

SCF Alliances for Research Challenges (ARCs) – Call for Expressions of Interest

Title: Collaboration to strengthen Scotland's mission to end child poverty underpinned by a human rights approach

Lead partner:

Scottish Poverty & Inequality Research Unit, Glasgow Caledonian University

Lead Contact:

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Partner universities/organisations:

The partnership brings together the leading individuals and organisations from Scottish academia and civil society, which currently support the Scottish Government's ambitions to tackle child poverty. At present, the partners are largely working independently or in bi-lateral project partnerships. As outlined in the proposal, the partnership would seek to both strengthen and broaden collaborations among the partners, and to extend the partnership by harnessing other talents from across the Scottish academy and civil society. We envisage participation from most Scottish HEIs. This bid has been developed by:

- Scottish Poverty & Inequality Research Unit, Glasgow Caledonian University (Professor Stephen Sinclair; Professor John M^cKendrick).
- Fraser of Allander Institute, Department of Economics, University of Strathclyde (. Emma Congreve; Dr. Alex Dickson).
- Institute for Inspiring Children's Futures, University of Strathclyde (Professor Jennifer Davidson, Helen Schwittay).
- School of Interdisciplinary Studies, University of Glasgow (David Clelland).
- Institute for Social Policy, Housing & Equalities Research, Heriot-Watt University (Professor Morag Treanor).
- The Poverty Alliance: (Fiona M^cHardy, [Research and Information Manager]; Dr. Laura Robertson [Senior Research Officer]).
- Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Chris Birt, Associate Director for Scotland).
- Improvement Service: Hanna M^cCulloch (National Co-ordinator. Local Child Poverty Action Reports).
- Scottish Children & Young People's Commissioner: Bruce Adamson.

Disciplines included:

At present, the partnership has representation from a wide range of disciplines. The range of academic disciplines would broaden as the coalition is developed. At present, the partnership includes expertise in Social and Public Policy, Economics, Human Geography, Sociology, Gender Studies, Law, Psychology (Child Development, Organisational Psychology), Public Health, Public Administration, Political Science, Education, Development Studies, and Rural Studies.

We are determined that nothing deflects us from our mission to tackle child poverty and deliver a fairer Scotland

Kate Forbes, Finance Secretary, June 1st, 2022¹

Proposed Challenge Area

The Finance Secretary's recent positioning of child poverty as a "national mission" echoes those of Shona Robison in March 2022 (Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government) when introducing *Best Start, Bright Futures*², the second child poverty delivery plan, and the First Minister in September 2021 when introducing the *A Fairer, Greener Scotland*³, the Programme for Government 2021-22. Scotland has been working toward the eradication of child poverty since the *Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017*⁴ was passed with cross-party support by the Scottish Parliament, and poverty has featured prominently in both the original and the refreshed National Performance Framework⁵. However, there has been a step-change in recent times with a sharpening of focus on what will be required to 'realise the mission' by 2030. Significantly, the Scottish Government has restructured to create a Tackling Child Poverty and Social Justice Directorate, which has a much stronger focus than hitherto on collaboration across Directorates. It has also introduced a Child Poverty Programme Board, which uniquely operates within and beyond Government by involving external partners in programme monitoring.

The proposed Alliance for Research Challenge will create a unique collaboration involving key research stakeholders with diverse and complementary expertise to address the Scottish Government's mission to end child poverty, while advancing children's human rights. ARC funding will be used to further develop the capacity to harness the collective talents across the Scottish academy and civil society to deliver analysis and evidence required to meet the ambition that Scotland becomes 'the best place in the world to grow up'⁶, and fulfil the commitment to the Sustainable Development Goal to end poverty in all its forms everywhere⁷.

By combining a human rights perspective with a national mission to end child poverty, Scotland is taking a distinctive approach to child wellbeing. This innovative approach is still in its early stages, meaning that research has a role and opportunity to provide evidence to evaluate impact and inform solutions. The lessons produced will have an international relevance and this provides an opportunity for Scotland to demonstrate global leadership in advancing children's wellbeing. However, taking this opportunity requires new research capacity, partnerships, and processes. Therefore, this expression of interest proposes developing a national collaborative network to consolidate and cultivate the multidisciplinary and cross-sectoral research and analysis required to advance children's rights and reduce poverty in Scotland.

The challenge area addressed by this proposal is a central Scottish Government priority, particularly in meeting the commitments in the *Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017* and informing the policies outlined in the *Best Start, Bright Futures: Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan*. Tackling child poverty is also central to the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and fulfilling *The Promise*⁸ made by the First Minister to children and young people in care that they will have the 'childhood they deserve' and the opportunity to fulfil their capabilities. Both poverty and human rights are strategic outcomes in

¹ <https://www.gov.scot/news/prioritising-national-mission-to-tackle-child-poverty/>

² <https://www.gov.scot/publications/best-start-bright-futures-tackling-child-poverty-delivery-plan-2022-26/>

³ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/fairer-greener-scotland-programme-government-2021-22/>

⁴ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2017/6/contents/enacted>

⁵ <https://nationalperformance.gov.scot/national-outcomes/poverty>

⁶ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/delivering-today-investing-tomorrow-governments-programme-scotland-2018-19/pages/8/>

⁷ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotland-sustainable-development-goals-national-review-drive-action/pages/4/#:~:text=This%20goal%20seeks%20to%20end,their%20chances%20limited%20by%20poverty.>

⁸ <https://thepromise.scot/a-good-childhood>

the National Performance Framework, and meeting them is central to the Scottish Government's commitment to inclusive growth which increases equity and increases opportunities for everyone⁹.

Multidisciplinary and Multi-sectoral Perspectives on a Whole Systems Approach

Ending child poverty, fulfilling children's human rights and advancing child wellbeing are examples of complex and 'particularly knotty societal problems'¹⁰. More than incremental policy reforms are required to meet the challenge. An integrated, whole-systems strategy is required to address such issues effectively, and the 'Scottish Approach' to policy reflects this¹¹. Systems thinking is also being promoted locally across Scotland, as evidenced by Perth and Kinross Council's recent deliberations in its Child Poverty Design Workshop¹². Understanding and improving the effectiveness of policies requires a strategic research programme alongside focussed analyses to connect the macro level of national missions with the meso level of policy implementation and the micro level of services delivery and service users' experiences. The collaboration enabled by ARC funding will address questions of international interest about a whole-of-government and mission-oriented approach to social challenges: what does this involve, how is evidence being used to inform the approach, how is it being delivered in Scotland, and how effective is it in relation to alternative approaches?

Innovative and effective responses arise from bringing together diverse insights and forms of expertise. Impactful research and effective policy must also be informed by insights provided by experts by experience and meaningful contribution from service users. Article 12 of the UNCRC requires that children's views should be heard on matters which affect them. Respecting this, the programme team will promote research collaborations, which create opportunities for the voices of children and young people, their families, carers, and communities to inform research and policy. This is part of the programme team's commitment to mixed methods, participatory research, and co-production of knowledge to generate new insights into child poverty, rights and wellbeing and contribute to policy.

Reflecting this, ARC funding will be used to develop a unique multidisciplinary and multi-sectoral research and knowledge exchange network. The programme leadership team submitting this expression of interest will build research and analysis capacity in Scotland through a systematic programme of knowledge exchange and capacity building to facilitate collaborations which lead to new research partnerships and funding proposals. The programme team and the network it will develop combines the respective expertise of leading academics, service representatives, campaigning groups and policy-makers. This team is the foundation upon which a national research network will be constructed, producing innovative cross-sectoral collaborations to investigate the causes of child poverty and rights deprivation, evaluate policy impact and develop new research projects and policy solutions.

Future Funding Opportunities

The proposal aligns with the priorities of several potential funders whose funding programmes include opportunities to develop grant applications. These include the UKRI (particularly the Economic and Social Research Council); UK research foundations and charities (e.g., Nuffield Foundation, Health Foundation, Joseph Rowntree Foundation); Scottish research foundations and charities (e.g., Robertson Trust, Carnegie Trust, Abdn Financial Fairness Trust); UK government and agencies (e.g., DWP, Social Mobility Commission), and international funders (e.g., Horizon Europe, Wellcome Trust) - building upon existing international relationships and the programme team's track record of successful European collaborations.

⁹ [https://www.gov.scot/publications/inclusive-growth-look/#:~:text=The%20Scottish%20Government%20defines%20inclusive,%20\(Scottish%20Government%202015\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/inclusive-growth-look/#:~:text=The%20Scottish%20Government%20defines%20inclusive,%20(Scottish%20Government%202015).) .

¹⁰ SFC ARC Call, para 9

¹¹ <https://www.alliance4usefulevidence.org/what-is-the-scottish-approach/>

¹² Wednesday 1st June 2022.

There are many aspects of the way in which the Scottish mission to tackle child poverty has been configured that are amenable to capitalising on funding opportunities. The appeal to funders extends beyond a concern to theorise and tackle poverty and the problems it presents. Opportunities are presented by grounding the mission in a human rights framework, operationalising the mission as an integrated 'system', introducing interventions across a wide range of policy fields (e.g., extending childcare provision, reducing household expenditures, promoting 'place' based approaches, etc.), being able to position the proliferation of specific policy interventions within the wider system, introducing new ways of working for government, and the devolved context of examining whether missions can be achieved when full control over the levers of change are reserved.

Scotland has the potential to be a world leader in harnessing resources to tackle child poverty. The opportunities this presents are self-evident for the Scottish research community. However, this also opens opportunity for international collaboration and comparative research. The partners are committed to realise this potential.

Coalition: Programme Team and Strategic Advisers

The programme team includes academics, policy makers, campaigning organisations and service users representing the Scottish research and policy ecosystem. Each member contributes particular expertise and resources which collectively cover the factors which impinge upon child poverty, human rights and wellbeing, as illustrated in the Scottish Government's *Child Poverty System Map*¹³. Each team member will assume lead responsibility for developing capacity, producing new research collaborations, and funding proposals in particular areas, working with a Project Manager employed to support the programme team as a whole.

The **Scottish Poverty & Inequality Research Unit (SPIRU)** at Glasgow Caledonian will coordinate the programme team and lead liaison with the SFC. SPIRU will also lead analysis of the mission-oriented approach to child poverty and implementation of the national child poverty delivery plan. The **Fraser of Allander Institute / Department of Economics** (University of Strathclyde) has an international reputation for applied economics analysis and quantitative research. It will lead the development of new approaches to modelling the impact of policies at the macro and micro levels, including fiscal and tax measures, quasi experimental Econometric and longitudinal analyses. The **Institute for Inspiring Children's Futures** (University of Strathclyde) will lead capacity building and develop research projects which examine international lessons of effective change efforts, as well as children's rights, child development and wellbeing and including the voice of children and young people in the policy process. The **School of Interdisciplinary Studies**, based at the University of Glasgow's Dumfries campus, will lead analysis of geographical aspects of child poverty and wellbeing and in engaging communities and stakeholders in rural areas. The **Institute for Social Policy, Housing & Equalities Research (I-SPHERE)** at Heriot-Watt University will lead the development of research collaborations into the impacts of poverty on children's lives and outcomes (e.g. in education), and analyses of large scale surveys. I-SPHERE also represents the Scottish Centre for Administrative Data Research which is an invaluable resource providing distinctive insights into social issues. The **Poverty Alliance** will lead in ensuring that the perspective of experts by experience informs research and policy analyses, and advancing co-production and participatory policy-making processes.

This core programme team will work with strategic advisers to develop the national and knowledge exchange network and future research programmes: **Joseph Rowntree**

¹³ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/child-poverty-system-map/>

Foundation, the Improvement Service, Scottish Government, Communities Analytical Services Division and the Children & Young People's Commissioner for Scotland.

Added Benefit of SFC Funding

This proposal seeks funding to support three coterminous activities:

1. Developing a national collaborative network to improve knowledge exchange and build research and policy evaluation capacity in Scotland.
2. Developing proposals for future large research projects targeted at prestige national and international funders and building capacity to bid for public sector tenders with a multidisciplinary focus.
3. Publicise the research collaboration, engage stakeholders and illustrate the potential benefits of a national research consortium through targeted demonstration activities such as workshops, podcasts, pilot analyses and co-produced best practice briefings.

The ARC will be focused resolutely on child poverty. Although this will necessitate consideration of a wide range of economic and social policy, our work will have a clear line of sight to the impact on children. The partners feel this is depth rather than breadth approach is proportionate given the intense political focus presenting a unique opportunity for impact over the next decade.

All programme team members are experienced in collaborative working but have not had the opportunity to develop long-term strategic research partnerships with each other nor devote time to developing national capacity in a concerted way. Collaborating with experts by experience and enabling genuine participation of children and young people in research and policy analysis is resource intensive. ARC funding provides an opportunity to consolidate research capacity in Scotland by increasing multidisciplinary, inter-institutional and cross-sectoral collaboration through a concerted knowledge exchange and networking programme to intensify, improve and increase collaborative research on children's rights, well-being, and poverty.

Funding will be used to build research and analysis capacity by providing opportunities for early career and post-doctoral researchers and non-academic stakeholders to enhance and apply their research skills, develop new collaborative partnerships, and disseminate research evidence. The programme team will work closely with the Scottish Graduate School of Social Science and build on the Fraser of Allander's experience with the Economic Futures programme to support skills development, and members of the programme team will invest in new PhD studentships. ARC funding will also be used to support training of citizen scientists and enable collaboration with experts by experience and service users to develop innovative mixed method projects which enable the voice of children and marginalised communities to inform policy.

This investment in collaboration and capacity building creates opportunities for innovative research, such as combining community action research, secondary analyses of administrative data, economic modelling, GIS modelling, and time and budget diaries to provide insights into such issues as service accessibility in Scotland. Such activities are not possible without investing resources to provide experts from all sectors with the opportunity to cultivate innovative collaborations, develop pioneering research projects and generate new insights to inform policy and practice and contribute towards achieving national outcomes.