Fully-funded PhD studentship opportunity at Sheffield University Management School

PhD Project: Voice, job security and productivity

Research Group: Work, Organisation and Employment Relations Research Centre (WOERRC)

WOERRC is made up of researchers from across Sheffield University Management School and the Faculty of Social Sciences who have interests relating to work, employment and the labour market. The aim of the centre is to generate and disseminate high-quality research that has the potential to inform and shape academic debates and influence policy and practice. WOERRC facilitates collaboration between researchers from different academic fields and disciplines and in so doing aims to promote theoretical and methodological innovation, provide fresh analytical insights and strengthen the evidence base.

Project Description

This theme clearly relates to the activities of the ESRC-funded Productivity Insights Network supporting research in an area that is a current government priority and of considerable concern to social partners and other stakeholders.

The organisation of work, the terms on which workers are hired and the quality of worker-manager relationships are of fundamental importance to productivity. These issues are at the heart of this theme. Some studies (e.g. Michie and Sheehan 2003, 2005) have found that ‘flexible’ employment forms are negatively associated with product and process innovation and that productivity improvements are most likely to occur where standard employment relationships and continuity of employment are emphasised (Rubery 2016; Wang and Heyes 2017). If so, growth in ‘non-standard’, insecure jobs (including zero hours contracts) may be an important contributor to the UK’s ongoing productivity malaise. Furthermore, an emphasis on cost adjustment via ‘external’ flexibility might reduce incentives for firms to develop ‘internal’ flexibility by developing the skills and capabilities of their employees (Colombo and Stanca, 2014). In addition, some studies have shown that collective bargaining and worker voice may encourage firms to innovate (Fakhfakh et al. 2010), perhaps by discouraging the adoption of routes to profitability based on low-wages and labour-intensive production practices (Nolan 1989).

The project aims to provide insights into the dynamic relationship between employment relations, employers’ decisions in relation to, for example, skills, technology and the organisation of work, and productivity. Potential project topics include:

1. The relationships between the growth of insecurity, non-standard employment and productivity.

2. The consequences of collective bargaining and other forms of worker voice for innovation and productivity.
3. Objective and subjective job quality and productivity.

4. Voice, job security and the introduction of robotics and AI to the workplace.

Application Process:

Applicants should submit a 1000 word research proposal which directly addresses the theme and/or specific topic to which they are applying. The proposal should contain a brief background to the topic, which demonstrates knowledge of existing work in the field, and potential contributions to knowledge. It should also explain the proposed research methods and include a plan of the research, and a timeline. We are seeking applications from exceptional UK/EU/International students with an outstanding academic record (distinction/high merit or equivalent) as well as a proven record in research training. Scholarships are awarded on a competitive basis - applications are assessed on the basis of academic success and qualifications, experience, research background, a clear well-articulated research proposal, the potential impact of the research and a good match with supervisor/departmental expertise.

Closing date for applications is 17.00 (UK time) on Friday 7th December. Interviews will be held week commencing 7th January 2019.

Proposed Supervision Team:

The supervisory team may include two of the following academics: Professor Jason Heyes, Professor Kirsty Newsome, Dr Dragos Adascalitei and Dr Jo Grady. The selection of supervisors would depend on which project(s) is pursued and staff availability.

Funding Notes:

This scholarship is offered on a full-time basis for three years from 1st February 2019 subject to satisfactory progress. It will provide a tax free bursary of £14,777 and cover the University tuition fees for UK/EU/international students.