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

Call for Applications November 2024: Guidance for Applicants

Background and Context:
The NIHR School for Social Care Research (SSCR) is dedicated to improving the evidence base of social care practice in England.

Social care is vital for preserving independence, enhancing the quality of life, wellbeing, and end of life care, but it remains under-supported by evidence and the infrastructure to produce and implement that evidence. Building an affordable, high-quality, and sustainable adult social care system that meets people's needs requires a strong evidence base to understand what works best, for whom and when.

As part of the programme's commitment to developing research capacity in social care, we are seeking applications for individual social care Career Development Awards. The SSCR Programme has been granted £7m to implement and conduct capacity-building activities 2024 to 2029; individuals who are committed to developing an evidence base and improving social care research in England are invited to apply.

Who is a Career Development award for?:
We are inviting applications from individuals who are committed to developing the evidence base to improve social care practice in England. This opportunity is open to a wide range of people and you are welcome to apply if:

- You are already working in social care research, education or practice at **any** career stage, or;
- You have research expertise in an aligned sector, topic area or discipline and want to bring your skills and experience into the social care field, or;
- You work in social care and have limited research experience and skills that you wish to develop, or;
- You work in social care in a research capacity and wish to strengthen your research skills further.

Career trajectories in social care research vary from individual to individual. We want to support pathways that develop existing social care researchers, and support moves between practice and academic settings, and and moves between disciplines. Applicants are invited to describe and justify the most pertinent pathway for them.

Support for successful award holders will be provided by the School's dedicated Capacity Building team, which may include access to mentoring, training, peer support networks, and invitations to Career Development events with opportunities to present.

What a Career Development Award offers:
Awards may cover bespoke components of the following nature:

- A development fund for early career researchers (ECR's) for pump priming of ECR-led collaborative research e.g. pilot data collection, preparing data access agreements, involvement/engagement, stakeholder consultation, focused evidence synthesis, small-scale qualitative research.
- An opportunity for ECR's to gain experience in developing and leading their own small-scale research project and to build their networks.
- Dedicated time for development activities (for both the project and the person) to build and support a future research proposal or fellowship application to a funder of social care-related research.
- Undertake a personalised training and development plan which is clearly cemented into a research career.
- Undertake formal training relevant to social care research.
- Enhance research skills to support evidence-informed practice.
- Transition from a relevant professional career to develop research skills and experience in social care-related practice over the longer term.
- Adapt expertise in areas outside social care with a view to their future application in social care research. For example, this may be to explore applying existing methodological expertise in social care research.
- Encourage academics to spend time in policy or practice and practitioners to spend time in academic settings.

It is important to note that these awards are designed for individual career development and are not suitable for funding substantive research projects or to buy-out time solely to write applications. The awards are established to support broader career development activities, such as building a research team, establishing a network, collecting preliminary data or evidence synthesis which may also contribute to a bid or fellowship development.

Expectations:
Successful award holders will be required to produce a detailed training and development plan within four months of the award start date. All award holders are expected to attend the annual SSCR Conference where they will be required to present a poster of their work. In line with the SSCR's commitment to capacity building, successful award holders are also expected to engage with the School's cohort of awardholders and alumni.

Other deliverables outlined in proposals will be reflected in individual Award Letters. Awards will be monitored annually at minimum but monitoring will be adapted to award aims and length.

Funding available:
The SSCR Programme expects to commission a range of applications and awards between £20,000 - £75,000 are available. All applications will be expected to demonstrate value for money

and should be costed accordingly. Staff and non-staff costs will be funded at 100%, with an overhead rate of 30% applied to staff costs at Higher Education Institutions. Costs for the applicant's salary, training (formal or short) courses and events, direct costs linked to the Career Development Award are eligible. The Programme does not fund supervision costs. The Programme will not fund international travel or international conference attendance, except in very exceptional circumstances and accompanied by a sufficiently robust rationale.

Please cost your application using the costing template provided. A full justification of resources is required as part of the application.

Duration:
Career Development Awards are expected to start mid-2025 (no later than 1st August), and to last between 12-24 months. The duration of the award should reflect the nature of the development plan and be fully justified. There is some flexibility with start date and duration. Applications that will not start within this timeframe should apply for the next call which will be announced in 2025.

Eligibility Criteria:
Please note that all applicants must have a contract of employment with an organisation which is able to act as host for the award for the duration of the award. Pre- doctoral applications are welcome and PhD students are eligible to apply if they have submitted their thesis and have an employment contract with the host organisation for the duration of the CDA.

It is expected that the applicant will have connections to relevant and robust academic support for social care research; this may or may not be through existing relationships with SSCR members however we encourage all applicants to explore future relationships within the SSCR core membership within their award if they do not have current links.

Applications will also need to:

- Make a strong case to the SSCR Programme for the proposed plan for their career development, with a clear commitment to establishing or consolidating a long-term career in social care-related research or as a practitioner-researcher. This should include the organisational support they will receive, any training they will undertake as part of their work plan, and how this package will help them take the next steps in their research career or develop their research capacity.
- Demonstrate fit with the remit of the SSCR Programme and show evidence of engaging with the priorities, as set out in our programme of work. Elements of comparative work and career development with other UK countries may be considered, but the focus of the research capacity development is on England.
- Applications from individuals already closely aligned with the SSCR (ie. in a member organisation working in social care research) will also need to clearly identify which internal funding routes they have already explored for their proposed activity and why a CDA is the most appropriate opportunity. A strong justification for accessing SSCR resources is required and will be factored into decision making during the review of applications.

Application process:
Please send your completed application form along with CV, Gantt chart and costing template to: sscr-training@york.ac.uk before the deadline of **5pm, Friday 14th February 2025**. Please note the application must be endorsed and signed by the applicant, line manager, career development supporter and an administrative/financial authority for the host organisation. Applications that do not include a CV, Gantt chart and costings template will be considered incomplete.

We expect to receive more applications than we can fund. All applications will be reviewed by a panel comprised of academic, practice and public members. Following the panel, unsuccessful applicants will receive constructive feedback on their proposals within four weeks of the decision, and, where appropriate, information on other sources of funding may be provided.

Selection Criteria:
Applications will be reviewed using the following criteria:
- A strong applicant research and/or practice profile, with clear proposed alignment to the remit of the NIHR SSCR Programme.
- A strong case for personal development through the award.
- A proposal clearly in line with the applicant's current career stage.
- A clear training/development plan that is integral to the award.
- A clear endpoint and objectives for the research career development award.
- A longer-term commitment to a research career in social care or related field.
- Strong support and commitment to the applicant's career development, from both the host organisation and named career development supporter.
- Value for money.

Questions?
Frequently Asked Questions can be found on the SSCR funding webpage under the 'Further Particulars' section.

If you would like assistance to explore links with SSCR to develop your application, please email sscr-training@york.ac.uk with a brief outline of your proposed topics and we will do our best to link you up with an appropriate member from the School. Any further queries can also be directed to sscr-training@york.ac.uk.

Timeline and commissioning process

- **Step 1:** Work collaboratively with your supervisors/mentors in social care research, practice and public partners to develop and complete the application form.

- **Step 2:** Completed proposal applications are reviewed, ranked and prioritized by the SSCR review panel. A small number of awards will be selected for funding and successful applicants will be informed. Unsuccessful applications will receive feedback.

- **Step 3.** Award letters will be issued and contract arrangements begin, with successful Social Care Career Development Awards to start no later than 1st August 2025.

November 2024	Call launches.
5pm Friday 14th February 2025	Deadline for applications.
February-March 2025	Peer (academic, practice, public) review of applications. Expert panel to rank and prioritise for funding.
April 2025	Outcomes communicated to applicants and feedback to those unsuccessful.
May 2025	Contracting with host institutions; research agreements will be between the NIHR School for Social Care Research and the host organisation. NIHR SSCR terms and conditions will apply.
mid-2025	Successful Career Development Awards begin.