

NIHR Health Services Research (HSR) programme

Open call for research proposals

1. Introduction

The National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Health Services Research (HSR) programme funds research to improve health policy, health systems and health care delivery. Its remit includes quality of services, access and equity in provision, relevance and appropriateness to the needs of individuals and communities, effectiveness and efficiency of health services, as well as how services are experienced. The NIHR HSR programme addresses the three dimensions of quality currently of central concern to the NHS: patient experience, effectiveness of care and patient safety.

The NIHR Health Services Research programme is funded by the NIHR, with contributions from the CSO in Scotland and WORD in Wales. Researchers from Northern Ireland should contact the HSR programme to discuss their eligibility to apply.

2. HSR programme objectives

The remit of the programme is broad and can include a range of study designs. Some examples could be:

- Applied methodology research (that falls outside the MRC-NIHR Methodology Research Programme remit) such as development of risk adjustment models for existing databases;
- Development and evaluation of patient-reported outcome measures (PROMs), especially if widely applicable in services, as long as studies are aimed at creating new knowledge and not simply rolling out existing models;
- The impact of PROMs on quality of care;
- Making better use of existing research knowledge, for instance, through modelling;
- Effectiveness of innovative and existing services;
- Problems of access to services and ways of reducing health inequalities;
- Variations in provision and outcomes of services;
- Efficiency and productivity of services;
- Determinants of quality of care;
- Implementation research to improve use of evidence in services.

The NIHR funds a range of research programmes. Applicants are advised to visit the other NIHR programme websites for further details on their remits at: www.nihr.ac.uk. Where boundaries between programmes are unclear, we will advise applicants and ensure applications are appropriately targeted.

3. Call for proposals: Remit

The HSR programme will accept researcher-led applications for primary research and evidence synthesis studies. Primary research may include observational and experimental methods. NHS organisations, universities, and other research organisations are eligible to apply.

HSR commonly requires multi-disciplinary approaches. Contributing disciplines include clinical research, epidemiology, health economics, medical ethics, social and behavioural sciences (including both qualitative and quantitative methods) and statistics. Most health services research is applied and policy-oriented but basic research on methods and measurement may sometimes be required. For example, improved data from routine sources such as linked records for English NHS patients could provide new opportunities for:

- validating and applying indicators of health and health care;
- identification of characteristics underpinning variations in process and outcome of care, including population based health outcomes and equity of access to care;

4. Criteria and process for proposal selection

The annual HSR budget is £5m. Applicants must submit an outline proposal which will be considered by the HSR Board. Those shortlisted will then be required to submit a full proposal which will be subject to external peer review prior to consideration by the HSR Board.

Selection Criteria

The HSR Board is made up of a range of individuals including NHS managers, academics and service users.

In assessing proposals, the HSR Board will use the following criteria:

- Importance of the suggested research to the needs of the NHS and delivery of health services;
- Scientific quality of the proposal including the likelihood of the study:
 - making a substantial advance in scientific understanding and knowledge;
 - leading to a substantial improvement in health or health services;
 - increasing understanding of the broader topic area;
- Feasibility of the study;
- Demonstration of the team's skill mix, experience, project management and infrastructure for success;
- Whether costs of the proposed research are realistic and value for money.

5. General guidance for applicants

The programme aims to commission high quality, well designed research which will be carried out by effective and efficient research teams, providing findings which meet the needs of NHS managers and leaders. NIHR experience suggests the importance of the following:

- **Theoretical framing and empirical methods.** Issues should be addressed in a way likely to lead to the wide applicability of findings. Applicants should clearly demonstrate links between theoretical and empirical work.

Large projects will need various methods, including both qualitative and quantitative approaches matched to study questions and with clear understanding as to how findings from different approaches will be integrated.

- **Research team makeup and expertise.** Large projects are likely to need teams with significant input from a number of disciplines. Applicants should bear in mind the difficulties of managing large and diffuse project teams across multiple institutions. Applicants should show how the work will be managed including the time commitment needed from all team members. The chief investigator should usually be the person who has contributed most to the intellectual and practical development of the proposal and should take responsibility for its implementation. The HSR programme will look favourably on proposals which include an element of research capacity-building.
- **Stakeholder and public involvement.** Applicants should demonstrate involvement of all relevant stakeholders (including where relevant, local communities, ethnic groups, lay people, service users, carers as well as health care practitioners and managers) during the design, execution and communication of the research. Projects should explicitly outline how the proposed work has implications for service delivery that could lead to enhanced public and community engagement.
- **Partners.** Given the mission of the HSR programme, successful projects are likely to involve partnership working between experienced academic teams and those involved in the delivery of services.
- **Research governance.** Applicants should ensure their proposal complies with the Research Governance Framework. Successful applicants will be required to provide proof of research ethics committee approval for their project, if required.
- **Costs and value for money.** We will fund a range of projects in both size and duration. Value for money will be an important consideration and project costs will be carefully scrutinised and must be well justified. NIHR programmes fund Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) at a maximum of 80% of Full Economic Cost (except for equipment over £50,000). For non-HE Institutions, NHS R&D may fund 100% of costs. The HSR programme reserves the right to award a grant for less than the amount sought by applicants where appropriate.

6. Dissemination and knowledge mobilisation

Applicants should make clear how findings will be communicated effectively to a wide variety of academic, policy and service audiences. Researchers should recognise that the HSR programme funds projects which show a creative and proactive approach to engaging with the NHS management and leadership community.

Researchers of successful projects will be expected to deliver the following written outputs: an executive summary with clearly identified policy, managerial and practice implications; a full report detailing all the work undertaken; and supporting technical appendices.

Applicants should outline plans for conference, seminar and other forms of dissemination to go alongside written communications. Where appropriate, the proposed work should lead to peer-reviewed publications.

7. Application process and timetable

Any questions, queries or requests for clarification in relation to this call for proposals should be sent by email to hsrinfo@southampton.ac.uk with 'Open call for research proposals REF: HSR002' 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.

Applicants **must** submit proposals via the HSR online application form available from www.hsr.nihr.ac.uk by **1300 on Thursday 22 April 2010**. No late proposals will be considered and this deadline will be observed strictly. No paper-based only submissions will be considered. Applicants will be notified of the outcome of their application within three weeks of the Board meeting.

ALL proposals must indicate at the appropriate section whether the same or a substantially similar proposal:

- (a) has been previously submitted to and rejected by another funder and if so, name the funder or funders and dates of submission must be provided
- (b) is currently under consideration for funding by another funder and if so, name the funder or funders and dates by which a decision on funding is expected

If the proposal has not been submitted elsewhere for funding then this section of the proposal should state "Neither this proposal nor a substantially similar one has already been submitted to another research funder".

Proposals which do not provide this information will not be considered.

Proposals for follow on studies must provide details of the earlier project including the project number, completion date and evidence of any published output or planned output.

Shortlisted applicants at the outline proposal stage will be invited to submit a full proposal via the HSR website to be considered by the HSR Board at its meeting in February 2011. Please note dates may be subject to change.