



University of the
Highlands and Islands
Oilthigh na Gàidhealtachd
agus nan Eilean

Research Strategy

Prepared for: Department of Nursing & Midwifery and all stakeholders

Prepared by: Department of Nursing & Midwifery research staff and UHI Health Cluster

Responsibility for Strategy: Head of research, Department of Nursing and Midwifery

Strategy number: 0.3

First edition date: 04 Oct 2017

Updated: 21 May 2021

Next review date: January 2025

Research Strategy

Introduction

Working in partnership with Highlands and Islands Health Boards, the Department of Nursing & Midwifery delivers high quality undergraduate nursing education and post-graduate education for Advanced Practitioners in nursing, midwifery and allied health professions (NMAHPs).

The Department also conducts high quality health research and collaborates with key stakeholders to build capability and capacity so that NMAHPs are research leaders.

The department's research strategy for the first three years (August 2017- August 2020) focused on establishing strong foundations for future research performance. The strategy functioned as a strategic direction to aid preparation for the Research Exercise Framework (REF) in 2021. The department has made a significant contribution to the return for Unit of Assessment A3: *Allied Health Professions, Dentistry, Nursing and Pharmacy*. Eight of the 26 (31%) independent researchers returned for this unit were from the Department of Nursing and Midwifery and two of the three impact case studies were provided by researchers in the department.

It is timely to shift strategic direction for the next three years. Alongside our previous commitment to conduct high quality research to improve health and well-being, we also plan to focus on building capacity and capability in NMAHP research leadership.

This revised research strategy provides the background for this new focus on NMAHP research leadership and sets out the department's:

- Strategic goals
- Aims and objectives

-
- Research themes and brand
 - Strategies for achieving the aims and objectives
 - Performance targets
 - How we will make it happen

Nursing, Midwifery and Allied Health Professional research leaders

Health research is vital because it improves patient care.[1] Patients in research-active NHS organisations have better outcomes and receive better care.[2] A further reason why health research is important is because it contributes to a nation's health and prosperity.[2] NHS organisations that engage in research benefit financially due to increased revenue from life sciences companies and pharmaceutical cost savings.[2] Hence it is crucial that NHS organisations continue to expand their research activities. An important way of doing this is the promotion of NMAHP leaders in research.

Nursing constitutes by far, the largest percentage of the professional healthcare workforce. The number of nurses on the Nursing and Midwifery Council register is greater than the combined registers of the General Medical Council and the Health and Care Professions Council.[3] It follows therefore that even modest incremental increases in nurse-led research will yield a significant increase in NHS research. Yet, nurses are under-represented in leading clinical and healthcare research and there remain scarce opportunities for them to develop a robust empirical evidence base for their profession. Allied health professions are similarly under-represented in research.

One of the established ways of building research capability and capacity is through clinical academic posts. A clinical academic is a qualified clinical and healthcare professional whose career combines both clinical practice and research.[1, 4] Clinical academics are employed by a higher education institution with an honorary contract with the NHS or vice versa and operate at the interface between academia and the NHS.

In 2017, clinical academics represented just 4.2% of NHS medical consultants, 0.4% of general practitioners and less than 0.1% of NMAHPs.[2] Clinical academic awards are recognised as important for sustaining clinical, health services and public health research[1]. These include pre-doctoral awards supporting initial research experience such as, Masters courses through to funding senior academic appointments such as, Research Professorships and Personal Chairs. A recent survey published in 2017 found that out of a total of 2840 awards, 77% of fellowships were awarded to medics.[1] Out of the 105 that were awarded to nurses/midwives, 51%, 34%, 11%, 1%, 3%, 0% were pre-doctoral, doctoral, initial post-doctoral, to establish a research career, established independent researcher and senior academic appointment, respectively[1]. The survey also highlights geographical disparities, with most of these awards clustered in just nine cities, with one city (Edinburgh) in Scotland.[1]

Alongside clinical academic posts are other ways to build capacity and capability in NMAHP research leadership. [Figure 1](#) illustrates how the Department of Nursing and Midwifery can work in partnership with our NHS colleagues to create a golden future for NMAHP research leaders. Over the next three years, we will explore several approaches to developing research leaders such as, offering research placements for undergraduate student nurses, and UHI honorary/visiting lecturers contracts.

Figure 1: Realising the capabilities of NMAHP research leaders



It is important to develop NMAHP research leaders because they are more likely to conduct translational and applied research. This is not to suggest that other types of research are less important but to make the point that NMAHP research will create a unique evidence-base focussed on improving and developing the services the NMAHP workforce delivers[4]. In 2017, 39% of medical fellowships were awarded for underpinning and aetiological research, 11% for disease management and 9% for health services research[1]. This compares to 3% of nursing/midwifery fellowships being awarded for underpinning and aetiological research, 30% for disease management and 18% for health services research.[1]

References

1. Medical Research Council. 2017 UK-Wide Survey of Clinical and Health Research Fellowships. London 2017.
2. The Academy of Medical Sciences. Transforming health through innovation: Integrating the NHS and academia,. London 2020.
3. Lees-Deutsch L, Stafford-Umughele A. The challenges and benefits of undertaking a nursing PhD. . Nursing Times [online]. London: Metropolis International; 2020. p. 24-6.
4. NMAHP Research Unit. A clinical academic approach for nurses, midwives and allied health professionals. - it's a no brainer! Edinburgh 2017.

Strategic goals

1. Excellence in research to improve the health and wellbeing of our local population and elsewhere.
2. Excellence in building NMAHP research leaders who will deliver evidence-based improvements in health and healthcare.

Aims

1. To foster a strong research community in the Highlands and Islands and build research collaborations nationally and internationally in order to conduct high quality research that improves health and wellbeing.
2. To build NMAHP research capacity and capability within the Highlands and Islands who will research key health and care issues that are relevant to Scotland and beyond.

Objectives

To meet this aim, we will:

- Deliver interdisciplinary and multi-professional research that drives improvements in health and wellbeing locally and globally.
- Provide research leadership to find solutions to key local and international health and social care challenges.
- Collaborate with multi-sector professionals within the region to conduct and implement research to foster sustainable excellence in health and social care services.
- Build NMAHP research capacity and capability in the region.

Research themes

NMAHPs work in policy, primary care, the acute sector and communities and support patients with a range of conditions. As such, the department does not restrict research to specific sectors of health and social care nor do we only focus on a narrow range of

conditions. Rather, this revised strategic approach aims to support NMAHPs conducting research across all health and care sectors and conditions.

The Department of Nursing & Midwifery is based in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, which is one of the most remote and rural regions of the United Kingdom. Academic staff include nurses, midwives and behavioural scientists at the Inverness and Stornoway campuses. Research is conducted by staff to improve health and wellbeing in remote and rural regions that has international significance and spans urban populations. Health and wellbeing is defined broadly to include functional, emotional and social health and our research expertise includes:

- Health promotion and disease prevention and treatment
- Active health
- Health and social care interventions and evaluation
- Improvement science
- Nurse education and workforce development

Strategies

We will achieve our objectives by:

- Developing a *collaborative network* with our local health and social care partners and the public so that our research makes a difference in the Highlands and Islands;
- Co-creating with people in the Highlands and Islands a *nexus for research excellence* to deliver research that matters to them;
- Supporting and mentoring early career research and NMAHPs via our post-graduate educational research programmes (Masters, PhD);
- Working directly with NMAHPs to conduct research that improves services and benefits their patients;
- Developing research opportunities for our undergraduate student nurses

DEPARTMENT OF NURSING & MIDWIFERY

- Establishing *partnerships* with other academic organisations to facilitate the conduct of high-quality research to drive improvements in health and wellbeing locally and globally.

Through these initiatives, we will:

- Demonstrate that our research impacts on people's health and wellbeing;
- Demonstrate that our activities impact on the number of NMAHP research leaders;
- Capture how our research directly influences our undergraduate and postgraduate teaching programmes for NMAHPs;
- Secure strategic partnerships with research funders and academic institutions;
- Attract, reward and retain the best people to deliver excellent research;
- Raise the profile of our research activity and expertise locally, nationally and globally.

Performance Indicators

Outputs

Research staff will publish high quality (REF 3/4*) articles in peer reviewed journals. Individuals will have their own personal targets; the average number of high-quality articles per 'research active' staff¹ in the Department of Nursing & Midwifery is 3.

We will increase the number of articles that are co-authored with NMAHPs employed by our NHS and social care partners.

Income

We will increase our grant capture from a range of funding sources. Our 'indirect costs' target is £72,000 each year.

Students

Post-graduate research student numbers will increase over the next 3 years.

¹ For the purposes of this document, research active staff are defined as those who are REF returnable

Projects

We will increase the total number of submissions for competitive research funding as Principal Investigator and Co-applicant.

We will increase the number of submissions for research funding that are in partnership with NMAHPs employed by our NHS and social care partners.

Impact

We will demonstrate how our research makes a difference to policy, services, population health and well-being and patients.

Our research will influence healthcare provision in the Highlands and Islands.

We will demonstrate how our activities improve capacity and capability in NMAHP research leadership.

Making it happen

To achieve our objectives, we need people, partnerships, an enabling research environment, and financial sustainability.

People

- Attract, reward and retain the best people

We will reward success by directing research resource to people who will help the department achieve its strategic goals. Use of the performance indicators will take account of performance expectations for people at different stages of research career. Rewards may include expenses for attending training courses, conferences and pump-priming for new research ideas.

- Promote equality

We will adopt the principles of the Athena SWAN charter within our policies, practices, action plans and culture. We will tackle all discriminatory treatment of people.

- Promote collaboration

DEPARTMENT OF NURSING & MIDWIFERY

We will introduce peer review to foster high-quality research. Peers will provide constructive feedback on research proposals submitted for funding. We will build strong teams to deliver research together within the department. This collegiate approach to research will extend to all of our colleagues within the School of Health, Care and Life Sciences and health and social care partners in the NHS, third sector and industry when it is relevant and appropriate to do so.

- Bring together research and teaching

The research and teaching activities will be closely intertwined and 'jointly produced'. As the sole provider of undergraduate nurse education in the Highlands and Islands, we will have a direct influence on the future generation of nurses in the region. Our students will be competent in accessing and using high-quality research evidence to inform their practice. Our pedagogical research will inform how our students are taught. Researchers within the Department conducting pedagogical research will collaborate with the Learning and Teaching Academy at UHI.

Partnership

Our success in achieving research excellence depends on people who can work in partnership with others to drive NMAHPs research leadership. We will therefore:

- Foster a culture of partnership working and collaboration

Our proposed collaborations will include other academic research organisations, local health and other public sector service providers (such as social care, education and leisure services) and the public. It will also include health-related businesses and third sector organisations. Together with these partners, we will conduct interdisciplinary, multi-professional research that is ideally led by NMAHP research leaders to identify and solve key problems affecting the health and wellbeing of people in our local communities, Scotland and beyond.

- Foster Patient and Public Involvement and Engagement (PPIE) in research and create a nexus for research excellence *with* and *for* people in the Highlands and Islands

DEPARTMENT OF NURSING & MIDWIFERY

The department of nursing & midwifery, with our colleagues within the School of Health, Care and Life Sciences, will foster PPIE in research in the Highlands and Islands so that our research is directly relevant to our local partners and the public. We will host public engagement events and consult widely to achieve this. We will engage the public in our research from start to finish. That is, we will work with the public in setting research priorities, conducting research and in disseminating the findings of the research to key audiences such as policymakers, service commissioners, practitioners and the public.

Environment

- Create physical and virtual space for partnership working and collaboration

We are fortunate that we work in the Centre for Health Science building that has open spaces for teamwork. It is located adjacent to the hospital and NHS strategic services such as the Directory of Public Health, and Health Improvement. This proximity facilitates research connections between the Department of Nursing and Midwifery researchers and NHS professionals.

The Centre for Health Science building also hosts a library specialising in health. There are several library and information specialists who ensure that the researchers access the right information at the right time and so that we have a global footprint by supporting the dissemination of our research.

The Highlands and Islands is the most remote and rural region in the UK and UHI is based in this region to serve the geographical population. Our research uses state-of-the-art information technologies (e.g., video conferencing, podcasts) to surmount geographical barriers to partnership working. UHI has a robust IT infrastructure to support partnership working. In addition, IT specialists will play a key role in supporting digital health research conducted within the School of Health, Care and Life Sciences. This digital platform continues to stand departmental research in good stead during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic because we have been able to continue to conduct research using this technology.

- Ethical research

Our research will be delivered in accordance with legislation, research council and NHS research and ethical guidance. The UHI Grants and Contracts staff are essential to our delivery of quality assured ethical research as is the Research, Development and Innovation Divisions in our local NHS Boards and we will work closely with them where appropriate so that we have auditable and transparent research governance and

DEPARTMENT OF NURSING & MIDWIFERY

conduct. We will follow the research ethics process in accordance with the UHI Research Ethics Framework and follow the principles set out in the UK Policy Framework for Health and Social Care Research.

Finance

Our research ambitions will be supported by the provision of both successful competitive grant funding for research projects and programmes and strong investment from UHI. This 'dual support' system is essential and mirrors the way in which UK governments invest in research (Stern 2016). We will therefore:

- Connect with key funders who have a commitment to funding research that aims to improve health and wellbeing. This will include UK government departments, research councils and charities
- Align our resources with our research strategy
- Undertake an annual assessment of our income generation from our research activities

Research funding governance is essential and the Principal Investigators (PIs) as budget-holders take responsibility for the research study budgets. The UHI finance office is essential to making sure that research income and expenditure for each research project is transparent and auditable to research funders, the public and for REF.

Research Committee

A departmental research committee, chaired by the Department's Head of Research, will be responsible for implementing the research strategy. The committee will include a deputy head of research and designated research leads responsible for delivering key components of the research strategy, the director of research for the UHI School of Health Care and Life Sciences, a representative from UHI Grants and Contracts, a representative from Library and Information Services and a member of the public.