

Frequently asked questions

Improvement research institute

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The Health Foundation

Tel 020 7257 8000

www.health.org.uk

Background

1. Why is the Health Foundation funding an improvement research institute?

Improving the quality of health care in a complicated, pressurised and ever-changing environment requires extraordinary commitment and skill. Improvement research has a critical role to play by helping front line staff, patients and carers identify, design, implement, test and modify improvements on a much wider scale. It also has a key role in developing more widespread and deeper understanding of how sustainable and replicable improvements to the quality of patient care can be made more effectively and faster.

Since 2010 the Health Foundation has been investing in and promoting improvement science, including through building an expert international group and funding fellowships, studentships and professorial chairs, and funding research. The work of those we are supporting has improved care and altered national policy.

The Health Foundation is building on its investment in the field to establish an improvement research institute that will develop evidence on a massive scale across the NHS about what works to improve patient care.

2. How does the improvement research institute fit with the Foundation's wider work?

Funding the new institute is part of the Foundation's ongoing charitable work to bring about better health and health care for people in the UK. The significant investment the Health Foundation is making in creating an improvement research institute demonstrates our commitment to building this academic field.

As well as supporting development of the new institute the Health Foundation is continuing to support health care improvement, including by:

- Connecting people across the UK with improvement expertise through our Q Initiative with NHS Improvement and accelerating solutions to complex common problems through our Q Improvement Labs
- Developing and testing modern improvement approaches through our improvement programmes and linked research
- Building skills through our fellowship programmes
- Building analytical capability, for example by providing rapid feedback on progress to local health initiatives through our Improvement Analytics Unit - a partnership with NHS England.

3. Why 'improvement research' and not 'improvement science'?

The Health Foundation's early initiatives in this field were described as 'improvement science' – a term that successfully encouraged academic disciplines to come together to pursue structured approaches to quality improvement. As the field has evolved, so has our thinking. The term 'science' has been seen by some to limit the disciplines that can generate knowledge and understanding. We have therefore moved to the more inclusive term 'improvement research'.

4. How was a host university for the institute selected?

There were three stages to the application process which was based on the processes used by the Medical Research Council and the Wellcome Trust and endorsed by a steering group (members are listed in question 10).

The three stages were:

1. An initial expression of interest in the form of a short letter setting out the vision and ambition of the host, accompanied by the CV of the proposed director and a letter of endorsement and commitment from the host institution.
2. A stage 2 application form with further detail
3. A stage 3 application form augmented by site visits and interviews with more detail.

The improvement research institute secretariat, Nick Barber and Anne Bowers, met with the Wellcome Trust to glean insight and advice, and was given access to the forms and guidance associated with each stage.

A summary of the three stage selection process, timings and outcomes for each stage of the process are in the table below:

Stage	Timeline	Process for progression to the next stage	Outcome and decision
<i>Stage one: expression of interest</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invitation launched 2 June 2016 • Deadline midday, 15 July 2016 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review by a panel of senior Health Foundation staff and external experts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 16 expressions of interest were received and reviewed. The decision was made to take four applications to the next stage of the process.
<i>Stage two: preliminary proposals</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outcome of stage one and invitation to submit preliminary proposals circulated 5 August 2016 • Deadline midday, 7 October 2016 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review by a panel of senior Health Foundation staff and external experts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On 5 August the Health Foundation shared the outcome of stage one and issued invitations to four successful applicants to submit preliminary proposals by midday, 7 October. • Notes for applicants and an application form were prepared for those invited to participate in stage two of the selection process. All stage two applicants were invited to attend an information event on 7 September 2016.

<i>Stage three: final proposals</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outcome of stage two and invitation to submit final proposals circulated 28 October 2016 • Deadline midday, 15 February 2017 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review by a panel of senior Health Foundation staff and external experts • External peer review of applications • Interview with panel including the Health Foundation and external experts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On 7 November the Health Foundation shared the outcome of stage two with applicants and invited a single preferred applicant to submit their final proposal in January 2017. This preferred applicant is working in partnership with other universities and organisations to shape a final proposal
<i>Final decision</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicated 28 March 2017 	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On 27 March the Health Foundation selected the University of Cambridge to establish and run the institute.

9. What were the eligibility criteria?

Applications were open to UK universities who could evidence through the selection process that they could provide:

- a sector-leading outstanding director with a world-class research track record
- a research vision that responds to real and pressing needs of the UK's health system and people using it
- a plan to realise that vision
- an outstanding research environment
- a strong track record in managing fellowships or similar at pre- and post-doctoral level
- a commitment to patient and public engagement
- an approach to translation and impact built on strong established relationships with a range of health care providers
- a strong understanding of the UK health system
- a clear plan for forming constructive relationships with partners and collaborators and a strong vision for collaboration with others once formed
- a well-defined physical entity to house an institute, in at least one organisation
- resources the university will commit to an institute.

10. Who was involved in the Health Foundation's decision about which university will lead an institute?

The decision about which university and director were selected to host the institute was taken by a steering group acting on advice from an expert selection panel and peer reviewers. The secretariat, which comprised Professor Nick Barber and Anne Bowers, supported the process but were involved in the decision.

The steering group members were:

- Chair, Melloney Poole, The Health Foundation Board of Governors
- Dr Jennifer Dixon, Chief Executive, The Health Foundation

- Bridget McIntyre, Governor, The Health Foundation
- Will Warburton, Director of Improvement, The Health Foundation
- Bruce Minty, Chief Operating Officer, Medical Research Council
- Secretariat: Professor Nick Barber and Anne Bowers

The selection panel members were:

- Professor Stephen Holgate, Medical Research Council Clinical Professor of Immunopharmacology Southampton University
- Professor Boel Andersson Gäre, Director of Futurum, the Department of clinical research and education in Jönköping County Council, Sweden. Professor and director of R&D at the Jönköping Academy for Improvement of Health and Welfare
- Professor Paul Batalden, Professor Emeritus of Pediatrics, Community and Family Medicine and the Dartmouth Institute for Health Policy and Clinical Practice at The Geisel School of Medicine at Dartmouth College and Guest Professor of Quality Improvement and Leadership at Jönköping University in Sweden.
- Melloney Poole, OBE, Deputy Chair of the Health Foundation Board of Governors
- Dr Jennifer Dixon, Chief Executive, The Health Foundation
- Will Warburton, Director of Improvement, The Health Foundation
- Helen Crisp, Assistant Director, Research, The Health Foundation

11. Why was the University of Cambridge selected to establish and run the institute?

The University of Cambridge's bid was unanimously felt to be outstanding with a clear, creative and convincing vision that reflected the scale of ambition envisaged by the Health Foundation and wider improvement community. The application is headed by one of the leading international researchers in the field and has a powerful coalition of partners including strong co-production with the health sector, patients and the public.

12. How will the Health Foundation support the institute?

The Health Foundation will provide in the region of £40 million of funding over a period of 10 years to support establishment and development of an institute. This funding reflects the scale and scope of the ambition of the application made by the University of Cambridge and their partners. During the next 10 years the institute will be expected to raise its own funds and become self-sustaining.

13. What does the creation of the institute mean for current Improvement Science Fellows?

The Health Foundation will continue to support its current Improvement Science Fellows who will continue to receive expert advice, support and mentoring during their fellowship. The institute will be working with a wide range of partners from academia, the NHS and beyond, and we anticipate that its development will provide Improvement Science Fellows with many opportunities.

14. When will the improvement research institute start its work?

Over the coming months a team led by Mary Dixon-Woods will begin setting up the institute,

with a view to launching formally within the next year.

15. How can I get involved and who should I contact to find out more?

At this early stage in the institute's development the University of Cambridge is not yet able to respond to enquiries about the fellowship programme, and, as the institute will not be a grant-giving body, they will not be in a position to accept enquiries about funding for individual research projects.

For regular updates about the institute's development, please register at www.health.org.uk/institute