



National Institute for Health Research

RESEARCH DESIGN SERVICE

Introduction

The vision of the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) is to improve the health and wealth of the nation through research.

This document sets out how the NIHR's Research Design Service is contributing to this vision.

Overview

The NIHR has funded ten regionally based research design services. These services together form a national Research Design Service (RDS), liaising with each other to develop common processes and a consistent service to the research community. A Research Design Service Charter sets out the help and advice available. Each part of the RDS has, at its core, access to expertise on research methodologies, systematic review, health economics and statistics, and can draw on other expertise as necessary to provide guidance to researchers on the formulation of research questions, study design, sources of funding, and collaborators.

Aim

The NIHR RDS aims to:

- Offer fit for purpose advice and support on research design and methodology to researchers making funding applications and doing research within the health research system.
- Increase the number and proportion of high quality applications for funding for applied people and patient focused health and social care research.

Benefits

The RDS offers the following benefits to researchers:

- Helping researchers develop and design high quality research proposals for submission to national, peer-reviewed funding competitions for applied health or social care research.
- Providing access to a range of expertise, including advice on the practicality and feasibility of research, study design and methodology (quantitative and qualitative), statistics, and economics, or referring enquirers to other sources of expert advice within the applied health and social care research system.

The NIHR Research Design Service (RDS)

The NIHR 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, embracing 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 and 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 analytical strategies; 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 embracing patients, patient representatives and the public at all stages in formulating research questions, designing, carrying out and acting on research.
- Advising on the interpretation of feedback from funding committees.

Face-to-face advice is available for local researchers, supported by telephone, email and website contact.

In the case of application for training fellowships, the RDS will not fulfil roles that should more properly be taken by the research supervisor.

Further information

Further details about the RDS are available on the [NIHR website](#).

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