UK Dementia Research Institute (DRI)

Creation of the DRI Hub and Centres
Call for Expressions of Interest (EoI)

Call timeline:
- Launch date: 6th May 2016
- Closing date: 17th June 2016, 16:00

1. Overview

MRC and its founder charity partners the Alzheimer’s Society and Alzheimer's Research UK are investing £250M to establish the UK Dementia Research Institute (DRI) in fulfillment of the ambition identified in Prime Minister’s 2020 Challenge on Dementia. Centered around the need for innovative, discovery science to unlock our understanding of the development and progression of the dementias, the DRI’s research will invigorate the therapeutic pipeline and drive new approaches to diagnosis, treatment, care provision and prevention.

The Institute will be structured as a hub and linked regional centres, and will be built in a way that optimally connects existing capabilities within the UK research landscape and engages emerging research opportunities.

Expressions of Interest (EoIs) are now invited from UK universities with existing capability in neurodegeneration/dementia research to host the DRI hub or centres, as detailed in the following sections.

2. Background and Rationale

Around 850,000 people in the UK have dementia and its incidence will continue to grow as the population ages, with the number of people affected projected to reach 2 million by 2051. There is currently no cure for any of the neurodegenerative conditions that give rise to dementia, which represents one of the toughest medical and economic challenges facing our society today.

The MRC, Alzheimer’s Society and Alzheimer's Research UK are to jointly invest £250M to create the UK Dementia Research Institute which will bring together world-leading expertise in biomedical, care, public health and translational dementia research. The new Institute will be catalytic for the UK’s dementia research effort. It will connect to the momentum already created through the establishment of the MRC Dementias Platform UK and the NIHR Dementia Translational Research Collaboration, and will align to recent charity-led efforts in areas such as drug development and capacity building. The DRI will also proactively seek industry and international partners in delivering its mission.
3. **Structure and development of the DRI**

The UK Dementia Research Institute (DRI) will be established as a single entity, based on a hub and centres model spanning several university sites.

The location of the DRI hub and its regional centres are being selected in open competition, based upon the best foci for neurodegeneration-relevant research in the UK. A parallel process will recruit a visionary Director who will have a say in the final decision on the hub and centres. Plans are for the Director to be appointed and the hub identified by November 2016 and the primary DRI centres to be identified by early 2017.

The first phase of identifying the DRI's location will focus on the biomedical research agenda of the DRI, with its care and public health activity to be integrated two years into the DRI development. The hub will be selected first, with the DRI centres to be identified in two phases: i) in 2016/17 to identify the key centres for the biomedical work, ii) in 2018/19 to expand this capability and further engage care, supportive technology and public health research.

Capital funding will be provided in support of the DRI development with a view to formal opening of the Institute by 2019. The DRI as a whole is expected to support up to 25 five year research programmes, at £3-£5M per programme, and around 400 scientists at steady state. Up to 50% of the activity is likely to operate at the hub, with the remainder at the DRI centres. Selection of the DRI’s constituent research programmes, to be undertaken at the hub and centres, will be undertaken through a separate competition in 2017.

4. **Selection of the sites for the DRI Hub and Centres**

EoIs are invited from UK universities with a track record in internationally-competitive neurodegeneration and dementia-linked research, coupled to a strategic approach to growing capability in this area. HEIs should demonstrate their capabilities in relation to existing staff and potential groups that might be recruited to the DRI, as well as resources or facilities that might be assimilated, expanded or established.

Universities to be selected to host the DRI hub or centres will provide resources to the DRI, in terms of lab space and access to existing facilities. Initial thinking is that up to £40M capital funding would be made available to refurbish and equip the DRI facilities. Of this, up
to £20M could be available to support necessary capital costs of refurbishment (with the majority at the hub), with the remaining capital funds to provide new equipment in line with the DRI research programmes to be established in due course. It is expected that this capital investment will be 50% matched by the host HEIs (ie. a DRI/HEI investment ratio of 2:1).

There is a possibility that additional investment would be identified to enable the DRI hub to move into a new, state-of-the-art building a few years into its development, and HEIs wishing to host the hub should submit options for how this could be realized.

Submission of an EoI is mandatory to selection of a hub or centre. Unsuccessful hub applications may be invited as candidate centres. Although there is potential in the future to bid for additional centres, this process would be handled separately and not until 2017/18 at the earliest.

Hubs that are short-listed will be invited to submit a 'prospectus' that will be provided in confidence to candidates reaching the short listing stage for the directorial appointment, a process to be run in parallel to this EoI exercise. In this way the person to be offered the role of DRI director, on the basis of their personal qualities, will have begun to form a view of the preferred location for the hub, which will be determined on conclusion of the appointment process.

In relation to prospective DRI centres, the EoIs will provide a shortlist of potential sites capable of hosting a number of DRI programmes, typically between two and four. Full applications to host DRI centres will be invited later in 2016. Once established, such centres should also expect to attract a halo of additional dementia-related funding support from other sources, along the lines of the existing MRC Centre funding model.

5. Eligibility

HEIs wishing to submit an EoI must be recognized as centres of research activity with a national profile in neurodegeneration/dementias research, as identified though either
  i) being in receipt of strategic funding from MRC Dementias Platform UK;
  ii) being in receipt of funding through the NIHR Dementia Translational Research Collaboration;
  iii) hosting an MRC Unit or Centre with significant research activity in this area.

6. Application

The DRI will recruit international-level expertise related to the full range of neurodegenerative diseases research that gives rise to dementias (covering Alzheimer's Disease, Vascular Dementia, Fronto-Temporal Dementia, Parkinson's Disease, Lewy Body Dementia, Huntington's disease, CJD etc), and will take a broad view to the scientific avenues that might provide insights in to the causes, progression, treatment, prevention and care of dementia.
For the avoidance of doubt, in this first phase the EoI should focus on the core biomedical/ neurodegenerative research element of the DRI. The second phase, to be launched in 2017/18, will ask for EoIs in DRI centre(s) encompassing care, supportive technology and public health research. However, hub applicants are asked to include reference to the entirety of the DRI vision and strategy in their applications (see below).

EoIs should make the case for hosting the DRI research activity, whether as a hub or centre, based upon the track record of dementia-related research currently undertaken at the university (which may include inflammatory, vascular, metabolic aspects, for example), the strategic approach to support and grow capability in such research in the future, and the ability of the university to provide the necessary space and financial commitment to host the envisaged DRI research programmes. The structure for the application is set out below.

Universities are encouraged to contact MRC to discuss plans in advance of submission if there are any uncertainties over remit or the content of the case. Given the goal of elucidating information of value to the incoming director of the DRI, applicants are encouraged to focus on the capabilities relevant to their own institution. There is no merit in Universities submitting joint, pre-formed plans for the putative DRI structure.

7. Format for EoI

7.1 General

The EoI should be submitted as a single pdf document using a typeface of 11 pt Arial font, single spacing. The length should be no more than 6 sides of A4, with margins of 1.5 cm on all page borders. Pages should be numbered. The same format should be followed whether the case is for a hub or for a centre.

No annexes will be allowed, except for:

a) Schematic diagram: A single diagram to illustrate the local research landscape, identifying the relevant research groups/resources that might be connected to the proposed hub/centre, and their locations within the University (one side of A4).

b) One page CVs for potential DRI Programme Leaders (see below).

c) For hub applicants only, a two page summary should be provided regarding the estate plans for the DRI hub, encompassing two options; i) for refurbished facilities able to host up to 100 researchers, to be available from 2018, and within a budget of £15M MRC contribution; and ii) expanded plans to erect a new building able to house 250 researchers, which might be operational by 2021/22, should additional funding become available for such a development. For the first option, the summary should outline how the hub development would be managed to ensure it was fully operational by 2019. For this second option, a view on the linkage between the two developmental stages, regarding the transition arrangements and the fate of the initial, refurbished space, should be provided.

d) For hub applicants only, a one page summary of a scaled-down case for hosting a
centre, should the bid to host the hub prove unsuccessful.

e) Clinical Research Facilities: For sites with such a facility, a brief summary of its capacity and current usage, and any case for its expansion and the capital requirement therein (one side of A4). For sites without such a facility, a case for establishing one may be considered (one side A4).

Any additional diagrams, tables etc must be included within the body of the application. An additional cover letter of one side of A4 may also be provided to highlight University support and relevant key information for the proposed hub or centre.

The case to be submitted must be specific to this EoI request, ie. based around neurodegeneration / dementia research and the establishment of the DRI. Generic university information should not be included. To maintain a level playing field, EoIs which do not follow the specified format may be rejected without assessment.

7.2 Case for support

Please structure the case under the following headings:

1) **Title:** This should take the following format, either:
   - University of [Name]: EoI application to become the hub for the UK Dementia Research Institute; or
   - University of [Name]: EoI application to become a centre of the UK Dementia Research Institute.

2) **Executive Summary:** up to 400 words.

3) **Capability:**
   1. What is your University’s current vision and strategy for investment in neurodegeneration / dementia research?
   2. What do you identify as the University’s current key strengths in relation to neurodegeneration / dementia research?
   3. For hub applicants, briefly describe how your University would be positioned to support the entire DRI vision and strategy across biomedical, care and public health research.

4) **Supportive environment:**
   1. What resources/facilities would be made available to the DRI, and on what financial basis?
   2. Is there a linked clinical research facility at your University, and if so, what is its capacity for dementia research? Please provide brief details as an annex.

5) **Relevant scientific staffing:**
   1. Provide details of the current PIs within your University who you consider would be competitive to become Programme Leaders within the DRI, ie. capable of running a £3-5M programme over 5 years (1 page CVs to be provided as an annex – see below).
2. Provide details of any relevant current or imminently planned recruitment in neurodegeneration / dementia research, or in areas that would directly connect with this area.

6) Partnerships:
   1. Supply details of any existing research partnerships at the University (up to five max.) that are of potential interest for the DRI. These partnerships may be from inside and/or outside academia (e.g. involving other universities in the UK or overseas, the NHS, industry).
   2. Supply details if there is a relevant track record of productive industry engagement of relevance to the DRI.

7) Space / capacity:
   1. What space will be made available for the DRI activity to be supported?
      • For the Hub, this should provide capacity for up to £8-10M per annum research activity at 100% FEC, ie. space for up to 100 researchers, in the first instance. A second option should also be presented for establishing the DRI in a new building with capacity for 250 researchers, should additional funding become available to allow for this; this would represent a second phase development after establishing the hub in temporary, refurbished accommodation as per option 1. Detail on both options to be provided as an annex.
      • For a DRI centre, which might typically host two to four DRI programmes, equating to £2-4M per annum, space may be required for up 40 researchers.
   2. Would there be potential for this space to expand, for example should hosting the DRI attract further dementia research support?
   3. What work would be required fit out the space, and on what timeline. For both options, the plans must provide assurance that hub will be fully operational in refurbished premises by mid 2019.
   4. What are the estimated refurbishment costs?
   5. Would planning permission be required?

8) Direct financial support:
   1. What capital investment is the University in a position to contribute to the DRI, noting that the funders will contribute towards capital investment in a 2:1 (DRI: University) ratio?
      Notes:
      • Up to £20M of capital funding will be available for building work within the hub and centres overall.
      • A further £20M will be available for equipment, to be allocated in line with the programmes to be recruited to the DRI, for which the host university will be expected to provide 50% matched funding (for purchase or contractual/technical support).
      • Should further funding become available for a new building, host commitment would be expected to rise in line with this, but at a lower ratio of matched investment.

9) CVs: One-side CVs (A4) are required, as an annex, for potential Programme Leaders
who might be recruited to the DRI at the hub/centre. The CV should briefly outline career
details covering the last three positions, key grant income and up to 5 major relevant
publications.

8. Assessment

An independent review panel will assess the EoIs received and advise the funders. The
following assessment criteria will be used:

- Fit with scientific remit for DRI.
- Strength of existing capability - evidence of critical mass/imminent potential critical mass
  in neurodegeneration/dementia research.
- Estates capacity and potential for growth.
- Level of institutional commitment to deliver the hub or a DRI centre (please specify
  whether direct capital support, in-kind, or a mixture)

Applications will be scored against the criteria using a system of 1 to 4, as follows:
1. Unsuitable. At least one of the major aspects is missing or insufficiently developed
2. Fair. Broadly addresses the criteria, but has significant weaknesses and may not be
   suitable for selection.
3. Good. Broadly addresses the criteria but there is room for improvement in certain
   aspects.
4. Excellent. Fully meets the criteria and potentially suitable for selection.

Hub EoIs: The top scoring EoIs for the DRI hub will short-listed and taken forward for
consideration in the director recruitment process. The selected HEIs will be asked to repackage
the information as a prospectus to inform short-listed candidates for the DRI director role - it is
likely that this information will be required within 2 weeks of notification, and before the end of
June 2016. Guidance will be issued in the coming weeks in relation to this to provide time for
some pre-planning. Bids that are not short-listed will enter into the competition for DRI
centres, subject to satisfactory assessment of the additional annex (see 7.1d) provided relating
to the centre bid.

Centre EoIs: EoIs scoring 3 or 4 will be selected to enter the next stage of the process, with
additional information to be provided within invited bids later in the autumn 2016. Those bids
eliminated from the process will be informed at an early stage.

9. Key Dates

EoIs should be structured as above and sent as a single, bookmarked, pdf document to:
dri@headoffice.mrc.ac.uk

The deadline for receipt of EoIs is 16.00h on 17th June 2016.

Submission of an EoI by this deadline is mandatory for selection of a hub or centre for the
UK DRI. A decision on the hub will be announced by December 2016 and the centres by
March 2017.

10. Contact Details

For queries please contact dri@headoffice.mrc.ac.uk

The scientific programme manager responsible is Dr Catherine Moody, also contactable on Catherine.Moody@headoffice.mrc.ac.uk or 020 7395 2231