

UCLH Cancer Academy Accelerator: An NCL Gateway for Cancer Education and Workforce Development

Project lead and organisation - Sharon Cavanagh/Lois Roberts/Andrew Wilson
North Central London Cancer Alliance

Partner organisation(s) involved – University College London Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

Funding requested (£) - £220,000

Proposed start and end dates - September 2026 to September 2028

Summary

This bid proposes the UCLH Cancer Academy Accelerator, a £220,000 programme (Sept 2026–Sept 2028) to strengthen the cancer workforce across North Central London (NCL) through coordinated education and training. It addresses major system challenges, including workforce shortages, poor retention, fragmented education provision, and inequitable access to development opportunities, all of which impact care quality and patient experience.

The project will establish a Cancer Academy hub hosted by UCLH, acting as a single gateway for cancer education and workforce development. This will include a digital portal that centralises access to training, career development resources, and communities of practice, improving visibility and consistency of learning across organisations.

In parallel, a dynamic education development model will identify workforce gaps and rapidly design targeted training programmes in priority areas such as systemic anti-cancer therapy (SACT), teenage and young adult care, research, and digital roles. Delivery will be coordinated by a dedicated project manager to ensure scalability without adding frontline burden.

The programme aims to reach 2,000–3,000 staff, improving skills, confidence, and consistency of care. By creating a more capable and supported workforce, it is expected to enhance patient experience, reduce variation, and support better outcomes. A mixed funding model is intended to ensure long-term sustainability.

NCLCA Big Ideas Fund – Expression of Interest

Section 1 – Project Details			
Proposal title	UCLH Cancer Academy Accelerator: An NCL Gateway for Cancer Education and Workforce Development	Project lead and organisation	Sharon Cavanagh/Lois Roberts/Andrew Wilson North Central London Cancer Alliance
Partner organisation	University College London Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust	Funding requested (£)*	£220,000
Proposed start and end dates*	September 2026 to September 2028		
Section 2 – The Idea			
1. What is the challenge you are seeking to address?*	<p>This project seeks to address system-wide cancer workforce challenges that are constraining care quality, access, workforce sustainability and patient experience across NCL. North Central London (NCL) hosts some of the largest and most complex cancer services in the UK and has an established workforce development programme covering planning, capability mapping and the alignment of education to ACCEND capabilities. However, there is currently no complementary function that can support the development and provision of tailored cancer education, training, and workforce development for all professions across the cancer pathway, especially non-ACCEND professions.</p> <p>This gap contributes to several interconnected challenges, highlighted in the NCLCA Workforce Strategy. Issues with staff retention and workforce pressures are driven by poor succession planning, unclear career progression pathways, and limited support for development—particularly for lower-banded and non-clinical roles—resulting in high turnover and reduced workforce sustainability.</p> <p>These challenges are compounded by fragmented and inequitable access to education for all cancer professionals, with no local entity to coordinate the development and provision of education, learning, or development opportunities. Education is often delivered in organisational silos and shaped by availability rather than workforce need, leading to variation in capability and unequal access. This lack of coordination also limits opportunities for cross-system networking, innovation, peer learning, and recognition of good practice.</p> <p>Finally, the absence of a dedicated Cancer Academy within NCL, unlike other cancer alliances that have a major cancer hospital, means there is limited capacity to develop educational content in direct response to workforce education and training needs, reducing the ability to create, update and reframe education in a dynamic and responsive way. This is further exacerbated by digital advancements, which are creating inequalities as workforce skills struggle to keep pace due to time and workload constraints. With demand for cancer services rising ~30% since 2019 and workforce capacity declining, there is a time-critical need to establish and improve access to relevant, current education and to dynamically develop learning in response to emerging and evolving training needs.</p>		

<p>2. What is your proposed project and – at a high level – how would it be delivered?</p>	<p>We propose a two-year Cancer Academy Accelerator, as both the portal and delivery mechanism for the NCL Cancer Workforce Strategy.</p> <p>This will be delivered through a Cancer Academy hub hosted by UCLH, acting as a single front door for NCL cancer education and workforce development opportunities. UCLH is uniquely positioned to host this function as the largest provider of specialised cancer services in NCL, with established links across the cancer pathway, a track record of delivering multi-professional education, and existing Academy infrastructure that has already demonstrated success in developing education and reinvesting in its workforce. Crucially, UCLH operates as a system partner with pan-NCL reach, making it well-placed to standardise approaches, and deliver at scale without duplication. UCLH also brings specialist expertise including in proton beam therapy (PBT), Teenage and Young Adult (TYA) cancer services, and a large Cancer Clinical Trials Unit, positioning it as a centre of excellence for complex, research-active cancer care and education. Hosting within UCLH enables rapid mobilisation, minimises set-up costs, and ensures the programme builds on proven delivery rather than creating new infrastructure from scratch.</p> <p>The programme will deliver two core outputs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Cancer Academy digital hub to complement and signpost to existing resources The Cancer Academy Portal will provide a single-entry point for the NCL cancer workforce, bringing together career development, workforce opportunities, specialist programmes, communities of practice and workforce communications. It will support workforce groups whose development needs are not fully met through existing national frameworks, such as research, digital, operational and transformation roles and non-ACCEND professions. The hub would also aim to highlight and share the many examples of existing educational good practice that already exist across NCL, offering opportunities for networking and collaboration across organisations and professional groups. • Dynamic Education Development Model – A scalable, responsive function that identifies workforce pressures and rapidly translates them into high-quality training programmes, including expansion of existing programmes (e.g. Cancer Research Professionals, Cancer Pharmacy, courses aligned to ACCEND) and new priority areas such as SACT readiness and TYA cancer care. <p>Delivery will be enabled through a dedicated project manager, providing the coordination and infrastructure required to scale existing activity and develop new programmes without increasing frontline burden.</p> <p>Overall, the project will be delivered as a gateway and responsive Academy model, improving visibility and access to existing education across NCL, signposting staff to relevant resources, and supporting targeted new education development where existing provision does not fully meet workforce need.</p>
<p>Section 3 – Impact & Strategic Alignment</p>	
<p>3. Which <u>NCL strategic objectives</u> and/or <u>National Cancer Plan ambitions</u> does your project align with?</p>	<p>The Cancer Academy Accelerator supports NCL Cancer Alliance objectives relating to a supported, knowledgeable workforce and reducing unwarranted variation in care (503b and 505a) by improving access to consistent, high-quality education and enabling a more cohesive 'one workforce' approach across the system. This aligns with NCL's stated focus on improving cancer outcomes through clinical and technological innovation, a supported and knowledgeable workforce, and action to tackle health inequalities.</p> <p>By complementing existing resources and creating a single-entry point for NCL cancer education, the project will make learning, specialist training, and career development opportunities more visible, accessible, and consistent across the system. This will particularly benefit workforce groups whose development needs are not fully met through existing national frameworks or pathways, helping staff across roles and organisations to build the skills, confidence and capability needed to deliver high-quality cancer care.</p> <p>The project directly supports the National Cancer Plan's ambition to modernise the cancer workforce as a critical enabler of improved outcomes. The Plan highlights that delivering earlier diagnosis, faster treatment and world-class care depends on a workforce that is highly skilled, adaptable, and able to apply innovation consistently in practice. The Accelerator will help translate this ambition into practice by developing and scaling education aligned to current and emerging workforce priorities, including areas of recognised shortage or specialist need, and by enabling best practice and specialist expertise to be shared more widely across NCL. It also supports the Plan's focus on reducing inequalities by ensuring equitable access to development opportunities across all staff groups, helping to address variation in workforce capability and patient outcomes.</p> <p>The UCLH Cancer Academy is already demonstrating this approach by addressing unmet educational needs across the cancer sector. For example, the 18-month Junior Clinical Trials Practitioner programme equips life science graduates with the knowledge, skills and competencies needed to begin a career in clinical research, supporting diversification of the research workforce in response to recognised shortages.</p>
<p>4. What impact do you expect the project to have on NCL cancer outcomes and/or patient experience?</p>	<p>The Accelerator will improve cancer outcomes indirectly by strengthening one of the core enablers of high-quality care: a capable, confident, and consistently supported workforce. Its immediate impact will be improved visibility, access, and uptake of relevant education across NCL, particularly among staff groups whose development needs are not fully met by existing frameworks. Its medium-term impact will be improved staff confidence, more consistent baseline knowledge, stronger cross-organisational learning, and reduced variation in workforce capability. These changes are expected to support better continuity, more reliable patient interactions, and improved patient experience over time. Success will be tracked through portal reach, uptake and completion of priority training, participation by organisation and staff group, pre/post confidence measures, and evidence of a sustainable mixed-income model by the end of the funding period.</p> <p>This is particularly important given that NCL currently ranks in the lowest quartile nationally for cancer patient experience (18th out of 21 Cancer Alliances, NCPES 2024). Variation in workforce skills, knowledge, and confidence across organisations contributes directly to this position. By ensuring all cancer staff have access to</p>

	<p>consistent, high-quality education regardless of role or organisation, the Academy will support more reliable, high-quality patient interactions and more consistent care across pathways.</p> <p>Over time, the Cancer Academy will support sustained improvements in patient experience and outcomes across NCL, with success measured through workforce reach (2,000–3,000 staff), uptake and completion of training, self-reported improvements in staff skill confidence and access to development opportunities.</p>
Section 4 – Resources	
5. What do you see as the likelihood of attracting external funding?	<p>High. However, industry funding supports specific course content — not the project management and infrastructure that enables the model to scale across NCL. What makes the Academy's external funding prospects particularly strong is its positioning. NCL is home to some of the largest cancer centres in the country, yet there is no cancer academy model serving the NCL workforce. The Academy fills that gap — providing a credible, specialist-led touchpoint for NCL that industry, academic and national partners will want to be associated with and invest in.</p> <p>The Big Ideas Fund fills this critical gap, enabling the Academy to reach the scale at which the mixed funding model — sponsorship, course fees, and partnership income — becomes fully self-sustaining. This is a one-time investment to reach the scale at which the Academy becomes financially independent and delivers lasting impact for NCL and beyond.</p>
6. High-level indication of how the budget would be used*	<p>Project Manager – The majority of funding will support a dedicated Project Manager (Band 8a, 24 months) to coordinate delivery of the Cancer Academy Accelerator across NCL, including development of the Cancer Academy digital hub, stakeholder coordination, communications, delivery planning, and oversight of project milestone. This role will enable existing education and opportunities to be brought together into a more visible, accessible, and consistent offer for the NCL cancer workforce, without adding to frontline clinical workload.</p> <p>Pump-prime funding for priority education development – The remaining funding will provide pump-prime resource for targeted education development in response to workforce priorities, shortages and areas where existing national frameworks or pathways do not fully meet local need. This may include priority areas such as SACT readiness, Teenage and Young Adult cancer care, cancer research roles, digital, operational or transformation roles, and other specialist workforce development needs identified across NCL.</p>
Section 5 – Anything Else	
7. Is there anything else you would like to flag?	<p>Key risks and mitigations:</p> <p>Duplication of provision; <i>the project will complement existing resources and centralise and signpost access rather than duplicate</i></p> <p>Sustainability beyond funding; <i>mixed income model (industry, courses, partnerships)</i></p> <p>Delivery capacity; <i>dedicated Band 8a PM to coordinate system-wide delivery of the project</i></p>

Additional Guidance on Completing this EOI

General

- All EOIs must not exceed 2 pages.
- Please submit to uclh.nclcanceralliance@nhs.net by 25th June 2026.
- Only NCLCA colleagues may submit.

Section 1 – Project Details

- Our current expectation is that we will fund a small number of projects from a total funding pot of ~£600k.
- Proposed end date for the project must be no later than March 2029.

Section 2 – The Idea

- Question 1 - Describe the problem or unmet need. Include relevant data or evidence where possible.

Section 4 – Resources

- Question 6 - e.g., staffing, clinical time, technology, evaluation, overheads. Precise costings are not required at EOI stage.