

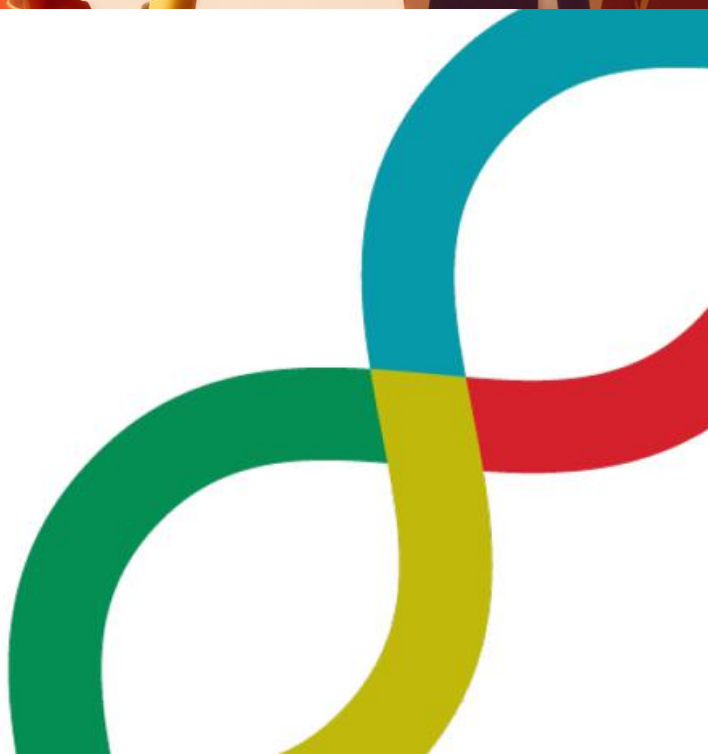


Ymchwil Iechyd
a Gofal Cymru
Health and Care
Research Wales



2020-2025 End of award report

decipher.uk.net



1. INTRODUCTION

On behalf of the DECIPHer centre I am very pleased to present our most recent report which highlights our work over the last period of 2024 to 2025. We also provide an overview of what we have achieved over the last five years of funding from Health and Care Research Wales. This report allows us to reflect on our considerable successes in securing 123 research studies to a value of over £70M during the period.

We outline some of the major studies conducted during this time – many of them cutting across our programmes of research: Healthy Public Policy; Healthy Settings and Organisations; Healthy Social Relationships and Methodological Innovation in Public Health Science. Within these you will find major infrastructure grants that we have secured for Wales. This includes: The Wolfson Centre for Young People's Mental Health (2020); an NIHR Public Health Intervention Responsive Studies Team (2020); a Health Determinants Research Collaboration (2023); a UK Behavioural Research Collaboration (2023); the NIHR Public Health Reviews Team (2024) and a successful joint post with Public Health Wales linking research teams from the partner organisations (2024).

We have taken the opportunity to look back on our key collaborations, engagement activities and impacts over the past year and also reviewed our performance over the whole funding period. This has allowed us to reflect and highlight our most important work with policy makers, practitioners and the public.

You will be able to read about our recent successes in developing capacity and also look back on the many promotions, awards and students we have been able to support over the years. This includes: 12 awards for excellence; three new Professors; four Readers; two Senior Research Fellows; three Research Fellows; ten Research Associates and two Professional Services promotions. We are also pleased to note 15 new PhDs awarded in 2020 - 2025, with 26 currently ongoing.

Finally, we provide an overview of our international work – our key collaborations, invitations to speak, conferences attended and short courses delivered. You will see that DECIPHer maintains its position as an international centre of research excellence with contacts across a large number of countries throughout the world.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S Murphy'.

*Professor Simon Murphy,
Director of DECIPHer*

Mae'r ddogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg. This document is also available In Welsh.

2. WHO WE ARE AND HOW WE OPERATE

DECIPHER Executive Team



Prof Rhiannon Evans

Co-Lead Healthy Families and Relationships



Dr Jemma Hawkins

Co-Lead PHIRNS and Methodological Innovation in Public Health Science



Dr Sara Jones

DECIPHER Centre Manager



Prof Graham Moore

Deputy Director of DECIPHER; Co-Lead Healthy Public Policy



Dr Kelly Morgan

Contract Research Representative



Prof Simon Murphy

DECIPHER Director; Co-Lead SHRN and Healthy Settings and Organisations



Dr Honor Young

Co-Lead SHRN and Healthy Settings and Organisations

DECIPHER Co-Investigators



Dr Julie Bishop

Co-Lead PHIRNS



Prof Amanda Robinson

Co-Lead Healthy Public Policy



Prof Mike Robling

Co-Lead Methodological Innovation in Public Health Intervention Science



Dr Jeremy Segrott

Public Involvement Lead; Co-Lead Healthy Families and Relationships



Prof James White

Research Development Support Group

Core Metrics

Reporting period: 2020/2025

Health and Care Research Wales infrastructure award to the group



Direct
funding
awarded

£2.49m

Jobs created
through direct
funding



Grants won during reporting period

Grants won	Led by group	Group collaborating
Number	47	76
Value	£10.4m	£70.6m
Funding to Wales	£7.6m	£24m
Funding to group	£7.2m	£3.7m
Additional jobs created for Wales	58	114
Additional jobs created for group	56	24



Number of publications



Number of public
engagement events



Number of public
involvement opportunities



Clockwise from top left: Public engagement; Short course teaching; Short course attendees; SHRN on the road; (Centre) Adapting intervention models for IMPACT Salud, Peru

DECIPHER is funded by Welsh Government through Health and Care Research Wales. In terms of core metrics, this last year saw us continue to secure grants, six led by DECIPHER and nine as collaborators. This brought just over £8M research income to Wales and of this £2M direct to our centre.

This means that between 2020 to 2025, we received a grant of just under **£2.5M** from Health and Care Research Wales and secured **123 studies**. Of these, 47 were led by us and 76 were as collaborators. Over the five years, we brought over **£31.5M of research income** into Wales, of which just under £11M came to DECIPHER.

Our five years of success has resulted in **172 additional jobs** created in Wales, 80 of them within our centre. DECIPHER has also supported **312 collaborative activities and events** with our stakeholders to co-produce and translate our research. Meanwhile, we have produced **283 publications** including refereed journal articles and published

reports and guidance. In five years we have also successfully supported and delivered **401 public engagement events**. This includes presentations by our centre staff, DECIPHER online events and our international programme of short courses.

Over the years, DECIPHER has made significant contributions supporting policy development and evaluation, with Welsh Government, UK and international activity. This includes membership of the Welsh Government Tobacco Working Group, the COVID-19 Technical Advisory Cell for Children and Education, the Ministerial Task and Finish Group for the Whole School Approach to Mental Health, an acknowledgment in the Welsh Government consultation response on the Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) Statutory Guidance and code, and work with UNESCO to support the drafting of 'Guidelines to Mainstream Social and Emotional Learning in education settings'.

4. DEVELOPING CAPACITY

4.1 Public Health Improvement Research Networks (PHIRNS)



Dr Jemma Hawkins

DECIPHer adopts a co-production partnership approach to tackle complex public health challenges.

To this end we have successfully developed a number of high impact

public health networks. The overall aim of these networks is to bring together policy, practice, public and academic stakeholders to develop solutions to Wales' public health challenges. We do this by setting up stakeholder **Research Development Groups (RDGs)** to progress funding bids and then support the research studies and their translation into impact. In part this is achieved through shared research priorities and joint capacity development with Public Health Wales as a key policy and practice partner. Over the past five years key developments have included successful funding from the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) for two of their key network infrastructure initiatives: **Health Determinants Research Collaboration (HDRC)** and **Public Health Intervention Responsive Studies Teams (PHIRST)**.

One of our approaches to developing research capacity and capability includes strengthening and consolidating links with Public Health Wales through embedded and co-located staff and also through shared networks. The most established networks exist in the context of schools, particularly through the **Welsh Network of Health and Well-being Promoting Schools (WNHWPS)**. This joint working is evidence of the evolution and integration that has been achieved between PHIRNS and key national public health programmes. Public Health Wales' transformation programme has provided opportunities to strengthen and align the partnership between **The School Health Research Network (SHRN)** and WNHWPS, including a lead role for WNHWPS in recruiting to the SHRN survey. The use of the survey data

is specifically included in the assessment tool for the Whole School Approach to Mental and Emotional Well-being, and the development of the new monitoring and evaluation framework of the Healthy Schools Network is likely to include a similar approach. Public Health Wales is using the survey data within the monitoring frameworks of other key public health policies e.g. Tobacco, in partnership with Welsh Government.

“
We have successfully developed a number of high-impact public health networks

”
DECIPHer staff were involved in the launch of the Public Health Wales Community of Practice on evaluation, with Prof Rhiannon Evans and Dr Kelly Morgan delivering talks at the launch event in March 2023. In January 2024, Dr Sara Long took up a new position in a jointly funded DECIPHer/ Public Health Wales post that further solidifies the strategic relationship between the two organisations. Sara's post includes managing a team of researchers in Public Health Wales' Health Improvement division with a focus on conducting policy and practice relevant research and facilitating evidence-informed policy and practice. This work will include developing mechanisms for enabling joint research between both organisations with the aim of establishing joint research projects and facilitating capacity development opportunities for PHW researchers to help work towards this.

In the first 15 months of the post we have set up RDG groups around themes of 'obesity and nutrition' and 'physical activity'. We have also established a research interest group around vaping and substance use. These groups are made up of academics, policy and practice stakeholders, working towards research outcomes such as submission of grant applications (three applications submitted to the value of £1.7m), academic papers (five manuscripts submitted/ published), and other research outputs, as per the image on page 7.



Academic
manuscripts



Technical
reports



Conference
presentations



Funding
applications



Drop-in
clinics



Research
development
groups

Above: DECIPHER/Public Health Wales joint post outputs



*Dr Julie Bishop, Director
of Health Improvement at
Public Health Wales,
reflects on a journey
through partnership.*

As this is the final report for
the 2020-2025 funding

period it has been helpful to reflect on working
with DECIPHER during the last five years and
how that has built on a much longer
partnership from the creation of DECIPHER 15
years ago. In my role working across Wales on
Health Improvement in a policy and practice
context, I can clearly see how the way in which
DECIPHER has developed and approached its
work is very different to the way other
academic institutions engage with us.

For me there are three key ingredients that
have helped to deliver the achievements
that we have collectively. The first is **a genuine
willingness to invest time in building
partnerships with policy and practice.**

Recognising that being willing to sit on groups,
provide advice and give time helps increase
understanding on both sides and ultimately
generates research that leads to real change.

That leads me to the second ingredient, which
is about **understanding the pathway
to impact.** There is a lot of good research
undertaken but much of it does not find its
way into policy or practice and therefore does
not have impact. Often this is because the

research ideas have been created in isolation of
those who will use the findings, or where
the ideas while technically sound would be
unrealistic or unaffordable to implement in
practice. DECIPHER has always understood
the need to ensure that work should be
valuable and useful in the real world and as
a result innovations like SHRN have become
part of the landscape, not just in schools but
also within Government and the NHS.

“
*DECIPHER has always understood the
need to ensure that work should be
valuable and useful in the real world*
”

That takes me to the third ingredient,
DECIPHER's **commitment to genuinely
transdisciplinary research** that involves
partners from the outset and gives equal
weight and value to practice and participant
expertise to that of academics. In contrast,
I receive many non-DECIPHER requests to
write a letter of support for research I am
completely unaware of and sometimes that
is OK, particularly if it is in a very specialised
area with UK wide application but
sometimes it is from much closer to home.

The health of our nation is facing more
challenges than ever and improving health,
reducing inequalities and increasing our
focus on prevention will need our collective
knowledge and expertise to achieve change.

4.2 National and International Short Courses



*Dr Rachel Brown,
Short Course Lead*

A key element of DECIPHer's methods research programme over 2020 -2025 has been our short courses that provide training on methods for public health intervention science.

Each year, we deliver a summer course that covers an introduction to a variety of methods and principles, followed by individual courses on particular methods. We deliver bespoke versions of these courses to groups across the UK and internationally.

2020 -2025 included delivery challenges presented by Covid-19 and the switch to online provision. In January 2021, DECIPHer co-investigator Dr Jeremy Segrott and our public involvement officer Peter Gee delivered an online training course, in collaboration with Health and Care Research Wales, on involving young people in research. Our five-day course was delivered online in June 2021 and, despite this change, the course was oversubscribed within a week of opening registrations. Likewise, our one-day process evaluation course was also moved online and oversubscribed with UK and international delegates.

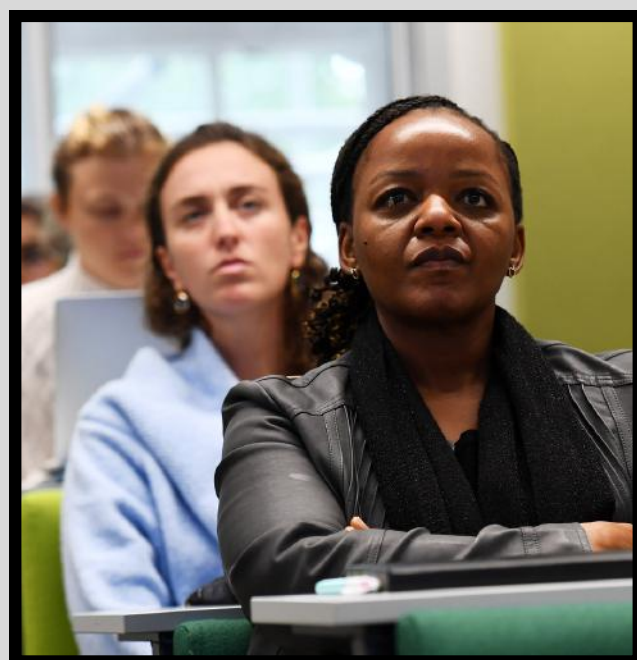
From 2022, we reinstated some in-person delivery, combined with online and hybrid courses. Our summer course delivered two, two-day workshops, supported by pre-recorded offline sessions. This allowed coverage of a wider variety of topics consistent with previous offerings whilst avoiding multiple days of screen time.

The full course returned to in-person delivery in 2023-24, hosted in DECIPHer's new location, Cardiff University's Social Science Research Park (SPARK). Attendees were national and international and included five members of Health and Care Research Wales faculty.

Our one-day course on process evaluation returned in-person in 2022, alongside a new one-day course based on DECIPHer's MRC-NIHR funded methodological guidance on **Adapting Interventions to New Contexts (ADAPT)**. Since 2023, our September programme has consisted of three courses on **Feasibility Studies, Process Evaluation** and **Adapting Interventions to New Contexts**. These courses are a key way to diffuse our methodological innovations to other national and international contexts.

— “ —
The course attracted an international audience and representation across various fields
— ” —

Requests for bespoke course delivery continues to grow. In 2022 our process evaluation course was delivered to the Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) on request. In May 2023, we delivered a three-day in-person course to staff at Ulster University in Belfast, focused on introducing methods for developing and evaluating complex interventions. In 2023/24 we delivered a two-part course to academic and clinical researchers from Oxford Brookes





Short course teaching in SPARK

University's Institute of Applied Health Research (OxInAHR) and Oxford University Hospital Trust. The course covered most elements of our Cardiff summer course and received very positive feedback.

Internationally, the programme continues to grow. In 2020, DECIPHer co-investigators Dr Jemma Hawkins and Prof Graham Moore led an online accredited doctoral training course on developing and evaluating complex interventions for PhD students at Karolinska Institute (KI) in Sweden. The course attracted students from KI itself, as well as students from elsewhere in Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands and Tanzania.

The course has run every year since, now as a three-week accredited doctoral training course, with Dr Rachel Brown recently joining the teaching team. This collaboration also led to successful external funding grants involving Dr Jemma Hawkins as a collaborator.

In 2020, Prof Rhiannon Evans and Dr Rachel Brown delivered an adapted online version of the Process Evaluation course to 15 researchers and doctoral students at Aalborg

University, Denmark. This has continued to run every year since. As a result of this, two DECIPHer staff members contributed a chapter to the Public Health Handbook for undergraduate and postgraduate degrees across Denmark.

— “
*Our methodological innovations,
 developed in Wales, become
 diffused to other national
 and international contexts*
 ” —

We have delivered international bespoke courses, including to staff at Monash University Central Clinical School in Australia, and academics from Canterbury Christ Church University and their collaborators from four Universities in Palestine as part of a Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) collaboration. We have also delivered bespoke sessions from our courses in a variety of international contexts, including Namibia, Austria, Finland, Moldova, North Macedonia, Spain and Germany.

4.3 Supporting Academic and Professional Services Staff Development

Looking back over the last five years, we are justly proud of supporting colleagues in their development, whilst building unique public health research capacity in Wales and beyond.

This achievement has included three new professors, four readers, two senior research fellows, three research fellows, ten research associates and two promotions for Professional Service staff.

We have also successfully supported 15 PhDs to completion with 26 still in progress and eight fellowships hosted. Added to this is our highly successful undergraduate and postgraduate research placement scheme. Here, we have hosted 32 UK and 18 international students.

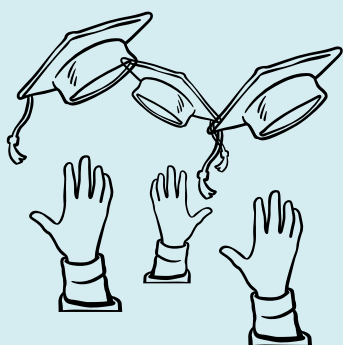
This year has seen DECIPHer continuing to successfully build capacity at all levels. This included a number of promotions including Dr Rhiannon Evans to Professor, Dr Jeremy Segrott, Dr Jemma Hawkins and Dr Yulia Shenderovich to Reader.

The year also saw significant awards and nominations for centre staff. Dr Shujun Liu was awarded a place on the GW4 Crucible 2025: Creative Societies and Cultures, Cultural and Public Good. Dr Sara Long was nominated for a 2024 Cardiff University Celebrating Excellence Award in the category of Excellence in Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and Dr Hayley Reed was awarded a place on the Welsh Crucible 2024: Competitive Professional Development Course.



Clockwise from top left: Emily Lowthian and Hayley Reed at their PhD graduation; Bethan Pell wins the Three Minute Thesis (3MT®) Cardiff heat; Jordan Van Godwin presents at the UKSBM Conference; Rebecca Anthony at her PhD graduation; Dr Caitlyn Donaldson presents a poster summarising her PhD

Staff development in numbers: 2020-2025



15

PhDs
awarded



24

Promotions



18

Personal
awards and
nominations



18

International
student
visitors



8

Fellowships
hosted



32

UK student
placements

5. RESEARCH PROGRAMMES

5.1 Healthy Public Policy



*Prof Graham Moore,
Programme Lead*



*Prof Amanda Robinson,
Programme Lead*

The Healthy Public Policy programme aims to provide timely and robust evidence to influence decisions by national and local government organisations, in order to improve population health and reduce inequalities. It also evaluates implementation and impacts of policy decisions on population health and inequalities.

DECIPHer's early years involved influential research to improve public health, including a trial of the National Exercise Referral Scheme and evidence informing the Welsh Government's decision to ban smoking in cars with children. Building on this legacy, from 2020-25, the Healthy Public Policy programme aimed to provide timely and robust data and evidence to influence decisions by national and local government organisations and evaluate implementation and impacts of policy decisions on population health and inequalities.

Smoking and vaping

Collaborating with the UK Prevention Research Partnership (UKPRP) consortium SPECTRUM, we expanded the **Smoking and Alcohol Toolkit Surveys** to Wales and Scotland, providing national-level data on smoking and alcohol use. We led a **Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2021 Impact Case Study** on influencing tobacco policy in Wales, drawing on earlier work and the NIHR-funded evaluation of EU Tobacco Products Directive (TPD) regulations. DECIPHer researchers were part of a Public Health Wales led **Incident Response group** focused on young people's use of e-cigarettes following the rise of

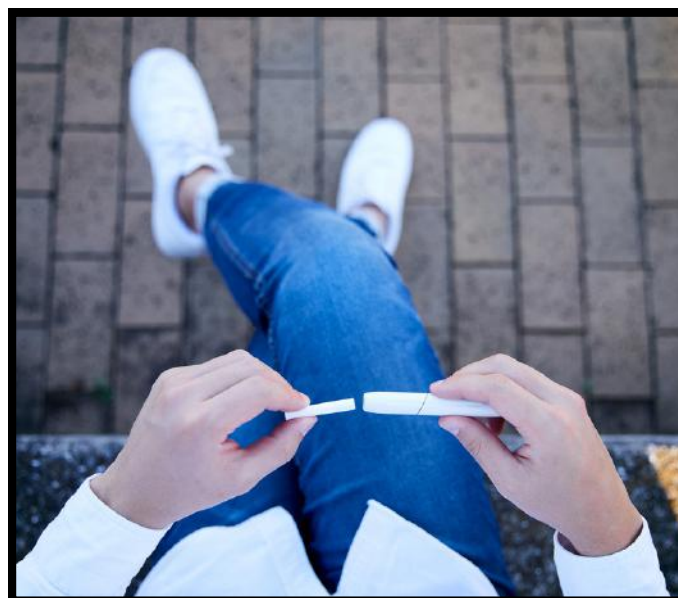
disposable e-cigarettes. UK Governments are now moving to ban these specific vaping products, and we are exploring use of The School Health Research Network (SHRN) data to evaluate impacts on vaping and smoking behaviours.

School settings

Intersecting with the healthy settings programme, Welsh Government funded pilot work to **expand the SHRN survey into primary schools** from 2020-2024. The survey reached approximately one in three primary schools in Wales and continues to expand as part of an integrated primary and secondary focused SHRN.

“
*Welsh Government funded pilot work
to expand the SHRN survey into primary
schools from 2020-2024*

”
A Health and Care Research Wales funded fellowship focused on health and well-being aspects of curriculum reform continues to publish its findings. Within the Wolfson Centre for Young People's Mental Health, we are continuing to evaluate Welsh Government





statutory guidance on embedding a Whole School Approach to Mental Health and well-being. Emerging findings have been shared in meetings with the Cabinet Secretary for Education, and we have had productive discussions around communicating findings to inform policy decisions.

Intervention evaluations

Intersecting with the Healthy Social Relationships programme, DECIPHer researchers evaluated the **Health Pathfinder** programme, which aimed to improve the health response to domestic violence and abuse across eight sites. Our legacy of policy-relevant research from earlier phases of DECIPHer includes work on universal food provision via the **Primary School Free Breakfast Initiative**. This policy intervention continues to be sustained many years after the trial, and was cited in arguments for universal free school meals in Wales.

Partnerships and collaborations

In this phase of DECIPHer, we have built partnerships to put us in a strong position to seek funding for research focused on the implementation and impacts of this policy in our next phase. Partnerships from the TPD evaluation, and **SPECTRUM**, led to DECIPHer's involvement in the £10m ESRC Consortium, **Behavioural Research UK (BR-UK)**,

conducting interdisciplinary research to address societal challenges. BR-UK is led by Prof Linda Bauld and Prof Susan Michie, involving researchers from eight UK universities and various government partners. The Wales arm is led from DECIPHer, who will co-lead the Health and Well-being theme in partnership with the Centre for Public Health in Queen's University Belfast.



The Wales arm of Behavioural Research UK (BR-UK) is led from DECIPHer, who will co-lead the Health and Well-being Theme



Focusing on policy at the local level, we have engaged with **NIHR Public Health Research programme initiatives**, including an **NIHR Public Health Interventions Responsive Studies Team (PHIRST)**. This is coming toward the end of its first five-year cycle and seeking funding to continue for another five years into the next phase of our centre. More recently, we collaborated in the establishment of an **NIHR Health Determinants Research Collaboration (HDRC)** in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

5.2 Healthy Settings and Organisations



*Prof Simon Murphy,
Programme Lead*



*Dr Honor Young,
Programme Lead*

The Healthy Settings and Organisations programme aims to develop and evaluate whole system approaches to improving population health, as well as understanding their implementation. We have researchers working with schools and communities on a broad range of health priority areas, including mental health and well-being, healthy eating, smoking prevention, sexual health and healthy social relationships.

During this period, we saw a step change in our work with the ongoing development of The School Health Research Network (SHRN). This has included conducting a biennial survey with students and staff, supporting multiple research studies, expanding recruitment to all primary schools and establishing SHRN as a Welsh Government funded entity. We have also extended our programme of research to encompass the workplace and community settings.

Supporting healthy school policies

In partnership with the Wolfson Centre for Young People's Mental Health, we have undertaken the **evaluation of the Whole-School Approach to Emotional and Mental Well-Being**. Through the provision of SHRN data analysis, we supported the **evaluation of the Welsh Government Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) In-Reach pilot** and a review of school and community based counselling.

Supporting healthy school practices

Schools, and local authorities, continue to benefit from engagement with SHRN

and its data infrastructure via tailored reports and data provision. We routinely publish research articles accompanied by lay summaries to share our research findings as well as hosting interactive webinars for our educational stakeholders. In addition, one project developed a school-based data dashboard for stakeholders to access and use key indicators to inform policy and practice.

“
Schools, and local authorities, continue to benefit from engagement with SHRN and its data infrastructure
”

Working with primary schools

DECIPHer completed a four-year study (2020-2024) which explored the feasibility of expanding SHRN into primary schools. Following study completion, the **SHRN survey was rolled out to all mainstream primary schools** in Autumn 2024.

Working with Further Education

DECIPHer continued its work in Further Education (FE). The Optimisation, feasibility testing and pilot randomised trial of **SaFE: a sexual health and healthy relationships intervention for Further Education**, piloted a new sexual health and dating and





relationship violence intervention for use in FE settings. Eight sites across England and Wales took part, with intervention sites receiving staff training to promote sexual health and recognise and respond to dating, relationship and gender-based violence, as well as receiving a free, confidential onsite sexual health and relationship services. The SaFE team are now in the process of applying for further funding to develop a next-phase evaluation study (SaFE2).

Developing a healthy workplace

A new area of focus within the programme was the workplace setting. Working in partnership with Public Health Wales, DECIPHer developed new evaluation tools for the **Healthy Working Wales programme**. This has involved interviews with organisations across Wales representing the private, public and third sectors spanning a range of industries. It has also involved academic reviewing of existing workplace health research and work-related health and well-being measures. This work was supported by a public health registrar training placement which was co-located between Healthy Working Wales and DECIPHer. The evaluation tools support employers in Wales to undertake an assessment of the health and well-being of their workforce, measure progress against this and develop data-informed health and well-being practices.

It supports Welsh Government's objectives to reduce the proportion of the working population who leave work due to ill health and recommendations from the Fair Work Commission Report (2019).

Community settings

Other programme work has increasingly focussed on community settings. An **NIHR Public Health Interventions Responsive Studies Team (PHIRST)** that works with local authorities across the UK was secured by DECIPHer in collaboration with Bristol University, and we hope to receive another five years of funding for the renewal of PHIRST.

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A new area of focus within the programme was the workplace setting
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DECIPHer was also the academic partner in successful bid for an **NIHR Health Determinants Research Collaboration (HDRC)** working with local government to address health inequalities in Rhondda Cynon Taf. Finally, a **HCRW Fellowship across DECIPHer and Health Data Research UK (HDRUK)** is examining associations between aspects of the built environment and adolescent mental health to inform Welsh local authority and government planners.

5.3 Healthy Social Relationships



*Prof Rhiannon Evans,
Programme Lead*



*Dr Jeremy Segrott,
Programme Lead*

The Healthy Social Relationships programme aims to develop, adapt and evaluate interventions that focus on children and young people's relationships, particularly relationships within the families that they live in.

The programme was established in 2020 and marked a new theme of research for the centre, bringing together emerging and established expertise around intervention development and evaluation in a range of family settings. As the programme has progressed, we have focused on three broad themes: **developing family-based health and well-being interventions and school-based interventions with a family component; preventing domestic violence and abuse;** and **improving the health and well-being of care-experienced and adopted children and young people.** Cross-cutting these themes has been an emphasis on capacity building, particularly in regard to PhD studentships and post-doctoral research fellows. Public engagement is also a priority, supporting the voices of parents in the research process. As the centre has developed, we have consolidated an additional theme on the **health and well-being of underserved populations.** We have continued to build such strength in this area, that 'health inequalities' has been identified as a research programme to be delivered during the next phase of DECIPHer.

Family based-interventions

The programme has secured funding for several evaluations of family-based interventions. We continue to deliver the Horizon and UKRI-funded **FLOURISH study**, which is evaluating the adaptation and implementation of a South African originated parenting intervention for Moldova and North Macedonia. Dr Jeremy Segrott is leading a Nuffield funded feasibility study on the remote delivery of the group-based version of the **Triple P Parenting Programme.**

— “ —
*Public engagement is also a priority,
supporting the voices of parents in the
research process*

— ” —
We are also moving to the final stages of the **Family VOICE** project, which is evaluating the effectiveness and implementation of Family Group Conferencing, bringing together family members in a meeting to discuss children who need support and protection. Other projects which we are currently involved with include an NIHR funded RCT of the **Early Positive Approaches to Support (E-PATs)** intervention for families of young children with intellectual disabilities.





Preventing domestic violence and abuse (DVA)

We have delivered key evaluations focused on the reduction of DVA, including the Health Pathfinder study, which aimed to improve the reach and quality of health services provision for survivors. Meanwhile, the NIHR-PHR funded **Family recovery after Domestic Abuse (FReDA)** evaluation was a feasibility study of a group based psychoeducational intervention for children exposed to domestic violence and abuse. Capacity building under this theme has focused on extending to new areas of DVA research, with Bethan Pell securing an ESRC PhD studentship to explore intervention needs regarding child to parent violence.

Care-experienced and adopted children and young people

A priority underserved population for DECIPHer remains individuals who are care-experienced and/or adopted. Key studies here include the **Well-being in Schools and Colleges (WiSC)** study which explored the experiences and needs of care-experienced individuals in educational settings in Wales. Meanwhile Dr Sara Long completed the ESRC funded study **Does Local Authority Care make a difference to the lives of vulnerable children? Longitudinal analyses of a retrospective electronic cohort.**

In 2024, the **Care-experienced children and young people's Interventions to improve Mental health and well-being outcomes: Systematic review (CHIMES)** was published and directly informed research calls issued by the NIHR.

“

A priority underserved population for DECIPHer remains individuals who are care-experienced and/or adopted

”

We have also successfully delivered the UKRI-funded **Transdisciplinary Research for the Improvement of Youth Mental Public Health (TRIUMPH) Network**. Again, we have built significant capacity within this theme. Dr Rebecca Anthony is currently delivering her Health and Care Research Wales Post-Doctoral Research Fellowship **“Feeling loved and appreciated”: A mixed methods study to examine care-experienced children and young people's relationships and their association with mental health and wellbeing**. Lorna Stabler has recently submitted **What are siblings' lived experiences of providing kinship care? Identifying pathways to improving kinship care outcomes**, her ESRC-funded PhD thesis examining the needs of sibling kinship carers.

5.4 Methodological Innovations in Public Health Science



*Dr Jemma Hawkins,
Programme Lead*



*Prof Mike Robling,
Programme Lead*

DECIPHER's methods research programme aims to advance methodological innovation for the development, evaluation and implementation of public health interventions.

We have a track record as a world-leader in methodological innovation including the development of methodological guidance, delivery of methods-based short courses, publication of methodological 'think-pieces' and case studies of methodological innovation. Over the last five years we have made contributions in all of these areas. Key examples are summarised below:

— “ —
DECIPHER researchers have continued to deliver methods-related capacity development in the UK and further afield
— ” —

Methodological guidance

In 2020, we published the ADAPT guidance for adapting interventions for new contexts such as a different country or with a different population. This work was led by Profs Graham Moore and Rhiannon Evans and was funded jointly by MRC and NIHR. Since its publication, there's been a growing number of published examples of researchers applying the guidance in diverse international contexts. In October 2024, Rhiannon and Graham contributed sessions about the guidance at three one-day

workshops in Finland, attended by researchers, third sector and policy/ practice representatives. In 2023, researcher Dr Hayley Reed published a co-production framework for use in school-based public health intervention research. The framework consists of several recommendations for integrating co-production into real world practice for the development of school-based interventions. The work was developed as part of Dr Hayley Reed's PhD **Co-producing School-Based Mental Health and Wellbeing Interventions: A Mixed Methods Intervention Development Study.**

Our previously published methodological guidance and frameworks continue to have impact in the UK and beyond. In 2020, our framework for co-producing and prototyping public health interventions informed guidance from the Independent Scientific Pandemic Influenza group on Behaviours expert group of the UK Government's Scientific Advisory Group on Emergencies (SAGE). The framework informed the group's principles for co-producing COVID-19 guidance, and was referred to in guidance for COVID-19 preventive behaviours amongst young people. This framework was also cited in the 2021 update to the Medical Research Council guidance on developing and evaluating





complex interventions, along with several other DECIPHER methods publications including the ADAPT guidance.

Case studies of methods innovation

In 2024, Dr Sara Long and other DECIPHER colleagues published findings from the first study to link data on children's social service intervention with their health and educational outcomes. The study examined the role of social services intervention in predicting educational outcomes and health care usage, to understand what works best for children who are known to social services. The findings highlight that all children receiving social service intervention experience poorer educational and health outcomes than their peers in the general population.

Capacity development

Beyond our short course programme (p8-9), DECIPHER researchers have continued to deliver methods-related capacity development via various forms, in the UK and further afield. The use of routine data to evaluate public health and social care interventions is a key methodological focus within DECIPHER and its partnership with the Centre for Trials Research (CTR).

This work has involved the development of training and resources for researchers using healthcare systems data, including a training package for promoting public trust when using administrative data in trials. The training is freely available on the HDR UK Futures learning platform.

“
Previously published methodological guidance and frameworks continue to have impact in the UK and beyond
”

Methods 'think-pieces'

Our methodological 'think-pieces' aim to generate discussion around ways forward for intervention research. In 2023 we published an editorial exploring best practice in the use of methodological guidance in intervention science, led by Prof Graham Moore in collaboration with several DECIPHER colleagues. The editorial advocates for more critical consideration and explanation of how guidance is applied within complex intervention research.

All cited articles and references can be found at decipher.uk.net.

6. COLLABORATIONS, ENGAGEMENT AND IMPACTS

6.1 Public Involvement in DECIPHer



*Dr Hayley Reed,
Lead for Integration
of Science and Public
Involvement Activity*

In the last five years we have continued our public involvement work through our young people's advisory group, ALPHA, and our Public Involvement Steering Group (PISG).

We have also made progress in terms of

setting up a **new Parent and Carer group**, developing new partnerships, and involving public contributors in the Centre.

Advice Leading to Public Health Advancement (ALPHA)

Our flagship work with the public has been through our ALPHA research advisory group of young people aged 14-25. Since inception of the group in 2012, DECIPHer has **recruited, trained and supported 99 young people** to be part of the group which has worked on **over 100 public health research projects**. During the last five years, the ALPHA group has had **40 active members** and met up to 12 times a year with researchers to ensure our research is relevant to the needs of young people. It has also created an **ALPHA animation** which demonstrates how DECIPHer works with young people and researchers.

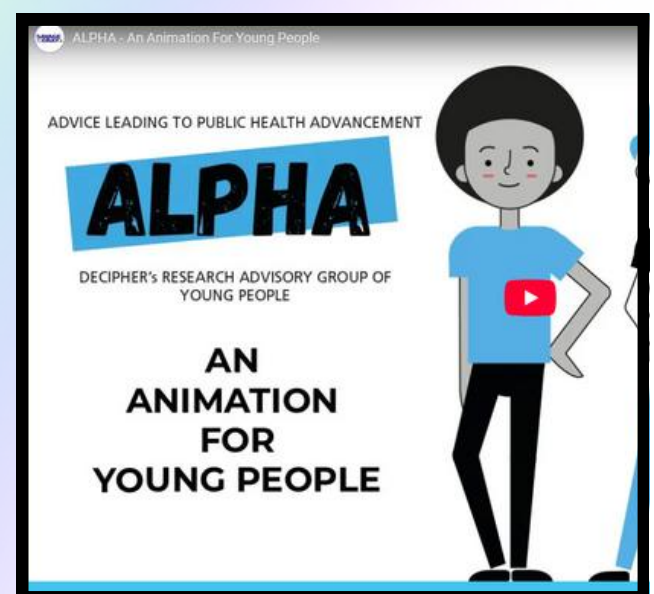
Some of its work includes providing strategic input to the NIHR supported Public Health Intervention Responsive Studies Team (PHIRST), UKRI eNurture network, Centre for Climate Change and Social Transformation (CAST), the European Society for Prevention Research (EUSPR), and the Wolfson Centre for Young People's Mental Health. For the latter, the group has supported the development of the Wolfson's Centre's own Youth Advisory Group. ALPHA members were major contributors to the UKRI-funded Transdisciplinary Research for the

Improvement of Youth Mental Public Health (TRIUMPH) Network, by **sitting on the steering group** to represent Wales, helping to **set the agenda for adolescent mental health research** and **co-authoring research papers**. They also assisted in co-ordinating **TRIUMPH Fest**, a conference for 150 young people and professionals with an interest in adolescent mental health. In 2024-25, ALPHA has been integral to **shaping plans for the next phase of DECIPHer** through advising on our Centre renewal bid and our strategic research priorities, and how we continue to develop public involvement in all our activities.

— “ —
The Parent and Carer Advisory Group (PAG) is key in enabling us to further develop parental involvement in research studies
— ” —

Public Involvement Steering Group (PISG)

The PISG comprises external stakeholders, from across the Welsh research infrastructure and organisations working with or for children and young people,





including the Children's Commissioner for Wales office, Parents Voices In Wales, ProMo Cymru and Children In Wales, as well as ALPHA members. Throughout the five years, the group has **co-written the Public Involvement Strategy for DECIPHER**, and met quarterly to monitor progress against our strategy objectives offering help and expertise where their expertise allows them. Through our PISG network we helped to **host a Child Friendly Cardiff event 'Children in the Media'** at SPARK, Cardiff University's Social Science Research Park. We are grateful to all PISG members for their contributions to our renewal bid for DECIPHER too.

Setting up of the Parent and Carer Advisory Group (PAG)

The PAG, established in 2022, builds on the success we have had with the ALPHA advisory group model and is key in enabling us to further develop parental involvement in research studies. Pilot testing of the group allowed us to trial different methods of engagement with parents including face-to-face and online, as well as creating connections with community-based parenting groups we can involve in the design and conduct of studies. Since inception we have **worked with 29 members from across Wales**, representing different parenting roles, including parents, carers, step-parents, kinship carers, adoptive and foster carers. This year, the group has worked on the

evaluation of the Triple P Parenting Programme specifically helping with the adaptation from face-to-face to remote delivery, the development of research questions and data collection tools.

Developing partnerships

The DECIPHER public involvement team have supported the development of SPARK's Public Involvement Network (SPIN), where researchers from a number of research centres and infrastructures in Wales share their experiences and best practice on how to involve members of the public in all aspects of their research and strategic plans.

“ALPHA has been integral to shaping plans for the next phase of DECIPHER”

The team are also frequently asked to share their experience of developing and running advisory groups. During the last five years the group successfully worked with the National Centre for Mental Health (NCMH), the Transdisciplinary Research for the Improvement of Youth Mental Public Health (TRIUMPH) Network and the Wolfson Centre for Young People's Mental Health to support the creation of their own Youth Advisory groups of neurodiverse young people and those with lived experience of anxiety and depression.

6.2 The School Health Research Network (SHRN)

– A 2020-2025 Review



Maria Boffey, SHRN
Knowledge Exchange and
External Affairs Manager

The School Health Research Network (SHRN) is a pioneering initiative that has transformed how schools in Wales approach health and well-being.

Since 2013, it has operated as a policy-practice-research partnership between Welsh Government, Public Health Wales and Cardiff University. SHRN works to improve the health and well-being of children and young people in Wales through innovative research and strategic collaboration. It brings together schools, researchers, policymakers, and practitioners to embed data and evidence into the school health system. SHRN also collaborates closely with the Welsh Network of Health and Well-being Promoting Schools (WNHWPS) programme to align research with practical health promotion efforts in schools, ensuring that evidence-based strategies are effectively implemented across the country.

Between 2020 and 2025, SHRN significantly expanded its reach, securing sustainable funding to develop an integrated network across both primary and secondary schools. This period marked a major step forward in SHRN's mission to support evidence-informed policy and practice at local, national and international levels.

Expansion into Primary Schools

Welsh Government funded a pilot to explore SHRN's extension into primary schools. This included a national survey of Year 6 pupils, with additional local authority samples, to assess well-being at school, local, and national levels. Additional work also explored data collection with learners in Years 3 to 5 and development of a school environment survey completed by a member of the school senior leadership team.

Strengthening Collaboration and Influence
SHRN played a central role in shaping education and health policy by **advising the Department for Education in England and the Medical Research Council on funding strategies and cohort development.**

It also became a **key partner in the UK Adolescent Health Study** - a major 10-year initiative involving 100,000 young people, supported by UKRI.

— “ —
SHRN data informed over 30 national policy documents and supported a £35 million research portfolio
— ” —

SHRN data informed over 30 national policy documents and supported a **£35 million research portfolio**. It contributed to a **2021 Research Excellence Framework** case study and was invited by the World Health Organization (WHO) to help plan a **European school health network**. The SHRN model has **inspired pilot projects in India, Ghana, Jamaica and Morocco.**

SHRN also helped **establish associate networks** such as SHINE in Scotland, SHRN South West of England, and #BeeWell in Greater Manchester. Collaborations with the NIHR Oxford Health Biomedical Research





Centre helped to establish the WISDOM school mental health research network.

Integration and International Impact
SHRN **secured sustainable infrastructure funding** for an integrated primary and secondary school network, including an **embedded WG Social Research post** to ensure a pathway from evidence to policy. In 2023, **almost 130,000 11-16-year-olds from 96% of mainstream secondary schools participated in The SHRN Student Health and Well-being (SHW) Survey**, the largest response to date. **Over 50,000 7-11-year-olds participated in the primary school survey in 2024**, making it the most extensive of its kind.

SHRN national indicators were **published with the Public Health Observatory Data Dashboard** and **featured in the Senedd**. Data collected by SHRN also **contributed to the Public Health Outcomes Framework**, published in July 2024, highlighting SHRN's growing influence in shaping national health monitoring and reporting systems.

SHRN directly supported **piloting of the SHRN model in Namibia** through capacity building activities including mentorship, training and exchange visits. Every four years SHRN supports data collection for the Wales-arm of the international Health Behaviour in

School-aged Children (HBSC) survey – ensuring data from Wales continues to support global health improvement efforts. This is due to take place again in 2025 and will involve collecting harmonised indicators to enable cross-country comparisons of young people's health and well-being across Europe and North America.

— “
A key priority is expanding SHRN to include all primary schools in Wales, with the goal of becoming fully embedded across the education sector
” —

Looking Ahead

We continue to evolve. A key priority is **expanding SHRN to include all primary schools in Wales**, with the goal of becoming fully embedded across the education sector. We are also exploring ways to **involve non-mainstream schools** to ensure the network is inclusive and accessible for all learners. SHRN continues to lead the way in embedding evidence-based health and well-being practices in schools. With growing national and international influence, its work is shaping the future of school health systems and ensuring that all learners benefit from inclusive, data-driven support.

6.3 Safia - My research journey from ALPHA to DECIPHer



Safia Ouerghi was introduced to ALPHA and DECIPHer through a third-year professional placement. Now, she's taking the first step in her research career and following her passion for public health improvement.

In the final year of my undergraduate degree at Cardiff University's School of Psychology, I completed various placements, organised by GoWales. In 2020, I was given the opportunity to do a three-month support role placement with ALPHA, which involved helping to facilitate and design the ALPHA sessions under the supervision of a Senior Public Involvement Officer.

ALPHA allows young people to have a say on interventions and strategies that are intended to support them and their well-being, whilst directly informing and improving research design. After my placement ended, I was eager to join ALPHA as a member because I witnessed first hand the importance of public involvement within research.

— “ —
DECIPHer's work is so important as it involves communicating directly with targeted populations to improve and tackle health issues and inequalities
— ” —

Participating in ALPHA helped me develop many skills, not least analytical skills through the evaluation of research methodologies. From being involved as a member and from having a support role with ALPHA, I came to understand my passion for public health research.

I've since joined DECIPHer as a Research Assistant, developing and implementing data collection for The School Health Research Network (SHRN). I was involved in a project that aimed to expand the established secondary-based SHRN into primary schools across Wales. We evaluated feasibility, addressed challenges, and piloted survey methods to assess their suitability for younger children. I was delighted that, following the pilot, the full survey was successfully conducted in primary schools in 2023. The survey is now embedded in primary schools, marking a significant step forward for SHRN. It was an exciting initiative to be part of and one that aligned closely with my interests.

— “ —
ALPHA allows young people to have a say in interventions and strategies that are intended to support them and their well-being
— ” —

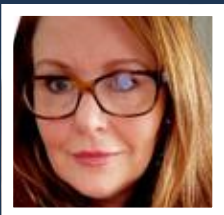
DECIPHer's work is so important as it involves communicating directly with targeted populations to improve and tackle health issues and inequalities. Taking account of a range of issues when approaching the research, rather than separating them out, allows us to see how they influence each other and develop a better understanding of correlations between them, leading to tailored interventions.

This is an exciting first role in research for me and I'm keen to develop further, potentially undertaking a master's degree and a PhD in the future. I'm passionate about public health research and how we can translate that research into tangible health improvements for people and populations around the world.

This article was written by Rhys Phillips and first published by Cardiff University College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences.

7. A WORD FROM OUR COLLABORATORS

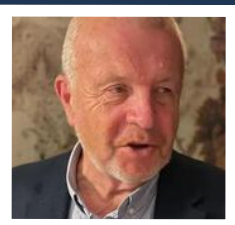
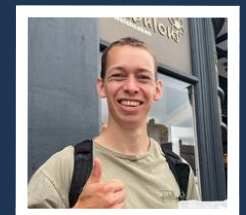
The Centre's work lies, elegantly and robustly, on the pathway between discovery and implementation, with a strong emphasis on public health and population health sciences to advance healthier societies, automatically placing the University on the front seats of world's leading global health research. **Prof J Miranda, Head of the Sydney School of Public Health, Faculty of Medicine and Health, University of Sydney, Australia**



I have found DECIPHer to be rights centred, values led, inclusive and forward thinking in their work planning and projects. DECIPHer is hugely networked across the UK and Wales, bringing up-to-date, evidence-based practice into their daily work. **Ceri Reed, Parents Voices In Wales CIC**



There's just an amazing culture/research environment at DECIPHer where everybody is welcoming and just as nerdy, if not more, as me about complex interventions. **Frederik Martiny, PhD student, University of Copenhagen**



I think DECIPHer's main (but not exclusive) work focused on health equality, and on children's and young people's health outcomes, and methodological innovation, are as exciting for a PPI contributor as for researchers associated with its varied work. **Martin Rolph, Public Contributor**



DECIPHer's reputation for excellence extends... To delivery of education as short courses which build skills of public health academics and future leaders. 'Development, Evaluation, Adaptation and Implementation' is internationally renowned as the 'go to' course for learning on methods used for developing, evaluating, adapting and implementing complex interventions.

Prof Ashley Adamson, Professor of Public Health Nutrition and NIHR Research Professor

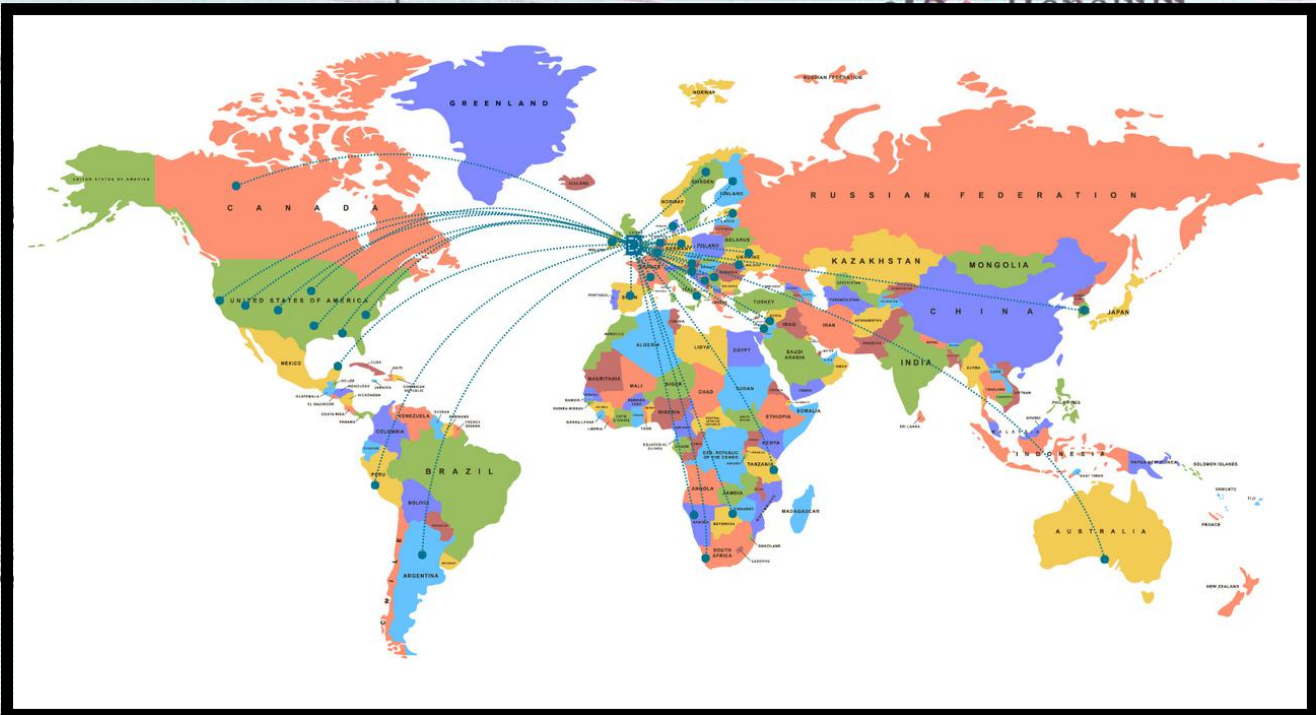


DECIPHer's emphasis on involving the public in every stage of the research process has led to innovative and impactful work. Its practical tools and resources developed from its research have been widely used in schools, youth organisations and healthcare settings. **Peter Gee, Senior Public Involvement Manager, Health and Care Research Wales**



8. INTERNATIONAL LINKS

Countries linked with DECIPHer through **visitors, studies, teaching, conferences, presentations** and **collaborations over the last five years:**



AFRICA

- Botswana
- Namibia
- Tanzania
- South Africa

AMERICAS

- Canada
- Mexico
- Peru
- USA
(California;
Colorado; Mississippi;
Nebraska; North
Carolina; Texas; Utah)

ASIA

- Palestine
- South Korea
- Syria

AUSTRALIA & PACIFIC

- Australia

EUROPE

- | | | | | |
|-----------|-----------|---------------|------------|-----------|
| • Austria | • Estonia | • Ireland | • Serbia | • Ukraine |
| • Belgium | • Finland | • Italy | • Slovenia | |
| • Bosnia | • France | • Moldova | • Spain | |
| • Denmark | • Germany | • Netherlands | • Sweden | |



L-R clockwise: Emma Wassell and Dr Swetha Sampathkumar at the FLOURISH research meeting in Belgrade; Dr Yulia Shenderovich presents at IPSCAN; Dr Jemma Hawkins with PhD student Trine Brøns Nielsen from Aarhus University; Prof Rhiannon Evans' research trip to South Korea; Devy Elling from Stockholm University presents to DECIPHER.



L-R clockwise: Dr Honor Young and Prof Rhiannon Evans welcome Namibian Fellows; Dr Kelly Morgan at the ISPAH conference in Abu Dhabi; Visiting PhD student Dr Frederik Martiny conquers Pen y Fan; A visit from Dr Knud Ryom and Dr Julie Sandell Jacobsen, Aarhus University, and Dr Louise Lund Thompsen, Aalborg University; Dr Jemma Hawkins and Prof Graham Moore visit Peru for launch of dementia research study 'IMPACT Salud'.

Frederik and Trine: Reflections on our DECIPHer research visits



'A bigger impact on my research than I dared hope for!'

Frederik Martiny is a medical doctor currently working as a PhD student at the University of Copenhagen. He visited DECIPHer in 2024 for six weeks to learn more about how to work with optimising a complex intervention.

For the first four weeks, I had the company of Hanna Ristolainen, visiting from Finland. We both had the chance to present our research projects at DECIPHer's monthly forum and there we had a good discussion about what it really means to develop/optimize/adapt a complex intervention.

— “
Inspiring insights that I hope we can adapt to the Danish setting
” —

Simon Murphy and Maria Boffey introduced me to The School Health Research Network (SHRN) and how they work with knowledge exchange, data infrastructure, and coordinating the priorities and views of researchers, policymakers and practitioners – really inspiring insights that I hope we can adapt to the Danish setting within my area of vocational rehabilitation and social medicine. I also attended DECIPHer's short courses, which were a really great learning experience.

Visiting DECIPHer exceeded my expectations by far. It has had a bigger impact on my research than I dared hope for! It strikes a great balance between a relaxed research environment where you can do puzzles with colleagues over lunch and still carry out innovative and practice-transforming research.



'Very valuable, professionally and personally'

Trine Brøns Nielsen, a physiotherapist with a MSc in health promotion, is a PhD student at Aarhus University, Denmark. She visited in 2024 for six weeks.

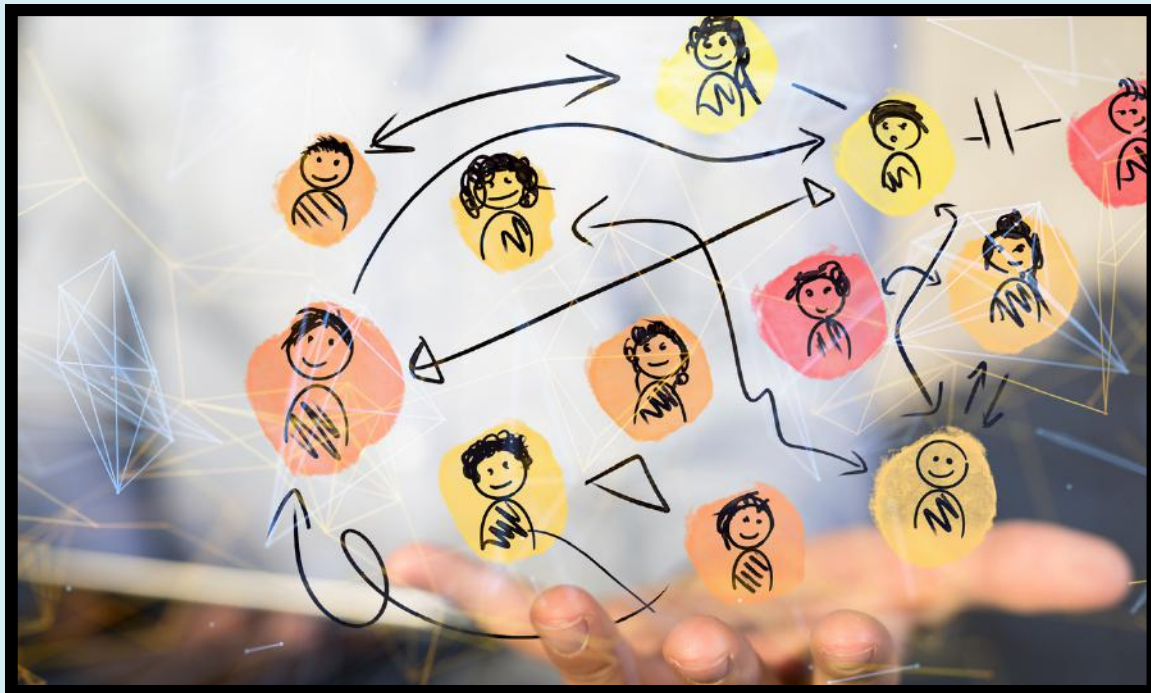
I arrived at the same time as two other PhD students: Kajsa Söderhielm from Sweden and my colleague Mia Fredens. On our first day, Jemma gave us all a warm welcome and a guided tour around the building and introduced us to the rest of the staff and the other PhD students visiting from abroad.

— “
I've met the kindest and most skilled people
” —

I quickly learned that DECIPHer is a great and welcoming place to work and that everyone was keen to discuss their work and share insights on places to visit during my stay. I had some very interesting talks regarding my own project with Rachel Brown, Jeremy Segrott and Jemma, and I learned a lot about the projects going on at DECIPHer through talks and presentations from other researchers and PhD students. I also enjoyed the writing clubs organised by Rabeea'h Aslam.

My research stay with DECIPHer has been very valuable to me, both professionally and personally. I have met the kindest and most skilled people, with whom I hope to stay in touch; experienced Welsh culture, beautiful Welsh nature and learned a few Welsh words. If anyone is considering a similar placement, I would definitely recommend DECIPHer. I guess there is just one thing left to say: Diolch!

9. SCIENTIFIC ADVISORY BOARD 2020-2025



January 2025 marked the last meeting of the DECIPHer Scientific Advisory Board in its current form, and an opportunity for reflection and feedback.

The Scientific Advisory Board (SAB) has met annually since 2020 and the start of DECIPHer's funding from Health and Care Research Wales. Chaired by Professor Ashley Adamson, the SAB's purpose is to provide independent external reviews, advice and support to DECIPHer's Executive Team on the operation, strategic development and institutional support of DECIPHer. In April 2025, when DECIPHer commences a new phase of Health and Care Research Wales funding, the SAB will continue with updated membership and priorities.

Prof Simon Murphy says: *'On behalf of DECIPHer, I would like to take the opportunity to thank our Scientific Advisory Board members for the invaluable advice and guidance they have provided over the last five years. Their independent oversight of our work has not only helped us to develop as a centre but provides an opportunity to reflect on our standing and contribution in the eyes of our peers.'*

SAB member Dr Sumina Azam reflected: *'Both public health and Public Health Wales have benefitted from the work done in DECIPHer. DECIPHer's research has shown how it is possible to apply research methods to address complicated issues and have a successful impact.'* Dr Michael Clark added: *'DECIPHer has forged positive relationships with others including universities, Welsh Government and international researchers. Thank you to Health and Care Research Wales for recognising the work that DECIPHer does, and continues to do.'*

SAB members 2020 - 2025:

- Prof Ashley Adamson
- Dr Sumina Azam
- Dr Julie Bishop
- Dr Michael Clark
- Nia Evans
- Dr Sara Jones
- Prof Frank Kee
- Prof Ruth Kipping
- Prof James Lewis,
- Prof Graham Moore
- Prof Simon Murphy
- Prof Eva Rehfuess
- Dr Chris Roberts
- Loretta Sollars

10. CONCLUSION



As I step down from the DECIPHer Director role after 10 years, it is my chance to offer good wishes to my colleagues as they take forward the next phase of the centre, and to reflect on the journey that has led us to this point.

In Wales in 2005, we established PHIRN, one of the first research networks to address public health research in Wales, with funding from what would become Health Care Research Wales. This led to DECIPHer, a Cardiff led partnership with Bristol and Swansea Universities securing UKCRC funding for a Public Health Research Centres of Excellence from 2009 to 2019. Our centre became a leading player in this new research community.

The ending of UKCRC funding in 2019 led to a successful funding application to Health and Care Research Wales as a Cardiff University centre in partnership with Public Health Wales. This phase saw us develop our position as one of the key public health research groups in Wales. DECIPHer's unique position in the Welsh research and policy landscape, its international reputation and UK and international networks meant that it was able to support the development of major centres and infrastructure for Wales.

Significantly, Health and Care Research Wales funding allowed us to develop the next generation of research leaders in Wales. The majority of the leadership team in this phase of DECIPHer, began their careers as DECIPHer postgraduate students and early career researchers. Indeed, capacity development and fostering leadership has been a critical element of our success. We have adopted a strategy that considers how undergraduate and postgraduate placements can support the development of our PhD community; the development of first time principal and co-investigators through mentoring; promoting opportunities for distributed leadership and supporting our professional services research staff.

DECIPHer has been successful in securing Health and Care Research Wales sustainability funding until 2030. The centre will be taken forward by a new Director Prof Graham Moore and a renewed senior leadership, professional services team and PHW partnership. I wish them all the best.

Prof Simon Murphy



Previous
annual
reports



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