



Damla Harmanci, an Applied Research Collaboration, Kent Surrey and Sussex (ARC KSS) PhD Student studying at Brighton and Sussex Medical School talks about her research journey as part of this year's National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) #YourPathInResearch campaign.



Research Project: Investigating the associations between mental health, sexual health and substance use for adolescents and young adults to inform service provision in Kent, Surrey and Sussex.

Why did you decide to get involved in research?

Going into research was not something I planned in advance, it was not a path I chose in school. In fact, I'm unsure whether I could have imagined what a role in research would have looked like back then. My first stint in higher education left me burnt out with no desire to study further. I had to find the right fit on a different course, in a different university and in a different country, to rediscover what I liked about learning in the first place.

I write this so that people know that your path may not always be linear. Sometimes, reaching dead-ends in life are a great way to refocus on where you want to go next. I am now a 2nd year PhD student at Brighton and Sussex Medical School and still uncovering what it means to work in research.

What has your research journey been like so far?

By the time I started my master's degree, I knew I wanted to pursue a career in research and that a doctorate would be the next step in this journey. I was initially accepted onto a PhD programme with a different research proposal but was unable to pursue this opportunity due to a lack of funding. This seems to be a barrier for many aspiring researchers. However, it's through organisations like the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) and the Applied Research Collaborations (ARCs) that researchers, like myself, are able to apply for funding and get the support needed to pursue their goal.

I would encourage those interested in doing a doctorate to cast a wide net and consider applying to projects in sister disciplines. Your skills and knowledge are more transferable than you may imagine.

What do you love most about being a part of research?

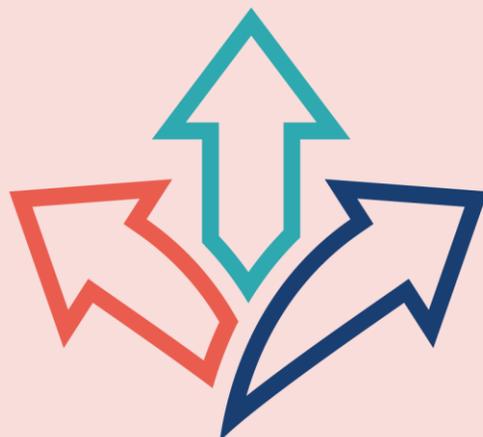
The most crucial part of my training, over the last two years, has been the opportunity to learn from the experience of those who have come before me. This has allowed me to truly appreciate the web of collaboration behind most research endeavours. My experience, so far, has been one of continual learning. This is simultaneously incredibly fulfilling and somewhat intimidating.

The freedom to design and run my own studies has given me insight into all aspects of the research process, while oversight from experienced mentors has kept me on the right track.

What are your plans and ambitions for the future?

Just as I didn't know where I would be a decade ago, I'm cannot fully imagine where I will be in the next ten years. The world of higher education and academia seem to be in flux and the face of research may transform in this time. What is unlikely to change, are the principles and methodologies which ground this discipline. It is this foundation that I admire most about research.

I would encourage anyone interested in pursuing research as a career to be persistent. There will be barriers in your way but your perspective is unique and your contribution a valuable one.



**YOUR PATH
IN RESEARCH**