

Expression of Interest: Living Sustainability and Youth Futures

Proposed Alliance Research Challenge Area

‘Living Sustainably: Youth Futures’ will squarely advance key priorities for children and young people of the Scottish Government, ensuring the skills, methodologies and knowledge are available for not only the immediate issues – but also for the challenges of the next decade. The ARC would be organised under three intersecting themes:

1. Poverty and living rights

The Scottish Government has established a firm commitment to addressing child poverty and social justice through the Child Poverty Act 2017, the Fairer Scotland Action Plan and the Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2022-26¹. This has been emphasised by the 2022 National Strategy for Economic Transformation’s priority to ensure a fair and more equal society, with reference to reducing child poverty and ensuring a sustainable standard of living², and the Collective Leadership Group for Children and Families having a priority to address child poverty³. The ARC would consider intersecting and consequential issues of youth (un)employment, access to training/work, leaving care, homelessness and migration.

An adequate standard of living is one of the human rights of children, which is part of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Once implemented, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) Scotland Bill will be transformative in realising children’s rights, providing an overarching framework that will support major children and young people’s initiatives such as The Promise and Getting it Right for Every Child. The forthcoming Theory of Change for UNCRC Implementation⁴ identifies the challenges of such complex change, and the need for concerted efforts to develop accountability mechanisms, systems and evidence. The proposed Human Rights Bill will further extend human rights throughout Scotland⁵, fostering a policy and practice agenda that needs evidential and conceptual support.

2. Building back better: Covid recovery, sustainability, resilient youth, families and communities

The National Strategy for Economic Transformation (page 1) identifies the next ten years as the ‘decisive decade’. The Strategy underlines the mutual reinforcement of a fair and equal society and a wealthier, greener economy⁶. Public Health priorities also highlight mental health issues and a focus on early years, alongside living in healthy, safe, vibrant communities with sustainable economies and equitable outcomes⁷. The need to address these have become only clearer in recent years, as presented in SFC intergenerational and community driven research across the Highlands and Islands of Scotland⁸. This research draws attention to the widening inequalities that need to be addressed in renewal post Covid. The Covid Recovery Strategy has highlighted as priorities children and young people’s wellbeing, good green jobs and fair work and rebuilding public services⁹. The Social Renewal Advisory Board¹⁰ and the work plans of the COVID-19 Learning and Evaluation Oversight Group¹¹ identify the need to learn from communities and public services, ‘to build back better’ and look to communities’ sustainability and resilience as we can anticipate ongoing ‘crises’ whether future pandemics, climate change or global unrest.

¹ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/fairer-scotland-action-plan/> and <https://www.gov.scot/publications/best-start-bright-futures-tackling-child-poverty-delivery-plan-2022-26/pages/3/>

² <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-national-strategy-economic-transformation/pages/8/>

³ <https://www.gov.scot/groups/covid-19-children-and-families-collective-leadership-group>

⁴ <https://www.ed.ac.uk/education/rke/our-research/children-young-people/childhood-and-youth-studies-research-group/research/observatory-of-childrens-human-rights-scotland>

⁵ <https://nationalperformance.gov.scot/national-outcomes/human-rights> Scotland’s commitment to human rights.

⁶ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-national-strategy-economic-transformation/pages/8/>

⁷ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-public-health-priorities/>

⁸ [Projects - Community-Determined Change-scapes of Recovery: Case studies across the Highlands and Islands of the impact and strategies for recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic \(uhi.ac.uk\)](#) Johnson PI

⁹ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/covid-recovery-strategy-fairer-future/>

¹⁰ Professor Morag Treanor contributed to the low-income policy circle for this report. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/now-social-renewal-advisory-board-report-january-2021/pages/2/>

¹¹ <https://www.gov.scot/groups/coronavirus-covid-19-learning-and-evaluation-oversight-group/>. Tisdall is a member

3. Inclusive, intergenerational and interdisciplinary methodologies for sustainable futures

The ARC needs to be at the forefront of mixed methods research and discovery, combining the best of quantitative and qualitative methods. These skills need to be turned to the substantive challenges in themes 1 and 2, whether it be supporting children’s rights budgeting or creating a suite of meaningful children’s rights indicators. Further, the ARC needs to support Scotland’s exceptional commitments to involve children and young people in decision making¹², which have implications for the ARC’s research agenda and for improving participative methodologies in co-production and co-design. The children’s rights field is increasingly recognising the need for relational ethics and intergenerational methodologies. The term ‘Living Sustainability’ both fits with the Scottish Government’s commitment to ‘making rights real’ for children and to translating the UN Sustainable Development Goals into policy and practice.

The ARC’s agenda necessitates an interdisciplinary approach. The interested partners bring disciplinary expertise from relevant sciences, social sciences, and arts and humanities, which will be capable of addressing complex problems requiring system change, innovative solutions and methodological advancements.

The ARC will build on the experiences of academic partners working productively with public and third sector partners to foster, undertake and share research. UHI is embedded in communities with partners in local government and civil society across the Highlands and Islands. They have been involved in SFC research on Covid recovery for the ‘hardest hit’ and developing the Scottish Government Islands Strategy and their CREATE Highland team to support small and medium sized enterprises. Davidson and Tisdall are part of the Observatory of Children’s Human Rights Scotland¹³, which involves leading children’s rights organisations such as the Children’s Parliament and the Children and Young People’s Commissioner for Scotland. The Observatory of Children’s Human Rights Scotland has articulated the need to combine research strengths with the very active children’s rights sector across Scotland. This ARC will be well placed to foster these interactions, based on the experience over the last 2 years of the Observatory.

The ARC will expand on the existing research excellence and quality of partners. There will be a Core Team with one member from each HEI/ Research Institute and they are included in the following table with some examples of research excellence:

Key Contact and HEI	Examples of research excellence	2022 REF Unit of Assessment, rank in UK ¹⁴
Johnson, UHI	Youth and Positive Uncertainty (2016-2018, ESRC-FCDO PI £498,502), Rejuvenate, global child and youth rights (2018-2022, WellSpring £476,528), SFC Covid recovery across Highlands and Islands (2020-2021 £100,000 PI), UIF allocation for CREATE entrepreneurship (£75-80,000/year).	Area Studies, 100% 4* for impact, and ranked 16/23
Tisdall, Edinburgh	Canada SSHRC, International and Canadian Child Rights Partnership (2021-28 \$7.5 M, Col); UKRI GCRF (2020-24 £1.8 M, PI) and Innovation in Social Care (2019-24 £2.0 M, Col).	Education, Ranked 21/83
van Blerk, Dundee	Canada SSHRC, International Canadian Child Rights Partnership (2021-28 \$7.5 M, Col); Growing up on the Streets (2012-2022, PI, £3m); YES-CAN feeds into COP 27 (2022-23 Col, £30K)	Geography, Ranked 28/56
Barnes-Macfarlane, Glasgow	Capacity Building/Civil Society Organisations (2017-21, Legal Education Foundation £313,000), Domestic abuse and child contact (2018-22, Scottish Government); Forced Marriage (2021-23, Scottish Government, £115,000); Leverhulme Trust (2018, £141,554); European Commission (2021-25, €4.32 million); AHRC (2020-23, £385,000); ESRC (2017-22, £359,398).	Law, Ranked 5/69

¹² <https://www.gov.scot/publications/decision-making-children-and-young-peoples-participation/>

¹³ <https://www.ed.ac.uk/education/rke/our-research/children-young-people/childhood-and-youth-studies-research-group/research/observatory-of-childrens-human-rights-scotland#:~:text=We%20are%20a%20collaborative%20of,local%20impact%20and%20global%20learning.>

¹⁴ Most listed from Unit of Assessment on <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/ref-2021>

Punch, Stirling	Bridge and Schools (2022-25, Davenport Fund, £275,000, PI); Bridge: A MindSport for All Crowdfunder (2019-22, £133,000, PI).	Social Work & Social Policy, Ranked 23/76
Treanor, I-SPHERE, Heriot-Watt University	Impacts of public debt on low income families (2021-23, Aberlour £56,000); Digital Equality in Education, (2021-22, Nuffield Foundation £99,000); Scottish Centre for Administrative Data Research (2019-26, ESRC, Col, £675,000); Destitution in the UK (2022-23, JRF, Col, £494,000)	
Inchley, Glasgow	Transdisciplinary Research for the Improvement of Youth Public Mental Health (2018-2022, UKRI, £1m, PI); Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study (2021-2024, Public Health Scotland, £437k, PI)	Public Health, Health Services & Primary care Ranking 12 th , 59.2% outputs world-leading

The proposed ARC balances breadth and specificity, with an emphasis on synergy. We will be able to build on and update horizon scanning activities, in which we have been involved (such as Theory of Change for UNCRC Implementation, the British Academy Childhood Programme), and memberships (such as National Child Protection Leadership Group; COVID-19 Learning and Evaluation Oversight Group; Scottish Centre for Administrative Data Research).

We will have a mix of inclusive events and open calls to sandpits, as well as targeted pilot activities and a Creative Lab in which we will conduct mapping across the HEIs and Tertiary institutions in the ARC and develop innovative and creative mixed methods and indicators to understand challenges in depth and track progress to impact. We will reserve resources particularly to ensure stakeholder involvement, including children and young people.

Each theme will articulate particular priorities, such as developing children’s rights indicators in theme 1 and intergenerational community strategies for Covid recovery and more inclusive and resilient communities for theme 2. Theme 3 on methodological advancements will enhance the transferability of capacity across the substantive foci for the ARC. Priorities and activities would be further elaborated upon should we be shortlisted and refined during the first stage of the ARC.

Funding Opportunities

This ARC will focus on key academic funding streams that include: UKRI, Horizons Europe, Leverhulme, Nuffield Foundation, Wellcome (esp health and wellbeing). We will be well-placed for large scale collaborations, such as research centres, as well as fostering early career applications with British Academy, Leverhulme and Wellcome. We will target philanthropic funders who support child and youth rights work such as Elevate Children and the Wellspring Foundation. International organisations such as UNICEF and UNESCO, as well as FCDO and specific funds for learning across global contexts can be sought from funders such as the British Academy or British Council. There are niche funders that we will form and renew relationships with including, the Froebel Trust and the Bernard van Leer Foundation for early childhood and the Spencer Foundation and Lego Foundation for education and play. Relationships are also strong in the alliance with international non-government organisations such as Save the Children and Plan International.

Prospective Coalition

This proposal would be jointly led by The Centre for Living Sustainability @UHI Inverness and the Childhood and Youth Studies in MHSES @ Edinburgh University. Each contact would foster strategic involvement of disciplines within their institution. For example:

- ✓ UHI will draw together its Living Sustainability and Covid Recovery research networks, to involve: Institute of Northern Studies, UHI Orkney; Centre for Mountain Studies, Perth College UHI; Centre for Recreation and Tourism Research, UHI West Highland; UHI’s Centre for Remote and Rural Health and Wellbeing; CREATE working on entrepreneurship and links with the Royal Society of Edinburgh and Highland and Island Enterprise to focus on the North and West of Scotland.
- ✓ The University of Edinburgh will capitalise on its ongoing networks across data skills (Edinburgh Futures Institute, Informatics, Data for Children Collaborative with UNICEF), human rights (Law School), creative

arts (Binks Hub, Edinburgh College of Art), and additional key disciplinary areas (e.g. Geosciences, Linguistics, and the School of Social and Political Science).

Extending beyond, this collaboration brings together a strong multidisciplinary and experienced core team. The context encompasses the large urban centres and extends to the remote and rural settings of the Highlands and Islands. The members co-constructing this proposal so far include:

- ✓ [Inspiring Children's Futures](#), University of Strathclyde, alongside the Fraser Allander Institute (economics) and work on the criminal justice system
- ✓ Humanities, Social Sciences and Law at the University of Dundee includes Geographers, Social Workers and Community Education Specialists working across local Scottish and Global contexts on child and youth poverty, empowerment and livelihood, working closely dentistry, environmental science & health sciences in research on young people's homelessness
- ✓ The [MRC/CSO Social and Public Health Sciences Unit](#) at the University of Glasgow has been leading research on child and adolescent public health, with a particular focus on co-production and mental health through the [TRIUMPH](#) and [SHINE](#) networks
- ✓ Further, the University of Glasgow will involve the Scottish Civil Justice Hub (<https://scjh.org.uk>, led by School of Law in collaboration with the Scottish Government's Civil Law and Legal System Division) and link with the Public Policy and Law Reform Research Group and Justice, insecurity and [Fair Decision-making Institutional Research Theme](#) (IRT) in Education (Dr David Lundie)
- ✓ I-Sphere at Herriot Watt University provides strength in the quantitative measurement of child poverty and close collaborations with third sector partners, The Urban Institute, its collaboration with ADR-UK, and the Scottish Centre for Administrative Data Research.
- ✓ Anthropologists, educationalists, sociologists and social workers at the University of Stirling contribute deeper understanding of children's everyday lives and their intergenerational relationships.

Beyond academia, ARC core members are currently working with key stakeholders in Scotland such as: Aberlour Children's Charity, Abriachan Forestry Trust, Generations Working Together, Judicial Institute for Scotland, Mental Health Foundation, Merkinch Partnership, Public Health Scotland, Scottish Law Commission, Scottish Youth Work Research Steering Group. Further, the ARC will be able to benefit from international learning, with active partners such as: the Children's Rights European Academic Network, the International Society of Family Law, UNCRC Implementation Project, the Justice for Children global initiative, World Vision International, partners that interact with the international Rejuvenate research and practice hub on child/ youth rights, the World Health Organisation, the Consortium for Street Children.

Added Benefits of SFC Funding

The ARC will foster cross-institutional learning and help support connections at all levels. This will support incentives to collaborate rather to compete. It builds on already strong networks, expanding them to ensure the interdisciplinarity required to address the social challenges.

The ARC will draw on the alliance partners' experiences of supporting those involved across tertiary education to enter into and engage with research and to foster early career researchers. This compliments UHI and others developing participatory research on poverty across tertiary education institutions.

This fits with the SFC's aim to achieve meaningful capacity building of ECRs, supporting equality, diversity and inclusion across the tertiary education sector and is important to objectives in and outside government to meet sustainable development goals and achieve just youth futures.

The ARC will ensure we remain on the methodological forefront of research challenges, across all levels of career and disciplines. It will create more coherent involvement of academic expertise with Scottish Government priorities and broader stakeholders, to ensure that academic developments substantively and methodologically are available