ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Non-Technical Summary

A 1000 word (maximum) summary of the main research results, in non-technical language, should be provided below. The summary might be used by ESRC to publicise the research. It should cover the aims and objectives of the project, main research results and significant academic achievements, dissemination activities and potential or actual impacts on policy and practice.

Aims and objectives
The aims of this research were: (1) to describe the pattern of support in the ‘mixed economy’ of care for carers of people with dementia in relation to psychological and social characteristics of carers, and (2) to study the interplay of contributions from welfare providers (statutory, voluntary and family) over 2 years e.g. identifying whether care services replace the family carer or facilitate their ongoing care.

Main research results
The data for this research had been collected during a large intervention trial of befriending by trained lay volunteers, funded by the Health Technologies Assessment Programme (99/34/07) and known as the ‘Befriending and Costs of Caring’ (BECCA) project (ISRCTN08130075). Analyses carried out as part of this project included the study of both ‘cross sectional’ and ‘longitudinal’ data. The cross-sectional data was used to study the relationships between variables of interest for 236 family carers of people with dementia enrolled into the trial. A mixed economy was in evidence with services provided by statutory, voluntary and private sectors in addition to family and friends. Carers in more socially restricted networks, that is, with less availability of support from family and friends, were less likely to use services such as day care for the person with dementia and residential respite. On the other hand carers in ‘well-integrated’ social network types made more use of such services. These results were in support of the ‘crowding in’ hypothesis. The longitudinal data was used to study the relationships between variables over a 2-year follow-up period. Both service use and family support increased over time for the sample as a whole, and there was ongoing evidence of a mixed economy of care. There were relationships between social networks at baseline and service use after 2 years, but such relationships were not as clearly delineated as for the cross-sectional data.

Academic achievements
In the course of this project there have been a number of academic outputs including: 2 journal articles, 1 book chapter, 4 conference presentations.

Dissemination activities
The findings have been disseminated to a range of interest groups and forums. In addition to the 7 outputs mentioned above, 4 further examples of dissemination activity have been recorded via the ESRC Society Today website, namely 2 user consultation seminars, 1 academic advisory group and a dissemination event.

Potential impacts on policy and practice
Prior to this work, the pattern of welfare provision for informal carers of people with dementia has received little attention, even though this group of carers are important providers of care, and UK government legislation entitles carers to support, independent of the care-recipient. In terms of practice, this work emphasizes the value of assessing a carer’s social support network, and reinforces the view that there is a relationship between support network type and service use. In terms of policy, there may be potential in supporting the development of initiatives to extend and diversify carers’ networks. It is clear, however, that local issues such as commissioning, demographics, service type and delivery have greater explanatory value than any of the existing models of service sector interplay.