

Giving Hope, Improving Lives.

Funding transformational research to
provide a better future for everyone
affected by mental health problems.

MHRUK Strategic Framework — March 2024



Welcome to Mental Health Research UK

Message from Chair, Professor Sir Mike Owen

Mental health problems have a huge impact on almost everyone. If this situation is to improve, we desperately need better treatments and prevention. These advances cannot be left to chance, but need to come from rigorous research to understand causes and mechanisms, and to develop and test new treatments and preventative approaches. Yet, mental health research remains grossly underfunded compared to research in other health areas. Mental Health Research UK (MHRUK) was established in 2008 as the first UK charity focused specifically on closing this funding gap.

Helping to develop the next generation of mental health researchers, we fund research to prevent, treat and better diagnose mental health problems. We choose projects with the most

potential to make a real difference to people's lives, and our researchers develop cutting-edge expertise so that our investments have a long term mental health impact.

Advances in many areas of mental health science mean that there has never been a better time to invest. We have over 15 years of experience to help leverage these advances in knowledge and understanding, and our vision is to significantly increase the volume of high-quality research and training we can support over the next 5 years.

The diverse research we fund will help so many people. We would love you to join us on this journey to provide better mental health for all.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. Owen', positioned below the text.

OUR MISSION

To fund research that gives hope and improves lives, providing a better future for everyone affected by mental health problems.

OUR FOCUS

To fund talented early-career UK-based mental health research scientists whose work will lead to better prevention, early diagnosis or more effective treatment for mental health problems.

OUR VISION

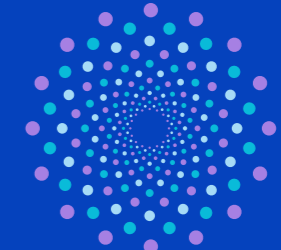
A world where mental health problems are better understood, better prevented, and better treated.



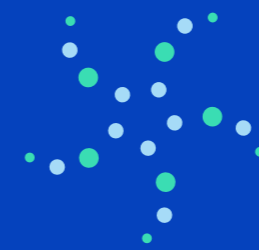
Our values



Innovation



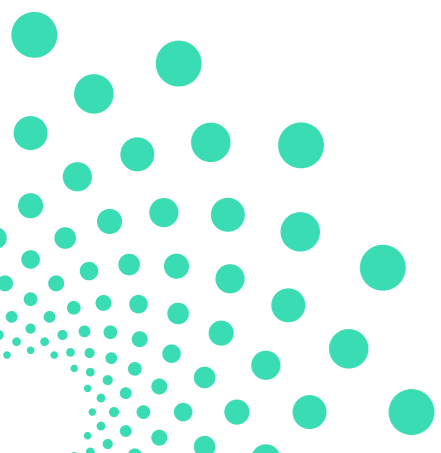
Inclusion



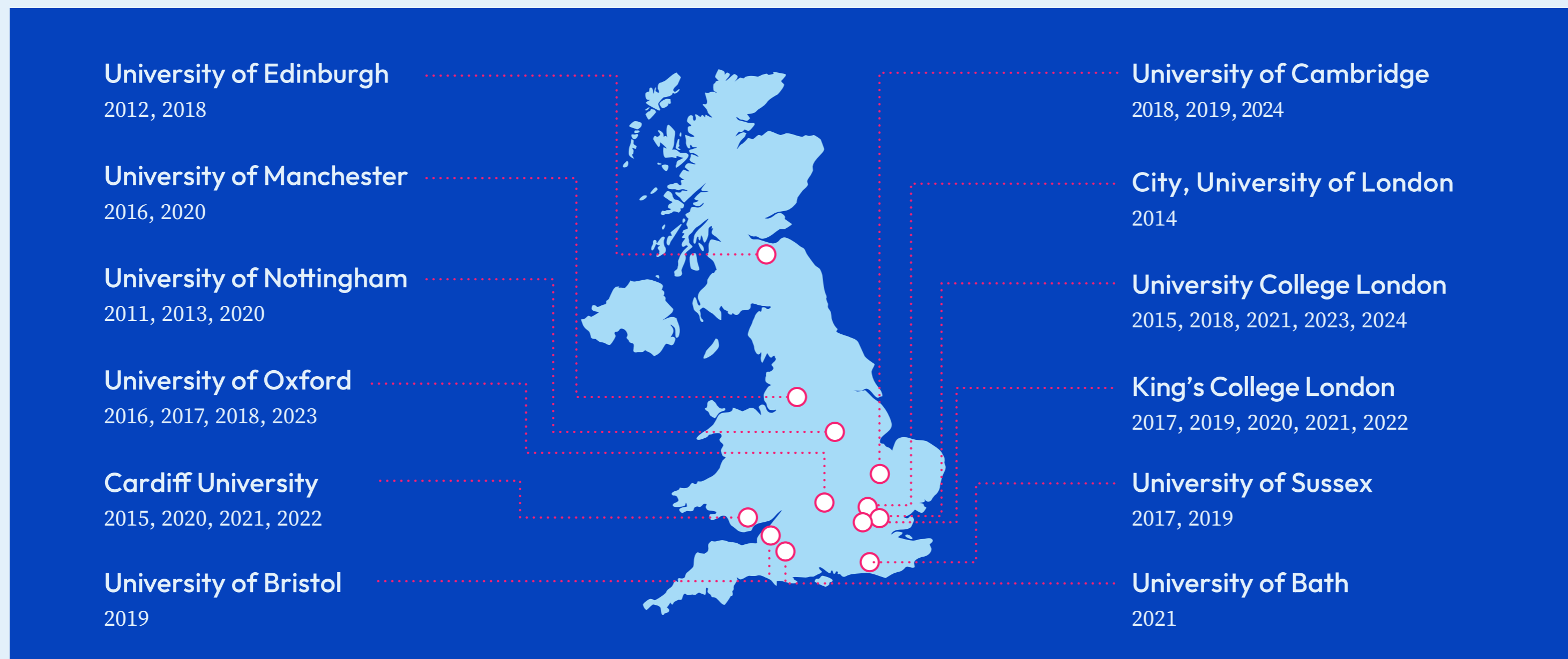
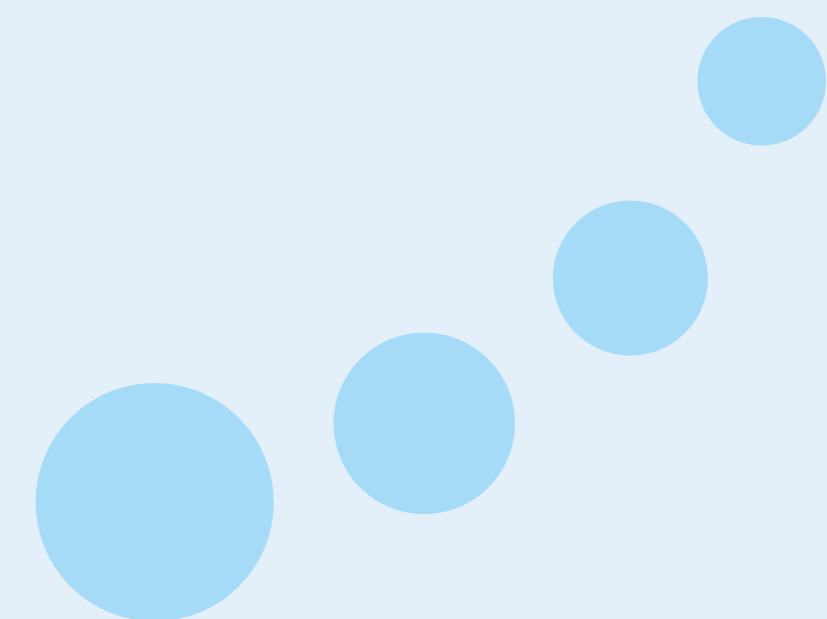
Inspiration



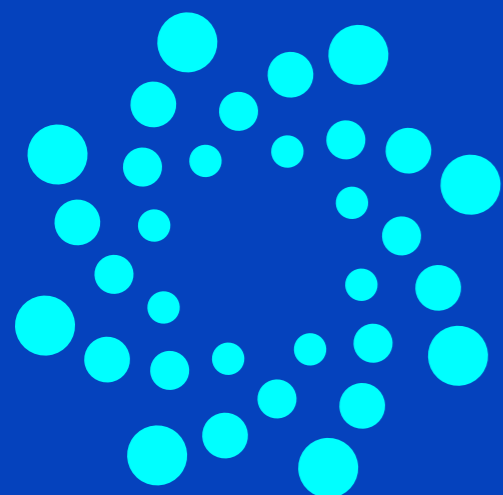
Integrity



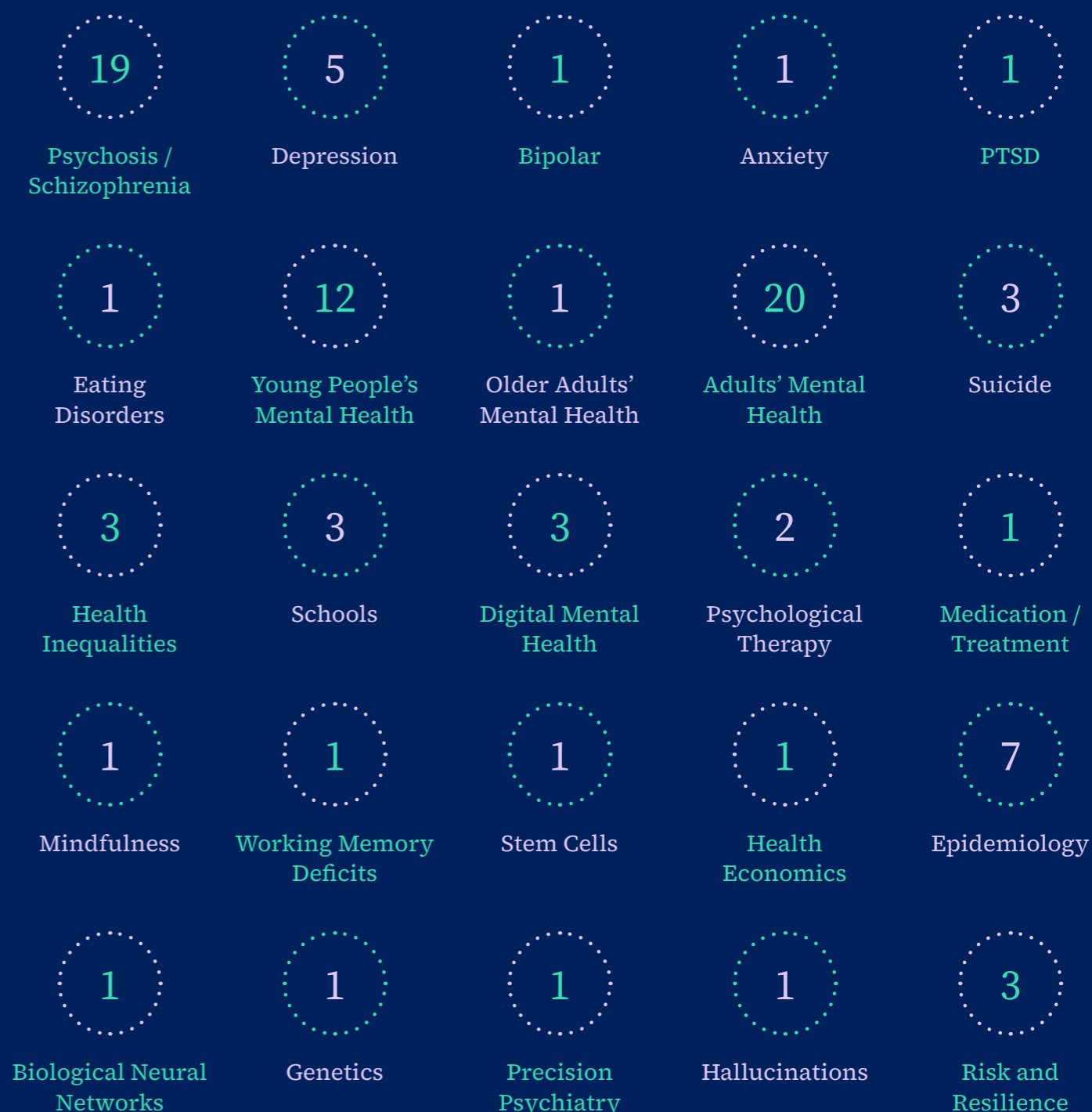
Since 2008, we have invested **£3.3 million in 33 PhD Scholarships** within high-performing research teams at **12 different UK locations.**



We currently fund *2 PhDs annually*. Our vision is be able to fund *5 PhDs every year*. You can help us achieve that goal! We fund a range of topics, but we do have a particular interest in psychosis and schizophrenia because of our **John Grace QC Scholarship** and our associated **Schizophrenia Research Fund**.



Research topics we have funded



Why mental health research matters



One in six adults will experience a mental health problem in any given year¹ and 18% of children aged 7–16 now have a diagnosable mental illness, which is a rise since the pandemic.^{2,3}



Research is essential to improve treatment and prevention. Yet funding — particularly charitable support — for mental health research lags far behind other health areas in the UK. Given the huge burdens that mental health problems impose on individuals, their families and society, this inequity must be rectified. MHRUK was established to fund high-impact, transformational research, and to train our mental health researchers of the future.

CASE STUDY

Psychological Therapy for Paranoia

MHRUK research has helped develop immersive virtual reality (VR) for the treatment of paranoia. This work is already being rolled out in clinical settings and has great future potential. In VR, everyday environments and situations can be simulated, allowing individuals to repeatedly experience the situations that they find difficult. Thus, individuals can learn how to overcome their difficulties using evidence-based psychological treatments within safe spaces. This overcomes the practical challenge of physically getting out into the required real-world scenario during therapy.



“I chose to do research into mental health treatments because it is clearly an area of increasing importance where there is much further work to be done. I wanted to do this more than I wanted to become a clinical psychologist because, while some current treatments are good, it’s exciting to be part of helping to create better ones.”

Dr Poppy Brown
Former MHRUK Scholar



¹ McManus S, Bebbington P, Jenkins R, Brugha T. (eds.) (2016) Mental health and wellbeing in England: Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey 2014. Leeds: NHS Digital: https://files.digital.nhs.uk/pdf/q/3/mental_health_and_wellbeing_in_england_full_report.pdf

² Baker C, Kirk-Wade E. (2023) Mental health statistics: prevalence, services and funding in England. House of Commons Library: Number CBP-06988. <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN06988/SN06988.pdf>

³ Newlove-Delgado T, Marcheselli F, Williams T, Mandalia D, Davis J, McManus S, Savic M, Treloar W, Ford T. (2022) Mental Health of Children and Young People in England. 2022. Leeds: NHS Digital: <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/mental-health-of-children-and-young-people-in-england/2022-follow-up-to-the-2017-survey>

Our strategy is based on 4 key elements:

1 | Investing in future impact



2 | Investing in future talent



3 | Involving those with lived experience



4 | Making your donations count

1/

Investing in future impact

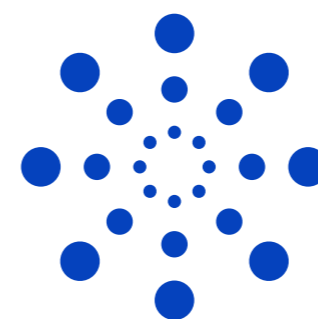
We fund research that offers exceptional prospects to improve lives through prevention, early diagnosis, or better treatment of mental health problems.

Our funding approach allows us to reach across UK academia and focus our awards where they are likely to make the greatest difference. We choose our annual research topics carefully to offer the most exceptional prospects for extending understanding and improving lives. We make our funding decisions with input from people with lived experience and eminent scientists who volunteer on our Scientific Committee or undertake peer review.

In seeking to fund the most impactful research we invest in interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary projects (including biological, psychological

and social disciplines). We also recognise that advances are most likely from highly regarded individual scientists and academic departments delivering excellent science, and in areas where new methods give leverage. Our independence from research institutions assures this.

Many of the projects MHRUK has funded are still in progress, but those completed have already had important impact. See page 15 for Case Studies of MHRUK funded projects having impact.



Our funded scholars have published over 119 peer reviewed papers based on their PhD research.

CASE STUDY

Nurturing resilience in schizophrenia

MHRUK-funded research has identified factors that improve resilience in those with schizophrenia. This work has contributed to the development and refinement of psychological therapies to nurture resilience in this exceptionally vulnerable group of people.

CASE STUDY

Assessing capacity in severe mental health problems

MHRUK research has contributed to the development of a guide that sets out research-based recommendations designed to support greater transparency and accountability in the assessment and recording of capacity in those with severe mental health problems. This provides much-needed guidance in a difficult area where the rights of individuals with mental health problems and the responsibilities of practitioners both need to be considered.

2/

Investing in future talent

We support some of the most promising and talented students in UK training environments of excellence, funding their PhDs as their first step to becoming the leading mental health scientists of the future.



Given the scale and complexity of the challenges posed by mental health problems, we need to attract talented students and train them to become the UK's future mental health scientists. Consequently, MHRUK currently focuses most of its funding on PhD scholarships. Once a project is funded, we work closely with the University to ensure they appoint an excellent candidate with the right academic and personal skills. We monitor progress throughout the scholar's studies and hold an annual Scholars' Day where the students present their work to their peers, trustees, members of the scientific committee and our supporters. This ensures our input and feedback, and creates a cohort of scholars who support and inspire each other. We are the only UK funder with a specific focus on funding PhDs in mental health research.

Scholar (now supervisor) profile: Jen Dykxhoorn

Jen is a psychiatric epidemiologist and public mental health researcher. Her research focuses on exploring the social and environmental determinants of mental health problems in vulnerable and historically marginalised populations.

Her MHRUK-funded PhD identified some of the factors influencing the development of severe mental health problems in migrants. These findings can now be used to target public health interventions aimed at prevention.

MHRUK has now funded Jen to supervise a project using newly developed statistical methods to understand why severe mental health problems such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder and major depressive disorders are more common in some population subgroups (such as urban residents, those who experience poverty, migrants and minority ethnic groups).

The results will be important to plan and target preventative interventions and treatment services. The student's new expertise in novel and advanced statistical methods will also be extremely valuable to a top researcher of the future.



"MHRUK has been a pillar of support throughout my academic career to date. My PhD studentship was supported by the MHRUK John Grace QC scholarship. This allowed me to complete my PhD with world-leading psychiatric epidemiologists at UCL, conducting research on the relationship between social environments and psychotic disorders.

Earlier this year, Prof James Kirkbride and I were awarded the MHRUK Health Inequalities and Mental Illness scholarship to recruit a new PhD student. Working with MHRUK, initially as a PhD student and now as a mentor and supervisor, showcases their dedication to funding imperative mental health research and supporting the careers of early career researchers. I am grateful for their continued support".

Dr Jen Dykxhoorn
Former MHRUK Scholar

3/

Involving those with lived experience

We ensure that our research is relevant to improving the lives of those with mental health problems by involving those with lived experience in deciding what research we fund.

As well as demanding high academic standards, we ensure that the research we fund is relevant to improving the lives of those with lived experience of mental health conditions by involving service users and carers in the review of all funding applications. We also require applicants to involve potential beneficiaries in the design and delivery of their research.

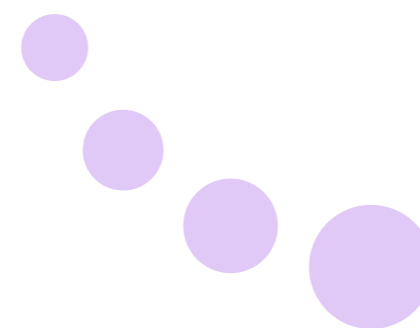
We work closely with the [McPin Foundation](#), whose goal is to transform mental health research by putting the lived experience of people affected by mental health problems at the heart of the research agenda and methods. Its co-founder and research director, Dr Vanessa Pinfold, is a Trustee of MHRUK and Chair of our Awards Committee.



In our latest awards round, we paid four peer reviewers with lived experience from the McPin Foundation to critically assess 12 applications. This vital part of our funding process provides feedback to the academic teams to help them make their work more meaningful. Our lived experience reviewers are also invited to our annual Scholars' Day. We strive constantly to ensure that the important knowledge of mental health service users and carers helps to shape our work.

“I chose to do a PhD in mental health because, when I was 24, I was diagnosed with depression and one year later with bipolar disorder. I therefore have a vested interest in helping to progress understanding.”

Dr Sumit Mistry
Former MHRUK PhD Scholar

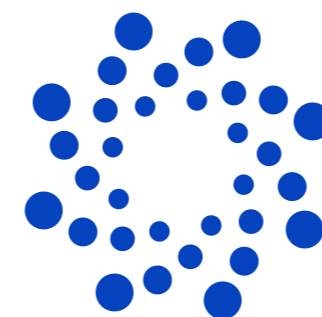


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Making your donations count

As an entirely volunteer-led charity, we have pledged that over 95% of the money we spend goes into funding critical research. We are passionate about making a difference and stewarding our income as effectively and efficiently as possible.

We take pride in being a volunteer-led charity with no paid staff. Our minimal overheads primarily cover UK charity compliance. This means we can ensure donations go directly into research, distinguishing us from other mental health funders and charities.



1,250 hours donated by volunteer administrators and **660 hours** by Trustees each year.

“Having funding from a charity has definitely made a difference to the way I have approached my studies. Knowing that Mental Health Research UK has chosen to invest in this research topic on the basis of a belief that it is a worthwhile project continues to feed into my motivation to produce the best work possible and commit myself even more to the PhD.”

PhD student

“I just wanted to say a big thank you – your support has been instrumental for us to advance innovation and research.”

PhD supervisor

Schizophrenia Research Fund



The Schizophrenia Research Fund (SRF) aims to advance the understanding of all forms of mental ill health, and in particular advance the understanding of schizophrenia and related conditions.

Partnership

In order to benefit from the synergy in our mutual aim to better understand schizophrenia and related conditions, the SRF linked with Mental Health Research UK in April 2014, and now shares our Trustees and administration.

Research

In addition to the John Grace QC Scholarship awarded for research into schizophrenia and related conditions, MHRUK administers donations made to, and grants given by, the SRF in this area of research.

“We know that funding for PhD studentships is available from many different sources, but is still in short supply for mental health research.”

Dr Louise Johns PhD supervisor, University of Oxford

“I felt there was a lot of catching up to do in understanding the biology behind psychiatric disorders. Modern lab-based techniques can now model these illnesses quite well and there’s growing evidence for genetic and environmental associations with psychiatric disorders, derived from large population-based datasets. I felt like it was an exciting time to be part of research in mental health, as these technologies are ramping up the rate of new discoveries in the field.”

Dr Daniel McCartney Former MHRUK PhD Scholar

Help us achieve more

Our research is already having an impact! But you can help us achieve more.

Our ambition is to be able to fund not only our 2 current PhD studentships per year, but 3 additional ones: a total of 5 annually. Together, we can achieve our goals of funding impactful research and helping to build the mental health research workforce of the future.

We have awarded a recent scholarship to Oxford University to identify the optimal way for the NHS to deliver care to those suffering from severe psychiatric disorders — particularly schizophrenia — through 'Big Data'. This will construct an economic model showing the most effective ways to provide NHS services. This project will also train a young researcher in Mental Health Economics; an area where more expertise is badly needed to help make the case for better services in the UK.

Last year we awarded a scholarship to King's College London to explore racial inequalities in mental health help-seeking among young people, particularly those who are Black, using data collected from 12 schools in the REACH cohort study. The researcher will work with young co-researchers to gain important understanding on what is needed for black young people from low-income households to be more able to access support.

Resilience, Ethnicity & AdolesCent Mental Health - King's College London (kcl.ac.uk)
<https://www.kcl.ac.uk/research/reach>



Fund our work

Progress in mental health research is only achievable with the support of dedicated donors who share our vision of a world where mental health problems are better understood, prevented, and treated. We are genuinely grateful for gifts of any size.



Join our scientific community

Our scientific community is vibrant and active. We would love you to join us to share your expertise with like-minded researchers who have a passion for driving cutting-edge research that will lead to the prevention, early diagnosis and treatment of mental health problems. In particular, we are seeking mental health researchers from diverse backgrounds who will help us review applications and potentially join our scientific committee.



Volunteer with us

We are proud that the community of volunteers we have grown over the years is at the heart of our charity. We would welcome additional support to drive our work forward, including for general administration, supporting meetings, liaising with funders, and helping with social media. If you feel you have time and a passion to help us achieve our goals, then we would love to hear from you!





For further information, or to pledge support, please contact us by sending an email to trustees@mhruk.org

Mental Health Research UK is linked with The Schizophrenia Research Fund

Mental Health Research UK is a registered charity in England (no. 1125538)

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