Further information for postgraduate research student based in NHS Lothian, Edinburgh, 2020

The Faculty of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies (WELS) at The Open University in collaboration with NHS Lothian is offering a full-time funded PhD studentship to an outstanding applicant who is interested in studying in an environment that supports world-leading quality research. In the last Research Excellence Framework (REF 2014) the UK government endorsed our research as overwhelmingly world-leading and internationally excellent, with significant and wide-reaching impact.

The student will be awarded a fully-funded studentship and receive a tax-free bursary covering three years of study. In line with Research Council norms, the anticipated stipend for 2020/21 is expected to be approximately £15000. The student will also receive an annual research training and support grant (currently up to £1000).

The collaborative studentship will be geographically based in the Maternity Services Unit of the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh, NHS Lothian. The student is expected to live in or within easy of this facility and will be expected to travel to The Open University in Milton Keynes several times during the year, to attend the university and engage with the research environment.

The student will join a vibrant international community of postgraduate students in the Faculty who are engaged in interdisciplinary research in education, education technology, languages (including applied linguistics and translation studies), and health and social care.
Person specification

Applicants need to have the following qualifications, experience and expertise:

- A good degree at 2.1 level or above relevant to the area in which they are applying or a Master’s degree in a relevant area
- Knowledge of and experience of using qualitative/quantitative research methods
- Good written and spoken communication skills. All non-native English candidates need to demonstrate a minimum IELTS score of 6.5 with no less than 6.0 in any of the four categories (or approved equivalent). You should have your level of proficiency certified through a provider approved by UK Visas and Immigration and provide your certificate and grade with your application.
- The ability to work collaboratively with supervisors
- The ability to work independently and manage time effectively to ensure completion within the funded period
- Use on line methods of communication, reporting and training
- The commitment to disseminating research findings
- If you are applying from outside of the EEA (European Economic Area) further details of the requirements for entry to the UK as a postgraduate research student can be found here.
- Familiarity with working in a healthcare environment is an advantage.

Support while you are studying

The supervisory team will be led by Professor Louise Wallace as lead supervisor, along with a second internal Open University supervisor. Dr Belinda Hacking (Head of Clinical Psychology Services, NHS Lothian) will be invited by the University as an external, local supervisor. We also support students in many other different ways including from the Director of Postgraduate Studies (who has overall responsibility for research students in the Faculty), and a Third Party Monitor. Support is also available more widely across the university through the OU Graduate School, the Library, the careers development team and other units as required. It is expected that the student will complete their studies within the funded period of three years and all students are supported to aim to achieve this.
Students have access to excellent library services and IT training, including on-line. They will be provided with a programme of academic training and skills development, which includes university-wide as well as faculty-based seminars and workshops, some can be accessed on-line. This includes resources and training offered through the Graduate School Network which draws on the OU’s world class expertise in pedagogy to support your development as a research student.

**Fees and studentships**

The successful student will receive a maintenance grant which is anticipated to be £15000 (£14,777 in 2019/20). This is likely to stay at a similar level with the possibility of a small inflationary rise. The university allows holders of full-time student grants to engage in 6 hours paid work per week (not cumulative) over and above their studies.

Further information about studying for a research degree at the OU is available in the Research Degrees Prospectus which may be accessed online at: http://www.open.ac.uk/postgraduate/research-degrees

**The application process**

To apply for a place to study for an MPhil/PhD in the Faculty you will need to complete and send us an application form and a research proposal. The application form can be found at http://www.open.ac.uk/postgraduate/research-degrees/how-to-apply/mphil-and-phd-application-process. You will be required to provide the names of two referees who can support your application; at least one referee must be able to comment on your most recent studies.

Applicants must also submit a research proposal of 2,000 words explaining the nature of their interest in the subject, with details of any previous work in this area or any related areas. The proposal is an important part of your application in which you outline your research, including the proposed methodology. Information about how to write a proposal is given at the end of this document.

The closing date for applications is Midnight 05/04/2020. Interviews in Edinburgh will take place on 28/04/20. All applicants will receive an email notifying them of the outcome of their application. If you have any queries about the studentships prior to applying, please contact the Director of Postgraduate Studies, Professor Jan Draper at wels-student-enquiries@open.ac.uk, or Professor Louise Wallace louise.wallace@open.ac.uk

**Selection process**

If you are shortlisted, we will contact you by email to arrange an interview date. For international applicants, interviews will be held by Skype. We anticipate that the interview panel
will consist of Professor Louise Wallace, Professor Jan Draper and Dr Belinda Hacking Director. Interview questions are based on your application and previous training in research methods, and your research proposal.

Applicants are requested to bring certificates for their current qualifications and a valid passport or alternative documentation to confirm their identity.

Your research proposal and interview performance are evaluated according to the following criteria:

- The fit of your project with the research brief (see below).
- Your knowledge of the subject including, for example, knowledge of theoretical and recent literature relevant to your proposed research area
- The rationale for your proposal and the relationship between the research question(s), research design and the proposed method of analysis
- Your knowledge and understanding of these proposed research methods and the rationale for your choice of methods in comparison with alternatives
- The feasibility of the project design and viability within the registration period
- Your knowledge and understanding of the ethical considerations
- Your written and verbal communication skills
- Your understanding of what is involved in undertaking a PhD.

**Topic for studentship**

**Topic:** “Being Open” with people when things go wrong: evaluating an innovative approach to improving patient safety and patient and family experience in maternity services in NHS Lothian

**Context:**

NHS Lothian is the provider of a large range of specialist and community health services. It includes a regional neonatal service and maternity services with approximately 7000 births per year.

All services strive to provide high quality and safe services. The consequences when things go wrong can be distressing and, rarely, lead to lasting harm or deaths which may have been avoidable. The impact on families and on the staff involved can be intense, and with lasting effects. The importance of understanding how adverse events occur is of paramount importance in order to learn and to provide safer services. In order for the investigations about
adverse events to be conducted effectively, those involved need to be able to share their perspectives and for the events to be carefully examined, and lessons learnt. The impact on families and on staff of being part of this process is the subject of this research.

NHS Lothian were commissioned in 2015 to undertake improvement work to develop reliable processes to involve families and staff in adverse event reviews in maternity and neonatal services. This resulted in the development of an integrated pathway for maternity and neonatal adverse event reviews, with a focus on improving processes and involving people.

Within Scotland there are two national guidance documents on the Management of Adverse Events and ‘Being Open in NHS Scotland – Guidance on Implementing the Being Open Principles 2015’ which NHS Boards are required to implement. In order to complement these documents, the CMO Directorate within Scottish Government has developed a Framework for Maternity and Neonatal Adverse Event Review processes for Scotland (http://www.healthcareimprovementscotland.org/our_work/governance_and_assurance/learning_from_adverse_events/national_framework.aspx . Other national UK reports have made recommendations on adverse event review process and engaging patients and families; MBRRACE, PMRT, Each Baby Counts.

In NHS Lothian during 2015 a project team previously worked successfully with the Effective Communication 4 Healthcare (EC4H) programme to deliver multidisciplinary simulation workshops which model best practice throughout the patient journey whenever an adverse event occurs. Quality Improvement methodology has shown promising benefits from this programme for mothers, family members, the multidisciplinary team and clinical management.

The scope of the research will include undertaking qualitative research to understand the perspectives of families and staff in involved in serious event reviews. These might involve rare events such as intrapartum stillbirth, birth asphyxia requiring therapeutic hypothermia, maternal death, or more frequent examples such as a baby being unexpectedly admitted to a neonatal unit requiring intensive care, a mother experiencing a very large haemorrhage following delivery and admission to intensive care. An appropriate methodology should be suggested to examine the lived experience of families and staff who have experienced these reviews. Issues to explore may include the families’ experience of the review and their view as to whether more needs to be done about the lessons learnt. The perspectives of staff may include how they feel they have been supported by their employers and colleagues, their confidence in “Being Open” and the cultural change that is inherent when implementing a change of practise. Researchers may wish to consider the relevant social science theories that may guide this research.
Developing your outline research proposal

As part of your application you need to submit a research proposal indicating the area you would like to research. Please use the above brief to inform the development of your proposal. If you are accepted onto the programme, your supervisors will provide help and support in refining your proposed research. Your research proposal is an important part of your application. It enables selectors to assess your knowledge of the proposed field of study and your ability to frame a project conceptually and propose an appropriate methodology.

Content of research proposal

Your proposal should be no more than 2,000 words long and should include the following. Approximate word lengths for each element of the proposal are indicated in square brackets to guide you on the relative balance of these in the overall proposal.

1. Your name and the title of your thesis

2. The importance/context of your project [100 words]
   Explain clearly why the project is worth pursuing. Is your interest a personal one? Have recent advances in the area made a previously unresolved problem solvable? Would resolving the problem you have identified help to answer some larger question? Does the issue that you would like to investigate have some urgent practical importance? Whatever the answer may be, it would be good to include some motivation for your project. Be concise.

3. A review of the literature [1000 words]
   Provide a summary of some of the key relevant literature in the area. You do not need to give a long reference list. Instead summarize and critically appraise the key articles or books you regard as particularly relevant to your project. Explain how they relate to your proposal. Do they contain an argument or position you intend to critique or defend, or an idea that could help you to answer your question? This section of the proposal will give some indication of your ability to write critically and concisely and how you are able to balance different arguments in the literature.

4. The research question [50 words]
   Your review of the literature and the context of your project should set up the rationale for why you want to research your topic and perhaps the gap in evidence. You should state clearly and precisely the question, or set of questions, that you intend to address. Research proposals – including successful ones – are almost always over-ambitious, but the more broad-ranging a proposal is, the harder it is to see how a coherent thesis might develop from it. So, do not be overambitious – be realistic with what you are going to be able to achieve within a 3 (or 6) year timeframe.
5. Methods [850]

The methods should set out your ideas for how you intend to go about answering your research question.

Methodology

We suggest that you start off by outlining your methodological approach. Link this if you can to the literature you have reviewed, and the data collection and analysis methods you plan to use. For instance, you may plan to take an ethnographic approach, or carry out an intervention study, or to capture objective data and subject them to statistical analysis. This section should explain why and how the approach you plan to use will fit your topic and the problem you are addressing.

Data collection/analysis

You should also outline in this section how you intend to go about collecting your data (for example by observation, interviews, a survey). You also need to describe the process you will use to analyse the data and whether it will involve using specialist software.

Access to participants/recruitment

Make sure you make some reference to how you intend to recruit your participants, whether there are likely to be any challenges and suggestions you have for overcoming these.

Ethics

Also include in this section reference to the ethical aspects to your study. What ethical issues does your research raise? Are human participants involved? How will you secure their consent and safeguard their confidentiality? Does the project involve risk? How will you mitigate this?

Timeline

At the end of this section please provide a proposed timeline for your study, illustrating the key activities. This could be presented diagrammatically.

6. References

List the publication details of all the works you have referenced in your proposal. Use a standard referencing format (e.g. Harvard or APA). This should help us to understand the literature with which you are familiar. Be accurate and precise in how you lay out the references. Your attention to detail will be something we will be considering as we review your proposal. The reference list is not included in the word count.

Additional information

As indicated above, your project will develop under the guidance of your supervisors. You are not committed to everything that you say in your proposal; only to producing the thesis that develops out of it. Please do not worry if you do not know exactly how your thesis will develop: you can signal areas you are uncertain about.

If you are awarded funding for your PhD from an external body, you may be requested to adapt your proposal in line with its requirements. Your supervisors will provide support and guidance in this event.