

**CANDIDATE BRIEF
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
NIHR RESEARCH DELIVERY NETWORK**



Competitive salary

Closing date: 5pm, 13 January 2026

National travel will be required

NIHR RESEARCH DELIVERY NETWORK (RDN) EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

BACKGROUND

The National Institute for Health and Social Care (NIHR) funds, enables and delivers world-leading health and social care research. The work of the NIHR is directed by the Chief Scientific Adviser at the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), who is also NIHR's Chief Executive Officer, and by the Senior Management Team of DHSC's Science Research and Evidence (SRE) Directorate.

The NIHR Research Delivery Network (RDN) supports the country's world-class research system to deliver high quality research. Through a network of 12 Regional Research Delivery Networks (RRDNs) and a coordinating centre (the RDNCC), the RDN operates as a single organisation across England. Through a unified approach, the RDN balances regional context, expertise and leadership with national coordination and strategy involving government policymakers.

The NIHR RDN plays a vital role in transforming the health and care research landscape and in bolstering the UK's position as one of the world's key destinations for health and care research delivery. This in turn will enable more people to take part in research wherever they live - helping to address changing population needs, support the health and care system and the economy, and become a routine part of care.

As Executive Director of the NIHR RDN, you will form part of the wider NIHR's senior leadership team and will sit on the NIHR Board, NIHR Strategy and Engagement Board, and NIHR Centres Executive Board. You will work closely with DHSC policy officials to implement government policy in priority areas through work highlighted in the [10 Year Health Plan](#) and [Life Sciences Sector Plan](#).

More information about NIHR Governance is available here: [Our governance | NIHR](#)

OVERVIEW OF THE ROLE

As NIHR RDN Executive Director you will act as the figurehead of the organisation and provide visible and expert leadership for research delivery staff across the health and care system in England.

The NIHR RDN was established in October 2024 to respond to the changing requirements of the health and care research system, building on the success of the NIHR Clinical Research Network (CRN). Research delivery is taking place in an increasing number and diversity of settings, and as part of that change, the NIHR RDN will drive strategic development in all regions in a coordinated way to drive continuous improvement. You will lead the advancement of organisation-wide excellence in ways of working and culture to ensure that the network functions as a single organisation with a shared vision and purpose across England.

You will directly lead your executive team of Directors across the RDN Coordinating Centre and Regional Research Delivery Networks (RRDNs), who will be key in supporting the development and success of the network. You will ensure that they are equipped to deliver the strategic vision and operate together as the senior ambassadors of the NIHR RDN, working effectively and credibly with other stakeholders, and leading their teams in a demanding and changing environment. You will lead by example and with integrity, inspiring others with your vision and drive, demonstrating significant people skills. You will be politically astute, adaptable and a skilled negotiator with a proven track record of building and maintaining relationships to ensure a successful and collegial joint leadership function across the NIHR RDN.

The NIHR RDN is multifaceted, diverse and ambitious, and you must be able to work flexibly and effectively in a developing organisation, to manage change and to support others to deliver measurable results that make the NIHR RDN vision a reality.

Strategic Leadership

- Be responsible for the active, dynamic leadership, organisation and management of the NIHR RDN to ensure excellent delivery of research in England. As Chair of the RDN Board, you will champion the joint leadership function of the organisation across the RDNCC and twelve regional networks.
- As an NIHR Executive Director, you will sit on the NIHR Board and other NIHR-governance fora. You will act as an ambassador for the NIHR's vision, with gravitas and ability to command the respect of the senior stakeholders across government, and in public sector, charity and life sciences organisations.
- Work closely with DHSC to advise on the strategic direction and use of funding within the NIHR RDN, and strategic positioning of the NIHR RDN within the wider research system.
- Deal with complex problems, often novel to the organisation, which will require innovative and multifaceted solutions. You will be expected to mediate across a range of viewpoints and bring together regional and national leadership to reach decisions that are critical to moving the RDN toward its overall goals.
- Ensure the skills and capabilities exist across the organisation to meet current and future objectives. To achieve this, significant knowledge and expertise across a broad range of service areas will be required to achieve organisational effectiveness.
- Oversee the implementation of the RDN Strategic Plan to ensure the successful development, management and performance of the RDN.

Partnership Working

- Work in partnership with DHSC and leadership across the RDN to maximise reach, impact and delivery of the RDN and its initiatives, driving forward business change management.

- Ensure effective consultation and partnership working with the NHS and health and social care system including but not limited to: UK Research & Development (UKRD), the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA), NHS England (NHSE), representatives from the life sciences industry, and the Health Research Authority (HRA).

Business & Financial Planning

- Direct and oversee the development, implementation and continuous improvement of the services delivered by the RDN. This includes senior responsible ownership of business cases and plans across the RDN with oversight via the RDN Board.
- Act as the overall responsible budget holder for the RDN, delegate budget authority as appropriate, and ensure robust financial procedures are in place.

These duties provide a framework for the role and should not be regarded as a definitive list. Other reasonable duties may be required consistent with the grade of the post.

PERSON SPECIFICATION

Knowledge & Experience

It is essential that candidates demonstrate their achievements, ability and expertise against the following criteria:

- Successful track record of operating and leading at Board level, running a large and complex organisation and managing significant people and financial resources.
- Extensive experience of successful senior leadership of complex networks in government, the NHS, life sciences industry, social care, public health or academia.
- Evidence of leading significant transformational change resulting in the delivery of operational excellence and a high-performance, unified organisational culture.
- Experience of developing, building and nurturing external partnerships and networks, with a demonstrated ability to work with health and care leaders and senior managers of research.

It is also desirable for candidates to have:

- An understanding of delivering life sciences industry contract and collaborative research and/or field experience of health and care research and/or its management.
- Experience of working in the NHS or across health and care sectors and/or a proven track record of working in a political context or with government policymakers.

Essential Skills & Attributes

- A strategic and innovative leader with the drive and enthusiasm to deliver services and outcomes at pace.
- An excellent people manager with the ability to motivate, engage and inspire others to lead and deliver organisational change and a culture of service and operational excellence and continuous improvement
- A passion for improving the care and health outcomes of patients and service users through the delivery of high quality and world-leading research.
- Emotional intelligence with the ability to navigate challenging discussions and situations and reach positive outcomes.
- Excellent communication skills with the ability to build strong relationships, mediate and work effectively with a variety of partners and stakeholders, drawing on well-developed influencing and negotiation skills to achieve results.
- Excellent organisational skills with a proven ability to balance operational and strategic requirements to meet targets and deadlines.

FURTHER INFORMATION

You will be employed as part of the RDNCC which is hosted by the University of Leeds. All RDNCC staff are employees of the University.

The reporting arrangements for this role are as follows:

1. Executive Dean of the Faculty of Medicine and Health: for the purposes of University line management, professional development, and other employment matters; and
2. Deputy Director, Research Capacity and Growth, Science, Research and Evidence Directorate (SRE), Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC): for DHSC policy, strategic and operational direction, and NIHR RDN performance oversight.

The postholder will have a joint annual staff review meeting (appraisal) with both University and DHSC reporting managers.