

# PhD Opportunity

## Disabled People as Foster Carers – Equality of Opportunity?

### Supervisory team

**Director of Studies:** Dr Peter Unwin

**Supervisors:** Professor Gyozo Molnar  
Becki Meakin, Healthwatch

**Research Group:** [Health Inequalities and Social Inclusion](#)

### Research Opportunity

In 2020 the University reported on a two-year study into the absence of Disabled foster carers from England's foster care workforce. Findings were that only a very small number of Disabled people were engaged as foster carers. These Disabled people were found to be effective foster carers who had a range of skills which benefited fostered children and helped with the shortfalls in fostering recruitment. The research findings received considerable national media and academic interest.

The research brief is to explore the extent to which Disabled people are now given equal opportunity to become foster carers. The PhD would design and implement an action-based piece of longitudinal research, working with a national fostering agency to track fostering applications from Disabled people. This study offers a wide range of theoretical and policy potential and should bring new knowledge to academia and practice.

### Reference List

Molyneux, C. (2023). Why employer inflexibility matters for the recruitment, retention and progression of disabled workers, *Disability & Society*, 38:4, 723-728, DOI: [10.1080/09687599.2023.2168180](https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2023.2168180)

Unwin, P., Meakin, B. & Jones, A. (2020) '*Mutual Benefits*' – *The Potential of Disabled People as Foster Carers*. Project Report. University of Worcester, Worcester. [drilluk.org.uk/documents/2020/10/end-of-project-report-mutual-benefits-the-potential-of-disabled-people-as-foster-carers.pdf/](https://drilluk.org.uk/documents/2020/10/end-of-project-report-mutual-benefits-the-potential-of-disabled-people-as-foster-carers.pdf/)

Unwin, P., Jones, A., & Meakin, B. (2024). Disabled people as foster carers – closing the recruitment gap and more. *Disability & Society*, 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2024.2412274>



## 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.

### **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 about this project, please contact Dr Peter Unwin: [p.unwin@worc.ac.uk](mailto:p.unwin@worc.ac.uk)**

