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EDITORIAL

Developing a research skilled workforce in the south west: nurturing capacity

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Welcome to this special edition of the South West Clinical School Journal, which celebrates our research active health, care, and scientific professionals working across the region. The opportunity to submit an article for this special edition of the South West Clinical School Journal was offered to those showcasing their work at our regional Developing a Research Skilled Workforce celebration conference in April 2025. The research and service improvement projects shared provide a snapshot of the clinical research activities taking place across the wider South West region.

Background

This regional momentum reflects a growing national commitment to embedding research as a fundamental component of health and social care delivery. The UK Government seeks to embed clinical research within the health and social care system (Department of Health and Social Care, 2022). This has involved engaging the workforce in a range of activities, from evaluating current practices to leading research initiatives (AUKUH Clinical Academic Roles Development Group, 2016). In 2022, NHS England South West convened a task and finish group to create a multiprofessional regional strategy and, in 2023, commissioned the University of Plymouth (UoP) to map the South West landscape, promoting engagement and collaboration in the development of a research-skilled workforce (NHS England, 2024).

Aim

The Developing a Research Skilled Workforce (DRSW) activity aims to promote sustainable research skills, capacity, and capabilities for all health and care professionals in the region.

The delivery framework

Research serves as a cornerstone for delivering excellent care and driving innovation.

Figure 1 represents our co-produced South West 'Plan on a Page' (Biddle, 2024). The plan provides a framework for implementing six key aims across the region.



Figure 1: South West 'Plan on a Page'.

The DRSW Implementation Team at the University of Plymouth delivered a regional conference in April 2025 which shared and celebrated how people are developing a research skilled workforce in their workplaces. There was an excellent range of oral and poster presentations on the day. These are available to view and download (<https://tinyurl.com/2jsbpppv>).

Progress has required work to build relationships, engage with integrated care boards, health and care provider organisations, and identify supportive, sustainable structures and models. Efforts to maintain momentum and focus energy continues via regular communication, committed leadership, and flexibility within a context of fluctuation in the NHS and social care.

The 10-Year Health Plan sets out an aspiration for health, care and scientific practitioners to actively engage in research and innovation (Department of Health and Social Care, 2025). Building on the momentum of the past three years, we must harness this engagement and commitment to establish a robust, sustainable regional clinical research environment.

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