

Postdoctoral Fellowship (PDF) and Postdoctoral Clinical-Academic Fellowship (CPDF) Guidance for Applicants 2023-24

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This document is intended to assist the completion of the Stroke Association Postdoctoral Fellowship Application Form. The guidance is intended to be used in conjunction with the Conditions of Award.

If you have any questions, please email research@stroke.org.uk and we will get back to you as soon as we can.

1. Purpose of the awards:

The Postdoctoral Fellowship schemes will allow a fellow to hold research funds in their own name, and to undertake an independent research project under the supervision of an established member of the stroke research community. It is a condition of award that the fellow seeks to obtain further research funds during the tenure of the award in order to consolidate and advance their career.

PDF:

The Stroke Association's research strategy aims to increase the UK funding base and capacity for stroke research across the full stroke care pathway. This award is for candidates who do not wish to undertake clinical activity during their PDF, or who do not have a clinical background.

These Fellowships are aimed at developing the stroke research leaders of the future. Postdoctoral Fellowships are intended to provide the necessary skills and training for the development of an independent career in stroke research.

CPDF:

We wish to embed research within clinical stroke care, and this award focusses on supporting capacity for clinical academic roles in stroke. Clinical academic roles provide an opportunity to close the gap between research and practice, whereby a reciprocal relationship can occur to improve the implementation of evidence-based practice, and to use real world clinical issues as a basis for the development of research projects. There is currently a lack of formalised clinical academic career pathways for nurses and Allied Health Professionals

(AHPs), and in alignment with HEE strategy, we wish to demonstrate a commitment to formalising this pathway.

The Postdoctoral Clinical-Academic Fellowship (CPDF) is aimed at the future clinical-academic leaders in stroke who have already completed a PhD and are establishing themselves nationally, both clinically and academically.

2. Remit of the award

The Stroke Association supports Fellows who plan to conduct stroke research into clinical and applied health, including social care research. This includes research that is conducted to answer specific questions relating to day-to-day practice in health services or community settings, and which has the potential to have an impact on the health or well-being of people affected by stroke. A clear trajectory to patient benefit is essential.

For the CPDF, the Stroke Association wishes to support fellows who have forged a clinical career in stroke, and have developed their own research question(s) from clinical experience. We wish to support fellows who wish to be an ambassador for clinical academic careers in stroke.

It is expected that the proposed project will align with the new priorities for stroke research, as set by the 2021 James Lind Alliance Priority Setting Partnership for Stroke.

Further details can be found here:

https://www.stroke.org.uk/sites/default/files/research/stroke_priority_setting_partnership_full_report.pdf

We welcome applications from [Allied Health Professionals](#) and nurses, psychologists, pharmacists, and other applied researchers including but not limited to: implementation scientists, health economists, digital health and computer scientists.

The Stroke Association will not fund basic or pre-clinical research through its wholly-funded Postgraduate and Postdoctoral Fellowship schemes. This does not apply to our joint Clinical Fellowship programmes with the Medical Research Council (MRC) or Association of British Neurologists (ABN), which are open to research across the whole pathway.

2.1 Joint funding

We welcome applications where funding from other sources has been secured to part-fund a Fellowship, such as from research charities, universities or government bodies. We would expect that the Fellowship award from the Stroke Association constitutes at least 50% of the funding towards the Fellowship. Please get in touch with the Stroke Association research team in the first instance, and before submitting your application, to discuss eligibility, the most appropriate way to budget for the Fellowship costs and how to acknowledge the funding that is already secured.

2.3 Scope of Funding:

PDF:

The maximum funding amount that can be applied for is £235,000 over a period of 3 to 5 years. Fellowships may be taken up on a part-time, pro-rata basis but the minimum working hours would be equivalent to 0.6 FTE ie, applicants cannot apply for the full amount if they want to work part time over 3 years only. If they would like to do this, the cost of the award will be reduced accordingly.

CPDF:

The CPDF will fund the research activity of the fellow- including their time spent on research activity, and research costs. The maximum funding amount that can be applied for is £235,000. It is expected that the research component of the CPDF will be undertaken at a minimum of 0.5 FTE. The length of the CPDF should be calculated according to the split of research and clinical activity, and it is expected that it will be completed over a period of 4 to 6 years. It is expected that the clinical activity is funded within the fellow's NHS or Statutory Social Care Organisation contract of employment.

3. Eligibility

PDF and CPDF:

- Your proposed project must be based at a University/ NHS trust/ Statutory Social Care Organisation/ Research Institution within Great Britain or Northern Ireland.
- Fellows must have one lead research supervisor who bears overall responsibility for the training and the research project. Additional supervisors are recommended.
- Applicants must include a named mentor and a support letter from the mentor in the application form. You will be asked to justify the appropriateness of your choice of mentor. (Mentoring is a widely used development tool that can have a beneficial impact on effectiveness, confidence and career advancement. We have found that researchers who have a mentor have a greater clarity of purpose and productivity, have increased sector knowledge, and are better prepared to reach their career aspirations).
- You will be asked to give details of whether you have involved your local Research Design Service (RDS) or Clinical Trials Unit (CTU) in the development of the research proposal, including details of any discussions you have had with the RDS/CTU, improvements to the proposal as a result of the advice offered and their ongoing involvement in the project.
- Please note: involvement of a CTU is **mandatory** for clinical trial applications.
- For clinical trial applications, you will need to outline the supervisor's track record in running clinical studies and the expected role of your supervisor in ensuring the study will recruit to target and stay on track within your expected timescales.

- Applicants should have submitted their **PhD thesis** prior to the deadline for applications for a Postdoctoral Fellowship. All applicants will need to have been **awarded their PhD** before beginning their Postdoctoral Fellowship, should they be successful after interview.
- Postdoctoral Fellowships are open to those who have undertaken **up to** maximum 6 years active research subsequent to obtaining their PhD qualification, excluding career breaks and other periods of leave such as sickness and maternity.

Example scenarios:

If you have already obtained your PhD and have undertaken **more than 6** years of active research subsequent to obtaining your PhD qualification, you are not eligible to apply to this scheme. You may wish to consider the Stroke Association lectureship/reader scheme.

Physicians and similar medical professionals are not eligible to apply for a Postdoctoral Fellowship; they may wish to consider the Stroke Association lectureship/reader scheme.

Please contact the Research Team if you are unsure of, or have any queries regarding, your eligibility for this award.

N.B If applicable, we must have a copy of your ethical approval before you can take up the award.

Additional eligibility requirements for the CPDF:

- Graduate professionals, holding registration with the relevant regulatory body as a Nurse or an AHP.
- Have at least four years' experience of professional, post-graduation practice at the point of application
- Applicants must have a contract of employment with an NHS trust or Statutory Social Care Organisation through which their clinical activity is paid
- Fellows on the clinical-academic scheme must have a clinical supervisor in addition to their research supervisor(s)

4. Patient and Public Involvement (PPI)

We expect that all applicants will have involved people affected by stroke in the planning and development stages of their funding application and will continue to do so should their application be successful.

We follow the [NIHR definition of Involvement](#) as an "active partnership between patients, carers and members of the public with researchers that influences and shapes research". This

is **not** the same as participation in research trials. We encourage applicants to consider NIHR's [UK Standards for Involvement](#).

Plans for involvement should be meaningful and explain the anticipated impact on your work and research. Planning should be fully resourced and costed. There is no defined maximum budget for involvement provided there is clear justification. We would expect costs to be requested in all applications and all costs must still fit within the overall budget for the award.

You can request advice for involvement by contacting our Research Involvement Lead, Dan Taylor (daniel.taylor@stroke.org.uk). Requests to involve people affected by stroke through our networks may be possible but are subject to demand and require at least six weeks prior to the application deadline.

You can find out more about how we can help you to involve people affected by stroke in your work [here](#).

5. Resubmission policy

Our resubmission policy permits you to resubmit previously unsuccessful applications to this call once. Should you choose to resubmit your unsuccessful application, we would ask that you take on board the comments of the reviewers and incorporate any suggestions accordingly.

If you are unsure whether you can resubmit an application, please contact the Research team at research@stroke.org.uk with the month and year you applied and the reference number of your application which can be found on your rejection letter.

6. Proposed research project

The proposed research project statement on page 5 of the application form should not exceed 2500 words. Please provide your references separately. Please include a Gantt chart/timeline as a file upload.

Your proposal statement should incorporate all of the following points, although not necessarily in the order listed below:

- Hypotheses, aims and objectives– where appropriate please consider the [NIHR definitions for feasibility and pilot studies](#) when describing your proposed project
- Background to the project
- Preliminary data
- Detailed plan of investigation, including proposed methodology
- If recruiting participants: a sample size calculation, tailored recruitment plan, statistical expertise (which may be costed)
- Plans to integrate PhDs and other research training posts into this work programme and their potential roles
- Potential problems and contingency plans
- Dissemination plans

- Value of this programme to stroke research

You will also be asked to provide:

- An outline of the trajectory of your research into the clinic, following the conclusion of the fellowship
- Annual milestones which will be used to monitor progress of the award
- Proposed programme of training
- Future plans for attracting further funding
- Supporting statement from the fellowship candidate
 - Why you wish to undertake a Postdoctoral Fellowship,
 - Future careers aspirations (what you hope to do in the future and what you plan to do with your research career).

Please see page 5 of the application form for more guidance.

We also ask you to outline details of managing **Intellectual Property** if any arise during the project, and your intention to partner with digital enterprises if your project involves the development or evaluation of **digital technology** that is intended for commercial/routine clinical use. We strongly recommend that any project using data adheres to the principles set out in the [Department of Health & Social Care conduct for data-driven health and care technology](#) code of conduct.

7. Details of support requested

In the main budget table of the application form we would like you to include all the funding you are requesting from the Stroke Association. You will also be required to fully justify all the funding you are requesting.

Please note that if your application is successful, the funding provided will be the figure that you have requested (unless this is queried by the panel). After the Award Acceptance form is signed, the amount awarded will not be increased if there are errors in your calculations so please ensure that the total amount requested is correct.

If you have financial support from other sources, the nature and tenure of the support should be disclosed in either the project proposal section of the application form, or in the justification textbox underneath the budget table.

Support may be sought for the following items:

- Salary of the fellow, in line with the host institution's policy. Please account for inflation in the costings in the application form.
- Equipment to be used exclusively in the research project.
- Consumables that are specific to the research project should be itemised and costed individually over the duration of the award.
- Travel expenses which are integral to the project, for example, when patients have to be visited in their homes.

- There is no maximum limit for imaging costs. However you will have to justify your request and ensure that costings are in line with institutional and national practices.
- Dissemination costs: Open Access publishing costs, conference attendance fees.
- [UK Stroke Forum](#) (UKSF) registration, travel and accommodation fees. We expect all fellows to attend the UKSF each year.
- Patient and Public Involvement: e.g. contributor fees ([NIHR rates here](#)), accessibility and travel expenses, independent facilitators, creating materials and outputs. We recommend using [INVOLVE's involvement cost calculator](#) to help put together an appropriate budget for PPI.

Where the study takes places within the NHS, we ask you to outline any associated NHS costs in the supplementary spreadsheet on the budget page and not in the main budget table:

Researchers are required to complete the [Schedule of Events Cost Attribution Tool \(SoECAT\)](#) at the point of submission of their application. This is designed to capture the different costs associated with clinical research and attribute them according to whether they are research costs, service support costs, treatment costs, and excess treatment costs/treatment cost savings.

Please be aware that if your planned project includes the recruitment of participants, your application should be accompanied with the Funder Export from the online SoECAT, obtainable via the NIHR [Central Portfolio Management System \(CPMS\)](#).

In order to create a SoECAT, you will need to create an account in CPMS. After creating the account, you will need to login to CPMS to activate this account. If any assistance is required in creating the account, please refer to our [user guide](#). Once your account has been created and is active, you can proceed.

Guidance for the completion of the SoECAT by the applicant is present in the online tool to assist at each page and stage of the application process and further details can be found on the [Online SoECAT Guidance page](#). There is also an [Online SoECAT Guidance Module](#) which includes video tutorials and linked resources (an NIHR Learn account is required to access and enrol onto the module) and a helpful [Study Representative - Online SoECAT Top Tips](#) infographic.

Please note that completion of the ***SoECAT may not be necessary*** when applying for funding to support: overarching programmes with no specific research study protocol, infrastructure, fellowships, anything where the grant is to be used for direct employment of a member of staff or purchase of an asset, and data or diagnostic reviews where recruitment data is not collected. Such applications should be submitted with supporting documentation to explain why a SoECAT was not submitted in this instance.

Non-commercial research sponsors have a responsibility to ensure the study is appropriately costed and attributed

Attribution support is available for investigators, study teams and their R&D offices through AcoRD specialists in the NIHR Local Clinical Research Network. Find out more about how to access this support via the [Study Support Service](#).

Under the new arrangements, sign off via the tool is required to confirm the study attribution complies with the Department of Health and Social Care [AcoRD guidance](#). This will underpin ETC sign off and be required for studies to be eligible for the NIHR portfolio. This early attribution support will underpin the excess treatment cost management process by providing formal sign off, supporting the role of the research sponsor and lead R&D office or Clinical Trial Unit. Completion of the Schedule of Events Cost Attribution Template will be required for studies eligible for the NIHR portfolio and the support this provides, which will include access to excess treatment cost payments under the new arrangements. This ETC value, alongside recruitment activity in the NIHR Central Portfolio Management System, will then be utilised to inform the payments to NHS providers.

8. Proposed training and supervision programme

Training and Development

As part of the award, Fellows will complete a training and development programme. This should include the training required to complete your research programme and the training / activities required to develop your career as a leader in stroke research.

In addition to the research objectives, applicants are required to outline their career development objectives. The Stroke Association wishes to fund individuals who are keen to support capacity-building in stroke research more widely in addition to developing their own career. Applicants may therefore wish to consider what leadership training or activities they can undertake which will support our stroke research community (appropriate for their career stage). The CAHPR research practitioner framework (Harris, Cooke, and Grafton 2021) provides some useful guidance, but it is not expected that this is used exclusively and components should only be chosen where relevant to the individual's career pathway.

CPDF Training

For the CPDF, Fellows are also required to design and complete a set of objectives specifically aimed at strengthening links between clinical practice and research- both in terms of workforce development and evidence based practice. **Table 1.0** below provides guidance for the types of activities/ objectives that could be included at each award stage. All award stages have been included for context, and have been based upon the CAHPR research practitioner framework.

Award	Clinical-Academic Competencies	Examples
Clinical-Academic Postgraduate Fellowship (CPGF)	<p>Communicates relevance of research findings and best practice to colleagues, advocacy groups and wider community</p> <p>Promotes evidence-based practice to improve service user outcome, patient experience and organisation culture</p> <p>Engages with knowledge mobilisation practices For example in service training, Communities of Practice; service improvement methodologies (e.g. 'plan: do: study: act'; micro systems)</p> <p>Supports and organises local research and teaching events e.g. conferences, journal clubs, study days</p> <p>Educates colleagues in audit skills, service development and evidence-based practice</p> <p>Critiques / evaluates local practice using a range of techniques including standardised tools / measures and innovative methodologies</p> <p>Provides students and practitioners with opportunities and experience of undertaking research</p>	<p>Develop and lead Journal clubs</p> <p>Participates in service evaluation / audit to ensure these are benchmarking against best evidence</p> <p>Develop and deliver research talks at departmental level, and develops opportunities for others to present also.</p> <p>Engages with and actively participates within professional networks</p> <p>Translates best practice principles for Public and Patient Involvement and Engagement to ensure co-production is embedded across all clinical service evaluation / improvement projects</p> <p>Leads development of research cafes to upskill teams</p> <p>Supports delivery of student placements into research setting</p> <p>Active engagement with local research networks (e.g. CAHPR, NIHR CRN)</p>
Clinical-Academic Post-Doctoral	<p>Establishes networks across boundaries e.g. health and social care systems and Higher Education Institutes</p> <p>Engages in peer support, mentorship and supervision of less-experienced researchers, to nurture talent and promote empowerment and autonomy</p> <p>Contributes to and promotes the professional development of the workforce in relation to research</p> <p>Showcases and uses data/findings from research consultancy/ service development</p>	<p>Creates working groups with researchers and clinicians across organisations / depts to address specific service / clinical problems</p> <p>Develops/supports processes across the organisation to engage clinicians interested in research</p> <p>Supports team members to include research skills within job descriptions and personal development plans</p> <p>Develops formal and informal training sessions to support teams in developing skills in QI and research, and knowledge mobilisation.</p> <p>Supports the embedding of Public and Patient Involvement and Engagement into local systems and processes for research and staff development</p>

Fellowship (CPDF)	<p>projects undertaken by staff, students or collaborators</p> <p>Supports students and practitioners through to publication and dissemination</p> <p>Persuades and influences a range of stakeholders to engage with research activity and evidence-based practice.</p> <p>Acts as a role model and makes an identifiable contribution to evidence-based change & development within the profession or service & beyond</p>	<p>Mentors and supports others to write grant and funding applications</p> <p>Supports teams to develop plans to implement change (new evidence), and leads services in QI / change management and effective data collection to support change processes.</p>
Clinical Lectureship	<p>Establishes networks across boundaries e.g. health and social care systems and Higher Education Institutes</p> <p>Attends and reports at a senior level (e.g. boards, executive committees) regarding research-related governance, policy and service development</p> <p>Contributes to and promotes the professional development of the workforce in relation to research</p> <p>Acts as strategic link between practice, professional bodies, research institutes and academia to develop and influence research education provision.</p> <p>Provides students and practitioners with opportunities and experience of undertaking research</p> <p>Supports students and practitioners through to publication and dissemination</p> <p>Influences and leads less experienced researchers and builds capability, creating a culture of creativity and enquiry. Creates ideas, recognises good ideas and opportunities and acknowledges the contribution of others</p> <p>Persuades and influences a range of stakeholders to engage with research activity and evidence-based practice.</p>	<p>Creates working groups with researchers and clinicians across organisations / nationally</p> <p>Sit on Research Ethics Committee</p> <p>Sit on organisation research planning / strategic planning committees</p> <p>Leads formal training sessions for team members / organisation to build capability and capacity for research, and supports these with mentoring, networking or other mechanisms to build communities of practice.</p> <p>Embeds Public and Patient Involvement and Engagement in associated research projects and the necessary time, training and resource for members of the team to upskill in this area. Involving contributors as co-authors and showcasing practice nationally.</p> <p>Is a member of professional network executive committees, engages with professional bodies (consults on projects, expert reference groups)</p> <p>Sets up opportunities for undergraduate students to take up research placements, develops opportunities for junior staff to have rotations in research settings</p>

Table 1.0: Example activities/objectives for Stroke Association clinical-academic awards.

Supervision and Support

Details of supervision and support for the fellow should be provided. For the CPDF, the research and clinical supervisors will agree to provide cohesive and joint support for the Fellow, agreeing to communicate and work collaboratively and flexibly to support the Fellow in fulfilling their research and clinical commitment. It is essential that collaboration between the clinical and research supervisors is effective in providing joint support.

9. Application checklist

- Fellows must have one lead research supervisor who bears overall responsibility for the training and the research project. Additional supervisors are recommended. For the CPDF, a clinical supervisor is also required.
- You are required to submit your application online, via our award management system, before the deadline (5pm 30th January 2024):
<https://strokeassociation.flexigrant.com>
- We will not accept paper/Word/PDF copies of the application form.
- Letter of support: Your application requires a letter of support from the **Head of Department** at the Host Institution.
- Letter of support: Your application requires a letter of support from your **proposed supervisor(s)**, (signed by all of the supervisors).
- Online signatures: The **Lead supervisor**, the **Head of Department** and the **Finance/Research Administration Officer** from the host organisation must provide their approval of your application in order to allow you to submit the application. This is done by you inviting them into your application form via the 'Participants' tab in the system and them typing their details into the corresponding declaration page. This acts as their signature. If your application is funded, wet copies of their signatures will be required. For the CPDF, a supporting letter from your second host will also be required.
- At the time of application, you do not require approval from the **Research Sponsor**, however if you are successful, wet copies of their signature will be required.
Awards that we fund require a Research Sponsor if the research is linked to the NHS. To identify who would be suitable to act as the Research Sponsor, we advise you talk to your supervisor(s) and your institution's Research Office. The Research Office will know whether or not you need a sponsor (and are often the sponsor in many cases). For more information about this, please take a look

at: <http://www.hra.nhs.uk/resources/before-you-apply/roles-and-responsibilities/sponsor/>

It is suggested that the Research Sponsor could be 'the employer of the chief investigator, the educational institution (e.g. for student research), or the care organisation where the research is to take place'. Please email research@stroke.org.uk if you require further guidance.

- You are not required to have the necessary ethical approval at the time of application. If successful, ethical approval for your study will have to be gained before you can begin your award. You are required to send us a copy of the ethical approval when it is gained.

10. Adjudication

During the adjudication of Postdoctoral Fellowships and the selection of fellows, the interview panel will score the application based on:

- The PERSON – the background, career aspirations and potential of the candidate to become a stroke research leader in the future (40%)
- The SUPERVISION that will be received by the candidate (15%)
- The INSTITUTION the candidate will be based at (15%)
- The proposed TRAINING programme the candidate would undertake if awarded the Fellowship (15%)
- The PROJECT that will be carried out during the Fellowship (15%)

The purpose of the proposed research project must be directly related to stroke. It must be clear how the research could ultimately be translated into clinical practice and, therefore, provide benefit to stroke patients. Details of the proposed research project, patient and public involvement, future plans and aspirations for further research and funding must also be provided.

Fellowships are awarded on the recommendation of a panel made up of expert members of the Stroke Association's Research Awards Pool and people that have been personally affected by stroke, using the system of peer review followed by a candidate interview.

Fellowships are awarded annually. Applications are invited by means of advertisements in the medical press and the Stroke Association website (www.stroke.org.uk).

What happens to your application?

Your application will be reviewed by external scientific and lived experience peer reviewers and adjudicated by an adjudication panel made up of the Research Awards Pool and people affected by stroke from the [Stroke Voices in Research](#) involvement network.

Peer review scores are used to rank applications and shortlist for interview with agreement from the Chair of the Adjudication Panel. If an application is shortlisted, the proposed candidate is invited to attend an interview. The Research Department will send out invitation letters for interview. Please hold the interview date in your diary from now on until we confirm if you have been shortlisted. You will receive a letter confirming if you have or have not been shortlisted approximately two weeks before the interview date.

The interview usually lasts for around 50 minutes. The candidate will be invited to give a short (8 minute) presentation to the panel outlining their research proposal and its outcomes, as well as their background, career aspirations, and the benefits that the Fellowship would bring to them personally. The candidate will then be interviewed by a panel made up of up to four members of the Research Awards Pool, two members of the Stroke Voices in Research involvement network and invited experts (if applicable) and members of the Research Team from the Stroke Association. The panel will be particularly interested in:

- The fellow's career to date
- The fellow's career aspirations
- The fellow's research experience
- The research proposal outlined in the fellow's application
- The fellow's plans for public and patient involvement
- What benefit the Fellowship would bring to the fellow

The panel will also explore the proposed research project, and will ask questions on any part of the application or detail of the proposed project. Presentation skills of the applicant will also be assessed.

Following the interview, the panel will discuss the merits of each of the candidates, and will make a recommendation to the Stroke Association Council of Trustees on the applicant(s) who should receive a Fellowship. Successful fellows will be informed in writing. Unsuccessful applicants will also receive a letter containing feedback from their interview and anonymised external peer reviewer comments.

Successful applicants will be required to provide an accurate start date upon accepting the award. We advise candidates to begin the award within 6 months of receiving the offer letter, but the start can be delayed if requested at the discretion of the Stroke Association.

11. Deadlines for applications:

Call opens: **6th November 2023**

Closing date for applications: **30th January 2024**

Interview date: **26th June 2024**

The Research Department will send out invitation letters for interview. Please hold the interview dates in your diary from now on until we confirm if you have been shortlisted. You will receive a letter confirming this approximately two weeks before the interview date.

Awards will be made in **July 2024**.