

Notts' Voice in Research

Notts' Voice in Research, part of Collaboratory's Local Voices in Research initiative seeks to understand some of the complex challenges that are important to our local communities and how research from our local universities should be shaped to address these. Through Notts' Voice in Research events, we aim to:

- Work with Nottingham(shire) residents, local civic and community professionals, community leaders etc., who have knowledge and experience of our diverse local communities.
- Collaborate with participants in our workshops to develop an informed understanding of what the Nottingham(shire) communities' priorities are and how these intersect and overlap.
- Use these mutually agreed priorities to direct the development of up to 15 new research projects that will be funded and delivered by Collaboratory, starting in April 2027.



What did our communities say?

Over the course of the workshop, **245 specific responses** were put forward by participants which describe the nature of priority communities, the challenges they face, and the connections arising amongst these. The responses were then analysed using an approach called "thematic analysis" to identify broader common themes and to describe specific, actionable priority areas. This makes it possible to see the bigger picture in hundreds of very different but interconnected responses. This report highlights **7 themes and 38 specific topics for action**.



Figure 1. 2026-27 Nottinghamshire Research Priority themes word cloud

This word cloud gives a graphical overview of the main themes arising from discussions in our Notts' Voice in Research workshop. The larger the word, the more common the theme was amongst the 245 priorities.

Overview of priorities

Priority Theme	Specific Topics for Action
1. Health determinants and wellbeing	1. Mental health challenges and their compounding factors. 2. Workplace stress and its wider health impacts. 3. Links health, policing and criminal justice risk. 4. Barriers to accessing health care (mistrust of services, cultural understandings, inaccessible systems). 5. Neurodivergent conditions - service pathway problems, adult diagnosis, and recognition and understanding. 6. Homeless and hidden homelessness populations. 7. Hard-to-reach populations and service invisibility. 8. Management of chronic and long-term health conditions.
2. Inclusive communities	1. Social isolation, loneliness, and related impacts on health, wellbeing and cohesion. 2. Communities experiencing exclusion from areas of day-to-day society, i.e., women 50+, elderly people, migrant, refugee, and asylum seeker communities. 3. Discrimination against minority communities leading to reduced help seeking, service mistrust and isolation. 4. Need for anti-racism measures and culturally appropriate service provision. 5. Ageing population needs - care provision, transport and mobility, fragmented services, economic hardship.
3. Inclusive economy, services, and support systems	1. Digital exclusion and access to essential services i.e., healthcare, parking, council services, etc. 2. Barriers to navigating Universal Credit and formal support systems, and consequences. 3. Service fragmentation and disconnected hubs leading to people being left behind. 4. Economic hardship experienced by people and community/civic organisations. 5. Challenges for community/civic organisations in adapting to lower/lack of funding. 6. Retention of neurodivergent individuals in the workplace and Access to Work issues. 7. Challenges of modern work, workplace stress, and absenteeism. 8. Transport challenges - disability access, affordability, lack of connectivity, digital exclusion.
4. Young people, education and achieving potential	1. Low levels of secondary school attainment for young people. 2. Young people's disengagement from formal education pathways. 3. Mitigating the impacts of out-of-school challenges on education, i.e., parental financial hardship, food insecurity, caring responsibilities, lack of after school spaces, youth crime and violence. 4. Supporting young people in education when they are experiencing instability at home 5. Unemployment challenges for young people, both in training and NEET. 6. Interconnected risks leading young people to antisocial behaviour and poorer life outcomes.
5. Age, gender, and culturally specific experiences	1. Domestic violence and hidden impacts on (predominantly) women. 2. Exclusion of young working class men and boys from roles and spaces in communities and risk of involvement in crime. 3. Positive empowerment of young men and boys experiencing hardship and isolation. 4. Isolation of older older woman (50yrs+), particularly those from migrant backgrounds, those who with low digital literacy, or those whose first language is not English.
6. Environment and sustainability	1. Impacts of limited access to nature and green spaces, particularly for low-income and urban families. 2. Lack of awareness of nature's health benefits and links to environmental consciousness and community sustainability. 3. Opportunities for outdoor activities are often inaccessible to lower-income communities.
7. Public Safety and community cohesion	1. Domestic abuse and gendered violence. 2. Antisocial behaviours and narratives leading to tensions between communities. 3. Domestic violence as a cause of women's homelessness. 4. Need for criminal justice system and services to better understand neurodiverse conditions or complex needs among survivors (support and after care) and perpetrators (outreach and prevention).

Table 1. Summary of priority themes and specific topics for action.

This table shows a summary of the main themes and sub themes to come out of all 245 individual responses submitted by participants. Themes are ordered from most common to least common. For examples, themes numbered 1 were more commonly mentioned in submissions than themes number 6.

Reflecting on these priorities

The responses from workshop participants highlight a complex and interconnected set of challenges which affect diverse populations across our city and county region. While some themes occur more frequently, such as mental health, long-term health and general wellbeing, there was no suggestion by participants that these were more important than other issues, but rather there was a clear acknowledgement that such issues are often the side effects of other challenges, such as unstable employment, financial hardship, social isolation, experiences of discrimination, etc.

When exploring the causes and effects of different types of challenge, participants often reflected on the role played by the structural barriers that exist to accessing, navigating, and benefiting from formal support pathways and essential services. Similarly, many of the priorities communities who are impacted by the challenges that our participants identified were often facing systemic under-recognition and lack of awareness and understanding. Overall, the responses underscore the need for more inclusive, joined-up, and preventative approaches to service design and delivery.

Priorities yet to be addressed

For our final project cohort (due to start in April 2027), Collaboratory is particularly interested in seeing collaborative, co-created PhD and Research Placement project proposals which seek to address priorities that have emerged multiple times across different iterations of Notts' Voice in Research workshops. These repeat priorities which have not yet been addressed through a Collaboratory research project are detailed below. They are provided in no particular order of preference of need.

Issues affecting young men and boys

- Those struggling with their confidence, sense of purpose, and role within their communities and wider society.
- Working class boys experiencing poorer education outcomes and the impacts on their life beyond school.
- Combatting negative influences from social media on young people, particularly young men and boys.
- How can young men and boys be supported to address their wellbeing in a society where they feel increasingly excluded from each other and communities?

Education, training, and employment

- Addressing the education and training needs of young people for whom more "one size fits all" approach to education doesn't work.
- More inclusive and culturally sensitive approaches to teaching and pastoral support in schools.
- More responsive and appropriate support for young people as they transition from education into employment

Needs of older age communities.

- Addressing social isolation (and consequences of) experienced by older people, particularly those who might live alone or have limited mobility beyond home.
- Rapid digitalisation of everyday life and the excluding of older age people from everyday services and systems.

Community cohesion

- Loss of communal spaces and places (from community hubs to youth centres) and the related impacts on crime/discrimination, hate crime, and overall community cohesion.
- Empowering communities to foster more positive, inter-cultural relationships and understandings.
- Better support for social integration - for ex-offenders, migrant communities, ex-homeless, those recovering from addiction, etc.