

Society for Applied Microbiology response to the Cooksey Report

The Society for Applied Microbiology (SfAM) welcomes this opportunity to respond to the Cooksey Report. In bringing together two very different funding programmes it is essential that the new model will take into account the requirements of a broader base of researchers, many from those allied to the medical disciplines, including applied microbiology. It must also take into account the requirements of local, national and international priorities and retain the flexibility to address these issues. In order to be cost effective, SfAM feels that it is important that the current strengths are identified and retained, though improved where possible, with the addition of more focussed applications from applied researchers.

It is also important in the new proposed funding programme that intended flexibility will embrace the needs of both investigator-lead biomedical research and evidence based NHS-R&D. In research programmes associated with applied microbiology, we have found that in bringing together scientists and healthcare professionals in both research and practice, fundamental problems are addressed more comprehensively.

The Cooksey Report is a means of bringing these two ends of the research spectrum together and SfAM would strongly support the development and implementation of an assessment process, which ensured that the allocation of a single budget would meet certain key principles:

- Transparency of all procedures
- Continued external review of proposals by specialists capable of addressing the applied nature of the intended research programmes.
- Cost effectiveness of proposals
- Accessibility of the funding programme by applied researchers in occupations allied to medicine, whilst not wholly medicine based.

Neither the NHS R&D or MRC programmes tend to support research programmes focussed on applied microbiology; they are more clinically based. To improve this situation, we would like to see the support of epidemiological research into the impact (especially the economical impact) of practices in food, the environment and health. For example, only 2.5% of funds from the UKCRC are allocated to research into primary prevention of disease. It is axiomatic that prevention is better than cure and that focussing on the applied side of the spectrum will benefit all.

The support of research into the impact of practices related to food, dairy, nutrition, water and related procedures from a microbiological perspective will be welcomed, e.g. the ecology of MRSA in hospitals, or the effect of probiotics on the outcome or prevention of intestinal disease. SfAM would like to see more focussed, better controlled studies that evaluate the impact that changes to food, water, agricultural practice, and pharmaceutical practice have on the health and well-being of the nation.

Applied Microbiology based projects which will have impact on health and wellbeing through infectious disease should be supported and considered equally alongside theoretical or clinical research. For example, it is important to establish the mechanisms underlying the emergence of new virulent strains of a pathogen as a cause of continued or increased disease incidence in a population, and how this influences vaccine efficacy. It is important to ensure that such studies are put in place to reflect the multi/cross disciplinary nature of health related research.

SfAM believe that funding for projects should be prioritised and linked to the UK's health policy and strategy. Establishment of networks of scientists is key to ensuring communication and implementation of the findings, for example, the EU network 'Med-Vet-Net' involves scientists across Europe and from major governmental centres in the UK, such as the HPA and VLA, working together to address zoonosis-related disease and at the same time preventing duplication of research across the EU. SfAM was asked to provide the internal and external communications unit of this network.

Thank you for this opportunity to contribute to this extremely important consultation and SfAM will be willing to provide any further information you may require.