Innovation in Social Care Collaborative Grants  
(invite only)  
Call specification

Version: 7 January 2019

This invitation-only call is open to applicants who have been invited to submit a full proposal under the Innovation in Social Care Initiative. All uninvited or ineligible applications will be rejected.

Summary

Through this call we will fund social science-led research and knowledge exchange activity to understand how, why and where innovation happens in social care, to best understand how to improve people’s lives. Each grant should be highly collaborative involving a range of disciplines and stakeholders throughout the research process. We take a deliberately broad definition of innovation including systems, practices, organisations, processes, products and funding.

Proposals should reflect the reality of how social care is experienced by care recipients and their friends and families, providers, funders and care professionals, as well as exploring the relationships between those involved. Applicants should explain how the proposed research and knowledge exchange activity will enable the uptake, spread and adoption of change in social care to deliver improved individual and system outcomes – covering patient, carer and staff outcomes and experience, as well as robust evidence of cost-benefit, both within organisations/sectors and between different parts of the system.

Proposals are expected to be between £1 million and £2 million (at 100% full economic cost), with a duration of up to 60 months.

This call operates a two-stage process. Applicants shortlisted in the outline stage are invited to submit full proposals no later than 16:00 on 27 February 2019. Full proposals will be subject to academic and user peer review. Final funding decisions will be available in late June 2019, and grants should start between 1 September 2019 and 30 September 2019 inclusive.
Background and scope

The demands on the social care system are significant and rising. In England, the number of looked-after children has risen by 11% in six years\(^1\), and in Wales there was a 5% increase between 2016 and 2017\(^2\). Data from Scotland suggests that 17% of the adult population were carers, and 4% of the child population were young carers in 2013\(^3\). There was a more than five-fold increase in carers receiving support in Northern Ireland between 2011 and 2015\(^4\), and projections in demand for adult social services in England suggest a 135% increase in public spending is required by 2035\(^5\).

It is clear that to meet the UK’s future needs we need research on how innovation happens across the diffuse and complex UK social care system, and must accelerate the impact of this research on practice. Given the broader context, research must be sensitive to financial pressures and other resource limitations, and to the cultural and practical challenges and barriers faced by carers, service users and service providers in sharing new knowledge and adapting ways of working.

This call is focused on social science research and knowledge exchange activity to understand how, why and where innovation happens in social care and how change is adopted and scaled within the social care system and at the interfaces with other services and sectors. We will not fund research under this call on the development, implementation and evaluation of new and existing interventions, or proposals that focus primarily on evidence synthesis or on use of existing evidence.

‘Social care’ is used here as a broad term covering provision of help and support (whatever age – including children and young people, working age adults, and older people) to enable people to lead fulfilling, independent and healthy lives, improve their quality of life or keep them safe from harm. It encompasses the care provided privately in the home either by relatives, paid carers, or by people themselves (‘self care’), and more formal sectors such as care homes, children’s residential care, supported living, care provided in NHS primary and secondary care settings, and financial benefits and allowances. We take an intentionally broad view of social care arrangements, to include statutory and non statutory providers as well as wider and atypical care arrangements.

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\(^3\) Scottish Health Survey (SHeS) 2012/3 data, cited in Scottish Government official statistics publication *Scotland’s Carers* ([http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2015/03/1081](http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2015/03/1081))


\(^5\) Universities of Kent, Manchester and the London School of Economics PSSRU report presenting projections prepared for the Department of Health and the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) *Projections of Demand for and Costs of Social Care for Older People and Younger Adults in England, 2015 to 2035* ([http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/64772/](http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/64772/))
Call details

This call aims to fund research and knowledge exchange activity on innovation in social care. All proposals must therefore address the core call focus on social science led research to understand how, why and where innovation happens in social care, and how innovations can be adopted more readily and scaled. We are interested in understanding the factors and processes that enable change to happen in the complex social care system, what the barriers are and how they might be overcome.

We particularly welcome proposals that seek to understand and influence change across different aspects of the care system, at transitions between different ‘types’ of care, or in under researched areas such as self care, self funders, and private provision. We recognise the importance of interactions with health care and other services and organisations not usually associated with social care, but which impact on people’s lives including welfare, housing, education, transport, leisure and retail sectors. We welcome research to support the uptake of innovation at the interfaces between health and social care, and between social care and wider services.

We take a similarly broad definition of innovation, including innovation within and of systems, practices, organisations, processes, products and funding. We recognise that innovating in such a complex and financially stretched system is hard and takes time. We also acknowledge that innovation is often linked to attempts to save costs; in view of this we welcome proposals that take a broader approach to the potential impacts of innovation including, in particular, how change can be spread and scaled to deliver improved wellbeing, impacts on the workforce and increased efficiency.

All applicants should also consider the following, and clearly state how these will be addressed in their case for support:

- **Social care system:** Proposals should be clear about how the proposed research fits with the wider system of care, including touchpoints with other systems, services and organisations not usually associated with care.
- **Theoretical and methodological approach:** It is important that proposals articulate the proposed underpinning theory/ies and planned methods clearly, and explain how this will advance social science theory and methodology.
- **Impact of inequality:** This might include diversity in access to services; how impacts of innovation differ across social groups; or approaches to scaling innovations that are sensitive to varying circumstances between groups.
- **Place:** Research might usefully be embedded in local contexts, but where this is the case should explicitly consider scaleability and applicability across different geographical areas; linking local and regional practice to national priorities and context. The focus can be anywhere in the UK and research looking across UK countries is welcome, as are international broader cross-national comparisons.
- **Outcomes:** Proposals should be clear about expected outcomes from innovation, reflecting lived experience of social care grounded in the reality of people’s lives and the provision of services. Proposals should think beyond cost-saving and describe how the proposed research will support the spread and scaling of innovation in
social care, considering outcomes such as wellbeing, workforce issues and wider economic impacts.

We particularly welcome proposals that focus on one or more of the following:

- **Housing**: The focus of much social care-related activity is on housing; for example where people live, how this links to their wellbeing, whether adaptations are needed, transitions between different living spaces, and how housing needs linked to care will be funded. Understanding innovation processes could have the potential to be transformative, and could encompass, for example, engagement with the building industry, or enabling scale and adoption of innovations in private homes.

- **Workforce**: The social care workforce is broad, heterogenous and dispersed. Research might focus on how innovation can support learning across sectors including paid and unpaid carers, organisational culture and leadership, and wider structural impacts on the workforce. Proposals may also address how to enable bottom-up innovation, and the levers and barriers for change such as culture and leadership.

- **Relationships**: The provision of care almost always takes place within a set of relationships, and wider demographic factors (for example rapidly ageing population and geographically dispersed families) mean these are changing over time. We therefore welcome innovative thinking about how to support and manage relationships linked to care, with a view to supporting the core aim of the call (how, why and where innovation happens).

- **Wider political and economic backdrop to social care**: Social care is profoundly embedded in, and affected by, political and economic circumstances. This wider context will have an influence both on what type of care is possible and also the potential for innovation and its adoption and spread. We therefore welcome projects that look at innovations in funding arrangements for care at the national level, and how this is played out in specific locales. The changing role of regulation and regulators is also particularly relevant here.

**Collaborative grants**

This call is for collaborative grants between £1 million and £2 million (at 100% full economic cost), with a duration of up to 60 months. Collaborative grants are intended to be national or international focal points for the uptake and spread of innovation in the chosen social care-relevant area of focus, where researchers can collaborate across disciplines and with relevant stakeholders on long-term research projects. Grants may often need to involve research groups from more than one research organisation, and should include researchers with a strong track record and methodological and content expertise that adds value to the proposed research. Typically collaborative grants might use a range of methods and data, including secondary analysis of existing data where appropriate.

Critically, grants should involve partnerships with key stakeholders such as practitioners and their managers, the voluntary sector, industry, policymakers, and carers and/or people who are cared for as appropriate. In addition to carrying out high-quality research, collaborative grants will build research capability and capacity that addresses social care by attracting new expertise to the field, for example through applying existing research strengths in disciplines not typically associated with social care research, or through the development of early career researchers. Grants can include a degree of cross-national comparative research where relevant to the question being addressed.
Funded grants will be considered as part of a broad portfolio of research grants relevant to social care. It is likely that the ESRC will co-ordinate these in some way, however the precise nature of this activity depends on the final portfolio of grants. As a minimum, successful projects will be expected to participate in joint grant holder events.

**Partnerships and collaborations**

We strongly encourage partnerships and collaborative relationships where these are substantive and add value. This includes the engagement of non-academic stakeholders (including people who are cared for and their carers) in research proposals. We recognise that the utilisation of new knowledge does not just occur at the end of a research project, but rather is embedded throughout the research process itself. We therefore encourage stakeholder involvement in both the early design and ongoing conduct of research projects. The commissioning panel will explicitly consider the plans for collaborations as part of the assessment process.

Partnerships may build on existing relationships or represent the development of a new collaborative relationship. The principal requirement is for meaningful, quality collaborations or partnerships, demonstrated through clear leadership roles across the proposed partnership, and balance and proportionality in partners’ roles and responsibilities.

Innovations in social care must be rooted in, and acceptable to, the relationships, organisations, and communities where they will operate.

**Capacity-building**

There is a recognised need to build capacity in social care research, and in this call we encourage the use of innovative approaches to building research capacity through the research process. We are particularly interested in those with relevant skills who have not previously worked on social care-relevant research projects being given opportunities to orient their research towards this issue. Other examples of possible activity include, but are not limited to:

- building of capability to work across disciplines
- structured support and mentoring for more junior team members, including supporting them to take on leadership roles in aspects of the research where appropriate
- developing skills associated with co-design of research including working in partnership and across stakeholder groups
- implementation with stakeholders.

Proposals should articulate how they will contribute to capacity-building in social care-related research, and this will be part of the assessment criteria.

**Intellectual property**

Grants will be subject to ESRC’s standard terms and conditions. These state that the IP generated through the grant rests with the grant-holding research organisation.
Ethical requirements
The ESRC requires that the research we support is designed and carried out to a high ethical standard, that it meets our core principles, and that it is subject to proper professional and institutional oversight in terms of research governance.

We expect applicants to have thought about the potential ethical implications of their research during the lifecycle of the project (including knowledge exchange and dissemination), how these will be addressed, what measures will be taken for ongoing review, what type of ethics review is required and how the review will be secured.

All applicants must comply with the ESRC Framework for Research Ethics (https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-applicants/research-ethics/) and the UKRI policy and guidelines on the governance of good research conduct (https://www.ukri.org/about-us/policies-and-standards/research-integrity/).

Eligible costs and activity
Applicants should carefully consider the full range of costs needed for their research. In particular, the costs associated with including stakeholders (including people who are cared for and their carers) should be considered and, where relevant, discussed with them at an early stage to establish what is appropriate.

We recommend that approximately 10% of the overall budget should be dedicated to delivering impact-focused activities. Researchers are encouraged to be innovative in the kinds of user engagement, knowledge exchange, communications and research uptake activities they plan to undertake. Guidance on developing an impact strategy is available on the ESRC website (https://esrc.ukri.org/research/impact-toolkit/developing-a-communications-and-impact-strategy/).

Applications can include secondary analysis of existing data, and therefore eligible costs include costs (including staff time) associated with accessing data where relevant.

Principal investigators (PIs) must be based at a UK institution eligible for research council funding; however, UK co-investigators can be from business, the third sector, or government organisations, and academic co-investigators can be based anywhere in the world.

Ineligible costs and activity
The following will not be supported through this call:

- Costs of interventions, or the development of new innovations or intervention evaluation. However, we acknowledge that understanding the processes linked to innovation may require exploratory work, and therefore costs for small scale ‘pilot’ innovation development that is clearly embedded within a wider set activities would be acceptable. Underpinning research on innovations already being developed or rolled out is acceptable
- Research that duplicates or overlaps with other planned or ongoing research, as we note there are currently other activities linked to funding research in social care
- Proposals that focus primarily on the health system
- Proposals that focus primarily on evidence synthesis or on use of existing evidence.
Selection criteria
Applications will be evaluated against the following criteria:

- **Research excellence:** Are the research questions important, novel, and likely to lead to significant new understanding? Is there potential to advance social science theory and methods?
- **Meaningful collaborative approach:** Does the study truly involve a range of stakeholders in a meaningful way? Is it adequately resourced?
- **Cross-disciplinarity:** Does the proposal encompass the appropriate and relevant combination of expertise needed to address the proposed research question?
- **Contribution to the aims and objectives of the call:** Including the potential for understanding innovation processes
- **Potential impact:** Does the proposed research promise to make a substantive difference to social care?
- **Capacity-building:** Does the proposal outline a coherent and convincing plan for building capacity in the area of research?
- **Timeliness
- **Value for money

We may make a strategic decision on the proposals to support, within proposals rated highly against the above criteria.

Assessment of proposals
Proposals will be assessed by a commissioning panel with appropriate expertise. The panel will include academic experts, non-academic research users and public and patient involvement (PPI) representatives.

Full proposals will be subject to academic and user peer review. Anonymised reviewer comments will be sent to applicants for written response. Full proposals will be considered by the panel before final recommendations and funding decisions are made.

Panel feedback following the outline stage
- The panel observed the following points after considering the outline proposals, which applicants should address in their full proposals:
  - The summary of the research must be suitable for a lay reader to understand.
  - Impact plans should be ambitious and clearly articulated. They should go beyond simple dissemination, and also should involve stakeholders from the outset where feasible.
  - Plans for public involvement in the research need to be clearly set out, as appropriate. Applicants may wish to refer to the National Standards for Public Involvement in Research for useful information on involving the public in research (https://sites.google.com/nihr.ac.uk/pi-standards/home).
  - Applicants should note that ‘cross disciplinarity’ is one of the assessment criteria. Proposals should be clear about how relevant and appropriate disciplines are involved in their research.
  - Robust evidence of cost benefit is a requirement of proposals – both within organisations / sectors and between different parts of the system.
• Proposals should clearly address the innovation focus of the call specification, and explain the innovation(s) being addressed as well as definitions of innovation being used
• As noted in the call specification, how the proposed research will support the spread and scaling of innovation to deliver improved outcomes needs to be clearly articulated
• Applicants should note that ‘impact of inequality’ is one of the expectations for inclusion in the case for support. Proposals should be clear about how they address the impact of inequality and consider diversity
• Applicants need to be clear how they have anticipated and addressed ethical issues in their full proposal, cross referencing to the ESRC ethics framework as necessary.

How to apply
Outline proposals should be made via the Joint Electronic Submission (Je-S) System (https://je-s.rcuk.ac.uk/) and submitted by no later than 16:00 on 27 February 2019. They must be costed and approved by the relevant research organisation before submission. Following shortlisting, applicants of successful outline proposals will be invited to submit full proposals through the Je-S System.

The Je-S guidance notes for applicants provide details on the information that they will be required to submit as part of their proposal. All applicants should consult the ESRC Research Funding Guide (https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-applicants/research-funding-guide/) which sets out the rules and regulations governing funding.

The ESRC is committed to working towards effective and transparent arrangements for managing the increasing demand for our research funding. Our aim is to have fewer, high-quality proposals so the best social science is funded in the most effective way. Please read our Statement on Demand Management: (https://esrc.ukri.org/about-us/performance-information/demand-management/)

Commissioning timetable
• Shortlisted applicants invited to submit full proposals – 19 December 2018
• Deadline to submit invited full proposals – 27 February 2019
• Deadline for applicant’s response to reviewer comments – May 2019
• Funding decisions announced – June 2019
• Grants start –Between 1 September 2019 and 30 September 2019 inclusive.

Contacts
For further information about the call please email isc@esrc.ukri.org or contact:

• Eira Hughes
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• Carlos Pueyo
  Telephone: 01793 442857
For queries relating to the Joint Electronic Submission (Je-S) system please contact the Je-S Helpdesk (jeshelp@rcuk.ac.uk).