

# PhD Opportunity

A good teacher listens: Why knowing your students and teaching your students go hand in hand.

## Supervisory team

**Director of Studies:** Dr Carla Solvason (ethical research, parent partnerships in education, education cultures)

### Additional Supervisors will include one of:

Dr Rachael Paige (teacher presence, educational leadership, coaching and mentoring)

Dr Angela Hodgkins (empathy and compassion/ emotional labour, Early years, practitioner wellbeing)

Dr Alison Prowle (childhood adversity/ trauma-aware practice, strength-based practice, parenting and family support)

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

## The PhD Opportunity

In the UK interest in Social Pedagogy is growing, as the chasm between what our children need, and what our education system offers them, grows wider by the day. Still recovering from the pandemic, our children need nurture, yet our outcomes driven education system offers high stakes and ever mounting pressure (Solvason, 2025).

Those who value Social Pedagogy see that care and learning cannot be separated. A child who feels unsafe cannot learn. A child who is hungry, or tired, cannot learn. A child who is anxious cannot learn (Solvason et al, 2020). Maslow (1943) highlighted the connection between a child's wellbeing and their capability to achieve over eighty years ago, yet this remains unacknowledged within education policy.

We expect teachers that are themselves anxious and tired, to support children effectively, introducing ever-more accountability as the means to improving quality, rather than considering the wellbeing of the teachers themselves (Solvason et al, 2023). The education system in England must change, and we argue that the values embedded within Social Pedagogy, of listening, valuing and acknowledging individual potential, can enable that change (Stobbs et al., 2023).

As such we look forward to reviewing proposals for educational developments which place the wellbeing of the child (or young person, or adult) at the centre of education initiatives.

## References

Maslow, A. H. (1943). A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review*, 50(4), 370–396.

Solvason, C. (2025) Accountability, Scapegoating and Rebellious Joys: Teaching in England, *British Journal of Special Educational Needs*. *In press*.

Solvason, C., Allies, S., Hodgkins, A., Weston, R., & Malomo, M. (2023). 'Occasionally there are moments of light': the challenges of primary school teaching in England, and the factors that motivate teachers to stay in the profession. *Education 3-13*, 1–15.

Stobbs, N., Solvason, C., Gallagher, S. and Baylis, S. (2023). A human approach to restructuring the education system: why schools in England need social pedagogy. *International Journal of Social Pedagogy*, 12(1):8

Solvason, C., Webb, R. and Sutton-Tsang, S. (2020) What is left...?: The Implications of Losing Maintained Nursery Schools for Vulnerable Children and Families in England, *Children and Society*, 35(1), 75-89.

## 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 on this project, please contact Dr Carla Solvason (Director of Studies) via email at [c.solvason@worc.ac.uk](mailto:c.solvason@worc.ac.uk)