BOA Research Committee Guidance

Supporting researchers undertaking Investigator Initiated Trials (IITs) to get their research adopted on to the NIHR research portfolio

Authors:

- Paul Baker (R&D Director, South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust)
- Lauren Tough (NIHR Portfolio Adoptions Team, Clinical Research Network NENC)
- Lucksy Kottam (Orthopaedic Trials Manager, South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust)

Summary:

- Only research studies are eligible for NIHR research portfolio adoption
- Investigator-Initiated Trials (IITs) - studies where funding has been awarded from a commercial organisation, but the protocol and study development are sponsored and managed by a non-commercial organisation (e.g. an NHS Trust)) are potentially eligible for NIHR portfolio adoption if:
    - Funding is open and competitive – Ask funder to complete template letter
    - The study has been peer reviewed – You or your organisation can organise this, the portfolio adoption team just need to know it has been done
    - The research is a) of benefit and value to the NHS and b) takes in to account the priorities, needs and realities of the NHS – Make this clear in your protocol under a 'future benefits' section
- Apply for NIHR research portfolio adoption via the IRAS form when you apply for ethical approval

1. Aims

- To provide orthopaedic research teams with information about the NIHR portfolio and its benefits in the context of Investigator Initiated Trials (IITs).
- To provide specific information about how to get IITs adopted on to the NIHR portfolio.
- To provide information about how to get IITs costed so that NHS researchers and research teams are appropriately funded for their time and work.

2. What is an Investigator-Initiated Trial (IIT)?

IITs are studies where funding has been awarded from a commercial organisation, but the protocol and study development are sponsored and managed by a non-commercial organisation (e.g. an NHS Trust). This covers a significant number of studies done with implant or device manufacturers where the commercial organisation offers funding for the delivery of a research project that has been designed and developed by an NHS orthopaedic research team.

3. Why would I want my study adopted on to the NIHR research portfolio?

The National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) is the research arm of the National Health Service (NHS) and is funded by the Department of Health and Social Care. The NIHR provides research funding and training as well as supporting delivery of research via its Clinical Research Networks (CRNs). The CRNs supports delivery of a portfolio of research studies through a team of dedicated research nurses and support staff that form part of the research team in all NHS organisations. There are many benefits to getting your research study adopted on to the NIHR research portfolio:

Study level benefits include:

- Access to a local network of skilled research support staff including research nurses and other allied health professionals, who can help identify eligible patients, arrange consent to participate in the study and monitor patients as they progress through the study.
- Support to ensure that your study can be successfully undertaken in the NHS including pharmacy, imaging and pathology services and the possibility of securing protected time for NHS staff to conduct research.
- Access to experienced research management and governance staff that can advise on governance aspects of undertaking clinical research in the NHS and facilitate the approval of your study.
- Support for staff learning and research training.
- Registration of your study on the ISRCTN registry so others can see what research you are undertaking.

Benefits for the Orthopaedic research community include:

- Greater recognition of the variety and breadth of research being undertaken within orthopaedics.
- Inclusion of orthopaedic research participation and recruitment in national metrics. By doing so we better represent the activity of orthopaedic research teams against other specialties to national bodies.
- Increases awareness of the research being done supporting the development of collaborative networks of individuals with shared research interests.

4. How to get your IITs adopted on to the NIHR portfolio?

The process of portfolio adoption is simple as long as you understand a few key facts (1-5).

i. Only research can be adopted on to the NIHR portfolio:

The NIHR defines research as the attempt to derive generalisable or transferable new knowledge to answer or refine relevant questions with scientifically sound methods. As such **audit; needs assessments; quality improvement, local service evaluations and the routine banking of biological samples or data (except where this activity is integral to a self-contained research project designed to test a clear hypothesis**) are not deemed to be research and are therefore not eligible for portfolio adoption.

ii. Who funds the research and how funding was obtained makes a difference to how easy it is to get your IIT on the NIHR portfolio:

In general terms the NIHR identifies studies as being either:

- **Non-commercial** - studies developed, delivered and overseen by a non-commercial organisation e.g. an NHS research department irrespective of the source of funding (**IITs fall in to this category**).
- **Commercial** - studies developed (i.e the company have created the protocol), delivered and overseen by a commercial organisation e.g. an implant or device manufacturer, they are also usually funded by the commercial organisation (outside of scope of this guidance).
- **Other** - studies supported by other NIHR infrastructure e.g. Biomedical Research Centres (outside of scope of this guidance).

While they are funded by a commercial organisation, IITs are typically fall into the non-commercial group as the research study is developed, delivered and overseen by a non-commercial organisation. Non-commercial studies can be divided in to three further groups:

- **Non-commercial studies funded by automatically eligible funding streams** - studies that have some of their research funding provided by the NIHR, other areas of central Government or NIHR non-commercial Partners.
- **Non-commercial studies funded by potentially eligible funding streams** - other funding sources, these include IITs in which funding has been gained through open, structured competition (See below)
- **Non-commercial studies funded by non-eligible funding streams -** studies funded without an open, structured competition. IITs may also fall into this category (See below)

It is recognised that commercial organisations do not usually award funding by means of an open, structured competition. Nevertheless, to be eligible for NIHR portfolio adoption the potential field of researchers who could be awarded the funding must not have been restricted to specific Universities or NHS Trusts or Health Boards within the UK. In essence this means that if you approach a company and ask for funding, and anyone else could have done the same, it is classed as open, competitive funding. To confirm this is the case the funders of IITs (the commercial organisation) are required to provide the NIHR CRN Co-ordinating Centre with written confirmation that the funding opportunity was open to all qualified researchers in the UK. An example template for this written confirmation is provided in **Appendix 1.**

iii. The research proposal must be peer-reviewed:

It is essential that all IITs have been subjected to high quality peer review before they can be considered for NIHR portfolio adoption. Peer review should be commensurate with the size and complexity of the study. Peer review can be obtained from a variety of

sources including from research colleagues in other networks or via other the CRN speciality leads in your own networks. The study sponsor (The lead NHS organisation) should provide confirmation of appropriate peer review in the IRAS form. **Please note the NIHR portfolio team do not need to see the peer review, they only need confirmation that it has been completed.**

It is suggested to add the following statement to the IRAS form: A54-1. "A high quality peer review that was independent, expert and proportionate was conducted and arranged by XXX (most cases sponsor organisation). The feedback was reviewed and appropriate actions undertaken."
(The BOA research committee will consider requests for peer review of ITTs)

iv. The research must be of benefit / have clear value to the NHS. It must also take in to account the priorities, needs and realities of the NHS:

The NIHR portfolio team assess the studies benefit and value to the NHS. This element is assessed by the national NIHR portfolio team, by 3 independent reviewers. To signpost the reviewers to the value of your study you should consider adding a 'future benefits' section to the protocol that outlines the value of the research and future benefits to the NHS. The study must also take into account the priorities, needs and realities of the NHS. Again this is assessed nationally by 3 reviewers. You should also consider covering these elements in your protocol within the 'future benefits' section. By having these elements clearly defined you vastly increase your chances of a positive peer review and gaining NIHR research portfolio adoption.

v. Requests for NIHR research portfolio adoption are made through the IRAS from when you apply for ethical approval:

Applying for portfolio adoption is done via the IRAS form and by marking 'Yes' to Q5a or Q5b of the filter questions. This will create a portfolio adoption form (PAF) which should be submitted electronically through IRAS. Once a submission is made to the Research Ethics Committee (REC) and Health Research Authority (HRA), the study documents will automatically be forwarded to the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) to allow them to review the study for portfolio eligibility. Please note that the NIHR are independent of the HRA and both reviews are completed separately. Research teams will therefore be notified separately of each review outcome.

Further information about the sections of the IRAS form that needs to be completed to support portfolio adoption are outlined in **Appendix B**.

5. How to get support for study set up and ensure your IIT is costed correctly so that NHS researchers and research teams are appropriately funded for their time and work.

The NIHR can help with the planning and delivery of your IIT. When planning your study, it is best to engage with the NIHR Early Contact and Engagement Service as early as possible (4,5). They can help with a range of activities including:

- Advice about NIHR portfolio adoption eligibility
- Regulatory submissions
- Assistance with costing your study
- Exploration of recruitment pathways
- Local intelligence to optimise delivery

This service is designed to complement the support already provided by individual Trust's Research departments and can be accessed by liaising with your local CRN (6).

Study Costing:
It is important that all study activities and research costs are recognised and appropriately costed. This ensures that the research team and the wider NHS are being paid appropriately for the work they are undertaking which, for an IIT, is usually being done in collaboration with a commercial partner. Broadly costs can be thought of as:

1. Costs for the research team running the project – Lead researcher time for project oversight, statistician and / or health economist time for analysis, study manger time to oversee day to day running of the project etc.
2. Costs for 'doing' the study – The time it costs the research team to do specific study activities related to the delivery of the project.

All study activities will need their costs attributed clearly according to the ***attribute the costs of health and social care R&D (ACoRD) principles***. This ensures costs are calculated in a transparent and consistent way. Costs are attributed in to 4 categories:

- Research costs (the cost that you should ask the funder to pay)
- NHS support costs
- Treatment costs (Care costs that would continue to be incurred if the service / intervention being assessed continued to be provided following the end of the research study)
- Excess treatment cost (ETC) (Difference between the Treatment Costs and the costs of the existing standard treatment)

To help researchers calculate and attribute costs correctly they should use the ***Schedule of Events Cost Attribution Template (SoECAT) forms*** (7). SoECAT is a cost attribution template designed to support correct cost attribution during the application for research funding and to ensure that full participant costs for site level research activities are recovered. It also helps researchers recognise other activities and costs that might need to be included in their costing application (e.g. centrally incurred costs associated with study management, monitoring etc.)

References

1. https://www.nihr.ac.uk/researchers/collaborations-services-and-support-for-your-research/run-your-study/crn-portfolio.htm
2. https://www.nihr.ac.uk/documents/researchers/collaborations-services-and-support-for-your-research/run-your-study/Eligibility%20Criteria%20for%20NIHR%20Clinical%20Research%20Network%20Support.pdf
3. https://www.nihr.ac.uk/documents/eligibility-faqs/11636
4. https://www.nihr.ac.uk/researchers/collaborations-services-and-support-for-your-research/run-your-study/
5. https://www.nihr.ac.uk/researchers/collaborations-services-and-support-for-your-research/run-your-study/early-contact-and-engagement.htm
6. https://www.nihr.ac.uk/documents/study-support-service-contacts/11921
7. https://www.nihr.ac.uk/documents/schedule-of-events-cost-attribution-template-soecat-guidance/23214

Appendix A: Template letter for commercial organisation to provide written confirmation that the funding opportunity was open to all qualified researchers in England

Insert Company Address

DD Month YYYY
RE: [Insert Project Name]

Dear

Thank you for approaching [insert company name] for a grant award to support your project [insert project name]. We are pleased to offer the following:

[Delete if equipment provided] This funding is offered on a one-off basis to support your research.

[Delete if money provided] The usual cost of this equipment/software/service is £XXX. However, we will not charge for this equipment/software/service for a period of XX months, or the end of the trial, whichever is sooner.

The [insert study title] study has been subject to 2 high quality peer reviews and the above funding/resources has been awarded through open competition. Our funding is not restricted to specific Universities or NHS Trusts or Health boards within the United Kingdom and has been awarded through open competition.

Yours sincerely,

Appendix B: Guidance from the NIHR portfolio adoptions teams on what they look for within the IRAS form to enable them to support NIHR portfolio adoption

Applications are made through the Integrated Research Application System (IRAS), or where Health Research Authority (HRA) approval is not required, directly to the LCRN team.

- Ensure the CI has selected 'yes' to question 5b in the IRAS project filter
- Ensure the study meets the required broad eligibility criteria and has demonstrated this in the IRAS form.
    - Meets the definition of research (see main document for definition for research). The study must have a specific research question to pass this part of the eligibility criteria.
    - Have appropriate ethical approval; and Health Research Authority (HRA) Approval where required
    - Have full research funding (i.e. funding to meet all Research Costs in compliance with the AcoRD guidance). **NOTE: It is easy for IITs to meet this criteria as grant awards from companies (or donations of equipment, licenses etc) are all potentially eligible, as long as they meet the other criteria.**
    - The funding must be confirmed and not pending.
    - The study must be fully funded. Part of the funding can come from non-portfolio eligible sources. As long as one of the streams is eligible, this is acceptable.
- Ensure that the funding duration matches the study duration
- The funding must have been awarded in open competition. This means open to all appropriately qualified individuals, and the funder is independent of the researcher. Consider providing a template funding letter to the funder.
- Ensure the application meets the other criteria as follows (These also all apply to IITs)
    - The application must demonstrate that the study requires CRN support. This comes in the form of NHS Service Support Costs, for example screening and eligibility checks.
    - The study must have appropriate peer review by at least 2 independent experts. Add the following statement to the IRAS form: A54-1. "A high quality peer review that was independent, expert and proportionate was conducted and arranged by XXX (most cases sponsor organisation). The feedback was reviewed and appropriate actions undertaken." The portfolio team do not need to see the peer review, they only need confirmation that it has been completed.
    - The study must have clear value to the NHS. This is assessed by the national team, by 3 independent reviewers. Consider advising the CI to add a 'future benefits' section to the protocol.
    - The study must take into account the priorities, needs and realities of the NHS. Again this is assessed nationally by 3 reviewers. Consider advising the CI to add a 'future benefits' section to the protocol.