NIHR | School for Social Care Research

NIHR SSCR Programme 2024-2029 Career Development Awards (CDA)

Q&A arising from CDA Informational Webinar (2nd July)

This document outlines the questions and answers raised at the informational webinar around the SSCR Career Development Awards opportunity.

Please note that some questions have been edited for clarity, and this document does not include queries already covered by our FAQ page.

For further information:

- Read the funding guidance in full
- Contact the Research Support Service for advice about your application
- Visit our funding Frequently Asked Questions page
- Watch a recording of the webinar

Send completed applications to sscr-training@york.ac.uk by the deadline of **5pm Thursday 24th September 2026.**

Queries not answered in webinar

Is this open to social workers in mental health [employed by the] NHS?
Yes.

Do you need to have a clinical background to be eligible? For example, staff who may be interested who work in research management and capacity building?
No. An SSCR Career Development Award is open to applicants based in adult social care practice or research, or adjacent disciplines, who wish to further their research career development. This includes individuals working in desk-based positions in adult social care practice.

We also have a very broad interpretation of 'practitioner' for this opportunity.

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Visit our FAQs page for further information on how we define this.

You mention grand or over complicated plans [in the context of what the panel is open to funding]. Are simple plans preferred?
We do not prefer simple plans, but we do expect awards to represent good value for money and present activity that is going to be highly impactful on the applicant's career.

For some applicants this may include many detailed award activities which have high associated costs, such as preparatory research activities, involvement costs and travel. For others, this may include a modest package of training and placements, and the time required to undertake them. In either of these cases, the panel will be assessing applications against the review criteria as outlined in the funding guidance.

It is important to ensure that you have robust rationale why your award plans and the associated costs represent a good investment of the SSCR in your career development. All Career Development Awards, but particularly those which are costed at the upper end of the available budget (up to £75k), will be scrutinised on whether the award represents good value for money. An overly complex award is not likely to be funded where a modest one would be more appropriate for the individual's career development goals/needs.

The NIHR pre-application fund sounds similar [to an SSCR Career Development Award], especially if the career development is about applying for future research funding. There is a slightly overlapping timeframe with pre-app cohort 9 (submission in July for decision in October). Is it permissible to apply to both?
Yes. We do not prohibit Career Development Award applicants from applying for other NIHR funding streams. However, although there are some similarities with the NIHR pre-application support fund, it's important to ensure that your SSCR CDA application is tailored to this funding call.

The SSCR CDA application form includes a short section in the beginning to detail other NIHR funding routes which you have recently applied to, and applicants should declare this here.

Is it ok to work across adult social care and justice sectors [or between adult social care and other comparable sectors]?
Yes, but this award must focus on adult social care and your career development in this area.

We will support applicants from other disciplines and recognise that there is lots

of overlap with other important areas, but this award is first and foremost centered on adult social care. Where there is overlap in your interests between adult social care and another research area, it's important to be very clear how these plans fit within the remit of the SSCR and why this funding opportunity is the most appropriate route for you.

We encourage applicants in this position to get in touch with the RSS for more guidance on shaping their award narrative.

Is there advice on what would be a suitable amount of part time hours? What has worked well with previous applications?
We do not advise on this as what works well for one applicant will look very different to another. This depends on career development goals, award activities and existing working arrangements.

Can you advise on the type of short placement and activities to develop research skills that would be appropriate?
For further guidance about proposed award plans, we encourage you to contact the Research Support Service: Specialist Centre for Social Care.

Queries answered in webinar (including those raised in advance)

Please can you explain a bit about the difference between line manager and career development supporter?
Your line manager is the person responsible for managing you while you carry out your award, while your career development supporter is the person who will give you mentorship and challenge you to maximise your development opportunities.

While a line manager can provide career development guidance, we encourage applicants to think about having someone who isn't their line manager in the career development supporter role. Having another that can give a wider, more holistic view of your career from an external perspective is very valuable, and different to someone who knows you in a day-to-day capacity.

For more information about what a career development supporter is expected to do, visit our FAQ: 'What kind of support is my 'Career Development Supporter' expected to provide'?

Can you still be eligible if you have previously held an NIHR career

development award (e.g. Doctoral award) if you can identify new training and development needs that relate to your career progression? // Are you eligible to apply if you have previously received the NIHR Research Support award?
Yes, we do not prohibit successful applicants from other NIHR funding opportunities from applying to this opportunity. Applicants who have recently received NIHR funding should declare this in their application and there is a short section to do so.

If you want to include attending conferences but you do not have details, how do you cost and apply for funding?
Estimates are acceptable at application stage. For conferences that have been run previously, information on location and registration fees is often available via their websites and can be a good indication of what should be budgeted for in future.

Similarly, the SSCR conference is held annually in one of our member cities (York, Leeds, London, Birmingham, Sheffield and Bristol) over two days. Estimated costs for x2 days of travel, subsistence and accommodation for is sufficient at this stage.

If you want to do a formal course, would this have to be completed by the project end date?
Yes. The award end date is the final date where any time spent undertaking your CDA can be claimed back; if a course would extend beyond the end point of your award, you would not be able to claim for your time or any fees undertaking it.

Would it be possible to explain a bit more about placements: such as locations and duration?
We do not have set criteria for placements and instead invite applicants to tell us why the location and duration of a proposed placement is going to be the most appropriate for their career development.

As the SSCR is focused on adult social care in England, we would expect that placement locations would largely be in England. Alternative locations (e.g. those in Wales/Scotland/NI or international) require a very clear, specific rationale.

Is there scope for paying people with lived experience for their time and skills in the context of relevant network building?
Yes, these costs are eligible and encouraged. More information on rates of payment can be found on the NIHR website.

Is there info available on previous successful CDA applications on the website?
Yes, via our SSCR awardees information page.

You can also read about the activities of past SSCR Career Development Awardees via our alumni page. *Please note that these awards were funded in the past phase of the school (2019-2024) and may include activity that is now ineligible.*

Does the actual placement need to be organised ahead of application? Or is just a description acceptable?
Any placements outlined in your award should be organised at the point of application submission. This is to ensure that award plans are ready to go once funded and reduces any risk/delay that comes with setting up a placement after your award start date. This is not only applicable to placements but any award activity which is outlined (i.e. identifying specific training/conferences)

There is a section in the application form to detail partner support so a short statement from any placement hosts should be included here. This is not a requirement, but it signals to the panel that the awardee has strong support to carry out their award plans.

Does the NIHR have pre-arranged fee levels with universities for master's level courses?
No. Masters fees can vary by course and institution, and we do not set a threshold for how much funding can be allocated to this. However, we invite applicants to clearly articulate what course they want to do and why this is the best fit for them and their career aspirations.

Would I be eligible as a visiting researcher from a specific university?
Yes, the main criterion is that a contract is in place with a host organisation which we can contract with.

If the university would be willing to issue a contract of employment to host you for the duration of your award then you would be eligible. Similarly, if an applicant has a contract of employment with a different organisation but had a visiting researcher relationship with the university, this would also be a suitable arrangement.

I'm self-employed/freelance but have an agreed host organisation. Is there anything I or they would need to be aware of in drawing up a specific contract that would exist only for the receipt of any award?

We do not have any specific guidance on this as the contract of employment would be determined by the terms of the host organisation. It is likely that the contract would be conditional on the funding being successful. If the host organisation has any queries, they can get in touch with us directly via sscr-training@york.ac.uk.

Is there an age limit?
No. There is no age limits for individuals, for career stages.

Is local authority provided mental health support in scope for research focus?
Yes, if the 'research focus' refers to the area of adult social care that the applicant is based in.

Is there a lower limit for salary buyout?
No, but we invite applicants to outline the FTE which appropriate for their proposed award activities.