

Growing Research Capacity Across Wessex 2019-2026



The story of growing research talent and capacity across
Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, Dorset and South Wiltshire

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How we began



Starting in October 2019, Professors Alison Richardson and Cathy Bowen devised a strategy to meet one of ARC Wessex primary goals – growing the number of skilled and experienced health and care researchers in Wessex.

Cathy Bowen brought in Dr Kinda Ibrahim to help her lead the Academic Career Development team.

Their vision was to work with partners to grow the research talents of health and care professionals and other professions.

Over seven years, this collaboration has awarded 117 internships, 8 PhD fellowships and supported 29 post-doctoral researchers – reaching across the health and care sectors, professions and different backgrounds.



Professor Alison Richardson
ARC Wessex Director

“Every step in academic career development is a step toward shaping the future of healthcare. At NIHR ARC Wessex we introduced a programme of awards to ignite curiosity, nurture talent, and empower individuals to turn ideas into breakthroughs that transform lives. Thank you for collaborating with us—together, we have created lasting impact.”

“Through strategic investment in people and ideas, it has been a privilege to support the development of the next generation of health and care researchers, driving change that will define the future of care and improving patient outcomes across our region.”



Professor Cathy Bowen
Lead for Academic Career Development

“Growing the internship programme has been one of the most rewarding parts of my role. I’ve seen how a small amount of funding can open doors, spark confidence, and completely change someone’s career trajectory. It’s not just about individual growth. Most organisations have integrated evidence-based approaches into everyday workflows, turning research insights into practical changes that improve care and efficiency. Watching those journeys unfold reminds me why investing in people is the most powerful way to drive change.”

Dr Kinda Ibrahim, Deputy Lead for Academic Career Development



Growth in numbers and why it matters



It is widely understood that NHS and care organisations that conduct research as part of their day-to-day business have better outcomes for the people they care for.

The Wessex region has a diverse geography: cities, towns and villages, rural and urban areas. We have an island community with people living there who are older than the national average. We have transitory populations who may only be in our cities for a few years or may settle and take root.

There are pockets of wealth and deprivation, densely packed housing and tower blocks, and much older, remote properties.

A region this diverse has similarly diverse health and care needs, which will evolve. So that care can be provided for the people that live here, we need researchers not just working now, but into the future to get the right care to the right people at the right time.

That future workforce of researchers will provide the evidence needed to inform changes, adaptations and transform our health and care services.

That is why NIHR ARC Wessex, working with other partners, established our Academic Career Development programme.

This is a story of just a few of those people who achieved places on our internships, PhD Fellowships and Post doctoral Awards, sparking a path for many of them to get experience of research and develop their research careers.

The Academic Career Development Oversight Group provided strategic leadership for our capacity-building initiative, aligning it with regional priorities and fostering a culture of research across health and care.

This was a major collaborative effort involving all ARC partner organisations, including NHS, universities, local authorities, and voluntary sector partners. Over time, the group evolved to become more inclusive and responsive, expanding its membership to incorporate representatives from NIHR Health Determinants Research Collaborations (HDRCs) and social care partners. This adaptability strengthened our ability to address emerging needs and deliver sustainable research capacity across Wessex.

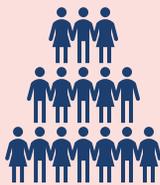
ARC Wessex Academy in numbers

Organisations Reached



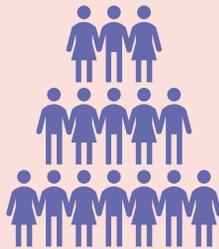
Number of People Taking Part in our Academy Research

One Thousand



Interns

Four Thousand



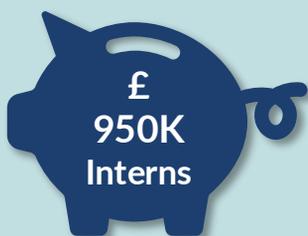
PhD

One Thousand



Post-Doc

Invested in Growing Research Capacity



Total spend £2,972,000

ARC Wessex Internship Awards

Cohorts 1- 9

Internship Awards Given

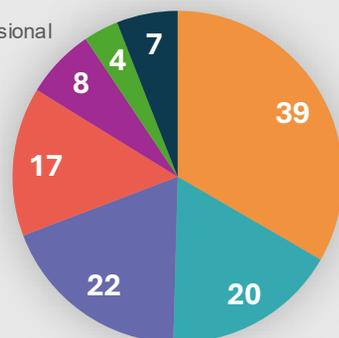


Cohort 1 - 8
Cohort 2 - 5
Cohort 3 - 11
Cohort 4 - 11
Cohort 5 - 10

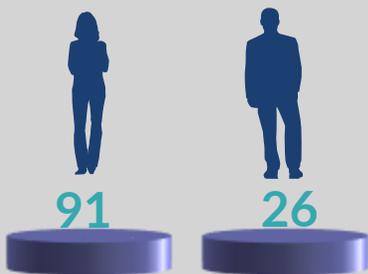
Cohort 6 - 12
Cohort 7 - 7
Cohort 8 - 8
Cohort 9 - 36
Sponsored awards - 9



- Allied Health Professional
- Other Health Professional
- Not a Health Professional
- Nurse
- Medically qualified
- Dentist
- Pharmacist



Gender



Additional funding

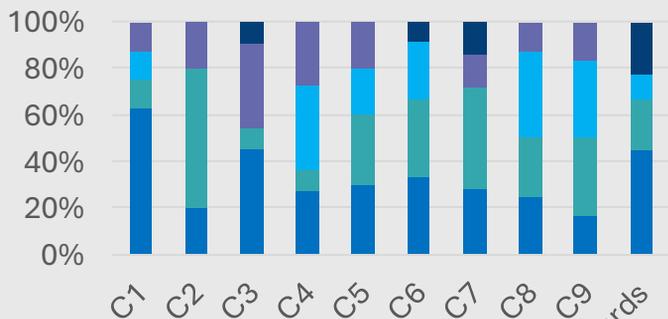
For every £1 spent



£9 leveraged from other sources

Total amount awarded
£2.9 M

Areas of Wessex



- Southampton
- Portsmouth
- BCP
- Hampshire
- Dorset
- Isle of Wight

Research Initiation Awards

86

Support to get started in research

Research Enhancement Awards

31

Support to continue research



What we offered



Growing capacity at all levels
Across systems

Internships

Internships offered health and social care professionals an award of £10,000 to release them from their day job for 1-day a week for 6 months to allow them space to conduct research, acquire skills, experience and knowledge. Later, teams could apply for a £20,000 team award to allow groups to take part.

PhD

Awards supported PhD students (mixture of full-time and part-time) co-funded by partner organisations including the Universities of Southampton, Winchester, Portsmouth, and Bournemouth University

Post-doctoral Awards

Supported post-doctoral researchers to work with research teams in ARC Wessex, Mental Health Fellowships, Public Policy Fellowships and Knowledge Mobilisation Fellowships.

We provided post-doctoral researchers with a bespoke Leadership Programme in collaboration with the Florence Nightingale Foundation, King's Fund and RADA.

Internships

Vikki Tweedy



Vikki was part of the Internship programme in 2022

Following on from her internship, Vikki Tweedy is moving on to do her PhD while continuing to work at Dorset County Hospital as a Nurse Consultant – now on a part-time basis to help accommodate her research.

Her internship looked at any link between COVID 19 and development of dementia; her PhD will be focusing on the lived experience of veterans with dementia in acute hospitals, further highlighting the importance of personalised, meaningful interventions in acute care.

“The internship afforded me a day out a week of clinical practice in order to dip my toe, as it were, into the research world. However, this was an opportunity for me to learn some research skills and to consider whether a research pathway was something that I'd like to consider in a clinical academic post going forward.

“Without doing the internship I don't think I would have necessarily had the confidence or the research skills to want to go to pursue a PhD, so I'd encourage anybody who's thinking about applying for an internship to go for it, because it might just be the difference between where you choose to do clinical academic pathway, full research PhD or to remain in clinical practice. Also, you learn some really valuable skills that can be transferred into clinical practice along the way.”

Paul New, a Physiotherapist at HMP Winchester working on health injustice, and used his internship as a first step to becoming a clinical academic.

He was examining the field of pain management for prisoners, specifically the problem of opioids for chronic pain relief being de-prescribed on conviction to eliminate any risk of them being mishandled.

He conducted interviews with prisoners on the challenges presented by de-prescription of the opioids and looked towards how the system can support the significant number of prisoners with chronic pain cope with their pain throughout their time in custody.

“It really inspired me to want to take the project to the next step, to form new research questions and to get to the bottom of the problem that I started looking into in the first place, and I found the internship was invaluable to that. I'd like to take this forward to a fellowship where we can look deeper into the lived experience of people with pain and start to put the tools together to design a pain management programme that's specific for the prison environment.”

“I learned so much through the process, understanding how to get a team around me that can help with the project and agencies and departments you can engage with to help you. Without the internship I never would have come to that level of understanding. It was a really positive experience, and I thoroughly enjoyed it and would definitely complete it again.”

Paul New

Paul New was part of the Internship programme in 2023



Bitesize

Jan Cavolina, a Paediatric Occupational Therapist at University Hospitals Dorset NHS Foundation Trust is considering further research after overcoming the challenges she faced during her 2020-2021 internship.

She said: "I was very lucky to be awarded an internship with the NIHR ARC Wessex, and I've been able to accomplish a literature review looking at motor skills programmes and how effective they are for children."

"My journey has been a challenge personally and professionally. It took me a bit longer than expected and there were some hurdles along the way. But I had a very, very supportive and wonderful academic tutor who supported and encouraged me all the way along and I finished it and dead chuffed with myself that I've done that."

Cheska Ball, a doctor from Dorset County Hospital, found it difficult to stay on track to complete her 2021 internship while balancing it with duties as a resident doctor – but found the networking and learning opportunities were a significant upside.

"There were some really big learning curves for me there, the biggest being: don't try to overreach. I tried to do two parts for my project within the six months, and sadly I've not yet completed either, but I found I really love research, so I have every intention of finishing those projects.

"Trying to do research as a resident doctor is very challenging, but I had some good support and actually I've learnt so much, whether that's simply time prioritisation or figuring out how to do a systematic review."

Daniela Matteccui is a Specialist Physiotherapist at Hampshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust. She applied to the internship programme in 2022 after listening to the experiences of others who had gone through the process.

Hearing previous interns speak at events gave Daniela the impetus to join the programme, otherwise she might have never joined in.

"I'd wanted to do something like this for a really long time but I lacked the confidence to do it, but it was brilliant."

"I would recommend anybody to give it a go because it's just been really fantastic to have the time and space to focus on something that's really interesting and can bring about really positive change for patient care."

Blue Pike

Blue was part of the Internship programme in 2023



Blue is a Psychotherapist based on the Isle of Wight.

She used her award for a systematic review into the use of psychological formulation to support person-centred assessment and care planning for people living in the community with mental health long-term conditions. She published her internship project in the Psychological Medicine journal and has since gained a second internship with an NHS trust and is pursuing a pre-doctoral fellowship with

“As a frontline clinician, I observed that working at a considerable pace, seeing people individually, was doing little to address the increasing demand and capacity issues for psychological therapy in mental health services. I believe that research is a way of utilising time and skills to contribute to the overall development and delivery of treatment.”

“For anyone interested in research, my advice would be to be tenacious! This quality enables you to access valuable avenues of support, network effectively, and identify suitable learning opportunities. Begin by reaching out and building connections with others, actively seek out opportunities repeatedly.”

Matthew is a Senior Orthotist from Dorset County Hospital in Dorchester and works part time to support personalised care training for the Wessex Academy for Skills in Personalised Care (WASP).

He was awarded a statistics internship award to help him with his evaluation of the WASP training programme.

“The internship gave me time to focus outside clinical work. A day a week to dedicate to research, helped manage my time much better”

“The expertise too, getting to work with statisticians was a brilliant experience. I don't think my maths skills were up to par to be able to publish something outright. But having them to be able to read through and give me guidance was really useful to help me get to the point of publishing.

I want to stick with my part-time clinical job and bring research into that. Keeping my fingers in the clinical pool is important to know what my patients need and bring research back to my profession.

There are only six hundred people working in orthotists in the UK, and of those only a handful are research active. It's a field that could really use some confidence in research skills that we just don't have at the moment.”

Matthew Wood

Matthew was part of the Internship programme in 2024



Bitesize

Hampshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust Physiotherapist Andrea Brimson put her 2022 internship award to use within outpatient musculoskeletal cases.

“It was so valuable to be given the time to actually fully research a topic, and I genuinely felt that by the end of it, patients would really benefit from this project, because if we can monitor patients’ disease progress or regression then it will reduce the number of visits that patients would have to make to the hospital. Patients are our main focus; if we can improve their outcomes that is always the best way.”

Harriet Wilding was working as an Occupational Therapist in Adult Community Mental Health with Hampshire and Isle of Wight Healthcare NHS Trust in 2023 when she began her internship.

She highly valued the advance it gave her in professional development, with access to additional training and being able to manage her own project, although she had to overcome her own doubts about whether she would thrive in the programme.

“I thought that this wasn’t for me, I thought that I wouldn’t be able to get through this, but with the support of my NHS trust I applied for a research development programme and I’m glad that I did because it’s made applying for anything else that much easier.”

Kirstie Ballinger is a Dietician for the Wessex Cystic Fibrosis (CF) Centre in Southampton and used her 2022 internship opportunity to investigate the effect a newly approved CF treatment was having on the body composition of people – an opportunity she relished.

“This drug is so new that we didn’t know what we were going to find when we were looking at body composition pre- and post-treatment, and currently there’s not a lot of data out there. It was so brilliant to be able to look at the data we’ve collected from our population of people with CF and be able to take research and understanding from that and share it with our patients.”

Katie Brown is a Cognitive Behavioural Therapist from Dorset who used her internship in 2023-24 to work with mums to help them find additional support from digital tools.

“The internship was really collaborative; I loved going in. I was going into Bournemouth University; being around other academic researchers was a really helpful environment to be in because I’ve tried to do research in my clinical setting before and it is a bit tricky when it’s just you, by yourself.”

“I think just having that support of my supervisors, and even just meeting other healthcare professionals also doing research, other academics, really helped me to learn what it is like.”

What they did next



Catarina Fandinga is an Advanced Paediatric Dietician and was awarded an internship. She gained promotion and secured a role as a Research Associate with the University of Glasgow for a UK-wide Crohn's disease study



Madison Geeves started a new position as Clinical Research Respiratory Physiologist at University Hospital Southampton following her internship and has now started her PhD

Justin Strain, a Senior Physiotherapist, completed an internship with ARC Wessex during 2022 after getting advice and backing from senior staff at Hampshire and Isle of Wight Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust.



He wants to breed a culture of research in his workplace to bring lasting change and positive outcomes

Theo Akudjedu's project, which was co-produced with masters-level medical imaging students, was chosen as the Editors' Choice at the Journal of Medical Imaging and Radiation Sciences. Theo is now is an Associate Professor and Director for the MSc Medical Imaging with Management Programme at the Institute of Medical Imaging and Visualisation, Bournemouth University



Dr Sofia Michopoulou made an application and was awarded an NIHR Integrated Clinical and Practitioner Academic Lectureship. She is a Consultant Clinical Scientist and Head of Nuclear Medicine Physics at University Hospital Southampton. She has gone on to receive a Research Leaders Programme (RLP) award from University Hospital Southampton



Rosalynn Austin has gone on to post-doctoral research, including visits to universities in Linköping, Sweden and Seoul, South Korea. In 2021 she was presented with an Early Investigator Award by the British Society for Heart Failure. She now hosts her own Podcast *Researcher Revealed* and continues to act as an ambassador for nurse led research

PhD Fellowships

Sam
Belfrage



Sam began her PhD in 2021 and was awarded her PhD in 2025

Sam Belfrage lives in Portsmouth and joined the ARC Wessex programme in 2021. She is the first person in her family to have a degree and a university education.

Her PhD based at the University of Winchester, looked at health literacy in parents.

Dr Sam Belfrage was awarded her PhD in 2025 and now works in Research Development at Portsmouth City Council and the Health Determinants Research Collaboration.

“I’m really grateful for the support I’ve had from ARC Wessex. They’ve given me peer support and helped me to travel internationally to showcase my research. I’ve also been able to take up an internship with the University of Munich.”

“I’m also now working at Portsmouth City Council and I’m able to use all the skills and knowledge I’ve developed over the last three years in a really practical and real-world way.

It can be very difficult for people to get some initial experience in a research career, and the ARC has helped me grow my networks and supported me throughout.”

Qian Yue Tan is a Geriatrician and joined the ARC Wessex programme in 2020, during the Covid-19 pandemic. Her PhD was delayed for several months as she went back to frontline clinical work at University Hospitals Southampton NHS Foundation Trust.

On returning to research, Qian studied treatment burden and capacity of people with Parkinson's disease and their carers. She completed her PhD in 2023 and published several papers about the impact of Parkinson's disease.

Qian is now a consultant Geriatrician at Portsmouth Hospitals University NHS Trust and applied for an NIHR Post-doctoral Fellowship.



Qian Tan

Qian began her PhD in 2020 and was awarded her PhD in 2023

“As clinicians you question how things work on a day-to-day basis, and you get ideas from what you see and how it can benefit your patients. Clinically that's been the most important thing, how we can make it better for our patients.

I think the NHS we all know is under demand. The number of a people who are ageing is increasing year by year and the number of people with multiple long-term conditions and frailty. And that's the biggest demand on the NHS system.

Building research capacity is, really important. Passing on that knowledge to the next generation because we know that research active organisations have better outcomes for their patients and have a better workplace environment.”

Public Policy Fellowships

Michelle
Myall



Michelle specialises in people with Long-Term Condition and End of Life Care

Dr Michelle Myall is an Associate Professor in the School of Health Sciences at the University of Southampton. Her research focuses on improving the health, care and wellbeing of people with complex needs from under-served communities. She leads an innovative research programme on domestic abuse where it co-exists with long-term/life-limiting illness, placing the voices of those with lived experience front and centre, to improve outcomes for patients and families.

“The Public Policy Fellowship has provided an invaluable experience to strengthen my knowledge and understanding to effectively bridge the translational gap between policy and research.

Opportunities to improve my leadership abilities, undertake training and work with members of the Public Policy team have equipped me with skills to engage with parliamentary groups and ministers and increase the impact of my research”.

Dr Eloise Radcliffe is a Senior Research Fellow working in the School of Primary Care, Population Sciences and Medical Education, Faculty of Medicine at the University of Southampton.

She has a social science background with expertise in qualitative methods across diverse health settings. Her research focuses on older people living with frailty, medicines optimisation, deprescribing and social prescribing.



Eloise
Radcliffe

Eloise specialises in Care for Older People and Polypharmacy

“The public policy fellowship has been an incredibly rewarding experience that deepened my understanding of UK health policy and the real-world challenges policymakers face. Working with the Public Policy team has helped me to develop practical skills in policy analysis, stakeholder engagement and writing policy briefs.

A particular highlight was organising and delivering a policy event in Westminster, showcasing our medicines optimisation programme of research directly to parliamentarians and other policymakers.

The fellowship has provided a valuable opportunity to develop my communication skills and build networks, to help translate our research evidence into meaningful conversations to shape policy, and our future research.”

Skaiste Linceviciute



Skaiste Linceviciute is a post-doctoral Research Fellow in the ARC Wessex Mental Health Hub, undertaking addiction-related research with diverse communities.

Skaiste got her BSc (Hons) in Psychology at University of Portsmouth where she first learnt the value of research that inspired her to continue her research career by undertaking PhD in Health Sciences and Social Work (University of Portsmouth).

Skaiste joined the University of Southampton in 2022 and began her postdoctoral fellowship at the ARC Wessex working on mental health and related issues.

Skaiste started her Mental Health Fellowship in 2022

“During my post-doctoral fellowship, I have developed expertise and skills in working with diverse communities affected by complex mental health issues and social needs. I have also developed meaningful collaborative partnerships with stakeholders and strengthened my skills in public engagement and knowledge dissemination. I have recently been awarded an opportunity to undertake leadership training through the NIHR ARC Wessex programme, which will enhance my research leadership capabilities in delivering applied health research with real-world impact. My time at the ARC Wessex has been a great professional opportunity where I have learnt a lot about my work but also about myself.”

Post-doctoral research topics

Ageing and Dementia

- Falls prevention in healthcare settings.
- Involving people with cognitive impairment in hospital care decisions.
- Loneliness and mental health in older adults.

Healthy Communities

- Domestic abuse and housing for people with disabilities or chronic illness.
- Socio-economic characteristics influencing health service referrals.
- Safe housing for adults with life-limiting illness and domestic abuse.
- Realist evaluation of interventions delivered in partnership between Voluntary and Community Sector and NHS.
- Supporting people to live well in their communities.

Long-Term Conditions

- Prevention and early identification of chronic conditions (e.g. liver disease).
- Impact of COVID-19 on physical activity in adults with Long-Term Conditions.
- Self-management strategies for Long-Term Conditions, including alcohol use disorder.
- Understanding complex needs of people with long-term physical and mental health conditions.
- Role of social prescribers in structured medication reviews .

Workforce and Health Systems

- Career aspirations of nurses in research delivery.
- Development and effectiveness of digital technologies to reduce hospitalisations and improve outcomes.

Mental Health

- Wellbeing of the mental health nursing workforce.
- Development of a core outcome set for mental health nurse wellbeing.
- Community mental health models and interventions.
- Psychosocial determinants of mental health in older adults.
- Psychosocial needs and trajectories of older adults with alcohol use disorder.
- Gambling harms and socio-economic factors.
- Comparison of hospital-admitted alcohol use disorder patients vs. community samples with loneliness.
- ADHD treatment in preschoolers.
- Adolescent resilience and empowerment interventions.
- Work lives and wellbeing of mental health nursing workforce.

Thank you to all our internship, PhD fellowship and Post-doctoral Award holders

Theophilus Akudjedu – Bournemouth University
Stefanie Andrew-Gibb – Dorset County Hospital NHS Foundation Trust
Rosalynn Austin – Portsmouth Hospitals University NHS Trust
Donna Austin – University Hospital Southampton NHS Foundation Trust
Olufolake Ayeyemi – Home-Start Portsmouth
Anna Badley – Hampshire & IOW Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust
Joshua Bailey – Hampshire & IOW Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust
Cheska Ball – Dorset County Hospital NHS Foundation Trust
Kirstie Ballinger – University Hospital Southampton NHS Foundation Trust
Niall Berry – Portsmouth Hospitals University NHS Trust
Andrea Brimson – Hampshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
Katie Brown – Dorset Healthcare University NHS Foundation Trust
Bessie Brumble – University Hospitals Dorset NHS Foundation Trust
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Karina Green – Dorset County Hospital NHS Foundation Trust
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Nour Odeh – Oaks Healthcare NHS GP Practice
Samuel Page – Dorset County Hospital NHS Foundation Trust
Karla Palframan – University Hospital Southampton NHS Foundation Trust
Jo Palmer – University Hospital Southampton NHS Foundation Trust
Clare Phillips – University Hospital Southampton NHS Foundation Trust
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