



BEST RESEARCH FOR BEST HEALTH

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN 3.2b

NIHR PROGRAMME TO BUILD CAPACITY AND CAPABILITY IN APPLIED RESEARCH METHODS

*Best Research for Best Health*¹ set out a 5-year Research and Development Strategy for the NHS in England. This plan provides more details on one of the key components of that strategy: NIHR Programme to Build Capacity and Capability in Applied Research Methods. This document will be regularly updated. The latest version should be used.

Version: 4

Issue date: January 2010

Planned revision & re-issue date: July 2010

The applied health research that is the focus of the NIHR relies on a range of research methods including health statistics, health economics, clinical trial design, operational research and modelling. However, there is currently a relative shortage of individuals with the necessary training and expertise in these key areas to support the volume of research that is needed.

To meet this need the NIHR has established a programme of linked schemes to build capacity and capability in applied health research methodology. This programme forms a part of the wider NIHR research capacity development programme and complements the existing schemes under that programme.

Aims

- To ensure that the research funded by the NIHR is based on the highest quality applied research methods; and in support of this,
- To increase the numbers (capacity) and skills (capability) of individuals with high-level expertise in applied health research methods.

¹ *Best Research for Best Health: A New National Health Research Strategy*. The NHS contribution to health research in England. Department of Health. 2006.

Purpose

- To attract the most talented individuals, especially those who are not currently working in a health-related field; and
- Provide these individuals with the necessary support and training to become specialist methodologists in areas relevant to the NIHR; or
- Expand their research interests into areas relevant to the NIHR.

Nature

- The original programme consists of three linked schemes:
 - NIHR Research Methods Fellowship scheme
 - NIHR Research Methods Internship scheme
 - NIHR Research Methods Opportunity Funding scheme.
- This programme has been extended to offer Masters Studentships specifically focused on sustaining capacity in Medical Statistics.

NIHR RESEARCH METHODS FELLOWSHIP SCHEME

Aim

- The NIHR Research Methods Fellowship scheme is aimed at highly-talented individuals who are either:
 - in their early post-graduate career; or
 - returning to the work-place after a career break; and
 - who are looking to change the focus of their career whilst still utilising their undergraduate/previous training.

Support provided

- The support provided includes:
 - Dedicated time to undertake structured research methodology training and gain research experience in a high-quality environment;
 - Up to three years full time funding of salary costs (or 4 years at 75% or 5 years at 60%); and
 - The opportunity to prepare an application and compete for an NIHR Doctoral Training Fellowship.
- The expectation is that the Fellow will pursue a relevant Masters degree at some point during the Fellowship unless candidates already have a Masters or equivalent. The progression to PhD will be encouraged, where appropriate.
- Eligible organisations applied to hold NIHR Research Methods Fellowships. Individuals seeking Fellowships applied directly to successful host organisations.

Eligibility for Host Organisations

- Organisations in England were eligible to apply to *host* NIHR Research Methods Fellows if they were in receipt of funding for the following activities with at least one year of their contract still in force:
 - NIHR Programme Grants for Applied Research;
 - Clinical Trials Units which have been successful in securing NIHR CTU Infrastructure funding; and
 - Hub in Trials Methodology Research (funded by MRC as part of the MRC/NIHR partnership).
- Organisations were able to make one application for each qualifying award.

Selection of Host Organisations

- The application process was managed by the NIHR Trainees Coordinating Centre – NIHR TCC. Host Organisations were selected by an expert panel.

Condition of award for Host Organisations

- Organisations hosting NIHR Research Methods Fellowships are also expected to host an NIHR Research Methods Internship (see below), with the Research Methods Fellow encouraged to provide input to designing a project and managing the intern.

Selection and management of Fellows

- Prospective applicants applied directly to Host Organisations. Fellows hold a relevant first degree, or possibly a Masters degree, where they could demonstrate why they were worthy of support through this scheme (for example, by changing field).
- Host organisations will be responsible for ensuring the Fellow submits annual reports to NIHR TCC. If the Fellow vacates the post before three years is completed then, depending on the circumstances and providing the award has been well managed, the Host Organisation will be able to appoint a second Fellow, following permission from NIHR TCC.

Funding for each NIHR Research Methods Fellowship

- Each NIHR Research Methods Fellowship attracts full cost of employment (including National Insurance, Superannuation and London Weighting where appropriate) for the Fellow (matching current salary for those in employment) for the award period, plus tuition fees for Masters (capped at £4,000). 'Full Economic Costs' are not met.
- The average cost of each NIHR Research Methods Fellow is estimated to be £40,000 (including on-costs) a year plus fees.

Timing

- Successful Host Organisations were announced in February 2009, and awards were taken up in 2009.

NIHR RESEARCH METHODS INTERNSHIP SCHEME

Aim

- NIHR Research Methods Internships are aimed at the brightest undergraduates (in mathematics, economics, or physics, for example) for the summer following the second year of their degree (or third year of a 4-year degree).
- The Internship offers a salaried opportunity over 7-10 weeks to undertake a discrete research project and gain some experience of NIHR research.
- The Internships are offered by organisations, which are Host Organisations for NIHR Research Methods Fellowships. Some supervisory activity from the relevant NIHR Research Methods Fellow is expected.

Selection of Host Organisations

- Host Organisations were selected as part of the competition to identify hosts for NIHR Research Methods Fellowships (see above).
- The application process is being managed by the NIHR Trainees Co-ordinating Centre (NIHR TCC).

Eligibility for Individuals

- Applicants for an NIHR Research Methods Internship will need to demonstrate a strong performance in their undergraduate training to date in a relevant undergraduate degree programme. Applications will need to be accompanied by a supporting statement from a personal tutor or equivalent.

Funding for each NIHR Research Methods Internship

- Each Research Methods Internship will attract a pro-rata salary equivalent to a post-graduate research assistant (University Grade 5: £18,710 - £21,681) plus a contribution to research costs of £1,000. Funding will commence once details (including start date) of the associated NIHR Research Methods Fellow has been submitted to, and agreed by, the NIHR TCC.

Selection and management of Interns

- Hosts must offer at least one NIHR Research Methods Internship over the duration of each NIHR Research Methods Fellowship including replacements, but could request to host a Research Methods Intern for each year of the NIHR Research Methods Fellowship if they wish, and if the budget allows.
- Host organisations will be responsible for their own advertising and selecting the NIHR Research Methods Intern.
- The host will ensure that each Research Methods Intern submits a brief report of their work and experience to the NIHR TCC before the end of their Internship.

NIHR RESEARCH METHODS OPPORTUNITY FUNDING SCHEME

Aim

- This scheme aims to encourage academic departments with outstanding research strengths in statistics & operational research, or in economics & econometrics to:
 - explore the possibility of, or to experience becoming involved in research of relevance to the NIHR;
 - and to develop capacity and capability in these areas.
- The Scheme is not prescriptive beyond this, but successful applications were specific about the objectives they wish to achieve and the people and activities that would be supported in order to achieve those objectives.

Eligibility and selection of host departments

- The academic departments in England, which are rated the most highly in the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise in Statistics and Operational Research and in Economics and Econometrics, were invited to submit a short application for NIHR Research Methods Opportunity Funding.
- The application process was managed by the NIHR Trainees Co-ordinating Centre (NIHR TCC). Applications were reviewed by an expert panel.

Funding

- Up to £30,000 was provided to each successful academic department.

Condition of grant

- Organisations in receipt of funding are expected to complete the project within 12 months and submit a report at the end of the initiative.

Timing and further details

- Details of successful departments were placed on NIHR TCC's website in September 2009. Further details about this Programme can be accessed through the NIHR TCC's website: www.nihrtcc.nhs.uk.

NIHR FUNDED MASTERS STUDENTSHIPS IN MEDICAL STATISTICS

Aim

- This scheme is intended to help build research capacity and capability in medical statistics as there is currently a relative shortage of individuals with sufficient training and expertise in this area to support current volumes of applied health research.

Support provided

- The NIHR is providing funding for 16 Masters studentships over a 3-year period.
- The support will cover tuition fees at the home/EU rate and a student maintenance stipend, at a level equal to that provided by the MRC.
- Successful courses will each attract up to 4 studentships per year.

Eligibility of courses for support

- This initiative is open to academic organisations that already have an established Masters course in medical statistics.
- Successful courses will prepare graduates for future research at PhD level or employment in a research-related capacity in academic, industry, or the NHS. The majority of the course content will be focussed on medical statistics. As well as taught modules, courses will offer a significant element of practical research experience.

Selection of courses for support

- The application process will be managed by the NIHR Trainees Co-ordinating Centre (NIHR TCC). Courses for support will be selected by an expert panel. Full details of the competition can be found at www.nihrtcc.nhs.uk/researchmethodsprogramme/

Selection of students

- Academic organisations hosting successful courses will be responsible for recruiting suitable candidates. The first cohorts of students must start courses in 2010.

Condition of funding

- Organisations in receipt of funding will be required to submit a formal annual report, providing information about the recruitment of students, their progress, and their destination after completion of the Masters course.

Timetable

January 2010 – Competition announced

3 March 2010 – Closing date

By end April 2010 – Decisions announced.

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