



Behavioural Science Networking event - Academia and Practice

25 March 2026 – 10:30 – 15:00

Time	Title	Speaker
10:30 – 11:00	Arrival – tea and coffee	
11:00 – 11:10	Welcome and introduction	Dr Spencer Robinson , <i>Deputy Director, Institute for Health and Care Improvement, York St John University</i>
11.10 – 11.20	The Yorkshire and Humber Behavioural Science Network <i>A fancy name, but we have some simple aims; why you might like to join the party!</i>	Co-Chairs of the Behavioural Science Network , Dr Amanda Stocks , <i>Research and Behaviour Change Lead, Wakefield Council</i> & Dr Rachael Thorneloe , <i>Senior Research Fellow, Centre for Behavioural Science and Applied Psychology (CeBSAP).</i>
11:20 – 12:00	AI Meets Social Marketing: From Insight to Creative Development	Dr Zhaozhang Sun , <i>Research Fellow, Department of Applied Health Sciences, University of Birmingham</i>
12:00 – 12:45	LUNCH	
12:45 – 13:10	Reclaiming trust: public health action to counter the infodemic	Paula Del Rey Puech , <i>Public Health Registrar, London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine</i>
13:10 – 13:35	'Sending the myths up in smoke' - Tackling misinformation about the links between smoking and mental health	Sarah Hepworth , <i>Associate Director, South Yorkshire Tobacco Control Alliance</i>
13:35 – 13:50	NETWORKING - BREAK	
13:50 – 14:30	Enhancing collaborative efforts for effective outcomes: Bridging academic and practitioner perspectives	Professor Maddy Arden , <i>Professor of Behavioural Science, Manchester Metropolitan University.</i> Professor Garry Tew , <i>Director, Institute for Health and Care Improvement, York St John University</i> Dr Janine Bestall , <i>Embedded Researcher in Wakefield Council/Senior Research Fellow in Applied Health Research, Leeds Institute of Health Sciences.</i> Samantha Start , <i>Director of Health Determinants Research Collaborative, Wakefield Council.</i> Dr Elaine Clarke , <i>Research Fellow, Centre for Behavioural Science and Applied Psychology (CeBSAP) Sheffield Hallam University</i>
14:30 – 14:50	Q&A Panel discussion	Facilitators - Dr Amanda Stocks and Dr Rachael Thorneloe
14:50 - 15:00	Summary and close	



Dr Spencer Robinson is the Deputy Director of Institute for Health and Care Improvement at York St University. He joined the Institute in September 2023. As Deputy Director his role is to support the development of the new research institute and provide strategic leadership across the institute's portfolio of activities. These include collaborating with partners from across the health and social care system within the NHS, Public Health, and VCSE organisations. Previously, Spencer has worked within the NHS for 28 years and has experience working nationally, regionally, and locally in the design, delivery and mobilisation of large-scale change and health related change interventions, as well as involvement with national and local cancer research studies within the NHS, public sector, and charity organisations. For the past 15 years Spencer has worked primarily in cancer improvement focusing on prevention and early diagnosis.

Dr Amanda Stocks has led a successful private sector career in business and marketing for national, and international organisations, Amanda has worked in the public sector for over 20 years. Originally working for the NHS and using her skills to tackle tough social and health issues, re-shape service delivery and creating sustainable behaviour change for social good. Her interest in this field, led to her being part of a ground-breaking team at The National Social Marketing Centre. Since then, Amanda has worked with a wide range of public sector organisations such as Local Authorities, The Fire Service, The Department of Health and NHS England, as well as a range of third sector and academic organisations. Amanda is currently working in the Public Health Team at Wakefield Council. Her role spans many areas across the Council contributing to the wider determinants of health and Amanda supports colleagues and partners to access or create evidence through research, and develop effective behaviour change programmes. Amanda has recently become Co-Chair of the Yorkshire and Humber Behavioural Science Network and is keen to share knowledge, build skills and support colleagues across the region.

Dr Rachael Thorneloe is a Senior Research Fellow at the Centre for Behavioural Science and Applied Psychology at Sheffield Hallam University. Rachael is a behavioural scientist and health psychology researcher, with over 10 years of post-graduate experience leading the delivery of a range of behavioural science projects. Rachael has extensive experience in applying theories and frameworks from behavioural science to explore factors that influence behaviour in real world settings, as well as co-designing and testing behaviour change interventions. Rachael has authored numerous commissioned reports and executive summaries for local and national government clients that provide rapid behavioural-science informed advice and recommendations to inform policy and practice, including Public Health England, Public Health Wales, Local Government Association (LGA), the Department for Education, and Local Authorities across England. Rachael is Co-Chair of the Yorkshire and Humber Behavioural Science Network.

Dr Zhaozhang Sun's research lies at the intersection of digital health communication, chronic disease management, and behavioural health interventions, with a strong interdisciplinary focus and a commitment to translating research into impactful, real-world applications. She specialises in harnessing social media, digital engagement strategies, and co-produced interventions to enhance public health communication, empower individuals in the self-management of chronic conditions, and drive policy-informed solutions that reduce health disparities. Zhaozhang's work integrates behavioural science, public health, and digital media studies, developing mixed-method approaches for target evidence-based interventions that improve patient engagement and health literacy. With expertise in social media analytics and stakeholder engagement, Zhaozhang's research explores how digital platforms and influencers can be strategically leveraged to shape public perceptions, influence health behaviours, and combat stigma surrounding chronic diseases such as Type 2 diabetes and obesity.

Paula del Rey Puech is a Public Health Registrar in London, where she is deepening her public health expertise across local, regional, and national public health systems in the UK. Before joining the specialty training in the UK, Paula worked across the public, private, and non-profit sectors in health, spanning multiple geographies. At FIND, she led initiatives in partnership with local and national health bodies to improve access to innovative diagnostic technologies in different countries. Prior to joining FIND, she supported key initiatives in sanitation and emergency response as part of the Mayor's Delivery Unit in Freetown, Sierra Leone, and advised on health strategies and operations while at McKinsey in the USA and the UK. Paula is passionate about advancing health equity and social justice by bridging innovation with the building blocks of health. She is particularly interested in ensuring that new health technology solutions are grounded in real-world problems and shaped by the communities they are intended to serve. Paula trained in Chemistry and Bioengineering at IQS and the MIT and holds an MPH from the Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health.

Sarah Hepworth is an Associate Director of the South Yorkshire Tobacco Control Alliance and is a senior tobacco control leader with over 25 years' experience delivering population-level approaches, underpinned by behavioural science, to reduce smoking prevalence and health inequalities. She has extensive experience working across local government, the NHS and the voluntary sector at senior levels locally, regionally and nationally, influencing and shaping tobacco control policy. From 2015 to 2025, she led the Sheffield Tobacco Control Partnership, achieving a 30% reduction in adult smoking prevalence. Her work was recognised nationally with a Local Government Chronicle Award in 2023. Now Associate Director of the South Yorkshire Tobacco Alliance, Sarah is leading the development of a pioneering regional programme and has a particular interest in the commercial determinants of health

Professor Maddy Arden is a Professor of Health Psychology and Behavioural Science at Manchester Metropolitan University where she leads the Changing behaviour, health and wellbeing research group. Maddy is a leading researcher in behavioural science with over 25 years' experience, and more than 60 peer-reviewed publications in addition to numerous reports. Her research focuses on the development and evaluation of theory-informed interventions to change behaviour and to promote behavioural maintenance and habit-formation in varied contexts. She has championed the application of models of behaviour and behaviour change to domains within and beyond physical health, including active travel, research management, and engagement in support services. She has been involved in securing research grants to a value exceeding £10 million from a variety of prestigious funders including NIHR, and the Wellcome Trust, and has secured and delivered contract research for national government organisations including the Department for Education, Public Health England, Public Health Wales, and local authorities including Sheffield City Council, Doncaster City council, and Cambridgeshire Borough Council. She is currently leading a project funded by NIHR called BeST Engage which is evaluating a toolkit for local authority staff to embed behavioural science approaches into their efforts to increase engagement in parenting interventions by parents living in areas of high social deprivation. Maddy is a chartered psychologist, registered health psychology (HCPC), Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences, and past editor-in-chief of the British Journal of Health Psychology (2018-2022).

Professor Garry Tew is the founding Director of the Institute for Health and Care Improvement, which is a hub for interdisciplinary research in health and social care at York St John University. The Institute aims to improve the health and care of the communities we serve. It does this by conducting high-quality research, supporting research and the next generation of researchers, connecting people with different knowledge and skills to develop interdisciplinary research, and including everyone in research so the research can benefit all. My own research focuses on the role of physical activity and exercise in the prevention, management and treatment of long-term health conditions. I am a Professor of Clinical Exercise Science and a BASES Accredited Sport and Exercise Scientist. I am also the Academic Lead of Scarborough Coastal Health and Care Research Collaborative (SHARC), which is a partnership led by York and Scarborough Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust that supports the development of research to benefit the health of the community of Scarborough and the surrounding area.

Dr Janine Bestall is currently an Embedded Researcher in Wakefield Council in the Public Health Team and part of the Health Determinants Research Collaboration (HDRC). She has been involved in developing research capacity and infrastructure and is working on projects focussed on vaping, Family Hubs, and young people's mental health resilience. Working with the Research and Behaviour Change team in Wakefield Public Health Team they aim to build connections across Wakefield and West Yorkshire public health systems to strengthen research capacity. Janine has 20 years' experience as researcher in respiratory medicine, primary care, palliative care and health services research. She has expertise in qualitative methods, systematic reviews, and mixed-methods research. She supports applicants applying for grants and fellowships from NIHR, Research Councils and charities with biomedical and public health research questions. She was Deputy Director of the Research Design Service in Yorkshire and Humber (2019-2023) and co-lead of the public health advice service PHRADA (2020-2023) (now part of RSS SCPH). For her research design role, she provides tailored research advice to people and teams, including signposting, coaching, training, academic skills development, and critical evaluation of research proposals.

Sam Start provides strategic leadership to the Health Determinants Research Collaboration (HDRC) Wakefield. Working closely with VCSE and academic partners, the HDRC is building research capability and capacity in the Local Authority to improve the lives of all Wakefield residents. Previously Sam led on communications and engagement in the NHS, and local government, building on her background as a trained journalist. Since 2013, Sam has worked in Public Health leading on health improvement and health protection at several Northeast councils. Most recently Sam has led on wider determinants of health, public mental health, sexual health, and children and young people, but has always championed using evidence effectively. She recently undertook a Postgraduate Certificate in Clinical Health Research to broaden her knowledge after completing her master's in public health in 2017. Sam's passions are focussed on how research can influence the wider determinants of health, the importance of

health literacy, public mental health, and suicide prevention. Sam is currently a registered UK Public Health Practitioner and is an assessor for the Northeast scheme, and a member of the NIHR Public Health Research Prioritisation Committee, which advises on research topics based on public health importance.

Dr Elaine Clarke is a Research Fellow at the Centre for Behavioural Science and Applied Psychology (CeBSAP) at Sheffield Hallam University. Elaine is experienced in quantitative and qualitative research methods and has interests in clinical and health research. She has conducted research to develop and evaluate health and wellbeing interventions, including their effects, perceived acceptability and uptake. Elaine is an experienced trial manager, having undertaken this role in two multi-site, multi-year randomised controlled trials. Elaine also leads the Behavioural Science training that CeBSAP delivers to corporate clients including the Welsh Government and Sheffield City Council and she has extensive experience of working with Local Authorities to develop and deliver behaviour change interventions.