



**Economic
and Social
Research Council**



Overcoming Obstacles: exploring barriers and facilitators for British Sign Language (BSL) users in accessing essential services.

ESRC DTP Collaborative Studentship

Loughborough University and Action Deafness

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.

Loughborough University, as part of Midlands Graduate School, is now inviting applications for an ESRC Doctoral Studentship in association with our collaborative partner Action Deafness to commence in October 2025.

This studentship will investigate the barriers and facilitators that British Sign Language (BSL) users face when accessing essential services, including healthcare, banking, insurance, and utilities. Additionally, the research will evaluate cost-effective interventions, such as Action Deafness' AD 360 service, aimed at enhancing accessibility and inclusivity across these critical sectors.

Deaf individuals experience significant social and linguistic exclusion, contributing to disproportionately poorer outcomes in health, education, and employment compared to the hearing population. For example, missed NHS appointments due to communication barriers are estimated to cost the healthcare system over £30 million annually, representing missed opportunities for early detection and prevention of potentially life-threatening conditions. This studentship seeks to address these systemic inequalities by identifying key access barriers and assessing the impact of targeted, evidence-based interventions.

The research will involve a series of interconnected studies, capturing the lived experiences of Deaf individuals through quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews. Fluency in BSL is highly desirable for applicants, as it is essential for building trust with participants and ensuring culturally sensitive and accurate data collection.

The successful candidate will join an experienced supervisory team from the School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences at Loughborough University and School of Psychology at Aston University, including Dr David Maidment, Professor Daniel Rhind and Dr Maria Goodwin. Additionally, they will have the opportunity to engage with Loughborough University's Digital Communities and Inclusion research cluster, which spans six academic schools and includes over six doctoral researchers exploring challenges related to digital inclusion, digital poverty, and marginalised groups.

This studentship also offers valuable opportunities for collaboration with Action Deafness, a Deaf-led charity based at Loughborough University Science & Enterprise Park. Action Deafness provides specialist, accessible, and equitable services designed to empower Deaf individuals to lead full and independent lives. This partnership will not only enhance the project's practical insights but also provide professional development opportunities for the successful candidate.

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: Monday 24 February 2025

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 Sport, Exercise and Health Science prior to application can be directed to Dr David Maidment d.w.maidment@lboro.ac.uk.