

RDN Leaders

Blog



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RDN Leaders Blog March/April 2025 - Professor Andrew Ustianowski, Interim RDN Executive Director

Welcome to the third instalment of this Research Delivery Network (RDN) Leaders blog, which arrives at a significant moment as we conclude our final quarter of 2024/25 and transition into the new financial year. In this edition, I am delighted to share updates on national directives, our recent progress, provide insights from stakeholder consultations, and offer a glimpse of what lies ahead.

Firstly, I want to signpost you to a very relevant [announcement by our Prime Minister](#) made on 7 April 2025. In this he stressed the importance of fast-tracking clinical trial set-up which has been a key focus of the UK Clinical Research Delivery (UKCRD) programme. The aim is to reduce trial set-up by 100 days by March 2026 (compared to 2022 data). This will require 'cutting bureaucracy and standardising contracts so time isn't wasted on negotiating separate details across different NHS organisations, and ensuring transparency by publishing trust level data for the first time'. This obviously has significant relevance to you and your organisations - and we will keep you informed of any asks, developments and progress. The entire ecosystem requires your help and adaptability to achieve these goals and there is much we will need to do in partnership together. He also announced an investment of up to £600 million to create a new Health Data Research Service to transform access to NHS data by providing a secure single access point to national-scale datasets.

Separately, I want to reassure our delivery organisations that ongoing financial investment in a robust research ecosystem remains central to our mission. Our transformation into the RDN is designed to ensure we continue our evolution into an innovative, forward-thinking organisation capable of adapting to the needs of a global-leading research infrastructure. Within that, development and support for a broad range of research delivery sites continues to be a key focus:

- **Investment:** We will continue to financially invest in our national and regional research delivery systems via both established and new delivery organisations across all specialties and settings.

- **Agile Research Delivery Team Support:** We will further develop an agile team that we can deploy to support delivery organisations in addressing capacity and capability challenges, facilitating research delivery in existing, new and diverse settings.
- **Workforce Development:** We are committed to investing in and providing effective training and development opportunities for research delivery staff to support ongoing strategic workforce development.

I share this to reassure our system partners that we remain steadfast in our commitment to delivering on our core business objectives, and as a key part of the wider National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR), as we continue to evolve.

In the RDN, we are committed to an evidence-based and intentional approach to our organisational change. Our goal is to ensure that we develop the RDN in a way that aligns with our NIHR core values and best meets the needs of our diverse stakeholders, fostering collaborative excellence in health and care research delivery.

This is not a one-time activity. We are building the RDN to be a continually evolving organisation. By working closely on an on-going basis with you, our stakeholders, we will enable the NIHR, delivery sites and other organisations across the health and care system to support UK government policies and priorities whilst building capacity and agility. This will help ensure that we can respond to future emerging priorities and our changing health and care environment.

In our ongoing commitment to nurturing a robust and adaptive RDN, we continue to engage with key stakeholders across the research system as we complete our service design which will provide the foundation for our future. By utilising a range of engagement methods including surveys and meetings, this mixed-method engagement strategy has enabled us to gather timely insights and foster collaboration.

- **October 2024:** Our initial engagement round focused on refining the Strategic Ambitions and Commitments to align with sector priorities.
- **December 2024:** The second round explored how to balance support for both established and emerging research organisations, particularly in response to key government shifts: Hospital to Community; Analogue to Digital; Sickness to Prevention.
- **February 2025:** Our most recent engagement round examined potential future funding models to ensure sustainable and impactful research support.

We extend our sincere gratitude for your valuable contributions throughout this process, particularly during the third engagement round which focussed on future funding models and received approximately 150 responses from 80 organisations

across the health and care system. Your contributions have provided rich insights that will inform our strategic direction.

In the final instalment of this current engagement series, we provided an overview of the feedback received and what this tells us the RDN should be doing to add most value in the system. This provides a final check with stakeholders as we finalise our approaches and move into implementation. We also met with the leadership teams from UK Research & Development (UKRD), Research & Development Forum (R&D Forum), University Hospitals Association (UHA) and Community Healthcare Alliance of Research Trusts (CHART) to discuss the feedback received and held a wider discussion forum with R&D teams.

We are grateful for your continued engagement and look forward to working together to advance health and care research delivery.

Thank you as ever for your support.

Best wishes

Andy