The Social Lives of Batteries and New Energy Materials

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: We are currently accepting applications for this post.
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 with a background in Science and Technology Studies, Anthropology, Geography, Material Culture Studies or Sociology. Experience of qualitative and ethnographic methods, and an interest in one of the following fields is desirable: new materialisms, science and technology studies, social practice theory, mobilities, sociology of the future.

Specifically focused on new energy materials, battery technologies and electric vehicles, the PhD will follow batteries through the laboratory and into the possible forms of mobility and everyday futures which they might be part of. This might develop in a variety of theoretical and methodological directions, depending on the interests of the successful candidate, but should include: i) conducting empirical research on how ‘the battery’ exists in the discourse and practices of material scientists that are working on new energy materials; ii) analysing how such assumptions have implications for the development of new materials and battery technologies; iii) creatively developing ‘everyday futures’ and imagined ‘social lives’ of future batteries.

The ultimate aim is to explore some of the alternative socio-technical lives of future batteries through focussing on futures of travel in different countries, in transformed vehicle ecologies, and in relation to changed end use practices. Through the Material Social Futures doctoral training centre, there will be many opportunities to engage in dialogue with material scientists (both staff and students), for example, through the MSF training programme, and with a thematically linked PhD in Chemistry on sustainable battery materials.

Informal enquiries prior to submitting an application are encouraged and can be made directly to Dr Nicola Spurling (n.spurling@lancaster.ac.uk).

Applications should be made via Lancaster University’s online application system. (http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/study/postgraduate/how-to-apply-for-postgraduate-study/).

Applicants must put LEVERHULME under ‘source of funding’ in the application form.
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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 new strategic collaborative partnership between two of the University’s recently formed 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 EU citizen;
- Payment of academic fees; A Maintenance Stipend (£15,009 pa);
- Access to a Research Training Support Grant (£800 pa) for reimbursement of research-related expenses including – but not limited to – conference attendance, training courses and equipment;
- Additional research costs (such as entailed in fieldwork) will be supported as appropriate;
- 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 science and technology studies, anthropology, geography, sociology and material culture studies. There is scope for the PhD to develop in relation to these existing interests. Experience of qualitative and ethnographic methods, and an interest in fields such as new materialisms, science and technology studies, social practice theory, mobilities and sociology of the future are desirable.

Candidates must have a good undergraduate degree (i.e. 2.i 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.
How to Apply

Applications should be made via Lancaster University’s online application system (http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/study/postgraduate/how-to-apply-for-postgraduate-study/). Applicants must put LEVERHULME under ‘source of funding’ in the application form.

This consists of:

- Online application form. Applicants must put LEVERHULME under ‘source of funding’ in the application form.
- Personal statement (not exceeding two pages of A4) outlining your suitability for this PhD.
- A research proposal (6 pages maximum) explaining how you would approach the research. For further guidance on writing a PhD proposal: https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/study/postgraduate/how-to-apply-for-postgraduate-study/writing-a-research-proposal/
- A copy of Bachelor’s degree and Master’s degree transcript (if masters study has been completed) (or for non-UK a copy of equivalent qualifications).
- A full CV, including two named referees (one of whom should be your most recent academic tutor/supervisor).

Supervisors

Dr Nicola Spurling has a background in Anthropology and Sociology, and her interests continue to span the social sciences. Her research focus is on decarbonising transportation, through exploring material cultures of future mobility.

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.