

Sir David Cooksey
Consultation responses
Cooksey Review Secretariat
HM Treasury
1 Horse Guards Road
London
SW1A 2HQ

27 July 2006

By email CookseyReview@hm-treasury.gsi.gov.uk

Dear Sir David

REVIEW OF UK HEALTH RESEARCH

Thank you for providing the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) with the opportunity to submit comments on the Review of UK Health Research.

Through its regulatory role, SEPA has specific responsibilities with respect to human health and the environment, and therefore we have a particular perspective on how health research can embrace the challenge to protect human health and improve quality of life. Therefore, rather than addressing the review questions individually, we have focussed our response on specific issues where they are relevant to our area of interest and expertise.

In response to **question 3**, on the priorities for health research, we believe that priorities must include research focussing on health protection and improvement of quality of life. The environment has the potential to impact on these, both positively and negatively. We believe there is much to be gained in improving our understanding of the potential to exploit the environment as a vehicle proactively to improve health, while, in contrast, research is also required to fully understand the impact of environmental pollutants on health and the responsive actions which should be taken to minimise such impact.

As stated in **question 12** of the consultation document, NHS R&D is currently devolved, while the work of the Research Councils is not. It is important to maximise the benefit from available research funding and, where appropriate, UK collaboration should be encouraged. This is demonstrated well in the field of environment and health through the recently launched NERC-led Environment and Health Research Programme. This programme, over the long-term, has the potential to drive a coordinated priority-led research programme to address the fundamental challenges associated with understanding the links between environment and health.

When there is multi-causality leading to an outcome, as is frequently the case when there are environmental factors linked to a disease outcome, then studies to determine the impact can be complex, expensive and are required to run over long time periods to achieve an acceptable reliability. These types of studies, such as long term population assessments, could certainly benefit from UK support through an integrated Health Research Programme.



Chairman
Sir Ken Collins

Chief Executive
Dr Campbell Gemmell

Corporate Office

Erskine Court, Castle Business Park, Stirling FK9 4TR
tel 01786 457700 fax 01786 446885
www.sepa.org.uk

In Scotland, the Scottish Executive has recently published its plan for a Strategic Framework for Environment and Health which will focus on two major health outcomes which are significant in Scotland: cardiovascular disease and asthma. It would be valuable to support inter-disciplinary research looking at both the environmental factors and other inter-related factors, such as social and behavioural elements, that have an impact on these significant diseases.

With respect to forging links across disciplines, mentioned in **question 6**, the recently launched NERC-led Environment and Health Research Programme, has put in place a process to bring together different research disciplines, which have historically not worked together, such as medical research and environment and social research, to produce an inter-disciplinary approach to research problems. The Environment Research Funders' Forum (ERFF, www.erff.org.uk) of which NERC, MRC and SEPA are members has been promoting inter-disciplinary research and also investigating ways of bringing scientific evidence to bear more effectively on policy making. Many of the models will be particularly relevant to health and environment topics.

As a public body committed to openness and transparency, SEPA feels that it is appropriate that this response be placed on the public record. If you require further clarification on any aspect of this correspondence, please do not hesitate to contact me, or our Principal Policy Officer for human health issues, Paula Charleson, at the address shown below.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Campbell Gemmell', written in a cursive style.

Dr Campbell Gemmell
Chief Executive