

The Institute of Mental Health Peer Research Academy

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Introducing the IMH Peer Research Academy

Peer researchers are people who research health-related topics of which they have personal lived experience. We are frequently independent researchers, or employed in charities, healthcare, government, and universities.

The Wellcome Trust has commissioned the University of Nottingham to establish the Institute of Mental Health (IMH) Peer Research Academy, through their Lived Experience Innovation Fund programme. This commission from Wellcome will support the development of mental health peer research as an **inclusive, accessible, influential, and health-affirming** profession or identity. You can find out more about Wellcome's focus on mental health research here: <https://wellcome.org/our-priorities/mental-health>.

The IMH Peer Research Academy opens on 1st September 2025, with initial funding to the end of 2027. The academy is led by peer researchers Caroline Fox-Yeo and Stefan Rennick-Egglestone and will be co-ordinated by peer researcher Joy Llewellyn-Beardsley. Work will be delivered with partners [Habitus Collective](#) and [Intentional Peer Support](#). Both of our partner organisations were founded by people with personal experience of mental health problems.

Why do we need the IMH Peer Research Academy?

In mental health, peer researchers can enhance research quality, including through offering insight into what it feels like to experience distress or to live with stigma or discrimination, and using our expertise to influence research design, methods and the production of knowledge. There are individual and structural barriers to peer researcher success, which we believe can be addressed through our specific programme of activities. For example, peer researchers already working in research may experience both ongoing disability and also notable levels of emotional labour when their participants have experiences related to their own. Childhood deprivation predicts both mental health problems and lack of educational access, and hence some very capable people may struggle to access peer researcher employment due not having the necessary qualifications. Peer researchers may have a stronger orientation than others to desire beneficial societal change through their work, and to support the success of others working in peer research. However, at present, peer researchers may be unaware of each other, and of ways in which their work can be used to create change.

What will we achieve with our IMH Peer Research Academy?

With Wellcome, we have agreed specific activities intended to *support individuals, challenge structural barriers, and build community*. From 2026 onwards, at least fifty peer researchers from across the UK can apply for a £400 support package, which will be individually tailored to their needs. In 2027, at least thirty peer researchers can apply for a free place on a new peer researcher training course. This will integrate new material on topics relevant to peer research, into existing peer support training offered by Intentional Peer Support. At least sixty researchers will have their attendance costs covered for our 2027 peer research conference, to be held in Nottingham on Wednesday 8th September 2027. We are already exploring mechanisms for offering greater support than the above, and welcome discussions on incorporating costs for IMH Peer Research Academy support into funding applications.

As a foundational part of enabling the success of our individual and community support offers, IMH Peer Research Academy staff and partners will review opportunities and barriers to peer researcher participation, and engage in a programme of positive action to support people through the process of becoming a peer researcher, for example through enabling people to apply for research jobs that they might not otherwise feel enabled to apply for, or through enabling researchers with personal experiences of mental health problems to more publicly adopt a peer researcher identity.

All of our work will be documented in publicly accessible reports, and through our website, which will be launched before the end of February 2026. Early in 2026, we will produce a report on the opportunities and barriers to peer researcher participation. By the end of 2027, we will have published an updated version of this report, augmented with what we have learnt on how to create institutional change. By end of 2027, we will also have shared our experiences of supporting individuals, and of developing and delivering our training course.

Who will deliver the Peer Research Academy?

Stefan Rennick-Egglestone is a principal research fellow at the University of Nottingham. His move into mental health research was inspired by more than two decades of personal mental health challenges.

Caroline Fox-Yeo is a research fellow at the University of Nottingham. She trained in architecture and was inspired to work in the field of mental health due to her lived experience.

Joy Llewellyn-Beardsley is a research fellow at the University of Nottingham. She developed and ran voluntary sector organisations including LGBTQ+ youth services before moving into narrative-based research. Her work is informed by her own lived experience, her Buddhist practice, and a commitment to creating safe spaces where authentic stories can be shared.

Lisa Androulidakis is a peer research and peer support trainer, with experience developing peer and lived experience-led initiatives internationally. She co-leads the International Peer Leadership Network (IPLN), particularly the community of practice, and works to build spaces and networks where peer leadership can thrive, lead and shape change. Her work includes collaboration with the World Health Organisation.

Callum Ross is a peer support mentor, trainer and researcher working internationally whose work is grounded in lived experience. He co-leads the IPLN, focusing on peer leadership projects through the incubator programme, and helps create spaces and networks where peers can grow and lead. He also contributes to international dialogue on lived experience leadership through the Global Leadership Exchange.

Lisa Archibald (she/ her) is one of the Co-Directors of Intentional Peer Support and an international IPS Trainer. She has worked in peer support for over 25 years after accessing peer support herself prior to that as a young person. Lisa is a proud Scot, a radical activist and a passionate advocate for social and systemic change.

The work of the Peer Research Academy will be guided by a panel of advisers with experiential knowledge of enabling and inhabiting peer research. This includes individual peer researchers and representatives of the [McPin Foundation](#), Nottingham Trent University, the University of Nottingham, and the [Institute of Mental Health](#).

How can you get involved?

Our initial focus is on extending our network of peer researchers and developing collaborations with people interested in peer research. Please contact us if you would like to a) receive updates from us; b) cost our peer research support package into your funding proposals; or c) conduct research about peer research, for example, through securing PhD funding for collaborative work with the IMH Peer Research Academy.

We would also like to hear from people who d) organise networks of peer researchers; e) have identified knowledge on barriers and opportunities to peer research success; or f) are interested in reviewing their organisation's processes relevant to peer research. If you are local to Nottingham, we will be organising peer support sessions for peer researchers. Please contact us if you would like to be invited.

We want to share individual accounts describing challenges, joys, and successes around peer research, on our website. If you would like to share a story please do get in contact.

How to contact us?

By email: peer@nottingham.ac.uk. Our full website will launch by end of February 2026, but in the meantime, you can find some further information about our work here:

<https://institutemh.org.uk/news/news/1989-peer-research-academy-launches-to-support-mental-health-researchers-with-lived-experience>

About this document

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