Mobility futures and the social lives of batteries

3 year, fully funded PhD opportunity for UK and EU Citizens, based in the Leverhulme Material Social Futures Doctoral Training Centre, and Sociology Department at Lancaster University, UK.

Start date: 1st October 2020

Deadline: 24th April 2020

Supervisor: Dr Nicola Spurling (nb a second supervisor appropriate to the successful candidate will be identified on appointment).

The Leverhulme Material Social Futures Programme and Lancaster Sociology are seeking a candidate for this exciting PhD opportunity. The position will suit applicants from a range of backgrounds including Sociology, Science and Technology Studies, Anthropology, Geography or Material Culture Studies. Experience of qualitative and ethnographic methods, and an interest in one of the following fields is desirable: mobilities, social practice theory, sociology of the future, new materialisms, science and technology studies.

The successful candidate will be interested in decarbonising travel and have a willingness to learn about a range of social futures methods, to explore futures of low carbon mobility in different places (e.g. rural, urban; different countries). For example, these futures would involve ways of living without the combustion engine car, but could involve new mobility services; new social practices including delivering, charging, picking up and dropping off; new forms of intermodal travel; new types, shapes and sizes of vehicle; novel vehicle ecologies; intermodal travel; transformed relationships between forms of mobility and everyday life. The candidate will explore the implications of different possible futures for what the battery is and does, and contrast this with the conceptualisations of ‘the battery’ that underpin contemporary material science.

Within Lancaster Sociology, the Centre for Mobilities Research will provide a rich intellectual home for the project, and The Institute for Social Futures will be a supportive environment for the methodological development of the work. Through the Material Social Futures doctoral training centre, there will be many opportunities to engage in dialogue with material scientists (both staff and students), and with a thematically linked PhD in Chemistry on sustainable battery materials. The candidate will also take part in a specially developed MSF training programme that is delivered by colleagues from across social sciences, humanities, material sciences and engineering.

Please send enquiries about the vacancy and applications by email to Dr Nicola Spurling (n.spurling@lancaster.ac.uk).
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Leverhulme Centre for Material Social Futures

This project is funded through the Leverhulme Centre for Material Social Futures Research at Lancaster University. This is a major strategic collaborative partnership between two of the University’s research institutes – the Materials Science Institute and the Institute for Social Futures. Based in the Sociology Department, you will be part of a growing team of PhDs working across the university to create more sustainable and socially beneficial futures. In addition to training in social research, you will be part of a vibrant programme of workshops designed to engage students from diverse disciplines in aspects of materials discovery and the analysis of social and economic structures to achieve these ends. In short, the goal of PhDs in Material Social Futures will be to help produce futures that people want and the world needs.

Funding and Support

- The PhD is for 3 years duration and is awardable to any UK or EU citizen;
- **Payment of academic fees**: A maintenance stipend £15,373 pa;
- Access to a Research Training Support Grant of £3,000 pa for reimbursement of research-related expenses including – but not limited to – conference attendance, training courses and equipment;
- Access to a range of training and development provided by the Sociology Department, the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, the Material Social Futures PhD Programme;
- Access to research seminars, workshops, reading groups and intellectual parties through the Centre for Mobilities Research, the Practice Theory group, and the Centre for Science Studies in the Sociology Department, and the Institute for Social Futures.
- The Material Social Futures PhD programme will offer optional internships (including international placements) in the second and or third year of training.

Person Specification

A diverse range of disciplinary backgrounds are potentially relevant to this PhD. These include Sociology, Science and Technology Studies, Anthropology, Geography or Material Culture Studies. Experience of qualitative and ethnographic methods, and an interest in one of the following fields is desirable: mobilities, social practice theory, sociology of the future, new materialisms, science and technology studies.

Candidates must have a good undergraduate degree (i.e. 2:1 or above) and a Masters (or expect to complete a masters before the PhD commences) to apply.

The successful candidate will need to demonstrate the desire to work in a multidisciplinary environment, willingness to learn, a collaborative attitude, and excellent written and oral communication skills.
Email the following documents to Nicola Spurling n.spurling@lancaster.ac.uk by 5pm 24th April 2020.

- A full CV, including two named referees (one of whom should be your most recent academic tutor/supervisor).
- A copy of Bachelor’s degree and Master’s degree transcript (or a copy of equivalent qualifications).
- A letter of application (not exceeding two pages of A4) outlining your suitability for this PhD and explaining how you would approach this research.
- An example of postgraduate level written work (e.g. an essay, or dissertation chapter).

Supervisors

Dr Nicola Spurling is sociologist and anthropologist of future mobility. Her research addresses questions about how futures of decarbonised mobility could and should be achieved. She is interested in theories of practice, social futures and the new materialisms, and engages in creative methodologies concerned with emergence, intervention and experimentation. In addition to academic publication, she has authored/co-authored several influential reports that take a critical perspective on the assumptions that underpin transport planning and policy-making.

A second supervisor appropriate to the successful candidate will be identified on appointment.

Candidates invited for an interview will be eligible to claim reasonable travel expenses to attend.