

Scottish Graduate School of Social Science



Scottish
Graduate
School of
Social
Science

Sgoil Cheumnaichean Saidheans
Sòisealta na h-Alba

Year in Review – 2023-24

Celebrating Success

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Director Foreword

Professor Graeme Nixon



Professor Graeme Nixon, Director of SGSSS.

Image description: Graeme is wearing a blue shirt and dark grey suit jacket; the background is a blurred black and white photograph of buildings.

Welcome to the SGSSS review of 2023-24. It has been a very busy but exciting year for SGSSS, our students, supervisor colleagues, university partners and other collaborators.

The focus of SGSSS is to fund and support doctoral students to become confident, accomplished social science researchers who will be able to address national and global challenges, making a difference across all sectors in Scotland, the UK and internationally. By working with our university and other partners, SGSSS delivers a range of training focused on research methods skills and wider transferable skills, cohort development events, collaboration opportunities, interdisciplinary working and knowledge exchange activities. Alongside all these activities is a focus on supporting our students through the challenging journey of a PhD.

2023-24 has been a very successful year and in the following pages you will read about our students, their research and the exciting opportunities they have explored through the SGSSS training, mentoring schemes, internship placements, overseas institutional visits and other activities. You will also read about the very valuable contributions of our partner organisations and the support they give SGSSS and our students.

A key success this year was our recommissioning as a Doctoral Training Partnership by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). SGSSS has been funded for a further five years, an ESRC investment of approximately £25m which reflects the quality of our training and highlights the importance of our research focus on highly relevant social issues. As our newest cohort of 54 PhD students commence their journey with SGSSS in October 2024, we particularly look forward to welcoming them to the new training structure focused on Scotland's societal challenges. We are also very pleased

that the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) has provided further funding for the next five years, allowing SGSSS to open much of its new training events to all social science students across Scotland, regardless of their funding status.

I hope you find this year in review helpful in learning something about recent developments at the SGSSS. We are keen to stay in contact with our students, colleagues, partners and alumni. Please stay in touch via team@sgsss.ac.uk, on our LinkedIn [Scottish Graduate School of Social Science | LinkedIn](#), on Twitter/X [@SocSciScotland](#). Our website has lots of helpful information www.sgsss.ac.uk and you can also sign up to our weekly Friday Digest via [Newsletter – SGSSS Social](#).

Thank you to everyone who has helped make 2023-24 such a successful year for SGSSS. We look forward to building on this in 2024-25.

Best wishes



Professor Graeme Nixon
Director, SGSSS

Accessibility

SGSSS is focused on ensuring accessibility is at the forefront of all our communications. For this newsletter, we've chosen a light grey background, sans serif font, and high-contrast section headings, all of which help [dyslexic readers](#). If you would like to receive the document in another format, please feel free to contact us via team@sgsss.ac.uk

About SGSSS

The Scottish Graduate School of Social Science (SGSSS) is nationwide partnership of 16 Scottish universities, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the Scottish Funding Council (SFC). We are the UK's largest facilitator of funding, training and support for doctoral students in social science.

Established in 2011, SGSSS was originally a Centre for Doctoral Training (CDT). In 2016, the SGSSS Doctoral Training Partnership (DTP) was established. ESRC DTP funding was renewed in November 2023 for a further five cohorts of PhD students ("DTP 2"), with the first students starting in October 2024.

Our vision is to equip our PhD graduates as independent thinkers who contribute to addressing global and systematic problems. Our students' work will have impact on more sustainable, productive, equal and inclusive societies, as per Scotland's [National Performance Framework](#) and aligned UN Sustainable Development Goals. Working at the national scale allows us to draw upon a wide pool of training expertise (including ~2250 social scientists across Scotland) to deliver our vision for excellence in the social sciences.

Our university partners are:



SGSSS is funded by:



**Economic
and Social
Research Council**



Scottish Funding Council
Comhairle Maoineachaidh na h-Alba

SGSSS also work closely with:



Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot



SCOTTISH GRADUATE SCHOOL FOR ARTS & HUMANITIES

Four horizontal bars in orange, red, purple, and teal are positioned to the right of the text.

Sgoil Ceumnachaidh na h-Alba airson
Ealain agus Daonnachdan

Image description: the logos of the SGSSS partners are shown. These are: University of Aberdeen, Abertay University, University of Dundee, University of Edinburgh, Glasgow Caledonian University, University of Glasgow, Heriot-Watt University, University of Highlands and Islands, University of West of Scotland, Edinburgh Napier University, Queen Margaret University, Robert Gordon University, SRUC , University of St Andrews, University of Stirling, University of Strathclyde, ESRC, SFC, Scottish Government, SDS and SGSAH.

Studentships

SGSSS is delighted to fund 54 new studentships starting 2024-25. This is the first cohort awarded through the new funding received from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). As the largest facilitator of funding, training and support for doctoral students in social science, this new pool of funding will support funding for five cohorts.

The new cohort will be working across nine universities across Scotland and a wide range of collaborative partners including Skills Development Scotland, Digital Health and Care Innovation Centre, Scottish Human Rights Commission, Elect Her, Glasgow Food Policy, The Cairngorms National Park Authority, etc.

Studentship applications are reviewed by a series of panels, with academic experts from SGSSS, universities, partner organisations and sector colleagues ensuring a rigorous assessment process. This year, three of our participating institutions became eligible to host studentships and submit applications across our competitions; Abertay University, University of the Highlands and Islands and University West of Scotland.

The 2023-24 studentship awards process included the use of the “Whole Person Approach” to assess PGR potential. This approach is designed to attract and recruit a wider set of PhD applicants, particularly from underrepresented groups. The Whole Person marking framework focuses on assessing candidate potential to flourish through their PhD research and contribute positively to the PhD community, ensuring the assessment goes beyond the traditionally narrow academic achievement definitions. We think this approach is making an important difference and starting to be used by a range of our partners.

This first cohort of the new iteration of our Doctoral Training Partnership will start in their PhD programmes in Autumn 2024. We look forward to welcoming these students to SGSSS in our student induction this November.

Studentships by numbers:

- 54 studentship awards for 2023-24
- 31 awards made through the Student-Led Competition
- 23 awards made through the Supervisor-Led Competitions, including one with Skills Development Scotland
- 10 awards were made projects that met the ESRC strategic “steers” definitions for Advanced Quantitative Methods, Datasets and Interdisciplinary pathways.
- 16 of our new cohort are international students (UKRI international caps apply to all studentship competitions) and are coming to Scotland from a wide range of countries including Egypt, Indonesia, Canada, Kenya, Sweden, Iran, Italy, Austria, Germany, Palestine, China, Spain, and Singapore.

Studentships in Review



54

Studentship awards
for 2023-24



13

Countries Represented
among the international
students in the cohort



9

Institutions
represented



31

Student-Led Competition
Studentships



13

Collaborative
Projects



10

Steer Projects

Image description: a graphic showing that SGSS awarded 54 studentships in 2023-24; 13 countries were represented; nine institutions were represented; 31 studentships were awarded in the student-led competitions; 13 collaborative projects were awarded and 10 steers projects were awarded.

Postdoctoral Fellows

SGSSS participates in the ESRC Postdoctoral Fellowship scheme. This opportunity provides funding for a year (full time, two years part time) to give Fellows time and support to prepare for successful career in research in academia or beyond. The funding is intended to support people in the immediate postdoctoral stage of their career, consolidating their PhD and preparing the next phase of their work.

Six Postdoctoral Fellowships were awarded for the 2023/24 academic year, based at the University of Edinburgh, Heriot-Watt University, University of Dundee, University of Glasgow and University of Strathclyde.

The Postdoctoral Fellows began their fellowship with an induction day at the SGSSS offices in Edinburgh in October and have participated in two subsequent quarterly meetings with our final meeting to be held in August. This year's cohort undertook both a CV workshop and a grant application session supported by academics from the SGSSS directorate team and a former Postdoctoral Fellow.



Five of the 2023-24 Postdoctoral Fellows. L-R: Dr Robin Dallas-Childs, Dr Liz Cooper, Dr Tess Davis, Dr Jowita Thor, Dr Janet Perkins.

Image description: five postdoctoral fellows are standing in front of an SGSSS banner in the basement office of SGSSS.

The 2023/2024 Postdoctoral Fellows attended a 2-day writing retreat in Dunblane in January 2024. The Fellows took part in two structured writing days with timed writing sessions and multiple breaks. There were also opportunities to socialise and relax outside of the writing sessions, for example making the most out of the swimming pool and sauna facilities. The retreat was a valuable opportunity for each fellow to focus on key writing tasks without distractions from other work commitments. It was also a chance for the fellows to get to know each other better and share updates, advice and tips about their fellowship activities so far. Following the retreat, the Fellows scheduled multiple follow-up writing sessions at the SGSSS office over the final six months.



The SGSSS Postdoctoral Fellows in Dunblane.

Image description: six Postdoctoral Fellows are standing on a grass lawn. They are flanked on each side by two stag statues; the sky is grey and overcast.

Every year we have the difficult task of choosing between a very high standard of applications from across the Social Sciences. Previous holders of the Postdoctoral fellowships have gone onto jobs in academia in the UK and other parts of Europe and to work for research funding bodies.

Training

Student Induction

Our 23-24 was packed to the rafters with interesting and productive training sessions. We started off with our Induction for our 54 new funded students, where they heard about all the opportunities available to them such as Overseas Institutional Visits and the Research Training Support Grant, and met our new Directorate members and our operations team.



Professor Graeme Nixon speaking to new SGSSS students at the induction event.
Image description: SGSSS students sit at round tables in a large room listening to Professor Graeme Nixon, with a Powerpoint slide listing SGSSS funders on display behind him.



Dr Ashley Rogers, SGSSS's previous Associate Director for Student Engagement, speaks to the students at the induction event.
Image description: SGSSS students sit at round tables in a large room listening to Dr Ashley Rogers, with a "Young Sheldon" image on display behind her.

Feedback from the Induction was very positive, including these quotes from our students:

“I was really impressed by the induction, and have definitely now got a much better understanding of how SGSSS can provide ongoing support, and are really keen for students to get the most out of this PhD journey as possible.”

“It was great to meet like-minded people in person and have time to talk about it.”

Spring Into Methods

In April – June 2024, Spring into Methods brought SGSSS together with the Scottish Graduate School of Arts and Humanities ([SGSAH](#)) to offer methods training to both social science and arts and humanities students across Scotland, through a competitive application process. These ran as 10 different workshops both online and in person, and 188 students who applied were awarded a space on sessions as diverse as Sensory Methods in Qualitative Research, Feminist Research, Postqualitative Inquiry, and Working with Objects.

Summer School

Our Summer School this year was a bumper edition of our training highlight of the calendar, with 36 training sessions across two in-person days and two online days.

Our in-person events took place at the sunny University of Dundee, where we had 259 students attend sessions on topics like “Thinking Through Decolonial Methodologies”, “NVivo for Beginners” and “Advanced NVivo”, “An Introduction to Demographic Analysis and Debate” and “Web-scraping for Social Scientists”. In amongst the whirlwind of new skills and concepts to think about, students also had the opportunity to meet three lovely alpacas – now somewhat of a Summer School tradition – and pit their wits against each other in our jam-packed Summer School quiz to win the twin prizes of glory and Dundee marmalade.

Our online sessions were equally diverse, attracting 256 students across 11 events with topics including “Using Focus Groups and Reading Groups in Social Research”, “Queer Data Production”, and “Best Practices around Data Visualisation”. We were pleased to be able to put into practice some policies around event accessibility, including standard timeframes for sending out joining links, explaining where closed captions could be found in different platforms, and ensuring adequate breaks. Summer School closed this year with a well-attended provocative keynote from Professor Gerry McCartney of the University of Glasgow on “Social Murder in the UK”.

Summer School has received some excellent feedback this year, including the following from students:

“The course is excellent in terms of clear delivery (explaining this difficult method in an easy way) and interactive hands on practice.”

“It's a great event for socialisation with experts and other peers. I personally enjoyed this summer feast of learning, socialisation and knowing about the City of Dundee.”

“Personally I think this year's summer school is more accessible than previous years including number of vacancies, variety of trainings and accommodation/financial support.”

As a new dimension to Summer School this year, we asked students to nominate their favourite training facilitators, and we are delighted to present the winners: Paul Pearson, the winner of our Early Career facilitator award, who led a session on careers beyond academia; Professor Ian Greener, whose training on “Hands On Qualitative Methods” was the most-nominated in person session; and Professor Adina Dudau, who led the nominations for online sessions for her “Crafting Your Scholarly Voice” training event.



The Summer School Alpacas made their annual guest appearance in Dundee. Image description: a hand holds up a white sign with cartoon alpacas and the text “Alpacas this way”, and a cluster of people stand on a patch of grass in the background. Photo credit: Andrea Torres



Summer School 2024 in the University of Dundee.

Image description: a view from above of a crowd of people standing and talking in the entrance area of a conference venue, some wearing distinctive green t-shirts.

Photo credit: Andrea Torres

Challenge-Led Pathway Allocation and Events

From 2024 our training pathways will be organised around a set of key societal challenges. These challenges were developed so that they represent the kinds of social science research that our students do and to reflect the themes of the Scottish Government's National Performance Framework and the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

We have six challenge-led pathways:



Image description: the six Challenge Led Pathway titles are shown: Communication, AI & New Technologies; Environment, Migration & Demographic Change; Governance & Institutions; Health, Wellbeing & Communities; Securities: Justice, Economies & Conflict; Social Inequalities.

Continuing students were paired into a pathway, while those starting this October indicated their preference at time of application. Those on the pathways will come together virtually and face-to-face to share peer-learning on theoretical, conceptual and methodological issues with a focus on communication of ideas beyond discipline. The prioritisation of learning would come from students' own development needs and those created collectively through early cohort development.

As part of introducing these new Challenge-Led Pathways to our students, we were able to run an event in April called "Stop Being Disciplined!". This was a hybrid event that asked difficult questions about how we should work together, share ideas and respond to the big challenges facing our world today. Originally developed as a performance at the Stand Comedy Club for the Cabaret of Dangerous Ideas, facilitator Dr David Overend explored performance, conversation and tools to help our students explore the blurry edges of their disciplines. We are looking forward to many more conversations about how our world class doctoral researchers can contribute to global challenges.

Student-Led and Discipline-Led Training

Scattered throughout the year were training sessions run by our students through our annual Student-Led Training Fund scheme. This gives PhD students and early career researchers a paid opportunity to take ownership over delivery of mostly online training events in their areas of expertise. Some of the sessions we have had the privilege to fund this year include:

- Jupyter Notebook: improving workflow for social science research
- Adapting critical discourse analysis approaches for interdisciplinary doctoral research projects
- Using co-production methods to explore young people's perspectives on and engagement with e-cigarette use and marketing
- Role play your viva
- Using social capital within and through research

We've had great feedback from these sessions from both facilitators and attendees:

- "The event went well, with good engagement from the participants - there was more interaction than previous workshops I have led." -Facilitator, May 2024
- "[What I liked most was] the opportunity to meet other PhD students at a similar stage. Also the opportunity to do something practical and combination of listening to others and speaking yourself. The workshop was well paced and the breaks were very helpful." -Attendee, June 2024
- "Great to see a webinar delivered for an ongoing project, puts perspective to the non-linear process in research!" -Attendee, November 2023

In addition to our SLTF events, we also have an annual call for our Discipline-Led Training Fund – this is a fund available for academics based in our affiliated institutions to run training events that are novel, use cutting-edge methods or concepts, or that are not traditionally available to PhD students. In 2023-24 we funded two social anthropology residential courses, a finance and accountancy doctoral colloquium, and a four-day event on theory and applications of regime-switching models.

Internships

SGSSS has partnered with seven organisations to run 42 internships in 2023/24. PhD interns have worked on a variety of placements across the public sector, with Scottish Government, Environmental Standards Scotland, Skills Development Scotland, Public Health Scotland and Social Security Scotland. We also partnered with IOD PARC and the Steamship Explorer Preservation Society.

PhD interns said:

- “My internship experience with the Scottish Government was truly excellent. The project I worked on was interesting and varied. My line manager and the team I was working with were very supportive and made the experience thoroughly enjoyable. I can say that I definitely developed professionally as a result of my internship and I am also considering applying for a position within government.”
- “The internship helped me understand how research is applied and appraised within government in order to make support consultations and secondary legislation. It has definitely given me insight into policy applications that I would otherwise not have.”
- “I am excited to get back to my PhD and bring with me some of my insights on research applications gained from my internship. I am also keen to keep up the work pace that I had at my internship. Work in the government was quite fast pace, which I enjoyed, and I am thinking of maintaining a similar working pattern to keep me motivated during my PhD.”

Our partner organisations said:

- “Our PhD intern completed a challenging internship project to a very high standard within the timescales of the internships. It was a pleasure to have her in the team and we are very grateful for the excellent work that she produced.”
- “Our intern made a contribution to a very high standard in challenging circumstances, and developed excellent relations with colleagues across the government.”

Mentoring Schemes

SGSSS runs two flagship mentoring schemes. The RSE Mentoring Scheme, led in partnership with the Royal Society of Edinburgh, matches ESRC-funded students with leading academics from the RSE network to explore interdisciplinarity and collaboration. The Career Pathways Mentoring Scheme matches current PhD students with PhD alumni who have gone on to work in the public, private or third sectors, to support those students in understanding what different career paths can look like.

We received 24 applications across both schemes in 2023/24 and were able to make 15 matches. The programmes kicked off with an in-person Launch Event in January 2024 at the Royal Society of Edinburgh building on George Street. Mentors and mentees had the chance to meet one another and discuss different approaches to mentoring in a session led by Charlotte Bonner-Evans of the Future Leaders Fellows Development Network.



The Royal Society of Edinburgh, George Street, Edinburgh

Image description: a picture of an interior room at the RSE in Edinburgh. People are seated at round tables with laptops and papers. In the background, a speaker stands at a podium beside a screen giving a presentation.

Overseas Fieldwork and Overseas Institutional Visits

In addition to fees and stipends, our ESRC funded students are entitled to apply for a series of additional funding opportunities to enhance their student experience.

Overseas Institutional Visits (“OIVs”) are funded trips of up to a month to an academic institution outside of the UK, in order to build academic networks, expand horizons and work on specific projects that will enhance the student’s PhD. In 2023-24, we funded six of these OIVs, and students visited the Netherlands, Australia and Canada. Here’s what they had to say about their experiences:

“This visit has highlighted the importance of writing for policy and impact, to engage with a wide range of research consumers. Overall, the OIV has allowed me to make professional connections that feel much more personal and enduring ... Being part of this process will hopefully lead to a parallel funding application being submitted by the UK research team to explore a similar alliance within the UK and Ireland.” - **Zain Kurdi, PhD student at the University of Edinburgh**

“As an academic who also takes part in activism, this was also a valuable opportunity in terms of gaining first-hand insight into how sex worker-serving organisations can operate within a decriminalised environment. Overall, the OIV was highly successful and has contributed greatly to my expanding academic profile and I thank SGSSS for their continued support in my academic development.” - **Jordan Phillips, PhD student at the University of Stirling**

“My OIV has provided me with excellent feedback on my own work and exposed me to other people’s approaches and research. I have had the opportunity to meet with and discuss my own work with a range of scholars from different backgrounds and expertise and at different stages in their career, extending my academic network.” - **PhD student, University of Edinburgh**



Zain Kurdi, who visited Melbourne in Australia for her OIV

Image description: Zain smiles at the camera, standing in front of a blue sign that reads “Melbourne School of Population & Global Health”.

Overseas Fieldwork

Around 10% of our students have planned fieldwork that takes them abroad, and SGSSS offers them the funding to cover travel and other expenses. 2023-24 was a busy year for Overseas Fieldwork, with nine applications approved across a huge range of countries: Nepal, USA, Peru, Colombia, China, France, Kenya, Uganda, Norway, Nigeria and India, with three of these students away for a full year of immersive fieldwork. This range of destinations highlights the international importance of SGSSS students’ research, and we are proud of being able to facilitate their participation on the global stage.

Work of SGSSS Associate Officers (previously Student Representatives)

In January 2024 SGSSS introduced a new model of student representation, our Associate Officers for Student Engagement. This new role is remunerated, ensuring our students are recompensed for their time, effort and expertise. Changing the role format helped better define the work, and also ensured any barriers to participation caused by expectations of unpaid work were removed.

Our current Associate Officers are: Daisy Bao (University of Edinburgh), Yuemiao Ma (University of Edinburgh), Elliot Napier (University of Glasgow) and Dean Smith (University of Stirling). Miranda Heath (University of Edinburgh) also held the role during the first half of 2024. The Associate Officers work with Dr Dely Elliot, the SGSSS Associate Director for Student Engagement and EDI.

Our Associate Officers have been involved in lots of different activities, including student representation, consultation and governance participation. They also organised the Doctoral Researcher Led Symposium, which this year was on the theme of “Beyond the Buzzwords: Interdisciplinarity and Wellbeing”. The Symposium was held at the University of Stirling in May and was attended by 48 students in person, with a further 17 online. Key highlights included the “living libraries” and the keynote speech from Dr Catherine Lido.



L-R: Elliot Napier, Dr Dely Elliot, Dean Smith, Daisy Bao, Yuemiao Ma; photograph taken at the Doctoral Researcher Led Symposium

Image description: five colleagues smile at the camera, standing in front of two SGSSS banners with the thistle logo showing.



Hsiao Chiang Wang presents at the Doctoral Researcher Led Symposium

Image description: Hsiao Chiang Wang stands with a microphone in front of an SGSSS banner which shows the thistle logo, and is facing towards a large presentation screen which shows a slide focused on interdisciplinarity.

Thank you to all our Associate Officers for their hard work, advice and support, it has been great working with you.

Focusing on the future: the Associate Officers are keen to engage with PGR students across Scotland, so please get in touch via team@sgsss.ac.uk with any ideas, or information about student representation in your university.

Black History Month

In October 2023, SGSSS once again collaborated with our colleagues in the Scottish Graduate School of Arts and Humanities ([SGSAH](#)) to mark Black History Month and celebrate the role that Black and global majority people have played in Scotland's history and society. SGSSS and SGSAH have worked with the Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights for many years, contributing to the overall Black History Month programme of events: www.blackhistorymonthscotland.org.

Events included training sessions on Antiracism in Universities, a series of talks related to doctoral research and equality, and a fascinating online keynote event called "Black Oot (T)here: Dreams and (Every)days O Us", led by speakers layla-roxanne hill and Francesca Sobande. The "Black Oot Here: Dreams O Us" graphic novel (versions in English, Scots, and Scottish Gaelic) can be downloaded here: <https://www.blackinscotland.com/graphic-novel>. The accompanying animation can be viewed here: <https://www.blackinscotland.com/animation>.

Get involved: plans for Black History Month 2024 are already underway. Get in touch via team@sgsss.ac.uk if you wish to promote any activities you are involved with.

Looking forward: in collaboration with SGSAH, we have also started to create a Global Majority Network. This is a new network of support and resource sharing for Global Majority PhD students in the Arts and Humanities and Social Sciences across Scotland. For our purposes, we define Global Majority as a collective term for people whose heritage can be traced back to the nations of the global south, i.e. PhD students of African, Asian, Indigenous or Latin American descent. Through this network, we hope to build a community of support and solidarity. We have started by exploring opportunities for a range of events and activities including writing retreats, workshops, conferences and training sessions, resource sharing etc.

If you would like to join this network and get involved, we would love to hear from you! To join the network, or for any questions, please email: anindya.raychaudhuri@glasgow.ac.uk

Collaboration and Impact Showcase and Impact Competition

The SGSSS Collaboration and Impact Showcase 2024 took place on 22 May at V&A Dundee. The Collaboration and Impact Showcase is a highlight in the SGSSS calendar that brings together university and external partners from across our network who support our work, as well as SGSSS students. It is also where we present the annual Impact Award to students who through their research have made a demonstrable contribution to society and the economy.



Images from our Collaboration and Impact Showcase.

Image description: three images show different groups of guests talking, smiling and laughing with glasses in their hands.

Photo credit: Chris Scott Photography Dundee

This year's event was themed 'Grand Challenges - an SGSSS Vision' and the evening began with a chance for guests to chat informally, over canapes while viewing the shortlisted entries to our Impact Competition 2024 and an interactive visualisation of our Challenge-led Pathways approach to studentships.

Guests then enjoyed a panel discussion with the theme of 'Grand Challenges - an SGSSS Vision'. The panel was chaired by Prof Alan Marshall and five panelists. Including SGSSS funded students Zain Kurdi from University of Edinburgh and Madeleine Clarkson from University of St Andrews and two invited external guests, Prof Bruce Guthrie, Director of the Advanced Care Research Centre at University of Edinburgh and Dr Audrey MacDougall Chief Social Researcher and Head of Central Analysis Division at the Scottish Government.



Panel session at the 2024 Collaboration Showcase, V&A Dundee

Image description: a group of six people sit in a row of chairs on a stage, facing the camera. One person is holding a microphone and talking to the audience. In the background there is a computer screen which displays a slide saying, "Panel Session." Photo credit: Chris Scott Photography Dundee

The evening finished with the presentation of our **Impact Competition Winners**.



Some of the Impact Competition finalists and their representatives, L-R: Aidan Flegg, Sofia Johansson, Shona Shinwell, Daniel Barnett representing Effie Marathia and Simon Gittins.

Image description: the Impact Competition finalists stand in a group. The competition candidates are all holding their certificates. In the background is monochrome map and either side are two banners reading "Scottish Graduate School of Social Science".

Photo credit: Chris Scott Photography Dundee

The Impact Competition gives PhD students across Scotland a chance to reflect on how their research can make a meaningful difference, and celebrates “the demonstrable contribution that excellent research makes to society and the economy”. PhD researchers submit examples of the impact that they have created, or plan to create, through their work. It is open to all social science PhD students in Scotland, no matter how their research is funded.

Approximately 40 students applied to the Impact Competition in 2024, and seven students were shortlisted across the categories “planned impact” and “achieved impact”. The finalists created videos and posters which were put to a public vote and SGSSS received over 800 public votes and were seen almost 2000 times promoting the impact of social science PhD research in Scotland to a large audience. The Collaboration and Impact Showcase audience watched the finalists' videos, before the winners were announced and their awards were presented by Professor Bruce Guthrie.



Planned Impact winner Shona Shinwell with Professor Bruce Guthrie

Image description: two people stand on stage facing the camera, shaking hands and holding either side of a certificate. There is a screen behind them and the slide reads “Planned Impact Category Shortlist”. Photo credit: Chris Scott Photography Dundee

Winner Planned Impact: Shona Shinwell, University of Dundee

Shona’s project Health Outcomes following childbirth for women who use opioids: An administrative data study will enhance our understanding of long-term postnatal outcomes of women who use opioids during pregnancy. The research will provide policymakers and service providers evidence required to inform the development of policies and guidelines to improve outcomes for women who use substances both during their pregnancy and postnatally. Improving the health of women in turn has the potential to improve outcomes for their children and wider families.

Planned Impact Shortlisted:

Simon Gittins, University of the West of Scotland
Sofia Johansson, University of Aberdeen, Forestry and Land Scotland.

Winner Achieved Impact: Anna Bovo, University of Edinburgh



Professor Laura Bradley, University of Edinburgh, accepts the award for Achieved Impact on behalf of Anna Bovo.

Image description: two people stand on stage facing the camera, the person on the left is holding a certificate. There is a screen behind them and the slide reads “Achieved Impact Category Shortlist”. Photo credit: Chris Scott Photography Dundee.

Anna’s work, “Nurses’ embodied experience of emotion when caring for patient-related, emotionally overwhelming events: trauma-informed inquiry” has been able to offer a bottom-up change to nurses’ realities, giving them the chance to be heard in their embodied experience of practice. The research explores emotions in acute contexts of care, where nurses are constantly witnessing life-threatening events. Post-pandemic times are now revealing the profound impact that emotional and physical exhaustion can have on nurses with consequences in their long-term well-being and capacity to hold on to the profession. By opening a dialogue with stakeholders in NHS Lothian Anna created impactful change into nursing practice at local level, aiming now to reach an international audience to showcase the qualitative output/data that has been produced as a building block for the development of a niche of future knowledge within the nursing field and beyond.

Achieved Impact Shortlisted:

Aidan Flegg, University of Glasgow, Scottish Human Rights Commission
Effie Marathia, University of Dundee
Lauren Rogers, University of Edinburgh

The winners each receive a £500 prize which could support their ongoing impact. Huge congratulations to our winners, and to all the shortlisted candidates.

Policy Events

During the past year, SGSSS has increased its focus on demonstrating how social science PhD research can influence and impact policy making. A key example of this was our knowledge exchange event held in conjunction with the Scottish Government Justice Directorate in November, focused on targeting violence against women and girls (VAWG).

The event was based on Equally Safe, Scotland's strategy to prevent and eradicate violence against women and girls. Three current PhD researchers, presented their emerging work to an audience of 50, comprising academics working in related fields, and Scottish Government policy makers. The presenters and their topics were:

- Ülkü Baturöğlü-Balcı (University of Glasgow): "Hard to reach but easy to ignore: victim-survivors' experiences of accessing support in rural communities."
- Niall Buchanan (Edinburgh Napier University): "An investigation into perpetrators of online sexual harassment: who are the perpetrators, and what are the predictors of online sexual harassment perpetration?"
- Lucy Mackay (Glasgow Caledonian University): "Will proposals to reform criminal law to address misogynistic harassment be an effective response to the harassment young women in Scotland experience in public?"

The presentations were followed by round table discussions. The event was a great success, sharing new and emerging research findings, offering insight into how officials currently utilise and apply research as part of policy development, and highlighting areas of interest relating to VAWG where further evidence may be helpful.

The Scottish Government will shortly release a report summarising the findings of the SGSSS event and how these have been applied in policy making since then. Our thanks go to Jeff Gibbons, Unit Head VAWG (Justice) and Tamsyn Wilson, Principal Researcher in the Scottish Government Justice Analytical Services, for their support of this event.

Celebrating Success of PhD Completions

We love hearing about and celebrating our students' successes. Many of our students are able to graduate as doctors every year, and move on to exciting positions in academia, research and beyond – congratulations to each and every one of you who has done that this year! Below are just a couple of examples of our funded students who have graduated in the 2023-24 year.



Newly graduated ESRC-funded University of Glasgow student and former SGSSS Student Rep, Dr Michael Vallely (centre), now a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Economic and Social Research Institute, along with his PhD supervisors Professor Jeanette Findlay (left) and Professor Kristinn Hermannsson (right)

Image description; three smiling people stand in graduation robes underneath the arches of the Cloisters at the University of Glasgow

Dr Lynne Brierley, who graduated in November 2023 from Stirling University, had these kind words to say about her studentship experience: “Please can you pass on my heartfelt thanks to the relevant people/sections in SGSSS who gave me the opportunity, support and funding to carry out my research. I learned a lot and It has given me a completely new career and direction ... it was transformational.”

If you have recently submitted your thesis, or graduated, please let us know by tagging us on X @SocSciScotland or emailing us at team@sgsss.ac.uk! You can also sign up to our SGSSS Alumni Network (regardless of your funding status) by filling in this form – you’ll be kept up to date with news, jobs and other opportunities. Sign up here:

<https://surv.ee/fd3de>

SGSSS Staffing Changes

Directorate:

Following many years of extremely hard work and dedication to SGSSS, we said a fond farewell to our Director, **Professor Jamie Pearce** at the end of August.

In March we also saw the conclusion of terms for our long standing Deputy Directors, **Professor Mhairi Mackenzie** and **Professor Jo Ferrie**. Mhairi and Jo have worked with SGSSS over a long period, growing and supporting SGSSS through many twists and turns.

Jamie, Jo and Mhairi were instrumental in securing the new funding from the ESRC and have really set SGSSS up for great success in the future. Everyone in the team and wider SGSSS network is extremely grateful for all their hard work and support.

Professor Graeme Nixon stepped into the Director role in September, following previous SGSSS involvement through his role as Dean of Postgraduate Research at the University of Aberdeen. **Professor Alan Marshall** (University of Edinburgh) is our new Deputy Director (Studentships and Partnerships) and **Dr Katy Keenan** (University of St Andrews) is the new Deputy Director (Training). Both started their roles in April. We also said goodbye and thank you to **Dr Ashley Rogers**, **Professor Andrew Manches**, **Professor Monika Harvey**, **Dr Rachel Shanks** and **Dr Tom Booth**, all of whom came to the end of their Associate Director terms during the year. Their work and contribution over the years was very much appreciated. Thank you all and best wishes for the future.

We welcomed new colleagues to the Associate Director team: **Dr Shari Sabeti** (University of Edinburgh), **Dr Yuki Kamide** (University of Dundee), **Dr Roxanne Connelly** (University of Edinburgh) and **Dr Dely Elliot** (University of Glasgow) all joined the team this year.

Looking ahead, we will also shortly be joined by **Dr Diarmuid McDonnell** (University of West of Scotland) and **Professor Kathy Hamilton** (University of Strathclyde). It is great to be working with our new academic colleagues, and we look forward to a great year in 2024/25!

Operational team:

During 2023/24, our SGSSS team said goodbye to our colleague **Anna-Marie Linnell**, who started a new role with our colleagues in the University of Stirling. Whilst we miss Anna-Marie, we were delighted to welcome **Victoria McQuillan** as our new Research Impact and Partnerships Manager. Victoria started work with us in February 2024 and has been a great addition to our SGSSS operational team.



Team SGSSS at the 2024 Summer School. L – R: Linsey Fender, Victoria McQuillan, Kelly Barbour, Dasha Narog, Andrea Torres, Ross Hoffie, Katherine Stephen.

Image description: seven members of the SGSSS team smile at the camera. They are standing in front of an SGSSS banner showing the thistle logo, and all are wearing green SGSSS t-shirts.

Looking Ahead

After a full and successful 2023/24, SGSSS are already planning and looking ahead to 2024/25. Key activities and milestones include:

- **Our first cohort from the newly funded DTP are starting their PhD journey:** as mentioned above, 54 students have been awarded studentships on a mixture of training programmes. We look forward to welcoming all our new students and supporting them on their exciting PhD journeys.
 - Included in the new cohort, three of our students have received Stuart Hall Fellowships in addition to their studentships. The [Stuart Hall Foundation](#) supports postgraduate researchers from non-traditional and disadvantaged backgrounds through training and networks across the UK.
- **New internship opportunities:** we have a fantastic range of placements available for Autumn 2024, with the Scottish Government, Skills Development Scotland and The Promise Scotland. Topics include advanced analysis and insight from large-scale surveys; data integration and mapping; reviewing equality, diversity and inclusion in the Scottish skills system; considering evidence relating to climate adaptation and agriculture and many more. There will also be a further exciting round of internships available in Summer 2025.
- **New training opportunities:** we are excited about our full year of training opportunities that will include a focus on research methods, research ethics, project management, communicating with impact and much more. Skills sessions will be held monthly, alongside our annual Summer School, Spring Into Methods sessions and student-led training sessions. We are excited to link much of our training to our [Challenge Led Pathways](#), with a focus on how research can address big societal topics. Further, we are delighted to be working with the Scottish Government to design training specifically looking at applying research to policy.

We have an exciting year ahead and look forward to seeing you at as many events as possible!

How to Get Involved with SGSSS

We hope you have enjoyed reading about the SGSSS activities over the past year. To keep up to date with activities and opportunities through the year, please sign up to our ["Friday Digest" newsletter](#).

There are many ways to connect with SGSSS and work with us. Please get in touch, we would be delighted to hear from you!

Future studentships and fellowships – keen to apply for a SGSSS studentship or Postdoctoral Fellowship? We post our information on our website – look out for 2023/24 updates coming soon: [SGSSS Studentships](#) and [SGSSS Postdoctoral Fellowships](#)

Existing students – our [Student Handbook](#) has a lot of great information, and you can also register with [SOCIAL](#) to stay in touch with events, opportunities and fellow students.

Supervisors and colleagues – there is a lot of guidance and information on our [website](#), including a [Resource Library](#). We are continuing our development of supervisor support and a community of practice. Please get in touch if you have any great ideas to share! We also look forward to seeing you at our HEI visits in August and September 2024.

Alumni – we would love to hear about our PhD alumni are now involved with. Please join our [Alumni Community](#) and keep in touch. You might also wish to consider becoming involved in our mentoring or internship programmes? Please see below for details.

Partners – we are always keen to build on our existing great partnerships and create new connections. If you would like to explore opportunities to support a [collaborative research project](#), [host an internship](#) or become involved with our [mentoring programmes](#), please get in touch.

Our team can be reached via team@sgsss.ac.uk. We have a [LinkedIn](#) profile and an X/Twitter account @SocSciScotland. Our website has lots of helpful information www.sgsss.ac.uk and you can also sign up to our Friday Digest via [Newsletter – SGSSS Social](#).

Thank you to everyone who works with us

As we approach the end of academic year 2023/24 and the start of an exciting new year, a big thank you from all the SGSSS team to everyone who works with us. Students, supervisors, all governance colleagues (Supervisory Board, Deans, UoA Leads, HEI Admin Leads), colleagues from ESRC, SFC, Scottish Government, Skills Development Scotland and all partners – the work of SGSSS is only achievable through great collaboration with you all. Thank you for helping make this another very successful year for SGSSS. We look forward to working with you in 2024/25.

Team SGSSS



Image description: the SGSSS thistle logo, which is green and purple.