



RFP N100025-2

Early Career Researcher (ECR) Learning Network – Mental Health



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Wellcome improves health for everyone by funding research, leading policy and advocacy campaigns, and building global partnerships. Collaborative research that involves a diverse range of people from different fields of interest is key to progress in health science – and to achieving our aim of fostering a healthier, happier, world. We're taking on the biggest health challenges facing humanity – climate and health, infectious disease, and mental health – to find urgent solutions and accelerate preventions. Find out more about Wellcome and our work at: wellcome.org.

If you are interested in working with Wellcome on this activity, please review the information below this explains the activity in which Wellcome is seeking proposals for, timetable, what questions Suppliers need to complete and how to engage with us further, to ensure you are successful please read the whole document and answer the questions within the section(s). Responses should be made via the Oracle portal. Responses will not be accepted outside of the system.

All suppliers are required to register on Oracle if they have not already done so. Please allow at least three working days before the final submission date to ensure you complete registration and receive approval in time to meet the deadline.

The first stage is the opportunity for the Supplier to input into RFP and ask any questions you may have on the information provided. Known as the Q&A (Question and Answer).

Once question section is closed Wellcome will upload the Answers to all questions, so you can use this to formulate your answers to the Full proposal response. At this point we will open the next stage for you to be able to submit your proposal. Please note that you will see "Not Applicable" in the evaluation criteria until this final stage is open.

We are aware that one of our links is broken for the sole trader T&Cs. You can access this link [here](#)

Wellcome Contact Details

The single point of contact within this RFP exercise for all communications is as indicated below:

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1 Synopsis

Wellcome seeks a supplier to design, deliver, and manage a global Early Career Researcher (ECR) Learning Network supporting up to 300 PhD students and postdoctoral researchers globally, working on Wellcome-funded mental health (MH) projects across depression, anxiety, and psychosis. The network will initially run for 3 years and will promote cross disciplinary collaboration, meaningfully embed lived experience expertise, and enhance visibility and leadership pathways for emerging MH researchers.

1.1 Background and Objectives

Wellcome is committed to strengthening the mental health research ecosystem, and early career researchers (ECRs) are central to achieving that vision. As research in depression, anxiety and psychosis accelerates, there is a growing opportunity to equip emerging researchers with the skills, networks, and confidence needed to thrive in a rapidly evolving, global field. By supporting ECRs development and collaboration efforts, we can nurture a vibrant and diverse community of future leaders who will shape the direction of mental health science.

Recent evidence underscores the importance of this investment. Recent surveys highlight consistent gaps in mentoring, skills training, and opportunities for ECRs to connect with peers - both within the UK and across low- and middle-income countries. These findings were echoed in a 2026 scoping survey of principal investigators across Wellcome-funded Mental Health, Climate & Health, Discovery Research and DELTAS programmes, which identified similar needs among PhD students and postdoctoral researchers. These gaps hinder the emergence of the next generation of mental health research leaders and may limit progress in addressing complex mental health challenges.

To enhance visibility, build connections, and reinforce a culture of belonging, Wellcome are proposing support for a Learning Network that will help retain talent in mental health research and ensure that the research community continues to grow in diversity, creativity, and impact. It will encourage researchers to explore the full breadth of the mental health discipline and engage confidently with the wider ecosystem - laying the foundations for a global cohort of skilled, collaborative, and influential mental health research leaders.

We now wish to commission an external supplier to develop and manage an **inclusive, and cross-disciplinary Early Career Researcher Learning Network** that enhances research capacity, facilitates collaboration, and supports career development for emerging researchers working globally across Wellcome priority areas in depression, anxiety, and psychosis, with the ability to generate lasting value, learning, and connections beyond the three-year funded period.

Learning Network Objectives:

- Delivery of numerous sessions over a diverse range of priority skills (e.g., grant writing, lived-experience involvement and leadership, measurement approaches, stakeholder engagement, and understanding the translational pipeline including how research informs solutions, policy, and practice, and how to work effectively with delivery, policy, and systems partners)
- Support career development and leadership
- Foster cross-institutional, cross-geography collaboration among network members
- Build a strong, inclusive global MH research community (e.g. structured opportunities for ECRs to shape agendas, contribute to conversations that influence mental health research priorities and solutions.
- Increase visibility and influence of ECRs across the mental health community
- Raise the profile of ECRs as future leaders and the profile of the mental health field (e.g., supporting ECRs to act as visible ambassadors for mental health research through external engagement, thought leadership, and high-quality communication of research and its real-world relevance).
- Strengthen lived experience practice

1.2 Specification

This section sets out the specification of services for this RFP exercise. Suppliers should use this section to fully understand Wellcome's requirements and to inform their response.

All our content should be WCAG 2.2. AA compliant. Any documents being provided to Wellcome must pass accessibility requirements. If you are unable to produce accessible documents, budget must be set aside to employ a suitable agency to do this work. *

Wellcome is seeking a Supplier to deliver and manage a global Early Career Researcher (ECR) Learning Network that strengthens the mental health (MH) research ecosystem by supporting up to 300 PhD students and postdoctoral researchers working on Wellcome funded mental health projects over a three-year period. The Network should provide high quality skills training, foster cross disciplinary collaboration, enhance visibility and leadership opportunities, and build a diverse, inclusive and thriving global community of emerging MH researchers. For the three-year period there is a total of £550,000 (including VAT), which must include all aspects of network design and delivery. We expect suppliers to manage the balance between operational costs and funds allocated directly to supporting network activities.

Geographic focus: While the Learning Network will be global in scope, current award distribution at Wellcome suggests that nearly half of mental health awards are based in the UK, with other significant regions including Africa, North America and Australia. The presence of early career roles will vary across awards, but we expect the network to have a strong UK presence from the outset, with an explicit intention to grow and

strengthen participation in Africa over time as part of our commitment to building global research capacity.

The commissioned work should address the following areas and questions:

1. Network Purpose and Added Value - What impact will an ECR Learning Network have? The Supplier should outline how their proposed model will:

- Advance skills relevant to mental health research (e.g., grant writing, measurement, lived experience involvement and leadership, scientific communication, stakeholder engagement or the use of data science and AI methods).
- Support career development and leadership among ECRs working in depression, anxiety, and psychosis.
- Strengthen peer support, mentoring, and community-building mechanisms.
- Increase cross-geography collaboration and reduce the isolation experienced by many ECRs.
- Improve the visibility and influence of ECR voices within the MH ecosystem.

2. Core Model and Delivery Approach - What should the core Network include?

The Supplier should outline how they will map, prioritise, design and deliver a core programme of activities for ECRs (in collaboration with Wellcome). The supplier is welcomed and encouraged to recommend activities and structure the programme based on ECR needs, supplier expertise and budget constraints.

Example activities include:

- A digital platform or online hub, hosting resources, recordings, methods guides, and community building tools.
- A structured annual skills programme, including thematic workshops and short courses.
- A mentorship programme, including mentor training, matching, and support.
- Peer-learning and collaboration activities, e.g., peer groups, research-in-progress clinics, informal knowledge exchanges.
- Opportunities for interdisciplinary engagement, including lived-experience experts, practitioners, policymakers, and industry.
- Cross-geography and cross-institutional learning opportunities, including regional meetings where feasible.
- Mechanisms to enhance visibility, such as newsletters, blogs, ECR-led sessions, and profiling opportunities.
- Seed funding for collaborative projects.
- Leadership development modules and leadership opportunities within the network as relevant.

- Networking events with industry, policymakers, and international partners.

Suppliers should identify which activities may differ based on geography, disciplinary background, technical infrastructure, time zones, or needs identified via ECR consultation.

3. Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) & Lived Experience

The Supplier must demonstrate how EDI will be embedded throughout design and delivery. Responses should address:

- How programming will meaningfully integrate lived experience (LE) expertise.
- How the Network will ensure equitable access for ECRs across geographies, institutions, disciplines, and personal circumstances.
- How the Supplier will promote inclusive practices in mentoring, facilitation, and community governance.
- How barriers faced by ECRs - particularly those in LMICs - will be understood and mitigated.
- How the Supplier will align with Wellcome's Equity and anti-racism principles.

4. Skills, Training and Professional Development

Suppliers should set out a plan for developing core competencies required for emerging mental health researchers, topics may include:

- Grant writing and funding strategy.
- Communication (scientific, public, and digital communication).
- Collaboration skills and stakeholder engagement.
- Integrating lived experience perspectives into research design and practice.
- Translating evidence into practice and policy, including implementation science approaches, scaling effective interventions, and working with delivery partners to support real-world impact.

Suppliers may propose additional skills modules informed by global/network needs or sector-specific priorities

5. Interdisciplinarity and Cross-Sector Engagement

The Supplier should (as appropriate to their proposed programming) outline how the Network will:

- Foster interdisciplinary collaboration across research domains.

- Create opportunities for ECRs to engage with practitioners, policymakers, clinicians, NGOs, and industry partners.
- Support ECRs to understand the broader mental health ecosystem and navigate cross-sector pathways for research impact.
- Provide structures (e.g., co-facilitated sessions, placements, guest speakers) that support meaningful interdisciplinary and cross-sector dialogue.

6. Participation, Retention and Research Culture

The Supplier should describe how the Network will:

- Promote ECR participation and sustained engagement within the network across the three-year programme.
- Support ECRs' sense of belonging and identity within the mental health research field.
- Encourage transitions into future career opportunities while contributing to retention in MH research.
- Build a positive, inclusive research culture between network members that values collaboration, support, and lived experience integration.

7. Operational Delivery and Global Feasibility

The Supplier should address:

- Their approach to coordinating a global programme across multiple time zones and digital environments.
- Feasibility of running a cohesive global network while supporting local and regional activities.
- How they will ensure accessibility, including WCAG 2.2 AA-compliant materials where appropriate.

Suppliers may propose innovations or hybrid delivery models to maximise reach and sustainability.

8. Alternative Models and Innovation

Suppliers are encouraged to propose creative models, such as:

- Hybrid or modular delivery formats.
- Innovative peer-learning structures.
- New digital engagement tools.
- Approaches to shared leadership with ECRs and lived-experience experts.

These should be grounded in the needs of emerging mental health researchers across both high-income and LMIC contexts.

9. Monitoring, Learning & Evaluation

Suppliers should outline:

- Their plan for monitoring, evaluation, and reporting, including metrics such as participation, satisfaction, collaborations formed, skills gained, and network impacts.

Expertise required

- We are seeking a supplier who can demonstrate: A strong understanding of the mental health research landscape across geographies
- Experience running researcher development or academic training programmes
- Experience working with global research communities including in lower and middle-income contexts
- Experience working with a range of diverse stakeholders including lived experience experts and experts to cover the gaps in your knowledge
- Proven capability in managing complex, multi-component programmes, including coordination across partners, time zones, and delivery formats.

Deliverables

Suppliers should clearly set out how they will meet these deliverables, including any dependencies, risks, and proposed refinements to timelines, which will be agreed with Wellcome at contract inception.

Deliverable	Description	Indicative Timeline	Suggested success Criteria
Framework for ways of working and communication	Establish and agree a framework covering governance, decision-making, reporting, escalation routes, and communication cadence between the Supplier and Wellcome.	By Month 1	Framework agreed and signed off by Wellcome; named leads and meeting schedule in place.
Communications and engagement plan	Develop a communications plan supporting recruitment, onboarding, engagement, and visibility of the Learning Network, aligned with Wellcome requirements.	By Month 2	Plan approved by Wellcome and implemented to support network launch (e.g. recruitment materials live, channels established).
Steering group established	Form and convene a steering group comprising of ECRs, relevant experts and lived-experience (LE) advisors; agree terms of reference and roles.	By Month 3	Board constituted, terms of reference agreed, and first meeting held.
ECR Learning Network launched and operational	Establish and launch a fully operational global ECR Learning Network, including cohort onboarding, governance structures, and engagement mechanisms.	By Month 4	Network operational with an agreed cohort size and composition; at least 50% of planned activities for the initial period planned or underway , as agreed with

			Wellcome.
Annual programme of events	Design and deliver an annual programme of virtual events and workshops aligned to priority skills and learning objectives, agreed annually with Wellcome.	Annually (programme agreed in advance)	Programme agreed with Wellcome and delivered as planned, with high participation and positive participant feedback.
Delivery of Learning Network activities	Deliver learning, networking, collaboration, and leadership activities for the cohort, ensuring accessible, high-quality delivery across geographies.	Ongoing	Consistent engagement and attendance; evidence of skills development, collaboration, and peer exchange.
Monitoring, evaluation, and reporting	Implement an agreed monitoring and evaluation framework and provide regular reporting on progress and outcomes.	Ongoing (with agreed reporting intervals)	Timely reports submitted to Wellcome, including metrics on participation, satisfaction, skills gained, collaborations formed, and emerging network impacts.

1.3 Timetable

#	Activity	Responsibility	Date
1	RFP issue to Suppliers	Wellcome	11-May-2026
2	Submission of Expression of Interest and Supplier Q&A	Supplier	27-May-2026
3	Return of Supplier Q&A to Suppliers	Wellcome	19-Jun-2026
4	Submission of RFP Response	Supplier	21-Jul-2026
5	RFP Evaluation Period	Wellcome	26-Jul-2026 to 06-Aug-2026
6	Supplier Presentations	Supplier	08-Sep-2026 to 10-Sep-2026
7	Notification of Contract Award	Wellcome	25-Sep-2026
8	Contract Negotiation	Wellcome & Supplier	Oct-2026
9	Contract Start Date	Wellcome & Supplier	01-Jan-2027

1.4 Guidance on Submission and Process

Submission:

- Suppliers submitting a full proposal should answer the following questions listed below
- All sections should be completed as fully as possible for Wellcome to review and score your responses once the submission period is closed. Please ensure you attach all information.
- Supplier's responses should be submitted via the Oracle portal. Once you have submitted your response you will be notified that it has been received
- Suppliers are allowed to revise their submitted response until the close date.
- Throughout this process Wellcome will ensure you are notified and contacted when you have been successful and unsuccessful

Supplier Presentations:

- Following a submission of the proposal successful proposals will be invited to an in-person or virtual

meeting the duration will be confirmed. This may comprise of a PowerPoint presentation, demo etc (depending on the activity) followed by question and answers session. We may also require a brief follow-up call after these presentations.

1.5 Contract Terms and Conditions

Wellcome will be looking to put a contract in place using Wellcome's Standard Terms and Conditions. Suppliers submitting proposals should review Wellcome's Standard terms and Conditions [document](#)

Individuals submitting proposals as a sole trader (not registered) should review this [document](#).

2 Responses Required

* Response is required

2.1 Section 1. Full Proposal Submission

*1.

After you have reviewed each of the questions below in Section 2;

- Methodology (1500 words)
- Experience (1500 words),
- Delivery & outputs (1000 words)
- Budget (1 table)
- Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) (500 words)

Please upload a single document detailing your proposed response, ensuring you keep within the word limit as specified for each question.

We have locked down your ability to answer directly in the sections below and you should state Yes and NO when you have added your answers to the full proposal section, for Wellcome to receive a consolidated document

Each question has a weighting to indicate its level of importance. These weightings correspond to the percentages set out in the Evaluation Criteria table.

Attachments are required.

Comments:

2.2 Section 2. Methodology

*1. Detail your methodology for developing and managing this learning network, including:

- The approach and methodology you will use to address the RfP specification inclusive of features of the Learning Network
- Plan for engaging with and encouraging representation of a range of ECRs within the Wellcome global cohort
- Plan for embedding equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) within the network – addressing global participation barriers, accessibility requirements, and equity across geographies
- Plan of how you would work with people with Lived Experience and other stakeholders you deem relevant for this project across various cultural and geographical contexts (e.g. co-design, and remuneration).

We expect the supplier to meaningfully and ethically involve and collaborate with people with lived experience expertise in the design and delivery of the project, as relevant to the deliverables.

We understand lived experience as a unique form of knowledge, insight, and expertise, that comes from having experience of mental health challenges. When we refer to 'people with lived experience' or 'lived experience experts' we are referring to people who identify as having experienced anxiety, depression or psychosis broadly defined, either in the past or currently.

For the purposes of this project, we are open to any methods of collaboration and roles the supplier chooses for lived experience experts to be embedded in this project.

Weight: 10

- ☐ a. YES
- ☐ b. NO

*2.

Coverage: How well are the desired focus areas (as outlined in the specification) covered in the proposed methodology addressed? Quality: Is the proposed methodology aligned with our needs? Utility: Will the proposed methodology deliver the desired, credible, and useful results?

Weight: 10



- ☐ a. YES
- ☐ b. NO

2.3 Section 3. Experience & Lived Experience Involvement

- *1. Using previous case studies or similar, please outline your experience in this area and explain how you meet the expertise requirements set out in the RFP specification, including case studies demonstrating your successful delivery of similar services and examples from your previous work.

We expect the supplier to be inclusive in practice. We also expect the supplier to meaningfully and ethically involve and collaborate with diverse stakeholders in the design and delivery of the project, as relevant to the deliverables.

Please ensure that you state Yes/No to ensure that this questions as been added into your full proposal response in section 2

Weight: 20

- ☐ a. YES
- ☐ b. NO

- *2. Skills and Experience: Does the supplier have the relevant skills, experience, and contextual understanding to deliver this work? Is there a good LE plan for the network (e.g. LE in the leadership of this network, LE training included or features such as LE mentoring)

Weight: 20

- ☐ a. YES
- ☐ b. NO

2.4 Section 4. Delivery and Outputs

*1.

1. Delivery Plan to reflect scale and timescale of the work.

Describe your proposed project plan and timelines with key milestones and deliverables against each of the following:

- Management plan, including the role of team members.
- Project deliverables.
- Plan for engagement with Wellcome during the contract.
- Anticipated risks and challenges, ways to mitigate them, and quality assurance efforts for your work.
- Plan for monitoring equity in engagement, participation and benefit across ECRs from different geographies.

Please ensure you state Yes/No to this question to ensure that this has been added to your full proposal as detailed in section 2

Weight: 10

- ☐ a. YES
- ☐ b. NO

*2. Communication: Is there a good plan for communicating with the Wellcome team?

Delivery plan: Is the proposed delivery plan appropriate and achievable?

Feasibility: How feasible is the delivery plan? Are there significant risks associated with the proposed timelines, and how well are they mitigated?

Weight: 10

- ☐ a. YES
- ☐ b. NO

2.5 Section 5. Budget

*1.

Provide a detailed budget including all costs and expenses, specifying all day rates of individuals involved (if applicable).

- Time contribution and roles of the various team members (if supplier is a team)
- Costs (including a comprehensive breakdown of expenses, including how many FTEs and number of days that will be required)

Budget (1 table)

Provide a detailed budget including all costs and expenses, specifying all day rates of individuals involved, the allocation of days between members of the team and the cost of activities.

All our content should be WCAG 2.2. AA compliant. Any documents being provided to Wellcome must pass accessibility requirements. If you are unable to produce accessible documents, budget must be set aside to employ a suitable agency to do this work.

Please ensure you state Yes/No to this question to ensure that this has been added to your full proposal as detailed in section 2

Weight: 5

- ☐ a. YES
- ☐ b. NO

*2. Value for Money: Is the proposed work good value for money?

Weight: 5

- ☐ a. YES
- ☐ b. NO

2.6 Section 6. Equity Diversity and Inclusion

*1.

Outline your EDI policies and describe how you will ensure that EDI considerations are fully integrated into the management and delivery of the project? (500 words)

Please ensure you state Yes/No to this question to ensure that this has been added to your full proposal as detailed in section 2

Weight: 5

- ☐ a. YES
- ☐ b. NO

*2. Do they have EDI policies and are these being put into practice in the proposal?

Weight: 5

- ☐ a. YES
- ☐ b. NO

3 Evaluation Criteria

During the RFP evaluation period the evaluation panel will independently evaluate your proposal against the criteria outlined below. All scores will be collated, discussed and a decision will be agreed on who progresses to the next stage of the procurement exercise.

Criteria	Details	Weight %
Full Proposal Submission		N/A
Methodology	Coverage: How well are the desired focus areas (as outlined in the specification) covered in the proposed methodology addressed? Quality: Is the proposed methodology aligned with our needs? Utility: Will the proposed methodology deliver the desired, credible, and useful results?	20%
Experience & Lived Experience Involvement	Skills and Experience: Does the supplier have the relevant skills, experience, and contextual understanding to deliver this work?	40%

Delivery and Outputs	Communication: Is there a good plan for communicating with the Wellcome team? Delivery plan: Is the proposed delivery plan appropriate and achievable? Feasibility: How feasible is the delivery plan? Are there significant risks associated with the proposed timelines, and how well are they mitigated?	20%
Budget	<i>Value for Money</i> : Is the proposed work within your budget and good value for money?	10%
Equity Diversity and Inclusion	Do they have EDI policies and are these being put into practice in the proposal?	10%
Accessibility	All our content should be WCAG 2.2. AAA compliant. Any documents being provided to Wellcome must pass accessibility requirements. If you are unable to produce accessible documents, budget must be set aside to employ a suitable agency to do this work.	N/A
Total:		100%

4 General Information

4.1 Data Protection

Wellcome is committed to upholding data protection principles and protecting your information. The [Wellcome privacy statement](#) explains how, and on what legal basis, we collect, store, and use personal information about you. This includes any information you provide in relation to this proposal.

Under UK Data Protection law, Wellcome must keep a record of all personal information it is processing (i.e., collecting, using, and sharing). This record will be made available to the Information Commissioner's Office upon request. This is Wellcome's record of data processing activities which meets UK [GDPR article 30](#) requirements.

Successful Suppliers will be asked to complete a TPRM and TPSRA assessment this is for Wellcome to assess how you handle data.

4.2 Equity Diversity and Inclusion

Embracing [diversity and inclusion](#) is fundamental to delivering our mission to improve health, and we are committed to cultivating a fair and healthy environment for the people who work here and those we work with. We want to cultivate an inclusive and diverse culture, and as we learn more about barriers that disadvantage certain groups from progressing in our workplace, we will remove them.

Wellcome takes diversity and inclusion seriously, and we want to partner with suppliers who share our commitment. We may ask you questions related to D&I as part of our RFP processes.

4.3 Disability Confident

The Wellcome Trust is proud to be a Disability Confident Employer (DC Level 2) and we encourage all our partners and suppliers to do the same. More information about this can be found on the government website [Disability Confident employer scheme and guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#). Disability Confident is creating a movement of change, encouraging employers to think differently about disability and take action to improve how they recruit, retain and develop disabled people.

4.4 Accessibility

Wellcome is committed to ensuring that our RFP exercises are accessible to everyone. If you have a disability or a chronic health condition, we can offer adjustments to the response format e.g., submitting your response in an alternate format. For support during the RFP exercise, contact the Wellcome Contact.

If, within the proposed outputs of this RFP exercise, specific adjustments are required by you or your team which incur additional cost then outline them clearly within your commercial response. Wellcome is committed to evaluating all proposals fairly and will ensure any proposed adjustment costs sit outside the commercial evaluation.

All our content should be WCAG 2.2. AAA compliant. Any documents being provided to Wellcome must pass accessibility requirements. If you are unable to produce accessible documents, budget must be set aside to

employ a suitable agency to do this work.

4.5 Independent Proposal

By submission of a proposal, prospective Suppliers warrant that the prices in the proposal have been arrived at independently, without consultation, communication, agreement or understanding for the purpose of restricting competition, as to any matter relating to such prices, with any other potential supplier or with any competitor.

4.6 Funding

For the avoidance of doubt, the output of this RFP exercise will be funded as a **Contract** and not as a Grant.

4.7 Costs Incurred by Prospective Suppliers

It should be noted that this document relates to a Request for Proposal only and not a firm commitment from Wellcome to enter into a contractual agreement. In addition, Wellcome will not be held responsible for any costs associated with the production of a response to this Request for Proposal

4.8 Environmental Sustainability

Wellcome is playing its part tackling the climate crisis through its mission-driven Climate & Health strategic programme.

In addition, our [Sustainability programme](#) aims to address the environmental impacts and carbon emissions of our activities and operations.

Our suppliers have a key part to play delivering on our sustainability ambitions. We expect all our suppliers to take active steps to:

- Address their environmental impacts, for instance as part of a certified Environmental Management System.
- Reduce the carbon emissions of their products and services, for instance by adopting Science-Based targets and plans to deliver them.
- Embed environmental considerations in the sourcing and delivery of goods and services to Wellcome, across all stages of their life cycle.