

PhD Scholarship – School of Population Health

Applications are invited from suitably qualified candidates to join a four-year programme of research, entitled STEP-UP: Investigating the role of thinking style and defensive information processing in cancer screening Participation: An opportunity to improve uptake of organised screening.

The programme of research (funded by the Health Research Board (HRB)) aims to investigate the role of cognitive processes in the cancer screening uptake pathway across Ireland's three cancer-screening programmes (BreastCheck, CervicalCheck and BowelScreen). The results of the research will be used to co-design (with stakeholders and PPI representative's) interventions to increase uptake in cancer screening. The candidate appointed to undertake the PhD will work within the School of Population Health (RCSI), under the supervision of the Principal Investigator (Dr Nicholas Clarke).

You will have the opportunity to work within an international multidisciplinary team that includes Prof Pamela Gallagher (DCU), Prof Linda Sharp (Newcastle University), Prof Amy McQueen (Washington University in St Louis), Dr Christian Von Wagner (UCL) and Dr Therese Mooney (National Screening Service).

The current PhD opportunity will provide a full time 4-year scholarship which includes an annual tax-free stipend of €18,500 plus tuition fees for 4 years. A laptop will also be provided and support for travel to training and conferences activities for the purpose of the project.

Project background

Organised population-based cancer screening aims to identify pre-cancerous lesions or cancer at an earlier stage, thereby reducing mortality, and, where possible, cancer incidence. The success of organised cancer screening depends on achieving high uptake. However, screening is often suboptimal, particularly in older individuals and lower socio-economic groups. Research now points to the value of investigating information processing factors (defensiveness and thinking style) in the decision to accept or reject screening invitations.

In partnership with Ireland's National Screening Service, this research project will investigate the role of thinking style, defensive information processing and psychological reactance in screening uptake in Ireland's three organised population-based cancer screening programmes (CervicalCheck, BreastCheck and BowelScreen). The findings of the research will inform the design of interventions to improve uptake in Ireland's screening programmes.

Methods: The project comprises 5 work-packages (WP). WP1 will systematically review evidence on interventions targeting defensive information processing, thinking style and psychological reactance aimed at screening behaviours. WP2 (quantitative surveys) and WP3 (qualitative cognitive interviews) involve primary data collection to understand the role of thinking style, defensive information processing and psychological reactance in screening uptake and exploring reactance to screening messaging. WP4 will involve co-design workshops where evidence and contextual factors will be considered in designing a potential intervention to increase uptake. WP5 will convene a screening research seminar bringing all interested stakeholders together to share learning, and explore possibilities for future collaboration and networking.

This research programme will have the potential to yield significant benefits for the health service, population and society as a whole by contributing to achieving the ultimate goals of cancer

screening, namely increasing early-stage detection and reducing cancer mortality via increased screening uptake.

Person specifications

Minimum criteria

- Hold a recognised honours degree qualification (minimum of 2.1) in the fields of epidemiology, psychology, public health, or other related fields.
- Experience of qualitative and/ or quantitative research methods.
- Excellent communication, interpersonal and organisational skills.
- Ability to take initiative and work under pressure to tight deadlines.
- Ability to work effectively as part of an interdisciplinary, multi-centre team.
- Demonstrates an ability to manage self, time, and own resources to enable a high level of personal effectiveness.
- Demonstrates a commitment to develop own transferable skills, profile and reputation to advance own career beyond the end of the PhD period.

Desirable criteria

- Hold a masters level qualification in the fields of epidemiology, psychology, public health, or other related fields.
- Experience of conducting research in a healthcare setting.
- Experience of presenting research findings at seminars and or conferences.
- Experience of the peer review publication process.

Following a selection process the successful candidate will develop a detailed research proposal which will be embedded with the research programme as outlined above. This proposal will be developed in collaboration with the project Principal Investigator and will be submitted to RCSI and subject to the PhD candidate meeting full requirements for admission to doctoral studies at RCSI.

Application Process

Applications to include CV, cover letter (demonstrating how you fulfil the essential and desirable criteria), and the contact details of two referees should be sent, via e-mail (in word or PDF only, combined in a single document) to Dr Nicholas Clarke at nicholas.clarke@dcu.ie

Closing date for receipt of applications is 28/07/2023.

We reserve the right to re-advertise or extend the closing date for this post.

Shortlisted candidates will be invited to interview.

Informal Enquiries in relation to this role should be directed to:

Dr. Nicholas Clarke, School of Psychology, Dublin City University.

Email: Nicholas.clarke@dcu.ie