

Early Market Engagement – NIHR Research Commissioning and Management services

Attachment: Current services

The sections below describe the main services currently delivered by the NIHR Evaluations, Trials and Studies Coordinating Centre (NETSCC), the Central Commissioning Facility (CCF), the NIHR Office for Clinical Research Infrastructure (NOCRI) and the NIHR Academy (collectively known as the 'NIHR Coordinating Centre', or NIHRCC).

The exact specification for these services may change and/or be organised differently in any future procurement.

NETSCC services

Research programmes

Identification and end-to-end commissioning for the following research programmes:

- **Efficacy and Mechanism Evaluation (EME)** funds clinical efficacy studies that test if an intervention which has shown early promise works as expected in a well-defined group of patients.

The EME programme bridges the translation of interventions supported by data from early phase trials (funded by NIHR, MRC and other funders) to later phase clinical trials, (funded by the NIHR and others) to deliver efficient and effective health research and de-risk future investment in research, as well building research capacity.

- **National Research Collaboration Programme (NRCP)** supports NHS England and NIHR to work in partnership, combining their expertise to commission robust clinical studies to develop the evidence base to support future commissioning (routine NHS funding) decisions. There is a focus on topics referred by NHS England that may otherwise present significant challenges and not progress.

For agreed topics, workshops are held with researchers, NHS England, DHSC and other research experts with the aim of reducing the time required to design studies and gain funding agreement.

- **Health Technology Assessment (HTA)** contributes to the NIHR's mission of improving the health and wealth of the nation by funding research that assesses the clinical and cost-effectiveness of healthcare treatments in comparison with the current best alternative(s), and that is therefore immediately useful to patients, clinical practice, and policy or decision-makers.

New and current treatments, tests and therapies are independently and rigorously tested for effectiveness and cost-effectiveness through targeted and researcher-led funding opportunities to stimulate ambitious research at scale in areas of strategic priority to inform and change guidelines, policy and practice.

- **Health and Social Care Delivery Research (HSDR)** funds rigorous research to inform the quality, delivery and organisation of health and social care services.

The HSDR programme provides evidence for NHS and social care decision-makers to inform the best ways for deploying staff and shaping services to deliver proven effective treatments and care, at scale, for all.

- **Public Health Research (PHR)** has a particular emphasis on local government and focuses on investigating and addressing health-related issues at the population level, with the aim of improving health and well-being and reducing health inequalities;

The PHR programme is leading on bringing together public health research and capacity-building activity across NIHR so that the combined offer is clear internally and externally - this is consistent with NIHR's five-year strategy that signalled prevention and public health as a key priority.

- **Evidence Synthesis Programme (ESP)** funds evidence syntheses that combine data from existing research studies to provide best evidence to inform decision-making, and brokers linkage between research teams and policy stakeholders to ensure project outputs meet their needs, facilitate knowledge exchange and foster uptake and use of knowledge generated.

The ESP remit spans health, public health and social care, including evaluation of the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of treatments, tests and other interventions; most projects are in the health domain. It includes bespoke research provision to NICE and other policy stakeholders through a network of commissioned expert 'standing groups' - enabling work to be completed with speed and efficiency, without the need to commission individual research projects.

- **Global Health Research Units** are partnerships between researchers in universities and research institutes with an existing track-record of delivering internationally recognised research, with our funding helping them to consolidate and expand this work.
- **Global Health Research Groups** funding is awarded to existing specialist academic groups who wish to expand into the field of global health, especially in shortage areas of research.
- **Global Health Policy and Systems Research (HPSR)** supports global health policy and systems research in LMICs. Global HPSR holds both commissioned and researcher-led funding calls.

Key outcomes

The key outcomes of the end-to-end commissioning process for NETSCC-managed NIHR Programmes include:

- ensuring calls reach a wide range of relevant researchers and the funding application process is fair
- ensuring research addresses questions that are relevant to end users
- ensuring funding is awarded to the highest quality applicants, including via involving appropriate expertise particularly during peer/public and committee review.
- supporting researchers, including those in LMICs, to submit applications and providing high quality feedback.
- due diligence and contracting
- risk-proportionate post award monitoring
- acting as sound custodians of public money
- maximising potential for impact and minimises research waste.

Open Research and publications

Co-lead the NIHR Open Research Programme and manage the NIHR Journals Library (NJL).

The NJL provides a full account of research funded by the NIHR. The Journals Library comprises a suite of five open access peer-reviewed journals reporting results from a range of health research areas. Each publication also provides a direct link to the relevant details, documents and outputs of its corresponding research project on the NIHR Funding and Awards website.

Communications

- Provide specialist communications expertise, working in partnership with the NIHR Communications Director, corporate communications team and working groups.
- Lead the Content, Campaigns, Global Health working groups, and the Research Inclusion community of interest group.
- Advertise funding opportunities, demonstrate NETS programmes' research impact, and engage with key audiences, e.g. to encourage funding applications and topic suggestions to commissioned funding streams.

Coordination and delivery of the James Lind Alliance

The James Lind Alliance (JLA) is a non-profit making initiative bringing patients, carers and clinicians together in JLA Priority Setting Partnerships (PSPs). The JLA PSPs identify and prioritise unanswered questions or evidence uncertainties that they agree are the most important, so that health research funders are aware of the issues that matter most to the people who need to use the research in their everyday lives.

Centre for Business Intelligence (CBI)

NIHR CBI responds to the data and insight needs of DHSC, NIHR and others, ensuring insight informs NIHR decision-making, policy and practice. This enables NIHR accountability and transparency and supports contributions to FOI and other requests including Parliamentary Questions and ministerial briefings.

Insight and Evaluation

- Provide research and analytical services, enhancing the NIHR CBI.
- Deliver four interconnected services: Data, Information Requests, Portfolio Analysis, and Research and Evaluation.
- Contribute to delivery of cross-NIHR activity including Impact, Open Research, Research Inclusion and Sustainability.

Research inclusion

Implement the NIHR Research Inclusion (RI) Strategy. Deliver research inclusion projects, providing training and support, and strategic direction for the advancement of local and global RI.

Climate, Health and Sustainability

Support delivery of NIHR's Climate Health and Sustainability Commitments setting out our next steps towards developing sustainable and resilient health, social care and research systems.

National Partner Hub

The National Partner Hub provides a scientific advice/commissioning service to national evidence users and key partners, including DHSC, NHS England, NICE, the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) and the Office for Life Sciences (OLS).

- Work with partners to understand their evidence needs and co-produces commissioning briefs.
- Support researchers submitting high quality applications to these calls and fund research that addresses the evidence gaps.
- Provide a fast-track scheme for priority topics and hold strategic oversight of all NIHR's commissioned activity with these national partners.

Public Health Hub

Working closely with groups not traditionally involved in research, the Public Health Hub offers a single point of entry and coordinates and showcases NIHR's public health offer and the impact of our investment in public health.

NIHR Digital Data Systems

- Manage digital, data and web activities and services including technical development capacity to develop, support and maintain NIHR websites:
 - www.nihr.ac.uk
 - www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk
 - fundingawards.nihr.ac.uk
 - www.ct-toolkit.ac.uk
 - www.jla.nihr.ac.uk
 - nihr.opendatasoft.com
- Manage procurement, implementation, deployment and continuous improvement of the REALMS awards management system, based on the SmartSimple platform. Curate critical NIHR data assets, including infoNIHR. Procurement and supplier management for cross-NIHR services/tools:
 - Researchfish
 - QlikView/QlikSense
 - Dimensions
 - SmartSimple

CCF services

Research programmes

End-to-end commissioning for the following research programmes:

- **Research for Patient Benefit Programme (RfPB)** supports research into day-to-day practice and has a clear trajectory towards benefiting the health or wellbeing of patients and users of the NHS and social care services.

Regionally administered scheme that increases research capacity and capability by, for example, supporting clinicians to become early career researchers.

- ***Invention for Innovation Programme (i4i)*** takes innovations from industry, academic innovators, clinical entrepreneurs or collaborations, from proof of concept through to being adoption ready.

i4i brings an industrial, commercial, business and adoption mentality to complement the other programmes with its greater emphasis on scale, regulatory, reimbursement, pathway and real-world use of research.

- ***Programme Grants for Applied Research Programme (PGfAR)*** funds large scale programmes of applied research which use a variety of methods in a single programme to answer a series of research questions linked to an overall topic area.

Within the NIHR research landscape it enables at-scale research from early intervention development, epidemiology and systematic review through to definitive evaluation, assessment of health and care benefits and implementation planning. It is a very flexible scheme and typically incorporates a wider range of methodologies than other programmes and thus has the potential to address research questions not able to be addressed within a single grant in other schemes.

- ***Research Programme for Social Care (RPSC)*** aims to fund research that generates evidence which increases the effectiveness of social care (child and adult, UK-wide), provides value for money and benefits people who need or use social care and carers.

Every NIHR programme could potentially fund social care research – and some have done so (notably, HSDR and the Research for Social Care stream of RfPB) – but RPSC is NIHR's first programme-level commitment to social care and interfaces with other programmes are still being explored.

- ***Policy Research Programme (PRP)*** engages with policy stakeholders to commission research to generate robust evidence to inform policy development and implementation; evaluate policies; or to tackle policy priorities and evidence needs over the longer term.

PRP commissions policy research to support the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, Ministers and Senior Officials in DHSC and its Arm's Length Bodies.

- ***Research and Innovation for Global Health Transformation Programme (RIGHT)*** funds cutting-edge interdisciplinary applied health research in key areas in LMICs where a strategic and targeted investment can result in a transformative impact. To date, RIGHT has commissioned research on multimorbidity, mental health, epilepsy, infection-related cancers, stigmatising skin diseases and unintentional injuries and emergency medicine.

- ***Global Health Research Development Awards*** support the underpinning work for the development of high-quality global health research proposals and applications to help award holders and their institutions secure further research funding from the NIHR and other funders.

Key outcomes

The end-to-end commissioning process for CCF-managed NIHR programmes includes:

- ensuring calls reach a wide range of relevant research and the applications process is fair
- ensuring research addresses questions that are relevant to end users

- ensuring funding is awarded to the highest quality applicants, including via involving appropriate expertise particularly during peer/public and committee review.
- supporting researchers, including those in LMICs, to submit applications and providing high quality feedback.
- due diligence and contracting
- risk-proportionate post award monitoring
- acting as sound custodians of public money
- maximising potential for impact and minimises research waste.

Research infrastructure

End-to-end commissioning and management of NIHR research infrastructure schemes:

- Research Schools (Primary Care Research, Public Health Research and Social Care Research & X-School programmes)
- Research Units (Health Protection and Blood & Transplant)
- NIHR Innovation Observatory
- Biomedical Research Centres (BRC) and BioResource
- Clinical Research Facilities (CRF) and UK CRF Network
- Experimental Cancer Medicine Centres (ECMC)
- Applied Research Collaborations (ARCs)
- Patient Safety Research Collaborations (PSRCs) and PSRC Network
- HealthTech Research Centres (HRCs) and HRC Network
- Health Informatics Collaboratives (HICs)
- NIHR Research Support Service (RSS) and Specialist Centres for Public Health and Social Care
- Patient Recruitment Centres (PRCs) – from April 2024 – and evolving into Commercial Research Delivery Centres (CRDCs)
- NIHR Global Health Research Centres

Key outcomes

The end-to-end commissioning and management process of NIHR infrastructure managed by CCF includes development of call guidance, due diligence, contracting, post award monitoring to ensure infrastructure are meeting the strategic aims of the schemes and addressing emerging government priorities, and assessing impact at infrastructure and scheme level.

NIHR IP Unit

- Provides a comprehensive service covering both operational and strategic aspects of knowledge transfer.
- Undertakes IP processes (due diligence, commercialisation analysis, value extraction, data management, workshops, mentoring) and strategy development.

The IP Unit takes a broad view of knowledge transfer beyond the commercialisation for wealth generation.

Research Capability Funding

- Distribute Research Capability Funding (RCF) according to amounts calculated by DHSC, including collection of RCF agreements.
- Collect the recipients spend analysis and consolidate the response for reporting processes.

NIHR RCF is allocated to research-active NHS organisations or NHS health care providers, to enable them to maintain research capacity and capability.

NIHR External Affairs

- Lead and coordinate stakeholder engagement and public affairs across NIHR to support more effective working with NIHR's key partners and improving awareness of the NIHR amongst Parliamentarians.
- Provide dedicated implementation and communications management for the Future of Clinical Research Delivery programme, including Research Recovery and Growth (RRG), and the Lord O' Shaughnessy programme of work.
- HMG engagement with key industry partners to develop strategic R&D partnerships and onshoring clinical trial activity.
- Development of a Vaccine Innovation Pathway to accelerate trials of vaccines for infectious diseases and mRNA therapeutics and vaccines for cancer.

NIHR Assurance Unit

- Develop and implement NIHR's assurance strategy.

Impact

- Provide impact and insight products to meet DHSC needs.

UK Public Health Rapid Support Team (UK-PHRST) (DHSC Global Health Security)

- Support the DHSC Global Health Security team to manage the research elements of the UK Public Health Rapid Support Team (UK-PHRST) capability.
- Manage the delivery of UK PHRST's research activities, assess ODA and remit compliance of proposed work, review strategies and research plans, and monitor progress against agreed deliverables and objectives.

JISC and Open Access

- Provide a dashboard report for monitoring and evaluating the performance of award holders against the requirements of the revised NIHR Open Access publication policy.
- Explore options for increasing access for NIHR funded authors to publishing agreements with expert support from JISC.

Open Research

- Manage delivery of the 'NIHR Open Research' through the F1000 publishing platform
- NIHR Open Research complements the NIHR Journals Library. Together they ensure findings from all NIHR funded research are publicly available.

NOCRI services

Collaboration

- Support, develop and scope NIHR-wide collaborations.
- Creates opportunities across NIHR Research Infrastructure to collaborate widely across NIHRCC, life sciences industry, charities and the clinical research landscape.
- Supports the Translational Research Collaborations (TRCs), some with a key role in delivering and supporting the Life Sciences Vision Missions.

Business development

- Spearheads NIHR's international visibility to the life science industry at high profile events, conferences, and webinars with key international organisations.
- Provides services to support life science companies of all sizes from around the world, and in particular UK based SMEs, to navigate and access both the expertise and industry supporting services funded by the NIHR and when appropriate the wider UK healthcare system.
- Catalyses the formation of research activity and the acceleration of study design and delivery within research infrastructure to help develop innovative technologies that support patient care to generate the evidence required for regulatory and market access.

NIHR Academy services

Research academic training, career development and capacity building programmes

End-to-end commissioning for the following research academic training and capacity building programmes:

- **NIHR Research Professorships** develop leaders, build research capacity and promote effective translation of research. Host Organisations nominate applicants to annual Research Professorships competitions (with initiatives to increase applicants from female and ethnic minority group applicants).
- **NIHR Integrated Clinical Academic (ICA) Programme** supports health and care professionals (excluding doctors and dentists) to develop careers combining research with continued practice and professional development. Pre-doctoral Clinical and Practitioner Academic Fellowship (PCAF) competitions run annually. Doctoral Clinical and Practitioner Academic Fellowships (DCAF) and Advanced Clinical and Practitioner Academic Fellowships (ACAF) have two competitions per annum.
- **NIHR Fellowships** support individuals on a trajectory to becoming future leaders in health and social care NIHR research. Predoctoral Fellowships (1 competition per year) are for individuals developing a research methodology career. Doctoral and Advanced Fellowships (2 competitions per year) support doctoral and postdoctoral health and care researchers from all professional backgrounds.
- **Integrated Academic Training (IAT) Award** provides research training for doctors and dentists integrated within their clinical training. Posts are awarded to partnerships of Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) (medical/dental schools), NHS organisations and NHSE offices. NIHR Academic Clinical Fellowships (ACFs) posts generally predoctoral and NIHR Clinical Lectureship (CL) posts are offered later in specialty training and at a postdoctoral level. Posts are awarded to organisations following national competition. Host partnerships are responsible for recruitment to the posts in line with NIHR guidance.
- **Senior Investigators Programme** recognises the outstanding contribution of prominent researchers to NIHR and health and care research. Two high profile events are organised each year (SI Induction and SI/RP events) which bring together this leadership community and senior leaders from DHSC and NIHR.

- **Senior Clinical and Practitioner Research Award** aims to support the career development of postdoctoral level research active senior clinicians or practitioners, or those looking to embark on or return to a role involving research and help embed roles involving research into NHS and other clinical and care settings. The awards have a broader remit than solely for clinical academics and support research activity more broadly including, for example, research delivery methodology.
- **NIHR Local Authority Academic Fellowships (LAAF)** supports individuals based within local authority settings at pre-doctoral (PLAF), doctoral (DLAF) and advance (ACAF) level to develop as health and/or social care researchers whilst retaining their existing employment and salary.
- **Undergraduate** includes a range of schemes aimed at attracting people into research careers at an early stage (undergraduate level), with a particular focus on underrepresented progressions and backgrounds.:
 - **INSIGHT: Inspiring Students into Research:** Organisations bid to deliver engagement programmes and up to 30 funded intercalated Masters studentships each year for 3 years across 12 regions.
 - **Undergraduate Internships:** Applications are open to early-mid career researchers to host undergraduate interns.
 - **New Medical Schools Internship and Intercalation:** Medical schools offering undergraduate degrees bid for support for internships and intercalated BSc studentships prioritising Widening Participation students.
- **Bridging and short-term support** includes:
 - **Pre-application support fund** to provide extra support for up to 12 months across all career stages for individuals struggling to otherwise prepare applications for NIHR career development awards, targeting underrepresented groups and professions.
 - **Development and Skills Enhancement (DSE) Award** provides “bridging with a purpose” - support for training and development that will increase competitiveness for further NIHR funding.
- **Incubators** aim to build research capacity in areas of national need. They are bespoke to the challenges in their field. Each Incubator has 3 years of funding and support, a Lead applicant and a Steering group, who provide an annual report.
- **Team Science Award** aims to bring together individuals from a variety of disciplines to tackle complex current and emerging health and care challenges. Each round is themed, and interdisciplinary teams apply for £100,000 over 6-24 months to collaborate on a future application. A Team Science Camp is held each year over 3 days. Attendees will learn about what they bring to a team and how to form effective teams.
- **NIHR Global Health Advanced Fellowship** were launched in 2024 and fund 10-20 awards annually for mid-career researchers.
- **NIHR Global Research Professors** funds five awards annually to support senior academics on track to become a future Global Health research leader.

- **NIHR Global Health Research Training Programme** includes Short Placement for Applied Global Health Research (SPARC) award which are open to members, and provides an opportunity to spend time in another NIHR programme to enhance research training and networking and Cohort Academic Development Award (CADA) award which are open to training leads, and provides a tailored programme of activities to meet the training.
 - The programme also adds value and builds upon existing investments across the GHR portfolio, working with:
 - Training Leads: individuals within GHR awards who are responsible for training and capacity strengthening.
 - Members: individuals who are supported by GHR awards to develop their academic careers.

NIHR Academy Member support

- Future Focused Leadership Programme providing tailored leadership coaching and training to leaders across the research community.
- Mentoring Programme for postdoctoral members from all professional backgrounds

NIHR Schools capacity building programmes

- Manage the NIHR Schools' capacity building investments, to ensure their offer is complementary to NIHR Academy's wider capacity building programmes.
- The NIHR Schools for Primary Care Research (SPCR), for Social Care Research (SSCR) and for Public Health Research (SPHR) each have a capacity building programme that sits alongside their research programme.

NIHR Infrastructure academic career development support

- Convene an annual meeting of the Academic Career Development Leads from NIHR's Biomedical Research Centres, Applied Research Collaborations Patient Safety Research Collaborations and Health Protection Research Units to share best practice and challenges.
- Run an annual Doctoral Training Camp over 3 days that focuses on applying for further funding.
- Manage Short Placement Awards for Research Collaboration (SPARC) to enable pre-doc, doctoral and post-doc researchers in the Infrastructure and Schools to undertake a short placement elsewhere in the NIHR that will enhance their CVs.

International capacity building

- Establish bilateral relationships with international partners in areas of strategic importance.
- Manage collaboration between NIHR, MRC and the National Cancer Institute within NIH to deliver Cancer Research Transatlantic Development and Skills Enhancement (DSE) Awards

Collaboration with partners

- Ensure NIHR's research training programmes meet the needs of our stakeholders and also complement and enhance the wider research training landscape.
- Partner with charities and industry on co-funding personal awards

Communications, events and engagement

- Coordinate engagement with Academy members and key partners.
- Communication activities to promote training opportunities, with a particular focus on underrepresented areas and groups including HCPs.
- Monthly members newsletter, with content optimised for engagement with Members across our website, social media and third-party channels.
- Organise and deliver annual NIHR Academy Members Conference, events for Research Professors and Senior Investigators and annual Doctoral Training Camp.

Evaluation, Business Intelligence and Impact

- Manage data warehouse and provide information to various internal and external stakeholders (including responding to information requests)
- Assess and showcase the impact of NIHR investment into research training and career programmes.

Best Research for Best Health: The Next Chapter

NIHR's overall operational priorities are set out in [Best Research for Best Health: The Next Chapter](#). The following six core workstreams will remain key to delivering NIHR's mission:

1. Commission and fund high quality, timely research that benefits the NHS, public health, and social care.
2. Invest in world-class expertise and facilities to translate discoveries into improved treatments and services.
3. Partner with patients, service users, carers and communities, improving the relevance, quality and impact of research.
4. Attract and support the best researchers to tackle complex health and social care challenges.
5. Collaborate with industry, other public funders and charities and to help shape a cohesive and globally competitive research system.
6. Fund applied global health research and training to meet the needs of the poorest people in low- and middle-income countries.

In addition, NIHR's five operating principles will continue to shape and reflect our culture and guide our decision-making:

1. **Impact** - We prioritise the challenges that are most important to those who use, work in and manage health and social care services and that could most benefit from research evidence. We accelerate the translation of discoveries and partner with others to ensure our evidence is used to improve everyday practice. We track progress against our goals and strive to ensure that our research addresses the needs of patients, service users, carers, communities, and the public.
2. **Excellence** - The quality of our researchers, research outputs and training is worldleading, and we have a highly skilled research design and delivery workforce. We embrace the latest developments in technology, research data and methods and knowledge mobilisation. We operate to the highest standards of integrity and

transparency in our funding and commissioning processes, and ensure that our evidence is accessible and actively disseminated.

3. **Inclusion** - We are committed to equality, diversity and inclusion in everything we do. Diverse people and communities shape our research, and we strive to make opportunities to participate in research an integral part of everyone's experience of health and social care services. We develop researchers from multiple disciplines, specialisms, geographies and backgrounds, and work to address barriers to career progression arising from characteristics such as sex, race or disability.
4. **Collaboration** - We partner with the NHS, public health and social care systems, people and communities, universities, government, regulators, the devolved administrations, industry, charities and other research funders to maximise our collective impact. We encourage collaboration across disciplines and specialisms, between researchers and the public, and within our own organisation. We foster equitable partnerships with researchers and institutions in low and middle income countries.
5. **Effectiveness** - We are sound custodians of public money. We have a strong track record of improving the efficiency of research and of generating evidence that enables health and social care systems to become more effective. We have a culture of continuous improvement, finding ways to simplify and streamline our processes, improve our communications and accessibility, harness the power of digital technology, and enhance people's experience of working with and for us.

[Best Research for Best Health: The Next Chapter](#) also sets out seven areas of strategic focus. These will evolve over the coming years and over the life of the new contracts and potential suppliers will need to demonstrate a high degree of flexibility and innovation to pivot to new priorities.