NIHR Health Services Research (HSR) programme

Open call for research proposals REF: HSR001

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 safety, patient experience and effectiveness of care.

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 NETSCC to discuss their eligibility to apply.

2. HSR programme objectives

The remit of this first call is broad and will include a range of study designs. Some examples could be:

- Cultural and organisational issues around patient safety;
- 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, as long as this is aimed at creating new knowledge and not simply rolling out existing models;
- Making better use of existing research knowledge, for instance, through modelling;
- Knowledge exchange/transfer within organisations;
- Measurement of quality improvement.

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, NETSCC 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 public sector 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.

The HSR programme is now seeking outline or full applications in the areas described above. Researchers are at liberty to choose which type of application they wish to submit.

Once the programme is established, cut-off dates will be given each year and only outline applications will be submitted. Outline proposals will be reviewed by the HSR Board, and a number invited to submit a full proposal. The Board will normally shortlist two to three times as many projects as can be funded.   Researchers whose proposals are shortlisted will be given the opportunity to develop a full proposal; individual feedback at this stage will be provided. All full proposals 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/lay representatives.

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: HSR001'** 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.netscc.ac.uk/hsr by **1300** on **Thursday 3 December 2009**. No late proposals will be considered and this deadline will be observed strictly. No paper-based only submissions will be considered. However, a paper copy with all signatures will be required for full applications, to be submitted within one week of the closing date in addition to the e-mailed application. 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

Applicants should also contact the team at NETSCC, HSR at hsrapp@southampton.ac.uk

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 July 2010. Applicants will be notified of the outcome of their full proposal application within approximately three weeks of the Board meeting in February 2010.   Please note these dates may be subject to change.