

Scoping exercise to identify critical areas for NMAHP academic clinical career development

Dr Marion Waite

## Executive summary

This report details a scoping exercise conducted from March to May 2023 to inform the development of a nursing, midwifery and allied health profession (NMAHP) academic career strategy for the NIHR Oxford Health Biomedical Research Centre (OH BRC). Scoping entailed interviewing representatives of the NMAHP groups and critical stakeholders responsible for developing clinical academic careers, including OHFT training and education leads, NIHR, and ARC managers. Additionally, stakeholders from other NHS organisations participated in the exercise. The scoping process also involved reviewing relevant literature and policy documents and mapping available resources for developing NMAHP clinical academics at various career stages (Appendix 1).

The current barriers concern; a lack of NMAHP research opportunities across a trajectory; the need to clarify NMAHP research careers and activity; competing demands between service delivery and research opportunities; connecting potential NMAHP research and BRC themes; and a lack of perceived NMAHP research infrastructure. However, there are perceived enablers, including current and ongoing Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust (OHFT) opportunities, a local strategic research pillar to support NMAHP clinical academic careers, and the availability of resources, including educational activities and programmes to raise research awareness and develop academic careers provided by local and regional organisations.

The recommendations concern: accessibility to NMAHP academic careers across a trajectory; building infrastructure through strategic goals and visible clinical academic roles jointly appointed between universities and the clinical setting; ongoing collaboration with NMAHP managers to maximise opportunities; collaboration with partner organisations who are leading NMAHP research capacity and capability and creation of a one-stop website to access relevant resources.

## Glossary:

Applied Research Collaboration Oxford and Thames Valley(ARC)

Council for Allied Health Professions Research (CAHPR)

Thames Valley Central Research Network (CRN)

NIHR Oxford Health Biomedical Research Centre (OH BRC)

Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust (OH FT)

Oxford University Hospitals NHS Trust (OUHFT)

Oxford Brookes University (OBU)

Oxford School of Nursing & Midwifery (OSNM)

## Introduction

The scoping exercise aimed to provide material of relevance to Nurses, Midwives and Allied Health Professionals (NMAHP) for inclusion in the OH BRC Academic Career Development strategy. The objectives concerned:

- Identifying the barriers to academic career progression for NMAHPs
- How the barriers linked with identified NIHR areas of strategic need
- Identifying how to link with the NHS to deliver opportunities to address barriers and needs
- Identifying strategies for measuring impact and potential collaborators to help deliver the research capacity development strategy.

OHFT provides comprehensive physical, mental, and social care to Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Swindon, Wiltshire, Bath, and North East Somerset residents. The team of NMAHPs comprises nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, social workers, speech and language therapists, dieticians, and art therapists dedicated to clinical practice, research delivery, community, palliative care, mental health, and children's services. Professor Kate Saunders, Academic Career Development/Capacity Development leader for Oxford Health BRC, initiated the scoping exercise. The NIHR's primary focus is enhancing careers for research delivery staff and underrepresented disciplines and specialisms, making it a highly relevant and timely area of strategic emphasis.

## Methodology

From March to May 2023, MW interviewed 14 critical stakeholders at OHFT, including mental health and community AHPs, nurse leads, training and development leads, and OHFT nurses enrolled in OBU's doctoral programme in nursing and midwifery. In addition, MW conducted interviews with an NIHR ARC manager and seven colleagues from other NHS and academic organisations who lead NMAHP academic career development.

The following strategies and resources were scoped:

- OHFT Nursing research strategy (Table 1)
- Chief Nursing Officer (CNO) for England's strategic plan for Research (NHS England, 2021) (Table 1)
- Allied Health Professions Research and Innovation Strategy for England (NHS England, 2022)(Table 1)
- NIHR priorities
- OH BRC research themes
- Oxford BRC research themes
- Current training and development opportunities OHFT (Appendix 1)
- Current training and development opportunities ARC (Appendix 1)
- Current training and development opportunities NIHR (Appendix 1)

## Results

### Barriers

#### **Lack of NMAHP research opportunities across a trajectory**

AHPs and Nurses at OHFT (physiotherapy, occupational mental health, community nursing and specialist fields) are concerned about the seeming lack of research opportunities across a career trajectory. All newly qualified NMAHPs joining the organisation will have recently completed a student dissertation project, and managers suggest the benefits and opportunities of continuing research activities and practices through preceptorship, which currently does not happen but could support the research-enabled NMAHPs pipeline. Many experienced staff are educated to the master's level, but the relationship between their study level and research application is unclear. At a later stage of the career trajectory, some OHFT staff are nearing completion of doctoral studies, and there is a need to review workforce planning to ensure specific NMAHP post-doctoral academic research job opportunities and retention of such staff.

#### **Need to clarify NMAHP research careers and activity.**

All managers want to provide staff with research opportunities but need more clarification and guidance on the characteristics of NMAHP careers. It may be helpful to distinguish between NMAHP research and biomedical research led by the BRC and emphasise the value of NMAHP research for inspiring clinical academic careers. Some managers were unaware that quality improvement (QI) projects in OHFT count as research, while others saw the impact of QI projects on practice while building staff research confidence. Managers want a better overview of existing QI projects undertaken at OHFT to avoid duplication and enhance learning.

#### **Service demands compete with NMAHP research opportunities.**

Community nursing faces challenges in balancing service demands with clinical academic research. Culturally diverse staff from all NMAHP roles can feel excluded from research practices, and housebound patients in the community are limited from public involvement in research. Prioritising research is complex due to high clinical demand and limited resources.

#### **Connecting potential NMAHP research and BRC themes**

NMAHPs aspire to connect their potential research with BRC themes and create research partnerships with Oxford Brookes University (OBU), but they require clarity and guidance. In mental health, some AHPs recognise the significance of BRC research themes and emphasise the need to build on the themes towards evidence-based practices for occupational therapy and physiotherapy.

#### **Lack of perceived NMAHP research infrastructure**

NMAHPs perceive an inadequate infrastructure for clinical academic roles, including unclear research guidance, difficulty finding colleagues with similar research interests, and the need for a comprehensive directory to locate research opportunities. Greater clarity on training organisations' opportunities (i.e. ARC, NIHR) would also be helpful.

#### **OHFT educational leads perspectives**

OHFT Educational research and training development leads have acknowledged the validity of the perspectives shared by NMAHP

managers and staff. The educational leads' experiences suggest that practitioners and managers express a keen interest in enhancing research skills for staff at all levels, although managers are uncertain about research specifics. Furthermore, managers are concerned about allocating appropriate time for their staff to engage in research-related activities.

## Enablers

### **Current and ongoing opportunities to support NMAHP clinical academic careers**

Relevant managers outlined current approaches to support NMAHP professionals' clinical academic careers, including opportunities and facilitation from OHFT. Six nurses are pursuing a professional doctorate at OBU with OHFT's support. Some disciplinary groups work effectively with the given support. For example, the clinical lead for community nursing identified how their team contributed to the James Lind Alliance Top Priorities for Community Nursing through work with the NMAHP research lead. CAHPR aims to develop and enhance the research capacity of the 14 AHP organisations with an active regional group <https://cahpr.csp.org.uk/content/south-central>

### **Strategies for increasing NMAHP research visibility**

The community nursing clinical lead confidently shared various effective strategies for increasing research visibility. One strategy involves modifying Band 7 job roles to include research in the job description, seamlessly integrating QI projects into practice. This approach has yielded tangible results, including clinical academic research projects involving collaboration with a technology company to design and evaluate wound care assessment apps.

### **Resources to raise research awareness**

Every manager who participated in the interviews identified at least one local or national resource that raised research awareness for their staff. For example, the opportunity to participate in a research methods module delivered locally but validated by OBU (Appendix 1); Queen's nurse institute resources <https://qni.org.uk/explore-qni/nurse-led-projects/>; Oxford Health Library resources (Appendix 1); and QI hubs appear to have good uptake.

### **Educational activities to increase capacity and capability**

Research/educational leads and managers reported their strategies for increasing the capacity and capability of NMAHP academic research careers. For example: Identifying staff who have carved out time and embedding research into services, Building a research delivery team from scratch, and identifying the skills of research delivery staff. OHFT's staff members are provided with diverse learning opportunities and are directed towards additional opportunities offered by ARC and NIHR (Appendix 1). The nurse research strategy ('Pillar')(Table 1), at OHFT is aligned with the CNO's top research priorities (NHS England, 2021) and comprises specific objectives and related activities for each priority. Moreover, the director of NMAHP at OHFT collaborates with chief nurses and clinical leads for MH and the

community to develop the research pillar, informed by staff focus groups. The research pillar aims to eradicate barriers for nurses at OHFT who aspire to pursue clinical academic careers. Furthermore, AHPs perceive the joint appointment of a rehabilitation professor between OBU and OH as a promising model for developing clinical academic careers.

## Recommendations

### **Accessibility to NMAHP academic careers across a trajectory**

Particular attention must be given to those embarking on research in accessible ways across a career trajectory. Relevant post-doctoral training and opportunities must be visible within OHFT, especially for those undertaking doctorates and is a priority. There is no current local research strategy for AHPs (there is a national strategy, Table 1). However, AHPs can confidently replicate the OHFT nursing research pillar, opening up the possibility of an overall NMAHP strategy. The OUHFT has already developed and implemented an integrated strategy for NMAHP academic careers, which provides a potential example for OHFT.

### **Building infrastructure through strategy and visible clinical academic roles in partnership with universities**

The OHFT nursing research strategy (Pillar) (Table 1) delivery could be supported and facilitated through the OH BRC Academic Career Development Strategy to create the infrastructure that some staff identify as currently missing. The respective strands require resourcing and offer an opportunity to create clinical academic roles shared between academic institutions such as OBU and OHFT (one is currently piloted). Other institutions, such as the OUHFT and others nationally, are implementing such roles to provide an opportunity for sharing and developing clinical academic skills. These roles require dedicated funding and evaluation for sustainability but provide the possibility of creating a post-doctoral career structure for NMAHPs.

### **Ongoing collaboration with NMAHP managers**

Managers are key stakeholders in appreciating the value of research and supporting staff development, and their engagement is critical to the success of OH BRC Academic Career Development Strategy. Every manager consulted during this scoping activity appreciated their inclusion and anticipated further consultation as the OH BRC Academic Career Development Strategy develops, is delivered and becomes embedded.

### **Collaboration with partner organisations**

Collaborating locally with the OUHFT and the Oxford BRC through the Director of Nursing and Midwifery Research and Innovation is possible to share and develop effective clinical academic career progression and collaborating regionally with CAHPR.

### **Creation of a one-stop website**

Creating a user-friendly website that is regularly updated is recommended to make it easier for people to find research areas and training opportunities based on the mapping activity shown in Appendix 1. Providing video resources that explain ARC and NIHR opportunities to assist managers and staff is also recommended.

### **Measurement of impact and success**

Success can be measured by the extent to which NMAHPs engage in developing clinical academic careers. Case studies, identifying role

models and opportunities to share success potentially motivate others. Objective ways to measure success are through research grant success, publications and completion of doctoral studies. Surveys of NMAHPs at regular intervals may provide pointers for progress.

<b>NIHR Strategic priority</b>	<b>Relevant national priority objectives for developing NMAHP clinical academic careers</b>	<b>Relevant OHFT priority objectives</b>
Strengthening careers for research delivery staff and under-represented disciplines and specialism	<i>Making research matter: Chief Nursing Officer for England's strategic plan for Research (NHS England &amp; NHS Improvement, 2021)</i>	<i>OHFT Research Pillar for Nursing Strategy (OH, 2022)</i>
	<i>Allied Health Professions Research and Innovation Strategy for England. (NHS England, 2022)</i>	

Table 1 NMAHP research priorities

## Limitations

GP practice employed NMAHPs professional research development is provided by the CRN <https://local.nihr.ac.uk/lcrn/thames-valley-and-south-midlands/> and not included in this report. The scoping activity was time-limited, and it was impossible to include patient and public involvement (PPI).

## Discussion

Many of the possibilities raised in the report align with those reported in the recently published literature on developing capacity and capability in NMAHP careers. Notably the recognition of the benefits for patient outcomes and career development (Henshall *et al.*, 2021; Cordrey *et al.*, 2022; Shepherd, Endacott and Quinn, 2022).

Key barriers reported in the literature concern lack of roles or opportunities to become involved with research compounded by securing protected time (Cordrey *et al.*, 2022), which can be most challenging to ringfence for nurses (Henshall *et al.*, 2021).

However, substantial evidence supports the interventions suggested in this report, particularly creating an infrastructure and dedicated clinical academic roles (Shepherd, Endacott and Quinn, 2022).

Henshall *et al.* (2021) found that establishing clinical academic career pathways for nurses is effective through formal links through joint clinical academic roles between universities and NHS settings.

However, efficacy is contingent upon unified strategic directions shared between partner organisations that are strategically led, managed and resourced through governance processes and relationships at the organisational level involving key stakeholders and alignment with national strategic objectives.

## Conclusion

The scoping exercise was undertaken between March and May 2023, outlining the critical barriers and enablers for developing NMAHP careers and making recommendations while mapping relevant resources. The recommendations align with appropriate and effective interventions reported in the recent literature and national and local policy objectives for developing the capacity and capability of NMAHP research to contribute to the OH BRC Academic Career Development strategy.

## References

Cordrey, T. *et al.* (2022) 'Exploring research capacity and culture of allied health professionals: a mixed methods evaluation', *BMC Health Services Research*, 22(1), p. 85. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-022-07480-x>.

Henshall, C. *et al.* (2021) 'Interventions and strategies aimed at clinical academic pathway development for nurses in the United Kingdom: A systematised review of the literature', *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, 30(11–12), pp. 1502–1518. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/jocn.15657>.

NHS England (2021) *Chief Nursing Officer for England's strategic plan for research*. London: NHS England.

NHS England (2022) *Allied Health Professions' Research and Innovation Strategy for England*. Health Education England. Available at: <https://www.hee.nhs.uk/our-work/allied-health-professions/enable-workforce/allied-health-professions%E2%80%99-research-innovation-strategy-england> (Accessed: 5 April 2023).

Shepherd, M., Endacott, R. and Quinn, H. (2022) 'Bridging the gap between research and clinical care: strategies to increase staff awareness and engagement in clinical research', *Journal of Research in Nursing*, 27(1–2), pp. 168–181. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/17449871211034545>.

## Appendix 1 Mapping of provision and resources to develop NMAHP academic careers

Organisation	Phase 1 predoctoral							
OHFT	Mental health pre-registration hub & spoke research placements (NIHR funded)	QI Hubs	R & D toolkit <a href="https://www.oxfordhealth.nhs.uk/research/toolkit/">https://www.oxfordhealth.nhs.uk/research/toolkit/</a>	Research drop-ins		Monthly lab lunches	Level 7 research modules (validated by OBU)	Research secondments 1/day a week
OBU <a href="https://www.brookes.ac.uk/study/subject-areas/health-and-social-care/career-development">https://www.brookes.ac.uk/study/subject-areas/health-and-social-care/career-development</a>	Health and Social Care Research Masters	MPhil <a href="https://www.brookes.ac.uk/research/units/hls/institutes/oxinmah/r/study-with-us/">https://www.brookes.ac.uk/research/units/hls/institutes/oxinmah/r/study-with-us/</a>						
Oxford Applied Research Collaboration (ARC) <a href="https://www.arc-oxtv.nihr.ac.uk/">https://www.arc-oxtv.nihr.ac.uk/</a>	Predoctoral health & social care research internship in collaboration and funded by Health Education England- limited places/year worth 20K							
The University of Oxford (accessible to all) <a href="https://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/courses/medical-sciences">https://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/courses/medical-sciences</a>	Introduction to essential medical research skills	Research planning	Research design & Protocols	Statistical thinking	Research publication & dissemination			

University of Oxford (affiliates only) <a href="https://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/course/s/medical-sciences">https://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/course/s/medical-sciences</a>	Teaching/learning	Statistics							
University of Oxford libraries (open to OHFT)  <a href="https://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/libraries/cairns-library">https://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/libraries/cairns-library</a>	Scoping lit. searches for review protocols	Developing search strategies	Using methodological search filters	Selecting databases	Identifying grey literature and ongoing research	Setting up search alerts	Managing references	Reporting search methodology	Peer-reviewing search strategies
Equator  <a href="https://www.ndorms.ox.ac.uk/graduate-courses/courses/equator-publication-school">https://www.ndorms.ox.ac.uk/graduate-courses/courses/equator-publication-school</a>	Writing for publication								

Organisation	Phase 2 doctoral	Phase 3 Post-Doctoral			
OHFT	Writing retreats (BRC funded)				
OBU	Professional doctorate in Nursing (Prof.doc)  <a href="https://www.brookes.ac.uk/courses/research/prof-doc-in-nursing/">https://www.brookes.ac.uk/courses/research/prof-doc-in-nursing/</a>	PhD <a href="https://www.brookes.ac.uk/research/units/hls/institutes/oxinmahr/study-with-us">https://www.brookes.ac.uk/research/units/hls/institutes/oxinmahr/study-with-us</a>			

NIHR	Doctoral fellowships <a href="https://www.nihr.ac.uk/explore-nihr/academy-programmes/fellowship-programme.htm">https://www.nihr.ac.uk/explore-nihr/academy-programmes/fellowship-programme.htm</a>				
NIHR research design service <a href="https://www.nihr.ac.uk/explore-nihr/support/research-design-service.htm">https://www.nihr.ac.uk/explore-nihr/support/research-design-service.htm</a>	Essential guide to grant applications	Fellowship application days	Post-doctoral fellowships	Research ideas workshop	Support for developing research projects for funding