

15th December 2023

Dear UKRD / UHA R&D / R&D Forum members,

Re: NIHR Regional Delivery Network

The purpose of this letter is to outline the transition process from CRN to RDN, to highlight the R&D community input so far and to advise of further opportunities to engage with the design process.

As you will have seen, the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) announced the new NIHR Research Delivery Network (RDN) on 14th November. The University of Leeds will be the supplier of the NIHR Research Delivery Network Coordinating Centre (RDNCC) from 1st April 2024. Twelve new Regional Research Delivery Networks (RRDNs) will start to function from 1st October 2024.

It is clear that the consultation carried out by DHSC in 2021 on the future of the clinical research network has helped to shape the vision and high-level specification for the RDN. The R&D community was a major contributor to that consultation and our voices have been heard.

The NIHR Clinical Research Network Coordinating Centre and DHSC have now initiated the programme of work to design the services and functions of the new RDN. The first phase of the design process is aimed at providing a set of short, snappy descriptions of RDN services. These descriptions are based on the service that DHSC has formally procured, and it is clear that the DHSC's aim is to provide focus and clarity around the primary role of support for research delivery across health and social care. The RDN transition leads and other CRN staff have been working on these descriptions in recent weeks. They presented their first draft ideas for discussion at a 2-day recommendation selection workshop on 6th-7th December.

We are pleased to report that the R&D community was represented at the recommendation selection workshop through UKRD (Nick McNally and Julian Walker), R&D Forum (Angela Topping) and UHA R&D (Saul Faust). The comments shared at the workshop are now being incorporated into next iteration, refined, but still high level, service descriptions. We felt that the contributions we made at the workshop on behalf of the R&D community were welcomed and taken on board. We were able to voice our questions and challenges, some of which relate to the [UKRD discussion paper](#) from 2021 to which many of you contributed.

All involved in this process acknowledge that the timelines for establishing RDN are short and challenging. The DHSC has set itself the goal of providing high level, service descriptions to each of the RRDN host organisations by 31st January 2024 to enable them to begin workforce planning.

Phase 2 of the service design work effectively begins from February. It will be at this stage that the details get added into service specifications, resourcing levels identified and interfaces and

integration with R&D offices worked out. The financial model for both the split between the 12 RRDNs and how the RRDNs will deploy the funding is not yet agreed and is also part of phase 2. DHSC regards the 8-month period from February to September 2024 as a period for iterating the service specifications with input from stakeholders such as the R&D community. DHSC has acknowledged that this change process will take some time to get completely right.

What does this mean for us as an R&D community? Crucially, it means that we are involved in the service design process. But it also means that, given the time pressures, we are going to have to be very nimble in the coming months as we get called upon to input to the service design process. There is considerable variation in the departments we run, our experiences of the CRN but also in the RRDNs we are due to be part of. In practice, at some point in the new year we will need to rapidly work out the best way to organise ourselves to ensure inclusivity in our responses and input. We hope to be able to advise on some more of the specifics in early January, but at the time of writing the exact dates and further timelines are not yet available.

With kind regards and season's greetings,

Nick McNally (UKRD)

Julian Walker (UKRD)

Angela Topping (R&D Forum)

Saul Faust (UHA R&D)