

Co-creating transformative and innovative strategies to improve social support, educational outcomes, and future opportunities for children and young people in Leicestershire

About the Project

Based on the latest data, 4.5 million children are living in poverty in the UK – that's every 9 pupils in an average classroom of 30 (CPAG, Child poverty facts and figures 2024). Many Leicestershire children face additional barriers to their participation in learning which compromise their safety and wellbeing. These are typically due to factors outside of school such as being exposed to domestic abuse, being a young carer, having a family member in prison, or committing a crime. Those with Adverse Childhood Experiences, from deprived backgrounds, in receipt of Pupil Premium Funding, and with special educational needs are particularly at risk. These children are also disproportionately more likely to be excluded or suspended, with negative implications for their short-term academic achievement and long-term life chances.

This project seeks to understand the causes behind poor educational outcomes, examine local risk factors, and explore new methodologies and practical strategies to improve the educational and social outcomes of vulnerable children. For example, where schools and trusts embed a culture of community and belonging as appropriate for all pupils' needs - becoming inclusive by design - children report feeling 'seen, understood and safe'. Inclusivity is an important starting point for supporting regular attendance, and provides an education that nurtures ambition, promotes high standards and the fulfilment of potential for all pupils.

A challenge for this PhD is how to ensure that lived experiences are represented in local understandings of educational and wider social and community support needs. Furthermore, focus will be placed on understanding how school and trust leaders and communities can all benefit from the data-informed solutions to maximise available resources and increase efficiencies for developing local intelligence. This is an opportunity to influence both practice and policy, as the research will inform the co-creation of a sustainable funding plan which would prevent unmet needs from escalating and would support children to achieve their goals and thrive alongside their peers.

About the Project

The successful candidate will develop distinctive knowledge and expertise in a local context, with the potential to empower local trusts, schools and communities to develop evidence-informed responses that combine lived experiences with best practice data analytics. This will in turn support the wider aim of fostering resilience, strong partnerships and positive attitudes which get to the heart of the challenges and build provision around the current and future needs of every child in every Leicestershire community.

This project has been co-created and is supported by researchers from De Montfort University, Loughborough University, and partners at The Mead Educational Trust. The successful candidate for this project will be enrolled at De Montfort University.

Project Aims

The overall aims of this project are :

1. To critically address the causes behind poor educational outcomes, with a focus on local risk factors.
2. To explore new methodologies and innovative practice strategies to improve the educational and social outcomes of vulnerable children.
3. To consider how approaches to supporting regular attendance can be tailored to the local community and vulnerable families, leading to the fulfilment of potential for all pupils.
4. To contribute to the effective implementation of programmes to advance the well-being of children.
5. To ensure that lived experiences are represented in local understandings of educational and wider social and community support needs

Supervisory Team

1. Lead Academic Supervisor: Professor Julia Shaw (De Montfort University)
2. Academic Co-Supervisor(s): Dr Juliet Stone (Loughborough University)
3. Community Supervisor(s): Mark Oldman (The Mead Educational Trust)

Key Details

Host University:	De Montfort University
School / department:	Leicester De Montfort Law School
Start date:	Monday 28 September 2025
Financial offer:	Tuition fees covered in full (worth approx. £15-17k across full PhD programme). Monthly stipend based on £19,237 per annum, pro rata, tax free.
Working hours	Full-time (minimum 37.5 hrs per week)
Working Style:	Primarily in-person at host university. Flexible working supported. Working pattern to be agreed between successful candidate and lead supervisor.

Competencies

Collaboratory Core Competencies		
Category	Competency	Assessed: Application (A), Interview (I)
Comprehension and evaluation	Strong understanding of the project and its subject matter.	A / I
	Analytical, researcher mindset with keen attention to detail.	A / I
	Communicate complex concepts with clarity and precision.	A / I
	Able to identify connections, patterns, gaps, and irregularities in information/data.	I
	Able to interpret data/information confidently with logic and empathy to derive meaning.	I
Social and emotional	Demonstrable experience of responding effectively changing contexts, information and demands.	A
	Ability to persevere in the face of challenges/failures and to remain constructive in developing solutions.	A
	Demonstrable passion for learning with clear drive and curiosity to undertake this specific research project.	A / I
	Willingness to immerse oneself in the research subject matter and make a contribute to new knowledge through a PhD.	A / I
	Strong desire to make a positive community impact through the research.	A / I
	Willingness to think deeply about complex concepts and engage with academic ideas and theory.	A / I
Preparedness and potential for success	Experience of working, collaborating and communicating effectively with different stakeholders.	A
	High level of self-motivation and ability to work with minimal guidance.	A / I
	Strong organisational and time-management skills with the ability to balance and prioritise multiple tasks.	A / I
	Ability to identify potential challenges and complexities and thoughtfully consider possible solutions.	A / I
	Able to identify the technical, personal, or professional skills required for a task and take action to develop these.	A / I

Competencies

Collaboratory Core Competencies			
Category		Competency	Assessed: Application (A), Interview (I)
Community Context		Genuine desire to undertake community-engaged research over more traditional approaches to research.	A
		Understand the impact of and need for the inclusion of diverse experiences and points of view in research.	A / I
		Appreciation/understanding of the importance of community insight and experience in the generation of new knowledge.	A / I
		Awareness/understanding of the broader societal context related to the subject matter of the project.	A / I

Project Specific Competencies			
Essential	Assessed: Application (A), Interview (I)	Desirable	Assessed: Application (A), Interview (I)
Knowledge of and interest in the primary and secondary education sector.	A / I	Local knowledge of the Leicestershire context, especially in relation to primary/secondary education.	A / I
Ability to work collaboratively with a diverse range of stakeholders.	A / I	Experience of using statistical tools and software to interpret data, draw conclusions, and make informed decisions.	A / I
Understanding of the challenges associated with working with vulnerable groups of society.	A / I	Knowledge and/or experience of conducting interviews and focus groups.	A / I
Commitment to ethical and professional conduct	A / I	Experience of working with vulnerable groups in society.	A / I

NOTE: The successful candidate for this project will be required to undergo a formal Disclosure and Barring Services check.

References for Further Reading

- Tucker J, (Ed), 2020 Vision: Ending child poverty for good. London: Child Poverty Action Group, <https://production.cpag.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-10/2020-Vision-ending-child-poverty-for-good.pdf> (book: openaccess)
- K Cooper, K Stewart (2021) Does household income affect children's outcomes? A systematic review of the evidence. ChildIndicators Research, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12187-020-09782-0>
- House of Commons Committee Report (2024-25). Report on Improving Educational Outcomes for Disadvantaged Children, <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5901/cmselect/cmpubacc/365/report.html>
- Robertson, L. and Fiona Mchardy (2021) Report on the Poverty-related Attainment Gap: A Review of the Evidence, The Poverty Alliance, <https://www.povertyalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/The-Poverty-related-Attainment-Gap-A-Review-of-the-Evidence-2.pdf>
- The Ethics of Research Involving Children: Common Questions, Potential Strategies and Useful Guidance. National Centre for Research Ethics (NCRE) Guidance Papers: <https://www.ncrm.ac.uk/resources/ethics/index.php>
- Whong, M. and J. Godfrey, Eds. (2020) What is Good Academic Writing?: Insights into Discipline-Specific Student Writing, Bloomsbury Publishing (book: open access)
- Kramer, S., Finn, A., Laher, S. and J. van Vuuren (2024) Online Readings in Research Methods (ORIM): <https://www.psyssa.com/publications/orim/>
- Marber, P. and D. Araya (2023) Augmented Education in the Global Age: Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Learning and Work, Taylor & Francis (book: open access)
- Mitchelli, N.M., Jacobovitch, T.J. and S. Campo (2023) Education for Social Justice: The Meaning of Justice and Current Research, Routledge (book: open access)