



**The Advancement of Interdisciplinary Working  
My journey working alongside the Mental Health &  
Justice (MHJ) Project**

**Insights & Recommendations**

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## **Acknowledgments**

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## **Section 1 - Report Context**

### **1.1 My Role - the start of this story**

My connection with the MHJ project started once the project was up and running- a project in which the underlying purpose was to address, in a multi-disciplinary way, a cluster of public policy challenges that arise at the complex interface where mental health and mental healthcare interact with principles of human rights. A senior colleague of the Project lead (with whom I had worked previously) suggested that the lead might find it helpful to have a 'coach' to help him think through his leadership of such a unique complex and significant project - uncharted territory for many, or indeed most, academics.

From the early coaching sessions, we identified the importance of the quality of connection of the key players at this stage - who had a place in the nascent senior leadership team, called the Academic Management Group (AMG) - and we decided to do a 360-degree feedback process in which I interviewed the AMG members, looking not only at the Project lead's style and approach but also how they perceived the project, how they were experiencing the collaboration, what was working well or less well and whatever else was of note to them.

This formed a useful snapshot from which we designed and ran a half-day workshop for the AMG, feeding back the views expressed in the interviews and specifically focusing on the development of interdisciplinary understanding and connection. The AMG valued this work and invited me to have a role in the project going forward.

This started my role as observer, supporter and challenger to this group over the following 4 years.

The main parts of my role included:

- Acting as a sounding board to the project lead (and other AMG members as requested)
- Attending many of the AMG meetings where collaboration issues were on the agenda to offer reflections, ideas and constructive challenge
- Carrying out both mid-term and end-of-project interviews with a wide range of project members and stakeholders to gain a snapshot of how they were experiencing the collaboration
- Designing and running the annual colloquiums to encourage and maximise cross-hierarchy, cross-workstream and cross-disciplinary connections. These originally were in a face-to-face format and then I supported the move to using a virtual platform as the pandemic kicked in

### **1.2 My background**

I have a background in organisational consultancy and, through my long association with Ashridge Business School, have had the opportunity to work with leadership teams in over sixty global and regional organisations. These have ranged from Investment Banks, Professional Service firms, The International Red Cross and several UK Academic Institutions. Having worked with and observed teams and groups in many complex environments cutting across cultures, functions, jurisdictions, generations, organisations and disciplines I was naturally interested in how the complex dynamics inherent in the MHJ project would evolve and how I could bring my experience to bear.

It has been my privilege to work alongside the project and to produce this report focussing on those areas of MHJ concerned with interdisciplinary working and the ways in which this project developed and advanced this kind of working. A summary overview of the key themes in this report is available as a separate report<sup>1</sup>.

### **1.3 Purpose of this Report**

This report has been written to meet part of the original terms of its reference as agreed with the Wellcome Trust:

*“We will combine methods and knowledge of disciplines in order to create new syntheses that solve problems, give insight, create impact and produce outcomes that would not be possible with only one discipline. We will also achieve a creative ‘confrontation’ of disciplines e.g. law will be challenged by anthropology and neuroscience; philosophy of mind will be challenged by psychiatry. We will leave a legacy of excellence in interdisciplinary working and a model for the international research community”*

The report has been developed by:

- Reviewing all the interview and observational notes made by the author during the life of the project as a participant-observer in the work
- Drawing on other materials and ongoing research about collaboration in the wider organisational world
- Explicitly interviewing members of the MHJ project, and key stakeholders, at significant points during the project about their experience of inter-disciplinary working
- Engaging in ongoing conversations with a shadow consultant and expert in organisational theory and practice (John Higgins)

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<sup>1</sup> The Mental Health and Justice Project – The MHJ ‘Model’ of Advanced Interdisciplinary Working Summary – Laura Heath, June 2022

It is intended to be of use to people who lead, take part in and commission large-scale, complex inter-disciplinary projects. It is not intended to serve as a submission to academic journals and so has only very limited explicit reference to organisational theory, although it is grounded in a particular school of organisational practice which is well summarised in ‘The Change Doctors: Reimagining Organisational Practice. Eds King, K & Higgins, J. Libri 2014), based on the Ashridge Doctorate and Masters in Organisational Change.

Its primary focus is to pull out the themes/factors which I consider demonstrate aspects of the desired ‘**syntheses, confrontation and innovation**’ within the collaborative aspects of this project. In each section I also draw out some key areas for attention/action

This is a personal perspective, influenced by my many years of observing and supporting effective collaboration in groups. In terms of research methods and ethics, as a participant-inquirer I am not claiming to hold an objective position in relation to the context I am reporting on, but I have paid explicit attention to the subjective reality in providing a commentary on events and experiences. I ensured extensive formal and informal supervision paying close attention to, for example, the assumptions I was working with and the presence of historic relational patterns shaping my experience.

I am extremely grateful that the many members of the project with whom I worked were very accepting and supportive of my on-going role and offered curiosity, time, support, challenge and rich observations of their experience in the project, enabling my role to continue and evolve in the course of the project.

I am well aware that there will be many aspects that are not covered in this report but my intention is to provide a useful narrative to anyone working in the field of collaboration or embarking on leading or participating in complex interdisciplinary work.

It is worth noting that the MHJ project has commissioned an excellent film which describes the project, its work and its impact<sup>2</sup> providing a very accessible but comprehensive and insightful overview.

#### **1.4 The key organisational units, roles and their acronyms**

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<sup>2</sup> Mental Health and Justice: a case study in interdisciplinarity <https://vimeo.com/705748662/35c1e77716>

**MHJ** -The £2.5m Wellcome trust funded research project (2016-2021)

**Workstreams** - 6 multidisciplinary research groups each covering a key theme within the work (see Table 1)

**ECR**- The Early Career Researchers group. A cross-workstream group formed by a pro-active researcher as an increasing number of PhD and post-Doctoral researchers were recruited into the project. Its purpose was to provide a hub for both social and project specific support

**SUAG** -The Service Users Advisory Group which consisted of 10 service user members and was managed by the McPin Foundation

**AMG** - The Academic Management Group which was responsible for the governance of the project

**MHA** - Mental Health Act

**AB** - Advisory Board of external experts and influencers

**PI** - Principal Investigator

**IoPPN** - The **Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology & Neuroscience** (Kings College London) which focusses on research, study and practice of psychiatry, psychology and related disciplines.

**The Policy Institute at Kings College London**

([https://kclpure.kcl.ac.uk/portal/en/organisations/policy-institute-at-kings\(15d07142-c289-4943-8287-9dd76fbef51f\).html](https://kclpure.kcl.ac.uk/portal/en/organisations/policy-institute-at-kings(15d07142-c289-4943-8287-9dd76fbef51f).html))

**The Bethlem Gallery** (<https://bethlemgallery.com/>)

#### **1.4 Interdisciplinarity and collaboration at the heart of the project – How and why?**

During my interviews with a range of academics during this study about the nature of interdisciplinarity in academia, many said things consistent with the following quote:

*“For a long time, in reality, most of these multidisciplinary studies have consisted of two or maybe three disciplines working on the same project, almost on parallel tracks with little **real** collaboration”*







The MHJ approach has, from its inception, attempted to work with a different model and has grappled with finding ways to keep the interdisciplinarity woven into its conceptual and working approach. All of the AMG members talked about their awareness from the start that “*no one discipline has the answer*” and that this required a new and different approach which was exciting but also challenging and, for some, out of their ‘comfort zones’. As the project lead said:

*“I knew from my previous work that interdisciplinarity **works** but not on this scale or complexity... and the challenges [it presents] as a project lead”*

A key starting point in this project, before it formally existed as such, was an early meeting at Wellcome in 2016 exploring a big question about empowerment and protection in mental health.

Interested parties were invited and coalesced around informing dilemmas and questions in the field. The proposal evolved from this meeting and established 6 research workstreams, each with their own set of problems bearing on empowerment and protection and each with their own identity. Each workstream contained academics belonging to different established disciplines (eg law, psychiatry, philosophy, social sciences and cognitive neuroscience) who had not worked together in this way before. This interdisciplinarity was built into each workstream (tailored to the focus of their work) and Table 1 below gives an **overview for each workstream** described in terms of:

- The key issues and concepts that each workstream was grappling with
- The disciplines involved
- Some of the typical tools and methods that were used.

<p><b>WS1 - Legal Capacity</b> Respecting and protecting people with disabilities</p> <p><b>Key Concept</b></p>  <p><b>Primary Disciplines</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Law</li> <li>• Legal Philosophy</li> <li>• Ethics</li> <li>• Psychology</li> <li>• Social Science</li> </ul> <p><b>Primary Methods</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ethics &amp; legal analysis</li> <li>• Systematic reviews</li> <li>• Surveys</li> <li>• Qualitative interviews</li> </ul>	<p><b>WS2 - Community Participation</b> Meanings of independence, role of community support across socio/cultural contexts, rights to live independently</p> <p><b>Key Concept</b></p>  <p><b>Primary Disciplines</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anthropology</li> <li>• Law</li> <li>• Social Philosophy</li> </ul> <p><b>Primary Methods</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ethnography</li> <li>• Participatory action research</li> <li>• Socio-legal analysis</li> <li>• Philosophical analysis</li> </ul>	<p><b>WS3 - Advance Directives</b> Self binding directives, Bipolar, Advance decision making in mental health</p> <p><b>Key Concept</b></p>  <p><b>Primary Disciplines</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Psychiatry</li> <li>• Law</li> <li>• Philosophy</li> <li>• Service User Research</li> </ul> <p><b>Primary Methods</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Systematic reviews</li> <li>• Legal analysis &amp; clinical analysis</li> <li>• Surveys</li> <li>• Qualitative focus groups &amp; interviews</li> </ul>
<p><b>WS4 - Insight</b> Guidance on the use of impaired insight in legal proceedings, use as a clinical concept</p> <p><b>Key Concept</b></p>  <p><b>Primary Disciplines</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Philosophy</li> <li>• Human rights law</li> </ul> <p><b>Primary Methods</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legal analysis</li> <li>• Philosophical analysis</li> <li>• Ward observations and qualitative fieldwork</li> </ul>	<p><b>WS5 - Metacognition</b> Using cognitive neuroscience to answer questions about metacognition. Applying neuroscience to an ethical dilemma- how can mental capacity be measured?</p> <p><b>Key Concept</b></p>  <p><b>Primary Disciplines</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cognitive neuroscience</li> <li>• Empirical ethics</li> <li>• Dementia research</li> <li>• Autism research</li> </ul> <p><b>Primary Methods</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experimental psychology</li> <li>• Meta-analysis</li> <li>• Psychometrics</li> <li>• Clinical research</li> <li>• Surveys</li> <li>• Qualitative interviews</li> </ul>	<p><b>WS6 - Contested Assessment</b> Understanding hard capacity assessment in court and clinical settings and developing guidelines</p> <p><b>Key Concept</b></p>  <p><b>Primary Disciplines</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Law</li> <li>• Ethics</li> <li>• Psychiatry</li> </ul> <p><b>Primary Methods</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legal analysis</li> <li>• Ethics analysis</li> <li>• Content analysis of Court judgements</li> <li>• Qualitative interviews</li> <li>• Guideline development</li> </ul>

This illustrates the degree of overlap, the potential for both the ‘syntheses’ and the ‘confronting’ of disciplines, and the inevitable recurrence of certain key cross cutting concepts. One good example of this is the concept of the degree to which someone has ‘Insight’ which is used widely across the disciplines ie from the perspective of law, ethics, philosophy, clinical practice, service user etc.



Appendix B<sup>3</sup> is based on a matrix, developed later in the project, by the cross workstream Early Career Researcher (ECR) group, where much of the cross-workstream work happened at a day-to-day level, showing how their work overlapped and connected around some core concepts.

It is intended that these tables provide some context in which to understand the centrality of finding new ways to collaborate within this work - the primary focus of this report.

There were also broader collaborations built into the project through three key partnerships to provide insight and input in policy engagement (The King's Policy Unit), service user research involvement (McPin Foundation) and public engagement (Bethlem Gallery).

## **Section 2 – Key Collaborative Themes**

### **2.1 The “Big (and evolving) Tent”**

The idea of the “big tent” has been common parlance in the MHJ project, encapsulating the large scope and desired culture of the study in which so many disciplines, institutions and ways of working were deeply embedded in the project. As mentioned above, the early Wellcome supported workshop brought interested parties together, drawing on existing networks and connections in the field where interdisciplinary work had often been a feature and where there was likely to be further appetite for this. This network also drew in interested parties across the disciplines from outside the Kings/IoPPN domain and internationally, including other institutions such as Essex, Cambridge, York, UCL and researchers in USA, Ghana and Palestine.

Clearly a large ambitious study of this nature (with funding!) attracts a broad range of interested parties: the early workshop and the ensuing process of putting the bid together helped the project lead to see what interests could be accommodated easily, whilst others faded as being interesting but on the periphery of what was emerging as the core. As one of the leads described it:

*“It was always about interesting people wanting to do interesting things – as we tried to get the right focus”*

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<sup>3</sup> Appendix B - ECR analysis of overlapping concepts across workstreams

During the course of the project, and in hindsight, for some, this ‘big tent’ lacked “*one big focus*” and “*it was not always clear what it was in the service of*” (AB member). At the same time, in my view, the ‘big tent’ allowed a certain ebb and flow as the work found its focus and direction, responding to the emerging findings and energies of the project as well as significant changes in the external environment.

The importance of this ‘emergence’ and adaption (rather than trying to plan for certainty with very clear boundaries/outcomes) started from the very beginning of the project and they are an important aspect of MHJ working. Whilst it was a project with clear strategic intent it was designed and led in a way that allowed for areas/aspects of the work to:

- ‘Fall out of the basket’/be less figural as the thinking developed (e.g. challenging the original centrality of the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD) perspective) or external events such as Covid impacting important fieldwork
- Emerge as new lines of energy or emphasis in response to both the new perspectives being generated internally in the work of the project or in the external world. Particularly significant external events include: shifting attitudes on diversity and social activism, the contribution of the Mental Health Act review, and the impact of the pandemic.

This dilemma, between planned and emergent methods, parallels much experience and thinking in organisational thinking outside the academic world.

A summary of key pointers for ‘Big Tent’ projects:

- In any project of this nature, you are not starting from a blank sheet. Gather together interests across disciplines, experience and world view and use collaborative inquiry methods to try to find a ‘good enough’ focus from which to progress
- Capture and build on the energy and commitment of interested parties but live with some of the uncertainty involved long enough for the core parties to crystallise (while some parties will naturally fall away)
- The ‘right’ focus is not cast in stone. This type of work is not amenable to traditional linear, A to B, thinking and allowing for some ebb and flow of figural areas is important for success
- Make sure that you keep boundaries fluid and notice, be cognisant of, how things are changing in the field and what may need to be shifted or let into the work, while allowing other things to fade or become less figural
- Remember that in any ‘big tent’, whilst opening many possibilities, there is a lot going on in terms of human dynamics e.g. ‘in’/’out’ groups forming, identity being challenged, power and gender dynamics shaping who gets heard, institutional politics, clashes of values, career

ambitions and so on. This all requires leadership time and attention – external support and challenge can play a key role here as well as building in space and time for reflective practice

## **2.2 Adopting a tight/loose management approach**

In the world of business there is a huge, and in my view disproportionate, attention given to project management as a discipline, so I was intrigued to observe the approach adopted in this complex project. I was particularly interested to see the balance between rigorous monitoring and control techniques versus a looser structure allowing for more individual autonomy and emergence. This is often called a tight/ loose approach, where the leader decides what level of control/autonomy is needed at any stage in the project and moves effectively between the two.

### 2.2.1 Keeping the boundaries of the project

This tight/loose dilemma played out at both the strategic and operational level. From the start of the project the lead had to keep the boundaries of the project both ‘tight’ at times and allow it to be ‘loose’ and new things to emerge as part of the work:

*“I sometimes had to be clear that we were not there to ‘change society’ – we have to keep it bounded” (Project Lead)*

*“The MHA review (the Mental Health Act Review White Paper in 2021 suggested changes both in the Act and in wider reforms policy and practice took place during the project) was just too opportune to miss – it was directly relating to policy and our ability to impact policy in the making - but I recognise it had an impact on some of the project work...”*

### 2.2.2 Devolved funding

The allocation of funding in any complex project of this kind is often a contentious issue, sending out messages about where accountability and ‘power’ lie. The project lead took the view that given the size and complexity of the funding, and the institutions involved, that the funding would be primarily devolved to work streams with a fairly ‘light touch’ reporting structure for transparency and visibility of progress. This was managed by the project lead and the programme administrator. This structure worked well in that the workstream leads all demonstrated a sense of collective responsibility but also enjoyed a sense of discretion, ownership and choice about how they did their work and I argue that this devolved approach significantly influenced the collaborative culture across disciplines and

workstreams (while in contrast in many commercial organisations, complex projects often get derailed by resource battles).

The devolved structure was very much put to the test in the very early stages of the project when the funding was cut by £.5m and each workstream was asked to make cuts. This was before I joined the project, but it had, not surprisingly, led to some very difficult conversations about how and where the cuts should occur, and this inevitably impacted the early stages of the collaboration.

### 2.2.3 The Key Role of the Project Administrator

An important element in the management of the project was the choice of an unusual programme administrator who was in place for the duration of the project. He was a very experienced administrator but was not versed in university administration, having previously worked with charities and orchestras. He did however bring valuable experience of the challenges of managing highly individual professionals working in a complex collective:

*“With his orchestra background he knew how to manage complex inter-dependent groups – he was there to support rather than ‘manage’ this disparate group – his continuity throughout the project has been important in my view” (Project Lead)*

*“He was so much more than the business administrator, he navigated the complexities of the project and the relationships... always polite... with a twinkle in his eye...”(AMG member)*

The project administrator himself recognised that:

*“I was used to working with people who are working at high levels in their field, that are often highly independent and not always used to working in groups – I knew it was important that everyone felt valued individually”*

### 2.2.4 The Role of the Academic Management Group (AMG)

The project lead established a management group which focused not only governance of the project but also on supporting themselves and colleagues who were all learning to collaborate with different world views and step into novel settings. This group of 6, all workstream leads or co-leads, met regularly (over 40 times in the duration of the project) initially face to face and then virtually during the Pandemic, keeping each other updated and reviewing and planning cross-workstream issues and activities.

In my view these meetings played an important role in the collaboration and, given the very limited time that it was felt could be given to these meetings (2 hours every 4-6 weeks), they were effective in many ways. However, the meetings were trying to cover multiple objectives, namely the formal requirements of ‘governance’ and an extensive agenda associated with all of the collaborative connections and issues. Given the pressure on time, there was rarely space for any reflective practice or creating space for more informal openness and connection e.g. more checking in with each other at the start of the meetings and finding out what was figural to each other in the moment, beyond the priorities of the formal meeting agenda:

*“Our AMG was not perfect – but it proved reasonably robust with transparency and accountability – I like to feel it was the place where things could be brought to discuss” (Project lead)*

I was part of many of these AMG meetings and witnessed many rich collaborative conversations where the sense of shared intent and respect for their differences led to the generation of new and innovative approaches to some challenging issues.

For some – especially the ECR and those who were geographically remote – the AMG felt remote and they were not aware of what it did. This was addressed to some extent by the later inclusion of an ECR rep at the AMG meetings, whose role was to offer ECR perspectives and feedback to the ECR group.

My impression was that the ECR was created and then operated in a somewhat medical ‘deferential’/‘hierarchical’ model and that opportunities may have been missed for the ECR voice to get heard more. At the same time there was something about its separation from the hierarchy that many ECR members liked, as they felt it gave them more freedom to share and collaborate in a way that was their own.

The way in which progress was monitored relied heavily on the distributed workstream model and the close working relationships between the core members of the AMG. For some AMG and ECR members (especially those who were more remote geographically) this felt too ‘light touch’ and they would have liked more updates and an overall picture of progress. Several researchers and workstream leads suggested WIP (Work-in-Progress) blogs, monthly newsletters, ad hoc sharing of successes, public introductions of new project members and so on. There appeared to be no email contact list for the group and this caused some frustrations for those who wanted more connection. The web site was intended to be the main focus for updates and general sharing and connecting, but unfortunately its development was slow (and the AMG admit they were “*slow to see the importance of the web site and other forms of social media e.g. Twitter*”) and the website did not get as widely

used as intended. Many of these communication/technology needs were discussed but it seemed hard to come to a workable technology solution and get the impetus behind such initiatives. Generational influences about the use of technology may also have played a part here. The use of social media did have pockets of success largely driven by enthusiastic individuals (such as the ‘Shedinars’ developed by one co-lead) and the natural uptake of technology in the ECR.

Despite the communication shortcomings noted by some, it must be said that for others I spoke with this somewhat distributed leadership approach (with the workstream leads being responsible for communication) worked well and met their needs.

From my experience I feel this is an area where, on being given the feedback, the project lead could have met some of these needs and stepped up into ‘tighter’ leadership at certain critical points in the study. This tight/loose dilemma reflects the complex nature of projects of this kind where there is no line management relationship, but some aspects of line management do need to be incorporated into the role even though it is not formally required.

One example of this was towards the final year of the project where there was much uncertainty about future work/funding/career directions. In a ‘management’ sense this was a point at which it could have been helpful for the project lead (in his leadership role rather than his formal institutional role) to speak with, or just check in with, all the AMG leads individually - maintaining transparency is vital at such a critical stage in the project when anxiety about the future coincides with, and can be in conflict with, a need to deliver on the project to date. In line with what I gather is common practice in academia this was not seen by the project lead as necessary or required. The resulting lack of transparency about future work caused a major upset in the AMG group and raised significant issues about the identity and sense of ‘ownership’ of the MHJ ‘brand’. Some limited reflective practice was then done to work through the issues and the issue’s importance has subsided as people’s focus is moving on post MHJ.

#### 2.2.5 Managing expectations about the limits to what can be managed within the remit of the project

The project co-existed alongside other institutional line management priorities and accountabilities and this provided some challenging tensions: particularly in terms of managing the expectations of project members about what is and isn’t within the gift of the management of the project – and what responsibility lies elsewhere. Not surprisingly in a project of this nature a strong sense of ‘belonging’ emerged and led to high expectations around the degree to which the AMG could influence things in other institutions.

A ‘bump in the road’ was caused by a sensitive issue which lay within the jurisdiction of a different institution but, partly because of the close collaborative MHJ culture, an expectation seemed to arise that the MHJ leadership should and could get involved. The project lead chose to stay apart from the issue as it did not lie within the accountability or line management structures of the project and this then created some uncertainty for some project members about what they felt they could expect from the AMG. It is an interesting example of the role that ‘belonging’, ‘identity’ and power dynamics play in cross-institutional/cross-departmental working and how this can impact effective interdisciplinary working. Disciplines do not exist in the abstract – in addition to any interpersonal conflicts, power dynamics, the separated departments, institutions, ways of working and governing structures that lie behind the disciplines are part of the complex mix that needs to be worked with and even ‘managed’ in collaborations of this nature.

#### 2.2.6 The role of the Advisory Board

This group was put together in a collaborative way with AMG members each proposing people across their fields. During this process I observed effective curiosity and respect for different voices and perspectives being brought into this body, rather than people defaulting to just the ‘usual suspects’. The intention, in line with practice on other projects, was to use this group as an external voice, ‘testing’ the work in MHJ. In the case of this project there was particular emphasis on the AB members’ ability to offer insight from a wide range of academic disciplines, working with people who were likely to have an appetite for, or interest in, the interdisciplinarity of the work. Their role was also to provide access to policy and practice networks to enhance the potential impact of the project. It should be noted that this ‘testing’ role in the project was also supported by the ‘Policy labs’.

Inevitably, given the broad perspectives in the AB, there were differences in view about the need for ‘drive’ and ‘focus’ in the project. Some members were not comfortable with the deliberate ambiguity of the project and did not want it to ‘*sit in the ether and not have impact*’. For many of the researchers it was important that the project was not completely ‘outcome based’ and as one workstream lead summed it up:

*“In the MHJ work there is the value of the outcome and the impact AND the abstract work we do IS the work as well”*

In practice, with the impact of Covid, it is recognised that the AB as a board was not (due to Covid and other health factors) as active as originally envisaged and in practice their advice and influence came more through bi-lateral, individual specific relationships (e.g. The project lead with the Chair Baroness Jay and Colin McKay through the Scott review).

A summary of key pointers for adopting a tight/loose management approach:

- The tight loose model of management seems to be an appropriate model for this kind of work allowing enough co-ordinating control alongside sufficient professional and creative autonomy
- Some visibility of the progress of the overall project needs to be held beyond a few key players and to be widely visible to (many) others. There is a wide range of software and communication tools that could assist in this area and there is no doubt that the role of such tools are and will be playing an increasingly significant role in complex projects of this nature. The challenge is to create some central championing (and funding) of technology-based tools while allowing emergence of innovative practice from those who are most invested and interested in this area.
- It's important that project lead pays attention to and 'models' regular communications to support the cohesion, visibility, transparency of the overall project. For most leaders what feels like 'over communication' is very often not seen as enough!
- Leaving space and resource for reflective practice as part of the real 'work' is another area that can be easily neglected or taken over by more 'urgent' things. Creating 'ring fenced' space for reflective practice allows knottier personal, professional and social dynamics to have meaningful and valuable attention.
- When setting up a management structure think beyond project control and governance. Value space for informal connection and sharing and build this into the way of working. As an example I suggest that the AMG would have greatly benefitted from an offsite space at various stages in the project – as one of the AMG said: *"Some 'walks and talks' would have had incredible value and led to even richer collaboration"*
- Remember the project lead's 'visibility' (how he/she present themselves and connects with the group as the 'head') is part of the required leadership to create and sustain a project community. Whether it is welcomed or not people build identity with the group and 'look to' the group leader, even if that leader is only having a light, indirect touch on their work.

### **2.3 A strong sense of purpose and a widely held commitment to 'making a difference' in the real world**

From my initial 360 interviews with the AMG, I was struck by the energy and commitment to the project of all those involved. At the core of this was something beyond academic interest and



ambition; there was a real desire to ‘change things in the world’ and this came from different perspectives:

*“Our dream is to change our fields AND change policy and practice”* (AMG member)

*“.... With all the different research ‘cultures’ together it was clear that they could see something to be valued – this collective clearly stimulated and energised them”* (AB member)

Whilst much is written in organisation literature about the importance of ‘purpose’ in creating and sustaining group effectiveness, my experience with the MHJ as a whole was that it demonstrated ‘purpose in action’. The project members had a constant and commonly shared focus on action and impact which underpinned much of the continuing interest and attention to working across disciplines. This sense of purpose provided an important ‘North Star’ which tapped into shared values and beliefs (regardless of discipline), as well as providing a barometer of what was important and this helped the project get through some of the difficult moments associated with working across disciplinary boundaries and methods:

*“MHJ is an intellectual powerhouse AND it’s about getting things into action”* (AMG view)

*“Our narrative is: ‘How are we answering real world problems?’”* (ECR group members)

A result of this ‘North Star’ in action can be seen in a comment from an AB member:

*“MHJ lived up to the rhetoric – one only needs to look at the MHJ research work in SLAM (the South London and Maudsley Trust) and its impact on the MHA review”*

### 2.3.1 The Role of the SUAG

Alongside this shared sense of purpose came a strong emphasis on building in service-user perspectives, in other words the lived experience of those directly affected by mental health issues including patients, their families and carers. As one SUAG commentator said:

*“At the heart of MHJ is the desire to make a difference to those affected – keeping them at the centre”*

The SUAG was a 10 person group set-up in partnership with the McPin Foundation in 2017 and it played an active and important role, described in the end of project “Impact Log” they have prepared<sup>4</sup> highlighting where their involvement has shifted the direction or impact of the work.

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<sup>4</sup> “The Impact Log Project” will be published by the SUAG

The SUAG also made a challenge to traditional methods and ways of thinking, offering a different lens, language, and orientation, providing rigorous critique through their capacity to look ‘in’ at the medico/legal world rather than being part of it. As one workstream lead said:

*“The SUAG was fantastic – it was just so participatory action based ..... none of us had the experience they could offer and they came with us all the way”*

They supported many aspects of the research process, helping to design the format/language /approach of questionnaires, questioning research protocols and interpreting data. As one AMG member summed it up:

*“The SUAG went way beyond [the] ‘tokenism’ of the service user voice – it grew with the life of the project....”*

MHJ’s Researchers were also encouraged to present their theoretical work to the SUAG for comment. From my observations, and from my interviews with SUAG members, this worked best where the researchers had thought through how they wanted to use the SUAG input rather than ‘showcase’ their work. As two members of the SUAG commented to me:

*“One of the things that made a difference was when they came to us with ‘humility’, it was best when they said things like: ‘We know we are too close to the research – please can we ask you for/can you help us with....”*

*“Sometimes we had to say to the researcher: ‘Yes... so please now show us how this benefits someone with Mental Health issues’...”*

I see it being of note that there was a key member of the AMG who was also a service user and played an impactful role in terms of:

- Challenging the language used and assumptions made in AMG meetings, bringing the service user perspective into discussions tenaciously where she felt it was lacking or not sufficiently in-focus
- Providing a critical and active link with the McPin organisation who were responsible for the management of the SUAG
- Bringing her own in-depth philosophical understanding to offer rigorous challenge
- Bringing her network and connections into the project e.g. ground breaking work with BipolarUK

Members of the SUAG participated in the Colloquiums (and contributed to the design) and these meetings were felt by them to get easier as the design of the colloquiums became more interactive and more ‘democratic’ over the years e.g. enabling them to give their views on-line or in post-it formats. However, I note that the Colloquiums were very intense long days and SUAG members mentioned they found it hard to keep energy and attention over such a prolonged period. I noticed that SUAG

members could offer powerful advocacy in small groups at the McPin offices but felt more intimidated in the large group climate of the Colloquium. In response to this, at one Colloquium MHJ commissioned a film which showed short interviews of SUAG member experience and perceptions of being involved in the project, to ensure that 'their voice was in the room'.

Once the Colloquiums went into the virtual format this offered benefits and drawbacks. For many SUAG members they were glad to be included on what they felt was a more democratic basis where they did not have to speak in public and could offer their views on an equal, anonymous footing (e.g. in Word-clouds). It should also be noted however that for a few SUAG members the virtual move led to 'exclusion' due to their home/technology circumstances.

Some key reflections from the SUAG include:

- They feel they could have offered more value if they had been brought in earlier to much of the MHJ work. It is helpful if project or workstream leads signal the importance of this user led 'lens' and model some early good examples of bringing in the service user perspective to show the benefits of earlier involvement e.g. in questionnaire design
- The SUAG lead also acknowledges that they may need to think proactively in projects like this to identify areas where they might be able to help/advance thinking rather than waiting for the workstreams to contact them
- Many academic researchers need help/training to think through how they work with the service user perspective, for example thinking about and preparing in advance the questions they might want answering in the session and where they most need service user feedback.

## **2.4 Building a culture in which both 'syntheses' and 'confrontation' can occur**

Reflecting on my experience of this MHJ project, what stands out is the way in which a collaborative 'culture' was built. Without getting into the details of culture theory, I mean the combination of behaviours, assumptions, values, communications and methods that played out. In relation to best practices in collaboration I would highlight the following factors as being significant in MHJ.

### 2.4.1 In-stream and cross-stream interdisciplinary focus

An important aspect of interdisciplinarity in MHJ was the initial formation of the cross-discipline workstream topics (shown earlier in this report) AND the recognition that this also had to occur across the workstreams. In our focus on whole MHJ collaboration, it would be unwise to underestimate the importance of in-workstream collaboration which was particularly important for those workstreams

such as WS1 whose members were in many cases geographically/institutionally remote from each other. As one remote researcher commented:

*“I learnt SO much even from the interdisciplinarity in our workstream – we had time to sit down, think together, talk about it, using different lenses. This made a real difference”.*

#### 2.4.2 Surfacing inter-disciplinary differences of world view with curiosity, appreciation and respect

The early workshop following the 360 interviews was an important building block in the attitudes and ways of working that were established. It was clear in the workshop that there was a lot of excitement about the project and an openness to being part of this group and above all a spirit of curiosity and respect was demonstrated. Some key aspects were that we:

- Explicitly identified how the different disciplines saw each other and themselves to facilitate acknowledgement of differences in orientation, values, focus, language, motivational drives etc (See Appendix A – which describes how we worked to surface disciplinary differences )
- Took time to share different methodological traditions, ways of working and what counts as ‘truth’
- Fostered interest in some of the learnt assumptions and practices of one’s own discipline - in order to look ‘inside out’ at one’s own preferences, assumptions, values and what has drawn us to this way of looking at the world

*“It was about sharing out methods/ideas and materials... being generous with each other, debunking things and testing on the ground...” (AMG member)*

- The effect of this early work was noticed by project members as the work evolved. As one Advisory Board member said:

*“They had a unique ability to unpack the preferences of their worlds – it was enriching to hear them explain their different disciplines with curiosity and respect. The interpersonal relationships were important but above all they saw this interdisciplinarity at the heart of the work...”*

- We also developed a metaphor about collaboration in an early workshop which provided a useful shorthand/language to talk about it. Workstreams were seen as richly growing ‘allotments’ with their own patch of ground but with strong connections (soil, climate, root structures etc) to neighbouring allotments. There were fences, but they were low and people could lean up against them and ‘talk over’ them, recognising the shared ground and complex root systems which interpenetrated the allotments, ignoring the above ground fences. Then there was the weather (the external shifting context) which they all shared and no one owned or controlled.

From this workshop foundation, the AMG demonstrated an openness and curiosity about methods and practices that were “*completely out of our comfort zone*” and showed a willingness to adopt and work with these. This was particularly true of some of the qualitative methods and experiences in Workstream 2, where the Principal Investigator was generous in offering a workshop to outline some key qualitative methods from her ethnographic world that were then adopted elsewhere in the study, leading to new insights and lines of enquiry:

*“The ethnographic workstream brought a hugely valuable difference .... she could challenge our paradigms from a place of her international experience of systems that are NOT functioning - bringing the value of her international work... brilliant observations” (AMG member)*

*“She offered us a skill set and an angle of vision that was so different to psychology and law ...this had a huge impact and no one emerged the same from the process” (AMG member)*

These ‘out of comfort zone’ approaches often brought fresh insights, for example one PhD Clinician was encouraged to use a free text survey/thematic analysis which she normally wouldn’t have done. She saw the data with fresh eyes and that:

*“.....it was so different to my taught perceptions and priorities – the data was so powerful - for me as a clinician to get such an intimate view into their (Service user) reactions and their world”*

Another researcher commented:

*“I was amazed by the enthusiasm for empirical work by our PhD researcher – they don’t do empirical work!”*

#### 2.4.3 The importance of Language

During the project it was recognised that it was important to pay attention to terminological and semantic differences, take time to delve into and explore the multiplicity of meanings that exist for the same, widely used words. A good example was the use of the word ‘Justice’ within the project title itself, with the Workstream 2 lead organising an ad-hoc workshop on this topic which was widely attended and greatly appreciated. As one Advisory Board member commented:

*“The philosophers brought to the fore how people used words... they challenged terms that, for example, psychiatrists use daily and they then interrogated the words – it became clear that we were using the word “insight’ in at least 4 different ways!...” ... “The philosophers brought this language issue to the fore.... drawing attention to the use of key words– it was a revelation to me”*

#### 2.4.4 Adopting approaches that gave people the time, space and support to stay with differences

Within the collaborative culture an important element was allowing space for effective ‘listening’ – providing a space and a climate in which people could be curious and hold back on judgement – this often involved using appreciative methods to allow positive/building responses before the more traditional academic tendency to ‘critique’ cut in. As one workstream lead said:

*“We discussed things from the 3 disciplines – thinking together from our disciplines and working at our boundaries – it was only that way that we could answer ‘what are the key questions we are interested in...?’”*

Other steps were also taken which:

- Encouraged people to adopt and adapt approaches to argument and inquiry that suited colleagues and not just themselves and their home discipline. There could often be some tension, for example, in style and approach in a number of areas:
  - In dialogue those who were very comfortable working along a robust advocacy dimension (propose - expecting robust challenge) and those who privileged exploration, inquiry and process awareness
  - The balance between critique (with a heavy emphasis on logical evidence-based thinking) and those who were familiar with more intuitive and empathetic forms of understanding
- Built acceptance that there is an emotional and time load associated with people having to work and stay with differences (rather than readily retreating into discipline specific or overly simplified solutions):

*“We had to hold the differences long enough to allow new understanding to emerge – a synthesis of our approaches... but this could be painful ... and time consuming! ... sometimes we just had to agree we could not resolve the differences but at least we understood and respected them” (AMG member)*

*“We would come back together in our workstream, and come back, and then come back again even 3 months later to continue the struggle and work with the differences” (Workstream senior researcher)*

- Utilised forums for connection that build on familiar forms (e.g. Colloquiums) and then stretch these into more novel forms of inquiry rather than stay with academic showcasing. Examples of novel practice include:
  - Working in small table groups to give people space for introductions, sharing ideas and responses in a mixed group
  - Encouraging ‘democratic’ Q&A sessions and responses from all (including appreciations, areas of doubt and suggestions) using both on-line and post-it based methods

- o Holding ‘world café’ processes to allow energetic small group discussions and the opportunity for participants to hear about and explore a number of the research strands
  - “We were learning how to ask curious questions – not debunking ones... getting away from academic tut-tutting in the back row!”*
  - “The Colloquium was not a showcase for knowledge – curious was more important than clever” (AMG member)*

#### 2.4.5 The development of Policy Labs

These Labs, run by the King’s Policy Institute, (which I was unable to observe) were designed to strengthen engagement and maximise the policy impact of the research. They focussed on key topics that emerged during the project, seeking to draw out a wide range of perspectives and views to develop new thinking and approaches and ensure that options and ideas were challenged and deliberated:

*“...(at the Labs) they had fruitful debates and got a lot out of people – and importantly included lived experience” (AB member)*

#### 2.4.6 The emergence and importance of the Early Researcher Group as a key part of the collaborative process

Following the appointment of early career researchers during the first 18 months of the project, the collaboration was greatly assisted by the informal emergence of this group not only as a support/social group for the researchers (which was greatly valued) but also as a forum in which a lot of the bottom-up, cross-workstream interdisciplinary work happened. The group had energy, drive and a strong identity and many of them felt that it flourished because it was ‘outside’ the ‘hierarchy’ of the project:

*“It’s been fun and stimulating”*

*“We felt entrusted to get on with it”*

*“It’s great learning at our level – we figure things out together and look at the bigger picture”*

As a result of their cross-workstream focus they became very aware of the dependencies and connections around key topics, producing a very useful matrix showing these interconnections across the project (see Table 2). The group was also highly valued by the more discipline specific senior leaders:

*“They are ‘on song’ .... bouncing off each other and really motoring – such energy they have really realised the power of their network!” (AMG member)*

*“It was the young people doing the work, not the Principals and Workstream Leaders... They were the true inter-disciplinary emissaries, they went to different territories and brought back new fruits and artefacts... held [with] the unknown [then] ‘Oh look! It worked!’” (AMG Member)*

This group have created their own research culture which is energetic and collaborative. It will be interesting to see how, and to what extent, they feel able/encouraged to carry this interdisciplinary mindset and approach forward in their next career moves within academia and beyond.

#### 2.4.7 The realities of marginalisation and exclusion

Within any ‘Big Tent’ collaborative group there is also a shadow side at work in which issues can fail to be noticed, or at worst shut down or silenced. The normal dynamics around power, gender, identity and status were playing out and on occasions created ‘bumps in the road’ for the collaboration. These bumps in the road, in which for example gender and institutional politics (in the context of the general rise of ‘culture wars’) were playing a part, did at times challenge the collaborative spirit of the project and undermine the cohesion of the AMG and the confidence of the ECR. There did not appear to be sufficient appetite or time allowed for addressing these complex issues through reflective practice, and so at times these issues were marginalised or ignored which in turn exacerbated some of the differences and tensions.

Within the ‘Big Tent’ certain disciplines felt themselves to be ‘outliers’ e.g. the neuroscience and ethnographic/international elements of the work did not hold such a clear and established place in this field. Some members admitted to, especially in the early days, having some resistance to the idea of the neuroscience element and methods and how this could fit with their values and approaches. As one researcher commented:

*“Are they (neuroscience and international work) just doing what they are interested in – does it fit?”*

From the perspective of one ‘outlier’, the Neuroscience workstream lead said:

*“...It was hard for us in the project – we felt we had to chip away at some of the assumptions about our role and approach ...and understand their concerns about us”*

There was also some wariness around how the international element could be brought in effectively.



It is a credit to both of the PIs in those areas, and to the collaborative spirit of the project, that both recognised these issues and found ways to build connection and understanding across the project and offer considerable value in the differences (and similarities) that they brought to the project. The WS2 lead provided valuable support in offering research methods workshops and offered generous insights across the project from her perspective. The Workstream 5 lead designed and ran a well-attended symposium about the neuroscience stream with a strong emphasis on showing its connection and relevance to the heart of the project, especially in the key area of insight. It is also a demonstration of the collaborative culture that, despite some of these potential stumbling blocks, the other disciplines still showed respect and curiosity about what these ‘outlier’ streams were up to and how it might be relevant to their work.

In terms of institutional ‘outliers’ (i.e. not located in London and international participants) they found it harder to feel connected to the MHJ study overall beyond their workstream. For some this “*allowed me just to get on with the work in my ‘sweet spot’*” whereas others felt more marginalised. There were sensitivities about how much their input was “*really wanted (in the core group).... they did not seem that keen for me to do it*” and this could exacerbate gender and other in/out power dynamics. With the pandemic and the requirement for virtual work some ‘outliers’ did feel that they had become more involved and connected to the MHJ project through their ability to attend meetings /colloquiums, and the like, without travel and the associated costs in time and budget.

Within the ‘Big Tent’ there were pre-existing relationships and alliances which led to some early perceptions of ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ groups; these evolved over the project with perceived proximity to the project lead being one measure of this, but with other powerful alliances evolving as well. In terms of addressing these dynamics explicitly, without wanting to generalise, there was some difference between medical/science-based disciplines some of whom (but definitely not all) were less keen, or saw less value in, adopting reflective practices than the humanities-based members. Many on the humanities side wanted more time and space to work and develop as a group and would have been prepared to invest the time because of the added value they thought it would bring. In my view the project would have benefited from more space and opportunity for reflective practice but I was also aware of realities of the time pressures (reflective practice had not been budgeted for) and the practical difficulties of getting all AMG members together. I therefore experienced myself trying to find a ‘good enough’ balance between more reflection and the potential dangers of what might have become time consuming and unfruitful ruminations in a group which was already working with such a noticeable spirit of curiosity and respect (with inevitable undercurrents).

However, at points of tension and uncertainty some of these differences became more marked and again impacted the collaborative culture of the project. This was particularly true as the project neared

the end and members were inevitably looking out for next moves, alliances and funding. Clearly inter-disciplinary, multi-institutional projects are temporary arrangements that exist within more enduring institutional and disciplinary contexts. Endings therefore become complicated when there are multiple, often competing, interests to pursue and careers to attend to as new interests emerge and these don't fit within the bounded timeframe of the project. One 'bump in the road' reflected the difficulty associated with endings – in which a lack of transparency about future projects being explored and developed by some key players - impacted cohesion within the AMG and beyond. Quite a lot of this tension was about the use of the term "MHJ" which was seen not only to have 'brand' weight in the sector, but also clearly invoked a strong sense of identity for all those who were involved in the project. This brought into strong focus the importance of the intangible power of the project's brand and people's identification with it, illustrating the sensitivities that have to be noticed and attended to in the process of 'ending' projects well as leadership attention gets drawn to new work (see section 4).

### **2.5. Key Pointers for Collaboration**

- Where possible draw on pre-existing networks and relationships where interdisciplinary working has been successful, but be aware of the drawbacks of creating impermeable "in" groups and ensure these can absorb new interests and perspectives that others can bring. Also be aware of the power dynamics, and the shadow they can cast, that exist when senior colleagues who know each other well form part of the core of the project (e.g. pay attention to broadly shared communication)
- Invest in reflective learning about 'how' the group is working and wants to work in the early stages of the project. This can help create the foundation of shared expectations/purpose and encourage curiosity about each other's work
- Where appropriate, identify themes where it is possible to build interdisciplinarity into core workstreams as well as across workstreams in order to maximise cross fertilisation of thinking, methods and assumptions
- Alongside establishing formal structures for collaboration e.g. the AMG meetings and Colloquiums, encourage a culture in which PIs and researchers can be proactive about offering up more ad hoc exploratory sessions. This is particularly important for the more outlying disciplines or areas of work. Recognise that some project members will be looking for more directive leadership in this area, while others will need to feel supported and that it is legitimate and valued to be proactive. Others will just get on with it!

- It is important to pay considerable attention to the Early Career Researchers whose energy and new thinking can have great impact on interdisciplinarity - and also use their technology awareness and skills!

### **Section 3 – The Art based approach to public engagement offers both ‘confronting’ and innovation**

Whilst a separate report<sup>5</sup> is being written about this element of the project, I feel this overview of interdisciplinary collaboration would not be complete without reference to the role played by the public engagement, art-based strand of MHJ.

#### **3.1 How and why Art based approaches became part of the MHJ project**

Through the PPE award MHJ set up a partnership with the Bethlem gallery and the selected artists, most of whom have lived experience of mental health service issues. The award enabled them to work with each of the six work streams to facilitate groups and produce public facing work.

For many involved in the project, particularly at the start, it was a fundamental challenge to see how this non-verbal approach could ‘fit’ or be part of the core work of the project. The artists were bringing in an approach from a very divergent discipline, with a fundamentally different frame of reference. This frame offers significant challenge to many of the premises of traditional academic research:

- Artists are deeply embedded in/ pay attention to the landscape within which the research is happening: they see that their work is not happening in isolation from the social and political context. For most artists you cannot take the political /social context out of the research (which academics generally work so hard to do).
- The service user voice and patient advocacy was critical in their landscape and completely at the heart of the artists’ work
- While researchers can often feel a pressure to come up with ‘answers’ to complex problems, artists have a capacity to tolerate and even embrace contradiction
- Artists are deeply interested in ‘failure’, not knowing, unknowing, unlearning and unravelling whereas, in contrast, academics favour knowledge, learning, knowing and can be linear and outcome focused. As one PI said:

*“We learned so much from them about not knowing and being okay with not knowing”*

- Academic researchers often seek to protect the rigour of their research by creating “controlled environments” whereas, in contrast, artists are very good at living with, accepting, working with and being open about “messiness”

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<sup>5</sup> The Art of the Impossible Question – artist led engagement in the MHJ

- The artists also saw themselves challenging some of the hierarchical assumptions about the research with their emphasis on equality and co- researching

### **3.2 Key pointers for including an Arts based approach**

With hindsight there are elements of the PPE area that could have enabled this to have more impact:

- The artists should /could have been more explicit about their role and how they can help – to bring the worlds together. They recognised that they should have encouraged the workstreams to have more dialogue with them and demonstrate the power of their world view and of the questions/reflections they could offer
- Allow more time for and attention to reflective practice which could have surfaced more effectively, or earlier, the potential value and ways in which they could work and bring their disciplinary difference
- Time for more reflective practice would have created more space for the acceptance and curiosity that would have allowed the ‘confronting’ of the artist discipline to be more effective

## **Section 4. ‘Good Endings’ and Dissemination - Having a public impact across lived experience, practice, policy and academic worlds**

### **4.1 Developing a shared sense of what ‘making an impact’ means**

In any project there is much weight given to the outcomes or impact of the project and this was clearly an ongoing debate within the big tent that was MHJ. From my interviews, it was clear that most workstream leads/AMG members recognised the multiplicity of ways in which the term ‘impact’ could be defined, achieved or perceived. It was also a critical point at which the pull of different disciplines, career paths, ambitions and institutional pressures could have destabilised the collaboration.

Significantly at this point the overall sense of purpose served the AMG well and there was a lot of positive energy around a sense that ‘we now really have something to say’. This shared energy also existed around the need to be heard not only through traditional academic research channels such as journals but also – in line with its shared sense of MHJ purpose - into the fields of practice and lived experience.

In one of our AMG meetings, around 18 months from the end of the project, we became increasingly aware of the importance of the term ‘impact’ and that it might be helpful to ‘unpick’ the differing meanings and assumptions that might be held by different disciplines and stakeholders. This was so a shared sense of ‘what we are aiming for’ could be developed. The term was seen to include both traditional academic ‘impact’ and a broader sense of impact and influence on education, practice and lived experience in this area. Key aspects were seen to include:

- Dissemination in academic journals
- Influencing debate in the field of mental health and justice across boundaries
- Changing policy and legislation (notably its role in the MHA review and Scott review)
- Changing practice in medico-legal training and associated environments as well as in service user organisations
- Offering a network which provides an important ‘depository’ of contacts, materials and up to date monitoring of current thinking and research in the field

As mentioned in the AMG ‘End of Project’ report, a critical way in which interdisciplinary advancement may be measured is traditionally – and by necessity - research publications, most of which are single disciplinary in focus. Most of MHJ’s achievements have crossed large disciplinary boundaries (health, social and neurocognitive sciences, philosophy and law) and have engaged with

academic literatures across those disciplines. They achieved this through cross-disciplinary co-authorships and this has, at times, pushed journal editors out of their comfort zones because of the conceptual and methodological issues raised. The AMG ‘End of Project’ report highlights the successes both in terms of publication in leading single based discipline-based journals (e.g. The Lancet, Medical Law Review, The Journal of Medical Ethics) and also in multi-disciplinary publications (e.g. Wellcome Open research, PLOS one, Journal of Law and Psychiatry).

#### **4.2 The work of maintaining collaborative interdisciplinarity**

Maintaining collaborative interdisciplinarity in this dissemination process did not come without its own ‘work’:

- As attention was drawn to certain aspects of MHJ work (e.g. the MHA review) it was seen by some to be distorting the emphasis of the work (i.e. towards an England geography and policy focus)

*“Policy involvement is great but the spirit of the project is NOT about “concrete” outcomes – it’s about how we impact the field”*

- The ever-present challenges of negotiating authorship protocols and status across academic worlds had to be navigated in this new interdisciplinary context
- As publications or policy impacts became more prolific this set-up some competitive anxieties between workstreams with the risk, for example, that some less visibly ‘active’ workstreams could feel in danger of being devalued. This was, in my view, lessened by the spirit of respect for each other’s work and contribution in the project. As one workstream leader said: *“Policy impact is just NOT what we do....”* to be met with the reply from a senior colleague: *“Yes, but you provide the scholarly underpinning for longer term legal reform which is invaluable – you do such important work....”*

#### **4.3. The importance of ‘Good endings’**

This focus is heavily influenced by my work and practice using some of the ideas developed by William Bridges<sup>6</sup> in his seminal work on ‘Managing Transitions’. At the heart of this lies the idea that at the ‘end’ of a project (or phase in organisational life) too much focus and energy is often put on the ‘new’ (the excitement of the new project, the new organisation). His view is that in order to move effectively to the new we have to ‘end well’ the previous phase. What he calls ‘good endings’ are key

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<sup>6</sup> William Bridges -Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change (Revised 4th Edition) Paperback – 10 Aug. 2017

to successful transition and this includes things such as respect and appreciation for what has happened, a recognition that social structures and relationships are being uprooted, and that our sense of identify and belonging is being shifted.

MHJ has paid attention to the ‘good ending’ although this has been somewhat complicated by the delayed (the unpaid extension) ending of some parts of the project due to personal circumstances and the pandemic impact. There has been a sense of energy in recent weeks (as I write this in June 22) as:

- The Phds complete their work and are moving to new and exciting challenges with strong experience of multidisciplinary working and approaches
- Aspects of MHJ work are receiving publication in highly respected journals AND have kept the interdisciplinarity at their heart
- Many areas of research are being pulled through into ground breaking practice e.g. the SLAM projects on Advanced Directives and work with Bipolar UK
- There is broad acknowledgement of MHJ’s critical and timely role in both the MHA and Scott review (Scotland)
- There are numerous examples of MHJ researchers carrying forward their working together beyond the project and in influencing the thinking and agenda in a range of connected research areas<sup>7</sup>.
- Curricula in education are being impacted eg The WS6 research (contested capacity) is already used to teach social workers at Queen’s University Belfast and in training psychiatrists at the Maudsley Hospital, London. The WS3 research (advance directives) is being taught to medical students on the MBBS programme at KCL.
- Many interdisciplinary grant applications are in place from project members to carry forward some aspects of the MHJ work that are gaining traction and interest in their fields.
- Many of the Bethlem initiatives are coming to fruition (some in unexpected ‘emergent’ ways) and are getting public recognition.
- The film about the MHJ project<sup>8</sup> is being released more broadly.
- A ‘closing party’ for all MHJ members was held at the Wellcome Trust in late May to ‘celebrate’ the project, our work together, its achievements and to provide a chance for everyone to reconnect face to face post-pandemic

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<https://eur03.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fblogs.bmj.com%2Fbmj%2F2021%2F09%2F08%2Fassisted-dying-we-must-prioritise-research%2F&data=05%7C01%7Cgareth.1.owen%40kcl.ac.uk%7C35aba5ae1a67466b80c408da5b6d38d0%7C8370cf1416f34c16b83c724071654356%7C0%7C0%7C637922821996868167%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWljoIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzliLCJBTiI6IjEhaWwiLCJXVCi6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=EBMENVBdUAiKzhNveh%2Fr88DYS%2FMxklAoJXe2jWBAOPU%3D&reserved=0>

<sup>8</sup> Mental Health and Justice: a case study in interdisciplinarity <https://vimeo.com/705748662/35c1e77716>



- The website is continuing to become an important depository for those working in the field and is likely to be developed further as a legacy of the project
- The formation of a short-term committee with a focus on dissemination and impact is helping to keep the momentum and sense of connection even as many MHJ participants are moving into new work

These offer a strong tribute to the way in which the ‘advancements’ that MHJ achieved in interdisciplinary working are bearing fruition in line with and beyond the original expectations. In my view this advancement has been made possible by:

- the shared resolution and intent of the group
- its ability to adapt its work in response to its context,
- its willingness to step outside familiar expertise and ways of working and ‘experiment’ with new ways of ‘doing’ interdisciplinarity
- the leadership offered by the project lead
- and the example of ‘collaboration and respect’ modelled by the AMG and further developed in the ECR group

I am proud to have been part of their journey and to have provided some road markers and road signs along the way to help this journey be so fruitful and rewarding. This has been a ‘good ending’ even though inevitably tinged with sadness (and some sense of ‘loss’ in Bridges terms) that this part of the journey is done.

#### **4.5 Key Pointers for good endings**

- Keep momentum going. The temptation can be to front load attention onto the start of the project, assuming that if this is taken care of then it can last through to the end of the work. Middles and endings also need distinctive forms of attention, with endings having to work with the co-existence of work to be done within the project and the development of work and careers going forward
- Some elements of mess and ambiguity are realities to be faced – and MHJ had to cope with a particularly messy ending due to extended contracts and complications associated with the Pandemic. The MHJ did not have a clean ending, an experience which applies to the author of this report as much as the rest of the project. In this case, within recent months a new group has formed around its legacy, an eventuality that could not have been predicted or planned for, but has certainly been taken advantage of
- ‘Letting go’ effectively is an important part of making successes in new beginnings and enabling the legacy with good relationships. While the project ceases to have an identity, a new

and/or enhanced web of social and professional relationships live on which will continue to exercise influence both formally and informally. At the same time, it has to be recognised that many people will feel that something has been lost in their lives in the form of the project, the identity it gave them and the network it provided which will no longer be there and whose absence will be noticed by people for some time.

- Even when there are no line management responsibilities (e.g. for next career steps), leaders in the project have a role in ending the project well, at paying attention to the experience of being part of something which has now run its course. How they move on, and see the moving on of others, will leave a legacy in how people talk about the work that has been done and how they are viewed in the extended network beyond the project
- In successful projects where a sense of identity and belonging emerges, the name of the Project matters and has a meaning for people. The extent to which it remains a collective name will have an impact on how the legacy of the project is talked about, potentially amplifying any lingering sensitivities.
- It is best to mark the formal ending – with celebrations and goodbyes, in this case long delayed due to Covid. Wakes can be great events even if tinged with some regrets and acknowledged losses.

## Section 5 – Looking to the Future – MHJ relevance to future research trends

The intent of this report in line with original Wellcome Trust proposal was to provide both a ‘legacy around interdisciplinary working’ and a ‘model’ for others. It is important to note however, before looking to the future, the many changes that have taken place both in the context and content in the course of the MHJ project. The field in which legacies or models can be relevant is permanently in flux, for the MHJ this included:

- The way the terms ‘mental health’ and ‘justice’ have shifted in meaning and political potency in the period of the research
- The growing importance of diversity and inclusion issues (and broader ‘culture wars’) has brought impact not only within the broad social /political context of the research but also within the team

There will be continuing changes in the research world, and its methods and context, in which any ‘model’ would need to be relevant. The research world overall can be seen to be moving towards more multi-faceted and complex studies, requiring more collaboration across disciplines and institutions. This will be accompanied by higher expectations and emphasis on public engagement, real world application and social impact – all of these trends are amply addressed in the MHJ work.

Other trends of note that will increase the demands of ‘managing’ interdisciplinarity include:

- Different forms of funding and partnering with multiple outside stakeholders, some of whom will have a focus on commercial return, require a breadth of leadership and management skills and focus
- The increasing role of technology to support, enable and enhance collaboration across institutions, geographies and audiences makes possible ways of working that are still being experimented with and applied on the hoof
- The opening up of, and access to, highly customised qualitative data through an increasing range of cross-disciplinary and innovative data collection/analysis techniques is creating new opportunities and risks in research process and method. This includes non-verbal, ethnographic and AI assisted approaches, all of which were experimented with during the MHJ work
- Changes in how hierarchy is viewed with the advance of:
  - Blending of teaching and research as undergraduates engage with material earlier in their careers
  - Practices such as ‘reverse mentoring’ as younger less experienced researchers are more closely involved in the research design process and projects are run in a more ‘bottom up’ way

- A realisation that ‘sowing the seeds of dialogue and inquiry’ is a fundamental building block in research collaboration
- The need to find appropriate balances between activism and scholarship

My experience is that MHJ worked with and addressed many of these trends - especially the learning that was achieved in the ECR. As one AMG member said:

*“It’s so great to see the PhDs going on to next things (at the end of the project) – we have a group of excited and collaborative researchers who have great connection to practice. This is a fantastic base for research and their careers.... **they may be the real MHJ legacy...**”*

## Appendix A: Making disciplinary differences and connections explicit

### Surfacing differences

At an early workshop for AMG members of all the workstreams, Laura ran a workshop exercise drawing on the popular (in management circles) ‘Johari Window’ framework, which allows people to explore the difference between how they see themselves and how others see them – with the intention of receiving feedback to see how well aligned self-perception is with how others see them.

In the workshop, project members identified with six disciplines (Law, Philosophy/Ethics, Neuroscience, Social Sciences, Service Users Advisory Group and Psychiatrists) and then set to work self-analysing their discipline in terms of:

- How we see ourselves – and our convictions and vulnerability
- How we think others see us – at our best and at our worst

At the same time people recorded their own views as to how they saw each of these different disciplines.

At the end of the workshop large sheets of paper pulled all these perspectives together and in a serious but playful spirit, the different world views of the disciplines became discussable in everyday language

#### 1. *The ‘Law’ Report* (Note there are differences between academic and practical lawyers)

How we see ourselves – what we bring, our convictions and our vulnerability

- Justice, clarity of reasoning/argumentation
- Impact at group and individual level
- Boldness
- Being seen as rigid, expensive

How we think others see us – at our best and at our worst

- Righters of wrong/champion of the underdog
- Jarndyce and Jarndyce (interminable)
- Sniper from the side-lines (academic)

How others do see us

- Love procedure (and procedural solutions) and rules, rule-making, logical rigour, deferential to precedent (though not always)
- Effect the world, [a] core discipline and practice [for MHJ], bring full understanding
- They see hard cases
- Their technicalities often need more explanation, their regulations and conceptions are quite technical, can be parochial by jurisdiction, they often talk principally to other lawyers
- Discrepancy/dilemma between legally right versus morally just
- System thinking and action

## **2. *The Philosophy/Ethics Report***

How we see ourselves – what we bring, our convictions and our vulnerability

- We love sharp edges... we used to be the ‘Queen of the Sciences’... we can argue about anything
- Whatever survives the most robust critique
- “Idea” ‘lism

How we think others see us – at our best and at our worst

- Lovers of argument/precision... helpful in framing arguments and principles
- Hair splitters... Aggressive, arrogant, out of touch

How others do see us

- They are holding a key concept in this study – autonomy, personhood etc... bring key methods and different views
- They always produce good discussion... questioning and tackle the big questions... unsettling and interesting... raising the core/identifying the essentials... normative thinkers... they are bringing a more empirical grounded philosophy which is fascinating
- They make brave statements – but these sometimes lack grounding and reflecting messiness of real life... can be over theoretical and miss practical reality
- It’s hard for SUAG members – we need someone to present to us in terms we understand – and we don’t know what we don’t know! Hard to judge... Must avoid internal debates when engaging with non-specialists

## **3. *The Neuroscience Report***

How we see ourselves – what we bring, our convictions and our vulnerability

- Experimental rigour... knowledge of mechanisms (brain and psychological)

- Commitment to the confirmable/refutable... claims about the world – Science!
- Do we have relevance in this field? Personhood/autonomy etc are not science subjects

How we think others see us – at our best and at our worst

- Based on hard science – reliable progress... able to show things rather than just argue/interpret things... keep things grounded in reality
- Powerful... holding all the money and the answers... irrelevant

How others do see us

- No one in the SUAG has met anyone from this discipline so we can't say... We don't know what they do? How can a very medical approach translate for SUAG contribution? Images that appear complex but often explain little as there is so much we don't know
- Seem to be asking the right questions... raising more questions than answers. Fascinating!... Clarity of scope?
- Have the potential to be interesting... can be illuminating... still in its infancy... cutting edge... new bridge to build
- Occupational hazard = reductionist... piecemeal... remote from application
- Empirical (find out how it really works)... nitty gritty (get under the hood)
- Bring technology and measurement

#### **4. *The Social Sciences Report***

How we see ourselves – what we bring, our convictions and our vulnerability

- Empirical work that focuses on meaning... long term, in-depth qualitative research trying to understand people's perspectives through exploring what they say and do... unpicking the taken for granted thinking about how concepts are lived in the everyday and get new meaning
- Slow working – often not able to churn out lots of publications quickly as qualitative datasets that combine observation, participating, various forms of interview are messy. Our outputs might appear few... at least at first
- Danger of making big claims which can appear as though we have little to contribute to real world problems

How we think others see us – at our best and at our worst

- Asking beyond the obvious about meaning and lived experience... reflective
- Promoting a form of relativism [that] stifles action and gets in the way of more normative thinking
- Too constructivistic (rather than positivistic)

How others do see us

- Social Sciences feel more accessible to SUAG – not as difficult to explain and we find it engaging
- They step away from the theoretical and incorporate the interpersonal... they bring a social view... context... nuanced and sensitive to differences... they get out into the world
- They bring a possible bias against existing systems (e.g. legal and clinical)... [and] can be seduced by good theory
- Deeply split between positivists and those who no longer believe in truth... can become internal and hard to focus... can be constructive or destructive... why do they do what they do?
- They shine a light on other disciplines... essential to understanding our issues and questions... innovative methods

### **5. *The Service User Advisory Group (SUAG) Report***

How we see ourselves – what we bring, our convictions and our vulnerability

- Practical lived experience which professional clinicians/academics cannot bring... the SUAG find the work really interesting... people in SUAG are driven by their own personal experiences... they really do want things to change for the better so that others do not have the same (usually negative) experiences they have had... SUAG may be aching for more things to do
- Voices of service users are under-represented and not properly understood in discussions of law and care... we want to stop others suffering the negative experiences (we have had)
- We do not always have the legal/clinical expertise to engage fully in discussions. We may need extra explanation

How we think others see us – at our best and at our worst

- Overcoming challenges... wanting to make a positive contribution
- Driven by personal bias and lacking objectivity... may be seen as unreliable due to health reasons

How others do see us

- They bring alternative knowledge but it is AS important (and is often soundly constructed)... insights... bring experience that is essential to the project... keeping us on track
- Risk of tokenism?
- They need confidence to intervene and influence the questions – they are new and finding their feet (and voice?)
- Disparate... challenging

### **6. *The Psychiatrists Report***



How we see ourselves – what we bring, our convictions and our vulnerability

- Medical training – interest in the working of the individual mind... seeking to relieve suffering flowing from disturbance in mental process... practice based on rigour/evidence
- Spring from science and experience/understanding
- “Failure”... absence of observed benefit

How we think others see us – at our best and at our worst

- Disciplined... rigorous... caring... committed at the coalface
- Too focused on the individual... aspiring to science is unrealistic... have a narrow view of the normal... based on flaky science... practice is defensive and conservative

How others do see us

- Core discipline and practice... in the care business as a way of life... extraordinarily committed... bring the clinical overview... facing trauma every day... effects the world/people... focus on practical, social and political practice of diagnosing and treatment
- They think they are the professionals so tend to question the SU [Service User] perspective... see them as colleagues but also as clinicians (SUAG) = strange love/hate
- Implicated in the system? Ethical challenges in their field... “Deontically screwed” – obliged to do something impermissible... Historical development of the field is both fascinating and troubling
- Uneasy combination of self-confidence and feeling ill at ease... feeling under threat... contested... powerful
- Use a multitude of models... what are they diagnosing? Illness/social problems/economic situation? Treatment of what?

## Appendix B – ECR analysis of overlapping concepts across workstreams

Eleven Early Career Researchers came together to explore what their common ground was. They came from five of the workstreams and from three different institutions. The following diagram shows the results illustrating that :

- Ten shared a connection with the field of ‘Decision Making’
- Six with ‘CPRD’
- Five with ‘Qualitative Methods’
- Four with ‘Courts of Protection’, ‘Survey Methods’ and ‘Undue Influence’
- Three with ‘Severe Mental Illness’, ‘Community’, ‘Capacity Reform’, ‘Advice Taking’ and ‘Metacognition’
- Two with ‘Older Adults’, ‘Intellectual Disabilities’ and ‘Philosophical Analysis’

