



## 1. Advertisement

**Post Title:** Research Fellow

**School/department:** School of Education and Social Work, Department of Education

**Hours:** Part time hours considered up to a maximum of 0.8 FTE per week. Requests for [flexible working](#) options will be considered (subject to business need).

**Contract:** Fixed term for 4 years

**Reference:** 6020

**Salary:** starting at £34,304 and rising to £40,927 annum, pro rata

**Placed on:** 07 December 2021

**Closing Date:** 14 January 2022. Applications must be received by midnight of the closing date.

**Expected Interview date:** TBC.

**Expected start date:** As soon as possible

The [Department of Education](#), within [the School of Education and Social Work](#), has been awarded with its partners the contract for the national evaluation of [A Better Start](#). To support this work, we seek to appoint a 0.8 FTE Research Fellow to conduct qualitative research.

*A Better Start (ABS)* is a ten-year (2015-2025), £215 million programme funded by The National Lottery Community Fund (TNLCF), delivered by local partnerships in five areas in England: Blackpool, Bradford, Lambeth, Nottingham and Southend-On-Sea. The programme aims to deliver a place-based approach, changing the ways in which services are delivered and working in partnership with parents to improve the life chances of babies and young children, in relation to four key outcome domains:

1. improving children's diet and nutrition;
2. supporting children to develop social and emotional skills;
3. helping children develop their language and communication skills; and
4. bringing about 'systems change'.

The national evaluation of ABS is being conducted by a consortium partnership led by [NatCen Social Research](#), working with the University of Sussex, [Research in Practice \(RiP\)](#), the [National Children's Bureau \(NCB\)](#) and [RSM Partners](#). The consortium is built upon longstanding working relationships and brings together internationally recognised expertise in three domains:

- cutting-edge methodological expertise, including large, complex 'real world' evaluations of interventions into family lives over time, combining quantitative and qualitative methodologies
- interdisciplinary perspectives on early childhood, spanning developmental psychology (for example, early language and communication and socio-emotional development); childhood and family studies; education; economics; and public health
- practice-near interprofessional expertise in policy and provision for children and families spanning primary care and public health, early childhood education and care, child and family welfare, family support and children's social care and schools.

Overall, the national evaluation aims to address four specific objectives:

1. identify the contribution made by the ABS programme to the life chances of children who have received ABS interventions
2. identify the factors that contribute to improving diet and nutrition, social and emotional skills and language and communication skills through the suite of interventions, both targeted and universal, selected by ABS sites
3. evidence, through collective journey mapping, the experiences of families from diverse backgrounds through ABS systems
4. evidence the contribution the ABS programme has made to reducing costs to the public purse relating to primary school aged children

The five ABS sites also have local evaluators, and our national, programme level evaluation is distinct from that work. The national evaluation work has been divided into two phases: an initial feasibility study which is now complete, and the main Phase 2 evaluation. The successful applicant will be involved in Phase 2, working as part of the overall evaluation team, within Sussex and across the consortium. The Sussex team leads Objective 3 and contributes to work on all other objectives. Work at Sussex is led by Professor Janet Boddy and Professor Gillian Hampden-Thompson, and involves researchers from Education, Psychology and Brighton and Sussex Medical School, and within Sussex is aligned with the [Centre for Innovation and Research in Childhood and Youth](#). The Research Fellow will play a key role in the national evaluation, conducting qualitative longitudinal research with families who work with ABS and contributing to systems-level qualitative research with professional stakeholders. The successful applicant will work and develop research relationships with colleagues across the consortium – spanning multiple disciplines. Specific responsibilities include conducting interviews with families (parents/carers and children) and professional stakeholders, and contributing to literature reviews, analysis and writing at all stages of the project.

For full details and how to apply see [www.sussex.ac.uk/jobs](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/jobs)

*The University of Sussex values the diversity of its staff and students and we welcome applicants from all backgrounds.*

## 1. The School / Division

The School of Education and Social Work (ESW) hosts the [Department of Education](#) and [Department of Social Work and Social Care](#).

The School was created in August 2009, bringing together two long-established and thriving departments – the Department of Education and the Department of Social Work & Social Care. The School occupies dedicated accommodation at the heart of the campus, benefitting from recent major investment by the University in teaching accommodation, library, IT infrastructure, and other facilities. The School has over 1,000 students and there are 140 members of staff made up of academic and professional service colleagues.

Both departments are led by a Head of Department, appointed on fixed-term rotation basis from within the senior faculty, and the School's work is supported by internal directorships with oversight of teaching and learning, student support, admissions and recruitment, doctoral studies and research & knowledge exchange. The academic work of the School is supported by a group of 23 professional services staff located within the School and led by the School Administrator, as well as by a range of central university services.

The School of Education and Social Work's (ESW) over-arching strategic aim is to foster a thriving and sustainable environment that contributes at the highest level to education and social work and allied disciplines. ESW has a commitment to supporting and improving social justice at the global, international and national levels through our research, teaching and professional activities. Under our current strategic plan, we are renewing and increasing our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion. We continue to build upon the strong reputation of our constituent Departments to identify and pursue new opportunities for within-discipline, inter-disciplinary, and pan disciplinary collaboration. We recognise that connections with other disciplines - such as sociology, psychology, anthropology, law and health/medicine - are fundamental for our success in current and future research and political and policy environments. Developing stream of interdisciplinary activity unites the work of colleagues with common interests including the study of childhood and youth, adult well-being, pedagogy and inter-professional policy and practice. As a School we embrace the University values of kindness, integrity, inclusion, collaboration and courage. In ESW, we are also committed to embodying community and social justice.

The **Department of Education** provides programmes of pre-initial and initial teacher education, international education, education studies and doctoral education, alongside an internationally renowned set of research programmes located within three research centres. There is a growing Undergraduate programme, an established and growing Masters programmes and a high number of doctoral students. The Department of Education is ranked 7th in the Times Good University Guide 2012. In the 2014 REF, Education at Sussex was ranked 26th position of the 76 submissions returned. The **Department of Social Work & Social Care** provides programmes of initial qualification and continuing professional development, alongside a thriving research programme. In the 2014 REF Social Work was ranked joint 31st out of 62 submissions in its interdisciplinary unit of assessment.

Success in socially engaged, policy relevant, and practice near research is enabled by existing and new relationships with academic and non-academic partners, making a significant contribution to the University's 2025 Research with Impact and Engage for Change Strategies. Our research spans institutions, disciplines and professional fields, creating the critical mass necessary for interdisciplinary teams, access to research opportunities and participants, and to ensure our reputation, credibility and voice in fields we seek to influence. Collaborations with charitable, NGO or stakeholder collaborators is routine, including national and international partnerships.

The post will be based in the Department of Education, but they will benefit from a research environment that is dedicated to supporting the ongoing development of its research staff and from links with the six research centres that are hosted by the School:

- Centre for International Education (CIE);

- Centre for Innovation and Research in Childhood and Youth (CIRCY);
- Centre for Innovation and Research in Wellbeing (CIRW);
- Centre for Higher Education and Equity Research (CHEER);
- Centre for Teaching and Learning Research (CTLR);
- Centre for Social Work Innovation and Research (CSWIR).

Sussex is a signatory to the [Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers](#) and the [European Charter for Researchers](#), and holds the [HR Excellence in Research Award](#) for research career development.

## 2. Senior leadership and management

The Vice-Chancellor is the senior academic officer and, as Chief Executive, is responsible to the University Council for management of the University. He is supported by an executive group which includes the Provost, the four Pro-Vice-Chancellors, the Chief Operating Officer, the Director of Finance and the Director of Human Resources. The Heads of the Schools of Studies at Sussex report to the Provost.

The Chief Operating Officer heads the Professional Services of the University. In addition, under the University Statutes, the Chief Operating Officer is Secretary to the University Council. The Director of Finance reports to the Vice-Chancellor, the Director of ITS and the Librarian report to the Chief Operating Officer.

## 3. Job Description

### CORE JOB DESCRIPTION

**Job Title:** Research Fellow in Education

**Grade:** Research Fellow I, Grade 7

**School:** ESW

**Location:** Essex House

**Responsible to:** Professors Janet Boddy and Gillian Hampden-Thompson

**Direct reports:** n/a

**Key contacts:** Principal Investigators and other members of the research team at Sussex, plus collaborators at [NatCen Social Research](#), [Research in Practice \(RiP\)](#), the [National Children's Bureau \(NCB\)](#) and [RSM Partners](#).

**Role description:** Research Fellow I is an early career-grade research position. Post-holders will be expected to contribute to the work of the research team, and also to develop their research skills with support from more experienced members of staff.

## **PRINCIPAL ACCOUNTABILITIES**

1. To engage in collaborative research activity in the national evaluation of A Better Start, including a core role in qualitative research with service users, resulting in high quality outputs for The National Lottery Communities Fund to fulfil reporting requirements. To contribute to School, Departmental and University activities, where required.

## **KEY RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **1. Role-specific duties**

- 1.1 To contribute as necessary to reviews of academic and policy literature concerned with (a) methodology for family research with young children; and (b) early childhood intervention and support.
- 1.2 To liaise and negotiate with ABS local sites in order to establish and maintain qualitative sample of families for the evaluation.
- 1.3 To ensure adherence to the highest ethical standards for the work, including confidentiality, safeguarding and informed consent and considerations specific to work with young children and families.
- 1.4 To contribute to methodological development for qualitative fieldwork, working with the evaluation team, including strategies for keeping in touch with participants over time.
- 1.5 To undertake fieldwork which will include national travel and overnight stays, in order to conduct:
  - qualitative interviews with young children, parents/carers and family groups, including creative and participatory approaches; and
  - interviews with professional stakeholders in ABS or comparison areas.
- 1.6 To analyse and interpret research findings in collaboration with the Sussex and the wider evaluation team.
- 1.7 To provide general research support to the project as directed.
- 1.8 To implement systems for secure data management for the project, including arrangements for data sharing within the project team.
- 1.11 To communicate and collaborate with the project team in developing analysis over time and across components in the research design.
- 1.9 To support and participate in meetings, including research team meetings, with ABS sites and the evaluation commissioners, and with evaluation advisory groups as appropriate.
- 1.13 To contribute to high-quality research outputs for publication and dissemination of the methodological and substantive findings of the research.
- 1.14 To build internal contacts and participate in internal networks and relevant external networks in order to form relationships and collaborations.
- 1.15 Continually update knowledge and understanding in field or specialism, and engage in continuous professional development.

## **2. Contribution to School & University**

- 2.1 Attend and contribute to relevant School and project meetings.
- 2.2 Undertake additional duties, as required by the Principal Investigator and/or Head of School.

This Job Description sets out current duties of the post that may vary from time to time without changing the general character of the post or level of responsibility entailed.

## **3. Decision making and Problem Solving**

Working in conjunction with the PIs and other members of the research team, the research fellow will have core responsibilities for the design and implementation of qualitative longitudinal research with families for Objective 3 of the national evaluation of ABS and will work with NatCen and Sussex to contribute to qualitative interviews with professional stakeholders as part of counterfactual case study research for evaluation Objective 2. For the longitudinal research with families (N=25), the successful applicant will need to work with families from diverse backgrounds, to develop situated family case studies which are centred on interviews with parents/carers but incorporate the perspectives of young children and wider family members as appropriate. This work will involve decision-making and problem solving at all stages of the research process, contributing to aspects of the work including methodological development, sample maintenance (working in conjunction with the project administrator), and analysis and reporting.

To meet these responsibilities, the post holder must be able to work individually on their own initiative and without close supervision, and as part of a cross-institutional team, maintaining clear communication and lines of decision-making with the PIs and the wider evaluation team. They must be able to exercise a degree of innovation and creative problem-solving and have the ability to prioritise and meet deadlines.

## **4. Major deliverables, projects, processes, responsibility areas etc.**

The primary responsibility of the Research Fellow is to arrange, conduct and analyse qualitative longitudinal interviews with families. The qualitative longitudinal research will involve a baseline sample of 25 families, five from each of the ABS sites, selected to encompass a range of characteristics of interest. Replacement sampling will be used to address attrition over the course of the longitudinal work. We will interview each family twice a year – an annual in-depth encounter, involving creative and participatory methods, and an interim keeping-in-touch telephone interview with the primary carer six months later, to document any key changes or concerns arising over the time period. It is anticipated that other team members may conduct a small proportion of the interviews, but the Research Fellow will have core responsibility for the qualitative longitudinal work. A project administrator will work with the Research Fellow to support sample maintenance. The Research Fellow will also contribute to qualitative research for Objective 2, which will include interviews with professional stakeholders in non-ABS comparison areas, particularly with regard to exploring systems-levels factors such as use of evidence, joined up working, community engagement and co-production and perinatal and early years provision.

In addition, the Research Fellow will be expected to participate pro-actively as a full member of the research team, supporting and contributing to team meetings and undertaking other tasks related to the project as appropriate - for example, updating literature reviews, engaging in cross-project liaison with the evaluation team, local sites and research commissioners where needed, and contributing to analysis and reporting and the development of high quality publications.

## **PERSON SPECIFICATION**

The following qualifications, knowledge, experience, skills and competencies are required:

### ***Essential criteria***

1. Normally educated to doctoral level, or other equivalent qualification, or appropriate level of experience, as appropriate to the discipline (see role-specific criteria below).
2. Evidence of engagement in high-quality research activity relating to young children and families, and/or services to meet their needs.
3. Able to engage and communicate effectively with: young children; parents and carers; academic colleagues; professionals who deliver services for young children and families; external audiences; and project commissioners.
4. Excellent oral and written presentation skills for academic and public audiences.
5. Ability to work individually on own initiative and without close supervision, and as part of a team.
6. Ability to exercise a degree of innovation and creative problem-solving.
7. Excellent organisational and administrative skills.
8. Ability to prioritise and meet deadlines.
9. Excellent IT skills.

### ***Essential role-specific criteria***

1. Knowledge of services for young children and families.
2. Understanding of early childhood and family lives.
3. Expertise in qualitative and longitudinal methodologies for data collection and analysis.
4. Experience of initiating, developing or negotiating links with external bodies such as local authority service providers and non-governmental organisations.
5. Knowledge of literature reviewing approaches.
6. Knowledge of ethics in research with young children and families.

### ***Desirable criteria***

1. Experience of creative and participatory methodological approaches with young children and/or families.
2. Experience of evaluation or service-focused research concerned with children and/or families.
3. Knowledge and experience with local authority and/or primary care systems.
4. Emerging track record of high-quality writing for external audiences, including academic publication, research briefings or other relevant outputs.

## **SPECIAL ATTRIBUTES:**

- a) Able to undertake travel for national fieldwork in England including overnight stays.
- b) Appointment depends on enhanced Disclosures and Barring Service (DBS) clearance.