

Expert Academic Review of NHS Ayrshire and Arran and NHS Lanarkshire “Search Strategy to Identify Evidence in Relation to Future Provision of Accident and Emergency Services”

Professor Trevor Sheldon, Pro-Vice Chancellor, University of York has reviewed the search strategy to identify and the approach to review and rate research evidence relevant to the service configuration options used by NHS Ayrshire and Arran and NHS Lanarkshire. He provided the following comments. As part of this review he met with Professor Craig White, (Associate Clinical Director, NHS Ayrshire and Arran) who led the work on behalf of both NHS systems.

“My opinion is that the search strategy has been well developed and is likely to be as sensitive as is feasible in the time and given the high specificity needed (attempting to cut down on hits which are not relevant – false positives) in such a time-limited exercise.

The search terms are relevant and comprehensive. I suggested adding something to pick up ‘economies of scale and of scope’, I understand that this has been undertaken and has picked up a limited literature that will be incorporated as the evidence continues to develop.

The sources (databases) being searched is also comprehensive and relevant. I checked that important data bases of systematic reviews or meta-analyses would be included and was reassured that they were. The restriction of the search to papers after 1996 also seems sensible both in terms of the generalisability of the evidence to modern practice and also in the context of the time constraints on the review work.

It was agreed that it would be worth getting expert peer review of the final evidence review results.

I also commented on the methods of handling the studies identified by the search. This follows normal internationally accepted criteria for appraising the quality of the studies in the review. The quality and reliability of this part of the review is likely to be lower than ‘best academic standards’ because of the resource constraints and time constraints. Some of those commenting on the papers will not be very experienced in this and though most of the papers will be checked by an experienced senior team member (Professor Craig White) there may be some bias in the selection and summary of and the commentary on, the quality of the research due to the interest in the nature of the findings. Independent peer review would therefore be a useful quality check.”