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Thank you to Catriona O'Toole

The INSA Executive Committee, on behalf of the entire INSA community, would like to express its sincere thanks to A/Prof Catriona O'Toole for her service on the Executive Committee.

Catriona is stepping down from the Executive Committee to focus on a more senior academic role at Maynooth University. She joined the Executive in 2022, shortly before delivering her stirring keynote address at the INSA Conference in the Netherlands.

During her time on the Executive, Catriona has consistently brought a wise and calm voice to the Committee's deliberations. She was instrumental in establishing the Education and Policy Subcommittee, has been a strong advocate for trauma-informed and equitable approaches to supporting school attendance, and has hosted a number of webinars.

We are deeply grateful for Catriona's contributions to advancing INSA's mission and look forward to her continued contributions to INSA and the broader field of school attendance.



Meet the New INSA Executive Committee Members

Chiara Enderle (Germany)



I am currently a doctoral researcher in special education at Europa-Universität Flensburg, with a focus on social and emotional development. I studied special education at Leipzig University, and during my studies I spent time in Norway as part of an Erasmus exchange. There, I supported a student experiencing significant school attendance challenges. This experience had a lasting impact on me and ultimately inspired me to focus my research on school attendance.

Early in my academic path, I became involved in a project about international comparative perspectives on school attendance problems. Through this work, I connected with researchers in the field and was introduced to the INSA community.

I initiated a discussion on strength-based perspectives to school attendance in 2023 with a roundtable coming out of it in New Orleans in 2024 (P.S: my first INSA conference). Ever since, I have been asking questions about how we can better prevent school attendance problems and not only treat symptoms of “absenteeism”.

In 2023, I initiated a discussion on strength-based perspectives on school attendance, which led to a roundtable at my first INSA conference in New Orleans in 2024. Since then, my work has increasingly focused on the question of how we can better prevent school attendance problems rather than primarily responding to the symptoms of “absenteeism.”

Chiara's Research

My research focuses on the building blocks and drivers of school attendance and well-being, particularly from young people's perspectives.

It is meaningful because it helps research, policy-makers and practitioners shift from deficit-/problem-centered views toward promotive factors and proactive, universal approaches to school attendance;

This area of research is meaningful because it supports a shift in thinking. Instead of approaching it primarily from a deficit- or problem-centered lens, it encourages researchers, policymakers, and practitioners to consider promotive

factors and proactive, universal approaches

One surprising insight from my work is how students articulate what supports their attendance with relatively simple yet powerful visions: listen to me; be attentive to my needs; help me address and reduce barriers to belonging, well-being, and learning; and support me in gaining, sustaining, or improving my strengths.

This research shows that the focus on measures of absence/attendance is not enough. It invites us to think beyond and reimagine school attendance by considering a broader continuum: from the presence of positive educational experiences to the absence of barriers for students and their surrounding systems.

Chiara's Hopes for INSA

Through my involvement on the Executive Committee, I hope to contribute to a broader and more positive vision of school attendance research and practice. For me, this means emphasizing the interconnectedness of the many factors that shape the school experiences of young people, their families, and the professionals who support them across different cultural and international contexts. Just like school attendance does not exist in isolation, INSA needs allies. To create meaningful impact,

I believe we must work together better to translate visions into real-world change. I see INSA as a powerful platform to support that collective movement forward.

Chiara Outside of Academia

Something personal that might surprise people is that outside of academia, I am a passionate CrossFit athlete. I train regularly, compete from time to time, and truly enjoy pushing my own boundaries, especially by learning new skills that I initially struggle with.

Jake Brosius (USA)



I am a Licensed Social Worker and the Director of Youth Programming for the Marion County Prosecutor's Office in Indianapolis, Indiana in the United States. In 2016, I received my bachelor's degree from Purdue University and then in 2019 my Masters in Social Work at Indiana University Purdue University in Indianapolis (IUPUI). Since then, I have worked at the Prosecutor's Office, designing, facilitating, and managing programming and outreach events to benefit the youth in our community. I also serve as the contact and assessment person for Failure to Ensure School Attendance referrals, where I interact with youth who have excessive unexcused absences and refer their families to community resources that address barriers to attendance.

Jake's Work

My main area of focus for school attendance is identifying the best ways to leverage our position as a law enforcement agency to support families and help students get back to school consistently. Indiana state law mandates that schools refer students with excessive unexcused absences to the Department of Child Services or the Prosecutor's Office. Though a traditionally punitive process, this presents an opportunity to intervene with families and divert them to community

resources that might be more helpful in the goal of consistent school attendance. Law enforcement agencies usually interact with people only on their worst days, but with the influence and connections we are afforded, we can also have the most positive impacts.

When I was growing up, my first career choice was to be an attorney. I wanted to help protect people by making sure that those who cause harm are held accountable. However, I quickly learned that most crime and harmful behaviors are

a result of societal problems, like poverty, food insecurity, and housing instability. I became a social worker because I found out that many of the people in my community are simply struggling with the hand they have been dealt. If I can help a family find some stability and improve their children's access to education, there can be a generational impact that benefits far more than one or two people. It can improve the community as a whole.

Jake's Hopes for INSA

First, I am hoping to connect more school attendance practitioners throughout the United States to the incredible work of INSA members around the globe. Solutions to school attendance issues are increasingly challenging and often

require multiple collaborators and brainstorming to be sustainable. Working with the other members of the Executive Team and INSA's larger community, we can provide the resources to help people in every community so that all students have access to quality and consistent education. In addition, I also want to bring my perspective on the role of government systems in school attendance solutions. The interaction between families and government, especially around attendance, can be positive and productive, but it takes careful planning, communication, and intentionality. I hope to combine my experiences with the leading research to develop positive systemic practices that can impact even larger populations.

Conferences and Events

2026 INSA CONFERENCE - ALICANTE, SPAIN

30th September - 2nd October 2026

Hotel Alicante Golf



Registrations and Abstract Submissions Now Open!

Early bird registration is open now and ends on 30 May 2026. Make sure to [register now](#) to secure this discounted rate!

Abstract submission closes on 15 April 2026. Abstracts can be submitted [here](#).

Submissions for Oral Presentations, Poster Presentations, Symposia, or Round Table Discussions are welcome.

Keynote Speakers

We will be profiling our keynote speakers in each issue of INStAnt leading up to the INSA 2026 Conference in Alicante.

We are pleased to introduce you to [Samo Varsik](#) in this issue.

In Attendance

with

Samo Varsik



Could you briefly share your professional background and the path that led you to your current work?

I currently work as a policy analyst at the OECD, where I focus on equity and inclusion in and through education. I have authored several publications, conducted quantitative analyses, and developed policy recommendations for decision makers across OECD countries. My work involves close collaboration with country delegates and representatives to understand their priorities and explore how the OECD can support them in building more equitable and inclusive education systems.

Previously, I worked as a senior economic analyst at the Education Policy Institute within the Ministry of Education in Slovakia. There, I authored and published studies on topics such as Slovak students' performance in PISA, Slovak emigrants in Czechia, and the educational pathways of Slovak high school graduates using administrative data. I also conducted a spatial analysis of the availability of places in Slovak pre-primary education, among other projects.

How would you describe your main area of research or focus? Why is research in this area meaningful? What is something about this area that people might not expect or know?

Although I would not describe myself primarily as a researcher, my work is, to some extent, shaped by the priorities of OECD countries. My main area of expertise is equity and inclusion in education. Currently, I am focusing in particular on school attendance problems from an internationally comparative perspective.

I strongly believe that every child should have the opportunity to reach their full potential. To make that possible, we must identify and dismantle the structural barriers that stand in their

way. Research and policy work in this area are meaningful because they help ensure that education systems do not reproduce inequality, but instead actively reduce it.

One thing people may not realise is that the cost of inaction can be greater than the cost of investing in the supports students need. When students disengage from education, the long-term social and economic consequences can be substantial.

What can attendees look forward to learning or thinking about during your keynote?

In my keynote, I will present evidence from large-scale assessments that monitor school attendance problems, including both truancy and long-term absence. This provides an internationally comparable starting point for understanding the scale and nature of the issue.

We have also collected responses from 45 OECD and EU education systems in regard to how they define school attendance problems and what policies and practices they use to support attendance. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first time such data have been compiled at this scale. Attendees can look forward to seeing some of these findings and reflecting on what they mean for their own contexts.

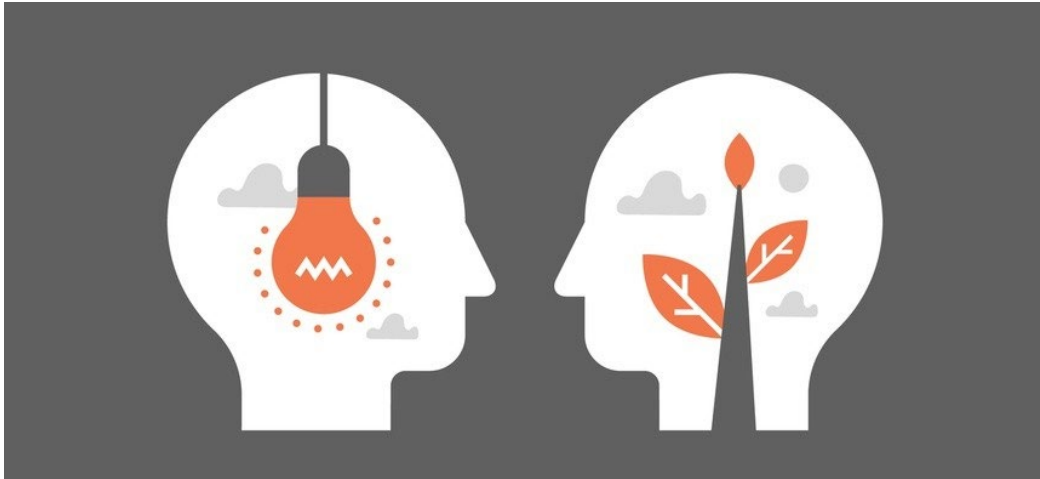
What is something personal about you that might surprise people who are familiar with your work?

Two things might surprise people.

First, I attended an after-school music programme throughout my childhood.

Second, there was a year when I disliked one of my teachers so much that I skipped an entire semester of classes. My parents were not thrilled.

INSA's Mentoring Program



Are you a Professor or Associate Professor with expertise in school attendance? Are you interested in supporting the development of emerging researchers? Then our mentoring program is for you!

INSA's mentoring program focuses on collaboration, knowledge sharing, and professional development. There may also be opportunities for short research visits, or collaboration on research articles and other short-term projects.

Applications are now being sought from prospective INSA mentors. For further information or to signup as a mentor, please visit the [Mentoring Program](#) page on the INSA website.



The Emerging Scholars Committee has so far welcomed 2026 with three virtual cafes for the Emerging Scholars community. In January, we were kindly joined by guest speaker Dr Carolina González who shared her insights from her academic career as a researcher. Carolina shared “the roses and thorns” of her journey through academia and led a Q&A session where she offered advice to Emerging Scholars. The committee was also pleased to introduce our first Journal Club session at the start of March where we were grateful to our Activities and Communications Coordinator, Dr Isabella Sasso, who led a presentation and discussion of the paper: Predictors and patterns of absenteeism among students with disabilities: implications for inclusive education (Whitley, Pegg & Ozturk, 2026). We closed out March with a virtual

café on submitting abstracts for the INSA 2026 conference, where Dr Gil Keppens and Yali Horta from the INSA Executive generously shared their insights on preparing a strong abstract.

Keep an eye on [News](#) via the INSA website, or follow us on [LinkedIn](#), for details of further upcoming events for the emerging scholars community.

Spotlight on Research

Call for Abstracts – AERA Open Special Topic Collection

Reframing School Attendance: Moving Quickly Toward Positive, Strengths-Based Approaches

This special issue is supported by INSA and brings together international perspectives from research, policy, practice, and related fields. It aims to move the field beyond deficit-focused perspectives and toward strengths-based, relational, and context-sensitive approaches for understanding and supporting young people's connection with education.

We welcome submissions of **empirical (quantitative, qualitative, mixed-methods), theoretical/conceptual, and practice-oriented contributions.**

Topics may include (but are not limited to):

- Protective factors, resilience, and well-being in the context of attendance
- Theoretical and conceptual reframings of school attendance
- Systemic, ecological, and contextual influences
- Stakeholder perspectives (students, families, practitioners, policymakers, communities)
- Partnerships and multi-level approaches to supporting attendance
- Innovative programs, practices, and tools that promote attendance and engagement
- Reimagining schools as inclusive, relational, and supportive spaces

Let's move together – abstracts are due **1 May 2026**.

Full details, including submission guidelines and the timeline, can be found in the [Call for Abstracts](#).

Call for Papers – JORSEN Special Issue

Reimagining Educational Environments: Needs and Supports from the Perspectives of Autistic Learners, Families and Stakeholders

This special issue seeks to foreground the experiences and needs of autistic students across educational stages, from the early years until secondary schooling. Further, the special issue aims to foreground transformative educational practices that challenge the neuro-normative barriers for autistic students. We aim to highlight the supports and practices that enable autistic learners to thrive in the learning environment, drawing on perspectives from autistic students themselves as well as key stakeholders in their educational journeys (e.g., teachers, parents, peers). We particularly encourage contributions that address priorities identified by autistic people (see Grove et al., 2024), as well as research focusing on under-represented groups, including autistic females.

Topics for this call for papers include but are not restricted to:

- My right to be me: Autistic students' voices in education ("Nothing about us, without us")
- Autism awareness and the role of school environmental factors
- School support tailored to unique needs, avoiding one size fits all
- Leadership for inclusion: accommodating autistic students
- Building deep knowledge and awareness among school professionals
- Fostering self-efficacy across the whole school community
- Practices that create an inclusive learning environment for autistic students
- Listening to parents/caregivers for effective school collaboration
- From theory to practice: (inclusive) didactics for autistic students

Submissions are due 1 June 2026.

Further information about the special issue and how to submit an abstract can be found [here](#).

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