

Audiology in Wales – Research Strategy (2025-2028)

Authors

Shibani Myne, Consultant Audiovestibular Physician, Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board. Link to the Welsh Medical Audiology group.

Ann-Marie Dickinson (Ph. D), Principal Clinical Scientist, Head of Audiology, Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board. Lead for the Welsh Audiology Research Network (WARN). Link to the Audiology Head of Service Group.

John Day, Consultant Clinical Scientist, Clinical Director Audiology, Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board

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Version control

Version	Date	Changes
1	October 2024	Shared with ASSAG for approval. Endorsed with some minor suggested edits.
1.1	January 2025	'Recommendations' section edited.
1.1	January 2025	Final version sent to ASSAG. ASSAG Endorsement to be added and document distributed.

1. Introduction

Audiology professionals in Wales are a proactive and ambitious group of healthcare workers who strive to improve services for Audiology patients, driven by the Audiology Heads of Service and the Audiology Standing Scientific Advisory Group (ASSAG). There is a requirement to formally define areas of research interest, to build research potential and capacity and to maximise funding opportunities to fully embed evidenced based practice in our service provision.

As documented in *A Healthier Wales*¹ and *Healthcare Science in NHS Wales looking forward*², healthcare science professions such as Audiology can improve healthcare for the people of Wales by being innovative whilst engaging in research and by facilitating evidence based clinical practice.

*The Healthcare Science in Wales looking forward*² framework also points that healthcare scientists have a significant role in leading, defining, designing, developing and delivering multi-professional collaborative research and they need support with research mentoring and development scheme throughout their careers. This document references specific areas where research can improve the lives of people living in Wales:

- Applied Research and innovation for Service Improvement
- Providing research opportunities surrounding commercial research studies

*The Research and Development (R&D) Framework*³ published by Health and Care Research Wales encourages all NHS organisations to have a positive culture of continuous improvement by embedding research in all aspects of service provision which aligns with the Duty of Quality (April 2023) as part of the Health and Social Care Act 2020. This document also states that research provides opportunities for staff development, enhanced job roles which helps with recruitment and retention as well as developing leaders and critical thinkers.

The most recently proposed *Five-year Research and Innovation Strategy for Healthcare Science Professionals in Wales*⁴ recommends cultivating an environment to encourage rigorous scientific enquiry and improving engagement of health care science professionals as leaders in value-based, patient centred research and innovation.

The Welsh Audiology Research Network (WARN) was conceived in 2018 and originally implemented as an informal network to support audiology professionals who were undertaking doctoral studies. It very quickly developed into a wider network to support and build research capacity in the audiology professions in Wales at all levels. In the earlier years, research webinars were set up to encourage those with research interests to engage with research activities. In the recent years, WARN network meeting is held annually as a half day precursor event prior to the audiology Cymru National conference. It has gained traction and coverage to the point where a more formal operations process is now required. We hence anticipate that this Research Strategy will strengthen and extend the existing WARN structure and network to support Audiology services across Wales in contributing more effectively towards the national strategic vision for integrating research into our organisational culture. This strategy outlines the objectives and recommendations to encourage participation of Audiology workforce in research, to optimise opportunities for the delivery of high-quality research and to promote evidence based and cost-effective improvements in Audiology service provision which can be uniformly implemented across Wales.

2. Key Objectives for Welsh Audiology Research Strategy

- To encourage Audiology workforce to participate in research and research related activities.
- To promote understanding and implementation of evidence-based clinical practice in our services.
- To develop a supportive team environment for staff undertaking research by enabling easier access to information, resources and peer support.
- To establish a multi-professional Pan-Wales peer support network to allow sharing of research related ideas, information and experience.
- To influence and inform the research setting agenda for guiding research-based activities.
- To network with educational institutions and other health care teams to optimise opportunities for collaborative research projects.
- To share outcomes from research projects in relevant meetings/platforms within audiology as well as in the wider health and social care settings.

3. Recommendations

1. Establish a Welsh Audiology Peer support group for execution and implementation of activities in keeping with this Research strategy. This group will comprise of 'Research champions' representing Audiology services within all the Health boards. 'Research Champion' will take on the lead role in supporting local and Pan Wales research-based activities. Research champions will reconstitute the existing WARN group; this group will function under the direction and guidance of ASSAG.
2. Head of Audiology services to identify Research champions for their services by end of 2025. Health boards can choose to have either two Research champions representing Paediatric and Adult Audiology services individually or one Research champion representing both the services. When identifying a candidate for this role, any interested team members from Audiology or Medicine within the Audiology team may volunteer, however consideration needs to be given to professionals with research-based qualification and experience (e.g., Masters or PhD degree course).
3. Head of services to plan and ensure that Research champions are allocated dedicated time on a weekly basis as part of their job plan to undertake this role by 2026.
4. WARN to set up an initial group meeting for all research champions for further planning by 2026.

Role of Research Champions

The role of research champions would be largely supportive at the local and national level for developing a positive and helpful network within Welsh Audiology for research-based activities as outlined below. Staff undertaking research would hold individual responsibility for ensuring they are compliant with the local research and governance training requirements and for liaising with their local Research and Development team (R&D team) and Health and Care Research Wales (HCRW) for information and guidance as needed.

Role of Research Champion within the Local Health Board

- To ensure there is a platform for communication for networking and sharing information within the local Health Board Audiology service regarding potential ideas for research and ongoing research projects. This can be achieved by setting up a new meeting structure or email group. Existing local meeting networks like audit meeting, journal clubs can also be used for this purpose.
- To facilitate discussion for identification of research topics based on review of evidence from literature, any gaps noted in evidence-based clinical practice, feedback/suggestions from patients and voluntary groups. The tools used for audits, quality improvement and research projects may overlap and can be effectively used in developing research-based skills and experience. This approach would particularly help team members who are new or inexperienced in this area.
- To encourage development of academic skills by sharing information regarding relevant meetings, courses, workshops e.g. critical appraisal of research articles, methods for data collection/analysis, ethical approval, managing funding for projects.
- Research is presently embedded into the undergraduate and postgraduate degree programs including Practitioner Training Programme (PTP), Scientific Training Programme (STP), Higher

Specialist Scientific Programmes (HSST) and appropriate equivalence schemes. The Research champions can look at liaising with the trainees and their supervisors to discuss topics for research projects and explore the possibility of service focussed research projects. They can also consider networking with the local R&D departments to ensure they are supportive of service-led research projects with local ethical approval.

Role of Research Champion in the WARN Peer Support group

- To attend, plan and schedule WARN Peer support group meetings.
- To support coordination and planning of WARN annual meetings and activities.
- To contribute in development and maintenance of existing WARN web-based database for information on potential research ideas, ongoing projects and outcome from completed projects, available funding options/research grants, relevant courses/workshops and professional subscriptions. The champions can share this information in turn with their local audiology teams.
- To explore ways to support research champions and staff undertaking research with dedicated and protected time for this in their job plans.
- To work closely with Health and Care Research Wales for developing clinical academic roles in Audiology.
- To support public and patient involvement in informing research ideas and their participation in surveys/projects as appropriate.
- To look at opportunities for research by exploring National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) Portfolio regularly and by liaising with educational institutions/universities and other health care teams for possibility of multi-disciplinary, multi-centric and collaborative research projects.
- To share outcomes from research projects in relevant meetings/platforms at regional, national and international level within audiology as well as in the wider health and social care settings.
- To look at ways to value and reward high quality research for encouraging qualitative and diligent input from the participating team members.
- To ensure regular future review of this research strategy

References

1. A healthier Wales: long term plan for health and social care | Gov.Wales
2. Healthcare-science-in-nhs-wales.pdf | Gov.Wales
3. NHS Framework for Research and Development: Research matters -What excellence looks like in NHS Wales | Healthandcareresearchwales.org
4. <https://heiw.nhs.wales/our-work/healthcare-science-cymru/hcs-research-and-innovation-strategy>

Useful links

<https://healthandcareresearchwales.org/researchers/funding-schemes>

<https://healthandcareresearchwales.org/faculty>

RNID – National hearing loss charity <https://rnid.org.uk>

<https://healthandcareresearchwales.org/faculty/personal-awards>

<https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/centre-for-trials-research>

<https://nworth-ctu.bangor.ac.uk/>

<https://swanseatrialsunit.org/>

<https://www.unicef-irc.org/evidence-gap-maps>

HRA decision tool to check: <https://www.hra-decisiontools.org.uk/research/redirect.html>

Courses/Learning Events

Wales Audiology Research Network (WARN) meetings and events

Quality Improvement Skills Training (QIST)

Good Clinical Practice training by NIHR (National Institute for Health and Care Research)

Library Service training by Health boards

e-learning for Health

Research module: <https://www.e-lfh.org.uk/programmes/research-audit-and-quality-improvement/>

Literature searching: <https://www.e-lfh.org.uk/programmes/literature-searching/>

BSA online learning platform: <https://www.thebsa.org.uk/about/bsa-grow/>