UKRI Mental Health Platform Collaboration and Innovation applications Review Process and Scoring Criteria

1. Application Review Process

The review process runs twice a year and will take less than 6 months, including peer review and final decision.

Unsuccessful candidates will receive feedback and can re-apply one more time in one of the following recruitment rounds.

The Mental Health Platform (MHP) will run two rounds of recruitment per year, between July 2025 and January 2028.
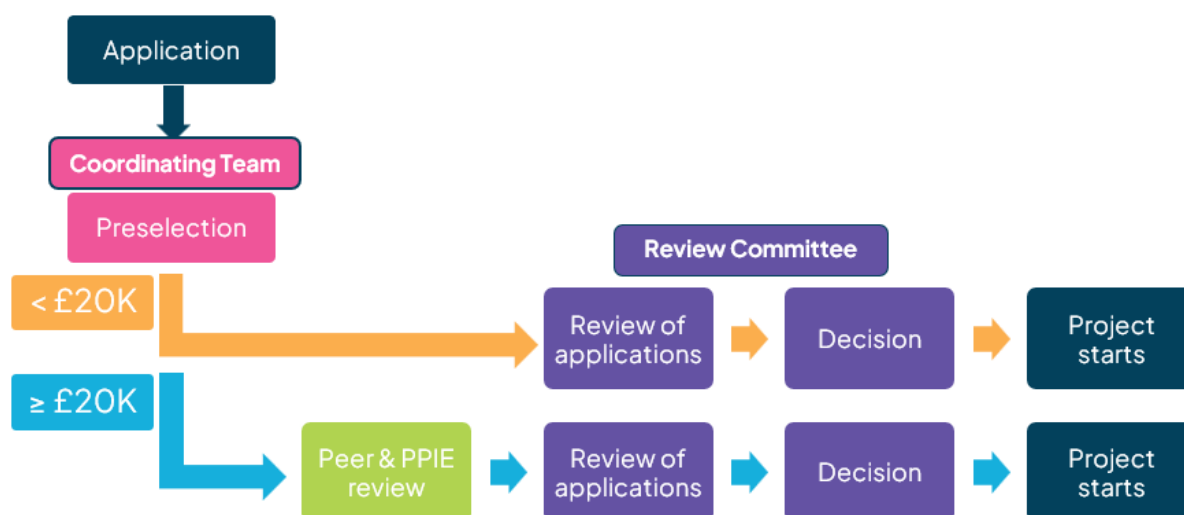

Figure 1. MHP Collaboration & Innovation process, running between July 2025 and January 2028.

2. Pre-selection process

Applications are screened for eligibility and completeness by the MHP Coordinating Centre team. Unsuccessful applicants will be informed within two weeks after the application deadline.

It's the applicant responsibility to:

- Ensure they have applied to the correct funding opportunity
- Submit the application with all documents (named according to the guidance provided in the application form and on the MHP website, and before the deadline announced for each round of applications. This will allow the MHP Coordinating Team to complete the necessary pre-selection checks and submit the application for peer review.

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It's the MHP Coordinating team's responsibility to:

- Confirm that all documents are named according to the guidance provided in the application form.
- Confirm that all documents are readable and have no technical problems
- Confirm the application form was completed and the applicant provided consent to process their data
- Confirm that all appendices requested have been submitted and match the pre-defined acceptance criteria (i.e. number and format of pages and font size).
- Confirm the proposal meets the programme's minimum eligibility criteria.

	Minimum Eligibility criteria
Pre-selection stage	- Application form and appendices correctly submitted. Consent was provided to process data. - The main applicant(s) must be a current member of the MHP. - The project must link at least two of the MHP Hubs - The research must address one of the Cross-Hub collaboration themes described in the application form. - The leads of the Hubs involved provided a letter of support to the project - The project must be completed by December 2028. Projects are expected to start within 6 months of the decision being made. - The proposed budget is between £10,000-£300,000 (100% FEC, cost to funder) and excludes ineligible costs. - Eligible costs: 100% Directly incurred and directly allocated costs, including staff time, travel and subsistence, networking activities and events, engagement and knowledge exchange. - Ineligible costs: Duplication of other sources of funding, indirect and estate costs, intellectual property related costs, equipment valued over £10,000, undergraduate and postgraduate activities or training and contributions to existing knowledge transfer partnerships. The salary costs of investigators and staff employed on existing funded Hub awards is also not eligible for inclusion. - People with lived experience were involved in the design of the application - Industry partners involved in applications for this award must be part of the MHP Industry Alliance

	• Collaborators must provide letters of support. These letters must include a statement that they have read and agreed to the MHP Privacy Policy and their data use.

3. Conflict of interest during the review process

The MHP is committed to ensure the review process is as objective and transparent as possible, and that any potential conflict of interest is minimised or removed. We recognise that individuals who may be involved in the review process may also be active members of the Hubs associated with the application, or involved in a variety of other projects that may create a potential or perceivable conflict of interest.

When selecting the review panels, the MHP Coordinating Team will exclude those named in proposal, as team members or collaborators or those employed by one of the participating institutions. Close collaborators or co-applicants in other projects with the main applicant, or reviewers employed by the same current or proposed host institution will also be excluded from the Review Committee for that application.

The MHP Coordinating Team will follow the MHP Declaration of Interest process when selecting Peer Reviewers and members of the Review and Interview Committees. We ask applicants to identify during the application stage any potential conflicts of interest with Collaborators, Hub leads, PPIE other members of the platform. All reviewers are expected to declare any potential conflict of interests when they are invited to be part of the Committee. If a conflict of interest is identified during the review process, the reviewer must withdraw immediately from reviewing the application.

Reviewers will be excluded from reviewing an application if they have:
- Direct involvement in the proposed project (e.g. co-supervisor, collaborator)
- Close professional relationship (e.g. collaborator, supervisor. mentor or co-applicant with the main applicant in other projects
- Employment at either the current or proposed host institution
- Personal or financial interest in the outcomes of the application

Hub leads or researchers representing the Hubs involved in the project in the Review and Interview Committee, will not review and score the applications.
PPIE reviewers involved in the design of the application will not be reviewing the application. However, they may review the application if they are indirectly involved in the project (e.g. part of the same Hub but not employed by the institutions participating in the project)

4. Review Process and Scoring system:

The MHP Coordinating Team will submit the applications for review within 4 weeks of the submission date

Proposals will be evaluated using the assessment criteria and the scoring system outlined below.

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For projects with budgets < £20,000, there will be only one step review process, where a review panel will review and score the applications based on the scoring criteria below and decide which ones are fundable in each round.

For projects with budgets ≥ £20,000, the proposals will be firstly reviewed by independent peer reviewers and PPIE members. All applicants will receive feedback on their application and will have the opportunity to respond withing ten days.

The peer review results and responses from applicants will be shared with the Review Committee. The Review Committee will review and score the applications, and decide which applications will be funded, using the same scoring criteria, taking in consideration the peer review and applicants' responses.

Peer reviewers will be independent researchers, selected from outside of the MHP and Hubs and will have significant experience and expertise in their field of work. PPIE peer reviewers will also be selected based on the relevance of their lived experience in SMI as patients, carers, or service users to the area under study in the application, and good understanding of PPIE role in research.

The Review panel and Review Committee will be composed of independent researchers, the Director and MHP Leadership team members, Hub researchers and PPIE members. MRC representatives may join the panel as Observers, throughout the applications review and decision process.

We are committed to uphold the principles of Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) in the recruitment of the ECR Review Committee. Our goals are to ensure that the committee is diverse and representative of the broader scientific community and to ensure a broad range of perspectives in decision-making processes, which can lead to more comprehensive and impactful research outcomes.

All applicants will receive written feedback on their application at the end of the application process.

The proposals will be evaluated based on the following three key criteria:

1. Team Strength, Collaboration and Research Environment (25%): Strength and suitability of the team and research environment to deliver the project
2. Impact and Strategic alignment (25%): Alignment with MHP priorities and potential impact on people living with severe mental illness.
3. Research Quality, Innovation and Delivery (50%): Scientific quality, innovation and feasibility of the research plan

The applications will be reviewed based on the following criteria (Scored using a 5-point scale: 5 = Outstanding/Fundable, 1 = Poor/Not Fundable):

Scoring guidance

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1. Team Strength, Collaboration and Research Environment (Score 1-5, 25%): Strength and suitability of the team and research environment to deliver the project

Team and Collaboration:
- The team demonstrates the right balance of skills and experience to deliver the project.
- Applicants must demonstrate a strong commitment to collaborative work within the MHP
- Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and appropriate.
- Collaborators (including Hubs and partners) show clear commitment and value-added contributions
- Cross-Hub and/or Hub-external partner collaboration is well-planned

Research Environment:
- The team has access to a high-quality supportive environment and the required infrastructure, services, datasets or samples to deliver the project

2. Impact and Strategic alignment (Score 1-5, 25%): Alignment with MHP priorities and potential impact on people living with severe mental illness.

Strategic alignment:
- Applications above £100,000 must demonstrate that they are uniquely suited to the aims of the MHP and could not compete for funding elsewhere, such as through regular UKRI routes or other funding agencies.
- Applications must demonstrate alignment with MHP's strategic priorities and Hubs goals. They should also explain how the project expands the value of individual Hub's research.

Impact:
- Clear and realistic strategy for translating research outputs into tangible impact.
- The project addresses a timely and significant challenge in mental health, with clear relevance to people with SMI.
- Strong integration of inclusive PPIE throughout the project lifecycle
- Applications must describe equitable partnerships will be created, ensuring fair support, renumeration, recognition, and timely feedback for all involved.
- PPIE budget is appropriate for the PPIE activities plan proposed
- Applicants can submit plans proposing involvement, engagement or co-production with people with lived experience (PWLE). PPI plans must follow the UK Standards for Public Involvement

For further guidance, please consult:
- Guidance for applicants on working with people and communities | NIHR
- 10 for 10: Public involvement in mental health research | The McPin Foundation
- NIHR Guidance on co-producing a research project
- Embedding lived experience in mental health research | Funding Guidance | Wellcome

3. Research Quality, Innovation and Delivery (Score 1-5, 50%): Scientific quality, innovation and feasibility of the research plan

Innovation:
- Ambitious, high-risk/high-reward research with transformative potential
- Demonstrates innovation in approach, design, methods, or technology, while building on existing Hub work.

Research Quality:
- Research plan must have well-structured work packages and realistic methodology, supported by appropriate risk mitigation and a deliverable timeline. Strong scientific rationale (e.g. literature or data).
- Robust data management plan ensuring quality, security, and data sharing. The plan must include the type of data used, format and scale, including appropriate statistical power justification. Applicants are expected to comply with the MHP Data Sharing policy and all data generated must be deposited on DATAMIND's Trusted Research Environment.
- The Project must actively embed diversity, equity and inclusion in research design, participation, and implementation. Applicants must demonstrate consideration of Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) principles in the research design, ensuring it reflects the diversity of the population affected by the condition(s) under study. Proposed research outcomes must be significant and meaningful for the target population. Any limitations in applying EDI principles must be clearly justified. For further guidance, please consult:
  - Embedding diversity in research design – MRC – UKRI
  - UKRI Guidance for equality, diversity and inclusion
  - NIHR Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Toolkit

Project delivery:
- Applicants must include plans to communicate and share research outputs with other MHP researchers, adhering to the MHP Data Sharing Policy.
- Ethical considerations are clearly identified, evaluated and addressed.
- Budget plan must be submitted with well-justified costs and deliver good value for money. A max budget of £300k (cost to funder, at 100% FEC) may be requested.
- Costs must be in British Pounds (GBP).
- A max budget of £300k may be requested.
- PPIE members involved in ECR projects should be offered payment for their contributions and these costs accounted in the budget plan. Please consult the two links below for support information on how to cost public involvement activities:
  - Guidance on payment for public partners – UKRI
  - Payment guidance for researchers and professionals | NIHR
- Projects involving matched-funding, or an industrial partner, are encouraged.
- For applications submitted under the MRC Industry Collaboration Framework, the following criteria will be assessed:
  - The collaboration is appropriate for the delivery of the research objectives and is a good use of public funding

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o	The collaboration will be managed effectively throughout the project
o	The contributions from the company partner have been costed appropriately

Subaward information and Next steps:

After the Leadership team decides which project to award, this decision will be communicated to MRC/UKRI and the successful candidates.

The Coordinating team, in collaboration with the University of Edinburgh Research office, will update the MHP Subaward template with the relevant information about the project and forward it to the different institutions and research leads leading the project. The project is expected to start within 6 months of decision being made and within 1 month of the subaward being signed.

Upon becoming part of the MHP, awardees are expected to comply with the MHP values and Data Sharing policy. All research data generated by the Project must be deposited on DATAMIND's Trusted Research Environment.

Awardees are also expected to comply with the Terms and Conditions of the MHP Subaward letter.

Project teams are expected to comply with the relevant MRC policies and guidance. Although ethical approvals do not need to be in place at the time of the application, successful applicants should not start their research before the necessary ethical approvals are in place.

For applications submitted under the MRC Industry Collaboration Framework, successful applicants will also need to submit a copy of the signed collaboration agreement to the MHP Coordinating Team and the MRC, within three months of the issue of the award letter and before the project begins.

Failure to provide the information requested for industry or company partners under ICF could result in the application being rejected. The applicant is recommended to discuss the goals and conditions of any collaboration with an industry or company with the technology transfer or contracts office before applying. A copy of the collaboration agreement must be signed by all partners, before an ICF award starts.

Funds must be spent as detailed on the application. The MHP Coordinating team will be in regular contact with awardees throughout their project to collect and discuss progress updates.

Awardees are expected to submit brief written project updates twice a year to the MHP Coordinating Centre and Leadership Team focussed on both research outputs and operational aspects of their project such as timelines and budget spent. Awardees will also submit to the MHP Coordinating Centre a final report on the conduct and outcome of the project within one month of the end of the project.

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