

soft money spend of over £1m, attests to the importance which is attached to research by the academic staff, and helps to provide an infra-structure for research activities by the trainees. There is ready access to statistical advice, and regular meetings of the Research Society.

However, none of this would work if it were not for our annual course called "Choosing a Research Project", first described on these pages ten years ago (*Bulletin*, 1981, 5, 148). This course continues to provide every trainee who wants one with a research project, and we would advise places which wish to catch up to imitate it.

The basic idea is quite simple. Each week the course is addressed by a different potential supervisor who starts by describing the problems surrounding one-person projects in the particular field, and lists the projects that still need doing. In the second part of the afternoon a trainee describes how s/he would carry out an actual project that has been assigned by the supervisor at a meeting two or three weeks earlier. At the end of the afternoon the trainee is asked whether they would like the project they have thought about; if not, it is offered to the class.

The success of the course is its symbiotic nature: supervisors need trainees to help them with field-work, and trainees need help from a more experienced person in order to think of a worthwhile idea and bring it to a satisfactory conclusion. By the end of the term each trainee has heard from a wide range of supervisors and has listened to a bewildering variety of ideas for one-man projects.

It remains to be seen whether our research record will remain as strong when the only real manpower gateway is between SHO and registrar appointments, since it would be unreasonable to expect an SHO to have made a start on a project. However, we suspect that there will always be competition for more desirable jobs, and that provided the training climate favours research, it will continue to flourish.

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Audit of research

DEAR SIRs

Audit is spreading (Junaid & Daly, *Psychiatric Bulletin*, June 1991, 15, 353–354). It is right that research activity is audited. This is particularly so when one considers the quantity of research literature that is produced annually. Junaid & Daly, however, have focused on quantity to the exclusion of quality.

Such an emphasis is surprising since audit has traditionally been concerned more with the maintenance of standards. Should this not also be so of

research? It may well be that quality in research is difficult to measure. However, if audit of research is to be repeated in the future then some attempt should be made. I would suggest that useful data is currently in the hands of editors.

While quality levels for research have never been formally agreed upon, in practice they have been set by editors of journals. Quality is reflected to a large degree by 'publishability'. All this is to point to the obvious – that editors have been expert auditors for years. The difference is that, unlike auditors, their glory has gone unnoticed. Perhaps their time has come?

While Junaid & Daly perform a quantitative audit on those articles accepted for publication they omit an analysis of the more important data: the amount of research that is refused. Such data is the domain of the editor-cum-auditor. Surely such an analysis is of greater evaluative importance. An audit of the number of successful operations in NHS hospitals would surely say little if it excluded the number that had failed.

I hope Drs Junaid and Daly will forgive me for auditing their audit.

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DEAR SIRs

Dr Williams is correct to address the issue of failed research. Currently trainees spend countless hours on projects that have no hope of succeeding. In a climate where research has to be done to improve CVs it is perhaps understandable that research undertaken for the wrong reason often fails. Professor Goldberg's Manchester Scheme, where research is given high priority, money is available and a structured approach to supervision is welcome news. While it may be impossible to accurately quantify the time, effort, energy and number of failed projects it is possible to determine factors which positively contribute to productive research.

Perhaps it is time that trainees look more carefully at the research activity of potential training rotations. In order to attract the right sort of candidate, and indeed provide all round training, all rotations need to look more closely, and more carefully at the degree of research supervision available and provided.

We arrived at only one conclusion in our paper, that is, there is a wide variation of productive research by trainees in psychiatry in the United Kingdom. We suggested that further work needs to be carried out to identify those factors which encourage trainees to successfully complete research. Professor Goldberg has listed four factors that he considers contribute to a high level of productivity for trainees in his region. It would appear a fairly