Heather Catt, was awarded her PhD spring 2019. Heather undertook HTMR Network funded PhD project Cost-effective modelling for benefit-risk with the University of Liverpool. Heather recently started a lectureship in Public Health at the University of Manchester.

As part of the HTMR Network, I have been part of a cohort of PhD researchers and have been able to engage with this group in both formal and informal ways. We have learned about each other’s research at the annual HTMR Phd student symposia and these meetings, and evening social events, have provided excellent opportunities to network, sharing experiences and offering support to each other. Given the unique challenges involved in undertaking a PhD, the value of this peer support cannot be understated. I have enjoyed having a group who understand the frustrations and isolation involved in PhD research, and to be able to benchmark progress! It has been very helpful to be able to discuss issues within the cohort and either come up with solutions or simply empathise with each other. The cohort continue to communicate through a WhatsApp group where we share news and areas of opportunity to develop research skills or promote our research. By covering all the expenses from the symposia, the HTMR Network has removed barriers to participation and has ensured that all PhD students are able to attend.

I have also attended two fully funded conferences where I have been able to attend presentations of trials methodology and had the opportunity to present posters on my research. The student symposia have offered training on generic research skills such as how to formulate good research questions, write publishable research, how to build a research network and how to pitch your research to people with different backgrounds in a short space of time. Generic research skills have been important to my achievements over the last year. They have helped me to write two papers, one of which was published earlier in 2019. They have also helped me to communicate my research effectively and develop a research proposal for a clinical lectureship at the University of Manchester. I am pleased to report that I started the post in November 2018.

In summary, I have found participation in the HTMR Network to be incredibly useful and believe it has established a researcher cohort that will maintain links into the future. The training sessions on offer have been very useful and I have directly applied the skills I developed to improving my research career.