

## **BEST RESEARCH FOR BEST HEALTH**

### **IMPLEMENTATION PLAN 6.6**

#### **RESEARCH UNITS**

*Best Research for Best Health*<sup>1</sup> set out a 5-year Research and Development Strategy for the NHS in England. This Implementation Plan provides more details on one of the key components of that strategy: **RESEARCH UNITS**. This document will be regularly updated. The latest version should be used.

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#### **NIHR RESEARCH UNITS**

Our present National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Research Units include Policy Research Units, Academic Units and Research and Development Support Units. These will continue to receive funding under their current contracts subject to the standard review process.

#### **Aims**

- Support policy-making nationally.
- Provide expert advice relevant to health and social care research.
- Support the development and management of clinical trials.
- Support research capacity and activity locally.

#### **Purpose**

- We will fund NIHR Research Units in order to support our different needs including:
  - provision of research-based expert advice
  - sustaining research capacity in priority areas
  - supporting the development and management of patient-focused research in the NHS.
  - All units will have agreed work plans and milestones and will continue to be performance managed and reviewed regularly.

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<sup>1</sup> *Best Research for Best Health: A New National Health Research Strategy*. The NHS contribution to health research in England. Department of Health. 2006

## **Policy Research Units**

- The NIHR will continue to fund existing policy research units and will review these periodically to ensure relevance to Department of Health (DH) priorities. The Policy Research Programme currently has five-year contracts with 17 research units and centres that provide high quality, negotiated, programmes of R&D to meet departmental priorities. These units provide an evidence base for policy-making in DH and are funded and managed centrally.
- These units cover some of those areas where there is heavy national competition for, and hence shortage of, expertise or where the expertise would not otherwise be easily available for DH to draw on. They are based within universities.
- These policy research units must continue to be responsive to DH needs, flexible within their areas of expertise, able to provide a rapid response when necessary, and prepared to work in partnership to translate research findings to inform the implementation of policies in health and social care.
- They are a source of training and career development for social and health services researchers.

## **Academic Units**

- The NIHR will continue to support a number of academic units with specific expertise appropriate to the needs of DH. These will be linked to other research units where relevant and/or support other NIHR programmes.
- These will provide high-level academic support to health and social care research by initiating, developing and maintaining collaborative research and promoting interdisciplinary research.
- They will provide a resource of expert advice on a variety of academic subjects relevant to health and social research.

## **Clinical Trials Units**

- The NIHR will continue to work with its partners to increase the number of individuals treated as part of well-designed multi-centre studies and trials. This increase in trial activity will need to be underpinned by an increase in clinical trial management capacity.
- The NIHR proposes to develop a network of Clinical Trials Units, which will need to collaborate closely with local R&D Support Units (see below). They will provide specific expertise and support the development and management of multi-centre studies and trials. We will ensure that units are developed over time to support specific areas of expertise.
- The NIHR is not the only, or indeed the main, provider of funding for Clinical Trials Units. Thus, developments will involve working with our partners to complement existing provision.
- Further work will map the current provision of Clinical Trials Units across the various funders and associated subject areas. Geographical coverage, subject area coverage etc will also be analysed to ensure maximum use of the network that is available.
- The Department of Health's R&D Directorate is also undertaking a review of the current capacity available to support clinical trials.

## **Research and Development Support Units**

- The NIHR will continue to support a network of research and development support units (RDSUs) with a geographical spread across the country. Typical R&D support activity is provided by a facility that:
  - a) Offers consultative advice on research methodology and protocol development.
  - b) Supports research training including training events on research and research methodology, mentoring NHS staff holding research training awards, and hosting NHS staff in research training.
  - c) Collaborates in specific research projects, when appropriate.
  - d) Is available to all potential and established NHS researchers, irrespective of the category of organisation which employs them.

**Department of Health Lead:**  
Dr Peter Sneddon  
Head of Research Programmes  
[Peter.Sneddon@dh.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Peter.Sneddon@dh.gsi.gov.uk)