



**Economic
and Social
Research Council**



**Co-developing intervention resources to support families of children with avid eating behaviour
ESRC DTP Collaborative Studentship**

Aston University and the Food Systems Team at Birmingham Public Health Division

The Midlands Graduate School is an accredited Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Doctoral Training Partnership (DTP). One of 15 such partnerships in the UK, the Midlands Graduate School is a collaboration between the Universities of Warwick, Birmingham, Nottingham, Aston Leicester, Loughborough, De Montfort and Nottingham Trent.

Aston University as part of Midlands Graduate School is now inviting applications for an ESRC Doctoral Studentship in association with our collaborative partner at the Public Health Division in Birmingham City Council, to commence in October 2024.

Project description:

The PhD project on the topic of childhood eating behaviour will focus on co-developing and feasibility testing tailored intervention resources to support families of children with avid eating behaviour. The project is led by academics at Aston University, Loughborough University and the Food Systems Team at Birmingham Public Health Division. It provides a unique opportunity to conduct research about children's eating behaviour whilst also gaining skills in intervention development, public health, engagement and impact.

Childhood obesity is a serious public health concern which places children at significant risk of developing diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease and some cancers later in life (Sahoo, 2015). Obesity often begins during early childhood and continues into adulthood (Clarke & Lauer, 2009) with an estimated cost of £27 billion per year for the UK healthcare economy (Public Health England, 2017).

The factors that influence childhood obesity are complex and for interventions to be successful they need to be tailored to the individual needs of families and children. Some children are more vulnerable to obesity than others due to their genetic susceptibility in an environment where palatable food is abundant and accessible (Schrempft et al., 2018). This is particularly the case in Birmingham where 23.4% of children are living with obesity by the time they leave primary school (NCMP 2022/23), statistics associated with the fact that Birmingham has the second highest rate of child poverty across UK cities (Birmingham Child Poverty Commission, 2016).

We are currently running a project with a large group of families and children measuring patterns of eating behaviour and exploring which parental feeding practices and behaviours are most effective to support healthy eating in children who are most likely to develop obesity. Through this project with 995 children we have found that 22% of children have avid appetites by age 6 (Pickard

et al., 2023) and we have identified parental feeding practices and behaviours that exacerbate risk of developing avid eating behaviour using a range of different methodologies (Kininmonth et al., 2022; Edwards et al., 2023).

This PhD project presents an exciting opportunity for a PhD student to join our team of researchers and work with colleagues at Aston University, Loughborough University and the Birmingham Food System Team, part of Birmingham Public Health Division. The PhD student will support the development of our work on childhood eating behaviour and will take the project to the next stage of co-developing and exploring the feasibility of a tailored intervention for families of children with avid appetites.

The PhD student will conduct focus groups with families to explore their views regarding the most effective ways to support children with avid appetites. The PhD student will lead creative workshops with key stakeholders who work with families and children living with obesity regarding a proposed intervention, and will develop a prototype intervention to support families and children. They will publish peer-reviewed academic papers and work with a well-established team of researchers working in the area of children's eating behaviour. Working with the Food Systems team in the Public Health Division they will gain experience with a range of key stakeholders and have the opportunity to understand more about real-world impact of academic work, how to influence policy development and collaborate across disciplines. They will gain unique practical experience and have networking and community engagement opportunities.

Application Process

To be considered for this PhD, please complete the Collaborative Studentship application form [available online here](#). Please upload an anonymised CV and cover letter as part of the online application process. Shortlisted applicants will also be required to provide transcripts and two references.

Application deadline: 25th February

Midlands Graduate School ESRC DTP

Our ESRC studentships cover fees at the home rate, a maintenance stipend, and extensive support for research training, as well as research activity support grants. Support is available to both home and international applicants. For further details, visit: www.mgsdtp.ac.uk/studentships/eligibility/.

Informal enquiries about the research or the School of Psychology at Aston University prior to application can be directed to Professor Claire Farrow: c.farrow@aston.ac.uk