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OCCASIONAL
P A P E R

A Prize Worth Paying?

Non-standard ways to
support and reward excellence
in health research and
development in the UK NHS

Tom Ling

2008

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Summary

This is a short paper scoping the issues involved in considering the merits of using prizes to support the objectives of the Department of Health Research and Development Directorate (DH R&D). The paper concludes that there is indeed merit in developing incentives to support excellence in health research in addition to ‘standard’ performance management and routine inspection. These could act either to reinforce the signals created by standard metrics (for example, awards recognising the best performers as measured by standard metrics) or they could ‘fill the gaps’ to encourage behaviour not influenced by conventional incentives. This would create an ecosystem to more effectively link reward with motivation, which could deliver benefits for patients and the health care system more widely. Prizes, it is argued, should play a more significant role in the UK health R&D system than in the past but it is not suggested that they replace existing systems to support high-quality research and development.