Purpose of this paper and action required:

This paper was written by the MRC Programme Manager for Public Health Partnerships to provide background information and additional context on:

- the rational for establishing the Centres of Excellence
- the funding received
Final report from UKCRC Public Health Research Centres: Background Paper

1. Rationale for establishing the Centres

In 2006, the UKCRC established a Public Health Research Strategic Planning Group of research funders (SPG) to review the status of public health research in the UK. The SPG’s findings were reported in *Strengthening Public Health Research in the UK*\(^1\) in 2008. Common themes emerging from this review included the need to build capacity and capability in the workforce, the need for more multi-disciplinary and collaborative working; and more investment in translational and applied research.

An immediate action was to establish a number of Public Health Research Centres of Excellence in the UK which would address the SPG’s recommendations.

2. Establishing the Centres

In 2008, a collaboration of eight Government and charity partners\(^2\) committed a total of £21m over a five-year period to fund five Centres based in Nottingham, Newcastle, Cambridge, Cardiff and Belfast following a UK-wide call (see table 1). Separately, the MRC and CSO established the Scottish Collaboration for Public Health Research and Policy (SCPHRP), also for a period of five years, which had similar objectives to the UKCRC Centres.

In keeping with recommendations in the UKCRC’s report, the Centres were not funded for primary research (which was to be supported by other grants) but to focus on:

- capacity building
- engagement with policy and policy-makers
- risky health behaviours associated with diet, sedentary activity; and alcohol and tobacco use, with methodological development as a cross cutting-issue.

3. Renewal of funding

In 2012, the UKCRC Centres sought renewal for a second five-year term. Given the alignment of the strategic direction of SCPHRP to the UKCRC Centres, and comparable timeline, the funders agreed that the scientific panel assessing the UKCRC Centres should also review the SCPHRP renewal. An international panel, chaired by Prof Mike Kelly, then Director of Public Health at NICE, assessed the renewal proposals and interviewed the directors. All five Centres and SCPHRP were recommended for funding and SCPHRP became a UKCRC Centre, continuing the original funding arrangement between CSO and MRC.

Table 1: UKCRC Centres and SCPHRP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Centre</th>
<th>Lead</th>
<th>Current</th>
<th>Acronym</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>


\(^2\) British Heart Foundation, Cancer Research UK, Economic and Social Research Council, Health and Social Care Research & Development Office, Northern Ireland, Medical Research Council, National Institute of Health Research, National Institute for Social Care and Health Research (Welsh Assembly Government), and the Wellcome Trust. Scottish Chief Scientist Office (CSO) did not contribute to the initiative initially as the CSO and MRC had previously agreed share to £3m investment in SCPHRP.
The international Panel also carried out a light touch review of the initiative. This concluded that the Centres had been delivering their strategic objectives and that the UKCRC's initiative was addressing a need for UK public health research. The Centres complemented existing investments such as the DH public health consortium (established 2005) which addressed English policy questions; and the NIHR Public Health Research Programme in England, which focused on applied public health research at a local and sub-regional level.

The funding allocated to the UKCRC Centres and SCPHRP is shown in table 2.

Table 2: Funding of UKCRC centres by funder (£3.5m for SCPHRP included)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Funder</th>
<th>Original Commitment (£m)</th>
<th>Commitment to renewal (£m)</th>
<th>Centres funded</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NIHR</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>CEDAR, Fuse, UKCTAS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wellcome</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>CEDAR, COEPHNI, DECIPHer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MRC</td>
<td>4.75m</td>
<td>4.625</td>
<td>CEDAR, COEPHNI, DECIPHer, Fuse, UKCTAS, SCPHRP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BHF</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>CEDAR, COEPHNI, DECIPHer, Fuse, UKCTAS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRUK</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>CEDAR, COEPHNI, DECIPHer, Fuse, UKCTAS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESRC</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>CEDAR, COEPHNI, DECIPHer, Fuse, UKCTAS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NISCHR</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>DECIPHer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NI R&amp;D</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>COEPHNI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSO</td>
<td>1.75, 1.625</td>
<td></td>
<td>SCPHRP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>24.55</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Final report and perspectives to consider

It was agreed with the UKCRC secretariat that the Centres should produce an accessible final report of the ‘UKCRC period’ that could be published, that addresses how the centres have progressed towards their strategic goals; and to highlight exemplars of that. The Board may wish to note that the research landscape has changed considerably during the tenure of the Centres. They were established approximately 2 years after the first year of operation of NIHR and they pre-date the NIHR PHRP and the School of Public Health.

3 Initially Martin White was the Director before his move to Cambridge during the second quinquennium
4 Initially Laurence Moore until 2013, then Rona Campbell (Bristol) for one year as interim Director.
5 Incorporated as a UKCRC Centre in 2013
6 John Frank has now retired and Ruth Jepson will lead SCPHRP
7 Includes £1.75m for SCPHRP for its first quinquennium which was reduced to £1.625m for the renewal
Research (SPHR). The aims for the UKCRC Centres initiative were considered ambitious and untried in 2008.

At the time the Centres were renewed the only other major funding initiative supporting public health research outside of an NHS setting (in addition to those mentioned above), was the National Prevention Research Initiative, a £34m multi-funder initiative for four funding calls (awards for 74 research projects of variable size and duration made 2005, 2007, 2008 and 2011). Around about that time the PHIND scheme was being set up but it was very small scale in its original incarnation.

In 2015, NPRI was reviewed and the subsequent report led to the UK Prevention Research Partnership (UKPRP) in 2017. The first UKPRP grants will be awarded in April 2018.

The UKCRC Centres final report was not intended to address the future of the Centres however, it is understood that five of the six host institutions are expected to provide continued support to the infrastructure and the name of the Centres may endure in some cases but without the UKCRC brand.

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8 The MRC Public Health Intervention Development scheme (PHIND) supports the early stages of development of interventions that address an important UK or global public health issue
10 https://mrc.ukri.org/funding/browse/ukprp/uk-prevention-research-partnership-ukprp-consortium-and-network-awards/