



**LANCASTER UNIVERSITY
(GRACE-NET PROJECT
HOST) AND LANCASHIRE
AND SOUTH CUMBRIA
FOUNDATION TRUST (NHS)**

RESEARCH ASSISTANTSHIP

Grace-Net (Gambling Resilience, Awareness &
Community Engagement Network):
Participatory Innovation Framework

**North West
Social Science
Doctoral Training
Partnership**



**Economic
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Project Outline

Grace-Net (Gambling Resilience, Awareness & Community Engagement Network) is a UKRI-funded research and innovation network based in the North West of England, focused on reducing gambling harm through prevention, protection and recovery (P-Pt-R). Grace-Net has been awarded Phase 1 funding (April 2026–March 2027) and is hosted jointly at Lancaster University and Liverpool John Moores University, in partnership with over 25 organisations including NHS trusts, local authorities, lived-experience recovery organisations (LEROs), and charities.

This placement sits within Work Package 4 (WP4): Participatory Innovation Framework. WP4 tests how cross-sector collaboration can directly improve identification of, and responses to, gambling harm through a series of co-designed workshops and small-scale micro-experiments conducted with frontline partner organisations.

Placement Key Objectives and Timeline

The student will support the design, delivery and evaluation of WP4's participatory innovation activities, contributing to:

- Supporting three co-design workshops (facilitated by Red Card and Empowerment LEROs) in which frontline practitioners and lived-experience contributors jointly identify priorities, map referral routes and prototype simple tools such as screening checklists or joint-training modules.
- Assisting in the design, implementation and documentation of three network-wide micro-experiments: these are small-scale, low-risk pilots such as referral-pathway mapping, shared-data templates, or cross-sector joint-training exercises, conducted with partners including Beacon Counselling Trust, Blackpool Public Health team and Lancashire and South Cumbria Foundation Trust.
- Developing and applying a structured evaluation framework to capture learning from each micro-experiment, assessing how cross-sector learning reduces duplication and improves coordinated responses to gambling harm.
- Producing co-design reports, accessible infographics and lived-experience video case studies to communicate findings to the Grace-Net network and beyond.
- Contributing LERO Research Briefs capturing lived-experience-led research priorities emerging from the workshops, which will feed into the Grace-Net Research & Innovation Route Map and Phase 2 planning.



The following timeline is based on working 0.5 FTE for 6 months. Other working models are available, see **Duration and Timeframe** section below.

Months 1-2: Induction; literature review of micro-experiment and participatory innovation methods; familiarisation with partner organisations and existing referral systems.

Month 3-4: Co-design workshop support; micro-experiment design and pilot delivery; data collection and ongoing evaluation.

Month 5-6: Evaluation synthesis; production of co-design reports, infographics and LERO Research Briefs; final report to NWSSDTP.

What skills will you acquire from this placement?

This placement offers direct experience of participatory and applied research methods in a complex public health context, working across NHS, local authority, VCSE and lived-experience settings.

This placement suits students with career interests in applied social research, public health evaluation, NHS or local authority research roles, the voluntary and community sector, or social policy and service design. It offers strong grounding in real-world participatory research and cross-sector innovation.

Required and Desired Skills

This placement is well-suited to students from the Health, Wellbeing & Social Care or Society, Culture & Politics pathways, and is particularly appropriate for students with an interest in applied, participatory or evaluation-focused research. Applications from beyond these pathways are welcome where students can demonstrate relevant expertise or interests.

DESIRABLE SKILLS & KNOWLEDGE

- Familiarity with qualitative and/or mixed methods research, particularly applied or evaluation-oriented approaches.
- Interest in participatory research, co-production, or action research methodologies.
- Ability to collect, organise and synthesise data from diverse sources including workshops, stakeholder conversations and documentary evidence.
- Strong interpersonal skills and ability to engage comfortably with a wide range of participants, including practitioners, commissioners and lived-experience contributors.
- Capacity to produce clear written outputs for non-academic audiences (reports, briefings, infographics).

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BENEFICIAL EXPERIENCE

- Prior experience with qualitative data collection methods (e.g. facilitated group work, semi-structured interviews, observation).
- Familiarity with process evaluation, logic models or theory of change frameworks.
- Understanding of gambling harm, mental health, substance use, or related public health and social policy fields (desirable but not essential).
- Experience of working across organisational or sectoral boundaries.

Duration and Timeframe

This placement is equivalent to 13 weeks full time (1.0 FTE/5 days a week). The preferred timing is July–September 2026, which aligns with the delivery of the micro-experiments (Months 4–8 of the Grace-Net project).

This could alternatively be structured part-time across up to six months (e.g. 0.5 FTE/2.5 days per week from July to December 2026 or 0.6 FTE/3 days per week from July to November 2026), which would allow the student to follow the full arc of the micro-experiment cycle from design through to evaluation. Timing is negotiable and can be adjusted to fit the student’s PhD timetable.

The timeline example in the **Placement Key Objectives and Timeline** section is based on 0.5 FTE (2.5 days a week) but can be adapted for other FTEs.

Delivery mode

Hybrid, with a significant in-person component. The co-design workshops and micro-experiment pilots require in-person attendance at partner sites (approximately 6-8 visits) across the North West (including Blackpool, Lancaster, Liverpool and potentially Preston or Burnley).

Background work such as literature review, evaluation framework development, data write-up and report production can be undertaken remotely. Regular supervision meetings will be held online with flexibility for in-person where preferred. Students should be comfortable with travel to partner sites within the region as a routine part of this placement.

Induction process and support you will receive

The student will be welcomed as a named placement researcher within the Grace-Net project team, with a defined role, clear responsibilities and a named supervisor.

The student will receive a structured induction in the first two weeks covering: Grace-Net project overview, aims and governance; introduction to WP4 partner organisations and their contexts (NHS, VCSE, LERO); health and safety protocols for travel to partner sites and in-

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person event delivery; safeguarding responsibilities and escalation protocols; trauma-informed practice principles relevant to engagement with lived-experience contributors and frontline practitioners; data protection (GDPR) and confidentiality requirements; lone-working protocols where applicable.

Fortnightly supervision meetings with the named supervisor and WP4 co-supervisors; access to the Grace-Net Steering Group and Ethics Panel; peer support through the Grace-Net project team; access to Lancaster University library, IT and researcher development resources; participation in Grace-Net network events and training webinars. The student will be embedded in an active, multi-partner delivery team and will have regular contact with practitioners and lived-experience contributors throughout.

Ethics Approval

Grace-Net Phase 1 does not involve primary research with human participants as research subjects. WP4 co-design workshops and micro-experiments are participatory innovation and service-improvement activities rather than formal research involving human subjects.

However, Grace-Net maintains a robust ethical governance framework appropriate to the sensitivity of the gambling harm field. The project operates under Lancaster University's Research Integrity and Ethics Code of Practice, with an independent Ethics Review Panel (chaired by Professor Judith Sixsmith, University of Dundee) meeting quarterly. Grace-Net's GREAT advisory team (Gambling Research Ethics Advisory Team) provides ongoing ethical guidance, and the RISK mechanism (Responsible Innovation Support network) allows any ethical concerns raised during delivery to be escalated promptly.

All WP4 activities involving lived-experience contributors follow INVOLVE principles, trauma-informed practice guidelines, and the RES-WELL researcher wellbeing framework. Participation is voluntary, and informed consent procedures are in place for all workshop activities. The student will be fully briefed on these frameworks as part of their induction and will be expected to adhere to Grace-Net's ethical standards throughout. Lancaster University's NHS and VCSE partner organisations hold their own relevant governance approvals. No separate ethics application is required for the placement activities themselves.

Equality and Diversity commitments

Lancaster University and all Grace-Net partners are committed to Equity, Diversity and Inclusion. Grace-Net's partnership charter explicitly embeds EDI commitments, including fair remuneration of lived-experience contributors, trauma-informed facilitation and accessible participation formats across all WP4 activities.

We confirm alignment with the NWSSDTP's EDI commitments and are fully willing to make reasonable adjustments for disabled students or those facing other barriers to inclusion. We

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are committed to discussing access requirements proactively. Where in-person attendance at partner sites is required, we will work with venue hosts to confirm physical accessibility and make appropriate arrangements in advance. Remote participation alternatives will be explored wherever possible for students with mobility or travel-related barriers. Students with additional needs are warmly encouraged to disclose these early so that adjustments can be planned with care.

How to apply

To apply for this role, please complete the 'Expression of Interest form' available on the [NWSSDTP website](#), using the reference **Grace-Net: Participatory Innovation Framework** when asked which placement you are applying for. If you are interested in multiple Grace-Net opportunities, please complete one Eoi form and list your order of preference for the roles.

Once completed and discussed with your supervisor, return the completed form to Amy Connolly (rippls@liverpool.ac.uk).

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