



Working together for Health

The Health Boards
Executive (www.hebe.ie)

THE HEALTH SECTOR IS GOING THROUGH A PERIOD OF MAJOR REFORM; THE MOST SIGNIFICANT SINCE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE HEALTH BOARDS MORE THAN THIRTY YEARS AGO, WHEN HEALTH SERVICES WERE ORGANISED ON A REGIONAL BASIS

The current reform programme arising out of the National Health Strategy – "Quality and Fairness", aims to move from a regionalised structure to a single national system approach. There has been a trend towards harmonising aspects of our health services, for some years now. This began informally when Chief Executive Officers of Health Boards decided to undertake a number of projects jointly. In time the Health Boards Executive (HeBE) was established on a statutory basis and came into existence in February 2002, to enable the health boards, the Eastern Regional Health Authority and non statutory service providers to work together on an agenda to develop and modernise the health service. Its board comprises the Chief Executive Officers of the seven

health boards, the three Dublin area health boards and the Eastern Regional Health Authority. Two nominated Chief Executive Officers of the Dublin Academic Teaching Hospitals and voluntary hospitals also attend and participate at meetings of HeBE.

HeBE was established as an agency that could respond quickly to modernisation opportunities by facilitating, through joint working, delivery of the National Health Strategy. This is the first in a series of articles describing how the health sector has been transforming itself through working together. While HeBE can be described as an organisation enabling collaborative working, it is also as much, the philosophy of "Working Together". This has reflected a significant cultural change within the health sector,

where collaborative working has now become the norm rather than the exception. HeBE adds value to the work of its member organisations, by not undertaking work on behalf of health boards, but by enabling health boards to undertake this work together. HeBE also recognised the need to draw on expertise from across the whole health system, to achieve its objectives. The majority of its work is as a result, undertaken by the staff of health boards and non statutory service providers.

Strategic Agenda

The work of HeBE is largely strategic and national in nature. The Health Strategy's principles of – People-Centeredness, Quality, Equity and Accountability – together with the increased focus on demonstrating value for money – are some of the forces shaping HeBE's work.

Project Management

HeBE's portfolio of work has also been re-aligned to the emerging priorities of the new Health Services Executive (HSE).

One particular feature of the way HeBE works is the use of project management approach, that enables the organisation to focus and deliver on particular priorities facing the health services. The project management approach is a process by which change is defined and implemented within a specific timeframe, using defined resources, and to an agreed quality standard.

The development of a structured, systematic health service approach to projects – which has been published in HeBE's Project Methodology Guide, increases the chances of the project's success by ensuring that work is conducted in a disciplined, well managed and consistent manner.

As the number of projects increased, (at present in excess of 60, an added refinement of the way they are managed was considered necessary. This has been achieved by grouping projects into Programmes covering a small number of strategic themes. Programmes therefore deliver more than just the sum of the component projects, outputs or deliverables. They are intended, for example, to bring about a change in organisational culture. HeBE project teams are cross functional and draw on personnel, usually from within the health services, which have the appropriate mix of skills and expertise to deliver the programme and project objectives. The project structure is temporary in nature and is disbanded on achievement of project deliverables.

HeBE programmes are typically

- a grouping of related projects having a common strategic goal managed in a coordinated manner to obtain

benefits which may not be available from managing them individually. Alternatively they may be large scale, complex projects with many interrelated and interdependent components, typically occurring over a long time frame, and too big to manage as a single entity.

Whereas Projects of HeBE have the following characteristics:

- They are unique – a one time set of events.
- They are finite – have a beginning and end date.
- They have a set of clear aims and objectives.
- They involve several clearly identified stages of work.
- They have limited resources and budget.
- They ultimately deliver on specific outcomes.

During 2003 HeBE significantly developed its programmes and projects approach. And together with the publication of its project methodology guide, a project management training course was developed.

In June last year the Government announced a significant structural and organisational reform of health services in Ireland following publication of the:

- Audit of Structures and Functions in the Health System (the "Prospectus Report").
- Commission on Financial Management and Control Systems in the Health Service (the "Brennan Report"); and
- The Report of the National Task Force on Medical Staffing (the "Hanly Report").

The new Health Services Executive (HSE) will come into existence in January 2005. An Interim Board has been appointed to shape this new organisation. The work of HeBE has formed an important basis for the new structures by providing both the environment and tools for collaborative working.

Work of HeBE

HeBE, in the two years since it was established, has been at the forefront of change in the health sector. The range of strategic change

Programmes have been launched, cover a diverse selection of themes. These include:

● The Programme of Action for Children

- Bringing together National Health Service initiatives in the areas of child health and child welfare.

● Service Improvement and Modernisation Programme

- Projects to develop the ambulance service.
- Development of national approaches to major emergency planning.
- Modernisation of the medical card system
- A series of national level strategic guidelines in the area of The Measurement of Patient/ Client satisfaction
- Protocols and Policies for Hospital Admissions and Discharges
- Complaints and Suggestions
- Community Participation
- A national Service Planning and Performance Indicator project.

● Information and Communications Technology Programme

- Development of a National ICT Strategy for the health sector
- Implementation of enterprise wide systems for Patient Management, Human Resources and Finance
- A range of eGovernment and eHealth projects
- Launch of the health services portal (healthireland.ie) which aims to be the single trusted point of contact for health information and services.
- A national programme to roll out eProcurement and sector wide approaches to materials management.

● Health Gain

- Cervical Screening
- Irish Clearing House for Health Outcomes.

Over the coming months a series of articles will describe in more detail some of the modernisation taking place within the health service.