PHD POSITIONS IN SOCIAL NORMS

**Applications are invited for two 4-year PhD studentships in the Department of Psychology at Royal Holloway, University of London.**

We are inviting applications for a September 2024 start, and the successful candidate will join a research project on **Social Norms,** funded by the Leverhulme Trust. The project seeks to understand how social norms develop and are sustained, and involves psychologists, economists, and computer scientists at Royal Holloway.The position will be supervised by Professor Ryan McKay (RHUL Psychology), but the successful student will also benefit from the expertise provided by members of the project team including Dr Gabriele Bellucci (RHUL Psychology), Dr Bjoern Hartig (RHUL Economics), Professor Kostas Stathis (RHUL Computer Science) and Professor David Levine (the Leverhulme fellow and the project’s principal investigator based in the Department of Economics).

Topics of interest include, but are not limited to:

- Tipping points in social conventions;

- Differential effects of descriptive vs injunctive social norms;

- Conflicting social norms;

- Social norms and identity;

- (consequences of) Norm violations;

- The social and psychological consequences of taboo language;

- Using norms to increase charitable giving;

- The usefulness of norms for decision-makers.

The scholarship provides support of £20,622 per year (UKRI rate including London Weighting) over a period of 4 years for a full-time student. It also includes a fee waiver to cover annual fees at the home fees rate (currently £4,712). Students who have already started their study programme are not eligible. Please note that fees for international applicants (i.e., the difference between home and international tuition fees) will not be covered.

The post is based in Egham, Surrey where the College is situated in a beautiful, leafy campus within commuting distance from London. At Royal Holloway, the post holder will join an active postgraduate research community, in a thriving research environment. The Department of Psychology ranked 3rd in the UK in the 2021 REF for our world-leading and internationally excellent research. The department has excellent facilities (e.g., EEG, MRI, VR, dedicated physiological recording equipment) and the post holder will have access to extensive training provisions provided by the doctoral school.

Applicants for the studentship should ideally hold, or be predicted to achieve, a first-class undergraduate degree or equivalent in Psychology or related discipline. A relevant MSc (e.g., cognitive science, decision science) with distinction is desirable, but not essential. Strong statistical skills, and experience with designing and implementing experiments with human participants, are essential. Applicants will need to submit a CV, a research proposal and personal statement (see guidance below), along with transcript(s) and copies of any qualifications.

Applicants must apply on the [college application portal](https://www.royalholloway.ac.uk/studying-here/applying/research-degrees/how-to-apply/). Please select "PhD Psychology" as the course title within the application form, specify the name of Prof Ryan McKay as supervisor and provide also a clear statement that you are applying for the scholarship entitled "PHD POSITION IN SOCIAL NORMS".

For an informal discussion about the post please contact Professor [Ryan McKay](http://tinyurl.com/ryan-mckay) ([Ryan.McKay@rhul.ac.uk](mailto:Ryan.McKay@rhul.ac.uk)).

Closing Date:  Midnight, 14th April 2024

Royal Holloway is committed to equality and diversity, and encourages applications from all sections of the community. Read [here](https://intranet.royalholloway.ac.uk/staff/your-employment/human-resources/equality-and-diversity/home.aspx) about structures and initiatives around equality and diversity, including information on staff diversity networks.

**Project Proposal guidelines**

The post holder will be part of an interdisciplinary team investigating **social norms**. Social norms are crucial for groups – from political parties to criminal gangs – to form, persist and succeed. Such groups face a free-rider problem: it is in the interest of each individual in the group to let the others do the work of advancing the common interest. Norms are equally pivotal in persuading individuals not to engage in anti-social behaviour, from littering, to thievery, and worse, where again there is a tension between individual goals and larger interests.

A general distinction can be made between injunctive norms (which capture social rules, i.e., what people *should* do) and descriptive norms (which capture what most people *actually* do).

In your proposal, which should be a maximum of 2 pages, please briefly describe a specific research question that you would be interested in investigating on this topic.Please include a brief background to justify your hypotheses and a detailed plan for the first study you would like to conduct, including proposed analyses, and 2 future research questions.

Although your proposal should be on the general topic of social norms, there is a fair bit of latitude here. For instance, swearing (using profane language) is a norm-violating behaviour, yet there is an interesting – and contentious – array of evidence suggesting it can serve useful social and physiological functions, increasing honesty and fostering social bonding. So, a proposal on a topic like that could fit within this project.

**Guidance on the personal statement**

Your **personal statement**(maximum 500 words) should include information about your reasons for applying for your PhD, and for this position in particular. Outline why you should be awarded this studentship, what your career goals are, what has prepared you to undertake the PhD and proposed work, and what skill set and knowledge you have that will allow to succeed and make an impact (please highlight relevant achievements supporting why you would be a strong candidate).

**Guidance on submitting your application**

Your application must be submitted through the [college application portal](https://www.royalholloway.ac.uk/studying-here/applying/research-degrees/how-to-apply/). You will need to nominate two referees on this online form. They will be contacted by the College directly, but it is always a good idea for you to contact referees before you submit your application to make them aware of your plans, and so they can respond to the College request swiftly.