

NIHR School for Primary Care Research Mid-Term Review Feedback

The mid-term review meeting took place online on 14 February 2024 to assess the progress of the NIHR School for Primary Care Research (SPCR) against its agreed research and capacity-building objectives. The review confirmed the School's positive progress and continued funding for the remainder of the contract period.

Key observations from the review included:

- A well-balanced portfolio of funded projects across member institutions covering a wide range of topics in primary care research.
- Strong collaboration among School members, with 95% of projects involving at least two members and 65% including three or more members.
- Increased collaboration with non-member institutions, with 55% of projects involving external partners. The partnership with Cambridge University on the Wellcome programme for PhD training was highlighted as a key example.
- Effective leveraging of funding from NIHR and other funding bodies.
- An evolving governance and structure that enhances participation from member representatives.
- Research aligned with clinical, organisational, and population priorities.
- Strong engagement with stakeholders through the Patient and Public Involvement and Engagement (PPIE) strategy.
- Proactive efforts to expand research capacity beyond general practice, with a focus on pharmacy, dentistry, and optometry.
- Development of case studies to showcase career development awards and research career pathways in primary care.

Specific recommendations for the School's future focus included:

1. Enhanced monitoring and evaluation of PPIE activities, including diversity and inclusion efforts and outreach to underserved communities.
2. More detailed reporting on career progression of trainees and fellows, including transition rates to further research posts.
3. Involvement of PhD students and early career researchers in recruitment and supervision of School interns.
4. Expansion of partnerships with non-member institutions, particularly in areas with high population needs.
5. Further reporting on governance structures and efforts to enhance the reputation of UK academic primary care.

6. Consideration of strategies to position the School as an exporter of expertise and talent.
7. Clarification of the School's objectives for the remainder of the contract.
8. Rationale for increased funding allocations to Seed Corn and Bridging awards.
9. Summary of the School's equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) initiatives within capacity-building awards.

SPCR Responses to the requested clarifications:

Objectives for the remaining contract period:

- SPCR has committed all research funds and is ensuring close monitoring of active projects.
- The Public Involvement and Engagement fund remains open for applications.
- Continued outreach efforts focus on researchers of African descent, nursing research, NIHR GP careers group, and collaborations with NIHR incubators.
- Upcoming research capacity development initiatives include post-doctoral fellowships, studentships, and clinician progression fellowships.
- Masterclasses, writing retreats, and enhanced induction programs are planned.
- Alumni engagement is being systematically approached to involve them in mentoring and leadership roles.
- A Public Steering Group has been established to support PPIE monitoring and strategic direction.

Rationale for increased funding to Seed Corn and Bridging awards:

- Feedback from member institutions indicated that these funds were critical in supporting early and mid-career researchers.
- Increased demand and inflation reduced the relative value of previous allocations.
- Additional funding ensures the retention of talented researchers during funding gaps, addressing financial pressures on higher education institutions.

Summary of EDI initiatives in capacity-building awards:

- SPCR is actively promoting EDI through targeted funding rounds and mandatory EDI workshops for award holders.
- Participation in the NIHR Race Equity and Diversity in Careers Incubator and the hosting of Race Equity Workshops.

- Increased diversity in selection panels, structured feedback for unsuccessful applicants, and enhanced involvement of PPIE representatives in decision-making processes.
- Standardised and centralised application processes for student summer internships.

The School will continue to address the recommendations outlined in the review and provide updates in future reporting and discussions with NIHR.