



New collaborations to improve children's learning and wellbeing

**Faculty of Wellbeing Education
and Language Studies (WELS)**

Call for PhD projects starting in October 2024

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Project description

School

Education, Childhood, Youth & Sport

Members

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Aim

To explore approaches that re-think how different actors might work in new ways to support children's learning, with an emphasis on collaboration.

Methodology

While we would expect to work with the doctoral researcher to refine the research question and approach, we have outlined some suggestions below.

Possible research question: what conditions and tools support the effective initiation of and sustained engagement with learning teams approaches or new collaborative practices?

Learning teams, their potential and their challenges, is an issue with global relevance. While much of our work to date in this area has focused on lower-

income countries (partly due to funder priorities), we would be open to the case study element of the PhD being focused a higher or lower-income country. This aligns with the Centre for the Study of Global Development (CSGD)'s commitment to viewing 'development' issues through a global lens.

An extensive and creative literature review into learning teams would be necessary (forming a substantial part of the thesis to respond to the research question, rather than just to establish the niche for the case study).

Fieldwork involving intensive engagement with a learning teams case study would be necessary. We would draw on the supervisors' methodological expertise to encourage creative, co-production approaches to data generation. These resonate with the socio-cultural theoretical framework of learning teams that we are building through our parallel work.

Contribution

Aspirations for educational collaborations, learning teams, partnerships and networks are increasingly articulated within education plans. This is partly due to emerging evidence which shows how collaborative practices can have significant benefits for pupil learning, retention and progression, as well as teacher wellbeing and motivation, community ownership of policies, developments and targets, and improved governance at local, district and national levels.

Over the past five years the proposed supervisors have been collaborating with the Education Commission (now part of the [Education Development Centre](#)) on a series of initiatives focusing on education workforce research and reform,

exploring what we call 'learning teams'. Our [initial study](#) established collaborative approaches as an area of interest. Our [recent study](#) included an analysis of 17 countries' Education Sector Plans, an extensive literature search, engagement with organisations around the world working with team-based approaches, and a small-scale learning teams case study from Ghana.

Our study demonstrated that because there is so much diversity in how teams are formed and how they function, and because there is no consistent terminology to represent a central commitment to collaborative practice, it can be difficult to establish the prevalence of learning teams. Further to this, the complexity of developing self-sustaining collaborations and teams is often a barrier for school leaders and teachers who are overwhelmed by everyday deliverables and administrative duties, and necessary shifts to identity and practice can lead to professional vulnerability and resistance. Finally, it is far from clear how collaborative teams become sustainable and how change becomes embedded.

We have identified a significant need to deepen our understanding of different types of learning teams, their histories, and the tools and conditions which enable and complicate purposeful, effective and efficient team working across a variety of education ecosystems and for different purposes. The PhD will make a key contribution to this understanding.

PhD project

A PhD project will support an ongoing body of work into 'learning teams'.

Learning teams represent a move away from the model of a single teacher being responsible for the learning and wellbeing needs of pupils, to a more holistic approach involving a range of professionals and community members in respectful, collaborative practice to transform pupils' education experiences and outcomes. A PhD would facilitate deep engagement with historical and socio-political factors that underpin learning teams initiatives (as well as factors that work against their creation) and enable rich and nuanced exploration of a single learning teams case study. A PhD would also complement and enrich our work on theorising learning teams.

