**Organisational management functions of The Cochrane Collaboration**

**Document prepared by:** Nick Royle, CEO, The Cochrane Collaboration

**Submitted to Steering Group (date):** Copenhagen Steering Group Meeting, 24th April 2009

**Purpose of paper**

1. This paper and the attached functional management organisation diagram are principally for information, although discussion is welcomed. The paper describes the organisational management functions of the Collaboration’s core services, taken here to be those services provided by or for which oversight is maintained wholly or partly by the Collaboration rather than by its devolved entities. In practice these are largely the functions for which the Secretariat is responsible. The paper’s language is deliberately that which might be used by a generic business organisation or institution, and where necessary ‘translation’ has been provided.

**Urgency**

1. Routine.

**Access**

1. Open.

**Background**

1. Jeremy Grimshaw in his report on the Strategic Review of The Cochrane Collaboration describes how the Collaboration, in organisational development terms, has evolved through a process known as ‘swarm intelligence’. This organisational theory describes an evolutionary process arising from the collective behaviour of a decentralised, self-organised system. Put simply, the Collaboration didn’t set out to create a ‘head office’ with the functional departments one might have expected to see – corridors of ‘human resource professionals’, accountants, corporate strategists, business managers, lawyers, etc. etc. Rather, and as limited resources have allowed, these multivarious functions have been dealt with as required by a very small team of people (principally the Secretariat).
2. This approach was described by organisational development theorists in the mid-1990s as the ‘virtual organisation’ (or, for the more humorously minded, the ‘donut company’). What this theory described was the concept of the organisation having a very small head office that operated as a facilitator of bought-in or external services, rather than as a direct provider of services to the organisation’s business units (departments), utilising these external services as and when required rather than wasting resources by hiring expensive teams of people who might not be fully occupied all of the time. Examples include the use of accountants and lawyers, and in our concept the decentralised and devolved nature of the self-supporting entities. The Collaboration is a rare and shining example of an organisation that has actually made the concept a reasonably successful reality.
3. There are of course limitations to this approach, the principal one being that the responsibility for getting things done outside of entity responsibilities rests on a very small number of people who need the skills and knowledge to co-ordinate effectively the wide range of services required, to an appropriate breadth, depth and quality of provision. The amount of concurrent, as against consecutive, activity that can be performed is similarly limited and every activity bears an opportunity cost.
4. Steps have been taken to address this, most recently with the appointment of an Editor-in-Chief to concentrate on the methodological, scientific and technical side of things (not covered by this paper), and previously with the appointment of a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) on the organisational, business and finance side, which this paper addresses. However, the creation of the CEO post without an operational support team was always going to bring challenges of its own, as was identified before the appointment was made, and was learned for the EiC appointment. In his 2006 Steering Group Review report, Alessandro Liberati stated (Recommendation 8) that:
5. “The CCSG should review carefully whether the Secretariat includes all the skills that are needed to assist the CCSG in the executive function. Strengthening and diversifying the Secretariat would seem appropriate in order to free CCSG time and to improve several issues that have emerged as critical in this review (i.e. internal communication).”
6. After that careful review, a number of key gaps were identified. Mindful of the need to keep the Collaboration’s core administration costs as low as possible, the view was taken that only some of the gaps should be closed at that time. It was decided to concentrate our limited resources on three key areas: internal business communications, project facilitation, and fundraising support. A post was created to cover the first two of these, with a key skill requirement to increase the Secretariat’s ability to facilitate organisational, business and financial processes and activities across the Collaboration, and funding identified to support the third. Unfortunately the fundraising support activity had to be cancelled at the 2008 Vellore mid-year meeting in order to make necessary additional funding available to the IMS team.
7. Bringing us to the present, Jeremy’s report makes a number of recommendations, highlighted above and further expanded in the paper “The future role of the Trading Company and its Directors: developing new products and lines of activity on a commercial basis”, which further emphasises both the need to structure and perform in an effective businesslike way; and also the need for further development of the core organisational management team in order to implement these recommendations. These recommendations have been factored into the functional structure presented (although they actually make little difference to the functional layout). Identifying the resources to undertake this will be a challenge, and will need to be prioritised carefully in the context of the overall demands on the Collaboration’s current and future resources.
8. Note of caution. This paper is an attempt to fit a structural and functional concept to a dynamic networked organisation that has developed through swarm intelligence. This structural concept should not be seen as a straightjacket. Time and energy could be wasted fiddling around with where the ‘boxes’ are and what they are called, and care must be taken not to get too distracted by what could be a fairly sterile exercise.

**Proposals and discussion**

1. This paper makes no proposals. The attached functional management organisational diagram instead highlights the range of activities and processes that must be coordinated and managed by a large organisation such as ours. Readers may take away the impression that the Collaboration manages a great deal with limited resources, and this is true everywhere within this fantastic organisation. Discussion may revolve around which elements of our core organisational structure need to be adjusted in order to achieve the vision outlined in the Strategic Review report.

**Summary of recommendations**

1. There are no recommendations in this paper.

**Resource implications**

1. The resourcing of the functions outlined in this paper is shown in other papers presented to the Steering Group, including the Cash Flow Forecast and the Secretariat budget request paper. Expenditure is reported in the Annual Report and Financial Statements presented to the CCSG and the AGM at the Colloquium meeting, and displayed on the Cochrane website.

**Impact statement**

1. The Collaboration’s core management and administrative structure continues to be a lean response to the challenges posed by an organisation of 95 constituent parts, over 300 paid staff, 20,000 contributors in over 100 countries, with an annual income of around £12 million (early 2008 currency conversions).

**Decision required of the Steering Group**

1. Nil at this time.

**Nick Royle**

CEO, The Cochrane Collaboration

Oxford, 4th March 2009

**Electronic version only:** The attached document is a low quality version of the paper copy available in the CCSG pack. The software on which the originals were produced has only limited availability.

