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Acknowledgements and contributions

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Executive Summary

The Allied Health Professions (AHP) Careers Fellowship Scheme (CFS) supported the learning and development of its sixth cohort of Fellows (N=14) between June 2024 and March 2025. The multiprofessional Fellowship is open to members of 14 professions employed across health and social care in Scotland and is accessible to all workforce levels, from support workers to consultants. Fellows are funded for up to two days per week to design and implement a work-based project and enhance their development across the four pillars of practice: Clinical Practice, Facilitating Learning, Leadership, and Evidence, Research and Development/Service Improvement.

Cohort Six was recruited through promotion of three strategic themes agreed by the AHP CFS Advisory Group:

- Preventative and proactive care
- Rehabilitation, reablement and recovery
- Innovations in health and social care

The CFS is one of only two educational supports that receive baseline funding from NHS Education for Scotland (NES) specifically for AHPs.

Method

This report contributes to the ongoing educational governance of the AHP CFS and presents data collected via two online self-report evaluation surveys (Microsoft Forms), completed between February and April 2025. Response rates were 100% from Fellows (N=14) and 68% from line managers and mentors (n=17 of N=25).

Results

Fellows rated the following five outcomes as most achieved:

1. Greater understanding of influence on others and ability to influence peers, close colleagues, and wider partners
2. Stronger practical collaboration with peers and colleagues to enhance services and improve outcomes
3. Active and purposeful building and use of relationships and networks to support AHP practice
4. Development of knowledge, skills, and adaptability to support dissemination of learning or wider implementation of a project
5. Sharing of new practices, evidence, and expertise effectively to facilitate service change and development

Fellows provided examples of how they achieved each outcome. Thematic analysis generated five overarching meta-themes:

1. Establishing Relationships and Collaborating to Achieve Outcomes
2. Enhancing Leadership Capabilities and Influencing Change
3. Sharing Learning and Dissemination to Facilitate Service Improvement
4. Service Improvement and Innovation to Address Local Needs
5. Person-Centred and Inclusive Practice

Leadership Development and Strategic KPIs

Fellows reported increased leadership confidence, rising from an average of 6.0 to 7.7 out of 10. They also reported stronger leadership identity and perceived effectiveness in the workplace (average score: 4.6/5 ± 0.5). Survey responses provided evidence of meeting NES Strategic Key Performance Indicators (SKPIs), including:

- 100% of Fellows and 100% of managers/mentors agreed the CFS improved Fellows' practice (SKPI 11)

- 93% of Fellows rated their overall learning experience as 80% or above (average 9.2/10) (SKPI 12b)
- 100% of Fellows would recommend the Fellowship to colleagues (SKPI 12a/22)

Learning Environment

Ten aspects of the learning environment were evaluated using a five-point Likert scale. Fellows reported very strong agreement that they felt supported by peers (5.0 ± 0.0), NES facilitators provided a safe learning environment (5.0 ± 0.0), and they learned from each other (4.9 ± 0.3). Slightly lower ratings were given to the accessibility and support provided by local NHS Board project mentors (both 4.0 ± 1.1). The most common suggestion for improvement was to include in-person workshops ($n=7$).

Application of Learning and Impact

Both Fellows and managers/mentors reported strong positive impacts on Fellows' practice and team development (average scores ≥ 4.4). Ratings for impact on service provision and service users were slightly lower (≥ 3.6), reflecting the early stage of some projects. Free-text responses highlighted signs of improved service efficiency, potential for broader adoption across Scotland, and anticipated long-term benefits.

Impact of Reduced Funded Time

Due to financial constraints, the Fellowship duration was reduced from 12 to 10 months. This had a moderate negative impact on learning and project delivery. Fellows cited time pressure, reduced opportunities for reflection, and challenges completing project cycles. Despite this, the experience was widely regarded as valuable and transformative.

Responding to the Findings

As part of ongoing quality improvements, the following changes will be made to the CFS to respond to evaluations findings:

1. Improved communication about the scope and expectations of the learning and development programme
2. Publication of a learning programme descriptor for applicants
3. Discontinuation of action learning sets and increased use of small group mentorship sessions focused on professional development
4. Restructuring of the self-directed induction package
5. Strengthened engagement and clearer expectations for project mentors to support the tripartite model

Due to ongoing fiscal constraints, in-person development sessions will not be delivered in 2025–2026 and the development programme will remain fully online.

What did the Fellows say about their Fellowship experience?

'Thank You for a challenging but wonderful experience! I have learnt so many new Leadership skills that I will continue to use within my substantive role and future projects.'
'I have thoroughly enjoyed the career fellowship programme , it has been a huge learning curve for me but it has had a profound effect on my NHS career aspirations. I would encourage any HCSW to step out of your comfort zone you will be surprised what you can bring to the cohort and the learning you will gain !!'
'Thank you for all the support throughout this experience. It has been hard work at times but very rewarding. I have felt supported throughout by everyone involved and I look forwards to hearing about cohort 7.'
'I really appreciated my time as a fellow, it was a very steep learning curve one which I have thoroughly enjoyed, and at times had me pulling my hair out. I would not be as far along in my goals had it not been for this opportunity.'
The project has enabled me to work collaboratively with other professions and teams... we have been able to learn from each other, build our professional resilience and bring a collective voice to drive change.
Service users have a bigger voice in our service... not just the project I was working on during the Fellowship but in the current service redesign we are embarking on.

What did the managers and mentors say about the Fellowship?

I have been impressed by the Fellowship system and the growth in the Fellow. Skill mix is central to the success (or failure) of the NHS and I think this is recognised in the way the Fellowship has been designed and executed.
I think the Fellowship is an amazing opportunity for staff. Not only to self-develop but for their team/service to have protected time for project development which benefits all'.
Provided a broader appreciation of the national picture and the challenges in other AHP teams/ professions. This fellowship has also allowed access to very senior people who have been very interested in the work.
Just seeing the development and progress of the Fellow during their fellowship has been impactful and rewarding.
[Fellows name] project has the potential to make a difference to young people across the country, not just [NHS Board].

Associated links for this report:

[Sway profiling the Fellows and their projects from Cohort Six](#)

[Booklet of Abstracts written by Fellows](#)

[Posters, animations, blogs, Sways and vlogs created by Fellows](#)

[Turas Learn site to find out more about the AHP Careers Fellowship Scheme](#)

[Download and read the full report](#)

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