

## Improvement Science Fellowships – Cohort 3

### Frequently Asked Questions

**1. Q. What is the Health Foundation?**

A. The Health Foundation is an independent charity working to improve the quality of healthcare in the UK. We are here to support people working in healthcare practice and policy to make lasting improvements to health services. We carry out research and in-depth policy analysis, run improvement programmes to put ideas into practice in the NHS, support and develop leaders and share evidence to encourage wider change. We want the UK to have a healthcare system of the highest possible quality – safe, effective, person-centred, timely, efficient and equitable. Further details about the organisation can be found at [www.health.org.uk](http://www.health.org.uk).

**2. Q. Has the Health Foundation funded other research fellowships?**

A. Yes. This is the third round of the Health Foundation Improvement Science Fellowships. In addition, the Foundation funds a wide range of leadership development fellowships for people working in the health service, as well as our Clinician Scientist Fellowships, which focus on bio-medical research. The Improvement Science Fellowships build on the knowledge and experience we have gained from these programmes. For more information, please visit [www.health.org.uk](http://www.health.org.uk).

**3. Q. What are the aims of the Improvement Science programme?**

A. The Improvement Science programme aims to develop the field of enquiry and practice of improvement in healthcare, with the fellowship scheme specifically contributing to developing the future leaders in the field. Improvement science aims to develop tools, concepts and methods, so that approaches to improvement in healthcare are more evidence-based and thus more robust to enable widespread implementation.

**4. Q. Why does the Health Foundation include leadership development in its fellowship offer?**

A. The Health Foundation recognises that for improvement activity to be effective and sustainable, leadership is required at every level. As our specific aim is to develop and equip the future leaders in the field, we want to help fellows to become reflective about their own strengths and weaknesses, as well as understanding aspects of contextual, technical, relational and personal leadership qualities.

**5. Q. What is the Health Foundation Improvement Science Development Group?**

A. The Health Foundation Improvement Science Development Group comprises leading international experts from disciplines within the field of improvement science. The group holds six-monthly meetings to enable sharing of ideas and experience, with on-going collaboration by members between meetings to

develop specific projects to support the development of improvement science members. The development group members are an important resource for fellows to advise on their research and fellows will have the opportunity to contribute to publications, take part in online discussions and deepen their understanding of the different disciplines that contribute to improvement science. For more information see: [health foundation isdg](#)

**6. Q. Do I need to have already obtained a PhD or MD?**

A. Yes, all applicants must be at the post-doctoral stage, able to demonstrate experience of leading research or practical implementation of improvement in healthcare, after completing their PhD or MD studies. Those awaiting confirmation of a PhD or MD are not qualified to apply until the award is confirmed.

**7. Q. Do I have to be working in a university now?**

A. No, we expect that some applicants will be working in academic institutions, while others are currently working in the health service in a role which involves leading quality improvement or clinical practice with quality improvement. All applicants must have firm arrangements to conduct their research from a host academic institution if successful.

**8. Q. Is the Improvement Science Fellowship restricted to the UK?**

A. Yes. The Health Foundation's work to improve the quality of healthcare is focussed on the UK and, as such, all fellows will need to be based at a UK university and research proposals will need to demonstrate how they have the potential to significantly impact on the quality, safety or value of healthcare services in the UK.

**9. Q. Can I apply as a working clinician?**

A. Yes. We encourage applications from candidates who are clinically trained and who want to apply their learning from clinical practice to carry out research in the field of improvement science. Clinician applicants will need to demonstrate experience of improvement in practice and the desire to undertake academically-based research for the period of the fellowship. Clinician applicants will still need a PhD or MD in order to apply. The Health Foundation will be flexible in respect of arrangements which enable continuing part-time work as a clinician and the Fellowship will be funded to match salary on a pro-rata basis.

**10. Q. What kind of leadership development will I be required to undertake as part of the fellowship?**

A. This will include a number of elements:

- Two-day learning sets, roughly every quarter, led by two experienced coaches/facilitators, exploring aspects of leadership for improvement and developing yourself as a reflective practitioner with the other fellows
- Attending six-monthly 3-day meetings of the Health Foundation Improvement Science Development Group
- Monthly telephone coaching sessions
- Ad-hoc meetings with individual members of the Improvement Science Development Group in order to gain insights on the development of the field and specific input and guidance appropriate to your specific research
- Various learning opportunities designed specifically to meet your needs, including supported attendance at key seminars related to improvement science.

- 11. Q. What is the nature of the relationship with the Health Foundation?**  
A. Fellows will be titled 'Health Foundation Improvement Science Fellow' and fellowships will be promoted through the Foundation's web-site to include your personal profile, photograph and an outline of your research. The connection with the Health Foundation enables Fellows to benefit from our networks to provide greater opportunities to present their research and to join collaborative work with other leading researchers. In addition, Fellows are expected to contribute to other Health Foundation activities such as assessment of conference abstracts, assessment of funding applications and to input to development activities, such as commenting on programme plans.
- 12. Q. How experienced do I have to be?**  
A. Successful applicants will demonstrate a track record in academic research, related to theory, methods or evaluation of approaches to improve the quality, safety and value of healthcare, supported by publication on these topics. This may be complemented by experience of implementation of improvement within healthcare services. Very experienced applicants, for example someone who already holds a professorship, will need to demonstrate how the fellowship will enable them to re-focus their work in order to make a significant contribution to the development of improvement science.
- 13. Q. Do I already need to have secured research grants to be able to apply?**  
A. No, although any research awards you may have won are indicators of your success to date and you should list these in your application.
- 14. Q. If I have already won a research grant, does this mean I cannot apply for an Improvement Science Fellowship?**  
A. No. But you will need to show that what the Health Foundation will be funding (in terms of the research bid, the leadership development aspect and your time overall) is distinctively different from any other research funding you already hold and how you will balance the work involved. The Health Foundation will be very concerned that we are not 'double-funding' if your post is already funded through an existing award.
- 15. Q. Do I need to have planned my research in great detail?**  
A. No, but you will need to have identified a clear need for research, that will significantly add to the appropriate body of literature, and to be proposing a programme of research with potential to significantly improve the quality, safety or value of healthcare services, that would be seen as credible, both in terms of theoretical approach and the plans for implementation.
- 16. Q. If other funders are considering a similar research proposal to that which I have submitted, can I still apply?**  
A. Yes. You will need to inform us immediately if you are successful with other funders.
- 17. Q. Do I need to have obtained ethical approval for my proposed research?**  
A. No, not at the time of application. Your proposal needs to include a robust plan for gaining the necessary approvals in line with national guidance, related to the appropriate body to approach and to have allowed the necessary time for this in your implementation plan.
- 18. Q. Does my host institution have to be a centre of excellence in improvement science?**  
A. Yes. The Health Foundation wants to ensure that Fellows are studying in

institutions that will effectively support their research into improvement science and that this will fit within a broader programme of research that is seeking to build the evidence to improve the quality, safety and value of healthcare. You will need to identify a suitably qualified academic supervisor and gain the support of those who are expert in improvement science. Your research needs to be aligned with the ethos and research priorities of your host institution.

**19. Q. Do I need to have agreements in place with a local NHS trust?**

A. An important aspect of successful research projects will be their amenability for implementation to improve the quality, safety or value of healthcare, so it will be important to have an outline plan for implementation which, depending on the focus of your research, may involve working closely with NHS organisations. You will need to demonstrate that you have thought through practical issues like this and that you will have the necessary support from your host organisation.

**20. Q. What is the maximum amount of grant I can apply for?**

A. The grant will cover your salary, including any annual increments (if applicable) and the direct costs of carrying out your research. All applications will be assessed with regard to value for money and the justification for all the items included as costs.

**21. Q. What costs can be included as 'research costs'?**

A. You should include what you expect to be the items of direct expenditure required to carry out your research. Items commonly covered include: travel costs for you to attend the meetings related to the Fellowship, relevant conferences, data analysis support, transcription of interviews and focus groups, venue hire/refreshments for research meetings/focus groups, travel costs for patients and NHS staff to attend focus groups. You can include 'honorarium' payments for patient participants and some backfill payments for NHS staff to participate in specific research activities but not where this would constitute covering part of a salary for any length of time beyond a few days. Costs may cover some staff time from Research Assistants, but it is not possible to use the Fellowship to fund an additional salary. We do not expect improvement science research to involve laboratory costs. The Health Foundation will NOT pay any overhead costs, full economic recovery costs, capital or equipment costs (other than small equipment within the lifecycle of the project).

**22. Q. What is the timing for the take-up of the fellowship?**

A. Fellows will be selected through a development centre and interview panel at the end of October 2014. The Health Foundation will send award agreements to selected applicants before the end of the year and the successful fellows will be announced in January 2015 and expected to commence the fellowship within the first quarter 2015, continuing through to the end of 2017/early 2018. Successful Fellows will be expected to attend an induction event to be held in Q1 2015.

**23. Q. Can this fellowship be part-time and how does this affect funding and timeframes?**

A. Yes. It is possible to continue to carry out some other aspect of your role, such as part-time clinical practice, or continuing to input to organisational management or other on-going research projects, but you must be able to demonstrate that you have adequate time to undertake a significant research project within the three year timeframe and within a pro-rata salary budget. You must ensure that you can fully participate in the Fellows' leadership development programme. It will not be possible to fund a part-time fellow for longer than three years.

**24 Q: To what extent does the research have to be multi-disciplinary?**

A: Research proposals will need to demonstrate appreciation of the multi-disciplinary nature of improvement science. So, while your work may be situated in psychology or nursing, for example, you need to think broadly about how other disciplines, such as statistics or operational research, for example, may contribute to the work and how you would access the necessary expertise. In addition, proposals will be assessed on the ability of the approaches being explored to impact on a wide range of healthcare settings.

**25 Q: Will research proposals with a clinical focus be acceptable?**

A: Improvement Science Fellowships will not support research focussed on the development of new treatments. Proposals will need to be broadly-based, focussed on methods to improve the delivery of services, the patient's experience, the safety, or value of the service and to be capable of implementation in practice during the three year period of the fellowship. While research may be set within a specific clinical setting, such as diabetes care, adolescent mental health or dementia services, the approaches to be explored need to include transferable learning to other settings, demonstrating the capacity to significantly impact on the overall quality, safety and value of healthcare.