

UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM



institute
for mental
health

Annual report 2021



introduction



Professor Matthew Broome,
Director of the Institute for Mental Health,
University of Birmingham

Moving into 2021 was a challenging time for many of us and our families. Vaccination began, but the COVID-19 pandemic was causing high rates of mortality and restrictions throughout the country. Many of us were taking on additional caring, home schooling, and clinical responsibilities, including supporting vaccination centres and the Intensive Therapy Unit at University Hospitals Birmingham. The year continued with uncertainty as new variants appeared, but I am proud to see how the Institute for Mental Health, its staff, and students responded. With the ongoing support of the University, we've been able to make several further academic appointments, as well as expand the leadership of our youth advisory group.

As the NHS began to think beyond COVID-19, we have been able to re-commence several of our clinical studies and further strengthen our partnerships with the NHS. We've been fortunate in attracting key funding from both the Wolfson Foundation (to develop the physical space and home for our Wolfson Research Unit in Youth Mental Health), the Wellcome Trust (for the Midlands Mental Health & Neurosciences PhD Programme for Healthcare Professionals, and from the CrEdo Foundation (for the 'Better than Well' campus recovery programme), all detailed further in this report. We've also managed to work with almost 4,000 Key Stage 2 children across the city, implementing anti-bullying programmes in schools, something personally praised by Ofsted as leading to real changes in the pupils' lives. A personal highlight for me was seeing our first cohort of MSc Mental Health students graduate on campus and being able to join them and their families in celebrating their success. This group of 38 students were outstanding – with the majority of them attaining either a Merit or Distinction.

As we move in to 2022, we've completed the first semester of the MSc Mental Health, and I hope that we can now begin to return more consistently to the campus at Edgbaston. This year marks the 5-year anniversary of the Institute for Mental Health and a time for us to reflect and review our strategy and plans for the future.

I have every confidence that we will further develop to be one of the internationally-leading sites for youth mental health research, practice, and training, and continue to have strong partnerships, interdisciplinarity, and co-production with young people at our core.



Dr Sally Adams is a teaching-focused associate professor. Her research interests are in the areas of alcohol use and hangover, harm reduction, recovery and sobriety.

Dr Matthew Apps is a leading expert in the computational, cognitive and neural basis of motivation and social behaviour. He will be leading the research theme 'Multidisciplinary Approaches to the Neuroscience of Mental Health.'

Dr Maria Dauvermann is a Lecturer in Youth Mental Health. Her research focusses on the identification of risk and resilience markers in young people who are at high risk of developing neurodevelopmental and mental health conditions.

Dr Nutmeg Hallett is a Registered Mental Health Nurse and Lecturer in Nursing. Her specialist areas of teaching and research are violence de-escalation, coercion, and trauma in mental health.

Dr Patricia Lockwood is a cognitive and social neuroscientist. She is head of the Social Decision Neuroscience Lab. Her work focuses on the neurocognitive foundations of social learning and decision-making across the lifespan, and in psychiatric and neurological disorders.

Professor Elizabeth McDermott joins as Chair in Mental Health and Society in the School of Social Policy, and Deputy Director of the Institute for Mental Health. Her research looks specifically at LGBTQ+ youth mental health and wellbeing.

Charlotte Saunders has joined Niyah Campbell as Youth Involvement Co-Lead, focusing on the Youth Advisory Group.

Dr Sophie Sowden is an experimental psychologist and director of the U21 Autism Research Network. She is interested in social cognition across the lifespan, as well as in a range of clinical conditions including autism, conduct disorder, and Parkinson's disease.

Dr James Thompson is a senior lecturer/associate professor. He has joined the team in a teaching post for the MSc in Mental Health.

people

The Institute for Mental Health brings together leading experts from a range of disciplines to address the vital challenge of improving mental health. Our researchers are leading global projects in areas spanning psychology and public policy, to healthcare and humanities. Here are some of the most recent additions to the IMH team:





our research areas

Self-Harm and Suicide Prevention

We are working to transform the understanding and response to self-harm and suicide prevention in research, clinical practice, policymaking and community practices. Our aim is to understand how social, environmental, political, psychological, cultural and biological factors make someone more vulnerable to suicidal behaviour or self-harm. Our commitment is to develop support and treatments across healthcare and non-healthcare settings to help vulnerable young people and their families.

Early Intervention and Prevention

Our goal is to extend the impact of translational research into early psychosis, and related youth mental health disorders with greater understanding of heterogeneity and common causal pathways, including dysfunction of the immune system. Our focus is on using multimodal, clinically relevant and accessible data to real world effect by developing new interventions and targeting existing treatments to improve recovery in early stages of illness.

Innovation in Policy, Systems and Services

Supporting people who are experiencing poor mental health is one of the key policy challenges of our time. We are bringing together and drawing upon the expertise of people with lived experience alongside academic, policymaker, service provider, industry, and practitioner knowledge to generate innovation in policy, systems, and service delivery. Our vision is to understand and strengthen support systems for people across sectors and through developing a robust evidence base to inform policy. We aim to share knowledge and learn from our global and international partners who are all facing a similar challenge in meeting the increasing demand for mental health support.

Mental Health Data Science and Epidemiology

Data science is at the cutting edge of mental health research. It traverses the study of the causes of mental disorders, their development, onset and experience of them. Data science presents opportunities to translate data driven insights to benefits for patients. We are a rapidly growing interdisciplinary group working to understand the development of mental disorders, through the interrogation and combination of biological, environmental and social data.

Justice, Equalities and Capabilities

Young people are not always offered the resources that they need in order to understand their situations and process their own experiences, in particular experiences of distress. The aim of our research is to find effective strategies to help empower young people, giving them a voice and enabling them to achieve greater social justice. In October 2021, Professor Elizabeth McDermott was appointed to develop this theme with a particular focus on mental health inequalities and youth-rights approaches to mental health support for young people.

Multidisciplinary approaches to the neuroscience of mental health

Our ambition is to understand the role of the brain in mental health in young people, across development, and in adults. By bringing together a range of tools and expertise, we take a multidisciplinary approach that links together biological, psychological and social processes to mental health. The aim is to provide a comprehensive understanding of mechanisms that serves as a platform to improve therapies, treatments and support.



Being part of the Better Than Well programme has allowed me to excel in both my education and my recovery. Having a community of others like me on campus has really made a difference. I am hopeful for my future for the first time in a long time.

Chris P

UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM

BETTER THAN WELL

better than well

The implications of addiction to drugs, alcohol, or behaviours such as gambling, gaming, or sex can be significant, destroying lives and breaking up families. Not only is addiction often the response to underlying trauma and social stressors, persistent and repetitive use of substances or behaviours can generate their own physical, psychological and social problems. Merely achieving abstinence is rarely a long-term solution, and the concept of 'recovery' from addiction incorporates physical and mental wellbeing, meaningful activity, and full involvement in the rights, roles and responsibilities of society. Education is often a key part of recovery, but University life can present a variety of challenges to recovery. In July 2021, the University of Birmingham launched a peer-led support program for students wishing to maintain abstinence-based recovery (Better Than Well; BTW). This project is led by Dr Ed Day from the Institute for Mental Health in the School of Psychology, supported by a philanthropic grant from the CrEdo Foundation. It is an example of a Collegiate Recovery Program, a successful strategy developed on campuses in the USA that allows students to work on a program of recovery whilst also accessing all the benefits of Higher Education. BTW aims to promote hope and purpose, positive identity development, a sense of achievement and accomplishment, capacity for stable interpersonal relationships, and healthy coping skills by:

- Support with completing the university admissions process, early orientation, developing individual plans of study, and general academic advice
- Establishing a safe, anonymous space for students to discuss their experience of addiction(s) and to receive peer support for behaviour change
- A weekly open meeting in 'celebration' of recovery that provides continued support to CRP members whilst also educating the wider community about the reality of addiction and recovery
- Training student peer mentors to address both recovery and educational issues
- Developing a student organisation responsible for facilitating recovery-orientated recreational and community volunteering activities

To date, the programme has engaged with nearly 30 students who report 10 separate forms of addiction. The group represents all five Colleges of the University and has an age range of between 18 and 45. A program of evaluation is getting under way, and the BTW team is supporting other UK Universities to set up similar services.



youth advisory group

Regular engagement with our Youth Advisory Group (YAG) is integral to the work conducted at the IMH. Comprised of young people aged 18–25 with lived experience of, or a strong interest in youth mental health, the YAG works to create, shape and challenge research into youth mental health. The YAG is supported by the IMH Youth Involvement Co-Leads Niyah Campbell and Charlotte Saunders.

Virtual meetings continued throughout the year – enabling IMH researchers to engage with the YAG even more frequently. Work also began on a youth involvement strategy, in response to the growth of involvement activity within the organisation.

In 2021, the YAG have been involved in several projects including:

- Attending monthly YAG meetings, offering guidance and advice to researchers and PhD students
- Co-producing and publishing a guide for young people seeking support from their GP (alongside Dr Maria Michail). YAG members were also actively involved in dissemination activity
- Participating in an online panel during the University of Birmingham's Black History Month celebrations, to promote the importance of diversity and inclusion within research
- Developing and delivering a teaching session to introduce medical students to the concept of public and patient involvement in research
- Creating accessible resources for young people participating in research studies



I've always felt so appreciated [at the IMH], with our opinions being heard, implemented and really shaping the direction of the research. I find it such a rewarding experience to see a research project evolving over time and knowing that my experiences as a young person are being heard is such an empowering feeling.

Lizzie (YAG member)



Dr Jack Rogers, Dr Sarah Jane Fenton, and MSc graduates

MSc in mental health

The IMH MSc in Mental Health opened to take in its first cohort of 38 students in 2019–20 and has since grown to a cohort of 62 students in the current academic year (2021–2022). The majority of students graduating from the 2020–21 cohort were awarded a merit or distinction classification.

Several graduating students are also currently working on preparing their dissertation projects for publication. The MSc remains the only interdisciplinary taught Masters in Mental Health in the UK, offering students the unique opportunity to study alongside other colleagues drawn from a range of professional sectors and educational backgrounds.

mental health humanities group

In 2020, the Institute for Mental Health oversaw the establishment of a new interdisciplinary initiative: Mental Health Humanities (MHH). The campus-wide collaboration is a new direction in the Medical Humanities, with its focus centring on mental health and illness and involving a much deeper cross-section of scientific and humanities disciplines at inception.

June 2021 saw MHH's inaugural symposium embrace expertise beyond the University of Birmingham. Organised by Professor Lisa Downing (Modern Languages), the event focused on 'Affect, Empathy and the Body'. The aim to nurture MHH at the University and its links beyond has been fostered by The Salon, a monthly virtual discussion organised by Drs Rebecca Wynter (Psychology) and Anna Lavis (Institute of Applied Health Research), which began in November last year. It is hoped this grouping will lead to cross-campus teaching and research initiatives and the University being a national leader in this area.





PhDs

The IMH team supervised a cohort of PhD students, carrying out vital research to address the latest societal and individual mental health challenges. Some of these include:

- **Fiona Clarke** (supervised by Professor Jennifer Cumming, Dr Jessica Pykett, Dr Amber Mosewich [University of Alberta, Canada]) working in partnership with The Compassionate Mind Foundation, with a focus on compassion, performance, and well-being in female team athletes.
- **Joseph Houlders** (supervised by Professor Lisa Bortolotti and Matthew Broome) research involves using ideas from philosophy to think about issues in mental health. He recently received an Honourable Mention for the prestigious Jaspers Award.
- **Maria Kolitsida** (supervised by Dr Anna Lavis and Professor Jennifer Cumming) working on a collaborative studentship with One Dance UK with the focus being on self-harm in dance students.
- **Paris Alexandros Lalouis** (supervised by Professor Rachel Upthegrove and Dr Renate Reniers) is a joint funded Priestley Birmingham - Melbourne PhD fellow. His research investigates the heterogeneity between and within depression and psychosis and their recovery prediction utilizing neuroimaging, metabolic, and clinical data in a machine learning framework. He was recently awarded an Early Career Research Award by the Schizophrenia International Research Society in recognition of his contribution to the field.
- **Dr Rosa Ritunnano** (supervised by Professor Lisa Bortolotti and Matthew Broome) research applies phenomenological approaches to the investigation of self-disturbance in early psychosis, to improve early identification and prediction models. She has published papers in philosophy journals and was awarded the 2021 Wolfe Mays Essay Prize for Early Career Researchers by The British Society for Phenomenology (BSP) and The Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology (JBSP).
- **Grace Tidmarsh** (supervised by Professors Janice Thompson and Jennifer Cumming) working in partnership with St Basils with a focus on conducting process evaluation and fidelity assessment of My Strengths Training for Life™ programme.
- During 2021, **A. Jess Williams** published three papers (two related to her PhD). She organised and presented symposiums at two international conferences, and gave various oral presentations and invited talks, about her latest experience sampling study. Jess was the recipient of the PSYPAG Rising Researcher award for her PhD research.
- **Jessy Williams** has completed two research projects with Dr Anna Lavis and Dr Rachel Winter on how people engage with online social media discussions on self-harm, and another with Dr Victoria Goodyear on gaming and mental health. Jessy is now working with a national youth mental health charity to engage participants for her PhD research on the use of digital technologies to support mental health.

new funding

Throughout 2021, members of the Institute for Mental Health have received prestigious awards and accolades through a number of national and international funding bodies and associations, including:

- National Institute for Health Research (NIHR)
- Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)
- Biotechnical and Biological Sciences (BBSRC)
- Wellcome Trust
- Jacob's Foundation
- MRC Skills Development Foundation
- Wolfson Foundation
- Canadian Institute for Advanced Research (CIFAR)

The Institute for Mental Health was awarded £1.5M from the Wolfson Foundation to fund a research centre focused on supporting youth mental health. This award from the Wolfson Foundation will help to create a physical space for individuals and groups from across the university and externally to come together and collaborate in a new purposely designed, shared place.

The IMH is part of a new Doctoral Training Programme (DTP) thanks to a multi-million pound award from Wellcome. Led by the University of Nottingham, the new DTP is a collaboration between the Universities of Nottingham, Leicester, Birmingham and Warwick. Wellcome has awarded over £7.24 million to the University of Nottingham to establish the Midlands Mental Health and Neurosciences PhD Programme for Healthcare Professionals, which will begin its training programme in October 2022. The unique partnership will lead the innovative multidisciplinary training centre that will develop the next generation of NHS research leaders across the workforce.



The Wolfson Foundation is delighted to be funding this crucial area of research. We were impressed by the quality of the proposed research and by its dynamic leadership. A real hallmark of the research unit will be collaborative working: with partners across the UK and globally – but, perhaps even more important, with young people and civil society across Birmingham. We hope the research will have a significant impact in Birmingham (the city with the UK's youngest population) and beyond.

*Paul Ramsbottom OBE
Chief Executive at Wolfson Foundation*

Thanks to a philanthropic grant from the CrEdo Foundation, in 2021, the University of Birmingham launched the student recovery program – Better Than Well. It is coordinated by academic staff from the Institute for Mental Health, but run by students supporting their peers to maximise educational and social opportunities whilst continuing a personal program of recovery from addiction.

partnerships and acknowledgements



Our work on tackling bullying

In 2019, we launched a partnership with Birmingham Children's and Women's Hospital and HSBC UK to take action on childhood bullying, a preventable root cause of mental ill health. Throughout 2020, we continued this partnership, adapting the work to include supporting teachers concerned about the trauma children will have experienced during lockdown, and are planning to re-launch the intervention in schools in the new academic year.

In 2021, we were fortunate to begin to roll-out the KiVa whole-school anti-bullying intervention in Birmingham. Despite the challenges schools are under, we have recruited 29 schools (almost 4,000 Key Stage 2 children) to the study and are working closely with Birmingham Education Partnership to deliver these interventions. Now that initial baseline data has been completed, we are recruiting a research fellow jointly with Birmingham Women's and Children's NHS Foundation to look at rates of bullying in the city, and how these vary with particular demographics and deprivation levels, as well as studying the impact of the pandemic on teacher wellbeing and burnout.

Working nationally with the third sector, charities and corporate philanthropy.

We have developed strong partnerships with local and national charities and third sector organisations that allow us to develop research that addresses real-world problems, thus maximising opportunities for impact and reach. We are working with The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children to explore the best way to provide effective help and support to children who contact the charity through its Childline service.

We are working with the Samaritans to explore the impact of COVID-19 on online self-harm and suicide discussions.

We are collaborating with charities such as St Basils, Homeless Link and Street Soccer to support young people who are experiencing homelessness or are at risk.

The University has also developed an important partnership and research collaboration with Siemens, where academics from the Institute for Mental Health and the University's Business School are working with the company to examine new ways of working during the pandemic and subsequently, its impact on workplace mental health and wellbeing.



International collaboration

The IMH has established a number of important global partnerships and strong international collaborations that enable our research to create transformational change in mental health policy and practice around the world. Such collaborations include the World Psychiatric Association, the International Association for Suicide Prevention, the International Association for Youth Mental Health, as well as industry partners such as Facebook and Instagram, advising them on their response to eating disorders, self-harm and suicide content.

Pavan Mallikarjun and Hareth Al-Janabi from the Institute for Mental Health are co-investigators on the SAMA Project – a UK Medical Research Council (MRC) funded International India–United Kingdom research consortium looking to reduce the prevalence of anxiety and depression among Indian adolescents by improving individual and school well-being.

We are the UK's leading site of the International Collaboration on the Social and Moral Psychology of COVID-19, a large-scale international collaboration bringing together scholars from around the globe to examine

psychological factors underlying the attitudes and behavioural intentions related to COVID-19.

We have a longstanding partnership with the University of Melbourne and Orygen, Australia's National Centre of Excellence in Youth Mental Health. The University of Melbourne and the University of Birmingham are founder members of the Universitas 21 network and in recent years, we have strengthened our research and education collaborations, culminating in the signing of a partnership agreement in 2016. We have joint posts and enjoy the shared Priestley PhD Scholarship in Youth Mental Health between the IMH and Orygen.

Orygen/University of Melbourne secured a \$33 million award from the US NIMH for the PRESCIENT study and we're delighted that the IMH is the only UK site in this important international collaboration examining the early course of psychosis, and improving the prediction and intervention of this important area in youth mental health.

Working with the NHS and social care to improve the outcomes and care for young people with mental health problems

The IMH has a strong partnership with NHS Foundation Trusts: University Hospitals Birmingham; Birmingham Women's and Children's, who manage the dedicated Forward Thinking Birmingham 0–25 youth mental health service; and Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health. These NHS partners have allowed us to create joint clinical academic appointments, shared research goals and strategy, ensuring our work has demonstrable impact on clinical practice. Over 2021, we developed successful funded research collaborations with NHS and University partners in Cambridge, Manchester, and Oxford.

acknowledgements

with special thanks to our partners



**Birmingham and Solihull
Mental Health**
NHS Foundation Trust



**Birmingham
Health Partners**
Collaboration. Innovation. Application.



**West Midlands
Combined Authority**



**WORLD
PSYCHIATRIC
ASSOCIATION**



W
wellcome



**RC
PSYCH**
ROYAL COLLEGE OF
PSYCHIATRISTS

SIEMENS



**University Hospitals
Birmingham**
NHS Foundation Trust



**INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR
YOUTH
MENTAL HEALTH**



MCPin
Foundation

**CrEdo
Foundation**

NIHR | National Institute
for Health Research



ForwardThinking
Birmingham



**Birmingham Women's
and Children's**
NHS Foundation Trust



BIRMINGHAM
Education
Partnership

The Wolfson*
Foundation

“

It is a genuine pleasure

to see how our Institute for Mental Health is flourishing. New colleagues, new initiatives, and new opportunities for research and training are all exciting additions in the last year. It is also important to remember that this has all occurred during a particularly turbulent and difficult period. This makes the extent of progress all the more noteworthy. The ethos, reach and influence of our Institute is something we should be proud of, and I am looking forward to supporting their ambitious plans in the year ahead.

Professor Ed Wilding

*Head of the School of Psychology,
University of Birmingham*



Connect with us

www.birmingham.ac.uk/imh

imh@contacts.bham.ac.uk

[@IMH_UoB](https://twitter.com/IMH_UoB)

Institute for Mental Health,

University of Birmingham,
Edgbaston, Birmingham,
B15 2TT, United Kingdom



UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM

Edgbaston, Birmingham,
B15 2TT, United Kingdom
www.birmingham.ac.uk

Designed and printed by

UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM

creativemedia