

NIHR Applied Research Collaboration Greater Manchester

Training and Development opportunities for Social Care and Social Work professionals

Guidance for Applicants 2024/25

Version dated 11 December 2024

Introduction

The National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) Applied Research Collaboration Greater Manchester (ARC-GM) has funding to increase research capacity in social care practice. NIHR is committed to funding high quality social care research that translates into improvements in outcomes and improves the efficiency and effectiveness of the social care system for those who need or provide care and support. Building research capacity and supporting the use of evidence in practice is a key part of delivering on this commitment. Developing social care research capacity in practice helps increase the output of research and evidence into practice, resulting in better outcomes for those in need of care and support.

ARC-GM are offering opportunities for those working in Adult and Children's Social Care in Greater Manchester who wish to develop their career and gain experience in research relevant to their area of practice. There are two programmes on offer, Internships and Pre-doctoral Fellowships, and choice of programme is based on your previous research experience and future career plans.

About the NIHR Applied Research Collaboration Greater Manchester

ARC-GM) supports applied health and care research that responds to, and meets the needs of, local populations and local health and social care systems. Our overarching goal is to improve the health of the Greater Manchester population and the quality and sustainability of the health and care they receive. We will achieve this by co-producing excellent research in areas prioritised by the system and by enhancing its impact through supported implementation into policy and practice.

ARC-GM has seven broad research Themes. More information about each of the ARC-GM Themes is available on the [ARC-GM website](#):

- **Digital Health**
- **Economic Sustainability**
- **Evaluation**
- **Healthy Ageing**
- **Implementation Science**
- **Mental Health**
- **Organising Care**

ARC-GM are working in partnership with the GM Adult Social Care Transformation Team and academic colleagues at The University of Manchester, Manchester Metropolitan University and University of Bolton with a research focus on social care and links to the [GM Social Work Academy](#).

Overview of Training and Development opportunities

Internships – for detailed guidance, please see page 6.

Internships deliver an experiential learning opportunity intended to provide those working in social care professions in Greater Manchester with an introduction to applied social care research. There are opportunities to explore priority research areas within social care with the benefit of methodological support and expertise from the ARC-GM team and their partner organisations. Internships will start in April 2025 and are backfilled up to £20,000 over 12 months.

Pre-doctoral Fellowships – for detailed guidance, please see page 11.

Pre-doctoral Fellowships provide research training awards for social care professionals working in Greater Manchester who wish to develop their career by combining social care practice and development with applied research and research leadership. The programme is aimed specifically at social care professionals who aspire to undertake PhD level study in the future. The Pre-doctoral Fellowships are designed to provide the time and support to develop a PhD proposal and funding application. Pre-doctoral Fellowships will start in April 2025 and are backfilled up to £20,000 over 12 months.

Key Dates

Applications open	Week beginning 25 th November 2024
Q&A online session	Wednesday 8th January 2025
Deadline for submission of application	Friday 24 th January 2025, 12noon
Shortlisting panel decisions	Week beginning 17 th February 2025
Interviews	Thursday 27 th February 2025
Interview outcome	Week beginning 3 rd March 2025
Start date	April 2025

Comparison of opportunities

The table below gives brief information about each opportunity to aid comparison between the programmes. More detailed information is given in subsequent sections of this guidance document.

	Internship	Pre-doctoral Fellowship
Eligibility	Staff with a minimum of an undergraduate degree who are working in social care organisations in Greater Manchester.	
Brief description	Entry-level for those with little or no research experience	Suitable for those with some research experience who wish to apply for a PhD
Duration	Up to 12 months	Up to 12 months
Time commitment	This is negotiable up to a maximum of 0.5FTE	This is negotiable up to a maximum of 0.5FTE
Funding	Backfill funding up to a maximum of £20,000 per Internship, irrespective of duration	Backfill funding up to a maximum of £20,000 per Fellowship, irrespective of duration
Supervision arrangements	A supervisor will be allocated upon award of Internship	Supervisors (maximum of three) will be allocated on award of Pre-doctoral Fellowship
Application form	Online application form available here .	
Interview	Interviews on Thursday 27th February 2025 – either in person at The University of Manchester, Oxford Road campus or online.	
Start date	April 2025	

Eligibility

Both Internships and Pre-doctoral Fellowships are open to applicants fulfilling the following criteria:

- Social Care professionals* with a minimum of an undergraduate degree.
- Employed within an organisation in Greater Manchester providing both adult and children's social care (including NHS Trusts, Local Authorities, care providers (both residential and domiciliary care settings) or voluntary sector organisations in Greater Manchester).

*** including and not limited to, social workers, occupational therapists, providers, social care commissioners and managers.**

Please contact [Alison Littlewood](#), for any queries about eligibility.

We welcome applicants from all sections of the community regardless of age, sex, gender, gender expression, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation and transgender status. All appointments are made on merit.

Application Process

All applications for both Internships and Pre-doctoral Fellowships must be submitted using an online form, which will be made available on the ARC-GM website (see <https://arc-gm.nihr.ac.uk/social-care-opportunities> for more information). Applications must be submitted by **12 noon on Friday 24th January 2025**; applications made after this time will not be considered. Applicants should contact [Alison Littlewood](#) if there are problems accessing the online application form.

All applications will be assessed for initial eligibility (see Eligibility on page 4). Those eligible will be shortlisted and selected according to the criteria described in this guidance (see relevant Recruitment and Selection Criteria, noting that these are different for Internships and Pre-doctoral Fellowships).

Applicants will be invited to an interview which will take place on Thursday 27th February 2025 either in person at the University of Manchester, Oxford Road campus or online. Successful candidates will be notified of the outcome of their interview no later than Friday 7th March 2025.

In some cases, candidates who apply for Pre-doctoral Fellowships who do not fully meet the required criteria may be suitable for an ARC-GM Internship. Those who wish to be considered for an Internship, if unsuccessful with an application to the Pre-doctoral Fellowship Programme, should indicate this on the online application form. Applicants should select the relevant check box on the online form which allows them to apply for both the Pre-doctoral Fellowship and Internship. Applicants should discuss which opportunities they intend to apply for with their employing manager as their agreement/approval will be required.

Those wishing to apply for Internships only should select the 'Internship' check box at the start of the application form. Similarly, those applying to the Pre-doctoral Fellowship only should select the 'Pre-doctoral Fellowship' check box.

INTERNSHIPS

Purpose of Internships

Research Internships comprise research ‘tasters’ of an agreed amount of time, used flexibly over up to 12 months.

The objectives of the Internship Programme are to:

- Enhance research knowledge and skills in the Intern’s field of practice and/or research interests.
- Gain first-hand, supervised experience of applied social care research.
- Explore opportunities to develop an academic career including postgraduate study e.g. [MRes Health and Social Care](#), Pre-doctoral fellowships or PhD.

Funding for backfill

Successful applicants will undertake their Internships over 12 months, with time commitment negotiable. ARC-GM can contribute up to a maximum of £20,000 per Internship towards the award holder’s salary costs, by way of payment to their employing organisation.

Approval is required from the award holder’s immediate line manager. This is required as evidence of the employer’s commitment to facilitate release from duties for the duration of the award. This should be a separate letter of support to arc-gm@nihr.ac.uk. The letter of support must be submitted by the application closing date.

The paid backfill time can be taken flexibly, and applicants should discuss how this will work with their line manager within the employing organisation at the earliest opportunity. Time will be used to attend workshops and training, gain experience of applied social care research and Public Community Involvement and Engagement work and explore academic career opportunities plus any other areas the Intern wants to explore as agreed with their academic supervisor.

Costings

Full costings for the applicant’s time must be submitted in the application. Costs should be submitted to cover the agreed percentage of the applicant’s time over one year (April 2025 to March 2026) including on-costs.

Applicants should contact the relevant person in their organisation’s finance department to provide the relevant backfill costs. Applicants should request confirmation of these costings from their finance contact, which should be submitted by email to arc-gm@nihr.ac.uk. Salary costings should include any increment applicants are due within the Internship period.

Recruitment & Selection Criteria

An offer of an Internship will be made based on the criteria below. Shortlisted candidates will be invited to interview, which will take place on Thursday 27th February 2025. Preference will be given to applicants who can demonstrate the following:

- An understanding of the role of applied social care research in their current and future practice.
- How the Internship experience will benefit current knowledge and skills.
- Willingness to undertake learning and development relating to research skills.
- Evidence of previous study at minimum of BA/BSc level or equivalent.
- Interest in exploring an academic research career.
- Support within the place of work/practice setting to undertake the Internship.

Structure of the Internship

The structure of the Internship is flexible and tailored to the needs of each Intern, but with core components:

- **Induction:** An induction meeting led by the Training and Development Team will take place at the start of the Internship. The Training and Development Team will give an overview of ARC-GM and the Internship to ensure each Intern is aware of the range of resources and support available to them including the role of the supervisor. Interns will be provided with a workbook with induction information, including guidance, opportunities for learning and reflection, and for recording supervision meetings.
- **Supervisory meetings:** Interns will meet with their allocated Supervisor at mutually agreed times (this may be face-to-face or online) at key points over the duration of the Internship. These meetings will include the co-development of a learning plan and discussion of research activities.
- **Training:** Interns will be provided with training opportunities throughout the programme and will be expected to take up courses that are relevant to their Internship plan (see Training).
- **Research Activities:** Interns will participate in activities that contribute to their own learning and development and ARC-GM research.

Examples of activities that Interns could undertake can be found below. Please note this list is not exhaustive and Supervisors are free to develop other activities in discussion with the Intern and in collaboration with staff across ARC-GM Themes and our partner organisations.

- Developing research ideas/questions into clearly defined objectives and a proposal for a Fellowship or other funding.
- Contributing to a social care research project e.g. literature review; protocol development, data collection/analysis; interpretation of study findings; dissemination (e.g., via social media).
- Contributing to the writing of plain language summaries, research reports, newsletter articles or website project overviews.
- Building a network of research contacts in their field for the exchange of information and to form relationships for future collaboration.
- Observations of project stakeholder meetings, focus groups, events.
- Working with the Public Community Involvement and Engagement team to better understand the role that the public/patients play in shaping applied social care research.

Supervision

Successful applicants who take up the Internship will be allocated a Supervisor. All efforts are made to match Interns with Supervisors who have experience that is relevant to the aims of the Intern. It should be noted that 'experience' refers to the research experience and expertise of the Supervisor; Supervisors may not have a social care work background.

Supervision sessions, meetings, workshops and teaching may be online or in-person, with a degree of flexibility. Interns will agree with their Supervisor the frequency and duration of supervisory meetings.

Training

The structure of the Internship is flexible and tailored to the needs of each Intern within reasonable limits. The core components of each Internship are outlined below.

During the first supervisory meeting, the Intern should devise a learning plan with the support of their Supervisor, based on the Intern's individual needs. Interns will be provided with a core of compulsory training opportunities at induction and along the course of the Internship. Alongside the core training opportunities, Interns will be expected to undertake training relevant to their interests and learning objectives.

Interns will have access to The University of Manchester's Lifelong Learning Portal where training resources will be hosted.

Core training

All Interns will be expected to undertake training in the topic areas listed below. Course dates will be provided to Interns with at least six weeks' notice. Wherever possible, training will be recorded to for those who cannot attend:

- 1) What is applied social care research?
- 2) Developing a research question
- 3) Research Approvals and Governance
- 4) Public and Community Involvement and Engagement in research
- 5) Literature searching and reviewing
- 6) How to read a scientific paper
- 7) Academic writing, presentation and poster skills
- 8) Career paths in applied health and care research

Bespoke training

In addition to the core training opportunities outlined above, Interns will be expected to undertake training relevant to their learning objectives and all training should be discussed with the Supervisor.

Interns will be eligible for audit only access (course materials are available but assessments are not undertaken) to Masters level units for independent study from one of the following courses:

- [MRes Health and Social Care](#) (Managing research in health and social care; Research design; Critical appraisal and evidence synthesis; Quantitative research design and analysis; Qualitative research design and analysis; Statistics).
- [MSc Social Research Methods and Statistics Modules](#) (for example Survey Research Methods or Methodology and Research Design).

Where sufficient progress is made during the Internship, and with support of the Supervisor, funding may be available for the Intern to undertake a research Masters module formally (not restricted to University of Manchester courses), meaning that they will undertake the course module assessment(s) and receive formal credit on successful completion. Interns who wish to undertake a research Masters module formally should discuss this with their Supervisor and the Training and Development team.

The Intern will also have access to:

- NIHR Learn as an NIHR Academy member.
- University of Manchester library resources e.g. My Research Essentials.

Support available to Interns

1) Support from the Training and Development Team

The Training and Development Team will provide an induction event for interns as outlined above. Throughout the internship, the Training and Development Team will be the Interns' point of contact for general queries.

2) Support from the Supervisor

Interns should meet with their allocated Supervisor regularly during the Internship. The Supervisor will support the Intern in co-development of a learning plan and accessing research activities.

3) Peer support

Interns will have the opportunity to be part of the Social Care Research Forum, a group who meet online bi-monthly. This informal support network comprises all colleagues from a social care background in any of ARC-GMs Capacity Building programmes. This forum provides a safe space for Interns to discuss anything relating to their experiences of the programme and share learning and opportunities.

4) Community of Practice

Interns will be part of a Community of Practice (CoP) led by our partners at Manchester Metropolitan University. This group will develop a common aim around increasing the knowledge, capacity and reach of research in social care. The CoP group will meet on a quarterly basis and membership will extend beyond the 12 month internship.

5) Support from Library services

The Library offers a wide range of workshops, online resources, and one-to-one sessions to support Interns through My Learning Essentials, My Research Essentials and Specialist Library Services. The workshops and online resources cover topics such as searching techniques, academic writing, literature reviews, critical analysis,

referencing, copyright, public speaking, steps to publication and systematic searching.

6) Support from wider ARC-GM team and partner organisations

Opportunities for Interns to get involved with training and research activities can come from across ARC-GM and our partner organisations. The wider team can provide a wide breadth of experiences across research design, methods, analysis and Public and Community Involvement and Engagement.

End of Internship

At the end of the Internship, the Intern is required to present a summary of the research activities undertaken, their learning and next steps at a Social Care Capacity Building event planned for March 2026.

PRE-DOCTORAL FELLOWSHIPS

Purpose of Pre-doctoral Fellowships

The Pre-doctoral Fellowship Programme is aimed at those who wish to further develop their research experience and who wish to apply for a PhD in the future. Pre-doctoral Fellowships are tailored as much as possible to suit individual commitments and timescales. Award holders can undertake formal training with appropriate academic supervision. They will prepare an application for submission for an NIHR or similar doctoral fellowship opportunity, which includes a research proposal and suitable training and development plan.

At the end of the scheme, it is expected that each award holder will have:

- developed a robust research proposal which is a suitable vehicle for a Doctoral Fellowship application, building on existing research skills and experience and fits with the Doctoral Fellowship funder's remit.
- identified an appropriate training and development programme to support the development of research skills.
- developed a clear understanding of their career trajectory.
- developed a publication plan.
- developed their research skills.

Funding for backfill

Successful applicants will undertake their Fellowship over one year (% Full Time Equivalent (FTE) to be negotiated but this is usually around 0.5FTE). ARC-GM can contribute up to a maximum of £20,000 per Fellowship towards the award holder's salary costs, by way of payment to their employing organisation.

Approval is required from the award holder's immediate line manager. This is required as evidence of the employer's commitment to facilitate release from duties for the duration of the award. This should be a separate letter/email of support to arc-gm@nihr.ac.uk. The letter of support must be submitted by the application closing date.

The paid backfill time can be taken flexibly, and applicants should discuss how this will work with their line manager and relevant departmental manager within the employing organisation at the earliest opportunity. Time will be used to attend workshops and training, develop the applicant's PhD application and their research profile for example, by conducting a literature review, pilot work, Public and Community Involvement and Engagement work and working on publications.

Costings

Full costings for the applicant's time must be submitted in the application. Costs should be submitted to cover the agreed percentage of the applicant's time over one year (April 2025 to March 2026) including on-costs.

Applicants should contact the relevant person in their organisation's finance department to provide the relevant backfill costs. Applicants should request confirmation of these costings from their finance contact, which should be submitted by email to arc-gm@nihr.ac.uk Salary costings should include any increment applicants

are due within the Pre-doctoral Fellowship period.

Additional funding over and above the maximum of £20,000 (including on costs) cannot be provided by the Fellowship*. Applicants should discuss options with their current line manager and/or service/department manager if the backfill of their salary will be more than £20,000. Options could include:

- The applicant's manager is still willing to release the candidate for the required time despite the funding shortfall.
- The applicant/their manager can identify alternative funding to cover the shortfall.

Applicants should refer to the Training and Support section above regarding training and development costs.

***ARC-GM acknowledges that £20,000 may not be sufficient to cover the full 50% of an applicant's salary. The panel will consider a proposal with commitment of less than 0.5FTE backfill for those in this situation; however, assurance would need to be given that the ambitions in the Fellowship were feasible in the allocated time frame, noting that the Fellowship can be carried out 12 months.**

Research Topic and Outline

The application should outline the proposed research idea that the candidate intends to develop into a PhD application over the duration of the Fellowship.

Research questions that have arisen from 'day-to-day work' within an applicant's organisation and align with citizens/clients/service users, service and organisational strategic priorities are particularly welcomed. Applicants should link with their organisation's research department or research champions, should these be in place, for support with this.

The assessment of the proposed research will be based on:

- Justification
- Aims, objectives, research questions
- The likelihood of the proposal answering the research question(s)
- Potential methods
- Outcomes (i.e. path to impact – how does the work have the potential to deliver improved outcomes for social care services, improvement to care or an improved citizen, client or service user experience?)

It is recognised and expected that the applicant may refine some of the components of their research plan during the Pre-doctoral Fellowship and applicants should acknowledge which area(s) they wish to develop further in their plan.

Please see the Recruitment and Selection Criteria section for further information about how applications will be assessed (in addition to the proposed research).

Supervision

Successful applicants who take up the Pre-doctoral Fellowship will be allocated up to three Supervisors. Academic supervisors have a vital role in supporting applicants throughout the duration of their Fellowship to work on the development of their specific doctoral Fellowship application and to undertake the training proposed in their

application.

All efforts are made to match Pre-doctoral Fellows with Supervisors who have experience that is relevant to their aims. It should be noted that “experience” refers to the research experience and expertise of the Supervisor; Supervisors may not have a social care work background. If you already have links with potential supervisors, please do include this information in the application form.

Training and Support

Pre-doctoral Fellowship award holders are classed as an ‘NIHR Academy Member’ as the funding for their award is received through the NIHR Infrastructure of ARC-GM or a partner organisation. As such, ARC-GM will share with Pre-doctoral Fellows any relevant training and development opportunities from the NIHR Academy and report back to the NIHR on the Fellow’s academic development.

The applicant and Supervisor(s) should discuss the training or development that is required throughout the Fellowship. Examples of training and support activities that Fellows may be able to access funds for include support with formal research training courses, such as a Masters module in research; training in specialist skills and research methodologies; placements with other research groups or centres; leadership training; conference attendance; Public and Community Involvement and Engagement training; dissemination of relevant research; professional development relating to research.

Supervision sessions, meetings, workshops and teaching may be provided both online and in-person, with a degree of flexibility. Pre-doctoral Fellows will have access to The University of Manchester’s Lifelong Learning Portal where training resources will be hosted. Pre-doctoral Fellows will have access to the core and bespoke training opportunities which are available to Interns and membership to the Community of Practice (see page 8 and 9).

Recruitment and Selection Criteria

Eligible applications will be assessed by a shortlisting panel which will include at least three people with a range of backgrounds in applied research. Shortlisted candidates will be invited to interview, which will take place on Thursday 27th February 2025. The following criteria will be used to assess suitability of candidates based on their application form and performance at interview for those who are shortlisted:

- The candidate’s research experience.
- The research proposal (see Research Topic and Outline section above).
- Timelines and milestones.
- Relevance and potential benefit to the applicant’s area of practice.
- The suitability and commitment of the applicant to pursuing further research.
- The quality and appropriateness of the proposed academic training and development (including Doctoral Fellowship application development).
- The clarity of the application, including presentation style and writing skills.

Applications will be graded according to one of the categories on page 14 after initial review and discussion of the shortlisting panel. Constructive feedback will be provided to candidates on their applications.

‘All criteria met’

Good evidence of research knowledge and experience as well as a good understanding of development needs. Clear research question and good study design and implementation details provided. Study is clearly appropriate and feasible with a realistic budget established. Training plan and doctoral fellowship development plan feasible and relevant with timeline provided. Excellent scope for the described project to provide benefit to social care services, improvement to care or improved citizen, client or service user experience. Very professionally organised and presented. Very high standard. No amendments or clarification required.

‘All criteria met, minor/fixable weaknesses’

Clear evidence of research knowledge and experience with indication of development needs. Clear research question or aim. Essential design and implementation details provided. Study adequately described and reasonable project management and budget details provided. Training plan and doctoral fellowship development plan feasible with suitable timeline. Good scope for the described project to provide benefit to social care services, improvement to care or improved citizen, client or service user experience. Professionally presented. Minor amendments and/or clarification needed but suitable for funding.

‘Majority criteria met, minor/fixable weaknesses’

Evidence of research knowledge but some essential design and implementation information missing. Clear research question or aim, professionally presented and writing style clear. Relevance and value of study well described. Some project management and budget details provided. Training plan and/or doctoral fellowship development timeline missing or inadequate. Study has potential but needs consultation and revision in most areas. Scope for the described project to provide benefit to social care services, improvement to care or improved citizen, client or service user experience.

‘Some criteria met, major/fundamental weaknesses’

Evidence of some research knowledge but lacks experience or understanding of development needs. Lacks essential design and implementation information. Research question or aim unclear or inconsistently stated. Application generally clearly presented or written but lacks significant detail and with little effort made to describe relevance or value of study. Training plan and timeline missing or inadequate. Some potential but would need major redesign and informed consultation. Poor scope to provide benefit to social care services, improvement to care or improved citizen client or service user experience.

‘Criteria not met’

No evidence of research knowledge or understanding, multiple design flaws, poor scope for the described project to provide benefit to social care services, improvement to care or improved citizen, client or service user experience, writing style unclear, multiple typographical errors.

At the end of the Fellowship, the Pre-doctoral Fellow will present a summary of the research activities undertaken, their learning and next steps at a Social Care Capacity Building event planned for March 2026.