

Information on Postgraduate Research Scholarship - Ref: VCS-GBS-03-2025			
Faculty:	Business	Department:	BOS
Lead Supervisor:	Emanuele Lobina		
Project Title:	Moving Beyond Ownership: Towards Democratic Control in Public Service Governance		
Project Description:	This project addresses the growing trend of public service remunicipalisation across Europe, where services in water, energy, housing, and transport are being reclaimed from private operators. While this represents a rejection of profit-driven models that have compromised affordability, equity, and sustainability, the research identifies a critical gap: public ownership alone does not guarantee improved outcomes. Many reclaimed public enterprises remain corporatised, mimicking private sector practices through hierarchical decision-making, commercial performance metrics, and limited stakeholder participation. The internationalisation of public enterprises acting as multinationals raises further questions about the risk of mandate drift (Lobina and Hall, 2014; Landoni, 2022). The project challenges New Public Management (NPM), a paradigm that has long dominated public governance through outsourcing, managerialism, and depoliticized performance indicators. It addresses a significant research gap by focusing not merely on ownership change, but on how democratic governance and service delivery outcomes are affected by reverse privatisation in the water sector (although we may also consider proposals on other public service sectors). The theoretical innovation lies in applying a critical realist approach (Lobina and Wegmann, 2021) to combine organisational psychology and institutional economics and heed Cumbers et al.'s (2022) call for examining how value is created, governed, and distributed. For initial steps in this direction, see Lobina (2013) and Lobina et al. (2021). The project poses two central retroductive questions about reinventing public ownership for deep sustainable development: 1. How can democratic workplace practices (such as German co-determination models and works councils) and institutional mechanisms (like participatory budgeting) strengthen accountability and embed public values into state-owned enterprises' everyday functioning? 2. How does democratic and participatory governance translate into improved operational performance and socially, economically, and ecologically sustainable outcomes? Key objectives:		

	- O1: Map the institutional mechanisms and forms of democratic governance that give workers and users voice in public services across the Global North and South. - O2: Assess the impact of the most promising forms of democratic governance on public service performance and progress towards deep sustainable development within and without Europe. - O3: Identify organisational capabilities, behavioural possibilities and regulatory mechanisms that enable the institutional transfer of the most promising forms of democratic governance to European public services. To meet O1, the project uses the thematic analysis (Thomas and Harden, 2008) of qualitative literature, pioneering its use in an interdisciplinary study combining organisational psychology and institutional economics to examine citizen participation in public services. This methodological repositioning has the potential to “bring new perspectives and agendas to bear on a method” (Jewitt et al., 2017: 112). To meet O2, the project combines corporate strategic research and the analysis of company accounts to produce a world-first assessment of Lobina’s (2019) “intrinsic organisational efficiency” - a concept that departs from NPM’s focus on economic value extraction and instead emphasises the conversion of economic value for sustainable development outcomes. Here, the project innovates by expanding the scope of established methods and revisiting associated concepts and practices to “respond to the changing concerns of a discipline or area” (Jewitt et al., 2017: 111), namely public service reform and performance evaluation. To meet O3, the project uses semi-structured interviews involving public service managers, trade unionists, and policy actors, alongside surveys of service users to assess lived experiences (and integrate the methodological strategies devised to meet O1 and O2).
Duration:	3 years, Full-Time Study or 6 years, Part-Time Study
Bursary available (subject to satisfactory performance): Year 1: £22,780 (UKRI 2025-26 standard rate plus London Weighting) Years 2 & 3: In line with relevant UKRI rate Tuition fees will be waived up to a maximum amount equivalent to the University’s Home tuition fee rate. Partially funded by the Netherlands Trade Union Confederation (FNV).	
Person Specification of Essential (E) or Desirable (D) requirements:	
Criteria:	E or D
Education and Training:	
• 1st Class or 2nd class, First Division (Upper Second Class) honours degree or a taught master’s degree with a minimum average of 60% in all areas of assessment (UK or UK equivalent) in a relevant area to the proposed research project	E

For those whose first language is not English and/or if from a country where English is not the majority spoken language (as recognised by the UKBA), a language proficiency score of at least IELTS 6.5 (in all elements of the test) or an equivalent UK VISA and Immigration secure English Language Test is required, if your programme falls within the faculty of Engineering and Science a language proficiency score of at least IELTS 6.5 overall with a minimum of 6.0 in all elements of the test or an equivalent UK VISA and Immigration secure English Language Test is required. Unless the degree above was taught in English and obtained in a majority English speaking country, e.g. UK, USA, Australia, New Zealand, etc, as recognised by the UKBA.	E
Experience & Skills:	
Previous experience of undertaking research (e.g. undergraduate or taught master's dissertation)	E
Previous experience in doing research (e.g. writing policy papers for NGOs or Trade Unions)	E
Understanding in Water Policy	D
Understanding in Public Service Policy	D
Understanding of PSIRU's policy and contract research	D
Understanding of qualitative and quantitative research methods	D
Personal Attributes:	
Understands the fundamental differences between a taught degree and a research degree in terms of approach and personal discipline/motivation	E
Able to, under guidance, complete independent work successfully	E
Other Requirements:	
This scholarship may require Academic Technology Approval Scheme approval for the successful candidate if from outside of the EU/EEA	E
The scholarship must commence before Monday 9th March 2026	E
Closing date for applications:	midnight UTC on Thursday 27th November 2025
For further information contact:	e.lobina@gre.ac.uk
Making an application: Please read this information before making an application. Information on the application process is available at: https://www.gre.ac.uk/research/study/apply/application-process. Applications need to be made online via this link. No other form of application will be considered. All applications must include the following information. Applications not containing these documents will not be considered. Scholarship Reference Number (Ref)– included in the personal statement section together with your personal statement as to why you are applying a CV including 2 referees * a detailed research proposal of about 1,500 words academic qualification certificates/transcripts and IELTS/English Language certificate if you are an international applicant or if English is not your first language or you are from	

a country where English is not the majority spoken language as defined by the UK Border Agency *

**upload to the qualification section of the application form. Attachments must be a PDF format.*

Before submitting your application, you are encouraged to liaise with the Lead Supervisor on the details above.