Research matters
What excellence looks like in NHS Wales

Background

Improving health and care services in Wales using evidence-based approaches is fundamental to improving the quality of care and putting the public at the heart of everything. It is widely known that research makes a real difference to improving health outcomes and to the lives of patients and people in our communities. Health and care research and innovation are critical to the delivery and development of the NHS and NHS organisations in Wales, who have a critical role to play to support research.

Research in the NHS is funded through a variety of sources. A key funder is Health and Care Research Wales – which is funded by Welsh Government (WG) to coordinate and facilitate health and social care research across Wales and provide resources to stimulate and support research. Health and Care Research Wales includes both policy (Research & Development Division, Welsh Government) and the various parts of the Health and Care Research Wales funded infrastructure which include research centres and units, faculty, Wales evidence centre, the support and delivery centre and NHS R&D.

The NHS also attracts research funding from a wide variety of sources including non-commercial funders through research grant income from government departments, research councils and charities, as well as commercial income for research from industry partners. These various funding streams work together to strengthen the NHS' capacity and capability. In addition, the NHS supports research through the provision of resources such as accommodation and facilities, as well as providing support for the day-to-day activities of NHS staff who support the research specialists on the ground.

This document has been developed through a co-creation process with key stakeholders facilitated by Health and Care Research Wales. It outlines what 'research excellence looks like' within NHS organisations in Wales where research is embraced, integrated into services, and is a core part of the organisation's culture.

To drive excellence, NHS organisations should have a positive culture of continuous improvement through research. This aligns with the *Duty of Quality* which came into force in April 2023 as part of the Health and Social Care Act 2020.

Research capacity and capability will differ between organisations and this document has been created to be relevant to all NHS organisations in Wales. There are seven local health boards and three NHS trusts which make up the NHS in Wales, as well as two special health authorities and a shared services partnership; and all these organisations support research.

As the NHS is part of a wider ecosystem, it is vital that Health and Care Research Wales and NHS organisations build on existing activities and work together across the features outlined in this document to support the NHS to strengthen its research and development (R&D) function. This is particularly important now to ensure that research plays its crucial role in supporting the NHS to evolve and adapt to future demands.

Why should research matter to the Welsh population and to the NHS?

Research provides the opportunity for patients and service users to access new treatments and services, that will improve their health and well-being and contribute to reducing health inequalities in the general population.
NHS organisations that are actively involved in research see improved health outcomes and lower mortality rates, not just for those patients participating in research, but for everyone.
Research creates evidence-based services, provides evidence for NHS standards and helps organisations to find new and better ways of delivering health and social care, including better health economic outcomes.
Research provides opportunities for staff development and enhanced job roles which helps with recruitment and retention, as well as developing leaders and critical thinkers.
Research leads to economic benefits by attracting non-commercial funding and commercial income that can build the research capacity of frontline and other support services, as well as providing access to novel treatments and technologies received for free.
Research is an essential pillar of securing and maintaining University (Health Board) status and a key enabler for NHS Wales to deliver '*A Healthier Wales.*'

Who is this document for?

Research is a fundamental component of everyday health and care and is critical to the development of all aspects of NHS Wales. This document is therefore relevant to all those involved in the design, management, and delivery of healthcare in the Welsh NHS including the NHS boards and all executives, those with responsibility for strategy development, clinical leads, professional leads, heads of services, operational managers as well as dedicated research staff such as R&D Directors and leads, research managers and the research workforce.

This framework is also relevant to the public as recipients of health and care services from NHS Wales.

It is also relevant for key stakeholders working in partnership with NHS Wales who have aligned vision for research and joint R&D strategies as part of the whole ecosystem which enables health and care research through collaborative effort. This includes but is not limited to government departments, higher education providers, research agencies and funders, third sector organisations, public sector organisations, life science companies and their representative bodies.

What research does it cover?

This document covers health research across all specialties and sectors which is within the responsibility of NHS Wales as part of the whole ecosystem, including but not limited to:

- primary care, secondary care, public health, community services, health research in social care settings and integrated care;
- commercial and non-commercial research, including clinical trials, observational studies, discovery science and experimental medicine, public health, translational and applied research; and
- research to support policy making, academic research in clinical areas and research into NHS services and care pathways.

How should this document be used?

- To provide guidelines on the core content of NHS R&D and/or R&D and innovation strategies and implementation plans.
- To provide a framework for organisational self-assessment and peer review to establish the maturity of an organisation in respect of its arrangements and approach to supporting high quality and impactful research.
- To support better alignment between the national and local infrastructure for R&D, including identifying 'once for Wales' opportunities in the context of the national strategy, and/or sharing local good practice.
- To support broader strategic discussions between the Research and Development Division (RDD), Welsh Government (WG) and NHS organisations at performance meetings.
- To provide one document that can be used consistently across a range of national guidance and activities to simplify reporting processes for example the NHS planning framework (and associated workplans such as Integrated Medium-Term Plan- IMTPs), Welsh Health Circulars publication, and the NHS Executive.

- To provide the basis for a work programme to achieve the ambitions within this document, taking a partnership approach with Health and Care Research Wales and NHS organisations working collaboratively.

Features of a research supportive NHS organisation

The features of a research supportive NHS organisation have been organised under ten pillars, which are summarised in Diagram 1. Supportive NHS organisations will work to embrace every pillar and the features they contain together, as they all play an important part in ensuring that research is integrated into services and is contributing to the whole system, thereby achieving excellence.

Diagram 1:
The ten pillars outlining the features of a research supportive NHS organisation

There are also several cross-cutting themes which underpin the ten pillars which include the statutory requirements to be addressed and considered when developing policy and implementation plans. These cross-cutting themes are highlighted in diagram 2 where those most relevant to the research agenda have been identified.

The Duty of Quality is a recent addition and reinforces the importance for research supportive organisations to adopt a system-wide way of working to provide safe, effective, person-centred, timely, efficient, and equitable health care in the context of a learning culture.

Diagram 2:
Cross-cutting themes which underpin the ten pillars of a research supportive NHS organisation

Each of the ten pillars is detailed below, along with the features of a research supportive NHS organisation.

1. Strategy:

Supportive organisations:

1.1. Have clear vision for research and ambitious R&D strategies, with aligned implementation plans and continuous progress monitoring. Strategies will:
- be coproduced with the public and key stakeholders to ensure they are patient/ public centred;
- outline a clear vision;
- demonstrate a clear connection to wider organisational strategies and service plans;
- demonstrate alignment with the opportunities presented by national and UK wide R&D strategies;
- be signed off by the Board, alongside a time bound implementation plan;
- be widely promoted to staff and the public.

1.2. Demonstrate a clear connection between their strategy and implementation plans and key local and national indicators for research performance.

1.3. Ensure R&D has full representation and visibility within the NHS organisations Integrated Medium-Term Plan (IMTP).

2. Governance and Leadership

Supportive organisations:

2.1. Demonstrate clear board commitment to research, with evidence of members contributing to agenda setting, assessing performance, and impact.

2.2. Appoint an independent board member/ champion for research, to act as an ambassador and to champion R&D at the board and across the organisation.

2.3. Support research at all levels by raising awareness among NHS directors, executives, deputies, senior and operational managers to secure commitment and by promoting research through existing committee structures.

2.4. Have a dedicated Executive Lead for research and a dedicated R&D Director, who have dedicated time to oversee the R&D strategy and provide strategic leadership.

2.5. Have a dedicated committee wired into the NHS organisation's governance where research is frequently discussed, with representatives from across the organisation and public members, to plan, oversee and report on research.

2.6. Annually report on progress against the organisation's R&D strategy, including reporting progress for a public facing audience for example, through a public facing annual report outlining R&D activities and income.

3. Partnership and Collaboration

Supportive organisations:

3.1. Establish strong interdisciplinary working within the organisation between departments and specialisms; across primary, secondary and community care; and evidenced connections across research, training and education, service improvement and innovation.

3.2. Establish cross-sector partnerships across Wales, the UK and internationally to increase the reach, level and impact of research. Specifically, there will be evidence of alignment of vision, joint R&D strategies, memorandums of understanding, deliverable plans and regular progress reviews with:

- Higher education providers, collaborating to maintain integrated partnership working between the NHS and academia including, where relevant, as part of the research and development pillar for University Health Board status
- Research agencies and funders (including research councils and third sector organisations)
- Public sector organisations, by working across organisational boundaries and adopting flexible approaches to enable easier movement of staff. This may include working with other NHS organisations, Digital Health and Care Wales, Health Education and Improvement Wales, and the Regional Innovation and Improvement Coordination Hubs.

- Life science companies and representative bodies as part of Wales and UK wide industry collaboration plans, whilst developing efficient systems to support commercial research.

3.3. Establish partnerships with external expert advisory boards and key international opinion leaders to bring fresh insight and perspective; act as critical friends and collaborative partners; and help NHS researchers to benchmark against internationally leading research within their fields.

4. Research Support

Supportive organisations have:

4.1. R&D offices and/or departments to support researcher development, research governance and the set-up, delivery, and quality assurance associated with studies.

4.2. Support for research within departments and directorates including support for staff time and NHS support services for research such as radiology, pathology, pharmacy, finance, and workforce and organisational development (W&OD).

4.3. The ability to assess organisational capacity and capability to undertake research so that studies can be hosted or sponsored.

4.4. Access to well-equipped physical and digital library services, where staff can access information on research outcomes to inform best practice.

4.5. Access to suitable space, facilities, and equipment for the conduct of research, with ongoing development enabled through the organisation's facilities and estates strategy.

4.6. An effective and efficient Information Management & Information Technology (IM&IT) infrastructure and systems to support research, with evidenced alignment to organisational digital strategies and national strategies, including those produced by Health and Care Research Wales for example supporting data and software that adheres to the FAIR (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, and Reusable) principles to allow full repeatability, reproducibility, and reuse.

4.7. Processes in place to contribute to the availability of health data for research purposes, increasing data resources for secure access data via trusted research environments and supporting more diverse research enabled by data driven services.

4.8. A commitment to embracing emerging technologies and to research enabled by data and digital tools, leveraging the strength of NHS Wales and UK health data assets to allow for more high-quality research to be developed and delivered, whilst adhering to data protection obligations in relation to conducting research.

5. Research delivery

Supportive organisations:

5.1. Implement UK and Wales wide research delivery support programmes in partnership with the Health and Care Research Wales.

5.2. Adopt One Wales approaches (where Welsh organisations operate as a national collective) to research delivery to enable streamlining, reduce duplication and consistency across Wales including national approaches for research approvals, rapid study setup and delivery.

5.3. Strategically manage the NHS organisation's research portfolio, to lead and participate in a wide range of research, capitalising on local strengths and research groups, organisational priorities and research capacity and capability.

5.4. Support research with high policy relevance which aligns with priorities at a national and regional level, and the NHS organisation's local population health needs.

5.5. Set realistic study delivery targets, ensure research delivery to time and target as agreed with sponsors and monitor the performance of individual studies, ensuring study management data is accurately recorded and monitored frequently.

5.6. Regularly review the organisation's track record in research delivery across the portfolio, understanding the context with local intelligence and benchmarking with UK peers.

6. Finance

Supportive organisations:

6.1. Secure adequate funding from Health and Care Research Wales to establish a sustainable R&D function covering research development and delivery and manage the funding transparently, in line with the Health and Care Research Wales R&D Finance Policy.

6.2. Include R&D within the organisation's financial strategies and plans.

6.3. Have financial plans for R&D with good forecasting, timely invoicing, and proportionate risk management.

6.4. Have a commitment to generate research income for non-commercial studies (i.e. from research funders, research councils and third sector organisations) and commercial studies (i.e. from industry partners) to facilitate capacity building.

6.5. Help existing and prospective researchers secure grants from a wide range of funding sources to advance their studies leading to high quality and impactful outcomes and peer-reviewed international journal publications.

6.6. Ensure financial support is provided to advise on and monitor all costs relating to commercial and non-commercial research.

7. NHS Workforce Capacity and Capability

Supportive organisations:

7.1. Promote R&D in the organisation's W&OD strategy to facilitate research and recognise the benefits of being a research supportive NHS organisation in attracting talented staff.

7.2. Deliver NHS workforce plans where research is a key component which will include plans to:

- o raise awareness of research and research careers through a variety of mechanisms to attract more people into research careers, whilst providing role variety, job enhancement and facilitating staff retention (e.g. through staff induction and mandatory training).
- o build research capacity and capability for all staff by supporting the professional development of research knowledge and skills (e.g. through PADRs, mentoring, and signposting to national training opportunities provided through Health and Care Research Wales and other training providers across Wales and the UK).
- o ensure that all NHS staff have the opportunity to support research by including research in all NHS job descriptions and have protected time for research for NHS staff through job planning and PADRs.
- o maintain support for research in the NHS workforce during times of clinical crises such as urgent public health emergencies and winter pressures, where research activity should be focussed toward the clinical needs.
- o enhance research delivery capacity amongst the workforce, including the capability to support clinical trials, ensuring good clinical governance and best practice.
- o adopt national polices enabling agile regional and national mobilisation of the R&D workforce across NHS organisation boundaries and adopt flexible approaches to staff contracts with partner organisations to promote cross-organisational working.
- o facilitate access to support for staff at all levels who wish to undertake research, advising on how to navigate the R&D environment and signposting to internal and external sources of information (e.g. on funding streams, protocol development, writing funding applications, statistical support, research design and methods).
- o explore opportunities for investment in joint clinical academic roles in specialties and disciplines aligned to local and national plans, in partnership with universities.

8.   Public Involvement and Participation

Supportive organisations:

8.1.   Have an evidenced commitment to proactive public involvement and participation in the development and delivery of research studies where the public's experience is valued and where they can play a variety of roles adding significant value to research e.g. strategy development, setting research priorities, study steering group member, as a research participant and in shaping plans to share the findings of research.

8.2.   Allocate sufficient budget to public involvement, ensuring that public contributors are acknowledged and recognised for their time, lived experience and contribution, in the form of monetary payment or other methods of reward and recognition in line with best practice guidelines.

8.3.   Ensure that all research supported by the NHS organisation is people centred, supporting research to make it easier for patients, service users and members of the public to access research of relevance to them and be involved in its design, learning directly from public experience.

8.4.   Adopt the national approach to promote research opportunities to staff and the public, including working in partnership with key stakeholders such as third sector organisations to promote research opportunities to communities of people with lived experiences; and signpost access to the organisation's and NHS Wales' research portfolio to enhance participation.

8.5.   Ensure that the public involved in the NHS organisation's research represents the population it serves with equality, diversity and inclusion being key drivers, and develop flexible approaches to involvement to enable inclusive representation e.g. addressing barriers to involvement and participation through language barriers and literacy levels etc.

8.6.   Adopt the UK Standards for Public Involvement, enabling good practice in public involvement.

8.7.   Facilitate access to national training on public involvement for research active staff, to raise awareness on how to effectively involve the public in research.

8.8.   Have active representation on the Health and Care Research Wales Public Involvement Alliance.

9.   Communications and Engagement

Supportive organisations:

9.1.   Include research in the NHS organisation's communications and engagement plans to demonstrate the value and importance of research, celebrating successes and raising the profile amongst staff and the public.

9.2.   Adopt the national approach to communications and engagement for research in Wales to ensure there is clear and consistent messaging.

9.3.　Have active representation at the Health and Care Research Wales Communications Alliance.

9.4.　Develop plans to raise awareness of the importance of research among local diverse communities, collaborating with researchers and ensuring proactive engagement with underrepresented groups, including working in partnership with third sector organisations and their local communities.

9.5.　Include research in the NHS organisation's equality, diversity and inclusion plans with a strong commitment to active engagement with specific groups to address health inequalities through research.

9.6.　Adopt national research campaigns and link local research with national Health and Care Research Wales research to maximise impact.

10.　Research Impact

Supportive organisations:

10.1.　Have a commitment to open access publishing for research findings, including a commitment to ensure that researchers follow the open access policies of those funding their work, to ensure that research outcomes are freely available and encourage the use of research findings.

10.2.　Have systems in place to enable research from Wales, the UK and beyond to influence practice and service delivery on an ongoing basis to improve and enhance the quality of services.

10.3.　Develop plans to ensure research is supported during service redesign and informs the design of new models of service delivery based on outcomes from national, UK wide and international research.

10.4.　Work with Health and Care Research Wales to develop mechanisms for measuring the economic and societal value associated with research and its impact.

Implementation of this document

This document will be used for the purposes described in the introduction.

A strong partnership approach will be taken with Health and Care Research Wales and NHS organisations working collaboratively to achieve the features of research supportive organisations.

Programmes to support implementation and monitor progress will provide the basis for a work programme to achieve the key features set out across the ten pillars.

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