

# NCRI Brain Group Strategic Priorities 2021-2024



## NCRI Partners

NCRI is a UK-wide partnership between research funders working together to maximise the value and benefits of cancer research for the benefit of patients and the public. A key strength of the NCRI is our broad membership with representation across both charity and government funders as well as across all four nations in the United Kingdom.



## Foreword



“The NCRI Brain Group is focused on clinical and translational issues relating to brain tumours. Over the last decade we have made great progress in growing the community of brain tumour researchers in the UK, developing clinical studies, and delivering practice-changing trials. It was fantastic to have so many new people participating in our four strategy sessions discussing the big challenges we face in developing more effective therapies for brain cancer patients. I have no doubt that with the new NCRI wider network and focused working groups we are in a strong position to develop innovative approaches to brain tumour research that will lead to patient benefit.”

– **Professor Michael Jenkinson, Chair of NCRI Brain Group**

## Brain Group Strategy Discussion Sessions 2021

The Brain Group strategy sessions held in September and October 2021 attracted over 60 participants from a range of sectors and disciplines, including NCRI Consumer Forum members, Early Career Researchers and Partners. The introductory session allowed for discussion of the overarching challenges, opportunities and gaps in brain cancer research, whilst the subsequent sessions addressed specific issues and areas of unmet need in the field. Experts exchanged ideas on the priorities of future research in the brain cancer community, with each session involving researchers from wide ranging disciplines encouraging cross-cutting collaboration to meet the most pressing needs in brain cancer today.

### Strategy session contributors

**Professor Michael Jenkinson**, University of Liverpool

**Dr Florian Boele**, University of Leeds

**Dr Thomas Booth**, King's College Hospital

**Dr Gerben Borst**, The Christie NHS Foundation Trust

**Professor Sebastian Brandner**, University College London

**Dr Paul Brennan**, University of Edinburgh

**Dr Juliet Brock**, Brighton and Sussex University Hospitals NHS Trust

**Dr Helen Bulbeck**, Brainstrust

**Dr Anthony Byrne**, Cardiff University

**Professor Anthony Chalmers**, University of Glasgow

**Dr Kazumi Chia**, University of Nottingham

**Dr Laura Clifton-Hadley**, University College London

**Dr Fiona Collinson**, Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust

**Dr Beth Coyle**, University of Nottingham

**Dr Simon Deacon**, Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust

**Dr Gary Doherty**, Addenbrooke's Hospital NHS Foundation Trust

**Dr Sara Erridge**, Western General Hospital

**Professor Jonathan Evans**, University of Glasgow

**Mrs. Sue Farrington Smith**, Brain Tumour Research

**Ms. Zoe Faulkner**, National Cancer Research Institute

**Dr Gerald Finnerty**, King's College London

**Professor Richard Gilbertson**, Cancer Research UK (CRUK) Cambridge Institute

**Dr Natividad Gomez-Roman**, University of Strathclyde

**Dr Robin Grant**, Western General Hospital

**Professor Oliver Hanemann**, University of Plymouth

**Dr Nicky Huskens**, Tessa Jowell Brain Cancer Mission

**Dr Sarah Jefferies**, Addenbrooke's Hospital NHS Foundation Trust

**Professor Kathreena Kurian**, North Bristol NHS Trust

**Dr Tai-Chung Lam**, Royal Preston Hospital

**Dr Joanne Lewis**, King's College London

**Dr Juanita Lopez**, Royal Marsden NHS

Foundation Trust

**Dr Cressida Lorimer**, Brighton and Sussex University Hospitals NHS Trust

**Dr Jillian Maclean**, Velindre Cancer Centre

**Dr Ryan Mathew**, Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust

**Dr Catherine McBain**, The Christie NHS Foundation Trust

**Dr Shaveta Mehta**, Clatterbridge Cancer Centre NHS Foundation Trust

**Dr Samantha Mills**, The Walton Centre NHS Foundation Trust

**Dr Louise Murray**, Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust

**Dr Alex Renziehausen**, National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI)

**Dr Meera Nandhabalan,**  
Institute of Cancer  
Research (ICR)

**Mrs Kathy Oliver,**  
International Brain  
Tumour Alliance (IBTA)

**Mr Puneet Plaha,** Oxford  
University Hospitals NHS  
Foundation Trust

**Dr James Powell,**  
Velindre Cancer Centre

**Mr Stephen Price,**  
University of Cambridge

**Mr Kieran Prior,** Cancer  
Research UK

**Dr Ameeta Retzer,**  
University of  
Birmingham

**Mr Thomas Santarius,**  
Addenbrooke's Hospital  
NHS Foundation Trust

**Mr Joshua Savage,**  
University of  
Birmingham

**Professor Susan Short,**  
University of Leeds

**Dr Stuart Smith,**  
Nottingham University  
Hospitals NHS Trust

**Dr Lucy Stead,**  
University of Leeds

**Dr Gerard Thompson,**  
University of Edinburgh

**Dr Igor Vivanco,** King's  
College London

**Dr Mueez Waqar,**  
University of Manchester

**Professor Colin Watts,**  
University of  
Birmingham

**Dr Gillian Whitfield,** The  
Christie NHS Foundation  
Trust

**Dr Matthew Williams,**  
Imperial College  
Healthcare NHS Trust

**Dr Rasheed Zakaria,** The  
Walton Centre NHS  
Foundation Trust

## Independent quinquennial review contributors

The work of the Brain Group is periodically reviewed by an international panel of experts in the field. The comments of these panel members contributed to the direction of the Group's strategic priorities.

**Dr Martin Forster,** University College Hospital

**Dr Matthias Preusser,** Medical University of Vienna

**Dr Mark Gilbert,** National Institute of Health USA

**Dr Aoife Regan,** Cancer Research UK

**Ms Nicola Keat,** National Cancer Research Institute

## Session 1: Introduction to Brain Group Strategy discussions

**Chair: Professor Michael Jenkinson**

Speakers:

- **Dr Sara Erridge**, Western General Hospital Edinburgh - NCRI Glioma Subgroup Strategy
- **Professor Oliver Hanemann**, University of Plymouth - NCRI Meningioma & Metastases Subgroup Strategy
- **Dr Robin Grant**, University of Edinburgh - NCRI Supportive & Palliative Care Subgroup Strategy

## Session 2: Biomarkers, Imaging and AI in Brain Cancer Research

**Chair: Professor Michael Jenkinson**

Speakers:

- **Dr Thomas Booth**, King's College London - Machine Learning in the Neuro-oncology Pathway
- **Dr Gerry Thompson**, University of Edinburgh – Current work on Biomarkers, Imaging and AI at the University of Edinburgh

## Session 3: Pharma, Study Design and Window Trials

**Chair: Professor Michael Jenkinson**

Speakers:

- **Dr Juanita Lopez**, Royal Marsden NHS Foundation Trust - The Opportunities and Challenges of Engaging with Pharma
- **Dr Igor Vivanco**, King's College London – Epidermal Growth Factor Receptor Clinical Trials

## Session 4: Primary vs Recurrent Brain Tumours and Treatment Efficacy

**Chair: Professor Michael Jenkinson**

Speakers:

- **Dr Fiona Collinson**, Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust – Systemic Options for Recurrent Glioblastoma
- **Dr Louise Murray**, Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust – Re-irradiation Options for Recurrent Glioblastoma
- **Dr Lucy Stead**, University of Leeds – Biology of Recurrent Glioblastoma and the Role for Re-sampling
- **Dr Paul Brennan**, University of Edinburgh – The Role of Surgery for Recurrent Glioblastoma

## **Fundamental principles of the NCRI and overarching work of the NCRI Brain Group**

The NCRI's fundamental principles of facilitating cross-funder, cross-sector collaboration involving Consumers and researchers at all stages of their career contribute to the overarching aim of developing a national portfolio of high-quality research. These principles run through the strategic priorities of all NCRI Groups. A dynamic mix of people, ideas and ways of thinking are needed to achieve these aims. The NCRI is committed to building a diverse, equal and inclusive environment for all those involved in our work. Crucially, steps to engage with and recruit a more diverse group of patients in, for example, clinical trials will be outlined in the implementation plans of any relevant project set up by NCRI Groups.

As well as Group specific strategic priorities, proposals guidance meetings are embedded within the activities of each Group. These meetings are key in facilitating coordinated research and will be held regularly to support the wider brain research community. By reviewing proposals relating to a breadth of tumour types and providing expert feedback, proposal guidance meetings allow the Group Executive broad oversight of the research portfolio and enable identification of areas of unmet need which require more focus.

The NCRI Strategy Advisory Group (SAG) regularly reviews our fundamental principles and scientific priority areas to ensure we have an agile strategy that develops as we evolve as an organisation and as gaps or opportunities emerge.

## Brain Group Strategic Priorities 2021 - 2024

### Priority 1

To produce and publish a position paper on the challenges faced in brain tumour research and proposed solutions, including a summary of the achievements from the previous 5-year strategy.

By addressing this priority, we aim to establish a joint consensus on the future of brain cancer research across the UK, with a focus on collaboration as opposed to competition. Greater collaboration will ultimately result in higher quality multi-centre studies.

The position paper will focus on ensuring that PPI, core outcome measures and neuroimaging are embedded within all studies from inception to delivery.

### Priority 2

To develop a window of opportunity study, early phase trial or basket study for glioblastoma patients utilising targeted agents, immunotherapy and/or drug-RT combinations.

By addressing this priority, we aim to work towards converting discovery science into patient benefit. This will include prioritising early evaluation of translational discoveries in patients and developing agile studies that can rapidly move into larger Phase III effectiveness trials.

### Priority 3

To develop an innovative research trial to improve outcomes for brain tumour patients with unmet needs.

This priority aims to improve outcomes for tumour patients with unmet need by focusing on developing trials that provide direct patient benefit, as opposed to recruiting these patients into safety trials for new drugs.

This Working Group will design a study for recurrent glioblastoma patients that will define the relative roles of surgery, radiotherapy, chemotherapy and palliative care and will consider innovative study design, tissue biobanking, tumour sequencing and combination therapies.



### **Priority 4**

To improve outcomes for elderly or frail patients, patients with poor prognosis and patients who are ineligible for active oncological treatment.

This priority aims to improve outcomes for patients with poor prognosis by developing a better understanding of brain tumours. This Working Group could focus on developing a biorepository to better understand the disease as well as exploring patient and carer priorities.

### **Priority 5**

To build and strengthen links with international groups and prioritise opening international studies for UK patients with rarer brain tumours.

This priority aims to expand our network to develop a truly collegiate brain research consortium, and ultimately help patients with rarer brain tumours. This priority will be embedded within the strategy of the main Group, who will focus on building proactive links with international groups such as ICR, CERN, EORTC and SIOP, as well as developing UK-initiated studies in some rarer brain tumours such as clinically aggressive meningioma.

### **Priority 6**

To support and provide guidance for a broad range of research proposals across the brain cancer community via regular Proposal Guidance meetings.

This aims to engage with and support the wider brain cancer research community by reviewing proposals relating to a breadth of tumour types and providing expert feedback. Proposal Guidance meetings will allow the Group broad oversight of the research portfolio to enable the identification of areas of unmet need to focus on. This priority is embedded within the strategy of the main Group who will ensure Proposal Guidance meetings take place as needed.

## Next steps

Working groups addressing each specific strategic priority are currently being formed. These groups will be made up of the experts needed to address each research question. The progress of these working groups will be published in the annual reports and triennial review of the Brain Group. These can be found on the NCRI [website](#). Members of the brain network will also be updated periodically of the progress of the Group.

Please [get in touch](#) if you have any questions or comments regarding this report or if you are interested in joining one of our [research networks](#), our [Consumer Forum](#) or our [ECR Forum](#).

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