



# **South West Integrated Clinical and Practitioner Academic (ICA) Programme**

**NHSE-NIHR Pre-doctoral bridging  
award (2024/25)**

**Guidance notes  
Spring 2024**

For further information contact: [SW.ICAP@nihr.ac.uk](mailto:SW.ICAP@nihr.ac.uk)

### Introduction

National Health Service England (NHSE) and the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) have established an overarching Integrated Clinical and Practitioner Academic (ICA) Programme for registered health, social care and scientific professionals (excluding doctors and dentists) who hold registration with [ICA approved regulatory bodies](#). The programme is for those who wish to develop careers that combine research and research leadership along with continued practice and professional development. The programme is intended to increase research capacity to improve health and care, by developing people with the potential and aspiration to become clinical/practitioner academics and leading independent research in the future.

The South West region has received national funding to support a number of bridging awards. This specific pre-doctoral bridging award supports individuals that have some research experience and are developing their research profile, have completed master's level research training and aspire to gain funding to undertake doctoral research training. In the South West region, the pre-doctoral bridging award offers you the unique opportunity to develop an individualised, structured, development programme to advance your plans working with your clinical academic supervisor. For the South West pre-doctoral bridging award, the expectation is that the project for doctoral studies and methodological approach has been identified. Some supporting work may be required, and the pre-doctoral bridging award should help you to address this, strengthen your research profile and prepare to submit a doctoral fellowship application such as the Doctoral Clinical and Practitioner Academic Fellowship (DCAF) or Doctoral Local Authority Fellowship (DLAF) or equivalent within 12 months.

The South West pre-doctoral bridging programme is aligned to eligibility criteria for the NHSE-NIHR Doctoral Clinical and Practitioner Academic Fellowship scheme. Prospective applicants must be employed by an NHS body based in England or by any other English provider of publicly or third sector funded health and/or social care services or by a recognised Higher Education Institution (HEI) based in England. The proposed academic supervisor must be affiliated to a recognised Higher Education Institute based in England. It is essential that the proposed research area matches to NHSE-NIHR interests (see [NIHR remit for personal awards](#)) and lends itself to development as a doctoral programme. Moreover, it is important for applicants to have support from their line manager.

#### Useful links:

<https://www.nihr.ac.uk/explore-nihr/academy-programmes/hee-nihr-integrated-clinical-academic-programme.htm> – NIHR Integrated Clinical and Practitioner Academic Programme  
<https://vimeo.com/showcase/9710034> - A series of 10 free, short films offering advice and tips for clinicians on engaging in research and/or pursuing a clinical academic career from the University of Southampton, funded by UKRI.

## Eligibility

The awards are open to registrants with one of the ICA approved regulatory bodies ([ICA approved regulatory bodies](#)) such as Allied Health, Chiropractic, Dental Care, Optical, Osteopathic, Pharmacy and non-medical Public Health professionals, Healthcare Scientists, Midwives, Nurses, Practitioner Psychologists and Social workers.

To be eligible for the pre-doctoral bridging award, you will need to provide evidence that you have the following:

- Current registration with a relevant regulatory body as per NHSE-NIHR ICA programme requirements.
- Applicants must hold substantive employment by a recognised Higher Education Institution (HEI) based in England, an NHS body based in England or by any other English provider of publicly or third sector funded health and/or social care services (for example, a commissioned social enterprise, local authority, or hospice).
- Your employment is based and connected to the following ICSs: Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, Devon, Dorset, Somerset, Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire, Bath, Swindon and Wiltshire, and Gloucestershire.
- Applicants must have at least one year's experience of professional, post-graduation practice
- Applicants must hold a First Class or Upper Second Class bachelor's degree or a Master's degree. For those without a bachelor's degree, evidence of postgraduate study at Level 7 is desirable.
- Applicants must have some research experience and/or research training to support preparedness for progressing to a PhD scheme.
- Support from your employer to undertake the award.
- Support from an appropriate clinical academic supervisor.

The pre-doctoral award is focussed on those planning to submit a doctoral fellowship application within 12 months. If you have previously received a South West internship award, you may apply for this pre-doctoral bridging award. Provide clear evidence of the outcomes of previous awards in your application.

If you have applied previously for this award and been unsuccessful, you are welcome to apply again. There is no restriction on application attempts however, previous recipients are not eligible to apply again.

## Duration of the award

You are expected to take up the award between 1<sup>st</sup> September 2024 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025. To allow for personal circumstance and service requirements, you can plan your pre-doctoral award programme flexibly up to a period of 12 months. Requests for an extension on this period will be considered on an individual basis. You will be asked to specify the planned duration of your programme and to provide an outline plan.

## How much is the award and how can the funding be used?

Each successful applicant will be awarded up to a maximum of £15,000 to cover costs including salary backfill, incidental research costs, research supervision, and formal research education costs. Suggestions on how the budget can be spent are presented below.

**Clinical backfill:** it is recognised that this may form the main budget expenditure. The most appropriate backfill arrangements can be decided by the awardee and their line manager. The award will cover direct salary costs only (i.e. salary, national insurance, and pension).

**Research project development:** this could include anything related to the applied research objectives from patient and public involvement expenses, travel expenses, equipment such as digital voice records, specialist software, transcription services, etc to support development of a project idea or practical skills. Please note that we are unable to fund laptops or computers.

**Academic supervision and formal research training:** it is essential to have supervision throughout the award from an appropriate clinical academic supervisor. Ideally this support should be from a University within the South West region, however it is recognised that some professional groups may have to find this support from outside of the region. It is recommended that academic supervision costs do not exceed 10% of the overall spending plan.

**Career Development:** it may be appropriate to access some credited and/or non-credited research training courses to support research activities and career development. Courses that focus on professional practice and skills will not be supported.

**Dissemination costs:** an element of the award is to disseminate the findings through publications and/or conference presentations. Therefore, the award can be used to fund conferences. Open access publication costs will not be provided.

The funding is available to provide tailored support for award holders to develop a PhD fellowship application and build a sustainable research career. This could include, but is not limited to: refining the research question(s) and methods, undertaking suitable Patient and Public Involvement and Engagement (PPIE), completing a systematic review as first author, engagement with a wider research

project team and contributing to authoring a paper and development of research awareness and research leadership skills.

**The amount awarded will be paid directly to the awardee's employer.** It is recommended that the spending plans are checked by finance teams prior to submission. A confirmed finance plan will be required from successful applicants prior to commencement of the award.

## Award Support and Monitoring

Successful applicants will be expected to attend two sessions with holders of Southwest ICA awards. The sessions will offer opportunities to engage with your peer group of awardees, review your progress and consider requirements for application to NIHR ICA awards. You will be required to present about your award activities at one of the sessions.

A written progress report will be required at the half-way point of your programme (maximum of 2 pages) to provide an update on progress with objectives, challenges and successes, any amendments to plans (where applicable) and priorities for the remaining period.

A final report will be completed at the end of the award (maximum of 4 pages) to provide a summary of achievement of objectives and outcomes, challenges and successes, financial summary, and future plans.

## Preparing an application

You can arrange to get further information or advice about the award by emailing [SW.ICAP@nhr.ac.uk](mailto:SW.ICAP@nhr.ac.uk) or the [named HEI contacts](#) included below.

Prior to submitting an application, it is recommended that applicants contact the research leads within your organisation to discuss applying for this award and investigate what support and help is available to you. You will also require support from a clinical academic supervisor to prepare your application. Ensure that you allow sufficient time to discuss your plans with your line manager/employer and your proposed supervisor(s).

### **HEI Contacts for ICA**

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The following people can be contacted with enquiries about potential clinical academic supervisors with relevant expertise.

**AECC University College:** Prof David Newell ([dnewell@aecc.ac.uk](mailto:dnewell@aecc.ac.uk))

**Bournemouth University:** Prof Jane Murphy ([jmurphy@bournemouth.ac.uk](mailto:jmurphy@bournemouth.ac.uk))

**Plymouth Marjon University:** Prof Gary Shum ([gshum@marjon.ac.uk](mailto:gshum@marjon.ac.uk))

**University of Bath:** Dr Tim Rennie ([twr32@bath.ac.uk](mailto:twr32@bath.ac.uk))

**University of Exeter:** Dr Sophie Gould ([S.L.Gould@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:S.L.Gould@exeter.ac.uk))

**University of Gloucestershire:** Dr Liz Berragan ([lberragan@glos.ac.uk](mailto:lberragan@glos.ac.uk))

**University of Plymouth:** Dr Lisa Bunn ([lisa.bunn@plymouth.ac.uk](mailto:lisa.bunn@plymouth.ac.uk))

**UWE Bristol:** Assoc Prof. Mary Cramp ([mary.cramp@uwe.ac.uk](mailto:mary.cramp@uwe.ac.uk))

You will need to complete the Pre-doctoral Bridging Application form and include the following as part of your application.

- Spending plan for the £15,000 budget (liaise with your organisation finance team)
- Letter of support from line manager
- Letter of support from clinical academic supervisor
- Curriculum Vitae (max. of 3 pages, 12 pt font)

**Appendix 1 contains further information about preparing a sound application.**

## Application Process

Please submit a completed application form including all relevant supporting information to [SW.ICAP@nihr.ac.uk](mailto:SW.ICAP@nihr.ac.uk): by **12 Midday, Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> May 2024**. The application form is provided as a Microsoft Word document, and it can be submitted either as a word or .pdf document.

The Pre-doctoral bridging awards will be awarded in an open competition. The selection processes and administration of the awards are overseen by NHSE South West. Following the submission deadline, applications will be checked for completeness. Incomplete applications will not be considered. Complete applications will be circulated for review and independent scoring by a selection committee. The selection committee will discuss the applications and select candidates to be invited for interview.

- Panel interviews will be held on Monday 17<sup>th</sup>/ Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> June 2024. If you are invited to interview, you will have a minimum of 10 days' notice. Interviews will be scheduled for 20 minutes and will occur virtually. Your interview panel will have access to your written application; they will make a recommendation for funding based on your interview, supported by your written application.

## Key dates

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<b>Closing date for applications:</b>	Midday, Tuesday 21 <sup>st</sup> May 2024
<b>Interview date:</b> Virtual via web-based conferencing	Monday 17 <sup>th</sup> / Tuesday 18 <sup>th</sup> June 2024

### NOTE:

- There will be no choice of interview dates. Applicants who choose to apply will need to be available for interview on the above dates. We will provide as much notice as possible allowing for a robust selection process. Where possible, we will try to accommodate specific needs for interview times.
- You will be notified about the outcomes of your application via email to the address that you have provided.

## Appendix 1: Writing a sound application

You have the opportunity to develop a bespoke development programme tailored to suit your specific needs and aspirations with your identified clinical academic supervisor. Overall, this development programme should include both research activities (such as PPIE, data collection and analysis, research dissemination) and research training to support these activities. The elements of your programme should be designed to help you to develop your knowledge and understanding of research, develop your proposed doctoral research project, strengthen your research profile, and establish optimal support arrangements with supervisory guidance and support to be competitive for future funding applications. You may plan to participate in other activities such as working with established researchers/clinical research teams, visiting clinical research facilities, and/or attending research presentations and seminars. Overall, in your application, aim to be clear about what you plan to do and show how the planned programme of work will help you progress as a clinical/practitioner academic and provide a suitable foundation for future career development applications such as NHSE-NIHR DCAF scheme.

Your application will be assessed using the following criteria:

- clear commitment to apply for NHSE-NIHR ICA DCAF programme or equivalent to pursue a career as a clinical academic
- quality and relevance of the applicant’s recent and overall professional and research experience
- the appropriateness of planned activities to enhance the applicant’s experience, profile, and their career development
- the appropriateness of the planned activities to develop the research project as a PhD programme
- the suitability of the research programme for NHSE-NIHR funding and the potential for impact on quality of patient care
- demonstration of suitable Patient and Public Involvement and Engagement (PPIE) with awareness of inclusivity
- the arrangements for support of the applicant to undertake the award from clinical and academic organisations

	<i>What goes wrong?</i>	<i>What do good applications have?</i>
Areas of interest, activities, and outcomes	Applications which give limited information about the research topic and/or does not clearly identify activities and outcomes that will advance development of a doctoral programme will score less well. A research topic that does not align to NHSE/NIHR remit will also be of lower priority.	A strong application will provide a clear justification for the area of research and explain the activities and outcomes that will help to advance development of a doctoral application. It is written with feeling and is persuasive about the importance of the area of interest.
Career development plans	A weaker application tends to read as if there is partial understanding of or lack of commitment to a clinical academic career or	It is evident that the applicant is actively pursuing a clinical/practitioner academic career and utilising all opportunities to develop research knowledge, skills, and

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	<p>completing doctoral studies. It is not clear about the outcomes that will help to develop their research profile and advance career.</p>	<p>experience to strengthen a future application. The best applicants will have a growing research profile, consistent with working towards a competitive application for a DCAF award.</p>
<p>PPIE &amp; Potential impact</p>	<p>Limited information that shows awareness of the importance of PPIE and inclusivity in research or applications that do not explain what the potential benefits or impact could be for those receiving care tend to score less well.</p>	<p>A strong application shows understanding of PPIE and inclusivity and where appropriate, has plans for PPIE. It explains what the potential impact is for patients/service users or the service.</p> <p>See NIHR webpages for information and resources.</p> <p>PPIE: <a href="#">NIHR Briefing notes for Researchers</a></p> <p>Inclusive Research: <a href="#">NIHR Include project</a></p>
<p>Spending plan and timetable</p>	<p>Limited details are provided.</p>	<p>A good application gives a detailed plan with justification for the costs and a timeline for the key activities of the programme. Applications that appear to be realistic, achievable, and feasible, and offer effective use of funds tend to do better.</p>
<p>Letters of Support</p>	<p>Letters are generic or vague about the application and the support that will be provided raise some doubts about sustained support.</p> <p>NB: Key judgements are not based on this aspect of the application.</p>	<p>A sound letter from the supervisor explains the support that will be provided and the appropriateness of the support for the area of interest. A sound letter from the line manager/employer explains the support for the area of interest and its relevance to the service/practice and commitment to the ongoing development of the applicant.</p>
<p>The overall quality of the application</p>	<p>Applications tend to score less well where they do not comply with the word counts that are given (either too long or too short) or where the statement letter does not address the areas identified on the checklist or where the application is not structured and therefore can be harder to follow.</p>	<p>A good application is complete, well presented, and readable. It keeps to the correct length and complies with word counts; it is concise yet provides sufficient detail and background to enable a reader who does not work in their field to understand the area of interest. It uses current policy or research, providing references, to justify the proposed work.</p>