

# **RCUK Strategy Unit review of the UK National Stem Cell Network (UKNSCN)**

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A report for the UKNSCN Management Board  
by the RCUK Strategy Unit  
April 2011

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## Preamble and Recommendations

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The RCUK Strategy Unit has undertaken this independent review of the UK National Stem Cell Network (UKNSCN) to establish whether the recommendations of a previous review undertaken in 2008 have been implemented. This review also provides evidence to the UKNSCN Management Board regarding how UKNSCN has carried out its role, whether there is continuing demand for the Network and about the Network's future strategic direction. This review makes the following recommendations:

**Recommendation 1:** The UKNSCN Management Board should note that the community, as represented by survey respondents, have indicated that there is continuing demand for the UKNSCN going forward

**Recommendation 2:** The UKNSCN Management Board should review the UKNSCN governance structure assessing whether it is fit for purpose and working optimally.

**Recommendation 3:** The UKNSCN Management Board should consider the focus of the network i.e. the key constituents and audiences and their relative priority, and whether current networking and communication mechanisms are appropriate.

**Recommendation 4:** In considering the focus of the network the UKNSCN Management Board should clarify the breadth of disciplines that the UKNSCN covers.

**Recommendation 5:** The UKNSCN Management Board should consider the scope and nature of UKNSCN's international activity and whether the UKNSCN should be more proactive in this area.

**Recommendation 6:** The UKNSCN Management Board should also consider whether there are opportunities to join up more with others, for example with the Knowledge Transfer Networks, regional networks and industry bodies, to do more for less and to have better connectivity across the national landscape. If this recommendation is pursued, the relationship with the regional networks would need significant attention.

**Recommendation 7:** For future monitoring and evaluation of the Network, the UKNSCN Management Board should consider appropriate means by which the impact of the Network might be assessed, including potentially the introduction of key performance indicators or other metrics.

# Executive summary

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## Introduction

The Research Councils UK (RCUK) Strategy Unit conducted a review of the UK National Stem Cell Network (UKNSCN) on behalf of its funders over the period December 2010 – January 2011. This followed a review of the UKNSCN conducted by People Science and Policy (PSP) in 2008 (PSP, 2008<sup>1</sup>). The 2011 review consisted of:

- a desk based review e.g. of the UKNSCN website and corporate and delivery plans;
- an online survey of members of the UKNSCN email correspondence list using an online questionnaire;
- interviews with members of the UKNSCN Advisory Committee and Management Board;
- interviews with representatives from four of the UK's Regional Stem Cell Networks.

This review was undertaken primarily to establish if the recommendations of the PSP review had been implemented and to give advice to the UKNSCN Management Board about the future direction of the Network. The five objectives of the review are shown in bold below along with the key findings and conclusions.

### **Have the five PSP recommendations been implemented?**

This review concludes that the [recommendations made by PSP in 2008](#) have now largely been implemented. In particular: the UKNSCN puts greater focus on its networking role, has the support of an additional staff member and continues to be hosted by the Research Councils. A Management Board has also been established and the role of the Steering Committee modified.

### **What has been the effect of these changes?**

This review concludes that there are two key areas following on from the recommendations made by PSP in 2008 that still require further consideration. These two areas relate to the UKNSCN governance structure<sup>2</sup> and the focus of the UKNSCN's networking activities.

- Interviews with members of the UKNSCN Advisory Committee identified a number of issues with the changes to the UKNSCN governance structure. Feedback from these members suggests that the role and purpose of both the

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<sup>1</sup> PSP. 2008. *Review of the UK National Stem Cell Network*. [pdf] Available at: [http://www.uknscn.org/0902\\_uknscn\\_review.pdf](http://www.uknscn.org/0902_uknscn_review.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of the review and for this report 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.

Management Board and Advisory Committee are not clearly understood by some Advisory Committee members. Some Advisory Committee members also questioned whether the governance structure is working optimally.

- Whilst networking activities were seen to have been enhanced, there were very different views about the focus of the Network i.e. the key constituents and audiences and their relative priority. Potential audiences mentioned included academics, industry, government, clinicians, regulators, patients and the public. There was no consensus amongst members as to the appropriate focus. There were also different views expressed about the appropriate breadth of disciplines that the UKNSCN covers. 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.

### **How well has the UKNSCN carried out its role and is there continuing demand for the UKNSCN from the community?**

This review concludes that the community, as represented by respondents to the survey, are relatively happy with how the UKNSCN has carried out its role in the past two years. Survey and interview evidence suggest that there is a common understanding of the role of the UKNSCN amongst the community, which is about bringing together the community, providing space for interactions to take place and keeping them informed. In particular the UKNSCN's annual scientific conference and email communications are fairly widely used and valued. According to the majority of survey respondents there is continued demand for the UKNSCN and they want to be involved with the UKNSCN in future.

From the interviews there were many constructive suggestions for continuing development, particularly in relation to the annual scientific conference as well as broadening and increasing the frequency of the current networking activity.

### **What does the community think the future strategic direction of the Network should be?**

Survey respondents were broadly happy with what the UKNSCN is providing them. The survey findings suggest that the UKNSCN vision, and how the UKNSCN intends to achieve this as set out through its objectives and the commitments stated in the UKNSCN corporate plan, continues to be important to the community. Survey respondents derive value from being involved with the network, particularly from the provision of information and the annual scientific conference. Very few survey respondents said there was anything that the UKNSCN needed to change.

Members of the UKNSCN Advisory Committee, Management Board and UK Regional Stem Cell Networks expressed a wide range of views about the future strategic direction of the UKNSCN. One key opportunity that emerged focussed on the increasing importance of international activity. Interviewees also indicated that the UKNSCN look to join up more with others for example Knowledge Transfer Networks and UK Regional Stem Cell Networks, to do more for less and have better connectivity across the national landscape. Also as mentioned above, feedback from interviewees suggests that the Network needs to consider its focus in future, in terms

of who its key constituents and key audiences are and the breadth of disciplines that the UKNSCN covers.

### **Key areas of learning for on-going monitoring and evaluation**

Quantifying the progress made by the UKNSCN in the past two years has not been possible as there was no established baseline against which to measure the effectiveness and achievements of the UKNSCN for this review. The findings from this review could form part of a baseline going forward; however the UKNSCN Management Board should also consider establishing other metrics, such as key performance indicators for the on-going monitoring and evaluation of the Network.

### **Other issues for consideration**

Consideration of how 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. The review has not sought to address this issue as it is not in scope, but it clearly is an issue worthy of further consideration by the UKNSCN Management Board. The project team therefore suggest that, prior to considering the detailed recommendations arising from this review; the Board might want to consider whether the current operating model of a network solely funded by Research Councils, with the advantages and constraints that this confers, is still the most appropriate model to take forward the future agenda of the Network.

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.

# 1 Introduction

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## 1.1 Background

The United Kingdom National Stem Cell Network (UKNSCN) was established in July 2006 as an independent national body for the promotion of research across the sub-disciplines of stem cell science and to act as the national focal point for disseminating information about UK stem cell research to overseas researchers, the public and the media.

The UKNSCN was set up in response to one of the recommendations made in the 2005 UK Stem Cell Initiative report (also known as the Pattison Report), which stated that “the Government should allocate additional funding to establish the UK Stem Cell Cooperative to maximise the cross-fertilisation between those involved in the sub-disciplines of UK stem cell research” (UK Stem Cell Initiative (UKSCI) 2005, p.8<sup>3</sup>). What followed was an on-line consultation conducted by Research Councils UK (RCUK) and an open meeting in 2006 at which delegates agreed an interim mode of operation. Since its inception the UKNSCN has been hosted by BBSRC.

## 1.2 PSP 2008 review of the UKNSCN

In autumn 2008, after two years of operations, the Network's sponsors commissioned an independent review of the Network's achievements and its future direction. The review was conducted by People Science and Policy Ltd (PSP) and looked to investigate the following key questions (PSP, 2008<sup>4</sup>):

- Is there a demand in the stem cell community for the UKNSCN? If so, for which activities or roles?
- How well has the UKNSCN discharged its current roles, defined by the five objectives it was given at the 2006 town meeting?
- Considering community demand and current performance, what is the most appropriate way for the UKNSCN to develop in future?

The PSP review was based on evidence gathered from written documentation provided by the UKNSCN, face to face and telephone interviews with a wide range of stakeholders, and 362 submissions from members of the stem cell community to an online questionnaire.

PSP made five recommendations:

1. The UKNSCN should re-focus its objectives to prioritise its networking role.
2. The UKNSCN should appoint at least one more full-time member of staff to enhance its networking capacity.

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<sup>3</sup> UK Stem Cell Initiative (UKSCI). 2005. *Uk Stem Cell Initiative Report and Recommendations*. [pdf] Available at: [http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod\\_consum\\_dh/groups/dh\\_digitalassets/@dh/@en/documents/digitalasset/dh\\_4124088.pdf](http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/@dh/@en/documents/digitalasset/dh_4124088.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> PSP. 2008. *Review of the UK National Stem Cell Network*. [pdf] Available at: [http://www.uknscn.org/0902\\_uknscn\\_review.pdf](http://www.uknscn.org/0902_uknscn_review.pdf)

3. The UKNSCN should continue to be hosted by the Research Councils.
4. A management board should be established to direct the Network, and other public and charitable bodies active in the stem cell field should be invited to contribute funding to the UKNSCN and thus qualify to sit on the board.
5. The role of the steering committee should be modified so that it plays a strong advisory role. The chair of this Expert Advisory Committee should be invited to join the UKNSCN management board.

### **1.3 Research objectives for the RCUK review of the UKNSCN**

This light touch review was conducted by the RCUK Strategy Unit<sup>5</sup>. The review gathered the views of the UKNSCN's main stakeholders including members of the UKNSCN email correspondence list, members of the UKNSCN Advisory Committee and Management Board and a number of UK Regional Stem Cell Networks.

Specifically the review sought to:

- establish whether the five PSP recommendations have been implemented and if so what the effect of these changes has been as perceived by the community, sponsors and other stakeholders;
- establish how well the Network has carried out its role;
- advise the UKNSCN Management Board whether there is continuing demand for the UKNSCN by the stem cell and regenerative medicine community;
- gather views from the community as to what the future strategic direction of the network should be.

### **1.4 Project governance**

The review was undertaken by a Project Manager and Project Director from within the RCUK Strategy Unit with direction from a Project Board and drawing in relevant expertise as required on research methods. The Project Board reviewed and signed off all of the projects deliverables including the methods statement, detailed research instruments, review findings and this final report. Methods advice was sought throughout the review to validate the approach used particularly in developing the research instruments and interpreting the data.

The membership of the review Project Board was as follows:

Dr Colin Miles, BBSRC (Project Board Chair)  
Dr Steven Hill, RCUK Strategy Unit  
Ms Ros Rouse, RCUK Strategy Unit (Project Director)  
Dr Phil Heads, NERC  
Dr Catherine Ewart, STFC

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<sup>5</sup> Research Councils UK (RCUK) is a strategic partnership of the UK Research Councils [www.rcuk.ac.uk](http://www.rcuk.ac.uk) The RCUK Strategy Unit works with the Councils to stimulate and enable cross-Council working. Its role is to foster joint activities by providing the platforms, tools and services needed to help the Councils collaborate effectively, both in terms of internal operations and in presenting Councils views and opinions collectively to the outside world. The unit is hosted by EPSRC.

Miss Sarah Townsend, RCUK Strategy Unit (Project Manager)  
 Mrs Toni-Jo Henderson, RCUK Strategy Unit (Project Support)

## 1.5 Research Methods

This review is based on evidence gathered from the following sources:

- a desk based review of the UKNSCN website, corporate and delivery plans, PSP report and minutes of past UKNSCN Management Board meetings;
- 290 responses to an online survey from members of the UKNSCN email correspondence list (13.8% response rate);
- interviews with seventeen members of the UKNSCN Advisory Committee (81%);
- interviews with six members of the UKNSCN Management Board (67%);
- interviews with four UK Regional Stem Cell Networks (there are currently 5 UK Regional Stem Cell Networks)

The relatively low response rate for this survey could have been due to a number of factors including: the nature of the membership in that some members are more closely engaged with the work of the network than others, the time of year when a significant number of people are on leave and survey fatigue. Some feedback suggests that members receive a large amount of email correspondence from the UKNSCN so this may have also been a factor.

The table below show's which findings were used to address each of the five review objectives:

	<b>Desk based review</b>	<b>Survey</b>	<b>Interviews</b>
<b>Objective 1.1:</b> Have the five PSP recommendations been implemented	Yes		Yes
<b>Objective 1.2:</b> And if so what has been the effect of these changes as perceived by the community, sponsors and other stakeholders?		Yes	Yes
<b>Objective 2:</b> How well has UKNSCN carried out its role as perceived by the community?		Yes	
<b>Objective 3:</b> Is there continuing demand for the UKNSCN by the community?		Yes	
<b>Objective 4:</b> What does the community think the future strategic direction of the network should be?		Yes	Yes

## 2 Review Findings

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### 2.1 Have the five PSP recommendations been implemented?

This review concludes that the recommendations made by PSP in 2008 have now largely been implemented:

PSP Recommendation 1: The UKNSCN should re-focus its objectives to prioritise its networking role.

The UKNSCN's revised objectives for the period April 2009- March 2011 are as follows:

- To coordinate existing activities through the sharing of knowledge.
- To facilitate interactions to promote the uptake and use of stem cells by the scientific, business and medical communities.
- To act as the national focal point for interaction with overseas researchers seeking collaboration with UK researchers.
- To work together with other stakeholders to ensure the effective coordination of national activities in stem cell research and its promotion in the media.

These objectives are reflected in the revised UKNSCN Corporate Plan and one-year Delivery Plan (2009/10) and incorporate a significant networking element. Members of the UKNSCN Management Board and Advisory Committee confirmed that the UKNSCN is now more focussed on its networking role. It is therefore concluded that this recommendation has been implemented.

PSP recommendation 2: The UKNSCN should appoint at least one more full-time member of staff to enhance its networking capacity.

The UKNSCN now employs a full-time Executive Director and an assistant to run its operations, supported by in kind assistance from BBSRC's press officer and in kind administrative assistance and web-site support. It is therefore concluded that this recommendation has been implemented.

PSP recommendation 3: The UKNSCN should continue to be hosted by the Research Councils.

The UKNSCN continues to be hosted by BBSRC and funded by the Research Councils (BBSRC, MRC, EPSRC, STFC and ESRC). It is therefore concluded that this recommendation has been implemented.

PSP recommendation 4: A management board should be established to direct the Network and other public and charitable bodies active in the stem cell field should be invited to contribute funding to the UKNSCN and thus qualify to sit on the board.

A Management Board has been established. The Board has eight members comprising the five sponsors of the Network (BBSRC, MRC, EPSRC, ESRC and STFC) and three members drawn from other Government Bodies (TSB, Department of Health, BIS). The Board meets four times per year. Funding has been sought from other public and charitable bodies active in the stem cell field<sup>6</sup>. It is therefore concluded that this recommendation has largely been implemented.

PSP recommendation 5: The role of the steering committee should be modified so that it plays a strong advisory role. The Chair of this Expert Advisory Committee should be invited to join the UKNSCN management board.

The membership of the steering committee has expanded significantly since the PSP review. The former 'steering committee' comprised only eight members and had an independent Chair. The new Advisory Committee comprises 21 members covering a wide range of stakeholder interests in stem cell research and translation. The Chair is a member of the community, and is appointed by the sponsors from within the membership of the committee.

The Advisory Committee does not have explicit terms of reference but the main role of the Advisory Committee is described on the UKNSCN website as follows: 'to work with, and provide advice to, the Executive Director on the current and future activities of the UKNSCN. The Advisory Committee also has an important role in providing and representing a wider community perspective on the past, current and future activities of the UKNSCN. Advisory Committee members are expected to consult others within their community of expertise for wider opinion on issues pertinent to the UKNSCN's successful operation'. The Advisory Committee meets three times per year. The Chair of the UKNSCN Advisory Committee also attends meetings of the UKNSCN Management Board<sup>7</sup> and has an input into the decision making process but is not a full member of the Board. It is therefore concluded that this recommendation has largely been implemented. The UKNSCN Management Board might want to consider clarifying the role of the Advisory Committee by establishing formal terms of reference

## **2.2 What has been the effect of changes made in response to the PSP review?**

This review concludes that there are two key areas following on from the recommendations made by PSP in 2008 that still require further consideration. These two areas relate to the UKNSCN governance structure and the focus of the UKNSCN's networking activities.

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<sup>6</sup> Although funding has been sought from other bodies it has not been forthcoming for a number of reasons

<sup>7</sup> UKNSCN operates a two tiered Management Board meeting system. Firstly the sponsors meet to discuss issues privately then the Chair of the UKNSCN Advisory Committee and the UKNSCN Executive Director are invited to join the meeting.

## ***Governance Structure***

Members of the Management Board were generally happy with the changes to the governance structure since the PSP review and overall feel this is working well.

Over half of the UKNSCN Advisory Committee had something relatively positive to say about the Committee, in particular about its broad membership. However **almost all Advisory Committee members identified issues with the current governance structure**. In particular the following issues were identified:

- 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;
- the role and purpose of both the Management Board and Advisory Committee are not clearly understood by some Advisory Committee members;
- 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; and,
- some 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).

## ***Focus of the UKNSCN's networking activities***

This review found that networking activities were generally seen to have been enhanced, in particular through the annual conference and email communications. However, **very different views were expressed throughout the review about the focus of the UKNSCN i.e. the 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 include clinicians, regulators, government and charities. 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).

**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, be that for instance, photonics, robotics, manufacturing or social sciences.

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 is currently no consensus amongst members of the Management Board and Advisory Committee as to the appropriate focus.

## 2.3 How well has the UKNSCN carried out its role?

This review concludes that the community is relatively happy with how the UKNSCN has carried out its role in the past two years. There appears to be a common understanding of the role of the UKNSCN amongst the community which is about bringing together the community, providing space for interactions to take place, and keeping them informed. In particular the annual scientific conference and email communications are fairly widely used and valued. There were many constructive suggestions from members of the Advisory Committee for continuing development, particularly in relation to the annual scientific conference and also broadening and increasing the frequency of the current networking activity.

According to survey respondents, **the UKNSCN has been particularly effective in meeting its objective to 'co-ordinate activity through sharing knowledge and information'** (78% said very/fairly effective). Survey respondents who said the UKNSCN has been very effective in this respect highlighted the sharing of information and networking through the annual conference and email bulletins as being particular strengths of the UKNSCN. This was also echoed in the interviews where **members of the Advisory Committee and Management Board highlighted the annual conference and email communications as key achievements of the Network**. This also aligns with what survey respondents saw as the key benefits of involvement with the UKNSCN (i.e. the flow of information (53%) and networking opportunities/access to contacts (28%)). The UKNSCN email bulletin, website and annual scientific conference were also the services that survey respondents claimed to make most use of and value the most. **There was little overall dissatisfaction expressed by survey respondents with any of the services provided by the UKNSCN**, however, far fewer respondents have used services other than the email communications and annual scientific conference (19% on average have used other services).

Around half of survey respondents felt the UKNSCN has been very/fairly effective in relation to its other objectives; however, there are still a large number of survey respondents who are yet to be persuaded or dissuaded either way (on average a third of survey respondents said they didn't know whether the UKNSCN has been effective in meeting its objectives). Relatively few survey respondents said that the UKNSCN has been not at all effective in relation to any of these objectives (on average 6%). Survey respondents were largely undecided about whether there are other ways of meeting these objectives other than through the UKNSCN.

The UKNSCN corporate plan outlines a number of commitments that are integral to realising the objectives that form its core vision, for example 'engaging the general public through the provision of web-based information'. When asked about the importance of these commitments, on average over half of survey respondents said they were essential or very important across the board. **Of particular importance was 'communicating the progress in stem cell research and stem cell therapies, in a balanced and objective way'** (75% said essential/very important), 'informing the community and other stakeholders to assist in the facilitation of stem cell research' (71% said essential/very important) and 'representing the UK stem cell

community both at home and overseas' (70% said essential/very important). No more than 5% of survey respondents said any of these commitments were not at all important.

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 what makes this conference distinctive and sets it apart from other conferences; and,
- establishing who the key audience for the conference is (for instance some say established researchers and others say early-career researchers, there were also suggestions to broaden the appeal e.g. to industry and other user groups such as patients).

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.

## **2.4 Is there continuing demand for the UKNSCN?**

This review concludes that there is continuing demand for the UKNSCN going forward.

**Most survey respondents said there is some/high future demand for the UKNSCN.** Only 1% of survey respondents said there is no future demand at all. Almost half of survey respondents provided further information for why they thought there was high future demand for the UKNSCN. The issues mentioned include:

- the continued need for co-ordination in what is a very diverse community involved in an ever expanding and increasingly important field;
- the importance of supporting collaboration; linkages between academic and non-academic stakeholders;
- dissemination of information about developments and opportunities in this field in order to help advance the potential for interdisciplinary research, translation and commercialisation;
- survey respondents also noted the increasing interest in stem cells from the public and patients of stem cell therapies, and suggested the UKNSCN has a continuing role to act as a central resource of objective and balanced information that the public can trust; and,
- as well as co-ordinating the community across the UK survey respondents also say there is a continuing need for a visible co-ordinated national presence to those outside of the UK in order to promote the profile of UK stem cell research and translation and maintain the UK's lead and competitiveness in this area.

**The majority of survey respondents are very/fairly interested in future involvement with the UKNSCN,** such as by receiving information, attending workshops/events/the conference and by being an advisor/consultant to the

UKNSCN on a range of issues. Only 7% of survey respondents said they were not interested in any future involvement.

**The UK Regional Stem Cell Network representatives<sup>8</sup> who were consulted for this review suggested that the relationship between their 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 their Regional Networks have not been well received. 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.

## **2.5 What should the future strategic direction of the UKNSCN be?**

Survey respondents were relatively happy with what the UKNSCN is providing them. The survey findings suggest that the UKNSCN vision, and how the UKNSCN intends to achieve this as set out through its objectives and the commitments stated in the UKNSCN corporate plan, continues to be important to the community. Survey respondents derive value from being involved with the network particularly from the provision of information and the annual scientific conference. Very few survey respondents said there was anything that the UKNSCN needs to change<sup>9</sup>.

Members of the UKNSCN Advisory Committee, Management Board and UK Regional Stem Cell Networks expressed a wide range of views about the future strategic direction of the UKNSCN, highlighting in particular the importance of international activity, joining up with others to do more for less, and establishing the focus of the UKNSCN. Members also expressed views about the future delivery model for the UKNSCN which was out of the scope of this review but is highlighted here for the consideration of the UKNSCN Management Board.

**One key issue that emerged was the increasing importance of international activity**, especially in the light of an increasingly competitive global context. It was noted that links with other countries have been made for example with Canada, Israel and others. However, there was a sense that the UKNSCN could do more in this area and play a more proactive role in order to raise the UK's profile internationally. This may mean approaching its activity in this area in a different way for example 'by organising proper colloquia getting other governments interested in what we do', 'delegating bi-lateral meetings to the community' or 'sending members of the community along to international conferences and other activities and getting

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<sup>8</sup> 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.

<sup>9</sup> less than a third of respondents answered this question of which more than half were unsure if anything should change or said nothing should change

them to report back'. 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.

**Members suggested that the UKNSCN look to join up more with others for example the Knowledge Transfer Networks and UK Regional Stem Cell Networks**, especially considering resource constraints, and also to have better connectivity across the national landscape. For example members suggested that the UKNSCN could have a closer working relationship with the Knowledge Transfer Networks by hosting joint workshops or joint meetings. Also some members queried how and whether regional networking activities should be brought together in a more coordinated fashion. Other suggestions included aligning and collaborating with European Networks, industry groups, more integration with the stem cell bank and also working with others such as trade associations and learned societies in relation to the annual scientific conference.

Also as mentioned above **feedback from interviewees suggests that the Network needs to consider its focus for the future**, in terms of who its key constituents and audiences are and the breadth of disciplines that the UKNSCN covers.

In thinking about the future strategic direction of the Network, the UKNSCN Management Board may wish to consider some of the issues within the wider landscape. Interviewees drew attention to issues 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.

Consideration of how the UKNSCN will be delivered in the future 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 worthy of further consideration by the UKNSCN Management Board.

## **2.6 Key areas of learning for on-going monitoring and evaluation**

Quantifying the progress made by the UKNSCN in the past two years has not been possible as there was no established baseline against which to measure the

effectiveness and achievements of the UKNSCN for this review. Some members of the Management Board and Advisory Committee suggested that the UKNSCN should do more to demonstrate its usefulness. The findings from this review could form part of a baseline going forward; however the UKNSCN Management Board should also consider establishing other metrics for example key performance indicators for the on-going monitoring and evaluation of the Network.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

In conclusion this review found that the community, as represented by survey respondents, are broadly happy with what UKNSCN is providing them and they feel that there is continued demand for UKNSCN. The in-depth interviews identified a number of areas which require further consideration by the UKNSCN Management Board, in particular, related to the UKNSCN governance structure and the focus of the UKNSCN's networking activities. These interviews also identified a number of opportunities for taking the UKNSCN forward, in particular, whether UKNSCN could be more proactive in terms of undertaking international activities and the opportunities for joining up with others such as the Knowledge Transfer Networks and UK Regional Stem Cell Networks. The review makes a number of specific recommendations related to these issues and opportunities which the UKNSCN Management Board are invited to take forward.

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