**BSBC Action Research Fund**

1. **Background**

The Better Security Better Care (BSBC) programme invests in research and consultation projects that support the aims of the programme in improving data and cyber security in ASC, as well as contributing towards central policy and strategy development. Project requirements are identified from within BSBC and JCU teams, however there is no formal route to seek out new action research ideas from across the ASC sector.

Informal conversations with partners often lead to the development of a new research focus, however there may be plenty of good ideas that we never hear about. As BSBC acts as the “by providers, for providers” programme supporting the care sector to improve cyber resilience, it is uniquely positioned to establish a more formal approach to harness sector knowledge and expertise via provision of a research grant fund to explore current issues and try out new approaches in cyber and data security for ASC.

1. **Proposal**

Using a more traditional approach to grants funding, BSBC will allocate a portion of the annual Special Projects budget to an action research fund and invite bids to run research projects. Research themes will be based on the [five pillars](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cyber-security-strategy-for-health-and-social-care-2023-to-2030/a-cyber-resilient-health-and-adult-social-care-system-in-england-cyber-security-strategy-to-2030#approach-the-5-pillars) identified by the new [Cyber Security Strategy](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cyber-security-strategy-for-health-and-social-care-2023-to-2030/a-cyber-resilient-health-and-adult-social-care-system-in-england-cyber-security-strategy-to-2030) combined with an assessment of strategic priorities identified in various documents such as the [People at the Heart of Care](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/people-at-the-heart-of-care-adult-social-care-reform-white-paper/people-at-the-heart-of-care-adult-social-care-reform) white paper, emerging risk, digital and sector developments.

Bids are invited from organisations with evidence of expertise and experience within the ASC sector. This would include ASC trade organisations, not-for-profits and member bodies operating within the sector. An open tender process may also attract specialist research consultancies, academic institutions, think tanks and tech organisations who may have avoided working with the sector previously due to lack of funded research opportunities.

Our proposed approach is similar to that taken by organisations like The Health Foundation who provide [“Tech for Better Care” grants](https://www.health.org.uk/funding-and-partnerships/programmes/tech-for-better-care) for discovery phases with ASC organisations with our approach focussed on data and cyber security. This approach provides an opportunity to pilot a set of new ideas sourced from the sector and outside of it at a smaller scale than we have previously. This proposal fits well with our "by the sector, for the sector" approach and could help to improve collaboration and engagement within the sector. It also offers an opportunity to listen to the market and ask what it needs rather than a solely top-down approach we have taken in previous years using our ‘special projects’ budget.

1. **Research themes**

Research funding will be awarded to original and robust pilot projects that will deliver tangible insight within the ASC sector. All research must make a clear contribution towards improving data security and cyber resilience in ASC and will align with one or more of the following strategic themes from the Cyber Security Strategy:

* + Piloting innovative approaches to ‘focus on the greatest risks and harms’
  + ASC workforce skills/training & the ‘cyber workforce’
  + ASC people & implementing a ‘just culture’
  + Piloting partnerships with cyber sector, ‘response & recovery’ from a sector POV
  + Furthering health & ASC partnerships to ‘defend as one’
  + Further research and understanding of the current state of the sector and recommendations for improvement to ‘build secure for the future’.

The outcomes from the research projects will contribute to the strategic planning process for the BSBC programme, and the wider policy development portfolio. Successful pilots may demonstrate a tangible need to undertake further work, informing or even becoming the larger BSBC projects within the next year.

1. **Assessment framework**

Bids will be submitted on an application form, and the bid scoring framework will be developed using the following questions:

* + Is the research question relevant to current challenges in ASC?
  + Is there a clear conceptual framework?
  + Is the question researchable and the methodology appropriate?
  + Does the team possess appropriate experience, expertise and potential?
  + Is the budget requested appropriate and does it offer good value for money?
  + Is there a clear route to use the output to positively influence future outcomes in ASC?
  + Does this have wider potential to become a larger project if successfully piloted?
  + Does the proposal closely align with one or more of the research themes identified?

Bids will go through an initial sift by the BSBC programme team, and the highest scoring bids will go through to the panel for final award decisions.

To ensure that funding is distributed appropriately and independently with due context given to the sector, we would recommend a panel consisting of a wide range of representatives from Adult Social Care whose expertise and knowledge can be drawn upon. In addition to members of the central BSBC team, we would recommend inviting a representative from ASC software providers, trade bodies, DHSC JCU, IPC and the DSC Special Interest Group of care providers with other members considered as appropriate.

1. **Eligibility criteria**

Bids need to meet the following eligibility criteria to be considered:

* Application submitted on the form provided by the deadline.
* From a registered company (eg. private company, registered charity, community interest company).
* The organisation will use existing resources and has the capacity to deliver the work within the set timescales, and does not require recruitment of research staff before the project starts.
* If the proposed research will involve direct engagement with members of the public / service users, this would require ethical approval from an accredited committee, such as an NHS or University Research Ethics Committee (IRAS) or an existing service user representative body, which would need to be arranged by the research team. The bid would also need to demonstrate existing safeguarding policies and procedures are in place.
* Needs to be a new piece of research, funding cannot be used towards existing/ongoing research.

1. **Evaluation framework**

Once completed, each research project will go through an evaluation to determine whether the project has delivered what was expected and if further work is recommended. BSBC Programme Board members will be invited to join the evaluation panels, ideally three members will sit on each panel (two at a minimum).

The primary purpose of the evaluation process is to determine whether a research area warrants further investment with a larger scale project to be established in the next financial year. The evaluation will be conducted with a scoring framework to ensure consistency.

The recommended themes and questions for the evaluation framework are as follows:

1. Quality score

* Did the final output meet expected standards eg. presentation, timescales, scope?
* Did the research team successfully engage appropriate stakeholders?
* Competency/skill demonstrated across components eg. literature review / data gathering / analysis / synthesis.

1. Insight score

* How well did the research deliver new knowledge/insight?
* How will the insights gained benefit ASC providers / partners / care users?
* Does the data support the recommendations made?
* Does the research make a tangible contribution towards one (or more) of the strategic themes?

1. Viability score

* Value for money assessment
* Would further research on this topic offer more benefit/insight - is it worthy of more investment?
* How important/urgent is further work on this topic?
* Any areas for improvement - what would we do differently next time?

1. **Budget**

Proposed allocation for 24/5: £125k which represents 20% of the Special Projects budget.

Maximum budget per research project: £25k but smaller projects are welcomed.

1. **Timescales**

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| Key Milestone | Timescale |
| Application window opens | 11 Oct |
| Application window closes | 30 Oct |
| First sift to create shortlist for panel | By 15 Nov |
| Panel decision on grant awards (to be booked between 15-23 Nov) | By 20 Nov |
| Grant agreements in place | By 30 Nov |
| Research projects commence | From 1 Dec |
| Final reports complete | By 28 Feb |
| Research evaluations | 1 – 29 Mar |
| Gateway decisions on which projects to be taken further in 25-26 | Mar-Apr 24 |

**Please complete the attached Expression of Interest and submit to** [**claire@digitalcarehub.co.uk**](mailto:claire@digitalcarehub.co.uk) **prior to the closing date of 30th October 2024.**