

UKCRF NETWORK

Guidance for Line Managers and Staff:

Using continued professional development (CPD) opportunities to develop clinical research teams

Version 1.0 – September 2025



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Using CPD opportunities to develop clinical research teams

Version 1.0 (September 2025)

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Intended audience

This guidance has been designed for the UKCRF Network workforce but is applicable to all clinical research staff.

Disclaimer

This guidance is provided for educational purposes to support clinical research staff and managers in planning their continued professional development. It does not replace individual judgement, local policies, or regulatory requirements. The UKCRF Network accepts no liability for actions taken based on this guidance.

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Document Summary

This guidance has been developed to support both line managers and clinical research staff in making the most of continued professional development (CPD) opportunities. In a rapidly evolving research environment, CPD is essential for maintaining high standards of care, advancing individual careers, and building strong, adaptable teams.

The document outlines the benefits of CPD, the range of available opportunities, and how to ensure fair and meaningful access across diverse roles and backgrounds. It provides practical advice on identifying relevant training, aligning development with service needs, and navigating funding options. Line managers are encouraged to use this as a framework for supporting team growth, while staff are empowered to take an active role in shaping their own learning and career pathways.

This guidance is intended as a living resource, something to refer to regularly during one-to-ones, appraisals, team planning, and funding applications. It also signposts key tools such as the NIHR Learn platform and the UKCRF CPD Directory, helping teams connect with high-quality, accessible learning.

Advantages of CPD for Clinical Research Staff

CPD plays a crucial role in the development of clinical research teams, enhancing skills, knowledge, and professional competence (Broughton and Harris, 2022). The key benefits include:

- Ensuring staff remain up to date with current best practices and regulatory requirements
- Improving research quality, efficiency, and patient outcomes
- Future-proofing teams by equipping them with the skills needed to adapt to evolving clinical research landscapes and emerging technologies
- Enhancing job satisfaction and providing career progression opportunities
- Boosting staff retention and morale through opportunities for professional growth
- Supporting the development of leadership and management skills within the team
- Ensuring contingency by distributing knowledge across the team, so expertise remains available even when staff members leave or transition to new roles.

Types of CPD Opportunities

CPD can take various forms as outlined by the Nursing and Midwifery Council (2021), Academy for Healthcare Science (2024) and General Medical Council (2012). It is important to consider which is the most appropriate learning method depending on the individual and the context:

1. **Work-Based Learning:**

Practical and experiential learning opportunities within the workplace. This can include:

- Mentorship and coaching
- Shadowing experienced staff/other departments
- Case discussions and reflective practice
- Participation in quality improvement projects
- Engagement in activities beyond an individual's current role to support development and provide relevant experience.

2. **Local Training:**

Organised within the organisation or Trust, these sessions are often cost-effective and aligned with local needs. Examples include:

- In-person and online courses delivered within an organisation (including mandatory training, leadership etc)
- Local workshops and seminars
- Staff development days
- Bespoke training sessions for specific clinical research studies.

3. **National Training:**

Offered by professional bodies, regulatory authorities, and external training providers. These can be delivered in-person or online. The NIHR hosts a number of programmes and opportunities which are free to access and provide individuals with a reputable certificate of learning. For example, the [Principal Investigator Pipeline Programme](#) for Research Nurse, Midwives and Allied Health Professionals (see page 11 for more opportunities, including the UKCRF Network CPD Directory).

4. **Academic Qualifications:**

These provide formal academic recognition of expertise and include:

- Postgraduate certificates, diplomas, and master's degrees in clinical research, healthcare leadership, and related fields
- PhD opportunities for those pursuing advanced research careers.

5. Online Learning and Webinars:

Flexible and accessible learning options that allow staff to engage with CPD at their own pace. Resources include:

- [NIHR Learn](#) free online modules
- Webinars from research networks and professional organisations
- Various e-learning platforms (care should be taken to ensure course is offered by a reputable provider and, where relevant, applicable to UK regulations and processes).

The UKCRF Network CPD Directory lists many of these opportunities (see page 11 for more information).

6. Conferences and Networking Events:

Attending conferences and research events such as the [UKCRF Network Annual Conference](#) enables staff to:

- Gain insights into the latest developments in clinical research
- Network with peers and experts in the field
- Bring back and share learning with their local departments
- Contribute posters and oral presentations which gives opportunity to develop additional skills in communication whilst empowering individuals to share and celebrate local practice.

Equity in CPD Opportunities

It is vital to provide all staff with equal and equitable access to appropriate research related CPD opportunities, regardless of background, circumstance, job role or career stage.

Managers should:

- Be familiar and comply with relevant legislation (e.g. [Equality Act, 2010](#)), national and local equality, diversity and inclusion policies and guidance. Please note that legislation and guidance may vary across the devolved nations of the UK and Ireland.
- Regularly review staff development needs and encourage all staff to discuss CPD in one-to-one meetings and appraisals.
- Ensure that staff are given equal opportunity and appropriate support to access learning and development opportunities and, where relevant, funding is allocated fairly avoiding discrimination.

- Encourage flexible learning options and opportunities to accommodate diverse schedules, abilities and responsibilities.
- Promote a culture of learning where all staff feel supported and appreciated in their professional growth.
- Recognise that some individuals may be less forthright with and lack the confidence to make requests for CPD and may require encouragement to ensure they are presented with appropriate opportunities.
- Be explicit in how applications for CPD and funding are assessed and how decisions are made.
- Advocate for a selection process that includes diverse staff representation in decision-making to promote equitable access to funding and CPD opportunities.
- Monitor applications and outcomes of CPD requests, to assess equity of access.
- Encourage team members to suggest new CPD and training opportunities and explore how these might be offered across teams or departments.
- Promote equality across their organisation by actively sharing this guidance and supporting its implementation. If there are any concerns about potential discrimination, this should be escalated in accordance with local policies and procedures.

Staff are encouraged to:

- Reflect on their own learning and development needs and regularly discuss these during one-to-one meetings and appraisals with line managers and education leads, to help identify suitable opportunities in advance.
- Proactively seek out CPD opportunities that support their professional growth and align with their personal and career goals and discuss these with their managers.
- Attend webinars and information sessions related to specific development programmes to better understand the programme content and application processes.
- Carefully consider their experience and the defined eligibility criteria when identifying and applying for development opportunities.
- When written applications are required, seek constructive feedback from mentors, education leads, or line managers prior to submission, to strengthen the quality of the application.
- Be familiar with their organisation's equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) policies and understand how these relate to access and participation in CPD.
- If a development request is not supported, staff should use appraisal or one-to-one discussions as a space for reflection and open dialogue to understand the reasons and explore constructive next steps.

- Escalate concerns if they believe CPD opportunities are not being provided fairly or equitably. Appropriate routes for escalation may include senior managers, HR staff, chaplains, or Freedom to Speak Up Champions.
- Make use of flexible learning options where available, and communicate any individual needs that may impact access to their manager and/or the CPD provider.
- Contribute to a culture of continuous learning by sharing development opportunities with colleagues and encouraging open conversations about learning and professional growth.
- Remain proactive in pursuing development opportunities, and seek support from a mentor, colleague, or line manager if challenges arise.
- Recognise that everyone has the right to fair and inclusive access to development. If you believe you or colleagues are being treated unfairly or facing discrimination, raise your concerns through the appropriate local procedures.

Figure 1: **Equity in CPD: Manager's Responsibilities**

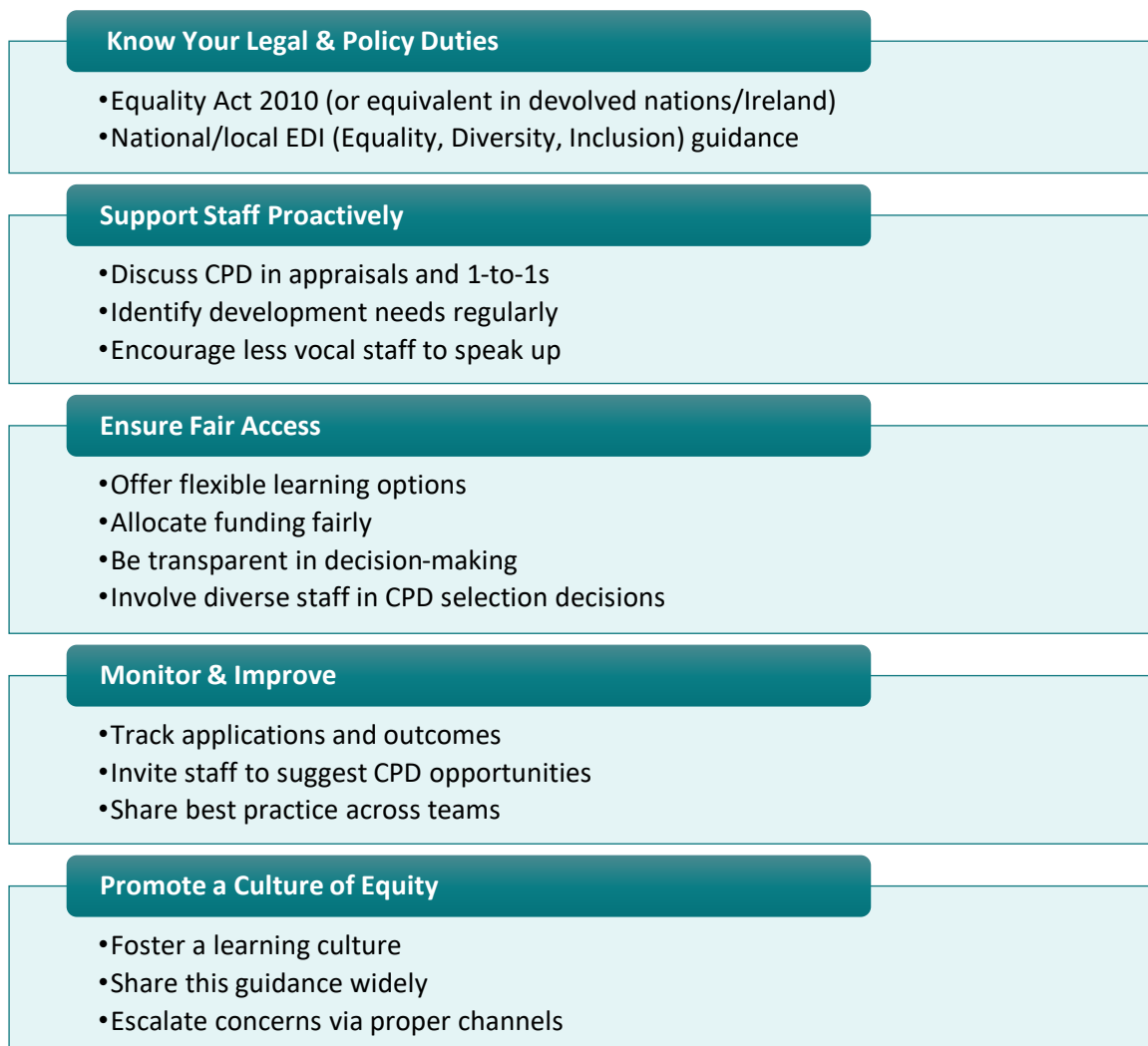
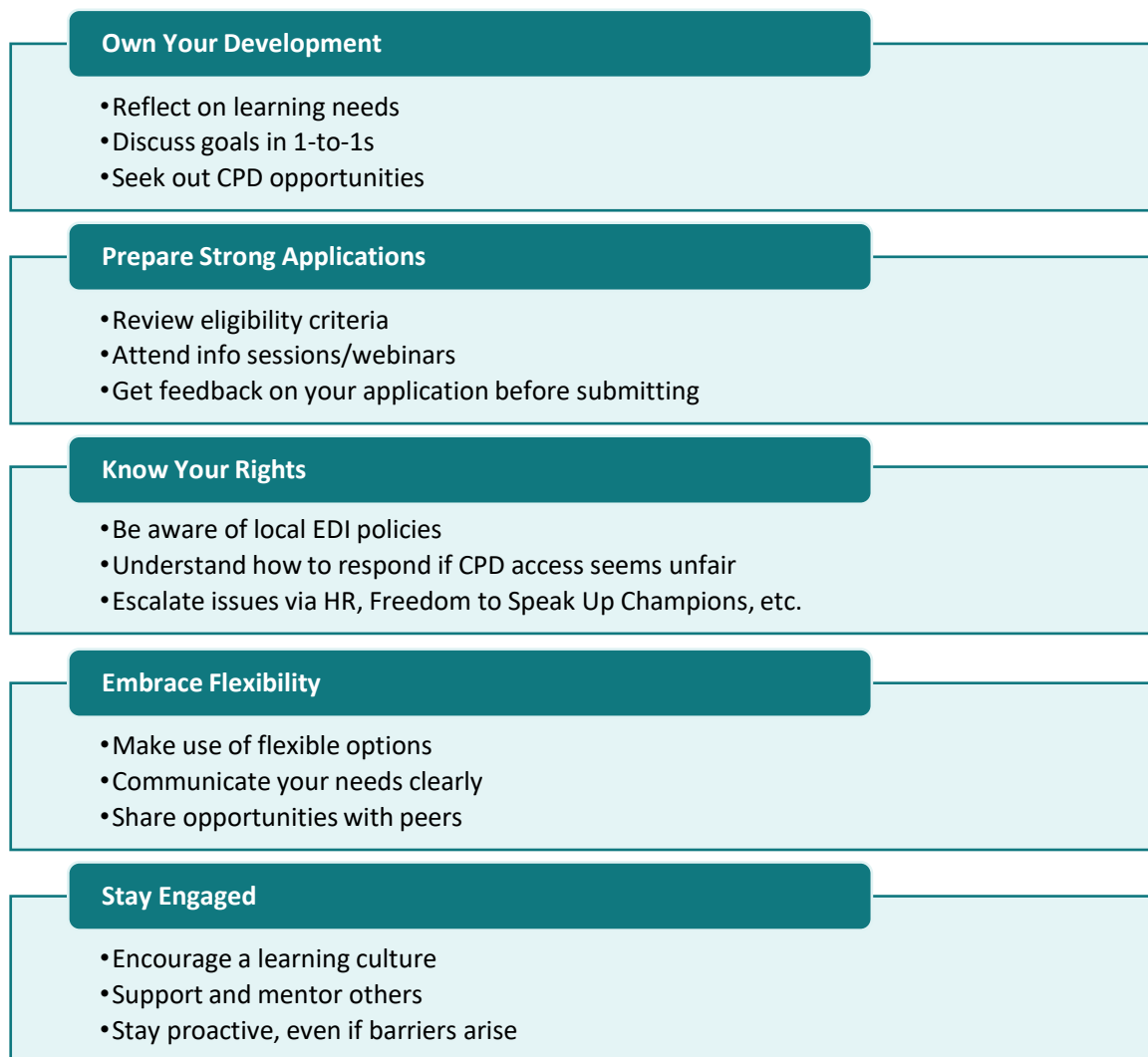


Figure 2: **Equity in CPD: What Staff Should Know and Do**

Tailoring CPD to Individual Roles and Service Needs

CPD should be strategically aligned with:

- **Job roles:** Training should be relevant to the individual's current responsibilities
- **Service requirements:** Development should support the objectives of the clinical research team and the wider organisation
- **Career progression plans:** CPD should help staff achieve their long-term career aspirations, including leadership roles or specialist expertise.

CPD Accreditation

CPD accreditation refers to the process by which an organisation, professional body or course provider certifies that a particular course or programme meets the standards required for formally recognised professional development. Some professional groups (i.e. medics and nurses working in The Republic of Ireland) need to access accredited learning as part of their professional revalidation. This may, therefore, be a factor to consider when identifying appropriate courses. Other groups (i.e. nurses in the UK) can log CPD hours rather than needing formal points. It is recommended that managers are aware of the necessary requirements regarding CPD accreditation for different members of their team and individuals are aware of their personal CPD requirements and share this with managers where required.

Formal accreditation comes at cost and bureaucracy for the provider, and therefore a lot of CPD opportunities will not have this formal recognition in place. This is not to say the courses are not relevant, high quality or useful. Therefore, a balanced approach needs to be considered when assessing the suitability of a course/opportunity.

Accessing CPD Funding

Funding for CPD can be accessed through various local and national sources:

- **Local Budgets:** Departments may have dedicated CPD funds
- **NHS England funding or NHS Workforce Development Funds:** National funding sources may provide support for research staff development
- **NIHR Training Grants:** The National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) offers funding schemes to support career development in research
- **Professional Body Scholarships and Bursaries:** Organisations such as the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) or the Academy of Medical Sciences provide funding opportunities.

To successfully apply for funding, individuals and/or managers should include:

- Clear justification for the CPD activity, linking it to service improvement and staff development
- Cost breakdown, including any associated travel or resource expenses
- Expected benefits and measurable outcomes for both the individual and the team
- Alignment with organisational objectives and workforce planning.

Local CPD Opportunities and Work-Based Learning

Before seeking external courses, individuals and their managers should explore local CPD options:

- Internal training sessions (in-person and online)
- Work-based learning opportunities.

Work-based learning is cost-effective and highly relevant to the day-to-day work of clinical research teams. Encouraging reflective practice, peer learning, and practical experience can strengthen professional development while minimising costs.

Signposting to Key CPD Resources

NIHR Learn

[NIHR Learn](#) offers free, high-quality online learning resources covering various aspects of clinical research. Managers are encouraged to promote these opportunities and support staff in identifying relevant modules that align with their development goals. Staff should take the initiative to explore NIHR Learn and discuss suitable courses with their manager to support their professional growth.

UKCRF Network CPD Directory

The UKCRF Network CPD Directory provides a comprehensive list of online and in-person courses across the UK and Ireland, helping managers identify relevant opportunities for their teams. Staff are encouraged to speak with their managers to understand how this resource is being used within their local setting. Key details:

- Courses are categorised using the **4 Pillars of Practice**:
 - Clinical Care (including Research Delivery)
 - Facilitating Learning
 - Leadership
 - Research
- The Clinical Research Delivery pillar aligns with the **12 themes of the UKCRF Network Induction Framework**, aiding seamless progression from induction to further development beyond six months.
- Some courses are free, while others require funding.
- The Directory is not an endorsement by the UKCRF Network but serves as a resource to help teams identify potential training opportunities.

- Local research teams may contribute to the directory by adding relevant regional opportunities.
- The directory can be downloaded from the [UKCRF Network Portal](#).

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

1. What if I can't find time for CPD?

Try to identify smaller, flexible opportunities such as short online modules, reflective practice, or peer learning. CPD doesn't always require time away from the job, even 30 minutes of focused learning or shadowing can count. Discuss workload challenges with your manager to find a sustainable approach.

2. I have completed all the available courses locally. What else can I do?

Work with your line manager to identify a personal development plan to identify gaps or areas you are interested in developing. From this, use the UKCRF Network CPD Directory and NIHR Learn to identify any further suitable CPD courses, but remember, CPD isn't just courses. There are different types of CPD (see page 5). Consider advancing your knowledge and skills through work-based learning strategies.

3. Do I have to pay for courses myself?

Not necessarily. Many CPD opportunities are free, especially through platforms like NIHR Learn or local Trust training. For paid options, speak with your manager about available departmental funding or bursaries from professional bodies. You can also enquire with the CPD provider directly to see if they have any funding options or discounts.

4. What if my manager doesn't bring up CPD?

You don't need to wait. Be proactive, raise it during one-to-ones or appraisals. It's your development, and you're encouraged to take the lead in shaping it.

5. Is it still CPD if it's informal?

Yes. Informal activities like mentoring, journal clubs, shadowing, or reflective practice are valuable forms of CPD, as long as they contribute to your professional growth. Make sure to record and reflect on them.

6. How do I know which CPD is right for me?

Consider your current role, service needs, and future aspirations. Research CPD opportunities by looking on webpages, speaking directly with the provider and/or discussing with others who have accessed it previously. Remember everyone's CPD requirements are unique, what works for one person may not work for another.

7. Can I access CPD if I'm part-time or on flexible working?

Absolutely. CPD should be accessible to everyone. Speak with your manager about learning options that fit your schedule, including on-demand or asynchronous learning.

8. What if I feel others are getting more CPD opportunities than me?

All staff have the right to fair and equitable access. If you feel this isn't happening, raise it with your manager or through your local equality and inclusion procedures.

9. How do I evidence CPD for appraisals or revalidation?

Keep a simple record, include dates, types of learning, reflections, and how it's influenced your practice. Some Regulatory Bodies and Trusts offer CPD logs, templates and guidance to help with this.

10. What counts as CPD for revalidation or professional registration?

It depends on your profession. Nurses, for example, need to log hours, while others may require accredited courses. If unsure, check with your professional body or ask your manager for support.

11. Where can I find CPD opportunities easily?

Start with the UKCRF Network CPD Directory and NIHR Learn. Local Trust intranets, newsletters, or training departments may also list upcoming sessions and workshops. Line managers should also have an awareness of appropriate CPD opportunities for your role.

12. I am happy and experienced in my role and I don't have any further career aspirations. Do I still need to partake in CPD opportunities?

Whilst you may feel you have all the knowledge and skills required of your role currently, it is important to keep these up-to-date and relevant. The research and clinical landscapes are ever changing and CPD is essential to remain abreast of this. CPD is also a requirement for revalidation for certain professional groups, and professional codes of practice mandate training to keep knowledge and skills up to date.

References and Further Reading

Broughton W and Harris G. (2022) (Eds.) on behalf of the Interprofessional CPD and Lifelong Learning UK Working Group. **Principles for Continuing Professional Development and Lifelong Learning in Health and Social Care**. Bridgwater: College of Paramedics. [Available online](#)

Equality Act 2010, c.15. London: The Stationery Office. [Available online](#)

General Medical Council (2012) Continued professional development: guidance for all doctors. [Available online](#)

Nursing and Midwifery Council (2021) Guidance Sheet – Examples of CPD activities. [Available online](#)

The Academy for Healthcare Science (2024) Continuing Professional Development – Standards and Guidance. [Available online](#)

Appendix 1: CPD Guidance and Directory Task and Finish Teams

Version 1 – 2024-2025

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