

**Optimal Timing of Anticoagulation after Acute Ischaemic Stroke with Atrial Fibrillation (OPTIMAS): Protocol for a Randomised Controlled Trial**

Jonathan G. Best<sup>1</sup>, Liz Arram<sup>1</sup>, Norin Ahmed<sup>2</sup>, Maryam Balogun<sup>2</sup>, Kate Bennett<sup>2</sup>, Ekaterina Bordea<sup>2</sup>, Marta G. Campos<sup>3</sup>, Emilia Caverly<sup>2</sup>, Marisa Chau<sup>2</sup>, Hannah Cohen<sup>4</sup>, Hakim-Moulay Dehbi<sup>2</sup>, Caroline J. Doré<sup>2</sup>, Stefan T Engelter<sup>5</sup>, Robert Fenner<sup>2</sup>, Nick Freemantle<sup>2</sup>, Rachael Hunter<sup>2</sup>, Martin James<sup>6</sup>, Gregory Y. H. Lip<sup>7</sup>, Macey L. Murray<sup>3</sup>, Bo Norrving<sup>8</sup>, Nikola Sprigg<sup>9</sup>, Roland Veltkamp<sup>10</sup>, Iwona Zaczek<sup>2</sup>, David J. Werring<sup>1</sup> and the OPTIMAS investigators

1. Stroke Research Centre, Department of Brain Repair and Rehabilitation, UCL Queen Square Institute of Neurology, London, UK

2. Comprehensive Clinical Trials Unit, Institute of Clinical Trials and Methodology, UCL, London, UK

3. MRC Clinical Trials Unit, Institute of Clinical Trials and Methodology, UCL, London, UK

4. Haemostasis Research Unit, Department of Haematology, UCL, London, UK

5. Neurology and Neurorehabilitation, University Department of Geriatric Medicine FELIX PLATTER; University of Basel, Switzerland

6. Royal Devon & Exeter Hospital, and University of Exeter Medical School, Exeter, UK

7. Liverpool Centre for Cardiovascular Science, University of Liverpool and Liverpool Heart & Chest Hospital, Liverpool, UK; and Aalborg Thrombosis Research Unit, Department of Clinical Medicine, Aalborg University, Aalborg, Denmark

8. Department of Clinical Sciences, Department of Neurology, Skåne University Hospital, Lund University, Lund, Sweden

9. Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, University of Nottingham, Nottingham, UK

10. Department of Brain Sciences, Imperial College London, London, UK; and Department of Neurology, Alfried Krupp Krankenhaus, Essen, Germany

Key words: atrial fibrillation, acute ischaemic stroke, anticoagulation, DOAC, timing

**Corresponding author:**

Professor David J Werring

Professor of Clinical Neurology

Affiliation: Stroke Research Centre, Department of Brain Repair and Rehabilitation, UCL Queen Square Institute of Neurology, London, UK

Address: Stroke Research Centre, 1<sup>st</sup> floor, Russell Square House, 10 – 12 Russell Square, London WC1B 5EH, UK

Email: [d.werring@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:d.werring@ucl.ac.uk)

**Word count:**

Cover page: 249

Abstract: 271

Main body: 1683

Figure and table titles and legends: 54

Total (excluding cover page): 2,008

Total (including cover page): 2,257

**Tables:** 1

**Figures:** 1

**Manuscript date:** 10/12/2021

## Abstract

**Rationale** Atrial fibrillation (AF) causes one-fifth of ischaemic strokes, with a high risk of early recurrence. Although long-term anticoagulation is highly effective for stroke prevention in AF, initiation after stroke is usually delayed by concerns over intracranial haemorrhage (ICH) risk. Direct oral anticoagulants (DOACs) offer a significantly lower risk of ICH than other anticoagulants, potentially allowing earlier anticoagulation and prevention of recurrence, but the safety and efficacy of this approach has not been established.

**Aim** OPTIMAS will investigate whether early treatment with a DOAC, within 4 days of stroke onset, is as effective or better than delayed initiation, 7 to 14 days from onset, in AF patients with acute ischaemic stroke.

**Methods and design** OPTIMAS is a multicentre randomised controlled trial with blinded outcome adjudication. Participants with acute ischaemic stroke and AF eligible for anticoagulation with a DOAC are randomised 1:1 to early or delayed initiation. As of July 2021, 80 centres in the United Kingdom have opened.

**Study outcomes** The primary outcome is a composite of recurrent stroke (ischaemic stroke or symptomatic ICH) and systemic arterial embolism within 90 days. Secondary outcomes include major bleeding, functional status, anticoagulant adherence, quality of life, health and social care resource use, and length of hospital stay.

**Sample size target** 3478 participants assuming event rates of 11.5% in the control arm and 8% in the intervention arm, 90% power and 5% alpha. We will follow a non-inferiority gatekeeper analysis approach with a non-inferiority margin of 2 percentage points.

**Discussion** OPTIMAS aims to provide high-quality evidence on the safety and efficacy of early DOAC initiation after AF-associated ischaemic stroke.

**Trial registrations:** ISRCTN: 17896007; ClinicalTrials.gov: NCT03759938

## Introduction and rationale

Atrial fibrillation (AF) causes at least 20% of all ischaemic strokes (1). Oral anticoagulation reduces the risk of stroke in AF by around two-thirds (2,3), but its safety and benefit in acute ischaemic stroke is unclear. Current practice - based on limited observational data and expert opinion - is to delay anticoagulation by up to two weeks, during which the daily risk of recurrence is 0.4-1.3% (4-7). Earlier anticoagulation might prevent many recurrent ischaemic strokes, but might cause intracranial haemorrhage (ICH), including intracerebral haemorrhage due to haemorrhagic transformation of the infarct (*Supplementary Figure 1*), which is associated with poor outcome if severe (8). The optimal timing of anticoagulation after AF-associated ischaemic stroke is thus a frequent dilemma in stroke medicine.

Historical evidence suggests that anticoagulation within 48 hours of stroke onset with vitamin K antagonists (VKAs) or heparins is not beneficial because an increased risk of symptomatic ICH outweighs any reduction in ischaemic stroke (9). However, direct oral anticoagulants (DOACs) are as effective in ischaemic stroke prevention, but with half the risk of ICH of vitamin K antagonists (3). Although the large randomised trials of DOACs excluded participants with acute ischaemic stroke (10), increasing observational data suggest they might be used safely in acute AF-associated stroke (*Supplementary Table 1*). However, this evidence is limited by selection bias and may not generalise beyond mild-moderate stroke (10). Randomised controlled trials (RCTs) are therefore needed, are supported by stroke physicians, who report clinical uncertainty regarding optimal anticoagulation timing (11), and have been called for by international guidelines (12,13).

The OPTimal TIMing of Anticoagulation after acute ischaemic Stroke trial (OPTIMAS) aims to establish the safety and efficacy of early anticoagulation with a DOAC after AF-associated stroke.

## **Methods and design**

OPTIMAS is a phase IV multicentre RCT with an open-label intervention, blinded end-point adjudication, and hierarchical non-inferiority/superiority gatekeeper design, comparing a policy of early DOAC initiation, within 4 days of stroke onset, to delayed initiation, 7 to 14 days from onset, in patients with AF and acute ischaemic stroke.

### *Patient population*

OPTIMAS will recruit 3478 participants within 4 days of stroke onset, from UK stroke units. Sites are listed at <https://optimas.org.uk>.

### *Inclusion criteria*

- $\geq 18$  years old
- AF (confirmed by ECG recording or medical records)
- Clinical diagnosis of acute ischaemic stroke
- Eligible for anticoagulation with DOAC
- Treating physician is uncertain regarding the potential participant's optimal time to start DOAC

### *Exclusion criteria*

- Coagulopathy or current anticoagulation with INR  $\geq 1.7$  at randomisation (anticoagulant-treated patients not excluded if INR  $< 1.7$ ); clinically-significant thrombocytopenia (platelets  $< 75 \times 10^9/L$ )
- Severe haemorrhagic transformation of the infarct (ECASS PH2) (14) or acute ICH unrelated to infarct
- DOAC use contraindicated: severe renal impairment (creatinine clearance  $< 15\text{ml/min}$ ); cirrhosis (Child Pugh B or C) or ALT  $> 2\text{x}$  upper limit of normal; concurrent medication with significant interaction (e.g. strong CYP3A4 inducers); definite indication for VKA use
- Pregnancy or breastfeeding

### *Randomisation*

Participants will be randomised in a 1:1 ratio using an independent online randomisation service with random permuted blocks and randomly varying block lengths, stratified by NIHSS at randomisation (0-4, 5-10, 11-15, 16-21,  $>21$ ). The participant and treating clinicians will not be blinded to allocation, but outcomes will be adjudicated blind.

### *Intervention*

The intervention group will initiate a DOAC within 4 days of stroke onset (or the time symptoms were first noted, if the onset time cannot be determined). The control group will initiate a DOAC 7 to 14 days after onset, an interval selected based on a 2018 survey of UK

practice (11). The treating clinician determines the exact timing of anticoagulation in each group. Any DOAC licensed for stroke prevention in AF (i.e. apixaban, dabigatran, edoxaban, rivaroxaban) may be used. The dose may be reduced if recommended by the relevant Summary of Product Characteristics (15–18). All other clinical care follows current UK best practice (19).

### *Primary outcome*

The primary outcome is a composite of recurrent ischaemic stroke, symptomatic ICH (including haemorrhagic transformation), unclassifiable stroke syndromes, and systemic arterial embolism incidence at 90 days post-randomisation. Primary outcome events will be adjudicated centrally by independent expert clinicians blinded to treatment allocation.

### *Secondary outcomes*

Secondary efficacy outcomes include all-cause and cardiovascular mortality, recurrent ischaemic stroke, systemic embolism, and venous thromboembolism. Safety outcomes include symptomatic ICH, its anatomical subtypes, major extracranial bleeding (20), and clinically-relevant non-major bleeding (21). We will record functional (modified Rankin Scale), cognitive (MoCA), and patient-reported (EQ-5D-5L, PROMIS-10) outcomes, length of hospital stay, medication adherence, and health and social care resource use.

### *Data collection*

Trial data are collected via a secure online electronic data capture system, and pseudonymised clinical imaging data via a secure file transfer portal. *Table 1* shows the schedule of study assessments and interventions, and *Figure 1* the study flowchart.

### *Sample size estimates*

Our planned sample size assumed a reduction in the primary outcome event rate from 11.5% in the control group to 8% in the intervention group (a relative risk reduction of 30%). We judged this to be a clinically meaningful benefit likely to influence guidelines and practice. The assumed composite event rate and hypothesised effect size were derived from the Virtual International Stroke Trials Archive of trials in patients with ischaemic stroke and AF (22). The sample size calculation used 90% power for superiority, significance level 5%, and was inflated by 10% for loss to follow-up or other challenges; we anticipate a much lower rate than this. Based on the expected event rate and a non-inferiority margin of 3%, a sample size of 3478 evaluable participants would have had 80% power for non-inferiority.

We re-evaluated study power in November 2021 at the request of our Independent Data Monitoring Committee, due to a lower-than-expected interim adjudicated primary outcome rate of 4.3%. Given this event rate, our planned sample size has 80% power to show non-inferiority based on a non-inferiority margin of 2%, and 80% power for superiority assuming an odds ratio reduction of 38%.

### *Statistical analyses*

Our main analysis will follow the intention-to-treat principle. Outcome data will be collected from all participants enrolled, unless consent is specifically withdrawn (in which case data will be included up to the point of withdrawal). We will first test for non-inferiority of the intervention, using a non-inferiority margin of 2 percentage points identified as clinically acceptable. If non-inferiority is established, we will test for superiority. For our primary outcome, we will use mixed-effects logistic regression including an independent variable indicating treatment allocation, with adjustment for stroke severity (NIHSS) at randomisation. Sites will be included as random intercept terms.

The health economic evaluation will calculate the mean incremental cost per quality adjusted life year (QALY) gained by early initiation of a DOAC. Cost-effectiveness will primarily be evaluated using cost-effectiveness acceptability curves generated from bootstrapped results to calculate the probability that early initiation of DOAC is cost-effective compared to late initiation for a range of values of willingness to pay for a QALY gained.

Further details of our statistical and health economic analyses are presented in the *Appendix*. A full statistical and health economic analysis plan will be published before the end of recruitment. Prespecified secondary statistical analyses will include: a per-protocol analysis; a mediation analysis; and analyses by stroke severity (NIHSS) and neuroimaging features including infarct location, volume, haemorrhagic transformation (including subtypes of haemorrhagic infarction and parenchymal haematoma (14)), and cerebral small vessel disease markers.

*Study organisation and funding*

The study is funded by the British Heart Foundation (CS/17/6/333561) and sponsored by University College London. The *Appendix* describes study approvals and governance, key study committees (*Supplementary Tables 2 – 7*), and arrangements for data monitoring, safety reporting, and quality assurance. Study results will be presented at scientific meetings and published in peer-reviewed journals.

## **Discussion**

OPTIMAS is a prospective RCT based in routine clinical practice throughout the UK, addressing the important clinical uncertainty of the optimal timing of anticoagulation for secondary prevention of cardioembolic stroke, with broad eligibility criteria intended to give a representative study sample and results readily applicable to clinical practice.

We decided against imaging-based eligibility criteria. Although infarct size is a risk factor for haemorrhagic transformation (8), to our knowledge, it has not been shown that anticoagulation timing and infarct size interact with respect to the risks of clinically-significant haemorrhagic transformation and adverse clinical outcomes, although these considerations often feature in expert guidance (23). Furthermore, larger infarct size is also a risk factor for recurrent ischaemic stroke in AF patients (24,25). Visual classifications of infarct size are based mainly on vascular anatomy and expert opinion (8), and accurate measurement requires diffusion-weighted MRI (or a delayed CT) and trained raters, increasing the time and complexity of establishing eligibility, an important consideration in a time-sensitive trial. Our approach concurs with that of the Swedish TIMING trial (ClinicalTrials.gov NCT02961348) (26), facilitating pooled individual patient data (IPD) analyses, and will complement the international imaging-based ELAN trial (which varies anticoagulation timing according to infarct size; NCT03148457) and the United States' START trial (which excludes participants

with large infarct volumes; NCT03021928) (27), with the possibility of aligning imaging-based subgroup analyses.

We chose a hierarchical non-inferiority then superiority gatekeeper design because: (1) a finding of non-inferiority but not superiority at our chosen margin of 3 percentage points would give confidence that early anticoagulation with a DOAC is of similar clinical benefit to delayed anticoagulation, so could reasonably be chosen for its practical advantages; and (2) early anticoagulation might have advantages beyond prevention of stroke and systemic arterial embolism, such as improved adherence and reduced length of stay.

No participants in OPTIMAS will be randomised to start anticoagulation between four and seven days after onset per protocol. This separation between treatment groups aims to minimise crossovers and ensure that the two groups receive different timings of treatment onset. Our best judgement was that these advantages would outweigh the possibility that the optimal timing of anticoagulation might be within this period. A large-scale pooled analysis with other anticoagulation timing trials is planned, giving full coverage of the first two weeks after stroke onset and power to explore this issue in detail.

## **Summary and conclusions**

OPTIMAS will determine the efficacy and safety of early anticoagulation with a DOAC in patients with acute ischaemic stroke and AF, a strategy with the potential to prevent early recurrent ischaemic strokes, shorten hospital stays, and improve quality of life.

## **Declaration of competing interests**

The author(s) declared the following potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article:

DJW reports personal fees from Bayer, Portola and Alnylam.

STE has received funding for travel or speaker honoraria from Bayer, Boehringer Ingelheim, BMS/Pfizer and Daiichi-Sankyo. His institution has received an educational grant from Pfizer and research support from Daiichi-Sankyo.

BN report personal fees from Astra Zeneca and Bayer.

MJ reports travel or speaker honoraria from Daiichi-Sankyo, Portola, Boehringer Ingelheim

RV reports research funding from Bayer, Boehringer Ingelheim, BMS, Pfizer, Daiichi Sankyo, Medtronic, and has received speaker honoraria or personal fees from Bayer, BMS, Pfizer, Abbott, Astra Zeneca, Javelin.

HC reports, outside the submitted work, institutional research support and support to attend scientific meetings from Bayer Healthcare, and travel support from UCB Biopharma, with honoraria for lectures from Bayer Healthcare and consultancy fees from UCB Biopharma paid to University College London Hospitals Charity.

GYHL has been a consultant and speaker for BMS/Pfizer, Boehringer Ingelheim and Daiichi-Sankyo. No fees are received personally.

All other authors declare no competing interests.

## **Funding**

The authors disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article:

HC, CD, STE, MJ, GYHL, BN, NS, RV and DJW report a grant from the British Heart Foundation for OPTIMAS. MJ is supported by the NIHR South West Peninsula Applied Research Collaboration. RV is partially supported by the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No. 754517 (PRESTIGE-AF).

All other authors declare no grants or funding in respect of the work.

**ORCID IDs**

Macey Murray: 0000-0001-6418-0854

Caroline Doré: 0000-0001-9796-4970

## References

1. Sposato LA, Cipriano LE, Saposnik G, Ruíz Vargas E, Riccio PM, Hachinski V. Diagnosis of atrial fibrillation after stroke and transient ischaemic attack: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Lancet Neurol.* 2015 Apr;14(4):377–87.
2. Hart RG, Pearce LA, Aguilar MI. Meta-analysis: antithrombotic therapy to prevent stroke in patients who have nonvalvular atrial fibrillation. *Ann Intern Med.* 2007 Jun 19;146(12):857–67.
3. Ruff CT, Giugliano RP, Braunwald E, Hoffman EB, Deenadayalu N, Ezekowitz MD, et al. Comparison of the efficacy and safety of new oral anticoagulants with warfarin in patients with atrial fibrillation: a meta-analysis of randomised trials. *Lancet Lond Engl.* 2014 Mar 15;383(9921):955–62.
4. Saxena R, Lewis S, Berge E, Sandercock PA, Koudstaal PJ. Risk of early death and recurrent stroke and effect of heparin in 3169 patients with acute ischemic stroke and atrial fibrillation in the International Stroke Trial. *Stroke.* 2001 Oct;32(10):2333–7.
5. Chen Z-M. CAST: randomised placebo-controlled trial of early aspirin use in 20 000 patients with acute ischaemic stroke. *The Lancet.* 1997 Jun 7;349(9066):1641–9.
6. Berge E, Abdelnoor M, Nakstad PH, Sandset PM. Low molecular-weight heparin versus aspirin in patients with acute ischaemic stroke and atrial fibrillation: a double-blind randomised study. HAEST Study Group. Heparin in Acute Embolic Stroke Trial. *Lancet Lond Engl.* 2000 Apr 8;355(9211):1205–10.
7. Hart R G, Coull B M, Hart D. Early recurrent embolism associated with nonvalvular atrial fibrillation: a retrospective study. *Stroke.* 1983 Sep 1;14(5):688–93.
8. Paciaroni Maurizio, Agnelli Giancarlo, Corea Francesco, Ageno Walter, Alberti Andrea, Lanari Alessia, et al. Early Hemorrhagic Transformation of Brain Infarction: Rate, Predictive Factors, and Influence on Clinical Outcome. *Stroke.* 2008 Aug 1;39(8):2249–56.
9. Paciaroni M, Agnelli G, Micheli S, Caso V. Efficacy and safety of anticoagulant treatment in acute cardioembolic stroke: a meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials. *Stroke.* 2007 Feb;38(2):423–30.
10. Seiffge DJ, Werring DJ, Paciaroni M, Dawson J, Warach S, Milling TJ, et al. Timing of anticoagulation after recent ischaemic stroke in patients with atrial fibrillation. *Lancet Neurol.* 2019 Jan 1;18(1):117–26.
11. Munn D, Abdul-Rahim AH, Fischer U, Werring DJ, Robinson TG, Dawson J. A survey of opinion: When to start oral anticoagulants in patients with acute ischaemic stroke and atrial fibrillation? *Eur Stroke J.* 2018 Dec;3(4):355–60.
12. Klijn CJ, Paciaroni M, Berge E, Korompoki E, Kõrv J, Lal A, et al. Antithrombotic treatment for secondary prevention of stroke and other thromboembolic events in patients

- with stroke or transient ischemic attack and non-valvular atrial fibrillation: A European Stroke Organisation guideline. *Eur Stroke J*. 2019 Sep 1;4(3):198–223.
13. Powers WJ, Rabinstein AA, Ackerson T, Adeoye OM, Bambakidis NC, Becker K, et al. 2018 Guidelines for the Early Management of Patients With Acute Ischemic Stroke: A Guideline for Healthcare Professionals From the American Heart Association/American Stroke Association. *Stroke*. 2018 Mar;49(3):e46–110.
  14. Berger C, Fiorelli M, Steiner T, Schäbitz WR, Bozzao L, Bluhmki E, et al. Hemorrhagic transformation of ischemic brain tissue: asymptomatic or symptomatic? *Stroke*. 2001 Jun;32(6):1330–5.
  15. Eliquis 5 mg film-coated tablets - Summary of Product Characteristics (SmPC) - (emc) [Internet]. [cited 2021 May 13]. Available from: <https://www.medicines.org.uk/emc/product/2878/smpc>
  16. Xarelto 20mg film-coated tablets - Summary of Product Characteristics (SmPC) - (emc) [Internet]. [cited 2021 May 13]. Available from: <https://www.medicines.org.uk/EMC/medicine/25586/SPC/Xarelto+20mg+film-coated+tablets/>
  17. Lixiana 60mg Film-Coated Tablets - Summary of Product Characteristics (SmPC) - (emc) [Internet]. [cited 2021 May 13]. Available from: <https://www.medicines.org.uk/emc/product/6905/smpc>
  18. Pradaxa 150 mg hard capsules - Summary of Product Characteristics (SmPC) - (emc) [Internet]. [cited 2021 May 13]. Available from: <https://www.medicines.org.uk/emc/product/4703/smpc>
  19. Intercollegiate Stroke Working Party, Royal College of Physicians. National Clinical Guideline for Stroke, 5th Edition. 2016.
  20. Schulman S, Kearon C. Definition of major bleeding in clinical investigations of antihemostatic medicinal products in non-surgical patients. *J Thromb Haemost*. 2005;3(4):692–4.
  21. Kaatz S, Ahmad D, Spyropoulos AC, Schulman S. Definition of clinically relevant non-major bleeding in studies of anticoagulants in atrial fibrillation and venous thromboembolic disease in non-surgical patients: communication from the SSC of the ISTH. *J Thromb Haemost*. 2015;13(11):2119–26.
  22. Abdul-Rahim AH, Fulton RL, Frank B, Tatlisumak T, Paciaroni M, Caso V, et al. Association of improved outcome in acute ischaemic stroke patients with atrial fibrillation who receive early antithrombotic therapy: analysis from VISTA. *Eur J Neurol*. 2015 Jul;22(7):1048–55.
  23. Kirchhof P, Benussi S, Kotecha D, Ahlsson A, Atar D, Casadei B, et al. 2016 ESC Guidelines for the management of atrial fibrillation developed in collaboration with EACTS. *Eur Eur Pacing Arrhythm Card Electrophysiol J Work Groups Card Pacing Arrhythm Card Cell Electrophysiol Eur Soc Cardiol*. 2016 Nov;18(11):1609–78.

24. Paciaroni M, Agnelli G, Falocci N, Caso V, Becattini C, Marcheselli S, et al. Early Recurrence and Cerebral Bleeding in Patients With Acute Ischemic Stroke and Atrial Fibrillation. *Stroke* [Internet]. 2015 Aug [cited 2021 Jan 22]; Available from: <https://www.ahajournals.org/doi/abs/10.1161/STROKEAHA.115.008891>
25. Paciaroni M, Agnelli G, Ageno W, Caso V. Timing of anticoagulation therapy in patients with acute ischaemic stroke and atrial fibrillation. *Thromb Haemost.* 2016;116(9):410–6.
26. Åsberg S, Hijazi Z, Norrving B, Terént A, Öhagen P, Oldgren J. Timing of oral anticoagulant therapy in acute ischemic stroke with atrial fibrillation: study protocol for a registry-based randomised controlled trial. *Trials.* 2017 Dec 2;18(1):581.
27. King BT, Lawrence PD, Milling TJ, Warach SJ. Optimal delay time to initiate anticoagulation after ischemic stroke in atrial fibrillation (START): Methodology of a pragmatic, response-adaptive, prospective randomized clinical trial. *Int J Stroke Off J Int Stroke Soc.* 2019 Dec;14(9):977–82.

## Tables

Table 1: schedule of study assessments and interventions

<b>Assessment</b>	<b>Screening and enrolment</b>	<b>Acute stroke unit treatment</b>	<b>Discharge from ASU</b>	<b>Follow-up</b>
<i>Time</i>	<i>Within 96 hours of stroke onset</i>			<i>90 days from randomisation</i>
Informed consent	X			
Documentation of AF diagnosis <sup>a</sup>	X			
Blood tests (creatine, ALT, platelets, INR) <sup>b</sup>	X			
Documentation of admission NIHSS <sup>b</sup>	X			
NIHSS at randomisation	X			
Baseline BP and weight	X			
Baseline scales and scores (premorbid mRS, IQCODE, EQ-5D-5L)	X			
First administration of DOAC		X <sup>c</sup>		
SAE/outcome event reporting		X	X	X
Collection of participant brain and vascular imaging <sup>d</sup>			X	X
Follow-up scales and scores (mRS, MoCA, PROMIS-10, EQ-5D-5L,				X

health and social care resource use questionnaire)				
---	--	--	--	--

<sup>a</sup> Current or previous ECG recording or report, or documentation in medical care records

<sup>b</sup> Generally part of routine clinical care

<sup>c</sup> During hospitalisation in most cases, but initiation after discharge also permitted

<sup>d</sup> Imaging performed as part of clinical care only

**Figure titles and legends**

*Figure 1: Study flowchart*