

SeNSS ESRC-FUNDED COLLABORATIVE STUDENTSHIP OPPORTUNITY



First Steps to Independence: Evaluating a Behaviourally Informed Travel Training Programme

Primary supervisor: Dr Amrish Patel

Institution Details: School of Economics, University of East Anglia

Collaborative partner: [Norfolk County Council \(NCC\)](#)

SeNSS Pathway: Economics

Degree structure: a three-year PhD programme

Project background

Today's children are growing up in tough times. Funding for children's services is under serious pressure, mental health problems are increasingly common, and the COVID pandemic has disrupted childhoods across the UK. One group of children particularly affected by such adverse climates are those with special educational needs and disability (SEND). Norfolk County Council (NCC) are committed to ensure that all children and young people with SEND reach their potential and thrive and are working together with The University of East Anglia (UEA) to continue to improve and evaluate a programme for SEND children, which aims to equip them with a skill fundamental to a teenage and adult life: independent travel skills. Travelling independently unlocks the door to social activities, employment, education, or volunteering opportunities, helps to combat social isolation, and ultimately supports individuals to achieve and maintain an economically active and fulfilling life.

Current home to school transport provision can be detrimental to the environment and contribute to budget pressures for local authorities. Where appropriate, if children and young people are able to switch to greener, healthier, and more sustainable modes of transport (e.g., public transport, cycling or walking), there could be benefits to all. This project, the first of its kind, will evaluate whether behavioural science informed independent travel training can support these goals. The successful student will be pivotal in achieving project objectives from leading the proposed final design of the randomised control trial (RCT), working closely with NCC to ensure it is implemented appropriately and that data collection are robust, to leading the trial data analysis.

Project aims and objectives

The overall aim of this project is to evaluate the impact of a behavioural science informed independent travel training programme (for SEND children, 11+ years old) in four dimensions:

1. Progress towards independent travel
2. School attendance, behaviour, and attainment
3. Non-cognitive skills, behavioural and psychological measures (e.g., confidence, self-esteem, quality of life, adult skill development, risk-aversion)
4. Broader impacts (e.g., parental burden, child-parent relationship quality, Local Authority expenditure)

To achieve this aim, the successful student will design and conduct a RCT on approximately 30 schools in Norfolk. In anticipation of this studentship UEA and NCC have been working together conducting small-scale pilot/feasibility trials in the area to provide the evidence base for the student to build on.

The objectives of the project are to

1. Determine the final outcome variables, intervention (i.e., the nature of the behavioural science informed training programme), data collection methods and trial design;
2. Evaluate travel training interventions;
3. Develop policy guidance for stakeholders

Supervisors: [Dr Amrish Patel](#) and [Dr Oana Borcan](#) (Department of Economics, University of East Anglia) and [Rebecca Brown](#) (Norfolk County Council)

Training Opportunities

A comprehensive package of training will be agreed in consultation with the supervisors. Elements of training will be provided by the supervisors, University of East Anglia and by other providers. In addition to the standard training opportunities that an economics PhD student can expect, they will receive considerable on the job training interacting with senior policy experts at NCC throughout the project. The student will be embedded in NCC's Transformation Community, so be fully immersed in methods and approaches to transformation in local government. Beyond the academic and professional training, this studentship offers the holder the opportunity to build a strong network in local government and education, paving the way to future employment in the sector

Applicants: essential and/or desirable attributes/skills

Studentship Details:

This studentship must be taken as a +3 award (a three-year PhD)

- It may be taken full-time or part-time
- The studentship award covers your university fees, and provides you with a stipend of £15,609 per year. You will also be able to apply for small amounts of additional funding via the SeNSS Research Training Support Grant.

Residential eligibility

To be eligible for a full award you must be a Home or International student who satisfies the criteria below:

To be a **home** student, you must meet the following criteria:

- Be a UK national (meeting residency requirements), or
- Have settled status, or
- Have pre-settled status (meeting residency requirements), or
- Have indefinite leave to remain or enter.

If you do not meet any of the criteria above, you are classed as an **international student**.

How to apply for this studentship

In order to be considered for this SeNSS studentship, you must first apply for a place to study University of East Anglia, noting that you are applying for the collaborative studentship. Please go to [University of East Anglia, How to apply for a PhD](#) for information on how to make your application.

You will then need to make a separate application to SeNSS for this collaborative studentship. Please read the SeNSS Collaborative Studentship Application Guidance Notes before completing our online application form. The Guidance Notes are available at the bottom of the following webpage: [Applying for a SeNSS collaborative studentship](#)

Deadline:

The deadline applying to University of East Anglia for a place is **23:59 GMT on 23 February 2022**

The deadline for submitting your application on HEIApply is **12:00 GMT on 28 February 2022**

No extensions to this deadline will be permitted.

For further enquiries:

For enquiries related to the studentship topic, please email Dr Amrish Patel (Amrish.Patel@uea.ac.uk)

For enquiries related to your eligibility for this studentship, and the application process, please email: senss.dtp@uea.ac.uk

About SeNSS

The South East Network for Social Sciences (SeNSS) is a consortium formed of 10 leading UK universities, all of which are engaged in cutting-edge social science research and training. The SeNSS consortium members are:

- City, University of London
- University of East Anglia
- University of Essex (the co-ordinating institution)
- Goldsmiths, University of London
- University of Kent
- University of Reading
- University of Roehampton, London
- Royal Holloway, University of London
- University of Surrey
- University of Sussex

SeNSS offers a world-class inter-disciplinary PhD research and training environment. It is committed to supporting its internationally recognised researchers and to producing the next generation of talented social scientists. SeNSS has been accredited as a prestigious Doctoral Training Partnership (DTP) by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), the national body which funds research and training in economic and social issues.

We pride ourselves on our rigorous doctoral training programme, making the most of our members' diverse specialisms and offering our students a wide array of subject-specific as well as advanced training opportunities. SeNSS offers high-calibre supervision, driven by our members' emphasis on formal training and research culture.

For further information about SeNSS, please visit [the SeNSS website](#)