

## ESRC Centre for Society and Mental Health PhD Studentship on Welfare Reform, Poverty and Mental Health

We are currently inviting applications from prospective students for an ESRC Centre for Society and Mental Health PhD studentship on 'Welfare reform, poverty, food bank use and mental health in the UK'. This is available for three years full-time (or pro-rata as a part-time studentship) for a +3 award (3-year PhD). This studentship will cover tuition fees plus a stipend and start on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2020.

### Eligibility

The studentship is only available for students who meet [residency requirements set out by the ESRC](#). If you are classed as 'overseas' or 'international' for fees purposes, then you are not eligible for this studentship. The ESRC covers fees-only for EU residents.

Applicants will need a very good first degree (BA or BSc Honours or equivalent, at 1st class standard or upper 2nd with clear evidence of first-class work) in a relevant area of social science (e.g., social policy, economics, sociology, demography, social statistics, social epidemiology) plus an appropriate Master's degree in a relevant social science subject (at distinction or at least high merit level) that has provided training in approx. 75% or more of the [Core Training Requirements](#) specified by the ESRC. This will be assessed based on the information you provide about your prior training on the application form. Other qualifications highly relevant to the proposed area of study, such as prior professional or work-related expertise, may also be considered. Please note though, that professional doctorate degrees and distance learning programmes are not eligible. Applicants who have already been awarded a PhD or equivalent degree are also not eligible for these studentships. It would be beneficial if applicants had experience or affinity with the analysis of quantitative data and methods to examine the impact of social policies.

### Project details

*Title:* Welfare reform, poverty, food bank use and mental health in the UK

*Primary Supervisor:* **Professor Mauricio Avendano**; *Secondary supervisor:* **Dr Rachel Loopstra**

*Overview:* This is an exciting project that aims to examine how recent policy changes in the UK welfare system influence the mental health of individuals and families experiencing food insecurity, and how this is linked to the increasing use of food banks in the UK. The prevalence of mental health problems is high among food bank users, affecting over 35% of this population. The causal mechanisms underlying this association, however, are complex: poor mental health may be caused by poverty and food insecurity, but poor mental health may also be the cause of food insecurity and poverty. This project will examine the relationship and underlying causal mechanisms between welfare reform, food insecurity and mental health, with a particular focus on the rise in the use of food banks since 2010 in the UK.

The project aims to explore the potential causes of food insecurity, food bank use and mental health disorders, and assess the role of welfare reform policy changes in understanding these relationships. It will use quantitative data to examine the causal effect of welfare reform, and to understand how life-

histories influence the complex links between food insecurity, mental health and welfare benefits. Depending on the interest of the candidate, it may also involve in-depth interviews with food bank users and policymakers.

### How to Apply

To be accepted, all applications must include:

- a completed [application form](#)
- a copy of your CV (maximum 2 A4 pages)
- 2 academic references, or 1 academic and 1 professional reference (these should be sent directly to [helen.2.fisher@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:helen.2.fisher@kcl.ac.uk) by referees). Reference letters should be 1-2 A4 pages. Referees should comment on: how they know the applicant, in what capacity, for how long, and describe how the applicant's existing skills/attributes will benefit the project to which they are applying.
- copies of transcripts for all relevant degrees

All of these materials should be sent to Dr Helen Fisher: [helen.2.fisher@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:helen.2.fisher@kcl.ac.uk) by 23.59 GMT on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2020 in order to be considered for these studentships.

Interviews are anticipated to be held in the week commencing 16<sup>th</sup> or 23<sup>rd</sup> March and candidates will be notified of the outcome of their application by 24<sup>th</sup> April 2020.

For queries, please contact Dr Helen Fisher: [helen.2.fisher@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:helen.2.fisher@kcl.ac.uk)