

# From Core to Periphery: FDI Connectivity, Knowledge Exchange, and Innovation in the UK

**Department:** College of Business and Social Sciences

**Contract Type:** Fixed Term

**Basis:** Full Time

**Closing Date:** Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> April 2025 23.59 (UK time)

**Supervisor:** [Dr Lisha He](#) & [Professor Surender Munjal](#)

Applications are invited for a three-year PhD studentship, supported by the College of Business and Social Sciences to be undertaken within Aston Business School at Aston University.

**The position is available to start in October 2025.**

## Financial Support

This studentship includes a bursary to cover the tuition fees and an annual maintenance allowance for living costs.

## Background to the Project

Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) serves as a primary mechanism through which multinational enterprises (MNEs) access global resources, acquire technology, and manage risks. Core cities, often regarded as knowledge hubs and engines of national economic growth, benefit from strong international connectivity, making them prime destinations for FDI. These cities facilitate knowledge exchange, foster innovation, and create dynamic ecosystems that attract investment. While existing research has extensively highlighted the role of core cities in attracting FDI due to their economic strength, global linkages, and technological advancements, the role of peripheral cities in global economic processes has received comparatively less attention.

In recent years, however, peripheral cities have increasingly emerged as attractive FDI destinations, offering new opportunities for knowledge diffusion and innovation. This shift has sparked renewed interest in two interrelated concepts: FDI connectivity and core-periphery city dynamics.

This research project adopts a core-periphery framework to examine the role of core cities in the UK and explore how interactions between core and peripheral cities influence MNEs' location choices, knowledge exchange, and innovation-driven investments.

The candidate will work with Dr Lisha He and Professor Surender Munjal to refine and augment their expertise in quantitative methods and data analysis. They will also have opportunities to present and publish research in peer-reviewed journals or conferences.

This research project has the following research objectives (RO):

RO1: Develop a comprehensive review and integrative framework for understanding the locational determinants of FDI at the subnational level.

RO2: Analyze the complexities of FDI connectivity between UK cities by mapping the structure of the FDI network and evaluating the position of individual cities within the network.

RO3: Investigate the spatial effects of core cities on FDI location choices in surrounding (peripheral) cities.

RO4: Assess the role of core cities in facilitating knowledge-intensive activities and their impact on driving innovation performance within city-regions.

## **Requirements**

The PhD candidate should have a strong background in Economics, International Business, Economic Geography, or other related disciplines. They should demonstrate expertise in quantitative research methods, a passion for academic research, excellent communication and academic writing skills, and the ability to work both independently and within a multidisciplinary team. Proficiency in computer and coding skills, such as R or Stata is highly desirable.

The PhD candidate will part of the Department of Economics and International Business and will have the opportunity to become a full member of the Centre for Business Prosperity (CBP). CBP is Aston university's tier 1 research centre focusing on the areas of international business and regional economics. For details visit: <https://www.aston.ac.uk/research/bss/research-centres/business-prosperity>.

Overall, the candidate will benefit not only from expert supervision, a thriving research environment, and extensive research resources but also from access to an international network of researchers specializing in global business strategies of MNEs.

## **Person Specification**

The successful candidate should hold a Masters degree in the social sciences (or related disciplines) with a Merit overall (or equivalent) with a dissertation/research element, PLUS a First or Upper Second Class Honours degree (or an equivalent qualification from an overseas institution).

## **Contact information**

For formal enquiries about this project please contact Dr Lisha He [l.he6@aston.ac.uk](mailto:l.he6@aston.ac.uk) and Professor Surender Munjal [s.munjal@aston.ac.uk](mailto:s.munjal@aston.ac.uk)

## Submitting an application

Your application must include:

1. English language copies of the **transcripts and certificates** for all your higher education degrees, including any Bachelor degrees.
2. A **Research Proposal** detailing your understanding of the research area, how you would approach the project, and a brief review of relevant literature. Be sure to use the title of the research project you are applying for. There is no set format or word count.
3. A **personal statement** which outlines any further information which you think is relevant to your application, such as your personal suitability for research, career aspirations, possible future research interests, and further description of relevant employment experience.
4. **Two academic referees** who can discuss your suitability for independent research. References must be on headed paper, signed and dated no more than 2 years old. At least one reference should be from your most recent University. You can submit your references at a later date if necessary.
5. Evidence that you meet the **English Language requirements**. If you do not currently meet the language requirements, you can submit this at a later stage.
6. A copy of your **passport**. Where relevant, include evidence of settled or pre-settled status.

## Apply for this position [here](#)

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If you require further information about the application process, please contact the Postgraduate Admissions team at [pgr\\_admissions@aston.ac.uk](mailto:pgr_admissions@aston.ac.uk)