



Economic
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Deteriorating Unnoticed in Digital Health: Inequality and the Human Dimensions of Telehealth in Care Homes

ESRC DTP Collaborative Studentship

De Montfort University and These Hands Academy Ltd

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.

De Montfort University as part of Midlands Graduate School is now inviting applications for an ESRC Doctoral Studentship in association with our collaborative partner *These Hands Academy Ltd* to commence in October 2026. **The studentship is available to students with home fee status only.**

Project Overview

In recent years, Martha's Rule, a national initiative introduced following the preventable death of 13-year-old Martha Mills, has highlighted a critical blind spot in healthcare: the failure to listen to patient and carer concerns before situations escalate into crisis. Although the policy is intended to empower patients and families to escalate care concerns, it also exposes deeper systemic weaknesses in communication, trust, and responsiveness across care settings. Within care homes, these issues are exacerbated by staff shortages, fragmented communication. As a result, despite the growing use of telehealth systems such as the Whzan Blue Box, residents may still experience unnoticed deterioration.

Across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland (LLR), the Blue Box has been implemented to support early detection and escalation of health deterioration through remote monitoring. However, findings from a Leicester Institute for Advanced Studies (LIAS)-funded project (Lu et al., 2025) revealed persistent inequalities in how these systems are adopted and embedded. While some care homes use telehealth data proactively to support collaboration with GPs, others struggle due to workload pressures, limited training, and lack of managerial or clinical engagement.

These findings point to a broader issue: digital health innovations are only as equitable as the social, organisational, and relational systems that support them. This ESRC-funded doctoral project, co-developed with These Hands Academy Ltd, will investigate how telehealth systems can be implemented in ways that genuinely support carers, enhance residents' wellbeing, and reduce health inequalities in care homes. Using participatory mixed-methods research, the project will work closely with care staff, residents, managers, and regional partners to explore lived

experiences of digital care, identify socio-technical barriers, and co-produce practical guidance for more inclusive, human-centred digital health practice.

Application Process

To be considered for this PhD, please complete the Collaborative Studentship application form available online here: <https://forms.office.com/e/HPK05i0fJ0>. Applicants will be required to upload an anonymised CV, anonymised cover letter, and transcripts as part of the online application process. You will also be required to provide details of your two referees in the application. Please note, only Home students can apply for this studentship. We are unable to support international candidates

Application deadline: Monday 25th May at 5pm (BST). Interview date will take place on **4th June 2026**. Interviews will be conducted online via Microsoft Teams.

Midlands Graduate School ESRC DTP

Our ESRC studentships cover fees, a maintenance stipend, and extensive support for research training, as well as research activity support grants. For further details, visit: www.mgsdtp.ac.uk/studentships/eligibility/.

Informal enquiries about the research or the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences at De Montfort University prior to application can be directed to Dr Ruth McKie: ruth.mckie@dmu.ac.uk