

SPCR internship projects 2026

Name & email supervisor(s):

Dr Aseel Al-salman - a.al-salman@keele.ac.uk (lead supervisor)

Dr James Prior – j.a.prior@keele.ac.uk (co-supervisor)

Prof Jon Packham - jon.packham@mpft.nhs.uk (co-supervisor)

Name & email of reviewer(s) for applicants applying to undertake this internship project:

Dr Aseel Al-salman - a.al-salman@keele.ac.uk

Dr James Prior – j.a.prior@keele.ac.uk

Prof Jon Packham - jon.packham@mpft.nhs.uk

Length and dates of internship:

4-weeks. Available anytime between 1st June 2026 to 30th Sep 2026

Host department:

School of Medicine, Keele University

How will the internship be conducted:

- In person at the university
- Virtual/ from home
- Both are possible, depending on preference of student

Title internship project:

The primary care pathways to healthcare access for people with axial spondyloarthritis and the disease understanding of healthcare professionals in this community

Summary of the internship project: (max 250 words, can include hyperlinks to further information)

Axial spondyloarthritis (axSpA) is an inflammatory rheumatic condition of the spine. Lower back pain is a typical symptom of axSpA, but this is also commonly seen in primary care for other reasons. As such, delay in diagnosis is common.

Our current research project aims to understand which primary care services these patients are accessing over this pre-axSpA diagnosis period. If we can understand which, of the many potential, primary care services people with axSpA are accessing, then we may be able to find ways to identify them more quickly.

In addition to identifying the services being used, we also want to determine the level of understanding of axSpA within the different types of health care professionals (HCP) in contact with these patients. Again, if we can understand this, we may be able to identify how these patients can be identified more quickly.

This research involves three separate studies to investigate this issue, and depending on the time-period of the internship, the student will have the opportunity to work on one or more of these. These studies include:

1. An online quantitative survey of Primary Care Network (PCN) managers to understand the services available for people experience lower back pain symptoms across England
2. Interviews with people with axSpA to understand which primary care services patients accessed before they received their diagnosis
3. An online quantitative survey to primary care HCPs to understand their knowledge of axSpA and in which areas training and education may be required

Learning objectives:

- Gain an understanding of axial spondyloarthritis and the principles of both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies
- Support Dr Al-salman in data collection/analysis of quantitative and qualitative research
- Gain experience in writing of research manuscripts for publication in scientific journals

Any further information:

Dr Al-salman is an early career researcher currently undertaking an Academic Clinical Fellow (ACF) post at Keele