

## CYCJ's Research Strategy

### CYCJ's vision

CYCJ works towards ensuring that Scotland's approach to children and young people in conflict with the law is rights-respecting, contributing to better outcomes for our children, young people and communities. This vision represents a subtle change of emphasis, from putting practitioners and policymakers at the centre, to ensuring that children and young people are at the heart of all our activity (although supporting policy and practice remains a key mechanism for change). This shift in tone is conveyed by our accompanying change of name, to the Children and Young People's Centre for Justice. The breadth of the name continues our focus on children (aged under 18) as a distinct group who require specific provisions due to their legal status and developmental stage, but also reaffirms our position that young adults do not emerge fully mature on the day of their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, but rather that they warrant specific attention as they navigate both the justice system and the path to adulthood.

Correspondingly, CYCJ now plans to formalise the Participation work that is currently undertaken within CYCJ, into a workstream in its own right, underscoring the importance that we place on improving children and young people's participation:



### The CYCJ Research Vision

Within the broader CYCJ vision, it is our intention to develop the research workstream of CYCJ into an internationally renowned place of research, with a focus on children and young adults in conflict with the law, and with increased capacity including post-graduate researchers, early career researchers and visiting academics.

By research 'workstream' we mean all of the CYCJ research activity, which will broadly fall to dedicated research staff but may involve research undertaken by other members of the CYCJ team, or by colleagues external to CYCJ but that is for or with CYCJ.



Children and Young People's  
Centre for Justice

[www.cycj.org.uk](http://www.cycj.org.uk)

## The background and context to the vision

The strategy has emerged from an ongoing reflection of CYCJ's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges, as well as drawing on learning gained from the recent evaluation of CYCJ, and through adaptations to the COVID-19 global pandemic. CYCJ is in a privileged position between policy, practice and academia and these connections mean that research is often relevant (responding to policy and practice needs), useful and impactful on a local and national scale. The focus on policy and practice means that outputs are timely, accessible and have breadth. Furthermore, for a small team the volume of research activity is substantial and has demonstrable impact.

With the potential for substantial impact there comes ever greater responsibility to ensure that CYCJ research is robust, rigorous and credible. And in many ways these same strengths are also the research workstream's weaknesses. In order to meet policy and practice needs and timescales, and without a budget, research has often been small-scale, short-term and following tried and tested patterns of methods and participants. The breadth and volume of activity is at the expense of depth of knowledge, understanding, and developing thinking and expertise. The (justified) importance of producing timely, accessible and practice-focused outputs limits time (and funds) available to prepare publications for peer-reviewed journals and international conferences, activities required for academic credibility, significance and international research of outputs. Busy workloads (and the qualification levels and experience of CYCJ researchers) also limit the opportunity to spend time on accessing larger research grants (especially those from funding councils), although numerous requests for external research and evaluation are rejected each year due to the time-consuming nature of managing multiple small grants. In this context it is difficult to develop staff, and engage in innovative and high quality research that can develop new knowledge and theories and really push policy and practice.

However, a number of opportunities have arisen that have given CYCJ time for pause and reflection on our research strategy. The first of these is from the [CYCJ Evaluation](#), published in February 2020, which confirmed and clarified our role as a boundary-spanning organisation, located in research, policy, practice and lived experience. While this position can sometimes mean that there can be an uneasy fit within any of these communities, the boundary-spanning role is important in building relationships and connections across these spheres, as well as having a major contribution to paradigm shifts and system change. Thus it became clear that a key role for the CYCJ research workstream would be to provide the capacity, skills and thinkspace to continue to look towards the future, to push at boundaries and to challenge the status quo. While research, evidence and support for current policy and practice remains a key priority in order to understand the here and now as well as to inform future thinking, an approach that was overly focused on current activity would reduce CYCJ's ability to futureproof justice for children and young adults. Thus, carving out the space within the CYCJ workstream to conduct research that can inspire and support system change will become essential.

Second, a strategic decision to remove the research workstream from the core-funded Scottish Government workplan for 2020/2021 has given the research workstream time and space to focus on developing a coherent strategy and to explore external funding opportunities in order to help CYCJ progress towards its goals. This approach comes with risks, leaving the research workstream vulnerable to the insecurity and instability that comes

with short and medium-term research funding, and thus there should remain sufficient commitment from CYCJ to continue to fund some research and development time from its core grant (focused primarily on consolidating and seeking new connections, collaborations and funding opportunities, and providing continuity for the research workstream in times of transition). However, this approach also provides opportunities in that the CYCJ workstream will be able to take on bigger scale projects and build capacity and networks in youth justice and related research across the sector. This increased capacity will also afford CYCJ the opportunity to focus on research quality, innovation, impact and international reach.

Lastly, the reduced capacity in the research workstream as a result of the pandemic has hampered progress in securing funding, as well as causing delays to planned research projects and potential funding opportunities. At the same time, there have been opportunities that have arisen from COVID-19 funding, as well as reflection and learning about *how* the CYCJ research workstream connects and conducts research in a global pandemic. Opportunities arising from the pandemic include the potential for more flexible working increasing productivity and wellbeing (although childcare issues remain potentially problematic) and the potential for increased international collaboration as the global research community adjusts to holding networking meetings and conferences etc via online and virtual platforms.

### The Approach

It is proposed that, over the next five years, CYCJ works towards growing and establishing its research workstream as a renowned centre for research with and about children and young adults in conflict with the law. In the short-term this means expanding, upskilling and developing the research team; applying for external funding (usually as part of a wider collaboration) in order to begin to support more innovative research; and focusing on producing quality outputs with wider academic and international reach and enhanced credibility. A core focus will be on securing funding for research projects that help to identify and fill gaps in knowledge and understanding, as well as projects that look towards the future of justice and more radical or system change. In addition, the CYCJ workstream will retain a focus on supporting policy and practice, predominantly through monitoring and evaluation activity, and supporting the workforce to generate and use evidence that can be applied in current justice settings.

The research vision and approach aligns and interfaces with the wider CYCJ vision and workstreams in multiple ways:

Research	Generate new knowledge, theories and understandings; provide capacity to push boundaries, identify new directions, gaps and priorities.	Emphasis: academic
Practice and Policy Development	Generate evidence for, and from, policy and practice, including monitoring and evaluation. Support research use and translation, support practitioner research and skill development.	Emphasis: applied
Participation	Promotion and innovation in participatory research methodologies; support the development, piloting and implementation of a Young Researcher's Network.	Emphasis: inclusive and creative

## Research Priorities

The following research priorities have been identified as they meet current knowledge or practice gaps as well as fit with the CYCJ research workstream's skills, experience and interests, or align with work currently underway. While the research workstream will remain flexible to emerging needs, priorities and funding opportunities it is proposed that the following themes are an area of focus over the next five years, with annual reviews to assess progress and identify any emerging priorities:

- supporting and documenting the implementation of rights in youth justice (including participation and the needs and rights of families)
- understanding and measuring the impact of inclusion, prevention and early intervention
- exploring the impact and experience of childhood adversity and trauma and the interaction with justice system contact (and other related systems)
- understanding contemporary masculinities and supporting boys and young men in order to reduce offending and violence and improve health and wellbeing outcomes
- developing innovative and effective participatory research methods, including supporting a Young Researcher's Network and a Practitioner Research pilot

## Action Plan

A full action plan will be developed in order to support the implementation of the strategic vision. However, the overarching activities for the next five years potentially include:

Year 1	<b>Baseline assessment and building networks and expertise:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research skills, strengths and gaps audit within CYCJ</li> <li>• Building experience and skills (collaboration on large bids, attainment of qualifications i.e. PhDs, methods training etc).</li> <li>• Identifying small to medium sized research and evaluation funding as transitional funding to bridge the gap to larger bids</li> <li>• Joining research networks and collaborations</li> </ul>
Year 2	<b>Consolidating skills, networks and funding:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrable track record in collaborating on large-scale bids</li> <li>• Clear partner in key research and other networks</li> <li>• Developing methodological excellence and innovation</li> </ul>
Years 3 and 4	<b>Extending networks and establishing leadership:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involvement in global research networks</li> <li>• Leading large scale funding bids</li> <li>• Clear leadership, expertise and training delivery/teaching in innovative and participatory research methods</li> </ul>
Year 5	<b>Developing as a centre of excellence</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to develop research networks and collaborations</li> <li>• Attract large scale funding and strengthen as an interdisciplinary centre for research focused on children and young adults in conflict with the law, in particular giving voice to the experiences of marginalised groups through innovative and participatory research methods.</li> </ul>