



Department of
Health

An Roinn Sláinte

Máinnystrie O Poustie

www.health-ni.gov.uk

Allied Health Professions' Research and Innovation Strategy Northern Ireland



Dramatherapist



Music therapist



Podiatrist



Occupational therapist



Operating department practitioner



Orthoptist



Therapeutic Radiographer



Art therapist



Physiotherapist



Orthotist



Diagnostic Radiographer



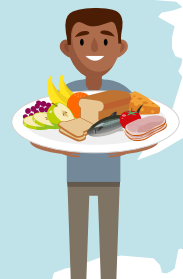
Paramedic



Speech & language therapist



Prosthetist



Dietitian

Forewords	3
Scope of the Strategy	6
Context of the Strategy	9
• International and National context	
• New roles, routes and careers	
• Research quality	
• Council for Allied Health Professions Research (CAHPR)	
Development of the Strategy	13
Strategic Vision Statements	14
• Vision Statement One: Transformation of AHP professional identities, culture and roles.	
• Vision Statement Two: Delivery of excellence in evidence-based Allied Health practice.	
• Vision Statement Three: NI strategic research agendas and priorities are explicitly inclusive of Allied Health research and innovation.	
Strategic Vision Statement One	15
• Strategic Aims	
• Strategic Objectives	
Strategic Vision Statement Two	16
• Strategic Aims	
• Strategic Objectives	
Strategic Vision Statement Three	18
• Strategic Aims	
• Strategic Objectives	
Next Steps	19
Acknowledgements	23

Invited Forewords

**Chief Allied Health Professional Officer Northern Ireland,
Professor Suzanne Martin**

The focus of our work across the Allied Health Profession (AHP) community is on the service users and patients who access our services – whether that is in the public or private space. Research and innovation are key to ensuring safe, effective and evidenced-based practice within existing services and support transformation of treatment modalities and service design.

From my own background and experience I know how much research and innovation assists us in improving lives, bringing new ideas to fruition, enhancing services, improving outcomes alongside developing and supporting our staff.

This first ever research, development and innovation strategy for Northern Ireland outlines our aspirations and ambitions as an AHP community. It sets the future direction for AHP research, development and innovation, it is ambitious, but I think it is only fitting and proper that we aim high.

AHPs have proven that we can move at pace when it comes to innovation, and this can be seen by the speed at which the research community moved in times of great challenge. This is the measure of our collective and individual capabilities.

As the Chief Allied Health Professions Officer, I am very keen to strategically support Research, Development and Innovation and to seek ways to enable clinical staff to engage in research.

Our universities are the breeding ground for research, development and innovation and I encourage all in the AHP community to make connections with the Universities, to deliver the vision within this Strategy, breaking through any barriers and reach new heights for AHPs.

**Professor Suzanne Martin
Chief Allied Health Professional Officer
Department of Health**



I am delighted to introduce the first research strategy for Allied Health Professionals (AHPs) in Northern Ireland.

There is a growing body of evidence to show that healthcare organisations that engage in research provide better outcomes for their patients. Therefore, research, development and innovation should be regarded as core activities of any effective healthcare system, with all professionals enabled to use, participate in or lead research as an integral part of their role.

Health and social care research are a global endeavour that seeks to identify how to provide the best possible healthy life years for the population. This includes prevention, diagnosis & treatment of disease, as well as rehabilitation, reablement, self-management and self-care for those living with long-term conditions, their carers, and relatives. The breadth of health and care practice across the AHPs contributes to all of these areas so we have the opportunity to act as real agents of change for the HSC and beyond.

HSC R&D Division of the PHA is responsible for management of the HSC R&D Fund for health and social care from the Department of Health. Research funding is used to put in place an infrastructure to support clinical trials and other high-quality health and social care research studies, with trained and highly skilled research professionals in place to deliver across a broad range of topic areas. In addition, R&D Division offers a range of funding award schemes, from early-stage training awards through to large-scale studies led by senior researchers. Awards are made through stringent and independent peer-review, to ensure only the highest quality research studies are funded. I am pleased to say many successful research studies, funded by the HSC R&D Fund, have been and are being led by AHPs, with many others availing of the training and development opportunities available.

AHPs are also active innovators, and through reflection on their area of practice and passion to help their patients and service users, often engage in developing and testing new devices, treatments or services as part of the quality improvement agenda, working in partnership across organisations and sectors.

Through HSC R&D Division, Northern Ireland is actively engaged in the UK Vision for the Future of Clinical Research Delivery, part of which aims to provide greater support for the research workforce. I would hope to see many more AHPs and other healthcare professionals developing into research leaders. In turn, this will help to provide the population of Northern Ireland with the opportunity to participate in health and social care research, led by AHPs and other professions, towards a better health and social care system for the future.

I welcome this Strategy and look forward to working with all of you towards its successful delivery.

Dr. Janice Bailie
Assistant Director, HSC R&D Division
Public Health Agency

This Research and Innovation Strategy defines an ambition for research activities for the Allied Health Professions in Northern Ireland. It provides direction and sets out a plan for AHP research and its impact. This strategy is essential to facilitate evidenced based practice and to make a difference to the care of patients.

AHP research is advancing within Northern Ireland. AHP led research contributed to the recent Research Excellence Framework (REF) exercise, which is an assessment of the quality of research conducted across UK universities. Within the Nursing and Health Research Institute at Ulster University, which includes all our AHP research, our results demonstrated that 83% of our publications were world-leading or internationally excellent and 95% of the research conducted had an impact on policy, practice and patient care that was considered world-leading or internationally excellent. Our work was ranked 5th out of 90 Universities in UK for research power in Allied Health Professions. The outcomes for this REF exercise recognise the global significance of research conducted by AHPs within Northern Ireland.

It is imperative now to ensure that this quality of research is continued but also expanded to include all AHP disciplines, roles, and settings. Many AHPs do not feel confident engaging in research and yet this group has huge potential for using research-based practice to improve the health and wellbeing of their patients. They play a critical role in ensuring that future developments in healthcare reflect the needs of the public.

Research capacity building is critical to improving Allied Health Professional research capability, quality, and its translation to clinical practice. A culture of research brings benefits both to individuals and the profession leading to higher rates of patient satisfaction, better outcomes for patients, improved efficiency within Health and Social care.

This strategy will provide support for development opportunities and careers in research and leadership roles for all AHPs and help AHPs at all stages of their career engage in research. This could help break down barriers to research activity and build a stronger research culture. Building a culture of research for AHPs could improve services for patients and increase career satisfaction for individuals.

Professor Ciara Hughes
Associate Research Director
School of Nursing and School of Health Sciences



Scope of the Strategy

This strategy comprises a definitive collective reference statement that supports the research and innovation agenda for all Allied Health Professionals (AHPs).

The Allied Health Professions in Northern Ireland include the following disciplines:



Art Therapists, Dramatherapists, Music Therapists, Podiatrists, Dietitians, Occupational Therapists, Orthoptists, Paramedics, Physiotherapists, Prosthetists and Orthotists, Diagnostic Radiographers, Therapeutic Radiographers, Speech and Language Therapists and Operating Department Practitioners.

These 15 professions form one of the largest workforces in health and social care.

Many of the 15 AHP Professional Bodies or Associations have research strategy policies and guidance as a key element of the professional development support initiatives for their own membership. Some AHPs may access research and innovation development opportunities through their engagement in multi-professional, cross-sector, and/or specialist research interest groups related to their own field/s of practice.



This Strategy directly addresses the need for relevant and appropriately differentiated support and development opportunities to be available to all AHPs, whatever their discipline, professional association membership, or employment context.

Hence, this new strategy comprises a definitive collective reference statement that comprehensively supports the research and innovation agenda for all AHPs. It is unique in articulating the united voice of all the professional associations, specialist research support initiatives, and the academic teaching and research communities.

This work builds on the work of the Health Education England (HEE) which commissioned a similar piece of work to identify high level strategic aims for a transformational change in AHP research and innovation reputation, influence and impact on services. In addition, it recognises that the quality improvement agenda encompasses the full breadth of scientific research methodologies across the spectrum from proof of concept, applied health research, implementation science studies, and service evaluations. The adoption of the terminology **‘research, development and innovation’** serves to be fully inclusive of all these approaches that contribute towards improvement of care quality, effectiveness and safety. It is also intended to span the historic gap between the spheres of researcher and practitioner communities; since the future vision is to bring together the respective expertise, experience and insights from both perspectives more powerfully than ever before. This will accelerate the cycle of implementation of research evidence into practice to improve health, wellbeing and care outcomes, in addition to driving practice-led priority setting and authentic co-design of future research and innovation.



**Research,
development
and innovation**

The scope of this Strategy covers all the AHP workforce community, inclusive of all career stages, employment sectors and job roles. The strategic aims and objectives have direct relevance to all AHP practitioners, educators, researchers, managers, policy leads, as well as all the key stakeholders who commission, fund, lead, manage and support AHP services.

The initiation of this Strategy was driven by the recognition of a vital need to expedite the pace of growth, stability and sustainability of our collective AHP research and innovation community. There is a time-critical push to align with multiple strategic local, regional and national agendas, specifically to secure greater visibility, reputation and influence and to achieve proportionate access to investment and infrastructures for the next generation of research and innovation leaders across all the AHP professions, geographies and employment sectors.

The development of the Strategic aims and objectives presented here was achieved through a coproduction approach with the full engagement of all stakeholders in Northern Ireland (NI).

The Four Domains

The scope of this Strategy addresses four domains. Each of these are interdependent and are all equally necessary to achieve transformational impactful change.



Capacity and engagement of the AHP workforce community, to implement research and innovation in practice;

Capability for individuals to undertake and achieve excellence in research and innovation activities, roles, careers and leadership;

Context for AHPs to have equitable access to sustainable support, infrastructures and investment for research and innovation;

Culture for AHP perceptions and expectations of professional identities and roles that **“research (and innovation) is everybody’s business”**.

The Strategy comprises three vision statements which express a clear intention to accelerate the pace of transformational change. Each of the vision statements is presented in terms of a bold strategic aim, with several related strategic objectives. These have been purposefully crafted to be measurable within the framework of appropriate evaluation approaches for quality and impact that have been developed within the scope of this work.

Development of robust metrics is required to provide credible indicators of progress, but it is essential for these to be relevant, appropriate, specific and sensitive within each domain; and not to be limited to volume of activities or to the most prestigious successes. Tools and approaches that reflect the visible impact of research will be key to securing commitment from all stakeholders. There is an impetus to demonstrate benefits that meet the strategic priorities of the respective stakeholders, specifically including commissioners and provider organisations of health and care services, as well as higher education institutions.

The real world examples linked and referenced in this document showcase various examples of completed research within Northern Ireland that has direct impact on service provision. It is the aspiration that the number of such publications will exponentially increase following the implementation of the strategy.

Context of the Strategy

Local, Regional, National and International context

Securing and sustaining excellence in research and innovation for the Allied Health workforce is a global priority agenda. The development work for this Strategy completed by HEE was underpinned by an extensive mapping exercise of international publications of relevant capacity and capability building initiatives, within and out with the Allied Health disciplines and sectors. This included policy statements and professional guidance; empirical evaluation studies were also catalogued. These sources include some AHP-specific initiatives, in addition to many that focused on multi-professional perspectives.

For Northern Ireland, the Department of Health directs all Health and Social Care (HSC) organisations to actively support research activities and to ensure evidence informed practice to improve care quality and outcomes. Research and innovation are also specifically identified in the HSC as a key driver for all professions to improve future health outcomes. By implication, all staff are accountable to have the knowledge, skills and confidence to apply research within their own scope of practice: a relatively smaller proportion may choose to undertake research and/or innovation as part of their career pathway.

The focus of this new Strategy dovetails with the recent attention to current and future Allied Health practitioners, including pre-registration level. Recent work led by the Council of Deans of Health and the School of Medicine at Queen's University Belfast, have introduced, and exposed AHP students to the research environment, through the NI Clinical Research Facility and the NI Clinical Research Network¹. The Council of Deans of Health has promoted a range of initiatives to enhance the students' exposure and experience of the research environment. Securing support for AHP academic educators to be more research active, as well as increasing research placements and internship opportunities for students will contribute to ensuring the legacy that our next generations of AHP workforce will be more **"research-ready"**.



Research-ready



¹ The Wellcome Trust-Wolfson Northern Ireland Clinical Research Facility | Queen's University Belfast (qub.ac.uk)

New roles, routes and careers

The Strategy specifically incorporates an objective to see more AHPs of all disciplines and at all career stages to be appointed in research delivery roles, in line with the [Department of Health](#) priority for supporting clinical research and enhancing the clinical research environment by participation from “**healthcare professionals from all backgrounds**”. In addition to making a valuable contribution to the Research Delivery workforce, this would generate increased opportunities for AHP practitioners to gain skills, experience, insights and confidence in research processes that may potentially lead them to explore other research and innovation activities, roles and career routes.

The Advanced AHP Practice Framework was launched in NI during 2019. This framework defines the concept of AHP Advanced Practice, and the skills and clinical expertise required. The framework recognises and characterises the extension of scope of practice required to work at the top of one’s professional licence. The framework created a blueprint for career progression for AHPs post registration including job titles, Agenda For Change (AFC) banding and core competencies required to practice at an advanced level, as well as the skills and post-graduate training and education required. Whilst the framework has facilitated career development in relation to Advanced Practice 1 and 2 roles in NI, these opportunities are not consistently available either across all the AHP professions or across all AHP services across the region. Another variation in NI is the availability of consultant AHP posts and equity of opportunity to progress to consultant level in comparison to other professions. The Advanced AHP Practice Framework in conjunction with the Research and Innovation strategy will support career development opportunities at all levels for all of the AHP workforce including assistant staff.



Healthcare professionals from all backgrounds

The move to Advanced Practice through the Advancing Practice Framework² enables development opportunities for experienced health and care staff to hone their expertise in specialist practice, leadership and management, education and research. Collaborative work is underway to further support the research element of these roles through the development of a clear pathway to map out research and innovation activities and roles, plus transition opportunities into more dedicated research career routes in academic or clinical-academic roles.

Access to support for research careers is essential to assure the growth of a sustainable critical mass of research leadership for the future generations of AHPs. This includes support for the workforce to be aware of the range of initiatives (including National Institute for Health Research – NIHR - Internships, Bridging Schemes and Fellowship opportunities) along with other opportunities offered by Trusts, HEIs, charitable trusts and other third sector organisations. The provision of more effective and efficient signposting for information, support, mentorship and funding opportunities continues to be an essential priority, so that highly talented individuals at any stage of their career may be supported to be successful in these routes.



There is a priority need to implement strategies that foster more equitable access to targeted and incremental mentorship for the under-represented AHP disciplines: for example, by adopting a collaborative coaching scheme.

Within NI it has been challenging to establish Clinical Academic roles and research careers, where an individual has dual roles and responsibilities in a practice and a teaching and/or research setting. There is significant interest and commitment to enabling these pathways. There is no doubt that within NI HSC clinical AHP staff have the knowledge, skills and motivation to take up these roles.

Furthermore, potential new roles for supporting the development of knowledge translation to facilitate the rapid implementation of high-quality research evidence into practice may be considered. In addition to immediate benefits to teams and services, these roles can provide more role models, champions and mentors. The principle of using rapid evidence syntheses to answer priority practice-based questions also addresses the growing concerns over research wastage and lays the sound foundation for evidence-based research.

There has been a steadily growing familiarity and adoption of Implementation Science frameworks in Allied Health research over the past decade, however there is the need for a clearer recognition that Implementation Science addresses complementary and essential issues to our current evidence base of scientific and clinical research. This is vitally important to support the clinical effectiveness, societal impact and scientific reputation of Allied Health professional practice. There is also widespread Quality Improvement work being carried out within HSC trusts in NI which is changing how services are designed and delivered.

Finally, there remains the pressing need for systems change to secure more sustainability and contractual security for post-holders, particularly at the post-doctoral stage. This must be driven by a sharper focus and recognition of the inherent value of all these activities, roles and careers to impact on excellence in the quality of research and of care. In the context of pressing organisational priorities for all stakeholders, the mutual benefits of more deeply integrated practice-academic partnerships to impact on quality and on retention of highly experienced and motivated staff is essential. Approaches that focus on alignment with strategic priorities at organisational, local and regional levels will be particularly powerful.

Research Quality

Establishing and maintaining the highest quality research evidence base for all the Allied Health professions, not simply for growing the volume of the collective evidence base or the number of research active individuals is vital. The commitment to authentic codesign and coproduction of research and innovations with the public voice is a fundamental premise.

The challenge of inequalities in access to services as well as inequalities in health, wellbeing and care outcomes is also explicitly addressed. The priority driver is for essential expertise from both practice and academic perspectives to inform research agenda setting, as well as throughout all stages of the design and conduct of research and innovation initiatives for all levels depending on the staff group, for example, modules, courses, all the way up to MSc and PhD.

Research Excellence Framework ([REF](#)), is the only United Kingdom exercise to assess research quality, underpinned by sound principles of requiring evidence of real-world impact. This is a highly significant driver for investment in research. Ulster University AHP research performed extremely well in the last REF exercise (submitted with nursing, pharmacy and dentistry) – with [examples](#) of world-leading research by AHPs across multiple domains in the REF exercise. The inclusion of this agenda here is to prompt a reflective and constructive engagement in dialogues that will increase transparency, recognition and reward of excellence for the specific contributions and achievements of research leadership in Allied Health research.³

Council for Allied Health Professions Research (CAHPR)

The Council for Allied Health Professions Research ([CAHPR](#)) is a UK-wide organisation that comprises a Strategy Committee, a Professoriate and a network of Regional Hubs. The Council was launched in 2014, with a mission to continue the work of former initiatives to develop AHP research, strengthen evidence of the professions' value and impact for enhancing service user and community care, and enable the professions to speak with one voice on research issues, to raise their profile and influence.

CAHPR offers a unique blend of expertise from both research and practice across Higher Education Institutes (HEI), National Health Service (NHS) and wider practice settings. The Hub structure and resources on the CAHPR website have been effective ways of signposting practitioners to support and next steps in becoming research active, and to funding and development opportunities. CAHPR has undertaken a role in addressing the workforce development challenges arising from a limited research culture in the workplace where research and innovation are not seen as mainstream activity.

CAHPRNI is the Northern Ireland branch and welcomes expressions of interest from clinicians across the Province who are interested in getting involved to help champion research in clinical departments across NI.

In relation to this Strategy, CAHPR has the unique opportunity to contribute to and guide the research and innovation reform agenda to facilitate and maximise AHP research activity, research careers and professional practice through their well-established national networks of practitioners, educators, researchers, clinical academics and university academics.

³ <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/digitalstrategy>

Development of Strategy

This statement provides the strategic vision to drive transformational change for AHP research and innovation, specifically for enhanced visibility, reputation, influence and impact on services.

This Strategy is predicated on establishing a consensus agreement on the aspirations and expectations for AHP research capacity and capability, specifically including appropriate and relevant metrics of quality and impact. Indicators of increased research capacity across the wider AHP workforce (active engagement in the research environment for practice) was clearly differentiated from measures of research capability building in individuals (research career routes).

The landscape for AHP research needs parity with other health professions and must include all the professions, across roles and services, for all those with protected characteristics and across all geographies.

NI STAKEHOLDERS

Department of Health Northern Ireland

Ulster University

Public Health Agency

**Council for Allied Health
Professions Research**

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust

Northern Health and Social Care Trust

Western Health and Social Care Trust

Southern Health and Social Care Trust

South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust

**Royal College of Speech and
Language Therapy**

British Dietetic Association

**Royal College of Occupational
Therapists**

Society of Radiographers

British and Irish Orthoptic Society

Royal College of Podiatry

Chartered Society of Physiotherapists

British Association of Art Therapists

British Association of Dramatherapists

British Association for Music Therapy

**College of Operating Department
Practitioners**

College of Paramedics

An iterative coproduction methodology (face to face workshop, remote meetings and asynchronous email) was established to enable engagement in the design of this strategy. In adopting this co-production approach, the aim was to engender ownership and commitment from key stakeholders, ensuring that the proposed aims are considered achievable and sustainable with the full commitment from all the AHP stakeholders outlined above. This collaborative approach with the strategic research leads for all the AHP stakeholders generated valuable reciprocal insights and commitment to contribute towards an effective, pragmatic Strategy to build on the AHP achievements to date and to ensure future sustainability. There was unqualified support for the resultant strategic vision statements, aims and objectives.

Strategic Vision Statements

The strategic vision is articulated within three distinctive strands. These express a clear intention to accelerate the pace of transformational change to assure achievement of the highest quality and reputation for the collective Allied Health research and innovation community.

Each of the vision statements is presented in terms of a bold strategic aim, with a number of related strategic objectives. These have been purposefully crafted to be measurable within the framework of appropriate metrics and indicators of quality and impact that was developed within the scope of this work.



Vision Statement One:
Transformation of AHP professional identities, culture and roles.



Vision Statement Two:
Delivery of excellence in evidence-based Allied Health practice.



Vision Statement Three:
NI strategic research agendas and priorities are explicitly inclusive of Allied Health research and innovation.



Vision Statement One: Transformation of AHP professional identities, culture and roles.

Strategic Aims and Objectives

Aim 1.1: A transformational shift in awareness, skills and values for research, development and innovation across the life course for all AHP workforce.

Strategic Objectives:

The legacy of a research-ready workforce is assured through:

- dynamic research-informed teaching of student AHPs;
- dedicated time and opportunities for AHP academic educators to engage in research, development, innovation and scholarship activities;
- opportunities for AHP pre-reg student research, development and innovation;
- optimal value and maximization of research, quality improvement and innovation skills across the AHP workforce.

Aim 1.2: Research, development, innovation and quality improvement is embedded into job descriptions and routine practice across all career stages of the AHP workforce.

Strategic Objectives:

The culture for research, development and innovation in AHP services will enable:

- systematic promotion and support for more active engagement with the research, development and innovation environment by the AHP and interdisciplinary workforce;
- skills and confidence to undertake, evaluate and disseminate research, development innovation and quality improvement activities.

Aim 1.3: A range of Advanced Practitioner, and research and development roles and clear career pathways for AHPs are clearly signposted and well-supported.

Strategic Objectives:

The culture for research, development, and innovation in AHP services will enable:

- access for all AHPs to research and innovation responsibilities, roles, pathways, secondments and substantive career routes, including dedicated Clinical Academic posts;
- facilitation, mentorship and support for research leadership roles;
- access to role models and systematic mentorship for AHPs of all disciplines at incremental levels by academic expertise;
- organisational level support for post-doctoral roles within the AHP workforce.



Vision Statement Two: Delivery of excellence in evidence-based Allied Health practice.

Strategic Aims and Objectives

Aim 2.1: World-leading quality research, development and innovation for Allied Health practice is co-produced by expertise from the public voice, academics, practitioners and the wider Allied Health Community.⁴

Strategic Objectives:

Capacity building strategies for Allied Health will enable a research, development and innovation evidence base that will deliver:

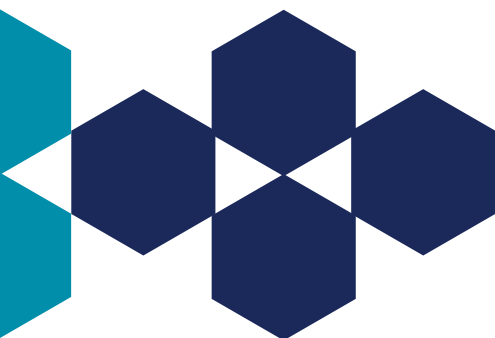
- commitment to authentic research priority setting and mainstreaming of research;
- establishment of a NI register of bodies interested in research representing a range of bodies/organisations;
- a world-leading quality research and innovation evidence base across all AHP professions, co-produced by expertise from the public voice, academics, practitioners, and the wider Allied Health Community.
- transparent recognition through the UK Research Excellence Framework of the distinctive value and impact of AHP research and innovation;
- Explicit recognition of health inequalities in access to services and in health outcomes;
- agreement on relevant outcome measures through collaboration between the public voice, academics, practitioners and the wider AHP community;
- maximised north-south collaboration and funding opportunities;
- improved organisation and convergence in Northern Ireland with better communication and networks;
- prioritisation of the public voice in the co-design, development and evaluation of AHP services;
- commitment to the consideration of Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging (EDIB) in AHP research, development and innovation,
- investment in and dedicated resources to infrastructure, e.g., access to databases, universities, libraries and existing research;
- commitment to environmental sustainability in AHP research and innovation initiatives.

Aim 2.2: Allied Health practice is underpinned by scientific research and driven by Implementation Science and service improvement models.

Strategic Objectives:

Capacity building strategies for research and innovation in the AHP wider workforce will enable:

- active uptake of research evidence sources and related resources, with an explicit focus on implications for practice;
- active promotion and dissemination of research evidence syntheses, rapid reviews, and evidence-based guidelines to support practice improvements;
- support systems, value recognition and incentives for implementation of research and innovation in Allied Health practice;
- opportunities for participation in research, development and innovation activities at all career stages that are supported and funded with clear pathways and a partnership approach;
- access for AHPs of all disciplines and at all career stages to research delivery roles;
- support to apply for scholarship and funding opportunities;
- strengthened communication and information and sharing networks, e.g., between Trusts and between professions and link with undergraduate and post graduate projects;
- organisational level support for direct engagement between research leaders and workforce teams and services;
- a change of culture in Northern Ireland to support AHP research, development and innovation.





Vision Statement Three: strategic research agendas and priorities are explicitly inclusive of Allied Health research, development and innovation.

Strategic Aims and Objectives⁵

Aim 3.1: AHP research, development and innovation directly aligns with and contributes to the priority agendas in health, social care and wellbeing strategies

Strategic Objectives:

The context for research, development and innovation in AHP services will enable:

- recognition of the value of AHP research, development and innovation in relation to strategic priorities,
- AHP representation at all local, regional, national and international level forums for senior research leaders in health, social care and wellbeing,
- strategic influencing and systematic resourcing for research, development and innovation in AHP practice.

Aim 3.2: Dedicated investment for substantive and sustainable funding, resourcing and infrastructure to support AHP research, development and innovation.

Strategic Objectives:

The context for research and innovation in AHP services will enable:

- sustainable growth for a legacy of leadership in AHP research, development and innovation across all AHP disciplines;
- organisational level support for AHP research and innovation activities, job roles, job plans and careers;
- access for AHPs to research, development, and innovation infrastructures within and across all provider organisations and subcontracted services;
- commitment from Higher Education Institutions and from care provider organisations to support joint appointments, including substantive Clinical Academic posts;
- access for AHPs to funding across the spectrum from seed corn projects to career fellowships and programme grants;
- links to industry for research, development and innovation including product innovation.

The next steps

The publication of this strategic vision marks the launch of a coordinated, systematic and sustained campaign to address the stated aims and objectives. With an oversight from the Department of Health in Northern Ireland the delivery for this Strategy will be driven forwards in a strong coproduction approach across the AHP associations. The development of a implementation plan that involves all the key stakeholders and has clear objectives and time lines is crucial to ensure this strategy migrates into shaping and changing practice.



The Implementation work will drive forward on priority actions to ensure that the impact of this work achieves significant changes, most particularly in strategic visibility, reputation and engagement with key influential stakeholders.

The achievement of impact across the vision statements in this Strategy will be dependent on securing system-wide engagement, specifically for substantive commitment to support collaborative working between all provider organisations and the higher education sector. Alignment with all strategic priority agendas of the NI Arm's Length Bodies will also be highly influential. This consideration is explicitly encompassed in the strategic aims and objectives.

Those responsible for leading this implementation work will remain responsive to any significant unanticipated changes or emergent priorities from our key stakeholders. Progress towards the transformational change initiatives encompassed in this Strategy is anticipated to continue over the coming decade, to secure a legacy of a more robust, sustainable and dynamic research and innovation environment for the future generations of AHPs.

One priority strategic initiative will encompass setting up new support alliances for incremental mentorship, coaching and collaboration, for the immediate benefit of building capacity and capability in research and innovation for organisations and for individuals. **The priority is to ensure equitable access of opportunities to support, resources and infrastructures for all the AHP disciplines, across all geographies, sectors and work roles, at all career stages and across all protected characteristics.** In this regard, the AHP disciplines will work together to specifically support research and innovation capacity and capability building across the most underrepresented groups. The development of new partnership initiatives with the National Institute for Health Research to foster excellence in capability building for research and innovation leadership across all the AHP disciplines will also significantly support and accelerate the progress of this strategic agenda.

A systematic framework for the delivery of an Implementation plan will include a coordinated network approach to optimise communication across national, regional and local levels. This will include mapping of environmental factors and existing support initiatives, both uni-professional and cross-professional. The mapping will explicitly reflect active collaboration initiatives between service provider organisations, academic institutions and research leaders across all the Allied Health disciplines.

The integrated approach to implementation initiatives across each of these significant agendas will support enhanced engagement and impact. Furthermore, the implementation phase will optimise active engagement across the multiprofessional arena to forward our collective strategic purposes to secure commitment and investment for research and innovation.

We will pursue open collaborative dialogues to optimise equitable access for the mutual benefit across our all respective AHP communities. This will include, but not be limited to, a specific focus on equitable, sustainable and flexible access for all AHP disciplines at all stages of their working lives to new roles, pathways and careers in research and innovation; and to ensure that research and innovation activities are more clearly articulated and securely embedded in job descriptions.



“Continue the conversation”

Examples of AHP published research



The ethos across all the Implementation initiatives will be to facilitate effective, efficient and energetic dissemination of exemplary systems and ways of working that have demonstrated significant impact across all four defined Domains.

Real world examples are a highly valuable and effective way to disseminate innovative practice, providing insights that may be shared and differentiated accordingly across other contexts. They also demonstrate powerful illustrations of impact and benefit from a range of stakeholder perspectives. There are many examples of AHP research which have been featured in various publications both in the UK and beyond, however, there needs to be a broader emphasis on encouraging, mentoring and supporting our AHPs to formalise and disseminate their work. The following selected examples demonstrate the impact of research and innovation carried out by AHPs from NI and the benefit across multiple strategic aims and objectives.

Examples of published AHP Research in NI

Adapting DESMOND, a structured education programme ... - Ulster University

Laurence, T, Coates, V & Mulhall, P 2016, 'Adapting DESMOND, a structured education programme for the self-management of Type 2 diabetes, for adults with intellectual disabilities', Endocrine Abstracts, vol. 43. <https://doi.org/10.1530/endoabs.43.OC23>

Riboflavin, MTHFR genotype and blood pressure: A ... - Ulster University

McNulty, H, Strain, JJ, Hughes, C & Ward, M 2017, 'Riboflavin, MTHFR genotype and blood pressure: A personalized approach to prevention and treatment of hypertension', Molecular Aspects of Medicine, vol. 0. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.mam.2016.10.002>

Addressing optimal folate and related B vitamin ... - Ulster University

McNulty, H, Ward, M, Hoey, L, Hughes, C & Pentieva, K 2019, 'Addressing optimal folate and related B vitamin status through the lifecycle: health impacts and challenges', Proceedings of the Nutrition Society., vol. 78, no. 3, pp. 449-462. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0029665119000661>

Applying evidence to practice by increasing intensity of intervention ...

McFaul H, Mulgrew L, Smyth J, et al. Applying evidence to practice by increasing intensity of intervention for children with severe speech sound disorder: a quality improvement project. BMJ Open Quality 2022;11:e001761. doi:10.1136/bmjopen-2021-001761

17 The MusiCAREER project: building capacity for high-quality research ...

Gillespie K, Graham-Wisener L, Potvin N, et al

17 The MusiCAREER project: building capacity for high-quality research on the role of music therapy in supporting informal carers of people at end of life

BMJ Supportive & Palliative Care 2022;12:A7

Conclusion

This Strategy presents the vision and direction to secure accelerated transformational change in the research and innovation culture, professional identity, roles and career routes across the breadth of the AHP community. The strategic aims and objectives specify concrete goals to ensure a vibrant, sustainable and fully inclusive research and innovation culture for all our AHP disciplines, without exception.

Full commitment to more substantive and sustainable collaborative partnership working between service providers and academic institutions will be achieved through demonstration of mutual benefits towards the strategic priorities of all stakeholders. Sponsorship and investment will be secured through the reputation of world-leading researchers in AHP research and innovation. The impact will be manifest through confident system-wide implementation of the highest quality evidence base that assures excellence in professional practice and care across all AHP roles and settings.



Acknowledgements

The development of this Strategy on behalf of Department of Health NI was led by the office of the Chief Allied Health Professions Office and was based on (with approval from) Health Education England. Thanks are extended to Beverly Harden who has supported and encouraged this initiative and Cora Regan from DoHNI.

This strategy has had input and regional endorsement from experts within the Research community. Experts such as Janice Bailie, Assistant Director of Research & Development division of the Public Health agency and Ciara Hughes Associate Research Director of the Institute of Nursing and Health Research at Ulster University, whose input and guidance was invaluable.

In addition, we appreciate the generous constructive feedback from many individuals representing a wide range of organisations across health and care sectors and higher education institutions.



Glossary

Local In the context of this paper by local we mean organisational or Trust-based

National In the context of this paper national means Northern Ireland

International In the context of this paper international means the UK and Ireland

Publication date: January 2023