

Research Design Service South East

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In this Issue...

We celebrate the RDS SE's work since it began in 2008, speaking to researchers who have worked with us on multiple projects, and featuring their recent successes. We also highlight some of the free expert services that the RDS SE can provide to assist health and social care researchers when applying for research funding.

Whether you are looking to apply for first time funding, or are a senior researcher, the RDS SE can advise on all aspects of your application and research design. Please contact us via our website for further information.

RDS SE celebrates 10 years of NIHR success

In 2006, the National Institute for Health Research was created as the research arm of the NHS. Its goal was to increase the health and wealth of the nation through high quality research. Ten years on, NIHR's success and impact on the research landscape has been impressive. It is now considered the world's most comprehensive research system.

The ten regional Research Design Services (RDSs) are a key part of NIHR's national success. Set up in 2008 to support health and social care researchers when applying for peer reviewed funding, they have helped researchers to secure funding for thousands of projects in the NHS, social care and public health.

In May, RDS SE staff joined colleagues from other RDS regions and across the whole NIHR, for an NIHR at ten anniversary celebration at Westminster's QEII Conference Centre.

The focus was the contribution of NIHR-funded research to UK healthcare, policy and practice. Keynote speakers included Secretary of State for Health Jeremy Hunt, and Professor Dame Sally C Davies. Patient and public contributors gave moving accounts of involvement in research, and there were debates around the NIHR's wider impact and value, as well as an opportunity to think about the future of health and social care research in England.

See more about NIHR at Ten:
www.nihr.ac.uk/about-us/nihr-today/nihr-at-10/

RDS support for NHS and social care research

RfPB grant to help boys living with haemophilia

Physiotherapist Dr David Stephensen has more than 20 years' clinical experience managing children and adults with haemophilia, an inherited blood clotting disorder mainly affecting males. He works at the Kent Haemophilia and Thrombosis Centre, East Kent Hospitals University NHS Foundation Trust and the Haemophilia Centre at the Royal London Hospital.

David leads the Kent and Medway Hub of the Council for Allied Health Professions Research network (CAPHR). He has worked with the RDS SE several times over the years as Principal Investigator or as part of a project team. RDS adviser Ferhana Hashem, a qualitative specialist, has worked with David on several occasions.

Ferhana said: 'David came to the RDS with a proposal for NIHR Research for Patient Benefit Grant Competition 27. As an experienced researcher, he already had a strong design and knew what he wanted but he needed help with health economics and statistics. We put him in touch with our quantitative and trials experts to strengthen and fine-tune his application. We also suggested that using 'nominal group technique' – a type of consensus method, rather than a focus group, would work best'.

David's application was successful on first submission and resulted in an RfPB grant of £247,816. His three-year study (DOLPHIN) will develop and pilot a physiotherapy intervention for boys with haemophilia. Haemophilia is an inherited condition mainly affecting boys. It affects the blood's ability to clot, leading to bleeding into muscles and joints.



Muscles become weak and joints become painful and difficult to move, making everyday tasks such as walking and using stairs a struggle.

David explained: 'One of the things that matters most to boys with haemophilia is their ability to take part in games and activities with friends. One boy said: "my blood needs more muscles!" A group of physiotherapists and patients will design the exercise programme. We want to find out which exercises can make muscles stronger or will have an effect on joint pain and movement. We will work out the best way to measure strength, how joints move, and how the boys feel about playing games and doing everyday activities. We will also work with the families to see how we might improve the exercises'.

David has built up a solid working relationship with RDS SE and really values the advice he has received: 'Research is about getting the right people together to do the work in the best way possible. The RDS can direct you to collaborators with the expertise you need. You may have a great idea in your own head, but someone outside your own area can look objectively, give feedback, draw out, and develop your thoughts into a workable proposal. Their focus on feasibility, and knowing what will work definitely helped me to hone the DOLPHIN application into a fundable study. The RDS team support you through the whole application process'.

Improving Hepatitis testing uptake among the South East Asian population

Professor Aftab Ala is an experienced Consultant in Hepatology and Gastroenterology based at The Royal Surrey County Hospital NHS Foundation Trust. Recently the RDS SE Surrey team supported him in obtaining NIHR Research for Patient Benefit funding of £329,740 for a study developing and piloting an innovative educational intervention to improve uptake of Hepatitis B and C testing in the South East Asian population.

Current barriers to uptake of Hepatitis B and C testing within the South East Asian population stem from a lack of engagement due to cultural, language, and educational differences. Professor Ala's study will use culturally sensitive local knowledge to address these barriers to increase the awareness and importance of hepatitis testing. The research team will develop an educational video and offer hepatitis testing in non-health settings more familiar to this population (such as mosques and community health centres). A feasibility study will assess the recruitment potential at different sites.

RDS adviser Bernadette Egan, who worked with Professor Ala on his application said 'Aftab came to the RDS with several research ideas. It was his first NIHR grant.



We helped him refine the research question and advised on feasibility study design. We were also able to suggest an academic collaborator with expertise in developing such interventions'.

Professor Ala is keen to work with the RDS SE again, developing new research ideas and learning from his recent experiences: "The RDS SE support was pivotal in the final success of my application. Crucially, the breadth and depth of expertise provided by the RDS team over many months prior to the deadline made a clear difference to the final positive outcome. The lessons learnt in the application process have been a model for ongoing engagement with the RDS Team, developing ideas and translating them into future major research applications".

RDS support helps Kevin become jolly good NIHR Fellow

As well as supporting NHS consultants, GPs, nurses and allied health professionals with research funding applications, the RDS also advises and supports health and social care professionals in applying for funding for a variety of NIHR training programmes.

NHS Physiotherapist Kevin Hall came to RDS SE when applying for a NIHR Clinical Doctoral Fellowship. This is an individual training award which offers funding to cover the award holder's salary costs, their PhD tuition fees, and the costs of an appropriate research project and training development programme. For his research project, Kevin wanted to conduct an RCT to test a physiotherapy intervention to treat shoulder tightness. The RDS SE gave him valuable guidance on his application, including how public involvement (PI) could help to inform his research design and develop his application.

Kevin is enthusiastic about the support he received: 'RDS helped me understand what PI was. When I started developing my research protocol, I had no understanding of how involving patients in research could inform research design. They advised me to identify patients who might be willing to come to the hospital to talk about my research.'

Kevin applied to the RDS SE PI Fund and received a small grant to cover costs of setting up a user group. The group's unique insight helped Kevin make some changes to the protocol, such as involving patients in the physiotherapists' training. Two user group members joined the trial steering group.

Kevin was delighted when his Fellowship application was successful, and the trial is now under way at Western Sussex Hospitals NHS Trust.

Mindfulness for Voices – putting research into practice

RDS SE are here to help you develop your research from an early idea through to a successfully funded project. Here we look at how RDS support helped a team of Sussex mental health researchers as they developed their innovative mental health project over the years from research idea to implementation.

Since 2008, RDS SE has worked closely and successfully with local clinical psychology researchers (pictured) Mark Hayward (R&D Director, Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust (SPFT)) and Clara Strauss (Sussex Mindfulness Centre Research Lead, SPFT).

Mark has almost 20 years of experience working with people who are distressed by hearing voices. These experiences can have devastating effects, such as high levels of depression and risk of suicide. One of Clara's interests is in drawing on the principles and benefits of mindfulness to help develop new interventions for different groups of service users.

In 2006, Clara and Mark collaborated on a research study with Professor of Clinical Psychology Paul Chadwick (Institute of Psychiatry, Kings College London). Professor Chadwick had developed a group-based therapy combining Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) with brief mindfulness practices (Mindfulness for Voices, M4V).

RDS advisers provided statistical support and helped the team build on their pilot work to design a full scale Randomised Controlled Trial investigating the effectiveness of M4V therapy for people who hear voices. With continued RDS support, the research team went on to secure funding of £183,000 for the project from the NIHR Research for Patient Benefit programme. The study began in 2011. By the time it closed in 2014, 108 people had taken part, making it one of the largest of its kind for this group of service users and therapy type.



The team received much positive feedback from participants, who generally liked the therapy because it was delivered in a group and they didn't feel so alone. Some also felt helped to practice mindful acceptance of their voices. Other participants described the positive impact the therapy had on their personal and working life.

The main study findings, published in April 2016, suggested that M4V has a positive impact on different elements of the voice-hearing experience and has long lasting effects on mood.

Mark and Clara were keen not to let M4V sit on the shelf. They used the momentum and interest from the study to translate their research findings into practice by piloting M4V groups within the Voices Clinic in Sussex Partnership Foundation Trust. The Voices Clinic has been designed to work across different patient groups experiencing distressing voices and help improve access to innovative evidence-based therapies while continuing to research their effectiveness.

The team are constantly striving to optimise the therapeutic experience of the Voices Clinic. Recently a smartphone app has been developed. This incorporates mindfulness principles and practice alongside therapeutic advice, to support patients both during their time at the clinic and when they leave.

The team are already working on a new research proposal with the RDS SE and hope to continue to develop innovative interventions in the field of mental health into the future.

Read the study findings in full <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4967452/>

also see http://www.sussexpartnership.nhs.uk/sites/default/files/documents/group_mindfulness_based_therapy_final.pdf

NIHR research funding – what’s right for you? Ask RDS!

‘The RDS can help you find the right funding source for your research application. This is one of the reasons why it’s important to seek RDS help early on in the application process. Ideas constantly develop, and what initially lent itself to one NIHR programme, may evolve into a proposal better suited to a different one.’

RDS SE Adviser

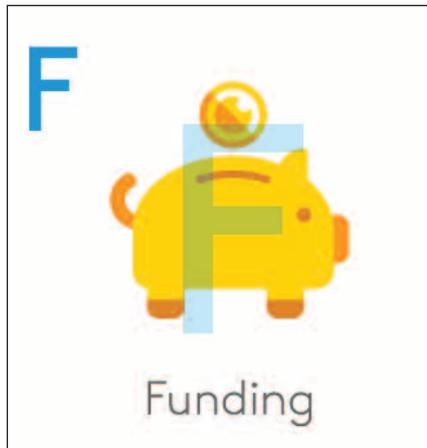
With its strong regional focus, the NIHR Research for Patient Benefit Programme is a popular choice when applying for funding. But there are many NIHR funding options – increasingly the RDS SE is working with researchers applying to a wider range of programmes.

The options may seem overwhelming, so how do you know which is the right one? Contacting RDS SE for advice on pinpointing and applying to the most suitable funder for your project is a good place to start. Below is a summary of the different funding streams available through the NIHR:

Efficacy and Mechanism Evaluation (EME) bridges a gap between preclinical studies and evidence of clinical efficacy, to progress new technologies and interventions through early trials and onto larger, later clinical trials. EME welcomes collaborations with industry and charities.

Health Services and Delivery Research (HS&DR) funds research for evidence on the quality, accessibility and organisation of health services, including evaluations to improve NHS service delivery.

Health Technology Assessment (HTA) funds research on clinical and cost effectiveness and impact of healthcare treatments for those who plan, provide or receive NHS care. Covers interventions used to treat, prevent or diagnose.



Invention for Innovation (i4i) supports preclinical and clinical development of new medical technologies for existing/emerging healthcare needs, with a pathway towards commercialisation and NHS adoption. Project teams comprise organisations from HEIs, NHS or industry.

Programme Grants for Applied Research (PGfAR) provide funding for major NHS priority research programmes that will deliver findings with practical application within three to five years, through improved healthcare or better delivery.

Programme Development Grants (PDG) fund preparatory research which will lead to a full Programme Grant application.

Public Health Research (PHR) Programme funds research to evaluate public health interventions, providing new knowledge on the benefits, costs, acceptability and wider impacts of non-NHS interventions to improve the public health and reduce health inequalities

Research for Patient Benefit (RfPB) Programme funds regional applied health and social care research. Applicants must demonstrate regional benefits of the proposed research and are encouraged to apply with academic partners.

Systematic Reviews (SR) programme includes the Cochrane Review Groups, the UK Cochrane Centre and the Health Technology Assessment Reviews, providing high-quality research evidence.

The NIHR funding opportunities booklet has full details and also includes career development funding opportunities, but do contact RDS SE for advice and support on this and any other aspect of your proposal.

RDS SE can also support researchers in applying to other peer reviewed funding programmes in applied health and social care.



National RDS Grant Writing Retreat

In June, twelve chosen teams of health and social care professionals – including two from RDS SE – attended the residential national RDS Grant Writing Retreat in Bath. Supported by RDS advisers, researchers used protected time to rapidly progress research ideas into fundable proposals.

How was it for you?

Two teams from Kent and Sussex attended the GWR. Sussex Community NHS Foundation Trust Researchers Dr Will Farr and Dr Sarah Crombie offer reflections on their time at the GWR:

'The aim was to develop high-quality research proposals prior to application to national peer-reviewed funding streams. We split into four groups and had the week to present, discuss ideas in our teams and scope for our project idea. Methodologists, statisticians, and key NIHR figures were on-hand to advise, or lecture on key themes

'The week was intensive with to-ing and fro-ing of ideas. Most teams unravelled their project idea as the week went on and then began the gradual process of reconstructing the project with RDS advice in mind. It was impossible to avoid talking or thinking about our project for less than ten to twelve hours a day; wherever we were, conversations returned to the week's focus.

'By the end there was some clarity over what to do next. Teams were in various stages toward submission with some classed as "NBs (no-brainers)" for funding, others as "strong", or "strong but with work to do". Some teams were talkative, whilst others spent most of the time writing furiously – a bit like being in an exam!

The retreat gave our team the first major opportunity to get together and think, write and organise our time. It exposed strengths and weaknesses in our project and our team. Would I do it again? You bet I would!'



RDS SE Research Writing Day, Brighton

In September RDS SE held a Research Writing Day supporting local researchers with designing and writing their research applications.

RDS Sussex advisers with research design, statistics, health economics, and public involvement expertise worked with teams from the Universities of Brighton and Surrey, Brighton and Sussex Medical School and Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust. They were preparing to apply to NIHR Research for Patient Benefit and Health Technology Assessment programmes. Subject areas included prostate cancer, cardiovascular disease and polypharmacy.

Each team had to pitch an idea, demonstrating the priority of and NHS need for their proposed research and how they hoped it could result in a change in care. Afterwards there were breakout sessions with writing teams working with RDS advisers on an application form.

Dr Greg Scutt, Brighton and Sussex Centre for Medicines Optimisation at the University of Brighton, enthused: 'It was an extremely useful and well organised day and great to meet the wider RDS team and academic colleagues from Surrey. They gave great suggestions for the project, and tips for future applications'.

For information about future events, please sign up to our local e-bulletin or visit our website.



RDS advisers Professor Anjum Memon and Dr Claire Rosten with researchers from the University of Surrey.

RDS SE – providing expert support for your research proposal



NIHR funds the RDS to help health and social care researchers prepare high quality proposals for submission to NIHR and other funders. Our team of experts give FREE advice, guidance and practical support on all aspects of the application process. We provide a responsive, effective advice service through meetings, email exchanges, phone consultations, drop-in sessions and workshops.

Our teams at the Universities of Kent, Surrey and Brighton have expertise and experience in all areas of research design and methodology. Below, we outline some of the specialist RDS resources available, focusing in this edition on our 'pre submission review panel'.

RDS SE Pre submission Review Panel

The RDS mostly operates on a one-to-one basis. Researchers are assigned a named Adviser for their grant submission. Other advisers with specialist expertise may be brought in, but most contact takes place between Researcher and Adviser through meetings, emails and phone conversations.

The RDS SE Presubmission Panel (PSP) extends and broadens the help RDS can provide by role-playing the part of an NIHR funding panel. Grant applications are reviewed by two RDS Advisers (unconnected to the proposal) and one or more members of our PI group.

We look at draft applications from the viewpoint of a funding panel, drawing on the wide range of RDS SE expertise. In a formal PSP meeting RDS SE Advisers present strengths and weaknesses of the proposed work, followed by lay review and group discussion.

We rate each grant application in terms of suitability for submission – if the Panel thinks a specific bid is unlikely to be ready for a forthcoming deadline, we ask the researcher to delay submission while we work with them to improve their chance of success. We don't invite applicants to attend PSP, but undertake to provide written feedback within three days, focusing on any major issues raised.

Many RDS SE members attend NIHR funding panels as observers in order to keep up to date with the themes that most commonly emerge when bids are evaluated for funding. RDS SE PSP meets three times a year. Feedback from researchers has been consistently high.

If you are in the late stages of developing a grant application and would like to submit to the PSP, please speak to your RDS SE Adviser.

Other ways RDS can support your research

- Face-to-face advice, via email and on the phone – please submit your request for support via our website and an experienced research adviser will contact you.
- Grant Writing sessions – the first national RDS grant writing retreat took place this year. RDS SE also held a one-day session in Brighton (see p6) and have further events scheduled.
- RDS SE PPI grants can help with the costs of involving patients and the public at all stages of the research process.
- Mock interviews for those RDS clients applying for NIHR Fellowships.
- Events and workshops in your region – see our events page on the RDS SE website for more information.
- Help with building the right research team for your study – we can put you in contact with local expertise and assist with various elements of your research design if needed, such as medical statistics, user involvement and health economics.
- Linking with key partner organisations such as the Clinical Trials Units and the local Clinical Research Network (CRN).

Public Involvement Focus

NIHR and Public Involvement

The NIHR seeks to increase involvement of patients and the public at all stages of the research process. Members of the public and patients help to shape NIHR research in a variety of ways including:

- suggesting research priorities and questions,
- joining NIHR programme advisory and funding panels,
- acting as reviewers for research funding programmes,
- being part of a research project team or a steering group,
- helping to disseminate research findings to a wider audience.

RDS PI strategy

Meaningful PI strengthens the quality and relevance of health research. Funding applications to NIHR need to show evidence of high quality public involvement being embedded into the research.

Following a strategic review of PI in the NIHR, *Going the Extra Mile (GtEM)* was produced. The report set goals and recommendations for the next 10 years. GtEM informs the national RDS involvement strategy and it guides PI work in all ten RDS regions.

RDS-INVOLVE partnership

As NIHR's national advisory group on public involvement in research, INVOLVE is one of the few government-funded programmes of its kind in the world. Since February 2016, in a major new initiative, the ten RDSs and INVOLVE have been working in a partnership to strengthen PI across each region. Part of this work is through regional PI networks, each with a unique project plan. The work will bring benefits including sharing good practice, overcoming challenges and fostering collaborative working between organisations.



Our local RDS SE PI team

The RDS SE Public Involvement (PI) Team is a well-developed, active and diverse team comprising RDS staff across Kent, Surrey and Sussex and our invaluable nine-member lay review panel. Duncan Barron, based at the University of Brighton is RDS SE PI team lead.

Funding public involvement at the grant application stage can be challenging. RDS PI Funds can help with this challenge. They are available to researchers to help facilitate public involvement in the development of research ideas and applications. Under our local RDS SE PPI grant scheme, up to £300 can be applied for. Last year, 12 PI grants were awarded to researchers in our region to help with the cost of involving patients and the public in their projects.

Our lay panel members carry out reviews of RDS-supported grant applications to NIHR and other funders. They also review applications to our local PPI grant scheme. Two lay members attend and participate in RDS SE pre-submission panel meetings (see p7) and Fellowship days. Four members belong to a Working Group providing valuable input to local RDS SE PI activity.

In September, the RDS SE PI team held a partnership meeting with INVOLVE and other NIHR and 3rd sector colleagues. Another event planned for January 2017, will work on developing the network further.

See our website for more details.

Keep up-to-date with RDS and NIHR news!

Subscribe to RDS SE e-bulletin. Our bulletin brings researchers up to date with regional and national events, training opportunities, funding calls and more. www.rds-se.nihr.ac.uk/join-our-mailing-list

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