

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

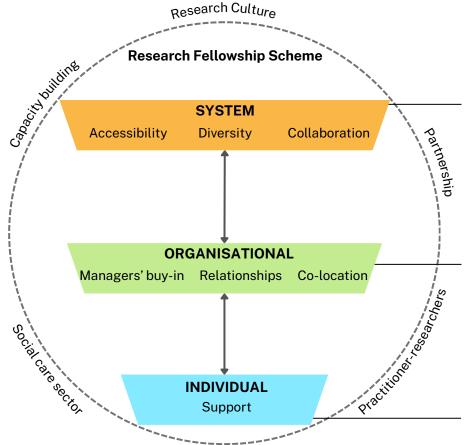
Introduction

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:

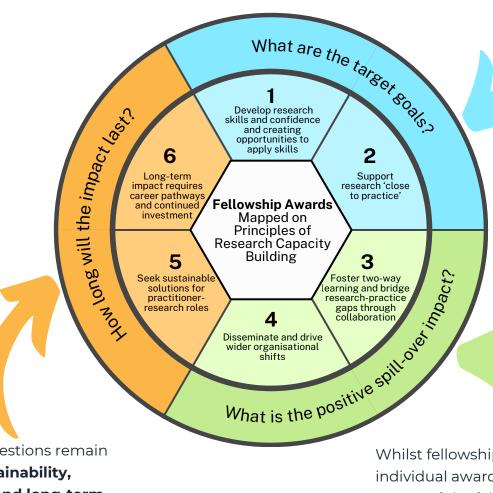


- Demystify research: e.g. use plain
 English to facilitate understanding of the link between research and practice
- Broaden and diversify the reach of fellowship opportunities across the social care sector
- Collaborate with existing teams/networks
- Provide accessible learning resources to support engagement with research
- Build relationships and ensure support from senior leaders and middle managers
- Provide opportunities to engage in academic environments
- Fund adequate academic support throughout the fellowship process
- Offer tailored support throughout the application and fellowship journey
- Support practitioner-researchers' wellbeing

To read more about this evaluation: Zhang et al. Research and training fellowships as a mechanism for building research capacity in social care: an evaluation of a capacity-building programme in England, PREPRINT, https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-7759522/v1.

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.

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