The UK Clinical Research Collaboration (UKCRC) is a partnership of organisations working together to establish the UK as a world class environment for clinical research. The Partnership’s ultimate aim is to harness the research potential of the Health Service and to benefit patients and the public by improving national health and increasing national wealth.

The partnership was established by the Chancellor in the 2004 Budget speech. Over the last four years, the UKCRC Partners have adopted a coordinated approach to:

- Building up the infrastructure for research in the NHS
- Building up the research workforce
- Developing incentives for research in the NHS
- Streamlining the regulatory and governance environment
- Coordinating research funding.

The UKCRC Partners have promoted cultural change by working to:

- Promote patient and public involvement in research
- Raise public awareness of the importance and value of clinical research
- Establish a new model for working with industry.

The UKCRC Partners are transforming the UK clinical research environment by implementing key changes within these areas. Best Research for Best Health in England and the R&D strategies in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales will continue to be key drivers for change in the Health Service.

Over four years the UKCRC Partners have developed effective ways of working together and have undertaken an ambitious programme of work. Many key changes have been implemented through working both individually and collaboratively to achieve shared goals. More is planned for delivery in 2009 and beyond, and the UKCRC way of working in partnership is now becoming a permanent feature of the UK clinical research landscape.

**ACTIVITIES**

**Building up Research Infrastructure in the UK**
A world-class infrastructure is being established by the UKCRC Partners to support all aspects of clinical research in the UK. This includes staff, facilities and enabling technology. Rapid progress has been made in:

**Clinical Research Networks**
The UK Clinical Research Network (UKCRN) has been established, developed and funded by the Health Departments of the four UK nations. This is providing world-class infrastructure across the UK to underpin clinical research, based on a network of professional and dedicated research staff working in the Health Service.

Development of the UK Clinical Research Network has continued over the past two years with patients being recruited into a growing portfolio of commercial and non-commercial studies across the UK. By September...
2008 1397 studies had been adopted into the UKCRN portfolio.

The UKCRN comprises a family of four national sets of clinical research networks: the NIHR Clinical Research Network in England, the Northern Ireland Clinical Research Network, the Scottish Clinical Research Networks and Clinical Research Collaboration Cymru. UK-wide coordination is provided by the NIHR Clinical Research Network Coordinating Centre, based in Leeds and London.

**Experimental Medicine**

The UKCRC Partners agreed that more investment in experimental medicine infrastructure and research was needed in the UK. By 2006, a collective investment of £134m had been made in experimental medicine research facilities by UKCRC Partners including the Wellcome Trust, the Medical Research Council (MRC), Wolfson Foundation, UK Health Departments, Cancer Research UK, the British Heart Foundation and the Health Research Board of Ireland.

The last four years have seen continuous investment and development in this area. Recent key elements of this initiative have included:

- Establishment of 12 Biomedical Research Centres and 15 Biomedical Research Units by the NIHR, six Translational Medicine Centres by the MRC and 19 Experimental Cancer Medicine Centres by Cancer Research UK and the UK Health Departments
- Launch of the Experimental Medicine Resources website to provide the first centralised information on the UK’s capability and expertise in this field.

**Streamlining the Regulatory and Governance Environment**

The UKCRC Partners have continued to implement several major changes aimed at delivering a new streamlined regulatory and governance environment. Achievements have included:

- Development of IRAS (Integrated Research Application System)
- Development of model agreements for commercial and Clinical Research Organisation-managed clinical trials and for commercial medical device clinical investigations
- Development and roll-out of the Research Passport system for Honorary Contracts
- Establishment of a UK-wide Advice Network for consistent, authoritative advice.

**Building up the Research Workforce**

Working with a wide range of stakeholders, the UKCRC Partners have developed and implemented an integrated career pathway for training clinical academics. This pathway is now well established, with three rounds of awards launched for NIHR Academic Clinical Fellows, NIHR Clinical Lecturers and Clinical Senior Lecturers in England and Wales. In Scotland, the Scottish Clinical Research Excellence Development Scheme is in place, and in Northern Ireland there are plans to create similar awards at Foundation Year, Academic Clinical Fellowship and Clinical Lecturer levels.

Building on this success, the UKCRC Partners made recommendations on a similar scheme for clinical academic nurses, midwives and allied health professionals.

**Coordinating Research Funding**

Building on the success of the first ever analysis of health research funding in the UK, published in 2006, the UKCRC Partners have conducted a further analysis of smaller and medium-sized charity funding. Health research funders have begun to adopt the UKCRC’s Health Research Classification System, developed as part of the 2006 Health Research Analysis, for ongoing research management.

Collaborative funding from the UKCRC Partners has enabled the establishment of five UKCRC Public Health Research Centres of Excellence.
through a £20m joint initiative, and the launch of a £16.5m jointly-funded UKCRC Translational Infection Research Initiative, which has included the creation of two Infection Research Consortia.

**NHS IT Systems and Research**

The UKCRC Partners agree that new developments in managing patient data open up enormous opportunities for research which can improve patient safety and enhance the effectiveness of clinical treatments in the UK. The UKCRC has worked with NHS Connecting for Health in England to ensure research will be a key component of their developing programme of work. The UKCRC Partners conducted a series of research simulations to test the feasibility of using the NHS Care Record System for a range of different research applications. Recommendations from these simulations have been endorsed by the Government and the NHS Connecting for Health Research Capability Programme has been established with NIHR funding to take this forward.

**Patient and Public Involvement in Research**

The UKCRC partners are working to promote active involvement of patients and the public in developing a world-class clinical research environment in the UK. The UKCRC and INVOLVE, an NIHR programme, have launched People in Research, a web-based resource for involving patients and the public in clinical research. A pilot scheme is underway which involves patients and the public as members of UKCRC advisory groups, Board Subgroups and the UKCRC Board. A UKCRC Strategic Plan for patient and public involvement 2008 – 2011 has been developed to ensure that active involvement of patients and the public in clinical research remains a central tenet of the UKCRC’s work.

**Raising Public Awareness of Clinical Research**

Increasing public understanding of the importance and value of clinical research has always been a goal of the UKCRC Partners. Providing clear information for patients and the public about clinical trials has been a key part of this work and the UKCRC has therefore developed generic information resources aimed at people who may be considering becoming involved. The resources are being used throughout the UK Clinical Research Network, the wider NHS and by commercial organisations. To date over 25,000 copies of *Understanding Clinical Trials* have been distributed.

In addition, the UKCRC has developed information materials and classroom resources on clinical research for teachers and students designed to support the national curricula for science across the UK.

**Working with industry**

Continued industry involvement in the broad range of UKCRC activities has ensured that the solutions being implemented by the UKCRC Partners not only improve the environment for non-commercial research but also meet the specific needs of the different industry sectors. Delivery of key pieces of the UKCRC’s agenda has only been possible because of direct involvement by individuals from commercial organisations and their trade bodies.

**TAKING THE AGENDA FORWARD**

By joining forces, the UKCRC Partners have achieved an impressive amount in just four years. These achievements provide increased incentives for research in the NHS. But there is still work to be done. The UKCRC way of working is fast becoming a permanent feature of the clinical research landscape, and will have impact long into the future as the UK realises its potential as a world leader in health research.

*Further information can be found on the UKCRC website [www.ukcrc.org](http://www.ukcrc.org)*