

NIHR School for Primary Care Research

Contract extension 1.4.26-31.3.27

Research

We are requesting one fifth of the grant amount for 2021-2026 for the 1-year extension of the NIHR School for Primary Care Research. This equates to £4.4M.

We are assuming that the variation to contract will increase the quarterly income from the next scheduled payment. This will mean that we can maximise the opportunities afforded by the additional time and additional funds. We will use the additional funds to run an internal funding round, a collaborative funding round and to support the management of the SPCR alongside work to maximise impact from already funded research

We will use the same model as previous internal funding rounds where we allocate funds to each member department, they run a competitive process including a funding panel with an external member and public contributors. Recommendations on allocation of the internal money will be made to the full SPCR Board at their meeting in November 2024. Awards can then run from 1 April 2025 for a maximum of 21 months to 31.12.26.

The collaborative funding round will ask at least three SPCR members to work together to propose a project that fits with the strategic aims of the partners involved and that meets one of the SPCR themes and/or one of the Department of Health and Social Care areas of research interest (the emphasis here will depend on whether the SPCR receives an uplift to the research contract in addition to the extension funds). As this will be the final funding round of phase 5 of the School, we will ask the external funding panel to consider the balance of fund distribution across members when making their decisions.

Due to the time constraints with the extension being granted at this point in the programme, we recommend that we ask members for a short 'Expression of interest' application and this will need to demonstrate the value of collaboration, the added value to SPCR and other key criteria such as the feasibility of the research in the time frame available and the value for money. The SPCR Board will then review these and decide which applicants should be asked to submit a full proposal to the external funding panel. The second stage will require a full costing breakdown.

1. Internal funding round

£150K per department: Internal research funding per member to be targeted at early and mid-career researchers.

Launch w/c 23 September

Close 15 November (eight week window)

Board meeting 25 November

Awards may commence 1.4.25 - and run for up to 21 months (to 31.12.26)

2. Commissioned research funding round

Max £500k per project

At least 3 members collaborating.

Launch w/c 23 September

Expressions of interest to be submitted by 15 November

Board meeting 25 November

Full application to be submitted by 31.1.25

External funding panel to meet March 2025

Awards may commence 1.7.25 - and run for up to 18 months (to 31.12.26)

3. Core funding to underpin directorate costs and linked member departmental support costs

65% of total cost (with the other 35% being charged to the research capacity development budget).

Funds for:

Research manager in each of the 9 members

Patient and Public Involvement allocation to each member

Directorate staffing to include director and deputy directors

Non pay items such as article processing costs for open access, research showcase, external outreach, travel and meetings

RESEARCH EXTENSION	
Internal funding round	£1,350,000
Collaborative commissioned research funding round	£2,250,000
Leadership, management and administration of the programme	£800,000
	£4,400,000

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Research capacity development

We are presenting two potential funding models for the research capacity component of the 1-year extension of the NIHR School for Primary Care Research:

- Model A costed at one fifth of the total capacity grant amount for 2021-2026 (£2m) and
- Model B costed with 20% extra on this figure (£2.4m).

The current 2021-2026 budget is overcommitted by approx. £400k. This has been caused by:

- a deficit in the allocation for clinical awards due to applicant demographics differing from the costings/assumptions made when finalising the business plan in 2020/21.
- We have also increased the value of the postdoctoral awards from £145k to £160k because of the need to meet non-clinical or allied health professional salaries and increases in the cost of living.
- we have followed the UKRI stipend uplifts for our doctoral awards
- inflationary rises in pay costs

The extension funds will also need to cover 26/27 costs committed under previous 'permission to launch' exercises in 2023 and 2024, which would otherwise have been covered by the next Phase (V) of the SPCR.

Model A and Model B

To address this deficit, we will not be seeking 'permission to launch' the following capacity development opportunities listed in our original business plan:

- October 2025 PhD students (9 doctoral students, one per member)
- April and October 2025 post-doctoral fellowships (4 awards in total)
- August 2025 Primary Care Clinician Progression fellowships (2 awards)

Furthermore, in both Models we do not plan to run any further doctoral or postdoctoral competitions nor another round of Primary Care Clinicians Career Progression fellowships in the extended time available. We have already awarded 26 postdoctoral fellowships, and this was the number stated in the original business plan.

We feel that the uncertainty of the renewal of the School in 2027 should not be passed on to any new awardees joining the school in 2025 onwards. We realise that this interrupts the pipeline of capacity development in primary care research but believe that is unreasonable to make further awards without the necessary contractual arrangements in place.

Instead, we will focus our efforts on supporting our current and completed award holders together with the early to mid-career researchers based in our membership, focussing particularly on our nurse and Allied health professional membership and our primary care scientists and methodologists.

In both Models there will be internships available via our members in summer 2025 and 2026 (£5k per member per year). The very popular and successful seed corn awards (£10k per member) and the bridging funds (£10k per member) will also be available for 25/26 and 26/27.

Shorter Career Development awards

During the extension phase, in lieu of the three above competitions that will not run, we anticipate that broader, career development awards would be beneficial to our membership. This allows for funding to be used to address current need and support researchers wherever they are on their career pathway. Each member would receive a funding allocation, competitions would be run locally and involve peer review and a funding panel with an external member and public contributors in line with the current process for funded PhDs.

Additional research capacity activities with Model B

Model B reflects a model where the SPCR does not have to absorb the commitment caused by inflationary costs incurred to date. Instead, there will be more funding towards the short career development awards described above with each member receiving £100K to award competitively for the extension year.

Core funding

In both Models updated forecasts for non-pay items and planned activities have been made to reduce costs where possible. Core funding to underpin directorate costs and linked member departmental support costs have been included (35% of total cost with the balance being charged to the research budget). This covers:

- Research manager in each of the 9 members
- Patient and Public Involvement allocation to each member
- Development opportunities, i.e. leadership training, Canadian programme and writing retreats
- Directorate staffing to include director and academic capacity development leads
- Other non-pay items such as article processing costs for open access, travel etc.

RCD	Model A	Model B
Overcommitment due to stipend uplifts etc.	£363,614	£363,614
26/27 costs from awards made in 2023 & 2024	£445,000	£445,000
Seed corn funding	£90,000	£90,000
Bridging funding	£90,000	£90,000
Internships	£45,000	£45,000
Career development awards	£490,000	£900,000
Leadership, management and administration of the programme, development costs & non-pay	£477,000	£477,000
	£2,000,614	£2,403,414

