

Wessex Health Partners Annual Review 2023/24

Executive Summary

Wessex Health Partners, a strategic alliance of health and care organisations, Universities and Health Innovation in Wessex, aims to accelerate, through partnership working, improvement in health and care through research, innovation and training.

Over recent years, the WHP founding partners have been increasingly working together. Further to approval of a business case in 2022/23 and appointment of the Chair and Managing Director, 2023/24 marked the first operational year of the strategic alliance.

The WHP Board approved the inaugural WHP annual in June 2023. This annual review reports progress against the annual plan.

Key highlights 23/24

- **WHP collaboration agreement signed** by all 15 **partners**, formalising the strategic alliance.
- WHP **governance structure** established, and **core team** appointed.
- WHP core team **engaged** with **founding partners** through site visits and regular meetings building relationships and understanding of research and innovation expertise and challenges.
- **Wessex health and care systems R&I culture and governance** developments include:
 - **WHP/Integrated Care System workstream** established supporting ICBs to meet their leadership responsibility and statutory obligation to ‘maximise the benefits of research and innovation’ resulting in a number of ‘**firsts**’ for example.
 - Regular **ICB support of research funding applications** and **deployment of innovation**
 - **Dorset ICB Research Strategy** aligned with WHP strategy published.
 - **HIOW ICB R&I board paper** and commitment to **R&I strategy, maturity matrix** and developing a learning health system.
 - **R&I ‘hard-wired’** into **governance structure** of ICBs/ICSS e.g. NHS Dorset Strategic Objectives Oversight Committee, HIOW Strategy Leads, NHS Dorset and HIOW Women’s Health Hub Programme Boards.
- **Pan-Wessex collaborative funding application success**
 - **36** Wessex collaborative **funding bids** received WHP support, resulting in **10 successful** applications with combined value of > **£22M** and a **return on investment (ROI)** of **1:15**.
 - Launched **WHP/WEMN** pilot for **seed-funding**, resulting in **21 collaborative expressions of interest** involving all of the WHP founding partners and allocation of >**£220k** of funding to **15 successful applications**.
- **Wessex R&I Infrastructure developed**
 - Established **Wessex Experimental Medicine Network (WEMN)**
 - Transition of **Wessex Research Hubs and Buses** oversight to WHP commenced.
 - **Wessex REACH** and **wider review** delivered
 - **NIHR Wessex Applied Research Collaboration (ARC) SWOT** delivered



WESSEX HEALTH PARTNERS

- **Pan-Wessex network development and learning events**
 - **Wessex Genomics Workshop** with Health Innovation Wessex.
 - **Wessex Integrated Care, Population Health, Research and Innovation Event**
 - Established **Clean Air South** with Sustainability and Resilience Institute, University of Southampton
- **Regional response to national R&I ecosystem review**
 - NHS Innovation Ecosystem Review Programme (Sinker Review).
- **Profile of WHP** strategic alliance increased through communications activities and regional, national, and international meetings and conferences.

Summary and conclusion

The first operational year of the WHP strategic alliance has seen the founding partners formalise arrangements and start to embed research and innovation into the new health and care landscape. All of the founding partners have fully engaged with the range of opportunities afforded by greater partnership working. Significant progress has been made in laying the necessary foundations on which to build future work and there have been some early successes, particularly with collaborative funding applications. The reputation of the WHP regional approach to research and innovation is growing with promotion of our strategic alliance at regional, national and international events and through representations made to the Sinker Review: Research and Innovation System.



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WESSEX HEALTH PARTNERS

1 Introduction and Background

WHP is the region's strategic alliance of the NHS organisations, Universities and Health Innovation Wessex (Figure 1). The WHP common purpose is '*working in partnership, to accelerate better health & care through research, innovation and training*'. WHP brings together world-leading expertise to work alongside and in partnership with our communities, local authorities, voluntary sector organisations and industry.

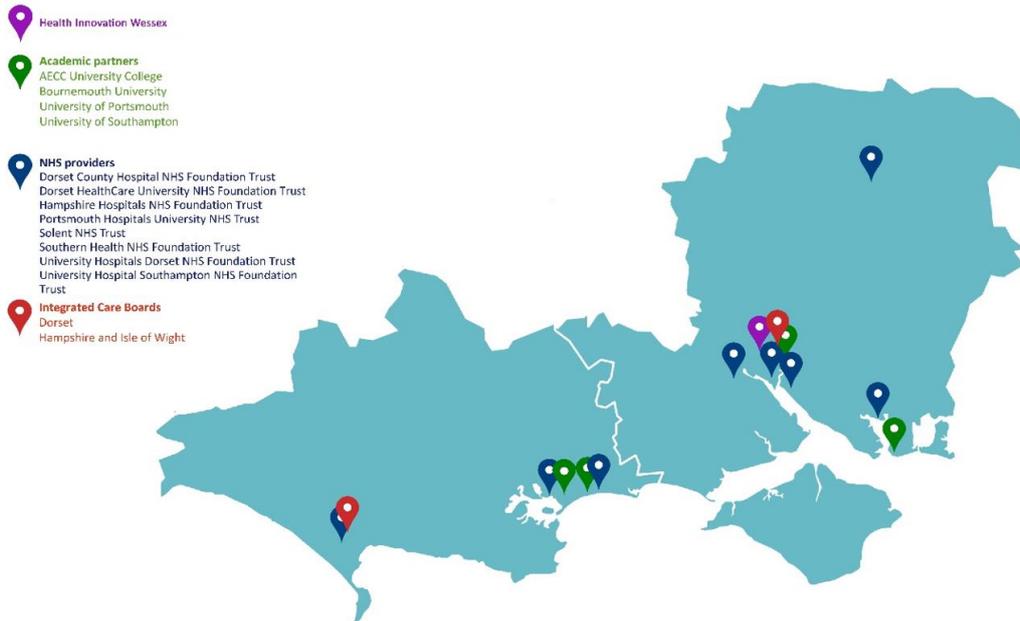


Figure 1: WHP Founding Partners

Whilst elements of the strategic alliance have been working informally for a number of years, the Boards and Councils of the WHP Founding Partners approved the WHP Business Case to formally establish WHP in 2022/23, following which the Chair, Managing Director and core team were appointed. The 2023/24 annual review reports on the first full operational year of the formal WHP strategic alliance.

2 WHP Annual Plan 2023/24

The WHP Annual Plan 2023/24 was developed by the WHP senior leadership team (SLT), in consultation with the WHP founding partners and wider stakeholders, during the first quarter of the WHP year (1st April-31st March). The plan, which received WHP Board approval in June 2023, set out activities within 5 strategic workstreams against the core ambitions, mission and vision of WHP, Figure 2.

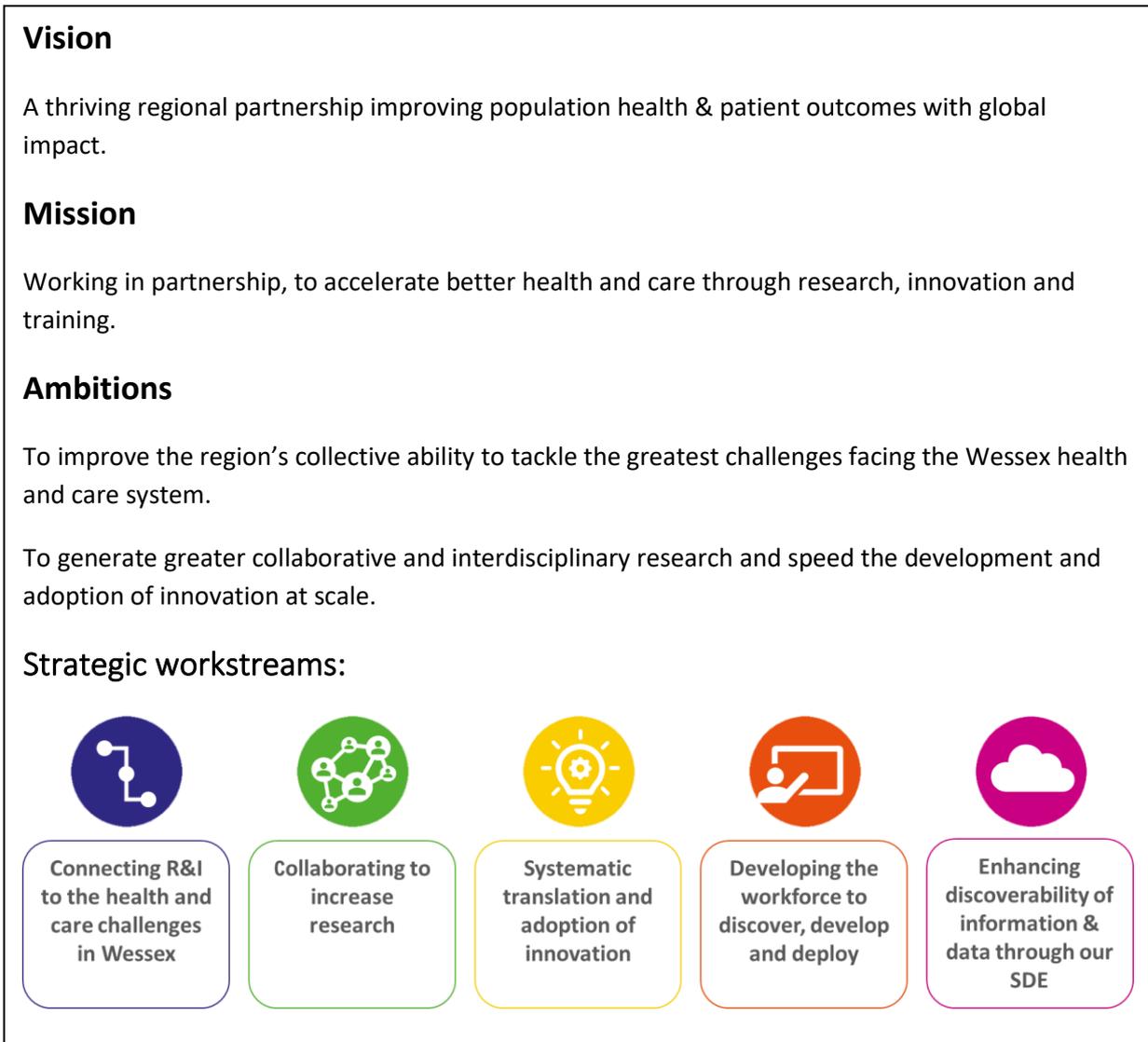


Figure 2: WHP Vision, Mission, Ambitions and Strategic Workstreams

In addition, the annual plan set out activities to develop the WHP governance, operational structure, business support and communications functions.

3 Key highlights 23/24

Below are key highlights from 2023/24 for the WHP strategic alliance, including a number of ‘firsts’ for the region.

- **WHP collaboration agreement signed** by all 15 **partners**, formalising the strategic alliance.
- WHP **governance structure** established, and **core team** appointed.
- WHP core team **engaged** with **founding partners** through site visits and regular meetings building relationships and understanding of research and innovation expertise and challenges.
- **Wessex health and care systems R&I culture and governance** developments include:
 - **WHP/Integrated Care System workstream** established supporting ICBs to meet their leadership responsibility and statutory obligation to ‘maximise the benefits of research and innovation’ resulting in a number of ‘firsts’ for example;
 - Regular **ICB support of research funding applications** and **deployment of innovation**
 - **Dorset ICB Research Strategy** aligned with WHP strategy published
 - **HIOW ICB R&I board paper** and commitment to **R&I strategy, maturity matrix** and developing a learning health system.
 - **R&I ‘hard-wired’** into **governance structure** of ICBs/ICSs e.g. NHS Dorset Strategic Objectives Oversight Committee, HIOW Strategy Leads, NHS Dorset and HIOW Women’s Health Hub Programme Boards.
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- **Regional response to national R&I ecosystem review**
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- **Profile of WHP** strategic alliance increased through communications activities and regional, national, and international meetings and conferences.

These highlights are expanded in the further detail provided in the Strategic Workstream section (section 6).

4 Measuring Success

A measurement of the success of WHP depends on the value perceived and realised by the founding partners – different factors will have importance for the various organisations. A review of activity against the annual plan for 2023 / 24 (summary in section 6: Strategic Workstreams) demonstrates delivery against the annual plan. Recognising that 2023/24 was the first year of operating and data collection systems are in development, Figure 3: WHP in numbers summarises available data and illustrates the extent of the reach and depth of some of the activity that has taken place over the year.



Figure 3: WHP in numbers

A large element of the work of the strategic alliance has been to build relationships and structures that will over time deliver a more cohesive Wessex research and innovation delivery engine. This work is 'in progress' with the ambition and current progress being describable. To identify the areas where founding partners are recognising the value being added by the actions of WHP, we asked WHP Board and Steering Group members to articulate the 'value-add' they are experiencing. A summary of responses is provided in Figure 4.



Supporting collaborative bid development

- WHP and WEMN seed-funding pilot call: 21 applications to build collaborations and develop further funding submissions.
- Provision of support for collaborative funding bids: cascading of opportunities and coordination of potential collaborators. Support for regional strategic bids.
- Forming of Communities of interest for future funding opportunities.

Developing the culture and environment to promote research activities across Wessex

- WHP and WEMN seed-funding pilot call: 21 applications to build collaborations and develop further funding submissions.

Developing approaches to introduce and bring research into health and care system strategic plans and activities.

- Promoting networking and collaboration opportunities across founding partners
- Bringing together researchers and the health and care system leaders, providing opportunities to build relationships, understand each other's needs, and identify potential opportunities and connectivity.
- Shared learning.
- Running events and networks to facilitate jointly tackling the 'wicked' issues.

Developing a single Wessex voice

- Articulation of a common ambition and collective voice.
- Jointly able to tackle 'wicked' and 'sticky' issues.
- Development of a single window (website) into Wessex research and innovation activities.
- Maintain an environment to encourage Wessex-wide collaboration.

Developing the Wessex-wide research and innovation infrastructure

- Partnership to provide foundations, oversight, and coordination to jointly provide a single research and innovation infrastructure to support existing Wessex structures (e.g. Wessex SNSDE; Wessex Research Hubs and Buses; NIHR infrastructure, HIW) and develop new approaches for joint working (e.g. horizon scanning; implementation of REACH review recommendations for capacity and capability building)

Promotion of WHP with Founding Partner Boards

- Engage with founding partners and with key stakeholders to promote the value of WHP to partner Boards

Figure 4 Founding Partner responses: Added Value of WHP

4.1 Return on Investment

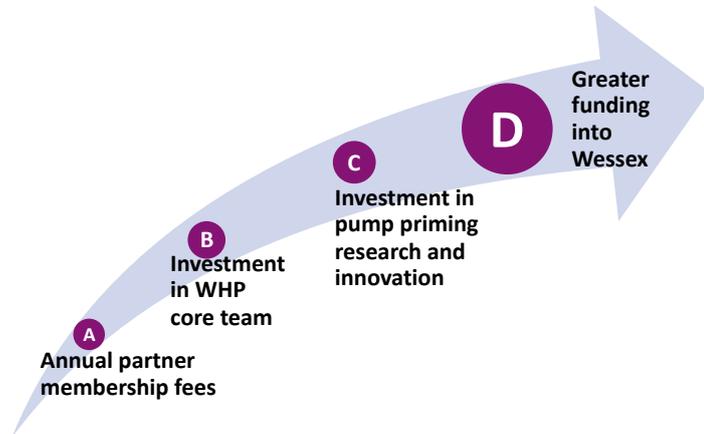
The WHP business case described the potential return on investment (ROI) by establishing the WHP strategic alliance. The potential ROI was based on evidence from the similar academic health partnerships.

At the end of 2023/24 the total WHP investment and successful grant applications confirmed a ROI of 1:15, exceeding examples from elsewhere.

Achieving a ROI of 1:15 is highly positive, however there is considerable work to be done to ensure this ROI remains consistent in future years. As detailed in the 2024/25 annual plan, this includes

further development of the culture, relationships and infrastructure that facilitate pan-Wessex collaborative research funding applications and deployment of innovations, for example:

- Cascading of opportunities and coordination of potential collaborators across the strategic alliance.
- Providing support for regional strategic bids.
- Forming of Communities of interest for future funding opportunities
- Hosting events and networking opportunities to facilitate the building of relationships and identification of potential joint ventures.



5 Strategic Workstreams

The WHP strategy has aligned the WHP activities into 5 strategic workstreams:

1. Connecting research and innovation to the health and care challenges in Wessex
2. Collaborating to increase research.
3. Systematic translation and adoption of innovation
4. Developing the workforce to discover, develop, and deploy.
5. Enhancing discoverability of information and data through our Secure Data Environment

A summary of the activities by strategic workstream, is provided in Figure 5: Summary of 2023/24 activities by strategic workstream. A detailed review of the work completed, split into the activity descriptors listed in this table, is provided in this section.

Activity 2023/24	Strategic Workstream
ICB/WHP Maximising value of research workstream	1
ICP/WHP population health need workstream	1
Wessex: System challenges / population health need event	1
WHP Academic Themes	1
Horizon scanning / funding opportunities	1,3
Discover, develop deploy (3D)	
commissioned programmes	1,2,3
response programmes	1,2,3
Convene/support pan-Wessex funding applications	1,2
Wessex Experimental Medicine Network	2
WHP Research hubs and buses	2
WHP Secure data environment	2,4
Wessex Expo event	2
Support LAs NIHR Health Determinant Research Collaboratives	2,3
Web resource of R&D capacity and capability/repository of expertise	2,3,4
Engaging industry strategy	2,3
Translation and adoption - a system approach workstream	3
Pilot approach focussed on system challenge	3
Review activities across Wessex and consider potential regional offer for:	
• Support for innovators	3,4
• R&I capacity building	4
Strategic review of Wessex REACH	4
Strategic Review of Wessex Patient Involvement Network	4
Deliver one peer review	4
Deliver SDE year 1 plan	1,2,3,4,5

Figure 5: Summary of 2023/24 activities by strategic workstream.

5.1 Connecting R&I to the health and care challenges in Wessex

Our ambition is to improve the region's collective ability to tackle the greatest challenges facing the health and care systems in Wessex. As partners, we each have knowledge and expertise which combined offers the opportunity to deliver greater impact, addressing health inequalities, improving outcomes and ensuring the quality and sustainability our future health and care services. Together, we will create an environment in which we collectively improve our knowledge and shared understanding of the challenges and align our research and innovation activities to the areas of need. We will promote a culture of collaboration across organisational boundaries and with patients and the public, supported by more systematic ways of working together to deliver impact.

5.1.1 ICB/WHP Maximising value of research workstream

The strategic alliance has established the WHP/Integrated Care Board (ICB) workstreams to scope and progress WHP role in supporting the ICBs to meet their statutory obligation to maximise the benefit of research.

The Health and Care Act 2022 (the Act) contains the biggest reforms to the NHS in nearly a decade, laying the foundations to improve health outcomes by joining up NHS, social care and public health services at a local level and tackling growing health inequalities. As part of the reforms, Integrated Care Boards have a new statutory responsibility to maximise the benefits of research. Through the strategic alliance of WHP, we are supporting NHS Dorset and HIOW ICB in their role developing thriving research and innovation ecosystems.

- The WHP core team supported NHS Dorset to develop their ICB research strategy, aligned to the WHP strategy. NHS Dorset has introduced a Strategic Objectives Oversight Committee, with representation from the WHP core team and Health Innovation Wessex, to provide assurance that the strategic aims of the NHS Dorset in relation to research and innovation are being delivered. NHS Dorset has:
 - Informed the WHP academic themes.
 - worked with the WHP core team to make new pan-Wessex connections and with wider stakeholders e.g. Ministry of Defence
 - Led and been a partner on funding applications with new Wessex partners.
 - Identified previously unknown Wessex research relevant to the NHS Dorset health and care priorities.
- The WHP core team is working HIOW ICB at a strategic level, supporting R&I conversations at ICB Board level and developing a research and innovation 'maturity matrix'. The matrix will signal expectations and support partners in HIOW ICS to develop a mature research and innovation ecosystem. More specifically, HIOW ICB has enabled the research and innovation community to join HIOW ICP assemblies and specific work streams, improving the knowledge of the R&I community on the population health need and enabling partners to explore approaches for integrating research and innovation. For example, members of the WHP core team are on the Women's Health Hub Programme Board and Working Group.

Both ICBs consulted with WHP on their 5-year Joint Forward Plans, accepting amendments to include research and innovation.

5.1.2 ICP/WHP population health need workstream

The WHP strategic alliance has worked with the HIOW and Dorset ICBs and ICPs to understand their system health and care challenges, to ensure that the work of WHP is aligned to helping to address these key priorities.

Previously there has not been a formal approach to bring researchers into the conversations setting the local strategies to address these issues. Through WHP we have started to trial different approaches to bring stakeholders together, while we jointly learn the most effective ways.

Approaches have included:

- identifying researchers whose work is aligned with the priority area, and bringing this cohort together to hear and understand the challenges being faced as well as sharing the research they are involved with (e.g. HIOW ICP Assemblies).
- making introductions between ICB leads and key academics where known research interests may inform solutions for addressing the priority (e.g. obesity in children NHS Dorset)
- completing a review of all of the research conducted in key areas of work to inform Programme Boards on the potential of research to offer some solutions to the challenges being faced by Women's Health Hubs in both HIOW and Dorset

5.1.3 Wessex: System challenges / population health need event

During the year, the WHP core team worked with partners to identify key individuals from across Wessex with expertise and interest in population health need. Subsequent to forming a steering committee, in March 2024, WHP hosted the Wessex Integrated Care, Population Health, Research and Innovation Event, bringing together academic and health and care leaders from across Wessex to understand the role of population health to prioritise the local health and care strategies and to provide research focus within Wessex. The day included an overview of the population health management tools utilised across Wessex. The event promoted a lot of discussion and networking opportunities, building relationships and enthusiasm to jointly address the local challenges across Wessex. Next steps include working with the Wessex Experimental Medicine Network/NIHR Southampton BRC, Wessex Applied Research Collaboration and stakeholders on increase the accessibility and understanding of population health intelligence to inform research and innovation.

5.1.4 WHP Academic Themes

A role of the WHP strategic alliance is to enable pan-Wessex collaboration to develop novel research or conduct research on a scale greater than would be possible for individual partners working alone. This will be achieved through the identification and allocation of support/funding in response to an open call for applications and commissioned activities within WHP Academic Themes. It is anticipated that responsive and commissioned activities will increasingly align as WHP matures.

Our academic themes seek to address:

- challenges identified by Wessex's health and care systems, and/or
- global challenges where we have particular world-leading expertise.
- utilising our academic strengths from more than one centre
- working together in collaborations that do not currently exist.

The ambition is to have national and international impact and a realistic plan to obtain external investment. Scoping followed by initial consultation completed in 2023/24 identified themes as having potential. In 2024/25, the WHP core team will support a programme of work to scope the themes in more detail, leading to the development of inter and intradisciplinary pan-Wessex collaborations, submission of funding

applications and the initiation of research activities by founding partners and wider stakeholders. The academic themes will have a research, not service design, focus.

Four draft academic themes have been agreed by the WHP Board as well as some cross-cutting themes that will be key considerations for each of the academic themes. The draft academic themes are:

Air Quality: to identify and target modifiable co-morbidities that are made worse in areas of poor air quality (e.g. respiratory disease; cardiovascular disease (particularly hypertension)).

Services Health: to address approaches to better serve serving and ex-service personnel at risk of mental illness and addictions (gambling, drugs, alcohol).

Inequalities and Multimorbidity: for populations living in areas with health inequalities. Consider approaches for those at risk of morbidity and mortality from disease caused by alcohol and / or obesity.

Genomics: work with relevant experts to develop approach using genomics to limit the adverse effects of polypharmacy in older people.

Cross-cutting themes:

Population data: to inform, design and deliver better health. Utilisation of resources available nationally and locally to understand the local population and health need.

HealthTech: to ensure latest technology is considered and appropriately included in the research undertaken.

Further consultation and scoping will take place in 2024/25.

5.1.5 Horizon Scanning / funding opportunities

In line with the WHP annual Plan during 2023/24, the WHP core team worked with teams within founding partners to explore and determine how to improve the identification of funding opportunities that might be suitable for pan-Wessex and support to teams to increase collaboration. The work delivered in 2023/24, which provides the foundation for further development, included:

- Launching the call for expressions of interest (EOI) to allocate seed funding for cross-organisational, inter-disciplinary teams to support 'discover, develop, deploy' (3D) programmes. (see section 5.2.1)
- Providing WHP support for collaborative funding applications focussed on the needs of our population e.g. NIHR Health Determinants Research Collaboratives (see section 5.2.2; 5.2.5)
- Establishing 'communities of interest' in areas identified as key priorities for the health and care system, where it is known there will be future national funding opportunities launched (see section 5.2.2)
- Establishing 'horizon scanning' process to identify and communicate funding opportunities. Where needed, convene pan-Wessex interdisciplinary teams to respond to specific calls (see section 5.2.2)

5.2 Collaborating to increase research

Funders of research, innovation and training, increasingly emphasise the importance of collaboration and impact. We will enable more deliberate and timely coordination and development of funding applications at

the level of the Wessex region and therefore access a greater range of opportunities where collaboration strengthens applications and larger population sizes are required. Our approach will harness local strengths and address clear priorities. Our cross-organisational and inter-disciplinary 3D teams with their potential to rapidly and substantially benefit local people and communities, will appeal to funding bodies. We will provide seed-funding to support growth of existing and new programmes. We will support wider stakeholders, for example, local authorities to engage in research and innovation and develop their capacity and capability.

5.2.1 Discover, develop, deploy: commissioned and response programmes

One of the key elements of the WHP Business Case was to invest in seed-funding and supporting research and innovation activities responding to the key regional challenges and opportunities. The WHP seed-funding call aims to support researcher and innovators from across Wessex to form new collaborations with colleagues in other founding partner organisations with the ambition of developing joint applications for further funding opportunities and hence bring more research and innovation investment into Wessex as well as building relationships to expand the research being carried out across Wessex. A further aim of the seed-funding call is to support the forming of new collaborations that more effectively join up the discover, develop, deploy pipeline, accelerating innovation adoption.

With the launch of the Wessex Experimental Medicine Network (see section 5.2.8) and associated increase in funding available (provided by NIHR Southampton BRC), the opportunity was taken to combine the WHP funding call with the WEMN funding call, providing a single front door for applicants followed by an internal triage process.

The pilot WHP /WEMN funding call for expressions of interest (EOIs) was launched in February 2024. Twenty-one applications were received from WHP partner organisations, meeting the deadline of 28th March 2024. All 15 founding partners were cited as collaborators in one or more of the applications, with the leads for the 21 applications coming from 7 of the WHP founding partners.

Of the 21 applications submitted, 15 applications were awarded funding whilst 6 applications were not considered suitable to WHP/WEMN funding and therefore unsuccessful.



Figure 6 below illustrates the extent of pan-Wessex collaborations identified in the EOIs recommended for award.

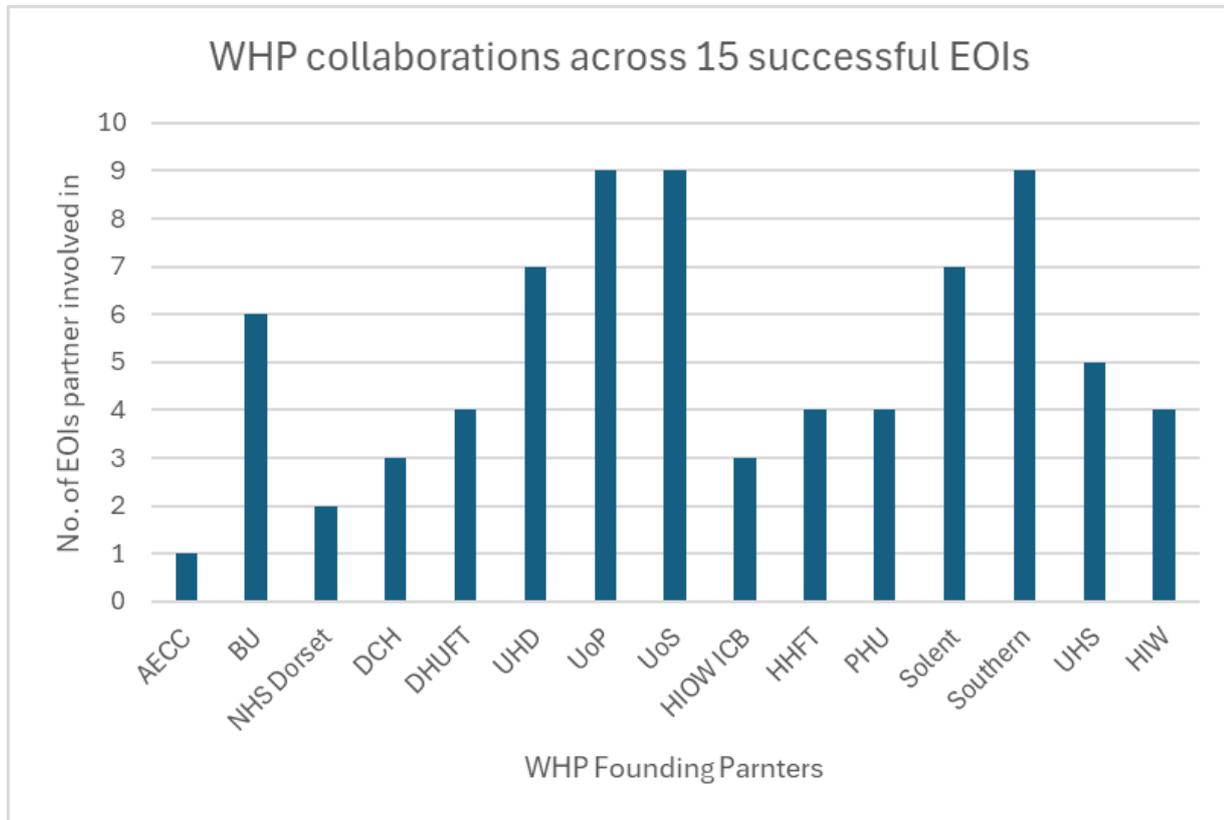


Figure 6: Extent of collaborations identified in the EOIs recommended for award 2023/24

5.2.2 Convene / support pan-Wessex funding applications

A key ambition of the WHP strategic alliance is to increase the number of successful pan-Wessex collaborative funding applications. During 2023/24, the WHP core team provided support to 36 funding application involving WHP founding partners. Of these, 32 applications were led by a WHP founding partner and 4 were led by a collaborating wider stakeholder. All WHP founding partners led or collaborated in at least 4 funding applications, Figure 7.

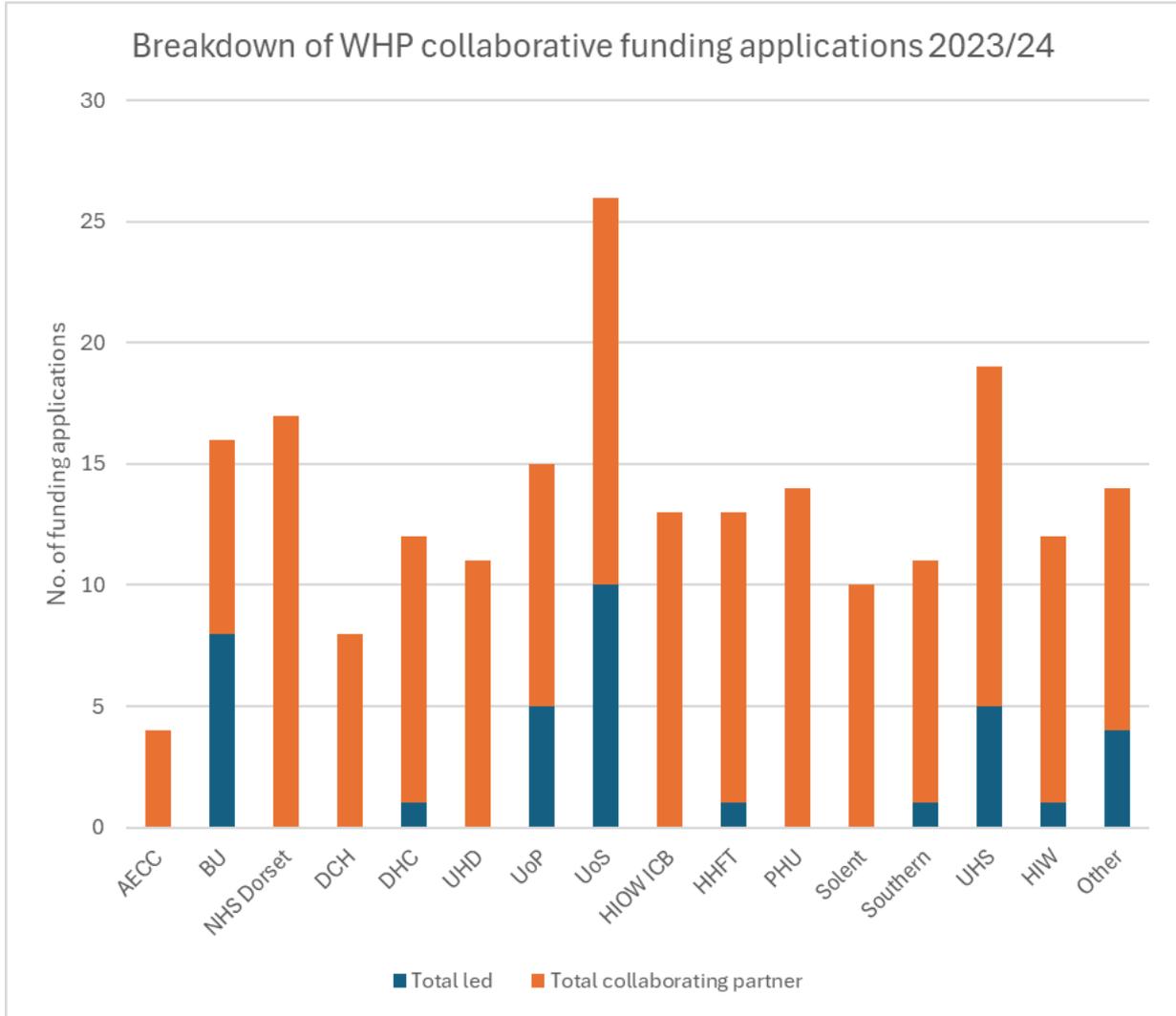


Figure 7: Breakdown of partners leading and collaborating on funding applications 2023/24

Of the 36 applications, 10 have had successful outcomes with a total funding amount of more than £22M, 6 are pending outcome of either expressions of interest (EOI) or full applications following successful EOI, 1 is still under development, 14 have been unsuccessful and 5 decided not to proceed. The status of funding applications per WHP founding partners is shown in Figure 8.

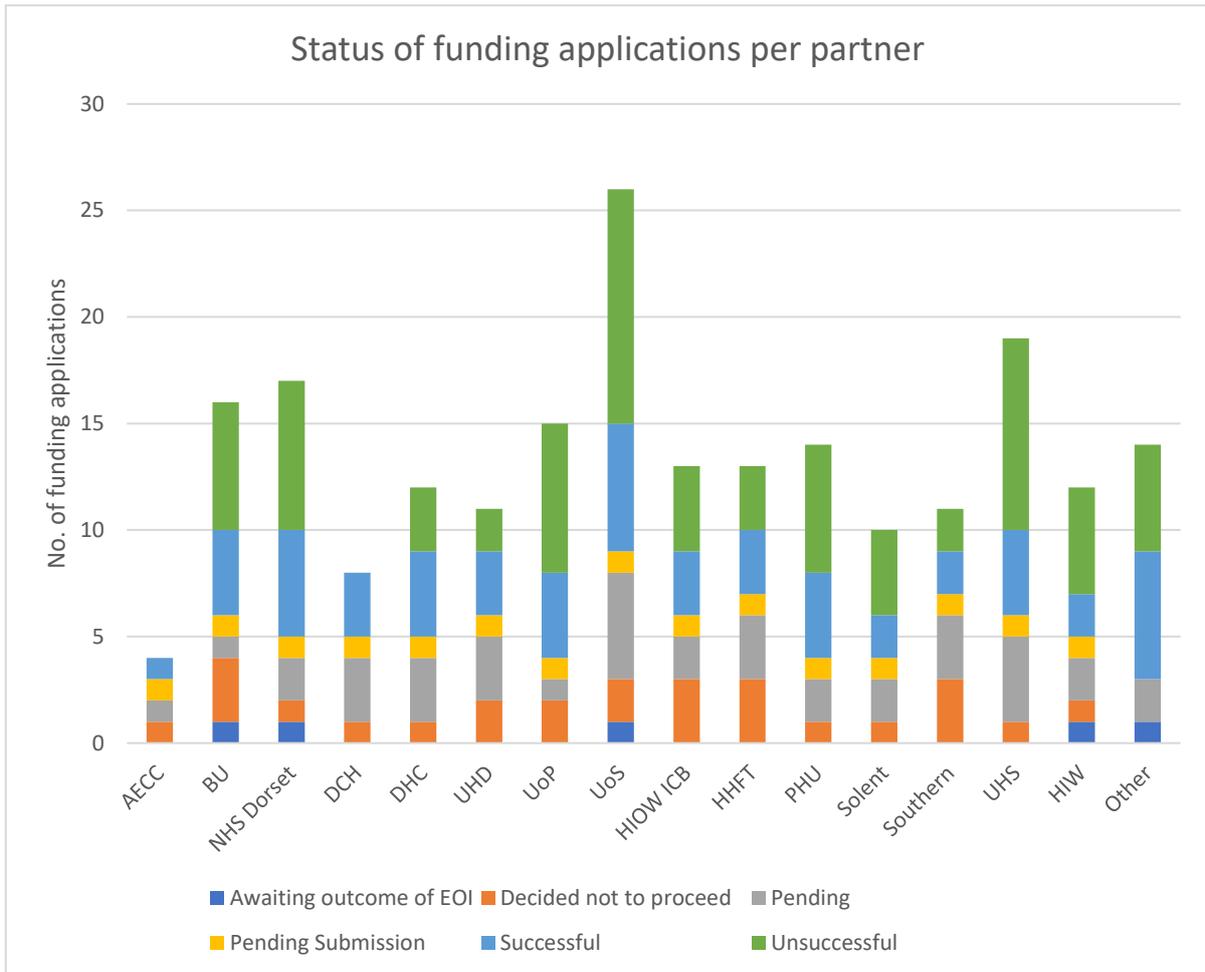


Figure 8: Status of funding application per partner

WHP has provided a range of support to these bids, depending on individual requirements. Examples of the support that has been provided include:

- Aligning potential competitors both within Wessex and external to Wessex to secure the most competitive funding application e.g. Two NIHR INSIGHT bids, NIHR RRDN hosting, NIHR Maternal Health Inequalities
- Facilitating intelligence gathering to inform major infrastructure applications e.g. NIHR Wessex ARC, NIHR RRDN
- Introducing founding partners to collaborators in other institution leading to funding applications e.g. NHS Dorset and CRUK Clinical Trials Unit
- Working with R&I leads within founding partners to shape applications e.g. Innovate UK Regulatory Science Network grant.
- Critiquing funding applications e.g. NIHR HDRCs Southampton and Portsmouth
- Providing supporting letters, submitted with funding applications, outlining the strategic alliance within Wessex, the commitment to working together to deliver research and innovation and highlighting alignment of the intent of the funding applications with the ambitions of WHP.

5.2.3 Communities of Interest

There have been a number of opportunities during the year to identify individuals with a research interest in specific topic areas, and to bring these people together to either:

- discuss the potential for developing a collaborative bid submission,
- consider future funding opportunities and jointly prepare for a collaborative approach,
- provide research knowledge and expertise to address a health and care system need.

The shape and role of these groups is developing and will vary. However, it is envisaged that they will develop into 'Communities of Interest' (COI) that will continue evolve.

Examples of work to date are outlined in the table below:

Research Topic Area	Activity
Mental Health	<p>University of Southampton (UoS) and ARC Wessex identified the NIHR Mental Health Research Group funding opportunity. As this funding was not available to organisations already significantly involved in mental health research but was looking for collaboration between organisations to develop further expertise, a meeting was held inviting partner representatives with an interest in mental health research. At this initial meeting it was agreed that Bournemouth University would apply for NIHR Mental Health Development Award funding with support from UoS and ARC Wessex. This application was not successful, but work is continuing to develop a Wessex-wide mental health COI.</p> <p>HIOW ICP also ran a Mental Wellbeing Assembly in September 2023. Through WHP joint working with the ICP the opportunity was offered to the identified mental health research community to attend this meeting to enable the researchers to better understand the challenges within the health and care system, and to consider approaches to more closely integrate research into the work of the ICP.</p> <p>As mental health and wellbeing is a key priority across both ICBs WHP is keen to continue to support the development of this Community of Interest</p>
Women's Health Hubs	<p>During 2023 NHS England has provided funding to all ICBs to set up Women's Health Hubs. Through joint working with HIOW ICB and NHS Dorset, the opportunity was Identified to bring the expertise from the research community into the discussions around this development. WHP identified academics working within the Women's Health arena and has included this emerging Community of Interest in conversations with the Women's Health programme boards.</p> <p>In response to the Women's Health programme boards, WHP has led on the development of a paper reviewing all of the women's health research that has been carried out in Wessex over the last 5 years. In parallel, HIW are reviewing innovations relevant to women's health. This work will be presented to both ICB Women's Health programme Boards in early 2024/25 with the aim of highlighting research that could influence the</p>

	work of the women’s health hubs, as well as identify areas for future research and collaborative working.
Air Quality / Net Zero	<p>WHP worked with Health Innovation Wessex (HIW) to develop a joint Net Zero funding application in August 2023. For this bid, individuals with research interests in Net Zero and healthcare were identified. With emerging funding opportunities for air quality research, these contacts were further refined to identify those with a specific interest in air quality and health. WHP working with the UoS Sustainability and Resilience Institute (SRI) held a call with these contacts to understand the potential interest of joint working to develop themes for future funding applications. This was followed up by a workshop in January where research themes and questions were identified along with commitment for future working and the forming of a COI.</p> <p>This COI, Clean Air South (currently 80 members), is now planning its ongoing activity and plans for developing collaborative funding submissions to address local priorities as opportunities arise.</p>

5.2.4 Horizon-Scanning for funding opportunities

Funders of research, innovation and training, increasingly emphasise the importance of collaboration and impact. Each WHP partner has knowledge and expertise which combined offers the opportunity to deliver greater local and global impact, address health inequalities, improve outcomes and ensure the quality and sustainability of our future health and care services and promote economic growth. As one did currently exist, it was agreed to develop a Wessex-wide approach to identify and enable more deliberate and timely coordination and development of funding applications at the level of the Wessex region and therefore access a greater range of opportunities where collaboration strengthens applications and/or larger population sizes are required.

A Horizon Scanning Group has been convened consisting of leads from each founding partner with the responsibility for carrying out horizon scanning of funding opportunities in each partner organisation. This group will meet quarterly with the focus of:

- operationalising a joint approach to identify and share funding opportunities suitable for Wessex-wide collaboration;
- identifying gaps in the funding opportunities that are currently reviewed (e.g. disease specific charities) and agree how to jointly include in the Wessex horizon scanning approach;
- understanding any infrastructure requirements for implementing the process.

5.2.5 Support Local Authorities NIHR Health Determinant Research Collaboratives

The NIHR Health Determinant Research Collaborative (HDRC) bids from both Southampton and Portsmouth were key strategic funding submissions during 2023/24. If successful, the learning from these collaborations would be key in understanding how to effectively work with local communities to understand and address local health issues. This work would also develop relationships to support future collaborative research across our communities.

The WHP Chair and Managing Director provided significant support to the development of these applications, enabling strong relationships to be built with the local authority leads for this work.

Both HDRC bids were successful, with Southampton receiving full funding and Portsmouth receiving a development grant with the aim of moving to full funding in 2025.

5.2.6 Web resource of research and development capacity and capability / repository of expertise

A key part of the WHP website is a listing of the WHP Founding Partners and links to each website to facilitate access to the detail of the strengths and offerings of each organisation.

Recognising that the strength of the WHP strategic alliance is in the depth and detail of the expertise within each organisation, and that it is this level of detail that is difficult for individuals to easily access, WHP has facilitated a number of approaches to support this need:

Requests for specific research expertise or capability sent to the WHP core team who have shared with key WHP stakeholders for wider input;

Development of contact lists for topics and communities of interest that WHP has actively worked on during the year. These contact lists have been shared within these groups to encourage cross organisation working;

Facilitation of meetings of individuals from across the WHP founding Partners to support requested input for potential collaborations.

The WHP core team has explored requests for a repository of all relevant research expertise from across Wessex. This is an extensive request considering all of the areas of expertise this would include, and the updating that would be required to keep up to date. Therefore during 2024/25, the core team aim to develop a mapping of the structures and links in each of the founding partners (and other key relevant organisations within Wessex) that can provide guidance to the relevant expertise in each organisation.

5.2.7 Engaging industry strategy

Recognising the importance of engaging industry and the overall contribution of life science research and innovation to economic growth, with 2023/24, working with HIW, the WHP SLT has engaged with the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEPs) in Wessex. Within Hampshire, WHP hosted with HIW and the M3 LEP, a workshop with a wide range of stakeholders to discuss the potential of the life sciences, and specifically human health, to economic growth within the region. The workshop established that that stakeholders are keen to work together to realise the potential, with further worked planned in 2024/25. Within Dorset, the Dorset LEP is taking forward the [OneHealth Enterprise Network](#), with representation from WHP engaged on the steering group.

In addition, the WHP SLT has linked to the CEO of Yorkshire and Humber Health Innovation Network and opened discussions to share learning and contacts to attract R&I commercial partnerships and investment, building on the already excellent innovation development and deployment work of HIW, to also include discovery research.

5.2.8 Wessex Experimental Medicine Network

The National Institute of Health and Care Research (NIHR) funds the NIHR Southampton Biomedical Research Centre (BRC) to develop and deliver experimental medicine research. NIHR are increasingly expecting BRCs

to collaborate with partners, especially organisations that do not have a BRC, and focus research on meeting the local population health need.

In 2023/24, NIHR Southampton BRC developed, with the WHP founding partners, proposals to establish the Wessex Experimental Medicine Network (WEMN). WEMN has been seen from the outset as a component of WHP, important to delivering the WHP strategic ambitions including securing future Academic Health Science Centre status. WHP and the Southampton BRC, working together will ensure the future successful delivery of the WEMN through Wessex-wide strategic collaboration and partnership working with the NIHR Southampton BRC is providing access to BRC infrastructure, expertise and pump-prime funding.

The joint WHP/WEMN funding call was launched in Q4 of 2023/24 and received 21 expressions of interest. Applications are currently being reviewed and will be notified in Q1 2024/25.

5.2.9 Wessex Research hubs and buses

The Wessex Research Hubs were established to rapidly deliver the COVID-19 vaccine research. Initially funded by NIHR and established by NIHR Wessex Clinical Research Network (CRN) the hub model has and continues to be highly successful providing a unique and attractive model for commercial and non-commercial research that is strategically important for UK life sciences research and Wessex.

With the transition from NIHR CRNs to the new NIHR Regional Research Delivery Networks, from 1st October 2024 Wessex CRN will no longer exist which put the future of the Wessex Research Hubs at risk. Given the strategic importance of the Wessex Research Hubs, members of the WHP core team have worked with colleagues across the region to agree short and medium plans for the hubs with a view to ensuring the hubs are sustainable in the longer terms including securing agreement for the Wessex Research Hubs to migrate to come under the oversight of Wessex Health Partners.

The transition to this new governance structure, facilitating oversight of the work of the Wessex Research Hubs and Buses by the WHP founding partners will take place over Q1 and Q2 for 2024/25.

5.2.10 Secure Data Environment

See section 5.6

5.2.11 Wessex Expo Event

In March 2024, WHP supported the inaugural [Responsible Innovation in Health Technology Event](#), led by the UoS in collaboration with partners in Wessex and wider stakeholders, including guest speakers from Canada. The event showcased existing expertise and potential in Wessex and provides a strong platform for future working. Early success includes securing an Innovate UK funding for Wessex to develop and lead a national HealthTech Regulatory Science Network. The successful delivery of this UKRI funded network will strengthen the region's ability to secure future funding and expand activities in research and innovation in HealthTech.

5.3 Systematic translation and adoption of innovation

The rapid and effective adoption of proven innovations at scale is a major challenge in health care. Health care is rich in evidence-based innovations, yet even when such innovations are implemented successfully in one location, they often disseminate slowly - if at all. With its core purpose of taking ownership of the 'Discovery, Development, Deployment' pathway WHP can deliver greater adoption at scale across Wessex.

5.3.1 Translation and adoption – a system approach workstream

Understanding the health and care needs and priorities, aligning these with the identification of relevant research and innovation, and providing real world evaluation and evidence for the potential benefit of these solutions is key to deliver greater adoption at scale across Wessex. The initiatives enabled by the WHP strategic alliance in 2023/24 have focussed on developing the foundations needed to increase partnership working across the ‘discover, develop, deploy’ pipeline. Of particular note is the work with the HIOW and Dorset ICBs (5.1.1 ICB/WHP Maximising value of research workstream) and wider stakeholders in the ICP (5.1.2 ICP/WHP population health need workstream) including local authorities and local enterprise partnerships (5.2.7 Engaging industry strategy).

The WHP support of external funding applications and the WHP pump-prime funding call are enhancing existing and providing new opportunities for collaboration between our discovery and development activities to deployment (the 3Ds) (5.2.1 Discover, develop, deploy: commissioned and response programmes, 5.2.2 Convene / support pan-Wessex funding applications) and our Communities of Interest span the ‘3Ds’ (5.2.3 Communities of Interest).

Delivery of the Wessex Secure Data Environment (SDE) as part of the National SDE is an important initiative to support expansion of Real World Evaluation studies, conducted by HIW and other WHP founding partners (5.6.1 Deliver SDE year 1 plan).

Of particular importance is our response to the national NHS Innovation Ecosystem Review. Commissioned by the CEO of NHS England, Amanda Pritchard and Chaired by Roland Sinker CBE, CEO of Cambridge University Hospitals NHS FT, the Sinker review is seeking to address ongoing challenges in the adoption and spread of innovation and drive improvements in the health innovation ecosystem. With HIW, the WHP SLT has contributed to the review through workshops, submission of a localities review in response to a call and direct communication with the Chair, promoting our WHP strategic alliance approach and prompting direct engagement with the national team. As the review continues, we continue the dialogue with the national team, raising the profile and reputation of Wessex with the aim of securing increased national support and funding.

5.4 Developing the workforce to discover, develop and deploy

Workforce challenges are prevalent across the health and care in Wessex and globally. Organisations that empower and support their workforce to engage in research, innovation and training attract and retain staff and deliver better outcomes. Our future workforce will require very different knowledge and skills to discover, develop and deliver innovative health and care services. WHP will work with partners to understand the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required across Wessex, the current training provision and develop collaborations to expand and enhance the offer.

5.4.1 Review activities across Wessex and consider potential regional offer for: support to innovators; Research and innovation capacity building

During the year, the WHP core team has supported a number of Wessex-wide workshops and training sessions focussed on developing the research and innovation community including two ‘*Understanding Intellectual Property to Create Health Impact*’ events led by our partners, Health Innovation Wessex.

5.4.2 Strategic review of Wessex REACH

With the NIHR incubator funding for Wessex REACH coming to an end in December 2023, the WHP Board commissioned a strategic review of Wessex REACH and other national or Wessex-based resources supporting the development of health and care research capability and capacity. As well as reviewing the work of the Wessex REACH incubator against the proposal that NIHR funding had been provided for, a second part of this strategic review was to understand the research workforce challenges that NHS Trust organisations are experiencing across Wessex to understand the support and infrastructure required across Wessex to address these needs. To understand these research workforce challenges, all Wessex NHS Trust R&D leads were invited to take part in interview to understand:

- The research workforce challenges in their Trust
- Where they currently go for support / gaps
- What they would like to see in the future

A report was produced (Wessex REACH and wider Review Report) which outlined the outputs of this review and made recommendations for the support required to develop the capacity and capability of the research workforce across Wessex. These recommendations considered the current and planned services and support provided both nationally and within Wessex, new structures providing support that are planned to be implemented over the next six months, and potential gaps in the current and planned provision.

Five key recommendations were made in the report. These recommendations consider all individuals who are interested in developing knowledge and skills to enable them to conduct research within the health and care setting, or in following an academic career, initially as an early career researcher (ECR). There are no limits to the settings included (e.g. acute hospitals, community care, primary care, social care, voluntary sector) or the profession (e.g. doctors, nurses, pharmacists, allied health professionals, clinical scientists, methodologists, data scientists etc).



Topic	Recommendation
To increase research championship by NHS executive teams	Prepare the case to support embedding research in the NHS. WHP to support R&D leads to run campaign with leadership teams to raise awareness about the benefits of research participation: improved quality of care; better recruitment and retention; increased financial income
For those individuals who want to do research as part of their role	Provide signposting to existing materials and courses and new structures being developed. For example: NIHR: API scheme, PIPP scheme, Credential, NIHR Learn courses (e.g. GCP training and others), Local Infrastructure: e.g. Trust R&D departments, RRDN, RRLO, ARC Wessex, BRC Local organisations: courses run across Wessex NHS and HEIs
For those individuals who want to pursue an academic career	Wessex-wide approach to identify potential candidates for development to an academic career (NIHR Academy offering) Signposting to development and funding opportunities Potential to provide offering like SOAR across Wessex if funding available
To support all organisations to become research active	Develop and encourage approach to encourage mentoring between organisations and individuals across Wessex to develop research participation in currently underserved organisations
Communications and signposting	Signposting to research training and development sources and opportunities. Development and ongoing maintenance would need funding and resourcing

These recommendations will be considered as part of the WHP 2024/25 annual planning process, and plans for progressing across Wessex made with the WHP partners and related infrastructure. In the short term the Wessex REACH website will be reviewed by the WHP core team with key elements to be retained and made available across Wessex. Longer term plans are dependent on emerging national changes being driven by NIHR through the new Regional Research Delivery Networks.

5.5 Strategic review of Wessex Patient Improvement Network

WHP supported a strategic review, with the Wessex NIHR Directors, of the Wessex Public Involvement Network (Wessex PIN). Historically founded by the Wessex NIHR Directors Wessex PIN is a network of Patient and Public Involvement and Engagement professionals. The network has plans to continue and is linked in with similar groups across Wessex. Wessex NIHR Directors have indicated that they would consider an application from Wessex PIN for continued funding. Wessex NIHR Directors are also considering what the NIHR infrastructure needs going forward.

5.5.1 Deliver one peer review

One of the WHP founding partners expressed interest in commissioning an external peer review, of their R&D function to share learning and support development. This was also of interest to other founding partners. The organisation subsequently requested that the review be delayed until 2024/25 to allow the recruitment of key resource to take place.

5.6 Enhancing the discoverability of information and data

The Wessex Secure Data Environment (SDE) forms part of the Southern Collaborative SDE (SNSDE) and will provide a secure infrastructure for researchers in the NHS and our regional partners, enabling access

integrated multi-modal data from various sources, including electronic health records, imaging, pathology, genomics, and research cohorts. The SDE will make data more accessible, less fragmented, and of higher quality, while also gaining public and patient support for health data research.

5.6.1 Deliver SDE year 1 plan

SDE phase three funding was agreed, and the memorandum of understanding signed with NHS England. This allowed budget to be released for the year 1 plan to be delivered (2023/24) and plans to be developed for year 2 (2024/25).

The SDE team has worked with WHP founding partners to identify regional data assets and to map priority datasets to be included in the early SDE development work. The proof-of-concept build has been successfully completed, and a pilot run between UHS and UoS. Exemplar research projects have been identified to be included in the SDE during 2024/25.

A key element of the SDE programme is a stakeholder and public engagement programme.

The Wessex SDE programme is working closely with the SDE national programme and is part of a Southern SDE Consortium to develop common approaches and processes.

6 WHP Governance and Operational Structure

A key deliverable of 2023/24 was to secure approval of the 15 founding partners to a single collaboration agreement. This was achieved and all founding partners have now signed the agreement which covers the first 3-year funding period, ending on 31st March 2025.

The WHP governance structure has been established in accordance with the collaboration agreement. The operational structure necessary to deliver 2023/24 plans has also been established and will evolve as programmes develop.

- The Terms of Reference were agreed, and regular meetings established for the WHP Board and WHP Steering Group.
- All founding partners are represented by a member of their Executive Team (or delegate) on the WHP Board.
- The WHP Steering Group includes representation from senior members of their respective leadership teams responsible for research and/or innovation, as well as representatives from Wessex NIHR and other research and innovation infrastructure in the region.
- Governance arrangements for Wessex wide programmes that come under WHP oversight will continue to develop in line with the programmes. To date arrangements for the Wessex Secure Data Environment [SDE] have been agreed and established as were the arrangements for the time limited Wessex REACH review. The Wessex Experimental Medicine Network [WEMN] are agreed in principal and in the process of being operationalised as staff come into post. The transition arrangements for the Wessex Research Hubs are agreed.

In addition, members of the WHP SLT represent the WHP strategic alliance on a number of Boards and Steering Committees of partner organisations aligned to the strategic ambitions of WHP.

Examples include:

- Health Innovation Wessex Board (non-voting)
- NIHR Wessex ARC Partnership Board
- NIHR Wessex CRN Partnership Board
- NIHR Wessex CRN Executive Group
- Wessex Research Hubs Board
- Wessex NIHR Director's (Chair)
- Wessex R&D Leadership Group
- Wessex Experimental Medicine Network Steering Committee
- NHS Dorset Strategic Objectives Committee
- Dorset OneHeath Network Steering Group
- Clean Air South Steering Group
- HIOW ICB Strategy Leads
- HIOW Women's Health Programme Board (HIW represent WHP on equivalent Board in Dorset)
- UoP/PHU/UoS/UHS HealthTech Board
- Pharma Contract Management Group (PCMG) Assembly Steering Committee

7 Business Support, Communications and Finance Functions

The business support, including finance and communications, functions are provided to WHP under a service level agreement with Health Innovation Wessex (HIW).

As legal hosts of WHP, the HIW corporate policies and procedures have been reviewed and where applicable adopted unchanged. Policies and procedures in need of amendment are in the process of being updated.

7.1 Communications

A full review of the communications activities is provided in the WHP Communications Annual Review available separately. Key highlights include:

- Visiting all founding partner sites
- Convening founding partner and R&I communications leads for a series of planning and strategy meetings to introduce WHP, develop relationships and co-produce communication plans and outputs.
- Developing strategic communications goals as well the WHP communications plan for delivery in 2024/25.
- Developing and launching the WHP website, achieving 4,904 page views
- Commissioning a brand strategy review and commencing work to take forward the findings and recommendations.
- Promoting the work of the WHP strategic alliance and its founding partners across a range of channels, including social media, newsletters, regional media and events.
- Representing WHP at national and international events and research steering committees.

8 Risks and Issues

The key risks, mitigations and risk levels are provided below.

Risk description:	WHP fails to demonstrate sufficient impact and value to partners
Mitigation:	The annual plan for 2024/25 will be agreed by the WHP Board by the start of Q1 2024/25. Delivery of the annual plans will be overseen by the WHP steering committee and WHP Board. An annual review will be presented to the WHP steering committee and Board annually and the end of each financial year. Evaluation of the impact of the first three-year period for WHP will be presented to the WHP Board in Q2 2024/25.
Risk level, with mitigation	Low

Risk description:	Due to ICS and health and care system workload pressures and funding constraints, some partners are not able to fully engage with and support the work of WHP
Mitigation:	The annual plan for WHP is structured to ensure that is aligned with and supports the requirements and priorities of the ICSs and the wider health and care system.
Risk level, with mitigation	Low

Risk description:	In order to maximise the potential impact of the WHP strategic alliance, The small WHP SLT represent the WHP strategic alliance on a number of Boards and Steering Committees of partner organisations aligned to the strategic ambitions of WHP. There is a risk that the WHP SLT is spread too thin to be able to represent as broadly as would be optimal
Mitigation:	The role of WHP SLT member on boards and steering committees across Wessex is prioritised to where the greatest support and impact will be realised.
Risk level, with mitigation	Medium

Risk description:	WHP fails to secure funding for a 2 nd term
Mitigation:	An options paper will be presented to WHP Board by the beginning of Q2 in 2024/25 with a decision requested from founding partners by the end of Q2.
Risk level, with mitigation	Medium