Capacity building, training and development plan

2019 – 2022

Building the evidence base to support public health practice
SPHR Capacity building, training and development plan 2019-22

1. Aims
The National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) School for Public Health Research (SPHR) is a unique collaboration between leading academic centres in England. Established in 2012 NIHR SPHR aims to conduct high quality research to build the evidence base for effective public health practice. Our research looks at what works practically to improve population health and reduce health inequalities, can be applied across the country, and better meets the needs of policymakers, practitioners and the public.

The benefit of the NIHR Research School model is that it brings together leading academic centres, with excellence in applied research, in a collaborative working relationship greater than the sum of its parts and with a strategic, long-term programme of work that allows the ‘big issues’ in the field to be tackled. The School provides a setting where PhD students and Fellows can benefit from the leadership of researchers at the top of their field and our extensive networks with public health policy and practice and where supplementary training, networking, mentoring, guidance and collaboration between members are part of the added value that the School environment brings.

The School is committed to building capacity in public health research by providing a range of multidisciplinary training and development opportunities.

We focus here on what SPHR will offer within the current contract, to the end of March 2022. What we offer will add value to and be synergistic with current fellowships offered by the NIHR Academy and other funders. In the longer term there is potential for a more ambitious and cohesive plan to be supported within SPHR.

2. Mission and activities
The SPHR research capacity building programme is aligned with the overall mission of the School.

Public health research is entering a phase of transformation following the publication of the Academy of Medical Sciences report ‘Health of the Public 2040’. There is a drive to build on existing strengths to make the UK the world leader in public health and prevention research, and to meet the substantial public health challenges we face. We want to see more research that is useful, timely and accessible to those responsible for delivering policies and services that ultimately protect and improve the health of the population. We need research that helps answer the most important questions facing policy makers, Local Authorities and service providers. To do this we need to inspire the next generation of academics into public health research with the option to combine academic research with practice as a career pathway.
SPHR has 31 PhD students, 15 of these are funded from member budgets (some are part-funded with leveraged funding from member institutions and two are part funded by the CLAHRC North Thames). Funding for an additional 16 studentships was awarded to SPHR from DHSC in 2018/19.

SPHR was awarded further funding for up to 16 pre-doctoral and post-doctoral fellowships to begin from January 2020 and 16 summer studentships to start in summer 2020. Due to fellows opting for part-time working, we were able to appoint seven pre-doctoral fellows and ten post-doctoral launching fellows (numbers for each fellowship were decided based on the best candidates at interview).

These studentships and fellowships target gaps in the academic public health career pathway identified by SPHR and colleagues in the NIHR Academy (appendix 2).

Each SPHR PhD Student and Fellow will have an individualised training plan and regular progress reviews within the host institution. The SPHR trainees automatically become members of the SPHR Researchers Network (ResNet). ResNet was established in 2014 and aims to link researchers working on SPHR projects across the eight members of the School. It is a forum for communication, peer support and networking to aid the professional development of researchers of any level, through virtual meetings and bulletins, researcher events and networking at the SPHR Annual Scientific Meeting (ASM). ResNet members have their own meeting preceding the ASM. The programme is planned by the ResNet group and facilitates peer support, cross department collaboration, training and learning. From 2019/20 there is the potential for SPHR to provide additional training events and meetings for ResNet members as the funding for our fellowships included some funding to support training.

By virtue of being part of SPHR, PhD students and Fellows are also NIHR Academy members and have access to a number of unique training opportunities including the placements in partner departments, the ability to participate in other NIHR opportunities (e.g. SPARC, IVSA, the NIHR Infrastructure Training Camp and NIHR Academy Annual Conference).

Objectives:
1. each SPHR PhD student and Fellow’s work will align with, and contribute to the SPHR research programmes and themes which will include involvement in programme and theme meetings and activities.
2. each SPHR PhD student and Fellow will have a personal training plan developed with supervisors and reviewed by the SPHR training lead Prof Rona Campbell, within 3 months of commencement.
3. PhD students and Fellows will be expected to undertake a placement in a public health policy or practice setting (e.g. Local Authority, Public Health England).
4. each SPHR trainee will draft a public involvement and engagement plan 3 months after the commencement of their award that will be reviewed by their supervisor and the PI&E lead Prof Jennie Popay.
5. each SPHR trainee will draft a knowledge exchange plan 3 months after the commencement of their award that will be reviewed by their supervisor and the SPHR Knowledge Exchange Broker.
6. all SPHR PhD students and Fellows will present a poster of their research at the SPHR ASM, annually.
7. eligible SPHR PhD students and Fellows will be encouraged to attend the NIHR Academy Annual Conference at least once during their award.
8. eligible SPHR PhD students and Fellows will be encouraged to apply for NIHR Academy SPARC/IVSA funding to visit another part of the NIHR Academy infrastructure and we will have an internal competition within the School to identify the two PhD candidates who will be nominated to join the NIHR training camp each year.

3. Management and governance
The School Directorate is hosted by Newcastle University with Professor Ashley Adamson (Fuse, Newcastle University) as SPHR Director. The SPHR Deputy Director, Professor Rona Campbell (University of Bristol), has been appointed to the role of Training Lead for SPHR. Each School member will identify a training lead with the relevant experience, interest and capacity who will have oversight of PhD students and Fellows within their membership.

Training in SPHR is managed on a day-to-day basis by the Training Lead, the School Manager (Dr Susan Bowett) and the SPHR Director. A Training Manager has been appointed to the SPHR Directorate (Andi Sull). Funding decisions for studentships and fellowships are ratified by the NIHR SPHR Executive Group and operationalised by the School Manager working with member leads in each host institution.

Capacity building and training will be a standing item on quarterly SPHR Executive meetings and will be a substantive agenda item bi-annually at which members will be required to report on the PhD students and Fellows in their membership. The ResNet Chair or a representative currently attends the SPHR Executive; this will be extended to include two representatives bi-annually from the cohort of PhD Students and Fellows.

The aims of the standing agenda item will be:
• to disseminate and promote excellence in training and capacity development;
• to contribute to the development of bespoke training events, resources and materials;
• to provide a platform for sharing best practice and progress in training methods;
• assist with the timely collection and reporting of information on PhD students and Fellows;
• be proactive in sharing local good practice across the School contribute towards the training and development available within the School; and
• to support arrangements for the annual ResNet meeting.
NIHR SPHR is committed to recruiting talented individuals via national competition. All applicants are asked to complete a modified NIHR standard application form based on those used by other national funding bodies. Applicants are shortlisted for interview by the School members and selected by a panel of representatives from across the School. The NIHR Academy’s commitment to equality of opportunity is an inherent part of the SPHR recruitment processes including the conduct of the selection committee. Independent references are taken up and made available to the interview panels where appropriate. Recommendations from the interviews are then approved by the full NIHR SPHR Executive Group and contracts are drawn up to distribute funding to the host institutions.

The SPHR Directorate will collect data annually that will be analysed and discussed with the training lead and Executive Group members. Data collected include equal opportunity metrics, details of publications and other dissemination activity, grants applied for, promotion and training opportunities. These data will be reported in the SPHR annual report to NIHR.

4. Building research capacity
Awards are distributed between SPHR Members in open competition. Where possible, we aim for an equitable distribution of awards across members but only where there are excellent candidates to fill posts. Supervision involves more than one SPHR member and, ideally, will include a practice-based advisor and a placement in practice, policy or other setting appropriate to the topic of study. The School awards aim to complement and not duplicate the opportunities offered by NIHR Academy.

SPHR summer studentships in public health research
The summer studentships are aimed at undergraduate students with an interest in a career in public health research. The studentships will offer support for 8-week projects supervised by SPHR Early Career Researcher (ECRs), Fellows and PhD students.

SPHR PhD studentships in public health research
Doctoral studentships are for those with a strong academic record who wish to develop a career in public health research. Applicants must have a first degree in a discipline relevant to public health research and will be expected to complete a PhD during the award period. Students receive fees and a tax-free stipend. The host member receives an allocation of funds to support the research.

1 The NIHR Academy is committed to eliminating unjustified discrimination and to promoting equality of opportunity for all applications to our Fellowships and other training schemes. NIHR Academy welcomes applications from all sections of the community and does not discriminate on the grounds of gender, disability, age, race/ethnicity, religion or philosophical belief or sexual orientation. In order to support this commitment the selection committee must ensure that the decisions and judgements about people are based on objective and justifiable criteria funding recommendations.
SPHR pre-doctoral fellowship awards in public health research
The pre-doctoral fellowships offer up to 24 months for individuals with a strong academic record who wish to gain experience of research in public health. Fellows can access skills training in topics such as epidemiology, statistics, health economics, qualitative methods, health services research and developing and evaluating complex public health interventions by attending courses and working on a variety of pre-existing research projects. These fellowships are similar to the Bristol Research Apprenticeships Scheme. This scheme, which has been running for six years, provides those with a relevant Master’s degree and a strong interest in public health research the opportunity to undertake a two-year research apprenticeship. This includes working on a variety of research projects, learning new research methods both through attendance at short courses and by applying them in the projects on which they work, and the opportunity to shadow and work alongside those in public health practice. The goal of the fellowship is for the fellow to gain experience, knowledge and, skills and to prepare an application to undertake a PhD in public health research in a way that supports the capacity and training needs for the future public health research workforce. The fellowship covers the Fellow’s salary with some research and training costs.

SPHR post-doctoral launching fellowships in public health research
The post-doctoral fellowships are ‘NIHR SPHR Launching Fellowships in Public Health Research’. They offer up to 24 months for individuals with a strong academic record who wish to become an independent public health researcher but one that is closely connected to practice. The goal of these fellowships is for the Fellow to publish papers from their PhD and write fellowship or grant application(s) to secure further funding e.g. an NIHR Advanced Fellowship. The Launching Fellows will receive training and development opportunities provided by SPHR, the NIHR Academy and host organisation that equips them to undertake research that meets the substantial public health challenges we face in the UK in the 21st Century. This will include specific training around coproduction of research with practitioners and includes the opportunity to undertake a practice-based placement and acquire skills in new methodological approaches, for example. Applicants are expected to have experience of research in public health or a related area. The fellowships cover the Fellow’s salary with some research and training costs.
A schedule for recruitment of PhD students and Fellows is in table 1 (providing that the applicants meet a high-quality threshold):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number of awards</th>
<th>Recruitment date</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Part time option?</th>
<th>Latest start date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PhD studentships</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>April-May 2018</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>1st April 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-doctoral fellowships</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Summer 2019</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1st April 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-doctoral launching fellowships</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Summer 2019</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1st April 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer studentships (round 1)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Jan-March 2020</td>
<td>8 weeks</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Summer 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Summer studentships (round 2)</strong></td>
<td><strong>16</strong></td>
<td><strong>Jan-March 2021</strong></td>
<td><strong>8 weeks</strong></td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td><strong>Summer 2021</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Funding for a second round of summer studentships is not confirmed yet. We will review the success of round 1 before making a case for a second round from the SPHR core budget.

5. Public Involvement and Engagement (PI&E)

Meaningful involvement and engagement of the public is central to the ethos of the School, ensuring our work draws on their lived expertise, incorporates their perspectives and responds to their challenge. PhD students and Fellows will contribute to and build on the existing body of involvement and engagement activities within our research projects and beyond. All PhD students and Fellows will be required to draft a public involvement and engagement plan 3 months after the commencement of their award (as objective 4 above).

The public will be involved and able to participate in all stages of research and governance. Existing expertise and structures will be used wherever possible. Work will be coordinated with other key organisations.

Professor Jennie Popay is the SPHR Strategic Lead for PI&E and with representatives from across the School and leads the SPHR PI&E group tasked with implementing the SPHR PI&E Strategy. SPHR PhD students and Fellows will have access to the strategy and be expected to implement the plan in their research and will be asked to consult the INVOLVE definitions of involvement, engagement and participation. All PhD students and Fellows are expected to produce plain English summaries of their research and outputs. The School will provide training sessions for its PhD students and Fellows on all aspects of PI&E.
6. Dissemination and communication
Communications about the SPHR research capacity development programme and impact will be managed centrally by the SPHR Directorate and locally by SPHR members. All research progress reports will include a description of dissemination activity and impact.

Funding will be made available to PhD students and Fellows to enable their research to be disseminated appropriately, in line with the NIHR Open Access policy.

PhD students and Fellows will be encouraged to produce at least one peer reviewed publication in a high-ranking journal, and these will be captured in annual reports and made available on the SPHR website. PhD students and Fellows will be asked to provide structured feedback, contribute ideas for training events, act as peer mentors, write blogs, tweet and provide articles about particular aspects of their training so that good practice and experiences are shared.

All PhD students and Fellows are expected to attend the SPHR Annual Scientific Meeting where they are required to produce a poster of their work that is entered into a competition, presented to their peers, external stakeholders and to senior academic staff in the School.

7. Feedback and review
The SPHR Directorate will collect regular feedback from our PhD students and pre- and post-doctoral fellows to monitor the quality of their experience as members of the SPHR and enable us to constantly improve what we are doing with regards to research capacity development. We will share findings and discuss suggested actions based on the findings with the SPHR Executive. We will also review the training plan annually to ensure that it remains up-to-date and fit for purpose.

8. Performance Indicators
The School will collate data on the number of applications received and success rates for all awards. These will be compared to other funding schemes in NIHR. Equal opportunity data are collected from all applicants for SPHR schemes by the NIHR Academy.

All School PhD students and Fellows will complete an annual progress report based on those used by the NIHR Academy to collect data on a range of performance indicators that are indicative of success, including, publications, grant income, training and career progression. High-level data will be presented and discussed by the SPHR Executive Group and be available for annual reporting to NIHR. The Directorate will also monitor career progression and research related impact, publicising this through our website, newsletter and wider dissemination activities.
Key performance indicators include:
1. Contribution to developing research capacity in public health research from pre-doctoral to post-doctoral levels including number and % of PhD completions; number of Pre-Doctoral and Launching Fellows appointed to SPHR; and training opportunities offered to PhD students, Fellows and ECRs
2. Number of high-quality publications by SPHR PhD students and fellows
3. Number of further research awards gained by SPHR PhD students and Fellows
4. Number and % of PhD students and Fellows continuing careers in public health research and/or practice
5. Public involvement and engagement activity by Summer students, PhD students and Fellows
6. Innovative approaches to communication used by Summer students, PhD students and Fellows
7. Impact of research of PhD students and Fellows on public health practice and policy
8. Promotions obtained by early and mid-career research staff
9. Impact of Summer studentship on awardee's future plans

The National Institute for Health Research School for Public Health Research, is a partnership between:
the Universities of Sheffield, Bristol, Cambridge, UCL; Imperial College London; The London School for Hygiene and Tropical Medicine; the LiLaC collaboration between the Universities of Liverpool and Lancaster and Fuse; The Centre for Translational Research in Public Health, a collaboration between Newcastle, Durham, Northumbria, Sunderland and Teesside Universities.