

# Victoria Johnstone-Cooke, Speech & Language Therapist, West Lothian

## First Steps into Research Gateway Award



### Tell us a bit about yourself and your career to date

I am a paediatric speech and language therapist and work in West Lothian, based at St John's Hospital.

I am relatively newly qualified, having completed my degree at Queen Margaret University in 2021. For my undergraduate dissertation I focussed on UK early years' practitioners' knowledge and attitudes to autism spectrum disorder and I was awarded the prize for the best dissertation in my cohort. I'm in the process of getting this work published in an international journal.

### What is the focus of your Gateway Award?

I am going to be joining the [National Autism Implementation Team](#) (NAIT) at Queen Margaret University to work with them on a qualitative study 'Employment Experiences of Autistic Professionals'. I will be mentored by Dr Marion Rutherford and Dr Ann Hodson.

I'll be involved in the study December 2022 to December 2023.

### What motivated to apply for this Gateway Award?

I am very much interested in progressing to further research opportunities both academic and within clinical practice, and I felt that the Award would be an ideal first step toward this ambition.

### What are you hoping to get out of the award you have received?

My role within the NAIT project team includes:

- Gaining insight into the process of developing a research proposal, ethics application and methods
- Reading and learning about qualitative methods
- Participation in the systematic literature review
- Conducting participant interviews
- Active involvement in the thematic analysis process and discussions
- Being a named author in the publication writing team
- Teaming up with another early-career researcher on the team to lead on writing up a smaller publication project within the study

I'm also planning to use some of the development funding offered as part of the Award to attend a two-day Clinical Research Methods course at the University of Edinburgh. There is still a bit left in the pot so I'll hopefully take part in other training opportunities too.

**What difference do you think having this funded support will make to your understanding of research?**

The Award will help me gain skills in qualitative research methodologies that are currently outside my experience, having undertaken a quantitative dissertation study at Undergraduate level.

The project I've joined has significant relevance within my area of clinical practice working with autistic children and young people, in that it concerns longer-term outcomes for this client group. It offers really valuable insight into person-centred, realistic care planning. As a professional this will inform my own practice. There is also the opportunity of sharing this learning and development back to my team.

**What do you hope to do in the future and how do you think this Gateway Award will help you achieve this?**

My area of clinical interest is around the link between socioeconomic factors and speech, language and communication needs. I'm also interested in the impact of socioeconomics on access to and engagement with SLT services.

Over the next decade, I plan to pursue further academic qualifications at doctorate level around this area. I hope to secure funding by proposing a methodological approach that emphasises the relevance of research outcomes to contemporary clinical practice in Speech and Language Therapy.

In the longer term I hope to combine ongoing involvement in academic research and publication with a clinical career, with each strand of professional development enriching the other. I am particularly interested in service-level planning of universal and targeted intervention, including the delivery of training and advocacy to education staff, with outcomes at population level.

I feel very fortunate to have the support of my Service Lead and colleagues, and the NAIT research team at Queen Margaret University, in my ambition to combine research with clinical practice, and to take part in this opportunity to advance toward this goal.

**Any other thoughts?**

As a newly-qualified clinician with research ambition, joining Cohort 1 of the Gateway Awards was perfect timing. There is such scope for nurses and AHPs with involvement in research to contribute to service improvement. I have really enjoyed discovering that I'm not alone in thinking this is a huge area of potential, and that early career researchers like me can be supported in this way within the NHS.

**For more information please contact:**  
[victoria.johnstone-cooke@nhslothian.scot.nhs.uk](mailto:victoria.johnstone-cooke@nhslothian.scot.nhs.uk)

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