

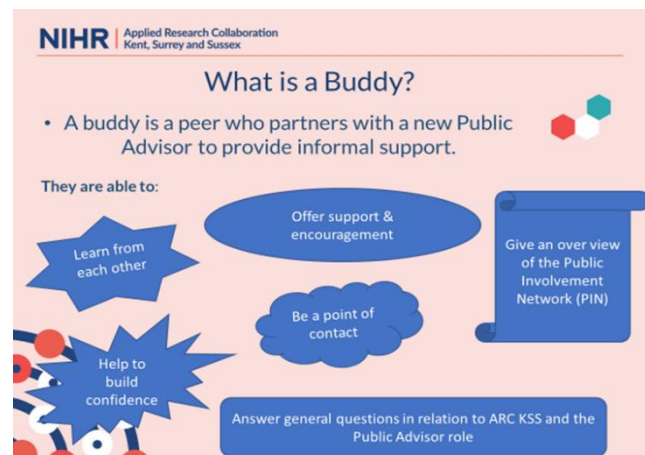


## National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR), Applied Research Collaboration Kent, Surrey and Sussex (ARC KSS)

### Development and Implementation of a buddy scheme to support ARC KSS Public Advisors

The ARC KSS Public and Community, Involvement and Engagement (PCIE) team have been developing a buddy scheme for public advisors who support and are involved in the applied research that ARC KSS funds.

During a previous public Involvement Network (PIN) meeting in 2023 we asked our public advisors what would have helped them when they first joined ARC KSS. Listening to their feedback we identified that there was a need for a buddy scheme (peer-to-peer nonacademic support). They raised that the priorities need to increase knowledge, build confidence, provide motivation, boundaries and most of all be a friendly face of encouragement.



This also fitted with elements of our PCIE strategy objectives which are based on the UK standards for Public Involvement:

1. iv. Inclusive opportunities – fair and transparent methods of recruiting and supporting new members.
3. ii, iv, v Learning and Support – ways to support and share learning between experienced and new public members through the induction process.

ARC KSS public members provided extremely helpful insights on the development of the buddy scheme and the handbook.

- For the handbook, recommendations included: lay language, avoid academic jargon and ensure acronyms are spelt out.
- For the buddy scheme, recommendations included: the length of time for each buddy session, key characteristics of a buddy such as empathetic, reassuring and



considerate to pace accordingly to the level of understanding of the new advisor especially if they appear overwhelmed or confused about anything and boundaries.

Four public members took part in the buddy scheme pilot. Buddies consisted of more experienced public advisors paired with newer members of the ARC KSS PCIE community, with some commonality whether that be geographic location, similar lived experience or accessibility requirements. They were introduced to each other via email, and it was proposed that they meet for 2.25 hours over three buddy support sessions across three months. The first buddy support session lasted 60 minutes, the second 45 minutes and the third meeting 30 minutes and these were arranged between themselves via their preferred method, such as, Zoom, Microsoft Teams and telephone, with the request that they kept the PCIE team updated each time they met.

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### Aims of the buddy scheme

- Sharing knowledge about the ARC KSS practices and organisational culture.
- Helping to reduce any initial uncertainty when becoming a public member in research.
- Build your relationships as peers

TO BE A FRIENDLY FACE

Whilst being a buddy was an informal role and no specialised training generally required, a buddy scheme information session was developed, providing a safe space to discuss what the scheme involved, conversation suggestions and boundaries. Buddies were reassured that they did not need to know everything, the most important aspect was to be a friendly face and signpost if and where needed. If a situation were to arise that was concerning and they felt they should not or could not deal with the issue, they were to contact the PCIE team for support.

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### Tips for conversation

- Sharing previous experiences in a similar role.
- Motivations for joining the ARC KSS as a public member.
- Any challenges you may have come across within your role.
- Other common interests if appropriate.

After the third buddy support session, the PCIE team gathered feedback from all public advisors involved, inclusive of questions such as what were their expectations, what worked well, and could we have done any better?

Overall, the feedback was very positive, and some expectations were that of “*talking to a new person and reassuring them about the role they had taken on*”, “*help new members to quickly get a sense of how they start to share their experiences confidently with ARC KSS*” and “*I*



*hoped the buddy scheme would offer an opportunity to understand the culture of ARC KSS as well as gain hints and tips about understanding the role*". It was also acknowledged that the buddy information session prior to commencing the buddy scheme was beneficial, "all worked well as we had a training presentation beforehand". The proposed three meetings provided ample time to get to know each other as colleagues, leaving the door open for further contact should they wish.

Meeting online worked well giving them flexibility to arrange each meeting around other commitments and easily rearranging where needed, *'chats were not challenged by technology, there was laughter and overall, a very comfortable and supportive environment, brilliant idea, well done'*. Whilst they were not challenged by technology during this pilot, we recognise that this may not be reflective for the future performance of technology or differing levels of digital literacy. It was acknowledged that technology such as internet connectivity, Zoom and Microsoft Teams can on occasion experience connectivity issues, and that the buddy scheme was created with flexibility of how and when they engaged in conversation with one another (telephone call, WhatsApp video, in person) as long as the three suggested buddy support sessions took place and the PCIE team were on hand to support where they could.

Support provided during each support session yielded reciprocal benefits in the form of a friendly listening ear, reassuring encouragement and confidence building. Thus, in respect of the experienced public advisors it provided self-acknowledgement and reassurance that their knowledge of ARC KSS was vast and valuable. They were able to share their experiences of how they navigated processes for payment for their involvement, information of the wider ARC KSS theme teams and being a member of the Public Involvement Network (PIN). There was a singular reflection of potentially benefiting further from the buddy scheme had they have had their second or third meeting once they had some theme public advisor experience with the ARC KSS however, they happily exchanged numbers with their buddy for further support in the future if required.

Whilst the buddy scheme is a concept which has risen in popularity across the last few decades and although systematic review of the scientific literature regarding it is yet to be developed it proved a positive step for the ARC KSS PCIE team and PCIE community to initiate and will be available for all future public advisors who join.

Disclaimer:

- All PCIE community members who participated in the development and pilot of the buddy scheme were paid for their time in accordance with the Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust (SPFT).



- The term ‘experienced public member’ for the purpose of this pilot were people with a minimum of six months experience at ARC KSS, being familiar with its general workings.
- This was funded by the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) Applied Research Collaboration Kent, Surrey, Sussex.
- The views expressed are those of the author(s) and not necessarily those of the NHS, the NIHR or the Department of Health and Social Care.

If you have any questions or would like to get in touch, please contact [Louise Lacey](#) and/or the [PCIE team](#).