

NTU DOCTORAL SCHOOL

NOTTINGHAM TRENT UNIVERSITY 

*“Creating future innovators and impact for education, industry,
the professions and society”*

These are University Funded PhD Studentships, for an exciting opportunity to study in the interdisciplinary, Nottingham Centre for Children, Young People and Families in the School of Social Sciences.

Important note: all applications for the project described below **must be accompanied by** a research proposal, which should be approximately 1000-2000 words. Proposals should (1) identify the proposed research supervisor from the list shown below, and (2) give details of your proposed research project. **The proposal should be clearly aligned to one of the PhD topics listed below:**

- 1. Professor Di Bailey - Has the early help agenda for children and families' in social work, worked?**
- 2. Professor Clare Wood – Understanding and enhancing the impact of speech rhythm-based training on children's reading outcomes?**

Please note that the application closing date for both of these studentships is **5pm (UK time) on 1st October 2017.**

Please see the project descriptions below.

1. Professor Di Bailey - Has the early help agenda for children and families' in social work, worked?

For informal discussion regarding the project, please contact: di.bailey@ntu.ac.uk

Local authority children's services operate with the aim to make children and families lives' safer and happier by focusing on opportunities for permanency and healthy development and wellbeing. Within government policy in the UK there is an increasing emphasis on early help services (Children and Families Act 2014, and Promoting the Health and Wellbeing of Looked After Children DH, 2011). Early help strategies are targeted at promoting healthy development and wellbeing generally as well as early help for children and young people with specific needs such as mental health issues (Future In Mind, NHS England 2015).

Within Nottinghamshire we know that in terms of children and young people:

- over 70% of initial assessments are completed within the required timescales and this performance is better than comparable Local Authorities
- there are lower numbers on Child Protection Plans for 12 months or more compared with comparable Local Authorities
- there are comparatively more children on repeat plans than comparable authorities or in England generally.

In terms of adoption in Nottinghamshire we know that:

- children are being placed for adoption in a timely way with the average time between a child entering care and moving in with an adoptive family being lower than comparable authorities and also lower than the average time for England generally.

This data suggests that Nottinghamshire is performing well in terms of offering help to children and young people at a relatively early stage and in a timely manner. However what remains to be established is whether good intentions as embodied in government policy and implemented through early help initiatives and targets really works in respect of promoting positive outcomes for children, young people and their families.

Project Aims:

The aim of this project is therefore twofold:

1. to explore whether early help services in Nottinghamshire are contributing to better outcomes for children and young people
2. to enhance our understanding of what these positive outcomes look like from the different perspectives of policy makers, practitioners, children, young people and their families in order to influence an evidence informed approach to service delivery/configuration and the timing of early help

Research Design

The nature of the research requires a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches be used to gather a range of data including locally held statistics, as well as the use of Participatory Action Research to capture narratives from children and young people, practitioners and policy makers. Through a process of abductive analysis (theorising from the data as it emerges) it should be possible to explore the effectiveness or not of early help services for children young people and their families. It is expected that the applicant will tailor the research design to the project aims and objectives as these are refined and developed in the early stages of the study and with agreement from the Local Authority who have agreed to act as the fieldwork site for this study.

Entry Criteria

UK 1st Class / 2.1 Bachelor's degree (or UK equivalent according to NARIC) and /or UK Master's degree with a minimum of a merit/commendation in a relevant subject area either psychology or social work.

2. Professor Clare Wood – Understanding and enhancing the impact of speech rhythm-based training on children’s reading outcomes?

For informal discussion regarding the project, please contact: clare.wood@ntu.ac.uk

Diverse research studies show that there appears to be a link between children’s reading development and their performance on measures of speech rhythm sensitivity. In particular, it has been found that children with reading difficulties show deficits in processing speech rhythm. There is also evidence from the work of Usha Goswami and others of consistent deficits in auditory processing linked to speech rhythm in individuals with dyslexia, and such deficits appear to be apparent across languages. Most recently, Professor Wood completed a Leverhulme Trust funded project which found that primary school-aged children who received simple training activities designed to enhance their sensitivity to aspects of speech rhythm (such as intonation, stress and timing of utterances) benefited in terms of their word reading performance after just a short period of training (Harrison, Wood, Holliman & Vousden, in press).

However, the processes by which speech rhythm sensitivity contributes to different reading tasks, and at different points in reading development, is still not well understood and requires further examination. Moreover, the nature of the training developed as part of the original Leverhulme project requires further development.

Project Aims

We are looking for a candidate who is able to continue to develop our understanding of speech rhythm in relation to children’s reading development in two key areas:

1. By developing experimental and / or longitudinal work which can help to shed light on when and how speech rhythm contributes to children’s early reading development.
2. By further developing and evaluating the resources and training activities that teachers can use with children to enhance awareness of speech rhythm.

Research Design

We are looking for a candidate who will bring his or her own experience of working with children and reading of the psychological research literature to this topic. The methods will need to be primarily quantitative, but could include the following design formats (as examples):

- A cross-lagged longitudinal study of children’s early reading development,
- An intervention study aimed at Key Stage 1 children, comparing different combinations of speech rhythm, phonological awareness and phonics-based training
- Microgenetic approaches to understanding how speech rhythm training contributes to reading tasks

The successful candidate will therefore need to be confident working with young children and educational professionals, whilst also having a good knowledge and understanding of the psychological literature on children’s reading development.

Entry Criteria

UK 1st Class / 2.1 Bachelor’s degree (or UK equivalent according to NARIC) and /or UK Master’s degree with a minimum of a merit/commendation in a relevant subject area either psychology or social work.