UKRI Mental Health Platform
ECR Fellowships Review Process and Scoring Criteria

Applicants must submit the completed application form and appendices by the 30th April (first round) or 28th September (second round), to be considered for the review process.

The review and interview process will take less than 6 months, including interviews with selected candidates and the time taken to make a final decision.

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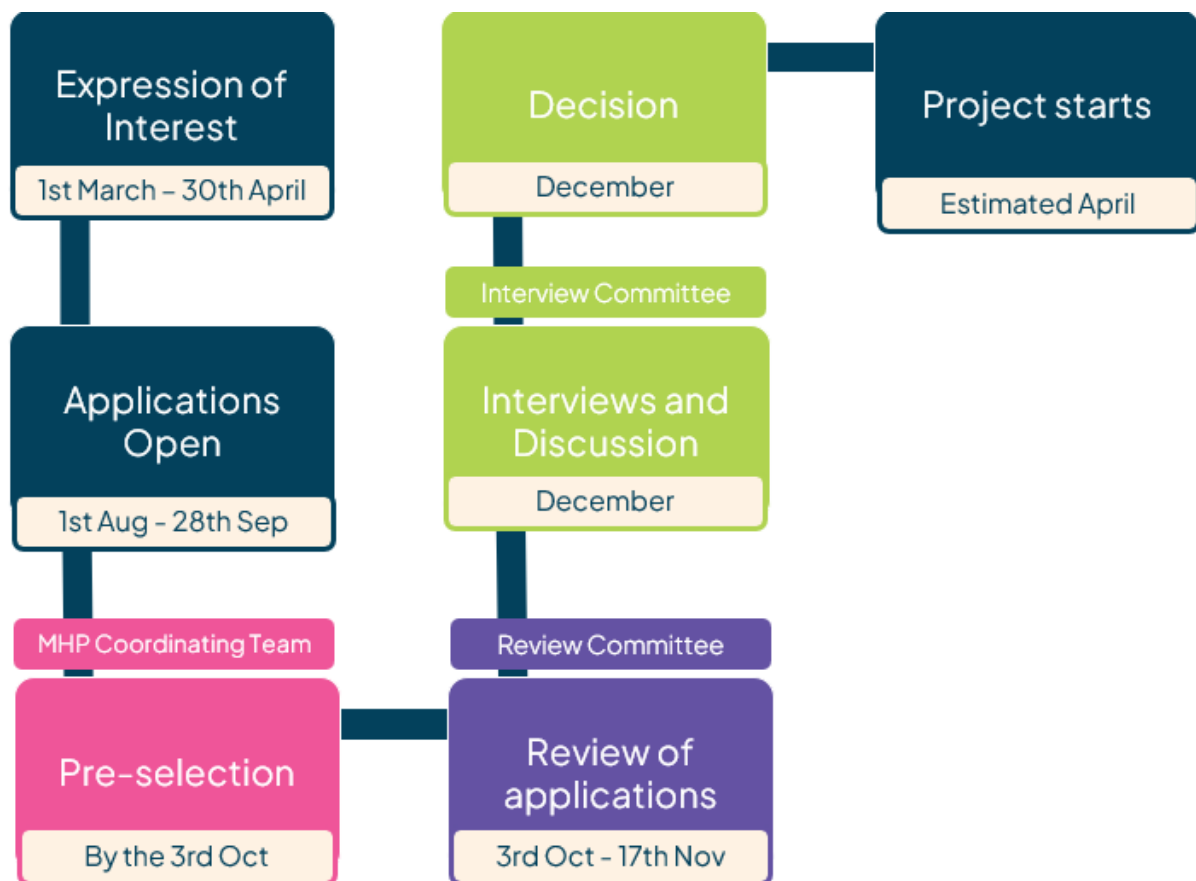

Figure 1. MHP ECR Fellowships process.

1.   Pre-selection process

Applications are screened for eligibility and completeness by the MHP Coordinating Centre team. Pre-selection decisions will be sent to unsuccessful applicants.

It's the applicant responsibility to:

- Ensure they have applied to the correct funding opportunity and that they fulfil the scheme's eligibility criteria.
- Ensure they have previously submitted a successful Expression of Interest before the call started – see ECR Expression of Interest page.
- Submit the application with all documents (named according to the guidance provided in the application form and on the ECR Fellowships webpage) and before the deadline date and time described on the ECR Fellowships webpage. This will allow the MHP Coordinating Team to complete the necessary pre-selection checks and submit the application for review by the ECR Review Committee.

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

- Confirm that all documents are named according to the guidance provided in the application form and on the ECR Fellowships webpage.
- 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 in Part III of the Application form (found on the ECR Fellowships webpage) have been submitted and match the pre-defined acceptance criteria (i.e. number and format of pages and font size).

	Eligibility criteria
Pre-selection stage	- Applicant submitted a successful Expression of Interest prior to their application - Application form was completed and the applicant provided consent to process their data - All documents are named according to the guidance provided in the application form. Submitted as one pdf file - All documents are readable and have no technical problems. The applicant identified their host institution, from the list of accepted host institutions, and provided the letter of support. Please see Additional Information on the ECR Fellowships webpage. - Applicant has committed to joining at least two MHP Hubs - Applicant have committed the majority of their time to deliver the project (> 50%)

	• Proposal must be between 1-3 years. Applicants proposed start and end date is within the expected timeline for the round applied and the project length does not exceed Dec 2028 • Budget proposed a maximum of £300k cost to funder (80%FEC) • The applicant holds a PhD or equivalent but has not yet transitioned to independence and is currently employed on a non-permanent contract • Successful applicants must be based at the same institution as their lead supervisor when the begin their fellowship and this institution • Applicants have identified co-supervisors from each Hub involved in the project. If an applicant's proposed lead supervisor is not a member of one of the Hubs (principal investigator, co-investigator or employed staff), the proposed supervisor must also become an associate member of the Mental Health Platform before an application is submitted (https://www.mentalhealthplatform.ac.uk/associate-membership) . • Letters of support from collaborators must include a statement that they have read and agreed to the MHP Privacy Policy and their data use.

2. Review and Interview process

Once pre-selected, applications undergo a first round of review by independent peer reviewers and then shortlisted by the ECR Review Committee. Based on peer review and the comments of Review Committee members, a list of ranked applications will be prepared, and a list of candidates will be shortlisted for interview. Shortlisted applications will be later interviewed using videoconferencing software (Teams) by the Interview Committee.

Short-listed applicants will be asked to present a 10-minute summary of their proposal, including why they are the right person for the project proposed, and the strengths of their local institution and environment.

2.1 ECR Review and Interview Committees

The MHP ECR Review and Interview Committees are responsible for reviewing and selecting the best research projects for the MHP ECR programme, and to uphold a robust, transparent and fair review process. The Review and Interview Committees are composed of members of the MHP Leadership team, Hub researchers and PPIE

members. Additional independent members will be sought from academia and industry as required, and where the expertise and/or capacity is not available within the MHP investigators. At least two scientific members of the ECR Review and Interview Committees will be selected from outside of the MHP members and host institutions, as independent scientific members. The Committees members have significant experience and expertise in their field of work.

Two members of the ECR Review Committee will be assigned as designated committee members (DCM), to act as lead reviewers for each application. The first lead will present a quick summary of the application and share key insights from the peer review phase. The second lead will provide additional information as needed. Two PPIE reviewers will provide their insights, following the same process (PPIE reviewer 1 and 2).

UKRI representative(s) will join the Review and Interview Committee meetings as observers.

The ECR Interview Committee will be recruited by the MHP Coordinating Team once all applications have been received. The names of the Interview Committee will be disclosed to applicants at the same time as they are notified of shortlisting. Two new DCMs will be selected to lead the interview questions. Applicants should not enter in contact with members of the Interview Committee. Any queries about the reviewing or interview process should be address to the coordinating centre.

Applicants are expected to submit their presentations the day before the interview. The presentation will be about their proposal, suitability, and institutional strengths. The presentation will be 10 minutes followed by a 15-minute discussion.

The Interview Committee is expected to review the shortlisted applications and prepare interview questions based on the application and the interview criteria. Further questions related to the interview may be asked during the meeting. Interview Committee members are expected to draw evidence from the application forms, peer reviews and Review Committee feedback and the interview when making final assessments.

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.

2.2   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 ECR Review and Interview Committees, the MHP Coordinating Team will exclude those with:

- Direct involvement in the proposed project, such as acting as a co-supervisor, named collaborator, or co-applicant.
- A close professional relationship with the main applicant, including being a current or recent collaborator, supervisor, mentor, or co-investigator on other projects.
- Employment at either the applicant's current institution or the proposed host institution.
- Any personal or financial interest in the outcome of the application.

Hub leads or researchers who are representing the Hubs involved in the project and are part of the Review and Interview Committee will not review or score the applications.

PPIE reviewers may participate in reviewing applications only if they are not directly involved in the project. For example, they may be members of the same Hub but must not be employed by the same host or current institution as the candidate.

The MHP Coordinating Team will follow the MHP Declaration of Interest process when selecting the Review Committee. 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.

If a member of the Committee is approached by the applicant for advice, they will need to report this to the Committee. Applicants should not enter in contact with members of their Review Committee after being informed of their assigned reviewers.

2.3   Scoring system for ECR fellowships:

Peer reviewers and members of the MHP ECR Review Committee will evaluate each proposal using the Review assessment criteria and the scoring system outlined below. Applicants with the highest scores amongst the ECR Review Committee members will be shortlisted to participate in an interview. All applicants will receive written feedback on their application at the end of the triage phase.

f the applicant is resubmitting a proposal from the previous round, they must show substantial changes were made to address any issues raised in the feedback received by reviewers.

Peer reviewers and the ECR Review Committee will evaluate applications based on the following four key criteria:

1. Research Excellence: Quality of the proposed research plan and its potential impact on mental health research and people living with SMI.
2. Project fit and feasibility: Alignment with the programme criteria, with adequate and well-justified timelines, budgets and resources.

3. Applicant's track record: Applicant's skills and expertise in alignment with interdisciplinary cross-hub requirements
4. PPIE and Diversity: Evidence of well-structured and inclusive patient and public involvement, engagement or co-production plans, and commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion in the research design and its implementation.

Each criterion will be scored using a 5 point-scale, where 5 represents the highest score and 1 the lowest. Applications can score up to 20 points in total.

Application requirement	Eligibility criteria
1. Research Excellence (Score 1 to 5): Quality of the proposed research plan and its potential impact on mental health research and people living with SMI	
Cover letter, Summary and Research plan	• The research plan must be innovative and interdisciplinary, and within the MHP remit. • Applicants must demonstrate a strong commitment to collaborative work within the MHP • ECRs are expected to act as key bridges between the Hubs and/or external partners, such as industry, social or healthcare providers. • Applicants must provide a detailed description of objectives and work packages supported by a strong scientific rationale (e.g. literature or data) and a robust methodology, including appropriate statistical power and how they will acquire and manage data. Please see Additional Information on the ECR Fellowships webpage. • Applications involving social and biological research Hubs are also encouraged to apply
Project impact	• The applicant must demonstrate the value of their research study to people with SMI, outlining measurable outcomes that will contribute to scientific research, health and social care • The applicant must articulate how their research advances the mental health research landscape by addressing knowledge gaps and contributing to improved diagnostics, early interventions, prevention, or new treatments for people with SMI. • Although applicants can propose 1-year fellowships, priority will be given to ECR applications with 2–3 year durations in the 2025 round, as these are more likely to deliver impactful results within the MHP timeline (up to March 2029)

2. Project fit and feasibility (Score 1 to 5): Alignment with the programme criteria, with adequate and well-justified timelines, budgets and resources	
Research plan	- The Research plan must connect at least two of the MHP Hubs and be delivered in 1-3 years. - The plan must outline achievable objectives and be feasible within the proposed timeline and resources. Potential risks to delivery should be identified and how they will be managed. - The candidate research is expected to leverage the data already generated by the Hubs - Applicants must be based at the same institution as their lead supervisor and this institution must be associated with the MHP. If the fellow's lead supervisor is not a member of one of the Hubs involved in their proposal, their lead supervisor must become an associate member of the MHP. - Their research proposal must demonstrate a full alignment with the Hubs objectives and that they can implement clear communication between all parties involved. Applicants must include plans to communicate and share research outputs with other MHP researchers, adhering to the [MHP Data Sharing Policy](). The applicant clearly identified, evaluated and addressed the relevant ethical considerations. - If the application includes collaborators, their role in the project should be clear, relevant and beneficial to the project. 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 - The collaboration will be managed effectively throughout the project - The contributions from the company partner have been costed appropriately If the applicant is resubmitting a proposal from the previous round, they must show substantial changes were made to address any issues raised in the feedback received by reviewers
Budget plan	- Budget plan must be submitted with well-justified costs and deliver good value for money - Costs must be in British Pounds (GBP). - A max cost to funder of £300k may be requested.

	- Funding will be awarded at 80% FEC, cost to funder. The ECR host institution is responsible for undertaking the 20% FEC shortfall. Budget plans must include a breakdown of 80%/20% FEC costs
	- Eligible costs include the costs of the research, training and travel expenses, PPIE expenses, the salary of the main applicant, conference attendance, indirect costs and estates costs.
	- Staff time must be adequately allocated to deliver the project, and when salaries are requested, it must be within reason considering researchers experience, expertise and role. Applicant have committed the majority of their time to deliver the project (> 50%).
	- Projects involving matched-funding, or an industrial partner, are encouraged.
	- 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](#)

3. Applicant's track record (Score 1 to 5): Applicant's skills and expertise in alignment with interdisciplinary cross-hub requirements	
Cover letter, Applicant information	- Applicants mus have a PhD or equivalent but not yet have made the transition to independence and must not hold a permanent contract at a host institution associated with the MHP. Applicants should follow published [UKRI guidance](#) on what skills and experience are needed to win support. Applicants should not have held a previous independent fellowship lasting more than 3 years Applicants must have delivered previous research projects, demonstrated impactful outputs (e.g., publications, conference presentations), and shown potential for leading independent research in the future. - Applicants must possess the necessary skills, expertise, and access to appropriate resources or facilities to deliver the proposed research plan. - Applicants may be clinical or non-clinical Early Career Researchers or ECRs with lived experience in SMI. Applications from clinical researchers, and with Industry partners are encouraged.

	- Current members of funded MHP Hubs (e.g. Co-Is or employed staff) may apply, though applications from outside the initial investments and institutions are encouraged to broaden involvement. - Part-time and remote working arrangements may be considered if consistent with the host institution's policies.
Personal Development plan	- The applicant must submit an achievable plan that supports the applicant's career progression, outlining research and training opportunities both within and outside the MHP. - The plan should detail how the applicant will gain specific skills to deliver their work, pursue new opportunities, and develop their career (e.g. short-term secondments, participating in the mentorship programme and collaborative projects with MHP members, Industry, or external partners). - Applicants should demonstrate clear evidence of career progression beyond their doctoral or prior research work. - ECR candidates intending to remain at the same institution are encouraged to articulate how they will establish intellectual independence—this may include identifying a supervisor different from their PhD or most recent advisor. Reviewers will also look for efforts to broaden professional networks, including the identification of new mentors and collaborators beyond the applicant's existing affiliations.
4. PPIE and Diversity (Score 1 to 5): Evidence of well-structured and inclusive patient and public involvement, engagement or co-production plans and commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion in the research design and its implementation	

Diversity statement	- 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:
	   o Embedding diversity in research design – MRC – UKRI
	   o UKRI Guidance for equality, diversity and inclusion
	   o NIHR Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Toolkit

Patient and Public Involvement and engagement plan	• The applicant must demonstrate they understand the value of PPIE in research and include an appropriate and proportionate PPIE plan for their application
	• 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
	• Early involvement of the PPIE members in the project design is encouraged but is not compulsory. If applicants involved PWLE during the study design, they should describe that involvement and how they will be involved in the future, if the proposal is accepted
	• Applicants should describe how PWLE will be involved at each stage of the project, specifying their roles and contributions. Applicants must describe how they will create equitable partnerships, ensuring fair support, recognition, and timely feedback for all involved.
	
	For further guidance, please consult:
	    o Guidance for applicants on working with people and communities
		NIHR
		    o 10 for 10: Public involvement in mental health research
			The McPin Foundation
			    o NIHR Guidance on co-producing a research project
			    o Embedding lived experience in mental health research
				Funding Guidance	Wellcome

Shortlisted ECR candidates will prepare a 10-min presentation on their project proposal, suitability, and institutional strengths. The presentation will then be followed by a 15 min discussion. ECR Interview Committee members will evaluate interviews for the MHP ECR Fellowships the following three criteria:

1. Candidate (25%):
    a. Strong academic track record demonstrating their ability to successfully deliver the proposed research and impactful outputs until date. Applicants have potential to become an independent researcher in the field.
    b. Clear and effective communication skills during the presentation and interview. Interdisciplinary collaboration experience

       c. Career aspirations align with this opportunity, showing potential to develop into or continue as a research leader in the field of Mental Health.

       d. Applicants must show progression beyond previous research and a clear path toward independence, including working with new mentors or collaborators where needed.

2. Research Environment and Support (25%):

       a. High- quality research environment and appropriate support at the host institution or via the Hubs connected to successfully deliver the project.

       b. Well-defined collaboration plans and alignment with Hubs involved. All Hub involvement must be clearly justified.

3. Quality of Research (50%):

       a. Research Importance: The project is likely to generate new insights that significantly advance the field of SMI research.

       b. Impact: The research has the potential to make a meaningful contribution to mental health research and improve outcomes for people with SMI.

       c. Feasibility & Design: The research plan is well-structured and realistic in achieving its objectives within the proposed timeline.

       d. Innovation: The project introduces new ideas, methods, technologies, or novel combinations of existing approaches.

3.   Post-award information:

The outcome of ECR Fellowship applications will be shared with applicants no later than six months after the submission date.

If your application is successful, you will receive a unique link to upload your personal details, the budget plan and a copy of your application to the UKRI Funding Service. Please note that the UKRI Privacy Notice will apply.

Successful applicants will be invited to be part of the MHP and are expected to follow the MHP values and Data Sharing Policy. The standard UKRI Terms and Conditions of Research Council fEC Grants and MRC's Additional Terms and Conditions will apply to this funding.

ECR Fellows must consult with their institution whether a collaboration agreement is required for the project. These agreements must not delay the completion of the fellowship, so we strongly advise you start collaboration agreement discussions and drafting promptly.

ECR Fellows 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.

It is expected that fellowships will start within two months of ECR Fellows receiving the award letter, subject to contracts being in place. Projects may not start until the fully executed contract is in place with the host institution and the actual start date must be confirmed to the MHP Coordinating Team. We expect the awardees to work closely with the host institution research office to ensure they can start as soon as possible.

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

Periodic check-in meetings, surveys, reports and focus groups with ECRs, PPIE members, the Hub members and external partners involved in the ECR Fellows work, will be held throughout the programme to monitor progress, gather regular feedback and adjust strategies.

Document last updated 2025-07-17 (v5.0):

Date	Version	Description
2024-01-24	1	New document
2025-01-31	2	The maximum funding of £300,000 is no longer restricted to a three-year duration. However, the funding requested is expected to be less for projects of shorter duration.
2025-02-27	3	Applicants must be based at the same institution as their lead supervisor. If an applicant's proposed supervisor is not a member (principal investigator, co-investigator or employed staff) of one of the Hubs, their lead supervisor must become an associate member of the Mental Health Platform.
2025 03 07	4	Applicants and lead supervisors must be based at one of the participating associated with the Mental Health Platform. Applicants must have discussed their project with the Hub leads PIs involved in their proposed project. The pre-selection eligibility criteria table was also updated with information previously available on the website: The applicant must hold a PhD or equivalent but should not have made the transition to independence. Candidates should not be employed on a permanent contract at a UK Research Institution.
2027 07 17	5	Figure 1 updated. Sections 1 and 2 updated to include Expression of Interest process, updates to pre-selection criteria and additional information on the Interview process. Formatting: Minor layout, font, and link updates throughout.