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NIMR closure on hold

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The UK's [Medical Research Council](#) (MRC) is to reconsider plans to close one of its flagship institutions following an angry backlash from researchers who work there.

The decision was taken last week to set up an expert task force to consider the long-term future of the [National Institute for Medical Research](#) (NIMR), based at Mill Hill in north London.

On Friday May 30, MRC chief executive George Radda confirmed in a letter to John Skehel, director of the NIMR, that the plan now is to consider "a broader set of options" for the size and location of the institute.

The decision reflects the [unprecedented opposition](#) the MRC encountered when it revealed plans to close the Mill Hill site and move the NIMR to Cambridge. The proposal was put forward as part of a much wider blueprint for the future of MRC laboratories, called the [Forward Investment Strategy](#).

The consultation period for the plans ended on Monday May 26, and the results were discussed a few days later by the full MRC council, as well as a special subcommittee tackling the issue of MRC investment strategy over the next 10 to 15 years.

Within hours, it was announced that an expert task force would be set up, chaired jointly by Radda and [his successor Colin Blakemore](#), who will take over the post in October. Others on the task force will include Council members, independent experts and senior scientists from the NIMR.

It will look at how NIMR research can be "strategically positioned" within the MRC's overall vision, how dialogue with staff at Mill Hill can be improved and how best to prepare a business case to persuade the government to cover future investment in the NIMR.

An interim report will be produced by the end of this year, and a final blueprint completed within the next 12 months.

Radda's letter to Skehel hinted there is no time to waste. "I suggest we start to discuss possible composition of the task force and its work programme with you and your senior colleagues when Colin Blakemore and I visit on 5 June," he said.

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