NIHR Academic Career Development: Fellowships
FAQs

Q. Do these changes impact the Integrated Academic Training (IAT) Programme for doctors and dentists or the HEE/NIHR Integrated Clinical Academic (ICA) Programme for non-medical healthcare professionals?

A. The only scheme from these 2 programmes (IAT and ICA) which is being amalgamated into the new Fellowship Programme is the Clinician Scientist Awards. All other aspects of the IAT programme and the ICA programme will not be affected by the changes to the Fellowships programme detailed here. The schemes which are moving into the new programme are detailed in Annex A.

Q. I was planning to apply to a scheme which is no longer available in this new structure, for example the Clinical Trials Fellowship. Will I still be able to submit a similar application to the new Fellowship Programme?

A. Yes, the programme has been designed to take account of all previous NIHR personal awards so that there are no gaps in terms of eligibility and models of support compared to the legacy schemes. A diagram mapping how old schemes fit with the new programme is provided in Annex A. If you were planning to apply for a legacy scheme this diagram will highlight the most appropriate scheme to apply to in the new model.

Q. The Knowledge Mobilisation Research Fellowship (KMRF) isn’t shown in Annex A. What is happening with this scheme?

A. Owing to the upcoming new competition for NIHR Collaborations for Leadership in Applied Health Research and Care (CLAHRC) and the fact KMRFs link closely to the work of CLAHRCs, there won’t be a KMRF competition launched in July 2018. NIHR will be announcing later in the year what format future KMRF competitions will take, once the new process for the CLAHRC competition has been announced. In the interim, recognising that Knowledge Mobilisation research remains an important area for NIHR, the Doctoral and Advanced Fellowships which launch in October 2018 will include Knowledge Mobilisation research as a Strategic Theme. However unlike with KMRFs which include a mixture of knowledge mobilisation and KM research activities, the Doctoral and Advanced Fellowships will focus just on KM research.

Q. If all post-doctoral applications are coming into 1 single Fellowship, the Advanced Fellowship, does this not mean that the majority of awards are likely to go to the more
experienced post-doctoral applicants and more early career applicants (straight from PhD) will miss out?

A. Whilst there will be a single post-doctoral fellowship we recognise that people will be looking for support at different stages of their career and as such different assessment criteria will be used depending on where you are in your career. Further details of these will be published ahead of the launch in October 2018. Each application will be assessed on its own merits and applicants will be assessed by different Panels depending on where they are in their post-doctoral career at the time of application.

Q. Can clinical applicants include clinical service and/or development as part of the activities covered by the Fellowship?

A. The Doctoral Fellowship will allow clinical applicants, medical and non-medical, to spend up to 20% of their time undertaking clinical activities in order to maintain clinical competence and skills. The Advanced Fellowship will include the option for clinical applicants to include between 20 and 40% clinical time that will be covered by the Fellowship. With both awards it will also be possible to undertake the Fellowship at less than 100% WTE which can accommodate clinical work paid for from another source.

Q. Who is the Development and Skills Enhancement Award aimed at?

A. This award has been designed to;
   a. Support current NIHR Academy members gain specific skills and experience to help advance their career ahead of applying for further substantial funding from NIHR. Applications will need to be proposing gaining skills and experience in specific areas defined by NIHR.
   b. Support current NIHR Academy members with career continuity ahead of applying for further substantial funding from NIHR. Applicants will still need to propose developing specific skills and experience to advance their research career but these need not necessarily match the defined areas as above. However applicants will need to demonstrate that they haven’t been able to source funding from elsewhere to support career continuity e.g. from Research Capability Funding.

Q. The Development and Skills Enhancement Award is open to ‘members of the NIHR Academy’. What does membership of the NIHR Academy mean?

A. Further details of this will be published when the NIHR Academy launches in October 2018 but as a minimum it will include all current NIHR Trainees. So if you are a current NIHR Trainee you will become a member of the NIHR Academy and hence eligible to apply for this award. The first round of Development and Skills Enhancement Awards will not open until May 2019 and further information on NIHR Academy membership will be available well in advance of this date.
Q. I currently hold an NIHR Fellowship, what do these changes mean for my award?

A. The changes being described here will not impact current holders of NIHR Fellowships or other research training awards. Your award will continue to be managed and supported through NIHR in exactly the same way.

Q. What will the application form look like?

A. Application forms will use the current NIHR Standard Application Form. More details of which can be found on the NIHR website: https://www.nihr.ac.uk/funding-and-support/documents/TCC%20SAF%20Stages%201%20and%202%20Combined%20Apr17%20-%20for%20web.pdf

Q. When will I be able to see more information and guidance about the new Fellowships?

A. Fuller guidance notes will be issued in July 2018 for the Doctoral and Advanced Fellowships ahead of their launch in October 2018. Guidance for the Pre-doctoral Fellowship and Development and Skills Enhancement Award will be published at a later date ahead of launches in February 2019 and May 2019 respectively.

Q. When it states applicants can propose between 50% and 100% WTE for the time they will spend undertaking their fellowship, does this mean applicants can select any percentage option between 50 and 100% WTE?

A. Yes. Applicants will be able to state the WTE they would like to undertake the award at provided it is no less than 50% WTE. Award length will change, with the exception of the Development and Skills Enhancement Award which is for 1 year maximum, depending on the WTE proposed. Applicants mustn’t exceed the maximum amount of time that can be supported in WTE terms by each award as summarised below:
   a. Pre-doctoral: 1 year WTE
   b. Doctoral: 3 years WTE
   c. Advanced: between 2 and 5 years WTE
   d. Development and Skills Enhancement Award: 1 year max regardless of WTE.

Q. With the amalgamation of fellowships into the new Fellowship Programme does this mean there is less money and hence fewer awards likely to be made?

A. No. The investment in research training is not decreasing as a result of these changes. The NIHR is committed to attracting, developing and retaining the best research professionals to conduct people based research and this new Fellowship Programme is key to this.

Q. The guidance for Advanced Fellowships states; ‘Individuals will be eligible to be awarded up to 2 Advanced Fellowships sequentially, not normally totalling more than 8 years WTE of funding.’ Does this mean I can potentially request more than 8 years’ worth of funding from 2 Advanced Fellowships?
A. In most cases applicants will not be able to request more than 8 years’ worth of funding across 2 Advanced Fellowships, however there may be certain exceptional circumstances where more than 8 years’ worth of funding is appropriate. A strong case would need to be made for this as part of an application and anyone proposing doing so should contact NIHR in advance of submitting an application for advice.

Q. If I am already an NIHR Fellow at post-doctoral level (for example, a Clinician Scientist or Post-Doctoral Fellow), will I still be able to access up to 8 years of funding from the Advanced Fellowship?

A. Yes, there won’t be a restriction on this Fellowship for people currently in receipt of or previous holders of NIHR Fellowships, and access to up to 8 years’ worth of support across 2 sequential Advanced Fellowships will still be available. However as with all applicants the justification for the support requested both in monetary terms and award length will be assessed as part of the review process.

Q. Will there be the option to request funding for a support post as part of the Advanced Fellowship and will this be restricted depending on the experience of the applicant, bearing in mind the current Post-Doctoral Fellowship (PDF) doesn’t allow for a support post and the Career Development Fellowship (CDF) does?

A. Yes there will be the option to request funding for a support post and no there won’t be a restriction on this depending on the post-doctoral experience of the applicant. As with all aspects of the application, the justification for the support requested will be assessed as part of the review process.

Q. With the move to 2 rounds a year for the Doctoral and Advanced Fellowships, are there any restrictions on how soon I can apply to the same Fellowship if I have been previously rejected?

A. If you have applied for a Doctoral or Advanced Fellowship you won’t be able to apply again in the round that opens 6 months later and will need to wait until at least the round which opens 12 months after your first application. For example if you apply to the round opening in October 2018 you will not be able to apply again until the October 2019 round. You won’t be able to apply to the April 2019 round.

Q. Will there be any restrictions on the number of times I can apply for a Fellowship?

A. It will normally only be possible to apply to the same Fellowship a maximum of two times. However there will be the following exceptions:
   a. Bearing in mind you are able to apply for a 2nd Advanced Fellowship after being successful with the first, the ‘clock’ will be reset after you are successful. You will have 2 opportunities to apply for a 2nd Advanced Fellowship even if you weren’t successful the first time with your 1st Advanced Fellowship.
   b. Normally after a period of 3 years has passed you will be able to apply again for the same Fellowship, if you have previously had 2 unsuccessful applications. This is to take account of the fact that both you, in terms of your
CV and experience, and the proposed research will have hopefully developed significantly in this timeframe.

c. Applications deemed fundable but which fall below the funding cut off will not be counted towards the maximum of 2 application attempts.

Q. When you say the majority of funding will still be in ‘response mode’ what does this mean?

A. When we say response mode we mean there won’t be any prioritisation for any one specific area of research over another. In response mode anyone who meets the eligibility criteria for a scheme is able to apply, and funding decisions are made based upon those deemed fundable by the Panels and the ranking of fundable applications.

Q. Can I apply for 2 different levels of Fellowship at the same time? E.g. Pre-doctoral and Doctoral Fellowships?

A. No, you will need to decide which fellowship you are going to apply to. If you would like to discuss this further in relation to your personal circumstances please get in touch with the NIHR (https://www.nihr.ac.uk/about-us/how-we-are-managed/managing-centres/about-the-trainees-coordinating-centre.htm)

Q. Will the Pre-doctoral Fellowship be open to those who have previously been funded at masters level by NIHR e.g. through the Research Methods Programme?

A. Yes, provided you meet all other eligibility criteria you would still be eligible to apply for a Pre-doctoral Fellowship if you have had funding through the Research Methods Programme.

Q. Is it possible to be awarded more than 1 Development and Skills Enhancement Award, e.g. at different points during your career development?

A. Yes this is possible, for example it is something you may look to apply for soon after completing a Doctoral Fellowship and then again between 2 Advanced Fellowships.