

ECMC Network Strategy 2023-2028

Introduction

The ECMC network vision is to build a truly collaborative, internationally competitive national network of early phase experimental cancer medicine centres, translating the most promising innovations from the academic and industry sectors into the cancer medicines of tomorrow.

Conducting experimental cancer medicine research in a post-COVID, highly resource constrained, and globally competitive research landscape is challenging. The pandemic has necessitated novel approaches to research delivery, with a culture of collaboration evolving to enable rapid problem solving, and the adoption of new technology to overcome barriers to trial delivery. Integrating those learnings, the ECMC network and relevant stakeholders developed a focused network level strategy, creating a shared understanding of where the network should collaborate to advance experimental cancer medicine research in the UK.

ECMC Strategic Framework

The aim of this strategy is to increase the impact of the network by focusing collaborative efforts to a clearly defined scope of activities in the following areas:

Vision	to build a truly collaborative, internationally competitive national network of early phase experimental cancer medicine centres, translating the most promising innovations from the academic and industry sectors into the cancer medicines of tomorrow		
Objective	Accelerate innovative translational research	Globally competitive research delivery	Increase patient centred and accessible research
Strategic focus areas	Facilitate research collaboration internally and externally	Develop an accelerated pathway for early phase trials	Raise awareness of the network and early phase research
	Explore resource sharing and data integration - pre-clinical, clinical, RWE	Digitise trial delivery and patient identification	Involve patients and the public in trial/research design and delivery
		Use meaningful metrics and targets	Enable patient access within and beyond ECMC
Enablers	A sustainable workforce with future capabilities Network approach to training (future KOLs), retaining skilled staff, and attracting researchers with necessary skills (present and future) to support strategy		
	A strategic and collaborative network Build/sustain relationships with key stakeholders to deliver strategy and influence broader landscape; enable collaboration within the network to deliver strategy		
Network operating model and governance			

Strategic Objectives

Acceleration of translational research

The ECMC network has globally recognised clinical and translational scientific expertise, however the strategy consultation highlighted how the network's role in advancing translational research was poorly understood and as a result network level collaborative activity in this area was lacking. Several areas have now been identified where there is clear potential for the network to add value, including internal and external cancer research collaborations informed by the network's clinical and translational expertise (e.g. Therapeutic Discovery Labs, RadNet) and expansion of genomic data and insights.

Creating a globally competitive location for research delivery

Whilst the UK remains a top European destination for clinical research, the critical limiting factor in delivering on the full promise of the network is the challenge associated with setting up and conducting research in a system as complex as the NHS. Addressing operational delivery concerns including accelerating study start up, increased use of technology in trial delivery (e.g. decentralised trials) and creating transparent and appropriate delivery metrics will be important not just in retaining our global position but in improving it.

Increasing patient involvement and improving access for all patients

With a presence in all four UK nations a key objective for the network is to ensure patients have equitable access to early phase studies regardless of age, gender, ethnicity and geographical location. This comes in addition to ensuring the patient voice informs the design and delivery of these complex and innovative trials.

Key Enablers

Building a sustainable workforce

This strategy will only be fully realised via a sustainable workforce with future-facing capabilities to support innovative translational research and trial delivery. Today, loss of talent from the network is one of the key threats to clinical research and delivery. Building on existing network advances in training (ECMC Junior Investigator and Research Nurse training events), exploration of innovative resourcing models across centres will help ensure those professionals and their skills are most effectively utilised (in alignment with UK Vision for Clinical Research Delivery initiatives).

A Strategic and collaborative network

The ECMC network is one element of a broader research ecosystem and delivering system-wide change to address key barriers to experimental cancer research requires working in partnership with regulators, funders, industry, and others. The network has experience of collaborating successfully to address challenges and realise new opportunities and progressing this strategy in step with CRUK/national initiatives and in partnership with others will be central to its success.