What Works for Children's Social Care (WWCSC)
Spark Grant Scheme Round 2

Guidance for Candidates

This document is intended to provide candidates with information about the Spark Grant Scheme.

1. **About What Works for Children's Social Care**

What Works for Children's Social Care (WWCSC) is an independent charity that is dedicated to raising the standards and volume of good quality research in the sector. WWCSC is committed to providing an evidence base for social workers, leaders in the sector and policymakers to support children, young people and their families in touch with the children's social care system in England.

2. **Spark Grant Scheme**

We are pleased to announce the second round of our Spark Grant Scheme. The purpose of this programme is to fund new and innovative research in children's social care, conducted by early career researchers (ECRs) as well as those who might otherwise be underrepresented in the research community. Furthermore we aim to provide project leadership opportunities for researchers who have not had the experience.

We hope that these grants, although small, will provide opportunities for the next generation of social care researchers to lead projects that otherwise might not have been funded, to catalyse diversity in research, and to act as a springboard for larger grants in the future.

2.1. **Scope**

WWCSC seeks better outcomes for children, young people and families by bringing the best available evidence to practitioners and other decision makers across the CSC sector. Our research looks at the point of referral through to permanence, including adoption, care-leaver support and targeted early help. We are therefore keen to invite proposals from eligible individuals and research teams that seek to facilitate project that my do one do of the following:

1) **Analyse quantitative data to further our understanding of a specific issue within children's social care, and/or to update previously conducted analysis.**
2) **Seek to conduct new, small scale quantitative research projects which aim to answer 'what works' questions. For example, this might include small scale quasi-experimental projects using administrative data.**
3) **Feasibility studies* that seek to work with professionals and/or families and people with care experience to develop and pilot new programmes or interventions to support children and families.**

*Please refer to the [WWCSC Evaluation pipeline](#) for further details of these types of studies.

While we will consider research projects that aim to improve outcomes in all areas of life for children and young people with a social worker, we're particularly keen to receive applications in our following highlight following areas:

- The Children's Social Care workforce
- Children and young people's mental health
- Residential care
- Domestic abuse
- Risk and decision-making

2.2.   Eligibility

Applications are open to applicants who identify as:
- Researchers from Underrepresented Backgrounds and/or
- Early Career Researchers

Researchers from Underrepresented Backgrounds:

We define 'underrepresented' as individuals that have been historically and structurally excluded from accessing resources and opportunities - through social processes of power and domination - by virtue of their characteristics.

For this scheme, we will consider applications from those who have at least a postgraduate research qualification or equivalent research experience. These applicants can be at any stage of their research careers. For example, an individual in an established research post, and/or who has a proven track record of independently conducting research, which can be demonstrated in their application (e.g publications in health and social care). Please be reminded that the aim of this grant scheme is to support researchers who are underrepresented in funding decisions, or who may not have been successful in receiving grants or fellowships in the past.

Some specific examples of **researchers from underrepresented backgrounds** who we welcome proposals from include (but are not limited to) researchers:

- with **lived experience of the children's social care system**;
- from **minoritised ethnic groups**. We define 'minoritised ethnic groups' as anyone from an ethnic group that has less power or representation compared to other groups in society as a result of structural racism;

- from **minoritised religious groups**. We define 'minoritised religious groups' as anyone from a religious group that has less power or representation compared to other groups in society as a result of prejudice and religious discrimination;
- with a **long-term physical condition and/or mental health condition**;
- who are **LGBTQIA+**;
- who are from a **working-class background**;
- who may have taken a **career break**, returned from prolonged sick leave, or are reentering the workforce following caring responsibilities.

Early Career Researchers:

We consider Early Career Researchers to be those who have completed their PhD within the last four years OR who have equivalent research experience. For applicants pursuing a PhD, please note that they should have submitted their PhD thesis before they can submit an application (although this can be prior to their viva). Please note, the four years does not include any periods of maternity or paternity leave, or leave due to illness or other caring responsibilities, or periods of unemployment.

We would encourage applications from researchers who are based at either a higher education institution (HEI) or an independent research organisation (IRO) in the United Kingdom, and applications will require the approval of the applicant's employing institution and/or supervisor. Applicants are not limited to those of any particular status (e.g. Lecturer, Professor etc). Co-applicants may be from anywhere in the world, but the lead applicant must be based in the UK. Furthemore, beneficiaries and/or focus of the research must be based in England.

If an applicant's employment contract ends before or during the proposed timeline of the research project, we recommend contacting your Research Office to determine if your institution is happy to support your application and administer any potential award.

If you are an independent researcher who is not affiliated with a UK academic or research institution, please get in touch with us by email at programmes@whatworks-csc.org.uk prior to the submission deadline to discuss your eligibility.

2.3.   Funding

Successful applicants will be awarded up to £25,000 in value to cover the direct costs arising from a defined research project over the duration of 12 months.

- WWCSC will not pay Full Economic Costing (FEC) for Higher Education Institutions (HEI). If a grant is awarded, WWCSC will only cover the direct costs for HEI. Direct costs are costs specifically attributed to the research project activities i.e travels, salary costs, consumables, equipment etc. WWCSC will however fund the overhead cost for non-HEI, but we do not expect overheads to exceed 60% as a proportion of salaries.
- All applications should demonstrate that funds are sought for a clearly defined, discrete piece of research, which will have an identifiable output or deliverable on completion, and which aligns with the aims and priorities of What Works for Children's Social Care.
- Applications will not be considered for less than £500. The maximum grant is £25,000 (plus up to £2,500 for dissemination activities) over 12 months. Applications for collaborative or individual projects are equally welcome under this scheme.
- Awarded projects must commence in January 2023, and last no more than 12 months.

2.3.1. Impact and Dissemination Funding

In addition to this, applicants are also able to apply for up to a further £2,500 to support dissemination activities.

Applicants should provide clear justification and rationale as to how these proposed dissemination activities will contribute to and/or benefit the outcomes of your research project.

Dissemination activities may include, but are not limited to the following:
- Conference attendance to present details of the proposed research project;
- Knowledge sharing events amongst non-technical and/or academic audiences.
- Development of training materials and guidance;
- Facilitation of training workshops;
- Development of decision-making tools and dashboards;
- Information repositories (only one-off/ single costs will be considered. However, we are unable to fund the ongoing management and/or maintenance of any websites or apps);
- Arts/performance-based engagement (e.g. creative workshops etc.).

Unfortunately, we are unable to cover the cost of Open Access (OA) publication.

3. Application Process

3.1. Timeline and Important Dates

Below is the proposed timeline for decision for this funding round. This is subject to change and is intended as a guide only.

Activity	Dates
Opportunity Shared	20th July 2022
Webinar 1: Spark Grant Information Session and Q&A	26th July 2022
Webinar 2: Spark Grant / Information Session and Q&A	16th August 2022
Deadline for Submission of Applications	**12:00 (GMT), Monday 19th September 2022**
Internal Review	September - October 2022
Rebuttal stage	October 2022
External Review	October/November 2022
Successful Applicants Notified	Early November 2022
Project Start Date	January 2023

3.2. Briefing Webinars

WWCSC will host two webinars in July and August for all those who may be interested in submitting an application for this opportunity. The purpose of these sessions will be to:

- Provide an in-depth overview of the eligibility criteria and call.
- Provide an overview of the application process.
- Provide all potential applicants with the opportunity to ask questions about the call and application process.

If you are considering submitting an application, we encourage you to attend at least one of these sessions as they will provide tips on how best to present your proposal to benefit your application. These sessions will be held virtually.

Please register using the links below:

Registration Link	Dates
Webinar 1: Registration Link	26 July 2022
Webinar 2: Registration Link	16 August 2022

3.3.   Pre-Submission Support

WWCSC are committed to ensuring that all applicants understand what is required in their application before they submit a proposal. If you need any further clarity on the application, we are more than happy to respond to any queries, provided that it does not relate to the content of the application. All enquiries should be directed to WWCSC: programmes@whatworks-csc.org.uk.

3.4.   Application Review

Applications will undergo a two-stage review process:

● **Internal Review:** Applications will be reviewed against the eligibility criteria and scope described above. Applications will be assessed internally by reviewers at WWCSC, who will provide scores and comments independently of each other.
● **Rebuttal:** Applicants who are successful in the internal assessment will progress to the rebuttal stage, where they will be provided the opportunity to respond to any comments and/or feedback from the initial review.
● **External Review:** Applications will then be reviewed by an external panel of reviewers. The external panel of reviewers will comprise individuals who have expertise relevant to the Children's Social Care sector and will provide recommendations for funding to WWCSC. These experts will be independent of the WWCSC Team, and we will ensure no conflicts of interest. The panel will assess applications following specific assessment criteria and make final recommendations to WWCSC on which applications to fund.

3.5.   Application Outcomes and Feedback

Due to capacity, we will be unable to provide individualised feedback for applications that do not progress beyond the internal review stage. General feedback, with the most common issues raised, will instead be published on our website after successful applications have been awarded.

Individualised feedback will only be provided for applicants that make it to the external panel stage.

4.   The Application
4.1.   Developing Your Proposal

The application form provides you with the relevant prompts to support your proposal. We recommend that you use the prompts to help focus your application. Your responses must be clear, concise and within the allocated word count.

4.2.   Lead Applicant and the Programme Team

4.2.1.   The Lead Applicant

The Lead Applicant's host organisation will serve as the contractor/administrative lead if the proposal is funded. Therefore, if successful, the Lead Applicant must be willing to:

- Manage the contractual agreements among partners, collaborators and/or co-applicants.
- Serve as the key liaison between WWCSC, the programme team and the evaluators (if applicable).
- Take responsibility for final contract agreement and other documents.
- Respond to annual financial reconciliation exercises, provide the final financial reconciliation statement for the project and to provide ad hoc requests for financial information during the lifetime of the project.

4.2.2.   Letter of Support

Alongside your application, you should submit a one page letter of support which is signed by your academic supervisor and/or line manager. Letters of support should include the following:

- Overall support for the research project;
- Commitment to managing the contractual agreements and disbursement of funds among partners, collaborators and/or co-applicants.

4.2.3.   Co-Applicants, Partnerships and Collaboration

Other organisations and individuals that form part of the project team must be included as Co-Applicants. Collaborators involved should also be listed.

Partnerships proposed in applications may build on existing relationships or represent the development of a new collaborative relationship. For existing partnerships, applications must provide details of projects/programmes that have been undertaken previously. In the case of new partnerships, applications must demonstrate that they have made contact with new partners. The roles and contributions of all members working as part of the partnership must be clearly stated within the application and reflect meaningful and quality collaboration.

Proposals that include international co-applicants and collaborators will be accepted.

4.3.   Budget and Costing

Applicants are required to submit a completed budget alongside the application form. This should include a summary and justification of costs within the application form itself.

The completed budget must include a total figure for the direct research costs required to undertake the proposed research as described in the application form. This figure should be broken down into:
- Cost between staff (e.g. FTE) and other costs (e.g. travel, cost across financial tax years;
- The specific funds requested for dissemination (maximum £2,500).

In order to support this process, we have provided a [Costings Template](#). Please download this and complete it as part of your application. You may amend this as you see fit.

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These costs will be used to assess value for money. Applicants should only submit thorough, realistic and accurate costings. A justification for all direct and indirect costs included in the budget will need to be included in the application form. Prior to any final awarding, we may request amendments to the budget based on feedback from reviewers.

The costing for the duration of the project should be based on current prices and should not be inflated. Funds will be awarded as grants and therefore VAT is not applicable. Dispersal of any funds will be contingent on signing of the grant agreement and satisfactory completion of agreed milestones.

4.4.   Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Equity

We are committed to achieving equality of opportunity for all funding applicants and we aim to ensure that these values are also reflected in the programmes we fund. To achieve this, WWCSC is keen to work closely with organisations which actively promote diversity and inclusion through their research study.

In the application, we encourage applicants to explain how they will consider equality, diversity, inclusion, and equity in the development and delivery of their study. The core focus of your study does not have to be on Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Equity (EDIE), but you must consider how and where you will address EDIE as prompted in the application. Applicants are also encouraged to ensure that adjustments should be reflected within the budget.

We are interested in a broad definition of diversity that includes the geographical regions, English Language ability, care experience, caring responsibilities and socio-economic factors as well as the [nine protected characteristics](#) in the [Equality Act 2010](#).

There may be barriers which hinder the participation of certain individuals/groups in research. These may be based on an individual/groups' protected characteristics,

socio-economic class, English language ability, caring responsibilities or being care experienced. Other examples of barriers identified may include, but are not limited to:

- Poor research promotion (via diverse channels and approaches)
- Lack of research understanding
- Lack of effective participatory incentives (e.g. monetary)
- Distrust of research
- Reluctance to share personal information
- Poor consent procedures
- Caring responsibilities
- Potential participant harm and risk
- Specific cultural barriers
- Burden on participants

Applicants must ensure that any participation in the programme and/ or intervention does not present unintentional barriers and have a detrimental effect on any protected groups. We understand that not all organisations will have an active EDIE policy or function and so WWCSC can provide support if required.

We are particularly interested in how you will consider and embed EDIE at all stages of their research study, from the design through to the data collection, data analysis and impact. In other words, how you will adequately consider the views and experiences of those with protected characteristics in the research study.

If applicable, please document how you will be collecting information on EDIE and how these protected characteristics have been considered and addressed in your application.

During the planning stage, it is important to consider the accessibility of your research methods, in terms of reaching children, young people and families from various backgrounds. For instance, this could include developing tailored topic guides to conduct qualitative focus groups with children, young people and parents who may have learning difficulties and disabilities. Conducting face-to-face interviews to account for participants with hearing loss would also be a good method in increasing the accessibility of your research. We would also encourage you to offer the option of one-to-one telephone interviews to avoid excluding people with limited or no access to technology. Additionally, we encourage researchers to take into account religious and cultural holidays for meetings and research visits. Also, where possible, we advise researchers to include interpreters in the costing and delivery of the research study for participants who do not speak English. Please see our Accessibility Guidance for further information. All in all, while we recognise that budget constraints may hinder some of these activities, it is important to be as flexible as possible in your data collection approach to ensure that you are addressing social care inequalities and barriers to participation.

All in all, your research study should consider how and where EDIE could be embedded into each of the research stages (study design, data collection, data analysis, interpretations of results etc), plans for ensuring inclusive sample and recruitment and a clear justification for potential exclusions, backed by evidence.

4.5.   Stakeholder Engagement

We encourage the active engagement and participation of beneficiaries throughout your research project. We would also advocate beneficiary participation in the delivery and/or oversight of the programme/intervention (e.g. steering or advisory groups), as participants in data collection etc. (e.g. interviewees).   Involving individuals and stakeholders from underrepresented communities in advisory groups and in other roles can be a key tool in helping to shape and influence the design, delivery and interpretation of research. In your application, you must also ensure you provide details of how these key stakeholders will be appropriately compensated.

4.6.   Risks and Challenges and COVID-19

Throughout the proposal, applicants should demonstrate that they have considered risks and challenges, as well as mitigating measures in delivering the proposed research projects. Some items to consider may include:

- Delays in ethics review and approval;
- Data protection e.g. data sharing arrangements between partners;
- Data access and availability e.g. is data reliably recorded in standardised datasets for all programme beneficiaries.

We recognise that local authorities, researchers and other organisations are having to deal with uncertainty and change as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. WWCSC is committed to funding programmes and conducting research where we can, whilst ensuring that additional burden on local authorities and children's social care professionals is minimised. As such, applicants must ensure that COVID-19 mitigations to be built into the project as and where appropriate.

4.7.   Data Protection

Each project must adhere to the requirements for processing personal data as specified in the UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the UK Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA18). You will need to include data protection practices as an embedded aspect of processing personal data. This will include such things as:

1. Having a plan for personal data protection from the very beginning of the project's inception.
2. Providing a Data Privacy Notice to each participant inclusive of the information required of Article 13 and/or 14 of the GDPR (points 2 & 3 will be needed to inform the Privacy Notice)
3. Knowing you will need to get consent from a parent or legal guardian if you are processing any children's personal data.
4. Keeping a record of any high risk processing activities in accordance with Article 30.5 of the GDPR.
5. Consider the geographic location of the data you are collecting and implement appropriate safeguards according to Chapter 5 of the GDPR if data will be leaving the UK/EEA.
6. Conduct a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) on any high risk activities using personal data including the processing of children's data.
7. Make sure the data is kept secure and only accessible to those involved in the study who need to access it (Article 32 and Article 89.1 are important to be aware of). Minimise, pseudonymise or anonymise personal data where you can.
8. Making sure any data you collect is only used for the reason it was collected.
9. Define a retention period and a methodology for deleting the data at the end of the retention period.
10. Understanding the lawful basis for processing personal data and that consent for ethical purposes is not the same as consent for data protection purposes. It is most likely the processing of personal data in accordance with Article 6 of the GDPR, will be either based on legitimate interest for societal benefit or for a performance of a task carried out in the public interest (it will be worth taking legal advice on this point).
11. Understanding the lawful basis for processing special category personal data in accordance with Article 9 of the GDPR (it is recommended that you read and understand GDPR Article 9.2(j) and DPA18 Schedule 1 Part 1.4(a),(b)&(c)).
12. Making sure you get the right advice around collection and use of Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Equity as per section 4.4.

Further information can be found on the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) Website.

It must be stated that any decisions you make are your sole responsibility and WWCSC takes no liability for any processing of personal data you undertake as part of your project.

4.8. Ethics Approval

If ethics approval has already been obtained, please provide a copy of the letter of the approval. If it is currently being reviewed, please state when the decision is due.

Any research study that involves primary data collection will require ethical approval. Research projects must not start until this approval has been secured from a Research Ethics Committee. We would advise you to speak to your organisation about obtaining ethics approval. In cases where you are unable, you can submit to the WWCSC ethics committee. Please specify what type of approval will be required for your proposed project, and what steps you will take in order to do this.

4.9. Due Diligence

As part of the application process, WWCSC will undertake a due diligence assessment to determine the appropriateness of potential or intended recipients of the grant. The assessment may include (but is not limited to):

- An assessment of the financial status, viability, and capacity to manage the grant.
- A review of the capacity, technical skills and relevant experience to manage activities funded by the grant.
- A review of safeguarding policies and practises to ensure that all children and vulnerable adults are appropriately safeguarded in the delivery of the funded programme.
- A review and assessment of compliance with data protection legal and regulatory processes.

Satisfactory completion of the assessment will be stipulated in the Grant Agreement as a condition for successful funding.

4.10. Submitting Your Application and Document Checklist

All completed applications should be completed and submitted to programmes@whatworks-csc.org.uk by no later than 12:00 (GMT), 19th September 2022. Please attach the following items as part of your application:

Completed Application form
Summary Budget
Project Timeline
A 1 page Letter of Support from Supervisor

Equal Opportunity Monitoring Form

5. Post-Award Information

We intend to notify all successful applicants in early November 2022 at which time you will be required to sign a WWCSC Grant Agreement which outlines the terms and conditions of the award. Furthermore, a collaborative approach between WWCSC and the successful applicant will be taken to agree on the project milestones and/or deliverables.

WWCSC expects Grant Agreements to be finalised prior to the start of the project in January 2023. We would expect to support a **maximum of 12 months** of project delivery (January 2023 - January 2024).