



Economic  
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Research Council



## Education, extremism and utopian thinking

### ESRC DTP Joint Studentship University of Birmingham and University of Nottingham

The Midlands Graduate School is an accredited Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Doctoral Training Partnership (DTP). One of 14 such partnerships in the UK, the Midlands Graduate School is a collaboration between the Universities of Warwick, Aston, Birmingham, Leicester, Loughborough and Nottingham.

We are now inviting applications for a doctoral studentship on the topic **Education, extremism and utopian thinking**, to commence in October 2021. The project will be jointly supervised by Professor Michael Hand (School of Education, University of Birmingham) and Dr David Stevens (School of Politics and International Relations, University of Nottingham). The successful applicant will be based at the University of Birmingham.

A salient feature of the extremist mindset is the belief that no price is too high to pay for the achievement of some utopian ideal. With schools in the UK and elsewhere now tasked with building children's resistance to extremism, the questions of what we should make of this belief, and whether and how we might properly discourage people from holding it, have become pressing ones. The aim of this theoretical research project is to develop and defend answers to these questions.

The idea that schools should do something about the threat of extremism has recently gained considerable ground in education policy in the UK. The 2015 Counter Terrorism and Security Act imposes a duty on schools to 'have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism' (Section 26, para 1). The Department for Education's advice to schools on implementing the Prevent duty charges them with helping children and young people to 'develop the knowledge and skills to be able to challenge extremist arguments' (DfE, 2015, p.5).

Not everyone who anticipates a utopian future believes that no price is too high to pay for it. But it is easy to see how the thought takes hold. If it is possible for humankind to enjoy a state of perfect harmony or fulfilment, what could be more important than realising that state? Why should the constraints of common morality, or concern for the rights and liberties of others, be allowed to stand in the way of everlasting peace and happiness?

Co-supervised by a philosopher of education and a political philosopher, the studentship-holder will use the analytical and argumentative methods of philosophy to diagnose the problem with the belief that utopian considerations trump all others and to develop a normative account of how educators should address it.

## **Application Process**

To apply, please complete the Joint Studentship application form [available here](#) and email this, along with two references, to [pgreducation-enquiries@contacts.bham.ac.uk](mailto:pgreducation-enquiries@contacts.bham.ac.uk). The deadline for applications is **Wednesday 3 March 2021**.

## **Midlands Graduate School ESRC DTP**

Our ESRC studentships cover fees at the home rate, a maintenance stipend and access to research activity support grants. Applicants must meet the eligibility requirements listed here: [www.mgsdtp.ac.uk/studentships/eligibility/](http://www.mgsdtp.ac.uk/studentships/eligibility/).

Informal enquiries about the project prior to application can be directed to Professor Michael Hand ([m.hand@bham.ac.uk](mailto:m.hand@bham.ac.uk)).