Research Grants

PROPOSAL

Future Research Leaders 2013

Organisation where the Grant would be held

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>University of Leeds</th>
<th>Research Organisation Reference:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Division or Department</td>
<td>Leeds University Business School (LUBS)</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Project Title [up to 150 chars]

How do inter-organisational relations affect employer engagement in welfare to work programmes in the UK and Denmark?

Start Date and Duration

a. Proposed start date

01 October 2013

b. Duration of the grant (months)

36

Applicants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Division or Department</th>
<th>How many hours a week will the investigator work on the project?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal Investigator</td>
<td>Dr. [redacted]</td>
<td>University of Leeds</td>
<td>Leeds University Business School (LUBS)</td>
<td>22.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Classification

International in nature?

Yes

Please give details
The research will examine the inter-organisational relations involved in employer engagement in welfare to work by comparing the contracting regimes of the UK and Denmark. In policy terms, the value of comparative research is in illuminating a policy problem in one country by examining it in another context. In theoretical terms, examining cross-national patterns can contribute a richer understanding of the complexities relating to important social issues which affect contemporary and future societies.

To meet the project's objectives requires extensive data collection in the UK and Denmark, via quantitative surveys of employers and qualitative interviews with employers and welfare to work organisations.

The PI has engaged the Centre for Comparative Welfare Studies (CCWS), Aalborg University as the host institution in Denmark. CCWS will provide the PI with a base in Denmark for project preparation, data collection and dissemination and will facilitate access to academic and non-academic networks throughout the project's duration. The research findings will be publicised to Danish stakeholders through networks via the host institution.
Objectives

List the main objectives of the proposed research [up to 4000 chars]

This project examines the neglected topic of employer engagement in ‘welfare to work’ programmes by focusing on a missing element in existing research: the inter-organisational relations between welfare to work delivery organisations and employers. By comparing the different policy contracting regimes of the UK and Denmark it will contribute to academic knowledge and to public policymaking in four main ways.

First, it will contribute new data to illuminate a highly topical issue about which little is currently known. It will take a sequential, mixed-methods approach involving data collection in two countries. This will provide insights regarding how the different configurations of organisations and the different contracting modes in the UK and Denmark affect which employers engage in welfare to work, why they do so and the degree and type of their engagement.

Second, the research will introduce an inter-organisational perspective into social policy, which is the dominant disciplinary perspective in welfare to work analysis. Through this novel approach the research will theorise the nature, outcomes and effectiveness of the relations between employers and welfare to work organisations in different policy contracting regimes. By combining these theoretical perspectives it will bridge two sub-disciplines that tend to remain distinct from one another.

Third, the research will produce a new conceptual tool for the study of welfare to work by developing a typology of employer engagement. This will differ from existing typologies by being comparative, reflecting the different contracting regimes, types and degrees of engagement and the different levels of inter-organisational relations (institutional, organisational and inter-personal). This typology can be further tested and developed in future empirical studies.

Fourth, the findings from the project will provide important guidance for policymakers and other stakeholders about how employers can be most effectively engaged in welfare to work. It will address the ESRC’s priorities of ‘Economic Performance and Sustainable Growth’, ‘Influencing Behaviour and Informing Intervention’ and ‘A Vibrant and Fair Society’ by contributing important new data to inform the policy design and delivery of welfare to work programmes, with the capacity to improve their effectiveness and to ensure the best use of public expenditure.

In addition to these objectives this project will contribute to the PI’s career development by allowing her to actively develop skills in research leadership, in advanced-level qualitative and quantitative research and in academic and non-academic knowledge exchange. It will enable her in the future to apply for larger research grants that extend the international comparative element of this research to a wider range of countries, permitting further testing of the typology. Through the project the PI will build a research and publications profile to establish herself within the academic community and to become a future research leader in welfare to work research which crosses inter-disciplinary boundaries.

The PI has determined four central research questions and developed a plan for user engagement and dissemination which, together with the support of a very experienced mentor will help her to meet these objectives. Research findings will be discussed at national and international conferences and seminars, via a project advisory group and user dissemination events during and beyond the lifetime of the project. They will be published in both theory-driven and empirical papers in the highest-quality international journals as well as in two reports aimed at stakeholders and the public.

Summary

Describe the proposed research in simple terms in a way that could be publicised to a general audience [up to 4000 chars]

How societies help people without jobs to obtain work is a highly topical public policy issue. Recently, a number of governments have introduced ‘payment by results’ models into ‘welfare to work’ policies. This increases reliance on employers, as it drives providers to source jobs directly from them to maximise job outcomes. Yet we know little about the ‘employer engagement’ relationships between welfare to work providers and employers: how such relations are forged, on what basis and with what perceived and actual benefits. This research will address that gap by examining these relations comparatively in the different policy contracting regimes of the UK and Denmark.
Welfare to work research is largely the domain of social policy analysis. Existing studies tend to exclude employers and those that do predominantly focus on the institutional level. The introduction of ‘payment by results’ exposes a significant gap in knowledge about the complex processes and relations involved in employer engagement in different contracting regimes, necessitating new conceptual tools that can look beyond governance and institutional structures. By combining an inter-organisational perspective with social policy analysis this study will capture the dynamics of the linkages between organisations at the institutional, organisational and inter-personal levels and contribute to the enrichment of two sub-disciplines that tend to remain distinct.

The project builds on the PI’s current research as part of a post-doctoral Fellowship at the University of Leeds. This explores the neglected topic of employer engagement in welfare to work, focusing on the UK government’s flagship ‘Work Programme’. In the proposed study Denmark provides a useful comparison with the UK because it has also been at the forefront of welfare to work policies and has introduced some element of payment by results, but involves a different contracting regime and configuration of providers.

The research involves a two-stage mixed-method approach to data collection. In Stage 1 there will be quantitative telephone surveys of 1,000 employers in each country to gauge the degree and type of employer engagement. Stage 2 will involve in-depth qualitative case studies of employers and the welfare to work organisations with which they are linked, totalling 60 semi-structured interviews in the UK and 60 in Denmark. Employing the under-used technique of fuzzy-sets, the study will shed light on the complex inter-organisational factors which impact on different degrees and types of engagement. From this, a comparative typology of employer engagement in welfare to work will be developed which will augment both comparative social policy analysis and organisational studies.

At a time of rising unemployment the study has critical relevance to public policymaking, with the potential to improve the design, delivery and effectiveness of welfare to work programmes and promote the best use of public expenditure. In line with the ESRC’s strategic priority of ‘Influencing Behaviour and Informing Interventions’ it will offer guidance about effective employer engagement to policymakers and public, private and non-profit welfare to work organisations. This will assist them in helping unemployed and other groups outside the labour market into work, in line with the ESRC’s priorities of ‘A Vibrant and Fair Society’ and ‘Economic Performance and Sustainable Growth’.

The PI has previously worked in central government research and policy, and has gone on to establish a track record of policy-focused research during her doctoral and post-doctoral work. Her ESRC CASE PhD compared welfare to work policies for partnered women in the UK, Denmark and Australia and has recently led to a publication in a 4-star journal. The PI is ideally placed to carry out this work and with the support of an experienced mentor will ensure it has the highest possible impact on both academia and policy.

**Academic Beneficiaries**

Describe who will benefit from the research [up to 4000 chars].

The theoretical approach and methods used in this research will have significant benefit for academics across the business and management and social policy communities. To date, welfare to work policies have largely been studied by social policy scholars but existing studies tend to exclude employers and to privilege institutional-level factors in their analysis. The introduction of ‘payment by results’ models into public services, including welfare to work exposes a significant gap in knowledge about the complex processes and inter-organisational relations involved in employer engagement.

The study will contribute a new theoretical approach and a new set of conceptual tools which can bridge debates in social policy and organisational studies and enrich two sub-disciplines that rarely cross paths. This offers a novel perspective on welfare to work policies by theorising the complex relations between welfare to work organisations and employers at the institutional, organisational and inter-personal levels. The study will develop a typology of employer engagement that can be tested and refined by scholars in both comparative social policy analysis and organisational studies. This will augment
existing typologies by including a comparative element and by examining both degree and type of employer engagement.

The study will use a mixed-methods approach, applying fuzzy-set analysis to the qualitative data. This will offer an opportunity for two early career researchers to gain experience of an under-used technique, resulting in a rigorous comparative analysis of the complex inter-organisational factors affecting different degrees and types of employer engagement. The study will produce two datasets for ESDS which can be used by researchers interested in welfare reform, public management, organisational studies, comparative labour market policies and human resource management.

The research will be disseminated to the international academic community through publications in high-impact journals. Building on her recent publication in a 4-star journal, the PI will aim to publish one theory-building paper and at least two empirical papers in leading business and management and social policy journals, e.g. Journal of Management Studies, Journal of European Social Policy and Organization Studies. She will present papers at the World Congress of Sociology (2014) and the International Labour Process Conference (2015/16) and develop a proposal for a panel symposium at the European Network for Social Policy Analysis Conference (2014/15). She will also present at UK conferences and seminars as and when opportunities arise, e.g. UK Social Policy Association and White Rose-sponsored events and at University of Leeds seminars. The PI will be based for short periods of time at a host organisation in Denmark: the Center for Comparative Welfare Studies at Aalborg University. During her visits she will present her research to staff and students, enabling her to engage with current policy-oriented academic debates in Denmark.

The findings and new approaches involved in this study will be disseminated to postgraduate and doctoral students via the PI’s teaching and MA and PhD supervision within Leeds University Business School and in the new MA in Work, Care and Global Transitions. It will also be transferred to doctoral and early career researchers through new inter-disciplinary teaching modules run through the ESRC DTC at Leeds and through the Leeds Social Science Institute. The PI will contribute to the activities of the HEIF-funded Professional Services Hub at Leeds which provides opportunities for academic and non-academic knowledge exchange. The PI is also embedded in the Building Sustainable Societies project at Leeds and at an international level in the World Universities Network which both afford opportunities for inter-disciplinary dissemination and collaboration.

Staff Duties

Summarise the roles and responsibilities of each post for which funding is sought [up to 2000 characters]

Salary contributions are requested for the PI. The PI will need to devote 60% of her time to the project over 36 months so that she can conduct research, undertake training, deliver theory-driven, empirical papers based on the research, develop academic networks and communicate with users. She will devote an average of 22.5 hours per week to the project. During the data collection and analysis period in Stage 2 the PI will spend around 75% of her time on the project. In the final six months of the project she will spend an average of four days a week on the project to complete the journal articles and engage in user communication and engagement.

Salary contributions are requested for a full-time research assistant (RA) for 9 months to support the PI in the collection and analysis of the qualitative data material in the UK and Denmark. This will involve intensive fieldwork in both countries over a number of weeks. During this time the RA will undertake training in research ethics, in Nvivo and in Fuzzy-set analysis.

To provide support for the project and the PI’s future career development, the mentor Prof Stuart will meet with the PI on a weekly basis to discuss project management, research methods and user communication and engagement. He will also advise on theoretical development, journal writing and submission and on the PI’s future career development. Mentor support will average around two hours per week and the cost of the mentor’s time will be covered by the University of Leeds.
Impact Summary

Impact Summary (please refer to the help for guidance on what to consider when completing this section) [up to 4000 chars]

This research is highly topical to public debates and has the potential to benefit a range of users across the public, private and non-profit sectors to improve employer engagement in welfare to work programmes. Beneficiaries include:

1. Policymakers, campaigning organisations and think tanks who can use the findings to improve welfare to work policy design and delivery and contribute to wider debates about the delivery of public services and about strategies to tackle unemployment.
2. Organisations across the public, private and non-profit sectors which deliver welfare to work are interested in research findings that they can use to directly improve their service delivery.
3. Service delivery representative organisations are interested in good practice in employer engagement and can use the findings to assist their input into the policymaking process.
4. Employers are potential and actual beneficiaries of public policy. Many will be interested in the benefits they can gain from employing unemployed people and the research can also play a role in raising awareness of welfare to work.
5. Employer associations input into public policymaking and can play a role in encouraging employer engagement.
6. The media and general public are interested in issues around unemployment and the effectiveness of welfare to work programmes. The findings will contribute to wider public debate about maximising the benefits of public expenditure to deliver effective public services and about how we can best assist those without work into sustainable jobs, with economic and social benefits to individuals, families and wider society.

The public face of the project during its lifetime and beyond will be a webpage linked to websites at the University of Leeds. From this webpage, stakeholders, members of the public and the media will be able to access up-to-date information about the project, including reports.

The PI will establish an advisory group of users which will provide a space for stakeholders to contribute to the design of the project and will be a mechanism for the PI to update users on the project's progress and emerging findings. This group will also play a role in dissemination and beyond the lifetime of the project will be an important vehicle for maximising further impact to a wider range of stakeholders.

In the final six months of the project there will be a half-day stakeholder dissemination event in London. Findings will also be publicised to Danish stakeholders through networks via the host institution (CCWS, Aalborg). During the course of the project the PI will leverage her networks and take advantage of opportunities to present findings at other stakeholder events.

The PI will produce two reports for stakeholder and public audiences. The focus of these reports will be on offering policy-relevant findings and recommendations that can be translated into practice.

The PI is capable of bridging the gap between the worlds of policy and academia. Having previously worked in central government research and policy, she has subsequently established a track record of policy-focused research during her ESRC CASE PhD. From her doctoral and post-doctoral work the PI has built up a network of contacts in the UK and Denmark which will play a key role in maximising the impact of this research and stakeholders have shown a keen interest in the project during the development of this proposal. Impact activities will build on recent HEIF-funded activities with policymakers which focused on translating research evidence into policy. To increase the effectiveness of communications the PI will take advantage of media skills training offered by the ESRC and by the Staff and Developmental Development Unit at Leeds. The research will be closely managed with the support of the mentor to ensure successful communication and engagement.

Ethical Information
Has consideration been given to any ethical matters raised by this proposal? Yes
Please explain what, if any, ethical issues you believe are relevant to the proposed research project, and which ethical approvals have been obtained, or will be sought if the project is funded? If you believe that an ethics review is not necessary, please explain your view (available: 4000 characters)

in designing this study full account has been taken of the University of Leeds' policy guidelines regarding the ethical conduct of research, as well as the ESRC's Framework for Research Ethics and the Social Research Association's Ethical Guidelines. The University of Leeds demands very high ethical standards of all of its researchers and research projects. As data collection will take place in both the UK and Denmark the project will be subject to review by Ethics Committees at the Universities of Leeds and Aalborg (the host organisation).

The study takes a sequential mixed-methods approach to examining the inter-organisational relations involved in employer engagement in welfare to work programmes in the UK and Denmark. The study will comprise a cross-sectional telephone survey of 1,000 employers in each country, followed by 60 qualitative interviews with employers and welfare to work organisations in the UK and 60 in Denmark.

Stage 1 - Telephone survey of employers
The survey data collection will be contracted out to third party research organisations in the UK and Denmark. They will be required to comply with industry-standard ethical requirements and the PI will ensure that the company contracted complies with the University's ethical guidelines in both countries.

Potential respondents will be contacted by telephone and asked to take part in the survey. Before deciding to take part, they will be given information about the purposes of the survey, the possible future utilisation of the research findings and compliance with the UK Data Protection Act (1998) and the Danish Data Protection Act (2000). They will be given the opportunity to ask questions about the project. Respondents will be offered an information sheet which will be emailed to them following the survey interview and this will contain contact details for the PI if they have any further questions. As is standard practice in surveying businesses by telephone, no incentives will be offered. Respondents will be given the opportunity to opt out at any stage.

Personal information about participants will be retained solely for the purposes of sampling for the qualitative interviews in Stage 2 of the study. Personal data will be kept securely on a password-protected computer as required by the University of Leeds ethical guidelines. Survey data will be anonymised for analytical purposes.

Stage 2 - Qualitative interviews
Respondents for the qualitative interviews will be contacted in advance and provided with information about the second phase of the study. They will be given the opportunity to take part or to opt out. They will be provided with information sheets and will provide written consent prior to participation. The information sheet will contain information about the project's compliance with the Data Protection Acts in both the UK and Denmark. Participants will be interviewed individually and will choose the location for the interview. As interviews will be with individuals who have existing relationships with each other it is important that respondents feel able to participate without overriding concerns around confidentiality or anonymity. Data will be anonymised and stored on a password-protected computer and care will be taken in writing up the research to protect identities and confidentiality.

The final datasets deposited with ESDS will be anonymised.

The PI already has experience of conducting ethically-sound international interview-based research. She will be supported by a very experienced mentor who will help to ensure that the project is ethically sound throughout. The RA who will assist with the qualitative data collection will be guided by the PI on how to collect and manage the research material. They will also attend Staff and Departmental Development Unit courses on research ethics. The project will benefit from the on-going
Pathways to impact

The findings from this research will assist organisations across the public, private and non-profit sectors in successfully engaging with employers and ultimately in helping unemployed people into work. The PI has built up a network of contacts in both the UK and Denmark which will play a key role in maximising the impact of this research. During the development of this proposal the PI has held discussions with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and other key stakeholders. They have shown a keen interest in the project and in the emerging findings from the PI’s current employer engagement research.

Short-Term Impact: The PI will establish an advisory group of users. The aims of the group are two-fold and two-way, focused on co-production of the research. First, during the project members of the group will have a space to contribute current policy issues and debates which are important to them and to the design of the project. Second, the PI will update users on the project's progress and the emerging findings. This advisory group will also act as a mechanism for dissemination and beyond the lifetime of the project will be an important vehicle for further maximising impact to a wider range of stakeholders. The PI will publicise the advisory group through her existing networks. This includes publishing an article in Working Brief – a publication which is widely read by practitioners and policymakers and produced by the Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion (‘Inclusion’), the leading non-profit company involved in welfare to work policymaking. Membership of the advisory group will be established at the beginning of the project but there will be some fluidity. Stakeholders in Denmark will be invited but due to practicality it is envisaged that membership will be predominantly from within the UK, including from the devolved administrations to take account of policy differences within those nations. Due to logistical and cost constraints, there will be one face-to-face initial meeting of the advisory group. Subsequent meetings will be held using Skype, and contact will be maintained by email and using LinkedIn and other social media. The PI will also engage with user group members and other stakeholders at practitioner events during the course of the project.

The public face of the project during its lifetime and beyond will be a webpage linked to the Building Sustainable Societies website, the Centre for Employment Relations, Innovation and Change (CERIC) and Leeds University Business School (LUBS) websites. This will be developed by an external provider and maintained internally by a member of administrative staff. From this webpage, stakeholders, members of the public and the media will be able to access up-to-date information about the project, including reports. The advisory group will be advertised on this website and there will be a feedback facility. The project will also be publicised via LinkedIn and Twitter and through the BSS, CERIC and LUBS websites.

In the final six months there will be a half-day stakeholder dissemination event in London. The event will comprise a presentation of findings, followed by a question and answer session. There will then be audience discussions about the findings and their implications, facilitated by comments from an expert panel of key stakeholders. The focus will be on embedding key messages about the findings which attendees can take back to their organisations for the benefit of delivery. The advisory group will be invited to this event and attendance will also be encouraged from a range of stakeholders with an interest in the research findings. These include the DWP; the Employment-Related Services Association, the trade association for the welfare to work industry; the Confederation of British Industry, which represents over 240,000 companies, including the multi-nationals which deliver welfare to work; the British Chambers of Commerce, which represent over 100,000 businesses; the Federation of Small Businesses, the Trades Union Congress; and the National Council for Voluntary Organisations, which represents non-profit welfare to work organisations. The research findings will be publicised to Danish stakeholders through networks via the host institution (Aalborg University). Stakeholders include the Ministry of Employment, which is responsible for welfare to work policies; the National Labour Market Authority, which oversees the delivery of welfare to work policies; the Confederation of Danish Employers (DA), which represents employer associations and private businesses; the Danish Federation of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises; the Danish Confederation of Trade Unions (LO); and the Danish Local Government Association (KL), which plays a key role in welfare to work policy design and delivery.
During the project the PI will take advantage of opportunities to present findings at other stakeholder events, such as the Welfare to Work Convention - the largest annual conference for stakeholders in the welfare to work industry. She will also seek opportunities to present to stakeholders outside London, to maximise impact in the regions and cities, for example via local Chambers of Commerce and Local Enterprise Partnerships.

The PI will produce reports for stakeholder and public audiences. The first will contain interim findings from the employer survey, with initial policy recommendations. The final report will present findings from the integrated quantitative and qualitative data analysis, along with policy recommendations from the project as a whole. The focus and tone of these reports will be on offering policy-relevant findings that can be translated into practice. Here the advisory group will play a role in inputting into prior discussions of the recommendations, to ensure that these are realistic and achievable. The reports will be in electronic format and will be distributed via the PI's database of stakeholders, via the project webpage and the BSS, CERIC and LUBS websites. The PI will engage with the University Communications Team to obtain support for press releases during the project.

**Medium-Term Impact:** The PI will contribute concise and policy relevant articles for publications produced by key stakeholder organisations. This will include Inclusion's widely-read publication *Working Brief* and publications produced by other relevant organisations, such as Chambers of Commerce, welfare to work delivery organisations, groups representing unemployed people as well as think tanks and campaigning groups. The PI will present findings to a meeting of Inclusion's Research and Statistics Programme – this brings together welfare to work delivery organisations and aims to share data and good practice which can feed directly into programme delivery. The PI will build on and consolidate her existing relationships with the DWP and her recent HEIF-funded impact workshops with 80 DWP staff. She will present research findings to DWP policymakers and use an 'evidence translation' tool she is currently developing to facilitate the translation of findings into policy. This will take place at the most opportune time for maximum benefit to policy discussions. The PI will contribute to the activities of the HEIF-funded Professional Services Hub at Leeds. This provides opportunities for knowledge exchange in line with a developing research and impact agenda on emerging professional services (including the welfare to work industry) and on professional services in transition (including the transformation of public services).

**Long-Term Impact:** This research on an on-going topical issue has the potential to influence policy at local, regional, national and international levels. Given that issues travel up and down the political agenda, a key aspect of the longer-term research impact strategy is for the PI to be keyed into appropriate networks. The PI will continue to utilise and build on the networks built up through this research. Such networks can provide her with on-going opportunities to contribute to policy debates and research opportunities as and when they occur. Building on existing links, there will be an on-going policy conversation with the DWP. The research will contribute to building the PI's reputation as one of a small number of academics with expertise in employer engagement in welfare to work, as well as around the wider topic of business and social policy. The PI is already on the University of Leeds Expert Database, which facilitates swift access to academics in response to media requests. Through this project the PI will develop expertise and networks which will enable her in the longer-term to input into discussions and round-tables with other key stakeholders in the policy process, as well as to contribute to government-commissioned reviews and taskforces.

The PI is capable of bridging the gap between the worlds of policy and academia. She has previously worked in central government research and policy and has gone on to establish a track record of policy-focused research during her ESRC CASE PhD in collaboration with the DWP and most recently with HEIF-funded ‘evidence and policy translation’ workshops with the DWP. The PI will also benefit from the experience and support of colleagues in LUBS. Her mentor Prof. [Name] has extensive experience of undertaking research with a strong element of user engagement and in regular one-to-one meetings with the PI will offer advice on the best means of maximising the impact of her research. She will also benefit from the advice of the Pro-Dean for Research, Prof. [Name], who has extensive connections and experience in engaged research which benefits business.
Case for Support

Introduction
How societies help people without jobs to secure work is a highly topical public policy issue. To date, both academic and political debate has largely centred on two aspects. First, the conditions placed on unemployed and other groups outside the labour market in return for benefit (Gregg, 2008). Second, improving the effectiveness of ‘welfare to work’ programmes, including by involving private and non-profit providers in delivery (Jessop, 2002; Farnsworth, 2006). Recently, a number of governments have introduced ‘payment by results’ models which pay providers to move unemployed people into jobs. These models are at the forefront of contracting regimes that shift the responsibility for delivering support away from the public employment service. In this context providers are driven to source jobs directly from employers to maximise job outcomes (Finn, 2011), making the success of welfare to work policies increasingly reliant on employer involvement.

Yet, we know little about the ‘employer engagement’ relationships between welfare to work providers and employers: how such relations are forged, on what basis and with what perceived and actual benefits. This research will address this gap by examining these relations comparatively in the UK and Denmark. By combining an inter-organisational perspective with social policy analysis it will contribute to the enrichment of two sub-disciplines that tend to remain distinct. Inter-organisational theory provides a way of examining how actors in different organisations link with one another, recognising both an organisation’s internal apparatus and the institutional environment within which it is embedded (Oliver and Ebers, 1998). The study’s findings will offer potential benefits to the design, delivery and effectiveness of welfare to work programmes, in line with the ESRC’s strategic priorities of ‘Influencing Behaviour and Informing Interventions’, ‘Economic Performance and Sustainable Growth’ and ‘A Vibrant and Fair Society’. Employer engagement is not part of the UK government’s evaluation of its flagship ‘Work Programme’ and the topic is under-researched in Denmark.

The project builds upon and extends research that I have recently been conducting as part of a post-doctoral Fellowship at the University of Leeds. A large body of research exists within the broad area of welfare to work. The dominant disciplinary perspective is social policy and studies have analysed the consequences of ‘work-first’ policies (Peck, 2001) and compared different national approaches. My own PhD research comparatively analysed welfare to work programmes for partnered women in the UK, Denmark and Australia (Kinstler, 2011; and Etherington, forthcoming). Social policy analyses largely exclude employers (Farnsworth, 2004) and those that do over-emphasise the role of institutions, rather than considering employers as agents of social policy (Seeleib-Kaiser and Fleckenstein, 2009). My research has begun to explore a further missing element.

The UK government’s ‘Work Programme’ is a fully outcome-based funding model in which providers are rewarded the longer a person remains in work. My analysis of a local employer survey and interviews with Work Programme providers and stakeholders suggests that large multi-national providers build relations with other large private sector employers (sometimes in contractual form) to obtain high volumes of job vacancies (Kinstler, forthcoming). I found limited examples of provider collaboration to engage employers, but a competitive contracting regime potentially discourages such effective partnerships (Morgan, 1997). The proposed research will facilitate a better understanding of these issues by examining them through the lens of another country (Hantrais, 2004). Along with the UK, Denmark has been at the forefront of welfare to work (‘activation’) policies. It has also introduced some element of payment by results into welfare to work but under a different contracting regime, which involves a wider mix of providers (Bredgaard, 2011). Martin and Swank (2001; Swank and Martin, 2004; Martin, 2004) argue that higher levels of employer engagement in welfare to work in Denmark stem from the institutional role of employer associations, which in the UK discourage engagement. However, the increasing multiplicity of organisations involved in welfare to work in the past ten years exposes a significant gap in knowledge about the complex processes and inter-organisational relations involved in employer engagement which cannot be explained by institutional and governance structures alone (Blois, 2002).

A focus on employer engagement within contracting regimes necessitates new conceptual tools for the study of welfare to work which can adequately capture the dynamics of the partnerships, exchanges and linkages (‘inter-organisational relations’) between organisations (Marchington et al, 2005). Such relations are inter-dependent:
inter-personal relations are fragile without strong institutional or organisational-level influences, but inter-organisational relations cannot be sustained without significant links at the inter-personal level (Marchington and Vincent, 2004). When entering an employment relationship both employers and employees experience information asymmetries which may benefit from the involvement of a third party (Forde, 2001), such as welfare to work organisations. This may reduce recruitment costs and turnover (Forde et al, 2009), but employers’ reasons for engagement are likely to be more complex than simple cost/benefit analyses of potential gains and losses (Bachmann, 1999). Previous studies exploring the barriers to employer engagement in the UK (Hall et al, 2008; Bellis et al, 2011) and in Denmark (Albrekt Larsen and Vesan, 2012; Bonoli and Hinrichs, 2010) suggest that employers hold negative perceptions both about unemployed people as job candidates and about the quality of service provided by the public employment service. This research will illuminate these issues by using inter-organisational theory to examine the relations between employers and different configurations of welfare to work organisations at the institutional, organisational and inter-personal levels.

The research will develop a typology of employer engagement in welfare to work which will differ from existing typologies by being comparative and reflecting different contracting regimes. It will build on existing typologies, for example Snape (1998) suggests that employers’ decisions to recruit unemployed people depend on whether firms are socially-motivated, commercially-motivated, or lack resources to recruit them. Martin (2004) considers degrees of employer participation, but does not consider types of involvement, which can include providing paid employment, work experience or placements, or being involved in designing or delivering training. Employers may receive incentives to participate: subsidised jobs are part of the Danish ‘activation’ model, but less so in the UK (REC, 2012; Vegeris et al, 2010). Based on my current research and previous examination of Denmark during my PhD, it is hypothesised that the differentiated contracting modes in the two countries give rise to different institutional, organisational and inter-personal level relations which impact on the degree and type of employer engagement.

Research questions
The research employs a sequential, mixed-methods approach comprising national-level employer surveys, followed by in-depth qualitative case studies of employers and providers. Research questions are as follows:

1. What are the characteristics of employers which do and do not engage in welfare to work programmes? Are there differences in these characteristics between the UK and Denmark?
2. What are the reasons (institutional, organisational and inter-personal) why employers do or do not engage in welfare to work programmes? Are these reasons different in the two countries?
3. What are the different types and degrees of employer engagement and how and why do these differ across the two countries?
4. How do different configurations of organisations and different contracting modes impact on employer engagement in the two countries, e.g. on the employers engaged, the type and degree of engagement, the effectiveness of the relations and the resulting outcomes?

Methods
The research design incorporates the three levels of analysis (institutional, organisational, inter-personal) advocated by Marchington and Vincent (2004), avoiding the risk of over-emphasising one level of relations above another. The purpose of the surveys is to provide cross-national macro- and meso-level data on a topic about which there is little current knowledge. The surveys will also provide sampling frames for the micro-level qualitative case studies in Stage 2.

Stage 1 will begin with an initial analysis and mapping of current welfare to work policies in the UK and Denmark, including the contractual flexibilities available to welfare to work organisations in the services they offer to employers. These will be logged in a database which will be updated throughout the project by the PI.

This will be followed by cross-sectional telephone surveys of employers in the UK and Denmark. The surveys will provide insights to research questions 1, 2 and 3, principally focusing on the institutional and organisational levels. The achieved survey sample will be 1,000 respondents per country, which offers the
potential for generalising to other contexts. Based on similar telephone surveys (e.g. UKCES, 2012), the anticipated response rate is 35 per cent. I will develop the survey instruments and the survey fieldwork will be undertaken by external agencies in the UK and Denmark. Outsourcing the survey reduces risk in relation to achievement of the research objectives: the desired sample size is not feasible with the resource of one researcher. The preparation period allows for a robust tendering process which will be conducted in line with University of Leeds Financial Procedures. The surveys will be conducted via computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATT), using a questionnaire which comprises a set of standardised questions for both countries. Based on similar surveys, questionnaires will last for a maximum of 15-20 minutes.

The sample will be obtained from commercial databases held by companies such as Dun and Bradstreet and Experian in the UK and Amadeus which holds Europe-wide company information. This will be a stratified random sample which is representative of the sectors which are most likely to offer entry-level jobs to unemployed people (Bonoli and Hinrichs, 2010) and which employ at least one person. These sectors are likely to include retail, hospitality, care, security, logistics and warehousing. Using datasets held by welfare to work organisations has been explored, but due to commercial constraints seems unlikely.

To obtain reliable data about engagement/non-engagement the survey respondents will be those with authority to make recruitment decisions. This will differ according to the type and size of the organisation but will normally be owner-managers (in small firms) or HR professionals (in large firms). A consistent sample of decision-makers will achieve better sample comparability between the two countries. There are limitations to relying on responses from sole respondents in organisations. To overcome this, the sample will be at establishment level: single locations, accommodating multiple responses from branches of the same organisation. To reduce survey fatigue and to maximise the response rate I will use my networks in both countries to as far as possible avoid issuing the surveys at the same time as other key employer surveys.

It is not common practice to incentivise employers to participate in telephone surveys. The selling point of the survey will be the opportunity to input into government policy across a range of areas relevant to business. If particular employers are non-responsive to the survey this will in itself provide important data which can be further interrogated using publicly-available information about the companies. If such non-response occurs, I will also consider boosting the number of such employers in the sample.

Respondents will be asked about their experience of welfare to work programmes in a specific period, including contact from different organisations, the type of programme, the service offered, the type and degree of engagement. Expanding upon Martin (2004) the latter can be categorised as: (i) not engaged/uninterested; (ii) interested but currently unengaged; (iii) weak engagement (lip service, limited involvement); (iv) moderate engagement (some engagement, ad hoc); (v) strong engagement (substantial involvement, sustained over time).

I will analyse the data using SPSS, Stata and other relevant packages. The survey analysis will test the hypothesis that the differentiated contracting modes in the two countries lead to different types and degrees of employer engagement. I will produce descriptive statistics and perform logistic regressions - depending upon the response rate, these will be binary or multinomial. The dependent variables will be the degree and type of engagement. Independent variables will include size of employer, sector, ownership, main product market, type of organisation (public, private, third sector, social enterprise, cooperative). I will combine the primary data with institutional-level variables (e.g. industrial structure, levels of business investment and percentage of unionisation) from other sources (such as the OECD) to provide a measure of the ‘stability’ of the wider environments in which organisations operate. Using ordinary least squares regression I will develop (i) an index of degree and type of engagement which defines an ‘average’ level and deviation from this average; and (ii) a measure of strength of engagement. These measures linked to the institutional and organisational-levels will form part of a comparative typology of employer engagement, to be finalised at the end of the project.

Stage 2 involves in-depth case studies of the inter-organisational relations between employers and welfare to work organisations. These will provide answers to research question 4 and contribute further insights to questions 1,2 and 3. The case studies are not intended to be empirically generalisable (Yin, 2003) but will
permit triangulation and analytical generalisation. This will be achieved by examining in-depth the organisational and inter-personal levels of inter-organisational relations. This will contribute to a multi-layered analysis which builds on the institutional and organisational relations examined by the surveys and which also allows for testing and refinement of the analytical categories (type and degree of employer engagement).

As policies are fluid and subject to change (Clarke, 2004) the analysis and mapping of welfare to work policies begun in Stage 1 will be revised to account for any recent policy changes, including policies relevant to the specific locales in which the case studies take place. This will contribute to ensuring the study’s relevance to stakeholders during dissemination.

The case study sample will comprise employers who, based on the survey data had engaged with welfare to work organisations. There will be 12 case studies in the UK and 12 in Denmark. Each case will be constructed in a unique way to accommodate 5 semi-structured interviews with key people involved in recruitment decisions in firms and with relevant employer engagement staff in the welfare to work organisations with which they are engaged. This totals 120 interviews, 60 in each country. Factors governing sample selection will include sector, size, engagement with different types of welfare to work organisations and different types and degrees of engagement. Interview schedules will include some standardised questions but allow for probing to interrogate the unique facets of each particular case.

The case studies will be conducted in a small number of specific localities, providing in-depth, rich data within local sites of welfare to work delivery. Locations will be identified from the survey responses and each case will comprise a small, medium and large employer. A research assistant (RA) will be employed to assist me with the data collection in both countries. Danish fieldwork will where possible be conducted in English. This should not limit the data collection as English is widely-spoken, but translation costs have been included.

The topic guides for the interviews will include questions to interrogate organisational-level (or establishment-level) variables. These will include the product market in which the firm operates, firm strategy, ‘forced-compliance’ in terms of the actions of rivals or patterns of behaviour within the particular sector, actions within employers’ own supply chains, organisational culture/degree of fit. In larger organisations corporate social responsibility is likely to be important but smaller firms may have their own form of ‘localised’ social responsibility. Whether organisations already engage with private recruitment agencies is likely to be important – my research in the UK suggests that welfare to welfare providers increasingly resemble and compete with such agencies by offering a ‘free, tailored recruitment service’.

The topic guide will include questions about inter-personal level factors. These are likely to include perceptions of trust and risk within relationships (Luhmann, 1988). At this level of relations, perceptions about the quality of service are likely to be important, including negative perceptions about recruiting unemployed people, either via the media or from previous experiences with welfare to work programmes, or other government policies. Data will be gathered regarding perceptions of transaction costs or the ‘price’ of engaging, including the role of incentives. Corporate or local social responsibility issues may also be manifest here.

We will analyse the data using Nvivo, including a combination of ‘open coding’ and codes devised during interview schedule production. Other publicly-available data sources will be incorporated into the analysis, including company and annual reports for employers and welfare to work organisations. The index of degree and type of engagement developed in Stage 1 will be triangulated and refined through analysis of factors at the organisational and inter-personal levels. To achieve this, the analysis will employ fuzzy-sets (Ragin, 2000), using fs/QCA software. This will permit rigorous comparative analysis of complex causal factors of different degrees and types of engagement, such as contracting modes, configurations of organisations, firm type, size and product markets. By combining quantitative and qualitative analyses, I will produce a comparative typology of employer engagement in welfare to work which can be tested and refined in future studies.

**Expected outputs and impact**
The study will result in two datasets which will be deposited with ESDS: one comprising quantitative employer data and one comprising qualitative data from employers and welfare to work organisations. To disseminate
this research to the international academic community in both social policy and organisational studies I will aim to publish one theory-building paper in the Journal of Management Studies and at least two empirical papers in the highest impact international journals in the fields, e.g. Journal of European Social Policy and Organization Studies. I will present my research to staff and students at my host organisation in Denmark (the Center for Comparative Welfare Studies (CCWS)), at the World Congress of Sociology (2014) and the International Labour Process Conference (2015/16). I will develop a proposal for a panel symposium at the European Network for Social Policy Analysis Conference (2014/15). I will also present at UK conferences and seminars as opportunities arise, e.g. UK Social Policy Association and White Rose-sponsored events and seminar series linked to the Centre for Employment Relations, Innovation and Change (CERIC) and Building Sustainable Societies (BSS). I will incorporate my research experience into my teaching and supervision within Leeds University Business School (LUBS), including on the new MA in Work, Care and Global Transitions (WCGT).

The research will produce important data for non-academic users which will contribute to the policy design and delivery of welfare to work in both the UK and in Denmark. In the UK the Department for Work and Pensions and other stakeholders have already expressed an interest in the proposed research. There will be two reports aimed at non-academic beneficiaries – one interim and one final. These will be disseminated via networks which I have built up and which I will extend during the project, including through an advisory group. At the end of the project there will be a dissemination event in London for key stakeholders. This will comprise presentations to and discussion with organisations across the public, private and non-profit sectors and will focus on embedding key messages. I will disseminate research findings to Danish stakeholders via CCWS and through the project reports. Project webpages will be created linked to the BSS, CERIC and LUBS websites.

Institution and mentor

My mentor will be Prof. [Name], founding Director of [Institution] at the University of Leeds. He has provided extensive expertise and advice during the preparation of this proposal and during my post-doctoral research. Prof. [Name] has a strong track record in generating external research income and in leading major practitioner-driven evaluation projects. Prof. [Name] research interests lie in the dynamics of organisational restructuring, welfare to work policies and the modernisation of employment relations and his mentorship will assist me in bridging different disciplinary perspectives. Prof. [Name] is an Associate Member of the ESRC Centre for Skills, Knowledge and Organisational Performance, is Co-Editor in Chief of Work, Employment and Society and has considerable experience, networks and substantive knowledge to bring to this project.

Given the international nature of the research the Center for Comparative Welfare Studies (CCWS), Aalborg University (Denmark) has been engaged as the host organisation (see letter of support). CCWS is a centre of expertise in comparative welfare research and Prof. Christian [Name] and Ass. Prof. [Name] specifically share my research interests. CCWS will provide me with a base in Denmark for project preparation, data collection and dissemination and will facilitate access to academic and non-academic networks.

I received my PhD from the University of Sheffield in July 2011. In October 2011 I began a two-year post-doctoral Fellowship in Work, Care and Global Transitions at Leeds, a post which is part of strategic investment to bring together inter-disciplinary expertise and to build research capacity. During my time at Leeds I have enjoyed extensive support for my research and development from CERIC and LUBS, including expanding my intellectual development across disciplinary boundaries. I have published in high-impact academic journals (Journal of European Social Policy and Work, Employment and Society) and secured funding (from the Higher Education Innovation Fund and LUBS ‘Seedcorn’). I have benefited from inter-disciplinary and international connections via my role in the University’s cross-faculty Building Sustainable Societies project and a World Universities Network project. With the support of my mentor, I hope to continue to thrive within LUBS and become a leading international academic in my research area.

Skills development

Research Leadership Skills Development: Through this project I will develop an on-going, innovative theoretical agenda around employer engagement in welfare to work and bring together different theoretical approaches which rarely cross paths. Through my CASE PhD and my post-doctoral research I gained
experience of managing research projects, I have supervised MA students and I currently supervise one PhD project. From this research I will gain further experience in managing a large cross-national project and build my research and publications profile. By managing the outsourcing of the employer surveys I will augment my previous experience of commissioning research within central government (see CV). I will gain experience of managing and mentoring an RA: in turn, the RA will benefit from the opportunity to undertake path-breaking comparative research and to build their research and publications profile. I will undertake training courses run by the Staff and Departmental Development Unit (SDDU) at Leeds, such as ‘Introduction to the Role of PI’ and ‘Leading and Managing in an Academic Environment’. I will use the Vitae Researcher Development Framework to plan and monitor my professional development and during weekly meetings my mentor will use his extensive experience to guide me in managing this project and my future development as an independent academic. Beyond the lifetime of the project, I will seek to further develop the links between organisational theory and social policy analysis. I will seek funding to expand this research to a larger cross-national study which will enable me to further test my typology. This study will include Australia, capitalising upon the knowledge and networks I built up during my PhD.

Research Skills Development: Together with my mentor I have undertaken a training needs analysis and devised a tailored training programme to assist me in achieving the project objectives. During my CASE PhD I developed skills in elite interviewing in three countries. I will further enrich these qualitative skills by employing a more complex inter-organisational approach to cross-national data collection and analysis. The RA and I will undertake training in Advanced-level CAQDAS using NVivo, provided by the University of Leeds Information Systems Services and within CERiC. Additionally, I will undertake training in using Fuzzy-set techniques at the Cathie Marsh Centre for Census and Survey Research (CCSR). I will develop my quantitative research skills through training in survey design and analysis and Stata within Leeds, via the National Centre for Research Methods and CCSR. Importantly, I will then implement these skills during the project. As this is a mixed-method two-country study I will develop skills in synthesising different types of research data for the production of high quality academic and non-academic outputs. Together, this development programme will expand my skillset for future mixed-method and large-scale comparative research. Through this complex cross-national project, I will develop skills in critical thinking and problem solving in research projects, aided by the regular support of my mentor. I will also build skills in research governance including ethics, data protection, data management and legal aspects within an international context. In turn, through my teaching in LUBS and on the new MA in WCGT I will pass on these skills to both undergraduate and postgraduate students, including through MA and PhD supervision.

Knowledge Exchange Skills: In addition to developing research and leadership skills, this project will enable me to develop skills in translating knowledge to academic and non-academic audiences. I have established a track record in bridging the gap between policy and academia. Having previously worked in central government research and policy, I completed an ESRC CASE PhD and have most recently engaged in impact-maximising activities with policymakers (funded by HEIF). The proposed project will allow me to build on these achievements through a series of user engagement activities, including an advisory group and dissemination events both during and beyond the lifespan of the study. The project will be an important vehicle for utilising and extending networks which I have built up during my PhD and post-doctoral research. To facilitate my skills development in this area I will undertake Media Skills Training courses offered by the ESRC and by the SDDU at Leeds. I will also undertake impact training run by the Professional Services Hub at Leeds (funded by HEIF), which also offers opportunities for research and knowledge exchange activities, focused on emerging professional services (such as welfare to work). Through this project I will strengthen and extend my international academic networks. I will be based for short periods at CCWS in Denmark and during this time I will share my findings with both academic colleagues and with non-academic beneficiaries within Denmark. The links forged with CCWS through this project will provide opportunities for future research collaborations. I will capitalise on my involvement in the Leeds Building Sustainable Societies project and in the World Universities Network project with the Universities of Sydney and Alberta to disseminate my findings to an inter-disciplinary audience of peers and to build collaborations to extend this research to other countries.
Justification of Resources

- The Principal Investigator (PI) will spend 60 per cent of her time on this project. The grant would fund her to spend an average of 22.5 hours per week during the 36 month period (based on a 44 week working year). This amount of time is needed for the PI to conduct the research (preparation, fieldwork, analysis), to deliver publications both for academic journals and for dissemination to non-academic beneficiaries. The remaining 40 per cent of the PI’s time will be spent undertaking additional research and teaching activity within Leeds University Business School.

- Funding is requested for a Research Assistant at 1.0fte for 9 months during Stage 2 of the project (the qualitative case study phase). Salary costs have been benchmarked against similar role-holders currently supporting research projects within the Faculty. The RA will work alongside the PI to support the collection and analysis of the qualitative research data in both the UK and Denmark. They will also have the opportunity to write at least one article with the PI for an academic journal and will be provided with appropriate developmental opportunities during their time on the project. Funds are requested to cover the recruitment costs associated with this post.

- Costs are included to cover approximately 2 hours per week of administrative support for the project. This support will provide assistance with booking travel, particularly during the case study fieldwork stages and with the organisation of the dissemination event at the end of the project. This support will also provide assistance with updating the project webpages once these are established.

- [Redacted] is requested at 100 per cent fEC for the sample construction and fieldwork for the employer survey. This will be outsourced to third parties in the UK and Denmark. The costs associated with this have been entered on the Je-S under the ‘Social Surveys’ heading and are based on the most competitive quotations received to date.

- [Redacted] is requested for an initial user/advisory group meeting in London. This will cover room hire if required, refreshments for those attending, production of associated materials and travel and subsistence for the PI (based on University of Leeds published reimbursement rates). Subsequent user group meetings will be by Skype and further contact will be maintained by email.

- [Redacted] in total is requested for a dissemination event in London. The funds will be used to cover venue hire, refreshments for those attending, production of associated materials and travel to and from the venue for the PI.

- IT support – funds are requested to cover the cost of support the design and construction of project webpages linked to the University of Leeds’ Building Sustainable Societies, the Centre for Employment Relations, Innovation and Change and Leeds University Business School websites. This will be the public face of the project during its lifetime and beyond. Costs are based on quotations received for similar webpage requirements for previously-funded projects.

- Supporting materials - funds are requested to cover the cost of the professional design of project materials, including two reports aimed at non-academic beneficiaries. The assumption
is that these materials will be made available via a pdf/e-print option (accessed via the project website).

- Travel and subsistence costs — funds are requested to cover travel, accommodation and subsistence costs for the following:
  
  o Two visits to Denmark by the PI, each lasting one week. The first visit will be at the inception of the project, prior to the survey fieldwork phase and will include a visit to the host institution, the Centre for Comparative Welfare Studies, Aalborg University. The second visit will towards the end of the project and will allow the PI to disseminate findings in Denmark, including presenting to staff and students at the host institution. Costs are based on known average flight costs, plus University of Leeds accommodation and subsistence rates.

  o Costs to cover up to seven weeks of qualitative case study fieldwork in Denmark, comprising 60 interviews in total in up to 6 specific locations. This estimate is based on the PI’s previous overseas fieldwork experience. This is based on the RA spending five weeks and the PI spending two weeks. Costs are based on known average flight costs, plus University of Leeds accommodation and subsistence rates.

  o Costs to cover qualitative case study fieldwork by the PI and the RA in up to 6 specific locations in the UK, comprising 60 interviews in total (based on University of Leeds published reimbursement rates).

- Funds are requested for the PI to attend training courses in survey analysis, Stata and Fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis at the Cathie Marsh Centre for Census and Survey Research (Manchester), the National Centre for Research Methods (Southampton) and their associated courses in London and Edinburgh. This cost includes course, fees, accommodation, travel, subsistence costs (based on University of Leeds published reimbursement rates).

- Funds are requested to cover the PI’s attendance at the European Network for Social Policy Analysis Conference in Scandinavia and the International Sociological Association World Congress in Japan during the project. Costs are based on average costs for attendance at these conferences in previous years, and include conference fees, travel, accommodation and subsistence costs (based on University of Leeds published reimbursement rates).

- Funds are also requested to cover the cost of purchasing a laptop for the RA, along with associated data-sticks and encrypted hard drive for use during fieldwork. Funds are requested to cover the purchase of software for which additional user licences are required, such as Stata. Costs are based on figures from University of Leeds approved suppliers.

- Funds are requested to cover translation costs for those interviews which are undertaken in Danish. Figures are based on known agency rates and allow for up to 50 hours of translation of audio recordings.