

RCUK Review of the UK National Stem Cell Network (UKNSCN)

Annex B Interview Analysis

Research methods

All members of the UKNSCN Advisory Committee and Management Board were contacted to take part in interviews. The Advisory Committee and Management Board cover a wide range of stakeholder interest groups including academic, private, public and third sectors as well as funders. All members who agreed to take part were interviewed, in total this was 17 members (81%) of the UKNSCN Advisory Committee and six members (67%) of the UKNSCN Management Board. Interviews followed a semi-structured interview schedule that covered issues such as the role of the UKNSCN, governance structure¹, achievements and future direction.

Views were also gathered from representatives of four of the UK's Regional Stem Cell Networks² selected on the basis of advice from the UKNSCN Executive Director. Interviews also followed a semi-structured interview schedule that covered issues such as the role of the UKNSCN, how the Regional Networks are currently working with the UKNSCN and how they would like to work together in future.

All interviews were conducted between the 7th of December and 4th of February 2011. All interviewees were asked to sign off a summary of the interview to agree that this was an accurate record. Interviews were a mixture of face to face and telephone interviews. Interviews were conducted by a small interview team that consisted of the project director and project manager as well as two independent colleagues who had previous interview training and research experience.

Interpreting the data

The interview summary notes were interpreted by undertaking a content analysis (no software was used). Both the Project Manager and Project Director separately and independently reflected on the content of the interview notes and then compared emerging themes to reach a consensus view.

¹ For the purposes of the review and for this annex the term 'UKNSCN governance structure' refers exclusively to the operation of the UKNSCN Advisory Committee and Management Board and does not refer to delivery of the UKNSCN through BBSRC or its funding mechanism as this was out of the scope of this review.

² The review team interviewed an individual from each of the four UK Regional Stem Cell Networks consulted for this review. The views expressed are not necessarily representative of all UK Regional Stem Cell Networks. These interviews were conducted to help the review team to understand some of the issues and opportunities arising from the UKNSCN working together with the UK Stem Cell Regional Networks.

The interview summary notes provided a very complex, wide-ranging and often divergent set of views. Qualitative research is not designed to provide statistically reliable data on what the population as a whole is thinking. Such research is illustrative rather than statistically reliable and, therefore, does not permit firm conclusions to be drawn. It is also worth bearing in mind that the research deals with perceptions at the time of the research, rather than facts. These perceptions may not accurately reflect the UKNSCN or its funders' processes and procedures, or the views of the broader community. In this annex, use is made of illustrative comments from the interviews. Where this is the case the views expressed do not always represent the views of all participants, although the sentiments expressed are representative of at least more than one person.

Findings

Part 1: The UKNSCN Advisory Committee and Management Board interviews

The interview team asked members of the Advisory Committee and Management Board a range of questions about the current operation of the UKNSCN. The views expressed were extremely wide ranging but there were also some common themes that arose. This annex is structured around the specific questions that members were asked with a summary of the feedback received.

Key role of the UKNSCN

When asked what the key role of the Network is around two thirds of the Advisory Committee and the Management Board broadly commented that this was 'bringing together/networking/coordinating the stem cell community'. Around a third mentioned sharing/disseminating information through communications activities such as the newsletter or bulletin.

'I think it provides a mechanism, a very valuable mechanism for bringing together under one umbrella in different ways a wide range of [...]stakeholders [...]who are directly involved in exploiting stem cells for therapeutic, commercial, strategic use.'

'Its design is to foster interaction between members of the different communities that are covered under the umbrella of stem cells from pure technology to basic science and into transitional application, and into the clinic.'

Has the UKNSCN refocused its networking activities?

When asked whether the UKNSCN has refocused its objectives to prioritise its networking role **around two thirds of Advisory Committee and Management Board members felt networking activities have been enhanced** and highlighted some of the specific activities the UKNSCN has been undertaking such as the annual conference and email newsletter.

'I'm actually really positive about the Network. I think it has done an extremely good job of centralising and including the community and creating some great mediums where there was a real breadth of people interested in stem cells in the UK.'

'Absolutely [UKNSCN has refocused on networking] [...] It did feel like a very top down political beast and I didn't feel it represented me or that I had a say or it didn't feel like the kind of grouping where I felt comfortable particularly. In the new version that has completely changed.'

However whilst networking activities were seen to be enhanced, there were very different views about the focus of the Network in terms of its key constituents and audiences and their relative priority. More and better engagement with industry was a suggestion that came out particularly strongly as did engaging more with the public and patients. Other audiences mentioned included clinicians, regulators, government and charities.

'I think there clearly has been a strong attempt at networking but I just think the focus of where the networking opportunities are, are maybe a little bit misguided [...] I don't think it should be specifically on the academic community because I think one thing that academics are actually really good at is integrating and holding their own meetings and I think what's really missing in the UK is more dialogue between academics and industrial partners or perhaps colleagues in the NHS and I think those are the things that would really help us.'

'I'm not sure we have enough links with industry either, so I think the patents digest and the bulletin are good but there is a limitation on that, so I think in terms of trying to leverage further funding from the TSB and people like that, there needs to be a stronger link with industry, so I think that's been a little ineffectual so far.'

'Needs a more explicit recognition of its position in the commercialisation or innovation process [...] needs to be aware of the fact that science is only significant particularly in the present economic climate only to the extent that it links to a commercial product [...] It's only in objective four [of the UKNSCN] where it talks about other stakeholders where this wider dimension is raised and I think it could be put much more explicitly within the objectives of the Network.'

'I feel about the Network that it tries to be too many things to too many people and I don't have even as a member of the Advisory Committee a very clear understanding of where its barriers and borders lie. My question for the Network would be where your boundaries are and who are your targets?'

However others felt the focus should be predominantly on academics (and within this there was disagreement about whether the focus should be established or early career researchers).

'At this point, I think it's very important that you engage and enthuse as many of the basic scientists as possible, and I include clinicians in that [...] People who are doing those fundamental investigations into basic stem cell processes etc. it's not to exclude the higher end industrial, translational etc [...] but I do believe in proper development of these types of things where you build up the strong

science base and you get that really going because [...] if you've created this Network properly, the rest will also will be there.'

'The Network does not have representation from the best people in the scientific community here. The only way you get them is putting them on the advisory board or forcing them to organise a meeting.'

There were also different views expressed about the breadth of disciplines that the UKNSCN covers. Views ranged from the Network really being about stem cell biology, through to a broader view that the Network needs to be more inclusive of regenerative medicine, including those aspects of tissue engineering not directly concerned with stem cells. Others thought all relevant disciplines were just as important to include.

'The Advisory Board includes developmental biologists and engineers and people that don't normally talk to each other [...] its really important that we talk to each other because that's the communities that need to be brought together.'

'There is a bit of a split in the UK between stem cell scientists and people who consider they work in regenerative medicine [...] I think partly the term UK Stem Cell Network has created a bit of a focus, even though I think it was unintentional [...] crossing the divide between basic stem cell scientists and the people involved in regenerative medicine and then actively engaging more with pharma companies on drug screening and toxicology sides, and biotechnology companies, I think all of these things could integrate better.'

The issue is therefore not that networking is not taking place, which it clearly is but, in the future, what the focus of that networking activity should be. There appears to be no consensus amongst members of the Management Board and Advisory Committee as to the appropriate focus.

What has been the effect of changes to the UKNSCN's governance structure since the 2008 review?

The establishment of a Management Board was generally considered to have been a positive thing by its members. Members of the Management Board also generally felt that the expanded Advisory Committee brought a broader spectrum of views to bear, although one member commented that this could sometimes be difficult to manage.

'The Advisory Committee have given their effort free of charge to give the best advice that they can and has actually disseminated a broader feeling of ownership about the Network to the community which didn't exist before [...] I like to think that the community has a wider participation in the Network and the direction that the Network takes and trusts the members of the Advisory Committee a little bit more.'

'The expanded scientific advisory board I think has brought a lot more sort of broader and considered view to what the Network has been trying to do and I

think therefore in that respect it does connect better with the community than it did previously.'

Over half of the UKNSCN Advisory Committee had something relatively positive to say about the Committee, in particular about its broad membership.

'I think the membership now is quite wide ranging, there are lots of different interest groups, areas of expertise sit round that Committee [...] I think the Committee has certainly moved in the right direction, it's much bigger; it's not unwieldy in being so much larger I know sometimes these things go hand in hand.'

'I think certainly the Advisory Committee now has much broader representation, both within the academic community the breadth of people who are represented there. Also people representing industry, representing charities, representing patient groups so it really does run the whole gamut of people involved in this particular field. I think that's a good thing I think with having a bigger Advisory Committee you've obviously got more divergent views from people about what things should be and how things should be run so it's harder to reach a consensus [...] but I do think you are getting better representation because we are representing a wider range of the community.'

However almost all Advisory Committee members identified issues with the current governance structure. In particular the following issues were identified:

Two thirds of Advisory Committee members suggested that the relationship between the Advisory Committee and Management Board could be improved considerably, particularly in respect of reporting back on how advice from the Advisory Committee has been taken on board by the Management Board and how activities were progressed between meetings. Feedback also highlighted that the role and purpose of both the Management Board and Advisory Committee are not clearly understood by some Advisory Committee members

'That's [the Management Board] fairly invisible I don't see its role in terms of my membership of the UKNSCN Advisory Committee coming through particularly [...] The Management Board has to be clearer about what it's trying to achieve and it has to make that more clear to the Advisory Committee and then it has to say we need the Advisory Committee to do this, this and this. There is no sense to which the Management Board is driving the process at the moment, it's not managing the process. It needs to take a much more proactive approach.'

'It's not clear that anything that is said at the steering committee has any impact on how the Network is run, I don't know if that's because it's the Management Board that really controls it or because of the way it's been run. The Management Board is run very much by the Research Councils; perhaps the best way to run the thing would be to have one advisory board that really has to have an impact, that would consist of the management board plus some of the advisory board.'

About a third of members also identified issues with the size of the Committee and commitment from some members which limited their effectiveness (e.g. issues with people participating via teleconference).

'I notice now we have loads of phone ins for it and that doesn't work at all it's a complete waste of time [...] I would have thought 8-10 people would be fine [on the Committee to cover the landscape] [...] I think there are too many people round that table [...] who are there to tick various boxes.'

'The advisory board could be much smaller and more efficient and it needs to have real responsibility in certain areas, and in a way, the way the academic society is run, is someone is the treasurer someone is the secretary, someone volunteers to take on a particular project, goes away and does it, that's what makes it work.'

Some members of the Advisory Committee also felt that they are not being utilised as fully as they might be, for instance in relation to a lack of substantive discussion at meetings and in relation to leading activities between meetings.

'The advisory board isn't really utilised. Not that people will be jumping up and down because they want to do more, but they probably will do it at the end of the day.'

'I think the Advisory Committee is not nearly as effective as it could be. I think the group comes together and it meets there are points that are discussed and I think they are discussed very coherently and with considerable depth of thought and then I think it disbands and then I don't think there is anything or very little happening in between the meetings. I think we meet far too infrequently to be effective and I think the board is only contributing when it's sitting round the table [...] I would like to see a much more interactive board, membership has become too dilute, people aren't sufficiently engaged [...] it is too big.'

What are the key achievements of the Network?

Almost all Advisory Committee and Management Board members mention the conference as one of the key achievements of the Network.

'The scientific conference [...] is growing in stature and growing in attendance, growing in interest level.'

'I think it has been successful in terms of establishing the meeting, it has attracted 400 plus delegates the last couple of years so I think that has to be seen as a success.'

Although the annual scientific conference was widely considered to be an important activity there were also a lot of constructive suggestions for how this event could be further improved. Key points raised included:

- Establishing who the key audience for the conference is (for instance some say established researchers others say early-career researchers. There were also

suggestions to broaden the appeal e.g. to industry and other user groups such as patients).

'Not many major PI's actually attend the meeting [...] I think it's been very good for pulling in say post docs and students but I'm not sure really that that ought to be the main goal of the UK National Stem Cell Network [...] really the top players in the field ought to be going to anything major that the Network holds to give it credibility and to really sort of move things on.'

'I think it [the national meeting] is very good [...] I'm a little nervous about it now though [...] I think personally that originally as the meeting was set up, it achieved what the UK National Stem Cell Network should be doing which is drawing together UK scientists at all levels but especially focusing on the younger scientists and getting them to be seen and them to present and talk to people. But now it's morphed into yet another international meeting.'

- Establishing what makes this conference distinctive and sets it apart from other conferences.

'I think a lot of senior people will be invited to lots of meetings every year so they see this as one, yes it might be nice to go to but there are others that are higher priority for them, it's a question of time. The meetings calendar is relatively full and you do have to make a choice at the end of the day you can't attend everything.'

Another frequent suggestion by members of the Advisory Committee was for the UKNSCN to consider doing more networking outside of the annual scientific conference for example more frequent meetings focused around a particular topic.

'The idea that the Network provides places for people to meet could be expanded, so you have the annual science meeting and then maybe you could offer the opportunity to organise more specialised meetings.'

Another achievement of the UKNSCN mentioned by over half of Advisory Committee and Management Board members was the email communications, particularly the newsletter but also the patents digest and to a lesser extent the website.

'Large membership that all receive the electronic bulletin, that's obviously what you want from a Network [...] E-bulletins are very good, very informative and you can circulate information for inclusion in them which works very well.'

'Email updates are also very useful bite size pieces of information for busy people. They can be revisited later and provide links to information.'

Three members of the Advisory Committee also identified specific examples of tangible impacts arising from the UKNSCN (which are paraphrased below).

'A social scientist who I met at I think the very first annual meeting approached me after that to undertake an extended interview about my work from a social

science perspective, something I had never done before, and contributed to a report that she later released and so on. It's a small example but it's the kind of interaction which might have happened otherwise but is much more likely in this setting.'

'One personal thing, received an e-bulletin in 2007 about a new funding scheme. A colleague in biology, got the same bulletin and suggested a joint proposal. We've had two years support so far. Had it not been for the bulletin, not saying we would not have seen the call, but it was the first place we saw the call. It gave us a head start, a very direct impact.'

'A chance meeting at a UKNSCN event led to a social scientist entering the lab for a year which was very successful. Those kinds of chance encounters which are encouraged by bringing people together should be what the UKNSCN is doing.'

What should the future strategic direction of the UKNSCN be?

Members of the UKNSCN Advisory Committee and Management Board expressed a wide range of views about the future strategic direction of the UKNSCN. The key areas identified were:

International focus/activity

One key opportunity that emerged focused on the increasing importance of international activity. There was a sense that the UKNSCN could do more in this area and play a more proactive role. This may mean approaching its activity in this area in a different way. It was also noted that better awareness of what is currently being done in this area would be welcomed i.e. reporting back and follow up activities.

'International dimension I see as the key networking function [...] The national community operates internationally therefore any national organisation that acts on behalf of that community needs to operate internationally as well so links with the Canadian Stem Cell Network, the ISSCR, India, China is an area that could be developed and Israel has come up as well [...] I would have thought that the international networking should be developed a bit [...] it is quite a passive statement [about international intentions] at the moment in the existing objective and that could be revised to make it much more proactive in terms of seeking linkages [with] overseas researchers.'

'Furthering the international profile [should be the main focus of the Network in future]. I think the international profile is better served rather than just inviting famous people from the states or wherever I think it's better served by organising proper colloquium meetings, that bring organisations together, get other governments interested in what we do that sort of thing.'

'I can think of a few things that have had great intentions. For example Network meeting in Berlin, and they are trying to organise an Israeli one, and another one in Spain. I think those things in theory are great ideas for pulling people together from different countries. But what's raised at every single one of those

is that there is no follow up funding mechanisms and I think that lots of things like that, that have started with the best of intentions maybe haven't been thought through to much in advance [...] it takes more than getting scientists talking to actually result in any major new project.'

Joining up more with others

Interviewees also suggested that the UKNSCN look to join up more with others to do more for less and have better connectivity across the national picture for example with Knowledge Transfer Networks and Regional Stem Cell Networks'.

'We will always open and facilitate the interactions with industry but there is already a dedicated industry group that is serving that community so perhaps we shouldn't duplicate but perhaps we should try and work more together with that industry group. The other group to think about is the involvement with the Knowledge Transfer Network [...] I think we need a much closer relationship and do work together with the KTN's and with the industry group to host joint workshops or joint meetings.'

'That relationship [between UKNSCN and Regional Networks] which is I think politically bound to be characterised by on-going [...] sensitivities given the fact that the regional entities are accountable in some kind of way to their regional groupings and that's how their identities are formed and so when they negotiate or link with or discuss with the national organisation they are bound to reflect on what do we gain and what do we lose from this engagement and so the trick is always to be able to say to them, well as a result of this engagement you will get added value which will not threaten your existing functions.'

'I think another aspect of being more joined up would involve the Research Councils, it would involve charities, Wellcome Trust and other funders [...] I think you need major players, you need people from British Heart Foundation or the equivalent charities in other fields. If we really want to make a difference here, I think things just kind of have to shift up a level and I think joining up some of those things would be beneficial and perhaps then we could drive forward a clearer agenda that has more effect.'

In discussing the future strategic direction of the Network interviewees drew attention to a number of areas within the wider landscape which are worth noting such as: the maturity of stem cell science as a discipline, the realisation of therapies arising from basic stem cell science and in particular the consequences this might have for patients, the need to develop business models that are attractive to industry in terms of how stem cell science can be converted into marketable products, increasing competition from outside the UK; and the development of regulatory frameworks.

Future delivery of the UKNSCN

Consideration of how the UKNSCN will be delivered going forward was explicitly out of the scope of this review. However, whilst interviewees were not specifically asked about this issue, it was raised in the course of interviews by a number of individuals. Feedback from some individuals suggested that the current structure of the Network (in that it is solely Research Council funded) is a difficult structure through which to

get buy-in from the academic and wider community. Some individuals also suggested that there is a perceived lack of intellectual leadership. There was also the view that the UKNSCN has a role to play in lobbying for funding and also that the UKNSCN should move towards a learned society model (though others also strongly disagreed with this view). This review has not sought to address these issues as they are not in scope, but they are clearly important and worthy of further consideration by the UKNSCN Management Board, so are illustrated here.

'Because of the way it was structured, which was around mechanisms that were Research Council mechanisms that caused difficulties and problems, it made it too bureaucratic and administrative, too much involved in process sometimes too much concerned about the implications of things we might do or be seen to be saying or doing. I can understand that a government body needs to act like that, that's not a problem but I think that overlaid on top of what the objectives of that should be within the scientific community in the UK I think was and is inhibitory [...] I thought that [establishing a Management Board] was a disaster because it totally reinforced the view, rightly or wrongly, that the hand of government was here all the time in this process, that this was more bureaucracy. It was a Board which let's be honest was mainly Research Council related people. Why did we need a Board? I think that was a big mistake.'

'It has been an uphill battle to improve things and it has made progress, but the struggle has been much greater than it really needed to be, and a lot of time could have been saved and that's where I guess this civil service idea, that one should need to consult with each community and come up with a consensus, which doesn't necessarily work when you are dealing with a bunch of scientists [...] You could get better input and more help from the community if there was of a perception it was their Network [...] It's really set up on a model that the Research Councils wanted, not the community. I don't think you will get tremendous buy-in financially as it was something the Research Councils dreamed up.'

'It's unclear about whether it's purely a scientific self regulatory organisation or whether it's part of Research Council operations and that confusion is embodied in its structure [...] I'm not quite sure how far the scientific community owns it to the same extent as it did previously.'

On-going monitoring and evaluation of the UKNSCN

Some Advisory Committee and Management Board members suggested that the UKNSCN could do more to demonstrate its usefulness and think about appropriate metrics to measure achievements and impacts. The review team also noted that there was no established baseline against which to measure the effectiveness and achievements of the UKNSCN for this review.

'The Delivery Plan objectives are not fully aligned with the community's needs. We should ask the community what the delivery plan should be and some metrics of the delivery plan could help.'

'Maybe the Network could ask the community to identify case studies or ways the Network has helped them. In future the Network should focus on demonstrating their usefulness, this is particularly important for the funders who need to say what has been achieved from their investment [...] measuring impact is not easy but it is not something the Network should shy away from doing. It might help to look at how other Networks are doing this.'

Others suggestions from the Management Board and Advisory Committee

The review team was impressed with the enthusiasm with which the Advisory Committee engaged with this review. In order to take advantage of the richness of the interviews, and the many constructive suggestions made, which cannot fully be reflected in this report, the review team suggests that the UKNSCN Management Board might want to have a collective discussion with the Advisory Committee about the issues raised in this report and how to take forward the specific recommendations made.

Part 2: UK Regional Stem Cell Network interviews

There have been moves for the UKNSCN to work more closely with the UK Regional Stem Cell Networks; therefore the review team spoke to representatives from four of the five Regional Networks about how they currently work with UKNSCN and how they might work together in future.

Role of the UKNSCN

As with members of the UKNSCN Advisory Committee and Management Board, those Regional Networks who were consulted generally agreed that the primary role of the UKNSCN is about bringing people together. The general view was that if the UKNSCN has to prioritise, its focus should be on networking academics with other academics. However, the opposite view was also strongly expressed.

'Its overarching aim is to make stem cell research in the UK more effective than it would otherwise be but for its intervention. And the intervention should be one of creating synergies and connections where they don't already exist. And ultimately not in its role but if you like in its purpose should be to maintain and secure the competitive research position of the UK in stem cell research.'

'I think that a Network has a major role in facilitating research across the UK [...] I think what we should be doing is providing opportunities for researchers to get together with others in the field, others in their immediate field but also others in related fields and particularly in other disciplines that relate to stem cell biology [...] I am a little anxious about being directed having the research community across the UK effectively squeezed into certain boxes which I feel is happening a little bit at the moment [...] I feel that a jump is made to translation and there is a push towards translation activity where it isn't appropriate in some cases from the Network side.'

As with the Advisory Committee different views were also expressed by the Regional Networks about the breadth of disciplines that the UKNSCN covers.

'They [UKNSCN] should be putting people together. And I think what they can be most valuable in doing now is by having an Advisory Committee that doesn't just look at stem cell research but does proper horizon scanning [...] bring in the other disciplines which are so important and I don't believe it's done that [...] the problem is that the very term, "stem cells", is narrow and unrepresentative. It has become the albatross hanging round the neck of the sector, while another restrictive term wheels overhead called regenerative medicine. With one focused on phenotype and the other on the clinic, the sector seems unable to recognise that the unifying theme is cell fate control, whether that means at the level of epigenetics, tissue engineering or, in important circumstances, cancer.'

'Trying to get biologists, physicists, chemists and engineers talking to one another is important and actually we are not there yet, that is not a trivial task [...] what I think the UK needs is a Scientific Society called something like the Society for Stem Cells and Tissue Regeneration or something to that extent, and I would model it on the BSCB [The British Society for Cell Biology] or BSDB

[The British Society for Developmental Biology]. I don't really understand why we have a very different structure, a different organisation for stem cell biology, because I would say that what we need is to facilitate the science so that at some point it can be translated.'

The Regional Networks consulted were generally quite negative about how the UKNSCN has carried out its role.

'I think if one looked at an index of the international standing of UK Stem Cell research, excellent as it, it has not maintained its position [...] it ought to have maintained or to have facilitated connections between different regions, and it just hasn't done it.'

Current working

The Regional Networks who were consulted for this review suggested that the relationship between Regional Networks and the UKNSCN is not working well. These Networks considered they have not worked closely with the UKNSCN and that attempts by the UKNSCN to engage with Regional Networks have not been well received.

'Trying to network the regions personally I feel is being unsuccessful and I think that the regions are being squeezed into a box that they didn't see themselves in [...] you feel that there's an agenda behind it which is actually coming from somewhere else and it's not a needs based one coming from the ground up which I think it possibly should be.'

Future working

Most of the Regional Networks consulted did see a role for UKNSCN going forward and some would like to work with the UKNSCN in future, however most suggested that change would be necessary in order for this to be viable, for example that the UKNSCN needs a clearer vision.

'I think if they can focus on what I believe to be their prime purpose then I think it would be absolutely right [for CellFate] to work closely and to be of benefit to members of the UK National Stem Cell Network in a way that the national network can't do itself [because CellFate has the independence that the UKNSCN lacks]. So the national network can't do lobbying but at the same time as a representative of researchers it will want those researchers to be adequately represented at a European level [which CellFate can do].'

'I think they [UKNSCN] should be lobbying for public funding. I think this is a very important area. You can't have a Network of all the researchers which basically blocks any other national Network of researchers being put together that doesn't do the responsible thing of looking after funds coming into the sector, and I think that's a major flaw.'

Future delivery

All of the Regional Networks consulted made comments that suggest the ability of the UKNSCN to effectively meet the needs of the community is restricted and or

compromised by its current operating model, in that it is solely funded by the Research Councils.

'Basically the UK National Stem Cell Network blocks any other national research network for stem cells being put together. You can't have two - the country is too small and if the one that is in place is not allowed to lobby for money for the sector [...] then I think that's wrong and I think it weakens the UK sector [...] the UK National Stem Cell Network should not be part of the Research Councils it should be independent [...] if it was something that was seen as independent people would rally round it [...] potential commercial sponsors say well you're underpinned by BBSRC, loads of money and that is an immediate turn off [...] it depends on how they perceive you if you're run by government then they won't help you as much I don't think [...]'

'What is the public face of stem cells in the UK? The UKNSCN was somewhat compromised, because it is really a Research Council [...] so how can it be a face for the public?'

Sarah Townsend
Ros Rouse

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