



[Living Assessments](#) co-investigator Dr Barry Coughlan

We caught up with Barry to find out more about his experience at his current institution and prior to joining the project, and how his research expertise contributes to this project.

Could you tell us a bit more about your PhD research and time at your current institution?

I did my PhD at the Department of Public Health and Primary Care at Cambridge University, where I'm currently based. I started in October 2017 and submitted my dissertation in Dec 2020. My doctoral research explored assessment practices for children with social and neurodevelopmental conditions. My dissertation was structured to reflect a hypothetical child and family's pathway through services starting with a query of autism, moving to the differential conceptualisation of autism, ADHD, and attachment difficulties. My interest in assessment practices started when I worked in a neurodevelopmental service for children and young people in Ireland. More specifically, I was working as an assistant psychologist at the time and became interested in the different forms of information that contribute to diagnostic decisions. In addition, I was also fascinated by the logic of organisational practices and, particularly, the interface between different levels of care. My PhD was a mixed-methods project, and I used systematic reviews, qualitative interviews, and quantitative analysis of electronic healthcare records. I passed my viva in March.

How do you feel your PhD research will contribute towards the 'Living Assessments' project?

I think my doctoral research contributes towards Living Assessments in several ways. First, my research was about assessment practices in children and young people. So, I have a sense of the different types of information that health care professionals lean on when making decisions about children and families. Moreover, I know that health and social care assessments can be complicated by an array of organisational factors, and these assessments are rarely emotionally natural. This helps me keep a broad view when providing accounts of these assessments and underscores the importance of making sure that children and families voices are at the core of research on these topics. I also hope to bring the research skills I have developed during my PhD to Living Assessments. So, I have experience conducting various types of reviews, including systemic, conceptual and umbrella. Now, I am working on several reviews with students as part of the work we are doing in Living Assessments. In addition, I am also working on studies on child welfare assessments using electronic healthcare records, which I see as a natural progression from my doctoral research. Already I have learned so much from colleagues at Kent and the National Children Bureau, and looking forward to working closely with colleagues on this exciting project.

The Living Assessments project is a Collaborative Award between the University of Kent, the University of Cambridge and the National Children's Bureau (NCB), and funded by the Wellcome Trust.

The research project looks to understand the experiences and impact of health and social care assessments on children and families, particularly the lived experiences of assessments in the past and present.

