

NIHR Health and Care Professional Internship Awards South East

2026-2027

Building research careers across Kent, Surrey and Sussex

GUIDE FOR APPLICANTS

This information is intended for those interested in applying for a NIHR HCP Internship award for health and care research, managed through the NIHR ARC KSS.

Contents

Section 1 – Background of NIHR	2
1.1 What is NIHR?	2
Section 2 – HCP Internship award aim, criteria and key information.....	2
2.1 What are these awards for?	2
2.2 How much funding is available and for how long?	5
2.3 Who can apply for the awards?	5
2.4 How do I apply?	5
2.5 Who is the main point of contact at ARC KSS?	6
2.6 Why will you ask me for anonymous Equality Ethnicity, Diversity, and Inclusion information after I have submitted?	6
Section 3 – Application form guidance	6
Section 4 – Application assessment, timelines and reporting information	9
4.1 How will my application be assessed?	9
4.2 What feedback will I receive?	9
4.3 How do I report back to ARC KSS on the progress of my internship if successful?	9
Why talk to your manager?.....	10
Ways you could frame the conversation?	10
Practical next steps	11

Section 1 – Background of NIHR

1.1 What is NIHR?

The National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) is the nation's largest funder of health and care research and provides the people, facilities and technology that enables research to thrive. NIHR's mission is to improve the health and wealth of the nation through research. The NIHR was established in 2006 and is primarily funded by the Department of Health and Social Care. Working in partnership with the NHS, universities, local government, other research funders, patients and the public, NIHR delivers and enables world-class research that transforms people's lives, promotes economic growth, and advances science.

NIHR has Applied Research Collaborations (ARCs) throughout England. In the South East, the HCP Internships are being offered by ARC Kent Surrey and Sussex (ARC KSS) and collaborative partners.

Section 2 – HCP Internship award aim, criteria and key information

2.1 What are these awards for?

The NIHR HCP Internship Programme is part of the NIHR Academy's expanded portfolio of career support for health and social care professionals. The Programme is directed at pre-doctoral applicants to encourage them to become engaged in research. It aims to attract and benefit all registered Health and Care Professionals (excluding doctors and dentists) from a wide range of backgrounds and with a wide range of career aspirations.

Eligible professions – list of approved regulatory bodies:

- Academy for Healthcare Science
- General Chiropractic Council
- General Dental Council
- General Medical Council
- General Optical Council
- General Osteopathic Council
- General Pharmaceutical Council

- Health and Care Professions Council
- Nursing and Midwifery Council
- Social Work England
- UK Public Health Register

There are similar Programmes being offered in other areas of England, this Programme is for applicants from the Kent Sussex and Surrey region.

The internships provide flexible and individually tailored programmes of learning designed to meet the needs and aspirations of each intern providing individuals with a strong foundation on which to build a research related career.

Internships are short duration awards for:

- Those with little or no research experience.
- Those with more extensive experience of research, to:
 1. grow leadership in research towards achieving organisational culture change
 2. expand skills and knowledge in research delivery leadership or
 3. build on established clinical academic programmes.

Awards will be offered at one of four levels:

- 1) **Stepping into Research:** For those in clinical or practitioner roles with little or no research experience but who want to take the first step into research to learn about ways to engage with research to improve professional practice and embed research in care.
- 2) **Growing in Research:** For those in Enhanced or Advanced Practitioner roles who want to develop the research pillar of their role and/or to develop team research culture and confidence.
- 3) **Delivery leadership in Research:** For those in (or aspiring to) research delivery roles who want to extend their research delivery skills, improve research delivery practice and leadership, and/or gain experience in wider aspects of the research process.
- 4) **Clinician or Practitioner academic leadership in Research:** For those aspiring clinical academics who want to develop their research knowledge and skills to lay foundations for future funding awards.

Each HCP Intern will be supported to develop their own internship learning programme by selecting from a range of potential learning opportunities to meet their primary learning goals with support from a mentor. We appreciate that many eligible applicants, especially those with limited research experience, will not have a clear vision about how to develop their ideas for an internship or what is available, therefore we have worked with our partners and stakeholders to develop a 'menu' of opportunities to choose from. This menu is not meant to be prescriptive or exhaustive but designed to stimulate ideas and open-up possibilities to advance research careers at all levels.

Examples of activities:

Level	Stepping into Research	Growing in Research	Delivery Research Leadership	Clinical/Practitioner Academic Leadership in Research
Example	Time and support to develop skills in research within own team e.g. Public and Community Involvement and Engagement (PCIE), evidence review of a service-related problem, dissemination of existing research evidence e.g. poster	In-practice learning: secondment or placement to a research or innovation team within own organisation or within a Kent Surrey Sussex organisation	Time to undertake the Associate Principal Investigator (API) scheme to understand the role of the PI in research delivery in order to become an established local research delivery leader	Shadowing Quality Improvement (QI) or Knowledge Mobilisation (KM) teams
	A taught research module/course offered by Kent Surrey Sussex Universities or other organisation e.g. the Research Champions programme (Kent Community Health Foundation Trust)	In-practice learning: secondment or placement to an organisation outside Kent Surrey Sussex where expertise is not provided in KSS	Bespoke leadership opportunities, focusing on leading research capacity building (e.g. use of the Multi - Professional Practice-based Research Capabilities Framework; Self - Assessment Framework SORT) or clinical research targeting under-served communities	Academic research training e.g. modules from the Masters in Research (MRes) at University of Brighton, or the INSIGHTS Masters Programmes (Universities of Brighton, Kent and Chichester)
	Short-courses/training or webinars offered outside Kent Surrey Sussex	Shadowing engagement/PCIE leads or carrying out independent study to understand and use PCIE in research	Placement with a similar organisation already active in research to understand successful integration of research in-practice, addressing specific contextual needs such as primary, social or community care settings	Time to work within an existing research group for topic-specific development of research skills
	Attending an Health Research Authority (HRA) Research Ethics Committee as an observer	Shadowing the research governance team to understand study set-up and safety of trials	Placement with the delivery organisations research team, learning how to complete Integrated Research Application	Short-courses/training or webinars that focus on research delivery - General Data Protection

			System (IRAS) forms and ensure a study is ready for approvals	Regulations (GDPR), Informed consent, Principal Investigator Essentials
	Time and support to undertake own small-scale audit or service evaluation or research project	Time and support to undertake own small-scale audit, evaluation or research project	Time and support to undertake own small-scale evaluation or research/or as part of a larger study	Time and support to undertake own small-scale, evaluation or research

2.2 How much funding is available and for how long?

Up to 33 awards will be made in this round. The award provides dedicated time via salary backfill for those who need it, for up to £10,000 per intern. Indirect or estates costs (i.e. overheads) cannot be claimed. The organisation supporting you, which in most cases will be your employer, will also receive up to £700 to help cover administrative costs and mentorship, where needed.

Internships will be of up to 9 months in duration, starting 1 February 2027, and be flexible to fit in with work or other commitments and the nature of the proposed activities.

2.3 Who can apply for the awards?

To apply, you must meet the following criteria:

- You should be at pre-doctoral level of research qualification (i.e. you do not have a PhD or equivalent).
- You should be a registered health and care professional (excluding Doctors and Dentists) (see link to NIHR eligible professionals in 2.1).
- You should be employed within the Kent, Surrey and Sussex region
- NIHR has provided additional funded spaces for professionals in Pharmacy and Radiography.

2.4 How do I apply?

To apply you need to complete the Application Form and send this to arckssacademy@kent.ac.uk

If you need help with the application, the ARC KSS Academy team and partners will be pleased to provide support and guidance.

Submit your application by **5pm 30 September 2026.**

You should provide all the information requested on the application form. Use clear and concise language with minimal use of technical jargon. Where you use abbreviations, these should be fully described in the first instance.

2.5 Who is the main point of contact at ARC KSS?

If you have any questions, please contact us at: ARCKSSacademy@kent.ac.uk

A webinar Question and Answer session will be held on the 14 July 12noon-1pm, **register here**. This session will be recorded and made available afterwards.

2.6 Why will you ask me for anonymous Equality Ethnicity, Diversity, and Inclusion information after I have submitted?

After submitting your application, you will be invited to complete an online EEDI questionnaire. We encourage you to complete this so that ARC KSS can monitor and ensure our funding opportunities and activities are unbiased and inclusive. This information will be collected anonymously and will not be shared during the assessment process.

Section 3 – Application form guidance

See below for guidance on each section of the application form:

Section 1 – Application contact details: Please provide your details including:

- Your name
- Contact details:
 - o address, email, and telephone number.

Your application will be reviewed anonymously. Section 1 of the application form will be removed and used for administrative purposes only and to notify you of the outcome of your application.

Section 2 – Employment and qualifications

- Name of your employing organisation.
- Registered profession, for example, Nurse, Social Worker, Physiotherapist etc.
- Registration body – see link in 2.1 to check your eligibility to apply.
- Registration number.
- Qualifications – include any professional and higher education qualifications e.g Diploma, Degree, Masters' qualification or equivalent(s). You do not need to provide your school qualifications. You cannot apply if you hold a PhD or are nearing completion for a PhD.

Section 3 – Award Level

Tick which of the award levels best represents your existing level of research experience, based on the guidance in section 2.1 and the Application Form. Applications for the 4 levels will be assessed separately so you will not be disadvantaged if you have little or no research experience.

Section 4 – Personal statement

Tell us about yourself by completing a personal statement of up to 500 words. Tell us if you have any research experience including any involvement in quality improvement or audit, for example. Tell us about your area of practice? Tell us how the internship will further your career in research and/or your clinical or professional career. Tell us your ideas about what you intend to do after you finish the internship – what are your proposed next steps? Tell us how completion of the internship will be of benefit to your organisation e.g. by enhancing evidence-based practice or patient/client care or promoting a more research-active culture within your department.

Section 5 – Award activities

Please describe the activities you intend to undertake during your award (in up to 500 words). Try and be as clear and specific as possible. A table of examples of activities is provided in the Application Form and in section 2.1. These examples are not exhaustive and have been included to give you some ideas about what you might do as part of your internship. You can add your own ideas for activities you will undertake.

Describe what you aim to achieve, learn or produce (e.g. writing a summary or brief report, presentation, specific learning from training). Set out what skills you will be developing and how. Think about how you would justify the value of your proposed activities to your line manager. How will you share your learning with others, within or beyond your organisation?

Will you include Patient, Public and Community Involvement and Engagement (PCIE) in your internship? Think about who will be involved and why? How will you support public contributors – reimbursement, safeguarding, accessible formats? How might you incorporate community feedback, or co-create aspects of the internship?

Inclusivity in health and care research is very important. It involves including diverse populations throughout the research process to ensure findings are applicable to everyone and that interventions are effective and equitable for all groups, particularly under-served communities. How will you ensure the activities or outputs of your internship activities are inclusive? You might also find this information from NIHR useful: [NIHR Inclusivity in research definition](#)

Finally, include a timeline of when you will undertake your proposed activities.

Section 6 – Organisation support

ARC KSS and partners will provide a package of support including a professional and/or academic mentor. A mentor is normally, an experienced professional who can guide and support you in developing your skills and knowledge. They may provide advice, career guidance, and opportunities to develop research ideas, for example.

If you already have a mentor in mind, please indicate this here and name your identified mentor. You will be expected to meet with your mentor on a regular basis, normally monthly.

Also list any other people who will be supporting you, such as a colleague in a Research and Innovation team, a lead researcher in your clinical/professional area, or others.

Section 7 – Budget

Tell us how you will use the (up to) £10,000 funding. This can include your own time/backfill costs, and for any other staff you need to support your internship activities. Budget cannot include overheads, but when thinking about staff costs you should include organisation pension and National Insurance contributions for the role/s. Please provide a Full Time Equivalent (fte) for each role, which should be formally costed out by your organisations finance/HR department.

You can include the following non staff costs: **travel, subsistence & conference**, small items of **equipment** or **consumables**, costs for **Patient, Public and Community Involvement and Engagement** – the usual rate for this is £27.50/hr. Include any training course fees (**training & development**). All costs should be identified under these highlighted headings on your application. You should discuss costs with your own organisation in the first instance and contact the ARC KSS Academy team if you need help with this aspect of your application.

Do be specific rather than using terms such as approximate or estimated. Remember this is a plan only and budget plans can change during the award, but we need specific costs identified for contracting purposes.

Section 8 – Financial agreement

Please name a Research and Innovation or finance contact for your employing organisation. Include their name, job role, organisation and email. This person will be someone who has oversight of research or finance at your organisation and will be our contact for arranging the funding contract.

Section 9 – Line managers agreement

If you intend to undertake internship activities during work time, either in whole or in part, and are likely to require backfill or time off you must have agreement from your line manager. Please tick the box to say if this has been agreed with your line manager. If you are planning to undertake activities within your own time, you are still strongly encouraged to discuss your application with your line manager or department lead, as part of ongoing discussion of your professional development.

Section 10 – Applicant Declaration and signature

Your form should be signed by you as the applicant to confirm the details in your application are correct. An electronic signature will be acceptable.

Section 4 – Application assessment, timelines and reporting information

4.1 How will my application be assessed?

Decisions will be made by an assessment panel. You will be notified within 6 weeks of the submission deadline. The panel will be made up of the HCP Internship partner steering group including the ARC KSS capacity building lead, member organisations, and public members. Your application will first be assessed to confirm your eligibility and that it meets the remit of the internship. Applications meeting all the screening criteria will go forward to be discussed by the assessment panel. Applications will be assessed using the following criteria:

- **Personal strengths:** Does this application present a good opportunity to support a career trajectory for someone who is building or becoming involved in research?
- **Objectives:** How appropriate are the proposed activities and plans for skills development? Are Activities clearly explained and appropriate? Is the timeline achievable?
- **Sharing learning:** Are their clear plans to share the skills and knowledge gained during the internship within organisation(s) or more widely?
- **PCIE and Inclusivity:** Are their plans to include patient, public or community involvement and engagement (where relevant)? Does the internship promote inclusivity?

4.2 What feedback will I receive?

Successful applicants will receive comments from the assessment panel within 6 weeks of submission. You may be asked to address any specific queries relating to your application, with the support of the ARC KSS team.

Unsuccessful applicants can request feedback within 2 weeks of the outcome on how the application might have been strengthened and advice on whether the activities can be supported by ARC KSS or partners in other ways.

4.3 How do I report back to ARC KSS on the progress of my internship if successful?

Details of reporting will be included in your funding letter. There will be an induction session, informal drop-ins every two months for support and a short form to complete at the end of the award, for evaluation purposes.

Appendix 1

Talking to your line manager about the Internship

The HCP Internship Programme provides up to nine months of funded, flexible learning to help health and social care professionals build research skills. It is open to registered professionals at pre-doctoral stage working in Kent, Surrey or Sussex, and is supported by mentorship, academic supervision and peer learning opportunities.

Why talk to your manager?

Even if formal sign-off is only needed for backfill or work time, it is good practice to discuss your application. This ensures your internship is seen as part of your professional development and highlights the benefits to your team.

Ways you could frame the conversation?

- **Professional development:**

This internship will strengthen my research and continuous improvement skills, which are priorities in our organisation. I'd like your support, as it will benefit both my career and our team.

- **Service benefit / knowledge transfer:**

The programme is designed so interns bring new skills back. I'd like to use it to strengthen our work in areas such as patient involvement, data use or evaluation.

- **Alignment with organisational priorities:**

This links to our organisation's focus on quality improvement and innovation. Supporting me shows our commitment to developing research capacity.

- **Low disruption / backfill covered:**

The internship provides up to £10,000 funding plus £700 for the employing organisation, helping to cover costs. I'll plan my workload carefully to minimise disruption.

- **Pilot / proof of concept:**

This is a short-term opportunity to test how staff development in research benefits our service. If successful, it could open the door for colleagues in the future.

- **Recognition / reputation:**

Being part of a national programme raises our team's profile and demonstrates our commitment to ongoing staff development.

Practical next steps

- Check who in your organisation needs to sign the internship agreement (via Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust).
- Share key dates: application deadline 30 September 2026; internships run February–October 2027.
- Direct your manager to the Manager Guidance Notes and FAQs for further detail.

Tip: Keep the conversation focused on both your development and the benefits for your team and service.