

RDN Leaders

Blog



Professor Andrew Ustianowski
Interim RDN Executive Director

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Dear Colleagues,

I'd like to introduce myself to those that I haven't had the chance to meet yet. I am the Interim Executive Director of the NIHR Research Delivery Network (RDN), covering for John Sitzia who is away for family reasons. Some of you may already know me from my substantive role as a Regional Network Director, or previous roles as a CRN co-Clinical Director and lead for our vaccine research programmes. I'm looking forward to working with all of you in this national role over the coming months, and I would also like to take this opportunity to thank you and your teams for all the hard work that you have given to support health and care research.

Within the RDN and the wider ecosystem, it is a time of significant change - not just as a consequence of the organisational change from the Clinical Research Network (CRN) to the new Research Delivery Network (RDN), but also as a result of the new Government, and the new and added pressures within each of our organisations. I therefore believe (a feeling echoed across our new organisation) that increased communication is important so we all understand better what is happening within the RDN but also across the wider R&D system.

Going forwards I am keen to hear from you directly if there are specific issues or concerns you would like to raise (and feel free to also escalate any such items through your Regional RDN Directors), but please be assured that there is also frequent communication across regional and national bodies and teams. The RDN has regular meetings with UKRD, the R&D Forum, the University Hospitals Association (UHA), the alliance of research active community NHS Trusts (CHART) and others, but I appreciate that there is a need for quick access to regular messages at this key stage and I hope that this and future updates will help in this regard.

As you will be aware, the regions transitioned from being LCRNs to Regional Research Delivery Networks (RRDNs) on 1st October. During this process we realigned from 15 regional networks to 12, but there are also multiple other significant organisational changes. This transition was needed to truly enhance the country's potential and capacity to consistently deliver health and care research. Across the research system, all of us will need to alter our services and functions, as well as embrace a new culture and ways of working.

There will be some instability as these significant changes take place – but we are keen to support you to ensure your services are as stable as possible over this time. Your Network funding has been confirmed for an extended period of time and our Agile / Direct Delivery / Out-of-Hospital delivery support teams will continue relatively unchanged through to 2026. These should help to ensure more stability whilst further significant work is undertaken to ascertain the best models for the future. We will also be developing and then delivering a consistent and clearer national RDN funding model from 1st April 2026, as well as new contracts, processes, updated terms & conditions, and other aligned processes.

These latter areas (and many more) will continue to require significant consultation with relevant stakeholders, and that obviously includes you. We will be communicating via your representative bodies on how you can best engage and help create a better system for us all. We appreciate and need your help in this. To update you on recent progress in this regard, there was a recent national workshop involving professional bodies and collectives that has been instrumental in shaping our on-going approach to the service design work and strategy development. As a result of key stakeholder feedback we are in a better position to: develop a range of options / platforms for collaboration and engagement; benchmark aims against stakeholder expectations; and provide timelines to map the process and demonstrate progress.

I am keen to keep you updated generally on such progress and initiatives. In this particular blog I also want to focus on our digital developments (with future blogs planned to be focussing on other areas).

We have had some considerable successes. One is that our national registry – [Be Part of Research](#) – has successfully passed a significant hurdle (the Government Digital Service assessment ensuring the service meets a high standard for engagement with the public) which now allows the planning of a formal public launch. There are already almost 600,000 volunteers signed up, but there are ambitions to get this to much higher levels as well as ensuring better diversity and representativeness. The service will become a vital asset for the wider research ecosystem and hopefully help us achieve our lofty aims of the UK becoming (and remaining) a leading venue globally for any health or care study.

We have also launched the [Scoping Locations for Research Self-Service Tool](#), which will help life sciences companies and researchers identify our nation, and then specific locations around the UK that have strong recruitment potential, for their specific study or pipeline. It will also help us to identify any gaps in our offer and to bolster our initiatives around reaching our under-served communities.

A major other initiative is the Site ID Tool. Work supporting this important pillar of our future functionality has been progressing behind the scenes and I hope we can give you demonstrations of its functionality and further details in the near future.

All these align to our Government's proposed shift from 'Analogue to Digital' as well as significantly improving our ways of working and offers to stakeholders – I will keep you updated on these as they (and other initiatives such as the NIHR-wide Research Delivery Data & Intelligence (RDDI) project and specific Research Delivery tools) progress further.

Finally, can I thank and acknowledge all of you for the work that you continue to do to support the transition of our Network from the CRN to the RDN. We can and will become even more globally leading in health and care research, and I sincerely thank you for all your efforts in helping us achieve this aim.

I wish you all a joyful and pleasant holiday season.

Best wishes,

Andy

Professor Andrew Ustianowski,

Interim RDN Executive Director