

NIHR SDO programme NHS Evaluations funding stream

Call for proposals for research into promising innovations in healthcare delivery in the NHS

SPECIFICATION DOCUMENT (REF: SDO 10/1009): CALL FOR PROPOSALS

The NIHR Service Delivery and Organisation programme is funded by the NIHR, with contributions from WORD in Wales. Researchers from Scotland and Northern Ireland should contact NETSCC to discuss their eligibility to apply.

1. Introduction

The National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Service Delivery and Organisation (SDO) programme has established a funding stream for research into evaluating innovative ways of working and delivery of service in the NHS, known as the NHS Evaluations workstream. This is its second call for proposals. We anticipate spending about £3 million per year from two annual calls. There is no formal cap per proposal on this call, however, the programme has in mind that projects are likely to cost up to £500,000. Applicants should note we anticipate funding a range of projects in both size and duration. Value for money will be an important consideration for all projects and project costs will be carefully scrutinised and must always be well justified.

The SDO NHS Evaluations Panel assesses proposals submitted to this work stream. It will provide a mechanism by which we can bring research to bear on promising innovations in healthcare delivery which arise in the NHS. These are often initiatives which bring together or are led or supported by Strategic Health Authorities (SHAs), NHS trusts, and Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) working together – in Wales, Local Health Boards and Trusts. We aim to promote closer links and partnership working between all these bodies, and their local academic institutions/partners with expertise in researching health services delivery and organisation.

This call provides NHS organisations with the opportunity to consider what innovations might benefit from being researched or evaluated. It also gives research organisations/academic institutions the opportunity to make contact and work with Strategic Health Authorities (SHAs) and Primary Care Trusts (PCTs).

We are seeking **outline proposals** using the online application form only. The deadline for submission is **10 June 2010 by 1pm**. Proposals should be submitted by a research organisation (usually an academic institution) and must include a letter of support from the relevant SHA.

Proposals submitted to the NHS Evaluations Panel will be assessed initially for the importance to the NHS of the research proposed, and then for scientific quality; more details of this process are given in Section 5.

2. The SDO programme objectives

The Service Delivery and Organisation (SDO) programme is one of the national research programmes of the NHS in England and Wales, and is a constituent programme of the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR). The NIHR SDO programme improves health outcomes for people by:

- commissioning research and producing research evidence that improves practice in relation to the organisation and delivery of health care, and
- building research capability and capacity amongst those who manage, organise and deliver services – improving their understanding of the research literature and how to use research evidence.

The primary audience for SDO commissioned research is decision makers in the NHS in England and Wales – particularly managers and leaders in NHS organisations. We focus our research commissioning on topics and areas where we think research evidence can make a significant contribution to improving decision making and so to improving the organisation and delivery of healthcare to patients.

Further information on the SDO programme, including a list of past, current and recently commissioned projects, can be found on the SDO website: www.sdo.nihr.ac.uk.

The NIHR SDO programme is managed by NETSCC, Service Delivery and Organisation - part of the NIHR Evaluation, Trials and Studies Coordinating Centre at the University of Southampton.

3. Background to this call

Within the NHS, many innovations and initiatives which support the wider NHS would benefit from independent and rigorous evaluation. The findings from such evaluations can help the NHS decide whether and how to adopt such innovations. The SDO NHS Evaluations Panel aims to fund projects that contribute to the national focus on innovation arising from the Darzi report *High Quality Care for All* (2008).

This work stream also promotes closer links between SHAs, NHS trusts, PCTs, local academic institutions and national bodies with relevant expertise. We are seeking proposals from academic organisations, but **these proposals must have the support and involvement of the relevant NHS organisations or national body and must be explicitly signed off by the relevant body**. Below are examples of research we are already funding. In each case the NHS organisation involved approached the SDO programme and requested that the programme commission an evaluation to run alongside the service initiative, pilot or programme:

- 08/1809/250 - *Evaluation of the Advancing Quality Pay for Performance Programme in the NHS North West (Professor Ruth McDonald)* [SDO: Project - 08/1809/250](#)
- 08/1809/255 - *An evaluation of transformational change in NHS North East (Professor David Hunter)* [SDO: Project - 08/1809/255](#)
- 08/1820/254 - *Negotiating the organisational and policy context for successful technology adoption in the NHS (Professor Sue Llewellyn)* [SDO: Project - 08/1820/254](#)

4. Call for proposals: researching promising innovations in healthcare delivery in the NHS

We are particularly interested in proposals to research or evaluate innovations in healthcare delivery in the NHS in England and Wales. We are seeking innovations which are likely to have all or most of the following characteristics:

- **Promising innovations in healthcare delivery** which have a substantial potential benefit and could be applied more widely in the NHS. Benefit might include greater efficiency and productivity, improved quality and safety, or better patient experience. The scale of potential impact is key, meaning that these innovations could be widely used in the NHS and which have significant and ongoing benefits.
- **Being piloted, tested or implemented in a number of healthcare organisations** so that there is an opportunity to evaluate the innovation in practice, preferably in a number or range of settings and to understand how they work. Evaluations of a promising innovation in a single organisation will be considered if they can deliver generalisable/actionable findings to the wider NHS.
- **Involving the application of ideas or technologies introduced or transferred from other countries, sectors or settings** because innovations are rarely wholly new and often involve the transfer of ideas or the application of new technologies or methods into the healthcare setting. We have a broad definition of “ideas or technologies” and this could include a new organisational tool or technique, a new model or process for care delivery or a new technology that changes organisational routines. Evaluations of diagnostic or therapeutic technologies do not fall within the remit of the SDO programme and would more usually be undertaken through the NIHR Health Technology Assessment (HTA) programme.
- **AND have not already been well explored and tested through research** so knowledge is lacking on impact, effectiveness, optimal implementation or adaptation, relationship to organisational context and generalisability and sustainability in the NHS. Where an innovation has already been demonstrated to work well and its implementation is well understood, then the case for its evaluation would be less convincing.

No study design or evaluation approach is specified. Both formative and summative research will be considered including research to assess costs, benefits and impacts. The proposed evaluation should be appropriate in scale and method to the innovation to be researched. It should provide the kind of evidence which decision makers in the wider NHS need both to decide whether to take up the innovation in their own organisations and to understand how to implement the innovation effectively in their own organisations.

5. Criteria and process for proposal selection

There is no formal cap on this call, although the programme has in mind that projects are likely to cost up to £500,000. Applicants should note that we anticipate funding a range of projects in both size and duration. Value for money will be an important consideration for all projects and project costs will be carefully scrutinised and must always be well justified.

The application process will be in **two stages**, and proposals which are found to be within the remit of this call will be reviewed by the SDO NHS Evaluations Panel which will shortlist a number to be further assessed by the SDO Commissioning Board. Feedback will be provided on all proposals which are shortlisted for further assessment by the SDO Commissioning Board.

Full proposals shortlisted for consideration by the Board, will be subject to external peer review before assessment by the SDO Commissioning Board. The Board will make recommendations to the Programme Executive Group (PEG) on whether to fund a proposal. Full proposals which are not funded will receive feedback from peer reviewers and the Commissioning Board via the secretariat.

The SDO NHS Evaluations Panel is predominantly made up of practising managers working in the NHS, and service users/lay representatives. It also includes some academics with relevant research expertise. The primary criterion against which this Panel assesses outline proposals is that of **importance to the NHS – whether the proposed research will be useful to research users in the NHS, and is likely to contribute to improving decision making and is more important at this time than other outline proposals**. It will use four main criteria to make this judgement:

- Relevance of the proposed research to the main areas or themes set out in this call for proposals.
- Relevance of the proposed research to the needs, interests, and current and future challenges for the management community in the NHS.
- Likelihood that the proposed research will produce findings which are useful to, and capable of, being applied/used by the management community in the NHS.
- Likelihood that the proposed research will promote greater engagement of the academic community of researchers and the practice community of healthcare managers. Proposed research should aim to develop links between academic institutions and NHS organisations in this area.

The SDO Commissioning Board consists primarily of academics with relevant research expertise but also contains some practising managers and service users/lay representatives. Its main concern is the **quality of the proposed research**. It uses two main criteria to make this judgement:

- Scientific rigour and quality of the proposed research, and the expertise and track record of the research team.
- Value for money of the proposed research, taking into account the overall cost and scale, scope and duration of the work involved

The Commissioning Board will also draw upon the assessment of importance to the NHS of a project, made by the NHS Evaluations Panel, where appropriate.

6. General guidance for applicants

Our primary aim is to commission research which is well designed, will be effectively carried out by the research team and will provide findings which meet the requirements of the SDO programme and the needs of the NHS management and leadership community it serves. We do not place any particular methodological approach, disciplinary background or expertise, research team structure or other constraint on applicants. However, experience of reviewing applications over a number of years leads us to make the following general points which we urge applicants to take into account:

- **Theoretical framing and empirical methods.** In addressing issues in a way likely to lead to the wide applicability of findings, we encourage applicants to demonstrate the sound theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of their proposals and show the theoretical and conceptual connections between their proposed research questions and empirical work. Empirical projects are likely to use a wide diversity of methods, including both qualitative and quantitative approaches, carefully matched to study questions and with clear understanding as to how findings from different empirical approaches will be integrated. Theoretical, unfocused and poorly justified empirical investigations are unlikely to be funded.
- **Research team makeup and expertise.** Substantial empirical projects will require broad teams with significant input from diverse disciplines and a commitment to developing robust inter-disciplinary approaches. Applicants should bear in mind the difficulties of managing large and diffuse project teams across multiple institutions and will need to show commitment of an appropriate amount of time and effort to the project. The principal applicant should generally be the person who has contributed most to the intellectual and practical development of the proposal and who will take *de facto* responsibility for its implementation. The SDO programme is interested to see an element of research capacity-building in proposals.
- **Linkage and exchange.** Successful projects will involve partnership working between experienced academic teams and those more closely involved in the design and delivery of services.
- **User involvement.** It is a core concern of the SDO programme that all commissioned projects should pay appropriate attention to the needs and experiences of service users, their carers and the public at large. Proposed projects should be explicit in their explanations as to how the proposed work has potential implications for service delivery that could lead to enhanced public and community engagement. Applicants should demonstrate clear involvement of all relevant PPI stakeholders including, local communities, lay people, service users, carers and minority ethnic communities during the design, execution and dissemination of the research.
- **Location of research.** The NIHR Service Delivery and Organisation programme is funded by the NIHR with contributions from WORD in Wales. Researchers from Scotland and Northern Ireland should contact NETSCC to discuss their eligibility to apply.
- **Research governance.** Applicants should ensure that their proposal complies with the Research Governance Framework. Successful applicants will be required to provide proof of research ethics committee approval for their project where required.
- **Costs.** NIHR programmes currently fund Higher Education Institutions (HEI) at a maximum of 80% of Full Economic Cost (except for equipment over £50,000 – 100%). For non-HEI institutions, NIHR may fund 100% of costs. However, the SDO programme reserves the right to award a grant for less than this maximum and for less than the amount sought by applicants where appropriate.

7. Dissemination and knowledge mobilisation

In outlining their research plans, applicants should make clear how findings will be communicated effectively to a wide variety of academic, policy and service audiences. Researchers should bear in mind the two main objectives of the SDO programme (see Section 2) and recognise that the SDO programme seeks to fund projects which show a creative and proactive approach to engaging with the NHS management and leadership community. Researchers will be expected to deliver the following written outputs from any proposed research:

- an executive summary (500 words);
- an abstract
- a full report detailing all the work undertaken with supporting technical appendices (up to a maximum of 80,000 words).

Applicants should outline plans for conference, seminar and other forms of dissemination to go alongside written communications during the life time of the project. Where appropriate, the proposed work should be designed and delivered in a way that is likely to lead to significant high-quality peer-reviewed publications. Projects lasting more than one year will be expected to deliver interim reports on progress and provisional findings every 6 months.

8. Application process and timetable

Any questions, queries or requests for clarification in relation to this call for proposals should be sent by email to sdofund@southampton.ac.uk with the reference number and title for the call for proposals as the email header. Applicants should be aware that while every effort will be made to respond to enquiries in a timely fashion, these should be received at least two weeks before the call closing date.

The process of commissioning will be in **two stages** for this call and applicants should submit **outline proposals** via the website by **1pm on 10 June 2010**. No late proposals will be considered and the deadline will be strictly observed. Applicants will be notified of the outcome of their outline application approximately three weeks after the closing date.

Shortlisted applicants will be notified that their application is being proceeded to the commissioning board and applicants who are not shortlisted will be notified of this within approximately three weeks of the meeting of the SDO NHS Evaluations Panel meeting. Please note that these timings may be subject to change largely depending on the level of response to the call.