The Ecologies of Learning Lab, led by Sheina Lew-Levy at the University of Durham (UK), is advertising **three (3) funded PhD studentships** for the European Research Council funded project "Children as Agents of Cultural Evolution (ChACE)".

Project Summary. Research into culture acquisition paints a picture of children as vessels for inheriting evolved culture from adults, rather than cultural producers in their own right. ChACE aims instead to take child and adolescent peer cultures as a focal point. Peer cultures — the cultures children produce and transmit among themselves — are incredibly well conserved across generations despite threats to social transmission inexistent in adult cultures, challenging our understanding of how cultures are maintained and changed across generations. ChACE will specifically advance two hypotheses built upon theoretical and empirical foundations in folklore, cultural evolution, human life history, and cognitive development: (1) Peer cultures evidence distinct cultural evolutionary mechanisms from adult cultures; (2) Knowledge produced as part of peer cultures helps communities adapt to social and ecological change. These will be empirically evaluated via experiments, observations, surveys, and interviews with children and adolescents aged 4-16 years, and their caregivers, at four globally representative field sites undergoing rapid culture change: the Likouala (Republic of the Congo), the Omo Valley (Ethiopia), Toledo (Belize), and County Durham (U.K.).

To read more about the theoretical and empirical underpinnings of the project, please read: Lew-Levy, S., Amir, D. Children as agents of cultural adaptation. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences.* https://www.cambridge.org/core/services/aop-cambridge-core/content/view/F14F6E1809BEB70894B14FB8B5A51E91/S0140525X24001377a.pdf/children-as-agents-of-cultural-adaptation.pdf

PhD student Roles & Responsibilities. PhD students will design a research project aimed to test the hypotheses outlined above. PhD students will be expected to undertake independent data collection, analysis, and writing of their outputs, under the primary supervision of Dr. Sheina Lew-Levy. PhD students will be expected to undertake data collection in the UK, as well as at *one* of the international field sites.

Position 1. The successful candidate working with Q'eqchi' and Mopan Maya in Belize will be co-supervised by Dorsa Amir (Duke University) and Benjamin Pitt (University of Massachusetts, Amherst).

Position 2. The successful candidate working with Hamar in Ethiopia will be co-supervised by Zachary Garfield (University Mohammed VI Polytechnic) and Luke Glowacki (Boston University).

Position 3. The successful candidate working with BaYaka and Bandongo in Congo will be co-supervised by Vidrige Kandza (Institut National de Recherche en Sciences Sociales et Humaines).

Funding. PhD students will receive a maintenance stipend of £20,780/year, as well as have fees covered (home or international).

Candidate characteristics.
Essential characteristics include:
·   A strong academic performance in an undergraduate degree (a 2.1 classification for UK degrees, or equivalent for international degrees) or Masters qualification in Psychology, Anthropology, or closely related fields

- Experience conducting research, e.g., an undergraduate or Masters research thesis/dissertation
- Excellent English written and verbal communication
- Demonstrable leadership and teamwork abilities
- Statistical experience (as acquired through class or a research project)
- [Candidates applying for Congo only] Spoken French

Additional desired characteristics include:
- Having contributed (as a co-author or lead author) to scientific publication(s)
- Experience conducting fieldwork (e.g., through a field school; as a research assistant)
- Experience conducting statistical analyses in R

Role conditions.
Potential PhD students should be prepared to conduct 9 months of field research, often in the absence of running water, electricity, and network connectivity, and roads, and with simple meals. These environments require adaptability, cultural sensitivity, logistical preparedness, and the ability to walk long distances.

This position involves working with children. Candidates must be able to pass an Enhanced Data Barring Service (DBS) check, including a children's barred list check, before commencing any research involving children.

How to apply. Complete all relevant sections of the **online application form**. We also require you to attach the following supporting documentation:
- Two Reference Forms completed by your referees **Reference Form (Postgraduate Research)**
- Copies of degree Certificate or Transcript of Marks to date
- Academic CV
- Writing sample (e.g., essay, dissertation/thesis, publication)
- If a non-native English speaker, evidence of English language ability with an IELTS score of 7 with no element below 6.5
- 2,000 work research proposal using this template **Proposal Template**

Criteria for admission.
- Your academic track record
- The quality and feasibility of the research proposal
- Written references
- English Language level
- Your ability to conduct research with children in challenging field conditions

Timeline.
December 15th 2025: Submission deadline
Week of January 26th 2026: Interviews
Week of February 2nd 2026: PhD offers made, conditional on DBS checks, medical clearance letter, and if relevant, degree completion
Successful candidates are expected to start between August and October 2026