ESRC Grand Union Doctoral Training Partnership – Health and Wellbeing Pathway

Further particulars for the Public Health, England cofounded studentship

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<th>Pathway Title</th>
<th>Health and Wellbeing</th>
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<tr>
<td>Project Code</td>
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<tr>
<td>Host institution</td>
<td>OU</td>
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<td>Host faculty</td>
<td>Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Key words</td>
<td>Health, inequalities, diversity, social justice, life course</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supervisory team</td>
<td>To be determined on individual basis but will include Dr Cliodna McNulty from Public Health England</td>
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Pathway highlights

The health and wellbeing pathway at the Open University is hosted by the Faculty of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies in association with the university-wide strategic research area of health and wellbeing. The research community for interdisciplinary social science-based research in health and wellbeing consists of over 90 academics. The pathway is built around a focus on issues of health, wellbeing and social justice. At the Open University there is a particular focus on inclusive and participatory research (and innovative methodologies) with groups seen to be ‘vulnerable’ and ‘hard to reach’ across the life course.

The pathway will equip students to address health and wellbeing as complex, dynamic and fluid phenomena across the life course, and to use established and innovative social research methodologies to address these challenges. It provides training that students will need to address current and emerging health and wellbeing challenges relevant to diverse communities and stakeholders.

Overview

Health and wellbeing research at the university is organised thematically into a number of overlapping areas across the life course: ageing and later life; children, young people and families; death and dying; living with disability and/or long term conditions; and sexual and reproductive health. Applications are invited in topics linked to one or more of these thematic areas, or one of the cross-cutting areas of research interest including: care and caring; mental health and wellbeing; affect and power; technologies for health and wellbeing; and concepts of ‘normality’ and ‘abnormality’.


Training and skills

The training provided for the health and wellbeing pathway will equip students with skills to understand and interrogate health and wellbeing through an interdisciplinary frame, to draw on a range of methodologies, epistemologies and research skills to address significant challenges and issues in health and wellbeing research and practice. The pathway consists
of core skills as well as advanced and subject specific training tailored to the student’s specific area of study. Students will be expected to attend both general research training and subject specific training. For students without relevant research skills, they will be expected to pursue a +4 programme and will be provided with core research methods training. In addition students will be encouraged to be actively involved in student-led activities and seminars across the three universities.

**Studentship Structure**

The studentships will be for a full-time +3 route. This is for students who have already completed a Masters in a relevant area of health and wellbeing (such as sociology of health, health psychology, anthropology, gerontology, disability studies)

**Studentship Description**

**An evaluation of Beat the Bugs: a community education course on hygiene, self-care and antibiotics**

Education of the public is an important strategy in the fight against antibiotic resistance. By educating on appropriate antibiotic use we hope to reduce the number of antibiotic prescriptions and thereby contribute to reducing the number of antibiotic resistant bacteria. Furthermore, by educating on hygiene and the spread of infection we can reduce the incidence of infection and thereby reduce the need for antibiotics.

**e-Bug and Beat the Bugs**

e-Bug educates children and young people on hygiene, the spread of infection and antibiotics. e-Bug has educational resources for use in schools (teaching resources) and in the home setting (student websites). Teaching materials are available for junior students, senior students and young adults and can be access on the e-Bug website at [www.e-bug.eu](http://www.e-bug.eu).

e-Bug has expanded its reach into the community to educate hard-to-reach groups and vulnerable adults on key hygiene and self-care topics. Vulnerable adults are often no longer in education and reaching these groups with healthcare information is difficult. In addition, vulnerable adults often need more support to live independently, and this course would equip participants with the knowledge, skills and confidence they need to reduce infections, increase self-care, and increase understanding about appropriate antibiotic use.

The Beat the Bugs community course is also suitable for other community groups such as Guide and Scout groups, and young mothers. These groups are often educated on life skills, such as cookery and first aid, and the topics covered in Beat the Bugs would complement these courses.
The Beat the Bugs course contains six basic hygiene workshops/lessons: 1) introducing microbes, 2) how infections spread through touch and sneezing, 3) how to prepare and store food safely, 4) an oral hygiene lesson, 5) how to take antibiotics correctly, and 6) how to self-care for common infections. The course gives practical advice as well as educating on hygiene topics and each session concludes with individual action planning. Beat the Bugs can be run as a six week course, or as individual sessions. The full course pack and accompanying PowerPoint presentations and posters can be downloaded from the Beat the Bugs website at www.e-bug.eu/beat-the-bugs.

Objectives of the Beat the Bugs community course:

1. Community members will have the knowledge and confidence to look after their self-limiting infections and seek help when appropriate.
2. Participants will have the knowledge and intentions to reduce the spread of infection throughout the community
3. Participants will have increased understanding about appropriate antibiotic use

The e-Bug team have run training sessions throughout the last academic year for community leaders to become approved Beat the Bugs trainers. These training sessions introduce the course and how it can be run, and give educators the knowledge, skills and confidence to run the course in their community groups.

Beat the Bugs pilots

Beat the Bugs has been piloted with adults with learning disabilities (8 participants) and young mothers in a children’s centre (4-6 participants). In both pilots, the full six-week course was run. Participants completed a questionnaire before the session began that asked simple multiple choice questions, covering the learning points in the session. After the session, the same questionnaire was completed again, to enable researchers to compare knowledge before and after the course. A follow up focus group with participants, and interview with the course leader, took place six weeks after the course had finished, to investigate knowledge retention, changes in behaviour and enjoyment of the course.

The questionnaire results suggest that the Beat the Bugs course is able to improve knowledge on hygiene, infection and self-care, with all sessions showing a positive knowledge change post teaching. The greatest improvements in knowledge were seen for sessions on introducing microbes, the spread of infections and antibiotics. In the follow up focus group participants reported positive behaviour change including an increase in
appropriate hand washing and tooth brushing for themselves and their children. The results suggest the Beat the Bugs course work well in both settings.

Further evaluations are now needed to evaluate the impact of the course in a wide range of community settings, and with a larger number of participants.

**Studentship Aims and Objectives**

This studentship is designed to evaluate the course with one, or possibly more, specific community group that are seen to be hard to reach and who may have specific learning needs. The aims are broadly to:

- To research appropriate methods for evaluation of the Beat the Bugs course, bearing in mind the potential different community groups, settings, ages and abilities of participants, with a particular emphasis on hard to reach groups with learning needs
- To undertake a full evaluation of the Beat the Bugs course in one or possibly more community group (such as adults with learning disabilities) and with a range of participants, assessing knowledge change, awareness change around the topic, enjoyment and engagement with the course
- More specifically, to determine the extent to which the Beat the Bugs course increases participants:
  - Knowledge and confidence to look after their own infections and seek help when appropriate.
  - Knowledge and intentions to reduce the spread of infection throughout the community
  - Understanding about appropriate antibiotic use
- To identify organisations and third party groups who can assist with rollout and promotion of the Beat the Bugs course

To determine for which community settings the Beat the Bugs course is most suited

**Further details:**

Prospective students should have a strong background in an area of health and wellbeing relevant to their area of study, indicative areas include: sociology of health, critical health psychology, anthropology, health economics, epidemiology, childhood studies, gerontology; but may also include experience through practice.

If you have any questions about the relevance of your previous academic or work experience, or the suitability of your proposed project, please contact Lindsay O’Dell (Lindsay.odell@open.ac.uk)
Applying for the studentship:

- Applications should include a cover letter outlining how they would approach the project brief, how your background relates to the research topic and why you wish to study at the Open University;
- An outline research proposal of no more than 2,000 words, covering research topic and methodology drawing on the project outline generated by Public Health England. General advice on the proposal can be found here: http://www.open.ac.uk/postgraduate/research-degrees/how-to-apply/mphil-and-phd-application-process;
- an academic CV that includes contact details of three academic referees;
- an Open University application form, downloadable from http://www.open.ac.uk/postgraduate/research-degrees/how-to-apply/mphil-and-phd-application-process

Applications should be sent to WELS-student-Enquiries@open.ac.uk