

# NHS England/NIHR Pre-doctoral Bridging Programme 2025

North Region

# Guidance for Applicants

## Practitioner academic careers

Practitioner academics combine their health and care work with applied health research. They work in health and social care to improve, maintain, or recover health while in parallel researching new ways of delivering better outcomes for patients. Practitioner academics may also work in Higher Education Institutions while providing expertise to health and social care.

Because they are active practitioners, their research is grounded in the day to day issues of **practice**. This dual role also allows the practitioner academic to combine their health and care role and research career rather than having to choose between the two.

A researcher immersed in a health or care setting is in an excellent position to identify the questions that matter to **the individuals**, to health and social care and to their profession. They are also in a position to ensure that research is applicable in practice, and to interpret and apply research findings in a practical and useful way.

Further resources on Practitioner Academic Careers can be found on the [NIHR Integrated Clinical Academic Programme](#) website

### Overview

NHS England (NHSE) supports the delivery of excellent health and care services and health improvement to the patients and public of England by ensuring that the health and care workforce of today and tomorrow has the right numbers, skills, values and behaviours, at the right time and in the right place.

The NHS England (NHSE) and National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) bridging programme supports health and care professionals (excluding doctors and dentists) to develop careers that combine research with continued practice and professional development (Clinical or Practitioner Academic careers).

The NIHR Research Career Development Funding Programmes comprise several schemes that support individuals at different stages of their research career. Each scheme requires the support of both a clinical and academic host organisation, which together support a career pathway for aspiring and developing non-medical practitioner academics:

- Internship & Insight Programme
- NIHR Pre-doctoral Award
- NIHR Doctoral Award
- NIHR Postdoctoral Award

Alongside the NIHR national programme sit locally managed internships and bridging programmes.

## Pre-Doctoral Bridging Programme

NHSE/NIHR offer funded places to join the 6 month Pre-Doctoral Bridging Programme in the North.

Applicants must:

- hold a professional registration and belong to one of the [eligible professions](#).
- hold a substantive contract of employment with a NHS Trust or other organisation. whose core business is delivery of NHS care as a primary aspect of your professional role in the [North East-Yorkshire and Humber region](#) or [North West region](#).
- be a graduate of a Masters in Research or equivalent postgraduate qualification.
- intend to undertake a PhD (research doctorate).

Aims of the award to enable the fellow to:

- prepare a fellowship application to compete successfully for PhD funding to further a Practitioner Academic Career. It is expected that the application will be made within 6-12 months of completion of the award.
- provide opportunities to work with established and early career researchers and PhD students at a Higher Education Institutes.
- develop academic networks necessary for a practitioner academic career.
- develop research skills.
- offer insight into a practitioner academic career and experience relevant to applying for further formal research training.

Pre-Doctoral Bridging Fellows will:

- participate in a programme of face to face formal workshop events (3 mandatory days) delivered in the region. Study days to be taken flexibly.
- prepare a high quality application for submission to a NIHR Doctoral Award or similar doctoral fellowship opportunity which includes a research proposal and suitable training and development plan.

Each Pre-Doctoral Bridging Fellow will identify an academic supervisor who will:

- be a formally qualified researcher, minimum PhD qualification.
- commit to supervising for the duration of the project.
- facilitate high quality learning opportunities for the Fellow.
- facilitate access to research professionals as determined by the development needs of the Fellow.
- assist with the development of the PhD Fellowship application and sign off the final PhD proposal by the Fellow.

All supervisors assigned to Bridging Fellows should have the skills to provide hands on support, mentorship and be able to act as a role model to other Fellows.

Applicants can nominate a supervisor provided they meet the criteria above and complete the supervisor section on the application form.

## **Funding**

The programme is fully funded by NHSE for successful applicants.

A payment of £7,000 is offered to the Fellow's employing organisation which can cover protected time away from substantive role, training and support costs and travel or other costs incurred reasonably by the Fellow. The applicant's immediate line manager needs to sign the application form as evidence of a full discussion of the scheme as a way of supporting practitioner academic careers and the employer's commitment to facilitate release from their substantive role for the protected study time. Study time can be taken flexibly, and applicants should discuss this with their immediate line manager at the earliest opportunity.

Funding will be released in line with Milestone Payments linked to the mandatory attendance at the workshop events.

## **Formal teaching**

A series of workshops and Masterclasses will be scheduled over the 6 months to support the Fellows to develop their application and in recognition of the highly competitive nature of the NIHR awards. These include topics such as:

- Research leadership.
- Doing research that has impact.
- Development of a research proposal embedded with effective patient and public involvement in research.
- Building a practitioner academic career.
- Costing your application – research costs, service support and treatment costs.
- Final proposal presentation and interview technique.

Dates of the formal workshop events will be confirmed in due course however for your own planning purposes we have indicated below when they are likely to be held (attendance is mandatory and will be linked to the release of your funding):

Day 1 – June 2025

Day 2 – September 2025

Day 3 – December 2025

## Outputs

At the end of the programme fellows are expected to have:

- i) developed a robust research proposal which is a suitable vehicle for a fellowship application, one that builds on existing research skills and experience and fits with the fellowship funder's remit.
- ii) identified high quality supervisors and appropriate mentoring and a clinical host.
- iii) identified an appropriate training and development programme to support the development of research, clinical and leadership skills.
- iv) developed a career trajectory and longer term career plans.
- v) prepared a Doctoral fellowship (or equivalent) application.

Fellows will also be required to produce a 1500 word report for their employing organisation.

## Key Dates

**Application Deadline: 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2025**

**Interviews: 29<sup>th</sup> May 2025, The Queens Hotel, Leeds**

**Start Date: June 2025**

**Completed application forms to be emailed to: [joanne.simpson@researchnorthwest.nhs.uk](mailto:joanne.simpson@researchnorthwest.nhs.uk)**

For any further questions please contact the Programme Co-ordinator;

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