

## For aspiring clinical academics, Clinical Scholar Bronze Award offers the first step towards a career as a clinical researcher

Presentation Day in June showcases the outstanding quality of research produced during the six-month programme, as this year's cohort goes on to further academic success

Participants in this year's Clinical Scholar Bronze Award showcased their research and celebrated their successes at the programme's Presentation Day and round-off event in June. The event, held at Stamford Court, Leicester, marked the achievements of twelve clinicians who have completed a six-month research project directly related to their clinical practice in fields such as nursing, midwifery, and physiotherapy.

Bronze Award participants received funded time off from work to pursue their research, which covered diverse topics such as fasting while pregnant, recovery from laryngectomy, and the use of limb constraint treatments in physiotherapy. As a result of the skills and experience gained during the Bronze Award, many of the participants successfully applied for funding to complete a Masters and continue their academic activities.

Dr Chetna Modi, Head of Research for Health Education England (HEE) in the East Midlands, said:

*"The really great thing about the Awards is that our success rate has been phenomenal. I'm proud to say that the students have done so well and that many of them go on to apply for the NIHR MRes, with the majority getting onto the programme. The feedback that I'm getting from the NIHR MRes panel is that, straight away, they could tell who's done the Clinical Scholar Bronze Award - because of the maturity, the way they were able to answer questions, and the depth of knowledge they had about research going in."*



*Scholar presenting at Stamford Court in Leicester*



The Clinical Scholar Awards, established by Health Education England in the East Midlands (HEE EM) in 2012, provide funding and mentoring to frontline healthcare professionals who wish to pursue an academic career alongside their clinical practice. As well as benefiting from 48 days paid release from clinical duties, participants also receive structured teaching and one-to-one mentoring to help them gain the research knowledge and skills they need to successfully complete their research project.



*Judging panel scoring the Clinical Scholar's presentations*

The Clinical Scholar Bronze Award sits at the beginning of the Department of Health's Clinical Academic Training (CAT) pathway and acts as a first step for healthcare professionals who may have an interest in research, but lack the skills or experience to pursue research projects on their own. Using structured workshops, the Clinical Scholar Awards provide clinicians with a basic grounding in research methods, while dedicated academic mentors provide one-to-one support and feedback. The next stage of the Award is a Masters in research followed by the Silver Award. The Silver Award is designed to help post-Masters students apply for a PhD.

Asma Rabab, a research midwife who took part in the Bronze Award, said:

*"Taking part in the Bronze Award was really fantastic, especially the fact that whatever I found I was able to apply to my practice straight away. It not only improved my professional life, it improved me personally as well."*

*"Something that really helped me complete my research was the fact that I was able to have two days off a week from work. That made a great difference – I don't know how I could have done it otherwise. What I found the most useful were the action learning sets – at the end of the action learning set I felt really motivated to go and do what I'm supposed to do."*

*"The fact that I've been able to do this on a small scale means that I'm able to take it forward for a Masters in September, and hopefully go on to develop it further and further."*

## About the Clinical Scholar Awards

*“In order to provide the highest quality care for patients today and for the future, the NHS needs to develop a flexible workforce that embraces research and innovation. Although a structured educational pathway into clinical academia exists for doctors, few opportunities to engage in research exist for other clinical professionals.”<sup>1</sup>*

### The Clinical Scholar Bronze and Silver Awards Schemes

The Clinical Scholar Awards exist to provide a gateway into research for clinicians other than doctors and dentists. Established by HEE EM in 2012, the Clinical Scholar Awards help talented healthcare professionals explore a research area directly related to their clinical practice, and take their first steps towards a clinical academic career. The Awards schemes build on the Department of Health’s Clinical Academic Training (CAT) pathway and enhance the clinical scholar’s ability to compete for the next stage of the clinical academic pathway.

The Clinical Scholar Bronze and Silver Awards provide participants with the following benefits:

- 48 days of funded release from their clinical roles
- Support to undertake an original, small-scale research project
- Structured education and training days to improve research skills (provided by the University of Leicester and the University of Lincoln)
- Expert, one-to-one mentoring from academics at the same universities
- The opportunity to network with other clinical scholars

The research experience acquired through the Clinical Scholar Awards gives participants the platform to apply for fully-funded Masters and PhD programmes and continue on the pathway to a clinical academic career.

### Benefits of the Programme

The Clinical Scholar Awards provide benefit on an individual, clinical, and organisational level. Successful scholars gain the skills and confidence necessary to pursue further research and qualifications. Patients benefit from clinical practice that is directly informed by research, delivered by clinicians with the skills and curiosity needed to constantly explore ways to improve patient care. Organisations benefit from the knowledge and perspective that clinical scholars acquire in their research practice.

### This Year’s Cohort

The 2015-16 cohort of the Clinical Scholar Bronze Award comprised 12 clinical scholars from across the East Midlands from disciplines such as nursing, midwifery, and physiotherapy. The quality of work produced was superb, and HEE is delighted to recognise the achievements of the East Midlands Bronze Scholars, and to wish them well as they continue in their clinical academic careers.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://heeminnovation.co.uk/articles/improve-8-developing-clinical-academic-careers-pathway-east-midlands/>





**What the Clinical Scholar Bronze and Silver Awards offer participants:**

<b>Bronze Award</b>	<b>Silver Award</b>
<i>48 days paid release from clinical duties, over a 6 month period</i>	<i>48 days paid release from clinical duties, over a 9 month period</i>
<i>Protected time to carry out a small piece of academic research</i>	<i>Protected time to produce a PhD proposal, including ethics and submission to a funding body</i>
<i>A structured educational programme composed of workshops and action learning sets, covering basic academic and research skills</i>	<i>A bespoke educational programme composed of workshops and action learning sets, tailored to meet the identified training needs of each individual, covering more advanced academic and research skills</i>
<i>Experience producing a 5,000 – 7,000 word dissertation, a 3,000 word reflective piece, and a short presentation on their research topic</i>	<i>Experience producing a literature review and portfolio presentation relating to the PhD proposal</i>



*2015/16 Clinical Bronze Scholar cohort*



## About the Presentation Day

Clinical Scholar Bronze Award Presentation Day, 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2016

On 22<sup>nd</sup> July HEE-EM welcomed the Clinical Scholar Bronze Award participants to the presentation day and wrap-up event at Stamford Court, Leicester. The event served not only to showcase the incredible research projects carried out by the clinical scholars, it also provided a venue for mentors, stakeholders, and former Clinical Scholar participants to share in the experiences of this year's Bronze Award cohort.

Dr Jo Cooper (PhD), Head of Nursing and Midwifery Research and Senior Research Fellow at the University of Nottingham, delivered the keynote address, in which she described how her clinical practice as a nurse inspired her to pursue her own journey into a clinical academic career. Dr Cooper emphasised the importance of curiosity, self-confidence, and resilience for clinicians who wish to pursue research alongside their practice, but also spoke of the great rewards and benefits of evidence-driven healthcare provision.

Dr Cooper asked delegates:

*“What is going to be your driving factor? What is going to keep you on the road if things get tough? I’m sure many of you had ups and downs over the last forty-eight days that you had with us on the Clinical Scholar Award. I don’t know what your driving forces are, but keep them in mind. It’s about balance and it’s about knowing what drives you. Be aware of what your driving force is as you go forward.”*



*Dr Joanne Cooper, Head of Nursing & Midwifery Research and Senior Research Fellow at Nottingham University Hospital Trust delivering the keynote speech*





During the morning session, the Bronze Award participants had the opportunity to present the outcomes of their research in front of delegates and other clinical scholars. According to Dr Chetna Modi, Head of Research for HEE EM, the quality of research this year has been exceptional. “They’ve blown me away, to be honest,” Dr Modi said of the Bronze Award scholars. “They are absolutely amazing.”

Dr Modi added:

*“What’s great about these scholars is that what they research is often something they’re seeing day-to-day. It’s very real, and it’s so patient-centred compared to other types of research. So if you look at areas such as lab-based research, often it’s twenty years before you’ll see that in clinic. And what’s so great about the research our Clinical Scholars are doing is that they actually do the research, and then they’ll implement it within their own areas of practice straight away, and see the impact straight away.*

*“That ‘bench-to-bedside’ process is so quick with them that they’re changing patient care all the time.”*

Following the presentations, certificates of achievement were awarded to all Bronze Award participants, recognising the hard work they have put in over the course of the Awards programme. In addition, two prizes were given for the best presentations on the day: the first, to Jaya Raju for her presentation on her work titled “Is the VISA- A (Sedentary) a more reliable and valid outcome measure than the VISA- A when used in a sedentary population?”, and the second to Lisa Patrick for her work titled “Enhancing daily activities participation for hospitalised people with dementia”.



*Lisa Patrick with Jane Johnson*



*Jaya Raju with Dr Chetna Modi*



During the afternoon, Bronze Award scholars had the opportunity to take part in a series of workshops designed to inspire their next steps towards a clinical academic career. The workshops covered the experiences of PhD students, writing a strong PhD application, and skills needed to write for publication.

Jane Johnson, HEE Executive Lead for Transformation and Innovation, closed the day by congratulating participants on the excellent quality of research on display. Ms Johnson added:

*“You are the people who are going to be the future of the NHS. This is the future going forward – getting academic research into everyone’s responsibilities across all areas of health and social care. It’s so exciting to hear what you’re all involved in, and I’ve been really interested to hear about all of the projects.”*

*“I want to take this opportunity to thank Dr Modi and her team for everything that they’ve done in establishing the programme.”*



*Jane Johnson, HEE EM Executive  
Lead for Transformation and  
Innovation*

The Clinical Scholar Awards are now being provided by Universities in the East Midlands, and as a result this was Dr Modi’s final experience running the programme. In her closing address to delegates, Dr Modi remarked:

*“On a personal level, I’m really sad to see Clinical Scholar go. I will miss working this closely with our students, and I will miss marking all the dissertations and seeing the presentations at the end of the Awards.”*

*“However, what really excites me is who we have now to take over and take Clinical Scholar forward. The Bronze Award will be taken over by the University of Lincoln, and the Silver Award will now be run the University of Nottingham – and we are developing the Gold Award as well at HEE-EM.”*

*“These universities have worked with us on the Clinical Scholar Awards from the outset, and I know that the programme is in safe hands and it’s going to get even better. I’m really confident in the academic ability and the expertise that sits in both of those universities, and I’m so excited to see what their experts can do with the scheme going forward.”*





*Scholar presenting to the audience and panel at Stamford Court*



*Scholars and audience listening to the presentations*





## What the stakeholders say

Dr Kate Radford, Associate Professor in Rehabilitation Research, University of Nottingham:

*“I got involved in running the Clinical Scholar Silver Award because I’d been a mentor for Silver Award scholars in the past, and supervised quite a few clinical academic PhDs before that. I became really interested in the programme when I was mentoring a Silver Award scholar last year, particularly about what was working well and what wasn’t working so well, and perhaps how we could do things differently this time around.*”

***“Listening to some of the Bronze Award scholars’ presentations this morning really brings it home on a clinical level that there’s just so many unanswered questions out there that directly affect patient care. We can’t just ignore it, and yet unless we learn to question what we do and the way that we do it, we’re at risk of not seeing the unmet needs or the problems. There’s a real need to question practice, to use evidence, and to think like a researcher as well as a clinician.”***

Sarah Brand, PhD student and former Bronze Award scholar:

*“For me personally, one of the main benefits of doing the Clinical Scholar scheme was the networking. Because of course as practicing clinicians, we have a lot of networks within the clinical area but not so many within the academic arena. I was able to develop networks within the academic arena, which I hadn’t had the opportunity to do before.*”

*“Another major benefit was the time – the time to really think about a project and to actually have some dedicated time to get started on it. And that might then be something you can take forward in the future.*”

***“For me the Clinical Scholar Award was the first step on a journey, and I wouldn’t be doing a PhD now if I hadn’t done the scheme, I’m sure. That journey would have been much more difficult, and I wouldn’t have been able to put in such a quality application for the things that I’ve applied for if I hadn’t done Clinical Scholar.”***



Amanda King (left) and Sarah Brand (right)



Rebecca Gordon, Bronze Award clinical scholar 2015-16:

*"I've found Clinical Scholar to be really positive. I've really enjoyed the teaching – I think it's been really high quality. **There's the benefits of having peers, as well, and the support that you get from having those people around you. It's the shared experience, a little bit of a rant over coffee, it's always been useful! The support has been brilliant from everybody.***

*"I never thought I would say this but after completing Clinical Scholar I would actually consider a Masters or PhD. I'd never really opened my eyes to it, but that's changed after my experiences here. **I've gained more confidence to come up with a project of my own and have my own ideas, and to try and see that through to a qualification.**"*

Anna White, Bronze Award clinical scholar 2015-16:

*"Clinical Scholar has been brilliant. I absolutely loved it. Really just having that time to do the project – for me that's been the best bit. Having the time out to stop and listen to our patients' experiences and really having the opportunity to do something with that. **It's having that ring-fenced time away from clinical practice. You have all these good intentions when you're working full time clinically, but the time constraints mean you don't follow through on things. This gives you the opportunity to do that.***

*"It's been great meeting other people and to have those group sessions spread out over the whole six months. We saw each other at regular intervals and that meant we kept on building those relationships and structures.*

*"I think the Clinical Scholar Award makes an excellent first step, because even if you're not totally sure if this is where you want to go, it will help you make up your mind. It will give you a taster of it and you can decide whether it's something you love. I think for most people who've completed the Award it's felt like that."*



Asma Rabab presenting her research to the audience





Dr Stephen Timmons, Clinical Scholar mentor, Associate Professor in Healthcare Innovation, University of Nottingham

*“Having worked in healthcare and research for quite a long time, I could see that the clinical academic career route was something that really needed to be developed. I thought that the Clinical Scholar Awards was a great initiative and I wanted to support it as far as I could, which is why I became a mentor.*

*“There are a whole bunch of reasons why Clinical Scholar is so important. **We want a health service that is evidence-based. Without people who can produce and evaluate evidence, that’s going to be hard to achieve.** I think it’s something that professionals increasingly aspire to as a career structure.*

*“At the same time, **I think it’s important for researchers like myself to keep in touch with people who are still doing the real clinical work,** and hear about their lives and the sorts of pressures that they have to face. And equally, the things that are interesting and important to them. Being a mentor has given me a breadth of insight in that regard and the opportunity to work with people I probably wouldn’t have worked with otherwise, so that benefits me as well.”*

Professor Susan Corr, Clinical Scholar mentor, Head of Research and Development at Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust

*“I’m one of many more senior members of the healthcare professions who did not have these kinds of opportunities, and I’m very passionate about helping individuals have that structured support and a career pathway into clinical academic careers.*

*“**As a mentor, it’s an absolute delight to be able to facilitate and support novices in that very beginning phase of their training.** They don’t even know what their potential is; they don’t have the confidence in their skills. It’s an absolute delight to nurture them. It’s lovely to see that confidence and that knowledge growth. I think the scheme is brilliant, and I advocate it everywhere.”*

Dr Christine Jackson, Principal Research Fellow, University of Lincoln

*“One of the great things about the Clinical Scholar Award is that it is allowing staff to remain in clinical practice, but dip their toes into the academic world and be trained up and have improved research skills. **We’re very keen to keep them in clinical practice – it’s about merging the two together.***

*“Conversely, we would also think that academic staff have a better opportunity to go back into clinical practice. **We want to see far more roles develop where the staff have a foot in both camps.** Not an easy career by any means – but we do think in the long run, it’s better career development for professionals and they end up asking better research questions.”*



Dr Ian Mcgonagle, Principal Lecturer, University of Lincoln

*“One of the things I have seen myself – **you see talented people, really good talented people, progressing and achieving.** One of the outputs of course is that people will get PhD scholarships, clinical scholarships – and we’re seeing that. And you just think, maybe they might not have done that; maybe they might not have had that opportunity or been so successful without these kinds of schemes to support them. Scholarships like that are extremely competitive. They’re so difficult to get. So seeing people achieve, and put forward really good PhDs which are about clinical practice and improving clinical practice, that’s really what I personally get out of it.”*

Rachel Bower, Clinical Development Nurse and former Clinical Scholar Award participant:

*“I applied for the Clinical Scholar Award because I’d identified an issue in practice that I wanted to work on, but when you’re very clinically based you just don’t have the time to think about it and investigate it. I also didn’t feel like I had the skills, so the Clinical Scholar scheme was a great opportunity to take that issue forward. **The research questions that come out of clinical practice are things that directly impact on patients because that’s where your questioning comes from. It’s what you see in practice. And any questioning can only benefit patients.**”*

*“The Awards gave me the confidence to do my own research and carry that forward. It gave me the confidence to write for publication, to present at a conference, and then to do a successful application for an NIHR-funded Masters. Without the Awards I don’t think I would have been successful in that process.*

*“Having completed the Clinical Scholar Award, **I have to say that it makes you question a lot more and go looking for the evidence to support the practice you’re giving. It’s also made me support others to do the same.** So now we’ve got a journal club running, we have posters presented at conferences, because we encourage and teach people how to submit their abstracts. We’ve got a much higher profile because of it.”*

Dr Adrian Brooke, Secondary Care Dean and Deputy Postgraduate Dean, HEE-EM

*“I come from a background of spending a long time doing patient-facing clinical work as a jobbing paediatrician, so I’m aware that healthcare is not the preserve of one profession. However, research within healthcare has traditionally been carried out very much by doctors. That’s why I think the Clinical Scholar Award is a really, really welcome development. It reflects the fact that we’re trying to develop a ‘healthcare’ workforce, rather than a ‘medical’ workforce – with other professions as an afterthought.*

*“**I think for any vibrant, high-quality service, you need to not just be doing what’s current best practice but you need to be able to keep analysing what you’re doing all the time. And thinking: ‘how can we do it better?’**”*

*“That kind of academic rigour really helps translate good ideas into improvements in practice, and improvements in quality and safety, and improvements in experience. It may even save money at the same time. There really is no downside. It’s an investment in talent.”*