

**Volunteering  
Service**

**U STUDENTS'  
UNION UCL**

**UCL**

# **Student Dissertation Showcase**

**Thursday 29 September  
14:00-16:00**

**COMMUNITY  
RESEARCH  
INITIATIVE**

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# Today's agenda

- 14:00** Welcome, housekeeping, introducing the Community Research Initiative
- 14:15** Opening remarks from UCL Education Sabbatical Officer
- 14:20** Why is it so important to collaborate? Keith Morgan, Voluntary Action Camden
- 14:30** Interview with Bohdana Dock, The Mix
- 14:40** Student-community partnership presentations
- 15:30** In conversation with: Sara Treneman, Meg Haskins, Veronika Dvorak
- 15:45** Hafid Ali, Camden United FC
- 16:00** Closing remarks from UCL President & Provost, invitation to celebrate
- 17:00** Celebration reception ends

# 2021-22 Collaborators: Presenters

## Sem Lee (she/her)



**Course title:**

MSc Health, Wellbeing, and Sustainable Buildings

**Community Partner:**

Laura Snoad, Forest Community Land Trust

**Dissertation title:**

Future of housing. What is the role of participation in the delivery of community-led housing?

**Academic supervisor:**

Gemma Moore

**Research abstract:**

Community-led housing models have been gaining traction at both grassroots citizen and government level over recent years and are being proposed as an alternative to mainstream, profit-driven, housing models. A defining factor of Community-led housing is the focus on the transference of power and agency over decision-making and design development of housing to local citizens and community groups, which is lacking in current traditional housing models. This lack of agency within the current housing development process could be negatively impacting citizen health leaving individuals disempowered and seemingly without control over their life circumstances which could be further exacerbating health risk from a social and physical health standpoint. This mixed methods study undertakes participatory action research in collaboration with Forest Community Land Trust. Arnstein's ladder of participation will be used to analyse the degree of participation that occurs within the delivery of Community-led housing and an adaptation of BRE Causal Pathways framework will be used to illustrate the causal pathway between participation and health. This will then act as a basis to produce an engagement model framed around Mary Douglas' worldviews to understand the potential of participation in Community-led housing to improve health outcomes for citizens and the wider population.

**[Working in this way] really taught me how to embrace how I work and what works for me. I have dyslexia and have struggled with academic work and written work over the years, but this year really taught me to acknowledge the fact that not everyone learns and consumes information in the same way and this in itself isn't a failure.**



# 2021-22 Collaborators: Presenters

## Sara Treneman (she/her)



**Course title:**  
MSc Social Policy  
& Social Research

**Dissertation title:**  
Why and how do students  
access mental health and  
wellbeing support services  
in London? An analysis of  
presenting themes in London  
Nightline callers

**Community Partner:**  
Meg Haskins &  
Veronika Dvorak,  
Nightline London

**Academic supervisor:**  
Darío Moreno-Agostino

### Research abstract:

Students experience unique challenges as they transition into university life and as a result experience lower wellbeing than other young people. London is home to a vast and diverse student body who increasingly need support for problems relating to their mental health and wellbeing. London Nightline is a student-run information and listening service that operates overnight during term time, providing support via a phonenumber, instant messenger, and email. Nightline services support students through all kinds of issues, from suicidal thoughts to how to get home after a night out, but no research is currently published that explores why and how students contact these services. Using data from London Nightline's call logs, why and how students contact Nightline was explored. Descriptive statistics uncovered that most students contact London Nightline via instant messenger (54.2%), rather than phone (44.1%) or email (1.7%). The most common reasons for contacting the service were for academic struggles, mental health concerns, sexual or romantic relationships, and depression or loneliness. Latent class analysis found three underlying profiles of individuals who contact the service; students experiencing issues to do with student life and academic stresses (60.9% of individuals), sex and relationships (19.9%), and suicide and severe mental health (19.2%). Multinomial logistic regression found students who want information rather than a listening ear have a much higher probability of calling than using instant messenger, while students who were struggling with suicidal thoughts, attempts, or self-harm were far more likely to use instant messenger than to call. It is thus recommended that Nightline services continue to invest in text-based support, particularly providing extra volunteer training on how to handle those in acute crisis or considering suicide via instant messenger.



# 2021-22 Collaborators: Presenters

## Markus Tralla (he/him)



**Course title:**  
MSc Business Analytics

**Community Partner:**  
Jennifer Barnes,  
Centrepont

**Dissertation title:**  
Predicting youth  
homelessness in England: a  
machine learning approach

**Academic supervisor:**  
Faiza Tabassum

### Research abstract:

Using data from youth homeless charity Centrepont, this paper uses machine learning techniques to predict the number of homeless youths aged 16-24 in different local authorities throughout England. The model incorporates external variables such as income, housing waitlists, domestic abuse, crime, and drug misuse among others. The paper will rank these variables in terms of feature importance, offering valuable insight into which factors are most associated with high levels of youth homelessness. This paper also suggests areas for further research, steps to improve the predictive model, and ideas for how Centrepont can incorporate these findings into their company strategy.

**Working with an organisation gave my dissertation more structure and increased my motivation – I felt strongly like I wanted to do a good job for them.**



# 2021-22 Collaborators: Presenters

## Ismat Juma (she/her)



**Course title:**  
MSc Global Prosperity

**Community Partner:**  
Olivia Darby, The  
Wonder Foundation

**Dissertation title:**  
Spaces that Empower Women  
Learners – The relationship  
between built environment,  
empowerment and learning of  
vulnerable women

**Academic supervisor:**  
Hannah Sender

### Research abstract:

With conversations about women's empowerment becoming more common, it is even more important that we discuss and look at the empowerment of women in social development settings, who are at risk of being most vulnerable to poverty, violence, and harassment. Research has found that the development sector's empowerment programmes aim to prepare women to respond to their current and future circumstances so that women can achieve things they value and not just maximize income, within which great emphasis has been placed on formal and informal learning. Given its importance for empowerment of women, scholars have investigated various factors that impact learning of women and girls, and one such factor is the built environment of learning spaces. This research aims to look at the relationship between built environment and empowerment & learning for vulnerable women. The study will explore how vulnerable women who are part of social projects experience the built spaces they are provided to learn in. The research aims to define 'empowering' spaces, explore the built environment of empowering learning spaces, how they may differ from the concept of 'safe spaces', and what might hinder and organization's ability to create such a space for their beneficiaries. This was done by using a mixed methods research design, utilizing a systematic literature review, a case study and expert interviews to explore views of various actors involved. Through primary and secondary data, the research was able to answer the research questions, and provide an operational definitions and factors for empowering spaces. The research also highlights recommendations for WONDER Foundation.



# 2021-22 Collaborators: Presenters

## Molly McCabe (she/her)



**Course title:**  
MSc Child Development

**Dissertation title:**  
Diverse Perspectives on  
Anxiety in Autistic Children  
Who Speak Few Words

**Community Partner:**  
Ned Redmore, Autistica  
UK

**Academic supervisor:**  
Mel Romualdez

### Research abstract:

Research suggests that anxiety is very common among autistic people and can present differently than in non-autistic people. This makes anxiety hard to manage and identify within the autistic community. Though there is growing research about anxiety in the autistic community, there is less known about specific groups within the autistic community. To better understand anxiety for autistic people, this study explored the perceptions and experiences of caregivers from minoritized ethnic backgrounds who had autistic children that spoke few words. The study was designed in partnerships with an autism research charity called Autistica and a parent collaborator who provided expertise from their lived experience. Caregivers from primary schools and autism organizations in London were invited to participate in a virtually recorded 30-minute interview. Three participating caregivers were asked several questions about their experiences with their child including how they perceived and managed their child's anxiety. The transcripts from the interviews were analysed to find common themes among the stories that were told. During the interviews, caregivers talked about their perceptions of their child's anxiety, management strategies that they use to support their child's anxiety, and how anxiety affects their child and family's quality of life. This study is a jumping off point for gathering a more holistic understanding of the needs of autistic people who speak few words and of autistic people from minoritized ethnic backgrounds. Going forward research must actively seek to explore these perspectives in a way that works with the community. Solutions should come from dedicated research aimed at creating sensitive supports that address the needs of all autistic people.





# 2021-22 Collaborators: Presenters

## Nightline London



**Meg Haskins**  
(she/her)



**Veronika Dvorak**  
(she/her)

Nightline Association is a national charity with the aim of raising the quality, available and accessibility of nightline services so that every student is aware of and can access confidential emotional support. London Nightline is an anonymous listening and information service run by students, for students. Our vision is that every student in London feels supported throughout their university experience. We offer a peer-led student support service.

**Student Partner:**  
Sara Treneman

### Partnership summary:

We attended one of the Community Research Initiative networking events, where we could meet lots of different students who we knew could be interested in collaborative work with a charity. It was quite a small event in the end but that didn't matter – we met Sara and had an exciting initial conversation where we immediately connected on the same issues. Through some further Teams meetings, we discussed what we wanted to know more about and listened to what Sara was able to do with her dissertation. We agreed on the topic and throughout the summer, Sara kept us updated with progress and we helped with providing some data we wanted included.

### Community product planned:

Nothing has been definitely decided but we know from the national Nightline conference that other Nightlines are very excited to hear about our project. We have discussed presenting at the 2023 conference which would be really good. So we're keeping that in mind but we think our relationship with Sara will go beyond the project and know we'll achieve something useful. Sara is even running a marathon for us!



# 2021-22 Collaborators: Presenters

## Hafid Ali (he/him)



**Student Partner:**  
Emily Petch

Camden United FC was set up in 2019 with the aim to tackle and raise awareness of knife crime and mental health issues. Many of its members have lived experience of losing someone to knife crime or seeing the repercussions of it within their communities. Football is being used to build community, talk about mental health and grief, and as a positive experience of Camden for its young people. Starting with organised Sunday games, there are now four teams playing regularly and big plans to expand.

### **Partnership summary:**

Camden United FC partnered up with Emily after she approached us about her dissertation. She really loves football and did her undergraduate project on the game. Together, we have designed a leaflet about costs of local football pitches. This is a really helpful resource that has not been available until Emily's work. It'll be amazing to be able to print this and make sure parents know what is affordable near them.



# 2021-22 Collaborators: Presenters

## Cake Komkai (they/them)

**Course title:**

MA Applied Linguistics

**Community Partner:**

LGBTQ+ Network

**Dissertation title:**

Opting Out of Stonewall: Academic Freedom or Transphobia

**Academic supervisor:**

John Gray

**Research abstract:**

University College London (UCL) claims itself as the first United Kingdom (UK) university to join and withdrawal from Stonewall's Diversity Champions programme Global and Workplace Equality Index (WEI). Even though it may sound like UCL is a trend setter, there are controversial discourses going on within the institution. The dominant discourses promoted by UCL's senior leadership are 'academic freedom' and 'disagree well'. Gender critics have used academic freedom as an argument to defend themselves against criticism for harming LGBTQ+ communities. They use academic freedom to claim the right to debate over the definition of sex and gender, which is considered by LGBTQ+ people as a threat to the legitimacy of trans people's existence. This raised the question of transphobia. Disagree well, like academic freedom, is also widely circulated, but no one really knows what it means. UCL seems to frame it as debates leaving no enemies, but LGBTQ+ staff and students see it as having their voice heard. This study aims to give voice to LGBTQ+ students and staff following UCL's decision to opt out of Stonewall. It explores discourses drawn on and deployed by those with different views on academic freedom and gender in the Stonewall argument at UCL, and how LGBTQ+ students and staff respond to these institutional debates and the reasons behind them. Open access data is used to answer the former part of the study and interview data is for the latter. The data were collected from open sources and semi-structured interviews and then analysed using Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) proposed by Schrier (2012) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) proposed by Fairclough (2015).



# 2021-22 Collaborators: Presenters

## Nyma Haqqani (she/her)



**Course title:**  
MSc Global Prosperity

**Community Partner:**  
Dave Morris, National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces

**Dissertation title:**  
Ethnic Minority Inclusion and Participation in Urban Greenspace: Good Practices of UK Friends Group

**Academic supervisor:**  
Hanna Baumann

### Research abstract:

Research shows that ethnic minorities are severely underrepresented in urban greenspace, despite current demographic trends indicating ethnic diversity is growing in urban areas. Existing studies have sought to understand the reasons for low ethnic minority participation in greenspace. However, this dissertation focuses on understanding successful practices that have reportedly improved ethnic participation in greenspace. I do this by examining reported success of UK Friends Groups – local community groups of volunteers coming under The National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces (NFPGS). The NFPGS hopes to make Friends Groups and their greenspaces more representative of the local community by being more ethnically diverse. I employed qualitative mixed methods with a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach to identify and investigate the initiatives and practices of six Friends Groups who self-reported improvement in ethnic participation. The findings of this study revealed five common themes running through different reportedly successful initiatives. These were 1) Representation, 2) Gaining Access, 3) Diverse Activities, 4) Youth, and 5) Facilitation. I discussed these themes in light of existing studies about ethnic minority participation in greenspace, as well as triangulated the themes with literature from wider contexts to establish their validity. Finally, based on the themes uncovered, I formulated recommendations for the NFPGS to disseminate to other Friends Groups to improve their ethnic participation as well, with the caveat that customising for local contexts is crucial to achieving success through the recommendations.



# Keynote speakers

## The Mix: Bohdana Dock (she/her)



Bohdana Dock is the head of data, research, and evaluation and from day 1 of the Community Research Initiative has been involved, working with a number of students across multiple collaborations. The Mix is the UK's leading support service for young people. Whatever challenges are facing someone, from mental health to money, from homelessness to finding a job, The Mix offers support online, on social, or on their free, confidential helpline or counselling services. During 2021-22, Bohdana made the decision to take stock of the work done during the collaborations, think about what was now known, what had changed as a result, and what is needed in the future. This will form the basis of Bohdana's talk today.

## Voluntary Action Camden: Keith Morgan (he/him)



Keith Morgan is the Chief Executive Officer at Voluntary Action Camden. He is experienced in stakeholder engagement, service design/redesign, and building diverse networks. Keith has recently partnered with UCL's Evaluation Exchange, a project where 7 local community organisations worked with a group of PhD students and early career researchers on an evaluation need, as identified by the Community Partner. Keith is currently working on creating a new pathway into delivering local community research through a new community-action research programme. He will talk today about the importance of a university open to collaborating and partnering with the voluntary & community sector.

# Keynote speakers

## **UCL President & Provost:** **Michael Spence** (he/him)



Michael Spence joined us at UCL as President & Provost in 2021, moving to the UK from his native Australia. The President & Provost role is the most senior leadership role at UCL. His successes prior to joining UCL include embedding inclusion and diversity with the University of Sydney's culture, investing in multi-disciplinary research, and creating strategic partnerships including with community organisations. You can hear Michael discussing his background, family, and what drew him to UCL, with the transcript accessible: [ucl.ac.uk/provost/about-president-provost](https://ucl.ac.uk/provost/about-president-provost)

## **UCL Education Student Officer:** **Hamza Ahmed** (he/him)



Hamza was elected to the Education Student Officer position earlier in 2022 and has taken up his role this summer for the academic year 2022-23. Student Officer roles, or sabbatical officers, are students who are elected by their peers to lead, advocate for, and represent them. They are agents of change. Hamza's key priorities for 2022-23 include working on university policies for students who need provisions made for extenuating circumstances, working to close what we call the degree awarding gap – the difference between the number of white UK students awarded top level degrees compared to Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic UK students – and extending the transition mentoring scheme, which is where UCL students help new students settle in and give advice on university life.

# Other 2021-22 collaborators

\*Find out more from the posters in the room!

## Megan Elias (she/her)\*



**Course title:**

MSc Public Archaeology

**Community Partner:**

Bankside Open Spaces Trust

**Dissertation title:**

Spoken from the heart: a heart-centred approach to collaborative practice at Cross Bones Graveyard

**Academic supervisor:**

Gabe Moshenka

**Research abstract:**

The Cross Bones Graveyard and Garden of Remembrance is a public garden that sits atop a post-medieval pauper's burial ground in London's borough of Southwark. However, the predominant narrative on site is that the burial ground holds the remains of medieval sex workers. This tale that began in oral tradition, was given new life by John Constable, a local poet, actor and activist who rallied a community against development of the site from 1996-2019. After partnering with Bankside Open Space Trust in 2013, a local charity that manages greenspaces in the borough, the site was allowed to open to the public as a community garden and memorial to 'the Outcast Dead.'

The conflicting narratives on site could be easily managed if they did not each have a strong community presence. The narrative of the 'Outcast Dead' which is rooted in the medieval lore has a following of supporters, which argue to maintain the grassroots organisation of the site and prevent any significant changes there. However, without some changes, it could be argued that the Victorian working-class poor and their children, who make up a large percentage of the burials, remain further marginalised. Additionally, BOST has worked within the guerrilla garden aesthetic that preceded them to allow for a truly biodiverse space in which even those plants we call weeds, the outcasts of gardens, are welcome to flourish.

These three narratives of the burial ground, rooted in lore and activism, the post-medieval pauper, and the wild and untamed garden all generate historic, spiritual, and social values within the surrounding community, and all deserve to be celebrated and protected. The primary goal of this project was to create a visitor information sheet that provides some initial site interpretation and demonstrates how each of these narratives weaves into the other to produce the whole in which the visitor is now a part. Another goal of the project was that in allowing different stakeholder voices to be heard, that fractures within the community could begin to heal through the process of collaboration.

# Other 2021-22 collaborators

\*Find out more from the posters in the room!

## Marta Borg-Rodriguez (she/her)\*



**Course title:**  
MA Education & International  
Development

**Community Partner:**  
The Breteau  
Foundation

**Dissertation title:**  
Impact of education apps

**Academic supervisor:**  
Tejendra Pherali

### Summary:

The aim of this research project is to provide the Breteau Foundation with an analysis of the sustainability of their education technology programme as well as a set of recommendations developed from the data analysis. Findings will provide insights on how current approaches to sustainability can better align with their future visions for the programme. This project has been delayed due to an extension until January 2023.





# 2021-22 Collaborators: Presenters

## Andy Lacey (they/them)

**Course title:**

MA Library & Information Studies

**Community Partner:**

Pamela Mhlophe, The Spires

**Dissertation title:**

Beyond Empowerment: The Spires Homeless Centre and the Information Practices of their Homeless Service Users

**Academic supervisor:**

Alison Hicks

**Research abstract:**

This study examines the Spires Homeless Centre (London, UK) - as a site of homeless information practice and information literacy education. It traces the role Spires' staff in building users' confidence and bridging trust gaps - to enable pedagogical practices to be employed. This study also examines how homeless users themselves are seeking and using information independently of Spires - and explores the information accessibility barriers encountered. Through qualitative methods, this study found that the homeless participants' information practices are strongly linked to trust (in services, peers, and other homeless people) - and that Spires' approach to relationship building forms the bedrock of their ability to extend information services. This study demonstrates how information literacy education is taking place at Spires, including active learning, social exchange, and mentorship - and brings out the barriers to learning. This is one of few studies to consider the information literacy educator role in a social support setting. Significantly, this study examines how the rough sleeper homeless subgroup are employing embodied information practices to manage their own personal safety and obtain information unavailable via services. This is the first study to examine the embodied information practices of the homeless. The study expands our understanding of homeless information practices, including the role of experiential knowledge, social exchange, and trust - and establishes homeless services as sites of information literacy education.

**I hadn't appreciated how refreshing it would be to apply what I had learnt on the master's program to a "real world" setting! Speaking to the homeless users of Spires services about how they find and use information was fascinating and threw up so many unexpected lines of enquiry. I would also say that dissertations are scary things, and rooting research in the lived reality of participants in the community really helped me get my head around it and make it tangible.**



# Other 2021-22 collaborators

\*Find out more from the posters in the room!

## Emily Petch (she/her)\*

**Course title:**

MSc Social Policy & Social Research

**Community Partner:**

Camden United FC

**Dissertation title:**

“It’s not just about kicking a ball with your feet”:  
Community Engaged Research  
Using Participatory Methods  
with a Football Club.

**Academic supervisor:**

Gillian Stokes

**Research abstract:**

This dissertation investigates the impact of Camden United, a football club based in North London, by exploring the views of young people who attend their training sessions. The club was established to provide young people with access to football as a means of reducing knife crime and violence (Puri, 2021).

Sports have been theorised as a vehicle for reducing crime, and can have many physical, social, and cognitive benefits (Ekholm, 2013; Jugl et al., 2021; Nichols, 1997). However, football access in London remains limited, with 54 council-owned pitches being sold between 2010 and 2019, and training sessions remaining costly (Doward, 2019). There is a gap in the literature when it comes to exploring the implications of this inaccessibility. This dissertation addresses this gap by assessing the impact of free football training sessions on young people.

A participatory approach was adopted to involve Camden United in decision making throughout the research process, ensuring it was suited to their needs and produced results that were useful for them (Wallerstein et al., 2017). Using a theoretical framework of relativist ontology and constructionist epistemology, lived experiences of nine young people who attend the football sessions were gathered through semi-structured interviews (Bullock, 2016; Scotland, 2012). The data were analysed using thematic analysis and explored through the social ecological model, revealing multiple levels of impact of Camden United (Braun et al., 2016; McLeroy et al., 1988).

The findings indicate that free football training sessions have many emotional, social, and physical benefits, and have a positive social impact on attendees. The sessions provide a positive distraction from knife crime and violence, whilst offering young people agency in tackling these issues. It is argued that current provisions do not go far enough in providing adequate access to football for young people, so implications for future policy are discussed.



# Other 2021-22 collaborators

\*Find out more from the posters in the room!

## Nick Baker (he/him)\*



**Course title:**

MSc Clinical Mental Health Sciences

**Community Partner:**

Re-Instate

**Dissertation title:**

Post-pandemic vocational support for people with mental health problems: A multi-perspective qualitative study

**Academic supervisor:**

Nicola Morant

**Background:**

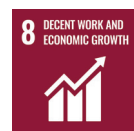
Vocational support services, such as Individual Placement and Support or job-retention services, help people with mental health problems secure and retain employment. Vocational support has been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, due to increases in technology use and employment market changes. We explored the views and experiences of vocational support clients, staff and key informants, to investigate the pandemic’s impact on vocational support and identify future directions for services.

Methods: The study setting was a vocational support charity in England. Interviews were conducted with seven clients and three key informants. One focus group was conducted with four vocational support staff. Data were analysed using thematic analysis.

Results: Three themes were identified.

1. The post-pandemic landscape: Participants described lasting impacts of the pandemic: increased service demand, prioritising a positive work-life balance, and advantages and disadvantages of increased technology use.
2. Key ingredients for vocational support: Key factors for vocational support were identified, including strong relationships, service personalisation and building confidence
3. Future directions for services: Participants felt services should prioritise assessing participant needs to offer personalised support – particularly regarding technology use; and employer engagement.

Conclusions: The pandemic has affected vocational support services by changing client expectations for work, and increasing technology use. Despite these changes, the key ingredients appear similar to before the pandemic. Services should prioritise supporting digitally excluded clients, ensuring services are personalised, and offer client choice. Exactly how to offer support, and when and where to offer remote or face-to-face consultations are key areas for future research.



# Other 2021-22 collaborators

\*Find out more from the posters in the room!

## Daniel Torquato (he/him)\*



**Course title:**

Bartlett School of Energy,  
Environment & Resources

**Community Partner:**

The Highgate Society

**Dissertation title:**

Care as futurity, Commons  
and Heritage: potentials and  
challenges of blockchain-  
based Distributed  
Autonomous Organisations  
for the self-governance of  
sustainable communities

**Academic supervisor:**

Richard Sandford

**Research abstract:**

The present article follows the claims for participatory empirical research to investigate both: 1) heritage as a future-oriented process of care led by communities in their specific and contingent assemblages, which could prompt insights on collective action and community organisation; and 2) the usage of blockchain-based Distributed Autonomous Organisations (DAOs) for the governance of commons through the engagement with Foresight to anticipate the implications of this kind of system adoption. To do so, this research was co-produced with the Highgate Society, one of the UK's largest civic amenity societies. Selected members of the organisation's Sustainable Living Group were invited to participate in this research, sharing their experiences installing renewable energy systems and then engaging with a proposed speculative scenario and the blockchain-based DAO system's hypothetical features. [conclusions to be confirmed] I conclude that the offered narrative that led to the constitution of a blockchain-based DAO to manage an integrated community energy system, set in the future Highgate, might not have disrupted enough the current landscape of centralised coordination, cohesion, and trust, in the participants' vision. For this reason, the proposed system might not have looked so distant from the present moment or presented clear advantages.



# Other 2021-22 collaborators

## Julia Wodzinska



**Course title:**

MSc Social Policy & Social Research

**Community Partner:**

Institute of Employment Studies

**Dissertation title:**

How does precarious work affect different groups in the youth population in the UK? A consultative systematic review

**Academic supervisor:**

Rebecca Rees

**Research abstract:**

Precarious employment in the UK has been debated for decades. As early as in the 1980's, the 'Thatcherite' policy fostered a rise of non-standard forms of employment for the sake of activation of the non-employed (Whitton, 2003). Certain features of these jobs, such as unguaranteed work hours, are now recognised as precarious (Kreshpaj et al., 2020). More recent disruptive events, such as the 2008 Great Recession (Rubery et al., 2018) (Berry and McDaniel, 2022) or the COVID-19 pandemic (Cook et al., 2021) (Matilla-Santander et al., 2021) further increased the prevalence of precarious employment, especially for young people (Schoon et al., 2017). Following these trends, this review sets out to investigate How does precarious work affect different groups in the youth population in the UK? - a consultative systematic review. In the process of conducting thematic synthesis, it finds that the influence on young people is complex, and many findings signposted in this review might require further investigation. This review is a work in progress in partnership with the Institute for Employment Studies (IES), so it is probable that there will be further renditions improving the work presented here.

**Working with IES has been (and still is) fantastic! Not only have I learned about how organisations in my field work day-to-day (as opposed to just learning the theory behind it at uni), but I also met some intelligent professionals who I learned a lot from. As the main outcome of our collaboration, my dissertation project will supplement IES' client work, but we are also discussing releasing some outputs beyond this, maybe a blog or a podcast. Stay tuned!**



# Other 2021-22 collaborators

## Ziyan Xue



**Course title:**  
MSc Business Analytics

**Community Partner:**  
Dimitrios Tourountsis,  
Brook Sexual Health

**Dissertation title:**  
Prediction women's likelihood  
of deciding to use Long-Acting  
Reversible Contraception

**Academic supervisor:**  
Mahmoud Elbattah

### Research abstract:

Both general practice and sexual and reproductive health services have been adversely affected by the impact of the pandemic and particularly with respect to the fitting and removal of long-acting reversible contraceptives due to face-to-face appointments only being possible for urgent cases. The unmet demand of long-acting reversible contraceptives provision during the pandemic is likely to have a cumulative effect on unplanned pregnancies, along with potentially poor maternal and child outcomes and an increased demand on maternity and abortion services.

Little is known about what factors influence the choice women in the UK make in relation to their reproductive health. To improve access and uptake of contraceptive services for marginalised groups, analysis exploring the way in which women's identity and life circumstances, as well as other socio-economic, educational, and cultural factors, affect their ability to access contraceptive care is needed. Our project with UCL explored the influencing factors for choice of contraception with a specific focus on long-acting reversible contraceptives, across different socio-demographics and context, priority groups including younger and older women, marginalised groups of women, such as from different ethnic backgrounds.



# Other 2021-22 collaborators

## Charlie Henderson



**Course title:**  
MSc Anthropology,  
Environment & Development

**Dissertation title:**  
Friends in Green Spaces:  
A Study of Conservation  
Volunteers in Bloomsbury,  
London

**Community Partner:**  
Susan Jellis,  
Association of  
Bloomsbury Gardens  
and Squares

**Academic supervisor:**  
Matthew Doyle

**Research abstract:**

*Currently unavailable – under review for January extension*



# 2021-22 Collaborators: Presenters

## Tianyu Gu (she/her)



**Course title:**  
MSc Business Analytics

**Community Partner:**  
Sandhya Suresh

**Dissertation title:**  
Text analysis of calls and webchats to the Centrepoint Helpline

**Academic supervisor:**  
Rajeev Nath

### Abstract:

This dissertation identified key call intents of transcript-style text and adopted supervised learning approach to classify these interactions using traditional and deep learning algorithms. The dataset was collected by Centrepoint, a UK-based charity, which has a dedicated helpline team to answer enquiries from young homeless people in England. Text analysis methods such as phrase aggregation was adopted to extract frequently mentioned keywords by the target group. 5 major call intents were identified using topic modelling, and the conversations were manually labelled with one of the intents. Data augmentation using original class distribution and minority class was performed to tackle lack of training set and class imbalance. Multiclass classification was then performed and showed that Logistic Regression had the best performance in terms of accuracy (57.24%) and MultinomialNB was the best one in terms of F1 score (56.35%). DistilBERT did not outperform baseline model which is a possible indication of the substantial domain transfer difficulty of the corpus. Using BERT-based models pretrained on more similar corpus was proposed as an alternative to the current methodology. Other limitations were also discussed, such as data quality issue. Business implication and recommendations for further analysis, such as active labelling, were also discussed.





# A short introduction to the Community Research Initiative

## Our values

We hold three ideas very close to our hearts at the Community Research Initiative: first, there are valid perspectives and ways of knowing besides academic knowledge; second, the highest quality knowledge and information is multi-perspective; and third, new knowledge should lead to positive social change. These underpinning ideas shape our work, and we strive to:

- emphasise power sharing and knowledge democracy – we are not UCL saviours of our lesser local communities and citizens. We acknowledge gaps in our own knowledge and seek to find out more from voluntary sector experts.
- act as a bridge; a bridge into the university of grounded, experiential, lived experience from citizens and citizen groups while at the same time, a bridge out of the university of academic perspectives and skills.
- promote the creation of useful and useable products from student research.

We think every master's student who wants to, should be able to explore the principles of knowledge equity, co-design, and solve 'real life' problems with their dissertation. We think that every master's student should be excited about their dissertation because they are doing it with and for a Community Partner.

## Very brief history

Through student-community research partnerships, the aims of the Community Research Initiative are to improve the master's student dissertation experience and to create useful and useable knowledge for our local communities.

The Community Research Initiative started in November 2018 with a part-time manager in post after some cross-university interest in the science shop model as well as evidence of a variable postgraduate-taught student experience. 2018-2020 were the pilot years, experimenting, learning from others across the world and closer to home, and building the service. During 2020-2022, the manager post was made full-time thanks to fixed term funding through an Office for Students-Research England grant. Known as the ISIKLE project (Increasing Knowledge Exchange & Learning), this funding has enabled the Community Research Initiative to hire administrative support as well as try out ideas that came from the pilot. From 2022, the Community Research Initiative will have a full-time permanent manager, funded by UCL.

## What we offer

1:1 coaching & advice  
Brokering with Voluntary & Community Sector organisations  
Skills development  
Supported knowledge exchange  
Partnership building and maintenance

We're only scraping the surface in terms of the students we are reaching, but we're proud of what we've achieved so far, culminating in our most successful year so far, 2021-22:

- We provided 140 bespoke 1:1 coaching & advice sessions to master's students.
- We trained 100 master's students in the essential skills to partnership working.
- We supported 23 student-community research partnership projects.
- We trained 80 PhD students in brief setting and research consultancy skills, including a practical with their first client – a Voluntary & Community Sector organisation.
- We designed and launched the Community Noticeboard, an online resource for Voluntary & Community Sector organisation to post their ideas for research and evaluation.

## What do our students say?

A service evaluation of the Community Research Initiative was conducted by PhD student Niamh Healey over the summer of 2022 to assess whether, how and to what extent the Initiative is achieving its central goal to improve master's students' experiences of their dissertation. 33 written student evaluations, from emails to semi-structured interviews, were thematically analysed to address four questions:

1. Why do students become involved with the Community Research Initiative?
2. How do students feel about their experiences with the Community Research Initiative?
3. What difference does the Community Research Initiative make to a student's dissertation experience?
4. How do students change through their engagement with the Community Research Initiative?

A realist approach was adopted within this evaluation – meaning that we paid attention not only to the changes students were telling us, but also the mechanisms that brought about the change. The fuller report, available soon, includes the set of context-mechanism-outcome statements that detail how the Community Research Initiative produced associated outcomes.

After reading and re-reading the student responses, it became clear that there were five themes, or categories, that could be used to summarise student feedback: motivators; career; student support; student learning; and the 'real world'.

The **motivators theme** is about what motivates students' engagement with the Community Research Initiative. The most common motivation for students was the potential to have a 'real-world' impact through their dissertation by working with the Community Research Initiative. The second most frequent motivation was the possibility that engaging with the Community Research Initiative could improve their job prospects.

The **career theme** emerged from students expressing concern about their employability following graduation and to some, the Community Research Initiative offered a way to ameliorate these concerns through networking opportunities and skills-building through engaging in a 'work-like' project alongside a professional partner.

**Student support** was the third theme, both around the support the Community Research Initiative provides directly as well as changes the nature of the support offered to students. Students frequently identified the Community Research Initiative manager as a considerable source of support as well as other students and staff involved in the service. Support for the Community Research Initiative students is also offered by the organization they work with. Some students further reported that completing a dissertation with the involvement of the Community Research Initiative resulted in receiving additional support from their academic supervisor compared to if they had completed a traditional dissertation.

The fourth theme emerged about the different types of **student learning** facilitated by the Community Research Initiative. Students observed how the Community Research Initiative involved 'learning outside the classroom' that was both additional and complementary to the taught aspects of their courses. Learning was present at different touchpoints with the service, from a single knowledge exchange meeting to the completion of a whole 'partnerships dissertation'.

The final theme identifies how the **'real-world' aspects** of the Community Research Initiative produce challenges but also opportunities for students compared to the traditional purely academic dissertation experience. Through the Community Research Initiative, students can meet and work with professionals working in 'real-world' environments. This opportunity involves new ways of working compared the taught component of students' course, presenting additional challenges such as time pressures and uncertain or varying expectations amongst academic supervisors and the external organisation. However, in navigating and overcoming these challenges, positive outcomes result for both the student and their project.

## 5 priorities for 5 years

We have ambitious plans for the Community Research Initiative. Continuing to provide our current service, we have 5 priorities for the next 5 years:

### **Develop a Community Research Office**

Initially covered by the Community Research Initiative manager, we aim to run an office in the community where residents, local groups, and charities can drop in and tell us what change they want

to see in their communities. Connections will be made with UCL students and researchers to explore taking ideas forward as projects.

### **Capacity building of local community**

We want to extend our skills and training offer to our local voluntary & community sector, building in capacity and sustainability; offer monthly Social Hackathons as a regular way for our community to benefit from UCL's expertise.

### **Develop a varied and full events calendar**

With dedicated event management and communications. We want to deliver more events like the hugely popular research consultancy training for PhD students; create monthly opportunities for staff and community organisations to meet about research; deliver more community consultancy clinics; bigger networking events.

### **Remunerate the experts contributing to our students' education**

It is best practice to remunerate those contributing 'know how' and intellectual property in some cases. Furthermore, if research is not 'core business' then our partners are potentially taking time from their usual business to work with our students. We want to work with others across UCL and learn from other universities to develop formal guidelines and processes.

### **Grow the student skills and knowledge offer**

Our asynchronous 'bite-sized' learning materials have proved popular, and we want to develop this. We want to work with the Evaluation Exchange and Community Engagement East to offer an optional module in student-community partnership working. Important topics for partnerships or collaborative working missing from standard PGT curricula include intellectual property, participatory ethical issues, knowledge democracy, open education. We want to explore developing an immersive week, potentially as a Summer School.

## **Intro to the team and our friends**

### **Anne Laybourne**

Anne joined the Students' Union UCL in 2018 as the first Community Research Initiative manager. In a previous life, she was a researcher in health services research but became frustrated with the life of short-term research projects and an absence of meaningful social change stemming from research. In 4 short years, Anne is convinced she has the best job at UCL!

### **John Braime**

John is the Head of the Volunteering Service at UCL. Indeed, he's the co-founder, 20 years ago! John secured the funding for the Community Research Initiative in 2018 and ensured it was homed in the best place for success – the Students' Union UCL, with its focus on student experience, and the Volunteering Service, with its focus on partnership working with the local Voluntary & Community Sector.

### **Molly McCabe**

Molly keeps the student right at the very centre of the Community Research Initiative. She worked part-time during 2021-22 as the student admin assistant while completing her own master's degree – including a collaborative dissertation with Autistica. Molly brought incredible communication strategy skills, creative design, and always put accessibility and inclusivity on the table.

### **Joanna Socha**

Joanna was the first student admin support staff on the Community Research Initiative during 2020-21 and also worked part-time while completing her master's degree. Joanna was instrumental in embedding the Community Research Initiative processes and brought an unrivalled systems-thinking approach to everything she did. Joanna laid the groundwork that will enable the service to scale and still helps out on webpages development.

### **Niamh Healy**

Niamh worked with the Community Research Initiative for a very short time – May to July 2022 – but did something that would otherwise have remained a pipedream. A PhD student in Computer Science, Niamh took on the challenge of the first ever evaluation of the Community Research Initiative. Taking a realist approach, Niamh read and analysed all spontaneous and formal written feedback from students between 2018 and 2022. In addition, she suggested designing 'personas' to help future students see that doing a collaborative dissertation through the Community Research Initiative is something for them.

### **Annalisa Morgan, David Parfitt & Guy Stepney**

Annalisa and David are graphic designers working with Guy in the Marketing team at the Students' Union UCL. Our materials only look so good because of them – they are our secret weapon! Annalisa deserves a special mention for her work creating the new design identity for the Community Research Initiative: the unfinished circle represents coming together, community and the Community Research Initiative fills in the gaps; the negative space is like a doorknob for opening doors; and the changing colourway represents the change that happens through collaborative work and inclusivity.

### **Max Keeble**

Max is Head of Systems at the Students' Union UCL and the best thing since sliced bread. Max has supported the Community Research Initiative with building the website and built the underlying system of workflows that will enable scaling. He has a solution for everything – even incorrectly spelled domain names.

### **Gemma Moore**

Gemma is quite simply the guardian angel of the Community Research Initiative. Responsible for Anne's epiphany to leave research and take on the challenge of the Community Research Initiative, Gemma is a researcher with a difference – she simply doesn't know how to not work collaboratively! She has given her time, expertise, and advice generously from the very beginning and leads the way with her Evaluation Exchange programme for UCL's PhD and early-career researchers.

### **Office of the Vice Provost (Education & Student Experience)**

The Office funds the Community Research Initiative, showing a commitment to partnership working for students as a great way to improve their experience with us and ensure UCL is a good neighbour to our local communities.

**Volunteering  
Service**

**U** STUDENTS'  
UNION UCL

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