

Engaging with the NHS

In addition to developing and maintaining local partnerships, nationally, we have worked to support the NIHR aim of increasing engagement with NHS clinicians.

Feedback from clinicians suggested that busy schedules meant a lack of concentrated time is available to develop a research proposal. Our first national Grant Writing Retreat which was developed through 2015/16 and delivered in June 2016 gave 12 clinically-led research teams protected time to focus on their research proposals.

During 2015/16 we were able to use our regional contacts to organise and promote a series of events to support the launch of the renewed RfPB programme.

The events aimed to promote the changes to the programme, and the need for high quality research of relevance to the NHS. They provided information on the two-stage application process and promoted design and methodological support available from the RDS.

Targeted communications to NHS Trusts and R&D Finance staff, led to a high turnout at the eight events, held nationwide, with a total of 418 registering to attend. The events also led to new clients coming to the RDS to support the development of their research ideas.

Along with promoting the changes to the programme the events underlined the need and importance of high quality, novel research for the benefit of users of the NHS in England.

The events also outlined the extremely valuable contribution patients can make in developing research, by providing an alternative perspective to NHS staff and the research team. The insight that can be provided from someone living with a particular condition can help demonstrate a patient's aspirations for health outcomes, leading to more relevant research.

Delegates were given the opportunity to book and attend one to one sessions with RfPB programme staff to provide feedback on remit, scope and general advice on research ideas. These meetings were supported by RDS advisers who were able to follow up with the researchers to help prevent good clinically-relevant research ideas being lost.



"I've found the retreat fantastic. Both Jennifer and myself are really busy clinicians, we're leaders of our department, so we have a heavy workload. To have a concentrated period of time to focus on our research project has been valuable."

Marc Moncrief, Consultant Plastic Surgeon, Norwich & Norfolk NHS Trust. Developing an application to NIHR EME.

The events were successful. Based on delegate feedback received during the evaluation process it is apparent that the comprehensive presentation about the changes to the programme from RfPB staff was highly valued, as were the opportunities to directly ask questions and listen to any discussions that arose.

In addition, delegates appreciated tips on applying to the programme and some information on common pitfalls that applicants can fall in to.

The events were also clearly valued by RfPB programme staff:

"I've found the events very useful and we've got to present to hundreds of people so far as well as talk to dozens of researchers, with the RDS advisers, individually. We've heard a lot of feedback on the new process which has given us some ideas and it is useful to hear what is and isn't being well received by researchers."

Ben Morgan, Interim Assistant Director, NIHR RfPB Programme

Many delegates expressed an interest in more events of a similar nature:

"I would be interested in attending more of these for other NIHR programmes, tailored approach is good. I have already used information from slides in discussion with prospective applicants and directed them towards RDS."

Event Delegate

In 2016/17 we will be hosting a series of PGfAR information events.

NHS

**National Institute for
Health Research**



Research Design Service
Annual Review
2015/16

Introduction

The NIHR Research Design Service provides expert design and methodological advice to researchers seeking funding to answer research questions of direct relevance to patients and the public.

We provide advice, across England, to investigators preparing applications for national peer-reviewed funding to NIHR, AMRC, MRC and other national, peer-reviewed, funding programmes, for applied health and social care research. We have a strong track record of supporting investigators in preparing and submitting successful grant applications.

RDS expertise is particularly important at a time when the research environment is increasingly competitive and funding is limited.

This review details how, during 2015/16, we further developed the service; providing responsive, high-quality, specialist advice.

The RDS offers advice on all aspects of research design and conduct, including:

- formulating a clinically-relevant research question,
- the development of quantitative, qualitative and mixed study designs,
- identifying suitable sources of funding,
- engagement and integration of patients and the public in research design and conduct,
- identifying potential academic, clinical and lay co-applicants and collaborators,
- signposting researchers to other sources of expertise, including financial, ethical, and intellectual property advice.

Strategic update

The RDS continues to evolve to ensure relevance to all stakeholders. Its regional structure enables strong partnerships with the wider health research infrastructure in each of its 10 regions; this brings the benefits of local integration together with a national strategy and resulting efficiencies. Each RDS is responsive to regional needs in the pursuit of high quality applied health and social care research, working closely with aligned NIHR structures. RDS staff have become the face of NIHR to many, reinforcing the role that our RDS advisers play as NIHR ambassadors, championing the NIHR and applied health and social care research.

Nationally, the RDS Strategy Group is our governing body, with membership comprising Regional Directors, supported by a National Business Manager. The group makes decisions on national strategy and on operational aspects of the service, including engagement with wider NIHR activity. The past year has seen further concerted efforts to improve the quality and consistency of the RDS.

The RDS Strategy Group provides an important forum for national collaboration between RDS regions. Particular achievements in 2015/16 include:

- a successful partnership with Wessex Institute to host the INVOLVE CC,
- a national and regional Public Involvement Strategy in response to the 'Going the Extra Mile' report,
- a national Grant Writing Retreat, with support from advisers across the 10 RDS regions,
- clarification of support for fellowship applicants,

- a formal process for knowledge sharing across all RDS Advisers of intelligence gained from funding panel observations.

The RDS Strategy Group has also directly supported development in other areas of the NIHR, including:

- feedback and recommendations on how to improve the (previous) RfPB programme,
- events to promote the renewed RfPB, Fellowship, and, the NIHR Efficient Designs initiative,
- contributions to a cross-NIHR panel to develop the Going the Extra Mile report,
- providing an interface between researchers and the NIHR through regular meetings with CCF, NETSCC and TCC,
- writing workshops at the obesity themed call launch event.

This co-operation and coordination has led to efficiency gains and a consistent, high-quality RDS.

Looking forward

RDSSG will continue to be proactive in its approach to further develop the RDS across England. In 2016/17 we will:

- formally evaluate the Grant Writing Retreat and make a decision about its impact,
- support NIHR PGfAR, with a further series of national events in Newcastle, Manchester, Stansted and Nottingham (previously in Leeds, London, Bristol and Birmingham),
- review link-Director roles with NIHR and the wider health research infrastructure to ensure effective communication,
- welcome Professor Mark Mullee and Dr Helen Hancock as the new Chair of RDSSG and RDS Lead Link Director, respectively.

Activity in 2015/16

2,784 new projects

620 outline submissions

1,035 full/one stage submissions

226 shortlisted outline submissions

401 funded submissions

Satisfaction

The level of satisfaction our clients report from experience when using the service remain consistently high:

71% of applicants to NIHR used the RDS to support the development of their proposal

98% of clients were either very satisfied or satisfied with the support they received

"Our first success with the NIHR Research for Patient Benefit (RfPB) programme took two attempts, but taught us a lot about what NIHR looks for. The most recent, funded by the NIHR Health Technology Assessment programme, got us working with a clinical trials unit in Birmingham. This brings a whole new dimension to the project and the way that the team has to work. We are indebted to the RDS SE for their help in developing these projects."

Dr Edmund Lamb, Consultant Clinical Scientist, East Kent Hospitals University Foundation Trust

Facilitating user involvement

We continue to work hard to promote and facilitate active and meaningful user involvement in the development of funding applications. We strongly believe in collaborative research where members of the public are part of the team undertaking the research. One of the ways we support Public Involvement is through our Public Involvement Funds. These awards are for researchers who require funding to support patient and public involvement at the research design stage and can be used to fund the involvement of members of the public (e.g. patients, carers or service users) in research design or developing research ideas.

In 2015/16 we awarded in excess of £36,000 of funding to support research teams.

"As a direct result of discussions the focus of recruitment was altered, this had a sizeable impact on the design of the trial and altered the aims and objectives of the project."

Researcher

"This is certainly helping me anyway, being part of this...knowing that it's not just me in this world that it affects."

Lay representative

