

NHS Innovation Accelerator – FAQs 2026 Intake Recruitment Call

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1. When can I apply for the NHS Innovation Accelerator 2026 cohort?

Recruitment for the 2026 NIA cohort opens the morning of 1 September 2025 and closes at 23:59 on 12 October 2025.

2. Who can apply for the 2025 NHS Innovation Accelerator?

The NHS Innovation Accelerator (NIA) is open to innovations of all types, from the UK or elsewhere, and innovators from any background. Innovations should be able to demonstrate an evidence base from clinical trials, pilots and/or real-world use.

Applicants can come from a wide range of backgrounds e.g. clinicians, academics, from a public-sector, charitable or not-for-profit organisation, from a small or medium-sized

enterprise (SME), or from a large corporate. You can be the inventor of the innovation, the lead for it within your organisation or simply the representative of an innovation you find compelling, and as such, wish to scale across the NHS; applicants should ideally have some decision-making input into planning the strategy for the spread and adoption of the innovation they represent.

To apply, you should be able demonstrate the following:

- Significant outcomes for significantly lower cost
- An evidence-base for your innovation that shows it is ready to be diffused across the NHS
- A personal set of strong values as well as a passion for learning and sharing your insight widely
- A commitment to scaling evidence-based innovations for patient and population benefit
- A commitment to understanding health inequalities and to improving equity of access, experience and outcomes through innovation.

Innovators from all genders, ethnicities and backgrounds are encouraged to apply for our accelerator. We know that many groups have been underrepresented in our past cohorts, and we are keen to move toward a cohort of Fellows that better represents the diversity of the people served by the NHS.

We are particularly keen to encourage female innovators, black innovators and those representing innovations focusing on female health; we understand that these groups may not receive as much support as others and want to ensure that they feel recognised and welcomed for the impactful contributions they can make.

3. Is the NIA only for UK-based companies?

No, the NIA is not only for UK-based companies. Applicants from across the UK and overseas are encouraged to apply; the location of the company is not taken into consideration during the application process. However, Applicants should note the mandatory requirement to attend the NIA launch, summit and Fellows' events in person; the applicant should, therefore, be mainly based in the UK. Additionally, the innovation that applicants are representing should ideally have some UK presence, or immediate intentions to establish their UK presence. Innovations must be in use somewhere in the world to demonstrate that they are ready for use in the UK; whilst we encourage innovations that are in use outside of the UK, it must be noted that the UK is a difficult (but not impossible) market to break into, so securing that first contract will take time and require dedication and effort.

4. I am from a start-up; can I apply for the NIA?

The NIA does not proscribe the number of staff your company should have. However, it is for innovations that are both ready to scale across the NHS in England, and that have the necessary resources and team to scale across England over a 3-year period and beyond. Your organisation should, therefore, have sufficient resources to be able to scale up at pace — and be able to take up opportunities that arise from your participation in the NIA.

5. I am a clinician; can I apply for the NIA?

Yes, the NIA is open to Fellows from any background, and we have supported several clinicians to scale their innovations. If you have queries or concerns regarding the time commitment for Fellows, we encourage you to contact the NIA team to discuss your options.

6. What are this year's recruitment themes?

The 2026 Call for Applications is an *open* call that does not cover a specific theme and is open to innovations addressing any health and care challenges. However, we particularly welcome innovations that address challenges highlighted by the [NHS 10–Year Health Plan](#) and [Life Science Healthcare Goals](#) (including Dementia, Cancer, infrastructure around Obesity, Addiction and Mental Health).

Note that we are also keen to support innovations not necessarily looking to commercialise their innovation.

Appendix 1 in the *Call for Applications document* highlights some concerns stakeholders have raised, alongside the challenges highlighted by the NHS 10 Year Health Plan and Life Science Healthcare Goals ; innovations that address one of these key concerns are more likely to be prioritised both in the NIA recruitment call and also within the wider health and social care landscape for procurement.

Additionally, all applicants must be able to demonstrate how their innovation actively alleviates health inequalities in practice, or how they intend to do so.

7. How do I apply to join the NIA?

You can apply for the NIA via our online portal. The link to the application will be available on the NIA website's [Apply](#) page from 1 September 2025.

Before applying, please ensure that you have reviewed the [Call for Applications](#) document in the [Resource Library on our Website](#) which provides a useful starting point for learning more about the NIA. You should also read the **Application Guide**, which is also in the [Resource Library on our Website](#) and review the wording of the contract, which both you and your organisation will need to sign should you be invited to join the NIA.

Please only apply if you are assured that you and your innovation meet the specifications, and that you can commit to the time requirements (including attendance at **all quarterly and Year 1 events**) and have the written support of your employing organisation.

8. Is the NIA for individuals only or can teams/ companies apply?

While the innovation may have been created by a team/company, the NIA focuses on the development and support of an individual representing that innovation. Therefore, all applications must include information on a sole named applicant who will be the innovation's representative (a Fellow) while active on the NIA and will participate in the mandatory attendance events throughout the 3–year programme.

9. Do applicants need the support of a Health Innovation Network (HIN) before they can apply to the NIA?

An application does not need the support of a [Health Innovation Network \(HIN\)](#) prior to submitting an application form. However, applicants may wish to engage with their local HIN to discuss applications and to seek advice on scaling plans before submitting their application.

For information on your local HIN, please visit the [Health Innovation Network website](#).

10. Why is there a time commitment for Fellows of 2 days a week?

In order to ensure they can take advantage of the benefits of being on the NHS Innovation Accelerator (NIA), Fellows need to be able to commit two days per week **to scaling their innovation**. These two days per week could include for example attendance at quarterly events, producing and implementing spread plans, meeting mentors and [Health Innovation Network \(HIN\)](#), developing stakeholder engagement and marketing plans, building networks, or a health economic case. Basically, any activities a Fellow undertakes around scaling their innovation counts towards the two-day commitment; this is the minimum amount of time any innovator should dedicate towards scaling their innovation, whether they are on the NIA or not, developing stakeholder engagement and marketing plans, building networks, or a health economic case.

For some Fellows, this will be part of their normal day jobs – where scaling their innovation is their everyday business.

For others, particularly those who are based in clinical roles, it might require setting aside the 2 days for the completion of these discreet tasks. *Please note that Fellows are **not** expected to come to the NIA offices for these 2 days per week, except for the learning events listed below, and other events which are in-person.*

11. What is the selection process?

When submitted, application forms are reviewed by a minimum of four assessors drawn from a range of perspectives including clinical, patient, commercial and implementation. Applications are assessed on the basis of the applicant, the innovation, and confirmation that there is no straightforward or obvious local mechanism for scaling; in other words, there needs to be a clear reason as to why the applicant needs the support of the NIA. Please note that references will be requested during the application process, and two references are requested for each Fellow – at least one of whom needs to be a senior representative from the Fellow's employing organisation; the other could be from a healthcare provider/ commissioner site where your innovation is currently in use (this does not need to be an NHS site).

Once shortlisted, applicants are invited to a panel interview. At the same time, the [National Institute for Health and Care Excellence \(NICE\)](#) and NHS England informally review all shortlisted applications. The applications will also be formally reviewed for Health

Inequalities and Patient and Public Involvement (PPIE) involving NHS patients. After the interviews, a final decision panel chaired by Professor Meghana Pandit, Co-Medical Director – Secondary Care at [NHS England](#), and Chair of the NIA Programme Board, reviews the recommendations from the assessment process (application, NICE review and interview) to agree which applicants will be offered a conditional place on the NIA.

At this stage, we will undertake a period of due diligence, and request – where relevant – two years of annual accounts, a list of company directors and published annual reports. All Fellows will be asked to sign an agreement with [UCLPartners](#) (who deliver the NIA) before being formally announced as an NIA Fellow. An example contract will be available on the application page of the NIA website when the Call is launched. Applicants should check that they and their employing organisation would be happy to sign this contract before applying.

12. How many Fellows will be selected to join the NIA 2025 intake?

Up to 24 individuals will be selected to join the NIA 2026 intake. These individuals will join the existing Fellows from the 2024 and 2025 cohorts, who would have progressed to Years 2 and 3 of the Fellowship.

13. Are there opportunities to connect with the NIA team before I apply?

There are a number of 'Meet the NIA' online information events during the recruitment period that you can join to find out more.

These online Q&A sessions are open to anyone, but we do ask that you register via Eventbrite beforehand. The interactive sessions will provide detailed information about the NIA, the recruitment process and this year's application. Slides will be made available and there will be an opportunity for Q&A with the NIA core team.

Dates for Meet the NIA online sessions:

- Monday 8 September 2025 – 13:00 – 14:00
- Tuesday 16 September 2025 – 12:00 – 13:00
- Wednesday 1 October 2025 – 13:00 – 14:00
- Thursday 9 October 2025 – 12:00 – 13:00

Please register for a session on Eventbrite [here](#). Joining details will be sent to you in the confirmation email upon registration.

If you have any questions that you need answered ahead of or following these events, please feel free to email us at nia@uclpartners.com; we would be happy to arrange a time for you to speak to someone in the team.

14. Will I receive feedback if my application is unsuccessful?

Unsuccessful applications will receive feedback by the end of February 2025. The level of detail of the feedback will depend on the stage to which the application progressed e.g.

applicants that have not progressed to the full assessment phase will receive basic feedback whilst those fully assessed will receive detailed feedback.

15. What are the key dates for this year's call?

The key dates are as follows:

Activity	Date
NIA opens for applications (6 weeks)	1 September 2025
'Meet the NIA' informational webinars	8 September 2025 – 13:00 – 14:00 16 September 2025 – 12:00 – 13:00 1 October 2025 – 13:00 – 14:00 9 October 2025 – 12:00 – 13:00
Application deadline	23:59, 12 October 2025
Application form assessment	23 October – 16 November 2025 (3 weeks)
NICE reviews of applicants to be interviewed	25 November 2025 – 2 January 2026
Shortlisting panel	10 December 2025
Invitation to interviews	12 December 2025
Unsuccessful applicants notified	15 December 2025
Interviews	7, 8, 9, 12, 13, 14, 15 January 2026
Final decision-making panel	28 January 2026
Outcomes communicated to interviewed applicants	30 January 2026
Due diligence and contracting	2 February – 6 March 2026
NIA introduce Fellows to SPARK framework (optional)	2 February – 13 March 2026
Deadline for due diligence docs	12 February 2026
Feedback sent to successful applicants	16 February 2026
Feedback sent to all unsuccessful applicants	23 February 2026
<i>The following dates/ sessions are a mandatory part of the NIA. You will not be able to take up a fellowship unless you are able to attend all of them.</i>	

Induction and preparation day for NIA Launch	17 March 2026
Launch Event at Rewired Fest at NEC Birmingham	24/25 March 2026
NIA panel Day	16 April 2026
New Fellow 1:1 meetings with NIA team	w/c 20 April 2026 (can discuss panel day feedback)
Quarterly events (Years 1, 2 and 3)	Tuesday 5 May 2026 Tuesday 7 July 2026 Tuesday 6 October 2026 Tuesday 2 February 2027
Year 1 learning events	Tuesday 2 June 2026 Tuesday 8 September 2026 Tuesday 2 March 2027

16. When will the panel interviews take place?

Panel interviews will take place virtually throughout 7, 8, 9, 12, 13, 14, 15 January 2026.

Applicants will need to be flexible about the time their interviews will take place as they are scheduled around clinician availability to take part in a panel.

17. I have not completed an application form like this before. Where can I go for support?

UK based Applicants

Your local Health Innovation Network may be able to provide support and advice in applying for the NIA. Find your local HIN here: <https://thehealthinnovationnetwork.co.uk/>.

International Applicants

You should contact [Healthcare UK](#) to access the dedicated support on offer for international companies looking to come to the UK.

For more information about the NIA, please review our [programme FAQs](#). You are also welcome to email us at nia@uclpartners.com.

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