 **PhD Policy Secondment Opportunity**

## **Children, Families and Disadvantage Analysis Division**

##  **Department for Work & Pensions**

***Investigating determinants of increasing food bank usage***

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has a 3-month secondment opportunity for a suitably qualified and experienced doctoral student to lead on a high-priority project within a policy analysis team. The objectives of this secondment are twofold:

1. To offer the opportunity for a student to gain direct experience of working at the policy evidence interface, in the heart of a high-profile analysis team.
2. To offer the opportunity for a student to lead on a priority evidence review project **to determine which factors are driving up the use of food banks.**

While there is no restriction on discipline (with applications welcome from a broad range of disciplinary backgrounds including economics, sociology, social policy, geography, statistics, psychology, epidemiology or other related subjects), we are seeking a candidate with **experience of conducting qualitative research, including interviewing and qualitative analysis. Experience of conducting literature reviews is also required.**

# **Analysis in DWP**

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is responsible for welfare, pensions and child maintenance policy. As the UK’s biggest public service department it administers the State Pension and a range of working age, disability and ill health benefits to over 22 million claimants and customers.

The Department is a large employer and offers many opportunities for graduate and post graduate analysts who are employed as government specialists. Analysts in government work closely with policy makers at all levels including government ministers. Therefore their work has a great deal of influence over policy and can have a substantial impact on the lives of large numbers of people. This is especially true of DWP analysts who work in the evaluation and analysis of very large programmes impacting on labour market policy, poverty reduction, disability, ageing society and welfare reform.

The analytical community in DWP is large and multi-disciplinary with over 500 members split between four core professions; Social Researchers, Economists, Operational Researchers and Statisticians. The Department also employs a growing number of data scientists; and expert advisers in Behavioural Science, Psychology and Medicine. Many analysts join the Department having completed postgraduate degrees and doctorates, attracted by the excellent opportunities for professional development and promotion within the Civil Service.

Analysts in DWP are split between four main sites: Leeds, London, Newcastle and Sheffield. Analysts at these sites can work on a variety of topics and areas of work are not restricted by site.

# **Main Role**

The successful applicant will work alongside senior policy analysts to manage a high-priority research project to help determine which factors are driving up the use of food banks.

The work will offer a range of opportunities to enhance research and analytical skills, including evidence synthesis and policy translation.

The successful applicant will also have the opportunity to inform the development of policy at a senior level in government. The post-holder will work within a busy analysis team, offering the opportunity to directly experience the generation and use of evidence in the policy-making process.

The student will also benefit from development opportunities offered centrally by the DWP Analytical Community, including spot mentoring, shadowing and peer support.

# **Essential skills**

We are looking for current PhD students who have the following skills/experience:

* Qualitative interviewing skills
* Qualitative analysis skills
* Research project planning
* Experience of conducting literature reviews and awareness of systematic reviews
* Evidence assimilation and synthesis
* Strong drafting and writing skills
* Strong presentation and communication skills

Whilst not essential to the post, some understanding of the foodbank research literature would be beneficial.

# **Project Description**

***About the project:***

Over the last few years there has been an increase in the number of food banks (charitable organisations established to provide free food assistance) across the UK. However, data on numbers of food banks, characteristics of those who use them and the factors which drive usage are limited.

The rapid growth in food banks has prompted debate about why so many people are using them. At the moment there is no agreement as to why this is. Some evidence, as in the above research, highlights the disadvantages experienced by those who use food banks. For example, the majority of households using Trussell Trust food banks were workless (84.2%) and three-quarters of households using these food banks contained someone with a health condition and/or disability. When looking at why these individuals were referred to the food banks, low income and benefit delays/changes were commonly recorded as the primary referral reason to Trussell Trust food banks.

However, both this and other studies have also described a complicated picture where food bank usage is driven by short-term crises or changes in family circumstances following long term difficulties. Others have also suggested that “supply side” factors such as the increased numbers of food banks, may partly drive the increase in the rate of food bank usage. It is not clear, therefore, whether factors connected with “demand” i.e. user’s short and longer-term disadvantage, supply side factors or a combination of both are driving the use of food banks.

The current research and statistical evidence on food bank usage is also limited in that it tends to involve the Trussell Trust either in terms of commissioning the research or in using data and interviews from individuals using their food banks. However, recent “mapping” of food banks not provided by the Trussell Trust indicate that around 38% of the total number of food banks are provided by other providers.

This limits current evidence as we do not have a complete picture of the extent of food bank usage. It may also be possible that those using Trussell Trust food banks may not be representative of the total population of users. Our current knowledge is further limited in that there is less research which has looked at “supply” side issues which may have helped the growth in food banks.

The broad aim this research is to:

* Provide evidence on the extent of food bank usage from all food aid providers.
* Explore supply side issues which may have driven the growth of food bank usage.
* Explore short and longer term issues which drive the use of food banks with these users.

***Research methods***

Research methods comprise of four broad elements:

1. a literature review
2. a mapping exercise
3. qualitative interviews & focus groups, and
4. analysis and dissemination of findings.

*Literature review*

A review of literature will be conducted around food banks, including academic papers and recent research reports. The review will identify evidence that already exists in relation to the above research questions and identify where there are gaps in our in current understanding which this research will attempt to inform.

*A mapping exercise*

This part of the research will identify the location of all food banks, including the Trussell Trust and independent food banks. The researcher will be provided with details (location and contact information) of independent food banks which have been identified and mapped by the Independent Food Aid Network UK (IFAN). At the time of drafting around 746.

Department officials have met with IFAN who have agreed to work with the department to further research in this area, and have links with Trussell Trust. The researcher will also make contact with any other researcher who is identified as mapping food banks to see if further non-Trussell Trust food banks can be identified. This may not produce a complete list of all existing food banks which are independent of the Trussell Trust, but it should produce a comprehensive list.

The researchers will obtain any statistical data that is available either from IFAN, other researchers or from food banks to explore, for example, growth over time, extent of food distributed. It is recognised, however, that this may be limited or in many cases non-existent.

*Qualitative interviews*

* Telephone surveys of food banks
* Qualitative interviews with food bank staff
* Qualitative interviews with food bank agencies and organisations in supply chain
* Interviews with food bank users
* Focus groups with food bank uses

*Analysis and Dissemination of findings*

* Presentation of high level findings from the literature review, mapping exercise and discussion of quantitative research instruments.
* Presentation of findings from the quantitative survey of food bank providers
* Presentation of findings from qualitative research with food bank staff.
* Presentation of findings from quantitative and qualitative research with food bank users
* Draft final report of all findings
* Final report for publication.

# **Secondment Details**

**Duration and timing of secondment:**

* 3 months duration. Starting as soon as possible but with potential for flexibility.

**Location and travel:**

The DWP analytical community relies on flexible and inclusive working practices, as all teams are cross-site and multi-location.

The successful candidate will be able to work flexibly between their home location and in DWP offices in London, Leeds, Sheffield or Newcastle.

Some travel may be needed to help conduct any face to face interviews/ meetings associated with the qualitative research. Travel and related expenses, whilst in post, will be covered by DWP.

All team meeting are conducted in a geographically inclusive way using videoconferencing and teleconferencing to facilitate flexible working.

# **How will applicants be assessed?**

Candidates will be shortlisted on the basis of information provided within the application form. Shortlisted candidates will be invited to an informal telephone interview.

Within the application form and if invited to interview, applicants will need to demonstrate a detailed understanding of qualitative research and analysis methods, and approaches to reviewing and assimilating evidence from different sources.

Candidates will be expected to be able to provide examples of where they have demonstrated these skills sets both at application and at interview stage.

Candidates will not be asked to give a presentation.

# **How to apply**

Please submit:

* CV
* Completed application form and
* Completed permissions form

by email to evidence.strategyteam@dwp.gsi.gov.uk. Please also use this email address for any enquiries related to the secondment.

**Deadline for applications: Midday, Monday 28th May 2018**