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NHS R&D North West

Better Connected Health & Care Research

NIHR Health and Care Professional (HCP) Internship Programme (NORTH WEST REGION ONLY)

GUIDANCE NOTES FOR APPLICANTS

2025/26

OVERVIEW

The NIHR Health and Care Professional (HCP) Internship programme will provide opportunities for professional development, education and training for registered Health Care Professionals (HCPs) to explore and extend the range of ways in which research can be incorporated into their roles and professional practice.

The internship programme will support HCPs:

- Who are curious about practice-based research but with little or no research experience
- Who already have some practice-based research experience and want to learn about and support the broader research agenda to improve outcomes for patients and service users
- Who wish to develop their existing research delivery roles or develop into these
- Who may wish to work towards clinical or practitioner academic research careers.

It will provide opportunities for those with little or no experience to make research a more valued part of practice and embed research in what they do. It will also provide an opportunity for those in research delivery roles to explore different approaches to practice-based enquiry and develop the required skills and knowledge that can be shared with peers and team members to help prepare an organisation to become more research active.

For those individuals who wish to develop a career that combines research and research leadership with professional practice, the programme will provide an opportunity to explore the nature of roles in the broader health and care landscape. It will promote the development of essential research skills and ensure that interns have access to effective communities of practice and local research leaders and influencers.

It is not expected that all interns will wish to access further NIHR awards or other awards available for clinical and practitioner researcher development as some interns are likely to engage with the research agenda in a much more modest, local context, for example, through a research champion role.

Each internship award will be bespoke, tailored to individual developmental needs and aspirations. All interns will have access to coaching, mentoring and academic/clinical supervision throughout the programme, supporting them to address their individual priorities and needs.

As part of the application process, applicants will be asked to create a research focussed Personal Development Plan (PDP). For successful applicants, this will be reviewed and evolve as the programme progresses, as the intern's confidence and knowledge develops, reflecting short, medium and long-term research goals as appropriate.

WHO CAN APPLY?
The internship will serve diverse groups of health and social care professions and practitioners, particularly those who are underrepresented in current clinical academic and practitioner research training opportunities.

To be eligible to apply, applicants must:

- be a health or social care professional *(non-medical clinical role)* registered with one of the approved regulatory bodies listed here.
- your main employment must be in the North West with an NHS Body, a provider of public or third sector funded health and/or social care services (for example a commissioned social enterprise, local authority or hospice that provides at least 50% of its services free at the point of delivery).
- not normally hold or be in the process of studying for a higher degree by research or one that includes a significant research component e.g. a Professional Doctorate or PhD or equivalent.

AIMS
The key aims that underpin the HCP Internship Programme are to:

- provide predoctoral level tailored and bespoke learning and development to the full range of health and care professions (not including doctors and dentists) across the full range of research-related career aspirations.
- provide opportunities for individuals with a desire to increase research awareness through practice up to and including providing individuals with a strong foundation on which to build a research-related career.
- develop collaborative partnerships and networks between organisations at a regional level.
- embed a positive and inclusive research culture within health and care services.

The programme will focus on individual practitioners' aspirations and include the following as appropriate:

- provide an opportunity to develop skills and expertise in essential aspects of practitioner related research.
- further enhance practice through application of newly acquired research skills.
- enable participants to apply new skills and become a research champion within their Trust/Organisation.
- enable individuals to make informed decisions about the future of their research career.
- enhance skills to develop successful applications for further research based development opportunities.

FUNDING
Successful interns will be awarded up to £10,000 to support educational engagement workshops, training and development activities and salary backfill.

WHAT IS INVOLVED IN THE INTERNSHIP?
Internships comprise 30 days release from award holders' substantive roles to be spent within a host research organisation, normally a university and/or a research delivery environment. This may also provide opportunities for interns to become involved in research activity (though interns will not engage in their own primary research requiring formal ethical approval as part of this programme). An additional 6 days will be spent participating in a structured educational engagement programme with other interns, in which the nature of practitioner research roles will be explored in more depth. There will be a celebration event following the completion of the programme to allow interns the opportunity to share their work in the form of a poster presentation.

SUPERVISED RESEARCH PROJECT/ACTIVITY
The programme has been designed to enable interns to negotiate the timing and nature of their research activity and where appropriate, their placement(s). The research project refers to a set period of supervised individual enquiry that is related to practice.

This can take the form of:

- desktop literature review
- methods of data collection and analysis relevant to a small-scale research project including service evaluation, audit and review
- project development and design

Interns will be encouraged to share their initial insights, learning and development ideas with potential supervisors (which could be academic or clinical) and mentors. The intern and supervisor will agree a written plan of work for the duration of the programme.

Where appropriate, interns will be encouraged to engage individually with research delivery training, including:

- Good Clinical Practice in Research training.
- Research Delivery Network training for potential roles in helping to deliver research e.g., consent training, Principal Investigator training, attendance at Site Initiation visits.
- HEI research-based modules through the University of Liverpool and/or another HEI where appropriate
- Development of a short research CV/portfolio

As part of the supervised research project/activity interns are required to identify a relevant academic/clinical supervisor who will support them. Contact with the proposed supervisors is strongly encouraged prior to applying. ***(Please note that if you do not currently have academic/clinical supervisory arrangements in place, NHS R&D NW will assist you in finding an appropriate supervisor to support you during***

the internship.) This early engagement enables applicants with the opportunity to share research ideas however tentative, with experienced researchers and provides an opportunity to develop longer term relationships with supervisors and mentors.

It is expected that through the agreed work programme, interns will gain exposure to working within a practitioner research environment (either academic or clinical research delivery) to increase their knowledge, understanding and skills. This may include and promote:

- Development of research questions
- Systematic review
- Methods of data collection and analysis
- Project development and design including research ethics and costing strategies
- Appreciation of challenges with conducting research within a clinical or service environment
- Presentation and writing skills development

Being located within a research environment will enable you to increase your understanding of the academic research environment, the differing research roles within research teams and the interface between academia and clinical practice.

Due to the timeframe of the internship programme, no research activity will be undertaken which requires an individual, to seek formal ethical approval.

RESEARCH DELIVERY TEAM PROFESSIONALS

The programme is also open to professionals in research delivery roles. Research delivery roles support clinical and health research, involving direct patient interaction or behind-the-scenes coordination. Examples include **Clinical Research Practitioners (CRPs)** who screen participants and collect data, **Clinical Trial Coordinators (CRCs)** who manage daily trial operations, and **Principal Investigators (PIs)** who lead the research team. The programme can offer the opportunity to have up to 30 days to support a bespoke programme focussed upon increasing the impact of the intern's existing research delivery role.

Interns will need to identify supervision/mentorship/shadowing within a research delivery environment**.** ***(Please note that if you do not currently have research delivery supervisory arrangements in place, NHS R&D NW will assist you in finding an appropriate supervisor during the internship.)***

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The programme's 30 days of supervised research engagement must be completed before the end of April 2027. These days can be configured to meet the needs of the intern, the employing organisation, the host organisation/clinical research network or practice environment and the programme of work to be undertaken. For example, this could be taken as dedicated time of 1 day a week over 30 weeks or in blocks of time as necessary. There is no requirement to complete the 30 days within the duration of the educational programme of the internship.

WHO CAN SUPERVISE MY INTERNSHIP?

All interns will receive supervision from experienced academics or clinicians or senior staff from practice, including senior researchers, and experienced peers within their specific discipline.

Key Individuals Who Can Provide Supervision

- ***Experienced Academics:***
  Senior researchers, or supervisors at a university or research institution who have expertise in the researcher's specific field.
- ***Senior Clinicians:***
  Experienced practitioners within the health or care sector who have strong knowledge of both clinical practice and research within that area.
- ***Peer Supervisors:***
  Other nurses, allied health professionals or social care professionals engaged in similar research.
- ***Interprofessional Supervisors:***
  Practitioners from disciplines other than that of the intern can also provide supervision, particularly when a researcher is working on an interprofessional project.

Qualities and Responsibilities of a Supervisor

- ***Clinical Expertise:***
  Supervisors in health and care must have the required level and currency of clinical or practice knowledge to ensure that the proposed research activities are appropriate and ethical.
- ***Research Expertise:***
  Supervisors must possess sufficiently advanced practitioner research skills to guide interns through the research process.
- ***Supportive Relationship:***
  A core aspect of supervision is the development of a strong working alliance to foster the personal and professional growth of the intern.
- ***Guidance on Practice:***
  Supervisors must help these early career researchers to ensure their practice is evidence-based, which protects both the patient and the professional's reputation.

Approved supervisors will:

- be actively involved in research and hold a **minimum** of a Masters degree by Research level qualification
- have experience of supporting and supervising Masters degree (by research) students to completion
- commit to supervision throughout the internship period
- assume responsibility for coordinating any placement including facilitating access to the wider academic research community

DEVELOPING YOUR PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Personal Development Plans (PDPs) make an important contribution to the promotion of personal and professional development, and they help individuals to record and reflect upon progress. PDPs are forward thinking strategies which detail what, where and how a person carries out activity in support of priorities. The programme will utilise PDPs to help interns to develop the skills, knowledge and behaviours relevant to their research aspirations. They identify perceived strengths and weaknesses, where there may be a need to improve knowledge and skills, how to do so, and the timescales to work to. Focus will be placed upon these plans throughout the internship period. They will be individual and private to the user.

Please consider when thinking about the PDP:

- What do you wish to achieve by taking part in the internship programme (aims/goals)?
- Why is this important to you?
- How do your personal values align to your proposed research activity?
- Do your research interests align with local/regional/professional research aims and wider policy?
- What's your assessment of your current research experience and working environment?
- Do you know the skills, knowledge or competencies you need to build on to take the next step in engaging/promoting research within your current or possible new role?
- Are there any activities or training you can identify and participate in to help you reach your desired outcomes and goals?

In preparation of the PDP, we encourage all applicants to reflect on what they perceive to be their professional attributes and identify areas of potential growth. This can take the form of specific personal development needs in a current field of work for engaging in research or enhancing current level of expertise.

- What are your strong points?
- Are you good at creative problem-solving, networking, managing, collaborating?
- Which of these areas/skills can you work on even more or are there any gaps in your current knowledge or experience?

Remember that your needs can be met independently, or with the help of your manager, a critical friend, a colleague, or a mentor.

EDUCATIONAL ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMME

This will be a core element of the programme where interns will be able to come together to share learning from their research activities and placements. It will provide an opportunity to engage with guest speakers and local and regional research leaders and influencers who will encourage debate on key themes across the broad researcher development agenda. Themes include 'working with multidisciplinary teams on research projects', 'enhancing creativity' and 'developing the skills needed to design, undertake and report research findings'. The workshops will encourage the development of critical thinking, for example by viewing different perspectives of a research question or problem and developing and practising reflection and reflexivity.

The educational engagement programme will be led by experienced health and care researchers and practitioners and will include input relating to research methods and methodologies, developing a research question, leadership in research. There will be visiting speakers who will share information about how to access and utilise the professional bodies and networks available locally, regionally and beyond.

The in-person element of the educational programme will be delivered through 3 x 2-day residential educational workshops comprising a total of 6 days in total.

Throughout the programme, emphasis will be placed on the interns' personal development needs, including the identification of any emergent new areas of research interest and focus, the development of more advanced skills, knowledge and practice, personal growth and confidence. Participants will develop reflective and reflexive practice skills; identify aspirational short/medium and long-term research goals.

- Interns will be encouraged to become part of an early career researcher community of practice by joining a dedicated WhatsApp Group.

- Within the educational programme, interns will participate in 6 group coaching sessions, the first of which is in person. The remainder will be delivered online within small coaching groups, all of which will supported by a professional coach over the duration of the programme.

The dates of the workshops are provided below. Attendance and participation at all these events is required as part of the programme.

The dates of the residential workshops are:
22nd & 23rd April 2026
15th & 16th July 2026
21st & 22nd October 2026

All in person workshops will be held at The Wrightington, Hotel Health Club & Spa, Moss Lane, Wrightington, Wigan, WN6 9PB.

Please note that if any intern awarded a place on the programme is unable to attend the residential workshops, your place on the scheme may be at risk.

UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL (UoL) CANVAS ACCESS

All Interns will have access to the virtual learning environment of the University of Liverpool (CANVAS) throughout the internship period. This provides library access and learning materials and other resources to support each educational component or theme addressed in elements of the programme. Appropriate training in its use will be provided by the UoL and supported by the NHS R&D NW delivery team.

THE INTERNSHIP OUTPUTS

Output 1. Report.

Written summary (up to 1500 words) of participants research experience through the programme. This will be shared with the employing organisation. The final report will be submitted 2 months after the end of the programme.

Output 2. Poster submission and presentation.

A summary of research undertaken during the programme in the form of a poster. This will demonstrate how individual research experience and activity has been used to impact or influence specific area(s) of practice or service delivery.

There will be an opportunity to present the poster at an NHS R&D NW celebration event or conference.

Output 3. Oral Presentation.

Participants will have the opportunity to share their learning and experiences gained during the programme with an oral presentation to their fellow interns at the last educational workshop. The audience at this "in person event" will include employer representatives, supervisors, facilitators, mentors, peers, and colleagues.

Output 4. Development of Personalised Learning Plan & Reflective Journal

During the internship participants will be encouraged to review and evolve their PDPs to demonstrate their learning and clarify and develop their research aspirations. Following completion of the internship, they will be encouraged to review and evolve their PDP and reflective journal to identify future priorities and goals.

WHAT IS INVOLVED IN PREPARING AN APPLICATION?

Before embarking upon the application process, it is expected that applicants will have obtained relevant approval from line managers and discussed any potential areas of skills development or service improvement that could be addressed during the internship.

It's important to think about who may be able to offer mentorship or supervision either within your own organisation/profession or through colleagues and networks that you already have. We encourage applicants to approach these individuals early in the application process. If you cannot identify a mentor or supervisor or need help in shaping your conversation with a potential supervisor or mentor NHS R&D North West will help you do this as part of the award of a place on the programme.

The completed application must be signed by your line manager, internship supervisor or research delivery supervisor (if identified and applicable). *For those working in a social care environment who are unsure as to who can supervise their internship then please contact our programme lead for advice.*

PLEASE ALLOW TIME TO OBTAIN THESE SIGNATURES AS UNSIGNED APPLICATIONS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED.

NHS R&D North West and partners will be holding a face-2-face pre-application workshop on the 14th November 2025 during which we will explore the application process in more detail, for example drafting the personalised development plan, supervisor arrangements and obtaining support from within your organisation. In addition, we will also be holding 2 open online Q&A sessions to enable you to learn more about the programme and raise any questions and queries about the content or application process. We would encourage you to invite your direct line manager who will be supporting your application to join the Q&A sessions. These will be an hour in duration, 12pm – 1pm, and held on MS Teams, the dates of the sessions are:

25th November 2025
9th December 2025

ASSESSMENT OF APPLICATIONS
Following the submission deadline, all applications will be checked for completeness and eligibility. All eligible applications will then be considered for shortlisting for interview.

- Deadline for applications **19th December 2025**
- Online interviews **w/c 2nd February 2026**
- Internship Programme start **22nd April 2026**

Applicants will be notified of the outcome of their application via email following the interview. Feedback will be sent on request to unsuccessful applicants.

If you require further information please contact the programme lead, Jo-Anne Simpson, Chief Operating Officer, NHS R&D NW
joanne.simpson@researchnorthwest.nhs.uk.

Please submit your completed online application no later than **19th December 2025**.

Please ensure you attach a copy of your CV and completed personalised development plan with your application.