

# Arts and Crafts Workshop: A Day of Fun, Family, Engagement and Support



On the 26th of July 2024, the University of Manchester's Parents, Carers, and Guardians Network (PCG Network) hosted an exciting Arts and Crafts Workshop at the Roscoe Building. With over 100 attendees, including students, staff, and their families, the event was a resounding success, offering a perfect blend of creativity, fun, and community spirit. The day provided a much-needed opportunity for families to bond, participate in hands-on activities, and discuss how the university can better support parents, carers, and guardians.



Figure 1: Families

## A Warm Welcome

The event kicked off with a warm welcome from Dr. Sayema Khan, the network's and internationalisation Ethnic Minority Officer. Dr Khan set the tone for the day, inviting everyone to the safe space and explaining the agenda and

housekeeping rules. She emphasized the importance of the network in creating a supportive environment for families within the university and encouraged everyone to engage with the day's activities. With a diverse mix of parents, children, and carers, the atmosphere was inclusive and inviting, reflecting the network's core mission of support and solidarity.

## Creative Chaos: Arts and Crafts for All Ages

The first major activity of the day was the arts and crafts session, catering to children of all ages, as well the adults. Separate areas were designated for younger children (ages 0-5) and older children (ages 5 and above), ensuring that each group had age-appropriate activities.

Younger children enjoyed toys laid out on the open space carpet floor, while older kids had the chance to explore their creativity with painting, various craft projects, and advanced playdough projects.

The unstructured nature of the crafts allowed families to bond, as parents sat alongside their children, helping and encouraging their little artists. The joyous mess of colours, glue, and creativity brought a smile to everyone's faces. Parents cherished the opportunity to engage with their children's imaginative projects, and many commented on the therapeutic effect of spending quality time together, free from the pressures of work and study.

## Games for Everyone

Following the arts and crafts session, the families came together for a round of indoor games, led enthusiastically by Dr. Perpetual Eze-Idehen, the network's Chair and Founder. The games included sack races, balloon races, musical chairs, Darts and egg-and-spoon races, bringing a competitive yet fun atmosphere to the event.



Figure 2: Fun Times

The sack race was particularly popular, with children excitedly requesting multiple rounds. The sight of children running with plastic eggs on spoons while holding onto sacks brought laughter and joy to all participants. Parents joined in the fun, cheering on their children and even participating in the games themselves. The sense of camaraderie and playful competition

reinforced the community spirit that the PCG Network is known for. At the end of the games, every child received a small prize, ensuring that no one left empty handed.

The network took advantage of the beautiful weather to host an outdoor event that brought families with teenagers together for a fun and energetic afternoon. Families participated in games like basketball and sack races, fostering a spirit of friendly competition and teamwork. Parents joined in the fun, cheering alongside their children and creating lasting memories. The atmosphere was filled with laughter and excitement, with small prizes awarded to every child, adding to the sense of celebration. The event successfully blended exercise, family bonding, and healthy competition, leaving everyone with smiles and a strong sense of community.

## Lunchtime Networking

At 1:00 pm, the group paused for a delicious, family-friendly lunch. The meal was ordered with children in mind, featuring a variety of options to satisfy even the pickiest eaters, hence catering for diverse needs of attendees. The relaxed atmosphere over lunch allowed families to engage in light conversations, meeting new faces and catching up with familiar ones. The meal break offered more than just food - it created a space for parents and carers to connect, share stories, and discuss the unique challenges of balancing family life with work and study at the university.



Figure 3: A chance to connect

For many parents, carers and guardians, this time provided an invaluable opportunity to connect with others facing similar challenges and discuss their unique experiences balancing work, study, and family life as well as experiences of being a parent, reinforcing the sense of community that the Network fosters. The discussions underscored the importance of the Network, with parents expressing relief at finding a support group that truly understood the complexities of their lives.

## Quiet Time for Kids, Thoughtful Time for Parents

After lunch, a 9-year-old star of the day, Zaynab, led an enthralling origami workshop. Her impressive skills captivated children over the age of five, as she taught them how to make paper swans, stars, and even a cat. The children remained quietly focused on their creations, a rare and magical moment of calm amidst the lively day.



Figure 4: Origami session

While the children remained focused on their paper creations, the parents engaged in a more serious discussion about the challenges of parenting while working or studying at the university. This discussion, facilitated by Dr. Eze-Idehen, touched on critical issues such as the high cost of childcare, the need for more flexible work arrangements, and the lack of accessible family facilities on campus. Many parents, particularly international postgraduate researchers, shared their struggles with navigating the university's childcare policies. The open and honest dialogue fostered a sense of solidarity among the attendees, many of whom were relieved to find others facing similar challenges.

### *Key Discussions and Feedback*

The roundtable discussion emerged as one of the most impactful moments of the day, as parents gathered for an informal yet focused conversation about the challenges and joys of balancing parenting with studying or working at the University of Manchester. Central to the discussion was the pressing need for additional support for international students, who often face difficulties navigating the university's childcare policies. Participants raised concerns over the high cost of childcare, highlighting the financial strain on many families, and the need for more flexible work and study arrangements to better accommodate parental responsibilities.



Figure 5: Discussions and Feedback

A significant part of the conversation focused on the inadequacy of family facilities across campus, particularly the lack of baby-changing stations, with specific attention drawn to the AMBS building. Many parents emphasized that better maintenance and expansion of these facilities should be a priority for the university. Another key issue discussed was the lack of awareness among students and staff about existing family-friendly resources. Attendees suggested that information about the network and available support be made more visible by including it in student handbooks and induction materials, especially for new international cohorts who often struggle to find this information on their own.

One of the most compelling suggestions was the revival of pre-pandemic mentorship programs that offered guidance and peer support to parents and carers within the university community. Participants expressed strong support for reinstating these programs, along with organizing more events like this one, 2-3 times a year, to foster a sense of community and continuous engagement.

The open dialogue fostered a sense of solidarity among the attendees, particularly those new to the university, with many expressing relief at finding a community that truly understood their struggles. The session underscored the importance of building both practical support systems and emotional camaraderie, reinforcing the idea that parents and carers are not alone in their experiences.

In addition to the roundtable discussion, a series of actionable suggestions were put forward:

- **Family Facilities:** Attendees identified gaps in baby-changing facilities and advocated for improved maintenance, especially in key locations like the AMBS building.
- **Awareness:** A need for greater visibility of the network and its resources was emphasized, with a suggestion to include information in student handbooks and induction materials.
- **Childcare:** A key concern was the difficulty of securing childcare on short notice, particularly when children are unwell, a challenge that many parents face regularly.
- **Mentorship:** Establishment of mentorship programs to provide peer support for parents and carers was strongly recommended to foster ongoing support, connection, and personal development.
- **Event Organisation:** Participants strongly advocated for the organization of more events like this one, 2-3 times a year, to foster a stronger sense of community and ensure continuous engagement. There were also calls for better time management strategies to help parents cope with their dual roles more effectively.

The discussions concluded with Professors Rachel Cowen and Dr. Perpetual Eze-Idehen outlining action plans to further these initiatives through the Future Families project. Attendees left the event feeling inspired and committed to working towards a more inclusive environment for families at the university. This event is part of a broader effort to ensure that university policies evolve to meet the diverse needs of families, with more events planned to keep the momentum going.

## Wellbeing

The day concluded with an upbeat Zumba session, where participants of all ages were invited to join in the fun. Families, including caregivers and children, enthusiastically took part in this energetic exercise, moving together in sync to the lively music. The session not only encouraged physical activity but also promoted a sense of well-being and togetherness. It was a heartwarming sight to see families laughing, dancing, and exercising side by side, fostering both health and happiness. The rhythmic movements and collective energy made for a memorable end to the day, with everyone leaving feeling invigorated and connected.



*Figure 6: Zumba Session*

## A Joyful End to the Day

As the event drew to a close, each child was presented with an age-appropriate gift, bringing smiles to their faces and marking the end of a truly memorable day. The children's excitement was evident as many eagerly asked for more events like this in the future. Families expressed heartfelt gratitude for the opportunity to attend such an inclusive and engaging event, which brought together fun, learning, and community.

Providing gifts at the end of our main events has become a cherished tradition in the network, particularly because we understand that many families, especially international students and researchers, often face financial challenges as they juggle between paying for child-care and managing daily living expenses.

The family gift tradition is a reflection of our network's commitment to supporting and uplifting these families, ensuring that they feel appreciated and included, no matter their circumstances. Over time, members of the network have consistently shown great appreciation for the family

gifts, no matter how small. Many have shared how these thoughtful gestures have brought happiness to their households, reinforcing the sense of community and belonging that our events strive to foster.

## Looking Ahead: More Events to Come

The success of the Arts and Crafts Workshop has left parents, carers, and guardians eagerly anticipating future events. Many attendees, particularly new families, shared their hope for more regular gatherings to build stronger connections within the UoM community. As the network looks to the future, we are excited to organize more events that bring families together, offering support, encouragement, and the chance to connect with others navigating similar challenges.

The PCG Network plans to host more gatherings in the coming months, including a family science event on the 25<sup>th</sup> of October, 2024 and a festive celebration on the 13<sup>th</sup> of December, 2024. The network is committed to creating a supportive and inclusive environment for all families at the University of Manchester, and future events will continue to build on the momentum of this successful workshop.

## Conclusion

The Arts and Crafts Workshop was a resounding success, offering a day of creativity, fun, and community for families at the University of Manchester. The Parents, Carers, and Guardians Network expresses heartfelt gratitude to the funders whose generous support made this event possible. Their contributions not only enabled a day of enriching activities but also helped strengthen the network's commitment to fostering a more inclusive environment.

Special thanks go to *Prof. April McMahon* and the *Doctoral Academy Humanities* for their crucial financial support in making this event a success.

Activities included painting, beadwork, origami, games, and scientific modelling with Play-Doh, as well as a panel discussion focused on the Future Families project under Athena Swan Objective 6.

Looking ahead, we are eager to continue growing this supportive network and building a stronger community for parents, carers, and guardians at the university. We encourage you to stay connected and informed by subscribing to the Network [UOM-PARENTS-CARERS-GUARDIANS](#) and follow us on Facebook [www.facebook.com/uompcgnetwork](http://www.facebook.com/uompcgnetwork)

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