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VOICES OF THE FUTURE

Bridging the gap
between evidence
and action

MetroPolis

Spring 2025

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MetroPolis is a research-led think tank established by academics at Manchester Metropolitan University.

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In Memoriam:

Remembering Gary Lindsay, a kind and thoughtful colleague who always had time for us at MetroPolis.

Gary also enjoyed volunteering in his community, especially at his local theatre, and is missed by all.

With a special thanks to all who contributed to this issue:

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Editor's Foreword

It's fair to say that much has changed since the last edition of MetroPolis.

Last July, the UK witnessed a Labour election victory, ending nearly 15 years of Conservative rule. Across the Atlantic, another seismic shift reshaped Washington, with Donald Trump's election as President and Republican control of both congressional chambers.

Yet, while politics is in flux – racing to adapt to new realities – many policy challenges remain stubbornly entrenched. Low productivity, crumbling public services, and the complexities of the low-carbon transition continue to test the UK.

What remains unchanged is the vital role of learning, evidence, and research in forging democratic and equitable solutions to these challenges. But policy isn't just about managing the present – it can also be prefigurative, illuminating pathways toward brighter futures.

With this re-launch edition, MetroPolis aims to do just that. Our focus on **'Young People'** and **'Sustainability and Circular Innovations'** seeks to highlight forward-thinking ideas that can shape a better tomorrow.

"The children are always ours, every single one of them, all over the globe..."

The first half of a famous and poignant quote from American writer and activist James Baldwin lays out a moral vision – one that speaks to our shared duty toward future generations. Just as we are bound to one another, we are also deeply connected to our planet and its well-being. While Baldwin's assertion is rooted in morality, his notion of 'duty' aligns closely with democratic values and the pursuit of effective, impactful policy.

The policy-focused research highlighted in these articles offers inspiring examples of how vital such initiatives are in generating the evidence, experiences, and knowledge needed to create positive, real-world change. Join us as we explore the potential of innovations like collaborative robotics and circular fashion design, both of which are driving more sustainable practices in industry, through the new *Robotics Living Lab*. Additionally, embark on a journey with the *Voices of the Future* project to uncover how the voices of children and young people can shape and influence policy decisions, particularly in preserving and expanding treespaces.

Our work to connect policymakers, practitioners, and researchers – fostering shared thinking and strengthening policy-making – is diverse. In this edition, we also spotlight recent initiatives, including our current Chancellor's Fellows, and the resulting policy partnerships with both national and international policymakers. Additionally, we highlight events coordinated with high-profile policymakers, such as the *From Work First to Good Work* conference, with Alison McGovern MP, the current Minister of State for Employment.

Everyone at MetroPolis, including myself, is grateful to have worked with our brilliant contributors at Manchester Metropolitan University and beyond to bring this edition to life. It has been an exciting journey to see this publication come to fruition, and we hope you find these examples of policy-based research as fascinating and inspiring as we do.



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Policy Briefs:

Bringing circular models to UK Fashion

Professor Susan Postlethwaite



“It is now universally recognised that the fashion industry is one of the worst polluters in manufacturing globally.”

Circular models offer the fashion industry a future beyond being a global polluter. Working with the Circular Fashion Innovation Network, the Robotics Living Lab is driving change – not only developing innovative manufacturing approaches but also equipping tomorrow’s workforce with the mix of technical and creative skills needed to build a thriving, sustainable sector.

It is now universally recognised that the fashion industry is one of the worst polluters in manufacturing globally. Circular economic models may offer the answer. As defined by the European Parliament, these involve “*sharing, leasing, reusing, repairing, refurbishing and recycling existing materials and products as long as possible*” – reducing the waste of resources and cutting harmful pollution. These provide a route to achieving several of the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals – from Goal 9, which calls for promotion of sustainable Industrialisation

while fostering innovation, to Goal 12 on responsible consumption and production, and Goal 13 based around the climate crisis and the Paris Agreement.

The industry is taking action to make these models a reality. The UK Fashion and Textile Association (UKFT) has co-chaired a programme with the British Fashion Council (BFC): the Circular Fashion Innovation Network (CFIN). Funded by UKRI and aligned to the Institute of Positive Fashion (IPF), the CFIN is guiding the beginnings of a circular fashion ecosystem in the UK through six main areas of focus: recycling infrastructure, sustainable manufacturing, circular business models, novel technology, green growth, and a diverse and future-proof workforce.

At the Robotics Living Lab (RoLL), we’re well equipped to look at one of these six aspects: novel technology. RoLL have recently published a CFIN-funded report with the Manufacturing Technology Centre (MTC)

which brought 30 firms – including designer, manufacturer and retailers – to a workshop in Coventry. The result is a paper: **Advancing Automation and Robotics for Sustainable Manufacturing Strategic Pathways for the UK Fashion and Textile Industry**.

Two of the key recommendations that emerged from this work relate to the circular economy. First, industry and academia must work together to identify skills gaps and develop university courses in sustainability and circular economic models. Second, the fashion and textile sector must upskill its workforce, developing a new narrative around modern industry and industrial practices, where UK firms may lack expertise in the latest technologies.

The ecosystem proposed in the first of these recommendations needs to include greater flexibility and development in UK textile production. For example, the industry should shift to using locally sourced fibres, bio-engineered fibres or grown textiles (like mycelium leathers) as standard. These sources demand long lead times, but the work is already happening in both universities and in industry to scale this production.

We should also work to widen this ecosystem, bringing innovation to both sportswear and to aerospace/space travel. An expanded sector could do more to explore and exploit advanced technologies, advanced materials and future-facing fabrication methods, when married to design innovation.

This would also support the industry in upskilling its workforce – meeting our second recommendation. UKFT have already identified a large skills gap in the UK's fashion and textiles workforce (see 'Skills for Growth' at ukft.org). RoLL hopes to develop an interdisciplinary master's degree that will train a future-facing workforce, while engaging with school-age children to help develop their interest in fashion as engineering.

With concerted and coordinated action, the sector can develop a narrative to enabling and supporting innovation – as is central to our second recommendation. Firms need to be convinced to invest in R&D and new tooling, but the current economic climate presents an imposing barrier. Any tariffs imposed by the



USA might also impact inward investment, which is vital for the collaborative robotics or other agile tools that can drive the transition from prototype to scaled production of high-value goods. Manufacturing is at the heart of the fashion design recognised as CreaTech, straddling both creativity in design and technology development through manufacturing. So, rather than completely replacing a human workforce, human skill needs to be celebrated and supported – upskilling the workforce is fundamental to this process.

The government is championing a new industrial strategy which currently includes the creative industries, but the Fashion and Textiles industry is not formally included. At RoLL, we strongly believe this should change. A taskforce has begun work on a targeted Creative Industries Sector Plan (as reported in the thecreativeindustries.co.uk). The group will work closely with the wider Creative Industries

Council (CIC), while Caroline Rush, CEO of the British Fashion Council, is part of that panel; we can be hopeful that the sector will have a voice in future policy making.

But how then might the government champion the UK Fashion manufacturing industry? The taskforce's remit would appear to be a perfect fit – with its focus on policy issues like crowding in investment, access to opportunity, people and skills, and supporting innovation. These are all issues tailor-made for supporting a reshored, circular fashion manufacturing base.

I would argue that bodies like the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre, the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce, Creative UK and the Design Council will also need to be champions for the fashion industry. They are well placed to convince government of the importance of fashion as a reshored industry – one built to engage with new technologies and agile tooling solutions to mitigate climate change, address circular economic models and meet its international obligations.

At RoLL, we are designing a Factory in a Box model of manufacturing. This research addresses key ideas for fashion, including circular economic models and the viability of reshoring manufacturing. Next, we aim to pivot toward design for disassembly and reuse, with legislation and regulatory frameworks in mind – particularly the EU's extended producer responsibility (EPR) schemes and ban on the destruction of unsold textiles.

Together with the CFIN, IPF and BFC, we have played an important role in nurturing the first green shoots of circular economic models in the UK's fashion sector. We hope to continue that work – engaging with government to include (and champion) the sector in policymaking far beyond the life of this Parliament.

“The government is championing a new industrial strategy which currently includes the creative industries, but the Fashion and Textiles industry is not formally included.”



Read more about the Advancing Automation and Robotics for Sustainable Manufacturing report at ukft.org – or access the complete report at e-space.mmu.ac.uk

Listening to the ‘Voices of the Future’

Professor Kate Pahl, Dr Khawla Badwan,
Samyia Ambreen & Dr Caitlin Nunn

Voices of the Future was one of several projects funded by NERC through the UKTreescapes programme to explore the opportunities and barriers to future treescapes expansion. The £2million, three-year programme brought together nine universities to explore children and young people’s relationship to the Treescapes of the Future – harnessing their voices to shape and drive policy change.

The concept of a ‘treescape’ takes on the plethora of trees in our landscapes, cities and parks as well as gardens and allotments. Unfortunately, many children and young people lack the opportunity to access treescapes and, concerningly, have no voice in the decisions made around future treescapes and their design, implementation and care. In particular, young people from multilingual, transnational and migrant background are less likely to be offered the chance to get involved in future treescapes, despite often having a rich understanding that would support their involvement.

We see an urgent need for the worlds of science and policy making to listen to what children and young people want from future treescapes – to learn from young people’s experiences about how treescapes can be developed and maintained. However, listening to children and young people is a skill underestimated by many. It’s not enough to send out a questionnaire or hold a few focus groups. Children often express ideas through visual means and in engagement with things – capturing their input involves engaging children and young people as researchers, rather than being researched on. We need to treat them as research partners, not research subjects.

In *Voices of the Future*, we have developed methodologies for helping children and young people carry out their own research. Drawing on information from ecologists about the value of urban trees to the environment,

and working with scientists interested in the carbon capture of trees, the young people devised their own ways of measuring and understanding treescapes. This rested on experiential practices developed with young people – with methods including video and audio recording, sensing, bark rubbing and drawing, all of which helps them develop an embodied understanding of treescapes. We call this understanding a ‘lexicon of experience’ that can inform future treescape planning.

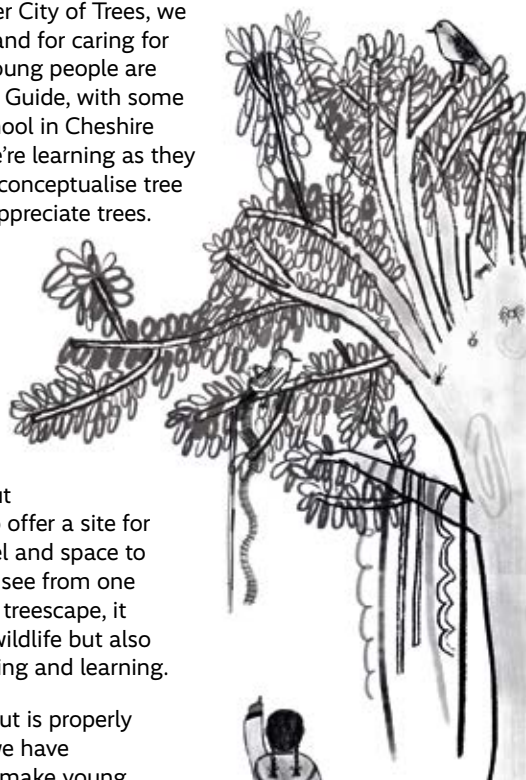
Learning from children

We worked with Manchester City of Trees and The Mersey Forest to involve young people in all stages of the tree planting cycle. This started with design – working with a landscape architect and an ecologist to develop plans for a future Treescape. Then, with the help of Manchester City of Trees, we created plans for planting and for caring for the trees. Right now, the young people are writing their own Tree Care Guide, with some support from a primary school in Cheshire and The Mersey Forest. We’re learning as they do – discovering how they conceptualise tree care, as well as how they appreciate trees.

We believe that we’re the first to develop a child-led typology of urban treescapes that takes in the many values of trees that children and young people appreciate. We might consider how trees offer shade and oxygen. But for young people, they also offer a site for climbing, a den, a bug hotel and space to hide and think. As you can see from one group’s account of a future treescape, it should not only be rich in wildlife but also offer opportunities for playing and learning.

To ensure this essential input is properly recorded and considered, we have developed various ways to make young

“We believe that we’re the first to develop a child-led typology of urban treescapes.”



people's voices heard. Here, we offer two: first, by sharing their view through a Manifesto and a story, and second, by giving children the chance to lead the way in environmental education.

A Children's Manifesto and Story

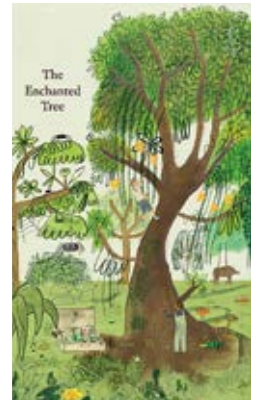
We took a creative approach to our methodological design to capture children's imaginings of the future – working with arts, language and voice not only as tools for inquiry, but also as part of our wonderment around how children talk about treescapes and what futures they want to envisage and realise.

We hear some of these demands in a manifesto that threaded together visual and linguistic demands – the result of a 90-child collaboration at a primary school in Greater Manchester. The manifesto speaks to children's commitment to a greener, cleaner and fairer world, sketching out a connected vision for climate justice that centres awareness, care, action, agency and empowerment. It sees trees as part of a wider, networked and vibrant ecosystem that includes insects, animals, humans, technologies, policies and government.

Their work has a relevance far beyond their locality – it is inspired by the familiar that cuts across multiple geographies, giving it a global reach beyond any regional borders. As such, this creative manifesto offers a new language that radically deviates from the

universalist and adult-centred approach that characterises the sustainable development discourses around the environment. As we seek to develop a new language that attends to land, trees and human/non-human relationships, children have much to offer – helping us shape a lexicon vital for education, community building, urban design and urban policy.

We also worked with the creative, the playful and the imaginative – giving the children the freedom to develop fictional narratives that speak to them: to tell stories. Our work around trees was not exclusively focused on instrumental purposes, as we understand impact as capacity building and not just instrumental change. As such, we invited a different group of children from the same school to work with A.M. Dassu, the renowned children's author, to co-produce a work of contemporary fiction. The result was *The Enchanted Tree*. The children developed characters, the setting, the plot line and the main scenes, which A.M. Dassu then weaved together into a narrative. The children then assumed the role of editors – adding describing sentences, elaborating on the scenes and changing the language of the characters.



The story is about family life, tensions between siblings, getting lost in a forest, undertaking challenges and working with the tree to learn new things – all of which is woven together in an exciting narrative that makes the tree character swing between the human and the non-human. The story is available to [read on the project website](#).

This creative output can drive policy change in areas around both literacy and environmental education. These two examples not only challenge any narrative around children's lack of interest in trees and the natural world around, but also create a space that centres children's perspectives in a way that should powerfully and meaningfully speak to policy makers – in education policy and urban design, and beyond.

Children as leaders in environmental education

Shifting the focus from how children learn about the environment, our work also explores how children can act as leaders by designing and developing resources about environmental education. In one of our research initiatives, children took on leadership roles in helping design a 'Tree Care Guide'.

The guide, which is currently being illustrated, aims to explain care for children in schools across the north west of England. The guide's design exemplifies how children reflect on their existing environmental knowledge and translate it into critical thoughts and actions.

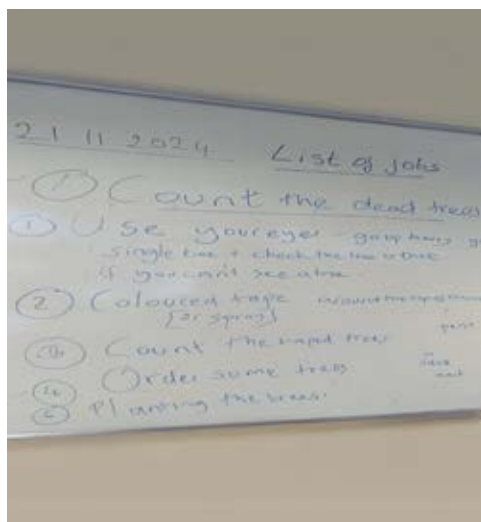


The process of its creation also offers valuable insights for practitioners and policymakers in both the forestry and education sectors. During two day-long creative research workshops, Year 3 children (aged 7-9) collaborated with our research team, along with a practitioner from The Mersey Forest. In this activity, the children explored the process of looking after trees that had been planted in their school playground a year ago. They also devised a child-led and child-friendly checklist for tree care which, in form of a tree care guide, will be used as a model for children in primary schools.

“children had a central role in decision-making. They were active collaborators.”

The children also participated in various hands-on activities which informed the development of the guide – including wood chipping and weeding activities in the school playground. In the final stage, the children documented, drew and designed the tree care guide, with support from a professional web designer and illustrator.

The children's contributions to the Tree Care Guide serve to highlight their role as leaders in environment as leaders in environmental education – particularly for adults. As co-researchers and collaborators, children had a central role in decision-making. They were active collaborators, helping adult researchers identify challenges with adult-led tree care rules, as well as contributing child-friendly steps for the tree care process.



The children's hands-on tree care practices, when translated into an educational resource, offer a strong message advocating for a practice-oriented approach to policymaking and for a model of policymaking more attuned to children's educational and social lives.

Children were keenly engaged in research workshops and performed routine school-based activities, such as reading and writing, in ways they might not typically do. One of the children remarked:

"I wish the day wouldn't end because we have been so busy doing things... I forgot what the normal school day feels like."

[A child in a north west primary school, November 2024]

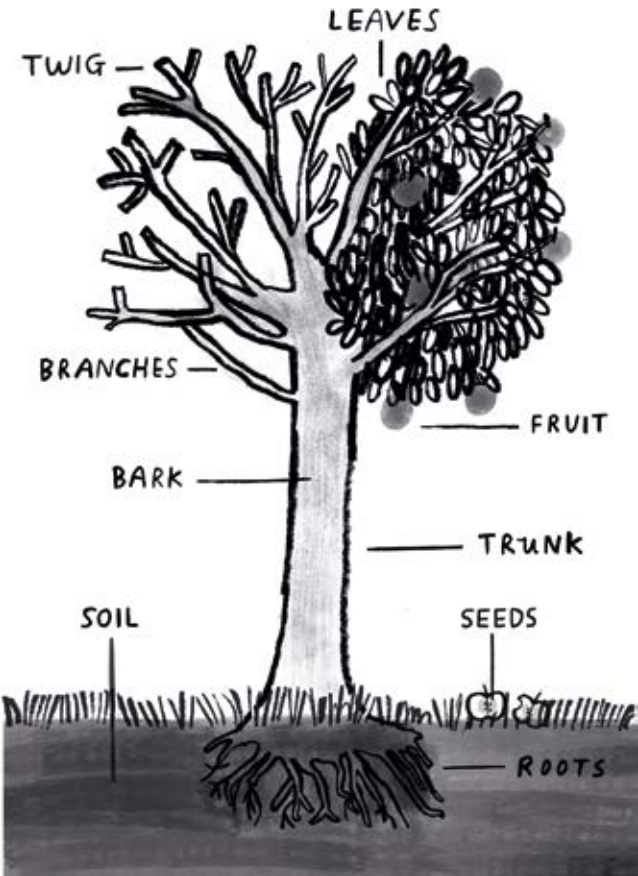
In creating the Tree Care Guide, children harnessed various methods and approaches, from verbal and written language, to drawing practices and patterns. The diversity displayed by the children throughout their work challenges the standard, adult-led communicative and linguistic practices – highlighting the need for (and power of) child-led and child-friendly models of policy development and dissemination.

The Tree Care Guide workshops clearly demonstrate how children negotiate agency through their educational and social practices – highlighting their role as leaders in environmental education theory, policy and practice.

**Collaborating with policymakers –
The 'Tree of Hope Youth Research Group'**

A final aspect of our work involved exploring belonging with/in treescapes for young people who migrated to the UK as unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. While there is compelling evidence that engaging with the natural environment is beneficial to the wellbeing of migrants, there has been little attention paid to how migrants can contribute to caring for treescapes. Yet our research demonstrated that 'global youth' (the youth team's preferred mode of identification, in resistance to stigmatised bureaucratic labels) can make valuable contributions to the treescape sector.

"In creating the Tree Care Guide, children harnessed various methods and approaches, from verbal and written language, to drawing practices and patterns."





This includes offering practical skills in planting and woodland maintenance, sharing knowledge and experience of other types of treescapes and ways of managing them, and providing insights into different ways of relating to trees, grounded in diverse cultural ontologies. Yet dominant understandings of and approaches to treescapes and tree-focused initiatives, can impose barriers to the contributions of global youth.

To address this, several emerging leaders in the group collaborated with members of the research team to form the ‘Tree of Hope Youth Research Group’. The group aimed to develop their knowledge and skills in treescape research, policy and practice to help the environment, influence the sector, and engage other migrant-background young people.

Throughout our collaboration, we reflected together on how we can support global youth engagement in treescapes initiatives, sharing our insights with, and learning from teams at DEFRA, Manchester City of Trees, and Mersey Forest.

This has resulted in the development of guidance for the sector, which is currently being developed as a document and a short film. Key messages include:

- Collaborate across sectors (migrant/youth/environment organisations) to support global youth to get involved;
- Embrace multilingualism as an opportunity for mutual learning;
- And, create flexible approaches that are responsive to the complex lives of global youth.

“These three activities within our project show the impact and importance children and young people’s voices.”

Giving children a voice

These three activities within our project show the impact and importance children and young people’s voices can have in conversations around the future of our treescapes. Whether it’s through telling powerful stories and articulating their own perspective, or in offering leadership in environmental education, it’s the children that make the most compelling case for real change. All we need to do is listen.

Read more about how the future of treescapes belongs to children and young people, at [the Voices of future website](#).

With children, for children

Professor Saul Becker

The Founding Director of Manchester Metropolitan University's new Institute for Children's Futures outlines its mission and vision, reflecting on the vast potential that lies across the University, together with the huge difference its members can make together.

With over 170 members as of February 2025, the cross-university Institute for Children's Futures (ICF) is one of the largest research groupings at the University. What makes this astonishing is that it is just three months old, having been founded at a one-day national conference of Manchester Metropolitan academics and professional staff, regional and national policy makers, and practitioners and service providers. There was clearly an appetite for a new approach and for new ways of working together.

Manchester Metropolitan already had pockets of excellence in research around children and young people, but it was scattered across the faculties and departments, with not enough collaboration, coordination or critical mass. ICF brings all this breadth and depth together under one banner, with clear membership, leadership and governance – all founded on an approach to research, engagement and impact that's rooted in children's rights and participation. Together, this amplifies our excellence and accelerates opportunities to make a difference with, and for, children and young people.

In supporting the launch of the ICF in November 2024, Paul Marshall, Deputy Chief Executive of Manchester City Council, commented: *"Manchester has an ambition to be a UNICEF UK Child Friendly City, a place that*

recognises children's rights and puts children and young people at the heart of decisions that affect their lives. The Institute for Children's Futures is a wonderful opportunity for the city to lead, guide and inform evidence-based policy and practice."

Our membership includes incredible strength across a host of specialisms and interests. Education and schooling, sport and exercise, health and wellbeing. Children with disabilities, learning difficulties and poor mental health. Young carers, child-parent relationships and social care. Childhood in low and middle-income countries. Safeguarding and gender-based violence. Youth justice, participation and rights. 'What works' evaluations. Digital childhoods. The list goes on and on.

Together, this weight of knowledge – this critical mass – offers us the opportunity to make an incredible impact. Building on all these abilities, ICF will focus on distinct themes for research and engagement in its first two years. Right now, we're considering areas including what constitutes 'child-friendly cities' for all children, 'what works' in promoting children's health and wellbeing, and 'Made in Manchester' – identifying and mapping educational, health, cultural, social and economic inequalities of children and young people across the region.

Making a difference with and for children and young people in any of these themes demands that we identify the key stakeholders within the complete multi-sector system. So, while young people's voices and participation will be central to our work, we must also seek engagement, collaboration and partnership with policy makers, practitioners and

professionals across what we might call the children's workforce – from people and organisations in the public sector, to the third, informal and independent sectors.

As such, the role of the ICF will be multifaceted. We will research key areas identified by children and those in policy and practice. Where we find the barriers to better outcomes for children, we will work to bring them down. As well as producing evidence-based measures that promote young people's health and wellbeing, we will work with external stakeholders to translate and disseminate our findings to inform policy and shape practice. And, across it all, we will harness our interdisciplinary expertise in child-participatory research and engagement to advance both the conceptualisation and the implementation of children's rights.

At the end of the day, ICF should be judged not just on the value it adds to the needs and actions of internal and external stakeholders, but on how we achieve that – through outcomes-focused collaborations and partnerships. Above all else, we should be judged on our impact. Better outcomes for children are better futures for us all – for families and communities, for society and the economy. Our reach is regional, national and international; our potential for improving young lives is huge.

Find out more about the ICF at mmu.ac.uk/icf or get in touch via email: icf@mmu.ac.uk



Rethinking interventions for parents

Professor Rebecca Pearson

As the crisis in children's mental health shows no sign of fading, it's important to ask where the wide range of programmes, initiatives and services are going wrong. Do we really understand the 'cause' of these problems? Are we reaching for complex solutions when more practical support will do greater good?

As a scientist, I've spent most of my career focused on finding evidence of the mechanisms, causes and thus solutions to a range of problems. If we find the cause and we know how to change that cause, then we have ourselves a solution to the problem. Job done. Right?

Maybe not. Take child mental health. Paper after paper has been published on the role of parenting, leading to a range of universal parenting interventions being funded and offered around the world. So why haven't we turned the tide on escalating child mental health problems?

Are scientists like me focusing on the wrong things? What are we missing?

A shift in perspective

I once attended a joint science and business innovation event, where I asked some business leaders what they thought were the barriers to collaboration between academics and business. Their response was enlightening: *"Scientists spend all their time finding what works, but in business, we start with what people want. There's no point in a product that works if no one wants it."*

This changed my thinking. We know, for instance, that parenting interventions under set conditions can work – as we proved in our meta-analysis of more than 50 randomised controlled trials (published on [pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov)). But our work showed something else too, something perhaps more important.

Within both the review of these trials and across our own focus groups and workshops with parents in the UK and Latin America, we

saw very poor uptake in these programmes – ranging from 20% to 60%. Many parents find it stigmatising or hard to engage. They feel blamed.

We have missed the glaring fact that we are not considering what parents want.

They often need much simpler, practical support. What they certainly don't want is a sense of guilt.

Cause is not blame

A critical issue in translating causal evidence into real-world interventions is avoiding the implication of blame. There are hundreds of studies linking the differences in parenting behaviours to 'worse' child development outcomes. To simplify our complex world, these assume that if an outcome is bad, its cause must be bad.

For instance, we think of homelessness or abuse as causes of depression. Blame seems justified. Similarly, if the outcome is good, we look for 'good' causes to credit – if a child is happy, we can credit the warm, loving parents.

"There's no point in a product that works if no one wants it."



But what about more complex associations? The relationship between parenting and child mental health is full of nuance. Traits we might consider ‘good’ can be linked to negative outcomes. Being trusting, for instance, could contribute to a child developing an eating disorder if the parent doesn’t question unusual eating behaviours.

In some cases, the same factor can lead to both good and bad outcomes. For example, speed is essential for winning a Formula 1 race, but it can also lead to increased risk. In other cases, a combination of causes is important for the outcome – sun and water help the plant grow, but sun without water will cause the plant to wilt and perish.

Parenting is full of complexity. Instead of attempting to fix ‘problematic’ parenting into ‘good’ parenting, what parents want is to be able to utilise the power of parent-child relationships – adapting parenting to their unique family needs and preferences.

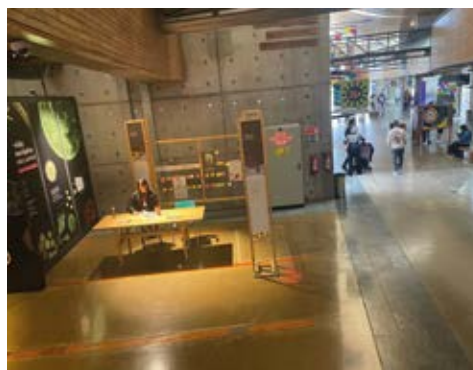
Less can be more

Another potential pitfall in translating the science (especially psychological science) into real-world measures is that we can get lost in the conceptual ideals, missing the simple solutions right in front of us.

There’s a famous myth that illustrates this point. The story goes that NASA, when preparing to send a manned mission into space, spent millions on engineering a special pen that would work in zero-gravity environments. The Russian cosmonauts, meanwhile, used a pencil.

Likewise, rather than spending time and resources trying to provide parents with gold-standard interventions that we don’t know work in our specific settings, we should look at the immediate, simpler needs first. Indeed, the most powerful finding of our meta-analysis was not around the various elements of interventions that can make a difference – it was that waiting lists not only delay potential help but also make the problem worse.

So, just like NASA, we should be using pencils rather than persisting with the perfect (and unobtainable) pen that ‘isn’t yet available’ in our contexts.



I am a parent of a child with an eating disorder. I waited for expert help and followed evidence-based parenting support at mealtimes. But I’m also a single parent, so struggled to put this parenting support into place – I couldn’t concentrate on monitoring emotions and addressing fear around meals as well as making the meal in the first place.

That’s just one example. The work we’ve done offers many more – showing that we may well think too much about the complex psychological situation, without considering the very practical needs around it. Perhaps it’s time to reconsider what we mean by ‘good’ or ‘effective’ when we consider the support that parents need. Or, more importantly, what parents want.

“Many parents find it stigmatising or hard to engage. They feel blamed.”

Read more about our work on **Early parenting interventions to prevent internalising problems in children and adolescents** at [pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov](https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10619111/)
[full link is: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10619111/>]

‘The Future is Ours’

The power of peer research

Simone Spray, CEO of Greater Manchester Mental Health Charity
‘42nd Street’

It was colleagues at Manchester Metropolitan University – thank you James Duggan, Janet Batsleer and Patrick Williams – that introduced to me the power of peer research and I’ve never looked back. Their approaches with young black men and young people experiencing isolation and loneliness were game changers for my own participative and rights-based practice and our approach to delivery at 42nd Street-a mental health charity supporting c5000 young people each year in Greater Manchester.

By using imaginative, creative, co-created, agile peer researcher alongside- but not dictated by – academic rigour, the teams were able to get into the detail of the experiences of young people in the here and now and at 42nd Street we have been able to apply the research to shape relevant, culturally intelligent services and approaches with young people. Perhaps most importantly – young people and the data tell us that by adopting these approaches, real, lasting tangible change can happen. For example, as a result of employing and training more male black workers, avoiding stigmatising “mental health” language and using film and spoken word alongside peer support- the charity has seen an increase in referrals from young black men and recovery rates improving by 15-20%.

It works. End to end. Research to evidence, evidence to delivery, delivery to impact.

Peer research is now embedded at 42nd Street; we have gone onto apply the approach to our support in the Orthodox Jewish Community, with care experienced and estranged young people, care leavers, global majority young people, young women, LGBTQ+ young people, young adults aged 16-25 years, crisis care support, our therapeutic community (TC42) and in our creative



programme – The Horsfall. The improved engagement and outcomes are indisputable...

Despite sharing our learning through co-developed and co-delivered training and our team and young people having a voice at numerous collaborative meetings, events and conferences, it is still hard to convince wider stakeholders to invest in, incubate, replicate, spread, mainstream and scale these nuanced approaches. There is a distinct lack of appetite to take the learning from peer research and the insights of lived experience and embed them into practice, policy and procurement frameworks. The system talks extensively about the importance and value of listening to lived experience and shared decision-making, but it is still unusual to see direct evidence of where the insights revealed have changed delivery.

Financial pressures, inflexible national models of “evidence-based” practice and risk are the usual justifications for the inability to bend. However, if we are committed to tackling the increased numbers of children and young people experiencing poor mental health, often because of their complex intersectional,

“There is a distinct lack of appetite to take the learning from peer research and the insights of lived experience and embed them into practice.”

cultural, social and economic lives, we need to recognise that it may be our aversion to change that is driving our inability to adapt and not the financial, clinical or safeguarding implications alone. We need to be open to new thinking and agile in our approach to change.

The 'Active Ingredients' theory proposes that traditional fixed interventions such as restrictive school curriculums, medication or therapeutic approaches can sometimes be passive and inflexible for individuals prescribed them and, there are in fact multiple routes to positive outcomes. The theory works to identify the specific therapeutic aspects of an intervention which bring about change. In 2023/4 The Horsfall conducted some peer led ethnographic research to identify the key active ingredients that make creative approaches work. The active ingredients that the young people identified are social connection, creativity, action, agency, belonging and fun.

Young people describe how The Horsfall is a space where they can develop their own recovery journey 'recipe' alongside experienced and supportive professionals. Over the last 7 years we have evolved our approach which has involved a co-designed capital build, extensive fundraising, development of a diverse workforce of young person-centred, rights-based mental health practitioners, artists and young practitioners and testing different models of one-one and group work. There have been performances, exhibitions, symposia, live streaming and social media campaigns. We have used immersive theatre, gaming, legislative theatre, visual arts, city centre billboards, short films, murals, spoken word, music, dance/movement, clay, pottery, textiles, sculptures, installations, poster campaigns, photography and the young people have collaborated with emerging and established artists to share their experiences, raise awareness, challenge stigma, express themselves and call for action.

These approaches can be genuinely life changing – the process of expression within a trusting, safe environment, using creative addresses both clinical presentations and psychosocial issues; it supports young people to develop tools, skills and techniques to



deal with and process trauma, distress, isolation and anxiety- creative tools, skills and techniques that become part of a creative approach to life that can stay with them far beyond the therapy room and meds.

The Horsfall team are now working with colleagues nationally to build a movement for change, strengthen practice and influence policy. We run a bimonthly Community of Practice and a National Symposium (this year being held on the 8th and 9th May on Manchester and online). For more details contact simone.spray@42ndstreet.org.uk

“The Horsfall team are now working with colleagues nationally to build a movement for change.”



“Snippets of my own personal experience of an abusive relationship are wrapped around every corset.... I've highlighted words in red to reflect ideas a feeling surrounding PTSD, depression and anxiety... The journey of creating this work has made me feel torn and vulnerable but also given me the space to really feel connected to myself.... This work is about me, but also everyone like me and I hope can help highlight the impact domestic abuse has.

**Gabby –
The Future Is Ours Festival 2021**

Circular change with social impact

Professor Paul Dewick, Professor Sally Randles, Dr Sarah Walker

Ideas around the circular economy are starting to take hold, with a wide range of initiatives and programmes across sectors both nationally and internationally. But, for a model with such rich potential for transforming society, the social value is often missing from the picture. This three-year project seeks to address this deficit.

The circular economy offers an alternative to the traditional, linear model that relies on the heavy use (and inevitable waste) of natural resources. Instead, circular models are designed to dematerialize economies, through the “12 R Strategies” – reduce, repair, recondition, reuse, return, recover, recycle, refill, refurbish, reclaim, redesign and remanufacture – all of which helps conserve those resources, cut pollution and regenerate the natural environment.

The circular economy is not a new idea, but it is one with a fresh wind in its sails. Policy makers are implementing circular interventions. Investors are putting their money into circular projects. Businesses are developing and reporting on their innovative circular practices. Collaborations, partnerships and initiatives are springing up across cities and regions to bring circular solutions to local issues. Across various sectors and locations, these initiatives and activities are offering opportunities for materials, energy and economic efficiencies. Change is happening.

Academics are in the vanguard of this movement. For those of us with an interest in the field, there is plenty of evidence to gather and impacts to investigate; the number of studies has grown exponentially. But we feel this work tends to miss something: the social value of circularity.

(One notable exception is Just2CE – a collaboration funded by the EU’s Horizon 2020 programme – which is researching a just transition to a circular economy: exploring what can facilitate or hinder such a transformation. Read more at just2ce.eu)

For us, circular projects and organisations are always social in nature. They involve people, impact all of society and are realised through social relations and processes. And yet social objectives – especially in equity and justice, but extending to human well-being, employment and other imperatives – are rarely central to the design and implementation of circular activities. All too often, the societal outcomes of the circular economy are poorly understood, vaguely defined and even ignored, while any unintended social benefits are overlooked. And, while the organisations involved will be quick to celebrate jobs or training any project generates, the quality of these opportunities (typically low-grade employment) are hidden and the value of non-paid work, like volunteering, is taken for granted.

“For us, circular projects and organisations are always social in nature.”



We applied to the UK Research and Innovation Economic and Social Research Council (UKRI ESRC) to redress this imbalance. We wanted to put a spotlight on circular projects and organisations that purposefully aim to be socially equitable, just and inclusive, ecologically regenerative and economically resilient. We call these ‘circular society innovations’, or CSI. We’re interested in how these initiatives are shaped by the conditions and people present in the places and spaces in which they happen, and in turn how they shape those places.

The resulting three-year study – **Place-based Circular Society Innovations** – began in October 2024, working in Greater Manchester and beyond to investigate projects that not only bring environmental benefits but also integrate social justice and well-being into

the way they are run. The Manchester Met team draws together colleagues from across disciplines and departments, including the Department of Strategy Enterprise and Sustainability and the Institute of Place Management (IPM) at the Business School, as well as the Department of Natural Sciences within the Faculty of Science and Engineering.

We’re joined by colleagues from HU University of Applied Sciences (the Netherlands), University of Turku (Finland) and the Illinois Institute of Technology (USA). These international researchers not only bring additional expertise, experience and skills, but also live and work in cities at the forefront of socially embedded circular projects – allowing us to compare, contrast and learn from international examples of circular society innovations.

“We wanted to put a spotlight on circular projects and organisations that purposefully aim to be socially equitable, just and inclusive.”





Place is an important aspect of our research. It's more than a point on a map – places are suffused with meaning, culture, history and even with ways of doing things. Places can help things happen, just as they can hinder some things. They are unique in their natural capital, local economies and distinct communities. As such, we expect that the processes behind circular society innovations to vary in different places.

The key for understanding and accessing all these aspects of place is local collaboration. By partnering with non-academic organisations, we can identify and access the projects doing the work. Here, those partners include the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA), Manchester City Council, Stockport and Oldham Metropolitan Borough Councils, as well as CLES (a national organisation for local economies). Further afield, we're also working with Re:London, a partnership of the Mayor and boroughs of London focused on waste, resources and transforming the capital into a leading low carbon circular economy. Together with representatives of CSI projects and organisations, these partners sit on our steering committee and advisory board – not only to ensure we deliver on our plans, but also to translate our findings into workable recommendations for policy makers and practitioners.



In exchange, our study offers partner organisations value just when they need it. As Nick Leslie and Liz Atherton, respectively the Head and Programme Manager for Climate Action Now at Stockport Council, say:

“We value collaboration in everything we do – that’s why we’re part of this project with Manchester Met. The 3-year project will add considerable value to what we’re doing here in Stockport, in a variety of ways.

Firstly, it’s an opportunity to celebrate the community actions happening to create a circular economy right now – to recognise the hard work that groups and businesses are putting in across the area. Sharing these successes will help us all learn how to nurture, amplify and scale CSI, as well as understanding the significance of local place-embeddedness.

Secondly, we’ll have the chance to discover more about what’s already happening and to use these stories from the project to inspire others.

Finally, this project will help us connect the dots across the borough and spark ideas for the future. We hope this work will lay a foundation for wider collaboration in Stockport, potentially with other project partners. We know there are fantastic circular projects and businesses in our borough – we want to explore how they can support each other, how we can support them and how we can work together to achieve more and better outcomes for our residents.”

Stockport Council isn't the only partner already aware of the kind of projects and organisations that we'd characterise as CSIs. Within just a few weeks of working with partners across the region, the abstract ideas we had about the circular society had been brought to life with actual examples – from urban farms closing the loop of local food consumption and lending libraries offering tools and equipment, to community hubs repairing and repurposing textiles and electronic appliances.

Take, for example, The Boiler House (boilerhouse.org), located in South Manchester's Moss Side. What was once a district power station is now a centre for making and mending. They run everything from a repair café to a tool-hiring service, as well as offering volunteering opportunities and tips on growing food. It's a true community-driven space that brings people together and empowers them to learn and grow.

Another project is MUD – the Manchester Urban Diggers (wearemud.org). Aiming to be part of a fairer food system, the community interest company started out by repurposing a disused bowling green in Platt Fields Park into a vibrant community-focused growing space. Now, as well as offering courses on food awareness and self-sufficiency, they're reclaiming spaces across Greater Manchester to help make food security a reality.

A third example is the Renew Hub (recycleforgreatermanchester.com/renew-hub) – the UK's largest reuse facility. Based in Trafford, the service is run by SUEZ Recycling and Recovery UK in partnership with GMCA, as part of Recycle for GM. There, donated items are repaired and renewed in the Hub's workshop, before being forwarded to one of three Renew Shops in Altrincham, Oldham or Eccles. This not only keeps useful items from going to landfill, but also generates income that supports local communities.

Over the next three years, we will look at more projects and organisations like these – investigating the 'what' and 'how' of circular society innovations. First, we'll identify 100

projects and organisations that meet – in various ways – our understanding of CSI as socially equitable, just and inclusive, ecologically regenerative and economically resilient. Then we'll take a deep dive into 50 of those cases, asking a range of questions: Who are the key actors initiating and scaling up CSI, and how do they interact? What makes innovation happen in CSI projects? How does place matter to the success of the CSI?

To maximise the societal impact of this new research, we'll focus on turning our findings into practical actions and interventions – not only for policy makers grappling with commitments to economic, environmental and social sustainable development, but also for practitioners working in communities with multiple and often conflicting needs.

We're in the process of creating a Knowledge Action Network (KAN) to co-develop and disseminate our findings with a broad range of stakeholders – from community organisations, sustainability practitioners and think-tanks, to local authorities and national government, not to mention colleagues across Manchester Met and other universities.

But the biggest beneficiaries of this work will be the places and communities that are home to these CSIs. Where appropriate, we'll support the policy makers and practitioners looking to scale up CSI projects – ensuring they make the greatest possible contribution to more equitable, inclusive, sustainable development.

To find out more about Place-based Circular Society Innovations, or to join the KAN, please follow this [link](#), or email place-basedCSI@mmu.ac.uk.

Professor Paul Dewick is a Professor of Sustainability and Principal Investigator on the Pb-CSI study.

Professor Sally Randles is a Professor of Sustainability and Innovation and Co-Investigator on the Pb-CSI study.

Dr Sarah Walker is a Research Associate and lead researcher on the Pb-CSI study.



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The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) is part of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), a non-departmental body funded by the government. Through its funding of world-leading research, data and post-graduate training across the economic, behavioural, social and data sciences, it seeks to raise productivity, address climate change, improve public services and generate a prosperous, inclusive, healthy and secure society. Find out more at <http://www.ukri.org/esrc>

Falling short of Career Guidance Benchmarks for those who need them most

Professor Lisa Russell and Dr Katherine Davey

Every young person has a right to the kind of quality careers guidance that is so vital for making informed decisions about the future. For those without significant social capital or home support, that guidance can be an essential driver in social mobility. As the most at risk of not being in education, employment or training (NEET), they have the most to gain. But our Leverhulme Trust-funded research – *Mapping interventions for NEET young people in England (MINE)* – shows that schools are failing these young people, revealing a fragmented careers provision and advice landscape that often bypasses the most in need.

Quality careers guidance matters

When young people know more about the options available to them, they have a better idea of the path they need to take to realise their potential and secure the best job possible. That's why Careers Information, Advice and Guidance (CIAG) is so important. Insecure and precarious pathways in education are more likely to lead to insecure and precarious situations in work – low-paid jobs without long-term prospects. As such, the school-to-work transition is an important stage that demands targeted, bespoke support.

Good CIAG opens young people's eyes to careers unfamiliar to them, like those beyond their own network of family and friends – revealing possibilities they may not have otherwise considered. That makes it particularly significant for those young people who have been excluded from school, since this may act as precursor to NEET status, which is associated with widening health inequalities, diminishing long-term job prospects and having a negative economic impact – both for the individual, and on wider society.

By giving young people better information about their education and employment pathways, better and fairer CIAG provision could reduce national NEET figures, as well as mitigating existing inequalities across both the education and employment landscapes. In August 2024, a report from [The Youth Futures Foundation](#) highlighted that one in eight young people in the UK are out of work, education and employment. Not only are these NEET figures too high, but the UK has been slower than other OECD countries in the work to cut those figures. Young people report navigating a more challenging and precarious labour market, while highlighting the need for support that better aligns today's employment market.

Setting a standard for careers guidance

The Gatsby Benchmarks are a framework for careers provision, based on a 2013 report that criticised CIAG provision in England for being inconsistent and patchy, and called for reform. This pioneering work resulted in the [Good Career Guidance Report](#) – which lays out eight benchmarks for world-class careers provision:

1. A stable career programme
2. Learning from career and labour market information
3. Addressing the need of each pupil
4. Linking curriculum learning to careers
5. Encounters with employers and employees
6. Experiences of workplaces
7. Encounters with further and higher education
8. Personal guidance

More than a decade on, the emerging findings from MINE indicate that many secondary schools and alternative education provision sites are falling short of these benchmarks.

“When young people know more about the options available to them, they have a better idea of the path they need to take.”

The MINE project

Funded by The Leverhulme Trust, MINE is designed to help us understand the nature and scope of early intervention programmes targeted at young people ‘at risk’ of becoming NEET. The project provides the first comprehensive national picture of CIAG provision, highlighting the voices of young people aged 14-16 accessing this provision – using interview, ethnographic observation data and (visual) document analysis to understand how their experiences of career guidance connect with their previous, current and future experiences of education and the labour market.

Overall, the project found a formal careers landscape that was fragmented, resulting in a widely varied guidance and advice provision. Across England, Local Authorities (LAs) and settings operate quite differently: some ‘buy in’ advice while other settings take a more individualised approach. Professionals often express concerns that not enough resources (especially time and funds) are allocated to career provision. While there are benchmarks that many educational settings need to meet, there is no standardised approach to how the resources are allocated to meeting them.

“The provision varies from school to school, because there’s no set standard. There’s just the benchmarks, and that’s why I can’t be like ‘I need more time’, because there’s no standard established time it requires.”

Head of Careers and Teacher, Secondary School – allocated one period a week for careers provision

Young people’s experiences

Perhaps unsurprisingly, young people in Year 11 tend to focus intently on their post-16 destination, but how these decisions are made and what types of provision young people have access to varies. Some young people attend careers fairs, others receive one-to-one advice from careers advisors, career lessons and support from subject and form tutors. However, for far too many the advice they experience is limited – an issue further compounded for those young people who may have experienced multiple school moves or have low attendance.

**Hannah (Year 10) –
Missing Opportunities for Advice**

The Pupil Referral unit Hannah attended

“It’s clear that today’s patchy and uneven Careers Information, Advice and Guidance falls well short of the eight Gatsby Benchmarks.”





offered a weekly careers lesson. However, Hannah was on a reduced timetable so had not attended this. When asked if she had received any careers advice in school, she replied: *“I was supposed to – yeah, in the lesson called careers, but because I don’t do afternoons I’m never in that lesson.”*

Some of our young people had experience of work, paid or otherwise. A significant number didn’t have the chance to complete a work experience placement through their setting – sometimes it was not even offered. For some young people, broken trajectories meant they had missed work experience opportunities or were unable to make the necessary arrangements.

Isla (Year 10) – Missing Work Experience

Isla was meant to complete work experience in her secondary school. However, she was excluded before she had the opportunity to take part. She is now attending a Pupil Referral Unit and says that: *“ever since I left [mainstream school] it’s just out of the picture”.*

Some young people want to move on from education and into work as soon as is possible, so would benefit from more career-focused curriculum content. By Year 11, most were keen to find work – whether paid part-time jobs or voluntary roles – but a lack of

experience and relatively young age seemed to act as key barriers for finding something suitable. A small number of our young people had initiated their own opportunities, making money through self-employment by designing games, streaming content or creating artwork for commissions.

Aiming for a higher standard

It’s clear that today’s patchy and uneven Careers Information, Advice and Guidance falls well short of the eight Gatsby Benchmarks. The provision young people receive should not come down to where they live, or the setting they happen to attend. Instead, we must strive for a more equitable CIAG landscape – one that gives all young people quality and bespoke experiences of workplaces, meaningful encounters with further and higher education, and personal guidance that will help them access relevant education and secure employment. Above all, our work shows how much good quality CIAG matters. Not only should those at risk of being excluded or becoming NEET not miss out on this guidance, but it should be treated as a key intervention – and, hence, better managed and better targeted to where it can make a profound difference.

Read more about the MINE project at [Mapping Interventions for NEET Young People in England \(MINE\) | MMU](#)

Saving the Prison System from collapse

What policymakers can learn from our youth custody evaluation

Kevin Wong

“The prison population in England and Wales has doubled over the last 30 years. We now have the highest incarceration rate of any Western European country and the prison population is projected to continue to rise by four and a half thousand offenders a year. Supply of new prison places has not kept up with the increase in demand and for the eighteen months after February 2023, the male estate was routinely operating at above 99% capacity. In Summer 2024, these capacity pressures brought this prison system within days of collapse...”

(Independent Sentencing Review 2024:4)

Opening the call for evidence from the Independent Sentencing Review, this frank assessment presents the scale of the problem the prison estate faces. Tasked by the Government with solving the prison crisis, the review needs all the help it can get.

The makings of a crisis

Evaluation is evidence incarnate – as Ray Pawson and Nick Tilley put it in their [Realist Evaluation](#) (available on [urban-response.org](#)) it is research which seeks to discern “what works for whom, to what extent, in what circumstances and why”. Once the sentencing review comes to an end, recommendations will be made, which the government will then accept, reject or ignore. They will formulate policy, which may work in part, not at all or make things worse.

Why such a gloomy outlook? Ray Pawson – a 30-year veteran of the criminal justice system – offers an answer. “*Policies are conjectures. They rest on theories about the causes of societal problems and further theories about how they may be resolved. Such conjectures are always fallible and even in rather modest reforms, the original hypotheses often fall short – vital preconditions are left unconsidered, unanticipated consequences arise.*” His elegant summation rings true: policy making and implementation is in a constant state of trial and error.



Last summer's prison crisis in England and Wales has been long in the making. It's a complex problem embedded within criminal justice, a complex system. Sentencing – the remit of the review – is just one of numerous drivers which have ramped up the prison population. As Cat Jones and Clare Lally note in their [January 2024 Parliament Briefing](#) (on [researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/](#)), other factors include unprecedented numbers of people on remand (in prison awaiting trial and sentencing), recalls (returning to prison because of breaches to conditions of release),

“Last summer's prison crisis in England and Wales has been long in the making.”

reconvictions and increasing convictions for offences (such as sexual offences) likely to lead to a prison sentence. This is all further exacerbated by the cumulative neglect from governments of all political persuasions.

That the current incumbents have established the review and not announced a prison-building programme is a step in the right direction – but it's worth pointing out in the strongest terms that sentencing reform alone will not suffice. For the moment, however, let's look at the review.

An unknown success story

It's noteworthy that the current review is restricted to the sentencing of adults – youth sentencing is outside its remit. Perhaps this reflects the startling 85% decline in the imprisonment of children in England and Wales in the last 25 years – from 2,610 people in April 2000 to 400 in October 2024.

This penal success story, largely unknown (and overlooked) by the public, softens the earlier gloomy prognosis: the fall in the imprisonment of children demonstrates what's possible for adults. However, it requires a clear plan, political stamina and an expectation that gains, set-backs, triumphs and disappointments are all inevitable.

Why did this fall occur? Since 2000, governments of all political persuasions have quietly pursued a policy goal that the imprisonment of children should be a measure of last resort. A similar kind of broad consensus on adult imprisonment is vital today, if the government wants to solve this prison crisis permanently.

Of course, there is a long road to travel between a policy aspiration and realisation. Tested solutions are needed to provide the means for adult sentencing reform to be executed.

A path lost?

I present the clumsily titled 'Youth Justice Custody Reinvestment Pathfinder'. This was piloted by the Youth Justice Board (YJB) and Ministry of Justice (MoJ) almost 15 years ago to test ways to reduce youth custody. It's likely that there are few (if any) civil servants toiling away in those departments today who will remember it.

Regrettably, lessons from Pathfinder and other initiatives from this time were swept aside by then Justice Minister, Chris Grayling's disastrous part-privatisation of probation in 2014 (which was then re-nationalised in 2021). Such is the nature of what Pawson and Tilly call "impending and perpetual policy change".

Here, I admit to a personal mission. Together with colleagues, I spent three years evaluating Pathfinder – studying the programme, closely observing practitioner efforts and wrangling data. We concluded that the programme showed promise. Of the many, many initiatives I've evaluated (and which have since drifted back into shadow), Pathfinder above others deserved its day in the sun. But it was denied.

Transformation in increments

The crisis offered an opening for innovation. Selected youth justice services (YJS) in England were given dedicated funding and free rein to reduce youth custody – but on condition that if they missed bespoke targets (based on the number of nights young people spent in custody), the money had to be repaid.

Evaluation consistently demonstrates that programmes work well in some places and not so well in others. Confirming this, two sites dropped out after the first year (without penalty). The two sites that remained – one a consortium of five YJS, the other a group of three – surpassed their custody targets by 40%.

Their strategy was straightforward. Eschewing a magic bullet solution, the sites relied on the cumulative impact of small practice improvements – marginal gains – positively influencing children's and their parents' behaviour and sentencer decision-making:

- Reducing the number of custodial sentences in favour of robust community alternatives.
- Reducing the duration of custodial sentences by supporting appeals against sentence length.
- Reducing the number of children on remand by recommending robust bail packages.
- Reducing the number of breaches by sharpening efforts to encourage children to comply with their orders.

“Pathfinder above others deserved its day in the sun. But it was denied.”



These steps which proved so effective for YJS could be applied by probation to adults to the same effect. But caution is advised.

Evaluation has shown us that programmes which seem simple in concept can turn out to be complex in implementation. What was beguiling, quickly becomes bewildering. Initiatives work because of their specific contexts and conditions – the same seeds will fare better sown in sunny St Austell than in windswept John o’ Groats. That said, if favourable conditions are carefully replicated, then the chance of success improves. Our evaluation of Pathfinder concluded that several factors were critical, including vigilant forecasting (of custody demand), agile practice implementation, sharing learning and risk as a consortium (of YJS), and canny and experienced YJS leadership – among others.

But even if these factors are faithfully replicated, differences remain. Adults are not children. A wounded probation service, still recovering from Grayling’s botched privatisation, is not the confident YJS consortia of the 2010s.

The prison crisis is a complex problem, demanding inevitably complex solutions. The challenges of implementing Pathfinder for adults should not be underestimated. Practitioners and policy makers don’t have to go it alone. Evaluation can steer and guide implementation, just as we did for the original programme.

Where evaluation counts

With the review set to offer recommendations this coming spring, what key points can we offer?

First, Government needs to commit to reduce the adult prison population and stick with it – for the long haul. As a society, if we believe in a fair, humane and effective justice system, then prison as last resort should be a guiding principle.

Second, sentencing reform can make a difference, but strategies are also needed to tackle the other drivers of prison population growth. We need to rebuild a robust and resilient probation service, fund adequate resettlement and rehabilitation provision, and tackle the structural inequalities which give rise to crime in the first place. Government must confront those challenges; sentencing reform will not be enough.

Thirdly, Pathfinder’s marginal gains strategy deployed to reduce custodial sentences, their duration, remand and breaches can be applied to reduce the adult prison population. But this requires funding, spirited leadership and fine tuning in implementation – combining nuanced replication with adaptation and attention to make it work here, there and everywhere.

And finally, evaluation – past, concurrent or prospective – can and should be marshalled to light the way.

“Government needs to commit to reduce the adult prison population and stick with it – for the long haul.”

<https://www.urban-response.org/system/files/content/resource/files/main/pawson--tilley-%282004%29-realist-evaluation.pdf>

Q&A

In Conversation with our Chancellor's Fellows

At MetroPolis, we've enabled dozens of Manchester Met academics to make an outstanding impact on policy by placing them with policy-oriented organisations and empowering them to drive policymaking within their chosen fields.

We achieve this through the Chancellor's Fellowship, a scheme that provides experienced researchers with practical and financial support to strengthen an existing relationship with a policy-relevant organisation. This allows the researcher to act as a consultant and advisor, supporting their partner organisation in developing policy informed by research evidence and contributing to related activities.

The work our fellows undertake is diverse and dynamic, enabling them to make a decisive policy impact. In this Q&A, three of our recent Chancellor's Fellows – Professor Hannah Smithson, Professor Rebecca Pearson, and Dr Bradley Cain – discuss their research, the impact they've achieved, and share advice for researchers looking to engage with policymakers in the UK and internationally.

*By Nicholas O'Dowd
(Policy Impact Coordinator at MetroPolis)*

Professor Hannah Smithson

Q1: Could you tell me about yourself and your research background?

I am Professor Hannah Smithson, specialising in youth justice at Manchester Metropolitan University, where I have been since 2009. Around ten years ago, I established the Manchester Centre for Youth Studies, a leading research centre focused on participatory and creative methods that amplify young people's voices.

My research is highly applied, collaborating with organisations such as the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, regional youth justice teams, and government bodies including the Ministry of Justice and the Youth Justice Board. My work influences policy and practice in youth justice, ensuring real-world impact.

Q2: How did you come to work with Anne Longfield (CBE) and the Centre for Young Lives (CYL)?

Anne Longfield, former Children's Commissioner for England and now a peer in the House of Lords, established CYL as a policy think tank advocating for children and young people. While CYL covers education and care, my work focused on shaping its youth justice policy agenda.

I had followed Anne's efforts to improve youth custody conditions and prevent young people from entering the justice system. We formally met when she spoke at an event I co-hosted at Portcullis House, Westminster, following my research on COVID-19's impact on youth justice. Our discussion led to an ongoing collaboration, and I became a research partner at CYL.

Q3: How did the Chancellor's Fellowship support your work with CYL?

The Fellowship, which I began in April 2024, allowed me to set CYL's youth justice agenda, particularly in lobbying MPs and parliamentarians. Key focus areas included:

- Reforming or abolishing aspects of the youth custodial estate.
- Improving initiatives for girls in the youth justice system.
- Enhancing education and employment opportunities for young people with justice involvement.

However, the unexpected general election announcement in July shifted our focus. With CYL's strong Westminster connections, we pivoted to working closely with the Shadow Youth Justice Minister. Together, we produced seven policy papers outlining key youth justice challenges and proposing research-backed solutions. Since the election, we have continued working with the new Youth Justice Minister to advocate for these policies.

The Fellowship was an invaluable opportunity to work with Anne and gain insight into Westminster's policymaking process – how policy is developed, how to engage ministers, and how to influence decisions effectively.

Q4: You outlined four key lessons from your Fellowship in a MetroPolis blog post. Could you elaborate?

Certainly. These lessons stem from my experience engaging with policymakers:

1. **Don't write as an academic** – Academic writing is rigorous and detailed, but policy writing must be concise and accessible. I had to adapt my style significantly.
2. **Be mindful of how much detail parliamentarians can digest** – MPs and ministers don't have time for lengthy research papers. Key messages must be clear and targeted, avoiding excessive theory.
3. **Don't just highlight problems – provide solutions** – Policymakers often know the issues but lack clear solutions. Providing actionable, well-researched recommendations is far more effective.
4. **Be realistic while staying true to your principles** – While ambitious reforms are desirable, they must align with political and fiscal realities. Balancing feasibility with principled advocacy was key.

The Chancellor's Fellowship was a fantastic experience, and I highly recommend it to academics seeking to engage with external organisations. It provided a unique opportunity to apply my expertise practically while gaining insight into policymaking.



Q&A



Professor Rebecca Pearson

Q1: How did you first become interested in studying the relationship between parenting and child mental health?

There is a mental health crisis among young people, reflecting an ongoing cycle across generations. History, literature, and science have long recognised that parental mental health plays a significant role in child development. However, rather than viewing parents as the 'cause' of mental health issues, I see the parent-child relationship as a source of strength and a key factor in breaking this cycle.

Q2: Through your Chancellor's Fellowship, you travelled to Chile to support policymaking relating to mental health for parents and children. Could you tell us about this collaboration?

The funding enabled me to attend the Chilean Ministry of Health's annual conference, where we explored shared policy challenges



and mapped solutions. I also visited local hospitals and community groups to discuss current mental health provision. For instance, in an adolescent mental health ward, we explored ways to integrate the voices of those with lived experience, an approach less common in Chile.

The Fellowship also supports ongoing work to create infographics and briefings that facilitate engagement between parents, young people, and healthcare providers.

Q3: What lessons have you learned about influencing policy?

You must work within existing structures, but impactful change doesn't always require financial investment. For example, simply shifting the narrative to see parents as part of the solution rather than the cause can be transformative. Change doesn't always require costly interventions – sometimes, it's about altering perspectives.

Q4: What advice would you give for influencing policy internationally?

Collaboration is key. My work with Chile Crece Contigo (Chile Grows With You) is mutually beneficial because its values align closely with UK initiatives like Home-Start and Family Hubs. Working with international organisations that share similar missions but face different challenges allows for genuine co-learning and long-term partnerships.

Q&A

Dr Bradley Cain



Q1: Could you elaborate on your conservation biology research?

My research focuses on Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly East Africa. Projects include studying the impact of fencing on protected areas, disease transmission at the wildlife-livestock interface, wild meat hunting in West Africa, endangered antelope recovery, and black and white rhinoceros reproduction. I have a long-standing commitment to black rhino conservation and contribute to national species management strategies as a member of the IUCN Species Survival Commission.

Q2: How did your Chancellor's Fellowship support your work in Kenya with the Wildlife Research & Training Institute (WRTI)?

The Fellowship enabled us to deliver a workshop to develop a standardised rangeland monitoring system for Kenya, which covers over 80% of the country. The workshop brought together scientists and conservation stakeholders to establish consensus on monitoring protocols and reporting systems. Following this, a core working group under WRTI was formed – including Manchester Met – to oversee the development and implementation of these systems.

Q3: What advice would you give to conservation biologists aiming to influence policy?

Conservation biology should prioritise real-world impact. Engaging policymakers and stakeholders from the outset ensures research is relevant and applicable, rather than confined to academic literature.

Q4: What advice do you have for researchers engaging with international policymakers?

Engage local scientists and policymakers early. Many of our East African projects address questions raised by managers and policymakers, ensuring our research directly contributes to national conservation strategies.



A Just Transition

Net zero transition risks UK jobs and worsening inequalities: The need for place-based policies in a Just Transition.

Dr Dan Bailey



The UK is committed to reaching net zero by 2050. In this blogpost, Dr Dan Bailey explores what decarbonisation means for decent work and regional inequality in the UK, and argues that policymakers need to focus on place-based economic policy interventions.

The net zero policy agenda has long been frustrated by vested interests in numerous sectors, including business and financial actors crucial to national growth strategies. The agenda, however, has recently been given impetus by the combination of technological innovations and evolving perceptions of future competitiveness in corporate

boardrooms and governments across the global economy. The various strategies borne from this interplay have served to instigate and accelerate systemic changes to production in the energy, manufacturing and automotive sectors particularly. These emerging shifts promote industrial decarbonisation, but there is a sting in the tail. These shifts carry a series of risks to employment in regions of the UK economy that requires the attention of policy-makers.

Challenges of transition

The reorientation of production – such as the shift to electric vehicles, green hydrogen, solar PV, wind energy

technology and heat pumps – are vital to net zero transitions, but each entails large-scale shifts toward alternative types of facilities, supply chains, infrastructure, expertise and energy usage. This could prompt the relocation of production, investment and jobs. It is already the case, for example, that automotive companies are shifting manufacturing to industrial sites in China where technical knowledge and cheap labour are abundant, gradually displacing the manufacturing of cars in Europe. Equally, the manufacturing of green hydrogen and solar PV are also being pioneered in areas where labour regulations and costs are less onerous. This presents clear conflicts between corporate strategies of transition and the interests of workers' unions.

These disruptions to patterns of employment are being re-shaped and escalated by the intensifying global 'arms race' on subsidies for low-carbon production. The long series of investments made by the Chinese state have effectively secured a host of competitive advantages in low-carbon manufacturing, but the \$369bn mobilised by Biden's Inflation Reduction Act for companies based in the US is seen as a key moment in the geopolitical competition to tempt companies to relocate their operations and jobs. The anxiety this created in Europe forced the EU to unveil a policy of 'matching aid' last year, which offer European companies equal subsidies to those offered elsewhere. Numerous carmakers have already paused plans to develop battery cells in Europe due to the offer of subsidies in the US, or are reassessing corporate strategies as firms seek to use their leverage to capture subsidies to invest in green hydrogen, electric batteries, carbon capture and storage, renewable energy industries, and other products perceived to be central to low-carbon value chains.

In the context of these emerging economic and political shifts, net

zero transitions represent a phase of capitalist restructuring with geographically uneven but potentially dire consequences for some countries and regions in the global economy. This reconfiguration of production and the 'global division of labour' could potentially lead to localised issues of 'green deindustrialisation' and structural unemployment.

The domestic impact

The risks facing each region of the UK economy remain unclear, but localised tensions and conflicts are already emerging. The low-carbon transition has already led to job losses in the UK Steelmaking industry, including in Port Talbot and Scunthorpe where the introduction of electric arc furnaces will result in approximately 3000 and 1900 job losses respectively. In Grangemouth, meanwhile, the closure of the oil refinery will see around 400 people made redundant this summer, and (as in Port Talbot and Scunthorpe) there will be additional adverse localised areas due to lower levels of disposable income and demand.

Inauspiciously, very few 'green jobs' have emerged to replace the jobs lost. The failure of Britishvolt demonstrates how difficult it is for British industry to secure a niche in low-carbon manufacturing supply chains, and post-Brexit trading conditions of UK manufacturers are only being worsened by the escalating global trade war. Hopes of a green jobs bonanza in a period of 'creative destruction' have diminished considerably.

There is nothing predetermined about these trends, but the transition to net zero in the UK could be turbulent. At the very least, the threats to domestic employment presents a grave threat to notions of a Just Transition in the UK. For some regions, this will add to historical scars of deindustrialisation, and the legacies of unemployment, loss of local pride and community

spirit, economic stagnation and regional inequality that it left behind.

Successive UK governments have been slow to respond to these risks. The domestic net zero policy agenda itself has historically been characterised by political posturing, policy U-turns and institutional conflicts more than the policy action required to avert climate catastrophe, which has left the UK at a competitive disadvantage to rival economies, and the inclination to protect workers from the forces of globalisation has historically been weak. In the next decade, however, UK policy-makers must confront these challenges, build coalitions with affected stakeholders, and devise the policies that affords the UK a position in emerging global value chains. Promoting decent work amid the global low-carbon transition relies on strategic, long-term, joined-up and effective state action.

Complicating the issue is that the failure to promote systemic change would also have adverse economic consequences for UK employment, insofar as key industries face being left behind if they fail to shore up their competitiveness in the putative low-carbon economy. This renders 'climate delayism' harmful to key sectors in the UK economy as well as the environment.

Interventions for a Just Transition

It is critical that we better understand the regions at greatest risk of 'green deindustrialisation' and job losses as a result of the low-carbon transition. There is a palpable need for place-based economic policy interventions in order to counteract these risks. In all probability, these economic trends will also generate political conflicts that result in industrial unrest and undermine support for major parties in their existing electoral heartlands, with far right parties eager to capitalise on discontent. As such, those within the British state will increasingly need

to grapple with the socio-economic effects of the net zero transition and contemplate a policy response that navigates the trade-offs.

Taking lessons from 'what works' elsewhere, this could include a combination of carefully sequenced regional industrial policies, education and skills policies, regulations, carbon taxes, community wealth building, and the strengthening of welfare provision in order to ensure a transition that avoids exacerbating existing inequalities. Chris Skidmore and IPPR have already identified areas where industrial policies could secure new competitive advantages and green jobs for the UK, and in the era of automation and AI this needs to be complemented by a focus on more labour-absorbent work in services. The challenge for the current Labour government will be to develop a policy package that seizes these opportunities, and GB Energy and the National Wealth Fund may prove vital institutions for doing so. However, unless these issues receive major attention by the government, these market forces will fundamentally re-shape the UK economy in the next decade and likely compound any attempts to tackle rising inequalities.

Dr Dan Bailey became a Senior Lecturer in Global Political Economy at Manchester Metropolitan University in July 2019. He previously worked at the University of Manchester, the Sheffield Political Economy Research Institute, and the University of York, completing his ESRC-funded PhD at Sheffield. His research examines the governance of just and unjust transitions, offering insights into political and economic structures, strategic dilemmas, and policy development within governance institutions.

Safeguarding Children

Strengthening responses to domestic abuse: safeguarding children

**Professor Khatidja Chantler,
Dr Kim Heyes, Dr Vicky Baker
& Dr Clare Gunby**

The Gender-based Violence (GBV) team (School of Nursing and Public Health, Manchester Met) have produced a series of research reports commissioned by the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's Office. In the fourth and final blogpost of their four-part series, they outline some of the issues identified within children's services and make policy recommendations for strengthening responses.

Trigger warning: This article may contain information that you find disturbing.

Domestic abuse and domestic homicide are highly gendered crimes with women constituting most victims and men most perpetrators. Roughly two women a week are killed by male intimate ex/partners and male family members. Around 30 men a year are killed in domestic settings, mostly at the hands of other men. Domestic homicide reviews (DHRs) are a statutory requirement and were introduced in 2011 to learn from such killings by identifying missed opportunities for intervention and making changes to improve responses to domestic abuse. To ensure that DHR recommendations are implemented, the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's office is developing a national domestic homicide oversight mechanism which will be informed by our research. In this blog we focus on



recommendations made in DHRs for children's services.

What did we do in the study?

We identified and analysed 33 DHRs published between 2017 and 2019. We used a mixed methods approach to systematically extract information from those DHRs, such as the recommendations made, areas for development and learning, and examples of good practice. We also specifically analysed how children featured within the DHRs.

Victims and perpetrators

Most victims were female (88%) and most perpetrators male (91%). Regarding ethnicity, the majority of victims (70%) and perpetrators (66%) were White British, with the remainder

coming from Minoritised backgrounds (including White Europeans). Victims ranged in age from 16 to over 65 years and perpetrators 18 to 65 years, with the majority in the 16-45 age range.

Victims had high levels of prior victimisation (91%), alongside difficulties with substance use (42%), mental ill health (39%), and socioeconomic disadvantage (33%). Perpetrators also had issues with substance use (58%), mental ill health (42%), and socioeconomic disadvantage (52%), but also with violence (94%) and criminality (55%).

The victim-perpetrator relationship

Twenty nine of the 33 homicides (88%) were intimate partner homicides (IPH), mostly perpetrated by male partners

or ex-partners (90%), with over a third (34%) of partners separated at the time of the homicide – a recognised risk for domestic homicide. Three (9%) of the homicides were adult family homicides (AFH), all perpetrated by male family members. Lastly, one case involved a victim killed by the sons of a woman she cohabited with. In most cases (88%), there had been prior domestic abuse within the victim-perpetrator relationship and in over half of these cases (59%) children's social care and education had been aware of the domestic abuse.

Children and childhoods

There were forty-three children reported within this sample of DHRs, ranging in age from unborn to 17 years. In some cases, children were injured, or even killed – either as primary targets of domestic homicide, or alongside their mothers or fathers. In other cases, they were witnesses – either to domestic abuse prior to the homicide, or to the homicide itself. The DHRs illustrate the intersection between domestic abuse and child abuse, perpetrators' manipulation of children as a method of controlling mothers, and perpetrators' attempts to 'groom' and socialise children to becoming future perpetrators.

"...and then [perpetrator] had pinned her to the floor and told the children to stamp on her, [perpetrator] had also punched her head several times." (DHR296, p12).

DHRs also illustrate the agency of children, their disclosures of violence to professionals and calling for help – although not always resulting in appropriate agency responses.

"[victim's] daughter was brave enough to disclose the violence to a teacher at her school. It was dealt with as an internal matter and the information not shared with the relevant services as it should have been in line with statutory Child Protection Procedures." (DHR154, p15)

What types of recommendations were made?

Most DHR recommendations were targeted towards Education and Children's Social Care, most often relating to the need for improvements in multi-agency working and information management (73%), assessments (36%), developing frontline practice (42%), training/development (58%), and policy and processes (79%).

Recommendations focused on the need to take a more holistic and proactive approach to understanding risks and dynamics within families and relationships, alongside the need to recognise separation as a time of particular risk, rather than an endpoint at which supports can be removed:

"The fact that [perpetrator] had left the matrimonial home and [victim] had taken legal steps to prevent contact provided a misleading sense of safety that influenced how some professionals, such as children's social care and the police, approached risk assessment and managed their contact with [victim] and [perpetrator]." (DHR149, p25)

Challenges around balancing child and adult safeguarding was also identified, particularly within the context of children's social care, where mothers were often responsibilised with changing their partners' abusive behaviour, for fear of social workers labelling them as "failing to protect" their children. Such framing of mothers can result in their avoidance of seeking help, for fear of being blamed for the abuse they are suffering and for fear of having their children removed.

Policy implications

Our policy recommendations from the project (available in full on the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's website) include the need for:

- Ensuring children's voices and experiences are fully reflected in assessment processes
- Increasing the visibility, responsibility, and accountability of perpetrators
- Improving domestic abuse training for social workers and education practitioners – including children as mechanisms of control, and particularly where women have migrated to the UK
- Improving regulation/oversight of independent schools who may not have adequate domestic abuse and safeguarding policies
- Developing interventions for adolescent boys at risk or perpetration
- And strengthening the support offer for children affected by domestic abuse and bereaved by domestic homicide

The Gender-based Violence (GBV) team members involved in this research are:

Professor Khatidja Chantler is Principal Investigator for HALT, this study and leads the Gender-based Violence Team. Khatidja is a Professor of Gender, Equalities and Communities.

Dr Kim Heyes is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Nursing and Public Health. Kim's research focuses on societal inequalities and intersections of mental health and abuse.

Dr Vicky Baker is a Lecturer in the School of Nursing and Public Health. Vicky's research focuses on child to parent abuse.

Dr Clare Gunby is a Senior Lecturer in gender-based violence in the School of Nursing and Public Health. For the last 15 years she has been leading and managing research on sexual and domestic abuse.

Events and News Round-up

New Economy North Social: On Gender Equality and Intersectionality, February 2024

In February, ahead of International Women's Day, Metropolis hosted a networking event with our co-founded thinktank network 'New Economy North' including a panel discussion on Gender Equality and Intersectionality.

We would like to thank our fantastic speakers at this event – Sarah Longlands, CEO of CLES; Lucy Gosling, Race Equalities Taskforce Programme Manager, WMCA; Atiha Chaudry, researcher on 'Uncertain Futures' and Chair of GM Ethnic Communities network; Sarah Campbell, senior lecturer at Manchester Met, and researcher on 'Uncertain Futures' project.



The Chancellor's Visit – Meeting with Lord Mandelson, March 2024

In March last year, the Metropolis team welcomed Manchester Metropolitan University Chancellor Lord Mandelson for a presentation to showcase some of our work from the past year.

Lord Mandelson has been involved with Metropolis since our inception back in 2015, and it was a great opportunity to showcase the work we have been able to support with three of our 'Chancellor's Fellows' – Dr Chris Field, Dr Katy Jones, and Professor Hannah Smithson – and, to update him on our future plans.



'So-called honour based abuse' Report Launch Event, March 2024

At a launch event attended by over 60 stakeholders, Dr Maz Idriss of Manchester Metropolitan Law School presented his new research report and policy briefing titled, 'Honour-based abuse in the courts: Shaping strategies for key issues'.

The policy recommendations provided in this briefing, stem from Dr Idriss' research project 'HBA and the Courts', which was undertaken in collaboration with the 'Iranian and Kurdish Women's Rights Organisation (IKWRO)', and 'The Sky Project'. The event was covered by ITV Granada News which featured it as a leading story.

We are looking forward to supporting Dr Idriss on his honour-based suicides event this coming May with guest speakers Yasmin Khan, Shahien Taj OBE, Nazir Afzal OBE and survivors who have been affected by suicide ideation after honour-based abuse from perpetrators. Their talks will be hugely important in raising awareness of this type of violence against women and girls, often perpetrated by men. They will be calling for changes in the law and propose a new statutory offence to bring such perpetrators to justice.



The 'From Work First to Good Work' Conference, April 2024

As a result of the fantastic research conducted by Manchester Metropolitan's 'Centre for Decent Work and Productivity', and colleagues from across the University, MetroPolis hosted a launch event for our policy briefing, 'A Good Work Revolution'. The event was attended by over 150 stakeholders, policymakers, and researchers – and highlighted the practical policy steps which are rooted in this body of research.

Further to the event itself, a pre-event roundtable took place where Dr Katy Jones, Dr Sarah Campbell, Matt Davies, Professor Julia Rouse, and Dr Sarah Crozier presented and discussed some of their findings in more detail with the then Shadow Minister for Work and Pensions, Alison McGovern MP.



'Drugs – The Greater Manchester Approach' Policy Day, October 2024

Hosted by Manchester Metropolitan University in collaboration with Metropolis, this event both set out the policy approach to drugs – outlined in keynote speeches by Mayor Andy Burnham, Deputy Mayor Kate Green, and the Assistant Chief Constable of GMP – and also, the public launch of the most recent report from Manchester Met's 'GM TRENDS' series.

Rob Ralphs, Professor of Criminology and Social Policy at Manchester Met, facilitated one of four afternoon workshops where he was able to discuss in more detail this most recent 'Trend Focus Report', focused on exploring data-driven findings of increased use of ketamine in Greater Manchester.



National Safeguarding Conference, November 2024

The 'Shaping the Future of Safeguarding' Partnership, supported by Metropolis at Manchester Metropolitan University, hosted their annual safeguarding online conference, with its focus on adult safeguarding across Wales and England.

The aim of the conference was to explore lessons from Adult Safeguarding, including Reviews and Inspections in Wales, and to identify key issues, good practice, and challenges, with a focus on what needs to happen next.

The event included presentations from academics – including Manchester Metropolitan's own Professor Michelle McManus and Emma Ball – as well as a multi-agency panel with senior representatives from social care, policing and healthcare backgrounds.



Centre for Young Lives: Ambitious about Inclusion: Developing a Vision for Inclusive Schools, January 2025

MetroPolis and the Manchester Centre for Youth Studies hosted an event on behalf of the Centre for Young Lives, 'Ambitious About inclusion'. The event brought together education leaders from schools, trusts and the third sector, and strategic managers from services for children, young people and families from across the Northwest to share their vision for delivering inclusion across the country.

"The Manchester Centre for Youth Studies was delighted to host the roundtable. We know from our work in Youth Justice how important school is for children. So many children who end up in the youth justice system have experienced school exclusion. Action about inclusive education is very important". (Hannah Smithson, Professor of Youth Justice, Manchester Met and Visiting Fellow, the Centre for Young Lives).

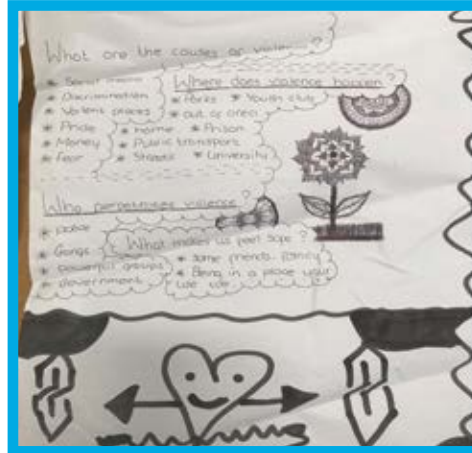


The Year in Brief(s)

The Rwanda Policy and the European Convention on Human Rights: An analysis of UK legal and policy duties, June 2024

In this 50-page analysis, Dr Rossella Pulvirenti, Dr Kay Lalor, and Catherine Jaquiss take an in-depth look at the legal implications, and duties of the UK in relation to both the compliance with the European Court of Human Rights, and the potential impact of the policy itself.

This thorough examination highlights key, and worrying concerns in both arenas. A key recommendation emerges for the UK to adopt a rights-respecting policy, which aligns with our international commitments to human rights legislation. However, in the absence of such a policy, asylum applicants can challenge any proposed 'removal' through existing ECHR case law.



Young People's Engagement with the Greater Manchester Violence Reduction Unit's Strategy 2023/2024

The Manchester Centre for Youth Studies, a world-leading and award-winning research centre at Manchester Metropolitan University, collaborated with the Greater Manchester Violence Reduction Unit (GM VRU) for this annual report on young people's engagement with their work. Authors – Professor Hannah Smithson, Dr Fatima Khan, and Kate Westwood – state clearly that:

“The purpose of this short research project is to provide the grounding for a longer-term youth-led and bottom-up understanding across GM of what young people need to stay safe and live prosperous lives.”

The report's findings provide valuable insight for GM VRU's future policy – and highlights that young people's conception of violence is multi-dimensional, it varies based on complex social environments, and that a strong mistrust of police is a pervasive barrier to be tackled in good faith, in order to advance any future engagement.

The report's findings provide valuable insight for GM VRU's future policy – and highlights that young people's conception of violence is multi-dimensional

'A Good Work Revolution': How to improve the UK's employment landscape, and tackle inequality

Building on a foundation of high-quality research from Manchester Metropolitan University's Centre for Decent Work and Productivity, this Metropolis policy brief presented an evidence-based approach to work and employment policy-rooted in recognising the link between tackling inequality, broken systems of support for finding work, and the UK's productivity crisis.

With work from multiple academics at the centre – including, but not limited to, Dr Katy Jones, Dr Sarah Campbell, Professor Julia Rouse, and Professor Carol Atkinson – this briefing provides policymakers with a holistic perspective on the changes needed for a better all-round employment landscape.

This is demonstrated in the actions considered in these recommendations – that tackling inequality along with supportive, not punitive, environments for jobseekers provide better long-term outcomes; that the role of individual employers in creating overall productivity requires deeper understanding; and, that developing better managers and management processes are key to delivering better work.



'Re-thinking the Circular Economy': How Manchester Metropolitan University is helping to unlock new potential

Showcasing a range of recent projects that explored one or more aspects of the 'circular economy' across faculties here at Manchester Metropolitan University, this briefing outlined ten policy recommendations.

Whether through collaborative projects like Knowledge-Transfer Partnerships – Dr Moe Roohanifar and Dr Tulin Dzhengiz on circular models for manufacturing rugs, or Dr Edward Randviir and Dr James Redfern on reducing landfill waste through circular planning in production of mattresses – or coordinating future work in this area, with the Circular Economy Network led by Professor Craig Banks and Professor Paul Hooper, the range of knowledge generated by these projects has been vast.

As such, the specific recommendations reflected the broad policy asks this sector needs to facilitate greater innovation and experimentation – such as inclusion of circular projects in funding from the new industrial strategy, the UK having a leading role in international coordination on regulations, and local collaborative networks to connect stakeholders for place-based consultations and pilot projects.

A range of projects seek to break new ground in the design and implementation of circular practice and processes

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