My GW4-CAT HP PhD Award- How I got here – Edozie Iweka (July 2025)

I have always wanted to further my academic development after completing an MSc in 2023, and the next step was to undertake a doctorate degree. Also, I have been building a research career in my current role as the research and clinical trials radiographer for my NHS trust and therefore saw PhD a necessity to achieve my dream of becoming a clinical academic. Being on a full-time job and with a young family meant that I would struggle with having both the protected time and the funds to successfully embark on this dream. So, I looked out for PhD funded fellowships and in 2023, was signposted the GW4CAT HP PhD award by the Wellcome Trust.

The GW4CAT HP fellowship ticked all the boxes I had for an ideal PhD fellowship including a full-time full-tuition cover, a ringfenced fund for my personal development, and most importantly, the freedom to undertake a project in my area of research interest. So, I jumped in on the opportunity, determined to give it my best shot knowing how competitive the process is. I attended the introductory webinar for the 2024/2025 cohort and had all my queries about the fellowship clarified. Thereafter, I worked on a research idea that focused on optimising Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) protocols for patients having pelvic cancer imaging examination, with some radiography academics from the University of Exeter. I was successfully shortlisted for an interview after a very straightforward application process. I then engaged widely with clinical academics in my Trust, the local NIHR Research Design Service (RDS), now called Research Support Service (RSS) and the academic team at University of Exeter. These were helpful in perusing my research idea and getting me ready for the interview through mock exercises.

My interview was very intense with many of the questions focused on my research development, the "big question" of my proposed PhD research and my plans if successful with the award. Although I thought my performance in the interview was not bad, the knowledge of the competitiveness of the award kept me on edge. I was unsuccessful, however, very detailed feedback on my performance was sent to me. The summary was that while the interview panel thought me to be a good candidate, my area of proposed research lacked the novelty that was fitting for the fellowship. The directors also suggested some contacts that I

can approach to further develop my research idea. So, although my unsuccessful outing was discouraging, the feedback was helpful as I knew the area in my preparation that needed tweaking was my research idea and therefore, I felt encouraged to give the award another attempt.

Prior to the advertisement of the next call, I contacted one of the directors in the panel that interviewed me, and I was thereafter linked up with the director of the Institute of Mathematical Innovation at the University of Bath. My research area has now developed further to include the use of artificial intelligence in triaging cancer patients for MRI examinations. I had series of meetings with my new academic contact in Bath, deliberating on and clarifying this very broad research area to ensure that it was novel enough for my second attempt at the fellowship. When the call for application was out, I was ready. I was again successfully shortlisted for an interview. Although this would be my second interview and with a previous experience, I however needed the academic team from University of Bath to help with a mock interview exercise. You see, I was not going to leave anything by chance. It is important to also note that within this period, I had been involved in a few research projects, with outputs disseminated in peer reviewed journals and presentations at professional conferences.

The interview was not as tense as it was in the previous year and the faces were a bit familiar, though there were a few changes in the panel. I remember arriving few minutes just before my allocated slot due to transport challenges and the program administrator was very helpful in calming my nerves. After the interview, the wait for the feedback felt unending and arduous. A couple of weeks after, the positive outcome delivered through my email brought me immense joy. All I could think to myself was, "I am definitely doing this, a PhD!". The almost two years of studying, networking, and preparation had finally paid off.

I am currently in my Pre-PhD period and getting to know more about the fellowship and other members of my cohort. I am also working with my assigned director mentor to identify the supervisory team that will assist in developing the final version of my PhD research proposal as well as the successful delivery of the project in the PhD proper from next year. My aim is to make sure I assemble the right team with the right expertise across the GW4 institutions. I am studying published research evidence around my topic area to further acquaint myself on the

research gaps and possible designs that will influence my study proposal. This will also inform my initial drafts of the proposal.

My dream is to become a clinical academic in radiography, providing research leadership to professionals interested in a research career while leading on impactful research that benefit patient care and service delivery in diagnostic radiography. I have received tremendous support from my NHS Trust and departmental senior management up to this time and have also been assured of ongoing support for my development. The GW4CAT HP PhD fellowship provides me the resources across four reputable UK institutions to help in achieving my ambitions and more. I am under no illusion about the enormity of the demands of a PhD program; however, I am certain that the support available to me will be harnessed to complement my tenacity to achieve a successful outcome. I am also hoping to enjoy the process as much as possible.