University of Salford MANCHESTER

# Job Description

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| **Role Title:** | Research Assistant – Social Cohesion in Greater Manchester |
| **School / Dept:** | Faculty of Social Sciences, Humanities and the Arts for People and the Economy |
| **Reference:** | MPF4101 |
| **Grade:** | Grade 6 |
| **Full or Part time:** | Part time |
| **Hours:** | 14.5 |
| **Reports to:** | Lecturer in Social Policy |

## Overview

The University of Salford has been commissioned by Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) to undertake a 6-month research study into the drivers, barriers and solutions to social cohesion in communities across Greater Manchester. They are seeking to understand the range of perceptions and experiences, but also to identify potential solutions at local levels that offer scope for wider application.

Cohesion can be a challenging topic to navigate, and is connected to other sensitive topics such as migration, race, belonging, employment, nationality and citizenship. Discussions can be polarised, (and polarising), and are influenced by a range of local, national and international actors and issues, the balance and significance of which constantly changes.

GMCA already collect quantitative data on social cohesion related indicators via large scale surveys including the GM Resident's Survey and Policing and Community Safety Survey.

Analysis of these suggests that poorer perceptions of social cohesion statistically correlate to neighbourhoods of higher socioeconomic disadvantage, where financial insecurity among residents is more prevalent. Such perceptions are also more significant among certain age and ethnicity categories.

However, GMCA does not currently have an evidence base to explain what is driving such perceptions, nor what people themselves see as positive solutions. They have commissioned the University of Salford to undertake qualitative research into these issues within GM neighbourhoods, with a particular focus on "people who are most likely to feel that social cohesion has broken down."

Our proposal envisages identifying two locations in GM to conduct research. We have committed to a range of activities including:

- Recruiting one group in each location comprising 5–6 participants connected through existing local social infrastructure, such as resident associations, community and voluntary organisations, or informal neighbourhood networks.
- Conducting two focus groups in each field site.
- Participants will be invited to take part in an individual walking interview.
- From the two groups across the two field sites, we will invite 2–4 participants to train as peer researchers. After completing a tailored two-day training programme, they will undertake interviews (3-4 each) with who may be disengaged from formal consultation processes, experience low levels of institutional trust, or have limited engagement with community organisations.
- Conducting Stakeholder interviews with 2-4 leaders/activists from community organisations in each field site. These interviews will provide contextual understanding of local dynamics, existing cohesion initiatives, perceived challenges and opportunities for future intervention. They will also enable triangulation between institutional and community perspectives.

We have agreed to the following outputs:

- Interim (3 month point) and final (6 month point) project reports. The findings from this research will contribute to shaping ongoing cohesion strategies across Greater Manchester

## Role Purpose

This is a 0.4 FTE (2 days per week) Research Assistant (RA) role. It involves undertaking a range of qualitative research tasks, supporting the project in the following areas:

- Managing aspects of the internal ethics application.
- Conducting rapid assessments of policy and literature to inform the 'what works' scoping review.
- Assisting with primary data collection – specifically undertaking stakeholder interviews with 2-4 leaders/activist from community organisations in each field site.
- Assisting with data analysis.
- Contributing analysis and content for interim and final project reports: leading on the interim report based on initial research findings with community members & scoping review.

Given the nature of the topic, we are looking to recruit an individual with experience in undertaking challenging qualitative research. Ideally candidates should have knowledge / experience of cohesion or a related field – but experience of conducting research on sensitive topics with communities and community groups is just as important.

This research initiative comes under the aegis of the University wide Social Innovation Institute (SII). It is managed by academics from three different faculties: Philip Martin (SHAPE), Sophie Yarker (Science, Engineering and Environment) and Jo Biglin (Health, Community and Life Sciences).

This post is expected to last approximately 5 months in duration. There will be flexibility on the distribution of the 2 days per week over this period.

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## Principal Duties & Responsibilities

- To assist the development of qualitative research instruments and the processes of internal approval (ethics)

- To conduct reviews of relevant policy practice and literature to support the project, as necessary.

- To undertake qualitative research with designated cohorts for the project in locations to be determined in GM.

- To undertake analysis of collected data and prepare written outputs for internal and external purposes under supervision of principal investigators.

- To work collaboratively with a range of stakeholders in GMCA, Local authorities, community groups, interviewees, etc.

- To ensure rigorous data management processes are followed at all stages.

- To liaise regularly with the principal investigators about project progress and lead on and contribute to academic publications and progress reports as required.

- In collaboration with the principal investigators to disseminate outcomes from the project through internal and external avenues at suitable times throughout the project's progress.

## Generic Duties

- Perform any other duties appropriate to the grade as may be required by the Head of School/Head of Division etc.

- Comply with the personal health and safety responsibilities specified in the University Health and Safety policy.

- To engage with the University's commitment to put our students first and deliver services which are customer orientated, represent value for money and contribute to the financial and environmental sustainability of the University when undertaking all duties and aspects of the role.

- Advance equality, support our work towards eliminating unlawful discrimination, foster an inclusive study and work environment for students, staff and visitors in accordance with our public sector equality duties and university policy.

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This role detail is a guide to the work you will initially be required to undertake. It may be changed from time to time to meet changing circumstances. It does not form part of your Contract of Employment.

Person specification follows on next page

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# Person Specification

The successful candidate should demonstrate the following, which are 'Essential' (E) or 'Desirable' (D)

## Qualifications

1. A good undergraduate degree (1st or 2:1) in Social Sciences or a related discipline (e.g. Psychology, Geography (E)

2. A postgraduate qualification in Social Sciences or a related discipline (e.g. Psychology, Geography) involving a research element (D)

## Background and Experience

3. Knowledge and experience of undertaking qualitative research in an academic or consultancy environment (E)

4. Knowledge and experience of employing (participatory) qualitative research methods in data collection and analysis; (E)

5. Experience of working as part of a research team (E)

6. Experience of working with external research commissioners in the public and/or private sector; (D)

7. Previous experience of conducting research with community groups / in a community setting; (D)

## Knowledge

8. Knowledge of current debates and practice in community cohesion and integration (D)

9. Engaging in non-discriminatory practice; (E)

## Skills and Competencies

10. Excellent communication skills with the ability to present information clearly to a range of audiences both written and verbally; (E)

11. Ability to use qualitative methods to gather and analyse data; (E)

12. Ability to write academic and non-academic outputs for a variety of audiences in a clear and accessible style; (E)

13. Ability to work in a team in an open, sharing manner; (E)

14. Ability to engage in independent working for periods at a time; (E)

15. Ability to be flexible with regard to research responsibilities and working locations. (E)

16. Capability and willingness to undertake administrative tasks necessary for the effective management of the project. (E)