

A high-angle photograph of a university courtyard. In the center, a large arched entrance leads to a building. The courtyard is paved with grey stone tiles. To the left, there are several round tables with orange chairs. In the center, a circular area is cordoned off with red stanchions and ropes. People are walking around, some standing in groups, and some sitting at tables. The background shows a brick building with windows and a large poster featuring two women's faces.

# **Postgraduate Researchers' Summer Conference**

**Middlesex University  
London  
June 16 - 17 2026**

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## Welcome Message from the Conference Chairs

Chairs' Welcome to the Postgraduate Researcher Summer Conference Middlesex University, 2026: Shifting Landscapes of Research in Critical Times

The Middlesex University Postgraduate Researchers' Summer Conference (PGRSC) is an annual event for our entire, multi-disciplinary PGR community. This year the conference runs over two days - face-to-face on 16th June and on-line on 17th June – to ensure that it is as inclusive as it can be, especially to our international colleagues.

PGRSC 2026 will showcase the research being carried out by PG researchers across the Faculties, International Campuses and our Collaborative Partner Institutions. As always, the conference is an opportunity to translate the significance of specialist research to a generalist audience. The conference offers a platform to share interesting ideas, create fruitful collaborations and celebrate research, in all its guises. It is also, a vital opportunity to practice skills of communicating the importance of your research to the Mdx community, and to enjoy the opportunity to be in a supportive environment.

The theme of this year's conference: 'Shifting Landscapes of Research in Critical Times', is intentionally broad enough for all PGRs to respond to in direct and/or innovative ways. The theme is intended to capture the current planetary context in which research is undertaken, that is, to consider the myriad threats and promises that research is subject to, framed by and responding to, for example:

- the rise in Artificial Intelligence
- geopolitical forces and systemic crises
- futures thinking
- working across disciplines
- the pursuit of hope

It is our ambition that the conference creates a vital space for us all to exchange ideas, experiences, insights, evidence and wisdom from our research, and to animate critical debate to address 'wicked problems' of our time.

A line-up of exciting Keynote speakers will share their work in response to this theme which hope will inspire and challenge you. There are also more interactive opportunities for debate in the form of roundtable discussions and

performative workshops. The goal of PGRSC2026 is to create space for lively dialogue, critical debate, and community building.

Our ultimate hope is that you will find the programme stimulating and come away nourished from the time that you have spent sharing, debating and contemplating the importance of your research as landscapes shift in these critical times.

Warm regards,

PGRSC Conference Chairs

# PGRSC 2026 Schedule

## Day One: In-person Schedule

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**16 June**

Day 1 In person

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09:00-09:15 Registration and welcome refreshments. (Registration desk located in the Rickett Quadrangle (Quad), College Building, Hendon.)

09:15 -09:45 Welcome address from the Conference Chairs in (Lecture Theatre CG77)

09:45-10:30 Keynote address from EJ Renold, "Title: Mobilising Matters: Staying with the political troubles in the field of Relationships and Sexuality Education" (Lecture Theatre CG77)

10:30-11:00 Break (Coffee Quad)

11:00-12:20 Parallel Session 1: Workshops I (see programme for rooms)

12:20-13:30 Lunchbreak and Poster Expo (Quad)

13:30-14:50 Parallel Session 2: Workshops II & Papers (see programme for rooms)

14:50-15:10 Tea/Coffee & Poster Expo (Quad)

15:10-15.55 Keynote address from Han Sang Kim, "The Construction of Ideal and Delinquent Racial Others on Digital Media in Gendered Context: A South Korean Case Study using the 'Media Figure' Method" (Lecture Theatre CG77)

16.00-17.00 Parallel Session 3: Workshops III

17:10-18.10 Postgraduate Researchers Panel Discussion (Lecture Theatre CG77)

18.10 PGR Social in the WG36a, Williams Building

# Day Two: Online Schedule

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**17 June**

Day 2 Online: (Link to Kenote and Closing Address: [HERE](#))

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09:30-10:15 Keynote address from S&T Dean, Klaus Dodds (Recording)

10:15-11:35 Parallel Session 4: Papers

11:35-11:40 Break

11:40-13:00 Parallel Session 5

13:00-14.00 Lunch

14.00-15:20 Parallel Session 6: Paper Presentations

15:25-16:45 Parallel Session 7: Paper Presentations

16.45-17.20 Reflections: Chairs' Jayne Osgood and Johan Siebers

17.20-17:30 Closing Address: Research Knowledge Exchange Office

# Day One: In Person

## PRESENTATIONS PROGRAMME

\*Please note that chairs allocation to sessions will be updated ahead of the conference, as necessary changes did not coincide with the creation of the Book of Abstracts. Participants will be informed ahead of the conference.

11:00am - 12:20pm Parallel Session 1: Workshops 1		
Room: C207	Room: CG47	Room: G272
Track A (30 mins)	Track B (90 mins)	Track C (90 mins)
Thanushka Wijayapala <b>Quantifying the Unquantifiable at the Meeting Point</b>	Jo Cheeseman & Donna Reddy <b>Navigating Polarities through a Transdisciplinary Lens: Researching in Critical Times</b>	Jayne Osgood and Nic Fry <b>Creative Methodologies Group</b>
(60 mins)		
Simone Hill <b>Exspressions of PAINT</b>		

**13:30pm - 14:50pm Parallel Session 2 and Papers: Workshops 11**

Room: MDX Pavillion	Room: CG47 Panel	Room: CG51 AI Digital Innovation & Intelligent Systems
Track D (80 mins)  Osgood, de Rijke & Maxwell <b>Relational encounters with the Anthropocene: encountering the world differently with Metre Squared Portals</b>	Chair: Eleonore Kofman Track E (80 mins)  Sofia Atsopardi <b>Advisory Proceedings as a Tool for Multilateralism</b>  Tofig Shahnnyarov <b>International Courts at Stake: More than symbols of hope?</b>  Fru Ndemeno-Tegomoh <b>The African Human Rights System and the Challenge of Unconstitutional Changes of Government</b>	Chair: Paul Gooderham Track F (80 mins)  Emmanouil Stafylarakis <b>Refining Measurement of Generative AI and Critical Thinking in Undergraduate Nursing: Pre-pilot Instruments and Scenarios Development</b>  Ian Kruger <b>The Socio-Technical Architecture of Institutionalised Data Governance</b>  Seamus Brady <b>A Shift Towards Data-Driven Detection of Potential Deliberate Underperformance in Football</b>  Andrew Grimmer <b>“A verray, parfit praktisour”: A qualitative inquiry into cognitive behavioural therapy practitioners’ understanding of the meaning and development of competence across the professional lifespan.</b>  Ciara Hablutzet Oppenheimer <b>The Outside World Trickling into The Therapy Space: A Pilot Study of Therapists’ Experiences of Multicultural Therapeutic Encounters</b>

**16:00pm - 17:00pm Parallel Session 3: Workshops 111**

Room: G272	Room:C207	Room: CG51
Track G (60 mins)  Millicent Penn <b>The Art of Inclusion: Using arts-based methods to support inclusive learning</b>	Track H (60 mins)  Han Sang Kim and Susan Hansen <b>Visual Research Methods: A Masterclass for Practical Exercise</b>	Track I (60 mins)  Janine La Rosa <b>Talking Joy</b>

# Day Two: Online

10:15am - 11:35am Parallel Session 4: Papers		
Room: ( <a href="#">Room 1</a> ) Data Analytics & Technology	Room: ( <a href="#">Room 2</a> ) Critical Biomedical Innovation I	Room: ( <a href="#">Room 3</a> ) Health, Human Performance & Clinical Practice
Chair: Xiaohong (Sharon) Gao	Chair: Johan Siebers/Tasneem Akbar	Chair: Bastien Chabe-Ferret
Track J (80 mins)	Track K (80 mins)	Track L (80 mins)
<p>Mrinal Sharma <b>A Quality Model Tool to Facilitate Development &amp; Validation of Intelligent Environments</b></p> <p>Geethu Joy <b>Tuning the SVM algorithm for customer classification based on credit risk</b></p> <p>Babak Mohajer <b>Learning Coordinated Control in Multi-Agent Systems without Explicit Model</b></p> <p>Asiya Bibi <b>Micro-Expression Driven Facial Expression Classification Using Deep Learning Models</b></p>	<p>Wendy Gomez Arenas <b>Validation of STAT3 and MMP9 as Key Determinants of Osteosarcoma Formation and Metastasis</b></p> <p>Maria Pop <b>Investigating the role of autophagy in chondrosarcoma chemoresistance and metastasis</b></p> <p>Michal D Rudich <b>The Impact of Dietary Protein Sources on Menopause Related Symptoms A Systematic Literature Review</b></p> <p>Ivan Punev <b>Development of automated pipeline to identify protein targets for therapeutic modulation in acute myeloid leukaemia by flavones using a machine-learning approach</b></p>	<p>Katherine Paice (recording) <b>Low Energy Availability in Female Netball Players: Prevalence and Feasible Screening Methods</b></p> <p>Melanie Hibbert <b>To assess the possible use of existential psychotherapy in assisting cardiac patients in identifying and managing the psychological risk factors associated with the causation of coronary heart disease</b></p> <p>Syeda Bushra Ali Rizvi <b>Physical Inactivity and Metabolic Syndrome in the UAE: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Parallel Epidemics</b></p>
11:40am - 13:00pm Parallel Session 5: Papers		
Room: ( <a href="#">Room 2</a> ) Psychotherapy, Therapeutic Practice, Professional Development, and Education	Room: ( <a href="#">Room 3</a> ) Equality, Identity & Social Justice	
Chair: Self Chair	Chair: Johan Siebers/ Ammara Abid	
Track M (80 mins)	Track N (80 mins)	
<p>Yvonne Langkamer <b>Title: Are they mental disorders at all? Rethinking borderline personality disorder through the epistemology of psychiatric knowledge</b></p> <p>Yoana Kirilova Stoeva <b>Feeling the Gap: Teachers' and Students' Emotional Experience in Dance Education</b></p> <p>Emilie Edwards <b>The experiences of autistic healthcare students in placement: Learning from a scoping review of the literature</b></p> <p>Joanne Shapiro <b>The Interplay of Core Self-Evaluation, Coping Strategies and Anxiety in University Students</b></p>	<p>Omari Solarin <b>From Equity to inequity (and back again?). Continuing the conversations on the barriers and challenges faced by Black British researchers in UK Higher Education.</b></p> <p>Shirley Adebayo <b>Transition to Parenthood by Same Sex Couples (SSC) and the Factors Influencing Receipt of Evidence-based Advice by Health Visitors.</b></p> <p>Michael O'Driscoll <b>AI and Privatisation in the NHS: Risks and Opportunities – an analysis of literature government and think tank reports and selected media coverage.</b></p>	

### 14:00pm - 15:20pm Parallel Session 6: Papers

Room: ( <a href="#">Room 1</a> ) Human Flourishing	Room: ( <a href="#">Room 2</a> ) Society, Rehabilitation & Human Development	Room: ( <a href="#">Room 3</a> ) Narrative Identities & Futures/ Rise of fictional anti-heroes
Chair: Kate Maguire	Chair: Betsy Thom	Chair: Bastien Chabe-Ferret
Track O (80 mins)	Track P (80 mins)	Track Q (80 mins)
Hannah Alexander-Wright <b>From Spiritual Practice to Strategic Wellbeing: Developing and Testing the Kind Resilience Framework in Critical Times</b>  John Conrad Magpayo <b>Bridging the Gap (Not Mind the Gap): Testing Low-Cost Behavioural Interventions to Increase Young Adults' Charitable Giving and Volunteering in the UK</b>	Suzanne Lassen <b>Shifting Landscapes of Research in Critical Times</b>  Mingzhe Li (Pico) <b>Human Capital as Competitive Advantage: A Framework for Digital HR Transformation in the Chinese Tech Industry</b>  Paul Oatt <b>Responding to the local authority private sector housing regulatory knowledge and skills shortage to deliver better enforcement.</b>  Rhoderick Romano <b>Precursor to regulation: A Social Practice Theory approach to Food Waste Policy and Practice in UAE Hotels</b>	Tremaine Baker <b>Exploring Practical Wisdom in Early Career Teachers Engaging with Climate Change and Sustainability Education (CCSE)</b>  Kavita Bhopal <b>The deeply interwoven threads of Atma-Prema (self-love): Exploring women's experiences and barriers to self-love within collectivist cultures through a culturally attuned existential-phenomenological lens</b>  Jasmin Mulvey <b>Envisioning the Collective Heroic Quest (Rise of the Fictional Anti-Heroes)</b>

### 15:25pm - 16:45pm Parallel Session 7: Papers

Room: ( <a href="#">Room 1</a> ) Self-Inquiry, Practice & Leadership	Room: ( <a href="#">Room 2</a> ) Critical Scientific Innovations	Room: ( <a href="#">Room 3</a> ) Sustainability & Supply
Chair: Jayne Osgood	Chair: Kate Maguire	Chair: Johan Siebers
Track R (80 mins)	Track S (80 mins)	Track T (80 mins)
Nicholas Wright <b>From Impact to Adoption: Studying Participants' Conviction as Evidence for 'Micro-Pause' Interventions in Leadership Teams</b>  Andreas Marcou <b>From an Organisational Psychology Perfective, how can an Organisation Leadership Focus on Happiness Manifest Greater Productivity and Organisational Citizenship</b>  Elisabetta del Ponte (recording) <b>"I Was There Too": Other-than-Human Voice and the Inconsistencies of Recognising PaR in Practice</b>  Donna Reddy <b>Speaking the Quiet Pieces Out Loud: Vulnerability and Voice in an Enmeshed Self Inquiry</b>	Merve Çetinkaya <b>Policy, Practice, and Access: Comparative Analysis of Alcohol Treatment Systems in Turkey and the UK</b>  Kezban Alpan <b>Boundary-Preserving Core-Selective Enhancement with Stain-Prior U-Net for Robust Ovarian Cancer Nuclei Segmentation in H&amp;E Histopathology</b>  Sailendra Ramanna <b>Dynamic Mode Decomposition for EEG Classification: A Generalisable Pipeline for Complex Time Series</b>	Rashita Puthiya <b>An exploratory study of the Indian investor behaviour towards sustainability - An Institutional Complexity Approach.</b>  Eda Sorani <b>Researching Emerging Technologies in Critical Times: A Hybrid Decision Model for Quantum as a Service Investments in SME Energy Management</b>

# Abstracts

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Keynote: Mobilising Matters: Staying with the political troubles in the field of Relationships and Sexuality Education.

Author: EJ Renold

Drawing on Tess Lea's book *Wild Policy* (2020) this multi-modal presentation approaches policy not as a bounded, hierarchical apparatus "coming down from on high to "impact" communities in some totalizing way" but as an ambient and unruly force that "more often unfurls as a series of project stutters, misdirects, and meanderings" (2020, 15). Lea's methodology of mapping policy ecologies and of attending to the human and more-than-human forces through which policy is made and moves, provides a conceptual frame for sharing a situated praxis of slow, creative coproduction across micro, meso and macro policy terrains within the landscape of relationships and sexuality education in Wales. Through spoken word, film and image, I explore how posthuman, artful methodologies have the potential to reconfigure policy texts as *dartaphacts* (arts-activist objects), translating policy into eventful, response-able resources to make policy matter otherwise.

Track A: Quantifying the Unquantifiable at the Meeting Point.

Author: Thanushka Wijayapala

There is no perfect formula for good architecture. Its value defies quantification, emerging from complex physical contexts, cultural narratives, and lived experience. Yet generative AI presents a profound opportunity to quantify experiential qualities at the meeting point of architecture, neuroarchitecture, environmental psychology, phenomenology, and computational design. Thus, the rise of AI is one of the shifts that sits at the heart of today's most pressing research landscape.

My PhD, "Towards a Human-Centred Generative AI Framework for Residential Concept Design," proposes eight empirically-grounded dimensions (sensory, spatial, proportion, movement, identity, social, cognition, and experiential) operationalised as measurable constructs linking lived experience to parametric design objectives, drawn from systematic literature review. While current AI tools prioritise sustainability metrics and BIM compliance, these human-centred frameworks remain poorly integrated, marginalising residents' psychological wellbeing. AI's transformative power lies in customisation: translating individual, family, and community aspirations into parametric design exploration, generating personalised homes rather than generic typologies. The main aim is to identify patterns that develop a human-centred framework for integrating AI into architectural design.

This interactive conference session invites participants to engage directly with the PhD's core research question. Using images as visual prompts, attendees first discuss what makes a home feel experientially rich or poor across the eight dimensions. Then use structured voting and live digital polling to rank the eight dimensions by importance in terms of individual wellbeing, family life, and community belonging. Gather both numerical preference scores (quantitative) and spoken reasoning (qualitative). This pilot constitutes the PhD's first empirical dataset of preference weightings. The session is researcher-designed but participant-responsive. These preference weightings directly inform how AI parametric design tools can be configured to reflect real human needs.

Amid AI-driven design transformation, this workshop demonstrates that, rather than replace, computational customisation can amplify architecture's human essence, offering a replicable, data-driven pathway to psychologically supportive homes at scale.

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## Track A: Exspressions of PAINt

Author: Simone Hill

Expressions of PAINt is a wonderful project born out of a desire to bridge the gap in understanding chronic pain and its often unseen struggles. By sharing my own experiences with pain and helping others do the same, I've created a unique tool rooted in art—a visual language that uses colour and mark-making to show where pain is, what kind it is, and how intense it feels. Right now, I'm excited to be in the final stages of my MA research, where I'll be using these participant sheets in focus groups with nursing students. The goal is to see how well they can understand and empathise with what participants experience through this artistic method.

This warm, in-person workshop will start with an introduction and a demonstration on how to use and complete the method. Afterwards, PGR community members will be invited to try it out themselves, and they'll even get to keep their worksheets for personal use.

I'm truly passionate about this project and its multidisciplinary approach to mapping pain, which encourages better communication and understanding. It's about offering a space for catharsis and self-awareness of personal pain experiences. It also aims to foster empathy for those living with pain and to explore whether people with similar conditions create similar or different images. The possibilities and impact of this work are truly inspiring.

I believe this research can bring meaningful benefits to many. The colour scheme includes red for high pain, blue for medium pain, and yellow for low pain. Symbols like spots show radiating pain, lines indicate nerve pain, and dots represent sensations like pins and needles or paraesthesia.

We don't want sympathy; we want understanding.

Supervisors:

## Track B: Navigating Polarities through a Transdisciplinary Lens: Researching in Critical Times

Authors: Jo Cheeseman & Donna Reddy

In today's critical times, researchers and practitioners find themselves increasingly called to engage with polarised thinking, constant change and uncertainty. Developing an awareness and understanding of polarities can provide ways to navigate them. Polarities – interdependent opposites, each enmeshed within the other with an irreducible tension – are in every situation: stability:change, complexity:simplicity, self:other.

Developing an awareness and understanding of polarities has greatly enhanced our respective transdisciplinary inquiries, providing a new lens through which to engage with complexity and additional language to articulate the phenomena we encounter. We invite you to join this interactive workshop, so that we can learn from different perspectives and understandings of polarities, and the relevance within our research.

The workshop draws on perspectives from complexity thinking, organisational dynamics, and reflective practice, informed by the seminal polarities framework of Barry Johnson, Gemma Jiang's understandings of polarity thinking incorporating a Daoist perspective, and Stacey and Mowles' explorations of navigating complex adaptive systems.

Participants will be invited to engage in reflective exercises to explore the polarities present in their own research and professional contexts. Attention will be given to the metaphors we use – such as “navigating,” “balancing,” or “holding” – and how language may enable new ways of seeing, so that polarities, instead of being perceived as problems to be solved, may instead open ways for us to move towards a dynamic ‘third way’ in which new insights and practices emerge.

Our aim is that participants will leave with an understanding of the polarities within their research and professional practice, and how engaging with polarities can be helpful when navigating the shifting landscapes of their research in these critical times.

Supervisors: Bastien Chabe-Ferret (Middlesex University)

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## Track C: Creative Methodologies Group

Authors: Jayne Osgood and Nic Fry

We are going to use this session to launch the Creative Methodologies Special Interest Group.

The Group will convene a small number of in-person workshops throughout the academic year and will be open to all researchers across the university (PGRs, ECRs, the curious and the sceptical). We hope this transdisciplinary group will bring together those interested in creative and arts-based methods, drawing from practices such as performance, movement, storytelling and making of many kinds to privilege sensory, affective, and material ways of knowing. It will challenge traditional hierarchies between research and creative exploration, intellect and emotion, subject and object, theory and practice. The group will explore a variety of philosophical and creative foundations that explore the coming together of bodies, spaces, and discourses which allow research to emerge in unpredictable and dynamic ways. This orientation invites experimentation, reflexivity, and responsiveness, positioning research as a generative and ethical practice that attends to the vitality and agency of the more-than-human world.

This session will be led by Dr Nic Fryer & Professor Jayne Osgood who will run introductions to some of their own research and provide a space for discussion about how the group might develop and what form(s) it might take.

## Track D: Relational encounters with the Anthropocene: encountering the world differently with Metre Squared Portals

Authors: Jayne Osgood and Wyn Griffiths

In this workshop we introduce the 'patchy Anthropocene' (Tsing, et al, 2024) as a framework for encountering planetary crises through fragmented and localised patches by noticing, understanding and attuning to shifting social, ecological and research landscapes. The patchy Anthropocene is explored via Metre Squared Portals (MSqP) which, whilst arbitrary, fluid and potentially infinite, make transdisciplinary, speculative enquiries possible. Participants will work with a discrete portal to reimagine Anthropogenic matters of concern away from a narrow preoccupation with science fact, evidence and results. Participants are encouraged to embrace the 'processes' encountered throughout the workshop as the 'product' itself – there will be no stable, permanent, finished outcome but only the generation of new and unexpected lines of enquiry (Griffiths, 2026). MSqP invite deep exploration through collaborative, transdisciplinary approaches that question human exceptionalism (see Osgood et al, 2022 for an example). Hopeful encounters with portals (Roy, 2020) creates opportunities to better understand human existence and its non-innocent entanglement with the world, and to undo the dominant idea that humans alone can fix the problems of the Anthropocene. This workshop makes visible how MSqP are forms of world-making – by participating in this workshop it will become possible to reimagine what counts as research when more-than-human ethics are made central to enquiries.

# Abstracts

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## Track E: Advisory Proceedings as a Tool for Multilateralism

Authors: Sofia Atsopardi

The advisory jurisdiction of international and regional courts is a process by which these judicial bodies are given the remit to pronounce on a legal matter (that is not an existing dispute between two parties) upon the request of a duly authorised body. The statutes for the International Court of Justice (ICJ), the Interamerican Court of Human Rights (IACtHR) and the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), all provide for advisory jurisdiction, which has known renewed interest by member States in recent years, with the requests for advisory opinions regarding climate change that were submitted to each of the above tribunals, serving as a primary indication for that interest. While advisory opinions are not technically legally binding, they carry the legal authority of the body that has published them and they create a space for States, other parties and organisations to participate by contributing their views, insights, information and experience on the subject of the request, furnishing the Judges with all pieces of the puzzle that are necessary for a response to be provided to each request. States and organisations have participated with renewed fervour in recent years; in a period like the present when international law and diplomacy seem to be moving along a tightrope, advisory proceedings offer an avenue of multilateralism and maybe even of hope for international justice, supported by the option that States and international actors make when they select to engage in these processes. By making reference to some representative examples of recent proceedings, this presentation suggests that there is significance in this trend of advisory proceedings, and that stakeholders who contribute to these outcomes are also bolstering international law for what is to come in the future.

Supervisors: William Schabas (Middlesex University);  
Giulia Pecorella (Middlesex University).

## Track E: International Courts at Stake: More than symbols of hope?

Authors: Tofiq Shahnnyarov

In an era marked by complex global crises and contested norms, international courts have emerged as crucial arenas for pursuing accountability and justice in relation to international crimes - genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and the crime of aggression. Beyond the high thresholds required for classifying such crimes, the jurisprudence of international courts often prompts reflection on their societal role and legitimacy. In a world where states remain divided on conflicts ranging from Ukraine to Gaza and Gambia, international courts are tasked with addressing politically sensitive issues while remaining anchored in legal principles. While the jurisdiction of these courts is often confined to specific parties or conventions, their decisions contribute to the development, interpretation, and reinforcement of international law, shaping both legal and normative frameworks globally. By situating these institutions within the shifting political landscape of the current century, this talk will explore how international courts respond to contemporary challenges, manage tensions between law and politics, and foster legal innovation. The talk will also offer a concise overview of contemporary cases concerning international crimes, examined through the lens of two key institutions: the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court. Ultimately, it will assess the functions of these courts and identify opportunities for enhancing their effectiveness and adaptability in an increasingly complex international system.

Supervisors: William Schabas (Middlesex University);  
Alessandra de Tommaso (Middlesex University).

# Abstracts

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Track E: The African Human Rights System and the Challenge of Unconstitutional Changes of Government

Author: Fru Ndemeno-Tegomoh

The African continent is confronting a dual crisis: a resurgence of unconstitutional changes of government ('UCGs')—encompassing both classic military coups and 'constitutional coups'—alongside popular uprisings and separatist movements challenging entrenched authoritarian regimes. These phenomena expose a profound tension in international law: the prohibition of UCGs and the presumption in favour of territorial integrity risks shielding authoritarian regimes when invoked against popular uprisings that arise precisely because constitutional avenues for change have been foreclosed. Furthermore, these phenomena implicate foundational and often conflicting principles of the African Union ('AU') legal order including: sovereignty, territorial integrity, the right of peoples to self-determination, and the nascent right to resist oppression.

This contribution focuses on the implications of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance ('ACDEG'); a legally binding treaty that transforms broad democratic commitments into enforceable obligations on African states. It argues that the ACDEG has effected a significant normative shift: by giving legally determinate content to what it means to be denied the right to participate in government, and by conditioning democratic legitimacy on compliance with that framework, it provides the doctrinal foundation for assessing when democratic breakdown is serious enough to trigger the right to resist oppression as well as ground a sub-state people's claim to external self-determination.

By examining recent events in, among others, Chad, Gabon, Burkina Faso, Mali, Sudan, Tanzania, and Cameroon, and applying an analytical framework based on regional sources to assessing the legitimacy of popular uprisings stemming from them, this contribution examines how the AU's normative framework can navigate the balance between stability and justice in postcolonial multinational states, and argues that it offers a distinctive regional contribution to the global rule of law with implications beyond the African context.

Supervisors: Anthony Cullen (Middlesex University);  
Alessandra de Tommaso (Middlesex University).

Track F: Refining Measurement of Generative AI and Critical Thinking in Undergraduate Nursing: Pre-pilot Instruments and Scenarios Development

Author: Emmanouil Stafylarakis

Critical thinking is fundamental to safe, accountable nursing practice, yet the rapid uptake of generative artificial intelligence (GAI) in higher education has created a contested pedagogical and ethical landscape. Current measures rarely capture how learners frame prompts, interrogate outputs, verify sources, revise judgements, document decisions, or connect GAI use with patient-safety expectations. This study aims to develop and refine a researcher-developed mixed-methods framework for measuring how undergraduate nursing students engage in critical thinking when using GAI.

The current phase is a pre-pilot refinement before feasibility testing at a single UK university. The framework emerged from the Stage 1 literature review and thematic analysis and includes four linked elements. First, an artificial intelligence add-on extends the student N-CT-4-S instrument through 12 pre-interaction and 12 post-interaction items. Second, a Critical Thinking Index (CTI) uses Anderson et al. (2001) Taxonomy Table as a structuring matrix and Facione's (1990) critical thinking skills as conceptual criteria for identifying higher-order reasoning intersections. Third, a Critical Use Index (CUI) examines prompt depth, source checking, revision behaviour and transparency. Fourth, a UK patient-safety check layer considers whether student reasoning remains aligned with evidence-based nursing practice, professional accountability and progression expectations. Responding to Stage 1 panel recommendations, the pre-pilot refines hypothetical clinical scenarios and graded synthetic responses to ensure that task demands discriminate between descriptive, analytic and evaluative reasoning. Ethics approval is being sought for expert review, scenario refinement and student cognitive interviewing to examine item clarity, content validity, usability and patient-safety alignment.

The study contributes to the conference theme by addressing GAI as both a disruptive challenge and a methodological opportunity in critical times. Expected outputs include a version-controlled instrument and scenario pack, a clearer logic model for pilot testing, and a defensible approach combining self-report, observed process and coded reasoning.

Supervisors: Liang Liu J(Middlesex University); Juan Carlos Augusto (Middlesex University).

# Abstracts

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## Track F: The Socio-Technical Architecture of Institutionalised Data Governance

Author: Ian Kruger

Data governance, often operationalised through frameworks like DAMA-DMBOK, has grown vital for organisations: aligning data with strategy, ensuring GDPR/DPA compliance, and underwriting decision assurances.

However, Star (1989)<sup>1</sup> notes that these formal frameworks are an abstraction, they are derived through "deleting the work" of local contingencies and ad hoc solutions. When implementing they clash with operational pragmatism and foster unstable implementations, workarounds, and reliance on "gurus" with tacit knowledge.

To address this tension between the formal and the empirical, this paper uses actor-network theory's sociology of translation and a related concept of boundary objects to reframe a Data Governance Operating Model as "heterogeneous engineering". Data Governance is seen as a network achievement. In this framing the artifacts of two workstreams form a socio-material network, one for definitions and traceability through maps, glossaries, catalogues; the other for remediation through the DQIL, remediation processes, dashboards. Implementing the model is approached through moments of translation key of which are problematization (where maturity assessment and the DQIL act as an OPP) and interessement (aligning actors without erasing local realities).

Artifacts start as flexible boundary objects (e.g., a business glossary), enabling cooperation sans consensus, hardening over time into immutable mobiles institutionalising a resilient "single source of truth".

Supervisors: Bob Fields (Middlesex University).

## Track F: A Shift Towards Data-Driven Detection of Potential Deliberate Underperformance in Football

Author: Seamus Brady

In football, the identification of possible match-fixing or deliberate underperformance has often depended on subjective judgement, usually based on video evidence and expert opinion. This creates uncertainty, as one analyst may see a behaviour as suspicious while another may view it as a tactical choice or a result of match context. In a more data-rich sporting environment, there is now a clear shift towards more objective, transparent and evidence-based approaches. This study explores whether match data can help identify unusual behaviours linked to potential deliberate underperformance, using passes allowed per defensive action (PPDA) as a measure of pressing intensity.

A developmental mixed-method design was adopted. The study began with qualitative video analysis and expert football judgement to identify potentially suspicious matches, before shifting to quantitative analysis of performance data. Match classifications were informed by alerts from external betting integrity monitoring providers. The full dataset included 5,170 matches, made up of high-level suspicious matches (n = 61), low-level suspicious matches (n = 70), and non-suspicious matches (n = 5,039). PPDA values were assessed using an outlier threshold and compared across 15-minute match intervals.

The findings suggest that potentially suspicious matches tended to show higher PPDA values than non-suspicious matches, especially in certain periods rather than across the whole match. However, unusual values were also found in non-suspicious matches, showing that data thresholds alone are not enough for reliable detection. This study shows a shift away from relying mostly on opinion and towards a more structured way of spotting possible integrity issues. It shows that data can help highlight unusual behaviour in football, but that match context, video analysis and expert judgement are still needed to understand it properly. This research helps create a clearer and more reliable way of spotting possible red flags, but it does not prove that cheating has happened.

Supervisors: Nic James (Middlesex University); Nimai Parmar (Middlesex University).

# Abstracts

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Track F: “A verry, parfit praktisour”: A qualitative inquiry into cognitive behavioural therapy practitioners’ understanding of the meaning and development of competence across the professional lifespan.

Author: Andrew Grimmer

## Introduction and aims

There are many CBT competence frameworks, curricula for training, and measures of competence that are expert-devised but there is little or no research on how CBT practitioners idiosyncratically understand and evaluate competence in context and the influence of professional development processes across the personal and professional lifespan.

## Methodology and method

Three qualitative studies were developed with CBT practitioners as participants using semistructured interviews preceded by creative priming exercises (photo elicitation; diary-interview; and reflective letter to one’s younger professional self): Study 1 participants were in training or recently qualified, Study 2 were mid-career, and Study 3 were later career or retired practitioners.

## Results

Study 1 produced a theme of training as a personal odyssey that described participants’ motivation to train, their learning process, understanding of competence, and evaluation of the value of training. Study 2 produced a theme of defensible practices to describe how participants managed a tension between compliant orthodoxy and individualised practice in the service of virtuous ends.

Study 3 produced a theme of the metacompetent reflexive practitioner to describe that aspect of the professional self that organises the tasks of therapy including technical and facilitative interventions while drawing on context, theory, practice norms, professional standards, ethical behaviour, and the relational skills of the personal self. The outcomes were a novel model of competence in CBT and a developmental-contextual model of professional development with practical application to training and professional development.

## Conference theme

The findings are aligned with the conference theme of “Shifting Landscapes of Research in Critical Times” in that they offer ways of conceptualising competence and its development that are intended to foster adaptations to training and development that enhance the effectiveness of CBT practitioners as they meet the challenges of delivering evidence-based psychological treatment in a rapidly changing and challenging world

Supervisors: Nicola Payne (Middlesex University); David Westley (Middlesex University).

Track F: The Outside World Trickling into The Therapy Space: A Pilot Study of Therapists’ Experiences of Multicultural Therapeutic Encounters

Authors: Ciara Hablutzel Oppenheimer

The therapeutic space is shaped by wider social and political forces; in an increasingly interconnected yet polarised world these dynamics enter the therapeutic encounter. Multicultural dyads in therapy come with challenges, such as different value systems, biases, power dynamics, inequalities, systematic oppression and ruptures. Within psychotherapy literature, cultural competence is widely emphasised; however, research often focuses on quantitative studies and single identity categories, overlooking the nuances, complexity and intersectionality within practice. This study aimed to explore a therapist’s experience of working with culturally different clients. The research question was: how are therapists experiencing the multicultural therapeutic encounter? This qualitative study employed van Manen’s hermeneutic phenomenological approach, as it enables engagement with lived experience. As a pilot study, one participant was interviewed using a semi-structured format. Inclusion criteria required the participant to be a UK-based practising psychotherapist, a UKCP member, at least five years post-qualification, experienced with diverse clients, and able to converse in English. Data was analysed through van Manen’s phenomenological framework. Six themes were developed using Van Manen’s existentials: relationality (experience and attitude informing the cultural encounter); corporeality (representations projected onto the therapist); spatiality (the therapeutic profession as a setting of practice); temporality (therapists and clients both have multicultural stories); materiality (supporting countertransference and sitting with it); and technology (modalities informing how therapists view culture in client work). The findings highlight the complexity of multicultural therapeutic encounters and the need for therapists to adapt to clients’ cultural experiences and identities, so clients can access care in a non-specialised service. This has implications for the profession and training of future therapists in developing the skills and knowledge required for practice with diverse clients. A limitation is the single-participant pilot design; however, the study offers preliminary insights informing ongoing research.

Supervisors: Dr Dwight Turner (University of Brighton); Dr Farah El Miligui (New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling)

# Abstracts

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**Keynote: The Construction of Ideal and Delinquent Racial Others on Digital Media in Gendered Context: A South Korean Case Study using the 'Media Figure' Method**

**Author: Han Sang Kim**

How a racial 'other' is represented and constructed as a personality within a specific society's media sphere is closely connected to that society's gendered context. In this regard, this interactive keynote session examines the behavioural traits and personality characteristics of popular media figures who are fluent in Korean and knowledgeable about Korean culture, using both traditional and digital media sources in and around South Korea.

To do this, I demonstrate my own digital ethnographic approach, entitled the 'media figure' method, which draws on the epistemology and methods of archival studies. As a constitutive argument development method that regards the personality information of a media figure as an ever-changing social construct, this approach pays attention to the role of internet users as archivists (or archival scholars) in practice.

The talk examines specific media figures well-known in the Korean-language digital sphere: one has been cancelled in mainstream media after a harsh controversy over his social commentary on South Korea's racism, and the other two are considered approachable foreign men by many of their peers in the same-generation Korean male population. This case study of the construction of ideal racial 'others' within the gendered context of South Korean media offers a glimpse of the novel 'media figure' model, which seeks to revitalise digital ethnographic methodology.

**Track G: The Art of Inclusion: Using arts-based methods to support inclusive learning**

**Authors: Millicent Penn**

In my research, I am exploring the potential of arts based pedagogies to encourage inclusive and engaging learning environments within mainstream secondary school classrooms, with particular attention to learners with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. As part of this work, I plan to collaborate with a local school to develop and facilitate a series of workshops that introduce arts based pedagogical approaches, such as process drama, interactive storytelling, and soundscape building, integrating learning objectives drawn from multiple subjects within the National Curriculum.

Addressing the theme of this year's conference: "Shifting Landscapes of Research in Critical Times", I will be delivering a workshop that works across disciplines, exploring the intersections between arts and education, using Practice as Research methods. In a world that requires rapid adaptation to keep up, there is a growing need for flexible and imaginative research methodologies within the education sector, which this research responds to. It situates the subject within the onto-epistemology of the student.

This workshop will introduce participants to process drama as a means for exploring topics within the National Curriculum. Framed within contemporary discussions of experiential and creative pedagogies the session aims to demonstrate how interactive storytelling, dramatic exploration, and reflective creative exercises can support deeper understanding of subject material. The workshop will offer an engaging and interactive experience designed to spark curiosity and deepen understanding. Participants will have the opportunity explore key areas of learning.

**Supervisors: Jayne Osgood (Middlesex University)**

# Abstracts

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Track H: Workshop: Visual Research Methods: A  
Masterclass for Practical Exercise

Authors: Han Sang Kim, Ajou University, Vice-President  
IVSA; Susan Hansen, Middlesex University, President IVSA

This workshop will provide an overview of visual research methods, and an opportunity to engage in some practical activities designed to illustrate how these methods may work in practice. We will critically reflect on the interdisciplinary field of visual studies, with a focus on visual sociological methods. Visual methods have not always been recognised as a legitimate form of scholarship. However, visually-based research is now increasingly popular in sociology, anthropology, psychology and the social sciences generally; and also in disciplines such as history; the visual and performing arts; the natural sciences; and graphic design and communication studies. Visual research projects may include but are not limited to visual studies of social and cultural organisation; cultural and media communication, including documentary and representational practices; emerging global relationships and trends; visual politics and visual activism; techno-social visual studies; visual and sensory qualitative social research, including photo/video elicitation and photovoice; and collaborative and participatory approaches, including socially engaged research.

Indicative reading:

<https://www.tandfonline.com/journals/rvst20>

Track I: Talking Joy

Authors: Janine La Rosa

Objective: Deeper understanding of joy and its impact on recovery and resilience. Building an intention to recognise the circumstances where joy occurs and commitment to spark joy.

Summary:

'Talking Joy' workshop for PGRSC26. The workshop aligns with the conference themes 'Shifting Landscapes of Research in Critical Times' to create a space for dialogue and connection, facilitating one of the key pillars of transdisciplinary research, the zone of non-resistance. Paradoxically the current global landscape may enable a deeper understanding and connection to joy through a collective coming together in the face of sorrow, as Willie James Jennings described 'joy is an act of resistance against the forces of despair'.

Workshop structure:

90 minutes duration:

-15 minutes – participant arrival and personal reflection on their understanding and connection with joy

- 10 minutes – Opening

- the purpose of the workshop

- boundary setting -respect, no mobile phones, confidential etc

- Goldfish bowl approach, encouraging participants with strong ideas about joy to come forward to be part of starting the conversation

- Ignition quotes about joy to begin the session.

60 minutes – open discussion about joy, participants will be moving in and out of the goldfish bowl throughout the hour. Prompts and quotes will be available to support the flow of the conversation.

5 minutes – Summary and close

Goldfish bowl format – Chairs to be arranged into inner and outer circles. The conversation will take place in the inner circle with people on the outside observing and 'tapping' into the conversation. There may come a point at which the circles become merged, this will be led by the participants and the flow of the conversation.

# Abstracts

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## Track J: A Quality Model Tool to Facilitate Development & Validation of Intelligent Environments

Author: Mrinal Sharma

The development of Intelligent Environments (IEs) has grown significantly across domains such as healthcare, assisted living, and smart homes. However, despite their increasing adoption, the engineering of IEs continues to face challenges, particularly in reliability, quality assurance, and validation. The central aim of this research is to design and develop a quality model tool that facilitates the engineering and validation of IEs by enabling traceability of quality metrics from initial scoping to deployment. The motivation stems from both academic and practical concerns. While several frameworks, such as User-Centred Intelligent Environments Development Process-2 (UCIEDP2) and models aligned with ISO/IEC 25010, exist to guide IE development, they are currently not supported with automation, such as a developer-friendly tool to track key quality metrics. Moreover, current practices rely heavily on manual documentation and ad hoc methods, leading to inconsistencies and prolonged development cycles. To provide a base to the proposed work, a systematic literature review was conducted, which revealed the following key gaps: a lack of tools for quality tracking in IEs; ambiguity in how quality is defined and operationalised across different systems; limited empirical validation of existing frameworks & tools; and insufficient support for developers in managing and tracking quality attributes across the development lifecycle. Building on these insights, the project proposes a web-based tool aligned with the UCIEDP2 methodology. Planned research methods include development of the tool, stakeholder driven validation, and a series of case studies involving academic and industry partners. These case studies will provide empirical data through interviews, questionnaires, observations, and iterative feedback cycles. This research contributes to the field by bridging the gap between theoretical quality models and practical implementation. It aims to enhance the reliability, usability, and stakeholder trust in IEs, ultimately supporting their broader adoption.

Supervisors: Juan Augusto (Middlesex University); Dr Adityarajasingh Santokhee (Middlesex University).

## Track J: Tuning the SVM algorithm for customer classification based on credit risk

Author: Geethu Joy

Credit risk classification plays a critical role in the financial sector, as inaccurate predictions can lead to substantial financial losses due to loan defaults and poor lending decisions. Among the several machine learning approaches, Support Vector Machines (SVMs) have been widely recognized in literature as one of the most effective algorithms for credit classification tasks. This study investigates whether SVM classification can be further improved through parameter tuning using two tuning methods: Monte Carlo (MC) and Quasi-Monte Carlo (QMC).

A comparative analysis is conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of the tuning methods based on parameter optimization and classification accuracy using a credit card dataset. Since MC methods are among the most used approaches for parameter tuning, and QMC methods are known for their superior convergence properties, this study examines whether QMC can outperform conventional MC-based tuning for SVM optimization in credit risk classification.

Results from the t-test indicate that QMC produces significantly improved parameter values compared to MC. However, both methods achieve comparable classification accuracy, suggesting that while parameter estimates differ, their effect on predictive performance remains similar, possibly due to the t-test's emphasis on mean differences rather than variability. The Friedman test, a non-parametric rank-based method, further indicates significant differences across methods for both parameter values and accuracy, highlighting the importance of methodological considerations when interpreting comparative results.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that while QMC improves parameter estimation, both tuning approaches yield comparable classification performance, underscoring the robustness of SVM in this application. The improved parameter estimation obtained through QMC may also contribute to reduced computational effort and more efficient tuning processes, although this aspect requires further investigation.

Supervisors: Juan Augusto (Middlesex University).

# Abstracts

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## Track J: Learning Coordinated Control in Multi-Agent Systems without Explicit Models

Author: Babak Mohajer

Many systems are controlled by several actuators that influence a shared outcome to differing degrees, and must coordinate their effort — a task that normally requires an explicit mathematical model of the system. We ask whether that coordinating information can instead be learned directly from experience. Studying the cleanest case — several co-located actuators acting on a common system, each with a different effectiveness — we show that the relative effectiveness of each actuator is encoded in the curvature of the value function that a reinforcement-learning agent learns while controlling the system. We prove that, when the reward depends only on the system's state, this curvature is exactly proportional to the actuators' effectiveness, so the effectiveness can be read off without any system model. Experiments with a model-free agent (soft actor-critic) confirm the prediction: the effectiveness direction is recovered almost perfectly from the learned value function, far above chance, and preliminary results indicate it tracks the true effectiveness as we vary it. We also characterise when this information is recoverable, finding it clearest under broad exploration and weakest once the agent settles into an optimal, low-variance policy. The work offers a concrete, model-free route to the structural information that coordinated control requires — recovered from what an agent learns, rather than from a model given in advance..

Supervisors: Juan Augusto (Middlesex University).

## Track J: Micro-Expression Driven Facial Expression Classification Using Deep Learning Models

Author: Asiya Bibi

Micro-expressions are extremely brief, involuntary facial movements that typically last only a fraction of a second. Unlike macro-expressions, which are more visible and consciously controlled, micro-expressions reveal genuine emotional states that individuals may attempt to conceal. Their subtle appearance and rapid onset make them difficult to detect, yet accurate recognition is important in areas such as security screening, psychological assessment, behavioural analysis, and human-computer interaction. Developing automated systems capable of identifying these fleeting cues remains challenging due to limited datasets, class imbalance, and strong inter-subject variability.

This research investigates a micro-expression-driven framework for facial expression classification using deep learning. Two datasets are used: SVD-OL for macro-expressions and CASME-II for micro-expressions. For macro-expression recognition, several CNN architectures were evaluated, which included ResNet-50, MobileNetV2, EfficientNet-B2 and EfficientNet-B2-V2, with EfficientNet-B2-V2 achieving the highest performance at 86.74% accuracy, demonstrating strong spatial feature learning. For micro-expression recognition, a spatiotemporal CNN-LSTM pipeline was developed. A pretrained ResNet-18 extracts spatial features from individual frames, while an LSTM models the temporal evolution across short video sequences. Using a strict Leave-One-Subject-Out (LOSO) protocol, the current CNN-based model achieved 43% accuracy on CASME-II, reflecting the inherent difficulty of micro-expression analysis.

Key challenges identified include limited dataset size, annotation complexity, subtle and low-intensity movements, and high computational cost. To address these limitations, future work will extend the study to additional micro-expression datasets such as MMEW to improve robustness and cross-dataset generalisation. Transformer-based architectures are also planned for further investigation, as their global self-attention mechanisms may offer improved sensitivity to subtle spatial and temporal patterns.

Supervisors: Juan Augusto (Middlesex University).

# Abstracts

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Track K: Validation of STAT3 and MMP9 as Key Determinants of Osteosarcoma Formation and Metastasis

Author: Wendy Gomez Arenas

Osteosarcoma (OS), the most common primary malignant bone tumour in children and adolescents, is characterised by aggressive behaviour and pulmonary metastasis. Survival is approximately 80% for patients with localised disease but falls to 20–30% in metastatic cases, highlighting the need to better understand mechanisms driving metastasis and identify therapeutic targets.

To investigate regulators of osteosarcoma migration and metastasis, our group developed a novel in-vitro Migratory Body (MB) assay using highly metastatic HOS-143B OS cells. MBs are spheroid-like structures characterised by enhanced stemness and the ability to generate secondary MBs, providing a readout of migratory potential. Using this model, signal transducer and activator of transcription 3 (STAT3) and matrix metalloproteinase 9 (MMP9) were identified as regulators of metastatic behaviour and are associated with poor clinical outcomes.

Based on these observations, we hypothesised that inhibition of STAT3 and MMP9 would suppress metastatic potential. In-vitro small-molecule inhibition of STAT3 and MMP9 significantly reduced MB formation in HOS-143B cells by 76% and 31%, respectively ( $p \leq 0.001$ ). As proof of principle, STAT3 inhibition was evaluated using an optimised chorioallantoic membrane (CAM) xenograft model, enabling assessment of STAT3 inhibitor treatment in HOS-143B tumours in-ovo within a physiologically relevant system. Histological analysis of excised tumours revealed reduced tumour neovascularisation and a trend towards decreased tumour cell integration (92.1%;  $p = 0.07$ ).

To further define the roles of STAT3 and MMP9, CRISPR–Cas9 genome editing generated STAT3 and MMP9 knockout clones in HOS-143B cells. RT-qPCR confirmed reductions in STAT3 and MMP9 expression of 92% ( $p = 0.003$ ) and 81% ( $p = 0.032$ ). Functional MB assays demonstrated reduced migratory capacity, with STAT3 knockout reducing MB formation by 65.2% and MMP9 knockout by 37.1%. Together, these findings identify STAT3 and MMP9 as regulators of OS migratory behaviour and therapeutic targets to limit metastatic progression.

Supervisors: Helen C. Roberts (Middlesex University); Xuesong Wen (Middlesex University); Scott J. Roberts (Middlesex University).

Track K: Investigating the role of autophagy in chondrosarcoma chemoresistance and metastasis

Author: Maria Pop

Chondrosarcoma is the second most common primary malignant bone tumour across all ages, following osteosarcoma, and the most common primary malignant bone tumour in adults. As standard therapeutic strategies are largely ineffective in chondrosarcomas, the alternative strategies are particularly invasive (wide margin surgical resection) and resistance can occur with chemotherapy.

Our group have previously shown that autophagy is increased with common chemotherapy drugs such as doxorubicin hydrochloride (Dox) and cisplatin (Cis) and it is thought that this contributes to chemoresistance (Pereria *et al.*, 2026). In the current study we investigate the role of autophagy in chondrosarcoma chemoresistance with the aim of finding novel effective therapies.

Dose response assays identified concentrations of Dox and Cis in human chondrosarcoma cells (SW1353) that acted synergistically to induce cell death (0.5uM Dox and 9uM Cis;  $p < 0.05$ ). These concentrations were used to examine the effect of chemotherapy on autophagy in SW1353 cells, with an overall increase in autophagy activation observed. Both Atg12 (2–3x fold change;  $p < 0.01$ ) and Atg3 (up to 2x fold change;  $p < 0.01$ –0.05) showed upregulation following Cis, Dox and combination treatment. Atg16L expression was also upregulated following combination treatment (8x fold change;  $p < 0.05$ ), while Atg7 has shown increased expression following Dox treatment (2.8 fold change;  $p < 0.01$ ). Furthermore, the key autophagy marker MAP1LC3 showed increased expression following Cis treatment (2 fold change;  $p < 0.05$ ) while SQSTM1, which is expected to become depleted during autophagy, has shown a downregulation following all 3 treatments, particularly Cis and CisDox (0.5 fold change;  $p < 0.05$ ).

The preliminary experiments indicate the activation of autophagy following cytotoxic treatment with cisplatin, doxorubicin and a combination of the 2. Future experiments will further establish the activation of autophagy by looking at protein expression. The research will be taken further by disrupting the autophagy process through Atg gene knock-out, and re-examination of cytotoxic effects on the knock-out cell line, to establish whether autophagy influences chemoresistance.

Supervisor: Frank Hills (Middlesex University); Helen C. Roberts (Middlesex University)

# Abstracts

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Track K: The Impact of Dietary Protein Sources on Menopause Related Symptoms A Systematic Literature Review

Author: Michal D Rudich

Women's longevity is increasing globally, bringing greater attention to health challenges experienced during menopause transition. Menopause symptoms vary across individuals and may be influenced by lifestyle and dietary factors. Despite the increasing interest in nutritional and lifestyle changes to support menopause symptoms management, the role of dietary protein sources remained insufficiently explored.

Aim : To examine associations between dietary protein source and menopause-related symptoms in an ethnically diverse sample of women in London.

Methods: A 73- item questionnaire, approved by Middlesex University Ethics Committee, was distributed online through SurveyMonkey and private clinics, between September 2024 and September 2025. The survey incorporated validated questions derived from UK NHS FFQ (Food Frequency Questionnaire) and the British Menopause Society – Symptoms Score Chart for practitioners . Participants reported ethnicity, menopausal stage (based on time since last menstruation), dietary protein intake, and menopause-related symptoms. Data were analysed using descriptive analysis, Pearson chi-square and Spearman's rho (SPSS v29) with  $p < 0.05$  and 95% CI.

Results: Of 162 responders, 130 women were included after excluding incomplete questionnaires. Symptoms scores were reported highest in perimenopausal groups across ethnicities. Tiredness and fatigue, sleep disturbances and cognitive impairment were found most common in White, Middle east and Black populations whilst general aches were more frequent amongst Asian participants.

Significant associations were identified between dietary protein sources and symptoms: Lamb consumption and hot flushes ( $p=0.032$ ); Beef consumption and night sweats ( $p=0.009$ ); Fish and fatigue, specifically in perimenopausal women ( $p=0.008$ ); and legumes and fatigue ( $p=0.035$ ). No statistically significant association found between menopause symptoms and ethnicity. However a trend was observed for ethnicity and night sweats ( $p=0.068$ ).  
Conclusions: These results indicate that specific dietary protein sources could be associated with severity or frequency of menopausal symptoms, suggesting plant-based proteins consumption resulting in fewer symptoms. Further studies should be able to assist converting these findings to practical clinical recommendations.

Supervisors: Michelle Barrow (Centre for Nutrition Education & Lifestyle Management); Sandra Appiah (Middlesex University); Liang Liu (Middlesex University); Abdul Akin-Imran (Middlesex University)

Track K : Development of automated pipeline to identify protein targets for therapeutic modulation in acute myeloid leukaemia by flavones using a machine-learning approach

Author: Ivan Punev

Acute myeloid leukaemia (AML) is a rising age-related problem in developed countries characterised by high relapse rate and drug resistance. Multi-omics studies demonstrate aberrant gene expression leading to disrupted cell signalling pathways such as apoptosis, autophagy, and PI3K, which promotes cellular proliferation and leukaemogenesis. Our previous findings indicated plant-based compounds such as the flavone baicalein have selective cytotoxicity to cancer cell lines compared to non-cancerous cells suggesting flavones could be utilised as sustainable adjuvant alongside established chemotherapy to alleviate the associated adverse side effects. The aim of the project is to integrate data-driven structure-based approaches in drug design with in vitro validation to identify sustainable plant-derived compounds that can modulate key signalling pathways in AML.

Currently presented work focused on building a machine-learning automated pipeline to identify and prioritise potential genes and associated proteins implicated in AML-dysregulated pathways - apoptosis, autophagy, PI3K, and Wnt. The analysis was performed on publicly available data on drug-gene associations using Spearman's correlation, LASSO, and Gradient-boosting in Python. The obtained output was scored in a novel way across the three methods based on the strength of association of a gene with multiple drugs and across the pathways with integrated stability weighting and robust resampling. Key genes identified reflected ongoing research in AML with highest scoring one being BECN1 and other strong candidates such as the antiapoptotic BCL2 family and IAP proteins, BH3-only and effector proteins, core autophagy initiators and conjugation factors, and upstream pathways regulators.

At present, molecular docking and machine learning methods are developed to screen a library of flavonoid analogues that can modulate AML-disrupted pathways. Future work will aim to validate the computational predictions using in vitro assays such as cytotoxicity, Western blot, Annexin V/Propidium Iodide. The project aims to support development of nature-inspired cancer therapy or adjuvants aligned with the UN sustainable goals 3,12, and 15.

Supervisors: Milan Vu (Middlesex University); Perry Devo (Middlesex University); Kevin Ita (Turo University); Sandra Appiah (Middlesex University); Zhanzhong Shi (Middlesex University)

# Abstracts

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Track L: Low Energy Availability in Female Netball Players: Prevalence and Feasible Screening Methods

Author: Katherine Paice

Women's longevity is increasing globally, bringing greater attention to health challenges experienced during menopause transition. Menopause symptoms vary across individuals and may be influenced by lifestyle and dietary factors. Despite the increasing interest in nutritional and lifestyle changes to support menopause symptoms management, the role of dietary protein sources remained insufficiently explored.

Aim : To examine associations between dietary protein source and menopause-related symptoms in an ethnically diverse sample of women in London.

Methods: A 73- item questionnaire, approved by Middlesex University Ethics Committee, was distributed online through SurveyMonkey and private clinics, between September 2024 and September 2025. The survey incorporated validated questions derived from UK NHS FFQ (Food Frequency Questionnaire) and the British Menopause Society – Symptoms Score Chart for practitioners . Participants reported ethnicity, menopausal stage (based on time since last menstruation), dietary protein intake, and menopause-related symptoms. Data were analysed using descriptive analysis, Pearson chi-square and Spearman's rho (SPSS v29) with  $p < 0.05$  and 95% CI.

Results: Of 162 responders, 130 women were included after excluding incomplete questionnaires. Symptoms scores were reported highest in perimenopausal groups across ethnicities. Tiredness and fatigue, sleep disturbances and cognitive impairment were found most common in White, Middle east and Black populations whilst general aches were more frequent amongst Asian participants.

Significant associations were identified between dietary protein sources and symptoms: Lamb consumption and hot flushes ( $p=0.032$ ); Beef consumption and night sweats ( $p=0.009$ ); Fish and fatigue, specifically in perimenopausal women ( $p=0.008$ ); and legumes and fatigue ( $p=0.035$ ).

No statistically significant association found between menopause symptoms and ethnicity. However a trend was observed for ethnicity and night sweats ( $p=0.068$ ).

Conclusions: These results indicate that specific dietary protein sources could be associated with severity or frequency of menopausal symptoms, suggesting plant-based proteins consumption resulting in fewer symptoms. Further studies should be able to assist converting these findings to practical clinical recommendations.

Supervisors: Christopher Curtis (Middlesex University); Konstantinos Papadopoulos (Middlesex University); Anthony Turner (Middlesex University); Laura Wilson (Middlesex University)

Track L: To assess the possible use of existential psychotherapy in assisting cardiac patients in identifying and managing the psychological risk factors associated with the causation of coronary heart disease.

Author: Melanie Hibbert

Background

Coronary heart disease (CHD) has a high prevalence and incidence worldwide and is a leading cause of death in most countries. Biological risk factors are well recognised and often treated as causative factors. Biopsychosocial risk factors are also recognised but are not usually considered as primary risk factors. Most western countries have developed programmes of cardiac rehabilitation following a cardiac event, which tackle known risk factors.

Aims

This study aimed to determine the association between the emotional responses of the participants to perceived life stressors and the development of CHD and how these responses might be amenable to modification with existential psychotherapy during both cardiac rehabilitation and primary and secondary prevention of CHD.

Methods

Research data was collected from a wide-ranging literature review in the fields of medicine, physiology, history, psychology, existential philosophy and psychotherapy.

New research information was collected from semi structured interviews with 10 participants recruited from internet support groups. The collected data was analysed using a classical grounded theory coding method. In addition, data was triangulated with a structured online questionnaire sent out to professionals involved in cardiac rehabilitation.

Findings

It was found that both leading up to the cardiac event and after it, the participants had experienced episodes of acute and chronic stress including for example work stress, relationship difficulties, harassment and/or discrimination and social isolation.

Discussion

Existential psychotherapy has been used in the management of certain illness such as hypertension in some countries with positive treatment outcomes.

It could also have a very beneficial role in the treatment of CHD by helping patients to identify and modify the emotional factors which are implicated in their disease.

Since it covers the 4 worlds of existence, it allows for a holistic approach to treating CHD and would integrate well with current biomedical treatment.

Supervisors: Betsy Thom (Middlesex University)

# Abstracts

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Track L: Physical Inactivity and Metabolic Syndrome in the UAE: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Parallel Epidemics

Author: Syeda Bushra Ali Rizvi

**Background:** Metabolic syndrome (MetS), a cluster of cardiovascular risk factors strongly associated with physical inactivity, has emerged as a critical global public health concern. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) exhibits elevated prevalence rates of both conditions, driven by rapid urbanization and lifestyle transitions. However, a comprehensive synthesis of the epidemiological evidence remains lacking.

**Objective:** This systematic review and meta-analysis evaluated the prevalence of physical inactivity and MetS in the UAE general population.

**Methods:** Data were obtained from systematic searches of eight databases (CINAHL, Embase, PubMed, PsycInfo, Scopus, Web of Science, Cochrane Library, SPORTDiscus). Inclusion criteria encompassed observational studies reporting prevalence data on physical inactivity (primarily defined as not meeting WHO guidelines:  $\geq 150$  minutes/week moderate-intensity activity) and/or MetS in UAE adults. Fifty-nine prevalence studies were included, with data pooled using random-effects meta-analysis.

**Results:** Three meta-analyses estimated physical activity (PA) prevalence using different methods across 39 studies ( $n = 77,360$ ), yielding a pooled prevalence of 32.2% (95% CI 24.8-40), substantially lower than the WHO global average of 69%. Accelerometer data (2 studies,  $n = 296$ ) showed 23.5% (95% CI 18.8-28.5), while survey-based reports (11 studies,  $n = 18,034$ ) indicated 51.1% (95% CI 37.9-64.3). MetS prevalence was 31.2% (95% CI 23.6-39.4) from 14 studies ( $n = 22,835$ ). Both conditions showed high heterogeneity and gender-related differences, with lower PA and distinct MetS patterns in women. Physical inactivity was associated with 34% increased odds of MetS.

**Conclusion:** Physical inactivity and MetS represent important public health priorities in the UAE, with notable demographic variations warranting targeted interventions. Building on existing government health initiatives, addressing this burden requires comprehensive, multisectoral interventions encompassing urban environmental redesign, culturally adapted health promotion programmes, and context-specific diagnostic frameworks tailored to the UAE's distinct environmental, sociocultural, and economic context.

**Keywords:** Metabolic syndrome, physical inactivity, prevalence, systematic review, meta-analysis, public health.

**Supervisors/Contributors:** Anne Elliot (Middlesex University); Chris Bishop (Middlesex University); Tim Evans (Middlesex University).

Track M: Are they mental disorders at all? Rethinking borderline personality disorder through the epistemology of psychiatric knowledge

Author: Yvonne Langkamer

Central to contentions that psychiatry is a discipline in conceptual and methodological crisis is a problem of knowledge production: how psychiatric categories are formed, validated, and sustained across psychiatry and allied fields. Influential nosological systems (DSM/ICD) rely on descriptive, symptom-based classifications that embed contested epistemological and ontological assumptions concerning the nature, boundaries, and causes of "mental disorder." Even dimensional model reforms often reproduce these underlying assumptions rather than resolve them.

My PhD thesis engages this problem at the level of epistemology, asking how psychiatric knowledge is constituted and what alternative frameworks might better account for psychological variation and distress. It argues that current classificatory practices produce heterogeneous, highly comorbid, and weakly validated categories that lack explanatory utility.

Illustrating this argument, this paper examines the case of borderline personality disorder (BPD), a highly stigmatized diagnosis with substantial overlap with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and complex PTSD. These overlaps highlight diagnostic boundary instability and raise questions about whether such categories capture discrete natural kinds.

To address this, the paper introduces the meta-theoretical framework of evolutionary personality psychology and psychopathology to reinterpret BPD-related behaviours, conceptualizing these as context-sensitive variations in evolved defensive and regulatory strategies. This transdiagnostic perspective dissolves rigid categorical distinctions and reframes so-called pathology as functional adaptation under particular environmental conditions.

The discussion of BPD demonstrates a wider claim developed in the thesis: that rethinking the epistemological foundations of psychiatry can generate more coherent, integrative, and less stigmatizing accounts of psychological distress.

**Supervisors:** Paul Cobley (Middlesex University); Tom Dickens.

# Abstracts

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## Track M: Feeling the Gap: Teachers' and Students' Emotional Experience in Dance Education

Author: Yoana Kirilova Stoeva

This presentation explores the role of emotional experience in dance education, examining how teachers' emotions shape and are shaped by the relational conditions of teaching and learning. Teaching emerges from embodied experience: dance teachers bring to their work knowledge formed through their own training, professional trajectories, and emotional encounters within dance cultures. Yet the emotional lives of teachers remain underexplored in dance education research. This presentation draws on an ongoing doctoral study that investigates how dance teachers experience, interpret, and draw meaning from their emotions within teaching contexts, and how these experiences shape their embodied understanding of pedagogy.

Existing scholarship has tended to approach emotion in dance education primarily through student wellbeing or policy-oriented safeguarding frameworks. While both are important, this focus reveals a gap: although students' emotional experiences are increasingly recognised, the teacher's own lived emotional experience has yet to be meaningfully centred in the literature. This presentation argues that these dimensions should not be separated. How teachers relate to their own emotional experiences inevitably shapes the environments in which students learn; attending to one without the other offers only a partial understanding of the pedagogical relationship. Drawing on literature across Western dance training traditions, embodied and somatic pedagogies, reflective practice, and student wellbeing, this work begins to trace how

emotional experience moves between teacher and student. At a time of profound uncertainty in education, such as from systemic and institutional pressures to the growing presence of Artificial Intelligence in learning environments, questions of how we feel, respond, and remain present in teaching take on renewed urgency. This study approaches emotional experience as a form of knowledge rather than something to be managed or resolved. The presentation will reflect on how these ideas may be explored in practice, opening space for more responsive, connected, and hopeful ways of teaching and learning.

Supervisor: Stefanie Sachsenmaier (Middlesex University).

## Track M: The experiences of autistic healthcare students in placement: Learning from a scoping review of the literature

Author: Emilie Edwards

**Introduction:** The landscape of autism research is shifting from a medical deficit model towards a neurodiversity-affirmative paradigm. Concurrently, there is a rising representation of neurodivergent students within healthcare disciplines. However, clinical learning environments are highly demanding, and the specific experiences of autistic students within these ever-evolving settings remain significantly underexplored. This gap leaves autistic students at a disproportionate risk of unmet support needs, burnout, and attrition.

**Aim:** This scoping review aimed to systematically map the existing literature regarding the experiences of autistic healthcare students during clinical placements, specifically identifying learning barriers and enablers.

**Research methods:** Guided by Arksey and O'Malley's methodological framework, a comprehensive literature search was conducted across databases and grey literature. Six relevant studies were identified. Bringing an insider perspective as an autistic midwifery researcher, a qualitative, framework-based synthesis was undertaken to organise experiential patterns into overarching analytical categories.

**Current findings and contribution:** Published in *Autism* by Sage Journals in April 2026, the scoping review identified four main categories: autistic profiles, sensory environments, disclosure and support, and belonging and inclusion. Findings demonstrate that while bringing valuable strengths to practice, like hyper-empathy and attention to detail, autistic students face systemic barriers. These include profound sensory overwhelm, lack of tailored accommodations, and stigmatising staff attitudes. Consequently, students engage in exhausting masking behaviours, negatively impacting mental health and belonging. This research highlights an urgent need for further research and institutional shifts, urging neurodiversity-affirmative practices, targeted autism training, and proactive support to ensure autistic students thrive.

Supervisors: Gemma Reynolds (Middlesex University); Helen Hingley-Jones (Middlesex University).

# Abstracts

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Track M: The Interplay of Core Self-Evaluation, Coping Strategies and Anxiety in University Students

Author: Joanne Shapiro

Introduction: The prevalence of anxiety in university students, globally, is high and increasing. How young people perceive their self-worth and how they cope with challenges, in this transitional phase in life, may influence anxiety levels.

My research aims to explore associations between self-evaluation, coping styles and anxiety.

My presentation will fit the theme of Shifting Landscapes by addressing rises in reported anxiety in students despite increased available support, increased awareness of, and dialogue regarding, mental health. I will discuss related issues, including data protection policies.

Methodology: I will use mixed-methods. The first phase, the quantitative study, is underway. It includes four standardised questionnaires. Data will be analysed using correlations and multiple regressions. A qualitative study, using thematic analysis, will follow. I will interview 10 students from the quantitative sample, to get insights into students' lived experiences.

Preliminary/Expected findings of the quantitative study: 112 complete responses have been received to-date. This study is currently a work in progress, though I hope to present some preliminary analysis at the conference. I am expecting to find a negative correlation between self-evaluation and anxiety, between maladaptive coping strategies and self-evaluation and between adaptive coping strategies and anxiety. And I am expecting to find a positive correlation between maladaptive coping strategies and anxiety, and between adaptive coping strategies and self-evaluation.

Expected contribution:

The intention of this study is to pave the way for further studies on the interplay of these factors being studied, which, in turn, could facilitate and guide the design and implementation of targeted interventions to safeguard students and reduce their risk of the development of clinical anxiety.

Supervisors: Nicola Payne (Middlesex University).

Track N: From Equity to Inequity (and back again?)  
Continuing the conversations on the barriers and challenges faced by Black British researchers in UK Higher Education.

Author: Omari Solarin

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 highlights an urgent global requirement for greater inclusivity, equity, and quality in education to promote lifelong opportunities for all. However, the progression of Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) initiatives in the United Kingdom's Higher Education (HE) sector has faced significant hurdles, particularly regarding Black British researchers. Despite an "explosion" of policy documents and action plans, the number of Black professors remains stubbornly below 1%, signalling a critical failure in systemic progression for Black postgraduates and academics.

The conference theme, "Shifting Landscapes of Research in Critical Times", is a provocation to evaluate the strategy, outcomes, and legacy of EDI initiatives specifically targeting this marginalised group. The methodology involves a comprehensive review of institutional strategies and policies implemented since 2020, mapping the trajectory of funded initiatives to determine their systemic and experiential impacts. Central to this approach are in-depth qualitative interviews designed to capture the lived experiences of Black British researchers, contrasting personal narratives with official institutional rhetoric.

Preliminary analysis suggests that while strategy documents hint at institutional learning curves, profound barriers remain unaddressed. These challenges include restricted access to research funding, a stark lack of representation among senior academic leaders, and persistent disparities between EDI policy goals and the daily realities of researchers. The synthesis of data from policy reviews and postgraduate reflections highlights that many initiatives currently function as mere compliance exercises.

Ultimately, this study seeks to derive context-specific, critical insights to transform EDI practices from performative compliance to genuine institutional transformation. By bridging the gap between policy and practice, this research provides a roadmap for fostering a more equitable environment in which Black British researchers can thrive within the UK academic landscape.

Supervisors: Paula Nottingham (Middlesex University);  
Nico Pizzolato (Middlesex University).

# Abstracts

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Track N: Transition to Parenthood by Same Sex Couples (SSC) and the Factors Influencing Receipt of Evidence-based Advice by Health Visitors.

Author: Shirley Adebayo

SSCs, as parents, are no longer keeping themselves hidden from public view; however, they are still experiencing 'negativism' when contacts are made with professionals working in education, social and healthcare, according to a recent Italian study (Everri, Tiziana et al 2021).

The 'Modern family' are parenting out of a conscious choice to become parents, (Golombok 2015). The research of same sex couples forming families and becoming biological parents can be described as 'an emerging area' in the UK. It is yet to be explored fully to have a sufficient body of knowledge to affect urgently needed positive, lasting universal changes, and therefore, more information about SS parenting is required in the public domain. This is important to secure greater EDI for SSC, their families and other marginalised groups. Also, service providers would have clearer guidelines regarding how or if to rethink service design and its implementation or delivery as necessary.

#### Aims

- i. To enhance understanding of the lived experiences of SS parenthood, by those identifying as gay or lesbian couples.
- ii. To identify what influences same sex parents, to engage with and act on evidence-based childcare & development advice provided by health visitors.

#### Methods

- i. Interviews via MST
- ii. Face to Face focussed discussion groups with HV

#### Contribution

The needs and challenges of SSC as parents, against that of different sex couples (DSC), are yet to be fully discovered, appreciated and acted upon. However, irrespective of the parents' biological sex or gender identification, quality information ought to be accessible to all to raise children safely and provided free from professional's own personal viewpoint (on SS relationships); according to healthcare research this is not so, (Sharek et al 2015), (Everri, Tiziana et al 2021). This study will contribute to the needed research in the UK regarding SSCs and parenthood.

Supervisors: Liang Liu (Middlesex University); Betsy Thom (Middlesex University); Lucille Allain (Middlesex University).

Track N: AI and Privatisation in the NHS: Risks and Opportunities – an analysis of literature government and think tank reports and selected media coverage.

Author: Michael O'Driscoll

This paper examines whether the rapid adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) in the NHS represents a route to improved public healthcare or a deeper form of privatisation through dependence on large technology corporations.

The UK Government's 2025 NHS 10-Year Health Plan positions AI at the centre of NHS reform, envisioning widespread use of generative AI, automation and data-driven healthcare by 2035 (UK Government 2025). While AI is often framed as a neutral tool capable of improving efficiency, diagnostics and patient outcomes, it also creates risks including threats to patient safety, data privacy, equity of access and the human dimension of care (Health Foundation 2024; King's Fund 2025).

The paper argues that AI adoption cannot be separated from procurement models, institutional incentives and the growing influence of multinational technology firms. Using the controversial role of Palantir Technologies in NHS data infrastructure as a central case study, the paper explores tensions between technological capability and concerns about transparency, accountability, democratic oversight and long-term dependence on private vendors. The analysis situates NHS AI partnerships within a broader history of outsourcing and public-private collaboration in UK healthcare. It argues that AI systems create particular risks because they rely on proprietary algorithms and data platform dependency, potentially shifting power towards corporations even where services remain publicly funded and formally state-controlled.

The paper concludes that debate on AI in the NHS should move beyond efficiency narratives to focus more critically on governance, public trust and unequal power relationships. Recommendations include stronger public ownership of data infrastructure, digital sovereignty and greater investment in NHS in-house technical expertise.

Supervisors: Liang Liu (Middlesex University)

# Abstracts

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Track O: Experiences of overweight and obese men and subsequent influences on their cognitive processes and emotions.

Author: Andrew Waller

In relation to the core theme of PRSC2026, "Shifting Landscapes of Research in Critical Times", exploration of how the experiences of overweight and obese men influence their cognitive and emotional processes will enhance understanding and assist improvement and sustainability of male mental and physical health, by better informing psychologists and concerned healthcare professionals. Improved understanding is also pertinent in the prediction of problematic behaviour and other areas of relevant comorbidity. A series of studies seeks to eventually cause cultural realignment by reducing instances of stigma and discrimination, which have been discovered by previous research, to ultimately aid adjustment of the social acceptability of humour, taunts and abuse aimed at the subject group. In most western countries, a greater proportion of men, rather than women are overweight or obese, in England, 67% of adult males against 60% of women are classed as being overweight, encompassing 26% of the male population who are considered obese. Despite this, previous research has focused predominantly on the experiences of overweight women. A mixed methods series of studies will explore the personal experiences of overweight and obese male adults and subsequent influences on their cognitive processes and emotions. The series of studies will augment the existing, small, and inconsistent research base, and will assist in addressing the imbalance of sex, in terms of participant focus, to assist improvement and sustainability of male mental and physical health and enhancing understanding of how associated prejudice may be pertinent in the prediction of psychological distress and problematic behaviour. Study One will use Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to capture personal lived experiences of overweight and obese men and interpret the emotional impact in relation to discrimination and prejudice. Informed by the findings of the IPA Study, Study Two shall utilise Constructionist Grounded Theory (CGT) to construct a theory of how obesity in men influences their cognitive and emotional processes. After the CGT phase, Study Three will test the constructed theory, using selected appropriate psychometric methodology.

Supervisors: Nicola Payne (Middlesex University).

Track O: From Spiritual Practice to Strategic Wellbeing: Developing and Testing the Kind Resilience Framework in Critical Times.

Author: Hannah Alexander-Wright

This paper presents the development of Kind Resilience, a transdisciplinary framework created to help individuals navigate continuous change in organisations. It responds directly to the conference theme, Shifting Landscapes of Research in Critical Times, by tracing a methodological and practice-based shift in my own doctoral work: from conventional organisational change thinking towards a framework informed by spiritual and human practices, translated into language that can be used in coaching, facilitation and organisational development.

The research began with self-inquiry and an exploration of my positionality as a coach, facilitator and Quaker. It then moved into dialogic, qualitative interviews with eleven practitioners working across areas including prayer, meditation, grief counselling, mindful movement, restorative practice and Non-Violent Communication. Across these conversations, three recurring conditions for successful change emerged: contemplative and reflective practice, relational and community-building practice, and embodied and expressive practice. These were distilled into the 3Ps framework of Peace, Perspective and Purpose, later named Kind Resilience.

I then tested the framework through a coaching placement with nine participants in a changing organisational context. Early findings suggest that the framework is especially useful when people are navigating stress, ambiguity, identity questions and value misalignment. It appears to work best not as a rigid model, but as a flexible reflective lens that helps people identify their "anchors of certainty" and take meaningful action.

The paper will also reflect on the challenge of commercialising doctoral work before completion. I will discuss how Kind Resilience has moved beyond the thesis into coaching offers, workshop design and wider facilitation practice, including use with a middle eastern team undergoing conflict, and what is gained and compromised when research is translated for organisational use. In doing so, I argue that research can be both rigorous and usable, and that hope may lie in frameworks that help people remain human in critical times.

Supervisors: Agi Ryder (Middlesex University); Clarice Santos (Middlesex University).

# Abstracts

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Track O: Bridging the Gap (Not Mind the Gap): Testing Low-Cost Behavioural Interventions to Increase Young Adults' Charitable Giving and Volunteering in the UK

Author: John Conrad Magpayo

Charitable participation plays an important role in supporting civil society, yet recent UK evidence indicates declining engagement among young adults in both charitable giving and formal volunteering. This trend is concerning not only because it may weaken the resource base of charities, but also because it reflects lower levels of charitable and voluntary engagement among young adults. Against this background, this study investigates whether low-cost behavioural interventions can help address this participation gap in the UK.

The aim of the research is to identify which scalable behavioural interventions are most effective in increasing charitable engagement, with particular attention to whether they operate differently for monetary donations and time donations/volunteering. The study is grounded in the Theory of Planned Behaviour, which provides a useful framework for examining how attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control may influence charitable action. By comparing money and time giving directly, the research also addresses an important gap in the literature, as these two forms of prosocial behaviour may involve different motivations, constraints and decision-making processes.

The research adopts a sequential mixed-methods design. First, semi-structured interviews and focus groups are used to explore salient beliefs, perceived barriers and social influences and to refine the intervention messages. Second, an online randomised controlled trial tests three light-touch interventions: message framing, social norm cues, and friction-reduction prompts, against a control group using behavioural measures of both monetary and time giving. Third, the most effective intervention will be tested in a student-facing fundraising campaign to assess external validity.

The expected contribution is to generate evidence on the behavioural mechanisms shaping young adults' charitable engagement, estimate the causal effects of low-cost interventions, and compare their effectiveness across money and time giving. In doing so, the study aims to inform behavioural economics research and the design of more effective youth-focused charity campaigns.

Supervisors: Bastien Chabe-Ferret (Middlesex University); Ericka Rascon Ramirez (Middlesex University).

Track P: Shifting Landscapes of Research in Critical Times

Author: Suzanne Lassen

In these critical times, with prison populations already expanding, the state carries the responsibility of administering punishment, supporting rehabilitation, and assessing the risk an individual may pose to society. My fieldwork is based in Denmark, where individuals who are considered to pose an ongoing risk to society may receive an indeterminate sentence. This creates a context in which the state's punitive and rehabilitative aims operate simultaneously.

In this paper, I propose the use of mind-body initiatives, such as breathwork, within rehabilitative contexts for individuals who have offended. Breathwork introduces a shift in perspective, moving from a primarily punitive approach toward one that is more rehabilitative and trauma informed. This shift changes how we understand individuals who have offended and how interventions with them might be designed.

The aim of this paper is to explore how reflexive breathing practices may support reflection on life choices and processes of desistance by influencing the individual's inner landscape from the inside out. A multimodal qualitative methodology is adopted to access embodied and pre-verbal experiences. Data are collected through semi-structured interviews supported by creative practices, enabling the researcher to see, hear, and explore the different ways participants communicate and make meaning. In this way, the study moves beyond conventional criminal justice approaches and seeks to better understand how breathwork may support emotional regulation, well-being, and identity change, benefiting participants, researchers, and the wider community.

Although in the early stages of data collection, the initial findings suggest an increase in empathy and a growing desire among participants to reconnect with and support their families. The breathwork practices also appear to help participants confront and live with the actions they have taken in the past, although this process is often challenging.

Supervisors: N/A

# Abstracts

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Track P: Human Capital as Competitive Advantage: A Framework for Digital HR Transformation in the Chinese Tech Industry

Author: Mingzhe Li (Pico)

The Chinese tech industry has emerged as a global innovation leader, with its digital economy reaching RMB 50.2 trillion in 2023—equivalent to 41.5% of China's GDP. In this hyper-competitive environment, human capital has become a critical success factor. Yet, while Chinese tech firms increasingly recognize the strategic importance of digital HR transformation, most struggle with implementation: 41% lack digital mindset, 39% have no clear transformation concept, and only 23% possess market-ready HR applications (Liu et al., 2024; iResearch, 2021).

Existing literature reveals a striking gap: Digital HR research analyzes technological potentials (e.g., AI recruitment, people analytics), while the Three-Pillar literature describes static organizational structures (COE, BP, SSC). Both streams remain disconnected—and neither adequately addresses how digital governance mechanisms can be structurally embedded within HR architecture, particularly under China's unique regulatory conditions (PIPL, DSL).

This doctoral research addresses this gap by reconceptualizing Ulrich's Three-Pillar Model—moving it from a static organizational architecture toward a dynamic transformation framework for the digital age. Based on 12-15 qualitative interviews with HR executives from leading Chinese tech firms (Tencent, Alibaba, Huawei, Bytedance), the study identifies structural measures and governance mechanisms required to anchor digital HR initiatives sustainably.

The research contributes to strategic HRM literature by integrating structure, digitalization, and context (Standardization-Localization) into a coherent framework. It provides actionable guidance for HR leaders in China—and for DACH companies managing Chinese subsidiaries.

Supervisors: N/A

Track P: Responding to the local authority private sector housing regulatory knowledge and skills shortage to deliver better enforcement.

Author: Paul Oatt

Background:

This study examines how variations in knowledge, skills, and professional capacity within local authority private sector housing teams shape regulatory enforcement practice in England's private rented sector. It addresses a documented gap between statutory enforcement and its uneven application at street level, despite persistent hazardous housing conditions.

Methods:

Using a pragmatic mixed-methods design, the study combines literature and policy analysis with an online survey, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups with Street-Level Housing Enforcers. Reflexive thematic analysis was used, exploring how education, experiential learning, professional identity, leadership and organisational contexts influence regulatory decision-making.

Results:

Findings show clear variation in enforcement preferences, confidence and perceived capability. Forty-five percent of survey respondents preferred informal action, 38% preferred formal action whilst 16.9% favoured a case-by-case approach. Amongst graduates, 18 of 39 preferred formal action compared with 12 who prefer regulating informally. Graduates favouring formal action reported greater confidence that their knowledge and skills supported successful outcomes. Non-graduates were more likely to prefer informality. Simultaneously, respondents favouring informal action identified substantial further training needs, particularly in legal enforcement, housing surveying, fire safety and investigative skills.

Interview and focus group data illuminate these differences. Managers linked inconsistency to uneven capability, confidence and willingness to enforce. Participants described some officer's reluctance to initiate enforcement once assigned to a case. Focus group participants highlighted heavy reliance on experiential learning and shadowing. But identified persistent gaps in translating housing surveying knowledge into enforcement practices such as drafting and serving notices and maintaining confidence amidst limited peer support and structured training.

Conclusions:

Regulatory effectiveness depends on both statutory powers and workforce capability, reflective practice and leadership cultures that support confident, consistent and proportionate decision-making.

Supervisors: Ruth Plume (Middlesex University); Stephen Battersby(University of Surrey).

# Abstracts

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Track P: Precursor to regulation: A Social Practice Theory approach to Food Waste Policy and Practice in UAE Hotels

Author: Rhoderick Romano

Food waste (FW) has gained global attention among wicked problem areas of sustainability that need to be addressed. Annual global estimates report a third of the food intended for human consumption is wasted, valued at a staggering USD1 trillion – enough to have fed some 783 million people suffering from hunger and food insecurity.

Recent geopolitical events are having disruptive effects in the Middle East region, particularly on food supply chains, further heightening the urgency to address social, economic and environmental impacts of FW. In the United Arab Emirates (UAE), FW is estimated to value USD3.5 billion annually, with the hotel sector identified as a significant contributor.

The establishment of Ne'ma as the national food loss and food waste initiative highlights the UAE's commitment to halve food waste levels by 2030. As Ne'ma remains in its early policy development stages, the private sector, including hotels, relies on pioneering voluntary efforts to reduce FW. This pre-regulatory context creates a distinct challenge for understanding FW policy and practice gaps.

This study offers a Social Practice Theory (SPT) approach to understanding how materials, competencies and meanings explain food waste policy and practice gaps in UAE hotels. SPT's focus of analysis on practices is argued as the more appropriate framework compared to institutional theory and decoupling, in the absence of hard regulation, or to individual behavioural intention, which is difficult to isolate in operational settings.

The study addresses gaps in the food waste literature through its focus on the Middle Eastern hotel sector, contributing theoretically grounded empirical research to help explain policy and practice gaps in pre-regulatory and voluntary compliance conditions. Ethical clearance has been approved for conducting semi-structured interviews with UAE hotel managers and staff. The practical contributions of this study aim to inform evidence-based policy development, which is critical in the region. Supervisors: Ignatius Ekanem (Director of Studies); Christopher Moon (Supervisor)

Track P: Envisioning Collective Heroic Quest (Rise of the Fictional Anti-Heroes)

Author: Jasmin Mulvey

For this presentation, I will exemplify a limited conceptual framework of flexible archetypes which are instrumental in my creative writing research. I will draw upon proto-archetypal character sets as developed for my novel to illustrate mutable archetypes as foundational not only in fiction, but also the ways in which they might be applied in broader contexts.

Recognising the foundational accepted approaches including Jung's archetypes (c.1919) and Campbell's (1949) Hero's Journey which have been influential since their inceptions; along with more recent developments from Murdoch's (1990) Heroine's Journey to Hudson's (2010) The Virgin's Promise is fundamental in developing fresh approaches.

I aim to illustrate the value of reassessing traditional perspectives of the monomythical quest. Just as authors such as Maria Tatar (2022) in *The Heroine with 1,001 Faces* have begun challenging previous perspectives; I will consider ways in which we may apply 'Thrutopia' a term coined by Rupert Read (2017) as a creative viewing platform to evolve narratives both fictional and actual.

In the collective heroic quest and the pursuit of hope, inclusive, diverse and flexible archetypal constructs may play a role in realigning world narratives; offering alternative perspectives, that we may otherwise miss.

Supervisors: Lara Thompson (Middlesex University); Ariel Kahn (Middlesex University).

# Abstracts

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Track R: From Impact to Adoption: Studying Participants' Conviction as Evidence for 'Micro-Pause' Interventions in Leadership Teams

Author: Nicholas Wright (Go Slow to Go Fast)

## DESCRIPTION:

This presentation examines a methodological shift that occurred during my doctoral fieldwork and invites discussion about its implications for practice-based research.

My research investigates micro-pauses: brief, intentional interruptions embedded into leadership routines, designed to disrupt autopilot behaviour and create space for alignment and psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999). I conducted a participatory action research placement (Reason and Bradbury, 2008) with a six-member agency leadership team over three months, involving co-designed practices, iterative workshop cycles, individual interviews, and reflexive journaling.

My original aim was to evaluate the impact of micro-pauses on team outcomes. During the fieldwork, the research question shifted. The team adopted micro-pauses with relative ease, but it became clear that the more defensible contribution was not demonstrating that micro-pauses produce measurable outcomes, but understanding the conditions under which leadership teams adopt intentional pausing practices. This reframe was driven by the data and by external feedback highlighting the difficulty of attributing team-level changes to a single intervention.

The methodological position I now occupy is this: rather than claiming micro-pauses objectively improve performance, I am studying the participating team's conviction that they do. Adoption correlates with their belief that the practices are both doable and beneficial. Early analysis suggests enabling conditions including existing trust, active leader modelling, flat team structure, prior collective development, and co-design rather than prescription. Adoption appears to operate as a spectrum, with variation observed even within a broadly receptive team.

I seek critique on three points. First, is studying participants' perceived adoption and its drivers a sufficient basis for a practice-based DBA? Second, how should a practitioner-researcher handle the tension of testing their own practice based methodology as academic research? Third, what are the implications of framing adoption as a spectrum for evaluating leadership micro-interventions?

I invite examination of whether these methodological choices are robust enough to sustain a thesis.

Supervisors: Nathalie Van Meurs (Middlesex University).

Track R: From an Organisational Psychology Perspective, how can an Organisation Leadership Focus on Happiness Manifest Greater Productivity and Organisational Citizenship

Author: Andreas Marcou

## Rationale and Aim

The relationship between employee happiness and productivity has become a central concern in organisational psychology. Research consistently demonstrates that well-being is not a peripheral issue but a strategic driver of performance. Leaders, as builders of workplace culture, hold the capacity to transform organisational practices to cultivate happiness, which in turn manifests as greater productivity.

In the industrial era, productivity was a function of mechanical efficiency; the worker was a cog, and their emotional state was largely irrelevant to the speed of the assembly line. In the modern knowledge economy however, productivity is a function of cognitive engagement, creativity, and collaboration. As the nature of work has shifted, so too has the imperative for leaders to understand the psychological mechanisms of their workforce. The happiness at work (HAW) literature suggests that happy workers are not merely more satisfied, but objectively more productive (Wright & Cropanzano, 2004).

The aim of this research is to understand the mechanism by leaders can pull to foster the best environment and management tools and methodologies to foster happier workers who engage in greater organisational citizenship behaviours in turn, greater productivity.

## Methodology (planned)

My planned methodology is to base the initial research within the NHS. The NHS carries out an annual staff survey. The survey is responded to by over a million employees and consists of 111 questions that asks a wide range of questions, from the very practical such as number of hours worked to the more subjective such as how valued they feel by their managers. Although there are no questions that directly ask about happiness, there are several that offer good alignment to many of the antecedents of happiness and organisational citizenship. A focus on the most HAW relevant questions should offer suitable proxies for happiness. Once positive and negative deviants have been identified in this way, more thorough qualitative research with particular teams and subsequent interventions can take be initiated and studied.

## Expected findings

I expect to find a positive correlation between happiness and work and productivity expressed as a direct link of via greater organisational citizenship behaviour. I also expect to find specific leadership interventions that when applied leader to greater HAW, that can be universalised in a management product with commercial benefits.

Supervisors: Nathalie Van Meurs (Middlesex University); Paul Gooderham (Middlesex University).

# Abstracts

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Track R: "I Was There Too": Other-than-Human Voice and the Inconsistencies of Recognising PaR in Practice

Author: Elisabetta del Ponte

This paper examines a key challenge within practice as research (PaR): how to acknowledge and communicate the voices of other-than-human collaborators within academic frameworks that still privilege human-centred and text-led modes of knowledge production. Positioned within the conference theme 'Shifting Landscapes of Research in Critical Times', it reflects on how methodological and epistemological shifts in PaR, as articulated by practitioners and theorists such as Bolt and Nelson, are not always equally recognised in academic assessment. Prompted by reflections arising from a practice-based doctorate grounded in posthuman thought, the paper considers how collaborative and other-than-human dimensions of research may still encounter complexity when assessed through conventional academic expectations. In that doctorate, the written thesis explicitly engaged concepts such as Braidotti's zoe-egalitarianism, Bennett's vibrant matter, and Barad's intra-action and the collaborative performative practice through which other-than-human voices emerged invited different modes of attention. Positioning LaG, an other-than-human collaborator in that research, as presenter of these findings continues the project's ethical and methodological commitments, while resonating with Haraway's call to rethink relations, responsibilities, and ways of knowing. The paper argues that critical times demand not only new research topics but also new listening practices. If research culture is truly shifting, its evaluative structures must shift too. It may not be sufficient to accept PaR in principle while remaining hesitant before the non-traditional forms of relation, responsibility, and collaboration through which such research produces knowledge. Although PaR is increasingly recognised as a valid mode of knowledge production, its assessment may still operate through familiar assumptions about what constitutes research, who or what may participate in knowledge-making, and whose voices are most readily received as credible. Drawing on practice as well as theory, the paper advocates for more conceptually coherent and ethically responsive approaches to recognising posthuman, collaborative research.

Supervisors: Alexandra Kokoli (Middlesex University).

Track R: Speaking the Quiet Pieces Out Loud: Vulnerability and Voice in an Enmeshed Self Inquiry

Author: Donna Reddy

What does it mean to research in a context of vulnerability without risking one's own? What becomes possible when the researcher speaks the quiet pieces out loud? How does discernment develop and mature to guide the researcher ethically in emergent, in vivo, moments?

This presentation emerges from an Enmeshed Self Inquiry situated within hospice care, where stories are encountered, held in relationship, and shaped through a trusting, values-based co-creative process that I call storying together. This research is motivated by a desire to deepen connection through rhizomatic communications: to enable stories to move, breathe, teach, connect, and enrich lives.

As both communications practitioner and researcher, I find myself implicated in the very dynamics I seek to understand. Echoing Coelho's conceptualisation of alchemy in which nothing can be transformed until the alchemist herself transforms, this work asks for transformation, not as an outcome, but as a condition. In acknowledging my own enmeshment, how can I navigate the inherent polarity: intimacy:boundaries? What is ethical to share, and what must remain held? Where is the line between witnessing and exposing?

Moments of encounter have revealed my agency in finding my voice and accompanying others as they find theirs, our mutual vulnerability creating solidarities and enduring connections. Yet these moments also disrupt conventional research expectations. There is no problem to solve here, no clean resolution. Instead, there is process: emergent, entangled, alive.

Guided by the belief that "there is a crack in everything—that's how the light gets in," (Leonard Cohen) this work dwells in the fissures and liminal spaces: between self and other, story and silence, ethics and expression. It illustrates research as an act of courage, integrity, and shared humanity, and invites an emergent depiction of storying together as a relational practice that may guide other practitioners enmeshed in sensitive care settings.

Supervisors: David Adams (Middlesex University).

# Abstracts

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Track S: Policy, Practice, and Access: Comparative Analysis of Alcohol Treatment Systems in Turkey and the UK

Author: Merve Çetinkaya

Alcohol consumption continues to be a significant public health issue worldwide. Alcohol use disorder is a serious problem that affects not only the individual but also society in multifaceted ways. It has adverse effects on individuals' physical and mental health. On a societal level, it contributes to reduced social welfare by reducing workforce productivity and labour capacity. Furthermore, healthcare expenditures associated with the treatment of alcohol-related conditions impose a substantial economic burden on healthcare systems. Therefore, the provision of effective treatment services for alcohol use disorder is one of the key priorities of health policies.

This research aims to evaluate the alcohol treatment landscapes in Turkey and the UK by focusing on three key pillars: national policies, clinical practices, and patient access. It examines the similarities and differences between the two countries' alcohol treatment systems, exploring how national healthcare policies, institutional arrangements, and cultural attitudes toward alcohol and addiction shape service delivery and treatment engagement. This study adopts a qualitative literature review methodology, synthesising and critically analysing existing academic literature, policy documents, and public health reports from both countries. Ultimately, this study seeks to contribute to the international comparative literature on alcohol addiction treatment and to support the development of more accessible, effective, and sustainable treatment services.

Supervisors: Camille Alexis-Garsee (Middlesex University); Betsy Thom (Middlesex University); Helen Gleeson (Middlesex University).

Track S: Boundary-Preserving Core-Selective Enhancement with Stain-Prior U-Net for Robust Ovarian Cancer Nuclei Segmentation in H&E Histopathology

Author: Kezban Alpan

Pathologists examine H&E-stained tissue slides to understand how ovarian tumours are structured at cellular level. In digital pathology, AI can support this process by marking cell nuclei, because the size, density, and shape of nuclei can provide useful information about tumour behaviour. However, H&E images often vary in colour and brightness because of differences in staining, scanning, and slide preparation. These variations can make the same type of tissue look different across images and can reduce the reliability of automated analysis. This study investigates whether carefully controlled image enhancement can make ovarian histopathology images clearer for AI-based nuclear segmentation without changing important cell structures. The dataset includes 6,023 image patches from the NIH/NCI PLCO resource, taken from whole-slide images of 31 High Grade Serous Carcinoma cases and 15 Serous Cystadenoma cases. Initial nucleus masks were generated with StarDist and reviewed by a pathologist. The image-processing stage first reduced stain differences between slides and then enhanced the darker nuclear centres while protecting nuclear borders. Therefore, the aim was not simply to increase contrast, but to improve the visibility of nuclei in a controlled and structure-preserving way. To validate the approach, the same segmentation models and training settings were tested on both the original and enhanced images. Patient-level training, validation, and test splits were used to avoid leakage between patients. Performance was assessed using overlap measures that compare AI predictions with reference masks, statistical tests of colour and contrast changes, and a second-stage classification test based on interpretable nuclear and stain features. The proposed stain-aware U-Net reached Dice = 0.84 and Jaccard = 0.72, while the feature-based Random Forest classifier achieved 95.61% test accuracy and 0.9924 ROC-AUC for distinguishing the two histology groups.

Supervisors: Song Wen (Middlesex University); Shahedur Rahman (Middlesex University).

# Abstracts

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Track S: Dynamic Mode Decomposition for EEG  
Classification: A Generalisable Pipeline for Complex Time Series

Author: Sailendra Ramanna

This research explores how advanced Machine Learning (ML) techniques can support the analysis of complex temporal signals in an era of rapidly evolving data-driven research. Electroencephalography (EEG), widely used in cognitive neuroscience, presents significant challenges due to its low signal-to-noise ratio, high dimensionality, and non-stationary nature. Traditional analysis methods often struggle to capture the evolving temporal dynamics of brain activity, limiting their effectiveness in classification tasks.

This study proposes a novel multi-stage pipeline based on Dynamic Mode Decomposition (DMD), a technique that models EEG signals as evolving dynamical systems. The proposed framework integrates signal embedding, DMD-based decomposition, temporal reconstruction, signal smoothing, and classification using a Convolutional Neural Network (CNN). This decomposition-driven approach enables the extraction of stable temporal patterns that are not readily captured using conventional spectral or time-domain methods. In addition, frequency factorisation is used to evaluate the discriminative contribution of individual EEG frequency bands.

The methodology is evaluated using a publicly available Kaggle EEG dataset derived from the PhysioNet EEG Motor Movement/Imagery database, comprising recordings from 109 participants across 64 channels sampled at 160 Hz. The study focuses on baseline eyes-open versus eyes-closed conditions, providing a balanced and realistic benchmark for evaluating EEG classification performance.

Results demonstrate that the DMD-based pipeline achieves strong classification performance while remaining robust to noise and inter-subject variability. To further investigate generalisability, the same framework was also applied to COVID-19 time-series data, demonstrating that the proposed decomposition-driven methodology can extend beyond EEG to broader temporal learning problems.

Supervisors: David Windridge (Middlesex University).

Track T: An exploratory study of the Indian investor behaviour towards sustainability - An Institutional Complexity Approach.

Author: Rashita Ponmanichintakam

**Introduction** The thesis aims to investigate the perceptions of Indian investors towards sustainability and sustainability information, in the context of the mandatory sustainability reporting introduced in India from the financial year 2022/23. Through the lens of knowledgeable investment decision-makers (hereafter referred to as Professional Investors or PI), the study aims to understand their current practice of incorporating sustainability aspects in investment decisions.

**Research aims**

RO1- To explore whether Indian professional investors incorporate sustainability in their investment decision-making process.

RO2- To evaluate whether professional investors perceive mandatory sustainability reporting as a useful mechanism to support investment decisions.

**Research methods**

The study adopts a qualitative method of data collection. In the first phase of the research, eighteen semi-structured interviews were conducted with professional investors in their official capacity to capture the practical organisational setting. An inductive coding technique has been applied, and thematic analysis is used to obtain preliminary insights.

**Expected contribution**

The study is the first to explore the perceptions and the use of the newly mandated sustainability reporting framework of Indian professional investors. Except for one recent study that has used qualitative methods to assess perceptions of individual investors, no other study has been found that offers rich insights into the perspectives of key decision makers, such as analysts and fund managers, on the new framework. The empirical findings interpreted using the lens of institutional logics will unearth the ground realities in the professional practice of investing, highlighting India's cultural landscape. The findings are expected to inform policymakers on the ongoing institutionalisation practices around sustainability reporting and their impact on the investing field.

Supervisors: Dr. Nitin Deshmukh (Middlesex University), Dr. Sulaiman Aliyu (Kingston University).

# Abstracts

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Track T: Researching Emerging Technologies in Critical Times: A Hybrid Decision Model for Quantum as a Service Investments in SME Energy Management

Author: Eda Sorani

The energy sector is undergoing profound transformation through renewable integration, decentralisation, electrification, and digitalisation, which is increasing the complexity of operational and investment decisions in energy intensive SMEs (Bruno Burger, 2024; Statistisches Bundesamt, 2025; Agora Energiewende, 2025). In this context, Quantum-as-a-Service (QaaS) is emerging as a potentially valuable access model for addressing high dimensional optimisation problems in energy management, including load forecasting, flexibility management and energy aware production scheduling (Colucci et al., 2023; Blenninger et al., 2024; Nikmehr et al., 2022). Yet its practical adoption remains constrained by technological immaturity, uncertain value realisation, and the absence of robust investment appraisal tools for SMEs (Orús et al., 2019; Peter Cooper et al., 2022; Smuts et al., 2024).

This doctoral project addresses that gap by developing a hybrid decision model for evaluating QaaS-investments in the energy management of manufacturing SMEs under technological uncertainty. The study asks how economic and technological criteria can be identified and operationalised, how such criteria can be weighted under different SME risk profiles, and how qualitative expert judgements and quantitative indicators can be integrated into a scenario based evaluation model (Lin & Kulatilaka, 2007; Trigeorgis & Reuer, 2017; Kauffman et al., 2015).

Methodologically, the project follows a convergent mixed methods design. A structured literature review is combined with semi structured expert interviews to derive and validate investment criteria. These are then translated into a scenario based MCDA framework, informed by utility logic and sensitivity analysis (Kuckartz, 2014; Kühnapfel, 2021; Belton & Stewart, 2002).

Expected outcomes include a validated catalogue of Quantum-as-a-Service investment criteria, scenario dependent weighting logics, and a practice oriented decision tool for manufacturing SMEs. The project contributes to research on emerging technologies in critical times by showing how investment evaluation itself must shift when firms assess disruptive and still immature technologies under volatile energy and market conditions.

Supervisor: Andrea Werner (Middlesex University)

# Poster Abstracts

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Poster Expo Title: Optimizing safety and efficacy of antibiotic therapy in critically ill patients

Author: Yury Surovov

Polymyxin B (PMB) remains one of the few antibiotics active against carbapenem-resistant organisms, yet its use in critically ill patients is complicated by highly variable pharmacokinetics and a narrow therapeutic window. The aim of this work was to improve safety and efficacy of PMB therapy.

A validated immunoassay enabled reliable quantification of PMB in the range of 5-192 ng/mL. This provided the foundation for clinical pharmacokinetic studies in critically ill patients, including those receiving extracorporeal membrane oxygenation (ECMO) and continuous renal replacement therapy.

The work demonstrated that critical illness and organ support significantly affect PMB pharmacokinetics. PMB exposure was higher in ECMO patients ( $AUC_{0-24}$  of 97 vs 70 mg\*h/L in the comparator group). Sequential Organ Failure Assessment score strongly correlated with PMB clearance ( $r = -0.81$ ) and its inclusion significantly improved the popPK model. In patients with sepsis pharmacokinetic modelling identified renal function as a determinant of PMB clearance, enabling stratified dosing. The first model of PMB in continuous dialysis described extracorporeal clearance of approximately 22% and supported a dose of 200 mg/day.

A physiologically based pharmacokinetic model was developed to predict early exposure and optimize PMB loading dose strategies. This model demonstrated good predictive performance, with predicted-to-observed ratios of 0.98-1.2 and a mean absolute prediction error of 26.7%. Predicted plasma and lung exposures indicated 2.5 mg/kg as the minimum dose required.

Limited sampling approaches were explored to facilitate therapeutic drug monitoring in routine clinical practice. Two selected strategies demonstrated good performance ( $R^2 \geq 0.85$ , mean prediction error < 5%, RMSE < 15%) and increased the probability of achieving target exposure by 25-40%.

Overall, this research provides an integrated framework to optimise PMB therapy. It highlights the importance of individualised dosing and supports the use of pharmacokinetic-guided strategies to improve treatment outcomes while minimising toxicity.

Supervisors: Richard Bayford (Middlesex University).

Poster Expo Title: Exploring Attentional Processing in ADHD: A Questionnaire-Based Investigation

Author: Tasneem Akbar

Interoceptive awareness is the perception and regulation of internal bodily signals. It is less known how interoception is processed in individuals with ADHD. This study examined how interoception in ADHD relates to both sensory processing and attentional control. The sample consisted of 259 UK adults aged 18 to 35, including 124 with ADHD and 135 neurotypical controls, all without an autism spectrum diagnosis. Participants completed an online survey that measured interoceptive awareness using the Multidimensional Assessment of Interoceptive Awareness, Version 2 (MAIA-2), attentional control using the Attentional Control Scale (ACS), and sensory processing patterns using the Adolescent/Adult Sensory Profile (AASP).

This investigation found that lower attentional control (ACS) was associated with a higher likelihood of ADHD classification, indicating that difficulties sustaining and shifting attention are central to the disorder. Sensory processing patterns (AASP) revealed that higher sensation seeking was linked to a lower likelihood of ADHD, suggesting that actively seeking sensory stimulation differentiates typical individuals from those with ADHD. Interoceptive awareness (MAIA-2) showed that difficulty ignoring distracting internal bodily sensations (Not-Distracting subscale) was the strongest predictor of ADHD group membership. These results indicate that attentional control, sensory processing tendencies, and the regulation of bodily signals each contribute uniquely to ADHD. Overall, these findings contribute to the complex nature of ADHD and its impact on attentional engagement with both internal bodily states and the external environment.

Supervisors: Alexander Jones (Middlesex University); Jonathan Silas (Middlesex University).

# Poster Abstracts

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Poster Expo Title: The role of Epithelial-mesenchymal transition, vasculogenic mimicry, cancer stem cells in tnbc, non-tnbc and normal breast tissues

Author: Oluwatosin Taiwo

Breast cancer is the most frequently diagnosed cancer in women worldwide, with approximately 2.3 million new cases and 670,000 deaths reported in 2022. Triple-negative breast cancer (TNBC) is an aggressive subtype characterised by the absence of estrogen, progesterone, and human epidermal growth factor receptor 2 (HER2) expression. In Nigeria, TNBC accounts for a disproportionately high proportion of breast cancer cases, with prevalence rates ranging from 41% to over 50%, and is often associated with late-stage presentation and poor survival outcomes.

Due to its lack of targetable receptors, TNBC treatment has been limited mainly to chemotherapy; however, its cellular plasticity and heterogeneity have posed significant challenges for effective treatments. Previous studies have shown that Epithelial-Mesenchymal Transition (EMT), Vasculogenic Mimicry (VM), and Cancer Stem Cells (CSCs) might be involved in cancer progression and metastasis in TNBC. EMT enables epithelial cells to acquire mesenchymal properties, facilitating invasion of surrounding tissues. VM allows tumour cells to form their own blood vessels independent of endothelial cells, promoting metastasis. CSCs represent a self-renewing subpopulation with high tumourigenic potential. All these features could contribute to chemoresistance in TNBC.

The aim of this research is to explore the connection between EMT, VM, and CSC activity in TNBC among the Nigerian population, by comparing relevant bio-markers' expression in TNBC tissue samples with non-TNBC and normal breast tissues.

Formalin-fixed paraffin-embedded breast cancer tissue blocks (30-TNBC and 30-Non-TNBC) plus 20 normal breast tissue blocks were obtained from African Research Group of Oncology Nigeria. Haematoxylin and Eosin staining will be conducted to assess tissue architecture, and immunohistochemical staining will evaluate individual markers. Statistical analysis comparing markers' expressions and correlations across groups will be performed.

Results will shed light on the key molecular mechanisms underlying TNBC including tumour progression, invasion, and chemoresistance. This would support the identification of novel therapeutic targets and improve therapeutic effectiveness in Nigeria where TNBC prognosis is poor.

Supervisors: Britta Stordal (Middlesex University)

Poster Expo Title: Soil Microbial Community Dynamics in Urban Tiny Forests: Effects of Pre-Soil Treatments, Tree Diversity and Temporal Variation Using eDNA

Author: Kianet Perwaiz

Urbanisation has changed natural landscapes, resulting in the loss of green spaces and disturbance of soil ecosystems. Urban soils are frequently disturbed and polluted, and vegetation is changing which can affect microbial communities. Soil microorganisms are the foundation of ecosystem function, mediating nutrient cycling, decomposition and plant health. Tiny Forests are a method to restore biodiversity and ecological function in urban environments. Although benefits above ground are documented, less is known about soil microbiomes in these systems.

This research explores soil bacterial community assembly in urban Tiny Forests and their dependence on soil pretreatments, tree species diversity, forest age and seasonality. It compares newly planted and established Tiny Forests with a nearby tree-free control site to assess effects of management strategies on microbial composition, focusing on four sites in the Mutton Brook area of London.

A transect-based sampling design will collect soil from the upper 0–10 cm in spring and summer. Soil properties including pH, moisture content, organic matter, nutrients, electrical conductivity and heavy metals will be measured. Tree species composition and diversity will also be recorded.

Bacterial communities will be characterised using 16S rRNA metabarcoding via environmental DNA (eDNA). Amplicon Sequence Variants will be generated using QIIME2 and analysed using alpha and beta diversity metrics, with multivariate statistics including PCA and PERMANOVA.

This research will improve understanding of microbial assembly in urban restoration. Findings will inform Tiny Forest design for improving soil biodiversity and ecosystem resilience and demonstrate the potential of eDNA for monitoring microbial diversity in urban forestry projects.

Supervisors: Diane Purchase (Middlesex University); Martijn Timmermans (Middlesex University); Dirk Wildeboer (Middlesex University).

# Poster Abstracts

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Poster Expo Title: Enhancing Engagement Through Assessment-Driven Gamification with SOBmonitor

Author: David Dorvekinger

SOBmonitor is a web-based assessment platform designed to support competency-based education through the implementation of Student Observable Behaviours (SOBs). Each SOB represents a measurable competency aligned with module learning outcomes and serves as an atomic unit of assessment. These competencies are structured across three levels: Threshold, Typical, and Excellent. Threshold SOBs define the minimum requirements for passing a module, while Typical and Excellent SOBs extend learning by encouraging deeper exploration and independent research.

The SOB framework promotes active, student-centred learning by allowing students to progress at their own pace and demonstrate competencies through diverse forms of evidence, such as coding, presentations, or practical tasks. This approach accommodates varying levels of prior knowledge and supports experiential learning. Observations made by assessors generate rich datasets that provide a more comprehensive understanding of student performance compared to traditional assessment methods. SOBmonitor captures and visualises these data, offering both students and educators detailed insights into progression across disciplinary and interdisciplinary contexts.

In the context of rapidly shifting research and educational landscapes, shaped by advances in artificial intelligence, evolving pedagogical priorities, and the need for interdisciplinary approaches, this research examines how SOBmonitor can respond to these changes. The research aims to enhance the platform by integrating more cohesive and meaningful gamification elements to improve engagement and motivation. A mixed-methods approach is adopted, combining system design iterations, user feedback, and analysis of engagement patterns. The study expects to explore whether incorporating narrative-driven and interactive features can foster deeper student participation and support self-regulated learning. This platform aims to contribute to the broader discussions on the role of technology-enhanced assessment in addressing complex educational challenges, offering a scalable and adaptive model that aligns with present demands for innovation, resilience, and hopeful futures in education.

Supervisors: Kelly Androutsopoulos (Middlesex University); Michael Heeney (Middlesex University).

Poster Expo Title: "Fat" Test - Framework for Non-Stigmatizing Body Representation

Author: Katerina Schmidova

In a media landscape shaped by shifting cultural norms and increasing demands for inclusive representation, the depiction of overweight female bodies in film remains constrained by persistent stereotypes and narrative conventions. This paper introduces the Fat Representation Framework, a practice-based critical framework designed to evaluate the portrayal of overweight female characters in contemporary cinema. Inspired by evaluative models such as the Bechdel Test (Bechdel, 1985), the framework proposes three core criteria: the absence of negative or stigmatising references to body size, the rejection of transformation narratives that require bodily change for narrative resolution, and the positioning of the character beyond reductive or stereotypical functions. Situated within film studies and media practice research, this project responds to the conference theme "Shifting Landscapes of Research in Critical Times" by combining theoretical analysis with an audiovisual methodology. In addition to written argumentation, the paper is accompanied by a video essay that applies the framework across a selection of films. Rather than functioning as a simple illustrative tool, the video essay operates as a methodological extension of the framework, enabling a close examination of formal elements such as framing, editing, performance, and sound that contribute to the construction of meaning. By structuring the analysis across thematic criteria rather than individual case studies, the project highlights recurring patterns of representation while also identifying moments of ambiguity and resistance.

Rather than employing a binary system of passing or failing, the Fat Representation Framework adopts a traffic-light model that recognises varying degrees of representation. Films are categorised as green when they offer largely non-stigmatising and multidimensional portrayals, amber when representations contain both progressive and problematic elements, and red when portrayals rely heavily on stereotypes, body-based stigma, or transformation narratives. This approach allows for a more nuanced assessment of representation and acknowledges the complexities of contemporary screen texts.

As a work in progress, the Fat Representation Framework does not seek to offer a definitive evaluative model but to open a critical space for discussing embodiment, visibility, and narrative agency. The project ultimately argues for the value of practice-based, audiovisual forms of scholarship in rethinking how representation is analysed, communicated, and challenged in contemporary screen media.

Supervisors: Helen Bendon (Middlesex University).

# PGRSC 2026: Biography Information

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## Message from the Director of Postgraduate Research



Dr Nico Pizzolato

For nearly 20 years, the postgraduate research community at Middlesex University has come together each summer for the annual Postgraduate Research Conference. This event is not only a formative experience for our postgraduate researchers, helping them to develop their projects through discussion and to strengthen their communication and critical engagement skills; it is also an opportunity to break down silos across fields, disciplines, and departments.

It is a joyful occasion to celebrate one of the University's core missions: nurturing the next generation of researchers and, in doing so, helping to secure a future of innovation and knowledge creation for our troubled societies. Collaborations, synergies, and friendships are forged over the course of the conference.

My sincere thanks go to the Chairs — Jayne, Johan, Sofia, and Ammara — supported by Nicola, as well as to the Organising Committee, for their commitment to this inspiring event.



Associate Prof Han Sang Kim

Han Sang Kim is an associate professor of sociology at Ajou University. His research and teaching interests include visual sociology, qualitative methods, migration and racism, and the sociology of film and media. He has conducted research and written on the themes of film archives, ethics of photographic representation, post/colonial visual culture, racism, and mobilities. He is the author of *Cine-Mobility: Twentieth-Century Transformations in Korea's Film and Transportation* (Harvard University Asia Center, 2022) and articles published in peer-reviewed journals, including *positions: asia critique*, *The Journal of Asian Studies*, *Journal of Korean Studies*, *Inter-Asian Cultural Studies*, and several other journals in Korean. As the Vice President of the International Visual Sociology Association (IVSA), he works closely with Middlesex University's Susan Hansen, the IVSA President.



Associate Prof Susan Hansen

Susan is President of the International Visual Sociology Association and Co-Chair of the Visual and Arts-based Methods Group at Middlesex University, London. She is a former Editor of the IVSA's flagship journal, *Visual Studies*; founding Editor of *Nuart Journal*; Co-Editor (with Jeffrey Ian Ross and Konstantinos Avramidis) of the Routledge Series on Advances in Graffiti and Street Art Research; and Co-Editor (with Julie Patarin-Jossec and Kate Korroch) of the forthcoming (2026) *Companion to Visual Studies* (Routledge).



Professor EJ Reynolds

**Mobilising Matters: Staying with the political troubles in the field of Relationships and Sexuality Education**

EJ Renold is Professor of Childhood Studies at the School of Education, Manchester Metropolitan University. Their research investigates how gender and sexuality, in all their human and more-than-human diversity, come to matter in children and young people's everyday lives across diverse sites, spaces and locales. Here, they have explored the affordances of how creative, coproduced methods, resources and events can engage micro and macro political change with young people, teachers, youth workers, educators, health professionals, policy-makers and politicians (see [www.agendaonline.co.uk](http://www.agendaonline.co.uk)). EJ was the winner of the UK's ESRC Impact in Society Prize (2018), the Huw Owen Medal for Outstanding Educational Research in Wales (2021) and received the American Education Research Association's Critical Posthuman and Postfoundational SIG's Collaborative Excellence award in 2025. Their forthcoming edited collection (with Huuki, Pihkala and Taylor) *Creative Research on Gender and Sexuality with Children and Young People: Making Methods Matter* (Routledge) will be published in summer 2026.



Professor Klaus Dodds

#### Warming climate, cooling relations: Geopolitics at the top of the world

Nowhere is the dual threat of climate change and geopolitical contest felt more strongly than in the Arctic. Sea ice is declining rapidly, wildfires are burning, and permafrost is thawing. All the while, global interest is gathering apace as the region transforms from being a frozen desert into an international waterway. Growing geopolitical competition is accompanying environmental disruption. Countries including Russia, China, and the United States are investing in the Arctic and consolidating their interests in strategic access, resource exploitation, and alliance-building. The consequences of this emerging Arctic Anthropocene are truly global—from rising sea levels due to melting glaciers to tensions between great powers determined to protect their territory and resources, and the well-being of Indigenous Peoples who have fought for centuries for rights and recognition.



Professor of Childhood Studies at the Centre for Education Research & Scholarship at Middlesex University  
Chair of Post Graduate Research Summer Conference 2026

Dr [Jayne Osgood](#) is Professor of Childhood Studies based at the Centre for Education Research & Scholarship, Middlesex University, London (UK). Her present methodologies and research practices are framed by critical feminist posthumanities. Her work foregrounds worldly justice by working directly with children and early childhood communities; and through critical engagements with early childhood policy, curricular frameworks and pedagogical approaches. For example, her current projects include [Making Oddkin](#) and [Towards Toddlerhood](#) which both take up artful approaches to re-imagining childhood. She has over 150 publications: her books include *Narratives from the Nursery: negotiating professional identities in Early Childhood* (2012); *Post-developmental Approaches to Childhood Art* (2019); *Feminists Researching Gendered Childhoods* (2019) *Postdevelopmental Approaches to Play* (2025) and *Gender Un/bound: Traversing Educational Possibilities* (2025). She is book series editor of *Feminist Thought in Childhood Research* (Bloomsbury) and *Key Thinkers in Education* (Springer). She serves on several editorial boards including *Childhood Art*; *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, *International Critical Childhood Policy Studies*, recently retired as Editor at *Gender & Education Journal*; and continues to serve as Editor for *Reconceptualising Education Research Methodology Journal*.

She was winner of the MDXSU Post Graduate Supervisor of the year, having successfully supervised seventeen doctoral researchers to completion and examined twenty-eight doctoral theses in the UK, Norway, Canada, USA, Australia, and Hong Kong. She is currently External Examiner for the taught PhD programme at Lancaster University. Jayne is thoroughly committed to ensuring that PGRs are well supported and can thrive by being active within research communities.



Professor Johan Siebers

Johan Siebers is Professor of Language and Communication at Middlesex, in the School of Law and Social Sciences. His research explores rhetoric, language, communication and the philosophy of hope, with a particular interest in how meaning emerges through dialogue and human interaction.

Throughout his career, Johan has worked across disciplines, combining perspectives from linguistics, philosophy, rhetoric, literary studies, and the social sciences. He is currently developing an interdisciplinary approach to the study of spoken interaction that seeks to reconnect rhetoric with contemporary research on language and communication. He has applied this approach to environmental futures, most recently in the UKRI project Treescapes: Voices of the Future. Johan has published widely in his areas of research and is editor of the *European Journal for Philosophy of Communication*, *Routledge Research in Anticipation and Futures*, *The Brill Bloch Bibliothek*, as well as on the editorial board of journals including *Language and Communication and Futures*.

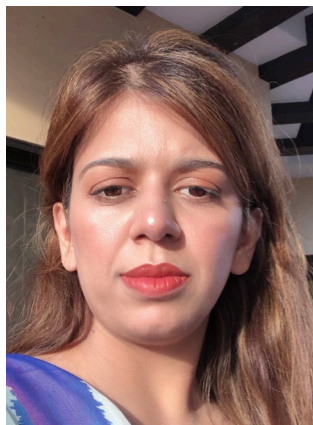
As an educator and academic leader, Johan supports researchers at all stages of their careers and fosters intellectual communities that encourage curiosity, creativity, and critical inquiry. He is delighted to be co-chairing the Middlesex University Postgraduate Researchers' Summer Conference 2026 to explore the Shifting Landscapes of Research in Critical Times.

A strong believer in the contemporary relevance of orality in scholarship, Johan sees research as flourishing through conversation and looks forward to welcoming postgraduate researchers from across Middlesex and its partner institutions to this year's conference.



Professor Kate Maguire

Kate is responsible for the Transdisciplinary Doctor of Professional Studies by Portfolio in the Faculty of Business and Law and works with a small, dedicated team to support established professionals to critically engage with their own outputs (papers, policies, publications, artefacts). The candidates come from a variety of sectors and meet every fortnight in a virtual café to exchange ideas and share their creativity and imagination as they navigate highly complex, rapidly changing and interdependent environments of diverse activities.



Ammara Abid

Doctoral Researcher in Counselling Psychology and Psychotherapy. Metanoia Institute / Middlesex University.

Ammara Abid is a doctoral researcher and trainee counselling psychologist/psychotherapist whose work explores Islamic psychology, faith-informed understandings of psychological distress, and meaning-making within Muslim lived experience. Her research critically examines how emotional suffering, identity, spirituality, and wellbeing are understood beyond dominant biomedical frameworks, with particular attention to culturally responsive approaches within counselling and psychotherapy.

She holds an MRes in Sports, Health and Applied Sciences from St Mary's University, where her qualitative research explored the influence of cultural differences on healthcare access and lifestyle among South Asian communities in London. She also holds a BSc (Hons) Psychology from the University of West London.

Alongside her doctoral and clinical training, Ammara has worked across counselling, healthcare, educational, and community settings, supporting both adults and young people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Her therapeutic and research interests include identity, belonging, trauma, emotional wellbeing, faith, migration, and culturally informed therapeutic practice.

Her current research draws upon qualitative and interpretative approaches to investigate how faith, identity, and spiritual worldviews shape experiences of psychological distress and therapeutic meaning-making among Muslim communities. Through integrating counselling psychology with Islamic psychological perspectives, her work aims to contribute to more inclusive, culturally attuned, and ethically responsive mental health research and practice.



Dr Sid Mohandas

Dr Sid Mohandas is a Montessori practitioner and childhood studies scholar, whose research in early childhood employs feminist, decolonial, anticolonial and more-than-human approaches. Sid has published extensively in peer-reviewed journals and edited book collections. They are the author of the Bloomsbury Academic book *Re-imagining Gender in the Early Childhood Workforce: Feminist and More-than-human Perspectives*. More recently Sid co-edited the Special Issue on 'Bewildering early childhood pioneers' in the journal *Pedagogy, Culture and Society*, and is currently the co-editor for a Special Issue in *British Education Research Journal* titled 'The state of gender(s), young people and education: inequities, inter/intrasectionality and inclusivity'. Sid also serves as an editorial board member for the journal *Reconceptualizing Educational Research Methodology*.



Dr Miranda Lewis

Dr Miranda Lewis recently completed the Doctorate in Professional Studies (DProf) at Middlesex University. Miranda's professional background spans 30 years of working with the not-for-profit sector as a researcher and evaluator. She is co-founder and Director of m2 consultants, an agency working with social, environmental and heritage organisations. During the DProf programme Miranda focused upon the role of creativity in social research, looking at how asking questions differently can help people and organisations to imagine and bring about positive social change.



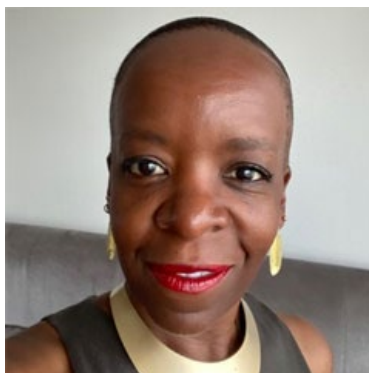
Dr Deepika Nallathambi

Dr Deepika Nallathambi completed her Ph. D in Creative Writing at Middlesex University London and graduated in June 2025. She writes detective fiction, and her research focused on the marginalization and misrepresentation of dark-skinned people, women and people with disabilities, particularly blindness. She is a blind woman from India, and her research and writings draws on her lived experience as well as research already undertaken in the areas of post-colonialism, feminism and disability studies. Her stories are based on crimes such as rape, sex trafficking, crimes against people with disabilities, violence against the third gender community, honor killing and smuggling.



Dr Alan Wheeler

Dr Alan Wheeler is an academic librarian, researcher and playful learning practitioner in HE. Since 2016, he has employed Lego(R) Serious Play(R) in his practice, facilitating workshops and participating in roundtables at conferences to promote the approach within academic librarianship and the wider academic community. His published output has incorporated audio recordings, paintings and autoethnography to engage audiences and demonstrate a non-traditional approach to scholarly output within academia. He is also a lifelong Arsenal fan, so is currently quite unbearable to be around.



Dr Zandi Ndlovu

My doctoral research changed the direction of my life in ways I could not have anticipated. Exploring experiences of inclusion and exclusion deepened my understanding of the relationship between self and structure, influencing both my professional choices and my creative practice. A defining feature of the research was the use of creative methods, including poetry and a research-based play. Creativity enabled me to engage with the emotional and relational dimensions of experience and became more than a way of communicating research, it became a way of knowing. The work continues to shape my writing, facilitation, and approach to creating spaces for reflection and dialogue.



Sofia Atsopardi

Sofia has graduated from the Law School of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece and holds an MA in Criminology with Forensic Psychology (Distinction) from Kingston University, London. She is a doctoral candidate at Middlesex University London, focusing on public international law, international environmental law and climate change. Her academic interests include international criminal and humanitarian law and human rights law.

She works as a Quality Assurance Officer at AKTO College Athens –one of Middlesex’ academic partners— where she is involved in maintaining academic quality standards and processes. She previously worked as Research Programmes Coordinator at Middlesex University, a role that entailed strategy building, training and development, academic planning for the research provision and stakeholder engagement within and outside the University.



Janine La Rosa

Janine La Rosa is a Doctoral Researcher Professional Studies (Transdisciplinary) (DProf TD). Her research is focussed on leadership in challenging contexts, with particular emphasis on Joy and it's transformative and protective properties. Alongside her research she is currently on secondment from her substantive position as Chief People and Strategy Officer in a large acute hospital, supporting a DHSC project to reduce heart disease in Londoners. Over the course of the doctoral research process Janine has been fascinated by the impact on self of being research and researcher, going on a journey In wayfinding herself. Janine has qualified as a reiki practitioner, meditation teacher and has recently launched a meditation course. All things unimaginable three years ago but part of her embracing being TD!



