

the note

Staff and student magazine for the
School of Sociology and Social Policy

Featuring contributions from Millie Hopcott, Pru Hobson-West, Karen
Lumsden, and Abida Malik



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Cover: [Trent Building viewed from Highfields lake stepping stones](#). By Lisa Gilligan-Lee. Image supplied courtesy of The University of Nottingham ©.

A note from the Editor:

We are now concluding a semester that saw us return to in-person teaching and learning. National Covid-19 restrictions were relaxed, although the university published recommendations aimed at ensuring we could stay safe on campus. (These can be viewed [here](#).) Now, the world faces a new crisis as it bears witness to the terrible events in Ukraine. The university has issued a statement condemning Putin's invasion [here](#).

In January, we learned that our dear teacher, friend and colleague, Amal Treacher Kabesh, had passed away. Amal touched the lives of many staff and students in the school, which has published an [online](#) tribute to her. We are deeply saddened by her passing, and will always treasure Amal's memory.

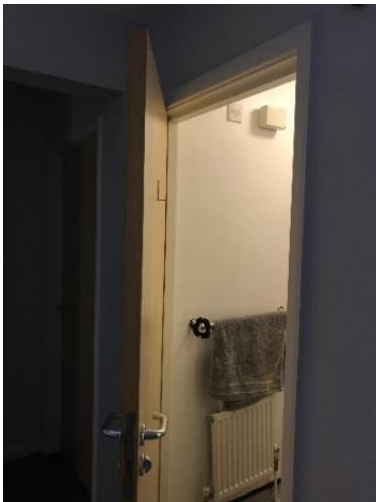
In this issue, we look back on the last two years, during which time these articles were written. Third-year student Millie Hopcott shares a reflective piece written during lockdown. Prof Pru Hobson-West recalls getting her first job. And our former colleague, Dr Karen Lumsden, writes about moving research online in response to the pandemic. We shine a spotlight on Dr Abida Malik in our final section.

Many sincere thanks to all the contributors to this issue (and for their patience with me). To those of you graduating this year, congratulations. To those of you returning in September, good luck for the exam period, and have a restful break. And to everyone, stay safe, and take care.

Scott Pacey

A Day in the Life of a Student During the Pandemic

Being a student in such troubling times is very difficult. Anxiety and depression are increasingly becoming overpowering for many students, who feel they are getting lost in a sea of irregularity. The following images show the story of a day in the life of a student studying in a student home during the pandemic, and how student life and activities were adapted to fit the new conditions of life we experienced in the Autumn Semester.



This is a picture of my shower door; the first part of my morning routine consists of having a shower in an attempt to wake myself up and get ready for the day. The shower door is only partially open, reflecting my reluctance to get up in the morning,

and representing the innate tiredness that comes with being a student, and an unwillingness to face the day head on.



Next, I eat breakfast. This second picture shows the fridge: unassuming from the outside, but messy and cluttered inside. The state of the fridge mirrors the jumbled and untidy nature of many students' minds during the pandemic; COVID-19 has disrupted so many lives in so many different ways. Students are faced with overwhelming feelings of uncertainty. Last semester it seemed like timetables and guidelines were constantly changing. Every week, someone else we knew contracted the virus. All of this, on top of maintaining a

good standard of work, put huge pressure on students and their mental health.



The third picture shows what I was greeted with when I entered my kitchen; overflowing and dirty bins. My desire for order and cleanliness has increased ten-fold since the start of the pandemic. At a time in which we have little control over what is happening in the world, making sure we have control over little things in our own lives is very important. I live with people who are not so concerned with the order and cleanliness of our shared areas. This has become a big issue in my life—one that I feel will resonate with many other students as well. This is why I have included this picture here; it represents the lack of control we all feel.

The focus of my day is on doing my university work. The fourth picture shows my desk and computer in front of the window; this is what I spend 90% of my day looking at. Even though the virus has put a halt to many things, one thing that stays

constant is the stress of deadlines. With the world seemingly turned upside down, many students feel that sitting down and focusing on their work is an impossible task.



The picture also shows the importance of technology during the pandemic. So much of what we do is online now. Technology has transformed our daily lives to the point where I think much of how we operate these days, in shops and businesses, will continue long after COVID-19 has gone. Technology has also enabled us to stay connected with friends and family when we need it the most; I am forever grateful for the privilege of being able to stay in touch with family members who are miles away.

The fifth picture represents something we should not forget during these intense times: the need to relax. This is a photo I took of autumn's fallen leaves in a park. We all need a way to recharge, and

I believe that protecting your mental health is just as important as protecting your physical health.



Our social lives have been completely transformed and deeply affected by the pandemic. Whilst we used to be able to see a wide group of friends, during lockdown, we can only stay with those we live with. Where we used to be able to go to nightclubs and have fun experiences with our friends, now we can only stay in the house. To go from first year, where I was meeting new people every week, to second year in a pandemic where I haven't met any new people, has needed some difficult adjustments, and I am sure many other students would agree. So, doing something like taking a walk in the park can be a way to remove oneself from confinement, change one's surroundings, and get some fresh air and exercise.

The sixth and final picture is an image of my childhood teddy bear in bed, surrounded by cushions.

During these stressful times, we can still find comfort in the things we have always loved. This teddy is a familiar object that reminds me of home, and comforts me when I feel homesick or miss family members. This is a key part of student life generally, but during the pandemic, I feel like this has been exacerbated, especially when family members might fall ill and you cannot go home to see or help them.



Despite the seemingly cyclical and monotonous feeling of student life during the pandemic, it is important to remember that it won't be like this forever. In this ocean of uncertainty, make sure you reach out for help if you need it. You don't have to get lost in the waves.

*Millie Hopcott
3rd year student, BA Sociology,
School of Sociology and Social
Policy. All photos are by the author.
This piece was written when Millie
was in 2nd year.*

Vaccine Blog

My sociological research looks at controversies in science and medicine, and I currently have two large projects. One looks at the topic of [vaccination](#), and the other looks at [animal research](#). In May 2021 I was invited to get my first Covid jab. As a researcher, this was a strange moment, when lots of my interests came together: I am interested in how vaccines are consumed and understood, but also how they are produced, using non-human animals in laboratories. I therefore decided to set myself a personal challenge that day, which was to write a short account of what I noticed during my vaccine appointment. I am definitely not a poet, nor do I have any training in creative writing, although I did once publish a (very) [short story](#), and later used this experience to consider how story writing might be useful as a [tool for teaching](#).

So here is what I wrote that day in May. Reading it now, I am struck by how this piece constitutes a highly localised snap-shot in time, when many in the UK were waiting for a first vaccine appointment, and global access to vaccination remains [very unequal](#). In sociological terms, what also strikes me is how hard I was trying to 'perform' my health

citizenship—both to myself, and to others. By my second Covid vaccine appointment in July 2021, it all felt so much more routine.

Please do feel free to [contact me](#) with any critical feedback, or your ideas about whether this kind of writing could be valuable in our teaching or research in the School.



***'You are here for the
AstraZeneca?'***

Like Goldilocks, I don't want to be too early, but I obviously can't be late. It's 1st May 2021. I wait until the car clock shows exactly 14.30. My appointment is at 14.40, but I need to walk the few steps across the carpark into the health centre.

There are no red carpets, no bugle players, and no balloons. But there is a short queue. Which tells me I am in the right place. Brought together by the accident of our birth dates, and our mouse clicks. Like good citizens, we line up neatly: united, but separate.

A cheery volunteer in an illuminous yellow bib monitors our queue, asking whether we have any symptoms of Covid-19. Confidently and loudly I answer 'no' to each symptom listed. I make that one syllable matter, as if my clear voice can convey just how very healthy I am. So that there can be no doubt: It is my turn. I can get my jab today.

Inside the clinic, the line continues to snake. An 'X' taped on the floor marks our treasure—the reassurance that we are standing in the expected place. Not a millimetre out of step. Performing the rules to each other. So that there can be no doubt: It is our turn. We can get our jab today.

At the front of the queue, my name is checked, and then I am asked: 'You are here for the AstraZeneca?' How strange, I think. No mention of a vaccine, a needle, a jab or a shot. My head nods but my mind whirs, taking me out of the room. I am upwards, soaring, trying to get a bird's eye view. Straining my eyes, hoping desperately to see all that is hidden: All my fellow creatures,

human and non, living and not, within the laboratory and without, whose labour, paid and un, led to this.

*Prof Pru Hobson-West
Professor of Science, Medicine and Society, School of Sociology and Social Policy (with thanks to Dr Scott Pacey, for helpful comments on an earlier version).*



Moving Our Research Online Due to Covid-19: Reflections from a Qualitative Researcher 18 Months into the Global Pandemic

Qualitative research during Covid-19

When the global Covid-19 pandemic hit 18 months ago, many researchers were faced with difficult decisions concerning their research projects and data collection. For those of us in the social sciences (i.e. sociology, social policy and criminology) who often rely on face-to-face data collection with participants (i.e. via interviews, focus groups, fieldwork, observations) this meant deciding how feasible it would be to continue with our research projects.

Should they be scrapped entirely? Postponed? Or should we look to amend our data collection techniques to take place online? Moreover, there was also a realignment of research priorities at many institutions to focus on projects which researched Covid-19 and its individual, societal and global impacts.

Lessons learned

18 months on, I've been asked to share some lessons learned in transferring my research to the online context. Herein, I focus solely on lessons learned for those conducting qualitative research projects who need to move their

data collection online. Below, I focus on six main lessons:

1. *Revisit your approach to data collection:* When moving data collection online, projects must (if possible) be redesigned for online data collection. It is not as straightforward as transferring what we would have done face-to-face directly to an online context. We must consider methodological, practical and ethical issues when moving to online data collection.

For example, if we are conducting interviews online we might have to consider questions such as: Will our participants be comfortable sharing their experiences via an online audio-visual call? If the research is of a sensitive nature is an online interview appropriate? How will we communicate interview questions clearly online? How will we record the interview? Depending on where participants are in the world – is the internet connection good enough to facilitate a synchronous interview?

2. *We can collect rich qualitative data online:* According to researchers such as Braun, Clarke and Gray (2017), online methods

can replicate, complement and possibly improve upon traditional methods, including interviews and focus groups. In qualitative research, we evaluate data quality based on 'richness' instead of quantity of data. Encouragingly, studies have demonstrated that online interviews still yield rich data when compared to in-person interviews (Krouwel, Jolly and Greenfield 2019).

3. *Beware of selection bias*: Online data collection offers the benefit of being able to conduct research over a large geographical spread (Archibald et al. 2019). For many participants, an online interview or focus group is more attractive than an in-person interview due to cost, travel time, flexibility and convenience (Hewson 2015). However, there is still a 'digital divide' which means that not everyone has access to the required technology or data resources, or has the knowledge of online tools, to be able to take part. Therefore, in moving online we must ensure that we are not biased in our selection of only those individuals or groups who can take part online.

4. *Create a sense of online presence*: Researchers also need to pay attention to how they build rapport with participants online. How can they make participants feel

comfortable opening up and sharing with them? In online communication, there are fewer non-verbal cues available to us. Therefore, we need to carefully consider how we use elements of non-verbal communication to build rapport. For example, this can include 'virtual eye contact', careful consideration of where we position our camera, the use of any additional functions on MS Teams/Skype such as the chat box, etc. Equally, verbal communication must be clear to keep participants engaged, ensure they do not drop out of calls, or misunderstand our questions (Salmons 2015).

5. *Familiarise yourself with the technology you are using and run test calls with participants*: It is important to get up to speed with the technology you are using to conduct your interviews or focus groups online. For most of us, this will be MS Teams or Skype. When logging in make sure you are familiar with the features it offers. Are there any features which might be useful, for example, when running an online focus group? Features here could include: whiteboards, polls, and the chat function.

It is also a good idea to organise a brief introductory test call with participants ahead of the interview/focus group to check

that the connection works, that they know how to use MS Teams/Skype, and also as an additional opportunity to build some rapport, answer any questions, and collect signed consent forms. You can also ask where participants will be when they take part in order to ensure that they are in a quiet and private space and that there are no distractions (Daniels et al. 2019).

6. *Moving online offers us a host of exciting and innovative ways to collect our data in different forms (i.e. text, images, video, audio):* Examples of new means of collecting data online include: the use of mobile methods, smartphones, storying, and photo elicitation. These offer us the opportunity to go beyond textual data and, for example, in the instance of smartphones, to collect data in real-time. Other important considerations include whether to conduct a synchronous or asynchronous interview online.

Looking forward

If a positive element is to come from all of this in relation to qualitative methods, it is that post-Covid-19, the innovative ways in which qualitative researchers are conducting data collection online, remotely, and using mobile means, results in a larger suite of methods and data collection tools for qualitative researchers to choose

from, and which better fit the needs of our participants. I hope that from now on, *online data collection* will sit comfortably alongside face-to-face data collection. And that the latter will no longer be seen as the 'gold standard' for qualitative research (Krouwel, Jolly and Greenfield 2019).

For a list of useful resources for conducting research online during Covid-19 visit:

<https://wordpress.com/view/qualitativetraining.com>

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*Dr Karen Lumsden
Formerly Assistant Professor in
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Spotlight on ... Abida Malik

What is your role in the School?

I am a Teaching Associate in the School of Sociology and Social Policy. I have taught in the school for almost a decade. Modules which I have covered include: 'Culture in Contemporary Society'; 'Global Studies and Human Rights'; 'Cultures, Identities and Deviance'; and 'Policy and Social Justice'.

What do you teach?

I teach specifically with the social policy team on modules such as 'Why Do Policies Fail?' and 'Globalisation, Europeanisation and Public Policy'. This includes co-convening modules, delivering lectures, and supporting and supervising students with their MA dissertations.

Describe your research and how you go about it.

I have always had a fascination with citizenship, nationalism, intersectionality, Islamophobia, postcolonialism, stigma, discrimination, race, identities, Critical Race Theory and social policy. These concerns have helped shape my research on BAME groups and their notions of belonging. As a microsociologist, I am preoccupied with

understanding the perceptions and experiences of respondents in studies, and thus follow qualitative approaches. This helps us to contextualise and understand the perspectives of social actors.

What led you to academia?

As a Muslim, disabled, working class, BAME woman, my journey within academia began when I started engaging with the literature and raising critical questions. As an undergraduate, I would read various journals, books and articles and felt that much more could be done to address various gaps in our knowledge. There was little coverage on topics that reflected UK contexts, or the complexities and nuances that shape knowledge and theory on BAME communities.

I loved sociology, and had a keen interest in the representation of women, the heterogeneity of identity, and the role of communities experiencing racism. This led to my PhD. After completing my studies, I took a radical and unconventional career path, setting up a think-tank rather than remaining in academia. I was very conscious of not wanting to be an academic sitting in an 'ivory tower', and was interested in how academic theory/knowledge can

impact socio-political contexts. This led to me working with social justice groups, Runnymede, the Institute for Public Policy Research, All-Party Parliamentary Groups and other policy-makers.

I found that academic knowledge often remains confined to the institutions that generate it, and I was very interested in transferring that knowledge into public spaces. I was able to do this as a Director of Research at the Bridge Institute, which is a think tank. I have a passion for thinking about how robust academic knowledge can influence policy development, our everyday lives and the wider society.

I pursued this interest at the Bridge Institute, where I produced various reports, such as one on British Muslims in Higher Education, and worked with Professor Jacqueline Stevenson, who is nationally recognised for her work on social mobility and education. I became a research advisor for BIMA (the British Islamic Medical Association), where I worked with a research team on dress code policy in the NHS for the BAME workforce. This received national and international press attention, and led to policy change through NHS Improvement and NHS England.

Yet, having said all this, I still had a deep desire to teach and remain in

academia, drawing together my knowledge and experience to have an influence not only outside academia, but also within it. Thus, I have come full circle! I have met fascinating and articulate students who have been a pleasure to teach, and who continually ask thought-provoking questions. This is what makes teaching so enjoyable.

What interests you most about your work?

I love making a difference through my work, and have been blessed to see some of it have an impact. I love working with colleagues in the School—who have wide-ranging research interests—and engaging with our students.

Currently, I am a Parliament Academic Fellow. I am exploring why Muslim civic organisations might choose to engage/disengage with parliament. Eventually, my recommendations will be presented to teams in parliament. As an academic fellow, I am keen to make practical changes through my academic work.

What do you do in your spare time?

I love to paint. I really like the work of William Morris and Jack Vettriano, and thus attempt (!) to paint in those styles. I also love baking; I have made macaroons,

cupcakes and biscuits, as well as celebration and wedding cakes.



One of Abida's creations (ed.)

I am also a Muslim Faith Advisor at the University, and really enjoy supporting students through pastoral responsibilities. As a student myself, I encountered various challenges in life, and thus can empathise with those who sometimes feel overwhelmed. To listen, empathise and support students feels like meaningful and important work, as students can encounter unique tests and challenges.

What achievement are you most proud of in your life?

Achievement and success are often measured in tangible/quantifiable terms, whether it be through awards, fame or fortune. Yet, small successes and achievements in our everyday lives are something to be proud of too. Our values, roles, and relationships with others shape and give meaning to our lives and

outlooks. This is something we should not underestimate. Being kind is something we should celebrate and be proud of. As someone from a BAME background, it is important to inspire others from similar backgrounds so they can achieve their aims, and overcome any barriers they may have.



'Brushes painter work shop', by [Homedust](#), is licensed under [CC BY 2.0](#).

What advice do you have for students?

The advice I would give to students is the same as that I would give to myself: focus on what makes you happy, and let that govern your decision-making in life. If you pursue what makes you happy, it will mean you enjoy it and will apply the best version of yourself to whatever you choose to do. Enjoy your time at university; it will pass very quickly, so make the most of it. Engage with all aspects of student life—from the academic side, through to joining various societies in the Student Union. You will make friends for life during

your time as a student, and will meet people from various cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Your experiences now will help shape you as a person, so use this time to explore yourself, and the social worlds you find around you.



*Dr Abida Malik
Teaching Associate in Social Policy,
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