



# **Social inclusion and empowerment**

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

Call for PhD projects starting in October 2024

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# Project description

## School

Health, Wellbeing and Social Care

## Members

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## Aim

This project aims at co-producing a roadmap towards democratic involvement through social inclusion and empowerment for people with learning disabilities and mental health patients. The aim is to undertake knowledge exchange activity for the next 5-10 years, identifying urgent priorities, longer term goals and horizon scanning for potential funding opportunities.

Specifically, the research will aim to begin identifying what excludes people with learning disabilities and mental health patients from formal and informal democratic processes, and what works to facilitate active citizenship. We are particularly interested in the role of self-advocacy groups in supporting people's engagement in democratic citizenship, both an individual and group level. We are also interested in exploring the potential for service provider organisations

to step in and step up in this space, inspired by conceptual developments in learning disabilities and mental health (notably ideas about citizenship and informed care) and the work of the [Having our say: Promoting voting rights for people with mental health difficulties | Centre for Mental Health](#) and [My Vote My Voice](#).

The research will – from the outset – frame this as an intersectional ‘problem’, proactively and deliberately exploring how different characteristics, identities and lived experiences serve to heighten the democratic exclusion of people with learning disabilities and mental health patients. Thus, the project will be ambitiously inclusive in nature.

## Methodology

Undertaking a search and scoping review (Peters, M. et. al. 2020) of the literature to identify current barriers and enablers to democratic inclusion for:

1. people with learning disabilities
2. mental health patients

Convening a series of inclusive sandpit sessions (3 x Learning disability; 3 x mental health community)

Conducting a series of interviews with key stakeholders.

Analyse findings.

Write up using PAGER framework (Bradbury-Jones, C., et al., 2022).

Dissemination.

## Contribution

Article 3 of Protocol 1 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) [Right to free elections - The European Convention on Human Rights \(coe.int\)](#) states that countries 'undertake to hold free elections at reasonable intervals by secret ballot, under conditions which will ensure the free expression of the people in the choice of the legislature '.

To exercise the right to vote is then a fundamental symbol of societal inclusion. People with cognitive and emotional impairments are especially vulnerable to exclusion from the political process despite the right to do so existing in the legislation; for some fifty years in the United Kingdom, the Representation of the People Act 1983 has allowed patients in hospital voluntarily to register to vote. Subsequent changes to the Representation of the People Act in 2000 went on to allow patients remanded to hospital and those involuntarily detained under the civil provisions of MHA 1983 to register to vote from hospital. Later under the Electoral Administration Act 2006 people can now vote in person from hospital.

However, the literature suggests that in practice people with learning disabilities and people in mental hospitals, however admitted, remain disenfranchised. One study aimed to explore the knowledge and uptake of the voting rights of adult patients in the 2020 General Election in the United Kingdom to understand whether these electoral changes helped in-patients exercise their voting rights and to consider how to overcome any barriers to registration that may remain (McIntyre et al. 2012). Somewhat ironically, the London borough in which the study was carried out was the one in which UK houses of Parliament is situated. Reinforced by Kelly in 2014, suggestions to overcome barriers include the

provision of information, assessments of voting capacity using standardised well-proven tools and proactive over registration programmes and awareness of voting rights on the part of the patient and staff (Kelly 2014).

## References

Bradbury-Jones, C. Aveyard, H. Rudolph Herber, O. Isham, L. Taylor, J and O'Malley, L. (2022). Scoping reviews: the PAGER framework for improving the quality of reporting. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*; 25:4, 457-470.

[Right to free elections - The European Convention on Human Rights \(coe.int\)](https://www.coe.int/t/e/treaties/Convention_on_Human_Rights/Convention_on_Human_Rights_1950/Convention_on_Human_Rights_1950_e.pdf)

McIntyre, J., Khwaja, M., Yelamanchili, V., Naz S., and Clarke, M. (2012) Update and knowledge of voting rights by adult in-patients during the 2010 UK general election *The Psychiatrist* Vol 36 pp 126-130.

Kelly, B (2014) Voting and mental illness: the silent constituency *Irish Journal of Psychological Medicine* Vol 31 pp 225-227

Peters, M. Marnie, C. Tricco, A et al. (2020) Updated methodological guidance for the conduct of scoping reviews, *JBI Evidence Synthesis*. 18 (10) p 2119-2126.

# PhD project

The doctoral project will be expected to:

- Undertake a search and literature review.
- Convene a series of inclusive sandpit sessions 3 x mental health community.
- Conduct a series of interviews with key stakeholders including patients, professionals, carers, and campaign organisations.
- Analyse and write up findings through a thesis and other publications.
- Disseminate through agreed avenues.

