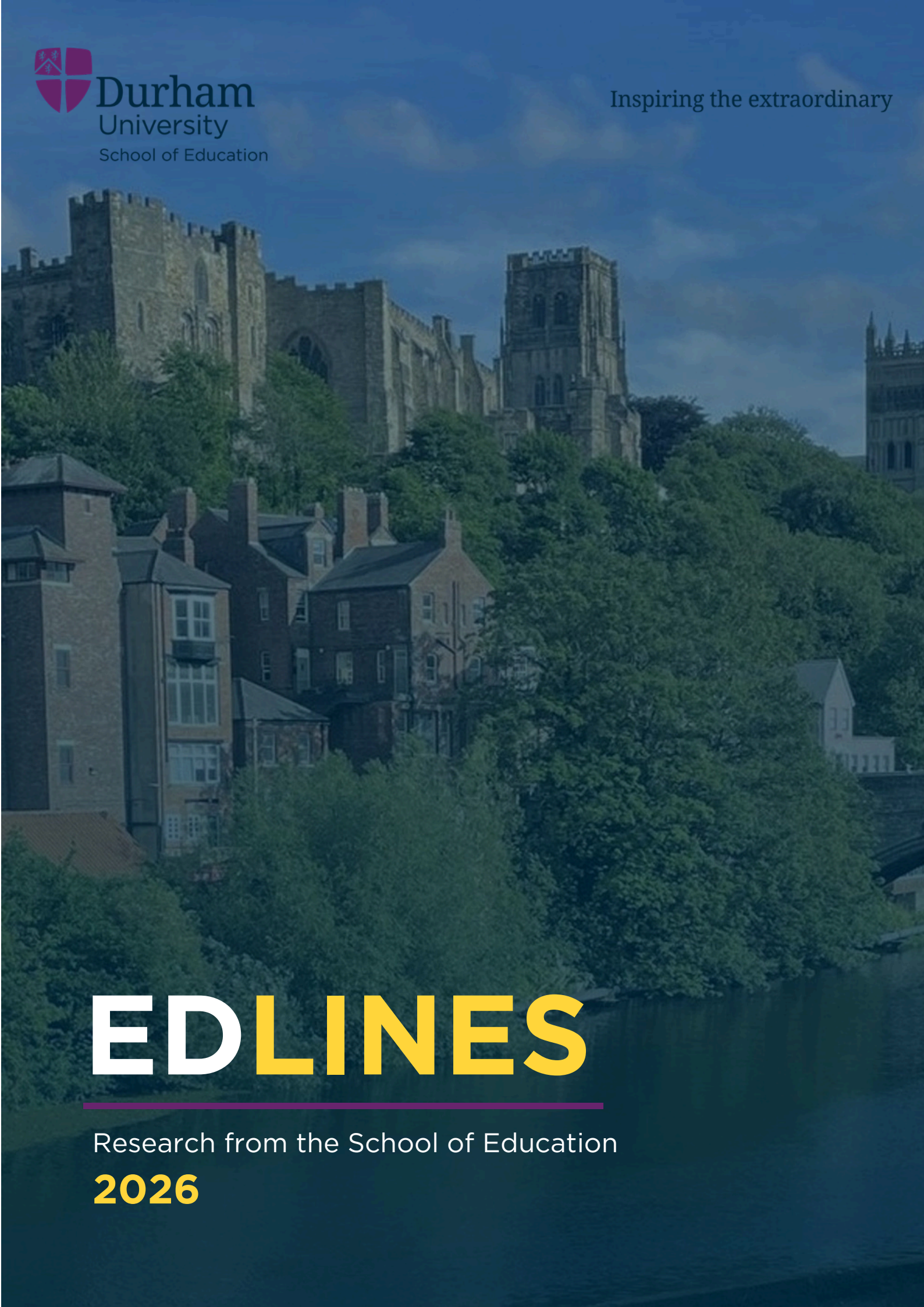

Durham
University
School of Education
Inspiring the extraordinary
EDLINES
Research from the School of Education
2026



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WELCOME

From the Head of School

Professor Julie Rattray



As part of sharing this magazine with you, it is important that we begin by telling you a little bit about who we are as a department and share our departmental vision.

We are a School of Education with approximately 165 staff comprising: full and part-time academics, and professional support colleagues, research and teaching assistants and casual staff. We have approximately 700 students studying a range of undergraduate and postgraduate taught courses leading to both academic and professional qualifications in Education as well as a large doctoral student community. The School itself has been in existence, in one form or another, since 1909 when it was established as a Teacher Training college for County Durham. This college was affiliated to the University in 1926 and continued to fulfil its role of training high quality teachers. The current iteration of the School as an academic department dates back to 1977, and this is when our contributions to research really began to take shape. Durham is a top 100 university in QS World University Rankings 2026, reflecting its global reputation and standing. The School of Education is ranked second for research in the country following the Research Excellence Framework 2021.

We have been ranked first amongst UK Education departments in the Times and Sunday Times Good University Guide 2025, and placed second in the Complete University Guide 2026. Whilst we are incredibly proud of these league positions, they are only a small part of who we are.

...a commitment to a more equitable world where education plays a pivotal role in enabling individuals, communities, and societies to thrive.

Our vision is to be a recognised School of Education regionally, nationally and internationally, fostering excellence in research, scholarship, and teaching. At the heart of this vision lies a commitment to a more equitable world where education plays a pivotal role in enabling individuals, communities, and societies to thrive. We believe that research, scholarship, and teaching conducted within the School of Education contributes to expanding the boundaries of educational knowledge and practice. This involves having a positive impact on individuals and organisations through policy and practice, creating a knowledge base that provides evidence for informed decision making in education and delivering rigorous and relevant, research informed, education that inspires our students to become the architects of an equitable and sustainable world.

1st **UK Education Departments**

in the **Times and Sunday Times Good University Guide 2025**

2nd **UK Education Departments**

in the **Complete University Guide 2026**

We place a significant emphasis on research that is underpinned by a clear evidence base, reflecting our recognition that the generation of evidence offers a strong basis for change. As you will read in this publication, our research has been instrumental in achieving this and has contributed to a range of educational policy and practice innovations that have had a long-term impact on people and societies. The work we do can be seen to make a difference regardless of whether the focus is on the early years, schools or higher education, reflects policy or practice. Working in university-based teams, or as part of collaborative partnerships with external organisations, charities and governments, we continually strive to support education at a regional, national and global level.

One of the highlights of the past 12 months was our inaugural Public lecture in memory of Professor David Galloway. We were delighted to welcome Helen Hayes, MP and Chair of the House of Commons Education Select Committee to deliver a lecture on the topic of Special Educational Needs and disability. The lecture drew on the 'Solving the SEND Crisis' inquiry report by the Education Select Committee. The event was chaired by Professor Martin Evans, Executive Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences at Durham University.

EdLines provides an opportunity for us to share what we do and brings together a collection of articles designed to showcase not just our current research projects and publications but reflects the vibrant and diverse research culture that we continue to cultivate. It offers insights into us as a School of Education and invites you to find out more with links to our website, researcher profiles and project pages. The publication is representative of our entire research community and features not only our academic staff activities but showcases the work of our postgraduate and undergraduate researchers too. You will also find information on how we work with community partners and other external organisations and groups so that we can ensure our work extends into wider society.

> **...emphasis on research that is underpinned by a clear evidence base, reflecting our recognition that the generation of evidence offers a strong basis for change.**

Through this publication we invite you to engage with us in our continuing research story.

Message from the Acting Director of Research

- Dr William Yat Wai Lo



Welcome to the second issue of EdLines, celebrating another exciting year of research across the School of Education.

What stands out this year is not simply the volume of research activity, but its breadth and reach. Across the School, colleagues are addressing pressing educational questions around wellbeing, SEND, inequality, AI and teacher education, while developing new partnerships with schools, communities, policymakers and international collaborators. Ten newly funded projects across six funding schemes reflect that continuing momentum (read more on page 8).

This issue also reminds us that a thriving research environment is about more than projects and publications. It depends on creating opportunities for people to exchange ideas, develop new collaborations and grow as researchers. I am therefore especially pleased that the issue showcases the work of our early career doctoral and undergraduate researchers alongside that of colleagues across the School (see pages 21–27).

Across these stories, we see a research community that is ambitious in the questions it asks, collaborative in how it works, and committed to making a difference beyond the University.

I hope you enjoy this year's EdLines and join us in celebrating the people and ideas behind our research.

Research Division

The Research Division supports and strengthens the School's vibrant research environment. We foster excellence across all career stages, from securing funding to enhancing impact. Through collaboration, mentoring, and strategic development, we help drive research quality, innovation, and real-world influence - helping to shape our dynamic research community.

Research Division team



Dr William Yat Wai Lo
Acting Director of Research



Prof Nadin Beckmann
Deputy Director of Research



Dr Sarah A. Walker
Research Environment Coordinator



Prof Nadia Siddiqui
Grants Coordinator



Dr Johny Daniel
Grants Coordinator



Prof Joe Elliott
REF Output Coordinator



Dr Antonia Manresa
Ethics Chair



Ashley High
Senior Research Administrator

Postgraduate Research



Prof Jonathan Tummons
Director of Postgraduate Research



Dr Anna Llewellyn
Deputy Director of Postgraduate Research



Sue Davies
Postgraduate Research Coordinator

Thematic Clusters

Our thematic clusters reflect the breadth, diversity, and excellence of our research community. They are dynamic hubs where ideas grow, collaborations flourish and innovative research practices are developed.

Psychology and Education

Cluster Lead: Professor Jens Beckmann and Dr Sarah A. Walker

Colleagues in this cluster study human behaviour related to learning and development from a psychological perspective drawing on cognitive, personality, social and developmental sciences and psychometric assessment to describe and explain the psychological processes behind learning and teaching.

Higher and Further Education

Cluster Leads: Dr William Yat Wai Lo and Dr Jasper Roe

Researchers in this cluster investigate policy, governance, pedagogy, assessment, learning and widening participation across the higher and further education sectors in local, national and international contexts.

Intercultural, International, Comparative Education (IICE)

Cluster Lead: Dr Cora Xu

This cluster examines intercultural and international educational issues through critical, interpretive and comparative lenses, addressing inequalities across educational contexts using ethnographic and discursive methods.

Pedagogy and Curriculum

Cluster Leads: Dr Linda Wang and Professor Aimee Quickfall

This cluster bridges theory and practice in learning, teaching and thinking from the early years through to higher and lifelong learning, building on expertise in creativity, digital pedagogy and technology including AI.

Durham University Evidence Centre for Education (DECE)

Cluster Leads: Professor Nadia Siddiqui and Dr Johny Daniel

DECE improves the uptake of trustworthy research evidence in education, generating and synthesising robust evidence to inform policy and practice, with a focus on inequalities, educational justice and wellbeing. DECE secures competitive research funding and supports active ECR and doctoral communities.

Digital Society and Education

Cluster Leads: Professor Cristina Costa and Dr Michaela Oliver

This cluster explores the intersection of digital technologies, experiences and society, bringing together research on digital pedagogy, equity, AI, wellbeing, digital literacies, citizenship and governance, while connecting theory, research and practice.

The School of Education welcomes new researchers

Our new research active colleagues span a diverse set of backgrounds and interests and have already brought fresh ideas and exciting new research opportunities for the School, and the wider Durham University community. We are delighted to welcome them to our school.



Professor Aimee Quickfall

Aimee started at Durham in January and is Director of Initial Teacher Education (ITE). She is a member of the British Educational Research association (BERA) Council and Chair of the BERA Conference and Events Committee. She taught in primary and Early Years for twelve years before leading ITE programmes. Her research interests are well-being and workload in education, ITE policy and experiences, feminist approaches; and research ethics. Aimee also enjoys stargazing, hiking and horror stories.



Dr James Wood

James Wood joins Durham as an Assistant Professor in the School of Education and Associate Editor of Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education. A Senior Fellow of Advance HE, he has worked across Bangor University, Seoul National University, King's College London and UCL. His research focuses on assessment, feedback, evaluative judgement and AI-mediated learning. At Bangor, he held leadership roles including Director of Assessment, PGT Lead and Director of the National EdD (Wales). He also serves on the executive committee of the Assessment in Higher Education network.



Dr Elle Young

Elle joined Durham University in 2025 as a Postdoctoral Research Associate after completing her PhD at Newcastle University. Her research interests focus on educational inequalities, social mobility, climate education and young people's mental wellbeing and resilience. She currently works with Professor Nadia Siddiqui on the ESRC-funded From the Centre to the Periphery project, the first quasi-experimental evaluation of the Department for Education's Opportunity Areas programme. Alongside leading qualitative research in schools, she has contributed to numerous policy briefs and reports on educational outcomes.



Dr Kartika Bhatia

Kartika Bhatia is an economist and researcher using rigorous evidence to improve outcomes for children and marginalised communities. She holds a PhD in Economics from Toulouse School of Economics and has worked at the World Bank and ASPIRE India, where she led education research reaching nearly one million children. At Durham, her interdisciplinary research spans education, safeguarding, social protection and emerging technologies, including projects on children's aspirations, school safety, responsible AI, and UNICEF Somalia's cash-transfer programmes and child wellbeing outcomes.

Research and Knowledge Exchange News

Congratulations to new research grant holders

Across the School of Education, new funded projects are tackling questions about young people's wellbeing, educational inequality, AI, teacher education and what works in schools. Here are some of the questions our researchers will be exploring over the coming years.

10

new projects

6

funding schemes

Research running through to 2031

How can we better support children and young people?

Dr *Johny Daniel* is investigating anxiety, depression and stress among pupils with SEND, while *Prof Cristina Costa's* Durham Digital Good Life project is working with young people to understand what wellbeing means in increasingly digital lives. *Prof Aimee Quickfall* is also contributing to a major five-year European project focused on supporting the mental health of young people across education, training and work.

Projects supported by the Nuffield Foundation, ESRC/Durham University and European Commission.

How should education respond to AI?

Two new projects are examining what meaningful AI education looks like at different stages of schooling. *Dr Michaela Oliver's* From Risk to Reason focuses on developing AI literacy in primary schools, while *Dr Jasper Roe's* project explores how the AI Assessment Scale can move from framework to practice in secondary education.

Supported by the British Academy and ESRC/Durham University.

What works in schools, and for whom?

Dr Victoria Menzies is leading evaluation work on Talk With Tales for Children and Stepping Stones, while *Dr Johny Daniel* is re-analysing EEF trial data to better understand outcomes specifically for pupils with SEND.

Supported by the Education Endowment Foundation and ESRC.

How do we understand education, inequality and the future differently?

Prof Aimee Quickfall's project is mapping the philosophical foundations of Initial Teacher Education, while *Dr Cora Xu's* Time Inheritance examines inequalities through a project focused on mapping experiences and co-creating alternative futures.

Supported by PESGB and the British Academy.

2026 Public Lecture

Teacher mental health and wellbeing

Sinéad McBrearty,
Chief Executive Officer, Education Support

Our upcoming inaugural lecture is being held at Durham University on Tuesday 13th October 2026. The lecture will be delivered by Sinéad McBrearty, CEO of Education Support, and will focus on the critical theme of teacher mental health and wellbeing. We would be delighted if you would be able to join us for the lecture and post-lecture discussion for invited policy makers, experts and thought leaders from the North East.

If you would like to attend the lecture, please sign up here: David Galloway Annual Education Lecture 2026 - registration form

Date
13 October 2026

Time
17:00–19:00

Venue
Collingwood College
Durham University
DH1 3LT

Coming to Durham

ISSID 2027 Conference & Summer School

Durham University's School of Education will host the International Society for the Study of Individual Differences (ISSID) 2027 Conference, 19–23 July 2027, preceded by a two-day Summer School for postgraduate researchers on 17–18 July. The programme includes the prestigious Eysenck Lecture from Professor Elena Grigorenko alongside keynotes from Dr Belén López-Pérez, Professor Florian Schmiedek, Professor Steve Woods and Professor Wiebke Bleidorn.

ISSID
International Society for the Study of Individual Differences
DURHAM, UK

Key Dates
Conference: 19-23 July 2027
Summer School: 17-18 July 2027

Chaired by Dr Sarah A. Walker, the Durham organising committee includes Professor Jens Beckmann, Professor Nadin Beckmann and Dr Michael J. Priestley.

From Daily Experiences to Lasting Change: Personality Development During the Year Abroad

Professor Nadin Beckmann





A year abroad is often described as a life-changing experience. Universities promote it as transformative, students frequently return convinced they have changed and employers value the adaptability and global outlook it is assumed to foster. Surprisingly little research has examined whether these perceived changes are reflected in measurable personality development. This study provides one of the most detailed answers to that question to date.

> **"A year abroad may not reinvent who students are, but it can cultivate qualities that matter for personal, academic and professional success."**

180 students

12 UK universities

3 timescales

Drawing on data from 180 undergraduate students across 12 UK universities, the research followed students over an academic year, comparing those living abroad with peers who remained at home. What makes the study particularly distinctive is its multi-layered approach. Rather than examining personality only at the broad trait level, it captured personality across three timescales: enduring Big Five traits, more specific characteristics such as curiosity, resilience and anxiety, and moment-to-moment personality states recorded through intensive experience sampling.

The findings challenge the popular assumption that studying abroad fundamentally reshapes personality. Broad personality traits remained remarkably stable, even during what many would consider a major life transition. However, a more nuanced picture emerged beneath this apparent stability. Students who spent a year abroad became more agreeable, more curious and less anxious than their peers who stayed at home. These effects were modest rather than dramatic, but they suggest that international mobility can foster growth in specific aspects of personality linked to social integration, openness to new experiences and well-being.

Perhaps the most compelling insight concerns the role of everyday experiences in driving development. While personality traits changed only gradually, personality states fluctuated substantially from day to day. Students abroad experienced more agreeable and extraverted states and fewer neurotic states than those at home. Crucially, the strongest predictor of longer-term personality development was not how variable individuals were, but the average states they experienced over time. Students who more frequently behaved in open, conscientious, agreeable or emotionally stable ways were more likely to show corresponding shifts in their longer-term personality profiles.

For senior leaders in higher education, internationalisation and student development, this finding is particularly significant. It suggests that meaningful growth is less about a single transformative event and more about the

accumulation of everyday experiences. Personal development appears to emerge through repeated patterns of behaviour, interaction and adaptation rather than through dramatic moments of change.

More broadly, the study advances contemporary thinking about personality development. It demonstrates that personality is both stable and dynamic: stable in its core traits, yet highly responsive in daily thoughts, feelings and behaviours. The research provides rare empirical evidence linking these short-term experiences to longer-term development, showing how repeated state-level experiences can gradually shape enduring characteristics.

Overall, the message is both realistic and encouraging. A year abroad may not reinvent who students are, but it can cultivate qualities that matter for personal, academic and professional success. By revealing how everyday experiences accumulate into lasting development, this research offers important insights for educators, policy-makers and organisations seeking to design environments that genuinely support growth.



Intergenerational transmission of indigenous knowledge beyond formal education

Dr Antonia Manresa

Field work in the Ecuadorian Amazon – 2025

In June 2025 I was able to spend just over 3 weeks collecting field data in a region of the Ecuadorian Amazon I know well, having links to this area for over 15 years. I conducted ethnographic research with the indigenous Kichwa midwives who form part of the organisation AMUPAKIN. I conducted narrative interviews with the midwives exploring their life histories in terms of acquiring and transmitting 'ancestral knowledge'. The term 'ancestral knowledge' is that used and expressed predominately by indigenous peoples.

My aim was to understand what is considered to be ancestral knowledge by the midwives, how this is expressed in their discourse with me and how this knowledge is currently transmitted including what the midwives consider to be the main challenges to the transmission of this ancestral knowledge.

I also conducted narrative interviews with young adult indigenous members of staff and volunteers who form part of the central office of the Indigenous Kichwa territory of Rukullacta. This is one of the oldest and largest legally recognised indigenous collective territories in this part of the Ecuadorian Amazon. Similarly my aim here was to explore how these individuals express their educational and professional life stories and how they relate this, or not, to acquiring ancestral knowledge.

> ***"Ancestral knowledge that is used and expressed predominately by indigenous peoples"***

My reason for conducting this research relates to my research focus on intercultural and indigenous education in Ecuador. Most of my research has centred around the context of formal education, including educational policy, interpretation and negotiation of these on the ground within indigenous territories and pedagogic practices in the classroom. One of the central issues in my research journey has been to understand the difficulties in categorising indigenous knowledge to respond to formal educational practices, which decolonial scholars critique tends become representational. In other words, is to translate into fixed representations of indigenous cosmovisions and descriptions of 'traditional' practices as the dominant form of intercultural education adopted in education systems in Latin America and beyond. However, from my doctoral research I have also developed the critique that 'ancestral knowledge' does in specific contexts take place in the classroom, expressed as ontological pluralism but is only possible in this formal space because it goes unnoticed as such by indigenous teachers. This creates a challenge in the framing of intercultural indigenous education from a critical and decolonial perspective and I propose requires further exploration of the practices and understanding of transmission of ancestral knowledge beyond formal education. Having the

. opportunity to re-engage with a specific indigenous context I know well has been incredibly enriching. The narrative interviews with indigenous Kichwa midwives and young adults are enabling me to explore anew how 'ancestral knowledge' is understood in a broader educational context.

This is expressed in terms how specific practices involving the transmission of ancestral knowledge are described, and the relationships between 'ancestral' and 'formal' educational trajectories as well as the central current challenges perceived for intergenerational transmission of 'ancestral' knowledge.

Loneliness and belonging at University

Dr Michael J. Priestley & Dr Louise Gascoine

Loneliness is a widespread and growing issue that has negative consequences for our society, our health and our economy.

Evidence collected by the Office for National Statistics shows that approximately 1 in 4 people in Great Britain who responded to the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) reported feeling lonely often or always, or some of the time. The most recent Student Academic Experience Survey 2026, focussed on undergraduate students in the UK, showed that approximately 1 in 3 reported that they felt lonely at least once a week.

Most people will feel lonely at some point during their life, this is part of human experience. For the majority, this will be short term and specific to a certain situation, although it is different for everyone. In a transition period like starting university, it might take a while to develop new relationships and a sense of belonging. Feelings of loneliness in this type of situation are normal and can be interpreted as a natural evolutionary response to being isolated from usual social connections, these feelings can encourage people to seek out new connections. However, when loneliness is experienced long-term it can have an impact on health.

Michael Priestley worked on the U-Belong project, led by King's College London and funded by the Medical Research Council. U-Belong aimed to better understand loneliness and belonging among university students.

1 in 4 people in Great Britain reported feeling lonely often or always, or some of the time.

1 in 3 undergraduate students in the UK reported that they felt lonely at least once a week

The main findings of the U-Belong project included:

- Expectation vs Reality - young people are constantly told they are living through the time of their lives and should have lots of close friendships. A difference between this expectation and actual social experience was found to increase the risk of loneliness.
- First impressions count - early experiences in a new social environment can have a big impact on future behaviours and relationships. Positive social exchanges early on promote pro-social behaviours that can spiral into large and fulfilling social networks. On the other hand, feeling excluded creates cycles of isolation and loneliness.
- It takes effort - young people often expect all relationships to form like they did in school, based on shared proximity with peers and enforced time together, and underestimate the effort and responsibility involved in making and maintaining friends. Without consciously making the effort to meet new people and try new things, friendships are significantly less likely to form.

So, what does all this mean for students, here are our top tips:

Be proactive about friendships and connecting with others - there are a huge variety of academic and social opportunities to connect with others at university, experiment and see what works for you! Check out clubs and societies to connect with others who have similar interests or experiences, or to explore new interests and opportunities! Group work in class can be intimidating if it's not an approach you are familiar with, however it can also provide valuable opportunities to make new connections.

Set your own expectations - remember, loneliness can often come from a difference between the social relationships you expect and those you have. Try to be realistic in your expectations of your social relationships, both in terms of how close you feel and how many you will have. Remember, spending time alone is not the same as loneliness.

Find out what support is available – there are multiple sources of student support available at university including well-being, academic and more specialised support.

Small steps – paradoxically, lonely people can find themselves avoiding seeking support and contact with others which can perpetuate a cycle of loneliness. So, if you are trying to support someone that is feeling lonely, be patient and take it small steps at a time.

When AI can produce the work, what should assessment prove?

Dr Jasper Roe & Dr James Wood discuss learner judgement and the future of university assessment





Generative AI is challenging universities to reconsider not only how students complete assessments, but what the resulting work allows us to claim about their capabilities.

What have you been working on recently, and what question increasingly connects that work?

Jasper: Lately, I have been preparing for an Impact Acceleration Account project that begins in September. Over the last year, my co-researchers and I have worked with the Joint Managerial Board for Voluntary Secondary Schools in the Republic of Ireland. We are exploring assessment reform in schools and what students and teachers need to know to use AI critically, ethically and effectively.

James: I recently became an Associate Editor at Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education and have been guest-editing its Feedback Futures special issue. The editorial connects to my Learning Orchestration question: what does AI-supported work let us infer about the learner? A grant application I'm working on extends this by examining students' uses of AI for learning, production and verification, and how educators can support the capabilities involved.

> ***"Not bans or detection, but clarity, trust and fairness. Those should be our focus, rather than permissions alone.***

If AI can help produce an excellent assignment, what does the finished work actually tell us about the student?

James: AI did not create this problem, but it has made it hard to ignore. Work can meet the criteria without demonstrating student capability. Declarations improve transparency, but recent marking showed their limits, a lot of them were missing, while completed ones rarely distinguished AI-supported learning, production or verification from displaced student judgement.
The same mark can represent independent capability, skilful AI use or AI-produced work. We need to know who made the consequential decisions and what the evidence warrants us claiming about the learner.

Jasper: I agree. We often focus on assessment as a finished product and AI has given us pause for thought about that. The difficulty is how to go beyond it. We can examine process data to understand how a student arrived at a result, but then we risk turning the process data into another product.

There are no easy answers, although verification, assessment redesign and attention to process are all important parts of the discussion.

Are universities concentrating too heavily on whether AI was permitted?

Jasper: For me, the most important things are a shared language and transparency between students and staff. My research suggests that both groups want the same basic things: not bans or detection, but clarity, trust and fairness. Those should be our focus, rather than permissions alone.

James: Yes. The debate is usually framed as a choice: ban AI or allow it because that reflects the world beyond university. Neither guarantees learning. A ban may protect independent work without teaching effective AI use; open use may improve the product while the learning disappears.

Permission tells us how the work was produced, not what the student understood, judged or can now do.

What would better assessment look like, and what should universities change next?

James: I would separate four claims: what students can do independently; what they learn through AI; whether they can produce better work than AI alone, even if that is not learning in the traditional sense; and whether they can verify and stand behind AI-shaped work.

Across a programme, controlled or oral tasks can sit alongside AI-supported learning, production and verification. Jasper is right that process evidence can become another product, so we do need to find ways around this. In a biosciences project with Mathilde Roger, presented at the AHE conference, short screencasts provided clearer evidence of judgement, learning and group contribution than the submitted work alone.

Universities should decide which learning outcomes require secure evidence of independent capability and which concern effective work with AI, then align assessment, regulations and grading with those claims. Instead of asking "Was AI allowed?", we should ask "What are we trying to learn about this student, and what evidence would show it?"

Jasper: James and I have a lot of common ground here. We need clarity about a student's capabilities both with and without assistive technology, and that starts with the learning outcomes we develop.

> ***Permission tells us how the work was produced, not what the student understood, judged or can now do.***

I approach this through the AI Assessment Scale framework. Across a module, assessment twins pair secured and unsecured components addressing the same learning outcomes, while a wider combination of AI and no-AI tasks can give us a clearer picture of student capability while supporting transparency and fairness. I do not think we will ever arrive at a perfect solution, though. Assessment is a complex business.

AI disclosure: Generative AI was used to help edit and structure this interview from material supplied by the authors. Jasper Roe and James Wood reviewed and approved the final text and take responsibility for its content.

AI disclosure: Generative AI was used to help edit and structure this interview from material supplied by the authors. Jasper Roe and James Wood reviewed and approved the final text and take responsibility for its content.

Authentic Assessment in the Age of GenAI

Dr Sophie Ward

In June 2026 we presented our paper, 'Authentic Assessment in the Age of GenAI', at the conference 'Postdigital Backlash: Past, Present, Future', in Zagreb, Croatia. This paper was the culmination of many discussions that we had over the future of the essay as a form of assessment now that students can prompt generative artificial intelligence models (GenAI) to produce essays that are indistinguishable from human writing. As a team, we brought together our knowledge of the philosophy of education, aesthetics, student wellbeing and emotion regulation to ask if human essay writing should be preserved in the age of GenAI, and if so, how.

Our discussions centred first on the value of writing to negotiate contested meanings and develop understanding of how social relationships and cultural dynamics shape our beliefs, thereby foregrounding strategies for action in the world. Second, we discussed how the use of GenAI smooths the learning experience by automating the task of gathering, analysing and synthesising information, but risks fostering emotional dependence and reducing self-regulatory capacity, thereby preventing the acquisition of skills to be capable, independent learners. From our analysis of literature on AI, essay writing, emotion regulation, and learning, we concluded that essay writing empowers learners, while prompting GenAI disempowers learners.

> ***Framing discomfort as productive, rather than a sign of failure.***

Next, we considered how we might support learners to write independently of GenAI. Here, we drew on our knowledge of care ethics to propose the adoption of relational pedagogy, encouraging students to share their feelings about learning, and framing discomfort as productive, rather than a sign of failure. We considered how pedagogy informed by care ethics, such as Digital Storytelling, incentivises students to recognise and synthesise their personal thoughts and experiences, thereby minimising the desire to outsource their thinking to AI.



We grounded our recommendations in the theory of Bildung, which we define as personal development through knowledge of the self and society; a concept that we have explored in a previous paper currently under review. This concept resonated with us, as it is strongly associated with the Romantic backlash to the mechanisation of thought and society under the conditions of the first industrial revolution. Arguably, we are experiencing an intensification of this mechanisation in the age of GenAI, with chatbots drawing on Large Language Models to formulate outputs that mimic human expression. Historic resistance to mechanisation centred on the human need to express the authentic meeting of mind and world, and we argue that this resistance is even more pressing today: despite the remarkable achievements of AI, understanding ourselves and the world around us through writing still holds value. We are mindful that students' use of GenAI may reflect the internalisation of the culture of performativity and recognise the structural constraints on relational pedagogy. We argue that these structural constraints must be challenged if essay writing as a method of brining-into-awareness students' subjectivity is to be preserved in higher education.

Dr Johny Daniel secures two research awards

Dr Johny Daniel has recently secured two research awards examining important but under-researched aspects of the experiences and outcomes of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

The first, funded by the Nuffield Foundation, will investigate anxiety, depression and stress among pupils with and without SEND. The two-year project will use the Education and Child Health Insights Linked Data (ECHILD), which brings together education and health records, to examine clinically recorded mental health referrals and diagnoses. The research will explore how these differ across types of SEND, socioeconomic groups, gender and regions of England, as well as how patterns have changed over time. The aim is to provide stronger national evidence about which groups of pupils may be particularly vulnerable and where support may be most needed.

The second is an ADR UK Research Fellowship, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. It will follow young people beyond compulsory schooling using the Longitudinal Education Outcomes dataset, which securely links school, further and higher education, employment, earnings and benefits records. The project will examine how young people with different types of SEND fare as they move into early adulthood,



including their participation in further and higher education, employment, earnings and benefit receipt. The project will also compare young people with similar reading and math difficulties to examine whether identification with a specific learning difficulty is associated with better later educational and employment outcomes.

Together, the two projects will provide new population-level evidence spanning pupils' mental health and their transition into adulthood. The broader goal is to help policymakers, schools and other services better understand where inequalities affecting young people with SEND arise and how support and resources might be more effectively targeted.

Research Spotlight

Inaugural David Galloway Public Lectures puts SEND in the spotlight





One of the highlights of the School of Education's past 12 months was its inaugural Public Lecture in memory of Professor David Galloway. The School was delighted to welcome Helen Hayes, MP and Chair of the House of Commons Education Select Committee, who delivered a lecture on Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND).

Her lecture drew on Solving the SEND Crisis, the inquiry report produced by the Education Select Committee. The event was chaired by Professor Martin Evans, Executive Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences at Durham University.

A lively panel discussion followed, exploring the implications of the report for pupils with SEND in the North East of England. Joining the panel were Mary Kelly Foy, Member of Parliament for City of Durham; John Hardy OBE, Headteacher of St John Vianney Primary School in Hartlepool; Jane Kennedy, Senior Specialist Advisor for Education Durham at Durham County Council; and Dr Xiaofei Qi and Dr Johny Daniel, both Associate Professors in the School of Education.

The event was a huge success, and the School was particularly pleased that members of Professor Galloway's family were able to attend.







The SUPPORT-Y Project: Co-creating Mental Health Support with Young People

Professor Aimee Quickfall



The School of Education is part of a new five-year research and innovation project, SUPPORT-Y (Supporting the Mental Health of Youth in Education, Training and Work), which launches this autumn with €4.5 million in funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe programme.

Coordinated by the University of Eastern Finland, SUPPORT-Y brings together twelve partners from England, Belgium, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Malta and Portugal to address one of Europe's most urgent and under-served challenges: the mental health of young people as they navigate school, vocational training and the transition into work.

To find out more about the project, visit the SUPPORT-Y website, which will be updated regularly.

I am fortunate to be leading the project at Durham, and I'd like to share a little about how this opportunity came about and why it matters so much to me personally.

One of the aspects of SUPPORT-Y that excites me most is its commitment to involving young people directly in the creation of mental health interventions. Many current approaches across Europe have not been co-designed with the young people they are intended to support. While these interventions may be clinically effective, they can miss valuable insights that young people themselves can bring to their design, testing and implementation.

> “Many current approaches across Europe have not been co-designed with the young people they are intended to support.”

One of the greatest challenges in improving mental health support is engagement: reaching young people who are struggling and helping them stay connected to the support available to them. SUPPORT-Y will work with between 100 and 150 young people in each participating country, with particular attention to groups that have often been marginalised, including young people with disabilities, those who have experienced poverty, and girls at risk of exclusion.

Working alongside young people, mental health professionals, educators, employers and other stakeholders, the project team will co-create a blended intervention that combines a digital app with the human connections that are so important to wellbeing, including mentoring, peer support groups and workshops. A dedicated seminar series will also be developed for young people undertaking apprenticeships and vocational programmes.

This work is deeply personal to me. I grew up on the east coast of England at a time when opportunities could feel limited and support for education, training and early careers was often lacking. I saw friends struggle with their mental health in environments where asking for help was difficult, and where young people were rarely asked what support they felt would make a difference.

My career has since taken me from working with children in schools in Lincolnshire and Nottingham to initial teacher education in Lincoln, Leeds and now Durham. Across these communities, many of which experience socio-economic deprivation and significant mental health challenges, I have repeatedly seen the importance of listening to young people and valuing their expertise in their own lives.

That is why young people's voices must sit at the heart of this project. By working with them as partners rather than simply recipients of support, we can create approaches that are more meaningful, accessible and effective.

In Durham and across the North East, we will be working closely with schools, colleges, mental health charities and community organisations to ensure local young people are properly represented and supported. More broadly across the North of England, we have already begun building partnerships with organisations such as the Leeds Learning Alliance.

Another question I have been asked frequently since the project was announced is: how do you become involved in a major international research project like this?

My own route has been far from conventional. My background is in primary and early years teaching, which was not even my first career. I have only been working in universities for ten years and have spent much of that time leading initial teacher education programmes.

There has not been a straightforward path towards becoming involved in international research.

My advice is simple: find people whose values align with yours, enjoy working with them, and nurture those relationships.

> “Find people whose values align with yours, enjoy working with them, and nurture those relationships.”

Kaisa, the principal investigator for SUPPORT-Y, has been a research colleague; and now a genuine friend; for many years. The same is true of Emma, another regional lead within the project. Together we have built relationships based on trust, mutual support and a shared commitment to improving outcomes for young people.

When we first met at a conference in Lapland (which is a story for another day), we discovered a common passion for mental health and supporting students through the challenges they face. None of us imagined that years later we would be embarking on a major European research project together. Being able to do this work alongside friends, on a topic that means so much to all of us, makes the opportunity even more special.

> “Young people’s voices must sit at the heart of this project.”

If you would like to learn more about SUPPORT-Y, please get in touch. This is a project built on collaboration, partnership and shared learning, and we would love to connect with others who are interested in supporting the mental health and wellbeing of young people.

Metacognition for Year 2 pupils in Maths problem solving and reasoning

Dr Yuqian (Linda) Wang, Dr Victoria Menzies and Dr Xiaofei Qi

Ask a seven-year-old to solve a maths problem, and you'll often see them just do it — but rarely do they pause beforehand to plan, or reflect afterward on whether they got it right or whether other strategies might have worked. That pause — stepping back to think about their own thinking — is called metacognition. We test pupils constantly, but do we nurture their ability to self-support their reasoning enough?

Only 69% of pupils met the expected maths standard in Key Stage 1 between 2021 and 2023, and problem-solving and reasoning make up more than half the marks in national maths assessments. Children are graded on their ability to reason and select strategies, but teachers often lack confidence and training in how to teach these skills in Year 2. The Education Endowment Foundation rates metacognitive approaches as high impact and low cost, with meta-analyses showing they're particularly effective for children around age seven — though disadvantaged pupils are less likely to develop these strategies without explicit teaching.

Colleagues at Northumbria University have developed 'Stepping Stones', a professional development programme for teaching classroom-based metacognition in Year 2 maths, funded by the EEF and piloted across 15 schools in the North East. Our Durham team — led by Victoria Menzies and Yuqian (Linda) Wang, with Xiaofei Qi and Rachel Oughton — is independently evaluating the pilot's promise, delivery, acceptability to schools, and potential to work at scale.

In the classroom, pupils sit in mixed-ability trios around a piece of blue fabric representing a river, with "stepping stones" — the steps of a worked maths problem — laid across it. Teachers encourage pupils to narrate their reasoning aloud, making the normally invisible process of problem-solving visible. Every task begins with planning and ends with evaluation — what did you learn, what was hardest, what's your top tip for next time?

This is a modest, pilot-stage evaluation: we're examining whether Stepping Stones fits into school timetables, whether teachers keep using it once we've left, and whether pupils — particularly disadvantaged pupils — can access and engage with it. We're also grappling with a tricky measurement problem: there's no established way to assess metacognition in six- to seven-year-olds, so part of the project involves developing new assessment tools, including whether AI-assisted comparative judgement could help score children's audio-recorded reasoning at scale.

For more, get in touch: steppingstones.evaluation@durham.ac.uk

From the Page to the World: The Journey of The Time Inheritors

Dr Cora Xu



When I submitted the final manuscript of The Time Inheritors: How Time Inequalities Shape Higher Education Mobility in China (SUNY Press, 2025), I had little sense of the journey that lay ahead. Drawing on nearly a decade of fieldwork with more than a hundred young people across China, the book argues that



social inequality is not only about money or status but also about time: some young people inherit a cushion of temporal security that allows them to explore, take risks, and plan strategically, while others begin life already in temporal debt, under pressure to repay family sacrifice before they can even begin to chart their own futures.

In the year since publication, the book has travelled further than I could have anticipated. I have given more than twenty talks across seven countries, including the United States, Singapore, South Korea, India, Germany, China, and the United Kingdom, to audiences at institutions including Boston College, the National University of Singapore, Queens' College Cambridge, King's College London, and Imperial College London. In May 2025 I delivered the keynote address at the British Postgraduate Network for Chinese Studies annual conference at Glasgow University, and here at Durham I have presented at events including the Education Agents Conference and the Centre for Academic Development.

Some of the most memorable moments have been unexpected. At the Durham Education Agents event, one participant told me afterwards, through tears, that she had never felt so seen. Similar responses came from audiences at Glasgow and at King's College London, as well as those who have listened to my podcasts: people who recognised in the framework of time inheritance something they had lived but never had the language to name. These encounters have reminded me why research matters beyond the page.

The book has been warmly received internationally. It has been reviewed in twelve peer-reviewed journals so far and has generated around twenty media interviews in both English and Chinese, reaching close to a million readers and listeners. A single podcast episode has been played over 407,000 times; one Chinese article based on the book has been read more than 100,000 times and another more than 67,000 times. The book is also being translated into Chinese, with the Chinese edition to be published by Shanghai Translation House (上海译文出版社) in March 2027. In 2026 it was awarded the Best Book Award by the Higher Education Special Interest Group of the Comparative and International Education Society (CIES HESIG), one of the most recognised book awards in the field of comparative and international higher education.

The reach of the book has also supported a widening programme of public engagement. Funded by the ESRC Festival of Social Science, I ran a public workshop on time inheritance and produced animated explainer videos in both English and Chinese. I have carried out school visits and contributed invited writing to a range of platforms stemming from the book's ideas. These activities reflect a conviction that research on inequality must speak beyond the academy if it is to make any difference.

The book now provides the foundation for two major funded projects. The British Academy SHAPE Involve and Engage award, running from April 2026 to the end of 2027, supports a public engagement and knowledge exchange programme built around the book's ideas. And from 2027 to 2028, I will lead TempoSphere, a Durham Institute of Advanced Study Major Project exploring what a temporally just university might look like. TempoSphere brings together colleagues from Computer Science, Psychology, Sociology, Business Analytics, Philosophy, and Engineering, reflecting the genuinely interdisciplinary challenge of rethinking how institutions organise, distribute, and value time.

I am grateful to colleagues in the School of Education for the conversations and encouragement along the way. The journey of this book is, in many senses, only beginning.



The ECR Network: a year of building research culture

- Dr Sarah A. Walker

Over the past year, the School's Early Career Researcher Network has been developing a programme of workshops aimed at helping ECRs and PhD researchers navigate some of the less visible parts of academic life.

The programme has focused particularly on areas that can often feel difficult to understand from the outside. Colleagues Martha Einav and Maria Aznarez from Research and Innovation Services joined the network to talk through the funding landscape, including how funding schemes work, what happens when developing an application, and when and how to involve RIS. This was followed by a grant-writing session with Professor Stephen Gorard, who shared practical advice on approaching funding strategically at different career stages.

More recently, the network turned its attention to REF and research impact. Adam Holden, Senior Impact and Engagement Manager at Durham, led a workshop exploring what research impact means in practice, including how it can be considered from the beginning of a project rather than treated as something that happens at the end. The session also brought together members of the School's research leadership team to discuss the REF, impact and the wider research environment, giving ECRs an opportunity to ask questions and think more broadly about their developing research trajectories.

The annual programme, developed by Dr Sarah A. Walker and Dr Michael Priestley, grew from a recognition that much of academic life is still learned informally. Expectations around funding, impact, career development and research strategy can often become clear only through experience, chance conversations or knowing the right person to ask. Creating dedicated spaces where this knowledge can be shared openly is an important part of building an inclusive research culture, particularly for researchers who may not already be familiar with the unwritten rules of academia.

Alongside providing practical information, the ECR Network is intended to create a space for researchers at similar career stages to meet, share experiences and develop a stronger sense of community within the School. The programme will continue to develop over the coming year, with further opportunities for ECRs and PhD researchers to learn from colleagues across the School and wider University.

> ***"...the [ECR] network provides an opportunity to connect, ask questions, and inform positive changes that can support the development of ECRs within the School***
>
> **- Dr Michael Priestley (ECR Representative)**

Dr Elle Young attends IfG's Engaging with Government Course 2026



Dr Elle Young, Postdoctoral Research Associate, recently had the privilege of attending the Engaging with Government programme, a three-day residential course held at the Institute for Government (IfG) in Whitehall, delivered in partnership with the

Arts and Humanities Research Council.

Now in its 13th year, the programme has supported over 200 early career researchers since it was first run in 2013, helping academics in the arts and humanities build the confidence and skills needed to engage meaningfully with policy makers. The application process was highly competitive, with only 20 spots available nationally for ECRs across all disciplines, making Elle's place on the course a notable achievement.

The course offered a thorough grounding in the policymaking process, with sessions led by senior civil servants, politicians, and policy influencers exploring both the challenges and opportunities of engaging with government. Sessions covered practical questions central to research impact, such as how policy makers use evidence, how to time and frame research so it lands at the right moment in the policy cycle, how to build durable relationships with civil servants and departments, and how to communicate findings in ways that are accessible and persuasive to a non-academic audience. Rather than focussing purely on theory, the programme placed a significant emphasis on application, encouraging participants to connect what they were learning directly back to their own research and to think critically about the concrete steps needed to translate academic findings into policy.

Elle came away from the course with greater confidence in her own ability to engage with government, a clearer sense of the practical steps required to do so, and a valuable new network of policy contacts spanning Whitehall and the wider research community. As part of the course's alumni structure, Elle will remain connected with fellow participants, the IfG, and AHRC.

Given Elle's ongoing work on the 'From the Centre to the Periphery' project, a large-scale independent evaluation of the DfE's Opportunity Areas programme, the skills and contacts gained through this course are particularly timely, offering new avenues for ensuring the project's reach and influence the policy makers who shape place-based education policy.





Kartika's journey to Durham

How can research and evidence improve the lives of children and communities who are too often overlooked?

Dr Kartika Bhatia

I trained as an economist at the Toulouse School of Economics, where I completed a PhD in Economics after a Master's in Economic Theory and Econometrics. Although my academic training gave me a strong foundation in quantitative methods, much of what has shaped me as a researcher has come from working alongside practitioners, policymakers and local communities.

Early in my career, I worked as a Research Economist at the World Bank, focusing on the drivers of conflict and violence in the Middle East and North Africa. One of my most

interesting studies explored drivers of ISIS recruitment, using the organisation's own personnel records. The work was intellectually challenging, but it also reminded me that behind every dataset are individual lives, difficult choices and complex social and political realities.

I later returned to India to lead the research division of ASPIRE, one of the country's largest education non-profits. For five years, I worked with colleagues supporting children aged 3–16 in rural and tribal communities. Together, we developed a longitudinal education information system tracking around one million children across four states. The evidence generated through this system helped programmes identify children at risk of exclusion and led to the reintegration of approximately 50,000 out-of-school children into formal education. I also helped evaluate large-scale initiatives in foundational literacy, hybrid learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, and local government financing. What I value most about this period is the opportunity to make research part of everyday decision-making and to see local communities and policymakers use the evidence to improve children's lives.

This commitment to research that connects rigorous analysis with lives of people is what brought me to Durham. My work here centres on children, marginalised communities, evidence and policy, but it also increasingly brings together economics, education, sociology, safeguarding and emerging technologies.

One current project uses essays and drawings from 5,500 children in tribal areas of India to explore their aspirations for adult life. Working across disciplines, we are investigating how large language models might support the analysis of this rich material while developing transparent, bias-aware approaches to using artificial intelligence in social science research.

I am also working with Durham University's Global Centre for Contextual Safeguarding to develop a national picture of safety and wellbeing in UK schools, drawing on safeguarding incident data covering roughly 70% of schools. I am co-developing a new postgraduate certificate course in contextual safeguarding for 2027–28, in collaboration with colleagues in Sociology and Education.

> ***"What I value most about this period is the opportunity to make research part of everyday decision-making and to see local communities and policymakers use the evidence to improve children's lives.***

The course is intended to support both practitioners and researchers working with children and young people.

Another strand of my work, supported by the Durham–Notre Dame Seedcorn Fund, examines health beliefs, alcohol use and tuberculosis among tribal communities. I am also collaborating with UNICEF Innocenti to examine how the timing of government cash transfers influences children's food security and wellbeing after adverse shocks in Somalia.

Looking ahead, I hope to continue building research that is methodologically ambitious, collaborative and useful. My aspiration is not simply to produce evidence, but to ensure that it reaches the people who can act on it, and that it remains grounded in the experiences of the children, families and communities it seeks to represent. Outside work, travel has been another important source of learning. I have lived and worked in four countries and visited hundreds of cities. Each place has reinforced the same lesson: people often respond to similar incentives, but context matters, and there is always more to learn.



Congratulations to Evelyn Mary-Ann Antony who wins prestious national award for her PhD research

Evelyn was presented with The Outstanding Doctoral Research Contributions to Psychology Award from the British Psychological Society, which recognises UK postgraduate research demonstrating significance, rigour, and originality.

> ***Receiving this award is an honour, and it is encouraging to see research in a traditionally underappreciated area acknowledged," said Evelyn. "I'm sincerely grateful to my supervisors and the Psychology and Education Research Cluster in the School of Education.***

Her award-winning work, carried out at Durham, tackled an often-neglected area of study: middle childhood and emotion dysregulation. Drawing on longitudinal data from the UK Millennium Cohort Study and the Zurich Project on the Social Development from Childhood to Adolescence (z-proso), she examined the associations between emotion dysregulation, parenting practices, and ADHD symptoms. Her thesis reconceptualises emotion dysregulation as a relational, developmentally specific process in middle childhood, showing how ADHD symptoms and parenting practices interact across these years.

Evelyn's research was published in JCPP Advances, a high-impact journal from the Association for Child and Adolescent Mental Health, and gained wider recognition through an interview with BBC Future. A recipient of the Durham Doctoral Studentship, she was supervised by Professor Nadin Beckmann, Professor Steve Higgins, and Dr Sarah A. Walker.

Our newly minted doctors

Congratulations to all our PhD candidates who successfully defended their theses in the past 12-months.

Dr Tara Paxman
Constructing social class: what matters to young children? A sociomaterial exploration of how class is produced by 4-5 year old children in an English primary school

Dr Xiaofan Zhou
Evaluating the impact of metacognitive instruction on EFL learners' English reading in Chinese secondary classrooms

Dr Artie Waterman
"Being estranged doesn't have to stop you from doing anything": A longitudinal study exploring the experiences of estranged students in UK higher education

Dr Priyanka Bhatia
Teachers' digital practices within the context of digitalisation: An exploratory case study of private education in rural and urban Punjab, India

Dr Clare Sutton
An Institutional Ethnographic Inquiry into the Everyday Work of Course Leaders for College-Based Higher Education

Dr Xi Chen
Thesis Title: Passion, Practice and Profession: Exploring how motivation shapes music engagement and career aspirations of Chinese classically-trained piano majors

Dr Anas Almassri
Capabilities of peace? A critical realist study of international graduate scholarships impact in Palestine

Dr Jiarui Li
Adaptation of western pedagogy in Chinese higher education: A case study of project-based learning

Dr Wenqing Chen
Evaluating teachers' use of research evidence to improve students' literacy outcomes

Dr Peter Mason
Misreading masculinity? An examination of understandings of gender and masculinity in relation to experiences of reading in some Northern England secondary schools

Dr Yuting Guo
Exploring early childhood teachers' occupational wellbeing experiences within professional learning communities: A mixed-methods study in mainland China

Dr Tong Meng
Intimacy and the use of mobile dating applications: A study of Chinese international students' intimate lives in the UK

Dr Carolina Gazmuri
Why some students succeed against the odds academically

Dr Yuanya Zhang
From the last row of the classroom to the top page of Kuaishou: An ethnographic study of Chinese rural students' struggle for recognition across school and social media

Dr Vu Tran Thanh
A phenomenological exploration of Vietnamese LGBTQ language teachers' intersectional identities in queer inclusivity practices

Dr Evelyn Antony
Extrinsic dysregulation: A cross-national reconceptualisation of emotional dysregulation in middle childhood

Dr Jiayi Zhao
Investigating the surge in the number of students from China pursuing Master's education

Dr Gulsah Dost
Exploring the role of sense and belonging in STEM education: understanding the impact of gender, ethnicity and intersectionality on student persistence, engagement and academic success

Dr Rachel Simpson
Developing creative teaching skills in pre service teachers: the design and testing of a professional development programme

Dr Yasmin Musse
"Nobody even stops to think about my side of it": to what extent can poetry foster epistemic justice for Black girls attending a public high school in Texas?

Dr Abdullah Alhowail
Trajectories of non-intellective factors and their association with wellbeing in secondary schools in Saudi Arabia

Dr Di Wang
Gender, drama, and life: exploring children's gender performances in Chinese ECEC settings through a power relations lens

Dr Felicity Percival
Hong Kong International Schools and the global Ed Tech Narrative. How the policy ecosystem and teachers' discourse surrounding Educational Technology within private international schools are sites of neoliberal struggle

Dr Randa Khaled El Soufi
The nursing profession in the UK and Lebanon: A case study of how nurses perceive care, gender, emotional capital and professional habitus



Dr Anna Pilson
"I swear adults think we don't have opinions. They should ask. They might learn something!" Exploring disability, difference and pedagogic possibilities for vision impairment education with visually impaired young people

Dr Ying Chen
Children's Voices Matter: Exploring Chinese kindergarten music curriculum from children's perspectives using an adapted mosaic approach

Dr Qian Sun
Dynamic perspectives on language anxiety, psychological adjustment, and personality - A systematic review and multi -method longitudinal study

Dr Fangfang Du
Assessing language learning aptitude through dynamic testing: A proof-of-concept study

Dr Sabrina Ahmed-Qureshi
Transitions into, and experiences of further education for British-Muslim students

Dr Yan Chen
Understanding Students' Resilience: Teachers' moral judgements and institutional limits in Chinese rural county-seat boarding high schools

Dr Rachel Kurtz
Body of Learning: A trans-disciplinary perspective on embodied approaches to enhance learning and wellbeing



Undergraduate voices in research: spotlight on an undergraduate summer scholar

- Olivia Zhang



I first came across this summer research opportunity through a department email. After reading the research proposal, I was immediately drawn to the project because it connected with some of my own experiences as an international. student in UK higher education. The project explored whether collaborative pedagogies, such as group work, could support first-year students' learning, social connection and wellbeing. I was particularly interested in how students adapt to a new educational environment, and how the ways we learn with others can shape that experience.

What surprised me most was how much happens behind the scenes of research. I had previously imagined research as mainly asking a question and finding an answer, but the experience showed me how many smaller decisions, revisions and discussions are involved along the way. The most useful thing my supervisor gave me was a clear understanding of the research process. Working through each stage of the project helped me understand what needed to be done and how different stages connected. This became especially valuable when I started my dissertation in my third year, as the process felt much more familiar and manageable.

Most importantly, the experience taught me how to turn curiosity into research: to take a question I genuinely care about, develop it into something I can investigate, and follow it through systematically. It made research feel much more real to me and strengthened my interest in continuing along a research pathway.

Best undergraduate dissertation

Congratulations to **Annie Hockaday** on achieving a top mark for her thesis, **"Perfectionism and Emotion Regulation Strategy Use: A Facet-Level Meta-Analysis"**, which synthesised 28 studies to show that it is the self-critical, evaluative side of perfectionism, rather than the drive for high standards, that is linked to unhelpful ways of managing emotions such as rumination. Annie was supervised by Dr Sarah A. Walker

Congratulations Annie!

Laidlaw Scholars in the School of Education

Over the summer of 2026, the School of Education hosted and supervised two Laidlaw Scholars, Judit Arvidsson and Anette Sanchez Guzman.

- Judit Arvidsson



This summer I had the privilege of researching alongside Dr. Sarah Walker and Dr. Micheal Priestly, as part of the Laidlaw Fellowship Programme. The Laidlaw Fellowship is a programme aimed at supporting undergraduate students to become strong ethical future leaders, including a 6-week research project that aligns with one of the UN sustainable development goals.

My research has been motivated by witnessing the widespread integration of AI into young people's lives, and as a History and Politics student, the lack of policies that address this. In particular, I have been fascinated by the growing use of AI tools by young people not just for information but also for emotional support and companionship.

With the context of undergraduate men being less likely to utilise traditional wellbeing services, alongside rising concerns about men's mental health, male loneliness, and a 'Manosphere culture', I believe it is a crucial time to understand whether young men end up turning to AI instead of people to meet their emotional needs.

This project surveyed 401 young men aged 18-25 in the UK about using AI for emotional support, the first study of its kind here. Men who used AI for companionship and connection reported more loneliness than those who used it for practical tasks, and this held regardless of how much AI they used overall. They also reported slightly less support from the people around them, and were more likely to endorse hostile sexism and relational entitlement. The project produced the first measure of AI emotional use styles, contributing to the UN goals of Good Health and Well-being and Gender Equality.



- Anette Sanchez Guzman

When I moved from Mexico to study at Durham, I expected the biggest challenge to be adapting to a new country. Instead, I found myself adapting to a completely different way of learning. I had grown up in classrooms where

success was largely individual, while at Durham, discussion, collaboration, and group work were an essential part of academic life. Although I gradually became more confident, I often wondered whether other students, particularly those from different educational backgrounds, were experiencing the same transition.

That question became the foundation of my Laidlaw research project. I am investigating how students experience collaborative learning at Durham University, and whether those experiences differ according to their educational and cultural backgrounds. Collaborative learning is widely promoted across UK higher education because it helps develop communication, teamwork, and critical thinking, while also fostering a sense of belonging. Yet there is surprisingly little evidence about whether these benefits are experienced equally by all students.

My research combines existing evidence with the experiences of Durham students themselves. Alongside a systematic review of UK research on collaborative learning, I am analysing data from a pre-arrival survey completed by incoming students before they started university, exploring their expectations and previous experience of group work. During the summer research period, I will also conduct focus groups, analyse a second comparative survey, and work with College Welfare Representatives to understand how students' experiences evolve over time and how collaborative learning influences both academic confidence and wellbeing.
This project is important to me because it grew directly from my own experience. As an international student, I realised that adjusting to university was not only about mastering new academic content, but also about learning the unwritten rules of participation. I believe universities should recognise that students arrive with different educational experiences and ensure that collaborative learning becomes an opportunity for everyone, rather than a barrier for some.

In the future, I hope to become an international lawyer working at the intersection of education, equality, and public policy. This project has strengthened my passion for research and shown me how evidence can shape meaningful change. My hope is that the findings will contribute to more inclusive teaching practices and help ensure that every student, regardless of background, has the opportunity not only to succeed academically but also to feel that they truly belong.

Undergraduate research recognised with 2026 BERA Award

Olivia Germaine has been named the winner of the **2026 BERA Undergraduate Award,** which recognises outstanding undergraduate research in education.



Olivia received the award for her Durham University dissertation, Facilitating or Hindering? A Survey Exploring Extrinsic Emotion Regulation and Test Anxiety among University Students in the UK and Abroad, supervised by Dr Sarah A. Walker in the School of Education. The BERA judging panel unanimously selected the dissertation as the winning submission, describing it as excellent and ambitious in both its scope and scale for an undergraduate study.

Olivia's research explored how situational appraisals and interpersonal emotion regulation relate to test anxiety among university students. Her findings suggested that when supporting someone experiencing anxiety before an exam, the particular emotion regulation strategy used may be less important than how that person understands their situation, particularly whether they perceive what is happening as within or outside their control.

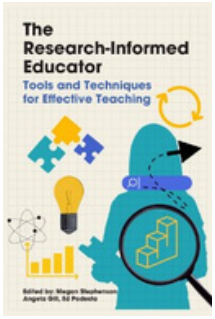
The award highlights both the quality of Olivia's work and the contribution undergraduate research can make to understanding important questions in education and student wellbeing.

New books from our academics



A number of books have been published recently by researchers across the School, reflecting the breadth and depth of our academic work - from early childhood and education policy to psychology and social justice. Below, you'll find a selection of these recent publications.

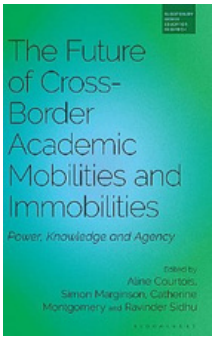
Click on any cover to learn more or visit the publisher's website.



The Research-Informed Educator

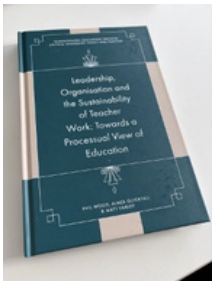
Edited by **Angela Gill,** with Megan Stephenson and Ed Podesta

The book aims to challenge and re-balance the recent "evidence-turn" in teacher training and development.



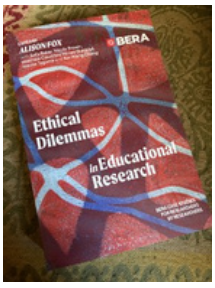
The Future of Cross-Border Academic Mobiities and Immobilities: Power, Knowledge and Agency

Catherine Montgomery has a newly published open access book from Bloomsbury Academic, co-edited with Aline Courtois, Simon Marginson and Ravinder Sidhu.



Leadership, Organisation and the Sustainability of Teacher Work: Towards a Processual View of Education

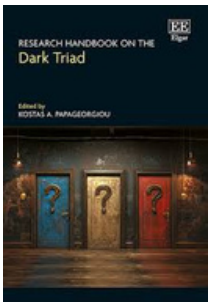
Phil Wood, **Aimee Quickfall,** and Matt Varley, focuses on the intersections between educational leadership, organisational processes, well-being and how these relate to concerns regarding teacher work, workload and the sustainability of the profession.



Ethical Dilemmas in Educational Research

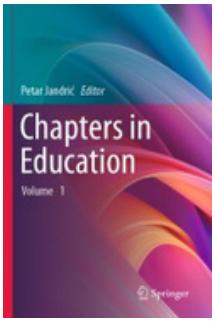
Drawing on the real voices and experiences of researchers, this book illustrates how the BERA Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research can be used to appraise research studies ethically.

Alison Fox, Sally Baker, Nicole Brown, Matthew Courtney, **Aimee Quickfall,** Natalie Tegama, Sin-Wang Chong



Research Handbook on the Dark Triad

Chapter: Dark Triad, happiness, and wellbeing by **Dr Sarah A. Walker** and colleagues. This incisive Research Handbook provides a comprehensive and accessible overview of the Dark Triad personality traits, namely narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy.



CHAPTERS in Education

Chapter: Why Generative AI Cannot Help Students Learn and What to Do About It: Postdigital Bildung as Backlash to Generative AI in Higher Education by **Sophie Ward, Michael Priestley, and Sarah A. Walker**.

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