



Health Research Board CORPORATE STRATEGY 2002-2006

1. Background

Statutory Obligations

The HRB is a statutory body established by the Minister for Health and Children under the Health (Corporate Bodies) Act 1961 by statutory Instrument 279 of 1986, as amended by subsequent ministerial orders.

The statutory functions of the Board are

- *to promote, assist, commission or conduct medical research, epidemiological research (at national level), health research, health services research;*
- *to liaise and co-operate with other research bodies in Ireland or elsewhere in the promotion, commissioning or conduct of relevant research;*
- *to undertake such other cognate functions as the Minister may from time to time determine.*

In the discharge of its functions, the Board is required to have regard to such general research aims and objectives as the Minister may, from time to time, determine and convey to the Board. The statutory functions of the Board are broad enough to enable the Board to achieve its goals and to carry out the role outlined for the Board in **Making Knowledge Work for Health.**

Background Information

In recent years, the activities of the HRB have expanded rapidly, facilitated by a trebling in funding over the past three years. Expenditure by the HRB in 2002 will be €21.5 million revenue, compared with €6.2 million revenue in 1998. The main source of the HRB's income is the Department of Health and Children but it also receives funding from the US National Institutes of Health and the European Monitoring Centre on Drugs and Drug Addiction to cover the cost of some of its intra-mural research and information activities. The main expenditure of the HRB is on grants for research and for careers in research, awarded following competitive peer review. Funding in 2002 for such grants will amount to €15 million approx.. The number of whole time equivalent posts filled in the Board at the beginning of 2002 was 44. The Board also meets the salary costs of 16 research associates involved in its intramural research and information activities. The staff of the Board are located in three premises – 73 Lower Baggot St, Clanwilliam Terrace and St Loman's Hospital, Palmerston, although the current accommodation arrangements are under review.

Role for HRB in Making Knowledge Work for Health

In September 2001, the Minister for Health and Children, Mr Micheál Martin launched the first strategy for health research – **Making Knowledge Work for Health**. The document was based on a process of strategic thinking and consultation undertaken by the HRB. The research strategy outlines the following roles for the HRB in its implementation:

- *a lead role in supporting science for health through support for research projects, programmes, research careers and infrastructure awarded on the basis of competitive peer review;*
- *an agency role on behalf of the DOHC in building research and development for health by awarding funding for proposals for R & D programmes from health agencies on the basis of competitive peer review;*
- *a key role in contributing through intra-mural research and information activities to building a research culture and the evidence base for decision making in the health services;*
- *a role in commissioning research on behalf of the DOHC and other agencies;*
- *a role in developing of guidelines for the health services on the commissioning of research;*
- *a role in developing expertise in research ethics and good research practice;*
- *a role in building all-island research capacity.*

The purpose of the Corporate Strategy is to ensure that the HRB is organised in the most effective way to meet its goal of enhancing health and social gain through research, information and strategic thinking and in particular to carry out successfully the role envisaged for the HRB by the Minister for Health and Children in **Making Knowledge Work for Health – A Strategy for Health Research**. The link between the HRB's outputs and outcomes is outlined in appendix 1.

Vision and Values of the HRB

The vision of the HRB can be summarised as – creating and applying knowledge for health. The values that underpin all HRB activities in achieving this vision are:

- *independence and integrity;*
- *openness and transparency;*
- *excellence and professionalism;*
- *responsiveness to clients' needs;*
- *competition and peer review in its research funding procedures;*
- *value for money.*

The HRB will be as flexible and adaptable as possible in pursuit of its vision. In its relationship with its staff, the HRB will endeavour to make the organisation, as creative a place as possible in which to work, foster a work place that reflects the principles of respect and dignity, support the career development of staff, manage its business in a spirit of partnership and promote a family-friendly work environment.

2. Context

External

Quality and Fairness – A Health System for You

The health strategy- **Quality and Fairness – A Health System for You** commits the Government to achieving the following goals in relation to the future development of the health services:

- better health for everyone;
- fair access;
- responsive and appropriate care delivery;
- high performance.

The document identifies a particular role for research in achieving the goal of high performance of the health system. In particular, it recognises the value of research to develop quality systems that support best patient care and evidence to underpin planning and decision making in the health system. The implementation of the health research strategy is identified as a key element in achieving these objectives (pp 90, 135 and 169). The document also recognises the importance of research in retaining the best of Irish skills and talent at home and to making the health services an employer of choice.

Other aspects of **Quality and Fairness** that have implications for the HRB are the commitments to implement 'frameworks for change' in relation to

- making health agencies 'employers of choice' by greatly strengthening the human resource function (pp 121-4);
- the carrying through of organisational reform, including a reorganisation of the Department of Health and Children (p 126), the establishment of an independent Health Information and Quality Agency (pp 127-9) and an independent audit of organisational functions and structures in the health system that will include the HRB (p 130);
- the implementation of the forthcoming health information strategy to meet the objectives of the health strategy by ensuring that the benefits of new communications technology is fully exploited (pp 131-3).

The commitments above, together with that to implement **Making Knowledge Work for Health**, will provide the main context for the activities of the HRB over the lifetime of the corporate strategy.

Environmental influences on the HRB

There are many positive factors in the external environment that are supportive of the role of the HRB. There is the unprecedented Government commitment to research, the establishment of Science Foundation Ireland and of the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences and the Irish Research Council for Science, Engineering and Technology. The Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions, managed by the Higher Education Authority, is building the capacity of universities, colleges and institutes of technology to conduct research on a much greater scale than ever before. The universities and colleges are streamlining their research functions and giving research a much higher profile in their corporate activities and in the Conference of Heads of Irish Universities. Discussions are taking place between the research funding agencies to ensure a co-ordinated approach to their research funding programmes. Key research issues such as agreed salary scales for researchers, attracting more graduates to careers in research, the payment of research overheads and agreeing codes of practice for good research management are being tackled in a co-ordinated way. The HRB is developing close links with the other research

funding agencies, including the voluntary sector, and playing a greater part in the national research effort. The contribution of the HRB to national research effort is likely to increase.

Promoting all-island research capacity has been a strong theme of HRB activity in recent years. The Ireland/Northern Ireland Research Co-operation scheme, jointly operated by the HRB and the R&D Office for Health and Personal Services and Public Safety in Belfast, is the only regular source of funding for all-island health research. The scheme has enabled valuable research collaboration on an all-island basis to take place.

The Belfast Agreement has provided an opportunity to strengthen co-operation on the island to build health research capacity. The Ireland/Northern Ireland/National Cancer Institute Cancer Consortium and greater involvement with the Cochrane Collaboration have highlighted the opportunities that exist for enhanced co-operation and to develop a common research area on the island of Ireland. The publication of the consultation paper 'Investing for Health' in 2001 by the Ministerial Group on Public Health in Northern Ireland, identifies challenges to health policy similar to those in this part of the island.

The HRB has strong links with the international research environment through its relationship with the Wellcome Trust, its involvement with the US National Institutes for Health, the EU's Research Framework programme and the EMCDDA and its membership of the European Science Foundation/European Medical Research Council and the Human Genome Organisation. The HRB also has a network of international peer reviewers that is indispensable to its research funding operations. These links have proved extremely important in building this country's international profile in research, in stimulating action in relation to research ethics and good research practice and in keeping the HRB abreast of research developments in the rest of the world. They will continue to be a major resource for the HRB and the research community.

The main negative environmental influence is the possibility of pressure on public finances that would weaken government commitment to invest in research. A positive external influence is the desire among health agencies to be more empowered to conduct research and put it into practice, thereby ensuring that services are increasingly based on high quality research.

Other external influences that will impact on the work of the HRB are changes in the demographic and health status of the population, the demand of new and emerging health sectors to gain a research profile, the rapid advances in information and communications technology, the inclusion of the HRB as a body that comes within the Freedom of Information Act, increasing attention to the governance of public bodies and to performance management in public sector agencies.

Internal HRB Strengths and Weaknesses

The HRB has a respected track record in funding scientific research for health, in building research capacity, in conducting research, in designing and managing health databases, in commissioning health-related research, and in strategic thinking about the future direction of health research. The expertise of staff is one of the HRB's strongest assets. The HRB faces an organisational and staffing challenge if it is to carry out all the roles envisaged in **Making Knowledge Work for Health**, particularly in helping to build R&D for Health, developing research guidelines and in commissioning research. The value of the HRB databases would be greatly enhanced if they were part of a network of information on health that is easily available to policy makers or service deliverers as evidence for decision making or to researchers for further investigation. Although the HRB has embraced information technology to improve the service it provides to its clients and is in the forefront of developing some applications, there is still some way to go before it maximises the benefits of the new technology for clients and to increase the effectiveness of the organisation. The HRB has

recently taken up the challenge of communicating its role with its stakeholders and with the wider public. It hopes to improve communication about health research in partnership with other interested organisations.

Opportunities and Threats

The main opportunity presented to the HRB over the next five years is to assist in the implementation of **Making Knowledge Work for Health** and to play its part in achieving the goals and objectives of **Quality and Fairness**. The Minister's and the DOHC's commitment to the research strategy present an opportunity to strengthen greatly research for health in this country. The commitment to a health information strategy and to the establishment of the Health Information and Quality Agency provides an opportunity for the HRB to integrate its information activities better with those of the health system generally. The commitments to improving the human resource function and to organisational reform provide a stimulus to developments already underway in the HRB.

The main threat is pressure on public finances to such an extent that it would weaken government commitment to implement the health research strategy or to fund the long-term investment needed to develop a knowledge-based economy. The commitment to reorganisation of parts of the health system in the health strategy may cause unintended delays in the implementation of **Making Knowledge Work for Health**. Another possible threat is the difficulty in recruiting and retaining staff of sufficient quality to carry out the roles envisaged for the HRB in the research strategy. A prolonged suspension of the institutions established under the Belfast Agreement might slow down the pace at which all island co-operation in research could develop.

3. Strategic objectives of the HRB

The objectives of the HRB in the period 2002-2006 are

1. to encourage the creation and application of knowledge for health and social gain, the growth of intellectual property and evidence relevant to health and social gain and the emergence of a knowledge based health system, economy and society;
2. to be the lead national organisation in relation to support for and co-ordination of, scientific research for health and social gain, including basic and translational research, health services research, population health and practice based research and to promote the highest ethical standards in research and good research practice;
3. to promote the growth of a value added research and development capability in the health system, in partnership with other relevant health organisations;
4. to impact on health and social policy and services through high quality research and information;
5. to be the main advocate for the development of research for health and social gain;
6. to make the HRB an employer of choice in its field.

These objectives are based on the following assumptions:

- that the commitments in **Making Knowledge Work for Health** will be implemented;
- that the funding needed to enhance the role of the HRB will be provided by the Department of Health and Children;
- that the HRB will retain the confidence of the research community;
- that the demand for research funding from the HRB will grow;
- that peace will prevail on the island and that the international dimension to research will grow;
- that the HRB will be able to recruit and retain staff with the relevant competencies to develop its role.

4. Key Indicators of Performance

Objective 1 – the creation and application of knowledge for health and social gain.
The key indicators of performance for the HRB are

- contribution of health research to overall national research performance;
- growth of evidence-based decision making in the health system;
- contribution of health research to the creation and exploitation of intellectual property;
- attracting new people of the highest quality into health research in Ireland.

Objective 2 – Lead agency in supporting scientific research for health.
The key indicators of performance for the HRB are

- the quality, efficiency and effectiveness of the funding programmes for investigator-led research;
- the number and quality of applicants for HRB funding;
- the outputs and outcomes of investigator-led research funded by the HRB, including intellectual property;
- an increase in interdisciplinary and inter-institutional research activity;
- the success achieved by those awarded HRB funding in attracting funding from other national and international sources and in their subsequent careers;
- an increase in public understanding of and participation in health research;
- an increase in Ireland's reputation for excellence in scientific research for health.

Objective 3 - Promoting a value-added research and development capability in the health system.

The key indicators of the performance of the HRB are

- the quality, efficiency and effectiveness of the funding programmes for institutionally-led research;
- increase in the number of professionals actively involved in health research;
- the outputs and outcomes of institutionally-led research funded by the HRB;
- the adoption of codes of good practice on research management and commissioning of research by health agencies;
- increased all-island co-operation in research and development for health and social gain.

Objective 4 – To impact through research and information on health and social policy and services through high quality research and information;

The key indicators of performance for the HRB are

- health policy and service initiatives taken on the basis of HRB research and information activities;
- publications in peer reviewed journals and published reports;
- database development that meets the highest standards of coverage, relevance, accessibility and data protection;
- database compliance with the Department of Health and Children's Health Information Strategy, when published.

Objective 5 – To be the main advocate for development of research for health and social gain.

The key indicators of performance for the HRB are

- involvement in national and international research policy and funding agencies;
- increased profile of HRB with key stakeholders;
- contribution to the successful establishment of the National Health Information and Quality Agency.

Objective 6 – To become an employer of choice in its field.

The key indicators of performance for the HRB are

- measurement staff satisfaction, retention rates and ability to fill key vacancies;
- effectiveness of human resource and organisational development policies to achieve the objectives of the HRB.

5. Monitoring Progress towards the Achievement of the Objectives of the HRB

Each division of the HRB has prepared a detailed implementation plan to support the achievement of the objectives of the Corporate Strategy. The HRB's annual business plan, adopted by the Board at the beginning of each year, will reflect the actions of the implementation plan for that year. Progress towards the achievement of the objectives will be monitored on a quarterly basis by the HRB management team and a report on progress will be made to the Board at the end of the second and fourth quarters. The Annual Report of the HRB will report on progress towards the achievement of the objectives of the Corporate Strategy in the previous year.

The HRB will invite a panel of national and international experts to review the extent to which the organisation is achieving its objectives on the basis of the indicators of performance outlined above. This review will be undertaken in 2005 and will inform the preparation of the subsequent Corporate Strategy. The HRB will co-operate fully with any independent audit of organisational structures and functions that may be commissioned by the Department of Health and Children as indicated in the health strategy, **Quality and Fairness**.

Appendix 1

HEALTH RESEARCH BOARD - OUTPUTS AND OUTCOMES

An indicative 'map' of the outputs and outcomes of the organisation is as follows:

