

My Research Journey: A Reflection

NIHR ARC-KSS Research Week 2024





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Structure

My talk today will take you through my research journey today, with some key (and honest!) reflections:

-  1. MSc – PhD: Why wouldn't I do three degrees!?
-  2. PhD: My journey and key reflections
-  3. PhD – post-PhD job: Scary but exciting job hunt/interview process
-  4. My role now: Post PhD life
-  5. Summary

Thank you!

- Grateful to be here to give this talk today
- My initial thoughts after receiving the email invitation...
 1. I feel like my research journey has just started!
 2. Most importantly...





MSc

- When people ask where my research journey began, I come back to my experiences during my MSc
- MSc – Foundations of Clinical Psychology 2019-2020 (Southampton/home)
- Clinical side of the MSc vs the research side – this is when I started to think about my next steps in research...



Why wouldn't you do three degrees?!

- I looked at research assistant positions and PhDs
- When I decided to focus on PhD applications there was lots to consider!
 - *Am I interested in the topic?*
 - *Does it link to my previous experience & enable development?*
 - *Is it funded?*
 - *Where would it be located?*
- I lived locally to Surrey at the time and so when the opportunity came up here, I applied and was lucky enough to be successful!

My PhD journey

- I did my PhD from Jan 2021 – Jan 2024 at the University of Surrey, in Psychology
- I was supervised by Dr Kimberley Smith, Dr Hannah Frith and Dr Sarah Hotham
- My PhD explored social prescribing and community-based support for older adults during and following Covid-19
- I was funded by the NIHR ARC-KSS and worked within the Primary and Community Health Services Theme
- I also had two project partners who were community services in Kent and Surrey providing social prescribing



Key reflections

General reflections:

- Build support networks (and hold onto them – it's a long road!)
- Explore all opportunities to develop as a researcher
- Being involved in wider department (e.g., through teaching, tutoring, post-graduate representatives) can be useful

Practical reflections:

- ❖ Read lots, write as you go, talk to those around you if you are unsure and take on what you can (opportunities which you enjoy and can boost your CV)
- ❖ The last few months can be difficult – I found this the hardest part. Although it is hard, connecting with others is very important during this time

Viva tips/reflections

- The day is scary and during the build-up relaxing feels impossible! *But...*
- I found that I relaxed into it – nerves are good to start with but won't last for the whole time
- Always remember that you know your stuff
- I tried to approach it like a conversation about my work
- Plan things for afterwards so that you can celebrate!





Scary job hunt (which is actually exciting!)

- The job hunt can be scary but is also exciting – it is the next chapter!

Here are a few things I thought about when looking at jobs and which ones to apply for:

- Do you want to stay in the same place? Do you want a change/a new challenge?
- What did you like about your PhD and wider research journey? Listing these can be useful when looking at a job and thinking: *'do I want to work here? Does this align with what I want to do next'*
- What is the progression like? Will there be other opportunities?
- What research has the team done previously – have they worked on topics I would find interesting? What would I learn from doing this job?

Interview process

- I had one interview post-PhD which involved a task and an interview – 3 hours

The task:

- I was only told about the task when I received my interview invitation – not when I applied for the position
- All the information I was given was that it would last an hour and a half, and I did not have to prepare
- It involved reading a paper (27 pages) and summarising it in 500 words

The interview:

- Panel interview with 4 people, lasted approximately 40 minutes
- They each asked two questions and then I had time to ask questions

Interview reflections/tips

- Confidence is important!
- You are also interviewing them - always think about whether you can picture yourself working with the people interviewing you (they may become your colleagues!)
- The job description is key when preparing – in my interview they asked me questions based on the requirements for the job
- Sell yourself but also show awareness about where you are in your career – you still have lots to learn, and it is important to be clear that you know this
- Ask them questions: e.g.,: *‘what do you like about working here?’*, *‘what does a usual working day look like?’* – these types of questions give a sense of what it will be like if you get the job

The transition from PhD – working life

- There is often a weird in-between stage between ending your PhD and starting your job: e.g., I submitted my thesis in January 2024 but started by job in December 2023
- This period can often feel like you are in limbo - not quite in your next chapter as you're still finishing up the previous one

My tips/reflections for this:

- I found it useful to get as much writing done as possible before starting – then whilst working I could focus mainly on edits
- Communicate with your new manager/team about where you are

My current job

Research:

- I am working as a Qualitative Research Fellow at University College London (UCL) in the Rapid Service Evaluation Team (RSET)
- Funded by National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) Health & Social Care Delivery Research (HS&DR) programme (2023-2028)
- Partnership between UCL, Nuffield Trust, and University of Cambridge

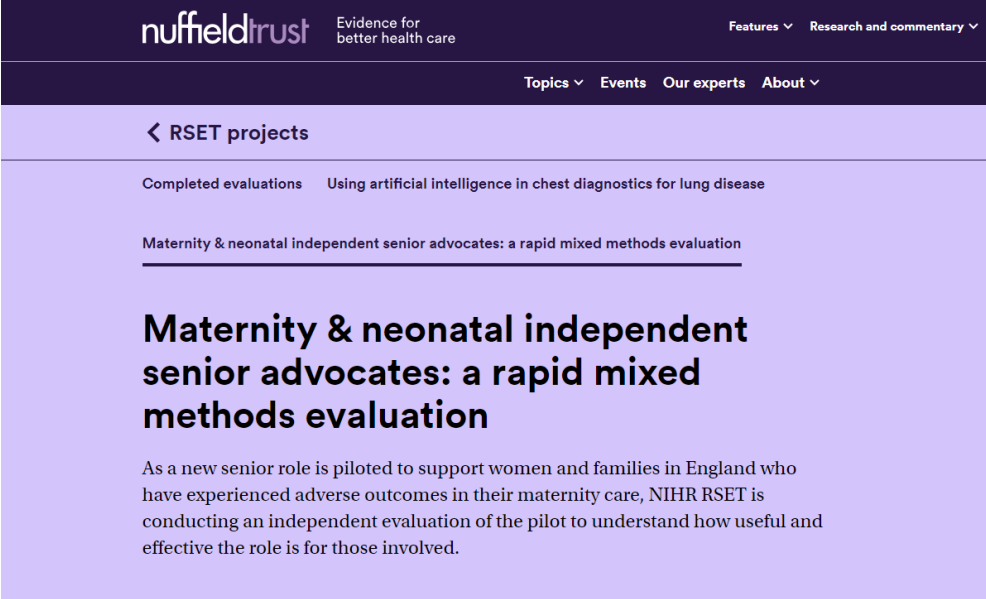
Teaching and supervision:

- Supervising BSc and MSc students (mainly on the Population Health MSc) and personal tutor across Population Health and Health Psychology MSc
- From this year, co-leading a module my team (research-informed)

What do we do in RSET?

- Conduct rapid evaluations of health and care service innovations (usually 3 at a time)
 - *'Rapid'* – can vary depending on the project! Usually between 6-12 months but one project has been 3 months
- Work in close partnership with those who deliver, manage and use these services
- Produce findings of national relevance and immediate use to decision-makers
- We use quantitative, health economic, and qualitative methods – each project will have different workstreams which cover these aspects
- Co-production and PPIE central to all aspects of our work – we have PPIE team members who work across projects and PPIE members who work on specific projects based on their lived experience

Examples of projects



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← RSET projects

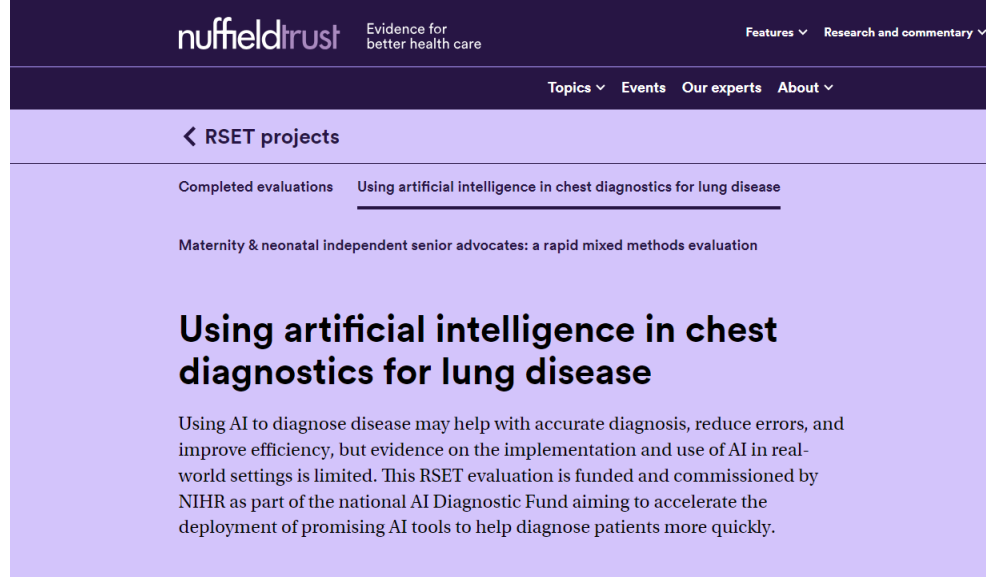
Completed evaluations Using artificial intelligence in chest diagnostics for lung disease

Maternity & neonatal independent senior advocates: a rapid mixed methods evaluation

Maternity & neonatal independent senior advocates: a rapid mixed methods evaluation

As a new senior role is piloted to support women and families in England who have experienced adverse outcomes in their maternity care, NIHR RSET is conducting an independent evaluation of the pilot to understand how useful and effective the role is for those involved.

- In this page**
- ↓ [What is the evaluation?](#)
 - ↓ [Our approach](#)
 - ↓ [When will the evaluation take place?](#)
 - ↓ [Study team](#)
 - ↓ [For further information](#)



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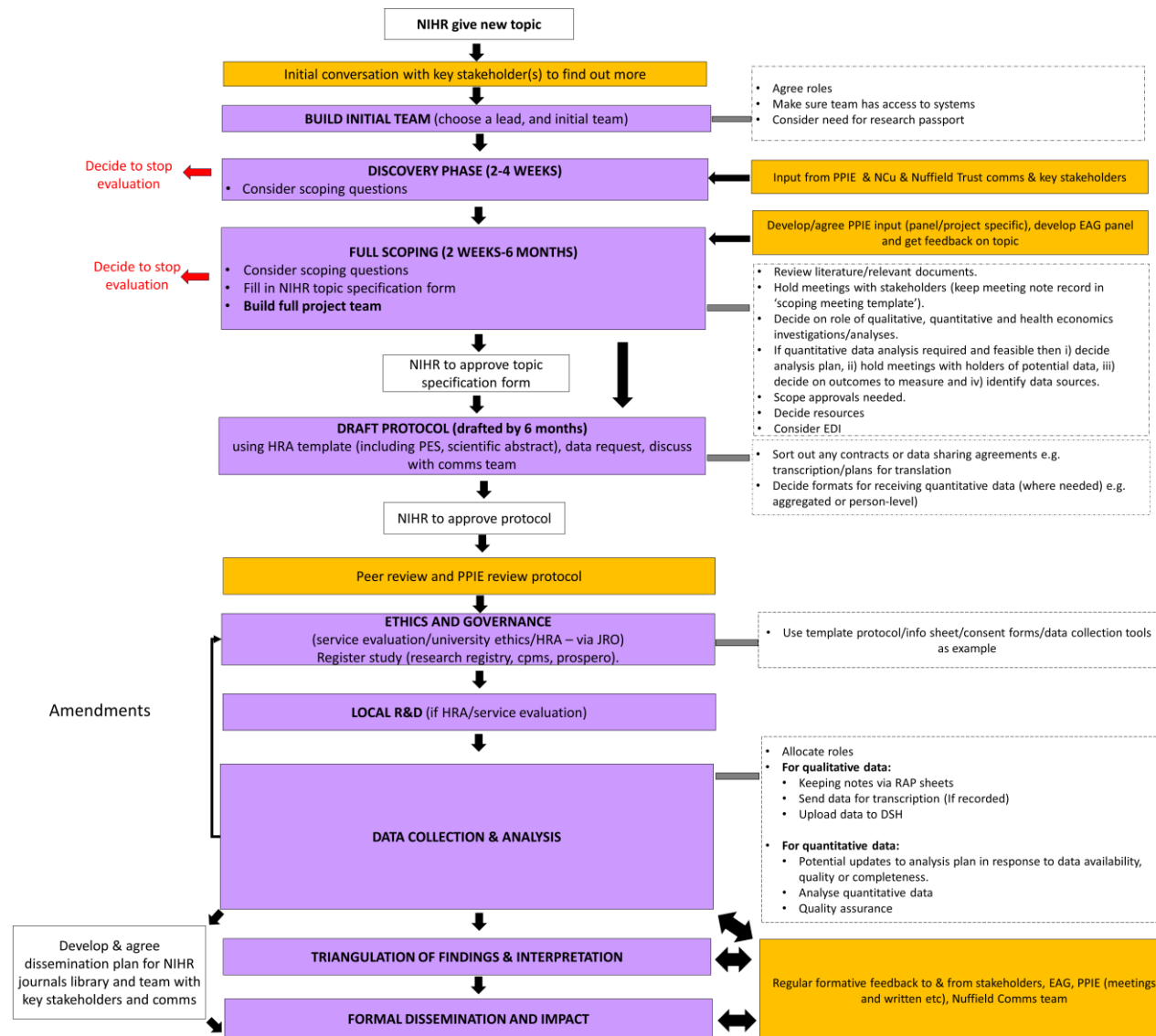
Maternity & neonatal independent senior advocates: a rapid mixed methods evaluation

Using artificial intelligence in chest diagnostics for lung disease

Using AI to diagnose disease may help with accurate diagnosis, reduce errors, and improve efficiency, but evidence on the implementation and use of AI in real-world settings is limited. This RSET evaluation is funded and commissioned by NIHR as part of the national AI Diagnostic Fund aiming to accelerate the deployment of promising AI tools to help diagnose patients more quickly.

- In this page**
- ↓ [Our research questions](#)
 - ↓ [Our approach](#)
 - ↓ [Project team](#)

How do we do it?





Teaching and supervision

- As research staff we are required to supervise 2-3 MSc/BSc students
- We usually provide options for students based upon the topics we are currently researching
- Involves meetings – usually about 1-2 every 6 weeks and commenting on drafts
- Teaching/co-leading the module has involved planning/editing of sessions in meetings, leading 2 out of the 7 sessions and marking



Key reflections so far

- When going into a research team which is very different to what you have done before, it takes time to get used to how they work – allow yourself this time
- You often learn the most by doing
- I'm enjoying the applied side of research – it is valuable seeing where your research goes and the impact it can have
- Value the collaborative way of working
- Enjoy working on different topics – you learn so much and no day is the same
- I have a very supportive team – support network is important

Summary

- My research journey has been quite structured – going from BSc – PhD and then into a job
- *But* there have been some twists/turns throughout in terms of what I enjoy (e.g., focusing on research vs clinical) and the type of research projects I want to work on (e.g., applied work which feels impactful)
- Since going into my Research Fellow position, I am learning a lot and gaining experience in different areas

Final points: take the opportunities, push yourself outside of your comfort zone and embrace change, trust your instincts!

Thank you for listening!

Any questions?

