

Researcher in Residence Opportunity **Evaluating a New Needs-Led Approach for Neurodivergent Children and Young People**

About the Programme

Sirona Care & Health is rolling out a new needs-led model across BNSSG to improve support for neurodivergent children and young people. The model is designed to help identify and respond to individual needs earlier, rather than making access to support dependent on waiting for an autism or ADHD diagnostic assessment. Diagnostic assessments will continue to be available for children and young people who need them.

The new Neurodiversity Support Team (NST) will provide training and support to education settings, including early years, as well as other professionals including (but not limited to) health visitors and mental health practitioners. This will support the use of a Neurodivergent Needs Analysis to identify appropriate adaptations and strategies for children and young people.

The programme presents a timely opportunity to establish a robust evaluation approach before large-scale implementation. Although early work has provided some initial learning, further evidence is needed about implementation, mechanisms of change, longer-term outcomes and the model's potential impact on inequalities. The Researcher in Residence will help establish the methodological foundations required to evaluate the programme over time.

About the Role

The successful applicant will be embedded within Sirona's Neurodiversity Support Team and work alongside clinical, operational and programme leads, as well as partners across health, education, local authorities, social care and parent-carer forums.

This is an opportunity to undertake applied, embedded research within a live health and care transformation programme. The researcher will help Sirona determine how evaluation and high-quality data collection can be integrated alongside service delivery, ensuring that proposed approaches are meaningful, proportionate and feasible for the organisations and communities involved.

Key Activities and Expected Outputs

Working with the NST leadership team and wider BNSSG partners, the Researcher in Residence is expected to contribute to:

- Developing and refining the programme theory and logic model
- Reviewing existing evidence and appraising potentially suitable outcome measures
- Identifying and testing meaningful measures of programme activity and outcomes, including measures that enable monitoring of access, experience and outcomes across different population groups.
- Assessing the feasibility and acceptability of proposed data-collection approaches
- Establishing methodological foundations for ongoing evaluation
- Considering appropriate ways to gather data and feedback from neurodivergent children and young people
- Engaging with schools, families, practitioners and system partners to understand what evaluation activity can reasonably be incorporated into service delivery

- Advising on the use of qualitative and quantitative research methods
- Exploring how data held by different system partners could contribute to evaluation including opportunities to analyse outcomes by deprivation, ethnicity, disability, geography and other relevant protected or inclusion characteristics.
- Supporting the development of an evaluation framework that assesses the programme's impact on health inequalities and outcomes
- Supporting the development of a longer-term clinical-academic partnership.

Depending on the agreed priorities and what can be delivered within the available resource, relevant methods may include evidence review, qualitative interviews and analysis, quantitative analysis of existing data, survey design and analysis, synthesis of evidence from multiple sources, and Patient and Public Involvement and Engagement activities. The work will support evaluation planning, evaluation review and policy development.

Support and Integration

The researcher will work closely with Sirona's NST leadership team, including colleagues with previous experience of evaluating the pilot and supervising related research activity. The successful applicant is also expected to receive support from their academic supervisor or manager within their university.

Resources available to support the placement include:

- Existing pilot data and learning
- Emerging programme data and developing data reports
- Access to Sirona's operational, programme-management and clinical leadership teams
- Opportunities to engage with the programme's evaluation workstream and relevant operational meetings
- Access to stakeholders across health, education, local authorities, social care and parent-carer forums
- Regular meetings with the project lead throughout the placement.

Detailed arrangements—including the final start date, working pattern, meetings, access requirements and reporting expectations—will be agreed with the successful applicant during project set-up. Researchers in Residence are granted an honorary contract with the ICB, with appropriate access subject to the necessary approvals and information-governance requirements.

Funding and Timescale

The placement offers:

- Funding of up to £7,000
- Approximately 20-25 days of researcher time
- An anticipated commitment of 1 or more days per week, subject to agreement with the successful applicant and project team
- A preferred start date of as soon as possible
- An anticipated project duration of approximately 4 months, subject to final agreement and completion of onboarding requirements (e.g. honorary contract, data access and payment arrangements)

Applicants should propose a realistic and achievable programme of work within the available time and budget. The application form asks researchers to explain what could be delivered at the maximum available budget and how the project's scope could be adapted under reduced-funding scenarios.

Who Should Apply?

This opportunity is open to academics based within **Bristol, North Somerset, South Gloucestershire or Gloucestershire**. Priority is given to researchers associated with universities in the G&BNSSG area, reflecting the scheme's aim of strengthening relationships between local universities and health and care services.

The placement may particularly suit researchers with relevant experience or interests in:

- Neurodiversity, autism and ADHD
- Child and young people's health and wellbeing
- Mental health and education
- Health services and applied research
- Programme or service evaluation
- Implementation research
- Health inequalities
- Qualitative, quantitative or mixed-methods research
- Outcome-measure development
- Embedded research and knowledge mobilisation.

Applicants do not necessarily need to cover every area. Proposals should demonstrate how the applicant's skills, experience and approach could contribute to the project's evaluation priorities within the available resource.

What You'll Gain

The placement offers an opportunity to:

- Shape the evaluation approach for an important needs-led service model from an early stage
- Apply research expertise within a real-world health and care setting
- Work across organisational and professional boundaries
- Engage with clinical teams, schools, families, commissioners and wider system partners
- Work with existing pilot data and emerging programme information
- Develop expertise in designing feasible evaluation approaches alongside service delivery
- Build clinical-academic relationships and networks for future collaboration
- Produce work with direct relevance to service evaluation, development and policy.

The placement may also help establish the foundations for a future collaborative NIHR application focused on developing the evidence base around the needs-led model and its longer-term outcomes for neurodivergent children and young people. This is a longer-term ambition rather than a guaranteed outcome of the placement.

How to Apply

Please submit:

- A completed **Researcher in Residence application form**
- A copy of your **research CV**

Applications should be emailed to **bnssg.research@nhs.net** by **October 30**.

If you have questions about the opportunity, eligibility or application process—or would like an informal discussion before applying—please contact the **G&BNSSG ICB Research Team** at **bnssg.research@nhs.net**.