



Economic
and Social
Research Council



**Perceived Impact of Expanded Early Years Childcare in England:
Effects on Children's Well-being
ESRC DTP Strategic Joint Studentship**

Loughborough University and the University of Warwick

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.

We are now inviting applications for an ESRC Strategic Joint Studentship between Loughborough University (where the student will be registered) and the University of Warwick to commence in October 2025.

Title: "Perceived Impact of Expanded Early Years Childcare in England: Effects on Children's Well-being"

Aim: This project explores the potential impact of extending governmental support towards childcare costs on children in England.

Background: In 2016, England introduced a scheme allowing working parents of 3- and 4-year-olds to receive 30 hours of government-funded childcare per week. In September 2024, this offer was expanded to include 15 hours of support for children from 9 months. A further expansion (September 2025) will provide 30 hours of 'free childcare' per week. This "largest ever expansion of free childcare in England's history" (Gov.uk, 2024) is intended to incentivise entrance to the labour market, especially for mothers. This change also means higher pressures on the childcare sector to be able to provide high-quality childcare to growing number of children. The potential impact of increased access to childcare from a younger age on children is yet to be seen.

What is the PhD about? This PhD explores perceived impact of changes to the UK's childcare policy on child wellbeing. Using data produced in childcare settings and digital interactions between nurseries and parents, the research evaluates, via the eyes of nursery practitioners and parents, what the expansion of government-funded childcare means for children.

Methodology

This project combines qualitative and participatory methodologies to explore perceptions of impact through narratives from those close to children in daily life. The study includes content analysis of anonymised nursery reports produced for the EYFS framework as well as anonymised observations on children provided via digital apps to parents. These will be co-analysed with parents to obtain their views on the impact of government-funded childcare on children.

Application Process

To be considered for this PhD, please complete the strategic Joint Studentship application form [available online here](#). Please also 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 24th February, 5:00pm.*

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 Department of Criminology, Sociology and Social Policy of Loughborough University prior to application can be directed to Dr Laura Valadez-Martinez L.J.Valadez@lboro.ac.uk