



# Improving clinical academic careers for nurses, midwives and allied health professionals

## Position Paper – March 2020

The Council of Deans of Health actively promotes clinical academic careers and has previously [advocated for improvements](#) to clinical academic pathways for nurses, midwives and allied health professionals (AHPs). Less than 0.1% of the workforce in these professions are clinical academics, therefore increasing capacity is essential to advancing evidence-informed practice and innovation in healthcare. This position paper clearly sets out the key issues that the Council considers to be essential in taking affirmative action to advance clinical academic careers and create a critical mass of clinical academic practitioners.

The Council of Deans of Health represents the UK's university faculties engaged in education and research for nurses, midwives and allied health professionals. At any one time our members will be educating in the region of 120,000 future registered health professionals. Operating as a multi-professional organisation at the heart of policy and political debate, the Council aims to lead policy at national and UK level, promoting the contribution of our members to health and social care.

## THE COUNCIL HAS THREE KEY ASKS

### 1. Increase research capacity across the nursing, midwifery and allied health professions

**Action 1: Develop and implement nursing, midwifery and AHP research strategies and clinical academic roles in NHS organisations in partnership with local HEIs**

A strategy for clinical academic research provides a crucial framework for the organisation with executive buy-in. Clear, achievable and costed objectives need to be in place including plans for investments in roles, joint or substantial/honorary appointments, opportunities and activities. NHS organisations' executive boards and research offices should recognise the value of nursing, midwifery and AHP researchers and enable them to act as principal investigators for studies and take on other research leadership roles.

**Action 2: Integrate research into pre-registration curricula for all healthcare disciplines**

Early awareness of the importance of research in health and social care, and experience of understanding or undertaking research, can encourage students to consider becoming clinical academics at an early point in their career and make the future workforce aware of the importance of healthcare research. We ask for all HEIs and practice placement providers to make research explicit in healthcare curricula,

ensuring that research questions, research designs and evidence derived from research are integrated throughout curricula and that students are connected with researchers who are making a positive difference in practice through their research.

### **Action 3: Equity of investment in research across the UK**

Research funding in the health disciplines is highly concentrated in a few geographical areas. Some teaching hospitals and universities in these areas tend to have well developed clinical academic research strategies and cultures. We ask for equitable access to infrastructures across the UK so that all nurses, midwives and AHPs have equal opportunity of access to funding and advancing knowledge in the field.

### **Action 4: Targeted measures to build research capacity and skills in underrepresented disciplines**

There is a need for targeted support of those disciplines that have more recently been integrated into higher education, such as paramedic science, to help to grow the research base and create a stronger chance of grant acquisition when competing against researchers from more established disciplines.

## **2. Broaden opportunities to engage with research**

### **Action 1: Widen access to research funding and awards**

Research funding bodies and medical research charities should open more of their health research funding grants to a wider range of health and social care researchers. Applications from multi-disciplinary research teams and studies that include an element of research capacity building should be encouraged. Efforts to ensure that funding panels are representative of all of these professional groups would be welcome.

### **Action 2: Ensure equity in funding opportunities across the UK**

The NIHR Academy's Integrated Clinical Academic (ICA) Programme provides a clear structure for research training and development opportunities for nursing, midwifery and AHP clinical academics. However, researchers in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales are currently not eligible to apply for ICA awards. Alternative schemes that provide similar support do exist in the devolved nations, but this is inconsistently applied. Funding schemes also need to support nurses, midwives and AHPs across the UK who do not spend 50% of their time in clinical practice, including those with a more substantial role in academia.

## **3. Support clinical academic healthcare professionals**

### **Action 1: Management support for role effectiveness**

Our evidence suggests that clinical academics often struggle to be effective in their role because of a lack of protected time for research. A clear career structure in line with Agenda for Change and culture needs to be in place that facilitates clinical academics to engage in high quality research. Clear guidance for NHS organisations and HEIs on how to set up the contracts and manage HR issues is also desirable.

### **Action 2: Close existing gaps in clinical academic pathways**

The pathway for research advancement across formal education programmes is unclear, especially at post-doctoral level. Finding an adequate clinical academic position following the completion of a doctorate appears to be one of the greatest challenges. Regional and national funding agencies need to work with universities and health and social care organisations to address this issue.

### **Action 3: Support for the development of proposals and applications**

Mentorship, coaching and masterclass programmes for funded research proposal writing needs to be established by universities, NHS organisations and research funders. Providing such opportunities will increase grant acquisitions for doctoral, post-doctoral and career fellowship awards if staff are enabled to take the time to participate in them.

### **For more information contact:**

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