**Post Doctoral Research Associate (PDRA)**

**About the role**

We are seeking to appoint a highly motivated Postdoctoral Research Associate to work on the OSC funded project Cultures of Listening in Crisis: enhancing professional listening to children and adults in situations of need or risk. The successful candidate will work closely with Dr Johanna Motzkau, based at the School of Psychology and Counselling, The Open University, and Professor Michelle Lefevre, Director of the Centre for Innovation and Research in Childhood and Youth (CIRCY), based at the University of Sussex. We are looking for a proactive, creative and dynamic PDRA who would seek to play an active part in supporting the development of a new research method, manage and analyse data as part of this innovative pilot research. They will use their research knowledge, skills and grant bidding experience to support key aspects of the pilot research and contribute to networking and preparing an external grant bid.

**Project Description**

# This project investigates listening experiences and practices broadly and with a specific focus on social work and multiagency child protection practice. It is a pilot designed to provide proof of concept for an innovative art-based method.

# In all encounters, the quality of listening matters because it determines the outcome. In professional contexts such as social work, the quality of listening becomes crucial to the futures of vulnerable lives. Less powerful people, including children, are often either misheard, misinterpreted or not heard at all ([[Lefevre, 2018](https://bristoluniversitypress.co.uk/communicating-and-engaging-with-children-and-young-people)](https://bristoluniversitypress.co.uk/communicating-and-engaging-with-children-and-young-people)). This project aims to research and enhance the listening practices of social workers, and related practitioners, in ways that address inequalities perpetuated by ineffective listening. It draws on Motzkau’s (Motzkau & Lee 2022) studies of ‘troubled’ listening in UK child protection practices to develop a ‘listening-toolkit’ that will enhance the listening of social work practitioners, particularly in child protection, through a structured process of learning to listen to one’s own, and others’, listening. The work builds on new knowledge about the role of ‘cultures of listening’ in structuring listening encounters. This research has shown that listening is not merely an aspect of auditory perception or communication, but is shaped by often tacit political, social, and experiential contexts and processes. Such 'cultures of listening’ can be detrimental, but when made explicit can be positively transformed. Hence practice deficiencies, and the longstanding ‘perpetual crisis of child protection practice’ (Parton 2014; Munro 2017; Hood et al, 2020; Maglajlic and Ioakimidis, 2020; MacAlister, 2022), are not solely produced by individual shortcomings, but generated/maintained systemically, they mark a ‘crisis of listening’.

# The project will further develop a participatory, art based, method called ‘dark listening’, that is based on the artwork Audio Obscura (Greenlaw 2011) and offers a novel way to explore service users’ experiences of being listened to vis a vis the listening practices/experiences of practitioners and decision makers they encounter; i.e. social workers and related practitioners in child protection contexts. Participants (practitioners) self-record audio diaries, reporting in short sound bites about their day-to-day experience of being listened to, or listening to children/families/colleagues; this provides a self-reflection tool. Selected excerpts from all diaries are turned into anonymized audio-collages created in collaboration with a sound producer. These audio collages are the focus of listening workshops attended by participants (practitioners/service users), who each come together to discuss the collages and the experience of listening to them. This offers a tool to collaboratively explore effective and troubled listening practices, levers and barriers to effective practice, while finding ways to challenge/transform them. In this way ‘dark listening’ generates tools that are strengths-based, support and foster adaptive strategies, and allow collaborative thinking and community where the high stakes nature of issues tends to isolate practitioners.

# Key responsibilities

This is not intended as a comprehensive list of duties or a restrictive definition of the post but is rather a guide.

The PDRA role involves some data collection, filing and processing, contribution to data analysis (quantitative and qualitative), including conducting and analysing feedback interviews; further the PDRA will lead on social media work and impact/stake holder networking and engagement, will find/establish dissemination networks including for interdisciplinary/multiagency academic, policy and stake holder audiences; contribution to build towards training/impact partnerships and thus contribute to key elements of assembling a large external grant bid that results from this pilot; contribute to drafting and editing of the pilot research report.

Work includes:

* coordinate audio diary data collection (manage sending and retrieval of audio recorders, smartphone data, and safe storage and admin of all audio data and participant information);
* check/format all data (AI transcribed); approx. 30 hrs of data in total;
* run 2 listening workshops;
* conduct post participation de-brief interviews;
* analyse post-participation de-brief interviews;
* contribute to production of and review stage 1 audio collage;
* extend the stake holder network, including contacts with policy makers;
* manage/oversee social media engagement and outreach work to the general public as well as related government and third sector organisations;
* contribute to drafting and editing of the research report;
* contribute to drafting of external grant bid.

**Skills and experience**

# Essential

* PhD in Social Work
* Training in, and experience of, systemic therapy
* Expertise in qualitative and quantitative research methods
* Excellent skills in qualitative and quantitative data management and analysis in the Social Sciences/Psychology
* Proven experience working with sensitive topics such as child sexual exploitation
* Experience of working in a legal context, including family courts
* Experience in working with groups of students, social work practitioners, or service users
* Good communication, organization and analytic skills
* Ability to work collaboratively as part of an interdisciplinary team
* Ability to plan and organize own work
* Ability to adapt to changing situations in a timely manner
* A commitment to, and understanding of, equal opportunities
* A commitment to own personal development.

# Desirable

* Good IT skills (e.g., NVivo, SPSS, Qualtrics or similar)
* Experience working with multidisciplinary stake holders in the context of child protection
* Experience working with charities in the child protection and social work context
* Experience of grant bidding to external funders
* An undergraduate or master’s degree in a relevant field.
* An existing track record of publication, particularly in academic journals.
* Experience of writing or communicating research ideas with non-specialist audiences.
* Experience of contributing to the planning of project activities and outputs.

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