

Job description and person specification

Post:	Academic Lead and Strategic Champion for the HDR UK Black Internship Programme
Location:	Flexible. Primary base could be anywhere in the UK, but must be willing and able to travel to London and elsewhere (mainly UK) in connection with the role
Salary:	This post is offered as an academic secondment
Duration:	Up to 2 days per week for 2 years
Reporting to:	Programme Director for Capacity Building

About Health Data Research UK

Health Data Research UK (HDR UK) is accelerating trustworthy use of health data to enable discoveries that improve people's lives.

We are the national institute for health data science. Our vision is for large-scale data to benefit every interaction with patients, every clinical trial and every biomedical discovery, and to transform public health.

The UK is in a unique position to realise the potential of health data, thanks to the NHS and its cradle-to-grave records for a population of over 65 million people.

Safe and secure use of this data could improve treatments, deliver better health care and save lives. It could help tackle some of the biggest health challenges worldwide, including cancer, diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

However, access to this data for researchers is often a lengthy, fragmented process, meaning the potential for improving healthcare is far from being realised in full.

We work in partnership with the NHS, industry, charities and universities to realise the potential of the UK's health data in life-changing research. Patients and the public are actively involved in shaping HDR UK's work and ensuring it delivers public benefit.

The Institute played a major role in the COVID-19 pandemic, working with the NHS and collaborators internationally to link and coordinate the use of large-scale data. With these resources, scientists and doctors could understand more about this new disease, identify which drugs were effective and provide evidence to allow the NHS and policymakers to respond to the challenge.

Our successes include:

- A Trusted Research Environments (TRE) for England was created early in the pandemic with health data covering >54 million people, thanks to a collaboration between NHS Digital and HDR UK through its British Heart Foundation (BHF) Data Science Centre. TREs are highly secure computing environments that provide remote access to health data.

- During the roll out of the Pfizer-BioNTech and Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccines against Covid-19, it was vital to understand how they performed in the population. A team supported by HDR UK through the BREATHE Health Data Research Hub were able to rapidly show the high protection offered by the vaccines after a single dose, thanks to assembling linked health data for 99% of the Scottish population.
- Nearly half a million people missed out on starting medication to lower their blood pressure during the Covid-19 pandemic, according to research enabled by the BHF Data Science Centre at HDR UK. The research included 1.32 billion records of medications dispensed to 15.8 million people in England, Scotland and Wales between 1 April 2018 and 31 July 2021.
- The Green Algorithms initiative promotes more environmentally sustainable computational science and is run by Loïc Lannelongue and Michael Inouye at HDR UK Cambridge. They have built tools for carbon footprint estimation, raised awareness about the environmental impacts of algorithms and driven change in the computational science community.
- A significant landmark early in 2024 saw the first research study of health records for 67 million people in all four UK nations. It looked at gaps in Covid-19 vaccine coverage and found that between a third and a half of the populations of the four UK nations had not had the recommended number of vaccinations and boosters by summer 2022. The approach could be extended to many other areas of medicine with great potential for new discoveries in the understanding and treatment of disease.

HDR UK is a virtual institute, with staff and partners in all four nations of the UK and an office in central London. We are an independent, registered charity with five years of core funding from nine of the UK's leading medical research funders, including UK Research and Innovation, the Department of Health and Social Care in England and equivalents in Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland, and leading medical research charities.

At Health Data Research UK, we employ talented individuals who bring their own unique skills and experience to support the Institute's vision and benefit the whole team. Our values of transparency, optimism, respect, courage and humility guide how we work together within HDR UK, with our partners and other stakeholders.

HDR UK's strategy

Our five-year objectives are to:

1. Accelerate trustworthy data use by sorting the data

- Make it easier and quicker for researchers to find, access and use high-quality, large-scale data
- Fix the technical challenges needed for swift, safe and secure data use, by assembling innovative infrastructure solutions
- Increase health research efficiency and productivity by accelerating adoption of the FAIR (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable and Reuseable) data principles

2. Improve people's lives by unlocking the power of data

- Deliver cutting-edge research that harnesses large-scale data to change health policy and practice
- Exemplify trustworthy data use to deliver research that was previously impossible
- Test and improve the infrastructure so it serves all researchers

3. Shape the future of health data research

- Connect data, people and organisations to bring about cultural change and realise the UK's potential to be at the forefront of health data innovation
- Develop people and teams with diverse perspectives and skills needed to deliver health data research
- Embed good practice in patient and public engagement and involvement to build confidence in health data research for public benefit by increasing transparency and trustworthiness.

Purpose of the post

Health Data Research UK (HDR UK) is seeking an influential, values-driven academic to serve as senior academic figurehead and strategic champion for its Black Internship Programme (BIP), a national initiative widening participation and creating meaningful career pathways for Black talent in health data research. Working with HDR UK's Talent and Training team, interns, alumni, hosts and partners, the Academic Lead will provide intellectual leadership and external advocacy; influence sector practice; and build the partnerships, funding and progression routes needed to grow the programme's reach, sustainability and impact.

Main responsibilities

A. Strategic leadership, advocacy and thought leadership

- Act as the senior academic figurehead and strategic champion for the Black Internship Programme, strengthening its profile, credibility and influence across the UK health data research and life sciences sectors.
- Articulate a compelling vision for the programme's future, positioning it as a catalyst for systemic change in access to research careers and the development of a more inclusive and representative research workforce.
- Champion the importance of diversity, inclusion and representation in health data research, making the case for why these are essential to research excellence, innovation, public trust and equitable health outcomes.
- Develop and communicate thought leadership on barriers to entry, progression and retention for Black talent in research, and on effective approaches to creating inclusive career pathways.
- Represent HDR UK and the BIP at senior-level meetings, conferences, sector events, university forums and external stakeholder engagements.
- Build relationships with influential academic leaders, funders, policymakers, research organisations and industry partners to strengthen collective action and encourage institutional commitment to change.
- Identify opportunities to influence institutional policies, recruitment practices, research culture and workforce development approaches beyond the programme itself.

B. Growth, funding and financial sustainability

- Lead, alongside HDR UK's Talent and Training leadership, the development and implementation of an ambitious growth and sustainability strategy for the BIP.

- Identify, cultivate and secure new sources of funding, including research and philanthropic grants, charitable funding, corporate sponsorship, industry investment and strategic funding partnerships.
- Develop compelling funding propositions that demonstrate the programme's value, outcomes and potential for national impact.
- Build relationships with prospective funders, sponsors and philanthropic partners, positioning the BIP as an investable, evidence-led programme with a clear social and research impact proposition.
- Work with HDR UK colleagues to identify relevant funding opportunities, shape grant applications and contribute to the development of successful bids.
- Secure and develop anchor partnerships with universities, research institutes, NHS organisations, life sciences companies and other employers willing to make sustained commitments to the programme.
- Champion multi-year funding and partnership models that provide greater financial stability, enable programme expansion and reduce reliance on short-term funding cycles.
- Explore opportunities to extend the programme's reach through complementary initiatives, including alumni development, mentoring, career progression support and new pathways into postgraduate research and employment.

C. Strategic partnerships and sector engagement

- Develop a network of high-value strategic partnerships that can support the programme's growth, influence and long-term sustainability.
- Engage senior leaders across academia, industry, healthcare, government and the third sector to secure commitments to hosting interns, providing mentoring, funding activities and supporting career progression.
- Establish and nurture a core group of anchor partners willing to make multi-year commitments to internships, funding, expertise or other resources.
- Mobilise academic networks and institutional relationships to identify new host organisations, broaden geographical reach and increase opportunities across different areas of health data research.
- Encourage universities and research organisations to embed inclusive talent development within their wider workforce strategies and research cultures.
- Facilitate collaboration between partners to share effective practice, strengthen the intern experience and create clearer routes into research careers.
- Represent the programme in relevant national networks, advisory groups and strategic forums, ensuring its contribution is recognised within wider research workforce and skills agendas.

D. Systemic change and inclusive research careers

- Champion practical approaches to addressing structural barriers that limit access to research opportunities and career progression for Black students and graduates.
- Promote the development of new, accessible and sustainable pathways into health data science, including opportunities spanning academia, the NHS, industry, clinical research and the wider life sciences ecosystem.
- Encourage host organisations to move beyond internship provision alone, developing meaningful progression opportunities, mentoring, professional networks and routes into employment or further study.
- Use evidence, programme evaluation, intern and alumni experiences, and wider research to inform recommendations for improving access, inclusion and retention across the sector.

- Work with HDR UK to communicate the programme's impact and build an evidence base for effective interventions that can be adopted or adapted by other organisations.
- Advocate for a more representative health data research workforce, recognising the importance of diversity in the people who conduct research, the questions they ask and the communities whose health data inform research.
- Support the development of a strong and visible community of Black health data talent, connecting current interns, alumni, mentors, academic leaders and employers.

E. Programme development, impact and external profile

- Work closely with HDR UK's BIP delivery team to ensure strategic ambitions translate into realistic plans, measurable outcomes and sustainable growth.
- Provide strategic advice on programme priorities, future development, partnership opportunities and the evolution of the BIP offer.
- Support the development of an ambitious programme narrative that communicates its achievements, demonstrates its value and makes the case for continued investment.
- Contribute to impact reporting, case studies, publications, presentations and other outputs that demonstrate the programme's contribution to individual careers, organisational practice and wider systemic change.
- Champion the voices and achievements of interns and alumni, ensuring their experiences inform programme development and are represented appropriately in external communications.
- Advise on opportunities to strengthen the programme's governance, advisory arrangements and strategic relationships.
- Support the identification and development of complementary initiatives that increase the programme's impact and help establish a sustainable, connected talent pipeline.

Knowledge/Skills/Experience

Essential criteria

The successful candidate will demonstrate:

- **Academic credibility and strategic influence:** An established academic profile and networks, with the ability to shape a compelling vision, influence senior stakeholders and translate strategy into action.
- **Equity, inclusion and talent development:** A demonstrable commitment to widening participation, addressing structural inequalities and creating meaningful, sustainable career pathways for underrepresented research talent.
- **Advocacy and communication:** Excellent communication, relationship-building and influencing skills, with confidence representing a national programme at senior meetings and public events.
- **Partnerships and funding:** Experience building cross-sector partnerships and contributing to or leading successful bids, grants, sponsorship, philanthropy or other external funding.
- **Collaborative, evidence-led leadership:** Ability to work effectively with diverse partners and use research, evaluation, data and lived experience to guide decisions, demonstrate impact and advocate for change.

Desirable criteria

- Expertise in health data science, biomedical or clinical research, digital health, health informatics, data-intensive research or a related discipline.
- Experience of widening participation, inclusive research culture, equality, diversity and inclusion, or talent development; relevant lived experience is welcomed and valued.
- A strong track record in external funding, corporate or philanthropic partnerships, and cross-institutional or national programme development.
- Experience working across academia, industry, the NHS, government, charities or research funders.
- Experience mentoring or sponsoring early-career researchers and students from underrepresented backgrounds, with knowledge of the UK health data and life sciences workforce landscape.

4. Expected outcomes

The Academic Lead will work with HDR UK to agree a focused set of objectives for the secondment. These are expected to include:

- A stronger national profile: Increased visibility and recognition of the BIP as a leading programme for developing Black talent in health data research.
- A sustainable funding pipeline: A credible pipeline of grant applications, sponsorship opportunities and external funding propositions, with measurable progress towards securing multi-year investment.
- Anchor partnerships: New or strengthened strategic partnerships with organisations willing to make sustained commitments to internships, funding, mentoring and career opportunities.
- Programme growth: A clear and achievable strategy for expanding the number and range of internships, host organisations and career pathways supported by the programme.
- Sector-wide influence: Thought leadership, advocacy and engagement that contribute to changes in institutional practice and wider approaches to inclusive research careers.
- Stronger progression pathways: Increased opportunities for interns and alumni to progress into employment, postgraduate research and other health data-related careers.
- Demonstrable impact: A strengthened evidence base, compelling impact narrative and clear case for continued investment and long-term sustainability.

5. Ways of working

The Academic Lead will work in close partnership with HDR UK's Talent and Training leadership and the BIP delivery team. The role is intended to complement, rather than duplicate, the operational responsibilities of the programme team.

The postholder will focus primarily on strategic leadership, external advocacy, thought leadership, partnership development and funding growth, while the delivery team will continue to manage day-to-day programme operations, intern support, host relationships and implementation.

The role will also engage directly with interns and alumni, ensuring that their perspectives, ambitions and experiences remain central to the programme's development.

The secondment will provide an opportunity for the successful candidate to contribute to a high-profile national initiative, build cross-sector relationships and help shape a more inclusive future for health data research.

6. The opportunity

This is an opportunity for an academic leader to make a distinctive contribution beyond their home institution: helping to shape a national talent pipeline, influence research culture and create opportunities that can change individual careers and the wider research system.

HDR UK is looking for someone who combines academic credibility with entrepreneurial ambition, strategic influence and a deeply held commitment to inclusive research. The ideal candidate will be motivated not simply to champion the programme, but to help it grow, attract sustained investment and become a powerful driver of lasting change.

We particularly welcome interest from academics with health data science expertise, strong external networks and a commitment to improving representation and opportunity across the UK research workforce.

Eligibility

Candidates must:

- hold a substantive academic position at a UK university,
- have a contract of employment at their university that extends up to 2028 or beyond,
- have the written support of their university before applying (an institutional supporting letter will be required for the application)

Dimensions

- This role is a secondment for up to 2 days per week
- Occasional travel may be required for the role as HDR UK activity takes place across the UK

Application Process

How to apply: Unless specified, please apply using our online portal.

Please upload your CV (include your most relevant publications and your most relevant grants, if relevant) and covering letter of no more than 500 words explaining what you can bring to this role these will be anonymised and reviewed by the hiring panel.

Please also include a letter of support from your university with your application.

Please contact recruitment@hdruk.ac.uk in the first instance if you have any queries regarding your application.

Equal Opportunities Policy Statement

Health Data Research UK is an equal opportunities employer, and as such aims to treat all employees, consultants and applicants fairly. It is our policy to provide employment equality to all, irrespective of:

- Marital or civil partnership status
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Sex
- Religion or belief
- Race (including colour, nationality, ethnic or national origins)
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Sexual orientation
- Age

We are opposed to all forms of unlawful and unfair discrimination. All job applicants and employees who work for us will be treated fairly and will not be unfairly discriminated against on any of the above grounds. Decisions about recruitment and selection, promotion, training or any other benefit will be made objectively and without unlawful discrimination.

Safeguarding

HDR UK is committed to robust safeguarding policies; we expect everyone who works with us to share our commitment to safeguarding.