

Introduction – Andrew McIntosh

Welcome, everyone. I'm Andrew McIntosh, a professor of psychiatry from Edinburgh, directing the UKRI Mental Health Platform. This webinar covers the Early Career Researcher Fellowship Awards. Over the next hour, I'll outline the mental health platform and the ECR award scheme. You'll also hear from investigators across the UK and a past early career fellow discussing the benefits of applying. A Q&A session will follow.

If you have questions, please use the Q&A function at the top of your screen. We'll address them at the end. The webinar is recorded, and live captioning is available.

Overview of the Mental Health Platform

The platform is a UKRI-funded network with five challenge-led research hubs:

- Metabolic Psychiatry – Edinburgh
- Complex Emotions – Sheffield
- ImmunoMIND – Cambridge
- Social Health – London
- Brain & Genomics – Cardiff
- DATAMIND – Swansea

Each hub collaborates nationally and internationally, supporting research on severe mental illnesses such as severe depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, and borderline personality disorder. The goal is to facilitate collaboration, harmonize data, and accelerate research impact. We work with individuals with lived experience, the NHS, and industry to advance therapies and applications.

Early Career Fellowship Awards

We are launching these fellowships to build capacity in severe mental illness research and strengthen collaboration among the hubs. Key details:

- Funding: Up to £300,000 for 1–3 years.
- Application period: March 1 – April 30, 2025.
- Start date: October 2025.
- Eligibility: Must have a PhD or equivalent, must not hold a permanent contract, and must be employed at a UK research institution or NHS setting.
- Research focus: Severe mental illness, linking at least two hubs.
- Proposal requirements: Must include patient and public involvement, as well as an equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) plan.
- Data sharing: Required via the Data Mind platform.

Presentations from Investigators

Brain & Genomics Hub – Neil Harrison (Cardiff University)

The hub focuses on identifying mechanistic subtypes of severe mental illness using:

- Large-scale genotyping.
- Deep phenotyping with cognitive, imaging, and social data.
- Machine learning for stratification.
- Data linkage to GP records for early detection.

Complex Emotions Hub – Richard Byng (University of Plymouth)

Explores emotional instability, relationship turmoil, and impulsivity, often associated with borderline personality disorder. The hub:

- Uses qualitative and quantitative methods.
- Engages with voluntary and criminal justice sectors.
- Utilizes wearable technology for momentary emotional tracking.
- Develops interventions based on lived experiences.

Data Mind Hub – Marcos del Pozo Banos (Swansea University)

Supports mental health data science by:

- Providing a trusted research environment.
- Linking NHS and research data.
- Developing machine learning-driven phenotypes.
- Offering governance and data-sharing tools.

Metabolic Psychiatry Hub – Arish Mudra Rakshasa-Loots (University of Edinburgh)

Investigates the link between metabolic dysfunction and mental illness through:

- Genetic and causal inference studies.
- Large-scale health data analysis.
- Biomarker identification in severe mental illness.
- Pilot testing metabolic interventions.

Social Health Hub – Livia Carvalho (Queen Mary University of London)

Focuses on social determinants of mental health:

- Studies how social environments influence disease progression.
- Uses machine learning to analyze social health data.
- Collects new data from 600 individuals.

- Pilots social prescribing interventions.
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Tips for Applying – Alex Kwong (University of Edinburgh)

Fellowships provide:

- Independence in research.
- Leadership and networking opportunities.
- A pathway to secure academic positions.

Application tips:

- Accept failure as part of the process.
 - Highlight leadership potential and scientific excellence.
 - Ensure clear alignment with the scheme.
 - Engage with funders and mentors.
 - Seek feedback and conduct mock interviews.
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Q&A Highlights

What qualifies as severe mental illness?

- Schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, treatment-resistant depression, and borderline personality disorder.
- Excludes general anxiety or mild depressive symptoms.

Can I apply if I'm awaiting my PhD viva?

- You must have your PhD awarded before the application deadline.

Do I need to be based at my lead supervisor's institution?

- No, but you must have a clear plan for mentorship and infrastructure support.

Do proposals need to fit within existing hub workstreams?

- Not strictly, but they should align with hub expertise and involve hub collaboration.
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Conclusion

Thank you for joining. If you have further questions, contact us at MHP@ed.ac.uk. The recording will be available on YouTube and our social media channels. Good luck with your applications!