



Department
of Health &
Social Care

*Professor Lucy Chappell,
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Via Email to Sarah Owen MP
Chair, Women & Equalities Committee

22nd June 2026

Dear Sarah,

Thank you for your invitation to give evidence to the Women & Equalities Committee on 1st July regarding research on reconstructive surgery for FGM survivors.

As you know, through our National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR), we launched a call for research on the effectiveness of reconstructive surgery for FGM survivors in November 2025. While we received two applications to this call, our independent funding committee recommended in May that neither application was ready for funding at that time. This is a complex area to conduct research, and it is important that the research we fund is feasible, robust, and will deliver impact for patients, particularly ensuring that we work with the communities most affected.

We strongly recognise the importance of addressing the Committee's recommendation for further research in this area, and we remain committed to fund research on this topic. In order to undertake this in the most efficient and effective way, we are now undertaking activity to support and work with these applicants in resubmitting high-quality applications to this call. This includes holding a workshop on 25th June to provide methodological and technical advice to both teams on the design of their studies. We are also providing support through our NIHR Research Support Service to help the teams in developing their revised applications.

This is additional to our usual approach for managing unsuccessful applications, but is based on our previous experience of working with applicants to enable a better quality application (and bringing teams together where possible to utilise all the skills and expertise of researchers across the country), rather than forcing a single application through funding routes where considerable amounts of work need to be done subsequently to address the research gap that you previously outlined.



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We hope you are reassured that we are taking swift action to support the researchers in this matter. While we will not be able to share any further updates publicly at this time, I will commit to providing a written update after the applicant workshop when we will have a revised timeline for commissioning the research.

Yours sincerely,

Prof. Lucy Chappell

DHSC Chief Scientific Adviser and NIHR Chief Executive Officer