

NIHR SPHR Transdisciplinary Placement (TDP) in public health research - Application guidance

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Section 1 Introduction and background to the School

1.1 Introduction

Applications are invited from individuals who currently working outside of public health, but in a relevant academic field, who want to gain experience of academic public health research. We are committed to a supportive, inclusive, caring, and positive community. We warmly welcome applications from disabled people and those of different cultures, genders, ages, ethnicities, and beliefs.

Public health research is undergoing 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 a world leader in public health and prevention research, and to meet the substantial public health challenges we face. The School strives to produce 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 and our planet and reduce health inequalities. The experience of the COVID-19 pandemic has served to heighten the urgency of doing so. 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. Public health research requires a multidisciplinary workforce and needs to be representative of the populations that it serves. It is important to us that we attract people from a wide range of relevant disciplinary fields and ensure that we are inclusive in our approach and offer equality of opportunity to people from diverse backgrounds and circumstances. These Transdisciplinary Placements are intended to provide people currently working in fields from which public health researchers are not traditionally drawn, such as engineering, architecture, public policy, or data science, but who would like to move into public health research and undertake a funded placement in the NIHR School for Public Health Research to work on a research project within one of the School's four research programmes described below (Section 1.3).

1.2 Background to the School

The NIHR School for Public Health Research (SPHR) is a partnership between the Universities of Bristol, Cambridge, Exeter and Sheffield; Imperial College London; The London School for Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM); the LiLaC collaboration between the Universities of Liverpool and Lancaster; Fuse, The Centre for Translational Research in Public Health, a collaboration between Newcastle, Durham, Northumbria, Sunderland and Teesside Universities; and the PHRESH collaboration between the Universities of Birmingham, Warwick and Keele.

The SPHR aims to increase the evidence base for cost-effective public health practice by:

- Conducting applied public health research to increase the volume and quality of useful evidence on cost-effective interventions
- Creating an environment where first class applied public health research, focussed on the needs of the public, can thrive
- Supporting local public health practitioners and policy makers to engage with research, and actively seek out high quality research evidence to inform their decisions
- Contributing to ongoing efforts to build research capacity in public health research

SPHR is funded by the [National Institute for Health and Care Research \(NIHR\)](#).

You can find out more about the School, our research and researchers on our [website](#).

1.3 SPHR Research Programmes

The placement project should align with one or more of the SPHR research programmes;

Public mental health – identifies ways to reduce mental health inequalities across the life course by exploring how the settings in which people live, learn and work can support good mental health and wellbeing.

Children, young people & families – adopts a multi-sectoral, multi-level approach to produce research that drives equitable, cost-effective policies, practices and interventions for child and adolescent health.

Health inequalities – produces high-quality evidence to support a step change in action on the social inequalities driving health inequalities.

Healthy places, healthy planet – develops the evidence base for improving and bringing greater equity to place-based health and environmental sustainability.

1.4 SPHR Training pathway

In SPHR, we aim to inspire the next generation of academics into public health research with the option to combine academic research with practice as a career pathway. The School provides a setting where interns, PhD students, research fellows and employed early and mid-career researchers can benefit from the leadership of researchers at the top of their field and from our extensive networks with public health policy and practice. It is also a place where supplementary training, networking, mentoring, guidance and collaboration between members who are geographically spread across England, are part of the added value that the SPHR environment brings.

We have developed a training pathway that provides a range of training opportunities for those interested in pursuing a career in public health research including placements, internships, PhD studentships, and pre- and post-doctoral fellowships. You can find out more information about these opportunities and hear from our current students and alumni by following the links below:



Section 2 About the Transdisciplinary Placement

2.1 Introduction to the TDP scheme

The SPHR Transdisciplinary Placements will be short placements of around 6–8 weeks aimed at those currently working outside of public health, but in a relevant field, who want to gain experience of academic public health research. Successful candidates will be based at one of our member institutions and will contribute to an SPHR research project, gaining experience of academic public health research with the support of an SPHR researcher supervisor. This is the second time we are running this scheme and we currently have no plans to launch another call. If you have any further queries after reading this guidance or feedback, please email sphr.training@ncl.ac.uk.

We are also planning a small number of salaried Transdisciplinary Fellowships which will offer funding of up to 24 months for individuals with a strong research track record in their base discipline (which has relevance to public health). The first year will involve an approved MSc in public health and the second year an in-depth SPHR research project where the fellow will make a substantial contribution to it using knowledge and experience from their base discipline. The Transdisciplinary Fellowship competition will launch early 2024 with an expected start date from August 2024.

2.2 Eligibility criteria

These placements are aimed at people working outside of public health research but in a relevant field (e.g., engineering, architecture, law, public policy, data science). Public health research is transdisciplinary and intersects with many areas of society. Successful applicants will have a strong research track record in their base discipline, which must have relevance to public health. Applicants will be expected to provide evidence of research outputs in a form relevant to their field and demonstrate the impact of this work.

Who is not eligible to apply?

Individuals who are working in a discipline that is traditionally recognised as a route into public health research. This includes epidemiology, psychology, sociology, anthropology, health economics, medical statistics, nursing, dentistry and professions allied to medicine such as physiotherapy and nutrition. If you are not sure if you are eligible to apply, please contact sphr.training@ncl.ac.uk.

2.3 Application shortlisting criteria

Your application will be assessed using the following criteria as part of the application shortlisting process:

- A first or upper second-class UK honours degree, or the equivalent qualifications gained outside the UK, in an appropriate subject (qualifications, or a combination of qualifications and experience, which demonstrate equivalent ability and attainment will also be considered)
- Evidence of higher training in base discipline (e.g., a Master's degree) is desirable
- Relevant previous research experience
- Substantial research outputs in a form relevant to the base discipline
- Evidence of the impact of research in base discipline
- Evidence of potential as a career researcher
- Excellent written and verbal communication skills
- Highly motivated
- Able to work both independently and as part as part of a team
- Able to plan and manage own work
- Good quality project planned with SPHR Member and within SPHR remit
- Evidence of skills that can be transferred from base discipline and applied to public health research
- Clearly demonstrates the mutual benefits and impact of placement on career development and SPHR

2.4 Award length, duration and start dates

Transdisciplinary Placements will be short placements of around 6–8 weeks that can occur as a block or part-time over a series of weeks between January-April 2024. We understand that some applicants will need to take time out of full-time jobs to complete these placements. It's up to the applicant, their line manager and 'Placement Host' (where the individual will be undertaking their placement) to agree the best fit for everyone. Candidate circumstances will be looked at on an individual basis.

2.5 Scope of funding

Applicants can apply for funding of up to £8,000 per individual. Funding can include:

- funding to cover; travel, accommodation and subsistence in order to undertake the short placement
- funding to cover salary for the duration of the placement. This will be paid to your employer to cover the cost of employment during the placement.

- funding for the production of relevant placement outputs (e.g. an infographic, informative video etc.)

2.6 Important areas for consideration when developing a TDP placement

- **Identification of potential placement host and supervisor**

The members of the School are located throughout England, each one has a wide range of facilities and expertise. Every member hosts a number of academics. Visit the SPHR TDP 'where I can go' guide to identify a potential host for your placement. With the potential host, you will need to:

1. Discuss potential placement ideas, activities and the length and duration of the award.
2. Ensure that there is mutual support and agreement between the applicants employing organisation and placement host institution.
3. Identify a placement host supervisor and work together to develop and agree a placement plan that meets the applicant's career development needs and clearly states how they contribute their expertise during the placement.
4. You must have discussed and sought agreement/permission from the placement host institution before you submit an application.

- **Helpful resources available to applicants**

[SPHR TDP – Where I can go guide.](#) This guide details the different Members of the School that you can contact to host a placement.

[Transdisciplinary case studies.](#) This provides examples of people who have used their skills from different disciplines and applied to a career in public health research.

[Frequently asked questions.](#) Please read this before contacting us with a question as the answer might be featured in this FAQ section.

- **Types of placements that can be supported by a NIHR SPHR TDP award**

It is important to note that applicants are encouraged to explore the wide range of facilities, expertise and opportunities available to them across the School for their personal and professional development and develop a placement that is bespoke to their individual training needs, background, skills/experiences, as well as their proposed career trajectory. Applicants to the scheme should also think about what they can contribute or offer to the placement host during their placement and how the two parties might want to work together in the future.

For example, individuals may wish to consider seeking placements that equip them with the skills and experiences to work across disciplines and specialisms, making connections that are important to their work/research and that may spark innovative new ways of working in public health research.

Section 3 How to apply

3.1 Completing your application

CV

Submit a CV along with your application which should be no longer than three pages. CV should include the following information:

Applicant job details

Please provide details of your current employer, job title, manager/ supervisor and their contact details.

Career history

Please detail your current and previous positions in chronological order with the most recent employment at the top.

When entering details of your current and previous positions, for any positions where you undertook any 'research'; please indicate at what percentage (WTE) in each post/role you were undertaking research. For example, if you undertook research for 2.5 days a week and teaching work for 2.5 days per week; please enter 50% for that position. If you have worked part time at 60%, and undertook research for half of that time, please enter 30% for that position.

Education background

Please provide the full details of any completed higher degree(s) and, where relevant, the full details of any higher degree(s) you are currently undertaking. Please ensure that your degree classification is included, if applicable.

Research outputs

Do include relevant abstracts, conference proceedings, articles, books, book chapters and reports that have been published and other research outputs relevant to your base discipline. Please provide hyperlinks to any papers that are published.

Please provide details of any awards or distinctions that would be relevant to your application including details of what the award was for. Examples may include travel bursaries for a conference, presentation prizes, innovation awards etc.

COVERING LETTER

Please submit a one page covering letter with your application. You may wish to consider include relevant skills and experiences highlighted in the application shortlisting criteria (Section 2.3).

APPLICATION FORM

Complete all sections of the application form. These include:

Section A: Application summary.

Applicant details

Please enter your full name, email address and current job title.

Placement host Institution

Please provide the name of the SPHR Member and university you plan to undertake your placement at.

Placement host institution supervisor

Please provide the name, job title and contact details of the person who will supervise you during the placement.

Section B: Proposed placement plans

Project description

Please provide a clear outline of your proposed placement and the order of activities planned (you may wish to upload a Placement Gantt Chart to highlight the activities and order these will take place during your placement) and explain why it is important for your career at this stage. It is also important to explain why you have chosen the particular 'Placement Host Member' that you wish to work with during the placement (for example, due to particular experts, area of interest, expertise, facilities, or teams). (Word limit: 400)

Project impact

Please outline:

- a) the likely benefits and impact of the placement on your research, training and career,
- b) how you will know whether it has been a successful placement. (Word limit: 400)

Personal statement

Please describe what:

- a) what does Public Health research mean to you
- b) what transferable skills you plan to bring from your discipline to Public Health research
- c) why this is important (Word limit: 400)

Funding

- The information entered in this section should provide a breakdown of the total funds requested to undertake the proposed NIHR SPHR TDP. Funding of up to £8,000 can be requested.
- It is in your best interest to undertake a thorough, realistic and accurate costing. You must provide a clear and full justification for all costs. You must also ensure that you include all costs required.
- It is expected that the finance section of a NIHR SPHR TDP application form has received appropriate input from the placement host organisation.

Eligible Costs

Salary

You can include your salary for the duration of the placement. This will be paid to your employer to cover the cost of employment during the placement.

Travel, accommodation and subsistence costs

Enter the total cost of accommodation costs (if necessary) to cover any accommodation required to undertake the TDP. Please note; subsistence rates should be in accordance with the SPHR host institution 'Travel and Expenses Policy' approved rates'. All costs provided should represent value for money.

Placement project outputs

These can include costs for production of an infographic, informative video, conference fees.

Section C Host member

A statement must be written and added by the 'Placement Host Institution Supervisor' and should detail how the 'Placement Supervisor' and 'Placement Host Member' are going to support the applicant to successfully complete their placement and activities outlined in the placement plan. This statement should be tailored specifically to the applicant, their research, training and career development needs; as well as future collaborations/joint working.
(Word limit: 400)

Section D Declaration and signatures

A signature is needed by the supervisor and training lead of the 'Placement Host Member'. A list of training leads can be found [here](#). Please ensure the correct signatures are completed before submitting your application.

SECTION E Academic Referees

We ask for the name and contact details of two academic referees. These will only be contacted if applicant is successful.

3.2 How to make an application

The application process consists of three stages.

Stage 1 Please complete and submit the application form which can be downloaded from the 'apply now' link on the main web page [here](#).

Please upload a CV (max 3 page) and a covering letter (max. 1 page). We also ask that you identify two academic referees.

Please name your application form, CV and covering letter using the following naming convention:

Surname_application_TDP

Surname_CV_TDP

Surname_letter_TDP

Applications must be emailed to sphr.training@ncl.ac.uk by Noon Monday 16th October 2023.

Stage 2 Applications will be shortlisted, and funding recommendations made by the NIHR SPHR TDP selection committee.

Stage 3

Successful candidates will be required to register for the placement at the host institution. You may be asked to attend an interview at the host institution prior to appointment. Detailed guidance will be provided to successful candidates. More information can be found on individual institution websites.

3.3 Application deadlines and competition deadline

Your application must be submitted by the deadline and any signatories must have approved and signed your application before submitting. All components of your application including CV and covering letter must be submitted by the deadline. Please give yourself sufficient time to obtain signatures before the deadline, below is a timetable for dates of the selection process.

NIHR SPHR TDP competition launch	Tuesday 18 th July 2023
Deadline for application	Noon Monday 16th October 2023
Inform applicants of outcome	End of November 2023
Placements to take place	Between 1 st January 2024 – 1 st April 2024

3.4 Application outcome

Applicants will be notified of the outcome of their application via email as soon as the funding decision is finalised. The outcome should be issued by the end of November 2023.

3.5 Equal opportunities and diversity

NIHR and DHSC have a duty as a public body to promote equality of opportunity. We will contact all applicants shortly after the application closure date with an Equality Monitoring Form. Monitoring ensures that all applications to NIHR SPHR Programmes are treated equally in terms of gender, ethnicity and/or disability. Information will be anonymised and stored separately from your application, only be used for the purpose of monitoring equal opportunities and be kept securely and in confidence.

3.6 Useful contacts and links

Please direct questions to Andi Sull, SPHR Training and Development Manager sphr.training@ncl.ac.uk or directly to the potential host member main contact that is named in the 'where I can go' guide.