

# Inspiring Children's Futures

## Doctoral Research Centre

Achieving the wellbeing of children in the post-COVID-19 Decade: Responding to children's distinct needs, and realising their full range of rights and opportunities.



### Programme Type:

PhD in Social Work and Social Policy or  
PhD Law or  
PhD Education or  
PhD in Economics

### Programme Overview:

The Institute for Inspiring Children's Futures Doctoral Research Centre (DRC) is focussing unwaveringly on 'Achieving the Wellbeing of Children in the post-COVID-19 Decade'.

Driven by the UN Sustainable Development Goals, this DRC aims to generate new knowledge, and apply this effectively in policy, professional practice environments, and the settings in which children live their lives. It will contribute to improving the global challenge of responding to children's needs, and realising their full range of rights and opportunities, ultimately to achieve peaceful, just and inclusive societies for all (SDG 16).

This applied, real-world impact is a bold aim, and achieved through collaborative, multi-sectoral internal and external partnerships, both within the UK and internationally.

### The following Principles underpin the DRC's Work Programme:

- Founded in the global frameworks of: the **UN Agenda 2030 and the SDGs**, and notably SDG 16 (<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/development-agenda/>); the **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)** (<https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>); and the **Justice for Children, Justice for All Ten Challenges** (<https://www.justice.sdg16.plus/justiceforchildren>);
- Grounded in a sound theoretical and conceptual framework; based on data and evidence; and providing real world applied insights and value;
- Informed by, and contributing to, global experience and knowledge;
- Contributing to the effective implementation of programmes to advance the wellbeing of children;
- Embracing participatory and partnership elements.

### The DRC will hold several key Attributes:

- The DRC draws together world-class scholars to study across disciplines, on complex problems that require the insights from multiple perspectives;
- It is multi-disciplinary, with doctoral students working together on common questions as a mutually supportive and joint cluster of PhDs;
- It will explicitly advance the University vision to promote cross-University collective scholarship, by building on the immense potential for joint engagement and for the joint analysis of the critical societal challenges;
- DRC Doctoral students will form the core of an innovative 'Vertically Integrated Project' approach, with students at all levels of study, across disciplines, engaging in the global challenge questions of how best to realise SDG 16, and in particular children's wellbeing, around the world;
- They will also form the core of a new 'IICF Doctoral Student Network', drawing together those across the campus who are working to achieve children's wellbeing from multiple perspectives, learning from each other and sparking innovations and ideas;
- The research themes will be drawn together to form a complementary and coherent set of studentships' research questions; that is, the overall Research Programme will explicitly reflect the highly integrated and dependent nature of the children's wellbeing and economic perspectives, and the criticality of bringing these perspectives together in a coherent focussed manner.
- Supervision will be collectively undertaken, with both a systematic supervision of each individual, as well as a less formal supervision of the cluster as a whole, drawing on a broader set of experts from both the academic and practitioner worlds. These include academic experts and individuals with experience of real-world policy and implementation.

For information on the **Institute for Inspiring Children's Futures** at the University of Strathclyde, visit:

<https://www.strath.ac.uk/humanities/inspiringchildrensfutures/>



## The Research Programme:

The DRC will focus on children who experience the greatest marginalisation. This is based on the imperative of the UN Agenda 2030 vision, that is, that no child should be left behind, and that those furthest behind should be addressed first.

### The DRC will capture multiple themes:

From the perspective of **children's rights and wellbeing** there are four broad themes:

- **Children in Contact with the Law**
- **Children in Alternative Care**
- **Children Experiencing Family Poverty**
- **Children Experiencing Family Violence**

From **the economic perspective**, there are three broad themes:

- **The Economic Determinants of Children's Vulnerability and Wellbeing**
- **The Returns to Investing in Children's Wellbeing: Understanding the societal and personal net value**
- **The Economic and Political Challenges to Effective Implementation**

In principle, the research themes that make up the overall Research Programme of the DTC could be drawn from any cell of this diagram, or indeed embrace several cells:

## Dimensions of Children's Rights and Wellbeing

Children in Contact with the Law			
Children in Alternative Care			
Poverty			
Violence			
	<b>Economic Determinants of Children's Vulnerability and Wellbeing</b>	<b>Returns to investing in Children's Wellbeing</b>	<b>Economic and Political Challenges to Effective Implementation</b>

## Economic Dimensions



## Dimensions:

These themes will be considered in relation to dimensions that reflect the potential 'wellbeing journey' of a child, namely:

- **Preventative factors: Anticipating the future**
- **Mitigative factors: Enhancing the present**
- **Responsive factors: Enhancing the future**

We welcome proposals for projects from applicants interested in the specific focus of the Research Programme set out above, and with suitable qualifications. We especially welcome interdisciplinary projects that bring together these disciplines.

We invite applicants to propose a 3pg research project proposal, including the research analysis that these questions might constitute, and that align with the Principles, Attributes, Themes, Dimensions and Focus of this DRC. The precise research questions will be identified once the successful candidates for the studentships have been recruited. Up to five PhD studentships will be appointed.

## Engagement with External Partners:

We are taking forward these studentships with in partnership with:

The **Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)**, an international organisation that works to build better policies for better lives. We are exploring how the work of the Inspiring Children's Futures Doctoral Training Centre can further engage with the OECD WISE (Well-Being, Inclusion, Sustainability and Equal Opportunity) Centre, with possibilities of closer collaboration and more substantive Paris-based links.

Through the 'Justice for Children, Justice for All' project we are exploring with organisers of the **World Congress on Justice with Children** and the **Pathfinders for Peace, Just and Inclusive Societies**, ways in which these studentships may engage with their aims and work.

For informal enquiries, please contact Professor Jennifer Davidson (iicf.execdirector@strath.ac.uk); and for specific Economics enquiries please contact Professor Graeme Roy (graeme.roy@strath.ac.uk).

## Illustrative Examples of Research Questions:

To guide applicants, the following are illustrations of the sort of questions that would be appropriate from the children's rights and wellbeing perspective, as set out above. The illustrations highlight the manner in which the economic perspectives, could also be integrated into the research proposals.

### A core set of questions could apply to each of the themes:

- What are the early common trajectories of children who subsequently are deemed the focus of this theme? To what extent and in what ways are these common/ differ across countries?
- What are the critical moments in a child's journey, in which families and public services have the greatest opportunity to enable these children to diverge from the trajectory into adversity?
- Which economic elements and processes are at play in these trajectories? How and why do these processes work?
- What is the return on investment in preventative / mitigative / responsive interventions for both the individual child and for the wider society? What are the applied lessons for public services and policies?

- How might these complex trajectories be addressed through policy? What are the implications of these findings for public services and national policies?
- What are the economic and political challenges to effective and sustainable implementation of policy?
- In what ways might participative methodologies with children, families, practitioners, policymakers, inform these research questions?

## Theme-specific questions further illustrate this core approach to each area of study:

**1. 'Children in Contact with the Law':** Children can come into contact with the law and justice systems as victims, as witnesses, and when accused of an offence, as an interested party or because intervention is required for their care, protection, health and wellbeing. **This Theme might be explored in the following ways:**

- What relationship is there between respecting the human rights of children and their families, and children's likelihood of coming into conflict with the law?
- What is the return on investment in child-friendly justice systems for both the individual child and for the wider society? What are core components of the effective and sustainable implementation of child friendly justice systems? What are the policy and practice implications?
- What are the economic and social drivers that bring children into contact with the law?
- What are the economic and social drivers that make children vulnerable to recruitment by armed groups and criminal gangs, including for national security- related offences? What is the return on investment in flexible and multi-dimensional response strategies that balance protection, harm minimisation and reintegration? How can this be effectively and sustainably implemented? What are the national policy implications of these findings?
- Where children who were deprived of liberty have been released from detention due to the health risks of COVID-19 in various countries around the world, what was the impact on these children and their outcomes? Where this move has resulted in a sustainable shift in fewer children being detained going forward, what can we learn about the benefits to children? About the return on investment for both the individual child and for the wider society? About the core components of this sustainable systems 'shift'?
- How does the presence or absence of a child aggravation in a court disposal impact proceedings in civil court?
- How do appropriate levels of advocacy support for children change justice responses? Improve outcomes for children? What are the skills, knowledge and values most essential for justice professionals and systems to be attentive to ensuring children's right to be heard and their best interests are given due regard, regardless of the complexity of a child's circumstances?

**2. The Theme of 'Children in Alternative Care' might be explored in the following ways:**

- In what ways can a human rights-based framework become core to alternative care practices and/or systems? What is the impact of this on relationship-based care, and children's experiences?
- What are the economic and social drivers that lead to children needing alternative care?
- What are the components of quality, relationship-based alternative care? How might we meaningfully define and measure 'love' and invest in this? What are the systems-based components that best support those providing alternative care to children? In what ways do these have a positive effect on children's experiences and outcomes? How are these effectively and sustainably implemented?
- What is the return on investment into family support interventions targeted at families before a crisis emerges, for both the individual child, family and for the wider society? What core implementation components are required to undertake a sustained shift in the focus of public services from acute, high threshold responses, to preventative support with families?

- What are the key components in complex adaptive systems that best enable good alternative care decision-making for children? How can these increase the likelihood of the provision of personalised, quality alternative care placements that match a child's needs, within a range of care options? What are the core components of effective and sustainable implementation of this approach?

### 3. The Theme of 'Children Experiencing Family Poverty' might be explored in the following ways:

- How does family poverty impact on children's present and future wellbeing? What are these trajectories? How can these impacts be mitigated by public services?
- How might a human rights framework, rooted in the CRC, strengthen and monitor the public services response to child poverty? What is the return on investment in reducing child poverty for both the individual child and for the wider society?
- What are the protective factors that enable developmental success among children and young people living in poverty? What role can schools/ education play in promoting these?
- What are the economic and social drivers that lead to familial poverty? What are the economic and social anticipatory indicators that can provide warning to facilitate the role of preventative policy?
- Which economic elements and processes determine the flow of children and their families into poverty? How and why do these processes work? How do these economic forces impact on familial wellbeing and familial relationships more broadly? How can economic policy impact most effectively on child poverty?
- What are the components of a useful and effective data infrastructure to assess children's well-being outcomes at regular intervals, to track their evolution over time, and to identify risks and protective factors in children's lives, as well as emerging challenges for children's well-being?

### 4. The Theme of 'Children Experiencing Family Violence' might be explored in the following ways:

- What are the economic and social mechanisms by which the family environment and parenting practices impact on the wellbeing of children at different stages of childhood and lead to violence against children?
- How do these contribute to the transmission of economic and social disadvantage from one generation to the next?
- What are the components of perpetrator-focused domestic abuse responses by public services that best sustain and strengthen mother-child relationships? Is there a relationship between these responses and reduced numbers of children taken into alternative care? What is the return on investment into these responses for both the individual child and for the wider society? To what extent do perpetrator-focused responses enable children to participate in decisions about their lives? Does improved participation correlate with better outcomes for children, in children's assessments? What would government policy look like if it were properly domestic-abuse competent? What does domestic abuse do to children's space for action and how can police, social workers, specialist services and courts work to expand that space for action?
- What are the challenges of parenting and parenting policy that emerge when comparing families in low, middle and high-income countries, and/or refugee families?





## Funding

The studentship covers Home/EU fees and a stipend for living costs of circa £15,285 (full time) per annum for the duration of 3 years.

## Eligibility

Prospective applicants should:

- 1) Hold a strong undergraduate degree in a relevant discipline at 2:1 (or equivalent) or better;
- 2) Hold a Masters' degree (or equivalent) in a broadly relevant discipline (for Economics Doctoral applicants, this includes the following core classes: microeconomics, macroeconomics, econometrics, a dissertation and a range of relevant options);
- 3) Demonstrate an interest in, and knowledge of, a global outlook and a real world impact for children.
- 4) Demonstrate the ability to undertake independent research;
- 5) Have an interest in acquiring and/or further developing skills in translation of research into policy.

Additionally, candidates who are not native English speakers will be required to provide evidence for their English skills (such as by IELTS or similar tests approved by UKVI, or a degree completed in an English speaking country).

## How to apply

Eligible applicants interested in the specific focus of the Research Programme set out above interested in PhDs in the disciplines of Law, Education or Social Work and Social Policy, are invited to submit their applications to the HASS Graduate School at [hass-postgrad@strath.ac.uk](mailto:hass-postgrad@strath.ac.uk)

Applicants interested in submitting to the School of Economics are invited to submit their applications to Dr Agnese Romiti, [agnese.romiti@strath.ac.uk](mailto:agnese.romiti@strath.ac.uk).

### Please submit your application with the following documents by 5PM on 4 Dec 2020:

1. A proposal outlining the PhD project (max. 3 pages incl. references)
2. An academic curriculum vitae
3. Degree transcripts
4. Two academic references

Applications will be ranked by a selection panel and shortlisted applicants will be **notified by 18 Dec 2020**.

Interviews will take place **early January**, with the studentship starting in **March 2021**. There is flexibility with this start date.

Success at interview is not necessarily acceptance of the research topic. Research topics will be open for further discussion, to enable coherence across all studentships working together in this DCR.

Candidates who are successful at interview will then be asked to complete the University's online application form and submit their degree certificates and English language qualification (if required).

## The following individuals will inform the selection:

Prof Jennifer Davidson, Institute for Inspiring Children's Futures  
<https://pureportal.strath.ac.uk/en/persons/jennifer-davidson>

Prof Marion Henderson, Social Work and Social Policy  
<https://pureportal.strath.ac.uk/en/persons/marion-henderson>

Ms Nina Vaswani, CYCJ  
<https://www.strath.ac.uk/staff/vaswanininams/>

Prof Graeme Roy, Economics and Fraser of Allander Institute  
<https://www.strath.ac.uk/staff/roygraemedr/>

Prof Andrew Goudie, Special Adviser to the Principal and Chair, Fraser of Allander Institute  
<https://www.strath.ac.uk/staff/goudieandrewprof/>

Dr Edward Sosu, School of Education  
<https://www.strath.ac.uk/staff/sosuedwarddr/>

Prof Claire McDiarmid, School of Law  
<https://www.strath.ac.uk/staff/mcdiarmidclairedr/>

Pending the research questions of the successful candidates, the PhD Supervisors may be amongst this panel, from amongst other Strathclyde staff and from other institutions.

## The Humanities and Social Sciences Graduate School:

The student will also be part of a vibrant postgraduate community of over 300 students across six Schools, many international, who have a dedicated work space in our Graduate School. The Graduate School provides support with research training, organizes regular events for students and runs a mentoring scheme for new students. More information on the Graduate School is available here: <https://www.strath.ac.uk/humanities/graduateschool/>

