



## Co-producing digital tools for health, well-being and social connection in later life

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This brochure was written by Dr Alison Dawson with the assistance of Annabel Young on behalf of the GOALD project.

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### **Abbreviations used**

<b>Co-I</b>	Co-Investigator
<b>GOALD</b>	Generating Older Active Lives Digitally
<b>PI</b>	Principal Investigator
<b>RA</b>	Research Assistant
<b>RF</b>	Research Fellow
<b>SBDRP</b>	Social Behavioural and Design Research Programme
<b>UKRI</b>	United Kingdom Research and Innovation
<b>VR</b>	Virtual Reality

# Contents

<b>GOALD background and objectives</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>What was GOALD?</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Who was involved?</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>What GOALD set out to achieve</b>	<b>4</b>
Understanding what encourages or discourages digital resource use	5
Exploring co-production	7
Assessing the appeal and feasibility of digitally delivered activities	9
Documenting the challenges and opportunities for businesses	12
Contributing to academic knowledge and understanding	14
Offering policy and practice recommendations	16
Fostering awareness of the benefits of user-engaged co-design	18
The GOALD project team	19

# GOALD background and objectives

## What was GOALD?

GOALD (Generating Older Active Lives Digitally) was a three-year research project that ran from March 2021 to February 2024. The project was funded through the Social, Behavioural and Design Research Programme, part of the UKRI Healthy Ageing Challenge a research and development initiative to promote longer healthy lives.

The Healthy Ageing Challenge aims ‘to help people remain active, productive, independent and socially connected across generations for as long as possible’ by ‘enabling businesses, including social enterprises, to develop and deliver beneficial products, services and business models’.

The GOALD research was developed and launched during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic highlighted the potential for digital products and services to help people who might otherwise be increasingly isolated to stay connected with their families and wider communities. It demonstrated the importance of universal access to suitable, affordable broadband and digital devices. This rapidly changing context brought into sharper focus the need for a deeper understanding of users’ needs and preferences in relation to digital resources. That is particularly true for the widespread adoption of digital technology to successfully support healthy ageing. The GOALD project sought to meet the Healthy Ageing Challenge by examining how to better design and deliver digital resources which could provide and engage older people in activities to improve their health, well-being and social connectedness.

The pandemic also challenged researchers on GOALD and other projects to be innovative, flexible and adaptable in their approach to conducting research. It influenced who could be involved and how they could be enabled to participate safely during periods when the COVID-19 virus posed particular risks and society faced periodic restrictions to interacting with others. This publication outlines and celebrates the GOALD research and the contributions to knowledge that it has been able to make despite these challenges.



## Who was involved?

The GOALD project adopted a 'co-production' approach in which academic researchers based at the University of Stirling (led by Professors Catherine Hennessy, Richard Haynes and Anna Whittaker) and the University of Plymouth (led by Professor Ray Jones) worked alongside a range of national and community-level organisational partners and groups of participants based in Scotland and the South West of England. (See our partners and funders page on the GOALD website for more information and links to our organisational project partners).

GOALD participants included both older adults living in the community and in residential care, younger people, as well as community and care staff working with older people. As 'co-producers' they were actively engaged in multiple aspects of the project, from shaping the data collection methods to understanding the project findings, generating new knowledge, and developing GOALD's evidence-based legacy resources.



## What GOALD set out to achieve

GOALD focused on working in co-production groups to develop digital tools for two types of activities in which the research team had experience and expertise: physical activity initiatives and sports-based reminiscence.

### Through this process the GOALD project aimed to:

- understand what might encourage or discourage people from using digital tools;
- look at the benefits for different groups of a co-production approach to developing digital well-being-promoting resources;
- understand what aspects of digitally-delivered activities appealed most to participants and assess their feasibility of adoption;
- provide insights into the challenges of, and opportunities for, businesses wanting to engage with older users in these markets;
- contribute to knowledge on co-development and co-production;
- offer policy and practice recommendations about how to engage older people in co-production;
- increase commercial awareness of the benefits of user-engaged co-design of products and services to promote health and well-being.

# Understanding what encourages or discourages digital resource use

With the assistance of our partner organisations, the GOALD project recruited an advisory group who met between October 2021 and March 2022 to explore what encourages or discourages older people's digital resource use. The group, whose members ranged in age from 32 to 79 years, included 28 individuals with experience of working with older people across a range of health, well-being and social contexts. Due to restrictions imposed during the pandemic, they met online via videoconferencing, with smaller groups of participants discussing topics with researchers across a series of meetings.





**The advisory group noted a range of factors, some providing motivation to use digital resources, others discouraging their use, including:**

**Connectivity:** not having access to the internet at all, or not having access to internet services capable of supporting the use of digital resources which require greater speed and/or bandwidth, deters the use of digital resources. The availability of suitable, affordable internet services promotes their use.

**Support for use of digital resources:** lack of support deters use. In residential care settings, this might be due to significant existing demands on staff time, staff turnover and shortages, and additional (pandemic) workloads. In community settings, this might be due to lack of availability, or to a failure to fully understand the support needs of older people and provide support that is appropriately formatted or tailored to older people's learning needs.

**Scheduling activities:** when using digital resources as part of activities with older adults scheduled, regular activity can encourage engagement and participation. The unpredictable nature of COVID-19 outbreaks and consequent changes in rules relating to in-person activities made scheduling regular activities more challenging and could deter participation. This particularly impacted GOALD activities designed to include vulnerable older people and added to the challenges of scheduling activities to fit in with potential users' pre-existing commitments.

**Levels of digital literacy:** lower levels of digital literacy contributed to lack of confidence in some potential users. They also led to potentially greater need for initial support and resulted in inflated perceptions of risks associated with engaging in digital activities.



# Exploring co-production

A central focus of the GOALD project was how to better design and deliver digital resources which could provide and engage older people in activities to improve their health and well-being. The GOALD team strongly believes that this can happen through user-engaged co-production in the process of designing digital resources. One of our core objectives was to generate further knowledge of how best to conduct co-production activities in this context.

Diversity of perspectives acts as a catalyst for discussion, potentially allows stereotypes and assumptions to be challenged by those with lived experience, and as a result can enhance the value of co-production findings. Accordingly, GOALD sought to ensure diversity in terms of participants' roles, ages, geographical locations, personal characteristics and circumstances.

Older adults, particularly those living with impairments, can be under-represented in research. GOALD engaged seven care homes and eleven community groups in our research, as well as people in diverse professional roles. GOALD sought to extend opportunities to participate to groups whose voices may not be frequently heard. The research team worked with partners to support co-production participants with cognitive, physical and sensory impairments.



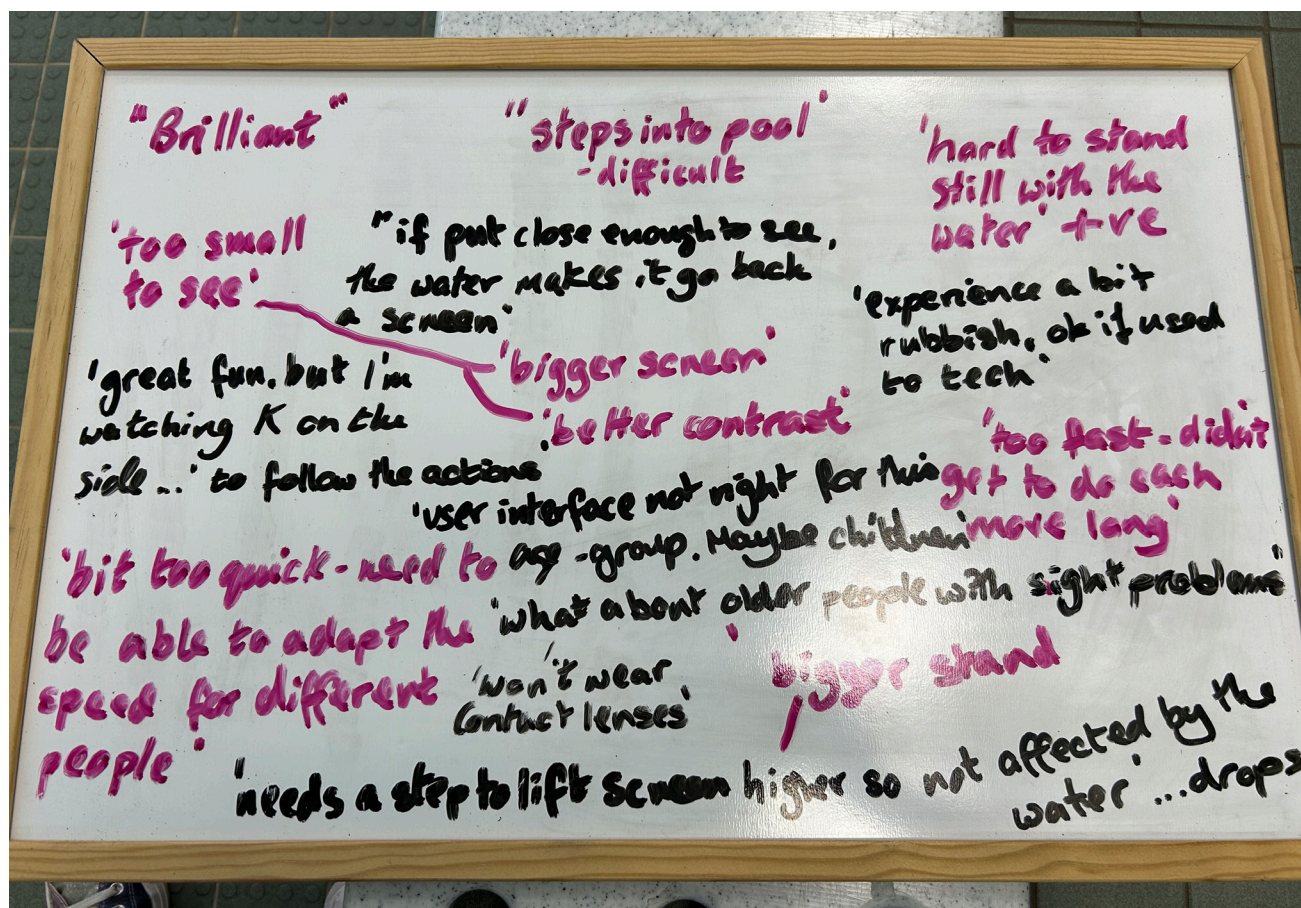
GOALD recruited more than 200 participants to take part in co-production groups. The original aim of achieving broad intergenerational participation by including younger school students in the project was not realised due to the impact of COVID restrictions at the time of recruitment. However, across the project GOALD recruited 165 older adults (aged 60+), 15 young people (aged 16-25), and 33 health and social care professionals in a range of roles which support or work with care home or community-based older people. Of those recruited, 194 individuals took part in the co-production work.

GOALD has produced audio-visual resources describing its co-production approaches and activities. Details of our methods can be found in the GOALD publications. Links to these and other GOALD outputs can be found on the GOALD website.

# Assessing the appeal and feasibility of digitally delivered activities

A key part of the GOALD project's work was to help both businesses and end-users of digital resources to meet the Healthy Ageing Challenge. Adoption and sustained use of products or services depend on a range of factors. GOALD examined their appeal to potential purchasers and users (who might represent different groups with different perspectives), and the feasibility of adoption of these digital resources.

To do this, co-production participants were provided with 'menus' containing brief information on a selection of different digital tools and products available to be tried out. As well as text descriptions, the menu choices were colour-coded according to their focus, e.g. on physical activity, general reminiscence and connectivity, or sports-based reminiscence. Each also included broad indicators of suitability for people living with different physical or sensory impairments. The co-production groups tested up to 13 different types of digital resources. Feedback from this exercise both shaped the subsequent GOALD research and enabled our business collaborators to further refine their offerings.



Qualitative and quantitative data from the co-production group discussions and workshops, ranking exercises, interviews and group observations were collected and analysed by the GOALD team. This provided specific guidance for our collaborating businesses, and was used to develop GOALD's 'toolkits', which distil what was learned for use by other designers and developers.

**Some examples of findings from participant feedback relating to digital resources for physical activity included:**

- factors associated with user enjoyment (e.g. provides a distraction from doing exercise; creates an immersive experience);
- barriers to engaging with and implementing digital physical activity products (e.g. ease of use; cost to individual user or care home);
- physical activity and exercise content (e.g. need for modification for those with reduced physical function; relatable instructors).



**“It was an incredible experience. I was sitting in a chair, using my arms to get the paddles to work. The realism was extraordinary. I’d love to do it again”**

Fred Horley, 92,  
Kayaking through the  
Antarctic using VR

**Examples of feedback on the reminiscence products included:**

- potential benefits (e.g. sharing stories and intergenerational reminiscence);
- suggestions for content (e.g. major historical events, childhood memories, well-known sporting events and figures from the past);
- considerations for navigation (e.g. screen to accommodate those with visual impairment to see sports-based heritage content).



GOALD's activities shed light on what different people might want and expect from new digital resources. More detail on the methods used, findings and implications for practice and policy are available in GOALD publications and audiovisual resources. For the full list of available GOALD resources, please visit the GOALD project website.

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*V.S. Lill* CHAIRMAN:  
WEMBLEY STADIUM LTD

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<b>E</b> TURNSTILE	<b>85</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>33</b>

TO BE RETAINED (See Plan & Conditions on back)

# Documenting the challenges and opportunities for businesses

The GOALD project has partnered and worked with a range of UK-based small and medium-sized producers of digital products and services open to user engagement in their design and development processes. By doing so, GOALD has been able to examine some of the challenges and opportunities that a growing older population with desires to remain physically active, engaged in their interests, and connected with others, might present.

Through its co-production approaches to testing and refining, GOALD has highlighted some of the challenges to businesses of designing for an older market segment. Users may have potentially greater needs around accessibility due to ageing-related health conditions or sensory impairments. Older people may have different requirements in relation to the layouts and operation of devices or controls to facilitate their use. In addition, they may require tailored informational support due to lower levels of digital experience and literacy.

Further challenges may relate to overcoming stereotypical views, including those held by designers, those supporting older people, and older people themselves about what older users can do or would like to do with digital technologies, and to recognising and catering for diversity within the target population through tailored offerings.



**“You were working in this environment and already had that knowledge and understood the challenges involved. We didn’t have to learn it ourselves or teach you; all we had to do was provide the equipment and gain feedback”**

Technology Developer Motus on benefits of working with GOALD

GOALD has also drawn attention to the need to consider challenges that relate to the wider environment for the use of new digital resources, such as the need for sufficient internet services, suitable locations for use, and the funds and personnel to support use in both community and residential settings.

**GOALD co-production activities have also provided rich evidence that older users are:**

- excited by the possibilities offered by innovative digital resources, prepared to invest time and energy in using them to support their own health and well-being;
- willing to work together with researchers and businesses to suggest improvements to products and services;
- able to actively contribute to the processes of designing and refining digital resources.

# Contributing to academic knowledge and understanding

GOALD has generated findings which extend and enhance knowledge of co-production methods, of what older users want and expect from digital resources designed to promote health and well-being, and of how different businesses can learn from and profit from such research. The GOALD team have shared these widely with colleagues across different academic disciplines through conferences, presentations, publications, and audio-visual resources. GOALD team members have also worked with others in the research community, making new intra- and extra-institutional links and engaging in collaborations which allow the knowledge generated from GOALD to inform broader research activities.

An example of these activities are the presentations on our work delivered by GOALD team members at a variety of national and international scientific and business conferences. These presentations have spanned disciplinary areas including: gerontology, gerontechnology, sporting heritage, public health/health promotion, and robotics/digital technology. Some of the events where we have disseminated GOALD project findings are the conferences of the British Society of Gerontology, the Gerontological Society of America, Health-enhancing Physical Activity- Europe, the Socio-Gerontechnology Network, and the International Conference on Public Health 2023.





Publications on GOALD's co-production approach and other aspects of the project have similarly contributed to knowledge across different fields. An example is the article by Bradwell et al. in *BMJ Open* (2023) which explores care home staff perceptions of one of the digital resources offered to GOALD participants: a virtual reality omnidirectional treadmill (MOTUS) aimed at increasing physical activity for older adult care home residents. It demonstrates the utility of the approach in bridging the understanding gap between designers and potential users, and the added value in such academia-industry collaborations.

Examples here represent only the 'tip of the iceberg': for further details of these and other contributions to academic knowledge and understanding, please visit the GOALD website.

# Offering policy and practice recommendations

Learning has been distilled from across the entirety of the GOALD project activities, and this has informed a range of policy and practice recommendations.

GOALD has provided compelling evidence of the commercial and wider societal benefits to be gained from partnership working between businesses and academia. Businesses without the skills and resources to do so themselves have been able to leverage academic expertise and experience in accessing groups of older people, working with diverse populations, and analysing data from user-engaged co-production to improve their digital products. All these factors contribute to enhance the chances of sustained commercial success. Policymakers need to create and maintain the funding environment in which successful partnerships such as those established during GOALD can thrive.

GOALD has illuminated some of the wider challenges to successful development of digital resources to support older people's health and well-being, including lack of access and opportunities for digital education. Policymakers must continue to work towards reducing digital inequality and increasing digital literacy across all of society.

Examples drawn from sports-based reminiscence highlight the need for suitable community-based venues and support in using digital resources. Policymakers must recognise the importance of people and place in fully delivering digital benefits and invest in the community locations and organisations that facilitate the use of digital resources.

GOALD has used the findings from co-production activities based around specific digital resources to produce 'toolkits' that can guide the designers and developers of future generations of digital products and services targeting ageing populations. These toolkits highlight potential issues to be addressed, but also provide valuable insight into the diversity of these populations in terms of their ability and desire to engage with new digital resources. They help to bridge the potential generational gap between designers and end-users and to break down ageist stereotypes of later life. More detail on GOALD toolkits can be found on the GOALD website.

# Samples of the toolkits during their development in September 2023:

Version 2 – 15<sup>th</sup> September 2023

## Developers' Tool Kit for Online Physical Activity Platforms for Older Adults

Generating Older Active Lives Digitally (GOALD)

Tool kit developed from the research conducted as part of the GOALD project at the University of Plymouth and University of Stirling.

This document has been created for an intended audience of online physical activity (PA) platform developers to support with the future creation of PA platforms for older adults. This is first draft of the data solely collected from the University of Plymouth workshops. Data from the University of Stirling will be presented in a second version of this toolkit.

**What is the GOALD project?**  
The GOALD project is an intergenerational project connecting older and younger people to co-create activities and interventions using digital health technologies for health and wellbeing benefits. The project focuses on physical activity, sports, and reminiscence.

**Who were our participants?**  
80 participants were involved in the University of Plymouth workshops, with 67 older adults (60+) and 13 younger adults (18-25), participants were residents within 8 care homes, 5 community charity groups.



**GOALD Co-Production Group Research Phases**

- Phase One**: Recruitment and baseline information phase.
- Phase Two**: Demonstration of menu items and initial participant feedback.
- Phase Three**: Based on phase 2 interest, use of menu technologies and evaluations.
- Phase Four**: Co-design technology based.

Participants were involved in four phases, (i) being recruited, (ii) presented with [DanceSing Care](#), [Vitality Hub Mature Movers](#), [Elder Gym](#) and [Wheel Power](#), designing improvements.

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Version 2 – 15<sup>th</sup> September 2023

## Developers' Tool Kit for Digital Platforms to Increase Physical Activity for Older Adults

Generating Older Active Lives Digitally (GOALD)

Tool kit developed from the research conducted as part of the GOALD project delivered through the University of Plymouth and University of Stirling.

This document has been created for an intended audience of physical activity developers who use digital platforms to support and increase physical activity for older adults. This tool kit is based on data solely collected from the University of Stirling workshops. The tool kit developed from the University of Plymouth can be used in conjunction with this tool kit. The physical activity tool kit created by the University of Plymouth focused on online digital products, and multi-use laboratory-grade equipment.

**What is the GOALD project?**  
The GOALD project is an intergenerational project connecting older and younger people to co-create activities and interventions using digital health technologies for health and wellbeing benefits. The project focuses on physical activity, sports, and reminiscence.

**Who were our participants?**  
78 participants were involved in the University of Stirling workshops. 58 older adults (60+), 2 younger adults (16-25), and 18 adults who were staff members. Participants were recruited from 3 care homes and 3 community groups.



**GOALD Co-Production Group Research Phases**

- Phase One**: Recruitment and baseline information phase.
- Phase Two**: Demonstration of menu items and initial participant feedback.
- Phase Three**: Based on phase 2 interest, use of menu technologies and evaluations.
- Phase Four**: Co-design technology based.

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Version 2 – 15<sup>th</sup> September 2023

## Developers' Tool Kit for Reminiscence Products

Generating Older Active Lives Digitally (GOALD)

Tool kit developed from the research conducted as part of the GOALD project at the University of Plymouth and University of Stirling.

This document has been created for an intended audience of reminiscence technology developers to support with the future creation of audio and sport reminiscence products for older adults. This second version of the data solely collected from the University of Plymouth and University of Stirling workshops.

**What is the GOALD project?**  
The GOALD project is an intergenerational project connecting older and younger people to co-create activities and interventions using digital health technologies for health and wellbeing benefits. The project focuses on physical activity, sports, and reminiscence.

**Who were our participants?**  
80 participants were involved in the University of Plymouth workshops, with 67 older adults (60+) and 13 younger adults (18-25), participants were residents within 8 care homes, 5 community or charity groups.



**GOALD Co-Production Group Research Phases**

- Phase One**: Recruitment and baseline information phase.
- Phase Two**: Demonstration of menu items and initial participant feedback.
- Phase Three**: Based on phase 2 interest, use of menu technologies and evaluations.
- Phase Four**: Co-design sessions technology areas based on phase 3.

Participants were involved in four phases, (i) being recruited, (ii) presented with a menu of technologies (i) [ECHO Point](#) for similar product, live streaming of [Football Museum](#), heritage tours and general reminiscence sessions designing improvements.

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Version 2 – 15<sup>th</sup> September 2023

## Developers' Tool Kit for Virtual Reality Products for Physical Activity and Accessing Places and Spaces

Generating Older Active Lives Digitally (GOALD)

Tool kit developed from the research conducted as part of the GOALD project at the University of Plymouth and University of Stirling.

This document has been created for an intended audience of Virtual Reality (VR) technology developers to support with the future creation of VR products for older adults with a focus on VR for physical activity and VR for accessing places and spaces. This is first draft of the data solely collected from the University of Plymouth workshops. Data from the University of Stirling will be presented in a second version of this toolkit.

**What is the GOALD project?**  
The GOALD project is an intergenerational project connecting older and younger people to co-create activities and interventions using digital health technologies for health and wellbeing benefits. The project focuses on physical activity, sports, and reminiscence.

**Who were our participants?**  
80 participants were involved in the University of Plymouth workshops, with 67 older adults (60+) and 13 younger adults (18-25), participants were residents within 8 care homes, 5 community or charity groups.



**GOALD Co-Production Group Research Phases**

- Phase One**: Recruitment and baseline information phase.
- Phase Two**: Demonstration of menu items and initial participant feedback.
- Phase Three**: Based on phase 2 interest, use of menu technologies and evaluations.
- Phase Four**: Co-design sessions technology areas based on phase 3.

Participants were involved in four phases, (i) being recruited, (ii) presented with a menu of technologies ([ROVR](#), [Oceans Conservation Trust](#), [National Geographic](#), [Brink Traveller](#) and some University of Plymouth 3D scans of heritage sites within VR), (iii) trying technologies, and (iv) co-designing improvements.

Page 1

# Fostering awareness of the benefits of user-engaged co-design

The GOALD strategy for fostering awareness of the benefits of user-engaged co-design has multiple strands.

GOALD has sought to work with a wide range of UK-based small and medium-sized businesses, both in testing and providing feedback through its co-production processes. The project also launched the 'GOALD Challenge', a design competition which provided small grants for digital resource development. In addition to raising awareness of the benefits of co-design, it gave businesses the opportunity to test and provide feedback to improve GOALD's own 'toolkits' for developers. Product and service refinement 'success stories' from Challenge award winners are emerging. As these are reported in trade and mass media, they raise further awareness of the benefits of this approach within the business sector and form part of GOALD's own impact story.

To help raise awareness, the University of Plymouth hosted a series of 'GOALD project talks'. A range of invited international speakers offered their own perspectives on aspects of digital resource development and use, fostering awareness and setting the context for GOALD research activities. Details of these are available on the project website.

## The GOALD project fostered wider awareness through different media, including:

- project and team members' social media feeds;
- regular project newsletters drawing attention to partners' products;
- service refinements informed by the findings of GOALD co-production processes;
- feature articles on GOALD activities published in *The Guardian* and *The New Statesman*.

Links to these and other relevant outputs are provided on the GOALD and SBDRP websites.



# The GOALD project team

## **Principal Investigator (PI)**

### **Catherine Hennessy**

Professor of Ageing, University of Stirling  
Overall project lead, liaised with SBDRP and UKRI.

### **Co-I Ray Jones**

Professor of Health Informatics,  
University of Plymouth  
Led the Plymouth Team.

### **Co-I Richard Haynes**

Professor of Media Sport,  
University of Stirling  
Led the Sports Reminiscence  
strand of GOALD.

### **Co-I Anna Whittaker**

Professor of Behavioural Medicine,  
University of Stirling  
Led the Stirling Physical Activity  
strand of GOALD.

## **Based in Stirling:**

Co-I Greg Mannion,  
Professor of Education

Co-I Karen Watchman,  
Professor of Health Sciences

Co-I Dr Alison Dawson,  
Senior Research Fellow

Co-I Pete Coffee, Professor of Psychology,  
Herriot-Watt University

Co-I Dr Gemma Ryde,  
Lecturer in Lifestyle and Metabolic  
Health, University of Glasgow

RF Sports Reminiscence Dr John Ritchie

RF Physical Activity (until June 2023)

Dr Simone Tomaz

RF Physical Activity (from June 2023)

Dr Colin Shore

Project Coordinator Annabel Young

Affiliated PhD student Levi Tippett

## **Based in Plymouth:**

Co-I Dr Alejandro Veliz Reyes,  
Associate Professor in Digital Design

Co-I Dr Alison Warren, Associate  
Professor in Occupational Therapy

Co-I Katharine Willis,  
Professor of Smart Cities  
and Communities

Co-I Sheena Asthana,  
Professor of Health Policy

Co-I Dr Tanja Križaj,  
Lecturer in Occupational Therapy

Co-I Dr Swen Gaudl, Senior Lecturer in  
Applied IT, University of Gothenburg

Co-I Arunangsu Chatterjee,  
Professor of Health and Digital Education,  
University of Leeds

RF Dr Hannah Bradwell

RF (to November 2022) Dr Rory Baxter

RA Leonie Cooper

RA Katie Edwards (until March 2022)

Media and Admin Officer  
(until Sept 2023) Rose Wilmot

Media and Admin Officer  
(from Sept 2023) Hannah Hobbs

## **Acknowledgements**

The GOALD team thanks all those who have enthusiastically taken part in our work over the course of the project—our co-production group participants, partner organisations, business collaborators, student volunteers and many others who have helped make the project a success.

### **GOALD Partner organisations**

Active Stirling

**[www.activestirling.org.uk](http://www.activestirling.org.uk)**

Cornwall Rural Community Charity

**[www.cornwallrcc.org.uk](http://www.cornwallrcc.org.uk)**

Football Memories Scotland

**[www.footballmemoriesScotland.co.uk](http://www.footballmemoriesScotland.co.uk)**

Generations Working Together

**[www.generationsworkingtogether.org](http://www.generationsworkingtogether.org)**

Hearing Loss Cornwall

**[www.hearinglosscornwall.org](http://www.hearinglosscornwall.org)**

iSight Cornwall

**[www.isightcornwall.org.uk](http://www.isightcornwall.org.uk)**

Nudge

**[www.nudge.community](http://www.nudge.community)**

South Asian Society Devon and Cornwall

**[www.southasiansociety.org.uk](http://www.southasiansociety.org.uk)**

Sporting Heritage

**[www.sportingheritage.org.uk](http://www.sportingheritage.org.uk)**

UK Active

**[www.ukactive.com](http://www.ukactive.com)**

## **GOALD Challenge Awardees**

Motus VR

Sentai

Triangular Pixels

Mature Movers

Age Scotland

Football Memories Scotland

Weekday Wow Factor

HiCarer

Good Boost

danceSing

**The GOALD website:**

Generating Older Active Lives Digitally (GOALD) - University of Plymouth  
(<https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/research/centre-for-health-technology/goald>)

**The SBDRP website:**

Research Projects Archive - SBDRP (<https://www.ageing-sbdrp.co.uk>)

The SBDRP website will be kept active until approximately 2029.

**The UKRI Healthy Ageing website:**

Healthy ageing – UKRI

(<https://www.ukri.org/what-we-do/browse-our-areas-of-investment-and-support/healthy-ageing/>)