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# NHS England /NIHR Pre-doctoral Bridging Programme

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## Guidance Notes

Closing date for applications: **5pm Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2025**

*The application form should be saved as a .pdf file and submitted by e-mail to [sorcha.finnegan@hscni.net](mailto:sorcha.finnegan@hscni.net). All the signatories who have e-signed the application declaration page must be cc'd into the submission email.*

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# 1 Introduction

- 1.1 The Pre-Doctoral Bridging Scheme is co-ordinated by NHS R&D Northwest in partnership with NHS England and NIHR to provide support in the pre-doctoral period, with the specific aim of facilitating high quality applications to doctoral fellowship schemes. The scheme forms part of a commitment to increase research and development capacity and build an evaluative evidence-based culture in Northern Ireland.
- 1.2 The Bridging Scheme is intended to enable individuals working in health and social care registered professions (excluding doctors and dentists) to make a high quality application to the HSC R&D Doctoral Fellowship Award (or alternative schemes) and to increase their research skills and experience through the development of an individually tailored programme.
- 1.3 The Bridging Scheme also aims to improve the number of high quality applications to the doctoral fellowship schemes available to applicants in Northern Ireland, and work towards equality of opportunity for all health care professionals to follow an academic career pathway.
- 1.4 The Bridging Scheme will provide:
  - A dedicated period of 6 months (with ongoing support up to 12 months) within which to develop your research proposal to form the basis of an application for a HSC R&D Doctoral Fellowship Award or alternative.
  - An opportunity for you to assess your current levels of 'researcher' skills and competence allowing you to identify plan and commence your developmental activity.
  - Access to academic and clinical environments that will encourage you to develop creativity and originality in research design and delivery.
  - Engagement with advanced research techniques and knowledge specific to your proposed research.
  - Enhancement of your personal development of written, oral presentation and other communicative abilities required by clinical academic researchers.
  - The opportunity to widen your research network links.
  - Development of the skills and knowledge required for you to become investigators and research leaders of the future.
  - Access to ongoing mentoring support.

- 1.5 The Bridging Scheme will be coordinated by NHS R&D Northwest.
- 1.6 All inquiries and correspondence relating to applications for the HSC R&D Bridging Scheme should be addressed to:

Strand Administrator: Eimear Cowan  
[eimear.cowan@hscni.net](mailto:eimear.cowan@hscni.net)

Senior R&D Programme Manager: Dr Sorcha Finnegan  
[sorcha.finnegan@hscni.net](mailto:sorcha.finnegan@hscni.net)

HSC R&D Division  
Public Health Agency  
9th Floor, Linum Chambers  
Bedford Street  
BELFAST  
BT2 7ES  
<http://www.research.hscni.net/>

## 2 Eligibility

2.1 The Bridging Scheme is intended for individuals;

- employed in or by Health and Social Care Northern Ireland (HSCNI);  
or
- employed in community, voluntary, or not-for-profit organisations in Northern Ireland involved in health or social care provision; or
- employed as an independent contractor in Northern Ireland involved in health or social care provision;

AND

- working within the [Integrated Clinical Academic \(ICA\) professions<sup>1</sup>](#) (excluding doctors and dentists).

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<sup>1</sup> Registration may be held with an alternative regulator than those listed in this table, please provide details of your Registration Body in your application form.

Desirable criteria:

- have a Master's level qualification prior to starting the scheme (or evidence of postgraduate study at Level 7);
- Previous/existing involvement in research.

2.2 Applicants must have agreement and support from their current employer for their application.

2.3 Applicants must demonstrate a commitment to a career in health and social care.

2.4 Applicants must demonstrate potential for development as a future leader in health and social care research.

### 3 Scope

3.1 The Bridging Scheme provides pre-doctoral support for a time period of up to 6 months (with the possibility of support up to 12 months based on fellowship application plans) and there is some flexibility in how each participant organises their own work programme.

3.2 The award will begin in June 2025.

3.3 The maximum award available is **£7,000**.

3.4 The awards can be used to support:

- the applicant's basic salary costs (plus employer's contribution to superannuation and national insurance, and normal increments and inflationary pay awards) to backfill their post;
- training and development;
- conferences and travel;
- other research expenses;

### 3.5 Formal teaching

A series of workshops and Masterclasses will be scheduled over the 6 months to support the Fellows to develop their application and in recognition of the highly competitive nature of Doctoral Fellowship awards. These include topics such as:

- Research leadership
- Doing research that has impact
- Development of a research proposal embedded with effective patient and public involvement in research
- Building a clinical academic career
- Costing your application – research costs, service support and treatment costs
- Final proposal presentation and mock interviews.

Dates of the mandatory formal training days can be found below:

Workshop 1 – 26th June, The Queens Hotel, Leeds

Workshop 2- 18th September, Holiday Inn, Manchester

Workshop 3 - 11th December, Holiday Inn, Manchester

During the course of the support successful awardees will have regular check-ins with the coordination team and support offered in line with their needs.

Attendance at the workshops is mandatory for awardee.

### 3.6 Outputs

At the end of the programme fellows are expected to have:

- i) developed a robust research proposal which is a suitable vehicle for a fellowship application, one that builds on existing research skills and experience and fits with the fellowship funder's remit.
- ii) identified high quality supervisors and appropriate mentoring and a clinical host.
- iii) identified an appropriate training and development programme to support the development of research, clinical and leadership skills.
- iv) developed a career trajectory and longer term career plans.
- v) prepared a HSC R&D Division Doctoral Fellowship (or equivalent) application.
- vi) Fellows will also be required to produce a 1500 word report for their employer

## 4 Application Process

4.1 The closing date for receipt of applications by the HSC R&D Division is:

**5pm Friday 2nd May 2025**

4.2 Applications for Bridging Scheme awards can be only be made by the prospective recipient, and must be submitted on the appropriate application form.

Application forms are available from the [HSC R&D website](#).

4.3 Applicants are asked to complete and submit an electronic copy of the application form with an e-signed declaration page.

- The application form must be saved as a PDF file. Please note a scanned PDF version will not be acceptable.
- Applicants should use the following filename format based on the applicant's name e.g. BridgingScheme.smith.john.2025.pdf
- Electronic signatures are required on the declaration page

- The application form should be submitted by e-mail to [sorcha.finnegan@hscni.net](mailto:sorcha.finnegan@hscni.net)
- All the signatories (who have e-signed the declaration page) must be copied into the submission email.

## 5 Evaluation

- 5.1 All applications will be validated by HSC R&D Division. Any invalid applications will not go forward for further evaluation. Applicants will be notified in writing if an application is deemed invalid.
- 5.2 Eligible applications will be reviewed by a Selection Committee and a shortlist will be drawn up.
- 5.3 Shortlisted applicants will be invited to attend for interview end of May 2025 (date TBC) after which the Interview Panel will make a decision on which applications to fund.
- 5.4 All interviews will take place online via Teams.
- 5.5 The number of awards made under the HSC R&D Bridging Scheme will depend on the quality of the applications and the funding available.

## 6 Notification

- 6.1 Each applicant will be notified of the outcome of their application by HSC R&D Division using the correspondence details specified on the application form.
- 6.2 Unsuccessful applicants will be able to request feedback on their application.



## 7 Successful Applicants

- 7.1 Acceptance of an Award from HSC R&D Division will constitute acceptance of HSC R&D Division core Terms and Conditions and any additional Terms and Conditions<sup>2</sup>.
- 7.2 Awardees will be employed by their current Employing Organisation for the duration of the Scheme; therefore will undertake the Scheme under the terms and conditions of their employment contract including financial arrangements.
- 7.3 The support of the HSC R&D Division must be appropriately acknowledged in any published or public communication including all forms of media communication, including media appearances, press releases and conferences<sup>3</sup>.
- 7.4 The Bridging Scheme will be coordinated by [NHS R&D Northwest](#).

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<sup>2</sup> For a copy of HSC R&D Division Terms and conditions please see: <http://www.research.hscni.net/terms-and-conditions-awards>

<sup>3</sup> For guidance on acknowledging support from HSC R&D Division please see: <http://www.research.hscni.net/acknowledging-hsc-rd-division>