Reviewer's report

Title: Asking the Right Questions: Scoping Studies in the Commissioning of Research on the Organisation and Delivery of Health Services

Version: 1 Date: 27 March 2008

Reviewer: Stephen Robert Hanney

Reviewer's report:

1. In general this is a very well written article that is soundly organised and draws some useful lessons about a key issue for organisations that fund health services research. A few detailed points and suggestions are made below.

Minor Essential Revisions

2. The second sentence of para 2 on p.7 begins, 'Two of the former...': It could be helpful to revise this to make it clearer how this exactly follows from the preceding sentence.

3. The section on peer reviewed publications on pp11/2 states that 3 scoping study final reports appeared in peer reviewed journals; but only 2 references are given. It would be useful to clarify this.

4. There are various points in the references that should be addressed: reference 8 is incomplete; reference 30 has the date in the wrong place. There are some other detailed ways in which some references are not precisely in the format requested in the instructions for authors, but perhaps these can best be left until the production team detail the formatting changes they would like to see.

Discretionary Revisions

5. It could be useful to consider whether some clarification is needed of the distinction made on p.4 between 'establishing research priorities' (for which there is 'a substantial literature'), and 'the process by which the research questions to be addressed are arrived at in the first place' (on which 'rather less has been written'). Later in the article (eg pp6, 8, 12) it is not clear to me that this distinction is maintained.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

Over 5 years ago I received research funding from the SDO.