



CSO – NHS Researcher Development Fellowship

Summary

The CSO NHS Researcher Development Fellowship is an introductory funded scheme for NHS employees currently working as a nurse, midwife, allied health professional, pharmacist, healthcare scientist or others to gain experience and develop expertise in research alongside their existing NHS duties.

There are two types of pathways available:

- **First Steps Fellowship:** for those with little or no prior research experience. It offers a hands-on introduction to research, including mentorship and supporting an active study. It is not an opportunity to do a piece of your own research.
- **Pre-doctoral fellowship:** for candidates who already have some research experience and wish to develop additional skills or receive mentorship to develop a competitive PhD fellowship application.

Funding and Duration

The fellowship provides funding for 13 days of protected time which can be used flexibly within the 1-year period from 1 April 2026 to 31 March 2027.

Expected Activities and Outcomes

First Steps Fellowship

Participants may:

- Attend training (e.g. on Good Clinical Practice, data management, statistics, Patient and Public Involvement).
- Contribute to an active research study (e.g. recruitment, data collection, analysis).
- Support systematic reviews (e.g. literature searching, data extraction).
- Present at conferences (e.g. posters or abstracts).
- Contribute to research publications.

Pre-doctoral Fellowship

Participants may:

- Complete relevant research training (e.g. qualitative methods).
- Conduct a scoping review.
- Involve patients/public in shaping research proposals.
- Build supervisory relationships and academic networks.
- Develop a PhD research proposal.

Our website features reflections from past fellows on the outcomes of their study experiences, which may inspire you and help show what's possible. You can view these here: [CSO NHS Researcher Development Fellowship Testimonials – Chief Scientist Office](#).

Mentorship

Applicants must identify a suitable mentor before applying:

- **First Steps:** The mentor should be leading an active research project, offering opportunities for practical involvement.
- **Pre-doctoral:** The mentor should ideally be a potential PhD supervisor, experienced in research supervision. - More than one mentor may be appropriate to ensure you have expertise related to your topic, methodology and the NMAHP perspective.

Your mentor can be from the NHS or a University. Depending on which type of Researcher Development fellowship you're looking to complete, one might be better than the other. For example, if you are looking to complete the pre-doctoral pathway, you might prefer to find a mentor from the university as they will be able to help you with your PhD fellowship applications following completion of the scheme and could act as your supervisor.

Identifying a Mentor

You could start by searching for someone in Scotland who has published research that relates to your topic area or likely research approach. They might be based in the NHS, Social Care or a University. Someone who is an NMAHP or has experience of the Researcher Development Fellowship scheme may be particularly helpful.

You could also look at the NHS Research Scotland Network and Speciality groups: [Networks and Specialty Group | NHS Research Scotland | NHS Research Scotland](#).

The clinical lead/managers in your area of interest may also be able to provide suggestions of potential mentors. You may wish to contact [Dawn Williamson](#) in NRS for further support in reaching the network leads.

Allied Health Professionals can contact the Council for Allied Health Professions Research Scotland (CAHPR Scotland) for help at cahprscotland@gmail.com.

If you are having difficulty finding a mentor, you can contact the following members of the Research Development Panel for advice:

- [Barbara Farquharson](#) (University of Stirling)
- [Pam Ramsay](#) (University of Dundee)
- [Lis Neubeck](#) (Edinburgh Napier University)
- [Joy Dawson](#) (NHS Borders)
- [Jacqui Reilly](#) (Glasgow Caledonian University)

Once you have identified potential Mentors, make contact with your preferred mentor first. Clearly state that you are seeking their mentorship for the CSO NHS Researcher Development Fellowship, briefly outline your area of research interest, and request a meeting to discuss the opportunity further.

During the conversation, be clear about what the mentorship would involve, including expectations, responsibilities, and key timelines. This will help you both determine whether the collaboration is a good fit and, if so, allow you to plan effectively for completing the application and Fellowship.

Please don't be worried about contacting people about mentorship, experienced researchers are usually delighted to help support novices taking their first steps into research!

Associate PI Scheme

Candidates who have already participated and completed in the existing [NIHR Associate PI Scheme](#) (API) are most welcome to apply for this funded research experience.

In addition, mentors who are already involved/been involved in the API scheme are also encouraged to get involved and support interested fellows in the CSO NHS Researcher Development Fellowship scheme.

Please note that if you are already currently active in the API scheme, you will not be eligible to apply for the CSO NHS Researcher Development Fellowship scheme. The API scheme ensures those applying are not currently involved in any other research programmes during their time on the API scheme.

Those interested in exploring the API scheme may contact [Dawn Williamson](#) in NRS who can provide more detailed information on the studies currently active in Scotland and recruiting for Associate PIs.

Please note that the CSO NHS Research Development Fellowship differs from the API scheme available to Scottish researchers by offering a funded placement to undertake research and a flexible approach to research experience over and above working on a research study.

Application Requirements

Fellowship Provision

The fellowship will pay for 13 days of time which can be used flexibly however is agreed between the service, mentor, and fellow in the 1-year period from 1 April 2026 to 31 March 2027.

Target Group

Nurses, midwives, allied health professionals, pharmacists, health care scientists, paramedics and others employed in a clinical role. A clinical role is classed as any post involved in direct patient care.

The employer must be an NHS Territorial Board, NHS Waiting Times Centre, or Scottish Ambulance Service.

Criteria for Application

Applicants must:

- be in an NHS post with a contract covering the duration of the fellowship
- have found a suitable mentor that can provide research experience and/or support in developing a further proposal.
- have support from their immediate line manager to be released for study leave.

How to Apply

Candidates should submit an application using the new [CSO Grants Management System](#). You will need to make an account to apply.

The application form needs to be completed in conjunction with your mentor and signed by your line manager to show you have local support to complete the fellowship. Instructions on how to do this are available on the application form.

If you have any questions around the application process or application form, then please contact csofellowships@gov.scot.

The deadline for applications is **17th December**.