

# NIHR Local Authority Academic Fellowship Programme



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# NIHR RSS Specialist Centre for Public Health

## Background:

- There is a well-established system for NHS research, but it is not fit for purpose for research outside the NHS.
- Public health research is not getting the support it needs.
- More research is needed to provide evidence to inform decisions relating to public health.
- We need to strengthen research culture within the local authorities and across the communities they serve.



## Our Vision:

“To work nationally and with NIHR Research Support Service and NIHR Health Determinants Research Collaborations and all local authorities to support the development of a research culture and the infrastructure, capacity and capability to enable practitioners and researchers to carry out high quality public health research, outside the NHS, within local government, other organisations and the communities they serve”



# NIHR RSS Specialist Centre for Social Care

A network of interdisciplinary experts in social care research offering a wide range of methods expertise and research support from pre-application to post-award delivery.

Working nationally to support:

- researchers of all levels of expertise and experience
- researchers across the full range of services and settings relevant to social care research, including adult social care, children and young people and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) support for social care research

Get in touch with the [RSS Specialist Centre for Social Care](#) via the website find out more about the support available for your research.



# Acknowledgements and contents

- These slides were originally created by Dr. Mal Palin at the NIHR Academy
- Contents:
  - What is the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR)
  - The NIHR Local Authority Academic Fellowship Programme
  - Support for you including NIHR Health Determinants Research Collaboration
  - Questions and (attempted) answers

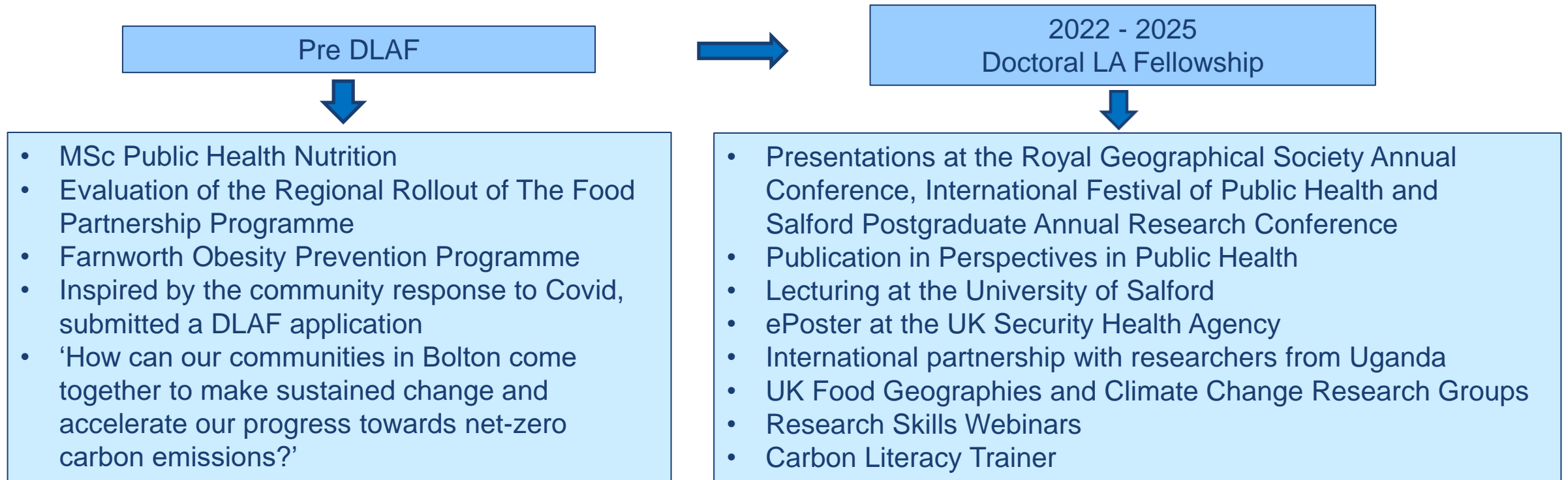
# About Scott

- 20 years' experience working in public health policy and practice.
- Genuine interest in research as a means of improving what we do.
- About 15 journal papers
- MY LAAF journey:
  - NIHR Local Authority Pre-Doctoral Research Fellow – September 21 to August 23
  - NIHR Local Authority Short Placement Award (based with the NIHR Policy Research Unit for Obesity) – September 23 to February 24
  - NIHR Local Authority Doctoral Fellowship application submitted 7 December 23, planned start 1 September 24



# About Bryony

- Background in Public Health
  - Public Health Specialist since 2007
  - Passionate about the power of Community Action
  - First cohort of the NIHR Doctoral Local Authority Fellowship Programme



# About Fay

- 'Working in the margins'
- Creative methods, Realist research
- Practitioner/Academic interface
- Children's agency within meetings
- Local authority data/research balance
- Personal Education Plans for CiC

## Background

Established career as a Virtual School Headteacher, children's social care for the past 13 years after teaching since 2003



## Development

Links with Foundations (WWCSC); LA SPARC placement with KSS ARC



## PLAF

50% of time spent on research activities, 50% in substantive role



### PLAF application #1

Frustration with the use of data and research in local authority children's social care. Unsuccessful application; VERY helpful feedback



### PLAF Application #2

Successful, high scoring application; Same topic; Part time over two years; MRes in Social Research at UCL alongside training from SRA and CARES



### So far...

- Elected Research Lead for NAVSH
- Building research capacity
- Conference presentations
- Broadened network and research skills
- Member of NIHR LA SPARC selection panel
- Co-authored published research
- Submitted DLAF application
- Improved reporting and data collection/analysis within local authority

# About Humera

- Background in Public Health
  - Specialty Registrar since 2009 and Consultant in Public Health since 2014
  - Currently working in Birmingham City Council
- Always been interested in academic public health
  - MPH theses
  - 3 publications through training
  - Applied for 3 PhD opportunities previously

2022-2024  
Pre-Doctoral Local Authority  
Fellowship 0.5 wte over 2 years



2024-2027  
Hopeful for a Doctoral LA Fellowship!  
1 wte over 3 years

- MSc modules in Health Economics
- Harvard Kennedy School – Public Narrative
- Environmental Justice: Publication in Town Country Planning Journal
- Presentation at Royal Geographical Society
- Global connections World Parks Forum
- DLAF application submitted

- Research Strategy for BCC
- Journal Club
- PhD title - ***How can Local Authorities use health economics evidence and adaptive leadership to inform investment in parks?***



# About Rachel



- Background in criminal justice, then mental health social work
- Love to learn! Passionate about bridging the gap between research and practice



# Am I eligible for any of this?

- **YES**
- NIHR is investing increasing amounts of funding into supporting research capacity and activity in Local Government
- Does my work contribute to a health or social care outcome?



# Am I eligible for any of this?

News ▶ Bristol News ▶ South Gloucestershire Council

## Bin strikes causing 'public health crisis' in South Gloucestershire

Talks are ongoing between the union and waste firm bosses

NEWS By [Adam Postans](#) Local democracy reporter

11:49, 12 JUL 2023 | UPDATED 12:21, 12 JUL 2023

Bookm

Enter your postcode for local news and info  Enter your postcode  In YourArea



Bin strikes causing 'public health crisis' in South Gloucestershire. The scene is a residential area near Warmley on Sunday, July 9 (Image: Clr Sam Bromiley)

Local authorities with lower economic inactivity rates or higher employment rates average higher healthy life expectancy

Healthy life expectancy at birth by quintile of deprivation and employment/economic inactivity rates for men and women: England, 2018-20

Employment rate - Males Inactivity rate - Males Employment rate - Females Inactivity rate - Females

Deprivation ● Most deprived 20% ● Middle 60% ● Least deprived 20%



Available in reports of major stories. Clickcard app required. Excludes News. Offer valid 20.05.23 - 04.05.23.

# NIHR Academy Fellowships

NIHR Academy Personal Awards	Pre-doctoral	Doctoral	Post Doctoral	Chair
Research Training Schemes	Pre-doctoral Fellowship	Doctoral Fellowship	Advanced Fellowship	Research Professorship
			Development and Skills Enhancement Award	
Practitioner Academic Training Schemes	HEE/NIHR Pre-doctoral Clinical and Practitioner Academic Fellowship	HEE/NIHR Doctoral Clinical and Practitioner Academic Fellowship	HEE/NIHR Advanced Clinical and Practitioner Academic Fellowship	
	<b>Pre-doctoral Local Authority Fellowship</b>	<b>Doctoral Local Authority Fellowship</b>	<b>Advanced Local Authority Fellowship</b>	
	In-Practice Fellowship		Clinical Lectureship	
	Academic Clinical Fellowship			

Also, short placement awards and pre-application support awards

# NIHR Academy remit for personal awards

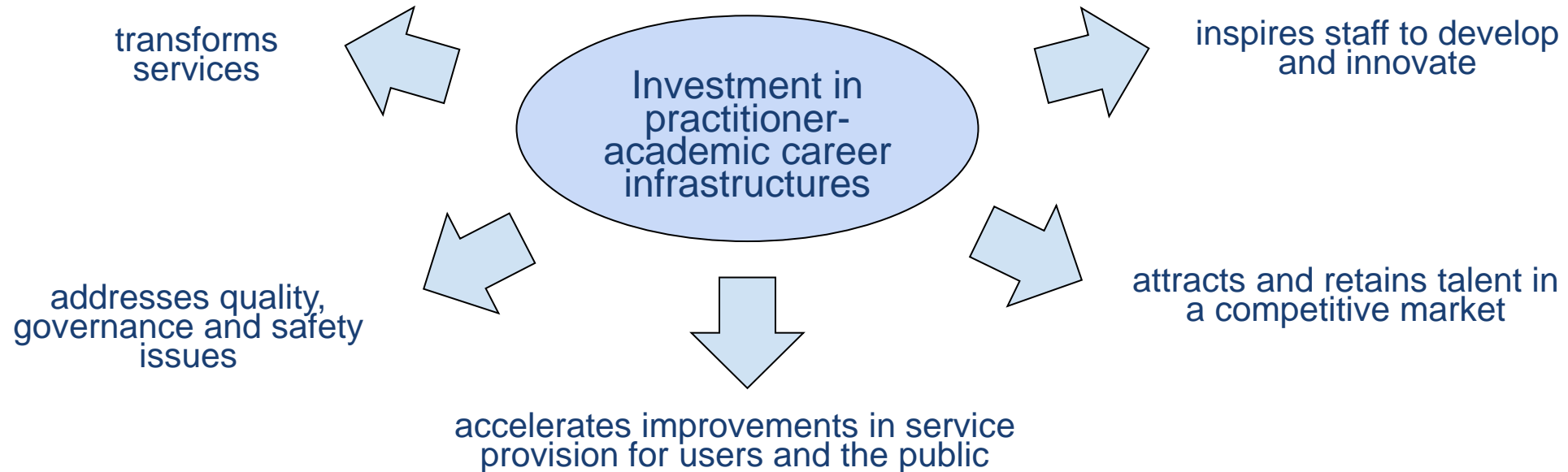
The NIHR Academy is responsible for the development and coordination of NIHR academic training, career development and research capacity development.

- For personal doctoral-level awards the proposal:
  - must be for clinical and **applied health research, including social care research**
  - must have clear potential for directly benefitting patients/service users **and the public** (but recognising the training element of the research)
  - can involve: patients/service users; samples or data from patients/service users; people who are neither; **populations**; health technology assessment; **or health/social care services research**
  - Early translational research at this level is funded through the NIHR Infrastructure.
- For post-doctoral awards, early translational (experimental) research is within remit. A clear and plausible path to patient/service user or public benefit must, however, be demonstrable.
- **NIHR does not support basic research or work involving animals or their tissue.**
- NIHR will also support educational research and methodological research provided it has potential for practical application, and the impact on patients/service users and the public is clear.

# Importance of Practitioner Academics

A growing body of evidence indicates that research active organisations deliver better services and outputs than organisations that are not research active.

Practitioner academics can critically appraise and utilise research findings in the development of evidence-based practice and service redesign and make invaluable contributions to the development and maintenance of optimum and adaptive services.



# Local Authority Academic Fellowship Programme

- The NIHR Local Authority Academic Fellowship (LAAF) Programme is open to all employees (excluding medically and dentally qualified individuals) of Local Authorities and Local Authority supporting services.
- The awards must be hosted by a partnership of a HEI and an LA / service
- Applicants must hold a contract of employment\* in England with either a:
  - Local Authority;
  - Provider of Local Authority commissioned services; or a
  - Non-profit organisation (such as a charity) that provides services on behalf of a Local Authority, or that otherwise supports\*\* a Local Authority in meeting its objectives.

*\* Fixed term contracts of any duration are acceptable, however, honorary contracts or bank work cannot be accepted.*

*\*\* This support does not need to be commissioned or funded, but it does need to be co-designed with, or at the very least acknowledged and signposted by, the local authority/authorities in question.*

# Pre-doctoral Local Authority Fellowship (PLAF)

- Supports aspiring practitioner academics (excluding doctors and dentists) from Local Authority settings to become competitive applicants for a doctoral fellowship
- Composed of two distinct funding offers allowing applicants to propose the level of support most appropriate for their individual requirements:

## “Standard PLAF”

(full time for 12 months, part-time over 24 months or 30 months)

- **salary costs** (time undertaking the Fellowship)
- up to £5,000 towards **Master’s level training**
- up to £1,000 for **conference/meeting** fees and associated travel and subsistence
- up to £1000 **PI&E** costs and **travel to supervision**

## “PLAF Bridge”

(4 days per week for 6 months or 2 days per week for 12 months)

- **salary costs** (time undertaking the Fellowship)
- up to £400 for **formal courses**
- up to £500 for **conference/ meeting** fees and associated travel and subsistence
- Up to £500 **PI&E** costs and **travel to supervision**

Launches annually in January/February



# Pre-doctoral Local Authority Fellowship (PLAF) Round 4



## Opens

09 January 2024

## Closes

28 March 2024

## Contact

- For help with your application contact [academy-awards@nihr.ac.uk](mailto:academy-awards@nihr.ac.uk)
- For more information about the funding Programme, visit the [Local Authority Academic Fellowship Page](#)

## Supporting Information

- [Guidance notes round 4](#)
- [Chair's report for round 3](#)
- [Case study: Supporting pre-doctoral research training in local authority settings](#)
- [PLAF Scheme Summary for Managers](#)

[Apply now](#)

The NIHR Pre-doctoral Local Authority Fellowship (PLAF) scheme supports the academic ambitions of individuals wishing to develop as health and/or social care researchers whilst remaining employed, or at least engaged, within local authorities or local authority supporting services.

These fully funded fellowships enable awardees to retain their existing employment contracts and salaries, whilst protecting their time to undertake a bespoke programme of relevant Masters level training and to prepare an application for a subsequent PhD fellowship.

With the exception of doctors and dentists, who can already access equivalent dedicated funding opportunities, this award is available to individuals of any profession or background. Applicants must, however, be employed by:

- a local authority
- a provider of local authority commissioned services
- a non-profit organisation (such as a charity) that provides services on behalf of a local authority, or supports a local authority in meeting its objectives.

This initiative represents an exciting opportunity for a wide range of individuals, but especially for those without professional social worker or clinician status. Eligible clinicians and social workers are welcome to apply for support from this scheme or, if similarly eligible, from the [ICA PCAF scheme](#), but cannot apply to both concurrently

<https://tinyurl.com/PLAF2024>

# Doctoral Local Authority Fellowship (DLAF)

Funds aspiring practitioner academics from local authority settings (excluding doctors and dentists) to undertake a PhD by research and, concurrently, to undertake professional development and retain a practice role

Fellows must:

- Be based at an English Local Authority or LA supporting service, or at an English HEI
- Have the support of excellent academic supervision and practice supervision

Funding and support

- 3 years FT (with part-time options)
- Funds salary (for academic time and practice time), research costs, academic training costs (inc. PhD fees), professional training & development costs, and the costs of research visits and conference attendance

Practice Time: Approximately 20% of award time must be dedicated to development of the awardee's service or practice role, which will be funded through the fellowship

Launches annually in September

# Advanced Local Authority Fellowship (ALAF)

Will support post-doctoral researchers developing Practitioner Academic Careers.

Applicants may:

- Have recently completed, or will soon be awarded, a doctorate but haven't yet established themselves as an independent researcher;
- Have started to establish themselves as an independent researcher, or be already established as an independent researcher but not yet recognised as an international leader in their field;
- Be seeking to re-establish their research career following a significant career break;
- Be seeking to re-establish their research career following time back in professional practice

Funding and support

- 2-5 years (and can be taken at between 50-100% WTE)
- Funding for salary, research assistance (eg doctoral researcher), research costs and training and development costs
- Can apply for two sequential Fellowships up to a total of 8 years

Practice Time: between 20% and 40% of the award time must be dedicated to development of the awardee's practice or policy role, which will be funded through the fellowship.

Launches annually in March/April.

# Local Authority Short Placement Award for Research Collaboration (LA SPARC)

- Individuals can apply to the LA SPARC scheme for up to £15,000 to undertake a bespoke short placement.
- The scheme supports:
  - Individuals based in a Local Authority setting who would like to undertake a short placement in a part of NIHR.
  - NIHR Academy members supported in a part of NIHR infrastructure who would like to undertake a short placement in a Local Authority/provider of local authority commissioned service setting.
- There is no minimum or maximum duration for the placement/taster opportunity; placements may range from 2/3 weeks to 4/5 months and this period can be broken up to allow flexibility.
- Annual application window opens September, closes November.

# NIHR Pre-Application Support Fund

- The Pre-Application Support Fund provides extra support to those who need it, to enhance their chances of making a successful application to an NIHR career development scheme in the future.
- Applicants can request funding including:
  - A contribution to the salary of the applicant to buy out the necessary time to prepare an application,
  - Training and development, mentorship or supervisory costs specifically associated with developing an application, and
  - Other costs where the additional support required to submit an application extends beyond the categories outlined above.
- Round one opened 19 September 2023, closed 30 November 2023.
- Three application windows a year, round two potential advert date 23 January 2024.

# Success rates

- PLAF and PLAF bridge outcomes

Round (year)	Applied (for full support)	Awarded (full support)	Applied (for bridging support)	Awarded (bridging support)
Round 1 - Pilot - (2021)	18	15	10	5
Round 2 - (2022)	20	12	2	1
Round 3 - (2023)	17	9	2	3

- Two applicants for full support were deemed to only require bridging support and were granted fellowships on this basis

# Success rates

- DLAFs Round 1: 2021-2022
  - Applied: 8
  - Shortlisted: 5
  - Awarded: 3
- DLAFs Round 2: 2022-2023
  - Applied: 12
  - Shortlisted: 8
  - Awarded: 5

## Q&A so far...

Available to view from 26:30 on the recording



# Scott's personal reflections

- An amazing opportunity
- I was part of the first cohort of Local Authority PLAFs!
  - I didn't consider everything in my application – no costs included for public involvement
  - I was lucky to have the best supervisory team (network, network and network again)
- The constant tussle between work and fellowship work
- I applied for a justified a full Masters in my PLAF – extra pressure & the LAAF is about developing Practitioner Academics, not a route to a free Masters
- There's a growing community

# The growing LAAF community

JOURNAL ARTICLE

## Striking Ethical Balances: The Contribution of 'Insider' Practitioner–Academic Social Work Research in England

Charlotte Ashworth , Nick Burke

*The British Journal of Social Work*, bcad171, <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcad171>

Published: 11 July 2023 [Article history](#) ▼

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### Abstract

Clinical-academics are well established and expanding in English health settings. However, despite growing evidence that research-active organisations improve service quality and outputs, research by social work practitioners remains relatively rare in social work practice in England other than as part of qualifying or post-qualifying study. In this context, the National Institute for Health and Care Research developed new funding streams to support the development of 'practitioner-academics', as an equivalent to clinical-academics in health settings. As early career practitioner-academics, who undertake research whilst remaining employed in our social work organisations, we present a case for practitioner-academic research, via two small research projects within our teams based on creative methods and focus groups. These projects illustrate the benefits of practitioner-academics in the knowledge production process, improving access to hard-to-reach research areas, developing swift rapport, which facilitates the production of rich and reliable data, and providing a novel means to navigate ethical issues including researcher positionality and research sensitivity. We also highlight challenges around informed consent, employee roles and researcher bias, including where practitioners are critical of practice within their service areas or are exposed to criticism themselves.

**Charlotte Ashworth**

Team Manager (Children's Services)  
Manchester City Council

**Nick Burke**

Social Worker  
Sheffield City Council

Both previous PLAF awardees, are now onto their DLAFs!

[Striking Ethical Balances: The Contribution of 'Insider' Practitioner–Academic Social Work Research in England | The British Journal of Social Work | Oxford Academic \(oup.com\)](https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcad171)

# The growing LAAF community

## Case study: Your Path in Research, Rachel Murphy, Social Worker

📅 Published: 07 November 2022 🕒 Read Time: 4 minutes 🖨️ [Print](#)



Rachel Murphy, Social Worker

"Upon my return to work from the pre-doctoral fellowship, I moved into a temporary Research Development role within the Local Authority, which involves working with universities and communities collaboratively, and driving forward the research agenda within the Council. I feel excited for the future and look forward to generating more interest in practitioner research among colleagues, and seeing the benefits of this within the Local Authority."

Rachel started her Pre-Doctoral Local Authority Fellowship in September 2021, funded through the NIHR and completed it in August 2022.

To celebrate the Your Path in Research Campaign, we spoke to Rachel Murphy, Social Worker who completed a Post-Graduate Certificate in Researching Social Care through the University of Central Lancashire and now works within North Yorkshire County Council. Rachel started her Pre-Doctoral Local Authority Fellowship in September 2021, funded through the NIHR and completed it in August 2022. Rachel was supervised through her Fellowship by Professor Aidan Worsley, [see video of Aidan talking about his research journey here.](#)

"I have always been keen to learn and to develop. I completed a criminology degree before qualifying in social work, and my career path has encompassed both of these areas of interest. My curiosity around criminality led me to complete my social work dissertation on exploring the treatment and interventions for child sexual offenders, and the subsequent impact on community safety. An unexpected discovery for me, from this research, was that there are people living in communities who are safely managing their attraction to children – they are not offending, not within the criminal justice system, and not being researched – yet would be such a valuable source of learning. This left me keen to investigate further, but as my training ended, I felt that the opportunity had passed and I embarked on my career in mental health social work. I loved the busy environment of the community mental health team, with each day bringing new challenges, and with multi-agency staff working together to support people on their journeys towards recovery."

"I progressed to become the Team Manager and then the Service Manager for my region within North Yorkshire. I felt very fortunate to have progressed in my career, yet also felt more distant from the aspects of learning and practice that I had previously enjoyed so much. Hence my excitement when I saw an opportunity advertised for Local Authority staff to undertake a pre-doctoral research fellowship through the NIHR. It was an opportunity for 12 months of post-graduate research studies, professional leadership development, to pursue a research topic of interest, and to develop as a research practitioner – bridging

[Case study: Your Path in Research, Rachel Murphy, Social Worker | NIHR](#)

# The application and assessment process

- Competitions run annually.
- All applications must be made through the NIHR Academy's online application management system. Prospective applicants can register (<https://aramis.nihr.ac.uk>) at any time to complete their CV (which auto-populates onto application forms) or view open competition forms.
- The application submission window is usually around 8 weeks long - good applications are planned in advance of a competition launching.
- Each application is allocated for independent review by two or three members of the relevant selection committee, with their assessments being used to inform:
  - Discussion at the funding recommendation meeting (pre-doctoral competitions)
  - The shortlist for interview (doctoral competitions)
  - Shortlist for external peer review in advance of interview (post-doctoral competitions)

# A strong application

- Is made by a candidate with the requisite experience and aspirations to lead and undertake the project, and to benefit from the opportunities it will provide.
- Is developed from conception with the support of suitably experienced academic supervisors and advisors.
- Is informed by appropriate patient/service user and public involvement and engagement.
- Proposes a project that:
  - Serves as an excellent vehicle for the personal development of the candidate.
  - Has good potential to make a positive impact on care and/or health.
- Includes a bespoke training and development plan that is tailored to the needs of the candidate and the project.
- Articulates strong support for the candidate, their career development, and the project by the hosting organisation(s), which must be well placed to provide it.

# NIHR PLAF Chairs Report - round two

The strongest applicants in this round:

- Demonstrated commitment to a career that combines continued practice and professional development with research and research leadership;
- Presented plans for research during the PLAF or in subsequent doctoral research that seemed realistic and sufficiently narrow to be achievable;
- Presented a training plan that was clearly set out, and in excellent alignment with the research they would like to subsequently pursue;
- Included well thought-out involvement of service-users, patients or relevant citizens or stakeholders;
- Made a convincing case that they will be able to submit a competitive doctoral fellowship application following completion of the award;
- Had made contact with collaborators (e.g. directly relevant academics, third sector organisations, etc.).

<https://www.nihr.ac.uk/documents/nihr-plaf-chairs-report-round-2/32314>

# Pre-application

- Know the process and the remit (website, guidance)
- Contact the NIHR Academy with any queries
- Talk to the NIHR Research Support Service (RSS) - <https://www.nihr.ac.uk/explore-nihr/support/research-support-service/> (RSS replaced NIHR Research Design Services from 1 October 2023)
  - NIHR Research Support Services (Hubs)
  - NIHR RSS Specialist Centre for Public Health delivered by Newcastle University and Partners
  - NIHR RSS Specialist Centre for Public Health delivered by University of Southampton and Partners
  - NIHR RSS Specialist Centre for Social Care delivered by Lancaster University and Partners
- Start PPIE/PICE early – not as an afterthought!
- Know your audience:
  - Look up previous award holders, panel members, topics
- Talk, talk, talk, before you submit:
  - Supervisor, current awards holders, senior academics, methodological experts, collaborators, mentors, finance office, colleagues etc.

# Common Weaknesses

- **Remit:** Failure to show research important to **NHS, benefits patients and/or public**
- **Clarity & Details:** Research questions not clear; don't show the relevance of the aims and objectives; not enough detail and depth
- **Overambitious:** Research programme not suitable for level of award; not achievable within time frame; too 'high-risk' – exploratory work not done



# Common Weaknesses

- **Applicant:** Person not quite experienced enough for level they are applying (research outputs, independence, etc.); not your project; reads like a way of securing applicant's salary; all about you (your trajectory, your abilities, your potential).
- **Training:** Programme too generic and not suited/specific to the applicant's needs and project; too centred around host organisation; pedestrian - this is a training fellowship!

# Patient Public Involvement and Engagement (PPIE)

- Involve from the outset – collaborate/partnership
- Comes across as tokenistic not meaningful;
- Make it clear how PPIE has influenced project
- Patient and public
- Training – for PPIE members, for fellow
- Cost appropriately (Payment guidance for researchers and professionals | NIHR)

# Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)

## NIHR Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2022-2027

26<sup>th</sup> September 2022

<https://www.nihr.ac.uk/documents/equality-diversity-and-inclusion-strategy-2022-2027/31295>



# Summary

- Start early
  - If you want to go for the NIHR Local Authority Pre-Doctoral Fellowship window that will close in March 2024, get started now
- Know and adhere to the guidelines/criteria
- Get all the advice/ criticism you can whilst preparing the application – advice from experts and non-experts
- Personal training fellowship (not project grants) – it's all about you
- *Training* fellowships – it's all about you
- Learn from others – for example, consider all costs
- Pay attention to detail

# NIHR Academy useful links

- [NIHR Local Authority Academic Fellowship Programme and associated opportunities](#)
  - [What the awards provide](#)
  - [Who can apply?](#)
  - [Other NIHR Funding](#)
  - [Contact us](#)
    - Queries: [academy-awards@nihr.ac.uk](mailto:academy-awards@nihr.ac.uk)
    - Mal Palin: [mal.palin@nihr.ac.uk](mailto:mal.palin@nihr.ac.uk)

## Contacts

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**NIHR RSS Specialist Centre for Public Health**

w: <https://bit.ly/NIHRRSSSCPH>

