

July 2026 Newsletter



Allied Health Professions Workforce Research Partnership



Contents

P1	Introduction
P2-3	Updates & Findings from the Priority Setting Partnership
P4	AHP Dashboard
P5	News
P6	Event & Funding Calls

Introduction

Welcome to the Workforce Research Partnership's second bulletin of 2026. Sixteen months into our five-year programme, we're pleased to share early findings from our first phase of work, and to let you know that we're now dedicating time to shaping the next stage of WRaP. We'll share more on this soon.

This edition highlights two areas of our research: the James Lind Alliance Priority Setting Partnership and Apprenticeships. Thanks to the 1,500 AHPs who took part in the JLA process, we now have a clear set of workforce research priorities which are already guiding our plans for the next three years.

Our Apprenticeships team has also launched an interactive dashboard that shows geographic patterns and the spread of AHP apprenticeship opportunities. Please do explore the link and try it out.

This newsletter includes updates on our progress, a look ahead to our future direction, and key developments and events for anyone interested in AHP workforce research. Feel free to share this newsletter with colleagues. To receive future bulletins directly, contact ahp-wrap@shu.ac.uk or yp9@aru.ac.uk.



The **Allied Health Professions Workforce Research Partnership (AHP WRaP)**, led by **Prof Julie Nightingale**, has just published the **Top 10 research priorities for AHP workforce research** in the UK. This milestone follows the completion of a national **James Lind Alliance Priority Setting Partnership (PSP)**, which was coordinated by Sheffield Hallam University in collaboration with the JLA. This is the first time that Allied Health Professionals, system leaders, researchers, and people and communities who use AHP services have come together at national scale to identify the most important unanswered questions about the AHP workforce. The PSP gathered more than 1,700 contributions from across the UK, representing all 14 AHP professions. Using the JLA's rigorous and transparent methodology, these contributions were refined into a shortlist and agreed through a final consensus workshop to produce the Top 10 priorities. These priorities highlight where research is most urgently needed to support a sustainable, skilled and future-ready AHP workforce, and will help guide researchers, funders, policymakers, and professional bodies in shaping future programmes of work. You can view the workforce research priorities and find out more information about the Priority Setting Partnership here: **[View the Top 10](#)**



Huge thanks to all of the brilliant workforce and patient representatives who attended and contributed to our Allied Health Professions Workforce research priority setting workshop

We are delighted to launch the Top 10 research priorities for the Allied Health Professions (AHP) workforce. They reflect the collective views of AHPs, system leaders, researchers, and people and communities who use AHP services. We hope these priorities will help guide future research, funding, policy, and collaboration across the AHP community.

ALLIED HEALTH PROFESSIONS WORKFORCE RESEARCH PARTNERSHIP

TOP 10 RESEARCH PRIORITIES



- 1** What is the impact and effectiveness of the allied health professions workforce on health service delivery and how can this be measured (e.g. reduction of waiting lists, increased availability of community based care, economic benefit, cost-effectiveness, health outcomes)?
- 2** How can it be ensured that the allied health professions workforce is properly funded and resourced for a fully staffed, safe and effective workforce? What impact would this have on service delivery and patient outcomes?
- 3** How can organisations (e.g. private sector, NHS, and social care) and service delivery teams work more seamlessly together in partnership to develop the allied health professional workforce and deliver the best patient care and outcomes?
- 4** How are innovations in technology such as artificial intelligence (AI) and other digital solutions affecting and/or assisting the allied health professions workforce and healthcare delivery? What training is needed to support the workforce to use it safely and effectively?
- 5** How can the future sustainability of the allied health professions workforce be addressed (e.g. succession, workforce and work planning, and staffing levels)?
- 6** How can more opportunities for leadership roles in the allied health professions be grown, and how can allied health professionals be encouraged into such roles?
- 7** How can preventative roles delivered by the allied health professions be developed and supported further? What is the impact of preventive roles?
- 8** What is the best way to balance capacity for health service provision whilst also allowing the allied health professions workforce access to professional training and career development? What impact would achieving this balance have (e.g. patient care, safety, service delivery, staff wellbeing, job satisfaction and retention)?
- 9** How can speciality, extended, enhanced, advanced and consultant roles be developed, funded and utilised more effectively to support the allied health professions workforce, and what impact does this have on patient outcomes?
- 10** What are the challenges faced by the smaller and underrepresented allied health professions? How can funding, roles and recognition for these groups be developed and spread more evenly and equitably (e.g. the arts based therapies or in specialist services)?



Interactive AHP Apprenticeship Dashboard

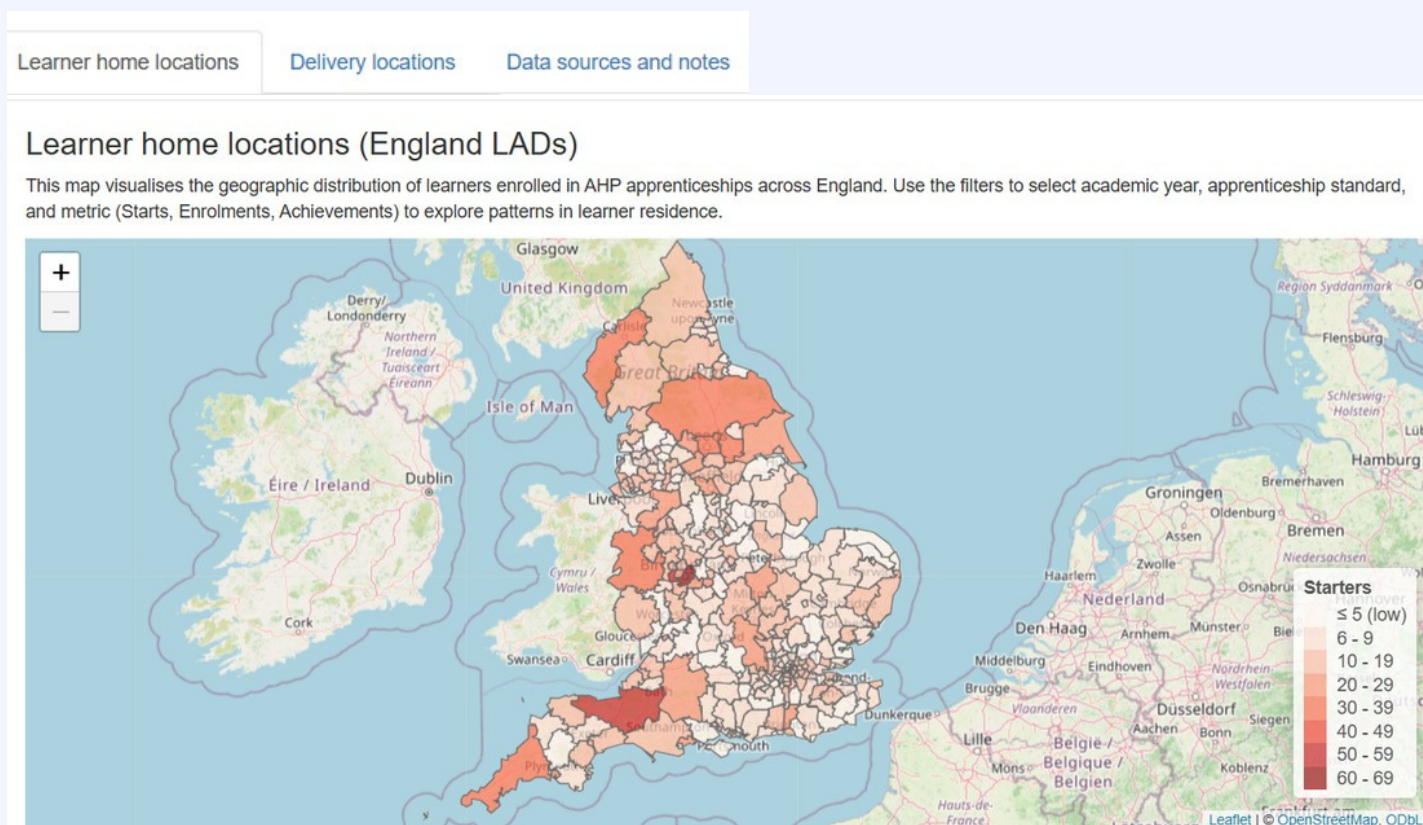
An interactive AHP apprenticeship dashboard developed by Dr Tanja Kleinhappel is now being embedded within the wider WRaP project webpage to help improve accessibility and visibility of apprenticeship-related activity and data across the programme.

The dashboard provides an engaging and user-friendly way to explore apprenticeship information and reflects ongoing efforts within WRaP to develop innovative and accessible resources for partners, stakeholders and wider audiences.

The dashboard can be explored here:

[AHP Apprenticeship Dashboard](#)

This dashboard provides an interactive visualisation of Allied Health Professions (AHP) apprenticeship activity across England. It enables exploration of learner home locations and provider delivery locations for different apprenticeship standards, academic years, and metrics (Starts, Enrolments, Achievements). Users can identify geographic patterns and gain insights into the distribution and coverage of AHP apprenticeship opportunities.



Professor Julie Nightingale delivered the prestigious keynote **Stanley Melville Memorial Lecture** to the Society of Radiographers' **UK Imaging and Oncology Congress** earlier this month on "Save Our Staff": Re-defining radiography through a workforce research lens."

Dr. Nicola Gillin will be presenting the findings from one of the WRaP's 'Flexfund' projects at the **BSA's Work Employment and Society conference** in Bath on the 10th September. The presentation is titled: Trends, indicators of success, and stepwise migration amongst internationally recruited Allied Health Professionals in the NHS (2020-2025)



Health Services Research UK (HSR UK) Conference

AHP WRaP had strong representation across the conference programme, with several colleagues presenting their latest research:

Dr Guptaeswar Patel – 'Examining the system- and service-level impacts of Level 6 AHP apprenticeships in England: a mixed-methods study.'

Allied Health Profession Apprenticeships in Rural & Coastal Health Systems
A Multi-Level Systems Perspective

Howe L.¹, Patel G.², Stevens T.¹, Grafton K.¹, Fowler-Davis S.², Willis S.¹
¹ University of Lincoln ² Anglia Ruskin University

FRAMING THE STUDY
Apprenticeships are used as a lens on how workforce systems operate, tracing how national policy becomes practice across very different places. The study reads policy, organisational capacity and individual experience as one connected system, informed by multi-level governance and complex adaptive systems thinking. (Rouse et al., 2019; May, 2022).

KEY MESSAGES

- 01 AHP apprenticeships are widely valued as a necessary workforce route in rural and coastal systems, especially where traditional, full-time university training is hard to reach.
- 02 Their sustainability depends on alignment across national policy, organisational capacity and individual circumstances. They behave as a complex adaptive system, not a linear training pipeline.
- 03 Current funding and regulatory design pushes operational cost and risk onto local services, so apprenticeships often become a substitutional decision instead of workforce expansion.
- 04 Identical national policy produces uneven local outcomes. Resilience and fragility coexist across places, affected by organisational readiness, leadership and the geography of higher education provision.

THE THEMATIC FRAMEWORK
A Complex Adaptive System of AHP Apprenticeship

CONSTRUCTING A COMPLEX ADAPTIVE SYSTEM

NATIONAL LEVEL

- Funding rule or structure (e.g. run, staffs)
- HEE and service programme
- ESL standards

ORGANISATIONAL LEVEL

- Recruitment strategy
- Practice design
- Use of resources and workforce planning
- Retention

INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

- Recruitment strategy
- Practice design
- Use of resources and workforce planning
- Retention

CONSTRUCTING A COMPLEX ADAPTIVE SYSTEM

- Regulatory and professional governance (RPG)
- National apprenticeship system (NAS)
- Service capacity, workload, effectiveness
- Supervisory structure and learning environment
- Organisational culture
- Non-linearity
- Emergence
- Path dependence
- Resilience / fragility

Sustainability is an emergent property of interactions across national, organisational and individual levels, navigated by adaptive mechanisms and complex-adaptive-system dynamics.

SYSTEM INSIGHT

Apprenticeships are not simply a workforce solution. They are a response to structural constraint in rural and coastal systems.

Their success depends on alignment across system levels. Without it, they risk adding strain to services that are already stretched.

METHODS - QUALITATIVE

- Secondary qualitative analysis - Band 5+ included
- 20 transcripts from rural and coastal services, England
- Inductive and deductive coding (complex adaptive system)

FINDINGS
A system under constraint

- 01 **NATIONAL**
 - Policy sets the conditions for feasibility.
 - Limited backfill, no placement tariff and levy rules narrow local flexibility, while uneven HEE provision restricts access.
 - Some professions still lack an apprenticeship standard
 - Widening participation and EDI
- 02 **ORGANISATIONAL**
 - Valued as a grow-your-own strategy.
 - Long-term investment competes with immediate vacancies
 - Lost posts into clinical capacity, impacting small teams
 - Supervision and protected time cap intake - one at a time
 - Readiness and leadership culture drive uptake
 - Limited supervision and clinical capacity hinder delivery.
- 03 **INDIVIDUAL**
 - Local staff train without relocating, contributing to retention
 - A route for support workers to qualify
 - Travel and hidden costs hinder rural area
 - A gradual route builds professional confidence
 - Balancing work, study and life can facilitate attrition

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY

- Make funding reflect service realities
- Recognise apprenticeships as both education and service.
- Coordinate regionally for equity in access.
- Formalise feedback from local practice into policy

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

- Strengthen HEE and service partnerships
- Tackle spatial inequity so access becomes fair
- Planned mentorship, protected time and intake
- Use digital, blended and regional collaboration

CONCLUSION

- Real potential to strengthen rural and coastal workforces.
- Boundaries by funding, capacity and individual circumstances.
- Strangled where system levels align (Rouse et al., 2019).
- Clear pathways for local recruitment, progression and retention

CONTACT
Dr Louise Howe
Senior Lecturer in Occupational Therapy
University of Lincoln
lhowe@lincoln.ac.uk

REFERENCES

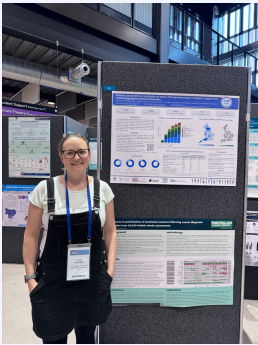
Howe L., Nightingale J. & Willis S. (2022) 'Examining the system- and service-level impacts of Level 6 AHP apprenticeships in England: a mixed-methods study'. *Health Services Research*, 57(5), 1511-1521.

Howe L., Nightingale J. & Willis S. (2022) 'Examining the system- and service-level impacts of Level 6 AHP apprenticeships in England: a mixed-methods study'. *Health Services Research*, 57(5), 1511-1521.

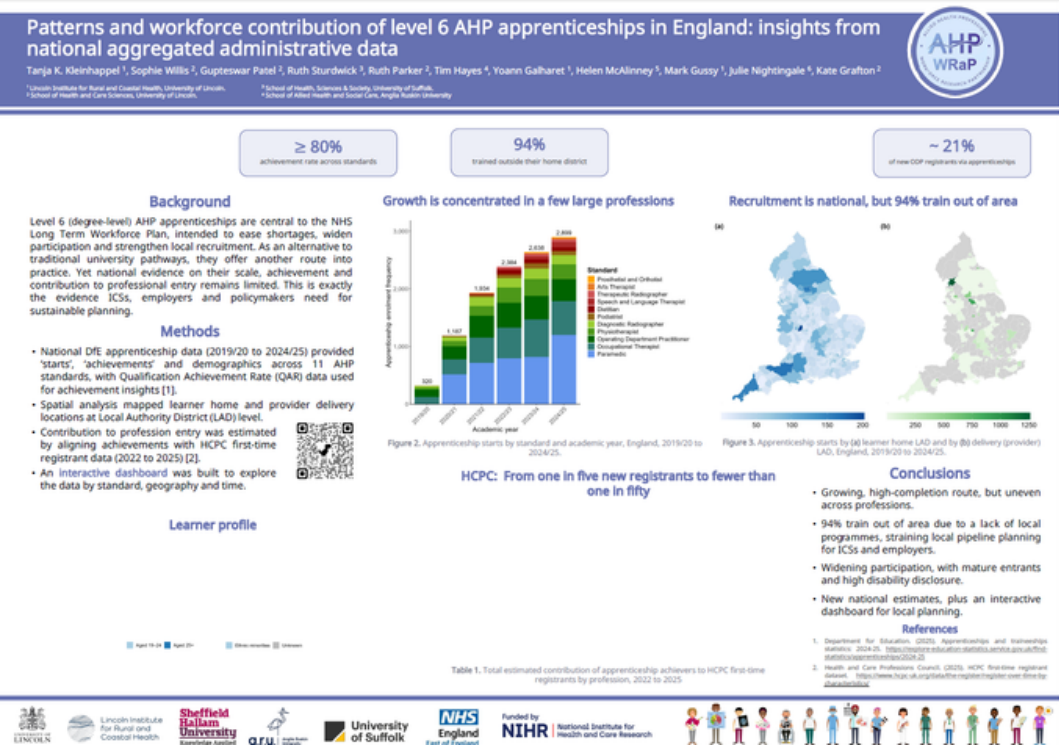
Howe L., Nightingale J. & Willis S. (2022) 'Examining the system- and service-level impacts of Level 6 AHP apprenticeships in England: a mixed-methods study'. *Health Services Research*, 57(5), 1511-1521.

FUNDING
Funded by the NIHR Health Services & Delivery Research programme (NIHR102636). Views are the authors' own and not necessarily those of the NIHR or the Department of Health and Social Care.

Tip: Click on the poster to download in full-resolution

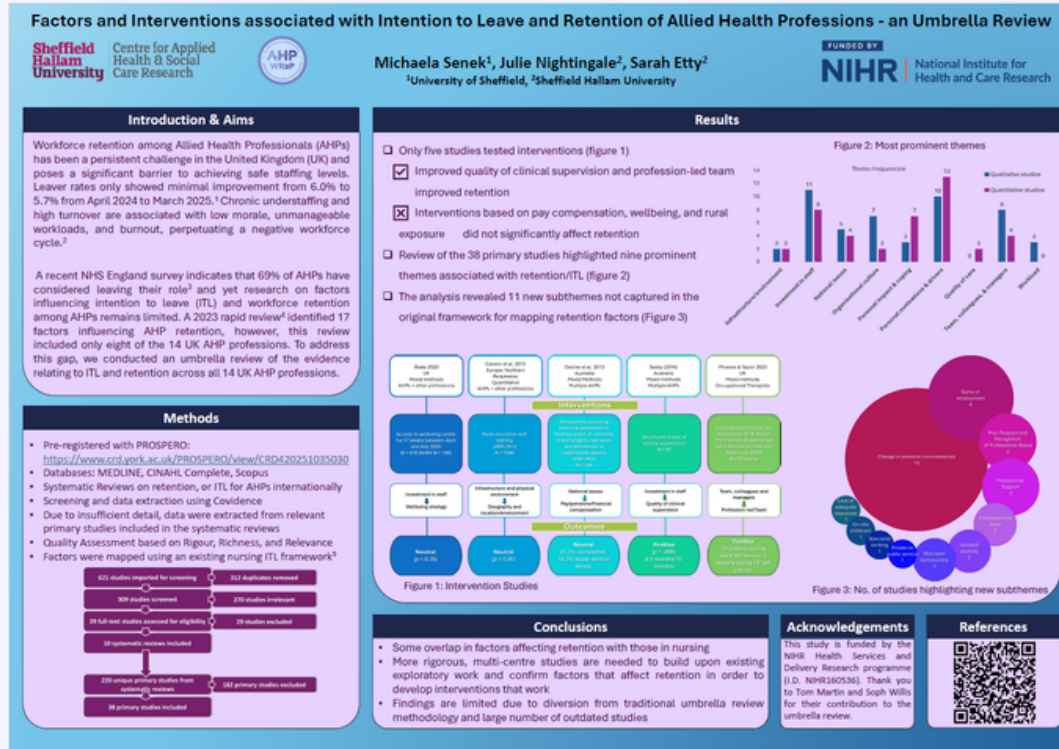


Dr Tanja Kleinhappel – ‘Patterns and workforce contribution of Level 6 AHP apprenticeships in England: insights from national aggregated administrative data.’



Tip: Click on the posters to download in full-resolution

Dr Michaela Senek – ‘Factors and Interventions Associated with Intention to Leave and Retention of allied Health Professions - an Umbrella review.’





Dr Maria Wishart pictured on the right with colleagues from La Trobe University, Melbourne

Dr Maria Wishart co-hosted a workshop at the Health Services Research UK (HSR UK) Conference at the University of Manchester on 30 June, titled **‘Building a sustainable, resilient and fit-for-purpose Allied Health workforce’**. The session was delivered in partnership with colleagues from La Trobe University, Melbourne.

Maria also presented a poster, ‘Sustaining the rural and coastal Allied Health Professional workforce’, showcasing findings from Phase 1 of the AHP WRaP project.



Tip: Click on the poster to view in full-resolution



Allied Health Professions Workforce Research Partnership

Maria Wishart, Anglia Ruskin University
maria.wishart@aru.ac.uk

Sustaining the rural & coastal Allied Health Professional workforce

Who are Allied Health Professionals?

- Third largest clinical workforce in the National Health Service (NHS England, 2024)
- 152,000 AHPs across all UK health and social care settings (AHP Federation, 2024)
- Degree level educated, professionally autonomous practitioners
- Fourteen distinct professional groups
- Aim: improvement of health and wellbeing to help individuals to live full and active lives
- Chronic AHP shortages in rural & coastal areas
- NHS 10-year plan shifts in emphasis to prevention & community care imply a key role for AHPs



Photo: Wellcome collection, Robin Stewart

Why the rural and coastal context?

- Ageing population, more chronic diseases, frailty & comorbidities mean greater complexity in healthcare needs (Whitty & Loveless, 2021)
- Deprivation: risk factors (e.g., smoking, obesity), unemployment, low educational attainment
- Impacts of context on healthcare needs and individuals' ability to access healthcare (The King's Fund, 2024)
- Healthcare inequalities are amplified in rural & coastal areas (Gkioleka et al, 2022)
- Poor understanding of how locational factors may affect AHP recruitment & retention

Aim: to explore evidence on the rural & coastal AHP workforce, to map the existing literature

Method: Systematic scoping review of literature on the rural & coastal AHP workforce

10,494 studies screened,
607 full-text reviewed, **49** included
157 findings extracted

Output: An evidence-informed framework to inform future research & workforce modelling

Rural factors

Accessing housing, the need to travel for work, social or professional isolation & lack of CPD can negatively affect recruitment & retention, while prior rural connections are positive



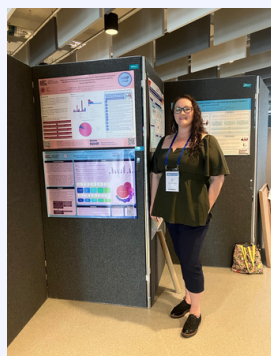
Generic factors

The recruitment & retention impacts of pay, career development, professional support and job satisfaction linked to autonomy & flexibility are amplified in rural & coastal areas

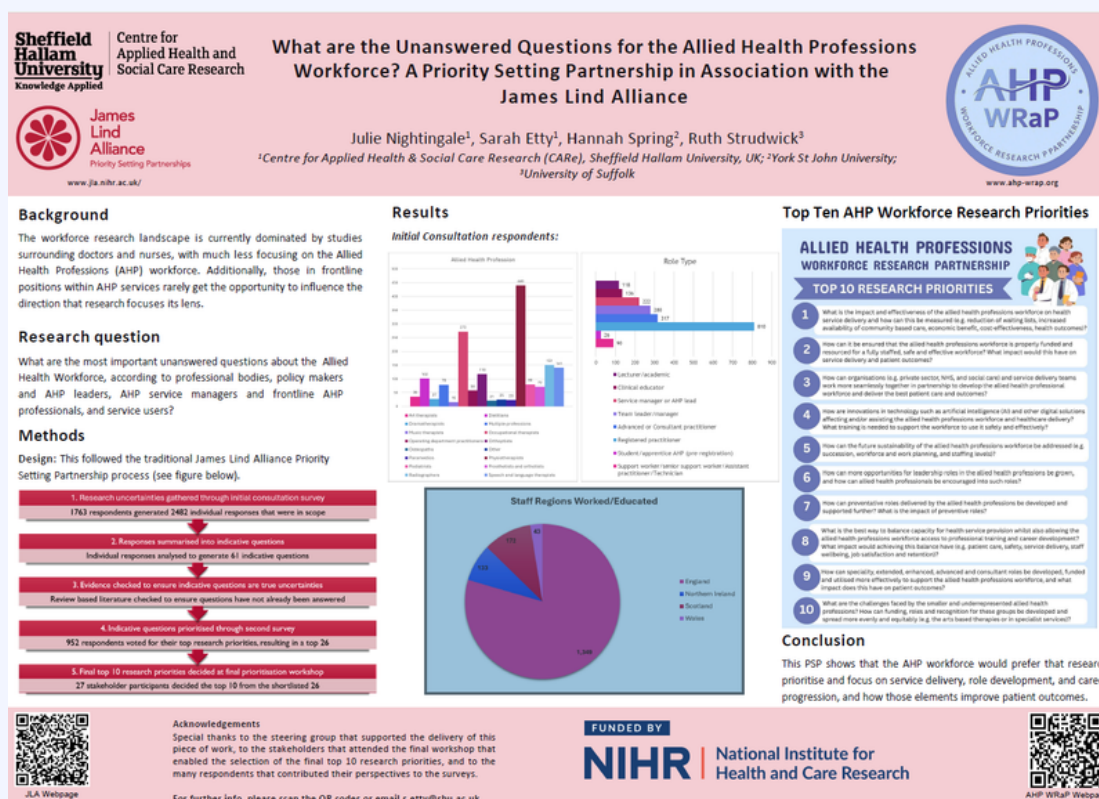
Next steps: (1) Further research to understand how the different factors that we have identified interact, and to explore differences in AHP professions
(2) Work with stakeholders to design attractive 'community specialist' roles that support patient populations in rural & coastal areas
(3) Develop a dynamic simulation model to simulate the effects of interventions to improve planning and management of the AHP workforce

The Allied Health Professional Workforce Research Partnership (AHP WRaP) is funded by the NIHR

<https://research.shu.ac.uk/ahpwrap/>



Dr Sarah Etty – ‘What are the unanswered questions for the Allied Health Professions workforce? A Priority Setting Partnership in association with the James Lind Alliance.’



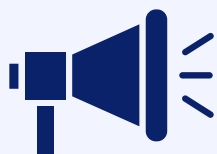
Tip: Click on the poster to download in full-resolution



Conference insights: Prevention Research 2026, Birmingham

In March, Ishant Arora, AHP WRaP research administrator, attended a PHI UK, UKPRP and NIHR conference on reducing health inequalities. The learning strengthens AHP WRaP's work on AHP workforce shortages in rural, coastal and deprived urban areas. A key message was that public involvement must be tailored to each community and context.

Events & Funding Calls



Funding Call

NIHR Research Programme for Social Care (RPSC)

Closing date: 30 September 2026

Seeking proposals focused on methods development, adaptation and implementation of evaluative research in community and social care settings.

Link: [Research Programme for Social Care \(RPSC\) | NIHR](#)



London Regional Listening Event – AHP Framework 2027–2032

Date: 6 July 2026

The Office of the CAHPO is developing a new professional framework for AHPs (2027-2032) to set the long-term vision, direction and ambition for the **14 registered professions** within the health and care system, aligned with national policy and wider NHS delivery strategies. This event will enable AHP leaders, educators, researchers and clinicians interested in workforce development and policy to contribute to the framework.

[Registration Link](#)

Date: Wednesday 15 July, NHS England is hosting a North East & Yorkshire AHP regional listening event here at Sheffield Hallam University in the Heart of the Campus (HoC).

This is an excellent opportunity to contribute your ideas and help shape national policy. You are welcome to attend all or part of the event and share your views.

Please register [here](#)

If you are unable to attend these events, you can also contribute by completing this [survey](#)

Deadline: Friday 18 September at 17:00.



NHS Online: Workforce Survey - AHPs are invited to take part in a new NHS England survey to help shape the future workforce model for NHS Online. The survey is primarily aimed at clinical staff and seeks views on what would encourage AHPs to commit time to delivering care on behalf of NHS Online, what barriers they may face, and what would make the offer attractive and flexible. Feedback will directly inform development of the NHS Online workforce offer.

Share your views [here](#)

Deadline to respond: 31 July 2026

Contact Us

Website: www.ahp-wrap.org

LinkedIn: [Allied Health Professions Workforce Research Partnership](#)

BlueSky: [@ahp-wrap.bsky.social](#)

Email: ahp-wrap.ac.uk