

Putting the Quality into Qualitative Research

As RDS advisers we've seen an increase in the number of research applications submitted to the NIHR proposing to use qualitative research, but this is not reflected in the numbers of funded qualitative research studies within NIHR programmes.

At the RDS we are always keen to work with researchers who are looking to use **good qualitative research** within their proposals.

- Qualitative studies can be useful to:
- Understand how opinions and attitudes are formed
- How people are affected by events that they experience
- Explore the differences between social groups
- Develop measurements and tools as part of a mixed method study

Looking at the feedback given by NIHR panels we found a number of common themes, based on these themes we have developed the mnemonic QUALITY to help you develop the qualitative element of your proposal.



Laura Venn and Rachel Evley, both Senior Research Advisors in Qualitative Methods, RDS East Midlands

Qualitative research does not mean theory light; feedback from panels has shown the need for qualitative research to be **underpinned by appropriate theory** as the theoretical perspective can change the focus of the question. Are you exploring individual experiences or is your focus wider - looking at the cultural, community or social settings?

Use appropriate methods to answer your research question; is participant observation the best way to collect your data? Maybe you need to talk to people about their experiences of a disease or a part of the health service, so in-depth interviews might be more appropriate. Think about the focus of your research question and **which methods will give you the richest information.**

Approaches are many and varied; be **innovative and creative,** can you use qualitative research to enhance your randomised controlled trial? Can you use observations and interviews to improve your intervention?

Lack of detail will be detrimental to your application; **fully describe your qualitative study** just as you would a quantitative project, you need to set out your underpinning theory, what your aims and objectives are, clearly describe how you are going to collect your data and also how you will analyse it. Your chosen theory is really useful in framing your data collection methods and subsequent analysis.

Integrate qualitative work with other elements of your research; consider weaving qualitative research throughout your project.

Tokenism will be reviewed poorly; make sure your **qualitative work is integrated into your project** and has a purpose, show how the results of the qualitative work will feed back into the overall project outcomes.

You should include staff with relevant qualitative expertise; just as you would expect to see someone with statistical expertise on a proposal carrying out an RCT, funding panels expect to see someone within your team who has expertise in qualitative research, either as a co-applicant or a collaborator.

The RDS has qualitative methodologists who can support you in writing your research application, help you think about the type of qualitative approach to take and the appropriate methods to use. They can also advise on the expertise you will need within your research team in order to carry out your project effectively.

New NIHR Fellowships

The provision of the NIHR Fellowship Programme has changed. There are four new levels of fellowship available and the diagram illustrates how the old schemes fit with the new programme.

Aim: To support individuals with the potential and on a trajectory to become future leaders in NIHR research.

Funding: Four levels of NIHR Fellowship award are available:

Pre-Doctoral Fellowship

- 1 year (between 50 and 100 WTE)
- aimed at getting necessary skills and experience required to undertake a PhD
- will only fund applications which address one of the named strategic themes in the call
- applicants need to demonstrate commitment and potential to develop as a future leader in research relevant to NIHR
- covers individual's salary, training and development costs up to £5,000 and mentorship costs up to £1,000

Doctoral Research Fellowship

- 3 years (between 50 and 100 WTE) clinical applicants can include up to 20% clinical time as part of the fellowship
- assessment looks for high quality research proposal, sound training and development programme along with commitment and support arrangements from supervisory team
- covers full salary, full research, training and development costs

Advanced Fellowship

- 2-5 years (between 50 and 100 WTE), clinical applicants can request 20-40% time dedicated to clinical service/development (cost will be covered by the fellowship)
- assessment looks for high quality research proposal, strong and appropriate training and development plan, high level of support from host organisation and mentoring team.
- individuals are eligible to be awarded up to 2 Advanced Fellowships sequentially
- covers full salary, full research, training and development costs

Development and Skills Enhancement Award

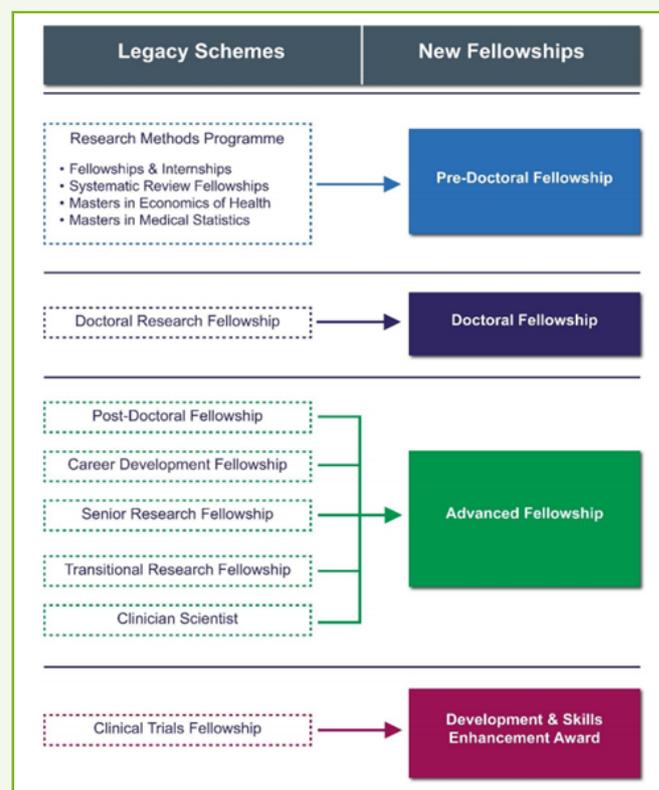
- 1 year (between 50 and 100 WTE but max duration is 1 year regardless of WTE)
- assessment looks for clear articulated plan for how the award will support an application for future funding, list of skills and experience that will be gained with the award
- researchers can receive several awards over the lifetime of career, but must be a member of the NIHR Academy to apply
- host organisations will be expected to match the level of funding, award will cover the salary, training and development costs up to £5,000 and mentorship costs up to £1,000

At each level of fellowship there will be opportunities to apply for jointly funded fellowships with either a charity or industrial partner. Additional specific eligibility criteria will be available for **co-funded fellowships**.

Process: The majority of fellowships will be awarded in response mode but a strategic component will also be introduced. Strategic themes will form the areas that will be prioritised for any given round of funding (areas of high importance, specific research skills or methodologies, or professional groups).

Key tips:

- Application forms will use the current NIHR Standard Application Form
- 2 rounds per year for Doctoral and Advanced Fellowships, reapplication only after 12 months
- Candidates can apply a maximum of two times for the same fellowship (applications deemed fundable but below the funding cut off will not count towards the maximum of 2 application attempts)
- Applicants can select any percentage option between 50 and 100% WTE
- Post doctoral fellowships will be assessed depending on where you are in your career (different panels depending on stage of post-doctoral career)
- There is funding for a support post available as part of the Advanced Fellowship but the justification for the support will be assessed as part of the review process



NIHR Pre-Doctoral Fellowship

- Launching February 2019
- Available to start from September 2019

NIHR Doctoral Fellowship

- Launching October 2018 (twice yearly)
- Available to start from September 2019

NIHR Advanced Fellowship

- Launching October 2018 (twice yearly)
- Available to start from September 2019

NIHR Development and Skills Enhancement Award

- Application window open all year round from May 2019
- Available to start from December 2019

Excess treatment costs - new processes

From 1 October 2018 simplified arrangements began for both commercial and non-commercial research in the NHS. There has been continued frustration about the complexity and variation in processes for commissioners and providers agreeing excess treatment costs (ETCs). To address the issues identified, the way in which excess treatment costs are met is changing and **a trial period for the new arrangements will roll out from 1 October 2018, through to full implementation in April 2019.**

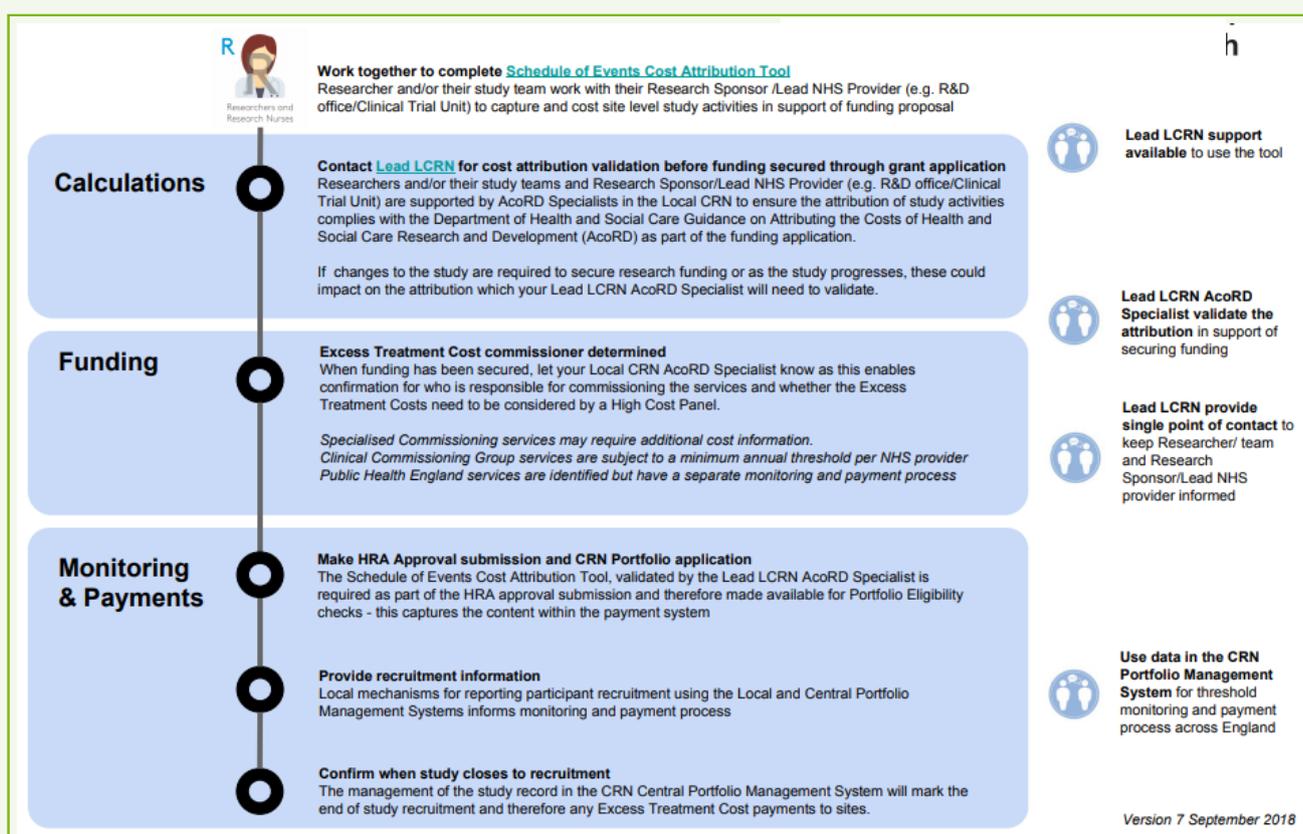
To underpin the new arrangements, a cost attribution tool has been created in partnership with charity funders and research sponsors. This tool provides a standardised approach for attributing the costs of health and social care research and development (AcoRD) across England.

As part of their funding applications, researchers will be required to complete this new tool, known as a Schedule of Events Cost Attribution Tool (SoECAT) for clinical research, which has been developed from the current **HRA Schedule of Events**. This tool is designed to capture the different costs associated with clinical research and attribute them accordingly.

<https://www.nihr.ac.uk/funding-and-support/study-support-service/resources/supporting-research-in-the-nhs.htm>

Supporting guidance:

<https://www.nihr.ac.uk/funding-and-support/documents/study-support-service/soecat-guidance.pdf>



10 ways to illustrate how you used public involvement in your funding application

This article is from the Health Research Authority on ways to use public involvement to inform your ethical review. You can use the same principles within your funding bid to show what effects the public have had on shaping your application. Public involvement needs to be woven through applications and it is imperative to show the changes you've made due to the involvement - it's no longer acceptable just to state that you've consulted the public during the design process, details are what will make your application stand out!

1. How patients shaped the research question or why patients thought the research important (not merely stating that patients thought it important).
2. How patients shaped the intervention and decided which outcome measures to use in clinical trials.
3. How patients' input was used to minimise the burden on participants.
4. How patients influenced the ethical design of a trial - e.g. whether use of placebo would be acceptable.
5. Where patients identified that participants might potentially experience distress and what appropriate changes had been made in response.
6. How practical arrangements were changed to better meet the needs of participants e.g. follow-up clinics at more appropriate times.
7. How recruitment processes were changed to be sensitive to the emotional and practical needs of potential participants.
8. How patients were involved in deciding what questions to ask in interviews/ focus groups, rather than only being asked comment on the wording of questions written by researchers.
9. How patients were involved in designing the protocol and patient facing information from the start, the responses they gave and the changes made as a result.
10. How patients would continue to be involved in the project at different stages, with a clear explanation of what input was expected and how it might shape future decisions.

<https://www.hra.nhs.uk/planning-and-improving-research/best-practice/best-practice-in-public-involvement/top-tips-public-involvement-your-research-application/>

NOTICEBOARD

NIHR supports new journal for adult social care research

A new international open access journal for social care research has launched, supported by the **NIHR School for Social Care Research**.

The open access journal has been commissioned from the International Long-term Care Policy Network (ILPN) at the London School of Economics and Political Science.

Professor Martin Knapp, Director of the School for Social Care Research, said:

"It is very exciting to see this new journal emerging. The aim is not only to get high-quality research evidence on adult social care out into the public domain, but to do so in a way that puts no restrictions at all on access."

The first articles in JLTC include findings from three NIHR-funded studies - one on the economics of unpaid caring, another on whether age matters in the social care workforce, and the third on priorities for long-term care resource allocation in England.

Submissions to JLTC are currently free, and further details can be found on the website. All articles are published online as open access on the journal's website to encourage maximum impact for all work.

<https://www.rds-eastmidlands.nihr.ac.uk>

A tool to help with plain English summaries when reviewing research applications

The **Plain English Lexicon** may be useful to researchers developing their plain English Summary.

The authors' of the work say this how it can be used:

"You can look up a word in the lexicon to see how often it's used and who's likely to know it. When writing for a mass readership, it's sensible to favour words that need a UK reading age of 13 or less... Higher-level words may need explaining at the point of use or in a glossary. Some readers will infer the meaning of a 'difficult' word from the context or by using a dictionary, but they are then working harder than they may like. Remember, though, that the scores in the lexicon are only a guide and, in the end, you should rely on your own judgement."

<https://www.rds-eastmidlands.nihr.ac.uk/resources/PlainEnglishLexicon.pdf>

NIHR Clinical Research Network Health Services Research Toolkit

This toolkit is designed to bring together ideas, guidance and support together in one place

https://sites.google.com/nihr.ac.uk/hsrtoolkit/home?utm_campaign=524963_Research%20and%20Innovation%20Bulletin%20-%20Vol%209%20Issue%2015&utm_medium=email&utm_source=Dotmailer&dm_i=4JL6,B92B,39514F,18J3M,1

Development of an online resource for recruitment research in clinical trials to organise and map current literature

Recruiting the target number of participants within the pre-specified time frame agreed with funders remains a common challenge in the completion of a successful clinical trial and addressing this is an important methodological priority. While there is growing research around recruitment, navigating this literature to support an evidence-based approach remains difficult. The Online resource for Recruitment Research in Clinical trials project aims to create an online searchable database of recruitment research to improve access to existing evidence and to identify gaps for future research.

<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1740774518796156#articleCitationDownloadContainer>

NIHR to launch senior nurse and midwife research programme

Nurses and midwives have the opportunity to become research champions and drive improvements in future care through a new £3 million training scheme.

<https://www.nihr.ac.uk/news/nihr-to-launch-senior-nurse-and-midwife-research-programme/8811>

Phinder - connecting public health practice and research

Are you a researcher interested in what interventions are out there that need evaluating? Got an idea for public health research but are unsure how to progress your idea with a public health professional?

Phinder connects researchers with relevant public health professionals with a view to discussing research possibilities, and encourages submissions for funding applications to the PHR Programme through the researcher-led application route. Access the Phinder portal to find out more.

<https://phinder.ning.com/>

Video: What could a research study of the future look like?

A digital future for health research isn't far away. This month Matt Hancock, Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, closed NHS Expo with his vision of a more tech-driven NHS, harnessing the power of peoples' innovation and using the NHS and the ground-breaking research that happens in the UK to build an ecosystem of the best healthtech in the world. The NIHR have created a video – 'Study of the future' – giving information on how digital technology could change healthcare research in the future.

<https://youtu.be/8WLHcmgYu2E>

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