**Faculty of Education, Heath and Wellbeing:**

**Sample PGR Research Projects**

*Guidance: The below projects, for PhD and MPhil study, exemplify our areas of research expertise at the University of Wolverhampton.*

*If you are interested in completing a research degree in the below areas, or variations of them, please copy and paste the project directly into the application.*

*We can then move your application ahead with that project, which will save you needing to devise or prepare a project yourself.*

*Applications can be made via: https://www.wlv.ac.uk/research/research-degrees/*

*Any questions? Please contact us at DoctoralCollege@Wlv.ac.uk*

Education

Food insecurity in Higher Education

Digital Learning Spaces for the UK’s marginalised communities

Beyond compliance? A critical examination of the role of the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) in challenging school exclusions in schools in England

Health

Active Ageing for Housing Association Customers

Physical Activity Empowerment for People Living with Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA)

Sport

Race and Equality in University Sport

Football academy research and knowledge exchange group

Combat Sport research and knowledge Exchange group

Physiological demands and characteristics of dancers

Workload, injury and performance in pre-professional adolescent dancers

The role of exercise in people living with and beyond cancer

The effects of exercise in women diagnosed with polycystic ovary syndrome

Physical Activity Interventions to Improve Movement and Quality of Life in People living with Parkinson’s Disease

Discipline: Education

Title / area of PhD research: Food insecurity in Higher Education

Supervisors / contacts: Dr Gurpinder Singh Lalli

Following a survey of 1,234 higher education students across three UK based and one US based university, nearly 35% of students reported low or very low levels of food security and 41% of students were worried that their food would run out. Also found was poor levels of mental health and wellbeing which was found to be associated to food security. Students who lived alone were found to be experiencing low or very low levels of food insecurity compared to those students living with family members. A high reliance on ultra-processed food was also discovered, which was the main source of student diets (Defeyter, 2020). The research on food insecurity in higher education is limited and this PhD proposal offers an opportunity for a prospective student to build further evidence. The follow research questions, impact objectives and methodological focus has been designed, but the student will be able to shape and develop further.

 Research Questions (RQ)

1. To what extent are students in the UK experiencing food insecurity in higher education?

2. How are universities responding to students who are food insecure?

3. How can existing university policy structures support students in today and in the future?

Impact Objectives (IO)

1. To understand food insecurity in higher education

2. To understand university responses of supporting students experiencing food insecurity

3. To co-create with universities, National Union of students and community groups to engage in dialogue for collaboration to around future strategies to inform policy decisions

Methodology: Mixed methods approach which combines a survey co-created with National Union of Students and ethnographic case study across UK universities

Defeyter, G., Stretesky, P., Long, M. (2020) Food Insecurity and Lived Experience of Students (FILES), [online] [https://pure.ulster.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/79557964 /FILES\_Written\_Evidence\_to\_Education\_Select\_Committee.pdf](https://pure.ulster.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/79557964%20/FILES_Written_Evidence_to_Education_Select_Committee.pdf).

Discipline: Education

Title / area of PhD research: Digital Learning Spaces for the UK’s marginalised communities

Supervisors / contacts: Dr Matt Smith, Dr Howard Scott

Whilst a lot of research has focused on marginalisation (Messiou, 2006; Mowat, 2015; Wilson, Heaslip & Jackson, 2018), and on digital and mobile learning (e.g., Traxler, 2021; Bygstad et al., 2022) in the UK and global contexts, very little has yet been concerned with drawing these elements together to explore how online, digital and mobile learning can support communities who find themselves at the margins of the larger societies around them for reasons of power, wealth, security, language, literacy, capacity, support, infrastructure etc. As the research on this, especially in the UK, is limited this PhD proposal offers an opportunity for a prospective student to explore how marginalised communities can be effectively supported by online learning spaces and pedagogies. The following research questions, impact objectives and methodological focus have been proposed, but the successful applicant for this PhD will be able to shape and develop their trajectory and design further.

Research Questions (RQs)

1. Are there commonalities amongst marginalised communities’ learning needs, and to what extent can these be supported by digital and online learning?

2. What are the barriers to effective online learning faced by these communities, and what are the existing and potential solutions to these problems?

Impact Objectives (IOs)

1. To understand the barriers to effective online learning faced by marginalised and excluded communities in the UK.

2. To explore solutions to these problems; both those currently being trialled and horizon-scanning for future opportunities.

3. To engage in dialogue and collaboration with these communities and those running educational programmes with them to discuss future strategies to inform policy decisions.

Methodology: Mixed methods approach which combines a survey co-created with National Union of Students and ethnographic case study across UK universities

Bygstad, B., Øvrelid, E., Ludvigsen, S., & Dæhlen, M. (2022). From dual digitalization to digital learning space: Exploring the digital transformation of higher education. *Computers & Education*, 182, 104463.

Messiou, K. (2006). Understanding marginalisation in education: The voice of children. *European journal of psychology of education*, 21, 305-318.

Mowat, J. G. (2015). Towards a new conceptualisation of marginalisation. *European Educational Research Journal*, 14(5), 454-476.

Traxler, J. (2021). A Critical Review of Mobile Learning: Phoenix, Fossil, Zombie or…..?. *Education Sciences*, 11(9), 525.

Wilson, D., Heaslip, V., & Jackson, D. (2018). Improving equity and cultural responsiveness with marginalised communities: Understanding competing worldviews. *Journal of clinical nursing*, 27(19-20), 3810-3819.

Discipline: Education

Title / area of PhD research: Beyond compliance? A critical examination of the role of the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) in challenging school exclusions in schools in England

Supervisors / contacts: Dr Stephanie Brewster, Dr Zeta Williams-Brown

The School of Education has a long history of working with SENCOs, delivering the mandatory training since its inception in 2009. SENCos in England are the only professionals in schools required – until now - to have a Level 7 qualification, the National Award for SEN Coordination. In 2023, the government is discontinuing the Award which will be replaced by a National Professional Qualification, thereby losing the 60 Masters level credits that came with the previous qualification. Therefore, professional development for SENCos is very much entering a period of transition, offering both opportunities and challenges to the role.

While there are examples of research studies exploring the managerial and operational aspects of the SENCO role, there is relatively little literature on the moral and ethical dimensions of their work (Richards, 2022) in relation to enshrining inclusive education as outlined in the SEND CoP (2015) and the UN Sustainable Development Goal 4. However, there are widespread concerns about the implications of the new qualification for equipping SENCos with the capacity to exercise ‘advocacy leadership’ (Done, Knowler, Richards and Brewster 2022). The key aim of this study is to explore the role of the SENCO in schools and their capacity to challenge exclusionary practices (Done, Knowler & Armstrong, 2021). Utilising an ethnographic methodology, the research will draw on theories of professional identity (Richards, 2022), inclusive education and exclusionary practices to offer the first in-depth exploration of the work of SENCOs in challenging school exclusions.

This study would be an important way of demonstrating the University of Wolverhampton’s commitment to supporting SENCO postgraduate professional development, providing a pathway all the way from ITE to postgraduate research. It would represent a significant offering in the form of a doctoral level qualification (thus professional equivalency with Educational Psychologists) and would be, to our knowledge, the first doctoral study in England to be aimed at working SENCos.

Done, E.J., Knowler, H. and Armstrong, D. (2021), ‘Grey’ exclusions matter: mapping illegal exclusionary practices and the implications for children with disabilities in England and Australia. J Res Spec Educ Needs. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-3802.12539>

Done, E., Knowler, H., Richards, H. and Brewster, S. (2022) *Advocacy leadership and the de-professionalising of the Special Educational Needs Coordinator role.* Published online 31.12.22. British Journal of Special Education. 50(2) p197-218 [DOI: 10.1111/1467-8578.12449](https://nasenjournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1467-8578.12449)

Knowler, H, Richards, H and Brewster, S (Eds) 2023. Developing Your Expertise as a SENCo; Leading Inclusive Practice. St Albans; Critical Publishing.

Richards, H. (2022) “It was tough making sure it happened”: SENCo experience of the reality and risk of education and health care plan implementation. *Educational Review,* DOI: 10.1080/00131911.2022.2033703

Richards. H. (2022) Developing your identity, agency and voice. Chapter 1 in Richards, H. and Malomo, M. *Developing your professional identity: a guide for working with children and families*. Critical Publishing. ISBN: 9781914171536

The proposed supervisory team has strong professional and academic experience in the field of Special Educational Needs and Inclusion Studies, including a number of publications relevant to the role of SENCo’s, and delivery of professional development. They also have experience of doctoral supervision and completion. The proposed study is clearly situated within the team’s expertise and current research activities.

Discipline: Health

Title / area of PhD research: Active Ageing for Housing Association Customers

Supervisors / contacts: Dr Gavin Ward

The University of Wolverhampton takes its role as a member of its local community seriously. The City and Walsall campuses are located within diverse communities that face challenging socioeconomic and health inequalities. Knowing how to support members of these communities to integrate Physical Activity to their lives to support the growth of their personal health resources and enrich their health outcomes is vital to levelling up health inequalities.

Knowing how to work with local partners such as housing associations, to support local residents to access physical activity and grow the capacity of communities to engage in physical activity, will be.

the central drivers to this project. Establishing initial health screening, working with partners to promote physical activity to residents, organising physical activity sessions and exploring empowering ways to capture impact will drive the methodological approach. The candidate will benefit from the work of university researchers from other faculties within the university to support the success of academic and partner outcomes.

The skill sets developed by completing this project will demonstrate a proven track record in successful project management with community partners, impactful intervention mapping and production of peer reviewed academic outputs.

Discipline: Health

Title / area of PhD research: Physical Activity Empowerment for People Living with Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA)

Supervisors / contacts: Dr Gavin Ward

Building on previous work at the University this project will extend a feasibility study aimed at understanding how to empower people living with RA to engage in physical activity. The research will develop physical activity and empowerment interventions to analyse effective ways of supporting people living with RA to initiate, maintain or grow their physical activity and exercise behaviours. Developing educational packages for clinicians and people living with RA, refining the use of motivational support, exploring co-creation of physical activity and use of technology will feature as the core architecture of this project.

The skill sets developed through project completion will demonstrate a proven track record of project management with clinical and community partners, delivery of physical activity interventions and people focussed methodology. These skill sets are in increasing demand with a rapidly aging population and growing health inequalities.

Discipline: Sport

Title / area of PhD research: Race and Equality in University Sport

Supervisors / contacts: Dr Gavin Ward

Building upon previous funded research with British Universities and College Sport (BUCS), this research project will aim to support delivery of report recommendations aimed at university sport provision. Following lines of investigation that track the implementation of other report recommendations made for both BUCS and universities will be a key feature of this project. This includes the development of specifically designed policies that drive practices to improve care and safeguarding for students whilst they train, participate, and compete in sport and physical activity. Using established networks, the candidate will work to support the sharing and piloting of best practice across BUCS member institutions and evaluate the adaptation of these practices at a case study level.

The skill sets developed through the completion of this project will demonstrate a proven track record of developing communities of practice and project management in the promotion, development, and evaluation of practices at an institutional and student level. By working to promote, refine, and evaluate practices that support improved social justice, the candidate will demonstrate the usefulness and power of research to support partner working to impact improved practice.

Discipline: Sport

Title / area of PhD research: Football academy research and knowledge exchange group

Supervisors / contacts: Dr Ross Cloak

Are you passionate about football and dedicated to advancing the field of sports science? We invite applications for a Ph.D. position at the intersection of Football Academy and Sports Science. This exciting opportunity is ideal for individuals who aspire to make a meaningful impact on the performance, health, and well-being of football players through cutting-edge research.

The successful candidate will have the opportunity to contribute to the scientific understanding of various aspects related to football performance and athlete development. Potential research topics include, but are not limited to:

Physiological and biomechanical analysis of football-specific movements

Injury prevention and rehabilitation strategies for football players

Nutritional interventions for optimizing football player performance.

Integration of technology in monitoring and enhancing football training programs

The research will be conducted within a vibrant and supportive academic environment, collaborating with leading experts. The selected candidate will have access to state-of-the-art facilities, cutting-edge technology, and a collaborative network of local clubs.

Discipline: Sport

Title / area of PhD research: Combat Sport research and knowledge Exchange group

Supervisors / contacts: Dr Ross Cloak

Join our dynamic and cutting-edge research group in Combat Sport Sports Science at The University of Wolverhampton. We are committed to advancing knowledge in the field of combat sports, exploring interdisciplinary approaches to enhance performance, optimize training methodologies, and promote athlete well-being. The PhD candidate will have the opportunity to contribute to research in one or more of the following areas:

Physiological responses and adaptations to combat sport-specific training.

Cognitive and psychological factors influencing performance in combat sports.

Injury prevention and rehabilitation strategies for combat sport athletes.

Work with a team of experienced researchers, practitioners, and coaches dedicated to pushing the boundaries of knowledge in combat sports.

Discipline: Sport

Title / area of PhD research: Physiological demands and characteristics of dancers

Supervisors / contacts: Professor Matthew Wyon

The School of Sport is a world-leader in the area of dance science. As part of its continuing examination into the link between dancers’ physical fitness and characteristics, their training demands and dance performance three themes are proposed to widen the evidence beyond western theatrical dance with foci on African Disapora and South Asian dance genres and wheelchair dance.

Discipline: Sport

Title / area of PhD research: Workload, injury and performance in pre-professional adolescent dancers

Supervisors / contacts: Professor Matthew Wyon

Adolescent pre-professional dance schools has to mix academic studies with dance training. The project will look at the physiological and psychological demands of this training and how interventions could possibly have an effect on injury incidence and performance outcomes.

Discipline: Sport

Title / area of PhD research: The role of exercise in people living with and beyond cancer

Supervisors / contacts: Dr Ian Lahart

Our past work in our research centre has focused on establishing the effectiveness of exercise as an therapeutic intervention for those awaiting surgery for cancer, people receiving chemotherapy for cancer, and those who have completed cancer-related treatment. We have specific interests in examining the effects and underlying mechanisms of exercise on cardiometabolic health and inflammation in people diagnosed with cancer; the feasibility of exercise in more challenging cancer populations; and the association between muscle loss and cancer treatment-related toxicity.

Discipline: Sport

Title / area of PhD research: The effects of exercise in women diagnosed with polycystic ovary syndrome

Supervisors / contacts: Dr Ian Lahart

Our work in this area investigates the potential benefits of exercise to help reduce and manage the adverse effects and symptoms related to polycystic ovary syndrome. Potential projects in this population could explore the effects of different modalities of exercise, such as resistance exercise; how exercise effects may vary according to polycystic ovary syndrome phenotype; and the effectiveness of exercise to reduce insulin resistance in women with polycystic ovary showing signs of pre-diabetes.

Discipline: Sport

Title / area of PhD research: Physical Activity Interventions to Improve Movement and Quality of Life in People living with Parkinson’s Disease

Supervisors / contacts: Dr Tina Smith

Parkinson’s disease is characterised by movement disorders which can impact on quality of life. Symptoms of the disease can affect many aspects of movement including the ability to perform activities of daily living, such as walking and turning, balance and fine motor skills. Further research is required to more fully understand how movement is affected in people living with Parkinson’s disease at various stages of disease progression and develop specific interventions to improve movement and quality of life. Various types of physical activity and exercise programmes have been shown to benefit people living with Parkinson’s disease. However, there remains scope to explore novel physical activity modalities and exercise prescriptions and understand their potential benefits and mechanisms in relation to this population from a quality of life and biomechanical perspective.

We are seeking to recruit to projects that will further explore movement characteristics in people with Parkinson’s disease alongside methods to quantify and understand disease progression, and physical activity-based interventions to improve movement and quality of life. Movement characteristics will be measured using 3D motion capture technology, integrated with measures of ground reaction force and EMG. There will also be scope to use additional technologies from our well-equipped laboratories such as accelerometers, inertial sensors, DXA and ultrasound imaging commensurate with the agreed project aims. Analysis of data will be carried out using Matlab and other specialist software, as required.

This is an opportunity for potential candidates to develop their own project around the above themes. The project will be housed within the Sport and Physical Activity Research Centre (SPARC). We are interested to hear from candidates with a strong interest and background in biomechanics, or those from a relevant area of engineering, maths or physics interested in applying their knowledge to human movement.

Please contact for more information.

Discipline: Education

Title / area of PhD research: Attainment and Progression Analysis, Student Experience and Learning Cultures in Higher Education

Supervisors / contacts: Dr Gavin Ward

Tracking student progress, particularly students from Global Majority back grounds is vital to closing long established attainment gaps in UK HE. Key to understanding gaps in student attainment, is analysing how student demographics, attainment and progression coalesce in university courses and associated areas of study. There is also a need to contextualise this quantitative analysis within students’ reported experiences of the learning cultures within their course community. This mixed method approach will play a vital role in ensuring the University of Wolverhampton achieves its ambition to be university of opportunity. The project will aim to establish a routine system of processing university held data, student survey data and exploration of student experiences. This will aid the establishment of a longitudinal research in this area of work.

Research impact will be at the forefront of this project. Findings developed from the research will support the senior leadership team in the School to make strategic decisions in relation to the management of teaching and learning. The PhD candidate will have scope to discuss the use of different methodologies that will enable the extraction and analysis of university attainment data and to explore learning cultures and student experiences of these cultures at a module, course, and school level. Completing this project will establish a skill set that will enable the candidate to demonstrate institutional impact through high quality research and the production of peer reviewed outputs.