



## **BEST RESEARCH FOR BEST HEALTH**

### **IMPLEMENTATION PLAN 5.5 (established)**

## **NIHR BIOMEDICAL RESEARCH UNITS**

*Best Research for Best Health*<sup>1</sup> set out a 5-year Research and Development Strategy for the NHS in England. This Implementation Plan provides details on one of the key components of that strategy: **BIOMEDICAL RESEARCH UNITS**.

**The Biomedical Research Units plan has been fully implemented.**

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Sir David Cooksey's Review of UK Health Research Funding<sup>2</sup> suggested that there needed to be scope for other NHS/university partnerships to develop, in order to provide a challenge to the established NIHR Biomedical Research Centres in future funding competitions, and thus help to drive excellence in the system. The Cooksey Report also suggested that greater priority should be given to supporting medicines and therapies that tackle unmet health needs in the UK.

In order to take forward these recommendations, NIHR has established Biomedical Research Units to undertake translational clinical research in the following priority areas of high disease burden and clinical need, which are currently under-represented in the existing NIHR Biomedical Research Centres, and in which the country has identified research strengths:

- Cardiovascular Disease
  - *Including coronary heart disease and diseases of the vasculature and circulation including the lymphatic system.*
- Deafness and Hearing Problems
- Gastrointestinal (including Liver) Disease
  - *Including inflammatory bowel disease, Crohn's disease, and non-malignant diseases of the digestive system (including liver and colon).*

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

<sup>2</sup> A review of UK health research funding, Sir David Cooksey. HM Treasury, December 2006  
[http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/cooksey\\_review\\_index.htm](http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/cooksey_review_index.htm)

- Musculoskeletal Disease
  - *Including osteoporosis, osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, muscular and skeletal disorders.*
- Nutrition, Diet and Lifestyle (including Obesity)
- Respiratory Disease
  - *Including asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and other, non-malignant respiratory diseases.*

### **Aims**

- To support the further development of NHS/University partnerships with existing critical mass in the priority research areas.
- To enable excellent, but comparatively small, research groups (comprising a relatively small number of research leaders, working in one of the priority areas, who are at the forefront of their field internationally) to achieve critical mass.

### **Purpose**

- The NIHR Biomedical Research Units funding will enable NHS/University partnerships to develop their research capacity in the priority area so that they are capable of submitting a credible bid for Biomedical Research Centre status in a future funding competition.
- The NIHR Biomedical Research *Units* will be “building on the best”, where the Biomedical Research *Centres* are about “making the best better”.

### **Numbers**

- The number of NIHR Biomedical Research Units was not determined in advance. A total of fifteen Units have been established.

### **Selection Process**

- NIHR Biomedical Research Units were selected through open competition, in a two-stage process, by an independent international Selection Panel.
- Successful applicants will receive funding of up to £1m *per annum* over a four year period (with 75% funding in the first year and full funding thereafter), awarded to the NHS partner; we have funded at least one Unit in each of the priority areas.

### **Selection Criteria**

- The selection criteria were:
  - the relevance of the proposed research to the health of patients and the public;
  - the strength of the strategic partnerships including those with industry;
  - the strength of the forward plan for the Biomedical Research Unit, particularly the strategy for generating a step change in the capacity of the partnership to undertake translational clinical research in the priority area;
  - value for money.

## Eligibility

- The NIHR Biomedical Research Units funding scheme is intended to complement the existing portfolio of NIHR Biomedical Research Centres.
- The majority of NHS organisations that are currently in receipt of NIHR Biomedical Research Centre funding were not eligible to apply, the exception being the two broadly based clinical organisations that are partners in NIHR Specialist Biomedical Research Centres.
- All other NHS providers in England in collaboration with their academic partner(s) were eligible to apply.
- Universities which are acting as the academic partner in an NIHR Biomedical Research Centre were able to partner with a different NHS organisation to submit an application for a Biomedical Research Unit, provided that they could demonstrate an existing, strong partnership with this NHS organisation and that their proposal did not include any research activity previously used to support a successful application for an NIHR Biomedical Research Centre.

## Implementation Timetable

- 30th July 2007 - published invitation to those NHS/university partnerships, which judged themselves to have the most substantial portfolios of truly world-class medical research in the specified priority areas to complete a standardised Pre-qualifying Questionnaire.
- 15th October 2007 - deadline for receipt of Pre-qualifying Questionnaires.
- November 2007 - international expert Selection Panel identified a short-list of 19 NHS/university partnerships, which, on the basis of the Pre-qualifying Questionnaire, not only appeared to have the most substantial portfolios of truly world-class medical research in the priority areas, but also appeared to have the potential, with support from the NIHR Biomedical Research Unit funding scheme, to generate significant additional research capacity.
- December 2007 - invited full applications from short-listed NHS/university partnerships.
- 11th February 2008 - deadline for receipt of full applications.
- March 2008 - Selection Panel conducted interviews with short-listed NHS/University partnerships.
- March 2008 - confirmed selected NIHR Biomedical Research Units.
- 1 April 2008 - funding for NIHR Biomedical Research Units commenced.

## Further Information

Further information on NIHR Biomedical Research Units is available on the NIHR website [www.nihr.ac.uk/infrastructure/Pages/infrastructure\\_biomedical\\_research\\_units.aspx](http://www.nihr.ac.uk/infrastructure/Pages/infrastructure_biomedical_research_units.aspx).

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