

NIHR School for Social Care Research

Post-Doctoral Research Fellowships 2026

Guidance for Applicants

Background and Context

The NIHR School for Social Care Research (SSCR) is dedicated to developing the evidence base for adult social care practice in England. Our mission is to fund and support high-quality research that improves the wellbeing, independence, dignity, and quality of life of people who use care services, unpaid carers, families, and communities. SSCR also aims to build capacity in social care research, supporting early-career researchers and strengthening links between research, policy, and practice.

As part of this mission, SSCR is offering Post-Doctoral Fellowships to support researchers committed to developing independent careers in social care research. These Fellowships will enable applicants to undertake their own research projects, publish findings, develop new methodological skills, and prepare for future funding opportunities. Fellows will also benefit from training, mentoring, and integration within SSCR's vibrant research community and will become NIHR Academy Members.

These Fellowships are intended for researchers at post-doctoral level who are developing an independent trajectory in social care research. Applicants will typically have completed a PhD and have some experience of contributing to research projects, publications, or related activities, but will not yet be established as independent research leaders.

While this Fellowship call is led by the NIHR School for Social Care Research (SSCR), applicants are also encouraged from outside the SSCR membership institutions. SSCR welcomes proposals that engage with the wider NIHR infrastructure where this is appropriate to the research aims, for example through links with NIHR Applied Research Collaborations (ARCs), Health Determinants Research Collaborations (HDRCs), Policy Research Units, Incubators, or other NIHR-funded programmes and networks. Such links are not mandatory but should be clearly justified where proposed.

Fellowship Details

- **Duration:** Up to 24 months (full-time). Part-time options (minimum 0.6 FTE) will be considered within the time frame of SSCR's current term.
- **Host institution:** Applicants must be hosted by a UK HEI for the duration of their fellowship and evidence credible experienced social care research support..

- **Start date:** Fellowships must start between September and December 2026 and run for up to 24 months
- **Funding limit:** Up to £200,000 per Fellowship to include salary, training, research, and public involvement costs and an overhead of 30% of salary costs. Supervision costs are unfunded.

Eligibility

Applicants must:

- Hold a PhD (or have submitted their thesis for examination at the time of application) in social care, social policy, or a relevant discipline.
- Have a demonstrable track record of research excellence and commitment to social care research
- Be a UK citizen or have confirmed right to work in the UK for the duration of the award

What We Fund

Fellowship projects must align with SSCR's remit, which includes research that:

- Improves outcomes for people using adult social care and their carers.
- Strengthens the evidence base for care delivery, organisation, and workforce support.
- Addresses inequalities in access, quality, or outcomes in social care.
- Involves service users, carers, and communities as partners in research design and delivery.
- Has clear potential for impact on policy, practice, and the wider social care system.

Assessment Criteria

Applications will be assessed against the following criteria. SSCR recognises that applicants will bring different strengths depending on their disciplinary background, career stage, and opportunities to date. Applicants are not expected to meet every

criterion in full; panels will assess excellence, potential, and fit with SSCR's mission in the round.

Applicant

- Demonstrable academic excellence (e.g., academic prizes or commendations, high quality peer reviewed publications, grant capture, etc)
- Demonstrable commitment to a career in social care research and potential to develop as a future leader in social care
- Experience in relevant research methods, dissemination, and collaboration.
- Strong communication and organisational skills.
- Knowledge of SSCR remit and priorities

Project

- Relevance to SSCR's priorities and social care practice.
- Clear aims, appropriate design, and methodological rigour.
- Involvement of people with lived experience of social care.
- Consideration of Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI).
- Feasibility and potential for meaningful impact within the timeframe.

Supervision and Support

Applicants must identify a suitable supervisory team, led by a senior academic with a background in social care research. SSCR encourages supervisory teams to include expertise spanning research and practice. Prospective applicants are advised to contact potential supervisors early in the process.

Fellows will become members of the NIHR Academy, gaining access to training, mentoring, and networking opportunities. They will also benefit from SSCR's own development and capacity-building activities.

NIHR is committed to a supportive, inclusive, caring, and positive community. Diversity and inclusion are fundamental to NIHR's values and success. As NIHR Academy Members, you will be able to access a portfolio of NIHR Academy development and support activities. The NIHR Academy also provides a range of leadership and mentoring programmes, regular networking opportunities, bespoke workshops and events and personal advice and guidance on funding opportunities. This includes an annual NIHR Academy conference.

Application Process

The application process has three stages:

1. Application submission

Submit a completed application form, CV (max 2 pages), and cover letter (max 1 page) by **5pm, Friday the 8th of May** to sscr@york.ac.uk.

Please state: 'SSCR Post-Doctoral Fellowship 2026' in the subject line.

2. Shortlisting

Applications will be reviewed against the criteria. Shortlisted candidates will be invited for interview.

3. Interview

Interviews will take place in person on the 17th and 18th of June. Applicants will be assessed on their project proposal, potential, and fit with SSCR priorities. A presentation will be required.

4. Outcome

Applicants will be notified of the outcome by the end of July 2026. Award contracting with host institutions will follow shortly after. Fellowships are expected to start in September-December 2026.

Successful candidates will be supported to finalise arrangements with their host institution before starting their Fellowship.

Timetable	
Time	Call launch.
February - April 2026	Applicants work with supervisory team to develop and complete the application form.
Friday 8th May 2026	Deadline for completed applications.
May 2026	Proposals reviewed by assessment panel. Shortlisted candidates are invited to interview.
17 th & 18 th June 2026	In-person interviews take place.

July 2026	Applicants are notified of outcomes. Unsuccessful applicants receive feedback and successful award letters are issued.
August 2026	Contracting with the host organisation.
September 2026 - December 2028	Fellowship awards run.

Contact

For questions about the Fellowship call, please contact:

SSCR Programme Team

Email: sscr@york.ac.uk

Website: www.sscr.nihr.ac.uk