

Health & Social Care R&D Strategy Implementation Plan 2016-2025



2016

The Health and Social Care Research and Development (HSC R&D) Division is part of the Public Health Agency. Its work is based on the principle that excellence in health and social care must be underpinned by knowledge founded on good quality research. The HSC R&D Division supports health and social care researchers in Northern Ireland and those who use research outputs. While the effectiveness of research performance and application depends ultimately on the skill and ability of individual researchers and users of research, the HSC R&D Division aims to ensure that researchers can work within an environment that supports, encourages and facilitates them.

For example HSC R&D Division:

- Funds essential research infrastructure such as information databanks, tissue banks, clinical research facilities, clinical trials units, research office team in the five HSC Trusts and clinical and public health research networks.
- Builds research capacity in Northern Ireland through research training opportunities.
- Enables research governance processes to be as efficient as possible.
- Creates opportunities for researchers to compete for research funding on a wider UK or international basis.
- Supports innovation as a means of transferring HSC R&D findings into practice.
- Ensures personal and public involvement (PPI) in HSC R&D.

This Action Plan underpins the third DHSSPS Health and Social Care Research & Development Strategy, and seeks to build on successes achieved through the HSC R&D Fund since 1998. Examples of this success are available on the HSC R&D Division website at www.research.hscni.net.

The Action Plan includes further development of existing programmes, and continuous review of all activities to ensure that they remain fit for purpose and are performing effectively.

In addition, key areas of focus in this strategic period, are:

- Securing European Union (EU) funding – by working with partners to secure funds from relevant EU funding programmes.
- Growing the research-related economy – by enhancing existing relationships with industry and representative organisations to ensure productive research partnerships.
- Creating the infrastructure for ‘big data’ research – by maximising the opportunities for research using and linking routinely-collected data from health and other administrative sources.
- Supporting social care and public health research – by engaging with researchers and practitioners to expand research capacity, participation and outputs.
- Involving people and service users in research – by further embedding the involvement of service users and the public as partners in the research process to help ensure our investment brings benefits for the local population.

Funding

This Action Plan has been developed in the context of current financial constraints. It should be recognised, however, that investment in health and social care research has been demonstrated to generate significant leverage of external funds into Northern Ireland, thereby allowing further research to be supported¹. An independent review of the impact of HSC R&D funding in Northern Ireland demonstrated that for every £1 invested, a total of £4.14 additional funding was leveraged into the region. This in turn brings potential benefits for service users in the form of improvements in public health, new diagnostics, novel treatments and more efficient care pathways, as well as the additional benefit to the Northern Ireland economy through the creation of a highly skilled workforce and high-value jobs.

Table 1 presents a snapshot of how the HSC R&D Fund is currently invested. The Action Plan will be operationalised initially through re-prioritisation of existing funds to deliver new activities. Every effort is already made to supplement the HSC R&D Fund through working in partnership with key stakeholders across all sectors and in this new strategic period we will continue to seek partnership funding from external sources such as the National Institute of Health Research (NIHR), EU funding programmes or others to supplement the HSC R&D Fund. However, any additional recurrent investment would increase the potential for leverage as described above, and enhance the potential for Northern Ireland researchers to lead world-class studies with national and international impact. It is anticipated that investment will continue across the existing areas of strategic priority: infrastructure; capacity building; funding; innovation and personal and public involvement.

Delivery

To deliver this Action Plan will require support and operational input, where appropriate, from the various partner groups detailed within the Strategy document. Delivery will be further guided through the vehicle of the HSC R&D Strategic Advisory Group.

¹ Evaluation of the Impact of Health & Social Care R&D Funding in Northern Ireland, DHSSPS, 2012

Table 1 Annual investment of the existing HSC R&D Fund

Strategic Priority	Breakdown	Cost per annum (£)
Infrastructure		
	Clinical Research Networks	£3,500,000
	Other infrastructure	£2,000,000
	Research Governance support	£1,200,000
Capacity Building		
	Post-graduate level	£1,000,000
	Career Development	£600,000
Funding		
	NETSCC Investment*	£3,200,000
	Commissioned funding programmes	£750,000
	Researcher-led funding programmes	£300,000
Innovation		
	HSC Innovations	£200,000
	Knowledge Exchange awards	£250,000
	Dissemination	£500,000
	Data accessibility	£150,000
Personal & Public Involvement		
	PPI Training & Involvement	£10,000
Total Annual HSC R&D Fund		£13,660,000

* Dependent on renewal of business case in 2016-17

OBJECTIVE 1.**To support research, researchers and the use of evidence from research to improve the quality of both health and social care and for better policy making**

Actions	Timescale	RAG status
1.1 Engage with HSC organisations to raise awareness of the value of research skills for productive professional employees, and encourage capacity building through education and training to foster a research-active workforce for the HSC		
1.1.1 Develop a research training programme to enhance staff capability and skills, and commission annual training schedule to enable staff to develop the required competencies	By April 2017	
1.1.2 Establish a structured framework to support HSC professionals towards the development of post-doctoral and senior research careers	By December 2018	
1.1.3 Raise awareness through regular R&D updates in various formats for the HSC community to highlight research successes	Weekly e-mail. Quarterly web features, other media	
1.2 Encourage HSC organisations to support staff to undertake research relevant to their clinical responsibilities		
1.2.1 Establish a bi-annual meeting with each Trust with R&D Director and responsible Executive Director to review research activity & capacity development	By September 2016	
1.2.2 Agree and establish a formal process for HSC Trusts at executive level to report on research activity through appropriate metrics	By September 2016	

1.3	Provide funding support at all levels for HSC relevant research, with appropriate involvement of HSC professionals		
1.3.1	Continue to provide funding to support early-stage research projects within HSC	Annual	
1.3.2	Invest in appropriate education and training & career development awards programmes	Annual	
1.3.3	Continue with existing researcher-led award schemes and establish new schemes where appropriate	Ongoing cycle	
1.3.4	Continue to provide funding for necessary underpinning R&D infrastructure	Ongoing	
1.3.5	Identify sources of funding for protected time for HSC professionals to prepare research funding applications and participate in studies	By April 2018	
1.4	Engage specifically with social work, social care and public health to develop mechanisms to support and foster research in these areas		
1.4.1	Ensure appropriate representation for social care and public health on HSC R&D Division strategic and operational groups	By December 2015	
1.4.2	Identify support needs for social work & social care researchers and work with relevant colleagues to address these through specific funding schemes or other measures	By Sept 2016	
1.4.3	Ensure strategic alignment of the activities of the NI Centre of Excellence for Public Health with HSC R&D Division priorities, through active partnership	Ongoing	
1.4.4	Support the development of public health research in Northern Ireland through the Northern Ireland Public Health Research Network (NIPHRN) action plan, specific funding schemes or other measures	From October 2015	

OBJECTIVE 2.**To compete successfully for R&D funding, and optimise local funding, to deliver returns on investment for health and wellbeing, academia and commerce**

Actions	Timescale	RAG Status
2.1 Aim to increase the HSC R&D Fund to align with the average per capita level of other UK health research funds		
2.1.1 Work with key stakeholders to increase the value of the HSC R&D Fund budget	By April 2018	
2.2 Bid for funds to continue investment in the NIHR Evaluation, Trials and Studies UK funding streams, providing access to additional research funds for Northern Ireland		
2.2.1 Provide support for researchers to prepare bids through Enabling Research Awards Scheme and other mechanisms	Ongoing	
2.2.2 Submit business case to DHSSPS for continuation of investment in NETSCC programmes	By Sept 2016	
2.3 Seek co-funding from other Government Departments eg DETI and DEL, to support health-relevant research initiatives		
2.3.1 Explore potential funding streams e.g. NIHR i4i and work with relevant stakeholders towards co-investment	By April 2018	
2.4 Increase the focus on relevant EU funding streams and facilitate HSC researchers to access EU opportunities		
2.4.1 Work within relevant networks to review the communication of relevant EU funding opportunities across the HSC, universities and other potential partners	Ongoing	

2.4.2	Support and participate in at least 2 events annually to promote EU funding opportunities	Ongoing		
2.4.3	Monitor and report on EU funding awards bringing funds into HSC to OFMDFM via DHSSPS	Ongoing		
2.5	Adopt a partnership approach, identifying and investing in research funding initiatives and consortia that can bring health, social and financial benefits to Northern Ireland			
2.5.1	Review existing partnership investment e.g. US-Ireland Partnership awards; Ireland-Northern Ireland NCI partnership programme	Ongoing		
2.5.2	Explore opportunities for new partnership investments	Ongoing		
2.5.3	Review membership of and investments through funders for e.g. National Cancer Research Institute, Experimental Medicine Funders Group, Antimicrobial Resistance Funders Forum, National Prevention Research Initiative	Ongoing		
2.5.4	Develop co-funding arrangements with charitable funders to develop and fund research programmes in key areas	At least one new co-funding programme per year		
2.6	Develop effective relationships with industry and representative organisations to ensure productive research partnerships			
2.6.1	Review outputs from HSC Innovations service and ensure activity is fit for purpose	Quarterly meetings and annual reports to Strategic Advisory Group		
2.6.2	Work with key stakeholders to develop industry forum, establish meeting programme and at least one annual event co-supported with industry and representative groups e.g. ABPI, Biobusiness	Quarterly / Annually		
2.6.3	Develop metrics and agree annual targets for industry-sponsored or -collaborative clinical trials activity in Northern Ireland HSC	By October 2016		

2.6.4	Work with key stakeholders to scope and establish a Northern Ireland Health Innovation & Life Sciences Hub, with appropriate governance arrangements	By October 2016		
2.6.5	Participate in strategic and operational management groups for Precision Medicine Catapult to help maximise the performance of the Northern Ireland Centre of Excellence	From September 2015		

OBJECTIVE 3.

To support all those who contribute to health and social care research, development and innovation by enhancing our research infrastructure, benefitting from local, national and international partnerships

Actions	Timescale	RAG Status
3.1 Commission an independent review of HSC infrastructure currently supported through the HSC R&D Fund to ensure it continues to be fit for purpose		
3.1.1 Identify independent review Panel, organise review process and report	By April 2017	
3.1.2 Undertake relevant re-structuring of HSC R&D infrastructure in response to review recommendations	By April 2018	
3.1.3 Monitor delivery of infrastructure on targets and objectives	Ongoing from April 2018	
3.2 Work with the other UK Health Departments to ensure research governance systems that facilitate UK-wide working within an effective governance environment		
3.2.1 Monitor HSC R&D permissions metrics – work towards time for approval to be at least equivalent to that in England	By Sept 2016	
3.3 Support identified areas of research strength by pursuing the creation of funding streams for new elements of research infrastructure such as Biomedical Research Unit(s) (BRUs)		
3.3.1 Consider opportunities for partnership investment in the development of Biomedical Research Unit(s) and other new elements of research infrastructure which are judged to be internationally competitive through peer review	Ongoing	
3.4 Support implementation of key national initiatives, including the 100,000 Genomes Project and the		

Precision Medicine Catapult (PMC)			
3.4.1	Participate in strategic and operational management groups for 100,000 Genomes Project, working with relevant partners towards the mainstreaming of genomic medicine	From Oct 2015	
3.5	Build on existing partnerships and form new relationships with key partners on the island of Ireland to maximise the benefits of cross-border working		
3.5.1	Develop at least one new collaborative funding initiative in Ireland with the Health Research Board or other key stakeholders in ROI (e.g. Science Foundation Ireland)	By Sept 2016	

OBJECTIVE 4.**To increase the emphasis on research relevant to the priorities of the local population**

Actions	Timescale	RAG Status
4.1 Ensure service users and the public are appropriately and effectively involved throughout all HSC research processes		
4.1.1 Ensure Personal and Public Involvement in all funding schemes and monitor through reporting processes	Ongoing	
4.1.2 Provide annual training programme for R&D PPI representatives, researchers and service users		
4.1.3 Share learning from PPI activity with UK and others	Ongoing	
4.1.4 Lead and participate in initiatives to encourage participation in research such as the 'It's OK to Ask' campaign, and 'Join Dementia Research'	Ongoing	
4.2 Commission relevant research informed by robust priority-setting exercises		
4.2.1 Review and refine research priority-setting process, identify and carry out up to one process every two years in line with strategic needs	By Sept 2016	
4.2.2 Allocate or secure partnership funding for up to one commissioned research call every two years	By Sept 2017	
4.3 Facilitate and maximise the use of health and other data routinely collected by the public sector for the benefit of Northern Ireland service users and the public		
4.3.1 Participate in the Honest Broker Governance Board and Working Groups	Ongoing	
4.3.2 Ensure appropriate governance and management of the NI Administrative Data Research Centre through appropriate representation at strategic management level	Ongoing	
4.4 Monitor and report the outputs and impacts of research		

supported by the HSC R&D Fund, ensuring it aligns with relevant policy drivers and draws in additional funding for research led by Northern Ireland researchers			
4.4.1 Conduct data collection, analysis and reports through ResearchFish and participation in quinquennial UK Health Research analyses	Ongoing		
4.4.2 Report to DHSSPS on the return on NETSCC investment	Bi-annually		

OBJECTIVE 5.**To disseminate research findings in such a way as to promote understanding and knowledge, support and best practice, stimulate further research and celebrate achievement**

Actions	Timescale	RAG Status
5.1 Support effective dissemination of research findings and use mechanisms of knowledge exchange to drive the adoption of evidence-informed practice and policy		
5.1.1 Provide funding for workshops and conferences	Annually	
5.1.2 Provide funding for Cochrane Fellowships	Annually	
5.1.3 Provide funding for Knowledge Exchange awards	Biennially	
5.1.4 Require all funded proposals to include a dissemination strategy	Ongoing	
5.2 Develop a communication strategy and media profile for HSC R&D Division to ensure relevant messages about HSC-funded research are effectively disseminated		
5.2.1 Develop and publish communication strategy in partnership with relevant stakeholders	By June 2016	
5.2.2 Introduce consistent branding of HSC R&D activity and recognition of outputs, to promote public awareness of the value of undertaking and participating in HSC research	By Sept 2016	
5.2.3 Develop relationships with relevant media partners and schedule media reports on HSC R&D-funded research	By April 2017	
5.2.4 Regular R&D updates in various formats for HSC community to raise awareness and highlight positive stories	Ongoing	