



Stock image of a nurse working on an NHS ward (Getty Images)

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Northumbria University leads major study to tackle NHS fraud

Northumbria University is spearheading vital research to enhance counter-fraud strategies within the NHS in England, aiming to reduce financial losses, protect public trust, and safeguard the quality and safety of healthcare services.

Official estimates indicate the NHS is vulnerable to losing up to £1.3 [billion annually to fraud](#). These crimes range from procurement fraud, such as inflated contracts and non-delivery of goods, to patient fraud, including

unlawful claims for treatment or exemptions, and employee fraud, such as falsified qualifications or timesheets., and employee fraud, such as falsified qualifications or timesheets.

A team of researchers from Northumbria, Cardiff and Manchester universities has been [awarded almost £900,000](#) of funding from the [National Institute for Health and Care Research \(NIHR\)](#) to lead the [SCAN: Strengthening Counter Fraud across the NHS in England](#) study.

With expertise in law, medical sociology, criminology and business studies, the team will examine how counter-fraud measures are delivered in the NHS across England and look for ways to make them more effective – protecting public trust, quality of care and NHS budgets.

[Dr Cerian Griffiths](#) of [Northumbria Law School](#), who co-leads SCAN alongside Professor Tim Rapley, highlighted the urgency of tackling fraud in the health sector. “Every pound lost to fraud is a pound that could have been spent on patient care,” she said.

“By improving counter-fraud strategies, we aim to help the NHS protect its resources and strengthen public confidence in the system.”

Across NHS organisations, counter-fraud measures vary significantly, with a mix of internal NHS teams and external companies delivering responses. Dr Griffiths added: “This fragmented approach has led to inconsistencies, making it challenging to coordinate efforts effectively. Our research project aims to address this issue by mapping existing counter-fraud strategies across national, regional, and local NHS bodies.”

Researchers will work closely with policymakers, fraud experts, and NHS staff to analyse policies, training programmes, and operational practices. Through surveys, interviews, and focus groups, the team will identify best practices and areas where improvements can be made. The findings will be used to co-develop practical recommendations, training resources, and tools to enhance fraud prevention and response.

Alongside this analysis, the team is ensuring the public and NHS workforce are heavily involved in shaping solutions. A Public Stakeholder Advisory Group will ensure that the recommendations align with public and workforce

needs.

[Professor Tim Rapley](#) of Northumbria's Department of [Social Work, Education and Community Wellbeing](#), emphasised the importance of this collaboration: "Engaging NHS staff and the public in this research ensures that our recommendations are practical and effective," he said. "By working together, we can build a more robust system to prevent fraud and protect NHS resources."

The SCAN project has been welcomed by many leading figures working in the NHS and government agencies.

Alex Rothwell, CEO of the NHS Counter Fraud Authority, said: "We recognise the value of academic study, which brings information and specialists from diverse disciplines and organisations together. The counter fraud landscape is complicated and fresh perspectives and transparency is welcomed."

Lisa McAlister, Counter Fraud Manager at NHS Business Services Authority states: "I welcome the efforts of the SCAN project to improve the national and local response to the threat of fraud against the NHS. This is a much-needed project at a time when NHS budgets are stretched more than ever. SCAN has great potential to bolster counter fraud efforts, and save public money lost to fraud and error."

Sean McNabb, Director of Cartels at the Competition and Markets Authority also stated: "Tackling fraud in the NHS and in other parts of the public sector has never been more important and this vital research should help ensure that those responsible for spending public funds are more alert to the risk of fraud and better equipped to combat it."

The research findings from this study, which runs until autumn 2027, will be shared widely with policymakers, NHS leaders, and fraud prevention experts through reports, conferences, and media outreach. The ultimate goal is to create a more coordinated and effective counter-fraud system that helps safeguard the future of the NHS.

The full research team includes Professor Tom Sanders and Emeritus Professor Jacqueline Harvey from Northumbria University, Alan Doig from Cardiff University and Professor Nicholas Lord and Dr Katie Benson from the

University of Manchester.

Visit the [SCAN project website](#) to learn more about the study and counter-fraud efforts across the NHS and wider health sector.

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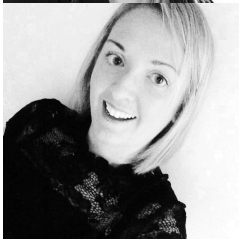


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