

## **Expert Reference Group for Research**

### **BASW and JUCSWE**

#### **Supporting Information**

This document contains information on the background to the Expert Reference Group on Research (hereafter 'the ERG'), the aims and objectives of the group, the recruitment of ERG members, their terms of office, the criteria and processes.

#### **Background**

Social work research is central to social work through developing and expanding the knowledge and skills of the profession.

Social work research does not automatically mean research carried out for academics exclusively by academics. It can mean research led and / or undertaken in partnership with practitioners, service users or survivors. Nor does it necessarily involve a one-way flow of theory to practice, it can equally be a flow of practice to theory.

However, research is resource intensive, it takes time and money. The vast majority of research funding is accessed through research funding agencies and to access these funds certain criteria and standards have to be met.

The research funding landscape for substantial social work research is problematic. In contrast to other related research areas (e.g. health), where there are established pipelines of funds to support research careers and research-practice links, social work researchers interested in developing and delivering proposals have less support. Furthermore, in national research funding competitions, with exceptions, social work applications tend not to be regarded as the most credible and thus miss out on getting the grants.

For academic researchers, demonstrating impact and dissemination are key. BASW offers researchers both a potential field of survey (social work and social work practice) and a significant audience for dissemination. Through BASW's developing Continuous Professional Development (CPD) program researchers can be offered a variety of routes (e.g. podcast, webinar, seminar, conference) to reach BASW members. In this model both BASW members and researchers benefit.

BASW wants social work research applications to gain success in national research funding. To address these issues BASW wishes to offer an active partnership with a small number of applications each year. This will not entail financial support but instead help for social work researchers in conceptualising their research project,

developing a polished application, making firm pathways to impact in practice and policy, and informing the research process with the perspectives and values of the BASW membership. This process parallels a strategy adopted by many university departments which advertise and then select from applications a small number that they will intensively support in national funding competitions.

The thematic criteria of funding agencies aim to be responsive to current and future 'big issues'. Since the lead in to significant funding can be at least a year, an ability to anticipate what current and future 'big issues' might comprise offers a distinct advantage. In this paper this is called a 'foresight' function. At a strategic level the foresight function is one method that allows BASW to anticipate future issues.

BASW is also keen to support social workers in their career development. In the research field this means social work researchers who are at doctoral, post-doctoral or early career research stages.

BASW does not have the expertise 'in house' to actively partner with and support significant research bids. Instead what is proposed is the ERG.

### **Aims and Objectives**

The function of the ERG is to help BASW support its membership – which will include social work academics - in achieving greater success in national research funding competitions. With more national research funding attracted to social work research than at present, this approach is anticipated to benefit the profession as a whole.

The ERG would contribute to six areas of work:

1. The ERG will support BASW in developing long-term strategy and activities to help social work research attract more national and international research funding.
2. This will include a 'foresight' function, advising BASW on future possible trends and themes.
3. The ERG will actively collaborate with BASW to encourage and facilitate significant grant applications in the area of social work research for submission to national funders and will be available to review proposals for such projects put forward for BASW support.
4. The ERG may set up specific time-limited sub-groups to work on, or support, specific proposals.
5. The ERG will actively collaborate with BASW to encourage doctoral and postdoctoral fellowship applications in the area of social work research for submission to national funders and will be available to review proposals for such projects put forward for BASW support.
6. The ERG will work with BASW to look at systems for support and development for registered doctoral students.

It is not the case that the ERG is only interested in 'big' bids: 'significant' bids might include bids that can potentially make a major research contribution to an area of social work understanding, policy or practice. 'Small' bids can also be supported for any national research funding competition e.g. a UK Research Council Networking Grant, and indeed, initial small 'path-finder' bids can unlock more significant subsequent research funding.

It is worth noting that this model would not mean that social work researchers are prevented from making research applications to research funders in the normal way i.e. direct to potential funders.

### **Recruitment of ERG members and terms of office.**

The vast majority of research funding is accessed through research funding agencies and to access these funds rigorous criteria and standards have to be met. This will need to be reflected in the composition of the ERG.

The ERG will consist of a maximum of six individuals. The ERG will be composed primarily of social work academic researchers with a recent track record of winning national research funding (e.g. ESRC, Wellcome Trust, Nuffield Foundation, Research for Patient Benefit, NIHR, SSCR, Health Foundation, Department for Education, Global Challenges, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, the Leverhulme Trust and the British Academy), who can draw on their personal experience in advising on strategy and reviewing applications. However, to ensure a multi-disciplinary view there will need to be at least one individual who has this experience but is not a social worker.

Application is by CV and supporting letter. Successful applicants will need to demonstrate their experience, their understanding of the task and how this relates to the function of the group.

ERG members, who are social workers, will need to be members of BASW.

Appointments will be made by BASW in conjunction with JUCSWEC.

### **ERG criteria and process**

The following minimum criteria will need to be met for a research partnership with BASW:

The ERG will prioritise applications by researchers who are qualified registered social workers and who are members of BASW.

The ERG will prioritise applications by researchers that are demonstrably applicable to social work practice.

Social work draws on a range of disciplines so applications from related disciplines in the field of social work are welcome but need to be undertaken in conjunction with social workers / researchers who are BASW members and / or social work agencies.

Applications from, or in partnership with, social work practitioners or their agencies, would be particularly welcomed.

Applications from, or in partnership with, service users or carers or survivors would be particularly welcomed.

Successful funding bids rely, to a greater or lesser extent, on adequate preparation and adequate lead-in time. The minimum period for preparation is nine months; applications for partnership by researchers could not be submitted at less notice than this.

Clear research proposals could be submitted without a particular funder identified to allow consideration and capacity for strengthening the proposal. ERG would give feed-back on research proposals.

The ERG will work towards producing written guidance to support would-be applicants and a resource on the BASW website.

Members of the ERG who wish to put applications forward for BASW partnership will have to withdraw from the group discussion of that particular application.

The ERG will determine the frequency of meetings but will need to meet two or three times per year with email communication in the interim. Meetings may be conducted virtually.

The ERG will be supported at an officer level in BASW by the Head of Policy and Research and the Policy and Research Officer. Through them the ERG will have access to the BASW 'hinterland' of resources including practitioner and service user groups, press, communications, lobbying and event management.

## **Review**

The ERG will be subject to reflection and review after 18 months of existence to assess the effectiveness of the group.

## **What the ERG is not**

The ERG would have no governance function. The ERG is not a replacement or substitute for how existing organisations like BASW, JUCSWEC and the APSW continue to relate to each other.

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