

Job Description

| | |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|
| Role Title: | Research Assistant |
| School: | School of Health and Society |
| Reference: | GRP76 |
| Grade: | Grade 6 |
| Full or Part time: | Part time |
| Hours: | 0.2 FTE |
| Reports to: | Project Lead |

Overview

The increasing use of data driven and AI enabled tools in children's social care and youth justice is reshaping how risk is assessed, decisions are made and accountability is distributed across multiagency safeguarding systems. While policy and academic debates have focused on issues such as bias, accuracy and ethics there remains limited empirical understanding of how these technologies are interpreted, negotiated and operationalised in day-to-day professional practice, particularly at the interface between services. This is significant given longstanding challenges in cross system working, including issues of information sharing, threshold alignment and shared responsibility.

This pump-priming project seeks to examine how AI enabled and data-driven tools are conceptualised, governed and enacted across children's social care and youth justice, with a specific focus on the points at which professional judgement, trauma-informed practice and multi-agency accountability intersect. The project is situated within a Greater Manchester context, enabling engagement with devolved governance structures and existing multiagency safeguarding arrangements.

The project adopts a phased approach. An initial scoping review will examine how AI and data-driven technologies are currently understood within academic and policy literature, with particular attention to their governance implications in safeguarding contexts. This will be followed by a systematic analysis of statutory, regulatory and inspection frameworks to identify areas of alignment, overlap and absence in relation to AI governance across service boundaries. A qualitative roundtable with practitioners, service managers and digital leads will then explore how these issues are experienced and negotiated in practice, generating insight into the tensions between regulatory expectations and frontline realities.

The purpose of the project is to generate a conceptually robust and practice-informed account of how digital technologies are reshaping safeguarding work, and to lay the foundations for the development of a cross-system governance framework. In doing so, it will contribute to emerging debates on ethical AI use in public services while centring the implications for professional practice, workforce development and service coordination.

Role Purpose

The Research Assistant will support the delivery of a pump-priming project examining the governance and use of AI enabled and data driven tools within and across children's social care and youth justice systems. The role will involve contributing to all stages of the project, including the scoping review, policy and regulatory analysis and the organisation and delivery of a practitioner roundtable.

The postholder will undertake literature searching and reviewing, support systematic analysis of policy, regulatory and inspection documents and assist in the preparation, coordination and documentation of stakeholder engagement activities. They will also contribute to qualitative data organisation and analysis, including synthesising insights from

roundtable discussions and support the development of project outputs such as reports, briefings and academic materials.

The role requires experience of supporting research processes, including ethics application preparation, data management and qualitative analysis. The postholder will be expected to work with a high degree of organisation and attention to detail, and to contribute to the production of high-quality written outputs suitable for academic and policy audiences.

Principal Duties & Responsibilities

- To develop and manage the submission of ethics applications internally and externally.
- To work collaboratively and effectively with the research team.
- To undertake appropriate organisational and administrative activities connected to the delivery of the project.
- To undertake structured literature searches and contribute to the development of the project scoping review.
- To support the systematic analysis of policy, regulatory and inspection frameworks relevant to AI and data-driven decision-making in children's social care and youth justice.
- To contribute to the collection, organisation and analysis of qualitative and documentary data, including synthesising findings across project phases.
- To assist in the planning, coordination and delivery of stakeholder engagement activities, including practitioner roundtables, demonstrating professionalism in engagement with external partners.
- To prepare and maintain accurate research records, including data management processes in line with institutional and funder requirements.
- To contribute to the written outputs required for the project (including research reports, policy briefings and academic outputs).
- To perform any other duties as may be required from time to time by the project management team.
- To adhere to policies, principles, practices and processes that govern ethical research conduct.
- 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.

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

Person Specification

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

Qualifications

1. A good undergraduate/postgraduate degree (1st or 2:1) in Social Sciences, Social Policy, AI Governance or a related field. **(E)**
2. A PhD in Social Work or related discipline. **(D)**

Background and Experience

3. Experience of undertaking high quality research in an academic or consultancy environment. **(E)**
4. Experience of conducting literature reviews (e.g. scoping or systematic reviews). **(E)**
5. Experience of analysing policy, statutory or regulatory frameworks (e.g. through document analysis, coding or comparative approaches). **(E)**
6. Experience of working with external partners (e.g. local authorities, third sector organisations). **(D)**
7. Experience or interest in digital technologies, data driven decision making, or governance in public services. **(D)**

Knowledge

8. Qualitative and quantitative approaches to research. **(E)**
9. Experience of structured group-based reflective or collaborative learning environments (e.g. workshops, roundtables, action learning). **(E)**

Skills and Competencies

10. Project management skills evidenced by an ability to arrange, manage and undertake complex fieldwork. **(E)**
11. Highly developed communication skills to engage effectively and sensitively with a range of stakeholders. **(E)**
12. An ability to lead/take responsibility for identified parts of a project. **(E)**
13. An ability to work in a collaborative team in an open, sharing manner. **(E)**
14. An ability to engage in independent working for periods at a time. **(E)**
15. Well-developed analytical skills (e.g. quantitative and qualitative longitudinal data analysis, literature analysis). **(E)**
16. Capability and willingness to undertake administrative tasks necessary for the effective management of the research activities. **(E)**