Research Grants

PROPOSAL

Research Grants (Open Call)

Organisation where the Grant would be held

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<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>University of Leeds</th>
<th>Research Organisation Reference:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Division or Department</td>
<td>Sociology &amp; Social Policy</td>
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Project Title [up to 150 chars]
Beyond the Gaze: The working practices, regulation and safety of Internet-based sex work in the UK

Start Date and Duration

a. Proposed start date
   01 March 2015

b. Duration of the grant (months)
   36

Applicants

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<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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<td>Principal Investigator</td>
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<td>Co-Investigator</td>
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Classification

International in nature? Yes

Please give details

[Blank space for details]
Objectives

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

Regulation, policing and sex work policy continues to focus on commercial sex that is based in public visible spaces and largely motivated by the policing of 'nuisance' with no account of the significant expansion of sex markets through the Internet and technological advancement. This project seeks to move forward our understanding of how sexual behaviour and technology interact but also crucially to consider what this means in terms of regulation. We want to investigate whether current policy and policing is sufficient in terms of regulation and control, or is there a threat that sex work will become increasingly 'beyond the gaze' as it slips out of public spaces and further populates the 'dark net' that is online space? Thus we identify the sociological problem as the massive expansion of sex work through the Internet (driven by socio-economic and cultural shifts) yet these markets exist within a vacuum of specific regulation. The aims of the research are threefold:

a) to understand the wider theoretical significance of new technologies for changing the social practice of sexual consumption and the sex industry, with the specific aim of creating new knowledge on how these markets operate.
b) to map the trends and understand the working practices in Internet-based sex work markets within the broader processes of the regulation and policing of sex work in the UK.
c) to facilitate the integration of Internet-based sex work into safety and health-related provision, policies and agencies.

With these aims in mind, our overarching research question is: How has the Internet shaped the 21st Century adult commercial sex industry in the UK and what is the role of regulation?

To address this research problem we have five Objectives:

Objective 1 - to map the current market in online direct sexual services and to interrogate how technology (digital communication and the Internet) have transformed the UK sex industry to create a large and diverse online sex market and to consider its interaction with other sectors of the market, specifically whether it augments or displaces other (such as street) sex work.

Objective 2 - to investigate to what extent sex work interacts with technology in terms of advertising, making contacts, using social media, negotiating transactions, screening clients, mechanisms for staying safe and seeking support in order to further understand issues of vulnerability, isolation and safety issues for online sex workers.

Objective 3 - to understand what forms of current regulation apply to this hidden and emergent form of sexual consumption and production and what forms are possible and/or desirable in the future through regulation and legislative changes?

Objective 4 - to assess perceptions and experiences of risk and safety from sex workers in the context of Internet based work and the availability of resources and support; and understand how practitioners and police (working closely with the National Police Lead for Prostitution) gather knowledge and address issues of safety for online sex workers and the current support available.

Objective 5 - to provide sex workers (of all genders across the UK) with direct provision of safety information, signposting to relevant agencies and support online via a 'netreach' service in collaboration with the project partner Genesis (Leeds). In addition, in collaboration with sex workers (including peer-researchers) and sex work projects (e.g collaborators UK Network of Sex Work Projects) we will develop a national Netreach resource to be rolled out by projects across the UK and beyond. This resource will be a tool kit which provides guidance and good practice models of how to engage in outreach with often isolated online sex workers as well as a safety guide for this group of sex workers.

Summary

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

Technology, particularly digital communication, has had a profound impact on how we organise our lives, conduct our relationships and the transactions of commerce and retail. The sex industry has followed this trend, with the online sex markets expanding and diversifying, changing the shape of how sex is bought and sold. Yet no regulation and very little policing focuses on the Internet-based sex markets. Our overarching question is: How has the Internet shaped the 21st Century adult commercial sex industry in the UK and what is the role of regulation? Our research focuses on the gaps in knowledge, in terms of how the market is structured, how it functions and how it is currently regulated. We are concerned with those individuals who work legally in their own homes, or as escorts doing outcalls to hotels and clients' homes, all
away from the ordinary gaze of policing. There has been no attention to the interactions between technology and types of commercial sex such as webcam sex; performing live sex acts and chat; sexual story telling; and how niche markets have developed both allowing sex workers to innovate as well as opening up working opportunities. Therefore our overall inquiry seeks to explain how regulation interacts with the Internet setting in relation to the experience of vulnerability and safety. Is working via the Internet safer for sex workers? Are there unintended safety issues? Are sex workers made more vulnerable by the isolation of the Internet or does technology provide mechanisms to enhance safety? Therefore the aims of this research are threefold: a) to understand the wider theoretical significance of new technologies for changing the social practice of sexual consumption and the sex industry. b) to map the trends and understand the working practices in Internet-based sex work markets within the broader processes of the regulation and policing of sex work in the UK. c) to facilitate the integration of Internet-based sex work into safety and health-related provision, policies and agencies.

We intend to answer these questions using a mixed methodology to gather new empirical knowledge, and have designed a project consisting of a large national online survey of sex workers; qualitative interviews with 80 sex workers and 40 interviews those involved in the policing and regulation of online sex work activities (such as the police, Home Office representative, IT specialists). Peer researchers will assist in the recruitment of participants, promoting the project as well as reviewing the progress of the Impact Plan. In addition, there is an integrated service provision and developmental role built into the project team through a Research, Support and Development Nextrae Officer. Beyond the academy, the project has three key beneficiary groups who are collaborators on the project: 1) Police through the Association of Chief Police Officers and the National Lead for Prostitution, policy makers (local and national government). 2) Sex workers who work online and the broader sex work community. 3) Sex work projects and practitioners who work with sex workers - both statutory and third sector, including sexual health practitioners who deliver specific clinical services to sex workers. These groups will benefit in the following ways: 1) a practitioner outreach service with sex workers (all genders) via the Internet (known as Nextrae) will be delivered on a weekly basis providing information on safety, signposting to health, welfare and offering a confidential listening service for 3 years. 2) In collaboration with partners the UK Network of Sex Work Projects, the development of a Nextrae toolkit for good practice models of Internet outreach. 3) Reduction in violence and crimes against sex workers and broader access to justice for this group. 4) Overall impact aims are to inform and influence legislation and policy in the regulation of prostitution through engaging in government processes and expert witness requests.

Academic Beneficiaries

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

The project will generate new empirically-derived analyses that are theoretically relevant to the studies of law and regulation, sexuality and labour studies, public health and criminology, as well as the broader interdisciplinary social science and humanities where sex work studies are located. This project will generate new datasets which will be archived (where appropriate) in the UK Data Archive for secondary use. This archived material may be particularly useful for the creation of future ESRC/DTC collaboration and network PhD awards independently through Leeds and Strathclyde.

Colleagues who study sex work will benefit from this large scale, multi-methods project because it is UK specific to the contemporary sex work scene, speaking specifically to the current legislative framework and debates over how to manage prostitution in the UK and across Europe. For instance, the findings will be directly fed into international forums. Both investigators are involved in a European Group of Experts running until 2018: COST Action IS1209 - ‘Comparing European Prostitution Policies: Understanding Scales and Cultures of Governance’ (ProPol). Scouler is Working Group leader for ‘Prostitution Policies and Politics’ and a keynote to the group which includes over 100 members from 22 European countries will be arranged to discuss interim findings and collaborative initiatives across Europe. We expect there to be considerable interest from pan-European colleagues as there are no indepth studies relating to Internet based sex work that we are currently aware of after a year of working with the COST initiative. Therefore, we plan to ensure this project acts as a springboard for collaborative work with multi-site research across European countries. We have a writing plan which covers journal articles prepared for a minimum of 3 academic journals (cf Sociology of Health & Illness / Journal of Law and Society/Sexualities) and 3 practitioner based journals during the lifetime of the project and immediately afterwards. Once the project has finished we will produce a monograph given the extensive datasets that will be created and the theoretical developments we have to showcase. We are confident of a book contract given the PI and CO-I's
existing links with Oxford University Press, Routledge, Palgrave and Policy press. There is significant evidence of the investigators strong working relationships. The investigators has worked together in various research and collaboration capacities over the past 15 years (examples and have written together and edited a special issue on ’Regulating sex work’ for the Journal of Law and Society 2010; have written jointly to several government consultations in England, Scotland, Ireland and for the EU parliament; and acted as expert witnesses in the Scottish parliament). Therefore we are confident that these outputs can be delivered effectively, in a timely fashion and to the highest quality. Both investigators have worked at grassroots level with sex work projects (for instance was Chair of Genesis from 2006-9 and both investigators have been academic members of the UK Network of Sex Work Projects for several years). These place the researchers in a strong position regarding maximizing academic and practitioner based events. The Impact Plan includes an academic and practitioner national conference which will bring together researchers and practitioners concerned with sex work issues in a knowledge exchange forum whereby findings and practice based information can be shared. There will also be a direct route from the research to informing teaching of undergraduates and postgraduates at both Leeds and Strathclyde as both investigators are involved in teaching regulation and the sex industry based modules and have between us 7 PhD students studying sex work related issues. We will develop teaching materials which can be used through lecture capture to reach audiences outside the classroom.

Staff Duties

Summarise the roles and responsibilities of each post for which funding is sought [up to 2000 characters]
The project is strengthened by two world leading scholars, considered experts in the field of sex work, embedding themselves in all stages of the project. PI ( ) Direct management of the Grade 7 Netreach Officer (Year 1-3). Manage the Steering Committee (Year 1-3). Qualitative interviews and data analysis (Year 2). Implement, monitor and review the impact Plan and media activities (Year 3). Co-I ( ) Direct management of the Grade 7 researcher. Qualitative Interviews. (Year 1 & 2). Lead on the co-ordination of the writing activities and conference presentations. Contribute to the Learning Events and national conference (Year 3). Grade 7: (60% 24 months) Design and pilot survey; input into project website and social media activities; manage survey and data; qualitative interview design. Preliminary survey analysis. Mid project reports (Year 1). Survey analysis. Qualitative interviews and analysis. Prepare the dataset for archive. Begin writing up of findings (Year 2). Grade 7 - (100%, 36 months): Research, Development Netreach Officer. It has been identified by the University that would be suitable for this research and she is interested in the opportunity. For this reason we have based the costing on her salary. However, as does not currently work for the University of Leeds (she did 2011-12), to ensure the University meets its obligations as an equal opportunities employer, the post will need to be advertised and or will be encouraged to apply. For this reason and given the extensive experience of in this field, we are requesting appointment towards the top end of Grade 7. In Year 1:project website/social media activities; ethnographic online observation and establishing a research presence within the online community; designing and providing netreach service delivery; contributing to survey/interview design. Year 2: Netreach tool; qualitative interviews and analysis. Year 3: Lead on the Impact Plan.

Impact Summary

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

There are three core groups of beneficiaries to the research: 1) Police through the Association of Chief Police Officers and the National Lead for Prostitution, policy makers (local and national government - particularly those involved in Prostitution Forums) involved in debating, planning and implementing sex work regulation. 2) Sex workers who work online and the broader sex work community. 3) Sex work projects and practitioners who work with sex workers - both statutory and third sector, including sexual health practitioners who deliver specific clinical services to sex workers. We have designed the research project with these three groups - engaging them with the research process so far by consulting key informants in our existing networks and gathering opinion from the UK Network of Sex Work projects and Genesis Leeds. As a result the overall theoretical questions that drive the project forward have been informed by specific needs identified by sex workers and sex work projects who are at the forefront of the industry and service provision supporting sex workers. Therefore our three groups of stakeholders have been influential in designing the Impact Plan, determining what would be the most effective outcomes of the project for sex workers, practitioners, the police and policy makers. We have designed the project
to ensure these three groups of stakeholders will benefit in the following ways: 1) Importantly, we will improve access to safety, support, and information to sex workers who work online (usually isolated and without links to support) including promotion of the Home Office funded National Ugly Mug crime reporting scheme for sex workers (part of UKNSWP). Such activities will have some reduction on violence and crimes experienced by sex workers, improving the reporting of crimes and access to justice more broadly for this group. This is a primary impact objective due to the high levels of violence and hate crimes that sex workers experience, their disengagement from services and crime reporting systems and their overall vulnerability as online and home based workers; 2) A key impact objective is to inform and influence legislation and policy processes in the development of the regulation of prostitution in the UK and beyond, by for example, presenting evidence to government and securing invites as expert witnesses. Such opportunities will be both generated by exploiting current links with government and reacted to during the life of the project and beyond as part of the Impact Plan (see Pathways to Impact document); 3) We will achieve impact through a direct service provision role to sex workers and relevant health projects through the activities of the Research, Support and Development Netreach Officer which has an integrated ‘delivery and impact’ element to the job description (see Pathways to Impact). This role will deliver practitioner outreach with sex workers (all genders) via the Internet (known as Netreach) on a weekly basis providing information on safety, signposting to health, welfare, and other relevant services, and offering a confidential listening service. 4) In collaboration with peer-researchers, the UK Network of Sex Work Projects and sex work-led organisations, we will produce a Netreach resource toolkit (building on the European Correlation Network) which will have positive impacts for the sex work community. The Netreach toolkit will be promoted nationally and via peer ‘netreach champions’ and the sex worker led consortium Saaf. The Netreach tool will be a free resource for the 150 UKNSWP sex work projects in the UK to use and adapt - a tool for guidance and good practice of how to initiate and provide outreach via the Internet to isolated sex workers. We expect there will be considerable interest in this toolkit across Europe especially given the shrinking of the third sector resources to develop such initiatives in recent years.

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)

Full approval will be sought from the Ethical Review Committee at the Universities of Leeds and Strathclyde. The research will be informed by the principles and guidance on ‘best practice’ contained within the ESRC Research Ethics Framework, the British Sociological Association Code of Ethics (especially points 1 to 5) and specific guidance from the international Association of Internet Researchers. Researching the sex industry always raises particularly issues relating to confidentiality, anonymity, illegal activities, safety and the broader issues associated with investigating an informal economy. All of the researchers have extensive experience of working with this population and the broader politics of prostitution. For instance, [name] has experience in the sensitivities of online sex work research (cf. [year] both [name] and [name] have conducted hundreds of sex work and key informant interviews over a 15 year period. Data will be held in anonymous form, as required by the Data Protection Act 1998. As sex workers are considered a vulnerable group, and there are some particular issues with over-researching this population, we are extra sensitive when presenting and promoting the project online and will work hard to develop existing and new online relationships with the community. Both investigators have considered and encountered the ethical issues associated with contacting sex workers online recognising the importance of full informed consent and overt researcher status declared in all online interactions with sex workers (cf. [year]). We have also constituted a Steering Committee of experts who have significant knowledge in working with these sensitive groups and issues and have committed their involvement through the Steering Committee. The Committee will comprise of [name] from the UK Network of Sex Work Projects; the national Police Lead for Prostitution, Assistant Chief Constable [name]; sex worker representative from the sex worker led organisation Saaf; social legal scholar with experience in this field Professor [name] (Northumbria University) and male sex work
specialist Professor [redacted] (London Metropolitan University). A detailed Data Management Plan has been written which considers the collection, use, storage, transfer and archiving of the datasets. There are three core issues regarding ethics that are immediately evident in this project. First, how we will recruit sex workers. We have already worked with our stakeholders in the design of the project in order to build up trust and ensure the project is not 'top down' to the communities we want to engage. For instance the UK Network of Sex Work projects have advised on the best possible recruitment methods and will provide access to their membership of approximately 1600 sex workers and 150 sex work projects by promoting the survey and related dissemination events. Second, how we will protect the identity of individual sex workers. We have considered this in terms of the Bristol Online Survey and how no personal identifying information will be recorded on the survey in order to protect identity at the point of completing the survey. Third, the issue of payment for interviews. This is a long standing approach to compensating a participant for their time taken to be involved in the study and we will provide a £20 gift voucher for each sex work interviewee to reflect their time (out of their working day) and also to signal the importance of their involvement in the project for the objectives to be met.
Pathways to Impact for Beyond the Gaze

Communication & Engagement: The users of this group are the following people: policymakers (local and national government); police and policing agencies – Association of Chief Police Officers and national working group for prostitution; UK Network of Sex Work Projects; sex work specialist support projects (practitioners working in NHS/NGO/third sector); sex worker-led organisations such as Saafe; sex workers. These groups will be engaged throughout the lifetime of the project and beyond in the following ways: Steering Committee to guide the project; website; social media activities; Research, Support and Development Nettreach Officer; dedicated programme of dissemination and impact activities; activities to encourage knowledge exchange; meetings with senior government ministers and chief police officers.

Collaboration: As documented in the Letters of Support, this project has three key stakeholders as collaborators:

1. The Association of Chief Police Officers Lead for Prostitution, Assistant Chief Constable, who is committed to improving the safety of sex workers and has acknowledged in the Letter of Support the lack of knowledge about the hidden Internet markets, and the timeliness and importance of this research. Consultation has already taken place with Mr when designing the project. Mr will continue to assist throughout the delivery of the project by helping to publicise the research to police officers and other high level policy makers in order to secure interviews with people who can advise on current policing and practise in this area. Mr and his organisation will be pivotal particularly in networking and enabling findings to be disseminated across the UK and at the highest level of policy making in the Home Office and across the police force.

2. The UK Network of Sex Work Projects (www.uknswp.org) is an umbrella organisation for 150 sex work projects across the UK. The inception of the project thus far has been guided by this practitioner based organisation who are also committed to being directly involved from the outset to enable engagement with the sex work communities, particularly in terms of recruitment with the survey and interviews. UKNSWP will also help facilitate the Learning Events by promoting the events in the regions covering Leeds, the Midlands, London and Scotland. These events will be free to UKNSWP members, ensuring that sex work projects are the first dissemination audience.

3. Genesis Sex Work Project (Leeds). This third sector organisation will facilitate the Research, Support and Development Nettreach Officer role, by accommodating the researcher in their offices during the netreach service provision. In this sense the researcher will become part of the Genesis team. Genesis has agreed to facilitate the netreach work and being active in assisting with its development. In their Letter of Support they note the timeliness of this research and service given the growth of the Internet based sex industry.

Objectives of the Pathways to Impact: 1) Engaging police, health and support practitioners, and policy makers with the findings and illustrate good models of practice regarding interventions and support for online sex workers. 2) Educating policy and service delivery agencies through sharing up-to-date knowledge on the nature of the online sex markets, experiences of crimes and safety issues. 3) To inform public debate on the issues around sex work, using findings to dispel myths and interject the most current trends and patterns into the debate on regulation across Europe and to internationally. 4) To educate and inform sex workers who mostly self-regulate about norms around safety risk and rights

Short term Impact (during the lifetime of the project): These four objectives will be achieved through various knowledge exchange and direct provision mechanisms. The Research, Support and Development Nettreach Officer has an integrated ‘delivery and impact’ element of the job description and the final 12 months of this post will be dedicated to achieving the following impact and dissemination objectives:

A1. Direct service provision of a netreach service throughout the three years to online sex workers in the UK.

A2. Development of a safety guide for online sex workers on the permanent website written in association with sex workers.

A3. The development of the Netreach resource/toolkit in consultation with peer-researchers and the Saafe consortium in order to provide a set of guidelines and good practice for services who want to engage in reaching out to sex workers to provide information and support via the Internet (known as netreach). The resource will be permanently hosted on the project website, available to download in PDF form and will specifically benefit NGO and third sector organisations that work with sex workers. This tool will also be available and applicable to the international audience and promoted through the Network of Sex Work projects (a global umbrella organisation).
Beyond the Gaze: The working practices, regulation and safety of Internet-based sex work in the UK

Rationale

Technology, particularly digital communication, has had a profound impact on how we organise our lives, conduct our relationships and the transactions of commerce and retail (Van Dijk 1991/2012), firmly establishing we are in the age of the ‘network society’ (Castells 2000). Increasingly sex is sold via the Internet, facilitating offline encounters and as a medium through which sexual services are sold. This project seeks to move forward our understanding of how sexual behaviour and technology interact but also crucially to consider what this means in terms of regulation (cf Murray 2006). Alongside our primary motivation to find out what is Internet based sex work in the UK, we are concerned with the challenges for regulation, given vulnerability, safety and the ‘underground’ nature of sex work are perennial features in a criminalised system. We see the challenges as twofold. Firstly, the regulation of sex work focuses on public nuisance and has not adapted to the technological advancement which have provided opportunities for Internet sex work to expand. Beyond controlling extreme pornography and age restrictions on accessing sexually explicit materials, there is an absence of regulation and scrutiny of the online sex industries. Is this sufficient in terms of regulation and control, or is there a threat that sex work will become increasingly ‘beyond the gaze’ as it slips out of public spaces and populates the ‘dark net’ that is online space? Secondly, given the Internet is largely self regulating, how does self regulation of sex work operate? Who are the actors, what are norms, how can these be strengthened and what is the relationship between self regulation and formal policing? We want to question whether it is realistic for policing to include Internet based sex work, and the ways in which safety and support can be developed for this hidden yet sizeable community. Thus we identify the sociological problem as the massive expansion of sex work through the Internet (driven by socio-economic and cultural shifts) yet these markets exist within a vacuum of specific regulation.

The PI and CO-I have thirty years combined experience of researching the sex industry, with internationally recognised profiles and a strong track record of impacting on law and policy in the UK and beyond. The team will include two experienced sex worker researchers, one with a profile in service delivery. The investigators have been involved in high-level government policy development and have collaborated in various roles over the past fifteen years (see JES/Staff Roles). This research project directly speaks to the ESRC Delivery Plan 2011-2015: ‘Influencing Behaviour and Informing Intervention’ and ‘A Vibrant and Fair Society’. The project has at its heart collaboration with national and local stakeholders (government, police, NGOs) who work directly with sex workers and sex worker-led organisations. Thus we can offer a programme of research and impact activities that sits within strong policy-orientated networks.

Legal, Policy and Political Context

Our own research and grassroots activities have shown that the Internet-based sex markets are pervasive (Armstrong 2005a,b, 2008), facilitated by computer-mediated communication through email, chat-rooms, social media forums and web-based advertising. One of our key collaborators, the UK Network of Sex Work Projects has 1,583 sex worker members, the majority of whom work through the Internet as independent escorts. Yet paradoxically policy-makers seem to be unaware of, or find it expedient to ignore this, preferring to focus on the more tangible and politically constructed ‘problematic’ forms of sex work. What is known about Internet-based sex workers in the UK is relatively little: who they are, their employment histories, how they operate, what are the characteristics of their work and forms of exploitation experienced and by whom. Equally, their experiences of violence and crime in the course of their work are comparatively unknown, apart from a small number of studies showing that negotiating risk and safety issues are an everyday reality and an often unmet concern (Davies and Evans, 2007; Laing and Pitcher 2013). We do know that many Internet based sex workers operate in total isolation, because if they work collectively they are exposed to the laws relating to brothel management and controlling for gain (Pitcher and Wijers 2014). An important fact remains that in the UK sex workers are 12 times more likely to be murdered than their non-sex work female peers (Ward et al 1999). Safety is a significant concern for sex workers (for instance hate crimes such as wherophobia/homophobia/racism as well as robbery, and men posing as clients committing serious violence and rape - (see Campbell 2014)), and the online world of hosting and web services may well pose new forms of exploitation and risk. In turn the rise of Internet based sex work poses
A4. A national practitioner and academic conference to disseminate findings, share good practice models, and review where the gaps are in service delivery. This event will launch the Netreach tool.

A5. Four Learning Events (Leeds/Edinburgh/the Midlands/ London) which brings together Local Authority/City Council stakeholders, police, Prostitution Forum groups, sex worker projects, other service delivery practitioners and academics across regions to achieve a two way knowledge exchange around the issues of sex work, safety and the Internet and broader regulation issues. The aims of these events is to ensure that regional issues and demographics are given a platform to come together and discuss online sex work and safety.

A6. Presenting the Netreach tool at an international level at two global practitioner/academic conferences: Correlation: European Network Social Inclusion and Health and Harm Reduction International 2017/18. These presentations will act as a springboard for other training workshops and collaborations across Europe which can continue the legacy of the Netreach tool.

A7. A Social Media Plan executed through Twitter, Facebook and a permanent website to promote information around safety and sex work as well as the Netreach service. These mechanisms are designed particularly to engage sex workers and the sex work community but also to enable an immediate response to policy and political activities during the life of the project (e.g. Bill’s presented in British and European Parliament; crimes against sex workers; activism etc).

A8. Developing links and opportunities to speak with Ministers and chief police regarding the relevance of the findings to the broader issues of regulating sex work in the UK and sex worker safety.

**Mid-term Impact (up to a year after)**

1. During the lifetime of the project we intend to build opportunities to have direct lines of dialogue with government ministers and police chiefs regarding sex work, regulation and safety as we feel informing regulation of prostitution in the UK will be the most important and far reaching impact. We will build on this after the project seeking out opportunities to engage with policy makers on the back of the research.

2. We will continue to work with Genesis, Saaf and UKNSWP to promote the safety guide and Netreach tool, which should have an impact on improving the knowledge available to sex workers working alone and detached from support services. Equally, by continual promotion of the Netreach tool, service providers will have the resources to reach out to sex workers who are mobile, wanting to remain anonymous, and geographically spread.

3. Articles and news pieces will be prepared for practitioner audiences which will address primarily health, harm reduction and policing audiences.

**Long term Impact**

1. Engaging in local and national government debates in the UK around the regulation of sex work in particularly in relation to giving evidence based on the research in parliament, acting as expert witnesses, presenting written responses to policy documents, proposals and Bills.

2. Engaging in political debates and activities (as already established in the team’s CV’s) on the regulatory approaches to prostitution across Europe, in particular providing comprehensive empirical findings and analysis from the UK that will feed into international policy debates.

3. The media plan will stretch 3 years after the project and will both be reactive to requests from the media (live radio, TV broadcasts and newspaper journalists), as well as involve reputable media (BBC TV and radio and key broadsheets) and media companies to pursue realistic documentaries about the online sex work industry and the issues that sex workers face without adequate regulatory frameworks within which to work. The plan will remain under review and advice taken from the Steering Committee regarding whom to target.

**Managing the Impact Plan and Measuring Effectiveness:** The Steering Committee will enable the Impact Plan to be reviewed and altered, making the plan flexible and reactive to ensure the objectives are delivered. We will also seek guidance from the sex work community to evaluate whether the Impact Plan is reaching the correct audiences. Via the Steering Committee we will monitor the Impact Plan and seek to measure its effectiveness by developing appropriate yardsticks and tools: for instance, how many people have engaged in the Netreach service, used the website, followers on social media etc. We will apply for further funds to evaluated and update the Netreach tool after it has been in circulation for a few years.
specific issues for the health and welfare support services tasked with providing a service to a mobile and diverse female, male and transgender group.

Speaking directly to the UK context, we investigate this subject on the back of a decade of intense prostitution policy and legal reform (2000-2009). During this period of reform there was no legislation that focused on prostitution and the Internet, and very few policing operations investigated this terrain either. What was favoured was the implementation of a national and European criminalisation agenda (including attempts to make the purchase of sex a crime), a raft of support projects seeking to ‘exit’ women from selling sex, and the use of various criminal justice tools (such as ASBOS) to control the ‘disruptive’ and ‘uncivil’ behaviour of street sex workers. Amidst this flurry of activities to control, shrink and displace the street sex market, the Internet-based sex markets have adapted and expanded. They are now arguably the largest markets situated at a contradictory axis – highly visible, yet a hidden and hard to reach community. We know that the online worlds of the webcam have become everyday spaces in ordinary life (Miller and Sinanan 2014), yet in the context of selling sex, policy remains focused on traditional forms of public space and harm. There has not been investigation into how webcam operations facilitate commercial sexual services or offline encounters and how this may operate across countries and jurisdictions.

Currently, Internet controls focus on images (extreme pornography is illegal under s 63 of the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008) and age restrictions. The rationales of regulating sex work still focus on laws and policing according to a public/private dichotomy (set out in prostitution law under Wolfenden 1959) yet the organisation and operation of the sex industry is now vastly different. For example, under the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001 (S 46 47) laws against public carding (in phones boxes for instance) were introduced despite high numbers of online advertisements even at this time. The Internet was mentioned only once in the Paying the Price consultation document (Home Office 2004:21) and the regulatory responses under New Labour were based on protection for young people using the Internet (Barnardos 2004). In the recent All Party Parliamentary Group (2014) report on prostitution in the UK, the Internet was completely omitted. The Internet based sex work markets exist within a vacuum of specific regulation and appear to be entirely off the policy agenda.

This project is driven by core questions about the ways in which prostitution is regulated in the UK. If one of the key aims of policy is to prevent exploitation, then what do we know about safety and exploitation in these private sex work domains? How does technology affect safety? We know how policing operates in the traditional markets of the street and the brothel (Sandell 2012), but we know little beyond anecdote of how the police interact with the Internet based sex markets. As the current approach in the UK draws on abolitionist ideology, resulting in criminalising sex work, then should online sex work be part of the enforcement model, and if so how? If enforcement is not relevant to online private sex work activities then should the approach be one that accepts consensual sex between clients and workers and refocuses the attention of the law on sexual exploitation, coercion and improving the safety of sex workers and clients alike’ (Ashford 2008:47-8). If so, then we need to think through forms of regulation and how they could operate in the context of the information age, and ask to what extent can the sex and moral norms of on-line/virtual communities inform legal measures and policing practices? (see Sandell 2009). It is our contention that regulatory norms are required which reflect the realities of the sex industry, the online communities that exist and the social norms that guide selling and buying adult sexual services.

Our aims are therefore threefold:

a) To understand the wider theoretical significance of new technologies for changing the social practice of sexual consumption and the sex industry and develop knowledge on how sex work online operates.

b) to map the trends and understand the working practices in Internet-based sex work markets within the broader processes of the regulation and policing of sex work in the UK.

c) to facilitate the integration of Internet-based sex work into safety and health-related provision, policies and agencies.
Leading from these aims, a series of five core objectives have been designed which enable the project to achieve the aims stated above (see JES).

**Existing Research on Internet based Sex Work**

Early calls to interrogate the abuses of sex workers exploited through ‘online prostitution’ (Hughes 2004) were surpassed by the health and psychology related disciplines who focused on ‘risky’ sexual practices of gay and bi-sexual male escorts (Parsons, Koken and Bimbi 2004; Lee-Gonyea 2009), in the shadows of HIV/AIDS concerns. There is still a lacuna of attention on female online sex work apart from some North American investigations of the interactions between ‘johns’ and sex workers in online discussions (Holt and Blevins 2007) and the content of escort websites (Agresti 2009; Castle and Lee 2008). In the USA there has been a small amount of research on the legalities of online sex business advertising (Green 2001) and the use of the listserv Craigslist (Hemmingson 2008; Larkin 2010). In the UK context, we know how the Internet has been used to advertise and negotiate direct sexual encounters (Sharpe and Earle 2003), and the formation of online sex work communities which self-regulate by passing down codes of conduct (Sandler 2005/2008). During the prostitution policy reforms there was some commentary questioning how ‘cyber-prostitution’ poses new socio-legal questions (Ashford 2008/2009), but no in-depth analysis of the market or the regulatory challenges posed. It appears that the majority of evidence gathering on the impact of technology on the sex industry in the UK has been gathered by PhD students, perpetuating the micro analysis and/or small scale nature of research with limited resources (cf Jenkins 2009; Tyler 2014). There is an absence of large scale data collection across genders and actors – most studies are either male/transgender (Ashford 2009, Walby 2012) or female sex work (such as Castles and Lee 2008) or focus on clients (Sharpe and Earle 2003; Langanke and Ross 2009). There is currently no large-scale data on all 3 gender groups combined. There are significant generic issues regarding regulation that need unpacking, particularly in relation to safety and risk, as well as specific issues for men, women and transgendered sex workers. In relation to safety issues there has been some research from USA from Cunningham and Kendall (2012) and Peppet (2013) who document the role that regulation has and could have in making sex work safer, however it speaks to a US context where selling sex is illegal so interaction between law, sex work and technology is different compared to the UK. To address these gaps we need ‘ground up’ knowledge to find out what the online markets look like and how risk and safety are negotiated.

**Research Questions**

Our overarching question is: **How has the Internet shaped the 21st Century adult commercial sex industry in the UK and what is the role of regulation?** This will be answered by the following sub-questions:

Strand A: What is the nature and organisation of the online sex markets and why and how have they developed?

1. Who are the workers, what are their experiences of work and their broader work histories?
2. Does hosting websites and services take a national or international pattern and how does this interact with regulation?
3. How do they work and what are their working patterns, who are their clients?
4. What forms of exploitation exist in these hidden private domains?
5. What have been the push factors (e.g. criminalisation) and the pull factors (technological advantages) into using this mode of organisation?
6. How do sex workers define and negotiate risks and do they engage in risky behaviours?
7. How do they engage with the police and other local agencies?
8. How do they keep themselves safe and how could regulation improve safety?

Strand B: How do the police currently interact with the online sex work markets, and how can regulation be developed?

1. How does the policing of adult sex work take place currently and what knowledge do the police hold regarding Internet based sex workers, particularly in relation to exploitation and safety?
2. How does the Internet markets self regulate through the community and IT personnel?
3. What types of regulation can intersect with existing mechanisms of safety to reduce crime?

Strand C: How can online sex work be integrated into specialist support and provision services?

1. What are the service needs of online sex workers?
2. What, if at all, is the current support and provision for this community (including peer support)?
3. How can services be developed, particularly around issues of safety?

Research Design

The project will begin in March 2015 and run for 36 months. In both the principles and design of this project, traditional methods of inquiry are combined with using a peer-involvement model where sex workers are trained (and paid) as peer-researchers. This is a proven method for achieving a less hierarchical researcher-participant relationship in sex work studies (O’Neill 2001) and one by which expertise from the community can be integrated into all stages of the research project. Four sex workers will be trained as peer-researchers to facilitate the survey within the sex work community and during the final year of impact and dissemination activities, ‘netreach champions’ will be recruited to assist with the implementation of the impact programme.

Data Collection

1) Survey (month 7-14): a national online survey will be the main method to address Strand A in order to identify patterns and descriptive statistics which cannot be uncovered through qualitative methods. The survey will map the trends, characteristics and experiences of sex work and sex workers. This will be hosted by Bristol Online Surveys, which is a standard platform for University of Leeds surveys (https://www.survey.leeds.ac.uk). The survey will run for 9 months with the minimum target of 500-1000 responses. There will be a continued recruitment process by marketing the survey through industry related websites, including promotion by our project partner, UK Network of Sex Work Projects. Peer researchers will promote the survey through various online communities (some of which are closed and would be unethical for researchers to access) as well as administer the survey amongst peers. There will be a pilot stage for both the survey and the interview schedule, with the assistance of the peer-researchers. Both the online survey method and the peer researcher involvement is tried and tested in separate sex work projects by Sanders, who testify that access to this hidden community and credibility with NGOs and the broader community can be gained by including peers in the research process.

2) Qualitative Interviews (month 10 to 21): Semi-structured interviews will commence towards the end of the survey phase to provide an opportunity to explore the survey findings and add empirical depth to Strand A questions. Interviews will be conducted with two samples. Sample One: to answer Strand B & C regarding, regulation, service provision and creating a new resource this sample will include those involved in regulation including representatives from our partner organisations such as the police (including on-line crime specialists and vice), senior Home Office officials, sex work support projects, web designers and hosts of webcam services, website moderators, technical experts who work with online sex workers (n=40).

Sample Two: 80 sex workers (divided across female/male/transgender as equally as recruitment allows) and selected to achieve a mixed sample based on age, ethnicity and locality. These interviews will be used to explore the key findings from the survey, in particular issues around safety, risk, police interaction and support. We will endeavour to conduct the majority of these interviews face-to-face but past experience has shown that some participants will want to utilise telephone, email or Internet messaging formats for reasons of convenience and/or anonymity.

3) Online ethnographic observation (month 4-30): The netreach officer role (see below) will be dedicated to having an overt presence amongst the online community, joining relevant online forums, message boards and support groups (where appropriate – see Ethics below). Participant observation methods will therefore be employed to gather information from key websites which are gateways to the online sex community – such as Saafe; Punernet; AdultWork; West Yorkshire Sex Guide. Some of these relationships already exist from previous projects and NGO activities (for example: Sanders' work with Punernet and West Yorkshire
Sex Guide, and previous collaborations with Genesis, as well as both Sanders and Scouler are members of the UK Networks of Sex Work Projects).

4) Research, Support and Development Netreach Officer (month 1-36) – this innovative research and practitioner role will be an integral part of the project, as both a means of gathering data about the online markets and the development and provision of a ‘netreach’ practitioner service and tool (Objective 4 & 5). The role will consist of three elements: 1) direct research activities – online ethnographic observation (detailed above); promoting the survey; recruiting sex workers to be trained and mentored as peer researchers; qualitative interviews; social media and website development; 2) practitioner outreach with sex workers (all genders) via the Internet (known as netreach) delivering information on safety, signposting to health, welfare, and other relevant services, and offering a confidential listening service on a weekly basis; 3) development of a netreach resource tool (building on the European Correlation Network example) which can be promoted nationally and via peer ‘netreach champions’ and our project partner the UKNSWP who has 150 project members across the UK. This role will be an integral part of the research team but partly situated within the third sector partner organisation Genesis, Leeds (see letter of support). In terms of the sustainability of the role, during the final year, the netreach officer will work with Genesis ensuring they are well-placed to apply for funding to continue the netreach role. The project will be used as an example of good practice in their and others’ funding applications as we envisage this will become a model for service delivery in this field.

5) Project website and social media engagement (month 7-36): An appropriate domain name will be purchased for the project, which will be independently outward facing, but hosted through the University of Leeds. The website will be pivotal given we are working with an online community and NGO support projects increasingly have an online presence. Sanders has experience of creating two other sex work website based projects (e.g. dancersinfo.co.uk and the Yorkshire Academic Sex Work Consortium www.yaswc.org). We are keen that the project has a social media presence: with a Facebook group and a twitter feed promoting the activities of the project, and details of relevant events, debates and policy developments.

Data Processing and Analysis (month 12-30)

As the surveys are completed, responses are logged in a format that can be exported and pre-coded for SPSS import. BOS allows indicative responses to be analysed and patterns to be continually monitored via some general descriptive statistics so we can retrieve interim findings 4 months into the survey. The research officer will use the database to create descriptive and comparative statistics at a preliminary and final stage. Interviews will be semi-structured around a pre-designed interview schedule informed by the survey results, involving extensive use of open-ended questions to encourage discursive accounts. With participants’ permission, audio recordings will be made of all the interviews, which will then be transcribed in anonymised form. Transcripts will be coded based on key themes driving the research questions (e.g. safety, risk, working patterns). Therefore, theory construction, data generation and data analysis will develop simultaneously in a dialectical process involving the establishment of web-like connections between emergent themes (Attridge-Stirling, 2001), which will be checked and rated by the team. The University of Leeds and Strathclyde are licensed for the use of NVIVO 10 software and Dr and have extensive experience in its use. This package will be used for the preliminary coding of all textual data as well as a data management system which allows several analysts to work on the data simultaneously. The process of exploring the quantitative and the qualitative data together will enable explanations, allowing trends, mapping and understanding to be achieved. The mixed methods approach will be pursued in the analysis as we understand process through the qualitative data, combined with data generated through the ethnographic observation of the context, and the broader picture arrived at via quantitative measurement. It is the triangulation of the statistics information, detailed discursive accounts and the observations of the online interactions that will allow the exposure of complex answers to the research questions. Therefore new datasets will be produced. A Data Management Plan (see attachment) has been designed with specialists at University of Leeds to ensure we securely store the data and to archive the data with UK Data Services (where appropriate).
Project Structure and Management

**Partnerships and Existing Networks:** The project team has worked together in various research and collaboration capacities over the past 15 years including collaboration on ESRC funded sex work projects and UK and European parliamentary work (see detail in JES application). Considerable partnerships have been cemented between the investigators and practitioner networks. Letters of support have been submitted by three key collaborators: (1) The National Police Lead for Prostitution of the Association of Chief Police Officers Lead for Prostitution, Assistant Chief Constable, Mr ; (2) The UK Network of Sex Work Projects (www.uknswp.org) - an umbrella organisation for 150 sex work projects across the UK; (3) Genesis Sex Work Project, Leeds. The team will also disseminate in international forums; members are involved in a European Group of Experts running until 2018: COST Action IS1209 – ‘Comparing European Prostitution Policies: Understanding Scales and Cultures of Governance' (ProPol). Scouler is Working Group leader for ‘Prostitution Policies and Politics’ (http://propol.eu/working-groups.html) and a keynote to the group which includes over 100 members from 22 European countries will be arranged to discuss interim findings. The team (two per conference) will ensure the work has an international reach through presenting at practitioners conferences (see below).

**Steering Committee:** This group will meet twice a year with the purpose of reviewing the activities of the project and the progress of the activities in-line with the objectives, Impact Plan and timetable. Individual members will be consulted throughout the lifetime of the project when issues arise. The Committee will comprise of representatives from the UK Network of Sex Work Projects; the national Police Lead for Prostitution; the sex worker led organisation Saafe; social legal scholar with experience in this field Professor (Northumbria University) and male sex work specialist Professor (London Metropolitan University) (5 members plus team of 4). All have agreed to be members of this Steering Committee.

**Project Team Meetings:** As the two investigators are at different institutions some distance apart (Leeds/Glasgow), we have scheduled in quarterly formal day long meetings to manage the project, assess activities, and plan for the next phase. Alongside the daily management of the researchers, the team will also come together using Skype and Facetime for trouble shooting and information sharing on a weekly basis. The PI will directly line manage the Netreach Officer in Leeds and the Co-I will directly manage the researcher working on the survey in Glasgow.

**Ethics:** has experience and written on the sensitivities of online sex work research (cf ). Full approval will be sought from the Ethical Review Committee at the University of Leeds and Strathclyde. The research will be informed by the principles and guidance on “best practice” contained within the ESRC Research Ethics Framework, the British Sociological Association Code of Ethics (especially points 1 to 5) and specific guidance from the International Association of Internet Researchers (see Ethics in JES).

**Impact and Dissemination Programme of Activities**

The Impact Plan has the following objectives: 1) Engaging police, health and support practitioners, and policy makers with the findings and illustrate good models of practice regarding interventions with online sex workers. 2) Educating policy and service delivery agencies through sharing up-to-date knowledge on the nature of the online sex markets, experiences of crimes and safety issues. 3) To inform public debate on the issues around sex work, using findings to dispel myths and interject the most current trends and patterns into the debate. 4) Educate and inform sex workers who mostly self-regulate about norms around safety risk and rights. These objectives will be met through the a detailed programme of activities delivered by the team including a website for sex workers, a netreach resource tool, Learning Events and a national conference for practitioners, police and policymakers, alongside media and academic outputs (see Beneficiaries section of JES). The Research, Support and Development Netreach Officer has an integrated 'delivery and impact' programme specifically tailored for the final 12 months of this post. In addition the investigators will seek out three meetings with senior ministers and policymakers to maximise legislative impact and dissemination at the highest government level.
Justification of Resources

Staff Costs

The PI and CO-I are two senior academics who will play a direct role in all aspects of the research project and design in addition to managing the project and the staff team. The PI and CO-I will have direct day-to-day management over the staff. PI will manage the Grade 7 Research, Development and Netreach Officer (based at Leeds) for the full 36 months of the project and the CO-I will manage the Grade 7 researcher for the 24 months. The PI and CO-I will undertake the ethical review process and the data management plan, as well as setting up the Steering Committee, ensuring its operation throughout the 3-year project. The PI and CO-I will undertake a proportion of the survey analysis, qualitative interviews with sex workers and police/practitioners, as well as oversee the analysis phase of both data sets. The Grade 7 Research, Support and Netreach Officer will be employed for the duration of the project, as this role is core to all aspects of the delivery of the project. The role is a senior researcher/practitioner level which will require extensive experience across academic and service delivery and policy fields. This role will require a high degree of autonomy to work across sectors and deliver the specific service provisions and impact activities. The Grade 7 researcher based at Strathclyde will have had past experience of managing online surveys and conducting fieldwork with this sensitive subject and group.

Management Costs

The Steering Committee will be made up of four team members and 5 external partners. We will meet twice a year across the lifetime of the project (6 times in total). Accommodation and travel have been costed in for 5/9 attendees as some will not need these expenses as the meeting will be in their work location. Subsistence for 9 people has been costed in at £60 per meeting (£20 per day). Across the 6 meetings we have costed subsistence for 9 people at £1620. We have added casual clerical assistance for help with organising meetings, Learning Events and national conference (165 hour at £12 per hour). Two iPhones for the researchers have been costed (36 + 24 months @ £99.99) as this will be important equipment so they both have designated work numbers for distribution. Additional justifications are: a) safety during fieldwork and making contact with participants and partners; b) social media engagement through Twitter and Facebook which can be access instantly and mobile; c) using Skype or Facetime to communicate with the team.

Fieldwork Costs

We are planning on interviewing only 40/80 sex workers face to face (the rest online or telephone), so travel and subsistence is reduced to 40 trips (airport travel x 40 = £1200 and 40 days of subsistence @ £20 per day is £800). We are aware from previous projects that sex workers often prefer more distant means of communication rather than face to face. Sex workers will be paid £50 gift voucher for their time (80 x £50 = £4000), as we recognised this as an ethical principle as well as a practical token of the time taken out of their
working day to engage in the research. 80 hours of interview transcription, pivotal to analysing the
qualitative data is included ($
\text{£16,800}$). We have included a fee for the survey hosting through Bristol Online Surveys ($
\text{£990}$), and website design ($
\text{£990}$) and URL purchase ($
\text{£99}$) - based on a recent website based project [www.dancersinfo.co.uk](http://www.dancersinfo.co.uk). Various equipment will be required to facilitate the fieldwork: 1 laptop for Strathclyde researcher ($
\text{£990}$) as Leeds already has one from a previous ESRC project. 3 audio/visual recorders (Leeds has one) ($
\text{£99}$) each. Sophos software purchase and yearly maintenance is part of the data management plan ($
\text{£990}$). For Key Encrypted USB flashdrives needed for all four researchers to ensure safe transfer of data ($
\text{4 x £99}$).

**Impact and Dissemination Costs**

Four Learning Events will be held (in the following localities: Leeds/Edinburgh/the Midlands/ London) which brings together Local Authority/City Council stakeholders, police, Prostitution Forum groups, sex worker projects, other service delivery practitioners and academics across regions. These localised learning events enable specific issues relating to sex work in that region to be discussed in a more targeted forum with key stakeholders from that region brought together. For these dissemination events we have costed venue hire and refreshments at $
\text{£3,400}$ for each event, travel for team members and accommodation to these events is costed $
\text{£1,950}$ + $
\text{£315}$ subsistence for the team members to attend various cities. To compliment the Learning Events and provide a national stage, a national conference will be organised at the end of the project (month 34) with venue hire and refreshments $
\text{£2,340}$ and a key note speaker fees and travel/accommodation costed at $
\text{£3,400}$. Here the UK Network of Sex Work projects members will be invited as well as practitioners, police and policy makers from the national networks who work with sex workers and policing activities. To assist with organising these events fees have been included for casual clerical assistance (165 hours @ $
\text{£9.29} = $
\text{£1,537.35}$). Findings leaflets will be distributed at these events - $
\text{300}$ has been costed for design and print of 300.

The investigators have planned three trips to meet senior ministers and policy makers in London to disseminate the findings and discuss future prostitution policy ($
\text{£7,000}$ for railfare / $
\text{£700}$ subsistence / $
\text{£600}$ accommodation for Co-I from Glasgow). Two team members will attend two conferences located in Europe ($
\text{per person has been costed for fee, travel, 3 nights accommodation, and subsistence}$). $
\text{£3,000}$ and $
\text{£300}$ will attend Correlation: European Network Social Inclusion to present the interim findings and net/reach activities in 2016/17 and $
\text{£600}$ and $
\text{£400}$ will attend the Health and Harm Reduction International (2017/18) to present the final findings and net/reach tool.

**Leeds/Strathclyde Budget Holders**

The travel and subsistence budget plus the interviewee gift vouchers, conference fees and peer researcher costs have been divided between Leeds and Strathclyde so each institution has access to the correct funds. Given the Grad 7 24 months post will be based at Strathclyde then this makes sense.