**Review of the executive structure and functions of The Cochrane Collaboration**

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**Introduction**

This is the second iteration of the review of the Executive structure and functions of The Cochrane Collaboration, as commissioned by the Steering Group.

Since October 2011 the need for and opportunity to pursue the review have been accelerated by the departure from the organisation of the Chief Executive Officer in mid-January 2012.

Following the issue of the October review I have been considerably assisted by conversations with and contributions from Sally Bell-Syer, Rachel Churchill, Sophie Hill, Steve McDonald, Mary Ellen Schaafsma and Denise Thomson, and further discussions and meetings with David Tovey, Jonathan Craig and Jeremy Grimshaw. In addition, I have received a comprehensive critique of the first draft from the Cochrane Operations Unit (COU) staff in Oxford, and detailed job descriptions for staff on that site, together with some suggested changes to roles and responsibilities in response to the review from Jini Hetherington, with regard to the management of Human Resources issues.

Mary Ellen Schaafsma also produced an extremely helpful document outlining some structural change suggestions, supported with proposals surrounding changes to senior roles and job descriptions. I have taken on board all the information received in providing the observations which follow in this review.

The initial draft clearly caused considerable debate and also, disappointingly, but perhaps not surprisingly, no little anxiety, given the prospect of change. This anxiety may have been compounded by the departure of the CEO, leaving a gap in senior leadership.

The first draft contained a number of inaccuracies, assumptions and comments drawn from what was seen as a narrow field of opinion. I hope this has been addressed through the wider consultation I have since undertaken, which hopefully also addresses the observations that were made about gender and geographical bias.

**Further thoughts**

Throughout the initial and second phases of fact finding and consultation, one consistent and positive theme emerged from the significant majority of contributors which was the requirement for change. The view is that if the organisation is to move forward and effectively address and meet its strategic objectives then it has to change. Change is required to enable the Collaboration to catch up and keep pace with the environment in which it is operating, and to enable it to deal with its own incredible rate of growth in a focused way. To do this, it must acquire new skills, techniques, information systems, methods of communication and marketing which reflect its desired profile, and enable it to use its own resources effectively and efficiently and improve its income base, whilst competing in an increasingly challenging environment.

The key areas for focus identified by those consulted, although there are others, were:

1. Partnerships and development
2. Communication (internal/external) marketing and media relations
3. Financial and operational management

The first area I believe should be a key personal responsibility of the new CEO, with support for delivery and maintenance. The CEO’s responsibility should also include policy and strategy development for the consideration of the Steering Group.

My view is that areas two and three require investment for the recruitment of additional specialist qualified staff to enable the Collaboration to pursue the recommendation of the Delta Media report, and to facilitate the introduction of professional high quality financial accounting and reporting arrangements to support effective budgeting and performance management systems for the Collaboration and its associated Trading Companies. This function should also oversee performance against an established set of key performance indicators.

In support of these three key priority areas I believe a short-term project to produce a coherent set of policies and practices surrounding Human Resources is required. This could be used to develop a clear and consistent salary structure, current and relevant job descriptions, monitoring arrangements, performance appraisal procedures linked to strategic objectives and perhaps a clear career structure for the staff in COU and CEU. Following establishment of such arrangements, their maintenance could be taken on by an existing administrative member of the COU.

The proposed structure is designed to attempt to address the Collaboration’s declared strategic objectives and outlined operational priorities, and is attached in Appendix 1.

There has been some debate, following the departure of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), as to whether such a role continues to be required. My view is that a full-time CEO, providing clear leadership and effective co-ordination of communication and activities across the COU, the CEU and broader Collaboration network, whilst stimulating meaningful policy and strategic debate at the Steering Group level, is needed more now than at any previous time. This view is driven by the growth and development of the Collaboration and the challenging changes in its operating environment. If you add to this my view that the CEO should personally address the requirement for the Collaboration to forge new partnerships and pursue new development opportunities across the globe, it is difficult to understand how these requirements could be fulfilled in less than a full-time post and by a highly competent and experienced individual with the key core skills required. The Collaboration needs such a new high-profile leader to re-energise the core supporting functions and add weight to the endeavours to improve and broaden the image and profile of the Collaboration.

The separation of policy and strategy development from the key decision-making and responsibility for it, and then its effective implementation and delivery, is a key challenge for the Collaboration, which cannot be achieved without an effective CEO. This improved operational engagement also provides the Co-Chairs and colleagues on the Steering Group the time to focus appropriately on policy and strategy options in the knowledge that implementation is the responsibility of the CEO and team.

Another continuing issue raised during the consultation has been the accountability and governance arrangements in respect of the Editor in Chief (EiC) and Chief Executive Officer (CEO). Traditional organisational theory would propose that the operational responsibility of the CEO should be all-embracing and include the Cochrane Editorial Unit, to ensure a comprehensive approach to management and communication. This would imply a line management relationship from the Editor in Chief through the CEO to the Steering Group. However, The Cochrane Collaboration, in common with other professional societies, has understood the need to protect editorial independence. The Cochrane Library Oversight Committee was appointed with the aim of providing such protection, and to advise the Steering Group if it feels its independence is being threatened. Thus, it needs to be clear that aspects of the EiC’s role that relate to the business role are appropriate for line management by the incoming CEO, whilst issues related to editorial content are the responsibility of the EiC alone, accountable to the Steering Group and overseen by the Cochrane Library Oversight Committee. However, given the appointment of a credible and experienced CEO with mature and effective interpersonal skills, this should be unnecessary as the CEO and EiC should be able to create an effective and appropriate working relationship. In any event, the EiC should continue to have direct access to the Steering Group and Co-Chairs in respect of editorial issues, and continue to attend Steering Group meetings and participate in CCC calls and communications.

**A Way Forward**

What must be avoided in moving forward is that the organisation becomes re-disorganised. Given that and the pending critical appointment of a new CEO I would recommend a careful and incremental approach to re-structuring to ensure it is done well and is owned by all parts of the Collaboration, who can see its value in terms of the contribution it will make to the achievement of strategic goals and improved operational performance.

Opportunity should also be taken to allow the incoming CEO to shape elements of the structure and procedures to reflect their own approach, style and way of working. To facilitate this but also provide an outline of the Collaboration’s intentions for prospective candidates, the attached suggested outline functional/ divisional structure is provided for comment and development. I am putting this forward for comment in isolation as responses to previous options have suggested that this type of arrangement would be the preferred way forward and the status quo has been virtually unanimously rejected. I have avoided putting names in the substructure but believe all existing personnel could be accommodated within it. The distribution of core functions between the COU and CEU is consistent with the Steering Group’s decision following the strategic planning discussion in its teleconference on 6 September 2011. Investment would, however, be required in the Marketing/ Communications and Media Division and in the Finance and Operational Performance Management Division. The CEO position itself will require investment if the appropriate calibre of individual is to be recruited. In addition, some short-term investment will be required in HR and Information Systems. I anticipate that between £150-200K would be required in total, which would deliver significant added value both in improved operational performance and in the required enhanced profile and income generation (see Appendix 2).

In addition to the three functional areas previously mentioned I would propose the retention of a core administrative facility in Oxford under the supervision of an individual fulfilling a Company Secretary type role, covering Legal/HR and Governance advice and the oversight of a core group of administrative support staff providing secretarial services and administrative support across the Collaboration as required, plus support to the Chief EO and the Steering Group.

I would propose no change to the role and responsibilities of the Editor in Chief and his portfolio of functions agreed by the Steering Group although this could be the subject of change following the arrival of the new CEO and as the new structures mature. However, I would encourage participation in the pursuit of a management sub-structure that provides for a range of skill levels and hence career opportunities.

Although not part of the brief, I commented in my first draft report on concerns surrounding Governance arrangements, particularly in the context of the requirements of the UK Charity Commission. I am conscious that great value is placed on the democracy of the current Steering Group membership, but I expressed concerns, firstly surrounding the appropriate separation of policy and strategy determination from operational delivery, and, secondly the need for independent and objective challenge from individuals sitting outside the Steering Group such as that given by non-executive directors in the NHS. The first concern would be resolved by appointing a CEO tasked with removing all operational responsibilities from the Steering Group. The second could be resolved through an appropriately constituted External Advisory/Governance Board, a suggestion which I believe has already been discussed.

**Summary of Key Recommendations**

1. The early appointment of a new full time Chief Executive Officer whose primary responsibilities must include:  
   1. Formulation and development of key policy and strategy options for the consideration of the Steering Group.
   2. Forging new and maintain key strategic partnerships and relationships.
   3. Develop new and diversified funding sources.
   4. Enhance the Collaboration’s image and profile.
   5. Oversee operational performance to ensure key performance targets are met and strategic goals achieved.
2. Introduce a new functional/divisional management structure along the lines proposed with supporting procedures and protocols.
3. Make key new appointments to lead the Communication, Marketing and Media Relations division and the Finance and Operation Performance Management Division.
4. Develop current HR policies and practices supporting a career sensitive management substructure that facilitates all staff understanding their role in achieving the key corporate goals. (this will need to be undertaken over time).
5. Create an External Advisory Board to improve Governance.