

Research and training fellowships as a mechanism for building research capacity in social care

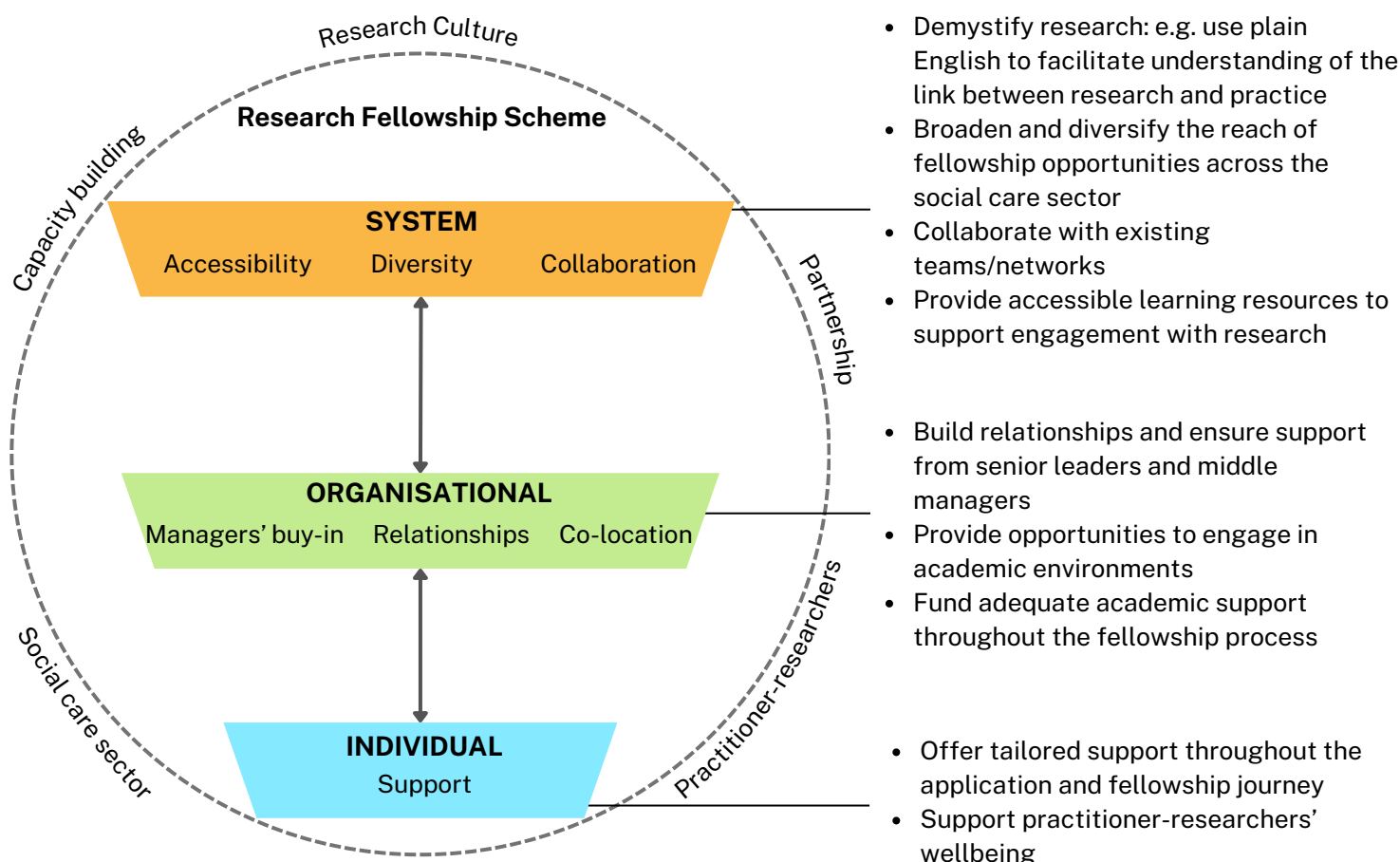
Introduction

Research capacity building in social care has received increased attention and dedicated funding in recent years, yet opportunities for practitioners to engage with research or apply evidence-based practice remain limited. The Kent Research Partnership funded and supported social care staff to undertake practitioner-research fellowships, as one mechanism to develop research capacity in the social care workforce.

Recommendations

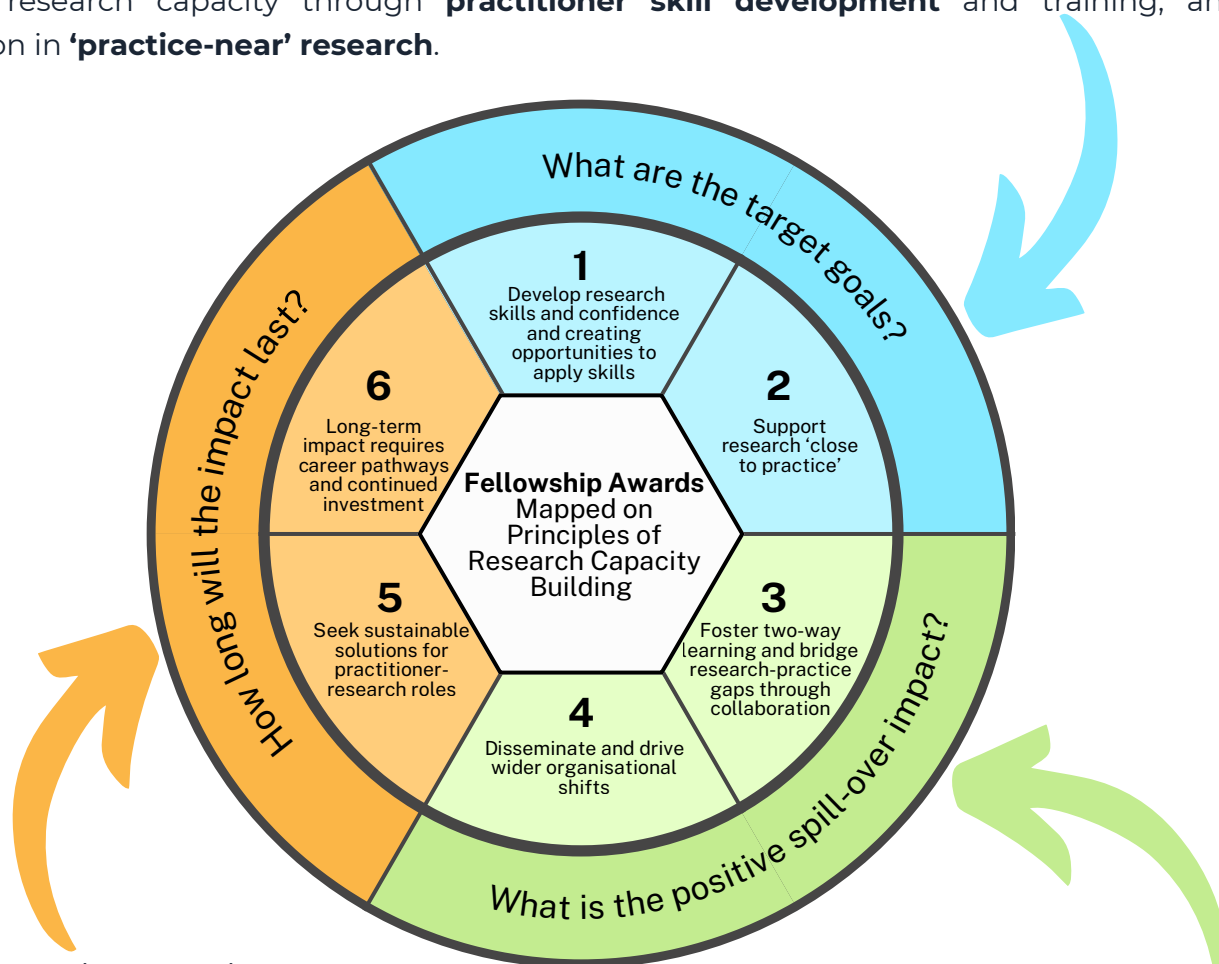
This evaluation explored the challenges social care practitioners face in applying for and taking part in fellowships, the impact on social care staff and organisations, and the lessons learned at individual, organisational, and system levels.

Key recommendations for fellowship-style awards to support workforce development and build a research culture in social care are summarised below the diagram, grouped under the same three levels:



Impact & Sustainability

Fellowships provide valuable opportunities to nurture practitioner-researchers and foster a research culture. This evaluation provides insights into the role of fellowship-style awards in building research capacity through **practitioner skill development** and training, and its application in **'practice-near' research**.



However, questions remain around **sustainability, inclusivity, and long-term pathways** for practitioner-researchers, highlighting the need for **continued investment, infrastructure, and flexible models** of support.

Whilst fellowships are inherently individual awards, the nested nature of the fellowships within a Research-Practice Partnership, and a wider commitment to capacity building in the sector as a whole, meant there was potential for **impact at the team, organisational and sector levels**. Fellowships enable **two-way learning** between practice and academia, bridging the research-practice gap.