

PRINCIPLES: Collaborative Postdoctoral Fellowships Programme (CPFP)

Building capacity and capability of academic-based researchers to tackle applied health and social care challenges.



02 July 2025

Introduction

The Health Research Board (HRB) Strategy (2021-2025: Health research – making an impact¹ highlights six strategic objectives for the HRB, including the building of a strong and supportive environment for health research in Ireland. Within this objective, the HRB is committed to investing strategically in research leadership and building a vibrant community of health and social care researchers from different professions, backgrounds, and research interests, and working in and across a range of settings including universities and TUs, hospitals and primary, community and social care settings.

To support this commitment, the HRB has designed a suite of schemes aimed at creating a diverse workforce of health and social care researchers via the dual research career path, targeting both academic and practitioner researchers. One such initiative is the **Collaborative Postdoctoral Fellowships Programme (CPFP)**. The scheme is designed to support health and social care researchers from various disciplinary backgrounds who are based in an academic setting and have a PhD or an equivalent² level of research experience. The scheme aims to enhance research training at postdoctoral level by enabling researchers to conduct studies which tackle an identified problem in the context of health, public health or social care.

The CPFP scheme replaces the 'Applying Research into Policy and Practice (ARPP)' fellowships and is part of the HRB research career path for academic-based researchers.

The funding model

The scheme uses a team-based funding model designed to support groups of postdoctoral researchers working together on a common research programme. Each grant will be led by an experienced Leadership Team which will include a Lead Applicant and up to two Co-Lead Applicants. Applications are invited from a team of independent investigators and non-academic partners as appropriate to propose an over-arching and interdisciplinary programme of collaborative research that will be delivered by recruiting three early-career postdoctoral fellows. Please note the following:

- The scheme will support newly formed or existing **consortia** (Leadership team, co-applicants and collaborators) that show clear evidence of **collaborations and partnerships**. Consortia must be formed by researchers from a variety of disciplines and backgrounds, and others including non-academic stakeholders, and with different skillsets working collaboratively on research programmes that fall within the scope of the call. Non-academic stakeholders in the team can for example include knowledge users, those affected by the research outcomes such as health and social care professionals, community organisations and patients, professional organisations, or the general public.
- Each consortium will be led by a **leadership team** which will include a **Lead Applicant** (for the purposes of the application process) and **one or two Co-Lead Applicants**. The members of the leadership team will hold equal co-leadership of the postdoctoral programme. The team

¹ <https://www.hrb.ie/about/strategy-2025/>

² HRB PhD equivalency must be applied for and approved by the HRB. The HRB PhD Equivalency application process is currently under review. It is anticipated that the HRB will start processing applications again in early September. Updated information will be published on the HRB website as it becomes available.

members must span a breadth of disciplines and professions with skills and expertise which complement one another to jointly lead the scientific and technical direction of the overall doctoral programme.

- The leadership team must demonstrate:
 - Strong track record in patient-focused research demonstrated by their contribution to knowledge, research outputs and expertise in accelerating the transfer and application of research evidence into real-world applications;
 - Complementarity of disciplines, skills and expertise as relevant to the research and training programme, including from under-represented professions/disciplines relevant to the strategic leadership of the programme;
 - Clear strategic vision of the research programme;
 - Strong collaborative and networking expertise;
 - Strong track record in training supervising and mentoring early and mid-career researchers.
- Each leadership team can apply for **three postdoctoral fellows** from a broad range of disciplines who will work collaboratively on the same research programme to address a complex research question from multiple disciplinary perspectives. It aims to embed the postdoctoral fellows in teams and expose them to other disciplines and methodologies while at the same time providing further training and development opportunities in their own discipline. Additional fellows funded from other sources participating in the research programme are welcome.
- The programme, environment and high-level training plan must be suitable to support the research and leadership development of these individuals, who will, once recruited, be referred to as **HRB Fellows** and will be expected to play a role in grant reporting/management.

There will be an expectation that the fellows will

- be involved in the management of their own research project, by reiterating, shaping and influencing the direction with the support of their leadership team and supervisory team
- support the annual reporting of the programme to the HRB
- shape and self- manage a network of fellows across the different awards, to enhance the peer support, networking and collaborative opportunities and training activities.

Aims and objectives

The **aim** is to build capacity of academic-based researchers at postdoctoral stage to conduct applied health and social care research³.

The **objectives** are to:

³ For the purposes of this scheme, applied health and social care research is defined as ‘research with an emphasis on providing evidence that will impact healthcare policy and practice leading to better health outcomes in Ireland and beyond.’

- Build capacity and capability at early and mid- postdoctoral level by supporting researchers from a broad range of disciplines who want to contribute to applied health and social care research and who have the motivation and the potential to advance on an academic path towards independent investigator status.
- Build on existing investments at PhD level by providing opportunities for postdoctoral level researchers to conduct applied health and social care research under the guidance of mentorship.
- Tackle an identified problem in the context of health, public health or social care from a variety of perspectives with a collaborative and complementary approach.
- Foster partnerships within and between academic institutions, service delivery organisations and/or policy and health service decision makers, as appropriate, with a view to making outputs useable and timely for translation into policy and/or practice.

It is expected that during the postdoctoral period each fellow will:

- Establish new collaborations and partnerships, including with knowledge users in a position to influence policy and practice
- Develop clear and independent thinking
- Strengthen their research experience
- Broaden their horizons
- Learn new research skills and methodologies

Ultimately, the fellowship programme should create more independent researchers who can competitively apply to more advanced funding schemes.

Scope

Each research programme should address an identified problem in the context of health, public health or social care with a collaborative and complementary approach, by tackling different interrelated aspects of a central research question that form a coherent theme and add value, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the identified problem.

Funding

Each Grant will fund the following:

- Salary and related costs for three fellows for three years, based on the IUA PD scales.
- Research related costs up to €240,000 per grant,.
- Overhead costs.

We envisage that the maximum funding per grant will be approximately €1.2 million, inclusive of overheads and dependent on the level of experience of the proposed fellows. We envisage making up to four Grants, equivalent to 12 Fellows in total and an overall investment in the region of €4.8 million.

The Grant has a 42-month duration, which includes up to six months for programme set-up and recruitment of the postdoctoral fellows. Each fellow will have salary support for a total of 36 months at 1.0 FTE.

Application and review process

The scheme will use a two-stage application process, consisting of:

1. Open call for Pre-applications- where the Leadership Teams with their wider consortia apply for funding – followed by shortlisting by an international review panel.
2. Invitation of selected Leadership Teams to submit a full application, followed by peer and public review, applicant response and panel interviews.

Timeline

Activity	Timeline
Call launch (subject to approval)	1 st week October 2025
Pre-application submission	3 rd week December 2025
Panel review and invitation to Full Application stage/stage open	End of February 2026
Full application submission	Mid-May 2026
Peer and public review	Mid-May to early-September 2026
Applicant response phase	Mid-September 2026
Panel interviews	Mid-October 2026
Board approval of funding recommendations	November 2026
Start of Grants	February 2027 onwards