



## **“Professionalising the Profession”**

### **UKTMN Strategy for increasing recognition and professional development opportunities for trial management professionals**

#### ***Background***

Clinical Trial Managers play a pivotal role in the design and delivery of clinical trials in the UK. In order for high-quality clinical trials to continue to be delivered efficiently, trial managers need support in their professional development, by a range of people and organisations. UKTMN was established in 1998 by the Medical Research Council in recognition of the important role trial managers' play in delivering clinical trials and to support them in their development by providing a range of opportunities to share expertise and best practice. UKTMN provides a voice for trial management professionals in the UK.

In June 2019, UKTMN conducted a survey of UKTMN members to ask for their views on the barriers and enablers to professional development. The full paper can be accessed here: <https://trialsjournal.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s13063-020-04316-z>. Data collected in this survey clearly demonstrates that action is required to improve professional development opportunities for this group.

#### ***The vision***

This document outlines UKTMN's vision for increasing recognition and professional development opportunities for its members; trial management professionals within the UK, and their strategy to achieve this. We define a trial management professional as an individual with the day-to-day responsibility for running a clinical trial. For the purpose of this document, they will be referred to as Trial Managers, though we recognise many job titles exist for the same role.

#### ***The strategy***

The strategies below will enable the overarching vision, to improve recognition and professional development opportunities for trial management professionals, to be achieved.

#### ***Short term:***

1. Creating increased recognition and appreciation of the trial management professional role by clinical trial stakeholders
2. Encouraging, supporting, and creating CPD activities and opportunities for UKTMN members

#### ***Medium term:***

3. Work with major funding bodies to develop professional development opportunities (including training courses)
4. Work with organisations representing employers of trial management professionals (e.g., higher education institutions and NHS trusts) to explore different career pathways

#### ***Long term:***

5. Explore options to enable UKTMN to become a professionally accredited organisation

## **1. Creating increased recognition and appreciation of the role of trial management professionals by clinical trial stakeholders**

Some progress has been made in recognising the pivotal role that trial managers play. However, it is important momentum is maintained to enable trial management to be seen as a valuable profession which is key in the design and delivery of clinical trials. Unfortunately, this is not yet recognised, as some people still perceive trial managers provide an administrative supporting role. It remains a UKTMN priority to continue to increase recognition and appreciation of the role by a wide variety of clinical trial stakeholders. We will do this by:

- Continuing to engage in a wide-range of opportunities when approached for collaboration
- Championing the role of Trial Managers at a range of events, forums and groups
- Ensuring UKTMN has representation on relevant national groups with an interest in clinical trials
- Increasing opportunities for involvement in UKTMN activities by liaising with existing collaborators
- Publicising UKTMN and UKTMN activities across a wide-range of platforms
- Establishing an independent UKTMN Advisory Group: membership will include a wide range of influential stakeholders. The Advisory Group will provide guidance and support to the UKTMN Executive Group.

## **2. Encouraging, supporting, and creating CPD activities and opportunities for UKTMN members**

UKTMN will continually strive to support UKTMN members in a range of activities and will continue to ensure members' needs are met by regularly surveying to understand what their needs are. CPD activities take on many forms and include, though are not limited to:

- Creating a programme of formal training opportunities, informed by the requirements of UKTMN members, including UKTMN own courses and pre-developed courses by other organisations (commercial and non-commercial)
- Engaging with training providers to identify and promote opportunities for CPD activities for trial managers
- Encouraging sharing of expertise via the UKTMN forum, social media and informal networking opportunities provided by UKTMN
- Ensure the UKTMN Competency framework remains relevant and up to date, drawing upon member feedback. Map competency framework activities to professional development opportunities and CPD activities.
- Encourage trial managers to use the UKTMN Competency framework in order to plan professional development
- Holding regular professional development workshops, offering alternative workshops depending upon experience
- Events including webinars, conferences, and journal club
- Continuing to provide the Guide to Efficient Trial Management, ensuring it is updated periodically

### **3. Working with major funding bodies to develop professional development opportunities (including training courses)**

Professional development opportunities are broad-ranging and can include a range of activities and resources, many of which can be provided online. UKTMN will continue to develop its own programme of professional development events, which will include webinars, training courses, conferences, podcasts and journal club. Events will continue to be planned in accordance with the UKTMN annual work plan, as agreed by the Executive Group and guided by the independent Advisory Group. In addition, UKTMN aims to work with major UK funding bodies to develop professional development opportunities by:

- Ensuring trial managers' views are represented (by continuing to liaise with and survey opinions of UKTMN members) in key groups, including the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Careers Initiative Group and the NIHR Methodology Incubator, established to strengthen research capacity and development opportunities for a range of clinical trials' roles
- Liaise with other major public and charity funders of academic trials in the UK to determine what development opportunities exist for trial management professionals and to determine where funding opportunities exist
- Including major funder representatives as independent members of the UKTMN advisory group
- Promote the UKTMN Competency framework to funding bodies to raise awareness

### **4. Working with organisations representing employers of trial management professionals (e.g., higher education institutions and NHS trusts) to establish appropriate career pathways for trial managers**

Within UK Higher Education Institutes (HEIs), trial managers are usually employed on one of two career pathways/job families: 'research' or 'professional/managerial'. However, the role of trial manager can often, though not always, be considered a hybrid between these two pathways. Usually, trial managers aren't responsible for managing their *own* research, i.e. a clinical trial they have designed and acquired funding for. Nor do they hold a role akin to many administrative/managerial/professional roles within a HEI. It is not uncommon for trial managers to fail to progress their career because the opportunity for promotion does not exist. An example of this of a trial manager on a 'research' pathway, unable to be promoted as they are not conducting their own independent research. Similarly, a trial manager on a 'professional/managerial' pathway may be unable to be promoted since the next position would involve managing HEI management, e.g. at School/Faculty/Institute level. This is a historical problem that should be addressed; it is of particular importance to many when embracing a 'team science' culture, which is crucial in order to design and conduct high-quality clinical trials. Since only around 10% of UKTMN members are employed by an NHS organisation, it will be important to scope and understand current career pathways for these members. UKTMN will:

- Explore successful case studies in HEIs where alternative career pathways/job families for trial management professionals and other roles in clinical trial delivery (i.e., not "research" or "professional/managerial") have been introduced
- Liaise with Universities UK (the representative of UK universities) and advocate for introduction of alternative pathways/job families for staff working in 'team science'

roles, e.g., trial management professionals. Work with other major clinical trial stakeholders to ensure this is done in a streamlined way.

- Advocate for standardisation of job titles for the role of Trial Manager; liaising with Universities UK and major clinical trial stakeholders
- For UKTMN members based in HEIs, raise awareness of the Vitae Research Concordat, encouraging them to open discuss the principles within their departments and universities.
- Encourage employers of trial managers to use the UKTMN competency framework for professional development conversations and annual appraisals
- Advocating for Trial Managers' job descriptions to include ten days per year to "develop research identity and broader leadership skills", aligning with the principles outlined in the Vitae Research Concordat. We will also strive to review and update the standard Trial Manager job description (originally produced by UKTMN), provided by NIHR upon award of new grants.
- Consult with UKTMN members, employed by NHS organisations, to further understand their career structure in order to advocate for progression in the future

## **5. Exploring options to enable UKTMN to become a professionally accredited organisation**

It is a long-held vision of UKTMN to gain professional accreditation for trial managers in order to fully professionalise their role. This is technically and legally extremely challenging, however we will continue to explore options to this end. The UKTMN independent Advisory Group and funding body (University of Oxford) will be crucial in re-opening these discussions.

The Executive Group will be responsible for monitoring progress of the execution of the strategy. Professional development will remain a key area of focus within annual work plans, with input from the independent Advisory Group. Achievements and progress will be published in the UKTMN annual report, via UKTMN events and the UKTMN website.