

# PhD Opportunity

## Arts-led Approaches to Trauma and Healing

### **Director of Studies**

Dr John Cussans, Arts and Health Research Group, Institute of Arts and Humanities, University of Worcester

### **Supervisors**

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### **Arts and Health Research Group**

#### **The PhD Opportunity**

The Covid pandemic led to a worldwide increase in physical and mental health needs, particularly amongst the young, the elderly and minority groups. There is subsequently a critical bottleneck in supply and demand for mental health services in the UK and further afield, especially for child and adolescent mental health [1]. There is growing evidence that art therapies (including art therapy, music therapy, dance and movement therapy, and dramatherapy) can have direct impact on mental and physical wellbeing [2] however practicing professional art therapists are currently oversubscribed with referrals from the NHS.

Dance and movement therapies, as well as wellbeing-focused dance and movement interventions, position dance as a way to make sense of an emotional state rather than a performance art form (Payne, 2003). There is a wide, published research base supporting this approach, including dedicated journals, however a systematic review of published work found generally poor-quality evidence within published work that is used to support the therapeutic benefits (Strassel et al., 2011).

We are interested in projects that aim to address these shortcomings through well founded and well-structured interventions/approaches. Through this we will create a stronger evidence base allowing for more acceptance of them within the psycho-medical community. These projects might take the form of a targeting of a particular at-need community group, or more general interventions.

We are also interested in supervising projects that investigate the upskilling of front-line community workers to include this kind of work within their own projects. Through this kind of project potentially many more at-need groups could access the benefits than the currently practising professionals can reach.

As a PhD student in the Institute of Arts and Humanities at Worcester you will be part of the Arts and Health Research Group, a transdisciplinary community of artists, educators and health professionals exploring the overlaps of art, culture and wellbeing. The Arts and Health group organizes symposia, research events and exhibitions which you can participate in and contribute to. There will also be opportunities to exhibit your work in the Window Galleries at the Art House, with Pitt Studio, a contemporary art organization based at the Art House and at other venues in the city. The Institute of Arts and Humanities also works closely with Meadow Arts, a local visual arts organization that creates projects in unusual and unexpected locations and with whom we organize an annual artist talks programme.

[1] Almost a quarter of adults with mild-moderate mental health issues have to wait more than 3 months between initial assessment and second appointment with around half reporting that this has led to a deterioration in their mental wellbeing. For young people it can be significantly longer.

[2] For example Moula, Z.; Powell, J.; Karkou, V. Qualitative and Arts-Based Evidence from Children Participating in a Pilot Randomised Controlled Study of School-Based Arts Therapies. *Children* 2022, 9, 890.

## References

Payne, H. (2003) *Dance movement therapy: Theory and practice, Dance Movement Therapy: Theory and Practice*. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203359266>.

Strassel, J.K. et al. (2011) 'A Systematic Review of the Evidence for the Effectiveness of Dance Therapy', *Alternative Therapies in Health & Medicine*, 17(3), pp. 50–59.

## Application Process

To begin the application process please go to

<https://www.worc.ac.uk/research/research-degrees/applying-for-a-phd/>.

## The Interview

All successful applicants will be offered an interview with the proposed Supervisory Team. You will be contacted by a member of the Doctoral School Team to find a suitable date. Interviews can be conducted in person or over Microsoft Teams.

## Funding your PhD

For information about Doctoral Loans please visit: <https://www.worc.ac.uk/study/fees-and-finance/doctoral-loans.aspx>

During your PhD you can access the Research Conference Support Scheme to support the costs of presenting your research at an external conference.

## Research at the University of Worcester

Research is central to the University's mission to make a difference in everything that we do. We are committed to delivering excellent research which extends the boundaries of human knowledge but which also improves people's lives by enabling better health outcomes, improving food security, developing environmentally sustainable solutions for crop production and socially sustainable solutions to our ageing population, enhancing public knowledge and understanding of the past and present.

The University hence focuses its research around five high-level challenges facing society, locally, nationally and globally:

- [\*\*Human Health and Wellbeing\*\*](#)
- [\*\*Sustainable Futures\*\*](#)
- [\*\*Digital Innovation\*\*](#)
- [\*\*Culture, Identity and Social Exclusion\*\*](#)
- [\*\*Professional Education\*\*](#)

The success of our research is reflected in our continuous improvement in external research assessment processes. In the most recent Research Excellence Framework, REF 2021, the University saw a near 50% increase in the scale of its research and 12% increase in quality, building on its performance in REF 2014 when it was the UK's most improved university in terms of Research Power, a combination of scale and quality.

### **Research Degrees at Worcester**

Our research students are central to our overall mission for research. They are working at the cutting edge of their disciplines and driving forward the quality of our research whilst enriching our research culture. We are looking to increase our research student numbers as a strategic imperative.

Our commitment to our students is reflected in the results of the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey 2023 in which we ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> for overall research student satisfaction nationally. Key to our success in this area is the Doctoral School, a focal point for all our research students.

It provides:

- day-to-day support for our students, both administrative and practical, through our dedicated team
- a Research Student Study Space with both PCs and laptop docking station
- a comprehensive Researcher Development Programme for students and their supervisors
- a programme of student-led conferences and seminars

### **Research Group**

#### **Arts and Health Research Group**

The Arts and Health Research Group is a collaborative, cross-disciplinary initiative combining expertise from the Arts, Health and Wellbeing, Education, Humanities, and Medicine which will develop a range of projects investigating the therapeutic potential of the arts and humanities within traditional health and wellbeing contexts and wider social settings.

Areas of focus will include the therapeutic use of arts, culture and humanities for health, mental health and wellbeing in the community; consider how the arts and humanities are applied to enable better understanding about health, wellness and illness; training of medical, therapeutic and arts practitioners in the application of arts-based approaches to mental health and wellbeing services; arts led approaches towards innovative social health solutions and innovations in data collection for quality of life and health outcomes through participation in arts-based activities.

## Widening Participation

As part of its mission statement the University is committed to widening participation for its higher degrees. Although most candidates will have an undergraduate and/or a Masters degree, the University is happy to accept applications from candidates with relevant professional qualifications and work related experience.

**For further information** or an informal discussion on this project, please contact Dr John Cussans (Director of Studies) via email at [j.cussans@worc.ac.uk](mailto:j.cussans@worc.ac.uk)

