

NIHR Local Authority Academic Fellowship Programme and Associated Opportunities



This programme of fellowship schemes and short placement awards supports individuals based within English local authority settings to develop as health and/or social care researchers whilst retaining their existing employment and salary. This new initiative provides exciting opportunities for a wide range of individuals.

In order to address the complex health and social care challenges of the 21st century, it is crucial to develop and support future research leaders from a wide range of settings and disciplines. The Local Authority Academic Fellowship (LAAF) Programme and similarly focused short placement awards are designed to strengthen the capacity for local authority settings to generate and support health and social care research by offering research training awards to the individuals that work within them.

The training opportunities include four schemes:

- **Local Authority Short Placement Award for Research Collaboration (LA SPARC) Scheme**
- LAAF Programme **Pre-Doctoral Local Authority Fellowship (PLAF) Scheme**
- LAAF Programme **Doctoral Local Authority Fellowship (DLAF) Scheme**
- LAAF Programme **Advanced Local Authority Fellowship (ALAF) Scheme**

By offering this range of funding opportunities to individuals embedded within local authority settings, these schemes contribute to the development of a credible 'practitioner academic' career pathway within local authorities and local authority supporting services.

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What the awards provide

Each class of award provides protected time within an individual's current employment to undertake fully funded research training, professional development and, depending on the scheme, a research project and academic qualifications.

Stage	LA SPARC	PLAF	DLAF	ALAF
Competition Launch	Autumn	January	September	March
Application Deadline	Winter	March	November	Late May
Award Start Date	April - February	September - March	September - March	April - September
Duration (when taken full-time)	Short placements	1 year or 6 months	3 years	2 to 5 years

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

The scheme provides funds for short 'placement opportunities' in a part of the NIHR (e.g a Biomedical Research Centre, Applied Research Collaboration, NIHR School etc.). It supports individuals working in local authority settings and NIHR Academy members allowing movement between NIHR/academia and local authority settings in either direction. These will be bespoke, personalised training and career development placements for individuals to develop their skills, knowledge and expertise, train in a specific technique and build meaningful relationships with other researchers.

These placements will draw on the skills of both the academic and NIHR, and the local authority setting to co-produce research that delivers real benefits to people and communities. This may appeal to those who are interested in enhancing their careers, in experiencing research from a different perspective or perhaps looking to take the next step in developing a practice academic career.

Individuals can apply to LA SPARC for up to £15,000 to undertake a bespoke short placement. Applications are short/light-touch and will be assessed in open competition.

Useful resources for prospective applicants:

[NIHR LA SPARC Round 3 Guidance Notes - September 2023](#)

Pre-Doctoral Local Authority Fellowship (PLAF) Scheme

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

Useful resources for prospective applicants

[NIHR PLAF Chair's Report - Round 2](#)

[NIHR PLAF Scheme Selection Committee](#)

[NIHR PLAF Guidance Notes - Round 3](#)

Doctoral Local Authority Fellowship (DLAF) Scheme

These fully funded doctoral fellowships enable awardees to retain their existing employment contracts and salaries, whilst protecting their time to undertake a PhD by research, undertake academic training and develop professional skill sets.

Useful resources for prospective applicants

[NIHR DLAF Scheme Selection Committee](#)

[NIHR DLAF Chair's Report - Round 2](#)

[NIHR DLAF Guidance Notes for Applicants - Round 3](#)

Advanced Local Authority Fellowship (ALAF) Scheme

These fully funded post-doctoral fellowships support doctorate holders to undertake further research and research training, while remaining employed within, or at least salaried to work in support of, a local authority setting.

An ALAF supports the award holder to develop their research skills and their professional skill sets in parallel. The scheme provides salaried time to undertake:

- a funded research project
- a funded programme of academic training and development,
- a practice or policy role, and
- a funded programme of professional training and development.

Between 20% and 40% of the fellowship must be dedicated to professional practice and development.

Useful resources for prospective applicants

[NIHR ALAF Scheme Selection Committee](#)

[NIHR ALAF Guidance Notes - Round 1](#)

Who can apply?

The LAAF Programme and LA SPARC can only support research, or the development of research, that meets the [NIHR Academy remit for personal awards](#).

LAAF Programme

The LAAF Programme awards are available to individuals of any profession or background, with the exception of doctors and dentists who can already access equivalent dedicated funding opportunities. Applicants must, however, be employed in England 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.

These schemes represent exciting new opportunities 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 programme or from the other existing NIHR Academy administered programmes that cater for their own professional groups, but cannot apply to both concurrently.

LA SPARC

To be eligible to apply for the LA SPARC, individuals should hold a minimum level of qualification at degree level (BSc/BA) or equivalent and hold a contract of employment in England with either a:

- local authority
- provider of local authority commissioned services (including those based in the NHS)
- 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 or
- be a Public Health Specialty Trainee based in England

The placement must be focused around early translational (experimental medicine), clinical and applied research that pertains to health, public health and/or social care.

Other sources of support

The NIHR has funded the development of three national NIHR Research Schools. The Schools for Primary Care Research (SPCR), Public Health Research (SPHR) and Social Care Research (SSCR) are unique collaborations between leading academic centres, undertaking outstanding research in their respective fields and sharing learning with policy makers, practitioners and the public.

The Schools are committed to equipping researchers in training with the tools to develop and build a research career, and offer a range of training and career development opportunities. Further information, including the opportunities and support available at each of the Schools can be found on their respective websites:

- [NIHR School for Public Health Research](#)
- [NIHR School for Social Care Research](#)
- [NIHR School for Primary Care Research](#)

Contact us

Call: 0113 532 8444

Email: Academy-awards@nih.ac.uk for the local authority fellowships programme or icbs@nih.ac.uk for the LA SPARC.