

1 – General Information

Project code	SHSP02
Partner University	Sheffield Hallam University
Faculty/School/Department/Research Centres	CRESR, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities
First supervisor Please provide name and weblink	Dr Aimee Ambrose https://www4.shu.ac.uk/research/cresr/staff/aimee-ambrose
Second supervisor Please provide name and weblink	Dr Will Eadson https://www4.shu.ac.uk/research/cresr/staff/dr-will-eadson
Third supervisor Please provide name and weblink	Dr Sea Rotmann, Operating Agent, International Energy Agency https://www.eceee.org/all-news/columns/sea-rotmann/
External/industrial supervisor	William Baker, Energy Advice Lead Citizens Advice
Which of the supervisors listed above is an early-career-researcher	Aimee Ambrose
Contact details for project for informal applicant queries	a.ambrose@shu.ac.uk 0114 2256297
DTA Programme	DTA Social Policy
Project title	Engaging the hardest to reach in energy advice



2 – Project Description

<p>Academic Excellence (500 words)</p>	<p>Initiatives and services intended to support individuals and households with energy related problems (i.e. high bills, cold homes, poor energy efficiency etc.) consistently fail to reach the most marginalised, vulnerable and low income households who stand to gain the most from such initiatives (Ambrose et al, 2016). Resources are instead taken up by consumers better positioned to take advantage of the help on offer. There is very little existing knowledge or good practice in relation to engaging the hardest to reach in energy advice initiatives (Ambrose et al, 2016; Ambrose et al, forthcoming). Acquiring new knowledge on how to engage society's most vulnerable households in energy initiatives is vital as energy prices continue to rise and such households face higher energy costs as a proportion of their income than other groups in society in addition to increasing pressures allied to welfare reform and limited access to social housing (Bouzarovski and Herrera, 2016). Such households will also need support to navigate conflicting messages around the need to reduce energy consumption for environmental and financial purposes whilst also heating homes sufficiently to maintain health and wellbeing.</p> <p>The student will work with the International Energy Agency (IEA) (the global energy authority) and Citizens Advice (CA) (the UK's largest advice provider and statutory body representing energy consumers) to clarify the concept of 'hard to reach energy users', establish the scale of the problem (how many such households are missed) and identify and critically review international good and bad practice in reaching these groups. Through the partnership with highly respected organisations (the IEA and CA) and the access to high quality international data this will provide coupled with the application of innovative methodological approaches including the use of Citizens Panels and other co-production techniques, the studentship will operate at the cutting edge of fuel poverty research. It will</p>
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	<p>address a significant, international gap in knowledge around how best to engage marginalised consumers with energy advice and address deficits in the literature around citizen engagement, which presently says nothing of hard to reach groups. In doing so it will contribute to addressing a pressing societal problem (present in every country around the world) that policy makers and practitioners have so far failed to impact sufficiently on and which is under researched by the academic community. The project will shape, utilise and contribute to an emergent high quality international database on good and bad practice in reaching the hardest to reach energy users in an energy advice context and existing databases on the reach of current and past energy advice initiatives. On a theoretical level the PhD will add to conceptual understanding of (energy) vulnerability, also addressing deficits within the literature around citizen engagement in energy initiatives which currently fails to acknowledge the distinct plight of hard to reach groups.</p>
<p>Aim (400 words)</p>	<p>Hypothesis: Initiatives and services intended to support individuals and households with energy related problems (i.e. high bills, cold homes etc.) consistently fail to reach the most marginalised, vulnerable and low income households who stand to gain the most from such initiatives.</p> <p>Aims:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To better understand and provide an evidence base in relation to the nature of hard to reach energy users in an energy advice context • To use existing data on the reach of past and present energy advice initiatives to better understand the extent of the problem • To work with industry stakeholders and a Citizens Panel of hard to reach energy users to understand the consequences of the failure to reach hard to reach energy users with energy advice • To work with Citizens Advice's European STEP project (see Industrial Relevance section) and the IEA's task on Reaching the Hardest to Reach to identify and critically assess international good and bad practice in engaging



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	<p>marginalised consumers on a low income and in vulnerable circumstances with energy advice.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To use an evidenced based approach to identify the most effective ways of engaging the key hard to reach groups identified and establish what works best for whom and under what circumstances • To use co-production techniques to distil (internationally relevant) key good practice principles for policy makers and practitioners to apply • To critique and develop the literature around citizen engagement in energy related initiatives in the context of hard to reach energy users. <p>Methods: Following an in-depth literature review, the student will work with existing and emerging quantitative and qualitative datasets held by the project partners to address the aims set out above. The student will contribute their knowledge to the development of the methodologies associated with CA's STEP project and the IEA task to ensure that the data collected will meet their needs as well as those of the project. The student will be encouraged to employ creative co-production techniques to identify and build consensus around key lessons emerging from the project. They will also be encouraged to assemble (with support) a 'citizens panel' of hard to reach energy users which can be used to generate additional qualitative data and as a 'reality check' for emerging findings.</p>
<p>Strategic Relevance (300 words)</p>	<p>This PhD would sit within and contribute to a long established, high quality programme of work related to experiences and eradication of fuel poverty within CRESR. This area of work has contributed significantly to SHU's highly successful RAE and REF submissions under Unit of Assessment 16 (now 13) which, most recently, deemed 80% of our research to be world leading and placed us 11th out of 45 institutions submitting to this UoA.</p> <p>It also speaks directly to the current priorities of the project partners: Citizens Advice and the International Energy Agency. The close alignment between this studentship and the priorities of both the IEA and CA demonstrates that reaching the hardest to reach in an energy context is a pressing policy concern on an</p>



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	international scale and is of utmost importance to these high profile policy shaping organisations.
Interdisciplinarity and fit with DTA3	This studentship will be truly interdisciplinary, operating at the intersection of social policy, energy studies and health research. It fits well with the Social Policy DTA, focusing on the key international social policy challenge of how we ensure that the most marginalised and vulnerable households can access adequate and affordable energy services improving health and wellbeing, and promoting greater financial inclusion.
Industrial Relevance (300 words)	<p>There are two placements associated with this studentship: one industrial (Citizens Advice) and one international (IEA).</p> <p>Industrial placement: Citizens Advice are part of a Europe-wide consortium that have just (January 2019) secured a grant of €2 million from the European Commission to deliver the STEP (Solutions to Tackle Energy Poverty) project which assesses the potential of different innovative interventions to engage with the poorest and most vulnerable energy users across Europe. The student will, via a placement at CA, access data emerging from STEP for their PhD and secure policy impact by feeding in insights emerging from their PhD. Alongside their supervisors, the student will also develop links between STEP and the IEA's task on hard to reach energy users (see below).</p> <p>International placement: The IEA is developing a new international 'task' on reaching the hardest to reach energy users. It will run across seven countries and involves an international review of current practice in reaching consumers missed by energy interventions. It will seek to identify specific groups of consumers that are chronically 'underserved' by the energy sector and will go on to develop and pilot new initiatives aimed at these groups. The student will be connected to the task throughout the PhD via Dr Rotmann (third supervisor and task lead) and will benefit from and contribute to a two way flow of intelligence into and out of the task. The IEA will also offer a placement which can be at the IEA headquarters in Paris, the task head office in NZ or within the Swedish Energy Agency. The student will be in the privileged position of being party to</p>



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	<p>findings emerging across the three projects (STEP, the IEA task and their own research) and will therefore be uniquely positioned to take an international view of the problem and potential solutions.</p>
<p>Economic and Societal Impact (300 words)</p>	<p>The potential economic and societal impacts are considerable. This PhD has the potential to help overcome a stubborn problem which has troubled policy makers and practitioners seeking to improve the circumstances of the hardest to reach households in society for decades. It is estimated that 11% of households in the EU cannot afford to heat, cool or power their homes at an affordable cost (Insight_E, 2015)- all of these households will be marginalised and vulnerable in some way and many will be hard to reach. Any contribution to improving access to energy advice for these households and tailoring it to their needs could result in a multiplicity of households accessing support on critical energy issues for the first time. This could contribute in turn to reductions in fuel poverty and increases in access to the associated benefits for health, wellbeing and prosperity (and related savings for public funds) at the same time as achieving energy savings amongst a population consistently missed by advice initiatives and services in the past. Moreover, the international basis of the project means that findings will also be applicable across other countries and contexts, maximising potential to impact at an international scale.</p> <p>The studentship will also play a key role in developing and operationalising an influential body of literature around the rationale for and approaches to citizen engagement in energy initiatives and look critically at concepts such as energy democracy and energy 'publics' in the context of hard to reach energy users. This literature makes a case for engaging with all citizens in the development and implementation of energy policies but it does not consider the needs of the most marginalised and vulnerable in society or recognise them as a heterogeneous population facing distinct engagement challenges. The student will be uniquely positioned to nuance the literature to take account of their plight.</p>



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3 – Admission Requirements

Specific Admission Requirements	The successful candidate will be expected to hold a first class or upper second class undergraduate degree in a related subject and a relevant level seven qualification which includes an appropriate level of research training. A 1+3 route may also be available to outstanding candidates.
Minimum IELTS score	An overall IELTS score of 7.0 or above, with at least 7.0 in each component or an accepted equivalent. Please note that your test score must be current, i.e. within the last two years.



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