



The University of
Nottingham



Towards 2009: Q-active Research Strategy

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Contents	Page
1.1 Policy Context	3
1.2 Background to Q-active	4
1.3 Research Strategy and Development	5
1.3.1 Research Significance	7
1.4 Key Targets for Research	8
1.5 References	9

The Q-active *Research strategy sets out the broad focus for Q-active research for the three-year period from January 2006 to January 2009.* Development has been in consultation with the Q-active team members. The *Research strategy* and research opportunities will be under continuing review.

If you have ideas on important future research issues for Q-active, your contributions are welcome.

Q-active Research Strategy

1.1 Policy Context

The National Health Service has been subject to a systematic approach to quality improvement through clinical governance, described as 'a framework through which NHS organisations are accountable for continually improving the quality of their services and safeguarding high standards of care by creating an environment in which excellence in clinical care will flourish (Secretary of State for Health, 1998, p.33). This not only means scrutinising individual health care areas but also paying attention to the 'culture' of the organisation and the health and well-being of employees who function within in. It is well-documented that 'healthy' employees are more productive which in turn impacts on the quality of clinical care provided.

The government is committed to supporting public sector employers to become exemplars of healthy workplaces and good occupational health practice (DOH, 2005). With the majority of working age adults spending 60% of their time at work, the workplace is the ideal setting to target large numbers and health promotion interventions in the workplace have shown to be effective, with the NHS purported to lead by example. Employers have the responsibility for protecting the health and well-being of employees and optimising opportunities to support people in making informed choices about their health, the key principles for which are laid out in the workplace component of the recent White Paper 'Choosing Health' (DOH, 2004).

Health research plays a key role in improving the health and economy of the nation. In 2004, the Chancellor of the Exchequer demonstrated the government's commitment to raise the level of research and development to 2.5% of GDP by 2014 (Science & Innovation Investment Framework 2004-2014, July 2004). The contribution of the NHS to encouraging a healthy workforce through evidence-based change is therefore a national policy imperative and Q-active's research strategy will provide us with a tool for guiding our team towards these wider strategic goals.

1.2 Background to Q-active

Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust (NUH) is one of the first health-care providers devoted to improving the health and well-being of staff in a 3-year workplace wellness initiative called 'Q-active'. Funded by Sport England through an 'Active England' grant, Q-active has a dedicated project manager to guarantee implementation. This initiative was developed in direct response to the government's call for healthcare settings to 'set the example' for workplace initiatives for health. The overall aim is to disseminate positive health messages and increase activity levels within the Trust through 'culture change'.

Based on an ecological model of health, this large-scale intervention aims to promote *internal* 'cultural' change and improve staff activity and health behaviours (onsite) and promote *external* 'cultural' change through advocacy and pioneer work (offsite). This will be achieved through a series of interventions and facilities, from those which provide information (e.g. notice boards, website, correspondence), to those which promote activity and health (e.g. exercise classes, sports clubs, nutrition intervention, stress management), to new Trust policy and environmental change (e.g. well-being room for classes, footpaths, stair-use signage).

It is anticipated that Q-active interventions at NUH Trust, will see a dramatic change in the health behaviours and attitudes of staff; changes which have been associated with decreased absenteeism, increased productivity and improved employee well-being; providing a blueprint for workplace wellness initiatives in the future. On a more global level we anticipate results to have national influence with regards physical activity policy in health-care settings. In response to the 'Choosing Health' White Paper, this work will help to set the NHS 'gold standard' for employee health. Supported by an important programme of research the Q-active team, in their first year, won a regional award in the BBC Big Challenge Health Works competition making the NUH Trust the East Midland Region's 'Most Improved Employer'.

1.3 Research Strategy and Development

Our research strategy will act as a structure for the development of numerous research projects that will become part of a programme of research to be continually developed and adapted as Q-active progresses. Research is one of the core activities of Q-active and in pursuing both academic excellence and practical relevance we have a multi-professional grounding and aim to be the leading research active team in workplace physical activity, health and well-being within the NUH Trust.

Our team is supported by the Trust Board of Directors and forges the first alliance between the Centre for Sports Medicine, the Divisions of Estates and Assets, Finance and Human Resources (NUH), Sport England and the University of Nottingham School of Nursing with research links with directorates and departments within the Trust, the university and beyond. Individual members of the team actively engage with key groups of stakeholders including senior staff, managers and employee representatives. Our potential audience includes all NUH Trust employees (n>12,000) with indirect effects upon a large number of university and independent company employees who are based onsite, plus patients and visitors to the Trust. Our strategic aims complement the wider research aims of the University of Nottingham and our planned research studies also fit within the remit of the main research groups of the School of Nursing with particular reference to the Educational Technologies for Health Research Group and the Public Health Group.

A strategy for research will allow us to:

- Create a defined focus for and influence the direction of Q-active research activity
- To create an evidence-base for Q-active health and well-being research within the Trust
- To measure and address the multifaceted needs of Trust employees based on an ecological model of health
- To focus on capacity building initiatives in strategically important research areas
- To forge new alliances and develop area-specific research groups within

the Q-active programme

- To support the career development of academics and non-academics, contract researchers and University of Nottingham students
- To implement long term targets for research and development

With a view to:

- A strategic approach of breadth (overall Q-active evaluation) and detail (individual research studies within Q-active)
- Securing research funding for Q-active studies
- Producing high quality outputs disseminating multi-disciplinary research

Our research will enable:

- NHS employees to fully understand health and well-being issues and their implications and to make informed decisions about health behaviours
- NHS service providers to make informed decisions about the effectiveness and cost effectiveness of interventions for health and well-being in a specific site
- NHS policy makers to make informed decisions about the direction of future Trust policy

The Q-active team aim to work collaboratively with colleagues from the Trust, University Schools and Institutions, as well as partners from the public, private and voluntary sectors. Our research networks will be strengthened as Q-active develops. The completion of Q-active in 2009 will see wide scale dissemination. Research outcomes of this study will result in guaranteed deliverables including national press releases, national and local conference presentations, publication in high impact journals, environmental changes within NUH Trust and new Trust policy for health and physical activity.

1.3.1 Research Significance

"It is the intention of Government to make the UK the best place in the world for health and healthcare research, development and innovation"
(Department of Health, 2005)

It is vital that Q-active is scientifically evaluated. Research will provide us with the evidence to make informed decisions about the benefits and costs of employee interventions for health, here at NUH. By assessing user need we can address the feasibility of multifaceted intervention, develop appropriate and timely services and by evaluation of the intervention(s) we will be in a position to demonstrate 'culture change' based on scientific evidence of *direct* applicability to the Trust. Audits will be included for assessment at specific time points (eg. smoking, nutrition). However, it is recognised that audit alone has a mixed impact on culture change and research is essential for good practice. Further, research will provide evidence for the financial implications of implementing workplace intervention for health. Research and evaluation information has been critical for the planning of workplace intervention post-merger e.g. 'rolling out' Q-active to the Nottingham City campus and extending our services beyond with the global vision of developing a 'Health and Wellness Institute' within the Department of Health.

Scientific evaluation and research alongside Q-active will allow us to disseminate results of our intervention to a wide audience and deliver appropriate and needed intervention and services in an efficient manner to NUH employees. We aim to integrate research evidence with available resources, expertise of our high calibre team and interpretations of employee needs and perspective in all our decisions creating a balanced approach to implementation. Health promotion and interventions will be wide ranging and therefore draws on a diverse evidence base including medicine and sports medicine, nursing, psychology, sociology, and public health. Our multi-professional team has significant expertise in these core areas.

Awareness and use of research by health-care providers can often be poor as it can take a significant length of time to translate research findings into practice (Cronenwett, 2002; Jolley, 2002; Balas and Boren, 2000). The Q-active research programme will not only provide evidence to improve employee health and well-being in the future, but will drive user-informed improvements in services and opportunities for NHS employees from the outset. We are in a unique position to translate research findings into practice almost immediately as the research programme will run alongside large scale intervention with our research directly informing service development within the Trust, evaluating it and subsequently informing change.

1.4 Key Targets for Research

1. Strong research leadership with a dedicated Research & Evaluation Manager as of October 2005, supported by the Team.
2. Applications for external funding to gain research income in each year of Q-active.
3. Q-active Team to support volunteer researchers to assist with projects who will be recruited 6 monthly through the University of Nottingham by the Research Manager
4. Q-active Team to support related student research projects and dissertations at the University of Nottingham in the School of Psychology, I-Who, the School of Nursing, the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, the Centre for Sports Medicine and other institutions (eg. Loughborough University).
5. Research strategies to be multifaceted including broad evaluation (Q-active main evaluation) and those targeted at specific groups within the Trust.
6. Research to be based on employee need and perspective, available resources and team expertise.
7. Research to be theory-driven with each aspect structured by the ecological model of health on which Q-active is founded.
8. Research to inform immediate and timely local service development.

1.5 References

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