

# The Davis Scholarship

## Durham University PhD Studentship on Contextual Safeguarding for a Care-Experienced candidate



The Department of Sociology at Durham University is running 'The Davis Scholarship' for the second year in a row – an enhanced PhD studentship, 3-year PhD (plus one-year Masters if required) reserved for candidates with experience of care<sup>1</sup>, this time co-funded with the national What Works Centre for Children and Families, Foundations.

The successful candidate will undertake a PhD (and MA) program based within the Sociology department under the academic supervision of Prof. Carlene Firmin, Social Work (Sociology Department) and senior researchers from the Global Centre for Contextual Safeguarding of which she is Director.

**Funding:** Subject to eligibility, funding for this scholarship covers:

Three-year PhD period

- A PhD studentship stipend (at UKRI level) totaling £62,340 over three years
- A stipend booster of £7,000 p.a
- Annual conference attendance/travel budget 1,500 p.a
- 1 X PhD (3 year) HOME Studentship fees totaling £15,465.45

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<sup>1</sup> We use the term 'care experience' or 'care experienced' to be inclusive of the range of care settings an applicant may have experienced, such as:

- living with foster carers
- living in a residential children's home
- being looked after at home under a supervision order
- living with friends or relatives in kinship care – either through a formal arrangement (e.g. a Special Guardianship order) or an informal arrangement without local authority support

We will also provide access to monthly clinical supervision and a peer-support network of care-experienced researchers

One-year Masters Period (if required) – taught course requiring the candidate to be in Durham during term time.

- 1 year tuition fee (at the home rate) - £ £11,750
- 1 year stipend - £19, 237
- Accommodation costs at St Aidan's College for the academic year 2026/27

**Hours:** Full time

**Starts:** 1<sup>st</sup> Oct 2026

### **The Davis Scholarship**

We created the Davis Scholarship to realise both the benefits of higher education for people with experience of care (Harrison, 2022) and the unique perspectives care-experienced people bring to a range of research disciplines (Alliance for Care Experienced People in Higher Education). We recognise that despite these potential benefits for individuals, universities and societies, academia is riddled with a range of hurdles that, if left unaddressed, create significant barriers for care experienced people to fully participate in university life. As such this scholarship features an enhanced funding model, providing additional resources to further support with living costs, clinical and peer support.

The Davis Scholarship is named after Jahnine Davis, National Kinship Care Ambassador and Founder of Listen-Up, a national research and training organisation established to amplify the experiences of Black and racialised children in child protection research, policy and practice. Jahnine is a care-experienced research leader whose work has significantly influenced the values and goals of the Global Centre for Contextual Safeguarding, and whose contribution to knowledge (and it's impact) exemplify the various benefits of increasing the numbers of care-experienced people in the academy and amplifying their voices.

### **The Project**

Contextual Safeguarding is an approach to understanding, and responding to, young people's experiences of significant harm beyond their families. It recognises that relationships that young people form in their neighbourhoods, schools and online can feature harm. Parents and carers have little influence over these contexts, and young people's experiences of extra-familial harm can undermine parent-child relationships. Therefore, children's social care practitioners, child protection systems and wider safeguarding partnerships need to engage with individuals and sectors who do have influence over/within extra-familial contexts, and recognise that assessment of, and intervention with, these spaces are a critical part of safeguarding practices. Contextual Safeguarding, therefore, expands the objectives of child protection systems to build safety for young people beyond their front doors.

The Contextual Safeguarding programme launched in 2015, and became a Global Research Centre in 2025. During this time the centre team have completed over 30 research projects to understand, and improve, safeguarding responses to extra-familial contexts and young people harmed within them. We have collaborated with young people, parents and carers, practitioners, policymakers, funders and service leaders to impact significantly on child welfare systems nationally and internationally. Despite progress, there remains much to understand, and even more to change. Our 2024-2027 strategy includes: collaborative projects with young people on redesigning approaches to commissioning local services, and with parents of adolescents, on whether/how Contextual Safeguarding reforms might work for them; ongoing work to co-design alternative child protection pathways for risks outside of the home; first attempts to test Contextual Safeguarding with organisations supporting young people who are unaccompanied and seeking asylum and with those working in hospitality; and work to build more inclusive school environments following incidents of sexual harm.

We are keen to see what the recipient of the Davis Scholarship brings to this portfolio of work, and where they believe research needs to go next if we are to realise our vision of a future where young people feel safe beyond their homes because their communities and child protection systems can, and will, protect them from harm. The successful project must have explicit implications for social work with children and young people, but beyond that can be designed by the successful recipient.

### **Eligibility**

The ideal candidate must:

- Be care-experienced as defined for this process
- Hold an Honours degree, potentially in one of the following subjects (but not necessarily) sociology, social work, youth and community work, psychology, education or criminology (min 2.1)
- Hold a Masters degree, or if not, be applying for a one-year Masters followed by three-year PhD as part of this scholarship, and must be able to be in Durham for the Masters year at least during term time using the accommodation provided by the scholarship)
- Have an interest in childhood and youth welfare, safeguarding or adolescent well-being

### **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 select ‘Other’ and enter ‘The Davis Scholarship’

Selection will be based on application documents and interview.

Supporting Documents:

- 1) A 3-page (maximum) proposal for a study on a topic relevant to social work and of interest to the Global Centre for Contextual Safeguarding. We encourage you to review the Contextual Safeguarding website to see how current and previous projects, as you develop a novel idea.  
Your proposal should include (i) A short section on why you are interested in conducting research in this area, (ii) A longer research proposal. 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. Please contact us if you would like to discuss this with a potential supervisor; we can provide some assistance in developing the proposal.
- 2) An example of previously written work (e.g. Dissertation / Written coursework, Published Paper, Report, Blog).
- 3) Two letters of references – at least one from an academic source
- 4) A one-page personal statement
- 5) CV (no more than 2 pages).
- 6) Transcripts of qualifications
- 7) For candidates where English is an additional 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](mailto: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.

**Closing Date: 01.03.26**

**Interview: Online - Week Commencing 16.03.26**

## Who are Foundations

Foundations is the national What Works Centre for Children and Families

We want all children to have the foundational relationships they need to develop and thrive. Strengthening family or other close relationships for children is vital to provide these foundations.

To deliver this vision, children need effective support that is shown to make a difference to their outcomes. That's why we commit in our ambitious strategy to

- generate and champion high-quality, actionable evidence about what works
- influence local and national decision makers to use evidence to drive improvements in support for families and children
- increase demand for evidence about what works to strengthen family relationships and highlight evidence gaps that need to be filled.

We focus on children who need targeted support to address family-level risks, children experiencing harm or abuse in the home and children in care and care leavers.

We want all children to be able live safely and happily at home, with the foundations they need to reach their full potential. And we want children who cannot live at home to have the stable, enduring relationships they need. To achieve our mission, we focus on achieving four child outcomes:

1. Children are supported by their families to develop and thrive
2. Children are safe in their homes
3. Children and their families stay together as much as is safely possible
4. Children in care and care leavers have stable, loving relationships.