



## **Institutional Trust and Health Care Reform**

The current government is devoting considerable resources to welfare state reform and (arguably) achieving real improvements in services such as the NHS and education. Despite this, the reforms remain highly controversial and there is considerable concern about lack of public trust in and satisfaction with the new policies. Declining trust may undermine the public acceptability of the reforms and threaten the ability of government to gain electoral support for them.

Recent work in sociology and psychology indicates that rational deliberative and non-rational valued-based and affective factors contribute to trust in institutions. However, the reform programme operates by manipulating incentives and opportunities through market competition, entirely within a rational actor framework. The risk is that the reforms fail to address the non-rational foundations of public trust, and improve provision but damage public support.

The project will carry out discursive interviews with forty-eight members of the public drawn from a range of population groups, to investigate the basis of trust in the NHS as a public service, the role of various rational and non-rational factors in contributing to it, perceptions of current reforms and of their impact on services, and the relation between understanding of the current reform agenda and trust in the NHS.

The research will contribute to theoretical understanding of institutional trust and to practical issues of welfare state reform. It is particularly timely when theoretical arguments suggest an increasing need for public trust, to enable the co-ordination of complex enterprises under conditions of uncertainty, and when rising demand and intensifying pressures for spending constraint provide a continuing impetus for reform.

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Investigator: Professor Peter Taylor-Gooby  
Researcher: Dr Andrew Wallace  
Contact: [p.f.taylor-gooby@kent.ac.uk](mailto:p.f.taylor-gooby@kent.ac.uk); 01227 827514