



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

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

**Guidance note  
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 post-doctoral bridging award supports individuals that have completed or will have submitted their thesis at the time of application, are looking to undertake post-doctoral research and build towards applying for a post-doctoral level fellowship such as the NHSE-NIHR Advanced Clinical and Practitioner Academic Fellowship. You will not yet be established as an independent clinical/practitioner academic researcher and you will be looking to build your research profile so that you will have strong evidence of recent high quality publication outputs as lead author and co-author, a growing funding record and research leadership to support a future application. In the South West region, the post-doctoral bridging award offers you the unique opportunity to develop an individualised, structured, training and development programme to continue to strengthen your research profile and advance your research plans. It is not a requirement that you prepare a fellowship application as part of the award but show a clear trajectory for advancement. It is expected that you will continue to work with a clinical academic supervisor to design a bespoke programme for your specific needs.

The South West post-doctoral programme is aligned to eligibility criteria for the NHSE-NIHR Advanced Clinical and Practitioner Academic Fellowship (ACAF) scheme (formerly the NHSE-NIHR ICA Clinical Lectureship). Prospective applicants must be employed by either an English health and/or care provider that is providing publicly funded or third sector funded services, or by a recognised English Higher Education Institution. The proposed clinical academic supervisor must be affiliated to a recognised Higher Education Institute based in England. It is essential that the proposed research matches to NIHR remit (see [NIHR remit for personal awards](#)). 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 post-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.
- Applicant must be employed by either an English health and/or care provider that is providing publicly funded or third sector funded services, or by a recognised English Higher Education Institution.
- 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 a relevant PhD or Professional Doctorate or have submitted their thesis by the application deadline. (For Professional Doctorates, please review the NIHR eligibility criteria in Appendix 2 and where possible, provide confirmation of eligibility.)
- Applicants must have at least three years' experience of professional, post-graduation practice.
- Support from your employer to undertake the award.
- Support from an appropriate clinical academic supervisor/mentor.

If you have applied previously for this award and been unsuccessful, you are welcome to apply again. There is no restriction on application attempts.

If you have previously received a South West internship or pre-doctoral award, you may apply for this post-doctoral bridging award however, previous recipients are not eligible to apply again. Being a current or previous NIHR Fellowship award holder is desirable but not essential. Ensure that you provide clear evidence of the outcomes of previous awards in your application.

Previous award holders of NHSE-NIHR ICA Clinical Lectureship may apply to support transition to the ACAF award. Clinicians and practitioners with doctoral qualifications who looking to start/restart a clinical academic career may also apply. Ensure that your career development plan provides a clear and realistic trajectory and outputs that are achievable in the competitive health research environment.

Applicants are strongly advised to contact the Research Design Service (Research Support Service from 1<sup>st</sup> October 2023) for advice about developing your research and appropriate funding programmes <https://www.nihr.ac.uk/explore-nihr/support/research-design-service.htm>.

## 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 post-doctoral award programme flexibly up to a period of 18 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 £25,000 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.

**Salary 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:** this could include expenses related to the applied research objectives e.g. patient and public involvement expenses, travel expenses, equipment such as digital voice records, specialist software, transcription services, etc to support research advancement. Please note that we are unable to fund laptops or computers.

**Academic support:** It is essential to have academic mentorship throughout the award. 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 5% of the overall spending plan.

**Career Development:** it may be appropriate to undertake further research training courses or workshops, visits to other centres, personal coaching or informal learning that will advance career development and support the individual in applying for post-doctoral funding to progress their clinical/practitioner academic career. 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 conference. Open access publication costs will not be provided.

The funding is available to provide tailored support for award holders to build a sustainable career as independent clinical academic researcher. It is not a requirement that award holders prepare a fellowship application as part of the award, though this may be appropriate for some. There should be some significant and tangible outputs that will increase competitiveness for future awards. This could include but is not limited to: preparatory research work to inform a funding application, completion of key publications related to planned work, appropriate Patient and Public Involvement and Engagement (PPIE), preparation of a funding application as lead/co-lead, and activities that improve personal effectiveness, widen research networks, and research awareness and develop 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@nihr.ac.uk](mailto:SW.ICAP@nihr.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/mentor 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**

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 Post-doctoral Bridging Application form and include the following as part of your application.

- Spending plan for the £25,000 budget (liaise with your organisation finance team)

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- 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@nhr.ac.uk](mailto:SW.ICAP@nhr.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 Post-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

<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 working with your identified clinical academic supervisor/team. Overall, this funded programme should focus on research activities (such as preparatory research, PPIE, research skills development, research dissemination, preparation of open call funding applications) and training to support career development. The elements of your programme should be designed to help you to increase your research skills in existing and new areas, increase your professional experience and influence, advance your independence as a researcher, and strengthen your research profile. You may plan a range of 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 independent researcher and provide a suitable foundation for future post-doctoral research career.

Your application will be assessed using the following criteria:

- clear plans to develop research career as a post-doctoral clinical academic
- the quality and relevance of the applicant's research experience, funding record and outputs/dissemination activities
- the quality and relevance of the applicant's recent and overall professional experience
- the appropriateness of planned activities to enhance the applicant's experience, profile, and career development and to support successful grant funding or NIHR fellowship applications
- the suitability of the research programme for health, social care and NIHR priorities and the potential for impact on quality of patient care
- demonstration of suitable Patient and Public Involvement and Engagement (PPIE) and inclusive practices
- the arrangements for post-doctoral 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	A research topic that does not align to NHSE/NIHR remit. Plans and outcomes that do not clearly advance research for future applications, focus on completing unfunded research or does not have a clear trajectory for development.	A strong application will provide a clear explanation of the activities and outcomes that will help to advance development of the research. It demonstrates the national/international importance of the area of research, and it is written with feeling and is persuasive.
Career development plans	A weaker application tends to read as if there is lack of clarity about how the outcomes will advance the individual's research career as an independent researcher. It is not clear that the award that will help to develop their research trajectory.	It is evident that the applicant is actively pursuing a clinical/practitioner academic career and utilising all opportunities to develop research knowledge, skills, and experience to advance their career. The best applicants will have a growing research profile, consistent with working towards competitive funding applications.

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<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>

## Appendix 2: Eligibility Criteria for Holders of Professional Doctorates

Eligibility for the ICA Clinical Lectureship and Senior Clinical Lectureship will be extended to prospective applicants holding Professional Doctorates, providing they can evidence the quality and proportionality of research education, training and experience gained within their Higher Education Institution (HEI).

Candidates holding Professional Doctorates will be assessed for eligibility on an individual basis following receipt of evidence of eligibility from the applicant's host HEI that they meet the criteria below, and are eligible to be appointed as a Clinical Lecturer or Senior Clinical Lecturer (as applicable), or equivalent role, or above.

Prospective applicants who hold a Professional Doctorate must contact the NIHR Academy for confirmation of eligibility before starting an application. Please send evidence from the host HEI to [academy-awards@nihr.ac.uk](mailto:academy-awards@nihr.ac.uk).

In order to claim parity with recognised doctoral level programmes a Professional Doctorate programme should meet the following criteria:

- Commit at least 50% of the programme to the development of a research-based thesis. The other 50% should include research training as appropriate (e.g., taught programmes on research methods, methodologies, statistics, and ethics) and also practice and professional development, which should all underpin a practitioner academic profile.
- Include supervision arrangements similar to those required for PhDs but also including as appropriate a clinical/practice-based supervisor.
- Normally have a minimum 65,000 word thesis depending on the research approach taken in the study.
- Include other written work, which is formally assessed during the professional doctorate programme, which underpins the individual's development in their profession and as a researcher.
- Include the same thesis examination format as for PhDs with identical criteria for judging doctoral standards, with the expectation that the thesis demonstrates the individual's development as a practice-based researcher.
- Be expected to make an 'original and new contribution to knowledge' through original research of a quality to satisfy peer review, extend the forefront of the discipline and merit (according to peer reviewers) publication in the established literature; and have at least one full paper for publication based on their doctoral work published or accepted for publication.
- Have no more than 40% of the 360 academic credits awarded at master's level.
- Have a minimum of 60% credits awarded at doctoral level.
- Include a maximum of three years' full-time study or five/six years maximum of part-time study, which should include research activities, research training and personal and professional development.