



**National Institute for
Health Research**

BEST RESEARCH FOR BEST HEALTH

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN 5.9

NIHR RESEARCH DESIGN SERVICES

Best Research for Best Health¹ set out a 5-year Research and Development Strategy for the NHS in England. This Implementation Plan provides more details on one of the key components of that strategy: RESEARCH DESIGN SERVICES. This document will be regularly updated. The latest version should be used.

Version: 5

Issue date: January 2010

Planned revision & re-issue date: July 2010

Aim

The NIHR Research Design Service (RDS) offers advice and support on research design and methodology to researchers making funding applications and doing research within the new health research system as set out in *Best Research for Best Health*. The aim is to increase the number and proportion of high quality applications for funding for applied people and patient focussed health and social care research.

Purpose

- To help researchers develop and design high quality research proposals for submission to national, peer-reviewed funding competitions for applied health or social care research.
- To provide consistent national coverage, with a focus on NHS-based researchers applying to the NIHR Research for Patient Benefit Programme.
- To offer access to a range of expertise in research design, including advice on research synthesis, study design and methodology (quantitative and qualitative), statistics, and economics, and to refer to other sources of expert advice on the applied health and social care research system.

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

NIHR Research Design Service (RDS)

- The NIHR RDS is a major initiative in which the NIHR is investing around £50m over five years. The RDS offers advice and guidance on all aspects of research design and conduct including:
 - formulating research questions – including advice on literature review and publication database searches, including systematic review, determining what research has already been done on a topic to avoid duplication and how new research may be able to add to existing knowledge.
 - research design for quantitative studies – including advice on randomised controlled trials encompassing ethical issues such as equipoise; feasibility issues such as recruitment strategies and contingency plans if recruitment targets are not met; arrangements for blinding and allocation to trial arms; power calculations and other underpinning statistical advice including on analytical strategies. It should also encompass advice on the conduct of observational and quasi-experimental studies in circumstances where RCTs cannot be carried out, and advice on economic aspects of studies.
 - research design for qualitative studies – on the range of approaches from ethnographic to interview based techniques, including appropriate methods and analytical strategies.
 - identifying and applying to appropriate funding sources – including searching databases of funders, and advice on preparing appropriate applications.
 - contacting appropriate collaborators in research – in universities and in the NHS including both researchers and practitioners, and also including patients, patient representatives and the public at all stages in formulating research questions, designing and carrying out research, and acting on research findings.
- Each RDS has, at its core, access to health economic and statistical expertise, systematic review and research methodological expertise, and can draw on other expertise as necessary to provide guidance on the range of topics indicated above.
- Face-to-face advice is available for local researchers, supported by telephone, email and website contact.

Structure

To ensure critical mass, focus and clarity, NIHR is funding ten RDS, one in each Strategic Health Authority (SHA) area. The RDS is a national service that aims to develop common processes and consistent service for the research community.

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