

Post-Doctoral Fellowship Guidance for Applicants

The NIHR School for Primary Care Research (SPCR) Post-Doctoral Fellowships support early-career researchers to develop as independent primary care scientists and future research leaders. These awards provide time, training, and support to develop an independent research trajectory, publish high-quality outputs, and prepare applications for future funding (for example, an NIHR Advanced Fellowship).

Fellowships are expected to begin in **October 2026**. The SPCR has a contract end date of 31/03/2029 and all awards must end by **30/09/2028** to allow for final reporting. Exceptions will only be made for award holders who take a period of leave. Eg sickness or parental leave. In these circumstances, contracts may be transferred to the NIHR for the remainder of the award.

Eligibility

Applicants must:

- Have experience of research in **primary care** or a closely related applied health field.
- Hold a PhD or equivalent doctoral qualification.
Typically, applicants will have been awarded their doctorate within the last three years, but we welcome applications from:
 - researchers returning after a career break
 - individuals transitioning from another discipline into applied health research.
- Demonstrate a strong academic track record with potential for research independence.

Applicants do not need to be employed by an SPCR member to apply. However, all nine fellowships will be hosted within SPCR member departments, with one fellowship awarded per member.

Every applicant, whether currently based in a member department or not, must notify the relevant department's [research manager or training lead](#) of their intention to apply. This is vital to ensure that local HR and costing procedures are followed.

Please note these awards are not intended to cover a clinical salary.

Fellowship Structure

- Fellowships are for 24 months and must be undertaken at a minimum 60% FTE

- Successful fellows will be hosted by one of the nine SPCR member departments (Bristol, Exeter, Keele, Manchester, Nottingham, Oxford, Queen Mary University of London, Southampton, University College London).
- All fellows will join the **SPCR Trainees Network**, gaining access to training, mentoring, and networking opportunities. Fellows will be a member of the NIHR Academy.

Funding Available

The award covers:

- Salary and employer on-costs (NI and pension). These awards are not designed to cover a clinical salary and are capped at the HERA Academic Salary scale point 41 (currently £53,301)
- 30% overheads
- Training and development activities
- Research costs

The award is not intended to fund a full research project, and non-staff costs are capped at £20,000.

Applicants are required to discuss funding and costing arrangements with the host institution's Research Manager or costing team prior to applying.

Detailed costings **are** required at the application stage.

Important Notes:

- Salary can include annual increments; however, the cap should not be exceeded during the course of the award.
- Any promotion or salary uplift resulting from securing the fellowship will not be funded.

Alignment with the NHS 10-Year Plan, Policy, or Knowledge Mobilisation

A key requirement of this round is that all fellowship proposals must clearly align with **one or more** of the following:

NHS 10-Year Plan for England

Delivering more care in the community

- strengthening primary care provision
- supporting integrated neighbourhood teams
- improving access and continuity

Making better use of digital and data

- technology-enabled care
- digital transformation of primary and community services
- AI, remote monitoring, digital inclusion

Prevention, early intervention and reducing health inequalities

- tackling major conditions
- supporting self-care and population health management
- addressing underserved or marginalised communities

Policy Impact

Fellowships may focus on:

- generating evidence to inform **national or local policy**,
- supporting Integrated Care Systems (ICSs) or DHSC strategy,
- evaluating implementation of new models of care or policy innovations.

Knowledge Mobilisation

Projects may focus on:

- evidence translation and implementation science,
- working with commissioners, ICSs, practitioners, or communities to embed evidence in practice,
- strengthening pathways for research impact at system, organisational, or community level.

Applicants must **explicitly describe** how their proposal aligns with one or more of these areas and how their fellowships will support a research career that could drive change, inform decision-making, or support service improvement.

What to Include in Your Research Plan

Research plans should address the following areas:

Research Problem and Importance

- What primary care challenge does your fellowship address?
- Why is it important now?
- How does it relate to the NHS 10-Year Plan, policy priorities, or knowledge mobilisation?

Potential Impact

- Who will benefit (patients, carers, clinicians, communities, ICSs)?
- How will your work improve outcomes, access, experience, or system efficiency?
- What are the implications for NHS primary care practice, policy, or service redesign?
- How will gaining this award support and further your development as a researcher?

Research Methods

Outline:

- design and methodology
- data sources
- analytic approach
- rigour and feasibility
- how involvement and inclusion will be embedded throughout your project
- how you will address equity, diversity, and inclusion (see: [Inclusive research funding application guidance | NIHR](#))

Stakeholder Engagement

- Identify key stakeholders (e.g. policymakers, community organisations).
- Describe how you will involve them throughout the project.

Outcomes and Knowledge Mobilisation

- Expected outputs and how they contribute to the evidence base for NHS primary care
- Plans for dissemination, engagement, or implementation
- How your learning will inform future fellowship or grant applications

Feasibility

- Delivery within time and resources
- Supervisory and mentorship structures
- Risk management and mitigation

Involvement and Inclusion

As with all NIHR-funded research, the fellowship must include high quality, meaningful involvement and inclusion of people and communities throughout the project lifecycle.

For further information on what to include in this section please refer to the Career Development section of: [Guidance for applicants on working with people and communities | NIHR](#)

Each SPCR member department has a **PPI Lead** who can support applicants. Contacts are available here: <https://www.spcr.nihr.ac.uk/PPI/get-involved/ppi-contacts>

The NIHR Research Design Service may also be able to support pre-application involvement activities.

Costs

Applicants should provide realistic, well-justified estimates of fellowship-related non-pay research costs, including consumables, specialist software or data access fees, essential equipment, travel for collaboration, training and development activities, and costs for dissemination and involvement and inclusion.

Details of proposed training and development plan

Applicants should provide a clear and structured plan outlining the training and development activities they intend to undertake during the fellowship. This could include formal courses, workshops, mentoring, networking opportunities, and skill-building initiatives designed to enhance research independence, leadership, and career progression. Justification should be given for how each activity will contribute to the applicant's long-term career goals and professional growth.

In this section we also ask applicants to actively consider what training is needed from an inclusion perspective. Base your needs on your current knowledge and experience of working inclusively and developing inclusive research. You should also consider your career stage, future goals and research area.

You can find further information about what training may be included in NIHR guidance for career development applications: [Inclusive research funding application guidance | NIHR](#)

Please note, reviewers will be scoring your application according to the following criteria:

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|--|
| PERSON |
| Interest in pursuing academic primary care research in the UK |
| Excellent academic track record with evidence of interest in teaching or research |
| Excellent written communication skills, demonstrated by a track record in publications, reports, a dissertation, or other written material |
| Ability and motivation to pursue an independent research project |
| Evidence of ability to work as part of a team |
| Ambition to collaborate and be part of the SPCR community |
| PROPOSAL |
| Relevance of proposal to primary care and SPCR |
| Relevance of proposal to the 10 Year Health Plan or Policy/Knowledge Mobilisation |
| Clarity of aims |
| PPI - involvement of patients/service users, carers and/or the public in developing this proposal and active involvement throughout the proposed project |
| Appropriate methodology |
| Feasibility and likelihood of completion in available time |
| Fit between proposed project and proposed supervisory team interests and expertise |
| Likelihood of being able to secure a further personal award or research funding at end of this fellowship |

Timeline:

| Stage | Date |
|------------------------------|---|
| Application window opens | 12 January 2026 |
| Application deadline | 1:00 pm, 2 March 2026 |
| Interview invitations issued | Late April 2026 |
| Interviews | Set by member department - Must happen by 15 May 2026 |
| Fellowship start date | No later than 1 October 2026 |

Support for Applicants

Each SPCR member department has a [Training Lead](#) who can help you develop your proposal and connect you with relevant expertise.

We strongly encourage applicants to speak with:

- a potential supervisor at their preferred SPCR host department,
- the local PPI lead,
- relevant stakeholders

Contact

For queries about eligibility or the application process, please contact the SPCR Team: spcr@keele.ac.uk