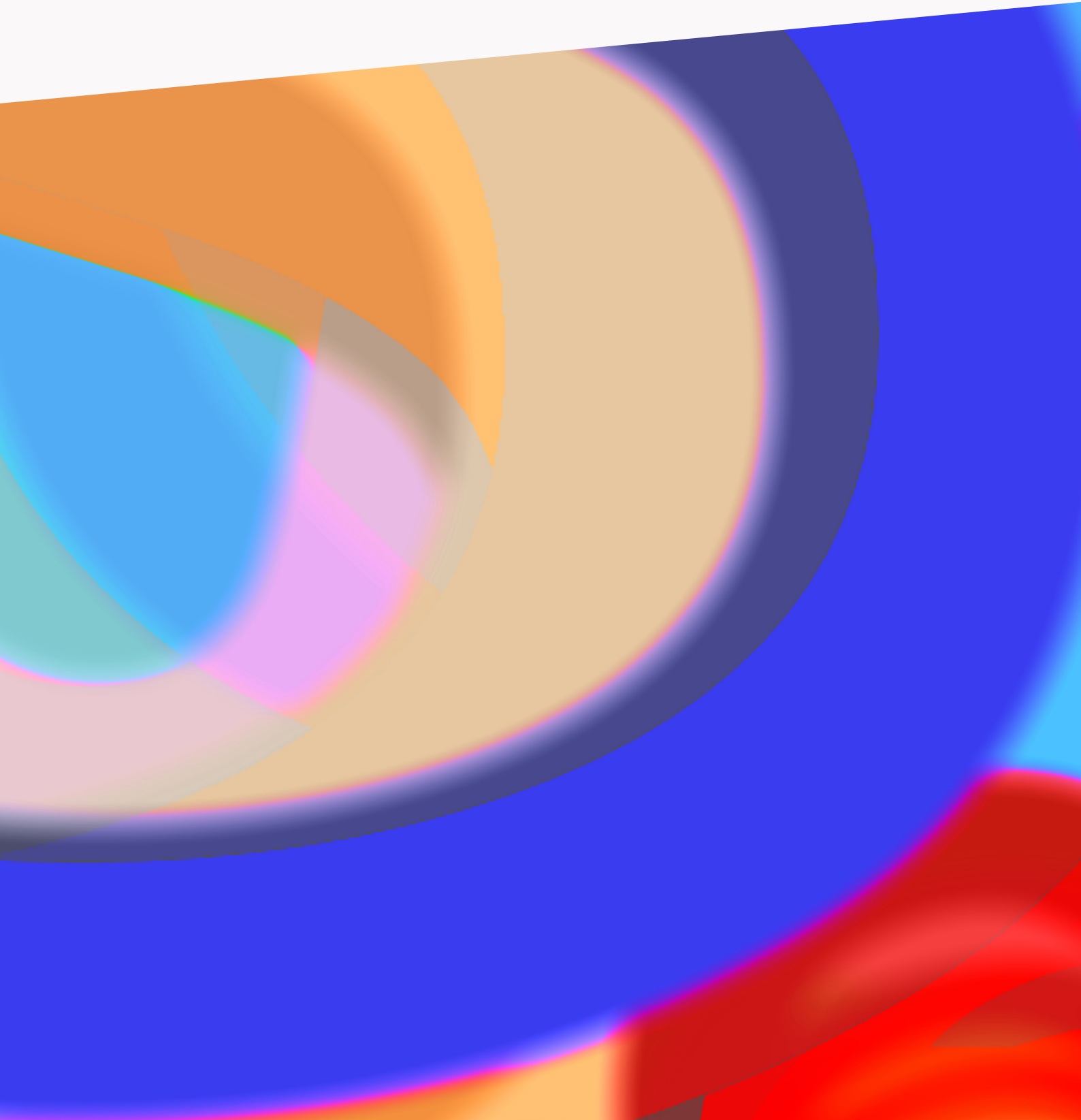




IOE Impact Stories 2024

Developing a new cohort of researchers



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Introduction



IOE Impact stories 2024: Developing a new generation of researchers

I am delighted to introduce IOE Impact Stories 2024. Our special focus this year is celebrating the work of a new generation of IOE researchers.

The articles featured in this publication are authored by researchers who have been recipients of the [IOE Early Career Impact Fellowship](#) since its inception in 2021. The Fellowship is a 5-month researcher development programme that provides funding for early-career researchers to deliver a series of initiatives that promote the engagement and impact of their work. Supporting researcher development is the IOE's key [strategic priority](#). Each year, a cohort of Fellows work with IOE's Research Development Team alongside senior academic staff and external collaborators to develop their impact skills and knowledge, leading to career development and further funding opportunities. The success of this programme is evidenced by the many achievements of the Fellows since being awarded the Fellowship.

The collection of stories showcases the exciting work that the researchers have undertaken in collaboration with policymakers, practitioners, young people and under-represented groups in research on a host of pressing issues. These include research to better understand the disruption caused by COVID-19 in schools, ways to improve inclusive education in Ecuador, and the work with Muslim communities to explore climate change.

As IOE Pro-Director and Vice-Dean Research, I am delighted and privileged to witness first-hand the dedication and enthusiasm of these researchers as they embark on their journey to deliver innovative and impactful research.

I would like to thank everyone at IOE and beyond who have contributed to the Impact Stories 2024. My appreciation of the funding from the UCL Research Culture team for their continued support for IOE's impact culture activities. Most of all, I would like to thank all our early and mid-career researchers for their valued contributions to making IOE the home of a truly vibrant and inclusive research community.

Professor Lynn Ang

Pro-Director and Vice-Dean Research
IOE, UCL's Faculty of Education and Society

Supporting inclusive engagement and impact

As a previous fellow, I wanted to reflect on the value of the programme from the perspective of an Early Career Researcher.

My experiences as a PhD student made me question who I was doing my research for. The tools I used and the communities that engaged with my work didn't represent the communities I wanted to reach. The Impact Fellowship gave me the space to step back and properly understand how to work in more inclusive ways, which has helped my research have a much broader reach and impact on the physical and cognitive health of older people.

Zoë Gallant

Academic Inclusion Lead for the
Department of Psychology and Human
Development, Lecturer in Psychology and
IOE Early Career Impact Fellow 2022-23



Letters from the Global South: widening engagement with climate policy among underrepresented faith and community groups in the UK

Letters from the Global South (LFTGS) aimed to get more people from different backgrounds - including people who do not see themselves as “climate activists” - to learn about and engage with climate policy.

For the UK to reach its Net Zero target, every community will need to be engaged, but currently its environmental sector and climate movement lack diversity, particularly from working-class and minoritised ethnic and religious groups. Dr Alessandra Palange’s fellowship set out to address this problem, by developing a pop-up exhibition and linked workshops to amplify the voices and experiences of global communities underrepresented in the climate movement. The project brought together social scientists at IOE, the informal group Muslims Declare and politicians and activists working to progress the Climate and Nature (CAN) Bill through the UK Parliament.

The [travelling exhibition](#) offered an accessible introduction to the science behind the CAN Bill. It included an illustrated introduction to carbon inequalities, climate justice, and the impacts of climate change. The exhibition brought together accounts, messages, and images into engaging case studies from countries including Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Nigeria, and Pakistan. The posters highlighted the disproportionate impact of climate change and environmental degradation on Global South communities, despite their minimal contribution to the problem. One participant said a key takeaway from the workshop was that “everyone has something valuable to say; there is vast knowledge and expertise in communities.”

Workshops to deepen engagement

To date, the project *Letters from the Global South* has involved conducting eight workshops across five cities. Approximately 50% of workshop participants had never engaged in environmental initiatives before, while around 60% identified as Asian or Black. Participant feedback suggested increased knowledge and awareness of climate change. One participant explained that they

had “learned about the role of governments in climate change.” Another mentioned that before the workshop, they did not know about “the extreme inequalities” that exist in relation to climate change. Others described an increased awareness of the potential that exists within their communities to influence these debates.

Addressing gaps in research

The project tackled a serious gap in contemporary social science. Current research on Muslim communities and climate change has predominantly focused on environmental readings and understandings of sacred texts by faith-based activists and religious scholars. Much less is known about how Muslims think about climate change day-to-day. It also provided important insights into the challenges of this kind of engagement process: in some settings, the researcher encountered considerable language and literacy barriers, suggesting that more research is needed into how to cater to different audiences.

The exhibition and workshop materials are now being borrowed by campaigners for widening engagement activities in different settings across the UK and for different audiences including schoolchildren, faith groups, charity workers and individuals with learning disabilities. Campaigners are also producing educational materials to support learning activities related to the resources Dr Palange has created.

[Dr Alessandra Palange](#) is an Honorary Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the Department of Curriculum, Pedagogy and Assessment at IOE. Dr Palange is building upon her [doctoral research](#), which investigated Muslim education and activism in online spaces, and has developed a [new project](#) in the areas of faith education, participatory democratic engagement, and environmental activism. [2023-24 cohort]



A good night's sleep: improving knowledge about autistic mental health by working with and learning from autistic young people

Clinical services for autistic people often draw on models developed for non-autistic people and fail to address the specific needs of autistic patients. A UCL researcher has engaged with autistic young people, their families, and clinicians to develop better strategies to tackle a major challenge: how to sleep well.

In addition to higher instances of physical and mental health concerns, many autistic young people experience significant challenges with sleep. Sleep disturbances frequently emerge in early life among autistic children and remain a common symptom throughout their development and adulthood; they are more pronounced in autistic adults compared to non-autistic groups. However, clinical support services often apply treatments that are not sensitive to the reasons why sleep problems and autism are related. Dr Georgia Pavlopoulou investigated “autistic adolescents” own experiences of sleep and what constitutes a “good night” of sleep.

Using participatory research to improve support for autistic young people

The project involved working collaboratively with 54 autistic adolescents to coproduce a [study](#) using a novel photo elicitation methodology, showing images in interviews to stimulate discussion and help capture participants thoughts and feelings. The participants reflected on their experiences with healthcare practitioners, who often try to impose mainstream sleep hygiene rules (like no screen use before bed). These can be experienced as one more pressure to comply with mainstream rules written by, and for, non-autistic people. Instead, the young people wanted to have the chance to co-create a personalised set of sleep habits. These may include daytime activities that increase predictability, flexibility to achieve sensory comfort, and activities, relationships and objects that promote a sense of worth.

Creative synergies and knowledge exchange led by autistic young people

To increase the impact of these findings, Dr Pavlopoulou brought together NHS clinical staff, autistic pupils, and school staff to understand their responses to the research, and to create resources to share the findings more widely. This resulted in a range of evidence-based support materials on the topic of sleep, including a

[YouTube video](#), a printed leaflet, novel self-reporting forms on sleep habits and a *Sleep!!!* music video created by autistic young people for TikTok and Instagram.

The research has directly informed several guidance documents for parents and clinicians through Sleep Charity conferences, the National Autism Society's professional networks' blog and as a core part of the NHS's National Autism Trainer Programme delivered to 4,800 professionals in NHS mental health settings, youth justice settings and special residential schools and colleges.

“Be kind to your senses”

The material has successfully sparked conversation between autistic young people and their support networks about how to plan and maintain healthy sleeping patterns. Dr Virginia Lumsden, Consultant Clinical Psychologist in Kent and Medway Mental Health Support Teams, worked with Dr Pavlopoulou on the project: “Dr Pavlopoulou's paper, and the voices of the young people in the original research, provided us with the evidence to prioritise an individualised approach to supporting autistic young people to get a better night's sleep. It affirms the value of learning from neurodivergent young people and their families to ensure a personalised approach to supporting them in all areas of their lives.”

[Dr Georgia Pavlopoulou](#) is an Associate Professor at UCL, a developmental and educational scientist and a registered integrative psychotherapist using a collaborative, integrative perspective, deeply rooted in humanistic and person-centred values. She is committed to creative and participatory research to improve access and involvement of neurodivergent people to educational, healthcare, and mental health services. She has experience working with autistic people and their families and has felt the benefits of involving them with clinical and educational decision making. [2021/22 cohort]



Towards embedding decolonising research in higher education structures

The goal of decolonising research is widely shared across the higher education sector. *Cultures of Decolonisation* has helped researchers to reflect on their own practices, leading to a widely used report pointing out challenges and practical steps to effectively embed this work.

Universities, like all institutions, need to take the legacies of colonialism seriously: to consider how its long history still shapes aspects of their culture and ways of working, including their teaching and research, perpetuating unjust social relations. Like many universities, UCL has responded to this with initiatives that aim to decolonise teaching and research. But how well are these initiatives working?

Researching UCL's decolonising activity

The genesis of this project was an internal UCL review which concluded that decolonising initiatives had been implemented in silos with minimal cross-faculty engagement and limited institutional impact. To help address this, the *Cultures of Decolonisation at UCL* Grand Challenges research project was developed to map decolonisation initiatives across the university and to assess their effectiveness.

Academics, doctoral students, and professional services staff shared their perspectives on decolonising research and showcased projects that embody decolonising principles. Dr Simon Angyagre Eten co-authored with Ysabel Hannam a [report](#) in 2022 which has generated significant traction, with over 1000 downloads from 43 countries.

A roundtable on the policy implications of the report

Dr Eten's fellowship has capitalised on this interest. He convened a [roundtable](#) in June 2023 to explore the policy implications of the report and examine the interface between decolonisation and wider equality, diversity, and inclusivity (EDI) efforts in universities. The event brought together academics, students and representatives from external organisations including the Runnymede Trust and the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI). Speakers and the audience deliberated on the complexities and possibilities of embedding

decolonisation in existing higher education institutional policy frameworks, including EDI initiatives. The event recording has had over 100 views since July 2023.

The Director of Dorcas Inclusive Education commented that the roundtable provided an important forum for discussion of perspectives on decolonial praxis, emphasising that the debate needed to continue to ensure decolonial praxis was embedded into policy and practice at UCL and beyond.

Just the beginning

The project report and the roundtable discussion have deepened UCL's understanding of how decolonising principles can be embedded in research, support services for research and doctoral training. New funding has been allocated to support projects that take forward themes from the report, and an institution-wide forum and 7 engagement sessions with UCL faculties have been held to discuss the findings and to explore what more can be done to implement decolonisation.

Reflecting on these initiatives, UCL Grand Challenges Associate Director Dr James Paskins said: "The UCL Grand Challenges programme exists to bring together different expertise to solve pressing societal problems, and the Cultures of Decolonisation project is helping us understand how we can make our university a more accessible and inclusive institution, so that we can hear from the greatest variety of voices."

***Dr Simon Angyagre Eten** is a post-doctoral researcher affiliated to the Development Education Research Centre, Department of Curriculum, Practice and Assessment at IOE. He is currently involved in developing research on youth understanding and the appropriation of active global citizenship. [2023/24 cohort]*



Improving the employment and disclosure experiences of autistic adults in the UK

“Reading about other people’s negative experiences of employment validated what had happened to me and allowed me to see this as a systemic, structural problem, rather than as a personal failing.” - Rose Matthews, autistic activist.

Autistic people constitute one of the most underemployed disability groups in the UK, with less than 30% in any form of paid employment (Office for National Statistics, 2022). Those who do manage to find employment often struggle in workplaces, encountering challenges such as a lack of appropriate adjustments, stigma, and discrimination. For autistic adults, disclosing that they are autistic may be one way to mitigate these challenges – but it can also have negative consequences.

Disclosing autism in the workplace

The Autistica-funded project on employment among autistic people has highlighted both the positive and negative experiences of autism disclosure and the common experiences that autistic people have had in navigating this difficult decision. Dr Mel Romualdez’s findings are shaping employment policy and helping autistic people decide when and how to disclose at work, and to understand the consequences of this decision.

Based on her [research](#), one step employers can take to create more inclusive workplaces for autistic people is to shift the focus away from autistic employees towards other workers. This means staff need to learn more inclusive ways of working and let go of neurotypical expectations of behaviour, to be more neurodiversity-affirming. Additionally, since inclusive practices benefit all employees and organisations, employers should shape inclusive workplace cultures through attitudes, practices, and policies from top level management down.

As part of the 2022 fellowship, Dr Romualdez convened an online panel discussion with autistic experts to share their perspectives on employment for autistic people – including what currently works and what needs to change to improve their outcomes and experiences. The audience was largely made up of autistic adults,

who took part in the discussion via the chat facility and shared their own experiences of employment. The [event recording](#) was made available on the CRAE YouTube channel and circulated widely on social media.

Spreading the word

The research has been presented at conferences in the UK and abroad. In early 2024, Dr Romualdez delivered a webinar to employees of VIB, a biotechnology research institute based in Belgium, about how to make workplaces more inclusive for autistic people. This has potential for lasting impact on VIB’s policies for supporting autistic employees. Her research on disclosure was cited in the [Buckland Review of Autism Employment](#), a policy document focusing on how to improve employment outcomes for autistic people, which was debated in the House of Commons in March 2024.

Working alongside and involving autistic people

The research has been picked up by autistic blogger and activist Rose Matthews. Dr Romualdez and Rose have collaborated with other researchers on a study looking at the retirement experiences of autistic adults in the UK. The relationship has been life-changing for Rose: “Dr Romualdez’s research on disclosure and employment is respectful and neurodiversity-affirming; it supports the research priorities of autistic people and is accessible. The successful revival of my career has been greatly assisted by this work.”

[Dr Anna Melissa \(Mel\) Romualdez](#) is an Assistant Professor of Psychology in the Department of Psychology and Human Development at IOE. She is based at IOE’s Centre for Research in Autism and Education (CRAE), which is generously supported by the Pears Foundation. CRAE aims to conduct research that improves the lives of autistic people by addressing their priorities. [2022/23 cohort]



Supporting pupils to overcome anxiety about physics in school

Physics is a subject that is highly valued in academic, economic, and political circles, but it is one that suffers from negative perceptions by young people in school. Building upon “*Can I Physics? Yes You Can!*” project, his fellowship project has helped teachers to understand and address the barriers to learning that many young people experience.

Pupils often consider physics to be too difficult as it involves a lot of mathematics, does not relate in an obvious way to their everyday lives, and it is regarded as only useful for a narrow range of careers (DeWitt, Archer and Moote, 2019). This can result in feelings of anxiety in physics lessons, as pupils struggle to engage with the discipline and understand concepts and experience feelings of inadequacy compared to a perceived small subset of pupils who are able to attain highly in the subject.

It is vital that teachers understand these barriers to pupil learning and take steps to address them. John Connolly’s fellowship drew on his doctoral research and brought together science teachers from a range of schools in London to explore the challenge. Working together, they developed an infographic to share strategies teachers can use to support pupils to overcome their negative perceptions about physics in school.

Co-constructing solutions

Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986) provides a framework to understand and address how disaffection and negative emotions impact on learning. John used this framework with a group of 16 teachers to explore their experience of negative attitudes towards physics in their lessons, and the barriers these create. Their goal: to identify strategies to overcome these barriers and to encourage greater uptake at A-level.

“*Can I physics? Yes you can!*”

The teachers’ ideas were collected and became the stimulus for a [infographic](#) titled “*Can I Physics? Yes You Can!*” that gives examples of how science teachers can support their pupils in their physics lessons to overcome feelings of anxiety and low self-efficacy. It contains examples of pedagogical practices that can be used in lessons to promote inclusive and adaptive teaching in physics.

The infographic has been shared with teachers in schools in London as well as student teachers on a PGCE training course at IOE. Teachers have responded positively to the infographic. One biology teacher stated that it “provides useful starting points before planning a lesson and the questions on the infographic make me think more deeply about the pedagogy”. A chemistry teacher added how they now preface asking a question with saying “say anything which comes to mind” to make sure pupils understand wrong answers are also accepted.

The project has shown how attending to student’s feelings about the subject can make physics teaching more inclusive. Teachers highlighted how the infographic has reminded them of the importance of factoring in pupils’ confidence and self-efficacy. When planning lessons, they are much more sensitive to the barriers young people experience and try to “ensure pupils have an opportunity for experiencing success”.

***John Connolly** is a Lecturer in Secondary Initial Teacher Education in science specialising in physics in the Department of Curriculum, Pedagogy and Assessment at IOE. Prior to working at IOE, he was an engineer in the private sector before leaving to study for a PGCE and teaching science for 10 years in a London school. [2022/23 cohort]*



Learning from learning disruption linked to COVID-19: An evidence-based resource for schools

The COVID-19 pandemic created huge disruption for primary schools, pupils, and teachers. IOE researchers sought to ensure that research evidence helped make sense of the crisis as it unfolded, and that the lived experience of teachers was brought to the attention of policy makers.

A rapid initial response

In May 2020, as plans to re-open schools after the first lockdown began to take shape, UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) funded a team of researchers at IOE led by Professor Gemma Moss, including Dr Sinead Harmey as one of the co-investigators, to explore the challenges that the COVID-19 crisis set primary school teachers, to [explore the challenges that the COVID-19 crisis set primary school teachers](#).

The resulting systematic review surveyed the literature on other episodes of unplanned school closures caused by natural disasters such as hurricane Katrina and its relevance for school closures in the context of COVID-19. Its findings highlighted the need for teachers to focus on care and community rather than on a 'learning loss' narrative.

The review emphasised that school leaders were pivotal in leading successful returns to school following disruption; that, on re-opening, the curriculum needed to be responsive to children's needs; and that schools were essential in supporting the mental health of the community.

This [open access review](#), published in Educational Review with over 19,000 views, is the third most cited article in the past three years from this journal. A [blog](#) based on this research, published by the British Educational Research Association (BERA), was in the top-five most read of blogs for 2021. The research team also submitted evidence to the [Education Select Committee Inquiry into the impact of COVID-19 on education and children's services, July 2020](#).

Involving education professionals in activating the research findings

Since then, Dr Harmey's Impact Fellowship has focused on developing resources to bring the results of this research to education professionals and schools. She conducted semi-structured interviews with five education professionals to explore how the research resonated with their experiences and how they might add to it considering their own experiences of working through the crisis.

The [resulting booklet](#) outlines the original research recommendations and, for each, further recommendations for how these could be implemented from those who took part in the project. For example, the original research suggested that local knowledge was key, and schools should have autonomy to spend funds as they see fit.

The booklet has broadened the reach of the research with educational professionals and schools and increased its international reach. It has been downloaded over 200 times in many geographical locations including the UK, USA, France, Australia, and Indonesia.

***Dr Sinead Harmey** is an Associate Professor in Literacy Education in the Department of Learning and Leadership at IOE. Much of her research to date has focused on understanding more about early writing development and supporting evidence-based practice, with a specific focus on review methodologies. She was a former student at IOE in 2007, where she trained to become a Reading Recovery Teacher Leader. [2022/23 cohort]*



Improving inclusive education in Ecuador

Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recognises that every child with disabilities has the right to inclusive education, but, globally, this provision is of variable quality and effectiveness. Research can help to identify where there are issues, and to develop solutions.

Funded by IOE International Funds, academics from IOE and Universidad San Francisco de Quito (USFQ), have established a research and knowledge exchange partnership to improve inclusive education in Ecuador. “Participants were united by a commitment to meeting the individual needs of each child and young person in schools in Ecuador” (workshop report building on the research).

Partnering to improve inclusive provision in Ecuador

Research has highlighted that it can be challenging to implement inclusive education in Ecuador because of the curriculum and pedagogy currently used in schools. Teachers feel that educators and schools are not sufficiently prepared for students with disabilities, creating a need for robust training for teachers in inclusive Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) practices.

Rosanne Esposito led on the collaboration with USFQ, to help to co-create a wise solution to the challenge of reducing social and educational inequality in Ecuador through the development of an inclusive teaching framework in Quito. Their goal was simple: to improve educational outcomes and life opportunities for Ecuadorian children and young people with SEND.

Stakeholder workshop

A workshop organised collaboratively by the UCL Centre for Inclusive Education and the Institute of Teaching and Learning (IDEA) at USFQ was held at USFQ in June 2023, led by Rosanne and Isabel Merino from USFQ. The event was attended by Ecuadorian teachers, school psychologists and representatives from the Ministry of Education (MoE) Ecuador and the British Embassy in Quito. Stakeholders worked together to build a shared vision of the inclusive principles that should underpin a co-created inclusive teaching framework.

The workshop gave a voice to professionals working in educational contexts across Quito and an opportunity for participants to share their perspectives on the barriers and facilitators to inclusive education in Ecuador. This in turn informed strategic planning by the MoE to drive forward the inclusive educational goals set by the Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador (2008).

A video was recorded by the British Ambassador to Ecuador and shared on social media. The ambassador celebrated the interchange of academic expertise as a clear example of the co-operation in the academic field between the UK and Ecuador: “Education is the key to any country’s socio-economic development and Ecuador is no different. Researching the needs of children and how to promote inclusive education systems is very relevant to improve education opportunities that embrace differences and promotes diversity and inclusion.”

The embassy continues to support the partnership established between UCL and USFQ as we develop the inclusive teaching framework established through this project. The project has attracted wider international attention via a [briefing paper](#) produced during Rosanne’s fellowship summarising the research evidence. Rosanne has now sought additional funding to collaborate with academic partners across the Latin American region for further engagement activities, research outputs and research impact.

***Rosanne Esposito** is an Associate Professor based at the UCL Centre for Inclusive Education in the Department of Psychology and Human Development, IOE. She has delivered a range of professional development activities in inclusive practices for local, national, and international education professionals. [2022/23 cohort]*



Influencing the social justice-oriented practices of prospective science teachers

Science plays an enormously important role in society and science careers should be open to all – but there is a serious lack of diversity in STEM industries. IOE researchers have paved the way for a profound shift in understanding of how educational interventions can better support all young people to engage with STEM – and what can be done to tackle this.

“Not for me”

Research by Professor Louise Archer (Principal Investigator) and Research Fellow Dr Meghna Nag Chowdhuri has found that a key reason for underrepresentation in science is that marginalised young people get subtle as well as explicit messages throughout their educational trajectory that alienates them and makes them believe that “science is not for me” (Archer et al., 2015).

Dr Chowdhuri was lead researcher for the associated IOE [“Primary Science Capital Teaching Approach” project \(PSCTA\)](#). Between 2019 and 2022, the team worked in collaboration with science teachers across England to develop a teaching model oriented to equity and social justice in everyday classroom practice. This resulted in an expansive 100-page teacher handbook, translated into multiple languages.

Supporting teachers to teach in justice-oriented ways

The IOE Impact Fellowship 2021 enabled Dr Chowdhuri to extend the PSCTA work to prospective teachers, cascading the new approach to teacher trainers in the UK via teacher education programmes, addressing the problem identified by research that science teachers are often ill-prepared to use social justice-oriented teaching. She collaborated with teacher educators to develop what they said they needed: an infographic to quickly communicate and translate the research findings. To date, over a period of three years, the [infographic](#) has been downloaded via UCL Discovery more than 9,000 times, along with the PSCTA teacher handbook. Dr Chowdhuri has been invited by several Initial Teacher Education (ITE) providers to give keynotes and address prospective science teachers about the PSCTA, encouraging them to embed it within their pedagogy.

Participant acknowledgements include: “Through the application of the PSCTA our students gain deep insights into sociocultural issues that are often ignored in science learning yet are inextricably linked to the nature of science and its applications.” (PGCE course coordinator) and “As an ITE provider with an explicit focus on social justice, we appreciate the specificity of the approach and its resources which are easy to navigate for trainees on an employment-based route.” (ITE provider)

A linked professional development course has proved popular: 20 teacher trainers and 54 science leads across UK schools signed up for the monthly online course, held over nine months. Dr Chowdhuri continues to develop her interest in social justice-oriented science practices. She is working on a five-year project focusing on early career teachers and leading [Making Spaces](#), a project focusing on creating equitable informal science learning spaces (‘makerspaces’). Her work is proving pivotal in changing the dominant ways of teaching science, challenging inequities in science participation.

***Dr Meghna Nag Chowdhuri** is a Research Fellow and lead researcher on a project focused on developing a social justice-oriented primary science teaching pedagogy. Her research interests include primary mathematics and science education, teacher professional development and issues of equity and social justice. [2021/22 cohort]*



Improving the experiences of trans and non-binary patients in fertility clinics

More and more people are identifying as trans and non-binary (TNB), meaning that their gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. Some TNB people decide to become parents, but little research has explored experiences within TNB parent families. IOE research has helped to address this gap in our understanding.

Dr Susie Bower-Brown's PhD research focused on the experiences of TNB parents in the UK. Her study is making an important contribution to an under-researched area and her fellowship project is helping to ensure that it informs and influences wider debates and policy developments in this area.

The key research findings

Dr Bower-Brown's interviewed 11 TNB parents, exploring how parents were impacted by gendered assumptions about parenting and how they navigated exclusionary parenting spaces. Parents were found to experience high levels of stigma and the journey to parenthood was a particularly challenging time, as fertility clinics, pregnancy spaces and adoption services were often experienced as un-inclusive. Her [research](#) also concluded that parents navigated exclusionary spaces using a range of different strategies. Sometimes parents used pragmatic strategies, such as not coming out or avoiding certain spaces, and at other times they used pioneering strategies, where they aimed to change spaces to be more inclusive for themselves and other TNB parents.

A focus on fertility clinics

Several studies have also highlighted that fertility clinics can be challenging spaces for TNB parents to navigate, but little work has focused on improving the experiences of TNB patients within the 107 fertility clinics in the UK. As more young people identify as TNB, it is likely that more TNB people will pursue fertility treatment in future and gender inclusion is thus increasingly important.

Applying the research to improve the experiences of TNB patients

Dr Bower-Brown's fellowship project aimed to address gender inclusion in fertility clinics. She produced a short [video](#) for clinic staff, sharing key findings from her

PhD research and providing three actionable tips for making clinics more inclusive spaces. Dr Bower-Brown collaborated with Rasha Radi, a graphic designer, and Debbie Howe, a fertility counsellor in the Centre for Reproductive and Genetic Health (CRGH), one of London's leading fertility clinics, to develop the resource.

To date, the video has been viewed more than 60 times online and has received positive feedback, with one CRGH clinical staff member stating: "Having the support and insight from Dr Susie Bower-Brown has been greatly appreciated and her video clip... has provided us with vital information". Debbie also stated that the video provided "useful insight into how the clinic can increase awareness using language, paperwork, and the clinic protocols to create an inclusive environment. It has been very insightful and informative".

Dr Bower-Brown continues to collaborate with Debbie to improve the experiences of TNB patients in fertility clinics, and Debbie has since set up a working group at CRGH to focus on improving care for TNB patients. An article outlining the research was published in British Infertility Counselling Association (BICA)'s quarterly journal in August 2023. This publication reached hundreds of fertility counsellors across the UK and Dr Bower-Brown has since been invited to present her research at BICA's Annual Conference (May 2025).

***Dr Susie Bower-Brown** is a Lecturer in Social Psychology at the Thomas Coram Research Unit, part of IOE's Social Research Institute. Her qualitative research focuses on LGBTQ+ identities and diverse family forms, and her PhD research explored the experiences of trans and non-binary adolescents and parents. [2023/24 cohort]*



“See What I’m Saying?” – Engaging with pupils’ perspectives on grammar schools

Most pupils who take the 11+ exam fail, but little is known about how they make sense of this experience, and its impact upon them. This project sought to plug this gap, and to bring these young people’s experiences into the debate.

The grammar school system remains a divisive topic within education policy in England. There is highly polarised debate, centred usually around social mobility and social injustice. But pupils’ perspectives rarely appear within such dialogue.

In her PhD research, Dr Francesca McCarthy explored the lived experiences and perspectives of pupils who take and fail the grammar school entrance test (the “11+”). Her findings addressed the fact that pupils’ perspectives are under-represented in both academic and wider literature on the topic and demonstrated that pupils expressed nuanced perspectives which blurred the established binary of viewpoints on the grammar school system.

Talking about the experience of failure

For her fellowship, Dr McCarthy worked in collaboration with artist Josh Knowles to develop a [visual resource](#), “See What I’m Saying”, via a series of interactive discussion groups with pupils from non-selective schools within a grammar school area, who had taken and not passed the 11+. Whilst the pupils were discussing events described by participants in the original research, Josh drew their conversation, resulting in images which were shared with the pupils and their school. It shares pupils’ stories and demonstrates how pupils were helped to contextualise experiences of failure.

The research explored pupils’ lived experiences of the grammar school system. At times, they accepted instances of inequity without challenge, conceptualising them as elements of education which were beyond question. However, their lived experiences also provided them with a critical awareness of how inequity operated within education.

Impact in the school

The creation of images to record discussions allowed the participating pupils to see their contributions immediately and therefore avoid the delays associated with the compilation of a written report. This stimulated discussions, but also increased the levels of engagement. In addition, the images provided participants with a tangible outcome of their discussions. The deputy head confirmed how the images have been utilised as a teaching resource across the school and have significantly developed the school’s approach to raising pupil expectations.

Impact at a national level

The images also provided a means of sharing pupils’ viewpoints to a wider audience, via social media. [They have been featured by the campaign group Comprehensive Future](#) and by Times Up for the Test. Dr Nuala Burgess, Chair of Comprehensive Future commented: “Dr McCarthy’s study is unique and offers insights into how children feel about a system that tells them they have failed before they have even stepped foot in secondary school.” Dr McCarthy was invited to contribute to a campaign video for Times Up for The Test and presented the images at the group’s cross-party launch event. She has subsequently acted as a consultant to the Widening Participation team at King’s College London in 2023, providing guidance on supporting pupils who take and do not pass the 11+ to apply for higher tariff universities.

***Dr Francesca McCarthy** is a Research Fellow in the Department of Curriculum, Pedagogy and Assessment at IOE. Francesca’s research draws upon the sociology of education to explore the intersectional social inequalities related to academically selective education. As a former secondary school teacher, She has a strong interest in methodological approaches that research with, rather than on young people. [2022-23 cohort]*



Helping young people to use Access Arrangements to support exam success

Access Arrangements are changes made to the conditions under which candidates sit exams, if there is evidence that they have specific difficulties. But many eligible young people fail to take advantage of them. IOE research has highlighted the problem and developed guidance to help more young people benefit from the provision.

Access Arrangements (AAs) are designed to ensure that all students with Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD) can showcase their knowledge, expertise, and comprehension during exams. They are mandated by regulation – for instance, by the Equality Act – but there are many obstacles to their being successfully applied, not least the fact that many young people lack understanding of how to use them.

Achieving a level playing field

The IOE Nuffield-funded research led by Dr Emma Sumner, which underpinned Dr Catherine Antalek's project, focused on practitioners, students with SpLD, and their parents, and investigated current school practices, provisions, and challenges in organising access. Findings from semi-structured interviews highlighted a gap in pupil understanding of AAs, which often results in a barrier to the pupil using an AA effectively. This is important because lack of use can result in the removal of provision.

The research also highlighted the challenges faced by Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) and Specialist Assessors in building individual cases for students to receive AAs, emphasising the administrative burden when formally applying for AAs.

Creating an infographic to tackle the lack of uptake

The project sets out to help students better understand and effectively use their AAs, and to try to limit the burden on SENCOs and Specialist Assessors. Dr Antalek ran a collaborative workshop with SENCOs, parents, and pupils. Together, they co-created a [guidance infographic](#), to inform pupils of the nuances of exam AAs and empower them to leverage these adjustments effectively in their assessments.

This infographic was disseminated as an open-access resource through UCL Discovery from November 2023.

It has since achieved a national reach, amassing over 400 downloads across the UK. It has also been shared by [Communicate-ed](#), the largest provider of access arrangements training in the UK, with their 2,119 members. Its utility has been acknowledged by educational professionals, with some sending it out in their school newsletters, re-tweeting, sharing on Facebook, and others commenting "This is an excellent resource" and "This looks great, I will be sharing with my students."

The research findings and infographic have been presented at the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) biannual Access Consultation Forum, where stakeholders with a relevant interest discuss the accessibility of regulated qualifications and assessments. It has fostered dialogues with UK qualification providers such as the Joint Council for Qualifications, and regulatory entities such as Ofqual aimed at providing guidance for pupils and parents in understanding AAs. This work is part of a wider project examining the efficacy of common Access Arrangements (e.g., extra time, use of a word processor, use of a scribe) to provide an evidence-base for supporting students with SpLDs in their assessments, which will help to implement the findings and the infographic into evidence-based practice in schools across the UK.

***Dr Catherine Antalek** is a Lecturer at the Department of Psychology and Human Development at IOE. Prior to pursuing her doctoral study, she taught English as a second language to primary aged children in Madrid. Her research interests focus on the neurocognitive processes of reading development for typically developing, dyslexic, and bilingual readers. [2023/24 cohort]*

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