

# Our Research Plan

2025-30



**Improving care,  
transforming lives...for a better Bolton**

## Executive Summary

As the Medical Director and Chief Nurse, we recognise the importance of fostering a culture of research in Bolton.

We are proud to have a dedicated research team working to ensure that our patients are able to benefit from evidence based care.

This plan outlines our commitment to further integrating research into our care. We know it has the ability to improve outcomes and optimise our ability to meet the needs of our local people - both now, and in the future.

By translating scientific discoveries into tangible healthcare practices, research empowers clinicians to deliver care that is not only informed by the latest evidence, but also tailored to the unique needs of the populations we serve.

To be able to achieve this and consistently provide the high quality care our communities deserve, we know that we need to continue to push boundaries by embracing technology, research and innovation to transform health and care.

It is within our gift to ensure that nursing, allied health professional and midwifery teams learn from our medical colleagues and work together to identify opportunities for research across all areas of the care we provide.

We hope that the contents of our plan inspire you to be curious about how you and your service can embrace research, so we can work together to bridge the gap between innovative research

With best wishes,

**Dr Francis Andrews**

Medical Director

**Tyrone Roberts**

Chief Nurse



## Why we do research

Research plays a crucial role in improving health and wellbeing. It supports independence and reduces health inequalities by finding new treatments and developing innovative ways of working. Our goal is to achieve the best possible outcomes for our patients and service users.

The NHS Constitution gives every patient the right to be informed about research studies they may be eligible to take part in. Research doesn't just benefit science, it has a measurable, positive impact on patient care and outcomes.

Evidence shows that research-active hospitals consistently perform better. They have lower mortality rates, improved clinical outcomes, and higher levels of patient satisfaction. Patients treated in these settings also report greater confidence in staff and feel better informed about their condition and treatment (Jonker et al., 2019).

In 2021, the policy paper "Saving and Improving Lives: The Future of UK Clinical Research Delivery" was published. It clearly states that research is the single most important way of improving healthcare. By embedding clinical research at the heart of patient care, making participation as easy as possible, and ensuring all health and care colleagues feel empowered to support research, we can make significant strides in healthcare improvement.

Research is core to the NHS Principles of maintaining the highest standards of excellence. As an organisation characterised by the pursuit of excellence in healthcare, it is our ambition to increase the profile, quality, and quantity of clinical research. We aim to embed a strong culture of research, making it accessible to everyone.

The benefits of research in the NHS are well documented:

- Patients benefit from earlier access to new treatments and technologies.
- The NHS benefits from the latest evidence on new treatments, processes and cost effectiveness.
- Staff have increased job satisfaction and NHS employers can improve recruitment and retention when staff are enabled to be involved in research.
- The NHS generates income from commercial clinical trial activity, which provides the opportunity for further research, improvements and innovation.

Research provides us with the opportunity to address some of our key challenges, enabling better outcomes through advances in diagnosis and treatment, taking a proactive approach to prevention, and delivering transformative change to our health care pathways.

## Background

The NIHR support our organisation to deliver high quality research, and the five themes of their Research Inclusion Strategy are reflected in our own priorities.



As a Trust, we work in close partnership with the NIHR Regional Research Delivery Network, North West (NIHR RRDN NW), who provide us with funding, training and practical support for the delivery of high quality, inclusive research, helping research to grow from formulating a research question to NIHR Portfolio adoption.

Research activity at the Trust has gone from strength to strength over the past five years, and we have exceeded NIHR targets for the recruitment of participants into research year on year.

Our research portfolio balances a good mix of interventional and observational studies across key research active areas, in line with both local and national health priorities.

## What we have done well

Over the past five years:

- 12,820 participants have taken part in research across 140 NIHR Portfolio Studies.
- We received special recognition from Prof Callum Semple OBE, for our research response to the Covid-19 pandemic, and were instrumental in the delivery of urgent public health studies and identifying the Delta variant of the virus.
- We were named the highest recruiting site in the county for an innovative commercial study using a urine test to support the diagnosis of womb cancers.
- We have sponsored and delivered our first 'home grown' NIHR Portfolio adopted, multi-site clinical research trial. The remote monitoring for prostate cancer study looks to prove that patients are able to safely take their own finger-prick blood samples at home for prostate-specific antigen (PSA) monitoring.
- We recruited the first global patient to a commercial NIHR adopted clinical trial/ IBD research.
- In 2024-2025 we recruited 6,462 participants into 57 research trials, across 26 different clinical specialties, making us the 4th highest recruiting site in the North West of England, and the highest recruiting single hospital site.
- We have delivered a balanced portfolio of interventional and observation trials across a wide range of specialties - 54%/56% in 2024/25.

## Highest recruiting trust in country for innovative womb cancer study



Our Trust was the highest recruiting site in the country for an innovative study that uses a urine test to support with the diagnosis of womb cancers.

Research Delivery teams at the Trust have supported 499 people in and around Bolton to take part in the NIHR portfolio trial, called the MCM5-UTERINE study, which focuses on diagnosing endometrial cancer.

The endometrium is the lining of the womb and, according to Cancer Research UK, is the fourth most common cancer in women in the UK.

The MCM5 study aims to determine whether looking at a protein found in urine could help diagnose womb cancer, as an additional diagnostic test alongside scans, biopsies and blood tests that are currently available. Find out more on [our website](#).

### Research roles and responsibilities

Our Medical Director is the Executive Lead for Research across the organisation, supported by the Deputy MD who acts as chair to the Research Committee and represents the Trust on the NIHR RRDN NW Partnership board.

Clinical divisional research leads provide a link between the Research Committee and the Trust's clinical divisions, supporting research activity across their clinical areas.

The Research Committee is held quarterly, its key purpose to support the delivery and performance of the Trust Research Plan. The Research Committee reports into the Clinical Effectiveness Group, which feeds into the Trust Clinical Governance and Quality Committee for assurance.

The Trust Research Department includes the Trust's R&D Team and the Research Delivery Team, led by the Head of Research. The Research Department sits within the Medical Director's Office.

Our R&D team ensures that all research undertaken within the Trust meets the required regulatory and ethical standards. They provide advice and guidance on research processes from research question to publication. The R&D team also:

- Review and confirm feasibility of all new research.
- Assess and confirm local capacity and capability to deliver each new study, as part of the national Health Research Authority (HRA) study approval process.
- Provide contractual review and oversight for research studies.
- Provide costing reviews for research using ACCORD and actively manage research funding arrangements.
- Manage the performance of research trials.
- Develop research infrastructure, and ensure capacity and capability to deliver.
- Encourage and build on research partnerships.

The Research Delivery Team works alongside the R&D team to support the safe and effective delivery of research activity across the Trust and our local community.

Our team of experienced Research Nurses, Practitioners and Administrators, are funded through the NIHR to support and deliver NIHR Portfolio Research. The team work as an integral part of the clinical multidisciplinary team to enable the set-up of new studies and co-ordinate research activity. They ensure the safe, ethical delivery of research activity, focused on providing a first class, patient centred service.

Alongside direct delivery support, the research team provide training and education for Trust staff and students across all professions, and deliver awareness events across the Trust and the Bolton locality.

## **Our research ambition**

As an organisation that is committed to quality and improvement, our aim is to embed research as a core component of our clinical services, since it is a key enabler to delivering high quality patient care as well as recruiting and retaining the best clinical staff.

Our ambitions are:

- To integrate research activity into all areas of the Trust for the benefit of our patients and colleagues, ensuring we are widely recognised for providing safe, personal and effective care.
- That every clinical area will be engaged in high quality research and every patient and member of staff will have the opportunity to be part of research activity.
- To deliver high quality healthcare research, fully integrated into clinical services, which translates rapidly into service improvements, thereby, improving care and transforming lives for the benefit of patients, our local population and staff.

## Achieving our research ambition

Our research plan sets out five key ambitions for the next five years, which link closely to our Trust Strategy and focus on how we increase engagement, empowerment and delivery of high quality, inclusive research across the Trust and the Bolton locality.

### A great place to work

We will invest in our staff and support them to develop their skills so they are able to provide the best care. Our workforce will feel a sense of belonging and be reflective of our communities.

#### What this means in practice:

- We will enable our staff to develop the skills to support, deliver and lead research
- We will unlock potential and support research talent across all professions
- We will recognise and promote research excellence

### A high performing, productive organisation

We will make the best use of our resources and identify opportunities to innovate, develop research and continually evolve so that we can be the best we can possibly be, both now and in the future.

#### What this means in practice:

- We will have a strong portfolio of research and set ambitious goals for recruitment
- We will support the development of a research culture, and monitor progress using the SORT Tool
- We will develop links with industry and increase our capacity for commercial research

### A positive partner

We will embrace and build on the partnerships we have with our communities and organisations in Bolton and across Greater Manchester, to improve health and outcomes for our population.

#### What this means in practice:

- We will seek new local external partnerships to develop research links and engagement opportunities
- We will work in partnership with the NIHR, NW RRDN, to expand local and national research opportunities
- We will work with local academic, council and charity organisations, to develop home-grown research

### Improving care, transforming lives

We will deliver high quality care through a focus on safe and effective systems and processes, and make sure that everyone has a positive experience in our care. We will work to improve people's health, to transform lives and outcomes of the people of Bolton.

Be delivered in a safe and ethical way

Be inclusive and meet the health needs of our local population

Be driven and informed by our patients and communities

### An organisation that's fit for the future

We will make sure that we have the right infrastructure and technology to allow our systems to work seamlessly, and our buildings will enable us to provide the best care. We will look for opportunities to reduce the impact we have on the environment.

#### What this means in practice:

- We will be digitally enabled to support new research technologies and improve access to healthcare data
- We will provide a dedicated research facility for our patients and staff
- We will proactively engage with our communities - to shape our research and ensure it is fit for the future

## **Ambition 1: Empower diverse voices in research by breaking down barriers**

**Increase research opportunities and involvement for our patients, carers and the wider public, ensuring inclusivity and access for our under represented communities.**

Research and innovation cannot take place without our participants and public contributors. Research informs health policy and practice, so it is vital to have as many people represented in research as possible.

Health and social care research has a fundamental role to play in helping to reduce the disparities that exist in health outcomes, caused by socio-economic factors, geography, age and ethnicity. It can give us a better understanding of our local population and the wider determinants of health, and with this, the steps to maintain health and reduce inequalities.

Making our research more visible across the Bolton locality, and increasing the public's understanding of research, will help to encourage greater diversity in research participation.

Every year, the NIHR asks thousands of research participants to share their experiences of taking part in research, through the Participant in Research Experience Survey (PRES). Working with the NIHR, our aim is to put participant experience at the heart of research delivery - improving the way research studies are designed and delivered, both now and in the future.

What our patients have told us about why research is important to them:

- **“I felt supported by the clinic staff, it was gold standard service.”**
- **“I could always get hold of the team. Helped sort out when I had appointments and holidays. Gave me my life back. Thanks.”**
- **“I felt valued by the research team. Taking part has helped me get back normality in life. Thank you.”**
- **“Being able to contribute to the future of healthcare.”**

(Bolton PRES 2023/24 Report)

To achieve our ambition we will:

- Measure the demographics of our research participants to identify where there are gaps in inclusion.
- Ensure that the research we offer is fully inclusive and meets the needs of our local population, enabling people from under-served communities to access research.
- Increase the number of opportunities for our patients and the wider Bolton community to take part in research studies.
- Engage patients and members of our local population to help us shape our research and set priorities.
- Give our research participants the opportunity to share their experience via the Participant in Research Experience Survey (PRES) and help us to identify where we can do better.
- Increase our community engagement to raise awareness of healthcare research through public engagement, PR and events.

## Improving health among South Asian communities



Our team support a study which is aimed to ensure that everyone in Bolton has access to the care they need no matter their background or heritage

The Genes and Health study is one of the world's largest community-based genetics studies, looking to improve the health of people of Pakistani and Bangladeshi heritage, by analysing the genes of 100,000 people.

Research tells us that our South Asian communities typically experience poorer health outcomes compared to the rest of the UK when it comes to conditions such as heart disease and diabetes.

By looking more closely at how genes work, and how diseases develop, researchers are hoping to identify better treatments to cure or help prevent them.

The study which is being delivered in Bradford, East London and Greater Manchester, has supported over 50 volunteers in Bolton to take part.

## Ambition 2: Release workforce potential to develop research excellence

**Support the development of our workforce and empower staff by providing a supportive infrastructure with access to resources, training and development opportunities.**

Our health and care professionals are pivotal in promoting participation in clinical trials to patients and the public.

Every role and every professional is important - whether they are leading research in their field of interest, a co-applicant or principal investigator for a study or taking a leading and essential role in the recruitment and delivery of studies.

*Clinical research is everyone's business* (NHS long term workforce plan, 2023).

The call for clinical research involvement amongst health care professionals is integral in UK healthcare through the Health and Care Act (2022). This legislation directs NHS England and integrated care systems to facilitate research and make research part of everybody's business in the health care workforce, including senior health care leaders.

In addition, research activity positively affects workforce retention and morality (Bimpong et al. 2020) and reduce the risk of burnout (Shanafelt et al. 2009).

Research empowers staff, enhancing capability, building confidence, and gives people a reason to stay, grow, and thrive within their roles. The training and development opportunities that come with supporting research offer health and care providers a valuable way to invest in their workforce.

Research opens doors to new ways of working, helping us do things better for the people who rely on our care and support. It strengthens skills, deepens knowledge, adds value to everyday practice, and contributes to greater job satisfaction.

**We will:**

- Support a culture of research excellence and ensure effective leadership to embed a research positive culture across the Trust.
- Ensure that multidisciplinary workforce planning encompasses the delivery of clinical research.
- Increase research visibility and empower our staff to promote and participate in the delivery of research.
- Develop research talent across all professions – doctors, nurses, midwives and allied health professionals; and offer clearer career pathways for research delivery and support staff.
- Give recognition of research activity in job planning, appraisals and BOSCA accreditations.
- Implement the SORT Tool to provide a consistent framework to support the growth and management of research at Bolton NHS FT, through strong leadership and governance.
- Encourage research to be recognised as part of our direct clinical activity, with ring-fenced research time available for staff who want to have a substantive research leadership role. (RCP NIHR position statement: Making research everybody's business, 2022)
- Launch an accredited research champions scheme to help increase research awareness and integrate activity in all areas throughout the Trust.

- Work closely with teams across the organisations (Quality Improvement, Audit, Organisational Development, Communications, Knowledge and Library Services) to ensure that staff have access to the right training, resources and support to develop ideas for research and innovation.

## Developing 'home grown' research to improve patient care



In 2024 we celebrated our first NIHR Portfolio adopted, multi-site clinical trial 'Remote Monitoring for Prostate Cancer'.

The research compares PSA results produced from the usual method of taking a blood sample in hospital, to a simple finger-prick sample which is taken by the patient at home.

The aim of the trial is to improve safety and convenience for our patients, to improve compliance with PSA testing, and to reduce the number of clinic appointments needed - improving service delivery for clinicians and patients alike.

Our Chief Investigator Jamie Osborne, Principal Biochemist & Point of Care Clinical Lead and his team have recruited over 100 patients to the trial, and results are showing to be very positive.

Jamie said "Research in Laboratory Medicine can impact almost every aspect of healthcare. We can contribute so much for our patients and it's a big part of why I became a Healthcare Scientist."

## Ambition 3: Optimise research from vision to impact

**Develop and strengthen our organisational systems and increase our capacity and capability to deliver safe, ethical, high quality research which meets the needs of our population.**

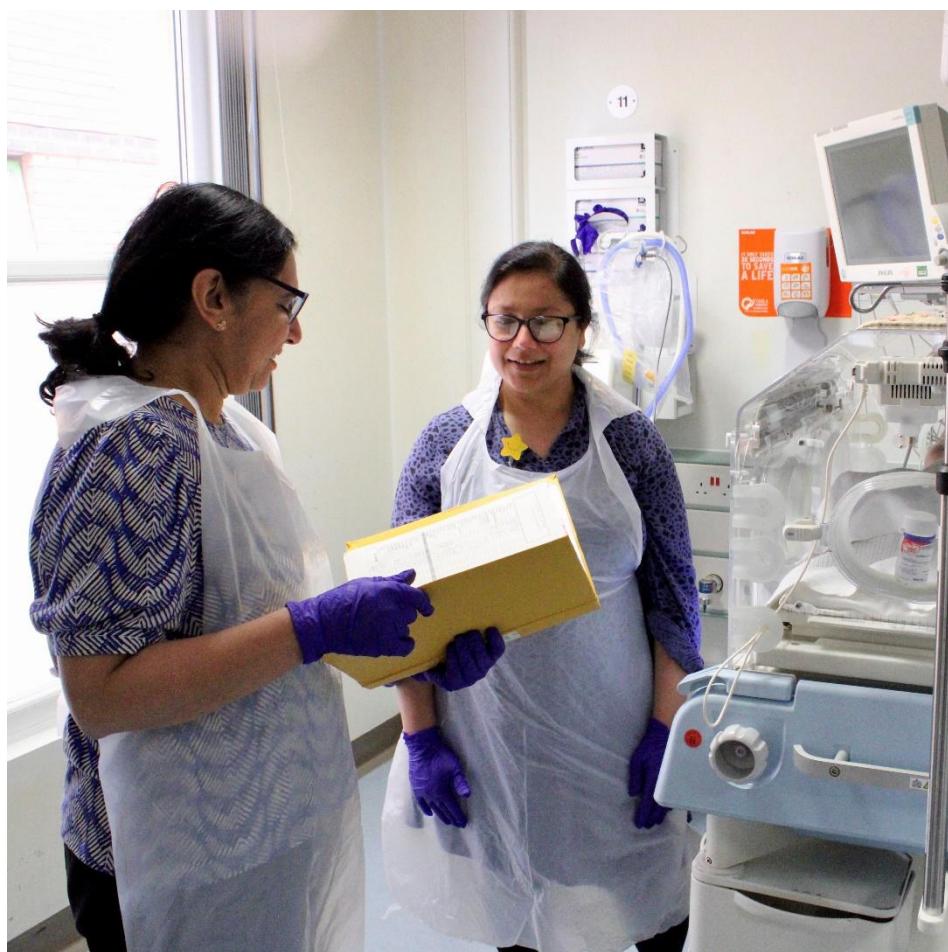
Clinical research is the single most important way in which we improve our healthcare – by identifying the best means to prevent, diagnose and treat conditions (Saving and Improving Lives: The Future of UK Clinical Research Delivery, DHSC 2021).

Research is a highly regulated activity which balances the need to keep patients safe, whilst at the same time ensuring trials open quickly so patients can access potentially life-changing treatments as soon as possible.

**We will:**

- Embed clinical research at the heart of patient care across the NHS, making participation as easy as possible and ensure all health and care staff feel empowered to support research.
- Actively seek to increase our portfolio of research, sharing best practice with partner organisations and the RRDN NW Network.
- Increase support and provide signposting to enable the development of new research ideas, funding applications and portfolio adoption.
- Encourage access to evidence and resources, linking closely with our Knowledge and Library Service and state of the art library facilities.
- Invest in our clinical support services to strengthen our capacity to delivery research activity.
- Set ambitious goals for trial recruitment to time and target, and increase our efficiency by streamlining our study set-up processes.
- Maintain a strong portfolio of research, which has a good mix of observational and more complex, interventional trials.
- Ensure all research carried out at the Trust is conducted in accordance with the Standards of Good Clinical Practice (GCP) and has all the required regulatory approvals in place.
- Invest in additional time and resources dedicated to the delivery of high quality research - to build research into everyday practice within the context of the national direction of travel within the NHS.
- Increase the number of GCP trained staff to ensure research readiness.
- Provide a dedicated research facility for staff and patients, which is fit for purpose and provides a suitable work/ clinical environment.
- Share the results of our research and publications widely with staff, to enable new learning and knowledge to be utilised effectively.

## 51 babies recruited to trial aiming to protect infants from serious illnesses



A total of 51 babies in Bolton have been recruited for a major study looking at how to protect new-borns and infants from serious respiratory illnesses.

The HARMONIE research trial looked at the effectiveness of an antibody, called nirsevimab that has been developed to significantly reduce the number of babies that are admitted to hospital with respiratory syncytial virus (RSV).

New data from the HARMONIE clinical trial in a real-world setting shows an 83% reduction in hospitalisations in infants aged under 12 months who received a single dose of nirsevimab, compared to infants who received no RSV intervention.

RSV is the most common cause of bronchiolitis in infants, with more than 60% of children infected by their first birthday according to government figures.

The trial recruited more than 8,000 infants and took place at nearly 250 sites across France, Germany and the UK.

## **Ambition 4: Evolve our research partnerships for a healthier future**

**Strengthen our existing partnerships and seek out new collaborations to encourage and support the growth of research opportunity - a whole community approach.**

The NHS is a rich source of ideas to improve the ways we deliver care that benefit patients, staff and the wider community. A range of healthcare providers and professionals can help us to access large, diverse and often hard to reach populations.

Increased engagement with our local community, partner organisations, academia and industry could provide opportunities for funding and expertise to support and grow our research capability. Aligning with the development of Bolton Medical School educational campus on site, the Trust has the opportunity to build collaborations for joint projects, research fellowship posts and shared knowledge and expertise.

Collaborative working could enable access to the resource needed to put the Trust on the map as a centre of research excellence.

“In a world that is increasingly breaking down the barriers between what we currently differentiate as ‘healthcare’, ‘public health’ and ‘social care’ delivery, NIHR research will need to become much more integrated across disciplines and better serve the more holistic research questions that we will increasingly be asked to address in years to come”. NIHR Report Best Research for Best Health: The Next Chapter.

### **We will:**

- Work with the University of Great Manchester, Public Health Bolton and other local organisations to develop systems to support partnerships and joint research ventures and that meet the needs of our population.
- Increase our links with industry to establish better connections and opportunities for commercial research and funding.
- Promote the Trust as a research capable organisation, and extend our external partnerships developing strong research links to build opportunities for ‘home grown’ research.
- Increased engagement with the North West RRDN, NIHR Applied Research Collaboration Greater Manchester (ARC GM), regional and national research specialty groups and partnership trusts, to expand opportunity for collaborative research.

- Explore ways to increase the time and resource available for research activity across the Trust, to enable us to tap into new markets and develop new commercial opportunities.
- Create innovation challenges for our staff with funding available to support the best research ideas.
- Provide a dedicated clinical space to enable the safe and effective delivery of research and attract increased commercial opportunity.
- Work with our The University of Greater Manchester to develop a joint R&D Office resource for staff and students, to enable new collaboration, joint and cross organisational posts and extended support.

## Success at Greater Manchester Health and Care Research Awards



Our researchers were celebrated at the Greater Manchester Health and Care Research Awards for their work in helping to improve patient care in the future.

The event recognised the outstanding work of the awards finalists during 2022/23 and celebrated the wider achievements of the Greater Manchester, East Cheshire and East Lancashire research community over the past decade.

The Bolton REDUCE 2 Trial Collaborative Delivery Team was awarded the 'Collaborative Working Accomplishment' prize.

REDUCE 2 is a study looking at improving quality of life for patients with palliative liver disease, by enabling treatments to be delivered in the patient's home, reducing the need for hospital visits. The award recognises the collaborative work between the Hospital Liver Team, community nursing services and Bolton Hospice.

## **Ambition 5: Unlock our potential for data-enabled clinical research delivery**

**We will work collaboratively with our digital teams and external partners to create a digitally-enabled and future-ready clinical research environment – developing and delivering research that is enabled by data and digital tools.**

Digital systems underpin the delivery of modern clinical research. They help to us design and deliver protocols, identify and recruit research participants and support public involvement, engagement and awareness.

These systems go hand-in-hand with accessible, interoperable and high-quality health data – to help us better understand disease and unlock advances in the future of patient care.

Information technology developments are occurring rapidly, enhancing research activity and improving research efficiency i.e. feasibility, delivery (randomisation and data collection), communication, governance, monitoring, permissions and performance measurement.

The ability to process 'big data', artificial intelligence (AI) and utilise genomic information will be increasingly important enablers of research, helping to underpin new models of diagnostic and therapeutic developments (NIHR 2021).

New methodologies and better use of 'real-world' evidence will be critical if we are to accelerate progress in research.

**We will:**

- Work with our partners to develop IT systems that improve access to healthcare data for research purposes.
- Make it easier for people to participate in research by investing in user-friendly and accessible digital and online approaches.
- Engage with and support the ongoing IT developments.
- Capitalise on our data assets to develop a data-enabled clinical research environment.

## Artificial intelligence research study success



We took part in a major trial that uses artificial intelligence to help detect cancerous tumours during a colonoscopy.

The COLO-DETECT trial, led by South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust and Newcastle University, used the GI Genius AI (artificial intelligence) device, a computer module powered by AI, which is added to the existing technology used during a colonoscopy.

The findings showed greater effectiveness in detecting tumours that could potentially become cancerous.

More than 180 patients at the Trust were recruited to this study between September 2021 and March 2023.

The AI equipment accounted for an 8.3% increase in adenoma detection, which could potentially equate to an almost 25% reduction in post-colonoscopy colorectal cancer and a 41–42% reduction in fatal cases.

## **Taking our plan forward**

The research plan aligns closely with our Trust Strategy, Clinical Strategy, Digital Strategy, Quality Improvement Plan, People Plan, and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Plan.

It will be supported by an annual action plan, which will detail how the Trust's ambitions will be met using specific, measurable, achievable actions. This will be delivered and monitored by the Trust Research Committee.

The Research Plan will be reviewed annually, in consultation with the Trust Research Committee. Progress in implementation will be reported quarterly to the Clinical Effectiveness Group, feeding into the Clinical Governance and Quality Committee for assurance.

It is recognised that divisions and clinical specialties may wish to produce their own research objectives but these should be consistent with, and supportive of, the aims of this plan, as well as agreed by the Research Committee.



Vision | Openness | Integrity | Compassion | Excellence



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