Making research make a difference   
Research impact in the School of Psychology

*‘an effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia’ (UKRI)*

Welcome to the School of Psychology’s first impact report. Its aim is to showcase how our research is making a difference in the world beyond academic. Read on to see how the School’s research is improving healthcare, supporting refugees, building resilience and teamworking, and helping people and society in many other ways.

An impact strategy for the SoP

Impact is important in terms of reputation and income. Impact will contribute 25% to REF2029, with contributions from impact case studies and an impact environment statement that narrates our impact activities and culture more broadly. We have performed strongly in terms of impact in the past: for REF2021, our 4 impact case studies (Andrade, Edworthy, Lloyd, and Pahl) gained a combined score of 3.5\*, meaning that our impact was judged as falling between ‘very considerable’ and ‘outstanding’. This impact score translated into an award of £1.8 million QR money for impact alone – £259,184 per annum for 7 years. To put it another way, each impact case study we submitted earns the School around £65k each year.

Impact activities are those that help make research make a difference: public engagement; dissemination of research findings to stakeholders; public and patient involvement in research questions, design, conduct and dissemination; policy engagement; commercialisation; consultancy; work to improve legislation, protocols, guidelines etc.

The School’s strategy is to value and support impact activities while recognising that impact is only one aspect of academic life; we do not expect everyone to pursue real-world as well as academic impact from their research. I’ve provided details on strategy in the Appendix. Comments welcome.

Impact cameos

# Routes to Wellness: Improving refugees’ mental health

## Helen Lloyd, Hoayda Darkal, Wen-Yu Wu

* **Underpinning research** shows the benefits of peer led and person-centred, rather than only practitioner-led, healthcare. Routes to Wellness applies this approach to developing mental health support for refugees with diverse backgrounds and needs.
* **Impact activities**: The Routes to Wellness team are developing an inclusive model of mental health support that encompasses different refugee identities, backgrounds, and languages. As well as improving refugee mental health support, the team has established a model for participatory, cross-cultural intervention development and research with people who have been forcibly displaced. Taking part in the co-design of the intervention has brought benefits already: Nafisa, a Libyan refugee, has been a participant in the study since its inception. She initially found it difficult to open up to the group about her experiences, but now hopes to use her skills to help other people in the same situation. “I can say anything about my life, or what I used to do, or about my mental health, it’s a very good group,” she says, “I want to do more projects in the future so I can help people if they need it when they come to the UK for the first time.” The project will develop and evaluate the benefits of a peer-supported mental health programme.
* **Impact goal**: A co-produced and robustly tested peer-supported mental health programme offered to refugees across the UK and internationally.

Helping people achieve their goals

Jon Rhodes, Jackie Andrade, and Jon May

* **Underpinning research**: Functional imagery training or FIT is an imagery-based motivational interview designed to build imagery for functional goals, reduce unwanted desires, and teach self-motivation using imagery. We developed it based on our theoretical work and empirical studies of imagery in craving and motivation. Our research has shown benefits of FIT for weight loss, resilience, athletic performance, and mental health.
* **Impact activities**: Jon Rhodes, with Jo Grover in the US, set up an international company, Imagery Coaching, which offers FIT-based training courses accredited by health coaching boards in the USA, UK and Europe, and Australia and New Zealand. They published a book based on FIT - The Choice Point – which has been widely reviewed and translated into 5 languages. 36 FIT practitioners have been trained in 9 countries. FIT has been used in large companies including IBM, KPMG, Citadel Securities, and in elite sport with teams and individual athletes competing at the highest levels.
  + KPMG: "FIT enhanced productivity by fostering stronger team member relationships and provided us with a shared language to collaboratively plan and tackle challenges. While our team maintained its size, the period when Jon and Jo collaborated with us saw a remarkable 120% surge in demand for our work. We successfully delivered key milestones with stakeholders, including reports and media outputs, resulting in a substantial increase in income for the company.”
  + Citadel Securities: "It has provided me with a method to silence the noise, nurturing deep thinking and promoting heightened productivity. Citadel has experienced consistent year-on-year growth [$7 billion in the ‘23 fiscal year], and imagery training has played a pivotal role in our problem-solving approaches."
  + What the FIT Practitioners are saying about the training:
    - “A brilliant course, packed full of content, anecdotes, cutting-edge research and laughter. The course leaders are clearly experts in their field and engage with the topic in such a way that complex material is readily absorbed. I would thoroughly recommend the training to anyone interested in accessing a deeper motivational state, through applied imagery methods” – Sid Hiskey, Clinical Psychologist, UK.
    - “As a seasoned coach and someone who has experienced a depth of training, I thought the Imagery course was fantastic. It feels like a really effective coaching approach and the facilitation by Jon, Karol and Jo was of the highest quality. Would recommend to business leaders or anyone working in coaching” - Jaime Blakeley-Glover, CEO: Orientate, UK.
    - “Exceptionally unique and outstanding, this course is a true game-changer in the realm of sports. I find myself wishing I had known these methods during my competitive days. The impact is already evident in how I coach and approach challenges in both my professional and personal life” - Dan Walsh, Olympic (Medallist) Rower, USA.
* **Impact goal**: FIT included as a component of NHS treatment for weight management and used by psychological service providers for mental health support.

Student mental health

### Sophie Homer, Jon May

* **Underpinning research:** I have undertaken 3 grant-funded projects on understanding and improving student mental health, wellbeing, and loneliness. For example, in 2018, I designed, implemented, and evaluated an intervention for postgraduate research student wellbeing, ‘The Researcher Toolkit’ (project funded by OfS; PI Jon May).
* **Impact activities:** The government has set a [target](https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2023/06/09/how-supporting-university-students-mental-health/) for all universities to sign up to the [University Mental Health Charter](https://www.studentminds.org.uk/uploads/3/7/8/4/3784584/191208_umhc_artwork.pdf) by September 2024. The charter requires that universities engage in student mental health research ([pages 73-76](https://www.studentminds.org.uk/uploads/3/7/8/4/3784584/191208_umhc_artwork.pdf)). I have already contributed to a scoping exercise undertaken by Student Services, during which we established that my research would form a significant contribution to UoP’s Charter submission.
  + The Researcher Toolkit is self-sustaining and is now in its 5th iteration at UoP, having reached hundreds of PhD students over the last five years. It has been implemented by at least one other university so far (the University of Derby). In 2021 it [won a national award](https://www.fenews.co.uk/skills/national-award-for-postgraduates-mental-health-toolkit/) for ‘[Best PG Wellbeing Initiative’, hosted by FindAUniversity](https://www.findaphd.com/events/awards/generic.aspx?bpid=4231). In 2023 it was selected as one of 7 [examples of practice](https://taso.org.uk/student-mental-health-hub/examples-of-practice/) featuring in the Student Mental Health Hub, funded by the Office for Students as part of the Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education initiative. It is available open-source to other institutions via the [Vitae website](https://www.vitae.ac.uk/doing-research/wellbeing-and-mental-health/catalyst-project-resources-1) and via [UoP’s website.](https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/student-life/your-studies/research-degrees/toolkit/resources)
* **Impact goals:** My goals are to contribute to UoP’s Student Mental Health Charter submission and to expand the reach of the Researcher Toolkit by encouraging uptake at other HEIs.

Developing Transcranial Ultrasonic Stimulation as a therapeutic solution for mental health disorders

Elsa Fouragnan and team

* **Underpinning research**: Transcranial ultrasonic stimulation (TUS) offers a non-invasive method to modulate neural activity by delivering focused ultrasound waves to specific brain regions. Its advantages include precise spatial targeting, even in deep regions of the brain and minimal side effects. We have now shown that TUS can induce early phase neuroplasticity in deep regions of the brain mediating impulsivity and compulsivity, which are recognized as important factors in the development and maintenance of both substances use disorders (SUD) and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). We have now started two preclinical research projects with these patient groups.
* **Impact activities**: Elsa is an executive board member of the International Transcranial Ultrasonic Stimulation Safety and Standards (ITRUSST). She participates in all board meetings and serves on the executive committee. ITRUSST provide consensus on expert guides, guidelines, and standardization for TUS to inform the Food Drug Administration (FDA) and other regulatory bodies. This includes how TUS can be used in clinical settings.
* **Impact goal**: Raising awareness of the potential of TUS to be used to as mental health treatments.

Using Psychology to help address plastic pollution

Kayleigh Wyles, Ana Voronkova, Deb Cracknell, ...

* **Underpinning research**: Have published to show the societal cost of plastic pollution and thus raising the issue’s profile and relevance (Beaumont et al., 2019; Wyles et al., 2016). Have done work on understanding drivers of behaviour and people’s perception of plastic pollution (more articles underway, e.g., from PISCES and PPP). And reviewed, developed and tested different interventions on people’s behaviour (e.g., PPP papers in prep). A lot of the work has focused on citizen science and participatory science, and the importance it has in bridging the gap between science and society, in helping to address the socio-environmental issue, and its potential to be a behaviour change initiative in itself encouraging other pro-environmental behaviours (e.g., Kawabe et a., 2023; Praet et al., 2023; Schofield et al., 2020; Wyles et al., 2017; Wyles et al., 2019; Wyles & Ghilardi-Lopes, 2023)
* **Impact activities**: Contributing to the development of the global Plastic Treaty through the Scientists Coalition. Contributing to global advisory reports (GESAMP, SEPEA). Contributing to national government (e.g., PostNote on microbeads, participating in a Defra run Plastic Legacy workshop). Giving guidance to local councils on how to frame messages to encourage greater behaviour change (as part of PPP project). Promoting the work in different contexts (e.g., media reports, interviewed on podcasts). Invited speaker to different events (e.g., SETAC, Natural England annual conference, Keep Norway Beautiful, South Carolina Aquarium Plastic Pollution Summit, BRLSI World Affairs Talk, panellist for Arctic Frontiers). Actively supporting local practice in the University of Plymouth by being on the executive board for the Sustainability Earth Institute and part of the Sustainability Advisory Group for the university.
* **Impact goal**: For policy and/or interventions to be based on psychological evidence. And for greater inclusion of citizen science in science and policy making

# Supporting people with brain injury and their families

Alyson Norman

* **Underpinning research.** My research involves working with people with brain injury focusing on social consequences. I focus on looking at the impact of executive impairment on people’s ability to access support services due to lack of insight from the person into the extent of their disability, but also due to a lack of understanding from professionals about brain injury, which leads to poor assessment and restricted access to support and welfare services. I am also involved in research with families looking at the long-term impact of brain injury on family members.
* **Impact activities**. As part of the NIHR funded Heads Together project, I am producing a training programme for social workers and have run a series of webinars to educate them about brain injury. I have also worked with colleagues to establish an organisation focused on support the needs of family members after brain injury (Anchor Point). This has included developing education and information resources for health and social care professionals about the needs of family members.
* **Impact goal**. My impact goal is to lead policy change in brain injury through changes to Care Act regulations, Mental capacity legislation and NICE guidelines and changes in education protocols for social care professionals, as well as more screening and access to long-term rehabilitation for those with brain injuries.

# Using psychological understanding of group dynamics to improve treatment outcomes for people with severe obesity

Mark Tarrant

* **Underpinning research** PROGROUP is a new group-based behavioural intervention designed to support the care of people living with severe obesity (BMI>35kg/m2). The intervention is underpinned by theory and research on the social identity approach to health and the social identity model of behaviour change. Our research is funded by NIHR (2021-2026) and PROGROUP has recently been subjected to a feasibility randomised controlled trial (RCT). It is now being tested in a definitive RCT in specialist weight management services across the UK.
* **Impact activities** We have established links with key national / international stakeholder groups, including Association for the Study of Obesity; European Association for the Society for Obesity who will support dissemination of the project to clinical services. We will bring the research findings to the attention of relevant guideline groups through engagement with NIHR Centre for Engagement and Dissemination; NHS Innovation Groups (e.g., Trust Innovation Group, Plymouth Hospitals NHS Trust) and Health Innovation Network (formerly Academic Health Science Network). We established a patient advisory group to support dissemination of our work to patient groups.   
  Additionally, we have developed a modular training programme for health practitioners to deliver the PROGROUP intervention, incorporating self-directed learning. This training programme is available on the NHS platform, Future NHS, and will be optimised and made available to NHS practitioners free of charge, along with the intervention manuals.
* **Impact goal** The dissemination programme aims to change practice, by impacting NHS commissioning, service design and implementation, professional training and clinical practice, and patient experience and outcomes. The anticipated impact of an optimised national Tier 3 service is improved patient access to cost-effective and sustainable non-surgical intervention, offering improved QOL and reduced obesity-related health risks.  
  Short-term: Enhancing engagement of people living with severe obesity with group-based care; production of guidelines for optimising Tier 3 services; development of training programme for healthcare professionals delivering group-based weight management intervention in specialist services.   
  Medium-term: Weight loss and improved psychological health necessary to realise health benefits in a greater proportion of patients; trained facilitators demonstrating competence in running groups.   
  Long-term: Weight loss maintenance and sustained behaviour change; consistency in provision and improved cost effectiveness of NHS Tier 3 care; establishment of PROGROUP as standard care offering nationwide.

Appendix: School of Psychology impact strategy

Overall strategy: to value and support impact activities while recognising that impact is only one aspect of academic life and that we do not expect everyone to pursue real-world as well as academic impact from their research.

Objectives:

1. To value and reward impact by appointing impact lead, allocating time in WAM for identified impact work, considering impact activities in PDR, devoting staff meeting and away day time to impact, financially supporting impact activities, showcasing impact on psychology webpages
2. To support staff in identifying possible impact of their research through 1:1 conversations with impact lead and university impact support
3. To build knowledge and skills in developing impact through impact meetings, regular briefings and website links
4. To recognise that impact is often interdisciplinary and facilitate interdisciplinary collaborations through PIHC and PIHR

Impact model: RAG rated as green = done, amber = ongoing, red = to do

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| Stage | How | Outcomes |
| Developing impact culture | Appointing impact lead with overview of impact potential in school  Regular seminars and news bulletins related to impact  Impact showcased on SoP webpages  Impact covered in PDR meetings | Impact is visible  Impact is valued  Staff have good understanding of diverse routes to impact |
| Identification of impact potential | Regular encouragement to consider potential impact  Impact lead has overview of staff research interests and proactively invites discussions about impact  1:1 support meetings with impact lead | Impact sessions and activities at staff away day  Expanding pool of staff engaged in impact |
| Impact activity | Support networking with health and social care professionals, e.g., through PIHR and PIHC  Support financially through strategic research funding  Skills building and peer support through Research Impact Group  Time in WAM for building impact case study  Also time in WAM for impact activity that is not directly contributing to ICS | Staff feel that impact activities are valued and supported |
| Evidencing impact | Impact culture supported by annual impact report delivered at awayday or in writing  Staff encouraged to document potential impact | Annual report on SoP impact  Good records of impact evidence to support future case studies |
| Refining research questions | Impact discussions include how impact activities will feed back into research, to ensure research is applicable were appropriate and to reinforce that real-world application is part of the research process | Scientific research that gets attention because it has real-world implications   * Altmeter scores * Press releases |