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Review of the Efficiency through Technology (ETT) Programme: Summary

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Efficiency Through Technology Programme (the ETT Programme) is a £10m Welsh Government programme aimed at promoting efficiency through technology in the National Health Service (NHS) in Wales. It was announced by the then Welsh Government Health and Social Services Minister in January 2015.
- 1.2 The ETT Programme is intended to accelerate the demonstration, evaluation and adoption of new products and services into practice, increasing efficiency and providing patients with better outcomes in accordance with the principles of prudent healthcare.
- 1.3 The Programme is also intended to encourage and support the NHS to increase levels of innovation activity (defined as technology transfer) and to increase its engagement with external partners – particularly industry and universities.
 - The ETT Programme is structured around four delivery themes:
 - Theme 1 – Technology adoption.
 - Theme 2 – Technology Development.
 - Theme 3 – Innovation and Industry Engagement.
 - Theme 4 – International and European Union (EU) partnerships.

2. The Review

- 2.1 OB3 and the Welsh Institute of Health and Social Care (WIHSC) were commissioned by the Welsh Government in December 2016 to undertake a review of the ETT Programme. The aims of the review as set out in the research specification are to:
 - Assess the process of implementation of the Programme.
 - Assess perceptions of effectiveness of the Programme.

- 2.2 These aims are underpinned by a series of four specific objectives which are to:
- Assess the perceptions of key stakeholders on the implementation of the Programme.
 - Assess the perceptions of key stakeholders on the effectiveness of the Programme. In this context, the review will need to explore whether the ETT programme is it doing what it was set up to do.
 - Review evaluation reports that have been received (relating to individual ETT funded projects) and produce a narrative summary of impact to date.
 - Make recommendations about what could be measured consistently across projects, and other steps which could support evaluation of the ETT Programme's impact over a longer term.
- 2.3 The review process involved desk based analysis of policy, programme and project related documents including monitoring information and where available project level evaluation evidence.
- 2.4 It also involved conducting qualitative, semi-structured interviews with a range of ETT Programme stakeholders and with a sample of eight funded projects.

3. The Review's Main Conclusions

- 3.1 The review's overall conclusion at this early stage is that the ETT Programme is an appropriate and agile response to a clearly identified need to accelerate the pace of technology adoption within the Welsh NHS, although further evaluation is needed to assess impact. It is well aligned with key policy drivers and is perceived to be delivering an appropriate range of activities at pace and very much in-tune with its original aims and intentions.
- 3.2 In terms of **rationale and design**, the review found that:
- The ETT Programme is appropriately structured around four main themes and fits well with the policy context set out by the work of the Health and Wellbeing Best Practice and Innovation Board and an inquiry conducted by the National Assembly for Wales' Health and Social Care Committee.
 - Unusually for this kind of Welsh Government initiative, the ETT Programme does not as yet have a formal specification or business plan setting out aims, objectives, delivery plans or outcomes. This is something that most stakeholders feel is now needed and would greatly assist in communicating the aims and objectives of the Programme more clearly while also providing a stronger and more visible connection between policy, key strategic drivers and the operations being delivered by projects on the ground.
- 3.3 In terms of **implementation and effectiveness**, the review found that:
- The ETT Programme has invested in an appropriate mix of projects covering both clinical and administrative innovation.
 - The fast pace at which the Programme has evolved and has been implemented via funded projects has been impressive and this is an important feature in terms of accelerating the pace at which technology is adopted within the NHS.

- Funding distributed via the various themes of the ETT Programme has been protected. This is a key implementation feature and one that is crucially important in terms of maintaining the Programme's focus.
- A valued feature of the ETT Programme is an implicit and in-built tolerance of risk to the way in which it is delivered. The Welsh Government recognises that not all of the projects funded will succeed. But they also recognise that learning from failure can often be equally important and valuable.
- Projects that apply to the ETT Programme for funding could be clearer about their objectives, their outcomes and their indicators. There is some good practice, but overall, this is an area of the Programme that could be improved. This could be achieved by developing and adopting slightly more detailed (though not overly prescriptive) guidance to applicants based on a clear programme specification document that enables projects to demonstrate more explicitly how they fit.
- The Programme could also be improved by tightening up on how projects report progress. Again, there is good practice to draw on here, but this needs to become more systemic and more consistent with greater use of a common reporting template.
- The ETT Programme, and in particular the open call rounds for projects under theme 1 (rapid evaluation and upscale projects) is perceived by some stakeholders to be resource intensive for both applicants and the Welsh Government. It may be possible to undertake further prioritisation of applications prior to their development and submission to improve efficiency. However, in responding to this concern, the Welsh Government should take care not to stifle or suppress the creativity, innovation or pace of delivery that the Programme has successfully engendered.
- The Welsh Government also needs to consider whether the Programme could benefit from having a wider, deeper and more technical knowledge base to help inform the decisions of the panel assessing project applications for theme 1 funding.
- While the fast pace of delivery is a core and positive feature of the ETT Programme, the evidence from this review suggests that some projects are struggling with the tight time-scales between approval (autumn) and projects needing to be up and running (April). This is something that the Welsh Government is already aware of and has started to address by introducing longer lead-in times.

3.4 In terms of **impact, monitoring and evaluation**, the review found that:

- There are encouraging signs (on the basis of evidence from stakeholders) that positive impacts will occur as a number of projects mature.
- There is very little as yet in the way of documentary evaluation evidence about the outcomes or impacts that the ETT Programme has generated. This is because most of the projects it has funded are either in the relatively early set-up stages or are still delivering and are yet to gather and analyse meaningful monitoring and evaluation evidence.
- The ETT Programme would benefit from a framework approach to outcomes indicators grouped around system and culture change, patient outcomes and health and wealth. The proposed framework is outlined in detail in Chapter 7 of the review. Projects should be required to select from and apply between three and five outcome

indicators from the framework. This approach recognises that not all indicators will be relevant to all projects.

4. Recommendations

- 4.1 Based on the overall conclusion that the ETT Programme is delivering an appropriate range of activities, we set out a series of 10 recommendations for the Welsh Government to consider in the context of improving what is already a strong programme that has the potential to deliver an important range of outcomes and impacts. These recommendations should not be overly-burdensome or resource intensive (either for Welsh Government or for applicants) to implement and are offered in the spirit of enabling the ETT Programme to continue to be delivered in an agile and responsive way.

Recommendation 1

- 4.2 The Welsh Government should continue to operate the ETT Programme to allow an assessment of impact and further learning across the range of projects. It should continue to do this on the basis of a ‘protected’ funding model i.e. that funding remains ring-fenced for the specific purposes intended. Our subsequent recommendations are intended to strengthen outcomes measurement, so that the programme’s impact and value can be reviewed regularly.

Recommendation 2

- 4.3 The Welsh Government should put in place a specification document which clearly sets out the aims and objectives for and the intended outcomes expected from the ETT Programme. Putting this document in place need not be resource intensive. Neither should it mean a fundamental shift away from the programme’s inherent agility. The programme specification document should be used as the basis for refining and adding detail to the outline logic model set out in this review report. The Programme Board should input to and be encouraged to have a strong sense of ownership over the programme specification document and logic model.

Recommendation 3

- 4.4 The Welsh Government should issue more specific guidance to applicants bidding for ETT Programme funding. The guidance should make clear that projects are expected to demonstrate how they intend to contribute to the overall aims and objectives of the ETT Programme but should avoid being overly-prescriptive. The guidance should be informed by the programme specification document (Recommendation 2). This should also be considered in conjunction with Recommendation 5 in the context of reducing the overall number of ETT Fund applications that are submitted under Theme 1.

Recommendation 4

- 4.5 The Welsh Government needs to impose a greater level of consistency in terms of how approved projects across the ETT Programme themes report progress. There is already good practice in this respect and this needs to be shared and used as the basis for raising standards across the portfolio.

Recommendation 5

4.6 The Welsh Government should consider whether the ETT Programme could be delivered more efficiently. In order to address this issue, the Welsh Government should consider exploring (alongside issuing clearer guidance) a number of options including:

- Introducing a limit to the number of bids that can be submitted per NHS organisation.
- Introducing an expression of interest stage to screen out projects and generate a more manageable short-list.
- Assigning more specific themes to funding rounds.

Recommendation 6

4.7 The Welsh Government and the Programme Board should consider broadening the experience and technical knowledge involved in the process of assessing project applications and in particular to advise on the extent to which proposals align with and add value to other NHS programmes.

Recommendation 7

4.8 The Welsh Government should carefully consider the benefits of extending the lead-in period for larger ETT funded projects, in particular where staff recruitment is a prerequisite to project delivery.

Recommendation 8

4.9 The Welsh Government should discuss the findings of this review with the Programme Board. In particular, it should look to refine the suggested outcomes based indicator framework set out in Chapter 7 of this report and introduce this as a means of generating more robust and consistent programme level evidence relating to impact. Welsh Government officials and the Programme Board should also carefully consider the benefits and challenges of retrospectively applying this framework to some projects.

Recommendation 9

4.10 In tandem with introducing the outcomes based indicator framework, the Welsh Government should consider providing or commissioning practical support, advice and guidance including a toolkit to assist projects with their on-going monitoring, evaluation and dissemination activities. This should be linked to the Health Technology Network events and the work of Heath Technology Wales.

Recommendation 10

4.11 Given the significance of evaluation activity in terms of generating the learning and knowledge from the experimental and innovative project activities funded via the ETT Programme, the Welsh Government should consider revising its project scoring criteria for Theme 1 to include a specific criteria for evaluation and learning.

Bryer, H; Llewellyn, M and Bebb H; (2017). Review of the Efficiency through Technology Fund. Cardiff: Welsh Government.

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researchers and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

For further information please contact:

Janine Hale
Principal Research Officer, Health Economics
Social Research and Information Division
Knowledge and Analytical Services
Welsh Government
Cathays Park
Cardiff
CF10 3NQ
Tel: 0300 025 6539
Email: janine.hale@gov.wales

Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.

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