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Dear colleagues

URGENT ACTION TO ADDRESS THE CURRENT RESEARCH DELIVERY CHALLENGES IN THE NHS

We are writing to update you on continued efforts to support the delivery of research and our commitment to support a diverse and balanced portfolio of studies.

We remain committed to delivering on the ambitions set out in [Saving and Improving Lives: the future of UK clinical research delivery](#), and to supporting the recovery of UK clinical research delivery system needed to enable this. However, clinical research delivery is facing unprecedented challenges at present, and we believe there is now an urgent need and an opportunity to reset to build a stronger future.

The [Managed Recovery](#) process was implemented in spring 2021 and has had a degree of success. Studies selected by research funders and sponsors for inclusion in the Managed Recovery cohort have recruited more quickly than those on our wider portfolio. However, this has not had the effect of clearing the path for other studies paused or delayed in the early stages of the pandemic to return to the levels of recruitment that would normally be expected.

The Clinical Research Network currently supports studies from a wide range of non-commercial and commercial funders, with around 20% being directly NIHR-funded. The number of studies in the portfolio is currently higher than ever before. This is accounted for by the additional COVID-19 studies; other research that has remained on the portfolio from before the pandemic that has been paused or delayed by pandemic-related challenges; together with new studies being funded and coming into the system. In addition, the number of studies in set up is now much higher than prior to the pandemic, further increasing the workload for NHS R&D offices and research delivery teams. This is taking place in the context of the recovery of NHS services and the ongoing pandemic, with the most recent omicron wave significantly impacting staffing levels across the system. Throughout this the resilience of the workforce has been remarkable.

We have consulted with stakeholders across the research system and the NHS and have heard consistently that we now need to take radical action to address the situation. Data available through the NIHR portfolio management systems has confirmed this and emphasises the need for an expedited approach. We have therefore initiated work at pace

to develop options for a revised approach. It is likely that this will include closing some studies that are struggling in the current context. Subject to agreement from Ministers, we will share plans with partners and stakeholders in the first weeks of March 2022.

In developing options, we will consider the open portfolio, new studies coming into the system, supporting sites to make transparent and realistic assessments of capacity and capability, and potential implications of any changes on the future portfolio and UK ecosystem.

The aim of this work is to ensure that the research ecosystem can continue to flourish. We are committed to undertaking this essential work in a transparent and informed way so that together we are able to deliver on the potential of clinical research to tackle health inequalities, improve the lives of people across the UK and to boost economic recovery.

Yours sincerely



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