

Research Master's Degree (MRes/MScR/MPhil) Award

Full Details, Terms and Conditions
21 October 2026

1. Introduction

NHS Lothian is committed to clinical academic careers for Nursing, Midwifery, Allied Health Professions, Psychology, Pharmacy Professions and Healthcare Sciences (NMAHPPS). With financial support from NHS Lothian Charity funded research training awards at various career development levels are now available for NHS Lothian employees. These awards will help employees to develop their research knowledge and skills to progress to the next stage of a clinical academic pathway if they choose.

These awards will serve to promote research capacity and capability by building a sustainable caucus of NMAHPPS within NHS Lothian developing research skills and knowledge alongside their developing clinical skills and knowledge. Ultimately it will sustain a higher volume of quality applied healthcare research amongst these professions in the Board area.

2. Details of the Research Master's Degree Awards

Research Master's Degree awards are aimed at NMAHPPS who have demonstrated a commitment to develop their research knowledge and skills with a clear focus on a research topic that they would take forward for a part-time research Master's degree

Recipients of this award will undertake a research Master's degree (MRes, MScR or MPhil) on a part-time basis at a university of their choosing. Research Master's degrees vary across academic institutions and may involve one or more of the following: i) evidence synthesis; ii) secondary data analysis; iii) primary data collection at a level commensurate with timescale of Master's programme and governance requirements.

The topic of the research will be chosen by the candidate based on discussion with their line manager and professional lead to ensure that it has relevance for the sponsoring service.

Candidates will have two academic supervisors and one clinical supervisor in NHS Lothian who will be a subject expert for the proposed study.

At interview, if shortlisted, candidates will need to provide written confirmation from the academic institution that they would be offered a place on an appropriate research Master's degree programme. This will require formal application to the academic institution, including outline research proposal. The awarding of the Gateway funding can only be made once this confirmation has been received.

3. Type of funding available

NHS Lothian will provide funding to cover the full cost of tuition fees for part-time research Master's degree study for the duration of the programme.

In addition, where relevant,[1] funding will be provided to successful applicants' employing service equal to the cost (including employment on-costs) of a maximum of 0.1 WTE study leave away from normal duties for the purpose of research Master's degree study, up to a maximum for the total award (including tuition fees) of £23,000. **Please note:** tuition fees costs for this type of study vary considerably across universities, hence, the amount of residual funding available to support the study leave costs of the employing service will vary also, within the overall funding limit for this award.

4. Process of awarding funding

Awards will be made following a competitive application process open to all registered Nurses, Midwives, Allied Health Professionals[2], Psychologists, Pharmacy Professions[3], and Healthcare Scientists employed by NHS Lothian. Staff on fixed term contracts can apply only for awards whose duration would not extend beyond the last day of their contract. Individuals with NHS Lothian honorary contract status only are not eligible for an award.

Applicants are required to complete and return an application form.

Interviews will form part of the selection process. The Awards Panel will comprise NHS Lothian and partner university representatives of the Lothian Clinical Academic Pathways Partnership.

5. Terms and conditions of awards

Award recipients' existing employment terms and conditions with NHS Lothian will be unaffected by receipt of this award.

All provisions described in NHS Lothian's Study Leave Policy are applicable to these awards. Award recipients should pay particular attention to the repayment requirements regarding NHS Lothian's contribution to course fees should they leave NHS Lothian employment or decide to leave the course prior to completion.

[1] Part-time employees may choose to carry out their Research Master's Degree study in their own time. In these circumstances study leave will not be necessary and the employing service manager will not be required to sign off the application nor the Contract of Agreement for successful applicants, and only tuition fees funding will be provided.

[2] The eligible AHP Professions are Physiotherapy, Occupational Therapy, Speech & Language Therapy, Dietetics, Podiatry, Radiography, Prosthetics, Orthotics, Orthoptics, and Arts Therapies.

[3] Pharmacists and Pharmacy Technicians

5.1 Contract of Agreement

On receipt of the offer of an award a successful applicant will be required to sign a Contract of Agreement to confirm in writing that they accept the offer of award on the basis of the specified terms and conditions. The Contract of Agreement will detail the following:

5.1.1 Agreed learning aims and research tasks to be experienced

The agreed learning aims and research tasks to be experienced during the period of the award will be detailed in the Contract of Agreement. These will reflect those described in the applicant's successful application for an award except in those circumstances where funding is awarded by the Awards Panel on condition of amendments to the learning aims and research tasks to be experienced as described in the application.

5.1.2 Duration of awards

The Contract of Agreement will stipulate the start and end dates of the period of award. The period of award will be equal to the research Master's degree study duration requirements stated by the provider university but typically will be approximately 24-48 months. The maximum period of award is 48 months except in those circumstances described in 5.1.6.1-5.1.6.7.

5.1.3 Study leave arrangements

The study leave time away from usual NHS Lothian post(s) duties needed to pursue the research Master's degree study will need to have been agreed between the applicant and their service manager(s) prior to application, where relevant[1]. Service managers will be required to confirm their agreement to these arrangements on the application form and details of the study leave agreed will be documented in the Contract of Agreement for successful applicants, where relevant[1].

5.1.4 Payment mechanisms

Purchases relating to research Master's degree tuition fees will be administered from a cost centre within NHS Lothian's Research & Development Office and directly with the provider university.

The agreed level of salary funding will be transferred internally from this cost centre to the successful applicant's employing service at commencement of the research Master's degree study, where relevant[1]. Award recipients will have no role or responsibilities with regard to this process.

5.1.5 Reporting mechanisms

Recipients of an award will be required to provide an Annual Progress Report of their research Master's degree study. The Progress Report will cover:

- Research tasks experienced
- Objectives achieved in relation to those specified at commencement.
- Occurrences of research supervision and mentorship
- Reflections on the research Master's degree study experience
- Ambitions regarding further research training and possible next steps
- Any issues encountered.

The Progress Report will need to be countersigned by the recipient`s research supervisor and service manager, where relevant[1].

5.1.6 Termination and suspension of awards

All awards will automatically terminate at the end of the award period (see section 5.1.2) except in certain circumstances described in sections 5.1.6.1-5.1.6.7.

In circumstances where the award is terminated prematurely (see sections 5.1.6.1-5.1.6.3) the following will apply:

- A Progress Report may be requested (as per the specifications in section 5.1.5).

- Repatriation of funding provided to the employing service will occur as appropriate, and commensurate with the amount of unused study leave time as a result of award termination.

- Repayment of NHS Lothian's contribution towards course fees will be required of the award recipient, as described in NHS Lothian's Study Leave Policy.

- Recipients will have a right of appeal against a decision to terminate the award.

It is the responsibility of the recipient of an award to inform the NHS Lothian professional research lead acting as their mentor during the award period of any of the circumstances described in sections 5.1.6.1-5.1.6.7 below at the earliest opportunity:

5.1.6.1 Recipient leaves NHS Lothian employment

Where the recipient of an award leaves the employment of NHS Lothian for any reason the award will be terminated on the last day of employment with NHS Lothian. In this circumstance the conditions described in 5.1.6 will apply.

5.1.6.2 Recipient obtains alternative employment within NHS Lothian

Where the recipient of an award leaves the employment of the service with whom a period of study leave was agreed under the terms of the Contract of Agreement, in order to take employment within a different NHS Lothian service, the award will be suspended pending amendment of the Contract of Agreement.

If it is not possible to amend the Contract of Agreement to the satisfaction of all the necessary signatories (particularly the recipient's new service manager) the award will be terminated on the last day of employment by the original service. In this circumstance the conditions described in 5.1.6 will apply.

5.1.6.3 Premature termination of award

Where the recipient of an award gives notice of wishing to terminate their research Master's degree study, or their study is terminated for any other reason, the award will be terminated on the last day of the terminated study. In this circumstance the conditions described in 5.1.6 will apply.

5.1.6.4 Changes in recipient's contracted hours of employment

Where the recipient of an award seeks a change in their contracted hours of employment with NHS Lothian there may be occasion to amend the Contract of Agreement or suspend or terminate the award. Discussion will be required between the recipient of the award, their service manager, the NHS Lothian professional research lead acting as the recipient's mentor, and the research supervisor to

determine if there are grounds for amending the Contract of Agreement or suspending or terminating the award. If the award is terminated then the conditions described in 5.1.6 will apply.

5.1.6.5 Maternity/paternity/parental leave

Where the recipient of an award takes maternity, paternity, or parental leave and seeks the suspension of their award for a definite period covering all or part of this leave then the award may be suspended for the period in question and the Contract of Agreement amended accordingly. The capping limit for the duration of awards (see section 5.1.2) may in such circumstances be extended by a period equal to the period of suspension of the award agreed by all signatories to the Contract of Agreement.

Where the recipient of an award chooses not to return to work with NHS Lothian after a period of maternity leave the terms and conditions described in section 5.1.6.1 will apply.

5.1.6.6 Sickness absence

The awards are unaffected by any periods of short term sickness absence of recipients from their NHS Lothian employment.

Where recipients of awards experience a period of long term sickness absence (as defined by NHS Lothian HR policy) from their NHS Lothian employment and request the suspension of their award for a definite period covering all or part of this leave then the award may be suspended for the period in question and the Contract of Agreement amended accordingly. The capping limit for the duration of awards (see section 5.1.2) may in such circumstances be extended by a period equal to the period of suspension of the award agreed by all signatories to the Contract of Agreement.

The award will, subject to discussions with Occupational Health and HR and any relevant changes in employment, be reinstated on return to work and resumption of study.

If the recipient of an award is not able to return to work following a period of long term sickness absence the award will be terminated. The requirement to submit a Progress Report will be waived in such circumstances.

5.1.6.7 Recipient seeks a suspension of study for other reasons

Where the recipient of an award gives notice of wishing to suspend their study for a fixed period, for reasons other than those described in sections 5.1.6.5 and 5.1.6.6, the signatories to the Contract of Agreement will enter discussions to determine whether the award should be suspended for the equivalent period of time. If the award is suspended in this way the Contract of Agreement will be amended accordingly.

Requests by recipients of an award to suspend their research Master's degree study indefinitely, for reasons other than those described in sections 5.1.6.5 and 5.1.6.6 will be regarded as requests to terminate the award and the conditions described in section 5.1.6 will apply.

5.1.7 Required signatories

The Contract of Agreement relating to an award will be an agreement between the recipient of the award and NHS Lothian. The Contract of Agreement will be signed by an appropriate NHS Lothian representative of Lothian's Clinical Academic Pathways Partnership (who will normally be the award recipient's mentor) on behalf of the Board. The Contract of Agreement will be countersigned by the research supervisor. It will also be countersigned by the recipient's service manager in those instances where the placement requires study leave from normal duties[1].

Copies of the written agreements will be retained by all parties.