



National Institute for Health Research

INFORMATION SYSTEMS FUNCTION

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 Information Systems Function contributes to this vision.

Overview

The NIHR provides the framework through which the Department of Health can position, maintain and manage a distributed health research system. To improve the health research environment, the NIHR maintains various corporate information sharing and business support services as well as specialised local systems for use by the NIHR Coordinating Centres.

The systems are managed both locally by the NIHR Co-ordinating Centres and as a corporate programme which has consolidated, unified, streamlined and simplified them into a suite of information services for the NIHR. The corporate services are known collectively as the 'NIHR Information Systems Function'. The current role of which is to maintain these systems; develop them further where necessary and appropriate; and continue to develop research data standards to ensure smooth interoperability between both NIHR systems and others.

Aim

To maintain, with partners where appropriate, an integrated set of national services and systems for health research and research management that:

- Unify and simplify the administrative procedures associated with regulation, governance, identification, and reporting and research administration.
- Enable procedures and input of data to take place once only, recognising the interdependency and interoperability of systems and processes.
- Make information available via secure systems and processes to everyone who needs to act on it.
- Support and integrate the operational functions of the NIHR and where possible its partners.

- Provide accurate intelligence and analysis on the operation of the NIHR to support planning and resource allocation

Scope

The NIHR Information System Function has three key elements all of which are designed to support the NIHR, to meet its overarching objectives.

1. The NIHR Hub and Website

The¹ NIHR Hub and NIHR website provides internet and secure intranet facilities for all the NIHR. They have been developed using Cloud based technology to:

- Act as the primary point of entry for researchers into a range of on-line secure collaboration services and applications to support and develop research;
- Provide the public internet facility for all NIHR organisations;
- Support individuals who are already involved, or who would like to become involved, in health and social care research, including researchers, R&D managers, policy makers, patients, service users and the public;
- Provide a unified interface for information required for ethics review, NHS site-specific permissions and regulatory authorisation of clinical trials;
- Give easy but secure access to information, documents, guidance and people to help investigators and R&D managers work collaborative, efficiently and consistently in real time;
- Offer a central resource of information on each study's design, organisation and progress to facilitate R&D management and inform the public;
- Be the primary on-line communications channel for the whole of the NIHR.

2. R&D Information Systems

The NIHR has developed a number of specific interoperable systems to fulfil identified need within the research community, these will continue to be developed and refined going forward as applicable, appropriate and affordable. These systems are designed to:

- Support the provision of information about NIHR studies so that patients can be informed about research that is of particular relevance to them;
- Enable researchers and research managers to access and manage the information and guidance required to operate efficiently and participate in high quality patient focused R&D with proper governance;
- Be the national source of authoritative information relating to NIHR studies;
- Provide and promote the secure integration of systems within and across the NIHR;

- Enable the facility for “once only” research study data-entry into NIHR systems, thus removing the need for data to be entered multiple times in different systems and, in the process, addressing associated data integrity issues;
- Continue to reduce the administrative burden of proposals, applications and reporting, releasing effort to manage outcomes and enable more effective monitoring and review;
- Use the NIHR Standard Application Form as the common integrated gateway to NIHR funding and the wider approvals process;
- Development of customised modules that meet the needs of individual NIHR organisations (where applicable and necessary), as part of the overarching NIHR systems architecture.

3. Data Standards and handling

Parallel to the development of systems the NIHR is continuing to develop, **in partnership with other research bodies**, vital and necessary research data standards that are:

- Reviewing, defining and publishing standards and workflow processes;
- Providing standards that are underpinning systems and services to support the operation of all the main elements of the NIHR including commissioning, funding, approvals, research management and outputs. This also enables the presentation of meaningful comparative performance information of all the NIHR Business Units;
- Enabling the development of a repository of data standards for the NIHR and its partners, and adopting international standards where relevant;
- Designed to enable researchers and organisations to exchange standard data sets and documents that require reports and outputs for regulation, accountability, or the administration of grants and contracts;
- Working to ensure that the standard data sets and documents are linked to important collaborators including EuroPubmed Central, and the wider NHS or other systems that are providing access to research outputs.

Benefits

The NIHR Information Systems Function is designed to enable the following benefits:

- To make the UK more attractive internationally as a site for conducting research swiftly, cost efficiently and accurately;
- Increased efficiency and effectiveness of research commissioning and initiation by giving policy makers, commissioners and researchers a clearer view of research requirements, and by supporting researchers and research networks;

- Significant reductions in the time taken in commencing research studies by seeking ethical and regulatory review by simplifying, clarifying and integrating processes, implementing integrated submission systems, research passports, advice and other services working to achieve the Government's initial benchmark of 70 days from receipt of a valid research protocol to recruitment of the first participant in a study;
- Significantly increased recruitment into research studies, by enabling clinicians, patients and the public to gain easy access to information about current trials and indicate their interest in participation, in those and other well-designed studies;
- Improved uptake of findings by increasing the visibility and ease of access of NIHR research findings:
 - supporting the principle of open access to health research outputs by making NIHR outputs readily and easily available through systems used by decision-makers; and
 - working with partners to contribute to international collaboration.
- Support the Government's package of economic growth policies, in improving growth across the whole of the United Kingdom as well as increasing the transparency of decision making, funding and research outputs; as well as seeking to reduce operating costs and the burden on the UK tax payer.

Further Information

Further information on the NIHR Information Systems Function including the revised NIHR Information Strategy, as well as, current activities, programme governance and approach, are available on the [NIHR website](#).

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