UK: Ageing Research Overview

Canada Meets UK on Design and Technology for Quality of Life in Old Age

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Agenda

• Welcome
• Evolution of Ageing Research in the UK
• SPARC
• Today’s Workshop
Ten years of ageing research

• **DEMAND FOR POLICIES**
  – Technology Foresight
  – Government White Papers
  – Royal Commission on Long Term Care
  – Debate of the Age etc

• **DEMAND BY END USERS**
  – Independence
  – Quality of Life

• **GOVERNMENT IMPLEMENTATION**
  – Health National Framework
  – Social Care and Housing etc
  – But constrained by:
    • poor understanding of capabilities and potential contribution of science
    • lack of hard evidence base
    • difficulties of implementation
Ten years of ageing research

- **ACADEMIC SUPPLY SIDE**
  - **Mid 1990s**
    - Break with market forces approach in science policy
  - **Late 1990s**
    - Bold and successful programmes of ageing research in design/engineering and biology
    - Despite successful programme in social science areas, not followed through
    - Little specifically for ageing in medical areas,
  - **Early 2000s**
    - Series of Parliamentary investigations expressed severe disappointment with ageing research
    - Well meaning recommendations for change but poor advice made situation worse
  - **Mid 2000s**
    - Prevailing outdated models challenged
    - New era for ageing research is emerging
Present situation

- **Research Councils** (blue chip funding for universities)
  - Increasing activity are now following the early-2000s doldrums

- **Charities** (important especially in biology and medicine)
  - Research into Ageing and many disease specific charities
  - Large activity in housing for disabled people and socially disadvantaged people

- **Government** (policy and practice)
  - Ageing is one of the UK Government’s Grand Challenges
  - Comprehensive Spending Review expected to award more funding to ageing research

- **Academic Community Challenged by**
  - Translational & outcome orientation which is required
  - Limited capacity for multidisciplinary work - particularly in some areas of social science and biology
  - Need to rapidly develop the existing slim evidence base
What else is happening?

• Main Research Council Scheme
  – Across all disciplines
  – New Dynamics of Ageing - after 3 years £3m allocated, £14m still to allocate!
• Calls for:
  – Collaborative Consortia (big awards) - Autumn 2007
  – Project Grants (small awards) biology will be emphasised - Spring 2008
What else is happening (2)?

• **EPSRC** (design/engineering) - EQUAL (Extending Quality Life)
  • Three large consortia
    – Design of outdoor environments
    – Design of products
    – Self management of chronic conditions
  • Project Calls expected - early 2008?:
    – mental health
    – knowledge transfer

• **MRC** (medical)
  – Lifelong Health and Wellbeing Centres (5? to be established)

• **BBSRC** (biology) - several potential schemes

• **ESRC** (social sciences) - nothing in offing at moment (only NDA)

• **Assisted Living Platform**
  – EPSRC, Department of Health and Technology Strategy Board (of Department of Trade and Industry) -
    • £9m for research and demonstrators
But since 1998 ageing research has been making a difference

• Design and Engineering Research
  – assisting the professions - design, health, social services
  – supporting those who commission buildings, transport systems and products
  – aiding policy development – housing, transport, care….
  – improving regulations, standards and expectations

• Biological Research
  – pioneering a new understanding of ageing processes
  – from new insights to new diagnoses
  – new practices for medical and health professionals – clinicians to physiotherapists
  – dramatic implications for healthy living and longevity
Touchstones for success

• Bottom-up not top-down
  – ageing is a new area for research
  – the innovators are those at the leading edge of science
  – policy driven approaches fail to spot the opportunities for matching science and the needs of an ageing society

• Ageing research thrives
  – when those with knowledge of leading edge of science become engaged with ageing issues
  – when older people, practitioners from all walks of life and researchers get together
  – on grassroots “bottom up” enthusiasm of researchers and their supporters to understand ageing and to make a difference to the quality of life of older people.
A SPARC is born

• **Unhappy environment 2001 - 2005**
  – Well meaning parliamentary committees misled:
    • by traditional models adopted by senior scientists and policy makers based in medicine and social policy
    • neither close to science nor close to older people!
  – missed opportunities, lost enthusiasm, wasted investment
  – slow progress of top-down approach stifling research
  – as recently confirmed by House of Lords findings

• **Stop wringing hands, take charge!**

• **Supported by many research users**
  – professionals, charities, older people as well as researchers

• **Research councils approached**
  – to support a bottom-up community-led initiative
  – EPSRC and BBSRC responded very positively
A new beginning for ageing research

SPARC

Strategic Promotion of Ageing Research Capacity

For the research community and its supporters in health, social and housing services, charities, voluntary agencies, local and central government, and amongst older and disabled people...
SPARC - a community led initiative

• Early 2005 – late 2008
• EPSRC & BBSRC - £1.6m
  – Design and engineering research
  – Biological research
  – All areas in between -
    • bio-mechanics/ergonomics
    • muscle/bone
    • cognitive/sensory
    • Assistive Technology, etc

• Staffing
  – Two part-time coordinators
  – Two very part-time directors
SPARC – three themes

• Networking through:
  – workshops
  – international activities

• Advocacy

• Capacity Building through:
  – small awards
Workshops

Regular workshops in collaboration with others

♦ throughout the UK, some international
♦ hosted by the community
  ♦ universities, firms, professional bodies, charities
♦ focused on
  ♦ older people’s needs, issues & problems
  ♦ contribution of biology, design & engineering

A platform for all-comers

♦ work of leading researchers on ageing
♦ research of newcomers
♦ perspectives of policy makers, practitioners and intermediaries
♦ experiences of end users – older people
International workshops

• Examples
  – International Symposium on Werner’s Syndrome, October 2005
  – Workshop with leading European Experts on Accessibility, May 2006
  – Showcasing the work of young biological gerontologists at AAA conference in US, June 2006
  – Werner’s workshop in Tokyo, May 2007
Forthcoming workshops

• **Examples**
  - **A Walk a Day keeps a Fall at Bay**
    - Joint workshop with London Borough of Camden Active Health Team
    - 26th June 2007
    - Falls Awareness Day
    - Largely for older people, their carers and professionals who work with older people
  - **Understanding the ageing brain: linking cognitive and neural change across the lifespan,**
    - Joint workshop with Centre for Speech, Language and the Brain, University of Cambridge
    - 26th September 2007
    - Largely for scientists and professionals
Advocacy

• Making the case that ageing research can and is making a difference
• Lobbying
• Developing a good track record
  – MPs do listen!
    • Two questions in Parliament on, Ageing Research and Older Workers
  – Ministers do listen (but Civil Servants don’t!)
  » Royal Patronage
  » HRH The Princess Royal participated in *Ageing Research and Occupational Therapy: building partnerships, creating opportunities*
Capacity building awards

• Small awards scheme for newcomers to ageing research

• 185 proposals total value £5.7m were considered in Summer 2005 & Spring 2006

• 34 were funded at total value £1.25m
  – for superior scientific excellence and capacity building
  – for more information see posters and www.sparc.ac.uk
An Award

• £20,000 - £60,000
• 1 year - 18 months
• Mentoring
• Editorial assistance
• Platform
  – national workshops
  – introduction to key UK players/organisations
  – introduction to international activities
• Lifelong Network
The 34 award holders
Good Time for Ageing Research

• Old approaches being challenged
• Multiplicity of schemes
  – many with strong relationship to design and technology
• Highly competitive
  – will attract all sorts of talents
    • including those less committed to older people
  – will need a competitive edge
    • build on networks nationally and internationally
Today’s workshop - vitally important

• So, by the end of today
  – Scintillating, innovative, creative embryonic proposals - ready to roll
  – Personal action plans for engaging with each other
  – Enthusiasm for an as yet a largely under-exploited and potentially very rewarding area for collaboration
The ultimate aim