



**Durham**  
University

Inspiring the extraordinary

## **Connect: a newsletter for our Members of Parliament**



# Welcome to the first edition of Durham University's MP newsletter

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Each term we will focus on a specific Durham University research stream.

We will showcase some of the fascinating projects underway in your constituencies and further afield that bring insight applicable to local communities. In our first edition, we consider the unique interdisciplinary approach our health and wellbeing researchers take.

We hope you find this newsletter useful and welcome your feedback.

**Rachael Richards - Director of Public Affairs, Durham University**

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## Introduction to health research at Durham University

Health sits at the centre of every life and every policy. It is shaped by the education we receive, by our household income, by the quality of our air and waterways.

Our experience of health is shaped by our access to healthcare, the stigma and social exclusion we might have to confront, and the extent to which we can sustain employment. Health is at the centre of our environment, the centre of our communities and the centre of our individual physical and mental wellbeing.

This is what Durham University's health strategy is all about – skilling up our future workforce and generating research that addresses some of the most intransigent complexities in society today; and that makes a difference to how we live our lives.

**Professor Charlotte Clarke**  
*Executive Dean for Social Sciences and Health*

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## Local Covid-19 modelling and facilitating data sharing agreements

Since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, a team of Durham statisticians and data modelling experts, led by Dr Camila Caiado, has been working closely with the Durham and Darlington Local Resilience Forum data cell and the Public Health England North East and Yorkshire Covid-19 Modelling and intelligence group, responding directly to the needs identified by local NHS trusts and authorities. The team is currently working to predict the likely impacts of a second wave of COVID-19, combined with a rise in the usual seasonal effects of flu and cold and is focusing particularly on the potential impacts in care homes over coming months.

The pandemic has highlighted logistical, legal and administrative challenges with sharing of data between institutions, something that needs to be addressed in order to ensure access to relevant data does not limit the way the research community responds to future crises. Durham is leading efforts to establish a Health and Social Care Data Hub, which will enable data-driven research and the provision of analytical support to health and social care stakeholders across the North, driving benefits in the delivery of services and improvements in care.

A consortia of higher education institutions, NHS trusts, and other health and social care stakeholders will drive activity through the Hub, including the Northern Health Science Alliance (NHSA); the North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care System; the Academic Health Science Network (AHSN) for the North East and Cumbria; and industry, particularly SMEs.

At the core of the Hub will be the Durham trusted research environment (TRE), an online safe space, which allows data controllers to transfer sensitive data into a secure platform where trained researchers and practitioners can, in turn, log in to undertake research on that data.



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## Enlighten intensive care programme

Durham's Enlighten programme puts sensory considerations side by side with medical interventions as part of the long-term recovery of patients. Set up in 2013 by Dr Paul Chazot FBPhS, himself an intensive care survivor, Dr Laura Johnstone, professional artist and ICU carer, and Professor Stephen Bonner, Critical Care CRN Research Lead, North of England, the team believes hospital design should aim to create a restorative environment with an emphasis on beauty, air quality and connection to natural systems.

The team provides a unique informed perspective and multidisciplinary clinical, academic and use-interface insight, combining experts from the intensive care community, including bioscience, art, clinical sciences, anthropology, human geography, psychology, computer sciences, architecture, engineering, hospital garden designers, as well as industry collaboration.

Intensive care, as seen through the Covid pandemic, can be a challenging environment. The programme puts the experience of the patient, carer and staff at the heart of its work. Despite consistent research demonstrating the therapeutic quality of windows since the 1980s - particularly a view on to nature, colour and imagery - intensive care in the UK is designed purely for medical purposes.

Enlighten installations, used inside and out, create connections with nature and time. The creation of accessible gardens, designed so that beds can be wheeled into beautiful outdoor spaces (including ICU beds), enable patients to benefit from the experience of being in nature. Artists illustrate how their involvement in the design of clinical settings can help ensure the aesthetic and mental health of the health care community is catered for.

Patients, often unable to speak due to intubation, need ways to communicate and maintain a degree of independence. Prototype devices have been created to alter the intensive care environment: a control and communication device was developed and successfully tested. Functionality is currently being enhanced to provide environmental changes designed to re-connect the patient to the full set of sensory stimulation.

Enlighten aims to create privacy for the patient whilst maintaining the social connection to others, improving the ICU experience.



## Body image in Nicaragua and implications for UK policy

Body dissatisfaction and rates of disordered eating are increasing globally, and the spread of mass media may be one reason why. But it's a challenge to link increasing media access with changing body ideals – because as populations gain more access to media, they also change in other ways.

They may become more urbanised, wealthier and have better access to nutrition – all of which can lead to differences in body ideals.

The Pearl Lagoon Basin is an area of Nicaragua which is currently in the process of receiving mains electricity for the first time. Those living in the remote villages of the Lagoon have no access to the internet or magazines, and can only access visual media through television. Over three years, Professor Lynda Boothroyd has examined the extent to which villages with different levels of television access exhibit different levels of body dissatisfaction.

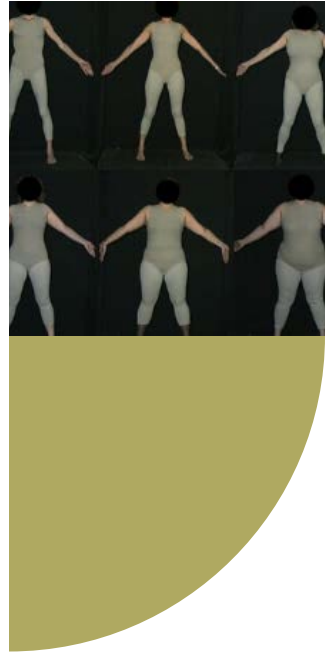
Research found that those who watched more television preferred slimmer bodies. Specifically, that people who watched approximately three hours of TV a week preferred a body one full point slimmer on the Body Mass Index than someone who didn't watch TV.

On a woman of average height, that's about a difference of three kilos. The research also found the more people watched TV, the slimmer their preferred female body size became.

This was true for both men and women. Findings also support the argument that increasing global rates of body dissatisfaction and eating disorders are driven at least in part by the expansion of globalised mass media.

Clearly the findings have implications for policy within comparable developing countries but also in the UK.

The team's recent evidence to the Women and Equalities select committee argued for greater attention to body image and media within the curriculum and that more could be done to diversify the range of healthy bodies portrayed within the media.



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## Tackling the domestic abuse Covid-19 crisis

Researchers in our sociology department are undertaking a significant amount of work on the impact of Covid-19 on domestic abuse.

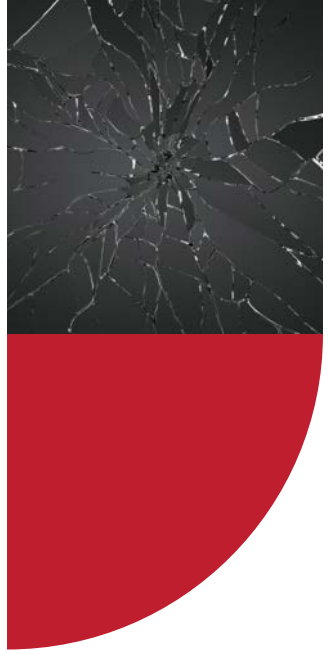
Professor Nicole Westmarland is working with colleagues in Durham's Centre for Research into Violence and Abuse (CRIVA) investigating:

- How domestic violence perpetrator programmes have moved their interventions online in Australia, USA and UK during Covid-19.
- Evaluating the work of *Respect* interventions during Covid-19, including their helplines, young people's programme, and victim safety work.
- Evaluation of a pilot project for Cafcass working with domestic violence perpetrators online.

Dr Stephen Burrell has also conducted the below new research:

- Evidence-based report for the US-based NGO Promundo about the connections between men, masculinities and Covid-19; from health to violence care, the economy and politics.
- A survey with 36 members of the MenEngage Europe network to find out how organisations working with men and boys on gender equality issues have been affected by the pandemic and their response.
- Research for the Respect Men's advice line with Professor Westmarland and other members of CRIVA looking at the experiences of male victims of domestic violence and abuse during the Covid-19 crisis. This has involved observing hundreds of anonymised calls and e-mails to the helpline.
- A collaboration with the local community interest company, *Changing Relations* which looks at how gender inequalities in the business sector have been impacted by the pandemic (including conducting a survey with North East businesses), and how these can be addressed.

Dr Kelly Johnson has conducted the largest study globally of police reporting of Domestic Violence incidence during the pandemic.



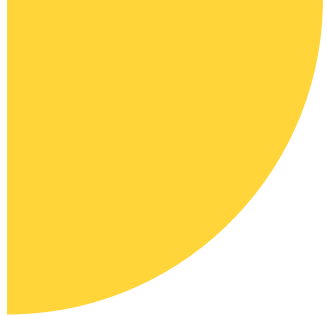
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## Helping to promote physical activity in people with disabilities

Our Department of Sports and Exercise Science has been granted funding from the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Applied Research Collaboration (ARC) for the North East and North Cumbria (NENC) and Sport England to develop and evaluate a programme to train social workers to promote access and participation in physical activity for disabled people.

The programme is being developed in partnership with Sport England, Social Work England, and Disability Rights UK.

Further information contact Professor Brett Smith  
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## About our policy team

Durham University's policy team is responsible for building relationships with policymakers regionally, nationally and internationally to optimise the external impact of Durham's world-leading research

Our key external relationships include politicians, government departments and agencies, non-departmental public bodies, think tanks, learned societies, NGOs and the voluntary sector – at regional, national and international level.

For more information, visit [durham.ac.uk/research.innovation/business.engagement/policyhub](https://durham.ac.uk/research.innovation/business.engagement/policyhub)

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