

PhD Opportunity

Exploring the Application of Universal Design in Social, Digital, and Architectural Learning Spaces

Supervisory team

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Research Group: [Inclusion by Design Research Group](#)

The PhD Opportunity

This research focus should aim to explore how the principles of Universal Design (UD) can be applied to the interfaces between social, digital, and architectural spaces to foster greater inclusivity. By investigating these interfaces through anticipatory design, the project seeks to identify strategies that can accommodate diverse student needs and promote accessibility. For example, as exemplified in the work of Zallio and Clarkson (2021), the relationship between the built environment and learning from an inclusive perspective is a critical facet for investigation. This focus could be further enriched when considering how universal design takes on board the interfaces between social, architectural and emotional dimensions of the learning experience. Depending on the background of the applicants, differing attributes of these interfaces could be explored at differing junctures of the lifelong learning journey.

Zallio, M., & Clarkson, P. J. (2021). Inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility in the built environment: A study of architectural design practice. *Building and Environment*, 206, 108352.

Project Aims and Objectives

The proposed PhD project aims to enhance inclusivity across various spaces by leveraging Universal Design principles. Specific research objectives include:

1. Investigating the Interfaces

- Examine how social, digital, and architectural spaces interact and influence each other.
- Identify the challenges and opportunities in these interfaces for promoting inclusivity.

2. Applying Universal Design

- Utilise Universal Design and/or Universal Design for Learning principles to create inclusive environments that anticipate and accommodate diverse user needs.
- Focus on multiple means of engagement, representation, and action/expression within these spaces.

3. Anticipatory Design

- Develop anticipatory design strategies that proactively address potential barriers to inclusivity.
- Engage with stakeholders, including users and designers, to co-create solutions.

4. Developing further guidance or frameworks:

- Through the exploration of existing or future planned learning spaces generate new guidance for enhancing spatial, digital and/or learning inclusivity.
- Gather feedback from users to refine and improve the designs.

Indicative Research Method

The research will employ a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods. Suggested methodologies include:

- **Participatory Action Research:** Engage stakeholders in the research process to co-create inclusive design solutions.
- **Design-Based Research:** Iteratively develop and test design interventions in real-world settings.
- **Case Studies:** Analyse specific examples of social, digital, and architectural spaces to identify best practices and areas for improvement.

Application Process

To begin the application process please go to:

<https://www.worc.ac.uk/research/research-degrees/applying-for-a-phd/>.

The Interview

All successful applicants will be offered an interview with the proposed Supervisory Team. You will be contacted by a member of the Doctoral School Team to find a suitable date. Interviews can be conducted in person or over Microsoft Teams.

Funding your PhD

For information about Doctoral Loans please visit: <https://www.worc.ac.uk/study/fees-and-finance/doctoral-loans.aspx>

During your PhD you can access the Research Conference Support Scheme to support the costs of presenting your research at an external conference.

Research at the University of Worcester

Research is central to the University's mission to make a difference in everything that we do. We are committed to delivering excellent research which extends the boundaries of human knowledge but which also improves people's lives by enabling

better health outcomes, improving food security, developing environmentally sustainable solutions for crop production and socially sustainable solutions to our ageing population, enhancing public knowledge and understanding of the past and present.

The University hence focuses its research around five high-level challenges facing society, locally, nationally and globally:

- [Human Health and Wellbeing](#)
- [Sustainable Futures](#)
- [Digital Innovation](#)
- [Culture, Identity and Social Exclusion](#)
- [Professional Education](#)

The success of our research is reflected in our continuous improvement in external research assessment processes. In the most recent Research Excellence Framework, REF 2021, the University saw a near 50% increase in the scale of its research and 12% increase in quality, building on its performance in REF 2014 when it was the UK's most improved university in terms of Research Power, a combination of scale and quality.

Research Degrees at Worcester

Our research students are central to our overall mission for research. They are working at the cutting edge of their disciplines and driving forward the quality of our research whilst enriching our research culture. We are looking to increase our research student numbers as a strategic imperative.

Our commitment to our students is reflected in the results of the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey 2023 in which we ranked 3rd for overall research student satisfaction nationally. Key to our success in this area is the Doctoral School, a focal point for all our research students.

It provides:

- day-to-day support for our students, both administrative and practical, through our dedicated team
- a Research Student Study Space with both PCs and laptop docking station
- a comprehensive Researcher Development Programme for students and their supervisors
- a programme of student-led conferences and seminars

Widening Participation

As part of its mission statement the University is committed to widening participation for its higher degrees. Although most candidates will have an undergraduate and/or a Masters degree, the University is happy to accept applications from candidates with relevant professional qualifications and work related experience.

For further information or an informal discussion on this project, please contact Dr Sean Bracken s.bracken@worc.ac.uk