

NIHR Research Delivery Network Strategy and Service Development

Stakeholder engagement consultation document v4.2

Context and purpose of this document

The purpose of this document is to initiate a consultation process with stakeholders regarding the strategic aims and objectives of the new NIHR Research Delivery Network (RDN), and the implications they will have on our services and the way we operate. In this document, we outline our proposed aims and objectives, our operating principles and the significant organisational shifts we believe are necessary for the organisation to achieve the aims and objectives and deliver on our purpose. These organisational shifts reflect our commitment to adapting and evolving in response to emerging challenges and opportunities within the health and social care system and the research landscape.

By sharing this information we hope to create a foundation for a more informed and productive consultation process.

Timelines and Next Steps

We are moving at pace to finalise the aims, objectives, and operating principles by mid-November, which will provide the foundation for the service design implementation. While there will be some time to focus on these elements during the meeting on the 30th October, the primary focus will be on understanding the practical implications of these aims and objectives, and how we can effectively put them into practice and build on extensive feedback already provided by stakeholders.

Background

The content of this document reflects consultation with a large number of stakeholders over several years by the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), the UK Clinical Research Recovery Resilience and Growth programme, and the NIHR Clinical Research Network. This work has provided the basis for the establishment of a new mission, purpose and organisation structure. With these defined and new contracts in place, we now move to the next stage of our transformation plan, defining the shifts in mindset and practice that need to underpin our new ways of working.

We are committed to submitting a draft five-year strategy to DHSC by the end of March 2025 and to implementing new services and operating models from April 2025. These will provide the basis for continuous evolution and improvement in partnership with organisations across

the research delivery system. This document and the consultation process represents a critical step in our pathway to achieving this.

How we developed our way forward

The development of the RDN's strategic aims and objectives has been an iterative and collaborative process, drawing on a range of evidence, stakeholder input, and expert guidance. This phased approach has enabled us to ensure that the strategy is grounded in both the current needs of the health and social care system and the future vision for the health and social care system and the RDN. The key steps in this process have included:

1. **Consultation and survey of the health and social care research community:** Pre tender (2021) DHSC actively sought input from the health and social care research community through a series of consultations and surveys. This engagement informed the [RDN Coordinating Centre \(RDNCC\) specification](#) and the [Regional RDN \(RRDN\) service description](#), which form the basis of the contracts for the new RDN.
2. **Consultation on the CRN's contribution to key government priorities:** The CRN - and now RDN - is a key partner in the UK Clinical Research Recovery Resilience and Growth programme. Consultation across the research delivery system informed the CRN's contribution to implementing [Saving and Improving Lives: the future of UK Clinical Research \(2021\)](#) and subsequent implementation plans (2021, 2022) and the [Full Government Response to the O'Shaughnessy Review \(2023\)](#).
3. **Phase 1 of RDN service design:** A significant amount of work was undertaken at the end of 2023/beginning of 2024 with the health and social care research community to begin to map out key requirements for RDN services under the new RDN contract. The outputs provided the basis for our new organisation structure and [our service and function descriptions](#).
4. **Engagement with RDN Health and Care Leaders:** We held a dedicated workshop with health and care leaders in the RDN to hear firsthand about the opportunities and challenges for research delivery in their specific fields of practice, focusing on those that were within the remit of the RDN to respond to.
5. **Engagement with RDN Staff:** We developed a survey inviting RDN staff to reflect on their areas of work in relation to the health and social care research environment. They were asked to envision what changes they wanted to see in the next five years that the organisation should begin working towards now. We also sought their insights on why these changes were important and the potential impact they could have on research delivery. We encouraged staff to think broadly and strategically, avoiding a focus on small, iterative steps, in order to foster ambitious ideas that will shape the future of research within the RDN.
6. **Evidence Synthesis:** A comprehensive synthesis of strategies and reports relevant to the health and social care research environment was undertaken to inform the development of our strategic aims. In total, 57 different publicly available strategies and reports were reviewed, representing 40 different stakeholders and organisations across the health and social care landscape. This included health and social care providers, research regulators, policymakers, charities, industry partners and the

NIHR. The synthesis identified key strategic themes which aligned strongly with themes identified in discussions with Health and Care Leaders and staff. They serve as the foundation for our strategic aims and were central to shaping discussions during a RDN strategic planning workshop.

7. **RDN Strategic Planning Workshop:** A strategic planning workshop in September 2024 brought together the RDN Board, composed of RDNCC, RRDNs and DHSC, and members of the RDN Senior Leadership Team. The workshop and subsequent refinements provided the basis for the content in this document, exploring the RDN's specific remit within the research delivery system, the immediate and long-term impact the RDN should aim to achieve, and what should be started, stopped, or continued in relation to current practice.

Stakeholder brief

The sub-sections below provide a full overview of the new RDN. The Vision, Mission and Purpose of the RDN provide the essential context and remit for the creation of the new organisation and have been approved by DHSC. The Operating Principles, Aims and Objectives, and Organisational Shifts have been drafted for your consideration during this consultation period.

RDN Vision, Mission and Purpose (approved)

Building on the success of the Clinical Research Network (CRN), the RDN **vision** is for the UK to be a global leader in the delivery of high quality research that is inclusive, accessible, and improves health and care.

Our **mission** is to enable the health and care system to attract, optimise and deliver research across England.

We have **two primary purposes**:

- To support the successful delivery of high quality research, as an active partner in the research system
- To increase capacity and capability of the research delivery infrastructure for the future

As a result, research will reach more people, address changing population needs, support the health and care system and the economy, and become a routine part of care.

RDN Operating Principles (for consideration)

Our operating principles will guide us in our ways of working. They are the golden threads that run through all of our aims and objectives, and keep us focused as one network on the way we wish to operate, and the way we wish to be seen by our delivery organisations, customers and stakeholders who comprise the health and social care system in which we operate. These are the principles that all RDN staff will be expected to operate to.

1. We are one network working within a 'one NIHR' system, and as part of the wider health and social care system. Our practices will be collegiate and connected, and we will work with acknowledged experts to inform our practice
2. We will act in a manner that is risk aware and is respectful of others and their roles within the health and care research system, acknowledging that the greatest assets are the people and the system we operate within
3. We will be consistent and add value whilst ensuring that we operate as a learning organisation, acknowledging that we do not always know best
4. We support UK government policies and priorities, we will build capacity and agility to ensure we can respond to emerging priorities and the changing health and care environment
5. We will operate across the whole health and social care pathway, being inclusive, and focused on opportunities for the whole population
6. We will be sustainable, accountable and impactful, recognising that quantity does not necessarily equal quality
7. We will be considerate and pause for reflection before acting
8. We will serve the interests and needs of the public in improving their access to research, particularly those from under-served communities

Aims and objectives (for consideration)

The aims and objectives are presented here in table format. There are five aims each with its own set of objectives. All aims are designed to be delivered nationally with regional implementation plans. No specific area of the RDN will have responsibility for a specific aim, all aims are applicable across all functions and services of the RDN.

Ref	Strategic Aim 1
1	As a system partner we will facilitate the efficient delivery of RDN Portfolio research which is collaborative and inclusive, and supports the participant journey through the health and social care system at the right time and in the most appropriate setting
Objectives	
1.1	Promote a broader, viable range of sites to sponsors and investigators as part of a national research-ready health and social care system, optimising the placement of studies
1.2	Provide advice and support to researchers and sponsors which enables them to plan the delivery of their studies across the entire health and social care journey, this includes sign-posting to, and supporting, data enabled recruitment through national and regional data in sets
1.3	Support a diverse and balanced portfolio of studies that will be delivered across all relevant settings and populations.
1.4	Enable new delivery organisations to conduct research that is relevant to their services and the needs of their service users.

1.5	In partnership with the wider social care system stakeholders and NIHR, further define, develop and grow a service offering for delivery of social care research, and delivery of relevant research in social care settings
1.6	In response to the Darzi review (2024) and in partnership with the wider health and social care system develop a service offering for delivery of research in independent provider settings
1.7	Respond to regional and national health and care inequalities by ensuring that those living with the greatest burden of disease are enabled to participate in research
1.8	Extend our reach into communities that have previously not been able to participate in research, to enhance and further develop resources and initiatives to promote research participation opportunities and support research delivery activities.
1.9	Ensure the public has access to research information and options through improved national interfaces and resources, including but not limited to, Be Part of Research and Join Dementia Research. These resources will be accessible to the public and researchers alike to support the recruitment of participants to studies.
1.10	Develop capacity and capability for research delivery by providing strategic funding based on national priorities, measuring value for money and impact against strategic project delivery
1.11	Use a national funding model for delivery partner allocations that supports the integration and strategic growth of research opportunities within the health and social care journey
1.12	Manage the deployment of the Agile workforce in a fair and transparent way with clear expectations outlined at the outset
1.13	Collaborate across the research system to collect, analyse and share appropriate metrics of research delivery, including being able to show sponsors and investigators the value/benefits of using different sites and delivery methodologies for studies
Strategic Aim 2	
2	As a system partner we will support and promote a culture to ensure that research delivery is the responsibility of everyone working within health and social care
Objectives	
2.1	Provide materials and system-wide evidence to support and influence delivery organisations and stakeholders who are engaged in, and/or receptive to research, to support the culture of research delivery in every job role and every setting
2.2	Offer a comprehensive suite of resources to delivery organisations and stakeholders in order to support them in promoting, engaging and training in research delivery, ensuring these materials can be tailored to meet the specific needs of their audiences and settings.

2.3	Promote the adoption of research readiness tools to assist organisations in evaluating their readiness for research delivery, and support the development of plans to address any areas of concern
2.4	Promote the RDN activities and resources to ensure the health and social care system is aware of who we are and how we can help them to deliver research
Strategic Aim 3	
3	As a system partner we will develop an internationally renowned, responsive, sustainable and diverse research delivery workforce
Objectives	
3.1	Ensure our RDN teams in the RRDNs and RDNCC have positive impact, are recognised as RDN staff and work as a single network
3.2	Invest in the recruitment and retention of a diverse workforce within RDN teams in the RRDNs and RDNCC, relevant to the regional population, and influence and support delivery organisations to ensure diversity in their RDN funded research delivery workforce
3.3	We will respond to the health and social care system needs to invest in and develop an expert, flexible research delivery workforce (Agile workforce) across all regions, trained to nationally consistent standards, and deployed by RDN to work within delivery partner organisations as needed.
3.4	Support the workforce we fund through our delivery organisations to have a positive impact within their organisation by providing training and career progression opportunities
3.5	Respond to government policy/missions and system needs to drive investment in workforce capacity and capability for research delivery in a nationally consistent way
3.6	Support national professional bodies to develop and implement consistent standards for research delivery practice (eg accreditation) with opportunities for all research delivery staff to achieve them
Strategic Aim 4	
4	As a system partner we will support the development of novel delivery methods to develop capacity and capability for research delivery
Objectives	
4.1	We will generate evidence about research delivery processes, ensuring we are recognised for innovative delivery methods throughout the health and social care pathway
4.2	Invest in capacity and capability to support innovative study delivery across all settings, enabling all parts of the health and social care system to successfully

	deliver as appropriate
4.3	Engage early (pre funding) with Investigators, methodologists, funders and NIHR Research Support Service to support study development and ensure deliverability of studies within and across relevant settings
4.4	Work with the NIHR Innovation Observatory to stay ahead of the curve in new technologies, settings and study designs and support feasibility for research delivery in relation to them
4.5	We will support the exploration of delivery models which incentivise the health and social care system to promote easier and more effective research delivery
Strategic Aim 5	
5	As a system partner we will support the UK in its aim to become one of the top 5 countries of choice to enable world leading delivery of life sciences research
Objectives	
5.1	Foster relationships with commercial and non-commercial sponsors (including UK based SME and med tech companies), setting up key accounts where needed
5.2	Proactively build Life Science Industry relationships in collaboration with NIHR External Affairs, Department for Business and Trade and Office for Life Sciences
5.3	Work in partnership across NIHR infrastructure, and with DHSC, to ensure a boundaryless experience for life sciences studies moving from early to late phase
5.4	Develop an Active National Delivery service that sits above our standard service that will be available for government priority projects or on a fee-for-service basis
5.5	Develop metrics of quality and consistency that will provide valuable intelligence to inform the placement of studies and assure life science companies that they are receiving a standardised, high quality service across all delivery sites
5.6	Support the development of innovative business models to accelerate commercial research delivery in community and primary care settings
5.7	Publish the evidence (including case studies) showing the value and impact of RDN as a system partner

Organisational shifts (for consideration)

In order to achieve our aims and objectives, and in response to both internal and external feedback, we recognise that we will need to 'shift' as an organisation and start to think and work in different ways in order to deliver a service which supports key Government priorities, alongside the health and care needs of our communities. The shifts have evolved into a dynamic tool, which will change and flex alongside the RDN as we learn to best serve the

needs of our service users, stakeholders and customers. Figure 1 represents the direction of travel for the RDN as we work through those organisational shifts.



Figure 1: A representation of the direction of travel for the RDN in terms of what the organisation will shift towards being.

Summary

The above content, and your feedback on it, has understandable implications for RDN Service Design, and we appreciate that there is anticipation to understand more about progress and plans in this respect. As stakeholders, and users of the future RDN services, it is important that we ensure the RDN understands your goals and needs, and that the services offered will address these (within the remit of the RDN) in the future. While we recognise that not all services will be in their final planned state on 1 April 2025, we are working towards the initial implementation of new services by this time. We will also continue to implement and learn from the delivery of commitments made in response to the O'Shaughnessy review and other government priorities. We look forward to discussing this with you as part of the consultation process.