

PhD Opportunity

A relationship-based approach to nurturing the mental health of young children and their families in the Early Years

Supervisory Team

Director of Studies: [Dr Emma Laurence](#), Institute of Education

Supervisors: [Dr Carla Solvason](#), Institute of Education

Research Group: [Social Pedagogy Research Group](#)

The PhD Opportunity

Over recent years, the decline in children's mental health has become increasingly obvious and deeply concerning. This reflects a national trend and a mounting anxiety about the wellbeing of those who educate and care for our children. In response, one non-profit organisation has been commissioned by Public Health to deliver an innovative project aimed at supporting the health and wellbeing of our youngest children.

Underpinned by social pedagogical values, this organisation is working closely with education and care practitioners to promote healthier parent-child relationships, with the ultimate goal of giving infants the best possible start in life. We are keen to investigate the impact of this programme and would like to appoint a researcher who is empathetic to these aims.

You will be supervised by experts in social pedagogy, early childhood education and care, and mental health, and will have the opportunity to join a vibrant research community to enhance your PhD research experience.

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 2025 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

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 details, please contact Dr Emma Laurence, emma.laurence@worc.ac.uk, who will be Director of Studies for this opportunity.

