

Durham University PhD Studentship on Safeguarding in Hospitality



HAVE YOU EVER WORKED AT MCDONALDS?
ARE YOU INTERESTED IN THE SAFETY AND WELLBEING OF ITS STAFF AND CUSTOMERS,
PARTICULARLY THOSE WHO ARE YOUNG PEOPLE?
DO YOU HOLD A 2.1 UNIVERSITY DEGREE?

IF YOU ANSWERED YES TO THESE THREE QUESTIONS WE COULD HAVE THE PERFECT POST
GRADUATE OPPORTUNITY FOR YOU.

The Department of Sociology at Durham University are inviting applications from individuals to undertake a fully funded 3-year PhD, plus one year Masters if required, on the topic of safeguarding in hospitality, with a particular focus on the experiences of adolescent (16-25 years) workers. This PhD studentship is sponsored by McDonald's UK and Ireland.

The successful candidate will undertake a PhD (and MA if required) program based within the Sociology department's Global Centre for Contextual Safeguarding under the academic supervision of Prof. Carlene Firmin, Social Work (Sociology Department) in collaborative co-supervision with colleagues in the Durham Business School and the Department of Psychology.

Funding: Subject to eligibility, the scholarship covers UK Home tuition fees and a grant towards living expenses of £20,780 per annum, for three years of a PhD, plus UK Home tuition fees and a £20,780 grant towards living expenses for an initial MA year (if required).

Successful applicants will also have access to a Research Training Support Grant and will be supported to deliver their PhD within the Contextual Safeguarding research programme run by Durham University.

Hours: Full time

Starts: 1st Oct 2025

The Project

The last 15 years has seen increased public and political concern about the welfare of young people. Various public national inquiries have evidenced harms young people experience from peers and adults in school or college, in public spaces such as shopping centres and on transport, online, and in their first jobs. This growing concern has been accompanied by a recognition that traditional safeguarding systems (largely designed to protect younger children in family homes) are ill-equipped to meet the needs of young people during adolescence, particularly those who come to harm in public, school or peer contexts.

In response various communities, practitioners, policymakers and scholars have started to reimagine what safeguarding could look like; working with young people, and their families, to identify ways for systems to increase safety in a range of contexts beyond the family home. This project will, for the first time, consider the safeguarding needs of young people within the hospitality industry, particularly young people who are themselves in leadership and management roles before they turn-25; identifying ways to best value, as well as safeguard, an adolescent workforce who are responding to (as well as potentially experiencing) harms that occur in public spaces.

The successful applicant will be supervised to develop a research project within this context, identifying the most suitable methodologies to evidence opportunities for developmentally-specific approaches to safeguarding young people in hospitality; both in terms of customers and in terms of staff. Such a unique project might suit someone from a varied academic background; for example this may equally appeal to someone with a business, psychology or social work degree amongst others. We are excited to see how applicants use the knowledge and skills developed through their undergraduate degree in concert with their experience of working in hospitality to turn this opportunity into a groundbreaking project.

Eligibility

The ideal candidate must have:

- Honours degree, potentially in one of the following subjects (but not necessarily) sociology, social work, youth and community work, business, psychology, education, criminology (min 2.1)
- Hold a Masters degree (if not, application will be considered for one-year Masters followed by three-year PhD)

- An interest in childhood and youth welfare, violence reduction, safeguarding or adolescent well-being

It is also desirable that they have current or recent experience of working in hospitality, particularly a McDonalds restaurant – although this is not essential.

How to apply

Applications should be made via the Durham University online application system: <https://www.dur.ac.uk/study/pg/apply/> quoting program code L3A001 – Sociology and Social Policy.

Please state on your application under the section on Finance and Funding which scholarship you are applying for – please state ‘McDonald’s Studentship’.

Selection will be based on application documents and interview.

Supporting Documents:

- 1) A 3-page (maximum) proposal for a study on safeguarding in hospitality and/or adolescent workforce development. This should include (i) A short section on why you are interested in conducting research in this area, (ii) A longer research proposal (i.e. what do you think we need to understand to improve safeguarding in hospitality?). This part of the proposal should include a brief review of relevant literature, a rationale for why this work is needed, aims, proposed study design, and expected outcomes. You may include figures, diagrams, or tables to illustrate any aspects of study if you feel it is helpful.
- 2) An example of previously written work (e.g. Dissertation / Written coursework, Published Paper, Report).
- 3) Two letters of references – at least one from an academic source and one from McDonalds staff
- 4) CV (no more than 2 pages).
- 5) For candidates where English is not their first language, we require English Language Evidence – please refer to following web page for details of accepted evidence <https://www.dur.ac.uk/learningandteaching.handbook/1/3/3/3/>

Enquiries regarding the application process should be forwarded to sociology.pgradmin@durham.ac.uk . Applicants are encouraged to contact us should they wish to speak to Prof. Carlene Firmin in more detail about the scope of this opportunity, and to be put in touch with a supervisor who may be able to assist them in drafting their application.

Closing Date: Friday 16th May 2025

Interview Date: Monday 9th June 2025