



This report evaluates the NHS R&D North West team's "Early Career Researcher Development Pathway" programme delivered Autumn 2019 to January 2021.

## NHS Research & Development North West.

Report on the evaluation of "Early Career Researcher Development Pathway"  
April 2021.

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## 2 Executive summary

This report evaluates the NHS R&D NW ‘Early Researcher Career Development Pathway’ leadership development programme which ran from October 2019 to January 2021. The report demonstrates clear benefits and substantial outcomes for the participants involved in the programme, summarised below.

This innovative leadership development programme used creative experiential learning to enhance participants confidence and knowledge to lead research and innovation in their own environments. The programme intended to hold ten face to face modules over 12 months, but had to be temporarily paused for three months and redesigned to run online due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Out of 21 participants that commenced the programme, 19 completed it. There was a total of 16 participant responses to a pre-programme online questionnaire, with 8 participant respondents in the post-programme online questionnaire. Four participants also participated in post programme telephone interviews. An interim evaluation was undertaken by Gillian Southgate in August 2020, and the executive summary of the interim report can be found in the appendix 4. This evaluation report summarises the main findings from pre and post programme survey data and the interviews undertaken and identifies the key outcomes and any suggested areas for improvement.

### 2.1 Programme Aims

The ECRDP is a 12-month programme and fulfils a strategic goal of the CRN NWC to increase the opportunity to participate in high quality clinical research across the population of the region through the development of research capability and capacity. It is specifically offered to early career research Nurses, Midwives and Allied Health Professionals (NMAHP) with the anticipation that they are the future research leaders in the region and with an aspiration to be the Principal and Chief Investigators of the future. It also provides a potential pipeline of future NMAHP applicants for the CRN NWC Scholars programmes.

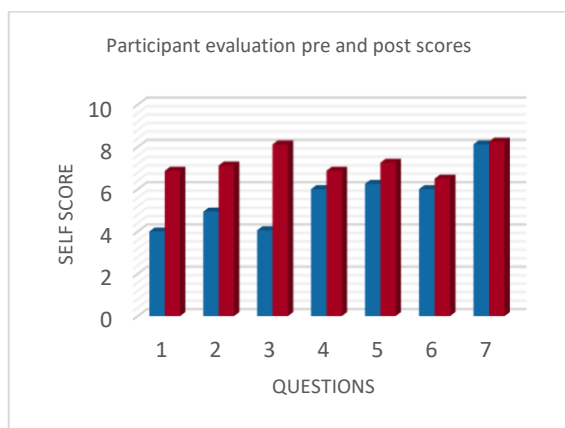
As such, the programme aimed to equip participants:

- To understand the drivers, policy context and value of research in the NHS and across the NWC Region.
- To ensure the development of the knowledge, intellectual abilities and methodologies to do and lead research.
- To understand how to engage and influence others to ensure the wider impact of research
- To understand the factors/dimensions that create and enable leadership in research.
- Develop the personal qualities and approach to be an effective researcher.
- Have knowledge of the standards, requirements and professionalism to do research
- To identify and fulfil personal development needs/learning outcomes

### 2.2 Programme Outcomes

The table below shows the pre programme and post programme responses from participants against the questions asked on the righthand side. The evaluation suggests that despite the challenges of the ongoing pandemic, participants are already applying much of their learning from

the programme, there are various examples of how they are now incorporating research practice into team meetings and looking to undertake further research activity both locally and nationally. Some have already applied and been accepted on further study programmes, notably the PCAP (Pre Clinical Academic Programme) and are instigating evidence based research in their teams and organisations.



1. Your knowledge and understanding of national, regional and organisational health and social care R&I agendas
2. Your understanding of how to engage and influence others to ensure the wider impact of health research
3. Your understanding of communities of practice and the personal benefits of being part of this
4. Your knowledge and ability with regard to taking part in health and social care research
5. Your current level of confidence to take part in R&I activity
6. Your current level of collaboration and connectivity to support and enable research
7. Your ability to be curious and open to new ideas and ready to embrace health innovations.

It is clear that participants have identified significant development against the first six parameters, with just a slight rise on the final parameter. The key outcomes can be summarised as:

- Increased confidence
  - Taking action
  - Reaching out to new connections to influence
  - Presenting more creatively and with greater confidence and presence
- Knowledge acquisition
- Undertaking research activity
- Created and strengthened networks and connections
- Applying for further study
- Developed leadership capability
  - Developing Self-awareness
  - Leading the team in research
  - Flexing leadership style to improve team working and relationships
- Being more resilient

### 2.3 What participants valued most about the programme

Participants valued the facilitation style, the creative nature of the programme and the networks they have created.

### 2.4 What could improve the programme

This evaluation indicates that participants may benefit from a greater degree of clarity on the content of the programme for future cohorts.

### 3 Introduction

“The Early Career Researcher development Pathway (ECRDP) is a 12 month programme delivered by NHS Research & Development North West (NHS R&D NW) on behalf of the National Institute for Health Research, Clinical Research Network, North West Coast (NIHR CRN NWC). It was developed to fulfil a strategic goal of the CRN NWC to increase the opportunity to participate in high quality clinical research across the population of the region through the development of research capability and capacity.” (Southgate, 2020)

This report evaluates the ten-module programme run by NHS R&D NW between October 2019 and January 2021. The programme was temporarily suspended and then re-started in an online format due to the Covid-19 Pandemic. 21 Participants commenced the programme, with 19 completing it. Two withdrew for personal reasons.

The programme was evaluated with a pre-programme questionnaire for participants and their teams, then with a post programme online survey for participants as well as telephone interviews with a random sample of 20% of the participants. Team members were asked to complete a post programme survey also, only 8 completed this. A separate interim evaluation of the programme was undertaken in August 2020, and the full report can be found in the appendices. [?Appendix?](#)

16 of the participants answered the pre-programme questionnaire. The post programme evaluation survey was completed by 8 participants.

The purpose of the report is to offer insight into the benefits and impact that the programme had on participants and to identify any areas for improvement for future programmes.

It is derived from both the pre and post survey results and the interviews conducted with 4 participants. 4 participants were interviewed via zoom or teams video call using a semi-structured interview with an external researcher. (The questions forming the basis of the interviews are in appendix three.)

#### 3.1 Background

The interim evaluation (Southgate 2020) articulated the rationale for the programme and is cited below:

##### 3.1.1 Course Rationale

The ECRDP is a 12 month programme and fulfils a strategic goal of the CRN NWC to increase the opportunity to participate in high quality clinical research across the population of the region through the development of research capability and capacity.

##### 3.1.2 Early Career Researcher Development Pathway (ECRDP) Course aims.

The key aims of the course are to:-

- To understand the drivers, policy context and value of research in the NHS and across the NWC Region.
- To ensure the development of the knowledge, intellectual abilities and methodologies to do and lead research.

- To understand how to engage and influence others to ensure the wider impact of research
- To understand the factors/dimensions that create and enable leadership in research.
- Develop the personal qualities and approach to be an effective researcher.
- Have knowledge of the standards, requirements and professionalism to do research
- To identify and fulfil personal development needs/learning outcomes
- To create a personal network that will progress and promote the research leadership journey.
- To engage with current Principal and Chief Investigators in the NWC region and understand their role and its impact.
- To develop reflective practice skills
- To develop aspirational goals and an initial 3-year career plan to achieve leadership potential.

### 3.1.3 Programme design and format

The programme is a 12-month course and consists of 10 days of workshops and training alongside a further one day a month for personal study and development.

The programme embraces a blended learning approach with homework, assignments and mentoring to ensure that all relevant content is covered during the 12-month period.

The ECRDP programme content was based on the Vitae Researcher Development Framework (RDF) (see Figure 1) which is a professional development framework for planning, promoting and supporting the personal, professional and career development of researchers in higher education. It articulates the knowledge, behaviours and attributes of successful researchers and encourages them to realise their potential.<sup>1</sup>

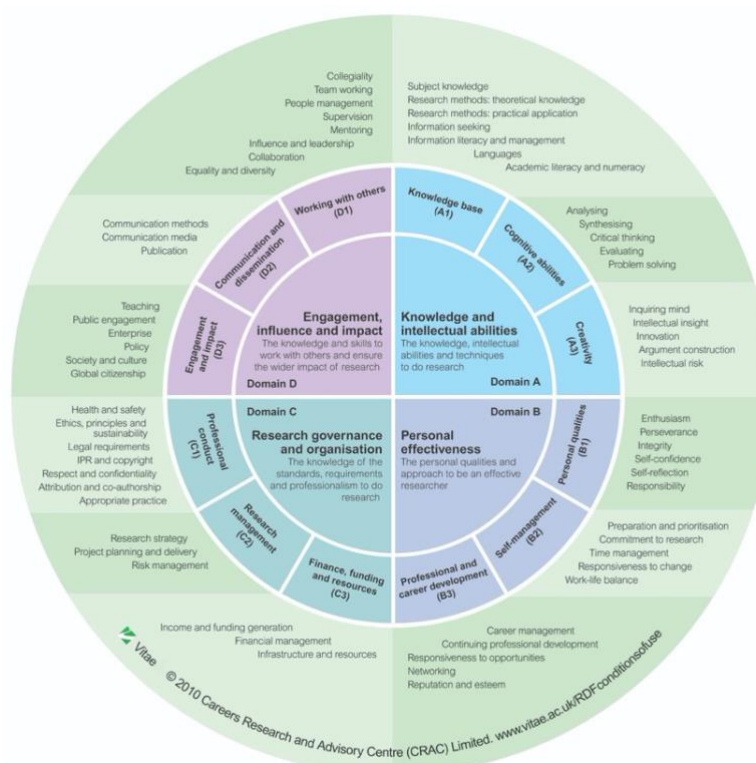
The RDF presents the generic descriptors common to researchers in higher education and seeks to describe characteristics of anyone conducting research in UK higher education as seen in Figure 1. Each of the ECRDP workshops was based on one of the RDF domains and sub-domains to provide a comprehensive and holistic approach to researcher development.

The programme is led by NHS Research and Development North West, which includes leadership coaches, organisational development experts, facilitators and a range of visiting speakers who cover specialist topics.

Figure 1.

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<sup>1</sup> Vitae, Vitae Researcher Development Framework 2011, retrieved 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2020 from <https://www.vitae.ac.uk/vitae-publications/rdf-related/researcher-development-framework-rdf-vitae.pdf>



### 3.1.4 Expected Course outcomes on completion of the programme

On immediate completion it is expected that each participant will: -

- Have a completed reflective diary
- Be more responsive and alert to opportunities for networking and developing reputation and esteem
- Have developed links with the R&D director and department in their employing Trust
- Have a foundation network of key people and organisations to support and enable their career plan
- Have both theoretical knowledge and some practical application of research methods
- An understanding of information literacy and management, research income and funding generation
- Have increased skills and confidence in their abilities to lead



## 4 Participant pre-programme aims

Participants reported a variety of reasons for attending. These can be grouped into the following themes:

### 4.1 Enhance or create networks for health research

For 8 of the participants on the programme, a key aim was to enable them to develop their network around the research agenda. Participants felt this would allow them to influence more broadly and by understanding how to apply for funding etc, would increase their opportunity to use research in their practice.

### 4.2 Develop Leadership in Research

Almost half (8) of the participants specifically mentioned their desire to develop their leadership ability in order to enable research activity within their settings and in turn to benefit outcomes for patients. As one participant described:

*“I would like to learn more about my potential to develop as a research leader within the NHS in my current role, how to take skills and findings and use these in clinical practice for patient benefit and enhance my ability to inspire and motivate my colleagues with regards to research”*

### 4.3 Increased confidence in using research within clinical settings

For 8 of the participants, one of the aims of the programme was to increase their confidence in using and promoting research within their practice and with their teams. This desire to increase confidence levels was to enable research activity to become more prevalent within their own teams, and for two of the participants, there was an explicit aim to use the course to prepare them for applying for a PhD.

### 4.4 Use research in practice

For 7 of the participants, one of their aims was to be able to use research within their clinical practice and for it to become more common place and better understood within their teams. One participant described that their perception of research before the programme was it was ‘academic’ and there was a gap between the academic process and the practical use and application of this process. For them, the aim of the programme was to bridge that gap, to identify how and where research could benefit patient outcomes.

### 4.5 To understand National and Regional and Social Care Research and Innovation agendas and to be able to influence effectively

For 4 of the participants, their aim was to increase their strategic knowledge and ability to influence at a strategic level regarding research. For participants this meant understanding the agendas first and increasing their knowledge of the research landscape and processes, as well as by expanding their networks to enable conversations regarding the importance and place of research within the healthcare setting.

## 4.6 Develop leadership ability

In order to achieve the above, for at least 6 of the participants, their aim was to develop their ability to lead and influence. Three participants described this as being able to motivate and inspire their teams to participate in research and for a further three, this was put more simply as becoming a better leader. The quote below describes this aspiration well:

*“I hope to be able to use learning from the programme to attempt to cultivate a culture more geared towards research within my team and potentially kickstart a project within our service which is related to both my research interests, but also the values and priorities of the organisation”*

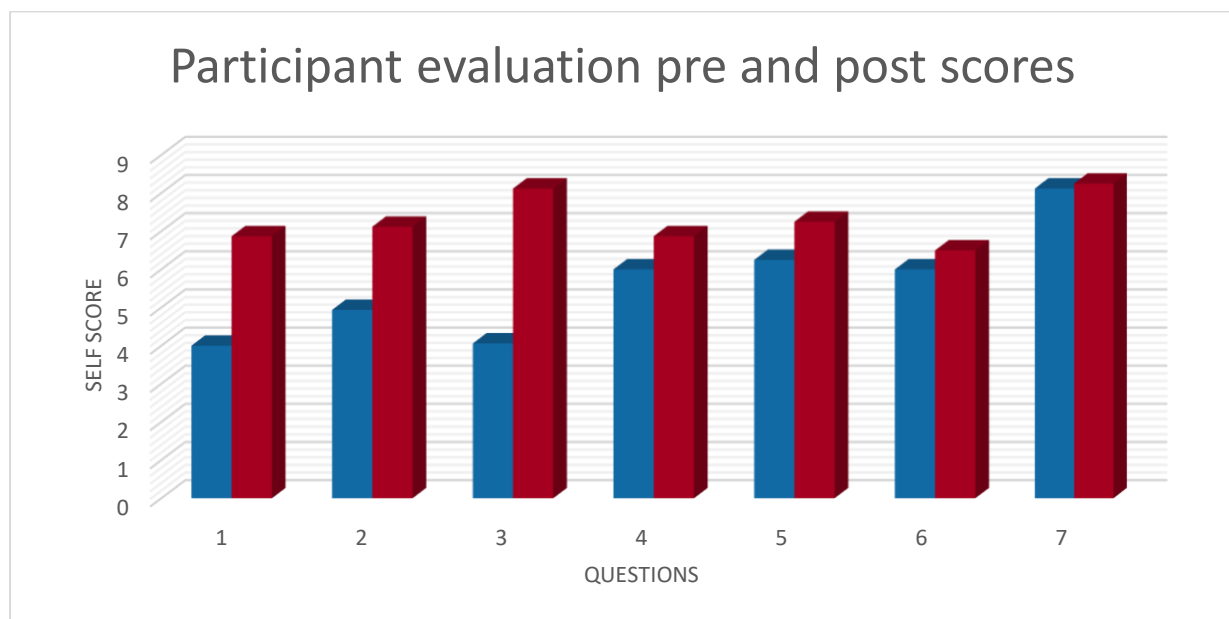
## 5 Findings

The graph in the following section demonstrates the pre and post programme perceptions of levels of knowledge and expertise from participants:

### 5.1 Perspective of participants:

Participants were asked to self-score on a scale of one to ten, ten being ‘completely’, one being ‘not at all’ against the statements listed below.

1. Your knowledge and understanding of national, regional and organisational health and social care R&I agendas
2. Your understanding of how to engage and influence others to ensure the wider impact of health research
3. Your understanding of communities of practice and the personal benefits of being part of this
4. Your knowledge and ability with regard to taking part in health and social care research
5. Your current level of confidence to take part in R&I activity
6. Your current level of collaboration and connectivity to support and enable research
7. Your ability to be curious and open to new ideas and ready to embrace health innovations.



Key: Blue: Pre-programme responses

Red: Post programme responses

### 5.2 Responses to the questions which help to explain the scores

Participants explained their responses to the questions as follows:

### 5.2.1 Question 1. Your knowledge and understanding of national, regional and organisational health and social care R&I agendas

Participants reported that their knowledge had developed as a result of the course. Several felt this was because they now had a network they can connect with and know where to go to find out more. One participant highlighting specific areas where they had developed....

*“especially into better understanding the role/purpose of the ARCs. I think another big area of learning on this subject has been around PhD funding options, particularly through the NIHR”*

For another participant the increase in score was because...

*“The course has described what the structures are in place to support and promote R & I and how they fit together.”*

### 5.2.2 Question 2. Your understanding of how to engage and influence others to ensure the wider impact of health research

Participants identified that they were more able to influence through the specific focus on this and on their leadership styles, as well as working with others to understand research agendas. One participant reflected:

*“I didn’t realise how much I didn’t know about this until being part of the sessions relating to this. I feel I have a lot of work to do to improve my ability to engage and influence others; but my understanding of this has improved massively due to this course. Now that I have the knowledge about this topic that I do from the course, I feel I over-scored my initial rating for this question at the start of the course.”*

### 5.2.3 Question 3. Your understanding of communities of practice and the personal benefits of being part of this

For participants, the benefit of being part of a community of practice was articulated by one as ‘invaluable, particularly through covid.’ The community has provided a safe space for people to share ideas and support and the what’s app group that was set up for the community was still active at the time of this evaluation.

### 5.2.4 Question 4. Your knowledge and ability with regard to taking part in health and social care research

- Many of the participants in the survey and that were interviewed felt it was very early to identify clearly how they would take more of an active role in research. However, participants were already exploring how they can undertake research projects and drive their teams and departments to be more research led. One participant aspires to develop a research driven outpatient physiotherapy department. The intent of this is to be able to take part in research projects and also provide the most up to date treatments for patients.

### 5.2.5 Question 5. Your current level of confidence to take part in R&I activity

Participants identified a number of ways that the programme had increased their knowledge of participation in R&I and how they were doing this. Two participants have already applied and been

accepted on further study programmes, with one signed up for the Pre-clinical Academic Programme (PCAP) which they had never heard of before the course. Others have already established research activity, one has set up a conference which is taking place at the end of April, and another has designed a research App for their trust. As one participant reflected:

*“This programme has helped me to recognise that I am investible as a researcher and has given me the pathway to proceed on that journey.”*

#### **5.2.6 Your current level of collaboration and connectivity to support and enable research**

Participants didn’t specifically explain their responses to this question but there are links to question 3, with participants feeling better connected and knowing where to go to become more active in research. Some mentioned action plans were currently hampered due to the ongoing pandemic.

#### **5.2.7 Your ability to be curious and open to new ideas and ready to embrace health innovations**

This question demonstrated the least change between pre and post course. In the pre course questionnaire, participants stated they felt open and excited by being on the programme, and one specifically said they were already very curious by nature, which is potentially why this question has had the lowest score change, although it has still increased marginally.

## 6 Evaluation themes

From the post programme survey with 8 participants, plus 4 interviews with participants during March 2021, two months after conclusion of the programme, the following themes have been identified.

### 6.1 Post programme outcomes for participants

#### 6.1.1 Increased confidence

Participants reported that their confidence had grown in a number of ways:

##### 6.1.1.1 Taking action

Respondents reported they felt more confident to make decisions and to take or instigate action as a result of the programme. One participant described how they had even felt more confident in many aspects of their life, from delivering a presentation to bargaining for a new car purchase. They commented:

*“I’m a different person, I am much braver and bolder at initiating things”*

##### 6.1.1.2 Reaching out to new connections to influence

The value of connections on the programme is discussed in more depth in the next section, but participants also felt that the course had enabled them to reach out to new contacts regarding research both within their own trusts and at moments beyond. One participant said they would not have had the confidence to get in touch before the programme but that they had been;

*“sending emails to the glitterati of the Speech and Language world”*

##### 6.1.1.3 Presenting more creatively and with greater confidence and presence

The innovative and creative emphasis of the programme had changed some of the participants perspectives and they commented that they now felt they had wider options in how to work with their teams to engage them, as well as engaging an audience if they needed to present information or findings. One participant described how they would have avoided presentations before but was now actively offering them and doing it in a different and creative way.

#### 6.1.2 Gained knowledge

Participants reported gaining knowledge in many ways, both regarding their leadership styles and about specific approaches and processes within research and the NHS. Two specific areas mentioned were understanding about NIHR processes and having the knowledge to apply for grants and funding, as well as for one participant being introduced to the PCAP (Pre clinical academic programme) which they have since been accepted on and they had no knowledge of prior to attendance on this programme.

#### 6.1.3 Undertaking research activity

For all of the participants, the impact of covid on their ability to apply their learning was mentioned, and for some this has delayed their action plans to implement research within their area of expertise. However, two participants had already taken action to develop research activity in their areas, with one having just finished a service evaluation and another reporting that they have

encouraged and enabled team members to undertake study at MA level around how to do research, and describing that team members now talk in ‘evidence based’ language that wasn’t present before they attended the programme. For a third participant, the programme has resulted in developing a research app icon for their service which they believe will help recruit research participants to studies.

#### **6.1.4 Created and strengthened networks and connections**

A key outcome for the participants engaged in the post programme evaluation appears to be the network that has been created as a result of being part of the programme. Participants became part of a What’s App group, which at the time of this evaluation is still being regularly used as a sounding board, a place to share ideas, successes and challenges. People commented that because the programme has run at the same time as the covid 19 pandemic, this connection with others has felt particularly special and important. One participant described the impact of being connected to fellow participants:

*“I moved into a new role through covid and to be honest, I am not sure I would have been able to do it without this programme. It has helped me to feel more connected and rooted to other professionals who are interested in research and development.”*

#### **6.1.5 Applying for further study**

Two of the participants interviewed have applied for the PCAP programme and anticipate this leading to a PhD study in their area of expertise. One participant has already been accepted on this programme and has started the next phase of their study, with a secondment two days a week to support their research activity.

#### **6.1.6 Developed leadership capability**

Linked to the earlier comment, 6.1.1, participants report they have developed their leadership capability through attendance on the programme. This has manifested in a few ways.

##### **6.1.6.1 Developing Self-awareness**

One participant specifically mentioned that the MBTI tool had helped them to understand how they communicate and how others in their team may operate differently, as well as patients.

Another participant felt that the feedback they received from colleagues on the programme had helped them to see themselves from a different perspective and they had realised they were not as shy as they had considered themselves to be.

##### **6.1.6.2 Leading the team in research**

More than half of the participants described that they had already held team meetings regarding how to use research in practice and to include teams in how to take this forward. As mentioned earlier, one participant has encouraged their team to undertake specific study on research and others are encouraging their team members to enroll on future cohorts of the ECR programme.

##### **6.1.6.3 Flexing leadership style to improve team working and relationships**

Participants interviewed mentioned they had developed a more coaching style of leadership with their teams and had become more compassionate as a result of the programme. Those interviewed felt this had made a positive impact in working through the pandemic. For one participant this was

particularly important and that using some of the techniques such as check ins from the programme had helped her team to cope as well as her.

### 6.1.7 Being more resilient

Participants spoke about how the programme had supported them through the challenges of the covid 19 pandemic. As well as the support between colleagues and the facilitators on the programme, the focus on mindfulness and well-being was described as vital by some.

One participant told how they had been close to burn out through the pandemic and that being able to stay connected to the programme had made a big difference.

*“I wasn’t sure I could connect and how the move to virtual was going to be. I initially found it inhibiting, but my perspective changed as I saw others coping on the virtual calls. I had been watching the recordings rather than attending the live sessions, but I realised I wanted to be there and to engage. These people were stable, open, supportive and intelligent and I valued being part of that community so much.”*

For another participant, there was recognition that attending the programme had helped them realise how important it is to look after themselves as well, and since starting the programme they had started running again and have lost three stone in weight.

## 6.2 What participants valued about the programme

The participants highly valued a number of elements of the programme and the key themes are listened below.

### 6.2.1 Connections/support network

One of the aims of the programme was to “create a personal network that will progress and promote the research leadership journey.” Participants were unanimous in their view that the network provided through the programme was valuable. It offered individuals support, challenge and the chance to link with likeminded professionals in the NHS who are both active and keen to develop their research practice. One participant described how she had felt quite isolated in her role since moving to the North West and that this programme had been “lifechanging”. She went on to explain that for her the programme offered both;

*“personal and professional development to support all I am capable of. It felt collaborative and rounded and has created a community of practice.”*

Another participant commented that it might have been a very different experience if it weren’t for the pandemic, and the chance to connect and support each other was invaluable. For them it....

*“Couldn’t have been better through the pandemic.”*

### 6.2.2 Facilitation style

The facilitation style of the team was described by one participant as “amazing”. She explained that the team had complemented each other well with different styles and input, that the content was incredible – she didn’t know how it all had been fitted in. Participants described how well the facilitation team worked together and their different roles were clear, if any one was missing, one



commented, then it was noticeable. The facilitation team were appreciated for their passion and energy, for their commitment to the participants, including engaging in the conversations through What’s App and for their creativity and energy.

### 6.2.3 Creative approach

The participants interviewed valued the creative approach to the programme. They reported that this had enabled them to think and work more creatively with their own teams, and this was especially useful when having to think differently through the pandemic. One participant commented that this has...

*“changed the way I present. I learned how to do animation and I have become more creative in my presentations and I can make them more memorable using video. The use of a video diary through the programme has helped me to become much less self-conscious and even helped me home school on video.”*

### 6.2.4 Programme structure and move to online

The programme had begun with a residential element, and several participants commented on how powerful this was. They reported that it provided a safe platform to engage and to develop open relationships with others in the cohort. Participants commented that the move to online because of the pandemic had been smooth and not negatively impacted on their learning or on the experience.

## 6.3 What got in the way of the participants learning effectively?

### 6.3.1 Covid 19 pandemic

Participants felt that in the context of the Covid 19 pandemic in 2020, the programme had been well managed and the transition that had to be made to online delivery was smooth. The impact of the pandemic cannot be ignored or underestimated though as it meant the programme was paused for a while before commencing online. Because of this, participants could not do the placements that they had planned to do, and several reported they felt they had missed out because this wasn’t possible.

### 6.3.2 Lack of clear structure at times

Whilst most participants enjoyed the slightly ‘mysterious’ nature of the programme, one participant felt they would have appreciated an overview of the course at the start and a greater sense of the content that was coming. One participant commented that there weren’t quite sure how some elements fitted into the programme, for example the lightening presentation so an overview and how it linked would have been appreciated.

### 6.3.3 Some content was seen as less relevant

Overall, the content of the programme was seen as both useful and balanced. However, one participant reported that they weren’t sure how helpful the session on writing proposals was. For this participant, the style of delivery wasn’t aligned with the rest of the programme and it felt procedural and an overwhelming amount of information, with the password to get back into the data after the session expiring within 24 hours.

## 6.4 Future programme improvements

The majority of respondents had no suggestions for improvements to the programme, and those that did comment felt any improvements or changes suggested needed only to be minor. Building on the comments in section 6.3 the areas which could be usefully further refined are listed below.

- Give participants a clearer sense of direction at the start of the programme and for some, more indication of course content,
- To ensure there is an explicit link with the content throughout the programme – a clear sense of why this is included in the programme
- Any supporting information or resource available for the full duration of the programme and not a limited time
- Ensure future cohorts have the opportunity to do their placement if this is feasible.

## 7 Conclusion

19 of the 21 participants completed this programme, of which 8 completed the post programme online questionnaire and 4 were interviewed. From this population, feedback on the programme is highly positive. Participants have already applied aspects of their learning and are delivering their practice differently, with the introduction of research on team agendas one of many examples discussed.

The creative and interactive nature of the programme was highly valued, especially the opportunity to consider their own well being and to learn how to look after themselves through practices such as mindfulness. This was seen as even more pertinent in the context of working through the Covid-19 pandemic.

The original aims of the programme were to:

- To understand the drivers, policy context and value of research in the NHS and across the NWC Region.
- To ensure the development of the knowledge, intellectual abilities and methodologies to do and lead research.
- To understand how to engage and influence others to ensure the wider impact of research
- To understand the factors/dimensions that create and enable leadership in research.
- Develop the personal qualities and approach to be an effective researcher.
- Have knowledge of the standards, requirements and professionalism to do research
- To identify and fulfil personal development needs/learning outcomes
- To create a personal network that will progress and promote the research leadership journey.
- To engage with current Principal and Chief Investigators in the NWC region and understand their role and its impact.
- To develop reflective practice skills
- To develop aspirational goals and an initial 3-year career plan to achieve leadership potential.

This evaluation concludes that the aims appear to have been addressed through the interviews and survey data from participants.

Below are some comments from those interviewed on their views of the programme.

*“I am so glad every day for this course”*

*“I wish it had been available 20 years ago!”*

*“This course has been life-changing and wonderful in so many ways”*

## 8 Acknowledgements

Thank you to Gillian Southgate who provided insight into the programme and whose interim evaluation forms the basis of the introduction section of this report, and to Leanne Gregory, who organised the collation and administration of the online surveys and contact details for the interviewees. Also, thank you to all of the participants who completed the surveys and to the participants who took time to be interviewed; Clare McCarroll, Linda Cantwell, Betty Pennington and Cathy Sanderson.

## Appendix One. Overview of the programme

### Introduction

The North West Coast (NWC) region has significant challenges regarding its population health and in particular its ageing population with increasingly complex needs. Recent research through NIHR has shown that research active healthcare organisations have better patient outcomes and to support research development the HEE R&I strategy emphasises the need to develop education strategies to ensure future professional staff are technologically literate and able to promote the adoption and spread of research and innovation, particularly in respect of long term conditions and their prevention. A strategic goal of the CRN NWC is to increase the opportunity to participate in high quality clinical research across the population of the region through the development of research capability and capacity.

### Early Career Researcher Development Pathway (ECRDP)

The ECRDP programme is a 12 month programme to support the specific development of early career research Nurses, Midwives and Allied health Professionals (NMAHP) as future research leaders in the region with aspiration to be the Principal and Chief Investigators of the future and also to provide a pipeline of future NMAHP applicants for the CRN NWC scholars programmes.

### Course aims

- ❖ To understand the drivers, policy context and value of research in the NHS and across the NWC Region.
- ❖ To ensure the development of the knowledge, intellectual abilities and methodologies to do and lead research.
- ❖ To understand how to engage and influence others to ensure the wider impact of research
- ❖ To understand the factors/dimensions that create and enable leadership in research.
- ❖ Develop the personal qualities and approach to be an effective researcher.
- ❖ Have knowledge of the standards, requirements and professionalism to do research
- ❖ To identify and fulfil personal development needs/learning outcomes
- ❖ To create a personal network that will progress and promote the research leadership journey.
- ❖ To engage with current Principal and Chief Investigators in the NWC region and understand their role and its impact.
- ❖ To develop reflective practice skills
- ❖ To develop aspirational goals and an initial 3-year career plan to achieve leadership potential.

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### Eligibility criteria

The programme will offer up to 25 places to NMAHP who: -

- ❖ Are employed by CRN NWC partner organisations. Please see appendix 1 for list of eligible partner organisations.
- ❖ Can demonstrate a significant interest and commitment to health and social care research and an ambition to become a research leader
- ❖ GCP aware (courses available online)
- ❖ **Applications from all disciplines will be considered but we particularly encourage applicants in the following disciplines where NIHR and/or the CRN have highlighted as priority areas: Cardiovascular including stroke, Dementia and**

### **Ageing, mental health, Infection including sexually transmitted diseases[LM(R1)]**

- ❖ Educated[LM(R2)] to degree level is desirable but not essential and previous research experience would be an advantage
  - ❖ Work in an environment where your potential as a clinical researcher can be fostered and supported by your organisation.
  - ❖ Have support from employing organisation with agreement to provide at least two days per month study time (**must attend 90% of course dates**)
- Selection will be by application and interview; it is anticipated that this will be a competitive process.

#### **Application process**

- Applicants for the programme will complete a standard application form (Appendix 1) and submit a brief CV by the programme's closing date of Friday 27<sup>th</sup> September 2019.
- Applicants should provide with their application written confirmation from their Line Manager/Supervisor and their employing organisation that they will be released for this programme one day per month for 12 months and provide a further one study day per month to support programme study. (two days per month)
- Shortlisted applicants will be invited to attend an interview on Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> October 2019 with the programme commencing on Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> & Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> November 2019. The interview panel will consist of experienced researchers and senior leaders of the CRN NWC.
- Applicants will be notified by email by Friday 4<sup>th</sup> October 2019 if shortlisted to attend for interview on the Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> October 2019 (please save these dates in your diaries)
- Feedback will be provided for applicants that are not successful following interview
- Places on the ECRDP cannot be deferred.
- This programme is only open to nurses, midwives and allied health professions working within the CRN NWC region (see map for NWC region)

#### **Programme format and content**

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The programme is a 12-month course delivered over 10 days (i.e. equivalent to 1 day per month).

The programme will embrace a blended learning approach with homework, assignments, mentoring and practical placements that will ensure that all relevant content is covered during the 12-month period.

The programme is lead by NHS Research and Development North West, which includes leadership coaches, organisational development experts, facilitators and a range of visiting speakers who will cover specialist topics.

The programme consists of:

#### **Programme Launch Days 1&2**

The launch is a two-day residential taking place at a NWC regional venue

**Day 1** sets out the parameters of the programme, the learning objectives, and expectation of learners' participation. It will establish the cohort as a community of practice building on the work of Wenger and Wheatley, embeds reflective practice and peer-to-peer learning. Pairing with mentors will be explored and the coaching groups will be formed. New learning tools will be introduced and other creative activities that will enhance the learning experience. The assignments, placements and expected outcomes for the programme will also be outlined at the launch.

**Day 2** will start to address the drivers, policy context and value of research in the NHS and across the NWC Region, ensure the development of the knowledge, intellectual abilities and techniques to do and lead research and look at engagement, influence and impact

### **One-day workshops**

A further 7 one day workshops will be delivered over the 12 months to address the aims and objectives of the programme and will consist of leadership theory, guest speaker presentations, and development of reflective practice. There will be workshops to develop confidence, personal presence and establish individual values based working. There will be time in each session for *group* coaching which will bring the coaching conversation into a small group context.

### **The final day**

On the last day of the programme there will be a presentation by all participants of their learning journey based on their reflective practice journals, a summary of their career plans and their aspirational goals for the future. Mentors and coaches, CIs from placements and senior CRN staff will be invited to watch the presentations.

**2 Day - Placement** (either two days together or two separate days.)

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Each course participant needs to be familiar with the research leadership role and during the programme will need to identify a research leader within the region, preferably one who is a NMAHP research leader, and arrange to spend some time shadowing this person and finding out what is involved in their job to better understand and experience the leadership role in research. This is also an opportunity for them to network at senior level and identify other individuals and organisations that can support them in their career plan. Support will be provided in contacting and engaging with suitable leaders and structuring the two days for maximum benefit.

*(In their own time each participant will also be expected to seek out and connect with a range of people and organisations to build their personal network, for example, R&D managers and directors, academics in local HEIs, REC Chairs and PPIE leads and champions).*

### **Course outcomes**

On immediate completion it is expected that each participant will: -

- ❖ Have a completed reflective video diary
- ❖ Have developed a personal career plan with set short-term goals (to be achieved in one year or less) and long-term goals (to be achieved in one to five years).
- ❖ Be more responsive and alert to opportunities for networking and developing reputation and esteem
- ❖ Have developed links with the R&D director and department in their employing Trust
- ❖ Have a foundation network of key people and organisations to support and enable their career plan
- ❖ Have both theoretical knowledge and some practical application of research methods
- ❖ An understanding of information literacy and management, research income and funding generation
- ❖ Have increased skills and confidence in their abilities to lead

### **Evaluation**

Before and after questionnaires will be administered to all participants and pre and post course telephone interview conducted to provide an immediate evaluation of the programme.

### **Dates for Cohort 1**

Interview date: 9<sup>th</sup> October 2019, Liverpool Science Park

Residential launch – 27<sup>th</sup> & 28<sup>th</sup> November 2019

Workshop dates for 2020:

16th January

12th February

19th March

23rd April

14th May

18th June

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2day placement – July/ August

10th September

15th October TBC – celebration and presentation event



## Appendix Two. Participant list

Katie Knott	Outreach Practitioner	North West Boroughs
Alex Maley	Acute Medicine Research Nurse	Blackpool Teaching Hosptials
Catherine Sanderson	Speech & language Therapist	Blackpool Teaching Hosptials
Betty Pennington		NWAS
Annette Odonoghue		UHMB
Emma Henstock	Specialist MSK Physiotherapis	UHMB
Elaine Fillingham		
Lauren Cox	Mental Health Nurse	Halton & Warrington Early Intervention Team
Amanda Bennet	Physiotherapist	Aintree Hospital
Harriet Colburn		Mersey Care NHS Foundation Trust
Olivia Wooding	Addiction support worker	Mersey Care NHS
Ruth Morgan (withdrew)	Mental Health Practitioner	Royal Liverpool University Hospital
Samantha Schug	Mental Health Nurse	Mersey Care NHS
Sophie Twiss	Research Nurse	Liverpool Heart and chest
Serena Jones	Learning Disability Nurse	RLBUHT
Andrew Britton		
Sinead Benson	Nurse	Clatterbridge Cancer Centre
Clare McCaroll	Physiotherapist	Mersey Care NHS
Sarah Ryan (withdrew)	Mental Health Practitioner	North West Boroughs
Linda Cantwell	Dietitian	North West Boroughs Healthcare NHS foundation trust
Sheridan Coker	RMN	North West Boroughs

## Appendix Three. Evaluation Interview questions for participants.

1. Can you describe a little about your background and role please?
2. Why were you attracted to the programme?
3. What was the experience like for you?
4. What impact has the programme had on you/ your team/your work?
5. What has had the most impact for you?
6. What got in the way of your learning?
7. How was the balance between leadership development and innovation and research
8. What will help you to apply your learning?
9. What can get in the way of you applying the learning?
10. What do you think could improve this programme?
11. What are you telling colleagues and managers about the programme and the  
learning?
12. What are your next steps now following the programme.
13. Any other comments?

## Appendix Four. Executive summary of the interim evaluation undertaken by Gillian Southgate

### Executive Summary

The Early Career Researcher development Pathway (ECRDP) is a 12 month programme delivered by NHS Research & Development North West (NHS R&D NW) on behalf of the National Institute for Health Research, Clinical Research Network, North West Coast (NIHR CRN NWC). It was developed to fulfil a strategic goal of the CRN NWC to increase the opportunity to participate in high quality clinical research across the population of the region through the development of research capability and capacity.

This interim evaluation was completed at the end of August 2020 and is a summary reading by NHS R&D NW of the progress the participants have made so far despite the ongoing challenges with the Covid 19 pandemic.

The programme is a 12-month course and consists of 10 days of workshops and training alongside a further one day a month for personal study and development. The programme embraces a blended learning approach with homework, assignments and mentoring to ensure that all relevant content is covered during the 12-month period. The programme commenced in November 2019 and was due to finish in October 2020. However due to the Covid 19 pandemic the programme was suspended from April till July and restarted in August 2020.

The ECRDP programme content was based on the Vitae Researcher Development Framework (RDF) which is a professional development framework for planning, promoting and supporting the personal, professional and career development of researchers and articulates the knowledge, behaviours and attributes of successful researchers and encourages them to realise their potential.

The evaluation was completed by collecting standard data on the numbers of applicants and attrition rates. Participants also completed a self-report RDF questionnaire at the beginning of the programme in December 2019 and at the end of August 2020 and a second self-report NHS R&D NW feedback questionnaire regarding their views on the course promotion, delivery and content.

There were 25 places available on the ECRDP and there were 22 applicants. One applicant did not meet the criteria as they were not a Nurse, Midwife or Allied Health Professional (NMAHP) and therefore only 21 were interviewed. Although some of the candidates were stronger than others it was decided that all the applicants were suitable and 21 were offered a place on the programme. All 21 commenced the programme but two people withdrew, one due to illness and another took up a new post out of area. There are 19 participants continuing with the ECRDP as of September 2020 and 17 completed the interim evaluation.

The results show that attrition rates have been low despite the suspension of the programme due to the Covid 19 pandemic. This may be due to the work done on building a community of practice with

the WhatsApp group, the coaching groups and the residential weekend. All 15 participants perceived themselves to have improved in skills and abilities since starting the programme. Some of the participants perceived themselves to have developed more than others which may be due to the fact that participants’ research knowledge and skills were quite varied. Some participants who had previously completed an MRes already had many of the basic researcher skills whereas other participants were very new to research with limited skills and knowledge. As a consequence, this meant that all workshops were required to address a range of knowledge and abilities.

The majority of the participants were very satisfied with the course but there was some concern about the clarity of the course aims and objectives. Participants’ comments highlighted a preference for face to face sessions rather than online sessions but it was acknowledge that this was not possible from March 2020 due to the Covid 19 pandemic. Participants highly valued the two day residential and being part of a community of practice that was very supportive and encouraging. Overall all the participants have found the programme to be beneficial to their development as an Early Career Researcher (ECR) at this stage in the programme. Two people were also successful in gaining an NIHR Pre-doctoral Clinical Academic fellowship (PCAF) since starting the programme, which is an exceptional achievement considering the extra challenges presented in the work place due to Covid 19. Both participants acknowledged that the programme had played a significant part in their PCAF success.

It is difficult to make firm recommendations as the programme has not yet completed, however preliminary suggestions for recommendations at this stage are

- Ensure the course aims and objective are communication clearly and concisely in all pre and post course material and are reiterated during workshops
- Consider restricting admission criteria to either pre or post masters level so that workshops can be more focused and specific to stage of development
- Deliver face to face when possible
- Consider one to one coaching rather than group coaching.

Further recommendations can be made in the final evaluation when the programme completes in December 2020.