PhD funded by an ESRC Midlands Graduate School DTP Collaborative Studentship

Department: Geography

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Eligibility: Available to UK/EU applicants only.  
https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/mgsdtp/studentships/eligibility/

Project Title: The contemporary rural gentry and processes of rural gentrification in England and Scotland

Project Description:

Gentrification has clear connections to landownership, being coined to draw parallels between contemporary processes of physical and social change and processes of wealth accumulation and social display outlined in historical studies of the landed rural gentry. Subsequent studies have demonstrated how landowners play an important role within contemporary processes of rural gentrification, facilitating, or preventing, the release of properties and land for conversion and development. New dynamics in landownership and gentrification are, however, potentially emerging. The 'financialisation' of land and housing, for example, may encourage land retention and land accumulation (or land-grabbing), or, conversely, land-release for housing and other forms of gentrified development. Rural land use may also be gentrifying as existing users diversify to take advantage of emergent middle-class tastes and through the arrival of new entrants to rural land ownership, who having accumulated wealth and expertise in lives beyond the rural are now purchasing and investing in rural land. For example, one of the largest agricultural landowners in the UK is now James Dyson, who has both purchased land with income derived from his global manufacturing business and applied his technological expertise and political influence to agricultural production.

Concerns have been raised about the impact of the arrival of such actors and dynamics, including land price inflation that prevents other new entrants and impacts on the acquisition of land by existing farmers; a rise of absentee landlords and associated decline in awareness of and activity in local communities; rising rental levels; and the eviction of tenant farmers. More positive impacts have also been identified, including heightened direct and indirect economic investment in agricultural and non-agricultural activities in rural localities, infusion of human technical and cultural capital into rural businesses, and a more ecologically diverse rural landscape. Such changes indicate that there is a need to consider relations between gentrification and agricultural transformation in ways that go
beyond a 'post-productivist' release of properties and land to also potentially encompass various forms of 'neo-productivism' and 'non-productivist' forms of agriculture linked to environmentalism and counter-cultural living.

The student will investigate changes in landownership and how they connect to processes of rural gentrification through case studies in England and Scotland. They will explore the impacts of these changes and assess their novelty through comparisons with earlier transitions in landownership associated with the rural gentry in England and Scotland. The research will involve a mixture of archival research, academic and stakeholder workshops, in-depth interviews and surveys. The student will be based at the University of Leicester but will spend time at the James Hutton Institute where they will receive additional research training, supervision and support.

**Funding Information:**
Our ESRC studentships cover fees and maintenance stipend and extensive support for research training, as well as research activity support grants. Support is available only to successful applicants who fulfil eligibility criteria. To check your eligibility, visit: www.mgsdtp.ac.uk/studentships/eligibility/

**How to apply:**
To be considered for this PhD, please complete the Collaborative Studentship application form at https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/mgsdtp/collaborativeandjoint/#collaborative, include a cover letter, CV, and email the documents to PGRGeog@le.ac.uk

**Email enquiries:**
Informal enquiries about the research or the School of Geography, Geology, and the Environment prior to application can be directed to the course administrator PGRGeog@le.ac.uk