

# Careers advice for aspiring clinical academic nurse and midwife leaders: development and evaluation of a clinical academic careers advisory service

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On behalf of the NIHR supported Nursing & Midwifery Incubator

## Background

- **Vision for nursing profession:** 'to lead, participate in and deliver research, where research is fully embedded in practice and professional decision making for public benefit' (Making Research Matter. Chief Nursing Officer for England's plan for research, NHS England and NHS Improvement, November 2021).
- Nursing and midwifery applicants for NIHR research training awards have a statistically lower success rate, compared to other professional groups, and number of applications received from nurses and midwives is not as high as it could be. The **NIHR Nursing & Midwifery incubator** was launched to accelerate capacity building and support development of the nursing & midwifery clinical academic workforce. One strand involved development and testing of a new form of support and advice – a **Clinical Academic Career Advisory Service**.

## Aims

The aim of the Advisory Service was to offer information and advice to individuals to enable them to: 1). start, or advance, a clinical academic career (or work out it is not for them)  
2). develop high-quality research fellowship applications

## Pilot phase 1 and 2

The service was advertised via the NIHR Research Design Service (RDS), partner websites and social media.

**Pilot phase 1:** Advisory service established in three RDS regions (North West, East Midlands and South East), involving nine advisors (8 nurses and 1 midwife) to test operational processes, supporting resources, and to ascertain demand/acceptability. Service was confined to three regions in order to provide bespoke and regionally focused advice. Ran between Nov 2020 – March 2021.

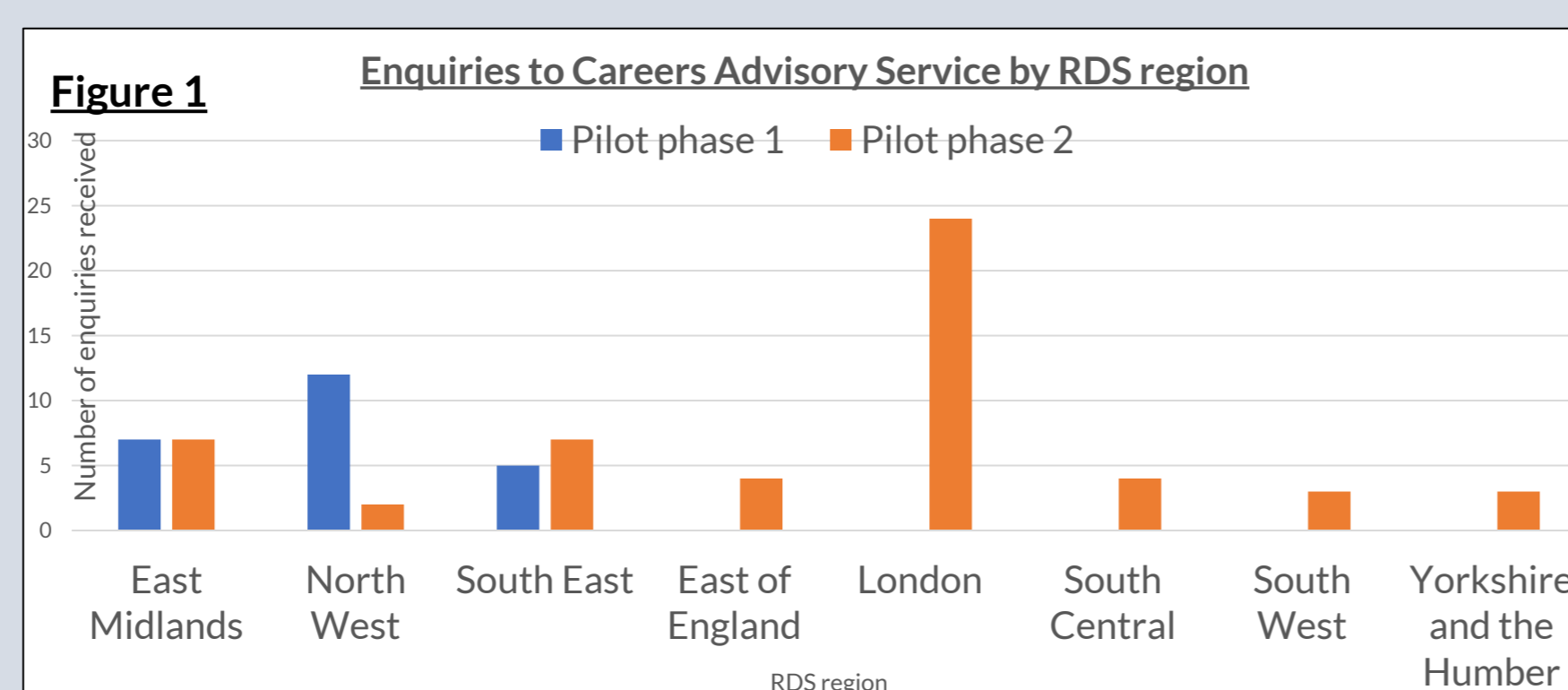
**Pilot phase 2:** Advisory service hosted in same three regions (with same advisors), and eligibility expanded to individuals from any region in England. This enabled demand across a national footprint to be evaluated and test whether advisors could respond effectively to enquiries from individuals outside their region. Ran between June 2021 – September 2021.

## Service delivery model and evaluation:



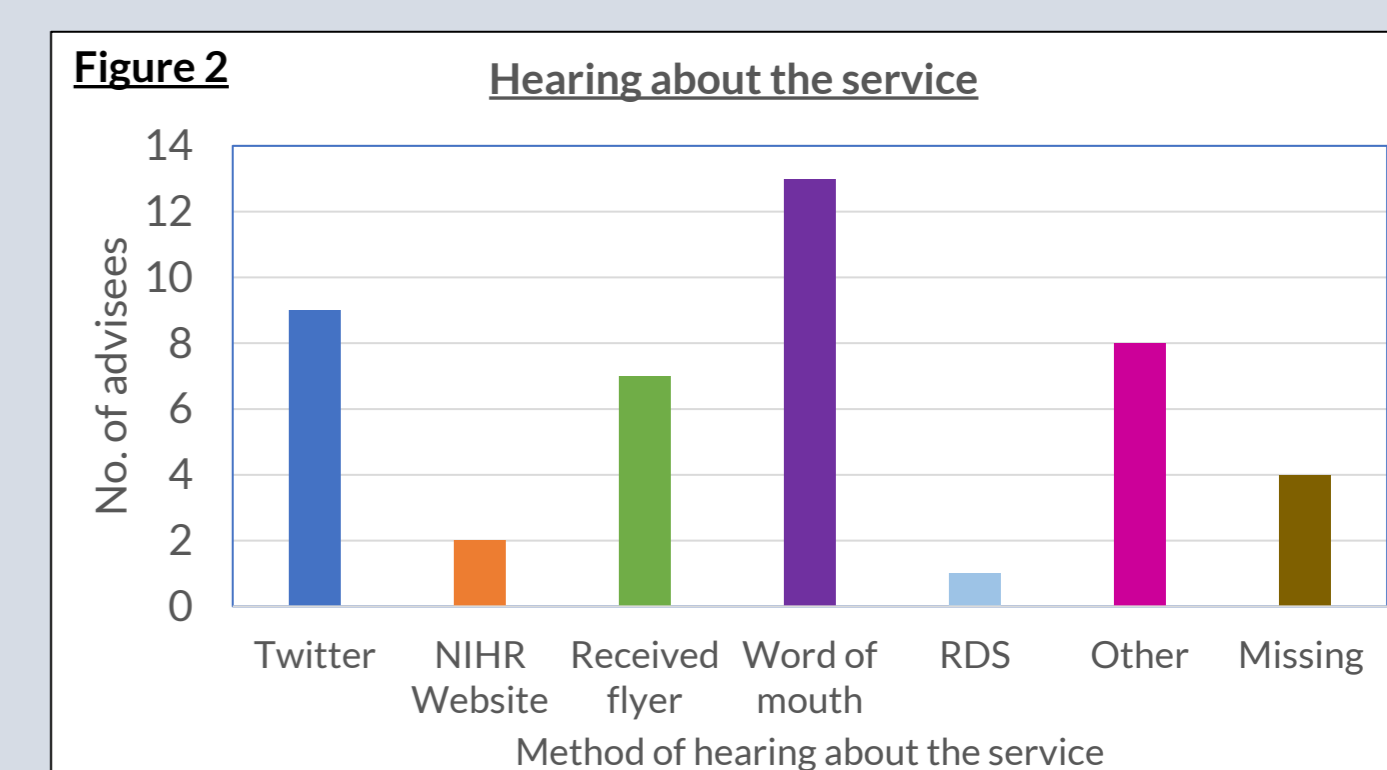
## Enquiries and appointments

There were 78 enquiries across the 2 phases of the evaluation (**Figure 1**) 72 appointments were offered, and 65 appointments arranged. Completed evaluation forms were received from 44 people accessing the service and 43 advisors.



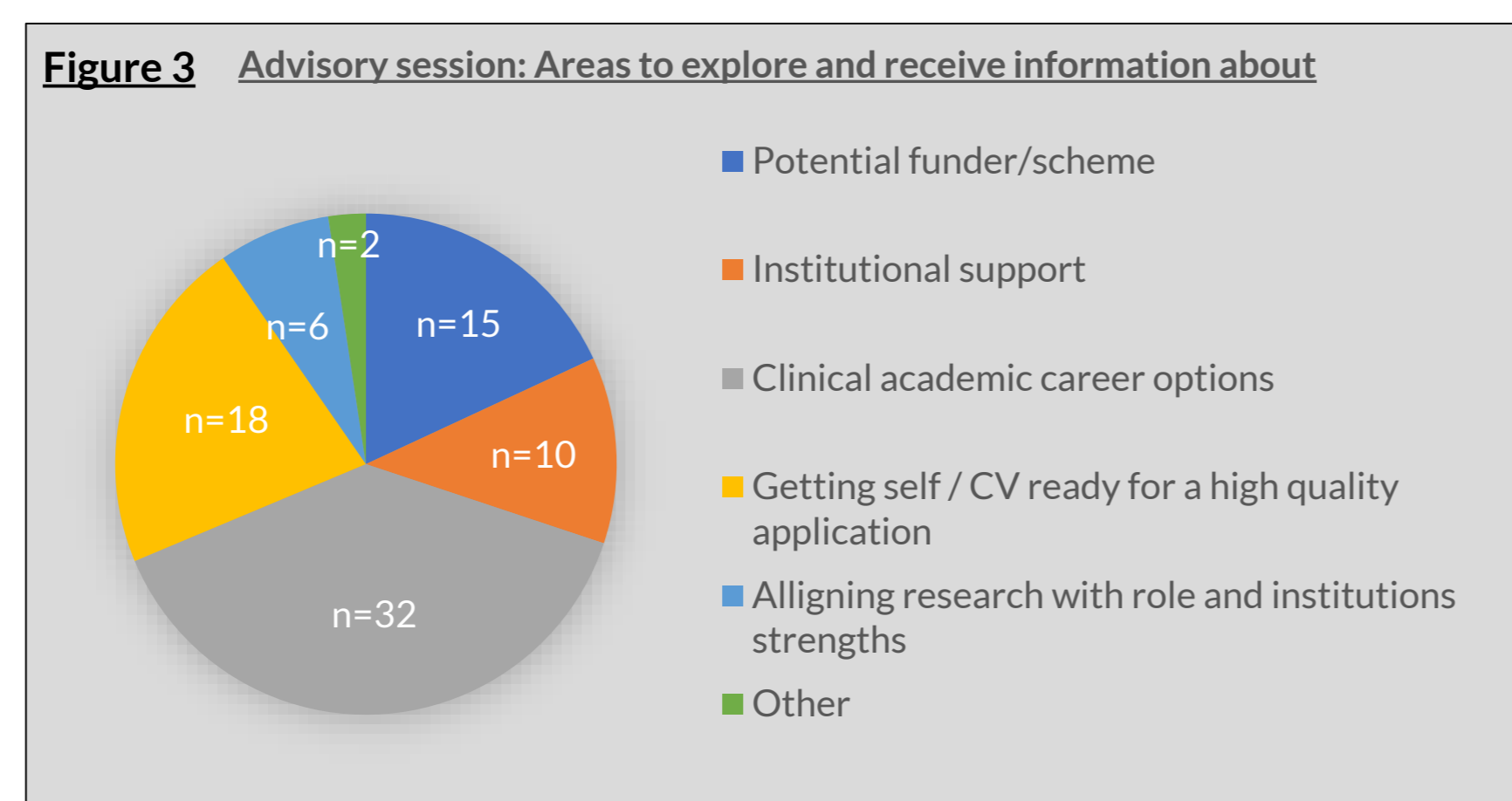
## Hearing about and accessing the service

Most people heard about the service through 'word of mouth' or Twitter (**Figure 2**). The majority found booking appointments and accessing the service 'easy' (score 5 – according to a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 represents hard and 5 represents easy.) (67% and 79% respectively).



## Advice session USER

Nearly half of the service users were unsure which application they planned to submit. Most wanted to receive information and advice about clinical academic career options (n=28, 72%) and explore potential funders (n=12, 31%) (**Figure 3**).



## Experiences of service

When asked whether they would recommend the service, using a scale of 1 'no, not at all' to 5 'yes, definitely', 39 (89%) of respondents would definitely recommend the service to friends and colleagues (score 5).

Some described feeling motivated and inspired - '*feeling energised and more committed to continuing my academic career*' (free text box on evaluation form)

The advisees described understanding more about:

- how to access support and contacts in the field of interest - '*given contacts regarding my chosen pathway*'
- funding opportunities - '*felt fully informed of all potential opportunities*'
- developing a strong fellowship application - '*clearer and confident about making an application*'
- developing clinical academic career - '*advice on what I can do next to develop into a clinical academic role*'

## Advice session ADVISOR

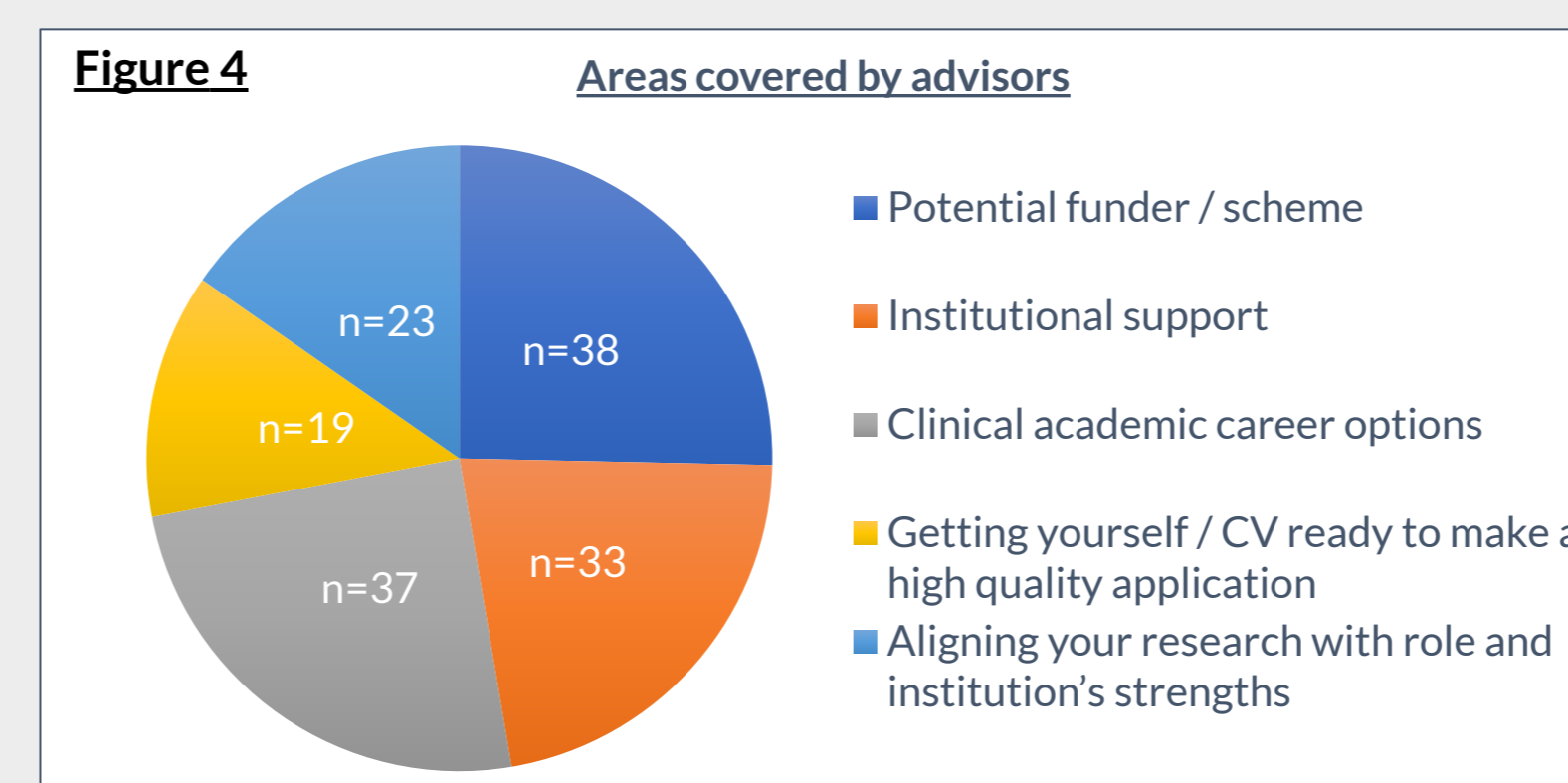
Nearly two thirds (63%) of advisors thought Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) were not suited to dealing with the types of enquiries received.

Advisors reported having enough time and felt equipped to deal with enquiries (**Table 1**).

## Experiences of advice session

When the service was extended to all of England, most advisors felt equipped to deal with enquiries where the advisee came outside of their region. For example, some of the advisors explained the following: '*mostly general advice wanted*', '*no requirement to provide specific regional advice*' and '*no local knowledge required to meet needs of individual*'.

When advisors were asked about which areas they covered in the session, the highest proportion selected 'potential funders and schemes' (n=38, 88%), other areas covered by most advisors were clinical academic career options (n=37, 86%) and information around institutional support (n=33, 77%) (**Figure 4**).



Question	Rating scale	Mean rating	% rated '5' (N=43)
How equipped did you feel to deal with the enquiry?	1=not very 5=good	4.8	35 (81%)
Did you have enough time with the advisee to discuss their query?	1-not at all 5=plenty	4.9	36 (84%)

Table 1

## Summary of findings and next steps

### Summary

- Overall, the evaluation determined there is demand for a careers advisory service and the offer was positively evaluated by those who accessed it
- It has the potential to tackle inequality and variation in access to support and advice, particularly for those not working at a 'research-intensive' Trust who often have access to people familiar with and committed to enabling clinical academic career development.
- The evaluation of the pilot service confirmed that both regional and national models of delivery are feasible

### Potential options for the service

1. Health Education England might chose to develop and link a service to the HEE/NIHR ICA programme and organise it on a regional or national basis
2. RDS regional offices might incorporate the service into the services they offer
3. NIHR Academy might organise the service and/or align it with other NIHR infrastructure, for example, Applied Research Collaborations (ARCs)
4. Relevant stakeholders might collaborate to offer a service across a regional footprint (e.g. integrated care systems), modifying to meet local needs and develop service based on learning from the pilot

### Acknowledgements

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We would like to thank the NIHR Research Design Service, especially Professor Peter Lovell and the three regional RDS leads in the North West, East Midlands and South East. We are enormously grateful to the 9 advisors for their time and help in developing, delivering and evaluating the service and NIHR ARC Wessex programme administration team who supported service delivery.

The incubator website, with access to the careers advisory service pilot evaluation executive summary, can be found here - [NMW Incubator \(nmresearch.org.uk\)](https://nmw-incubator.nmresearch.org.uk) - in the information and resources section.

For further information about this initiative please contact Nick Sandison at NIHR Nursing & Midwifery incubator [n.j.sandison@soton.ac.uk](mailto:n.j.sandison@soton.ac.uk)