HARP PhD Clinical Research Fellowship Application Guidance

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Introduction

Health **A**dvances for Under**r**epresented **P**opulations (HARP) is a clinical PhD Programme dedicated to redressing health inequality through representative research in an inclusive environment. The programme is located at the Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry, Queen Mary University of London (QMUL) and at City St George's, University of London (CSGUL). We welcome applications from any health professional, regardless of their background, who have the scientific rigour, drive and ambition to carry out world-class research in underrepresented populations and diseases.

Underrepresented populations are underserved by healthcare and underrepresented in research due to:

- social inequalities (examples - demographic and protected characteristics)
- marginalisation (examples - socioeconomics, education, lifestyle choices, migration, legal and housing status)
- health status (examples - mental health or rare diseases)

The research should focus on a population, subgroup, phenotype or disease that is underrepresented in research *and* have a credible path to tackling or improving a consequence of this underrepresentation. The research is not restricted by method; it can include discovery, mechanistic, qualitative, clinical or any other research appraoch. This three-year full-time fellowship is open to all health professionals registered in the UK or Ireland and we are committed to broadening the backgrounds of our fellows through open and inclusive recruitment.

Contingent on timely submission of their thesis, and an approved research plan, fellows will be eligible for up to six months' funding for postdoctoral training. HARP also offers Internships (supported by partner NHS trusts) and an optional 1-year full-time Pre-Doctoral Fellowship (funded by Barts Charity and CSGUL). Please see sections below and separate guidance documents for further information on these. Applications for Internships and Pre-Doctoral Fellowship involve separate application forms, please contact the HARP Manager for details.

General information

- Healthcare professionals that are eligible to apply include:

art therapists
chiropodists/podiatrists
chiropractors
clinical psychologists
dental hygienists
dental nurses
dental therapists
dentists
dieticians
drama therapists
health visitors
healthcare assistants
physiological sciences
physical sciences and biomechanical engineering and bioinformatics
medical graduates
midwives
music therapists
non-medical public health specialists
nurses
occupational therapists
operating department practitioners
optometrists
dispensing opticians
orthoptists
osteopaths
paramedics
pharmacists
pharmacy technicians
physician assistants
physiotherapists
practitioner psychologists
prosthetists and orthotists
radiographers
research practitioners
social workers
speech and language therapists
vets

- Applicants should be practicing and be registered in the UK or the Republic of Ireland with the relevant professional body on the day of the application deadline (such as the General Medical Council, Nursing and Midwifery Council, Health and Care Professions Council, General Optical Council, General Pharmaceutical Council, General Dental Council and others). Health professionals need to have completed at least 1-year full-time equivalent (FTE) of clinical practice, and medical graduates must have completed foundation training. Projects must demonstrate a clear relevance to the main aim of the HARP PhD Programme: research on underrepresented patient groups or diseases.
- Applications should be made jointly by the candidate with their supervisors, outlining the proposed programme of research and the nature of the training to be provided.
- Costings should be calculated fully by the relevant research office at either QMUL or CSGUL. Supervisors are expected to review these and Head of Department letter of support should include a statement acknowledging that the costings are correct. In line with the Follett principles, salaries should be calculated by the research office according to experience on the appropriate clinical salary scale, including London weighting if relevant. Applicants need to provide research offices detailed information on their salaries backed up with their latest payslips. They also must inform the costings team if they intend to change jobs between application deadline and start of HARP fellowship or if they expect to be promoted during this time.
- No further funds can be requested after the award letter is accepted.
- Regular clinical work should be limited to no more than 8 hours a week (2 clinical sessions; increased to 16 hours or 4 clinical sessions for craft specialities) during

the fellowship. This time is **included in the full-time salary provided by HARP**. If the fellow retains their employment within the NHS, a further statement is needed from the host NHS department agreeing to this restriction.

- One candidate can only apply with one project, and one project can only be submitted by one candidate. A candidate can reapply once; however, should seek feedback from the HARP Programme Directors before the second submission.
- HARP does not allow concurrent study or transferring fellowships, therefore you are not eligible to apply if you are in receipt of a current PhD fellowship.

Other options to consider

The HARP programme consists of a series of opportunities designed to help interested health professionals train in research. Before you start, consider discussing with the HARP team which is the right opportunity for your stage.

Internship

This is for people who have an interest in but have not had the opportunity to experience or engage with research. You will spend one protected day per week for 6 months embedded with a research team or collaborator from within the HARP community. During this time, you will keep your clinical employment but will receive a QMUL or CSGUL honorary contract to enable you to engage in research. You will be able to use this time to improve your understanding of the research process and see what clinical academia could offer you. This period may help you understand an area that could interest you and develop relationships, building towards an application to the pre-doctoral or doctoral training phase.

Pre-doctoral training

This is for people who are committed and show signs of high potential to succeed in research but have had little research exposure. This could be a healthcare professional with knowledge, experience and passion for their clinical area who wants to develop a career in research but is not yet ready to submit a competitive doctoral application. The predoctoral scheme offers one year (full-time equivalent) to develop in research and work with supervisors to develop a competitive PhD proposal. Successful candidates will have the option to complete a full MSc, or relevant modules, at QMUL or CSGUL and will automatically be shortlisted for interview should they choose to apply to the HARP PhD scheme.

How to apply to the doctoral training scheme

Applications must be received by email (info@harpphd.org) by 16:00 on the **11th January 2027**. Applications received after the deadline will **not** be accepted.

The application needs to contain the following elements:

1. Application form
2. Case for support document
3. Completed research office-derived Worktribe costing
4. Supporting letter from Supervisor
5. Supporting letter from Head of Department confirming costings are correct
6. Supporting letter(s) from Collaborator(s), if any
7. Supporting letter from Head of Clinical Department, if fellow intends to retain employment in the NHS
8. Ethical approval (if any and available at the time of submission)
9. Equality monitoring form (you will receive a link you will need to complete)

You must submit elements 1-8 of the above as one PDF document

The fellowship application is a one-stage process; however, all applicants are **strongly** encouraged to discuss their project and any re-application with a HARP director prior to submission. Fellowships are awarded by panels consisting of members of the Faculty, Advisory Board, appropriate experts and members of the public who will be co-opted as necessary.
There are four elements to the assessment process:

1. **Eligibility:** at this initial stage the scientific summaries of each application are assessed by the fellowship funding panel. Applicants will be informed at an early stage if their proposal is rejected because it is not within the remit of HARP or is incomplete. **To be within remit a proposal must address a population, subgroup, phenotype or disease that is underrepresented in research. They must *also* show that this underrepresentation has a consequence that the research will tackle.**
2. **Peer review:** the full applications of all those successful at the suitability stage will be sent for external scientific peer review by experts of international standing in the field of the proposal.
3. **Shortlisting:** the full applications and peer reviews are assessed by the fellowship funding panel members. Shortlisted applicants are invited to attend interview.
4. **Interview:** the fellowship awarding panels interview the shortlisted applicants, and funding decisions are based on the outcomes of these interviews. The Faculty and Advisory Board members and co-opted other experts as well as lay members of the public will form two small panels for the interviews.

Shortlisting is expected to be early March followed by in person interviews on 24th March. Fellowship start dates will be from October 2027 onwards.
Further information and FAQs about applying for fellowships are available here.

A suggested timeline for application

Preparing a successful PhD application takes time and involves far more than writing the proposal itself. Below is a suggested timeline to help you prepare a successful application.

Time to application	Action
3-4 months before	**Reach out** to potential supervisors and discuss a project. Supervisors must be an employee of QMUL or CSGUL The current approved supervisor list can be accessed at www.harpphd.org/our community/
3 months before	**Design** your project and draft your application working closely with your supervisor. Read past fellows' projects for a sense of scope and style. Consider contacting current fellows.
3 months before	**Reach out** to a HARP Director to discuss your project idea and (if relevant) and resubmission, to help ensure you are eligible and for support with the process.
3 months before	**Discuss** with your clinical team or Training Programme Director so they can support and plan for your time away.
2-3 months before	**Confirm** your primary and secondary supervisors. Ask your prospective Head of Department for a supporting letter (it needs to guarantee facilities, resources and academic status for the duration of your PhD, as well as confirming that the costings look correct).
2 months before	Consider **ethics or animal licences**. If your project needs approval, consider starting the process now. It does not need to complete before submission but you need realistic plans and timelines in your application.
1-2 months before	**Present** your plans at research group, whiteboard or clinical departmental meetings as appropriate to gather opinions and suggestions. **Circulate** your project plan to your supervisors and collaborators well before the deadline for feedback and improvement. **Liaise** with Research Offices at QMUL or CSGUL to complete your costings.
>2 weeks before	**Ensure your salary and project costings are complete.** Please send your pre-costing questionnaire by mid-December the very latest to the research office. The final Worktribe costing from the research office will need to be added to the application.
Submission	Apply by email to info@harpphd.org by **deadline on Monday, 11 January, 16:00.**
0-10 weeks after	After receipt, your application will be screened for eligibility and then sent for external review. Assuming you are eligible you will not hear anything until shortlisting is completed. If you are successful, you will receive an invitation for interview. If

	you are unsuccessful, you will receive notification as well as feedback.
10-12 weeks after	**Reach out** to your supervisors to support you with mock interviews. Candidates who prepare often perform better at the interview.
~12 weeks after submission	**Interview**
~14 weeks after submission	**Outcome**
~8 months after submission	**Fellowships start**

Guidance for completion of the application form

The Applicant is the prospective PhD fellow. Please adhere to the word count limits where stated; going over the limits risks rejection of the application. You will not be penalised for writing less if you have provided the necessary information.

Application form - Part 1

Section 1

Structured Curriculum Vitae - please complete Applicant details, Qualifications, Employment History, Career Breaks and Prizes and Awards.

Research outputs:

Please enter a complete list of the Applicant's research publications and other outputs to-date (full citations including title and all authors). These should be separated into

- Original peer reviewed papers
- Reviews
- Books or book chapters
- Editorials, letters or case reports
- Conference presentations
    - Oral
    - Poster
- Other research outputs, such as
    - Development and sharing of new datasets, software, research reagents, tools, methods, products or patents.
    - Contributions to collaborations/consortia/team science
    - Participation in Patient and Public involvement and engagement activities (PPIE)
    - Influence on policy, practice, education or training
    - Development of new preventative, diagnostic, treatment or management approaches and interventions
    - Improvements to health or quality of life of patients and the public

Applicant's statement

Please use this section to state your reasons for applying for this PhD Programme. Outline the skills, knowledge and experience you have gained from your previous experiences (consider studies, work, community and personal activities) that are relevant to this project. Consider experiences that demonstrate your potential as well as what you have achieved. Please give us any information that contextualises your achievements to date. Describe how the Fellowship will further your research and career aspiration.

Part-time working

We are supportive of fellows undertaking their Fellowships part-time as part of their usual working pattern and with the support of the host organisation. Part-time working is not permitted for the purposes of continuing clinical training or to maintain another salaried position. Fellows have the opportunity to work part-time either from the outset of their PhD fellowship or as a result of a change to their working pattern during their PhD. Questions related to part-time work can be discussed with the Programme Manager and Directors.

Supporting letters

1. A supporting letter from the prospective primary supervisor showing their support of the applicant and the project. As a minimum, this letter should:
    - provide details of the research environment that the fellow will work in
    - plans for supervision and supporting progress
    - outline the role of other supervisors if appropriate
    - confirm that costings, including salary, are accurate and describe any extra funds or 'in-kind' resource that is being made available
    - demonstrate active sponsorship of the fellow through the application process
    - express commitment to contribute to HARP training and recruitment
2. A letter from the Head of Department where the research will be conducted including a statement that appropriate space and support is in place to host the PhD fellow within the department. The Head of Department needs to guarantee facilities and resources for the tenure of an award and confirm that **they have reviewed the budget requested.**
3. If the fellow intends to retain employment in the NHS, a supporting letter from the Head of Clinical Department confirming that the fellow and line manager have reviewed and agreed appropriate clinical and non-clinical activities and responsibilities that maintain and develop their professional competence; and that these are agreed in advance with the fellow and their academic supervisor and flexible to the fellow's research demands.

Section 2

A. Scientific title

This should be descriptive

B. Scientific abstract of research including key goals

This should include the purpose, hypothesis, aims and objectives, study design, expected outcomes and impact of the research

C. Lay summary

Please outline the background to the problem, the aims and purposes of your proposal and why they are important, a brief plan of the research project and its relevance to HARP's aim and potential patient benefit.

Note on language: The lay case for support should be written in appropriate non-technical language. For more information on how to write a clear and informative lay summary please use the following resources: INVOLVE plain English summaries; The Plain English Campaign

D. Case for support

Please adhere to all word limits – going over the limits risks rejection of the application. This document (smallest margin 2cm, smallest font size Arial 11) should be submitted as an attachment, consisting of 3 parts:

1. **Four-page project description including figures**

Please include the following sections within the project description case for support:

Background & Importance:

Briefly and clearly explain the context of your research, the particular area(s) that your proposal seeks to address and the need for further understanding or treatment options with regards to the research gaps in this field. Why is this study necessary to inform a gap in knowledge that will be useful for subsequent translational research?

Preliminary Data (if relevant)

Hypothesis / Research questions and aims:

What is your hypothesis or your research questions and what steps will the project take to support (or reject) the hypothesis or answer the research questions?

Experimental Design/Methods. These should be detailed enough for reviewers to understand what you intend to do over the three years of the project. Consider using a structured approach (e.g. PICOT or SPIDER) and, where relevant, demonstrate that you have considered sample size and feasibility in your proposed methods. Detail how you will you analyse your data. Explain what form you expect your results will take and what will be the consequence of success in your research.

Expected outputs and development opportunities:

What are the potential next steps that would be required to get your research findings to a further phase of research, for example a clinical intervention or the next research question to be asked? Please outline any relevant intellectual property issues. When might the benefit be achieved, with realistic justification of these timelines?

2. **References (not included in four pages)**: These should include the first author and, where relevant please indicate the position of the fellow, supervisor or collaborator (and highlight this in bold). Please include the Pubmed ID number (PMID).

3. Please include a **Gantt chart** for your fellowship **(not included in four pages)**. This should include specific milestones and deliverables.

E. Explain why this project is suitable for the HARP PhD Programme

Based on the overall aim of the HARP PhD Programme, describe how your research will fit into our remit. The NIHR webpage could help guide consideration of what constitutes underrepresented and help applicants consider which factors their proposal aligns with. This is where you should make a clear case for your specific research project (not just the population or characteristics of your participants) and how it will address an area of underrepresentation. It is not enough to simply say that a disease has not been studied in a group of people without explaining the consequence of this and how this project addresses that disparity.

F. Impact and dissemination

Describe the expected impact of your project over the next 3-5 years, including significance and sustainability. This could include environmental impact - both physical and cultural, impact on researchers, patients, the public, science in general and society.

G. Data management and research integrity

Please outline the plans for handling data, how it will be stored and made available in the future.

H. Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Please outline how was AI used in the preparation of this application. We adhere to the Wellcome policy on Use of Generative AI (maximum **200** words).

I. Re-application

Please outline how the application has changed in response to feedback from the previous application.

J. Other funding bodies

We encourage fellows to seek funding from all relevant bodies. Please let us know where you have applied to. This will not count against you in the decision-making process.

Section 3

This section should be filled in by the supervisors

Supervisors

Please add details for primary and secondary supervisors. The primary supervisor should meet the supervision requirements for their institution to be the primary (e.g. they

must be CAT A supervisors at CSGUL); please discuss this with your primary supervisor to ensure this is the case. A third supervisor can be added with similar details as second supervisor, this supervisor can be from other institutions, including overseas.

- List previous and current PhD / MD(Res) / other doctorate fellows of supervisor over last 10 years
- Confirm date of last supervisor training date for first and second supervisor
- Please outline evidence of the supervisor's commitment to career development and creating a positive research culture (300 words)
- Please add up to three career vignettes each for each of the supervisors' previous researchers they have supervised, mentored or managed. These should demonstrate a good fit with the HARP DTP research culture aims. (maximum 100 words per vignette).
- Please outline the primary supervisor's scientific suitability for the supervision for this project (200 words).
- For the 2nd (and optional 3rd) supervisors, state how this supervisor will contribute to the project and supervision (maximum 200 words)
- 3rd supervisor can be from a different institution including overseas

Section 4

Collaborators

You can include details of collaborators who will be essential to the success of your doctoral studies. Collaborators are individuals who are not involved in the day-to-day execution of the research but may supply research materials, specific expertise or access to patients. All collaborators associated with the application will be required to provide a letter of support. These should be attached to the application.

Section 5

Human involvement

Please only complete this section if applicable to your application.
Include details of Ethics Committee permissions relevant for human research that will be required or have already been obtained.

Animal involvement in study

Please only complete this section if applicable to your application.

We are committed to the principles of reduction, refinement and replacement in animal studies. The projects must comply with Wellcome's policy on animal usage in research: https://wellcome.org/grant-funding/guidance/use-animals-research-policy.

Provide details of Home Office project and personal licences (number holder name and date of expiry) and details of procedures of moderate severity and above. Detail the maximum severity of the procedures involved.

Please justify the use of animals, the species and techniques proposed and the number of animals to be used per experiment. Please include details of sample size calculations and statistical advice sought for the number of animals required to reach statistical significance.

Please follow the PREPARE guidelines (Planning Research and Experimental Procedures on Animals: Recommendations for Excellence) and the CAMARADES/NC3Rs systematic review facility recommendations for the design and analysis of your experiments. For power calculations, please follow the ARRIVE guidelines (2020, 2nd edition), and other developments and advances in the 3Rs, including the Norecopa platform.

Section 6

Patient and Public Involvement

Indicate how you have involved, and will continue to involve the public, including patients and patient groups, actively in your research e.g. in developing the research proposal and/or taking account of likely public reaction to your research. Add justification for costs requested.

Section 7

Communications Plan

State what plans you have for disseminating results of your work to the professional community as well as patients and the lay public. Explain how these plans will be supported by the host Research Organisation's own policies and facilities communication and education of the public**.**

Section 8

Finance and costs

The finances requested for the grant should be entered in this section. **Ultimate responsibility for the accuracy of costings rests with applicant, their supervisor and institute.** The finances will be reviewed by the HARP team and may be adjusted individually, if necessary, prior to award. At QMUL and City St George's Clerkenwell and Tooting campuses, the costings are required to go onto local Worktribe systems.

Fellow salary

The only salary included should be that of the fellow. This **must** be calculated by the relevant research office and should include full costs (salary, pension, national insurance, London weighting etc). Please ensure you give the research offices all relevant information about your current salary, date of progression and any intention to change job or grade during the time of the PhD. No other salaries will be accepted in this section.

Expenses/Consumables

Reasonable research expenses directly related to your proposal can be applied for. Items and their cost should be listed. Access fees for specialised equipment could be listed here. The programme may need to adjust the expenses.

Apparatus/Equipment
Only small items permitted (pipettes, small centrifuge etc. costing less than £5,000). Please add these items under consumables.

Travel costs
Travel for research purposes can be included, if justified. However, please do not include travel to conferences. Support for conference attendance can be available for fellows who are presenting their work, subject to review and approval by the Supervisor and HARP Manager. We aim to support attendance at least at one national and one international conference although funding is limited and support cannot be guaranteed. Decisions will depend on the costs and available budget.

PhD tuition fee costs
HARP only cover home student fees. Excess fees for international students will not be covered.

Training costs
Costs for relevant training, if justified, can be included.

Eligible costs:

- Any additional salaries/staff time (e.g. statistician/data manager/trial manager) should be costed as a consultancy under expenses and not as a salary. These costs must be fully justified and will be considered by the panel
- Access charges for use of specialist equipment
- Costs to cover travel and accommodation (if required) to a collaborating institution can be requested
- Training courses for the professional development of the fellow can be applied for. These should be relevant to the aims of the fellowship and justified within the application
- Cost for overseas research – please discuss with HARP Manager
- Costs associated with patient and public involvement/engagement can be applied for, and candidates are advised to use the INVOLVE guidance here. Please contact the HARP Manager for further information

Ineligible costs within a clinical research fellowship application:

- Computers are expected to be supplied by the host institution. Specialist equipment that falls outside this should be justified.
- Relocation costs
- Home office license fees (personal and project)
- Funding to provide maintenance of equipment
- Office stationery costs unless required for the project and justified accordingly
- Publication costs for open access to be claimed from the library (for QMUL-based fellows) or can be directly applied for from Wellcome (for City-based fellows). Advice on support for open access can be asked from the HARP Manager
- Travel cost for conferences (see above)
- Visa application costs and international student fees

Animals
We require the costs associated with animal use to be separated by species and strain.

Specific instructions for finance

Please liaise with your relevant QMUL or CSGUL research finance office to complete your costings (supervisor to advice).
QMUL applicants must engage with the QMUL research finance team and have the costings submitted via Worktribe by 14th December 2026 at the latest. Please add the completed research office-derived Worktribe costing to your application.

CSGUL applicants must engage with the CSGUL research finance team and have costings submitted by 18 December 2026 at the latest. Contact the Research Support Services Manager, Peter Aggar: peter.aggar.1@citystgeorges.ac.uk

For further details and for questions please contact the HARP team.

Justification for consumable support requested

Provide detailed justification for the consumables (300 words)

Justification for animal research support requested

Including animal species, the number of animals per species to be used, and why each species is the most appropriate for this project (300 words). Please include

- Animal species
- Animal strain
- Whether they are genetically modified
- Source of supply
- Number of animals to be purchased for each year of the fellowship
- Purchase price per animal
- Number of animals to be maintained for each year of the fellowship
- Number of weeks maintenance required for each year of the fellowship
- Weekly maintenance cost
- Refer to ARRIVE guidelines

Section 9

Reviewers

Please suggest at least six reviewers with relevant scientific knowledge with whom you or your supervisors have **not** published or collaborated with over the last 5 years. Please adhere to this and do not attempt to suggest reviewers who you know to be conflicted. List, if any, potential reviewers you do not wish to be approached. Both lists should be compiled in close working with your supervisor, who will be aware of standard definitions for conflicted reviewers. All reviewers will be checked by HARP directors for suitability.

Section 10

Equality monitoring

This MS Form is for equality monitoring purposes and the information you provide will be anonymised and will not be available to recruiting supervisory teams. QMUL and City

aims to promote an organisational culture that is respectful and inclusive irrespective of age, disability, gender reassignment, ethnicity, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, sex and religion or belief. Moreover, it seeks to ensure that intersectionality is recognised, with explicit acknowledgement of the interconnected nature of social identities including race, class and sex, where these facets can create overlapping levels of discrimination or disadvantage. Please remember to contact info@harpphd.org to request a link to this form, as it is a requirement for the application.

The Interview

On the day you will be interviewed by two panels. The first panel will focus on you and your future as a clinical academic, focusing on your experience to date and what makes you the right person for a HARP PhD. The second panel will focus on your project's scientific merit, techniques you will use, how you plan to engage patients and the public and its potential to address a problem within the HARP remit. This will involve a short presentation followed by questions.

Tips for a successful application

The HARP team are looking for someone who has the *potential* to develop into a future academic leader. You do not necessarily have to have a lot of experience in research but need to show in your application evidence of that potential and a clear interest, commitment and drive to improve human health. We are looking for people who are passionate about their chosen area of study (whatever it may be). We are interested in projects that clearly explore and address a problem that is underrepresented in current research (the HARP remit), even if your research project is mechanistic and not directly clinical. It is important to show this in your application and at interview. Start your preparation early, seek support and practice for interview to give yourself the best opportunity to show us why you and your project are right for the HARP program.

Note to supervisors – we expect our supervisors to take an active sponsoring role in helping fellows prepare their applications and in preparing for interview.

Contact

For further enquiries on any aspect of your application, or any issues relating to the submission of your application, please email info@harpphd.org.