

NHS Research Scotland Changes to Topic and Specialty Group Infrastructure

Background

In order to ensure that Scotland remains a leader in attracting and delivering clinical research, CSO has been carrying out a review of aspects of the NHS Research Scotland infrastructure.

CSO circulated a letter in November 2013, following a consultation during July and August, setting out the main points of a proposed restructuring arising from the consultation. The proposals were subsequently presented and discussed at meetings of the NRS Strategy Board, NRS Topic Specific Networks & Health Boards, and NIHR Specialty Group Scottish Leads. Proposals were also discussed individually with NHS R&D Directors, with Topic Network Managers and Clinical Leads, with several Specialty Group Clinical leads, and also with senior NHS R&D managers.

The responses to the consultation, and a summary, as well as the letter setting out proposals have previously been published on the CSO and NRS websites.

Key Points

The proposals circulated in November 2013 by CSO confirmed that Topic Networks and Specialty Groups (SGs) will continue to be key national bodies for supporting clinical research activity in Scotland.

Networks and Specialty Groups have a new primary goal of managing patient recruitment to time and target. This applies to all eligible, commercial or NIHR/NRS adopted studies within their subject area, making the process of Network adoption unnecessary. Specialty Groups will continue to be the basis for managing research out with the 7 Topic Networks.

All supported research will now lie within the remit of at least one Network or Specialty Group, which will be responsible for overseeing and supporting progress at a national level. Close liaison is expected to take place with local R&D offices to ensure that studies are fully supported. Research Networks will continue to have additional, dedicated budgets which can be used to target supplementary resources where required to address specific problems with study delivery.

Topic Networks and Specialty Groups

The historical development of the Network and SG infrastructure has led to some anomalies in coverage and remit, and the opportunity has been taken to adjust some

Network responsibilities to ensure consistency and coverage of all supported research across Scotland.

The decision has also been made to combine some SGs with relatively low levels of research activity, in order to provide larger volumes of studies within related areas of research. Activity levels will be monitored by CSO to balance workload for SG leads and managerial support, and ensure efficient use of resource.

CSO will continue to review Network and SG activity to ensure that continued investment is appropriate to the volume of activity, which will inform renewals of current network agreements when these terminate in 2015.

Scottish Children's Research Network

Although the Scottish Children's Research Network covers a broad area of research, encompassing all the adult specialties, this remains a specialist area, requiring additional knowledge of the logistical, legislative and regulatory issues surrounding working with children in a research environment.

In 2011, the Network remit expanded from covering medicines alone to include all paediatric research, and the name of the Network was subsequently amended. The work of the non-medicines Paediatric SG largely forms part of the work of the Network already, and as a result the separate SG will be formally integrated into the Children's Network from April 2014.

CSO has confirmed that responsibility for overseeing and ensuring support for research involving children, teens and young adults with cancer lies with the Cancer Research Network; however in order to ensure support and delivery to these trials, continuing close dialogue between the Cancer and Children's Networks is encouraged, to ensure that each study receives the support necessary for successful delivery.

Scottish Dementia Clinical Research Network

The Scottish Dementia Clinical Research Network was set up in 2008 in response to a bid from a group of academics and NHS consultants active in the field.

The level of research activity involving NHS patients in Scotland with Dementia is at a lower level than had originally been envisaged. In England, the analogous organisation, DeNDRoN ('Dementias and Neurodegenerative Diseases Research Network') covers a wider range of clinical areas, providing support and oversight to not only Dementia, but also Motor Neurone Disease, Parkinson's Disease, Huntingdon's Disease, and Multiple Sclerosis. The consultation also suggested a lack of support available for studies in other neurological disorders.

As a result the remit of the SDCRN will be expanded to cover the broader range of Neurodegenerative Disorders, aligning the work of the Network with the area covered by DeNDRoN. The Neurological SG will no longer act as a separate group,

and studies will be covered by the expanded SDCRN, Mental Health or Stroke Networks.

The expanded remit provides for a better utilisation of available resource, ensures that dedicated resource continues to be available to support research in dementia, and encourages collaborative working in related areas of clinical research.

Combined Critical Care SG

The volume of research activity in the individual SGs of Critical Care, Injuries & Accidents, Anaesthesia, and Surgery is relatively low, and there is considerable overlap in research areas and personnel. The work of these SGs will be combined with the current Critical Care Specialty group. Close collaboration will be encouraged between the combined group and local clinical leads, working with NHS R&D Directors to support research in the area.

Clinical Leads

The Topic Network Clinical Lead roles will be gradually replaced by National Research Champions. These are NHS consultant level appointments, of up to 2 sessions each, appointed by open competition to consistent job descriptions for instances of 3 years at a time. These posts will have a strategic and developmental national remit, combined with a recruitment and delivery oversight role for their clinical area. A phased transition will take place over the two years to 2016, in which the current Topic Network Clinical Lead roles will gradually be replaced by Research Champion posts.

New Cancer Champion

Development of the Scottish Cancer Research Network (SCRN) has been, until now, based on the success of regional networks, however national coordination has been underdeveloped, and there has been no single Scottish clinical lead for Cancer research. A new Cancer Clinical Research Champion is to be appointed to better integrate regional SCRNs activity, and to act as a voice for Cancer Research nationally. This post has been advertised, and an appointment is anticipated by mid-2014.

Primary Care Champion

The departure of the current Scottish Primary Care Research Network (SPCRN) Clinical Lead offers an opportunity to appoint a Primary Care Champion, using a job description with remits and responsibilities aligned with those of the new Cancer Champion. This post has also been advertised, and an appointment is expected by mid-2014.

Topic Network Clinical Leads

Remaining Topic clinical leads will be withdrawn, and advertised as Champion posts during 2015 and 2016. Should any of the current clinical leads step down or otherwise vacate the post, the position will be replaced by a new Champion, appointed through open national competition.

New Champions

CSO has created three new Champions for the areas of Cardiovascular Disease, Reproductive Health and also in Musculoskeletal Disorders. These posts will benefit from an additional session (2 in total) to develop strategic clinical leadership within these active areas of research. These posts will be advertised during the latter half of 2014, and appointment will be by open competition. Existing clinical leads have been asked to continue to support these roles in the interim.

Specialty Group Clinical Leads

The majority of current Specialty Group Leads will continue in their current roles, providing continuing oversight of recruitment activity. A move to open competition for appointment will, however, be phased in over three years, with three posts to be advertised during 2014, in Renal, Infectious Diseases & Microbiology, and Non-Malignant Haematology. If any of the remaining SG lead posts become vacant, they will be reappointed to 3 year contracts using revised job descriptions, by open competition.

CSO has previously indicated that levels of research in individual Specialty Groups will be kept under review to ascertain whether there is sufficient activity to justify separate national oversight of recruitment. If levels are low, CSO will enter into discussions with those Specialty Group Leads to consider whether there is scope for increasing the level of activity or combining Specialty Groups in areas of cognate research activity.

UK clinical lead roles are currently unaffected, and will continue as before.

Managerial and Administrative Support

To ensure that Specialty Group Leads have access to the recruitment information to allow them to perform their functions effectively, new performance manager posts are being created.

New Champions managers

Three new management posts will provide dedicated support for delivery of studies in the new Champion areas. One post will be based in Glasgow, one in Edinburgh, and a further post is planned to support the new Cardiovascular Champion. Advertisements for these posts are expected to be circulated during 2014.

New Nodal Performance Manager roles

New nodal performance managers, with associated administrative support, will be based in each NRS Node. These posts will fulfil a dual role.

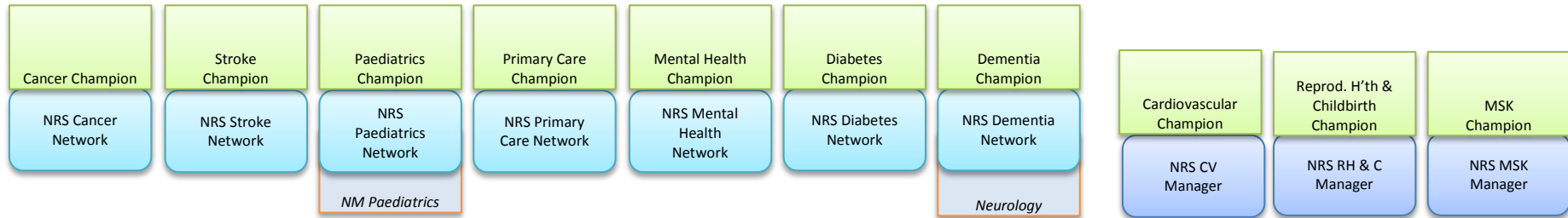
Firstly, these posts will provide support at a national level to those SG leads hosted within the node, to ensure that they can oversee delivery of all research within their specialty across Scotland.

Secondly, these posts will review recruitment activity across the Specialty Group studies taking place within the Node, identifying and resolving recruitment problems with local study support staff.

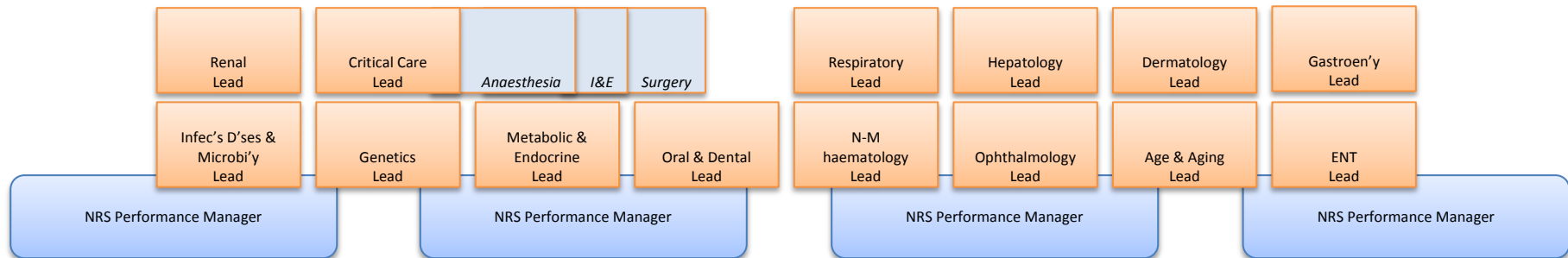
These posts will be expected to work closely with Clinical Research Facilities, Node commercial research managers, and local research infrastructure to ensure delivery to studies.

Revised Structure

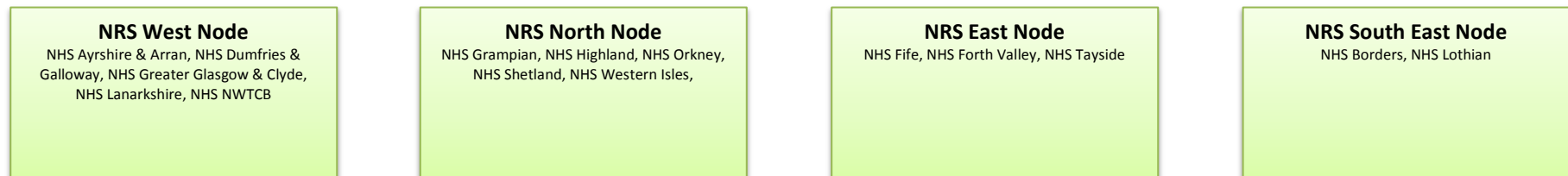
NRS Champions



NRS Research leads



NRS Nodal Delivery Infrastructure



Timescale

Area	Detail	Timescale
Topic Networks	Appointment of Cancer Champion	By mid 2014
	Appointment of Primary Care Champion	By mid 2014
	Two Topic Lead posts reappointed as Champion roles	During 2015
	Remaining Topic Leads appointed as Champion posts	During 2016
	Incorporation of Paediatrics SG into Scottish Children's Research Network	From April 2014
	Expansion of Scottish Dementia Clinical Research Network remit, and incorporation of Neurological SG	From April 2014
Specialty Groups	Appointment of three new Champions in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Musculoskeletal • Reproductive Health & Childbirth • Cardiovascular Disease 	During 2014
	Combination of Critical Care, Injuries & Emergencies, Surgery and Anaesthesia & Perioperative Care into a single Specialty Group	From April 2014
	Readvertisement of Clinical Leads posts in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Renal • Infectious Diseases & Microbiology • Non-Malignant Haematology 	During 2014
	Readvertisement of half of remaining SG lead posts	During 2015
	Readvertisement of remaining SG lead posts	During 2016
Managerial Support	Appointment of new Nodal Managers	During 2014
	Appointment of new Champion Managers	During 2014