In August 2016 the 10 RDS Regions were contacted to identify all the Information Specialists (IS) to establish:
- How many Information Specialists are employed as advisers
- The typical activities of RDS Information Specialists
- Search methods and resources used

Method
An online survey was sent to:
- Known Information Specialists in 4 regions (EM, WM, NE, YH)
- Information or administrative managers in the remaining 6 regions

Literature search activities of IS and RDS advisers
- All 8 regions provide search advice
- 7 provide search strategies and results
- 5 advise on and can supply text describing search methods (4 are IS)
- Most advisers search for ongoing research
- All spend from 1-2 hrs to several days on an enquiry depending on complexity

Results
- 8 out of 10 regions responded
- 4 regions have Information Specialists
  - EM, NE, WM, YH (YH in more than one local centre)
- Funding varies from 0.6 – 1 FTE
- In the 4 regions without IS other RDS advisers provide literature searching advice

What IS do that other advisers may not
- Spend longer on the average query
- Search a wider range of resources
- Use more sophisticated search methods
- Search for research priorities / known evidence uncertainties

Activities undertaken by RDS Information Specialists include:
- Consult with researchers
- Literature searches
- Support reference management
- Search for ongoing research
- Author sections on review methods
- Advise on systematic review methods
- Review grant applications/act as mock panellists
- Reference check/document supply
- Advise on reporting methods
- Support literature reviews in applications

Impact of Information Specialists in the RDS
- Improving quality of applications submitted in 2015/16 half the 50 proposals supported by the IS in RDS East Midlands or Leeds were successful in moving to 2nd stage or being funded.
- Information provided may mean researchers decide to drop or change their original question (saving researchers’ time and preventing waste in research).

RDS Regions with Information Specialists

 References
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