

Cover Sheet

Trust Board Meeting in Public: Wednesday 14 July 2021

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Title: CRN Thames Valley and South Midlands Annual Progress Report

Status: For Decision

History: TME 1 July 2021

Board Lead: Chief Medical Officer

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Confidential: No

Key Purpose: Assurance

Executive Summary

1. This paper provides an update to the Trust Board as Host of the NIHR CRN Thames Valley and South Midlands (LCRN) on the progress of the network. The report has been received by OUH Trust Management Executive who recommend approval of the recommendations below listed below.
2. During the year, the activities of the network were dominated by the need to support the delivery of priority Urgent Public Health (UPH) COVID-19 studies, which have led to the development of new treatments and vaccines, and generated evidence that has underpinned the response to the pandemic. All trusts within the network participated and recruited well to studies. The LCRN played an important role in the research delivery both locally and nationally and was the Lead Network on more UPH studies than any other part of the country reflecting Oxford University's central role in the fight against COVID-19. These included the RECOVERY and PRINCIPLE platform studies and the Oxford Vaccine Group trials.
3. Whilst research into other conditions continued, it was severely affected by a reduction in capacity and accompanying NHS services. As the pressures of the pandemic begin to ease and COVID-19 caseloads fall, activities to support the recovery of research into other conditions have increased and the LCRN is working closely with stakeholders across the region to support the Managed Recovery of the non-COVID-19 portfolio.

Recommendations

The Trust Board is asked to receive this progress report, note the content, and accept the recommendation of TME to approve:

- the CRN Thames Valley and South Midlands 2020-21 Annual Report.
- the CRN Thames Valley and South Midlands 2021-22 Annual Plan.

CRN Thames Valley and South Midlands Annual Progress Report

1. Purpose

- 1.1. NIHR Clinical Research Network Thames Valley and South Midlands has been hosted by the trust since 1st April 2014 and the current contract is due for renewal as of 31st March 2024. The network prepares an annual progress report for the Board and this paper provides an update on the network's activities during 2020-21 and plans for the coming year.

The Trust Board is requested to approve both the CRN Thames Valley and South Midlands 2020-21 Annual Report and the 2021-22 Annual Delivery Plan.

2. Background

- 2.1. Governance and management arrangements remained unchanged during 2020-21 and the trust has continued to fulfil its responsibilities as a network Host in line with the DHSC/LCRN Host Organisation Agreement and the Performance and Operating Framework.
- 2.2. The network covers all the NHS trusts across Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Milton Keynes with a combined population size of 2.3m.
- 2.3. The requirement for annual reporting in 2019-20 was waived by the NIHR CRN due to the need to prioritise urgent COVID-19 research during the pandemic. This is therefore the first progress report that has been presented to the Board since July 2019.

3. 2020-21 Annual Report

- 3.1. The NIHR CRN played a central role in the delivery of urgent COVID-19 studies with over 1.3m participants nationally in 2020-21. 75,000 of these were attributed to the Thames Valley and South Midlands region although less emphasis was placed on local recruitment numbers during the year given the collective national endeavour.
- 3.2. CRN Thames Valley and South Midlands was the Lead Network on a total of 17 UPH COVID-19 studies liaising closely with study teams and fellow networks across the country to support the prompt setup and performance management of recruitment both locally and nationally. These included the major RECOVERY and PRINCIPLE platform studies both of which have found effective treatments for COVID-19. The network was also the Lead Network for the Oxford vaccine studies working very closely with Oxford Vaccine Group and other stakeholders both locally and across the country to support delivery to time and target. Other key studies included RAPTOR

which has successfully evaluated over a dozen different testing devices, FALCON COPCOV and MERMAIDS. A list of all the UPH COVID-19 studies, including those led from the region can be found at <https://www.nihr.ac.uk/covid-studies/>.

- 3.3. The region has also successfully run 2 other large scale vaccine studies which both met their recruitment targets. The Novavax study ran in Oxford Health NHSFT and the Ensemble Study (Janssen) was run through two GP surgeries in West Oxfordshire. The network was heavily involved in the governance, planning, staffing, systems and training of both studies.
- 3.4. The network has also been working with trusts and study teams on the delivery of non-COVID-19 studies and to restart studies that were paused during the height of pandemic where this is now feasible. In addition, DHSC asked NIHR to work with research funders and partners across the UK's research system to develop a formal plan to manage the recovery of non-COVID 19 studies that require support over the next 6-12 months. The network has received twice-weekly updates on those studies that have been designed as part of the Managed Recovery process and is working closely with stakeholders to ensure that these can be setup and delivered within the region where possible.
- 3.5. The LCRN was awarded a budget of £16.2m in 2020-21 compared with £15.5m in 2019-20. This included £270k of additional monies allocated in-year to support increased capacity and the delivery of the vaccine studies. All required financial returns were submitted to NIHR CRN CC in line with requested timescales and a break-even position at year end was delivered. No internal audits of the financial arrangements were undertaken during the year, but the NIHR CRN provided quarterly feedback on the quality of the financial returns reporting that the work of the trust R&D Finance team and LCRN is of high quality.
- 3.6. The format for the Annual Report covering the network's activities is specified by the NIHR CRN and provides further details on some of the specific initiatives the LCRN undertook to support the delivery of UPH studies and the Managed Recovery of the non-COVID portfolio, alongside details of communication and engagement and workforce activities during the year. The report is provided in Appendix 1.

4. 2021-22 Annual Plan

- 4.1. The CRN High Level Objectives for 2021-22 are provided as Appendix 2. These focus on efficient study delivery for both commercial and non-commercial studies and increasing participation by provider organisations including those in Primary Care and non-NHS settings.

- 4.2. The delivery of new and existing activities relevant to the research response to the COVID-19 pandemic also remains a priority for 2021-22. The network will continue to perform a key role in the major platform studies and anticipates supporting a number of additional vaccine studies both for Oxford Vaccine Group and commercial partners.
- 4.3. The LCRN will also continue to support the delivery of the CRN activities in the DHSC Recovery, Resilience and Growth Programme for non-COVID-19 studies through the Managed Recovery Programme.
- 4.4. Primary Care Research Engagement is also an area of strategic focus for the coming year, with a number of initiatives planned to encourage more GPs to take active roles in research and more engagement with local Primary Care Networks (PCNs) and Integrated Care Systems (ICSs). The network is also planning to deliver several supra-network initiatives with colleagues in CRN Peninsula, Wessex and West of England and a number of local initiatives across the various domains within the CRN Performance Operating Framework.
- 4.5. As the research landscape evolves, a greater focus on novel, more digitally enabled study designs and delivery models is expected. DHSC has therefore agreed that more funding should be allocated to build a new workforce - a 'CRN Direct Delivery Team' - in each network with the flexibility, capability and capacity to deliver current priorities and future research studies across broader settings, particularly outside of hospital settings. An additional £750k has been made available to the network which has been confirmed as recurring funding and is expected to fund an additional 10FTE in Oxford and across the region.
- 4.6. As a result of the disruption caused by the pandemic, NIHR CRN did not apply a performance-based model to inform the funding allocations this year but retained the funding model from the prior year. This resulted in the network receiving a core allocation of £17m for 2021-22 which includes an inflationary uplift and additional delivery monies. The network followed a similar approach with regard to agreeing budgets with partner trusts. It also retained an amount of £570k as central contingency to address emerging demands and pressure points during the year
- 4.7. The Annual Plan covering the network's activities for the coming year is provided in Appendix 3.

5. Conclusion

- 5.1. This has been an unprecedented year for CRN Thames Valley and South Midlands and it has played a key role in the delivery of many high-profile activities relevant to the research response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Plans for the coming year ensure that the network will continue to support priority COVID-19 research as necessary alongside a renewed focus on the delivery of the non-COVID-19 portfolio and the wider NIHR CRN High Level Objectives.

6. Recommendations

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