Guide to Securing Funding for the Leaders Plus NHS Fellowship

Investing in your leadership development benefits both you **and** your organisation.
Securing funding is often more possible than it first appears, especially if you approach it strategically.

Asking your employer for funding for professional development can feel daunting, especially in a system as financially stretched as the NHS.
However, the case for investing in leadership development is strong. Data from the Office for National Statistics shows a significant Gender Pay Gap across NHS roles, including:

- **21% for clinical academics**
- **24% for hospital doctors**
- **34% for GPs**

When you consider statistics like these, it becomes clear that this is a conversation worth having.
Each year, we see increasing numbers of NHS applicants to the Leaders Plus NHS Fellowship. Many successfully secure employer funding, and their experiences offer valuable lessons.

1 Start by Asking (Really!)

One of the strongest messages from NHS Fellows is simple: **If you don't ask, you don't get.**

Many managers are more supportive than expected, but they won't know unless you raise it.

- Don't assume the answer will be "no"
- Even if it's a no initially, you can ask again
- Keep your request simple and clear
- Don't rush to fill silence after asking

Practical Action:
Book a 20-minute conversation with your manager this week titled: 'Professional Development Discussion.'

2 Be Clear on the Benefits

One piece of advice we give to all prospective Fellows when approaching a funding conversation with their employer is to be 100% clear on the benefits for the organisation, not just for them personally.

The Fellowship is designed to create a network of change-makers so think about how you can use your learning on the Fellowship to benefit your team or department.

Before your meeting, prepare a clear case that connects the Fellowship to NHS priorities.

Highlight:
- **Impact on performance:** How your skills will improve delivery
- **Strategic alignment:** Links to workforce, retention, or leadership priorities
- **Knowledge sharing:** How you'll bring learning back to your team
- **Retention:** Investing in staff reduces costly turnover

You may also want to reference:
- NHS workforce challenges
- The cost of attrition (e.g. nurse retention challenges)
- Evidence from Leaders Plus impact reports

Practical action:
Write down 3 specific outcomes this programme would support (e.g. spearheading a network group for return to work parents, improving patient experience, supporting staff retention).

3 Align with NHS Priorities

Strengthen your case by linking your request to current organisational goals.

Consider:

- Workforce development priorities
- Leadership pipeline development
- Retention and wellbeing initiatives
- Equality, diversity, and inclusion goals
- Supporting return-to-work parents

Practical Action:
Review your Trust or organisation's strategy and identify one priority to reference in your request.

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4 Ask the Right Way

How you ask matters just as much as what you ask for.

Make your request clear and concise:
- What the Fellowship is
- The cost
- The time commitment
- The benefit to the organisation

Best approach:
1. In person
2. Video or phone call
3. Follow-up email summarising key points

Practical Action:
Prepare a short 2–3 sentence summary covering:
- What it is
- Cost
- Organisational benefit

Practice saying it out loud before your meeting.

5 Don't assume there is no funding

Funding often exists, you just need to find the right source.

Many NHS Fellows found that Senior leaders were supportive **but** not always aware of where funding sat.

Potential funding sources include:
- Leadership development budgets
- Study budgets
- Return-to-work schemes (e.g. post-maternity leave)
- Departmental budgets
- Hospital charities

Practical Action:
Make a list of people to reach out to, this could include:
- Medical Director
- Clinical Director
- Director of Medical Education
- HR team
- Finance or budget holders

Then ask:
"Where would funding like this usually sit?"

Insider Tip: One Fellow told us she had found out that Postgraduate Medical Education budgets are sent back every year because they are not used!

Something useful to support:
You may find this episode of the Big Careers, Small Children podcast featuring Paul Fisher (Associate Fellow and Programme Director of the Oxford Programme on Negotiation) useful for your negotiations as it's packed full of tips. Listen now

6 Use your Network

Colleagues can be one of your best resources.

- Speak to peers who've secured funding before
- Ask where they applied and what worked
- Check with finance teams for guidance
- Ask your manager for advice, even if they're unsure

Practical Action:
Message one colleague today and ask how they funded external training.

7 Learn from other NHS Fellows

Speaking to others who've been through the process can be incredibly helpful.

Many Fellows report:
- Strong manager support once they asked
- Creative approaches to funding
- Significant career progression after the Fellowship

Some have even secured promotions shortly after completing the programme.

Practical Action:
Reach out to connect with a current or past Fellow to learn from their experience.

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8 Be Flexible

If full funding isn't available, explore alternatives.

Options include:
- Part-funding between you and your organisation
- Shared funding across departments
- External contributions (e.g. charities or leadership bodies)
- Instalment payments
- Splitting costs across financial years

Practical Action:
Prepare 1–2 flexible funding options before your conversation.

You can also talk to us about spreading the costs or consider accessing one of the part-funded places available, such as those provided by the Royal College of Emergency Medicine and Royal College of Psychiatrists.

9 Follow Up and Stay Persistent

Funding decisions often take time, and it's common to need more than one conversation.

If you don't hear back:
Send a short follow-up email
- Offer additional information
- Revisit when budgets reset

If you receive a "no":
- Don't assume it's final
- Ask if there are alternative funding routes
- Explore other teams or budget holders

Funding in the NHS is often complex, and persistence can make the difference.

Practical Action:
After 7–10 days, follow up with:
"Is there any further information that would help move this forward?"

If you receive a "no," ask:
"Is there another team or budget you'd recommend I speak to?"

10 If funding isn't possible right now

While employer funding is preferred, self-investment is an option for some.

Benefits include:
- Accelerating career progression
- Building confidence and leadership capability
- Expanding future opportunities

Support options may include:
- Instalment payment plans
- Part-funded or hardship-supported places

Key Takeaway

Funding is often more possible than it first appears and Investing in your leadership development benefits both you and the NHS.

With the right approach:

1. Ask clearly
2. Make a strong organisational case
3. Explore multiple funding routes
4. Stay persistent

You significantly increase your chances of securing funding.

Interested in finding out more?
Arrange a call with the Leaders Plus team.

Ready to apply?
Download the application form and take the next step in your leadership journey.