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The Wolfson Centre for Young People’s Mental Health brings together world-leading researchers to focus on reducing anxiety and depression in young people.

Established in 2020, the Wolfson Centre includes experts in developmental and clinical psychiatry, genetics, social sciences, and neuroscience, to better understand the challenges of adolescent mental health.

MISSION, GOALS & AIMS

- Our vision is to make a step-change in scientific discovery that has a benefit for young people’s mental health via the implementation of effective intervention and policy.

- We will engage with young people and stakeholders to help shape our research and practice aims while also designing and conducting new interventions to improve young people’s mental health in health and educational settings.

- Our ambition is for our scientific discoveries to rapidly inform policy and practice, and act as a catalyst in the field of youth anxiety and depression.

- We will work with international and national collaborators, partners, and networks to ensure that scientific evidence about what works to support young people’s mental health is shared widely.

- We will carry out internationally excellent research in the area of young people’s mental health with a particular focus on anxiety and depression in young people.
Recruitment to core management and professional services, research, and policy positions at the Wolfson Centre for Young People’s Mental Health has been a major theme over the past six months.

We have now recruited 8 new members of staff to help us deliver our vision of making a step-change in scientific discovery that has rapid benefits for young people’s mental health via the implementation of effective intervention and policy.

Recruitment for remaining positions continues apace and our funding partners have confirmed their continued commitment to joint funded positions.

The global pandemic has served to emphasise the importance of research-informed policy and practice to protect young people’s wellbeing and mental health. As a Centre, we have contributed scientific expertise to inform a variety of UK policy efforts around strengthening young people’s mental health in education and health settings. One example that has recently been launched is the Framework on embedding a whole-school approach to emotional and mental well-being in Wales.

While several workstreams have been slightly impacted due to recruitment delays associated with the pandemic, we have been able to maintain strong outputs in terms of research papers and grants on the topic of young people’s mental health.

We look forward to increasing the pace of our research endeavours and working with young people and key stakeholders in the coming months. Our communications officer and core team have already done a fantastic job in establishing the Centre’s online presence and we look forward to building these platforms and networks.

We will work with international and national collaborators, partners and networks to ensure that scientific evidence about what works to support young people’s mental health is shared widely.

Professor Stephan Collishaw
Wolfson Centre Co-Director

Professor Frances Rice
Wolfson Centre Co-Director
We will examine longitudinal data that tracks children over time to better understand how anxiety and depression develop, risk and resilience mechanisms, and why levels of youth depression and anxiety have increased.

Using genetics to identify environmental factors that contribute to anxiety and depression in young people and to separate and classify different types of adolescent depression.

Our research aims are split into five separate workstreams, each led by a member of the Centre's Executive Board.

1. **Population mental health**
   We will examine longitudinal data that tracks children over time to better understand how anxiety and depression develop, risk and resilience mechanisms, and why levels of youth depression and anxiety have increased.

2. **Genetics**
   Using genetics to identify environmental factors that contribute to anxiety and depression in young people and to separate and classify different types of adolescent depression.

3. **Interventions in adolescents at high familial risk**
   We will develop and test a new intervention to reduce adolescent depression in high-risk families and use longitudinal data to understand processes of risk and resilience.

4. **Schools and in-school interventions**
   Understand the role schools can play in promoting positive mental health in young people.

5. **Population and patient e-data cohort**
   Working with the SAIL Databank and Adolescent Mental Health Data Platform, Swansea University will use information uniquely available in Wales to better understand the risks, protective factors, and long-term outcomes for young people who experience anxiety and depression.
Workstream 1
Population mental health:

- Led by Professor Stephan Collishaw
  - WS1 appointments are projected to start in June 2021.
  - New research since our last report includes papers focusing on the validity of longitudinal assessments of mental health into young adulthood, the role of friendships in the link between ADHD and depression, and the impact of COVID-19 on mental health and family life in vulnerable children.
  - A new Ph.D. student funded by MHRUK started October 2020 investigating resilience in young people at high risk of depression.

Workstream 2
Genetics:

- Led by Professor Anita Thapar
  - WS2 will not start until Autumn 2021 due to COVID-19 delays.
  - All collaborators have been notified, and we anticipate that posts will be advertised by April 2021.
  - Professor Thapar has also offered support to trainee programmes and NHS consultants.
  - WS2 in the process of setting up an advisory group made up of young people with lived mental health experience to support research work.

Workstream 3
High familial risk interventions:

- Led by Professor Frances Rice
  - WS3 is planned to commence in April 2021.
  - Related work based on the adult follow-up of the Cardiff high familial risk depression cohort (Early Prediction of Adolescent Depression; EPAD) is progressing well.
  - Discussions with Gwent Health Board to joint fund two clinical academic posts are progressing well and interviews for the post-doctoral research associate took place in early March.
  - A stakeholder group to inform the planned work is scheduled for April/May.
Led by Professor Ann John

Our main objective is to take advantage of whole-population, electronic health data to identify targets for optimizing outcomes of youth anxiety and depression. We also will work with WS1 and WS2 to test exposures that are available and recorded reliably via SAIL (e.g. severe childhood maltreatment, school exclusion, family and neighbourhood deprivation).

The team is in the process of setting up regular meetings with all collaborators and completing Information Governance Review Panel IGRP applications.

Professor John was interviewed for Therapy Today magazine in early March and had two blog posts featured on Reachwell.org in October 2020.

Led by Professor Graham Moore & Professor Simon Murphy

- We were pleased to appoint Dr Yulia Shenderovich to the Senior Lecturer post in Social Science and Dr Rebecca Anthony to our Research Associate (Quantitative Methods) post.
- We continue to hold monthly WS meetings to develop the programme of work and monitor progress towards our objectives to evaluate the whole school approach to mental health and the development of a digital intervention.
- Work on the evaluability assessment of the whole school approach to mental health continues to progress well. Interviews with stakeholders have been conducted by R Brown/ J Van Goodwin, young people have been consulted and an initial logic model has been shared with the study advisory board. The report to Welsh Government will provide a framework for progressing the planned WS4 evaluation of the national policy in the next six months.
- We are also undertaking an evaluation of secondary school-based counselling provision in Wales and reviewing the evidence base for primary school counselling services to inform Welsh Government plans for a possible pilot study.
Our Wolfson Centre Core Team has expanded in recent months. Our Centre Manager, Angharad Jones, joined in January 2021. Although new to the Division of Psychological Medicine, Angharad previously worked in Cardiff University’s Centre for Trials Research, as a Research Manager. Angharad has already hit the ground running and feels like she has been part of the team for much longer than just three months!

Becs Parker is the Communications Officer for the Wolfson Centre. She joined Cardiff University in December 2020 after four years of working in the Welsh Parliament. Having personally campaigned on issues surrounding body image and young people’s mental health, Becs is excited to be already creating content for the new Centre and supporting our research in any way she can.

Emma Meilak is our Administrative Officer. She previously worked with Professor Frances Rice on her EPAD study before starting her new role last October. It’s been a busy few months for her with homeschooling, working full-time and being away from family in Scotland but Emma is already an incredibly valued member of the Wolfson team.

Our latest addition to the team is Dr Chris Eaton who starts in the post this month (March 2021). Chris is returning to Cardiff University after completing his PhD here. He is looking forward to starting as a Research Associate in the Wolfson Centre for Young People’s Mental Health and working with the Welsh Government to evaluate and inform national policy on youth mental health.

Aneurin Bevan Health Board remains committed to joint-funding the clinical academic posts.

The Clinical Professor in Child and Adolescent Psychiatry post is currently awaiting Royal College approval and we anticipate being able to make appointments for both posts starting in Autumn 2021. It is worth noting that, unsurprisingly, the NHS has been particularly affected by delays due to the pandemic. The recruitment of a senior lecturer and postdoctoral research positions are also ongoing.
Works are progressing well on-site, and the building is nearing completion. The contractor continues with controlled site activity and safety measures due to COVID-19 restrictions. This remains under review with productivity levels being impacted due to new site safeguarding measures to protect people incorporating social distancing, PPE, welfare, parking, etc.

The installation of the feature oculus staircase (pictured below) complete and the building is now watertight. The first fix for the M&E is complete and the second fix is ongoing. The building completion date is 19th November and staff will move into the building in January 2022.
COVID-19 IMPACTS, OPPORTUNITIES AND RISK MITIGATION

With respect to COVID-19, our over-riding priority is to remain attuned to stakeholder priorities.

We have provided advice to the Welsh Government on the mental health impacts of re-opening schools, provided guidance and resources to CAMHS clinical leads, worked with UK and international collaborators (e.g. population and high-risk cohorts) in the development of research protocols to assess the impacts of COVID-19 and lockdown on children and young people’s mental health, and successfully adapted research protocols for ongoing studies to allow their successful completion (e.g. WS3 high-risk depression study).

We do not foresee that COVID-19 itself will have major impacts on our planned scientific programme, but we appreciate the support and flexibility of the Foundation to bridge recruitment/clinical trial delays.

The Centre will likely run for longer than five years, with some flexibility and a staggering of start dates across workstreams. With respect to recruitment, we believe it is essential to only recruit outstanding people, and the complexities of COVID will mean that recruitment processes and the arrival of new recruits may be slower than usual.
This infographic shows some key figures for the Wolfson Centre.

ACHIEVEMENTS

NOVEMBER 2020 - MARCH 2021

- 17 academic papers published
- > 80k social media impressions
- 8 new team members
- 12 academic papers submitted
- 5 grants awarded
- 19 panel memberships
- 6 grants submitted
- 9 invited talks
We met with Baroness Eluned Morgan, the then-Minister for Mental Health, Wellbeing and Welsh Language, in November 2020.

The creation of a new ministerial portfolio dedicated to mental health in Wales is an important development and we will seek to ensure that the Wolfson Centre continues to have a strong voice in developing, implementing and evaluating youth mental health policy.

The Minister cited the Wolfson Centre during Senedd proceedings in December 2020, referring to us as an 'expert centre' on adolescent mental health when highlighting that 80% of mental health issues begin when an individual is young.

The Centre investigators are already well represented on various government mental health steering groups (e.g. Together for Children and Young Peoples Policy Implementation on Mental Health).

We have also successfully recruited for the Wolfson/Welsh Government joint funded policy post.

We welcomed Dr Chris Eaton to the team in mid-March. This position will provide a direct link between the Wolfson Centre and Welsh Government facilitating effective cross-talk between policymakers and the Centre’s research.

We look forward to continuing to work with Welsh Government and welcome the news that Lynne Neagle MS has become the new Deputy Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing.

The Wolfson Centre continues to work closely with clinical colleagues. This has been particularly important in the context of COVID-19.

Professor Anita Thapar has trained clinicians and disseminated digital tools to NHS child and adolescent mental health service clinical leads to allow effective adaption to COVID-19 in the provision of clinical services to children and young people.

The Wolfson Centre investigators have built on already very strong links with Welsh Government.
STAKEHOLDERS AND COLLABORATORS:

In addition to core stakeholders and partners (Welsh Government, Schools, NHS, young people), we have built links with a wide range of stakeholders who have all expressed an interest in collaborating with us on a number of fronts.

This includes research, training, public understanding of young people’s mental health, knowledge exchange, and intervention development, evaluation, and delivery. Interested stakeholders include Action for Children; The Children’s Society; Early Intervention Foundation; Mind; Manon Jones Foundation; NSPCC and the Prince’s Trust.

We have developed a process by which we will formalise specific partnerships/collaborations going forward, and we are excited about the opportunities that these partnerships will offer over the coming years.

YOUNG PEOPLE:

We are establishing a new group of young people with lived experience of mental health disorders for the purposes of research co-production. This will complement our existing young people’s advisory groups.

An inaugural focus group will meet online in June 2021, a month prior to the first formal meeting of the Implementation and Engagement Board (IEB) which is scheduled for July 2021.

The focus group will ensure that young people’s voices can feed directly into the IEB and aim to inform the Wolfson Centre’s research.

COMING SOON:

Our next report will feature details on our official launch event, the planned first meeting of the International Scientific Advisory Board and the Wolfson Centre’s own lecture series.
Enquiries

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