A total of $457 million has been set aside to strengthen social sciences and humanities research in Singapore over the next five years. This is around a 30 per cent increase from the $350 million that was previously set aside for the financial years 2015 to 2020 to support key initiatives launched by the Social Science Research Council (SSRC). Education Minister Chan Chun Sing, in announcing the increase in spending yesterday, said the funds will help to boost support for young Singaporean researchers with promising careers, as well as efforts to build a vibrant social science and humanities research ecosystem in Singapore.

“Mr Chan said: “The objective is to cultivate interdisciplinary research... The Covid-19 pandemic has underscored the importance (of this). While a biomedical scientist can sequence the virus and develop vaccines, we need the behavioural scientists to help us better understand the science behind the impact of Covid-19 on our well-being.”

He cited how Dr Anne Rifkin-Graboi, senior lecturer (research scientist) at the National Institute of Education (NIE) in NTU, drawing on her training in behavioural neuroscience, tapped existing data to examine the impact of Covid-19-related stress on early childhood development and family functioning in a project that she led. Her project was awarded the Singaporeans Global Summit held at Nanyang Technological University (NTU).

Chan added: “However, we really don’t know what the specific outcomes will be in Singapore, though we are hypothesising that the impact may be different, depending on the degree of additional stress families have experienced in relation to the pandemic. “(Other factors include) pre-existing risks and resilience factors, and the ages of the children during... the peak periods of restrictions on activities and social gatherings.”

Mr Chan also announced a new SSRC graduate research fellowship targeted at Singaporeans pursuing their PhDs or post-doctorate studies overseas. “This initiative offers a boost to those Singaporeans who have made the move to embark on a research career on their own, and are interested in working with established researchers in Singapore,” he said.

The fellowship will provide a grant of up to $10,000 for PhD students, and $20,000 for post-doctorate fellows.

Applications for the scheme will open next year. Prospective applicants may refer to the NTU, National University of Singapore, Singapore Management University and Singapore University of Technology and Design webpages for more information.