



Department
of Health &
Social Care

From the Lord Bethell
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Name: Petitions Committee

By email to: petitionscommittee@parliament.uk

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Dear Petitions Committee,

It will be a pleasure to discuss brain tumour and childhood cancer research with you on Thursday 29th April. Thank you for all your work in highlighting this important area.

I agree with your suggested way forward that the session will be more productive if NIHR was to provide written evidence ahead of the evidence session. The written evidence is set out below.

Request for written evidence

- 1. Can you provide an update on how much of the £40m of funding protected for brain tumour research over the 5 years from May 2018 has been allocated to date? How do you plan to ensure the full £40m is allocated by the end of the 5-year period?**

Since May 2018, the NIHR has committed approximately £8.8 million to directly funded brain tumour research in addition to the brain tumour research that the NIHR was already funding.

This figure is based on NIHR Programmes and Academy spend. This does not include NIHR Infrastructure spend, which is crucial to enable research delivery in the health and care system. When Infrastructure spend is added, we are confident spend will be significantly higher.

Health Minister Lord Bethell updated on the funding recently during a House of Lords debate on brain tumours on Tuesday 19 January 2021 where he said: “...*although the £40 million for brain tumour research has not all been allocated yet, it is not going anywhere and we are working as hard as possible to ensure that the right kinds of research project are put forward for that money.*” Lord Bethell also went on to say that he would like to see it all allocated as soon as possible.

The NIHR does not ring-fence funding for specific disease areas. The level of research spend in a particular area, such as brain tumours, will depend on the number and scale of successful funding applications.

- 2. Of the portion of the £40m allocated to date, how is this broken down across basic, translational and clinical research, and/or support for research infrastructure? Does NIHR have a view on an optimal split of brain tumour research funding across these areas?**

The NIHR funds health and care research, including translational and clinical research. The NIHR also funds the infrastructure in the health and care system that is needed to deliver this NIHR-funded research plus the research funded by the NIHR's non-commercial funding partners such as charities. Basic research is more the remit of UKRI.

The NIHR does not have a view on an optimal split across these areas. However, new discoveries from basic science are much-needed. The NIHR stands ready to translate these new discoveries, as soon as they arise, as quickly as possible into new treatments and diagnostics for patients.

- 3. What assessment have you made of the impact of the £40m, and the 2018 highlight notice for brain tumour research, in promoting new high-quality funding applications for brain tumour research? Has there been an increase in the annual number of research funding applications a) received, and b) awarded, since 2018?**

The NIHR has received a substantial increase in brain tumour research applications since the April 2018 Highlight Notice. In the three financial years prior to April 2018 the NIHR received 34 brain tumour applications, five of which were successful, and one of which was withdrawn. In the three financial years since April 2018 the NIHR received 69 applications, 10 of which have already been successful, and a further seven are under consideration.

- 4. What role do measures of unmet need and life years lost play in determining the overall division of NIHR's research spending across different cancer types and other disease areas, and/or the outcome of individual funding applications? How do these interact with factors such as value for money and scientific quality?**

Applications to the NIHR are subject to peer review and judged in open competition, with awards being made on the basis of the importance of the topic to patients and health and care services, scientific quality, and value for money.

- 5. What steps are you taking to ensure data on NIHR cancer research spending is easily accessible to the public, including (where possible) broken down by cancer type and sub-type, as well as type of research?**

The NIHR Funding and Awards website (<https://fundingawards.nihr.ac.uk>)

provides a platform for the public to search and analyse information on NIHR supported activity in health and care research, including expenditure and research findings.

NIHR research relevant to brain tumours covers a broad range of areas. The NIHR Dissemination Centre makes NIHR research findings available via the NIHR Journals

Library (<https://www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk/#/>), and via NIHR Evidence (www.evidence.nihr.ac.uk).

6. Are there any other points relating to NIHR's activity on brain tumour and childhood cancer research which you would like to draw the Committee's attention to?

- The recent designation of Tessa Jowell Centres of Excellence will be a major step forwards in enhancing both treatment and research for people with brain cancer. Its mission is to unite professional, patient, charity and Government groups to share information, and establish transformative programmes that will lead ultimately to a cure for brain tumours.
- We are working with the Tessa Jowell Brain Cancer Mission towards funding workshops for previously unsuccessful researchers to support them in submitting higher quality research applications.
- The NIHR is working with the new Tessa Jowell Centres of Excellence on the research training component of a one-year curriculum to train specialist brain tumour oncologists.
- The launch of the Tessa Jowell BRAIN MATRIX, which will ensure that this trials platform is delivered efficiently and effectively. Relevant NIHR Programmes encourage applications for research through the platform.
- NIHR has recently begun engaging with UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) colleagues, as they hold the Government budgets and levers in the basic science space – as contrasted with the NIHR which works in the translational, clinical and applied space. We have had some positive discussions with UKRI colleagues, with more planned in the future. It is hoped that these discussions will help shape the future direction of our activity.
- The NIHR Research Design Service offers expert advice and support to help researchers develop the best possible application for funding.
- The NIHR funds childhood cancer research across its whole remit from early translation and experimental medicine research through clinical and on to applied health and social care research.
- Specific examples include the early-phase studies supported by the Experimental Cancer Medicine Centre (ECMC) Paediatric Network that the NIHR funds in partnership with Cancer Research UK and Scotland, and the later-phase childhood cancer studies supported by the NIHR Clinical Research Network.

With my very best wishes,



LORD BETHELL