

Global Centre for Contextual Safeguarding Annual Report 2025-26



A message from our Director, Professor Carlene Firmin

"I honestly cannot believe it's been a year since we joined with 300 young people, parents, carers, practitioners, policymakers, funders and scholars to launch the Global Centre for Contextual Safeguarding (GCCS). So many features of that two-day launch event were carried through the 12 months that followed.

The launch featured speakers from around the world, and in the first year of the centre we have continued to build the international reach and relevance of Contextual Safeguarding. Policy and decision-makers in Iceland, Luxembourg, Australia, Estonia and Tanzania have drawn upon our work, or requested research briefings, to assist in developing their own responses to extra-familial harm; and scholars in the US, Norway, Australia, Chile and Italy have also approached us to consider collaborations on research, writing and events.

We look forward to formalising many of these partnerships in the future years of the GCCS, and lay the groundwork for this by establishing our first formal academic partnership with Strathclyde University in Scotland. Through this partnership, and others in the future, we will build the research capacity of Contextual Safeguarding with scholars who know their geographies best, and alongside them identify pathways to impact policy and practice across a range of countries around the world. The commitment of the people who came to the launch reflected the impact Contextual Safeguarding has had over the last decade, and the partnerships we've built in the last year have furthered that legacy.

Broadly speaking the GCCS has two impact goals: to redesign child protection systems to recognise extra-familial harm and the young people affected, and to reimagine service responses to these harms and the contexts where they occur- including how those responses are evaluated. In our first year we have made strides in both these areas.

In terms of child protection systems, our research on Risk Outside The Home (ROTH) Child Protection pathways has been reflected in proposed changes to England's statutory safeguarding guidance; the findings from our study into multi-agency safeguarding responses to extra-familial harm, Prioritising Protection, informed revisions to newly issued guidance on information sharing in situations of extra-familial harm; and Contextual Safeguarding has also been referenced in the new standards for Lead Child Protection Practitioners under the current children's social care reforms.

Similarly, we have been reforming responses to extra-familial harm and the contexts where it occurs; we have continued our work to embed a Contextual Safeguarding approach with McDonald's UK and Ireland, with that collaboration extended for a further year; BBC Children in Need has worked with a coalition of funders to resource various VCS projects which include Contextual Safeguarding objectives in their funding requirements; the Australian E-Safety Commissioner has issued new guidance on Contextual Safeguarding in Online contexts; and Railway Children Africa have reported supporting 3,500 children via child safety desks in 12 bus terminals across Tanzania. A range of sectors and disciplines have been involved in making those impacts happen, many of whom were at the GCCS launch.

The interdisciplinary nature of the centre, and the opportunities that come with it, have started to bear fruit in our first year. We have recruited academic staff and postgraduate researchers across Education, Law, Business, Theology, Criminology and Psychology, and have secured two large interdisciplinary research grants in the process. I am truly excited about the potential of these collaborations for supporting interagency safeguarding partnerships. For example, we have begun to build our North-East hub of expertise of multi-agency approaches to Contextual Safeguarding; we have established a community of practice with leaders in education who are testing Contextual Safeguarding resources in their schools; we launch a new champions group for youth workers who are using Contextual Safeguarding ideas and resources; and we have continued to grow membership of the Contextual Safeguarding Local Area Interest Network.

I am also incredibly inspired by the partnerships we have built with young people and parents (including young people who are parents) via projects like Capacity to Context, Seeking Safety, and Resourcing Safety. We used what we learnt from this work to incorporate paid youth and parent/carers co-researchers into our recently successful bids (to be announced soon) and have plans to grow this aspect of our research capacity in future years.

It's true what they say – time really does fly when you're having fun. All in all, I feel blessed beyond measure to be leading such a caring, creative and compassionate team of people. We doubled in size this year, and with 22 members of staff and 9 PGRs a lot of people have had to settle in, get to know each other, and hit the ground running. Amidst the projects, partnerships and pathways are people, and they are creating a context in which our vision can be realised:

A future where safeguarding is truly everybody's business."

GCCS Desired Impacts:

Redesign child protection systems so they can respond effectively to harm beyond the family.

Change how abuse is addressed by building safety in the contexts where harm occurs, rather than focusing primarily on changing young people's behaviour



Our Role:

- Generate research that rewrites the rules of child protection.
- Create education that embeds a boundary-spanning safeguarding curriculum.
- Use partnerships and products to transform safeguarding implementation across sectors.



Our Vision:

A future where safeguarding is truly everybody's business.

Young people feel safe beyond their homes because their communities and the child protection systems they interact with can and will prevent them from harm.

Year One: building the foundations for global reach and sustainable impact

The Global Centre for Contextual Safeguarding (GCCS) was launched in September 2025 to transform how societies understand and respond to harm experienced by young people beyond their homes.

During its first year, the GCCS developed from a portfolio of established projects and partnerships into a coordinated, interdisciplinary Centre connecting research, professional learning and implementation to improve responses to extra-familial harm for children, young people and families.

The centre now brings together 22 academics, professional services and researchers from across six Durham University departments into one interdisciplinary unit.

Setting up the GCCS

Year One saw the establishment of governance, supervision and mentoring arrangements, alongside integrated systems for budgeting, contracts, communications, impact monitoring, external enquiries and delivery planning. We also developed more sustainable consultancy and expert services models, launched new learning products, built new partnerships, and established an ambitious interdisciplinary research pipeline.

These foundations have strengthened the GCCS's ability to coordinate expertise, develop international and interdisciplinary collaborations, and respond to new opportunities, while creating the infrastructure needed for long-term influence on policy, practice and research.

Importantly, this work took place alongside an active programme of research activity, rather than in place of it.

By the end of Year One, the GCCS has established itself as a functioning interdisciplinary centre with strong foundations for future growth and substantial progress against its monitoring and evaluation framework.



Year One: creating capacity for growth

A significant development during Year One was the creation of a dedicated professional services team within the GCCS.

Working alongside academic and research colleagues, the new Senior Business Manager has developed the operational infrastructure needed to support internal development, new partnerships, and learning, implementation and consultancy activity. The new GCCS Co-ordinator has built systems for receiving, recording and managing enquiries, requests and opportunities, allowing GCCS to engage more effectively with new and existing partners across a range of sectors, organisations and institutions. Our GCCS Assistant Editor has overseen rebranding, new communications strategies, and a reinvigorated blog, newsletter and social media presence.

Together, these developments have increased the centre's capacity to connect with practitioners, policymakers, researchers and organisations nationally and internationally, helping to translate opportunities for collaboration into meaningful activity that strengthens safeguarding systems, professional practice and outcomes for children and young people.



106

Local Authorities in our Local
Authority Interest Network



2 Major research awards

4 more in pipeline



500+

learners on our first major e-
learning offer



Research Portfolio 2025-26

- 8 live research projects
- 6 academic papers
- 3 reports
- 1 briefing
- 1 book

Research and Policy Influence

Year One saw the GCCS continue to build its interdisciplinary research capacity across both academic staff and postgraduate researchers. The centre recruited Assistant Professors in Law, Business and Enterprise, and Education, alongside Postdoctoral Research Fellows in Psychology and Criminology. We also welcomed new postgraduate researchers whose work spans Theology, Hospitality and Sport, further strengthening the centre's ability to examine extra-familial harm from multiple disciplinary perspectives.

In terms of research growth, the GCCS secured funding for two major interdisciplinary projects and developed proposals for a further four. These projects are being delivered through partnerships that extend beyond Durham University and include national and international collaborations, helping to strengthen research capacity across institutions, disciplines and geographical boundaries.

Alongside these developments, the centre completed its first commissioned research tender through the Youth Endowment Fund, investigating multi-agency safeguarding responses to extra-familial harm through the Prioritising Protection project.

Research Spotlight: Prioritising Protection

Prioritising Protection was the GCCS's first commissioned research tender, and explored the role of multi-agency safeguarding arrangements in responding to extra-familial harm across England and Wales.

Findings from the study have already informed Youth Endowment Fund guidance and contributed to wider policy discussions about how safeguarding systems respond to young people affected by harm beyond the family.



Through research partnerships, participatory methodologies and close collaboration with practitioners, policymakers, young people and families, the GCCS is generating evidence that supports safer contexts, stronger safeguarding responses and improved outcomes for young people affected by extra-familial harm.

Research undertaken by the GCCS continues to influence policy and practice both nationally and internationally. During Year One, our work informed proposed revisions to England's statutory safeguarding framework, including developments relating to Risk Outside The Home pathways and responses to extra-familial harm.

Research from the GCCS also informed our response to the Government's Information Sharing Duty consultation and has been referenced within new standards for Lead Child Protection Practitioners in England, Scotland's Care Inspectorate review of child sexual abuse and exploitation, and guidance produced by Australia's eSafety Commissioner.

Recent Outputs

Books

Firmin, C., Langhoff, K., Peace, D. et al. (2026) **Beyond Risk in Adolescent Safeguarding: Creating Conditions for Young People to Flourish**. Bristol Policy Press.

Papers

Firmin, C. (2026) 23rd Kilbrandon Lecture: Why common-sense need not be complicated: Creating heartfelt, humble, and humanising responses to extra-familial harm *Scottish Journal of Residential Child Care: An international journal of group and family care experience*.

2026 Kilbrandon Lecture paper

Firmin, C., Peace, D., and Wroe, L. (2026). Why 'Common-Sense' is complicated: Unearthing the Cultural Facilitators of Contextual Safeguarding Structures. *Journal of Social Work*. Pp. 1-23.

2026 Why Common Sense is complicated paper

Lloyd, J. 2026. Multiagency Safeguarding Panels for Extrafamilial Harm: Ethnicity, Gender and the Type of Harm Discussed. *Child Abuse Review* 35, no. 5: e70163.

2026 Multiagency Safeguarding Panels for Extrafamilial Harm paper

Lloyd, J., & Peace, D. (2025). Subverting the gaze: using fictional videos and reaction videos as a participatory method to create practice change in social care systems. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*. Pp.1-18.

2025 Subverting the gaze paper

Owens, R and Firmin, C. (2026) Recognition and redistribution: tracing possibilities for social justice within Contextual Safeguarding practice. *Critical and Radical Social Work* (Advance Online Publication)

2026 Recognition and redistribution paper

Wroe, L., Owens, R., Lloyd, J., and Firmin, C. (2025). From 'risky choices' to 'risky contexts'? The state of play of UK child welfare responses to adolescent 'extra-familial harm'. National and international implications, *The British Journal of Social Work*. 55, (7). Pp.3414-3434.

2025 From 'risky choices' to 'risky contexts' paper

Resources

Firmin, C. (2026). 23rd Kilbrandon - When Common Sense Need Not Be Complicated. [27 November 2025]. Video Available from: **YouTube 2026 Kilbrandon Lecture**

GCCS Toolkits:

- The Global Centre for Contextual Safeguarding. (2026). Context Assessment and Responses Toolkit.
- The Global Centre for Contextual Safeguarding. (2026). Planning and Outcomes for ROTH Toolkit.
- The Global Centre for Contextual Safeguarding (2026). Developing an integrated approach to extra-familial harm for ROTH Toolkit.
- The Global Centre for Contextual Safeguarding. (2026). Why 'Common Sense is Complicated' Toolkit.

All toolkits available from: **<https://www.contextualsafeguarding.org.uk/toolkits>**

Briefings and Reports

Firmin, C. (2025). *Government Expectations for Family First Partnerships and Extra-Familial Harm: A briefing to outline alignment with Risk Outside of the Home (ROTH) Child Protection Pathways*. The Global Centre for Contextual Safeguarding. Available from: **FFP ROTH Strategic Briefing**

Firmin, C. and King, H. (2026) *Prioritising Protection The role of children's services and wider safeguarding partnerships in protecting young people impacted by extra-familial harm*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Available from: **YEF Prioritising Protection Report**

Owens, R., and Cairns, L. (2026). From Capacity to Context Research Project: Interim Report. The Global Centre for Contextual Safeguarding. Available from: **Capacity to Context Report**

Stutz, A., and Firmin, C. (2026). Review of youth workers' role in safeguarding children and young people at risk of or involved in violence. The National Youth Agency, The Global Centre for Contextual Safeguarding, and Youth Endowment Fund. Available from: **YEF NYA Youth Workers Role in Safeguarding Report**

Implementation and Practice Development

For the GCCS, research is only the starting point. Our implementation and learning activities are the routes through which evidence creates real-world change.

The launch of the centre strengthened the infrastructure through which Contextual Safeguarding can be adopted in practice. Bringing in dedicated professional services staff and partnering with Durham University Business School brought additional expertise into the team to establish structured consultancy, training and expert services models. These models are now being used to support delivery while balancing paid work, strategically significant engagement and selected pro bono activity.

Consultancy is a key example of the way the GCCS supports the implementation of Contextual Safeguarding beyond our direct research activity. In Year One we provided consultancy services for organisations including local authorities, child-oriented charities and hospitality-sector partners. Our work included reviewing systems and practice, analysing complex cases, supporting strategic development, designing workforce training programmes and advising on implementation plans. By combining evidence, practice expertise and organisational development approaches, we help partners embed Contextual Safeguarding in the structures, relationships and decision-making processes that shape everyday responses to children and young people experiencing extra-familial harm.

During the first year, within its implementation agenda, the GCCS also:

- progressed a North-East hub focused on multi-agency response to extra-familial harm
- established a practice-sharing network and training partnership in Scotland with CYCJ
- invited practitioners and sector specialists into challenge-mapping and market research activity to inform future products
- developed a number of new practical resources, including three new practice toolkits, supporting multi-agency working and Risk Outside The Home pathways

Expanding our consultancy, speaking and training portfolio has increased both the reach of Contextual Safeguarding and the centre's ability to sustain this work over the long term. Diversifying our portfolio of funding sources has supported staff continuity and development, bridged funding gaps and created a model for ongoing resilience.



Learning and Professional Development

During Year One, the centre expanded its learning and professional development offer, creating new opportunities for practitioners, leaders and organisations to engage with Contextual Safeguarding principles and approaches.

Our first free e-learning course, Violence and Abuse in Schools, was completed by more than 500 learners and demonstrated the potential for high-quality digital learning to reach practitioners at scale. Alongside this, our webinar programme brought together participants from across sectors and locations, attracting more than 800 registrations across seven substantive events and creating an accessible route for sharing learning internationally.

Learning activity extended beyond webinars and digital content. During the year, the GCCS trained 135 Contextual Safeguarding Champions, delivered specialist workshops for Risk Outside The Home (ROTH) panel chairs, expanded its continuing professional development offer, and developed new train-the-trainer models, including a successful launch in Scotland. These programmes are helping to build collective capacity across safeguarding systems and support organisations to respond more effectively to extra-familial harm.



The centre also began developing longer-term learning infrastructure. Support was secured to develop a second e-learning course, while planning commenced for Durham University's accredited online Postgraduate Certificate in Contextual Safeguarding, currently anticipated to launch in September 2027.

Together, these developments are creating new routes through which research can inform professional learning, leadership development and organisational change.

Learning Reach

- **500+** learners completed our first e-learning course
- **800+** webinar registrations
- **135** Contextual Safeguarding Champions trained
- **70** Risk Outside The Home panel chairs trained
- **7** substantive webinar events delivered
- **1** postgraduate qualification in development

Some feedback from our training sessions:

"Understanding how to use the peers resources and how to conduct the assessments effectively [...] to safeguard peers and the contexts they are in. Thinking about how to conduct the assessments and develop my peers work was really helpful."

"The case studies showing how to implement ROTH/HOTH in practice [...] helped me understand the process better."

"This training need[s] to be rolled out to the wider trust."

Reach and Engagement

Network Reach

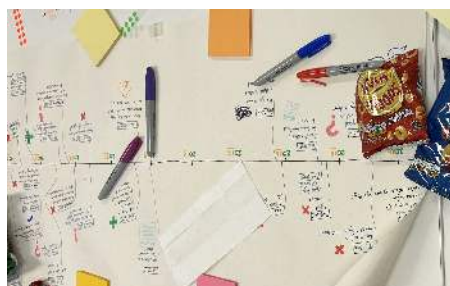
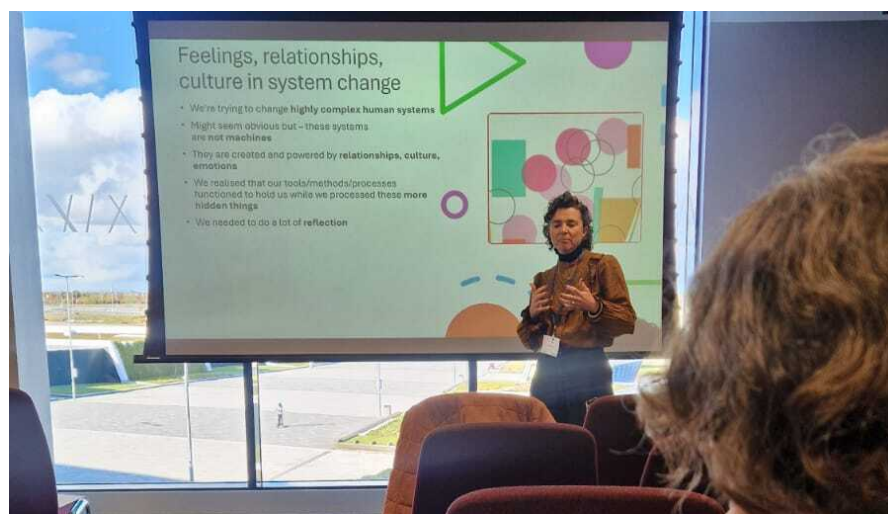
- **106** Local Authorities in LAIN, with 8 more expressions of interest
- **405** Contextual Safeguarding Champions
- **135** Strategic Leads engaged through LAIN
- **>750** professionals in wider community of practice
- **33** speaking engagements delivered
- **1** joint conference with YEF focussed on support for children vulnerable to extra-familial harm
- **>2500** GCCS newsletter subscribers
- **443** LinkedIn connections since launch
- **349** Instagram followers since launch

By the end of Year One, the Local Authority Interest Network (LAIN) had grown, ending the report period with more than 100 Local Authorities directly engaged with the GCCS through the LAIN. We invest heavily in our LAIN Champions to ensure that our work is relevant, co-produced and continues to create real-world change.

In addition, our wider community of practice engaged more than 750 professionals across social care, education, youth work, policing, law, hospitality and faith settings. These networks provide routes for sharing learning, testing ideas and supporting implementation across a wide range of safeguarding systems and settings.

As well as our established networks, we engaged directly with a number of sectors through keynotes, panels, briefings and speaking engagements that enabled research findings and implementation learning to reach new audiences.

Professor Firmin also appeared in a BBC documentary this year- Britain's Forgotten Girls- and took part in various other media engagements to talk directly to the wider public.



A few words from LAIN members

"Our South West LAIN group has a fantastic chair committed to holding the space for us to come together and share experiences, learning, ideas and the inevitable challenges and frustrations. We have supported each other with practical queries, shared policy documents and contacts, and - most importantly - reflected together on system approaches that actually help keep children, young people and communities safer. While we come with different locality contexts - from urban cities to rural and coastal local authorities - the opportunity to connect regionally and problem-solve around our shared aims is incredibly valuable and provides much needed peer support."

Lisa Colombi, Dorset Council

"Our London Contextual Safeguarding champions group is a space where colleagues share what young people are telling us - in words and through their behaviour - and where we then explore emerging themes across boroughs. People often say the biggest value is the reassurance of knowing they're not alone in the challenges they're facing. For me, the cross-borough connections have been invaluable. Young people travel, and having trusted contacts in neighbouring areas makes a real difference to how joined-up our responses can be."

Cat White, London Borough of Ealing

The GCCS Team



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Looking forward- Year Two and beyond

The first year of GCCS has focused on building the foundations of an interdisciplinary centre: bringing together colleagues, projects, partnerships and systems to create a stronger platform for research, learning and implementation. Alongside delivering significant activity, the centre has established the infrastructure needed to support future growth, broaden its reach and strengthen its long-term sustainability.

As GCCS enters its second year, the emphasis will shift from establishment to consolidation and growth. Year Two priorities include:

- Expand the centre's national and international partnerships.
- Increase the reach and accessibility of Contextual Safeguarding learning and professional development.
- Launch new learning products and progress accredited learning pathways.
- Strengthen implementation support for organisations responding to extra-familial harm.
- Continue building partnerships and participation with young people, parents and carers.
- Develop further sustainable income streams across a variety of centre activities.
- Secure further interdisciplinary and international research collaborations.
- Strengthen workforce resilience, project oversight and organisational sustainability.
- Revisit the centre's organisational structure to further increase team development, diversified ownership of the GCCS mission and balanced working patterns across the centre.
- Continue growing GCCS's influence as a leading voice in Contextual Safeguarding research, policy and practice.

While much has been achieved during Year One, many of the initiatives highlighted in this report are only beginning to demonstrate their full potential.

The GCCS is committed to generating high-quality research, supporting effective practice, and working collaboratively with professionals, organisations and communities to improve outcomes for children and young people affected by extra-familial harm.





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or scan the QR code for our Contact
Form and social links



<https://www.contextualsafeguarding.org.uk>

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