

# PhD Opportunity

The impact of maternity unit culture on student midwives' learning experience

## Supervisory Team

**Director of Studies:** Dr Lucy Hope, Principal Lecturer in Midwifery

**Supervisors:** Dr Tina Dennis, Senior Lecturer in Midwifery,

**Research Group:** [Health Professions Education and Practice](#)

## The PhD Opportunity

The interest in investigating UK maternity care quality is ongoing. Initiated by the Kirkup (2015) report highlighting the improper maternity care at Morecambe Bay NHS Trust, followed by the Ockenden (2022) report on maternity care at Shrewsbury and Telford NHS Trust, and the more recent Kirkup (2022) report on East Kent, and the anticipated report on Nottingham University Hospital NHS Trust, it is clear that maternity care culture is a serious and ongoing concern. These reports focus on the impact of culture on the outcomes for women, people and their babies, and the clinical staff. Given the NMC (2023) requirement for all midwifery learners to spend 50% of their programme in practice, it is an opportune time to look further into the concerns on culture for these learners.

The recent independent practice learning review commissioned by the NMC (Palmer et al, 2024) highlights the impact of an organisations culture for learners, citing negative team and organisational culture as a potential barrier to learning. This report also supports the known connection between practice learning environment quality and the care quality that learners go on to provide well beyond graduation. Whilst this identifies broad organisational concerns, there is yet to be an in-depth exploration of the experiences of learners themselves. The available literature on this topic is limited, out-dated or unrelated to UK midwifery practice (Panda et al 2021).

This PhD offers a motivated person the opportunity to explore the impact of maternity unit culture from a learner perspective, and to generate findings and recommendations to ultimately support safer maternity care.

## References

Kirkup, B (2015) The Report of the Morecambe Bay Investigation. An independent investigation into the management, delivery and outcomes of care provided by the maternity and neonatal services at the University Hospitals of Morecambe Bay NHS Foundation Trust from January 2004 to June 2013.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/morecambe-bay-investigation-report>

Kirkup, B (2022) Reading the signals Maternity and neonatal services in East Kent – the Report of the Independent Investigation.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/maternity-and-neonatal-services-in-east-kent-reading-the-signals-report>

NMC (2023) Part 3: Standards for pre-registration midwifery programmes [NMC Standards for pre-registration midwifery](#)

Ockenden, D (2022) Final findings, conclusions and essential actions from the Ockenden review of maternity services at Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital NHS Trust. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/final-report-of-the-ockenden-review>

Palmer, W et al (2024) Practice learning in nursing and midwifery education An independent rapid review commissioned by the NMC [Nuffield Trust independent review on practice learning](#)

Panda S, et al (2021) 'Challenges faced by student nurses and midwives in clinical learning environment – a systematic review and meta-synthesis', Nurse Education Today 101, 104875.

### **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 stations
- 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 on this project, please contact Dr Lucy Hope [l.hope@worc.ac.uk](mailto:l.hope@worc.ac.uk)**