

PhD Opportunity

Reframing Critical and Socially Engaged Arts Practices from a Creative Health / Health Humanities Perspective

Supervisory team

Dr John Cussans, Professor Sandra Nicholson

Director of Studies

Dr John Cussans - Senior lecturer in Fine Art, course leader for BA Fine Art and BA Fine Art with Psychology and leader of the Arts and Health Research Group.

Supervisors

Professor Sandra Nicholson - Founding Dean Three Counties Medical School, University of Worcester

Research Group: [Arts and Health Research Group](#)

The PhD Opportunity

Background / Context

Within the field of contemporary arts there has been a significant shift over the last decade towards collaborative, participatory and socially engaged arts practices that could be re-purposed for wider and specific public health needs. Such practices, which are often aligned with wider struggles for social justice, widening participation in the arts, increasing access for minority and marginalized groups and giving platforms for less often heard voices, also include an important critical and educational dimension that seeks to enhance the social agency of those involved in them.

Aims and objectives / Research Questions / Hypothesis

This project seeks to explore these possibilities at a larger, national scale. It will begin to explore what can be learned from the history and practice of socially engaged contemporary art practices for creative health initiatives, and how the critical and educational dimensions of such practices can be embedded within them. It will develop practical proposals for creative, collaborative and innovative approaches to mental health, wellbeing and recovery that combine the expertise of health professionals with that of creative practitioners.

In doing so it could address one or more of the areas of priority of the Arts and Health Research Group:

1. The therapeutic use of arts, culture and humanities for health, mental health and wellbeing in the community.
2. Research to consider how the arts and humanities are applied to enable better understanding about health, wellness and illness.

3. The training of medical, therapeutic and arts practitioners in the application of arts-based approaches to mental health and wellbeing services.
4. Arts led approaches towards innovative social health solutions.
5. Innovations in data collection for quality of life and health outcomes through participation in arts-based activities.

Indicative method / methodology

The project will involve a survey of the field of socially engaged practice from a health humanities perspective asking what specific public health needs could be addressed using these methods.

It will propose a participatory arts initiative specifically designed to address the particular health and wellbeing needs of an identified group that will involve collaborations between health professionals and creative practitioners.

The initiative will be used as a test case to explore how the wellbeing effects of such initiatives can be effectively measured and assessed.

Potential academic significance and impact of research

The project aligns with the All-Party Parliamentary Group inquiry into Creative Health published in 2017 which has advised that collaboration between different disciplines and practices is essential if we are to use the arts effectively within health and social care settings and by the growing field of Health Humanities, which sees arts and culture in the widest sense as a powerful but largely untapped public health resource and encourages innovative cross-cultural collaboration between the arts, humanities and health sectors.

The project seeks to have academic significance within these fields and to propose new initiatives by which these policy directives can be realised. We welcome applications from artists working in these areas or health professionals whose practices include arts-based therapies and/or teaching methods.

It will contribute to the debate about how the social and health benefits of such socially engaged arts practices can be better measured and evidenced and propose ways to combine evidence-based research methods from the social and medical sciences with therapeutic arts practices.

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 3rd 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

