NIHR Three Research Schools' Mental Health Programme

Improving mental health and wellbeing in underserved populations through collaborative research

Masters Scholarship 2026/27

The Three NIHR Research Schools' Mental Health programme has identified a need to build future capacity in academic mental health research, following the conclusion of previous funding on 31 March 2026. These master's level fellowships aim to fill the gap, providing opportunities for those in frontline health and care roles to gain expertise in research methods relevant to mental health - especially for individuals who may have limited access to such opportunities.

Background:

At least one in four people experience mental health problems, many of whom never access care and treatment. There are also large numbers of people with learning disability (prevalence c.2%) and autism (prevalence c.1%). Mental health problems, learning disabilities and autism generate challenges for individuals with these conditions, their families and the wider society, with often quite high utilisation of health, social care and other services. Those challenges are seen across the life course.

The impacts of mental health problems on individuals and the wider societal and economic consequences are multiple and vast and include above-average rates of concurrent physical illnesses, shortened life expectancy, social exclusion, socioeconomic disadvantage, and the need for health and welfare support. Despite the high prevalence, many people do not receive the support they need and there are significant inequalities in access. These underserved groups include, but are not limited to, people with learning disabilities, older people, parts of the autistic and neurodiverse community, people from Black and other ethnic minority backgrounds. There are also other geographical, demographic and socioeconomic inequalities which this call addresses.

By working collaboratively across primary care, public health and social care, we aim to address problems in a multi-professional, multi-disciplinary way and at the individual, family, group and population levels using a variety of methodological approaches. Research will be underpinned by strong and diverse public, carer, service user and patient, and, as appropriate, practitioner involvement and engagement. Our research will prioritise those groups with high needs for treatment and support, and that have been underserved by research to date.

The requirement:

Since the programme commenced in April 2021, we have been working together across primary care, public health, and social care and have funded 100 new awards. ([Three NIHR Research Schools' Mental Health Programme — NIHR School for Primary Care Research](#)). Funding has been awarded to a diverse range of partners, including practitioners, local authorities and those working in the third sector. Funding also achieved a wide geographical reach, actively working with populations and communities not

traditionally engaged in research. We have established a Fellowship scheme to develop new research capacity in key topic areas and localities in need of capacity development.

The Opportunity

The Three NIHR Research Schools are pleased to announce that funding for a number of Master's scholarships is available. This opportunity is particularly relevant to those working in frontline health and care positions who want to gain expertise in research methods relevant to mental health but have limited opportunities. Applicants must demonstrate a clear commitment to establishing a long-term interest in mental health research.

Successful applicants will join a supportive cohort of trainees, from other programmes, and gain access to funded training opportunities, including participation in a residential writing retreat.

The scholarship will cover the tuition fees for a UK-based Master's programme. Funding may also be available to backfill substantive employment costs (if applicable).

Applications are particularly welcomed from health and care professionals not traditionally involved in research. Candidates who have applied to or been accepted onto a master's programme are eligible to apply, including those who have secured a place or are in the process of paying tuition fees.

- Eligible courses include Master's level programmes focusing on research and or research training
- Courses can be studied full-time for one or two academic years or part-time for a maximum of two academic years, but STRICTLY must not extend beyond **30 November 2028**.
- You must be a home student paying home-level tuition fees and have been resident in the UK for at least five years before starting your undergraduate course for a purpose other than study.
- You must not hold a Master's qualification or higher.
- You will need to have a Bachelor's degree at a grade of 2:1 or above in a health, social care, or related topic. Please note that some of the Master's courses have specific entry requirements.

Successful applicants will be asked to provide confirmation that they have employer agreement for undertaking this period of study, if relevant.

How to apply:

Applications for these scholarships can be submitted via the GoodGrants online system by 1:00pm on 26 March 2026.

If you have any questions about the application procedure, please contact SPCR Directorate Team: spcr@keele.ac.uk

Selection process

The Three NIHR Research Schools are committed to supporting equality, diversity and inclusion for all staff, members and students. Applications for scholarships for part-time study are welcome, where the course allows.

All applications will be assessed by members of the schools who have a role in career development and capacity building, and will be reviewed by the Three NIHR Research Schools' Mental Health Programme Steering Group.

TIMETABLE

Monday 19 January 2026	Competition launch
Thursday 26 March 2026 at 1:00pm	Closing date for submission of applications
April/May 2026	Panel to discuss applications
May 2026	Competition outcomes will be announced
September/October 2026	Awards may start from this date