Riots and wrongs
Is Britain really broken?

Euro in crisis: Complexities of currency management

Fight for freedom: The hidden cost of FOI

Voices: Global economics simplified
Welcome
to the Autumn issue of Society Now, the ESRC’s regular magazine which showcases the impact of the social science we fund.

This issue takes a look at high-profile economic and social issues. Our main feature offers three viewpoints on whether the Summer 2011 riots were caused by simple criminality or were symptomatic of a wider malaise.

We talk to Professor John Van Reenen, Director of the ESRC Centre for Economic Performance, who in simple terms explains the real causes of the global recession and what policies might encourage growth and boost employment. And the economic theme continues with a feature on research on financial risk and regulation in the context of the euro crisis.

Experts also offer their views on why more needs to be spent on prevention of HIV, how data linkage offers greater value to research, and share their perspective of dealing with complex Freedom Of Information requests.

I hope you find the magazine enjoyable and informative. Please do email us with your feedback or ideas for content.

Nick Stevens, Editor - nick.stevens@esrc.ac.uk

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INNOVATIVE ACTIVITIES IN China are growing at an astounding rate fuelling widespread concerns over Western economies’ ability to maintain their dominance in knowledge creation and high-skill employment. New research on innovation and globalisation indicates that the UK could actually benefit from these developments, but that this will require investing in the necessary skills and innovative capacity.

“There is a barrage of statistics highlighting China’s unprecedented recent investment in skills and science and the resulting rapid growth in innovative outputs,” says researcher Helen Miller. The proportion of Chinese national income invested in R&D (1.1 per cent) is now comparable to that in the UK (1.15 per cent). At the same time, large investments in education have produced a proliferation of Chinese graduates, almost half of whom study for science and engineering degrees. This investment in research capacity has been translated into equally impressive growth in innovative outputs. For example, if current trends continue, China could become the world’s largest filer of patent applications by 2015. Such trends raise concerns, not least when recent work for the European Commission concluded that if the recent trends in R&D continue then ‘in 2025, the United States and Europe will have lost their scientific and technological supremacy for the benefit of Asia’.

“But innovation is not a zero-sum game; the success of China need not be at the expense of the West,” argues Ms Miller. There are many reasons why these trends are not necessarily bad news for the West. Firms locating activity in China, whether to adapt products to local markets or gain access to specific skilled workers at a lower cost, can lead to standard gains from trade where firms experience improved performance and may transmit knowledge back home. Certainly, there is evidence that knowledge flows across national borders and this is less restricted by distance than was the case 20 years ago. That more research is being carried out in China does not necessarily imply that less will be undertaken in the West. China also represents a new market for technologies developed in the West.

The challenge for Western governments is not to devise policies to deter investment in China or other emerging economies, but to ensure they make sufficient investments in their own economies to remain leaders in innovation. Yet while China continues to make unprecedented investments in research capacity and increased incentives for firms to invest in innovation, the UK is making real cuts to budgets.

“Being able to compete with China in ten years’ time requires investment in skills and research today,” Helen Miller insists. “The current economic climate should not prevent investment in our capacity for economic growth in the future.”

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**IN BRIEF**

**TERROR PREVENTION**
Efforts to counter terrorism are increasingly drawing upon community-based initiatives. A new study seeks to establish research collaboration between leading academics in the UK, US and Northern Ireland who have been examining community-police engagement and partnership in helping to prevent terror crime. Topics include implications for training and possible tensions between police and communities.

ESRC grant number RES-193-25-0004 - Connected Communities Cross-Council Programme

**SECOND LANGUAGES**
A new project will establish a digital repository of instruments used for research into second language learning and teaching. This freely accessible repository, based at the University of York, will contain multimedia resources for a wide range of research areas, such as investigating how learning develops at different stages and documenting the contexts in which second languages are used and learned.

ESRC grant number RES-062-23-2946

**MODEL PLANNING**
Development viability modelling has become an increasingly important component of policy formation at the local planning level and the delivery of affordable housing. This study will address the current lack of evaluation of the performance of development appraisal models in these areas and, in particular, investigate the extent to which existing models vary.

ESRC grant number RES-000-22-4146

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**Childhood trauma triggers social exclusion**

A NEW STUDY of some of the UK’s most socially excluded people finds a remarkably consistent story: childhood trauma, substance misuse and mental health problems very often precede the experience of homelessness, including rough sleeping, and other adverse life events. While housing-related problems may not generally be the starting point for many experiencing the most acute forms of social exclusion, the provision of stable housing is likely to be an essential element in ending it, says researcher Professor Suzanne Fitzpatrick.

Researchers explored the nature and patterns of ‘Multiple Exclusion Homelessness’ (MEH) in seven UK cities. Professor Fitzpatrick explains: “People have experienced MEH as defined in our study if they have been homeless, including having experienced temporary/unsuitable accommodation as well as sleeping rough, and have also experienced one or more other domains of deep social exclusion: institutional care (prison, local authority care, mental health hospitals or wards); substance misuse (drug, alcohol, solvent or gas); or participation in street culture activities (begging, street drinking, ‘survival’ shoplifting or sex work).”

Researchers surveyed more than 1,200 users of services such as street outreach teams, drop-in services, day centres and soup runs. Findings reveal that almost all of those surveyed (98 per cent) had experienced homelessness, but 70 per cent had also experienced substance misuse, 67 per cent street culture activities, and 62 per cent institutional care. The overlap was very high, with 47 per cent of service users having experienced all four domains of social exclusion studied.

Among the MEH population, findings further show that those experiencing the most complex forms of MEH (eg, street homelessness, hard drugs, prison, and serious mental health problems) were often middle-aged men with a history of childhood trauma. “Policy emphasis and public sympathy often focus on younger and older homeless people, and on women who are homeless, but there is a forgotten middle of men in their 30s who often face the most extreme forms of MEH,” says Professor Fitzpatrick.

“Our evidence strongly supports the argument that there is a very high degree of intersection between deeply socially excluded groups”, she continues. “Hence, there is a pressing need to coordinate responses across all aspects of these people’s lives, rather than ‘view’ them through a series of separate ‘professional lenses’.”

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Risks of fatigue

FATIGUE, WHETHER INDUCED through sleep deprivation or mental exhaustion, is a widespread problem in a variety of industries such as manufacturing, transportation and the military. Researchers recently tested more than 220 cadets from the University of London Officers’ Training Corps to see if working in groups can help stave off the worst symptoms of fatigue such as poor decision-making.

Officer cadets took part in a series of tasks which tested the effects of fatigue on vigilance, risk-taking and problem solving ability. Researchers discovered that, when fatigued, groups performed better than individuals on a problem-solving task. A more novel finding concerns the effect of fatigue on risky behaviour. Based on a betting task, the study finds that both individuals and groups engaged in riskier behaviour when fatigued, despite being able to differentiate between levels of risk involved in higher and lower risk bets.

“This provides the important insight that while fatigue does not affect the perception of risk, fatigue does appear to make risky behaviour more attractive,” says researcher Dr Daniel Frings.

Raising security standards

HOW SUCCESSFULLY IS the Security Industry Authority (SIA) reducing criminality in the private security industry and raising standards? Established in 2001 as a non-departmental public body, the SIA was given the responsibility of reforming the burgeoning private sector industry. A new study evaluates the progress of this security regulator.

Research into private security providers and purchasers, SIA staff and members of the police concludes that the SIA has helped the development of a more co-ordinated and more professional industry, but a number of governance problems remain. On the positive side, a third of private security providers surveyed thought the SIA has succeeded in reducing criminality through the administration and enforcement of its licensing system. With regard to skills, researchers found that regulation had made significant inroads. Most stakeholders felt that those individuals working legally within the industry have in general raised their standards as a result of regulation.

“Alongside these positive trends there is also the more negative trend that respect for the industry among the police has not been greatly enhanced as a consequence of regulation,” says researcher Professor Martin Smith.

“It’s also clear that some members of the police lack confidence in the SIA. The SIA needs to develop a better strategy for advertising the benefits of regulation to increase the police’s confidence in both the SIA and the private security industry.”
Emergency exercises

THE THREATS AND HAZARDS facing the UK currently include not only terrorism but other events such as Avian Flu or flooding. Exercises are one of a number of ways to prepare for such events by providing an opportunity to develop expertise in dealing with a specific hazard or threat and its consequences. But are they worthwhile?

New research based on observation of exercises and interviews with emergency planners finds that exercises are indeed helping develop the forms of knowledge that are necessary to act in emergencies. Building on a dissemination workshop with emergency practitioners, researchers now aim to develop user guides for practitioners that will aid the process of planning, designing and undertaking exercises. “These will complement existing guides which are now considered too basic for practitioners with existing experience of organising exercises,” says researcher Dr Ben Anderson.

Families short on information

YOUNG PEOPLE WITH learning disabilities can find it difficult to get the information that they need about relationships and sex, and face numerous barriers to their sexual awareness and development, says a new study.

While non-disabled young people often learn about sexuality from their peers, young people with learning disabilities generally have to rely more on their families for information, especially their mums.

“However, mothers in our study admitted that while they found it hard to talk to all their children about sexual matters, it was even harder with their child with learning disabilities,” says researcher Professor Andrew Jahoda. Mothers often believed their child with learning disabilities had fewer sexual feelings and mothers delayed talking about sex as they felt it was less urgent.

“Our research suggests that families of young people with learning difficulties need to actively provide information about sexual matters,” Professor Jahoda points out. “While young people with learning disabilities may have fewer places to learn about sexual matters, this does not mean they do not have questions or are not interested. Mothers may need help in understanding that this will not encourage risky behaviours. Rather, providing information can help their child stay safe and reduce their vulnerability to abuse.” Information, particularly on the sex education provided at school, should be made more freely available to parents, he concludes.

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ESRC Grant Number RES-000-22-3124
All ethnic minority groups – not just Muslims – feel disproportionately targeted by current anti-terrorism measures, says a new study of public views on contemporary anti-terrorism policies within the UK. “Worryingly for British democracy, this view of differential treatment held by ethnic minority groups leads many to feel not only detached from the body politic, but less likely to co-operate with police and security services,” says researcher Dr Michael Lister.

Based on community-based focus groups across the UK, the study explored the significant differences in attitudes to anti-terrorism measures caused by an individual’s geography or ethnicity, as well as the implications of these attitudes for citizenship and security within the UK. “We found both positive and negative attitudes to anti-terrorism measures among all ethnic groups,” says Dr Lister. “But while the differences in attitudes of ethnic groups to anti-terrorism (support or otherwise) are slight, there were big differences in the impact of such measures (perceived and experienced) upon citizens and communities.”

The study highlights a common concern that anti-terrorism measures have disproportionately affected rights, responsibilities and the opportunities for social and political participation among communities, with white individuals generally viewed to be less targeted than non-white individuals. This widely shared sense of differential treatment poses considerable problems for the universality of citizenship within the UK. As co-researcher Dr Lee Jarvis says, it also “potentially undermines the security of those individuals and communities who may feel stigmatised, at risk, or under threat by specific anti-terrorism measures introduced throughout the past decade.”

Last July a UK Government review addressed public concerns over counter terrorism powers such as Control Orders and 28-day pre-charge detention. But the researchers believe this initiative will neither reduce the alienation felt by some communities, nor significantly enhance civil liberties within the UK. “The review aims to enhance the operational effectiveness of the counter terrorism apparatus,” says Dr Lister. “It does little to deal with the festering problem that, in certain parts of the UK, government policy is seen to be targeting wide swathes of its own citizens producing forms of disengagement which have potentially serious long-term consequences relating to social cohesion, equality and citizenship.”

Leaner start-ups do better

An abundance of resources may do more harm than good for start-ups, according to a study of 7,000 Norwegian start-up firms and their founders.

“Economic theory suggests that if entrepreneurs are liquidity constrained and not able to borrow in order to operate on an efficient scale, then entrepreneurs with more personal wealth should do better than those with less wealth,” says researcher Professor Hans Hvide. “Our findings show that, as expected, there is a positive relationship between a founder’s prior wealth and start-up size, but not for the richest quartile of founders, where start-up performance deteriorates.” A moderate amount of wealth boosts start-up performance while higher wealth may induce a less alert or a less dedicated management.

Further analysis of firms where the founders die within the first few years of operations produces a surprising conclusion. “We discovered that founder death has only a moderately negative effect on start-up prosperity,” says Dr Hvide. “This suggests once start-ups are set up, they are remarkably robust.”

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ESRC Grant number RES-000-22-3765
DOES THE PURSUIT of materialistic values and goals – money, fame and material goods – lead to a happy, satisfied life? Strong cultural beliefs may indicate the answer is yes, but a new study suggests exactly the opposite.

In the study, researchers undertook the first systematic assessment of a growing body of research on this topic, using meta-analysis, a technique that measures the strength of the link between materialism and wellbeing across all the studies that contain quantifiable measures.

“Our findings show that a strongly materialistic orientation is linked to lower wellbeing,” says researcher Dr Helga Dittmar. “Crucially, materialism is linked significantly with negative effects on all dimensions of personal wellbeing including poorer life quality, a less positive sense of self, poorer mental and physical health, and dysfunctional consumer behaviour. Hence we found, for example, that strong materialistic values were linked with feeling less satisfied with life, experiencing more negative emotions, as well as feeling greater anxiety and depression. This link held across different age groups.”

Many people are unaware of the psychological and social costs that a strongly materialistic outlook may entail. “As a society we should be wary of inculcating excessively materialistic values – particularly through advertising which implies that the pursuit of materialistic goals is the way to become successful, attractive and happy,” says Dr Dittmar.

“Given our findings, the influence of these materialistic messages on young people is particularly worrisome,” she adds. “Advertising for under-12s is banned in Sweden and the possibility of adopting this type of measure in the UK, combined with greater educational input on the potential dangers of materialism for both adults and children, should now be explored.”

SICKLE CELL DISEASE (SCD) is a serious chronic illness that, in the UK, mainly affects minority ethnic groups. A study of the experiences of young people with sickle cell disorders finds both low awareness of the condition within local authorities and schools, and reports by children of inadequate care during school hours.

SCD, which affects some 6,000 school-age children in England, is a complex condition with symptoms including chronic pain, and acute painful crises. But, argues researcher Professor Simon Dyson, “SCD as a potential issue affecting pupils is relatively invisible in education policy terms.” Researchers found that local authorities did not know the numbers of young people with SCD and less than ten per cent of schools had a specific policy.

Young people with SCD reported missing an average of 16 school days per year and most felt they were not helped to catch up on the education they missed. Findings further show that schools were largely poor at helping their pupils prevent sickle cell complications by, for example, keeping warm, being allowed to drink water in class to remain well-hydrated, avoiding strenuous exercise and being permitted to go to the toilet when required. Rather, half of the children reported not being allowed to drink water in class or go to the toilet and 30 per cent stated they had been made to take part in unsuitable exercise and called lazy when in fact they were tired from their anaemia.

Interestingly, there was no link between young people reporting teachers or other pupils “knowing” they had SCD and any improved experiences at school. Researchers drew up a policy guide for schools with a range of recommendations to meet the health, social and educational needs of those with SCD. This policy guide has since been adopted by the Department for Education and published on their website for use by schools.
Making the best better

RESEARCH ON A UNIQUE, pupil-centred educational initiative, ‘Be the Best You Can Be’, has resulted in a series of recommendations to enrich and modify the programme.

The programme was developed by Dr David Hemery CBE and his colleagues in response to the desire for a legacy of the 2012 London Olympic Games that would inspire the nation’s children. Designed to facilitate pupil awareness and responsibility, the programme will be integrated into the National Curriculum. Research in ten schools showed that the programme in its existing form did not lead to expected improvements for pupils. Based on the study, researchers made a range of suggestions to enhance the programme ranging from clearer aims to best-practice guidelines for programme delivery.

Dependable innovation

TODAY, MORE THAN ever, it’s no longer sufficient for products and technologies to be innovative; they also have to be dependable – reliable, available, safe and secure. But, says researcher Dr Luciana D’Adderio, “there’s mounting evidence to suggest that managing Dependable Innovation will become one of the great challenges of the 21st century”.

Technologies that fail lead to annoyance, disruption and, in some catastrophic cases, injury and loss of life. To avoid this, firms devote considerable economic and organisational resources to validating their products and services.

“Unfortunately, simply allocating resources is no longer sufficient to ensure that innovations are also dependable, as the challenges to validation and testing have escalated significantly,” says Dr D’Adderio. Due to the growing complexity of technology, specialisation and the globalisation of productive knowledge and activities, firms are struggling to validate innovative products whose design, production and maintenance are distributed across increasingly extended inter-organisational networks.

“Our research finds that the shift from the tightly-integrated multi-divisional corporation to the loosely-coupled modular network organisation holds important consequences for the dependability of organisational processes and their outcomes, especially in fast-changing, high innovation environments,” says Dr D’Adderio. “Specifically, these include difficulties in co-ordinating and controlling knowledge and processes that are dispersed across a diverse range of organisational functional, cultural and geographical boundaries. Today’s firms are therefore presented with harsh challenges that bear directly upon their competitiveness and viability.”

IN BRIEF

CLIMATE TARGETS

The Climate Change Act (2008) places a legal requirement on the UK government to set targets and report on progress on climate emission reductions. This new study examines whether and how governance structures make a difference to policy effectiveness and accountability within the field of carbon emissions management and the transport sector. ESRC grant number ES/K007439/1 - An ESRC Venture

TACKLING INEQUALITY

Progress towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) on maternal and newborn health in Asia and Africa has been uneven. Effective interventions rarely reach those who need them most. New research will explore how to address the exclusion of poor and otherwise marginalised groups from efforts to achieve the MDGs and how to reduce socio-economic inequalities in maternal and newborn mortality. ESRC grant number RES-167-25-0682 - ESRC/DFID Joint Scheme

VENTURING ACTIVITY

Corporate Venture Capital (CVC) is the practice of non-financial firms making equity investments in entrepreneurial companies. A new study of the UK pharmaceutical sector will use both firm- and industry-level analysis to give a broad perspective on CVC activity, examine the impact of CVC on the performance of the whole economy and the effect of CVC on industrial structure. ESRC grant number PTA-026-27-2859 - Post Doctoral Fellowship

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Do wrongs make a riot?

Were the August riots ‘simply criminality’ or a symptom of a wider malaise? Looking at the key sectors of education, employment and family wellbeing, expert commentators explore whether society actually is ‘broken’ – and how it can be fixed.

THE WIDENING GAP
Dr Lee Elliot Major, Director - Research and Policy, The Sutton Trust

HAD MICHAEL YOUNG’S prophecy come to pass? This was the immediate question that came to mind as I sat in horror in my home in north London as the riots appeared to be getting closer and closer to our local area.

In his classic 1958 book *The Rise of the Meritocracy* Young predicted the creation of a new powerful ‘meritocratic elite’ that would eventually lead to society’s downfall as an underclass became increasingly disenfranchised. This elite would justify its stranglehold of power by closely controlling what ‘merit’ constituted. And with no stake in society left, the underclass would take to the streets. Chillingly, Young’s vision seemed to be realised during those nights when the streets in London, Birmingham and Manchester became battlegrounds.

One would not want to overstate the case here: the summer riots were triggered by a multitude of factors – tensions with the police after a controversial shooting, opportunistic lawlessness, and boredom among them. But the fact that so many of our young had so little to risk to so brazenly break the law, suggests that perhaps they could be the generation, consciously or not, who fulfil Young’s prophecy.

But then as suddenly as the riots had erupted, normal life seemed to resume – save for the odd boarded-up shopfront. Only in Britain, one felt, could so much happen, and yet so little change. And in the weeks after the disturbances, the annual school results were published. The usual news stories emerged. Pupils from independent schools were three times more likely to score top A-levels than students in state comprehensives. Independently-educated children were set to gain even more places at Britain’s most prestigious universities.

The huge weight of academic evidence suggests that social mobility is lower than it could or should be in the country. Family background, rather than individual talent, matters more in Britain (and the United States) in predicting future earnings than most other developed countries for which we have data.

The privileged classes continue to dominate our professional elites. Two thirds of the current Cabinet were privately educated – despite private schools making up only seven per cent of schools. Over half of leading news journalists, and eight in ten of high court judges went to private school. One study by Bristol University found that the latest generations of children entering professions such as law or journalism were more likely to come from more prosperous homes, but less likely to be one of the cleverest children in class at age 11 than previous cohorts. Our elites are becoming posher, but less clever.

Meanwhile, every year half of children leaving school at age 16 have failed to reach basic levels in English and maths – many of whom we know had academic potential to do so. At the same time opportunities for more vocational or creative development are still seen and treated as an inferior option by most, good only ‘for someone else’s children’.

As Young rightly predicted, academic evidence also suggests that widening income inequality...
leads to a cycle of ever-increasing opportunity gaps between rich and poor. As the privileged accrue more wealth, they are able to devote ever more resources to maximise the educational achievements of their children – paying by fees or postcode or private tuition for them to attend the best schools. At the same time educational achievements – most notably prestigious university degrees – have increasingly become the golden tickets to exclusive entry into the professional elites, and higher earning jobs.

In this and other ways, income inequality and educational inequality reinforce each other in an endless generational feedback loop, leading to an increasingly ossified society.

Inevitably and depressingly the long-term implications of the riots have polarised political opinions, and been exploited for point-scoring in Parliament. The Prime Minister has spoken in terms of a moral crusade, wanting to mend poor parenting and a society of broken values. The Labour leader has sought instead to stress the inequalities in circumstances and lack of opportunities experienced by the people who took to the streets.

Shorn of political rhetoric, both of these insights could, and are likely, to have some truth to them. While family resources are important to future life prospects, it is often the things that cost nothing – support, aspirations, drive – that are found to make the difference to the development of young children. Whatever the answers, one point from Young’s book is irrefutable: failure to solve one generation’s problems will simply store up even greater problems for future generations. We reap what we sow.

LOW WAGE OR NO WAGE

Dr Mark Taylor, Director of Research, Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISER)

AS THE BRITISH economy struggles to emerge from its first recession in almost 20 years, and the worst recession since the Second World War in terms of loss of output, the unemployment rate has remained lower than at the same stage in previous recessions. Thus far, it has peaked at less than nine per cent, compared with ten per cent at the same stage in the recessions of the 1980s and 1990s. Falls in the employment rate have also been modest compared with previous recessions.

Taken at face value, these facts suggest that the labour market has remained relatively strong. But what if we dig a bit deeper? The employment prospects of particular population subgroups have been affected more than others by the recession, and those of young people in particular. Unemployment rates among 16-24 year olds doubled between 2008 and 2010 to almost 20 per cent, and were even higher among those with low educational achievement. In contrast, unemployment rates among 25-49 year olds remained below seven per cent. Although young people are always more adversely affected by economic downturns, they have been affected much more by the recent recession than previous recessions relative to older workers. Perhaps more worryingly, unemployment among young people started to rise in the years prior to the financial crisis and subsequent recession – it has been rising since 2004 – suggesting that other factors lay behind the rise in unemployment among young people.

There is also evidence that an increasing proportion of jobs are of low quality – yielding low wages, poor promotion prospects and contributing little to the well-being of those employed in them. There is a large proportion of the UK working population in peripheral or unstable jobs faced with low pay and short-term contractual arrangements.

Furthermore wage inequality has increased substantially over the previous 30 years with the wages of people in low-skilled, low-quality jobs falling further behind those of people in more highly skilled jobs. One consequence of these trends is an increase in working poverty as employment has become a less secure means of escaping financial hardship. This polarisation in the labour market raises the possibility of less skilled workers becoming trapped in low wage jobs and unable to progress into ‘good’ jobs unless firms provide career ladders or suitable training opportunities to make such jobs accessible to those in ‘bad’ jobs.

Therefore the headline unemployment and employment figures hide trends that should be of concern to policymakers. It is important to understand why unemployment among young people had been increasing prior to the onset of recession, to ensure that young people remain attached to the labour market on leaving school, and to ensure that mechanisms remain in place to facilitate career progress into stable jobs. Otherwise there will be a large group of potentially disaffected young people suffering the lasting scars of unemployment and peripheral employment, including poverty and material deprivation.
SUPPORTING STRUGGLING FAMILIES
Dr Elizabeth Young, Director of Research and Policy, Home-Start UK

WHETHER WE REFER to society as ‘broken’ or ‘challenged’ is at one level a question of semantics, and the phrase ‘broken society’ resonates in different ways with different people. Working to support families at Home-Start, we know there are families who are vulnerable to the repercussions of a depressed economy and the accompanying reduced public services.

Across the UK demand for our services has increased by up to 75 per cent over the last few months. Thirteen per cent of the families in our statistics needed support to manage their budgets, and 7.5 per cent of the families we supported last year have children on child protection plans. These figures represent a real challenge, every day, for the families behind the figures.

Family support organisations like Home-Start have the experience and skills to manage these challenges. Across the UK thousands of Home-Start volunteers visit families at home each week, supporting parents who are struggling to cope.

The term ‘broken society’ alludes to concepts connected with values, social capital and connectivity. These things are difficult to express and measure. So, for example, families come to Home-Start because they are socially isolated (55 per cent of the families we support). Is this a marker for a broken society?

Home-Start works to build the strengths of these families and this starts in their own homes. Allowing a volunteer to visit regularly in your home is itself an act of trust. It creates the basis for respectful relationships. From this basis families can be supported to change their behaviours, develop their skills and build their confidence as parents.

So, from a position of trust between the volunteer and the family – perhaps the antithesis of a broken society – the family are enabled to become more able to cope, to feel able to develop and then trust their tuned parenting skills and engage in their wider community. Furthermore it is a commitment of Home-Start to enable parents to enjoy being parents. Trust in oneself and others, confidence, engagement, enjoyment – these are all aspects of a strong family and these strengths resonate beyond the home and contribute to a more coherent society.

Volunteers have been coming forward to help in increasing numbers over the last twelve months.

We see this as evidence of a connectivity in society and of a desire to help that is strong – and that is seen across the full spectrum of communities in the UK. It is evidence that all of society is not broken. Sixteen thousand volunteers support Home-Start families every year; the total helping all charities is immense.

Financial hardship and uncertainty exacerbates the vulnerabilities of already fragile families. However, there are positive outcomes available for vulnerable families if support can be provided. Perhaps what needs to be fixed is the economy so that families facing challenges can continue to be supported.
Despite significant progress in the development of new surgical techniques and equipment, the ‘human element’ of surgery such as surgeons, anaesthetists and nursing personnel has been neglected.

A research team of psychologists and doctors led by Dr Nick Sevdalis, experimental psychologist and Senior Lecturer at Imperial College London’s Clinical Safety Research Unit (directed by Professor Charles Vincent, a clinical psychologist), has devised a tool to offer a scientific yet practical assessment of teamwork within the complex and often stressful environment of an operating theatre.

The Observational Teamwork Assessment for Surgery (OTAS) tool assesses the quality of team-related behaviours of the core members of an operating theatre team. The tool captures five team-related behaviours: Communication, Co-ordination, Co-operation, Situation Awareness and Leadership, each one of which is rated on a seven-point behaviourally anchored scale. Taken together, these behaviours provide an index of the quality of inter-professional teamwork in the Operating Theatre.

OTAS is scientifically robust yet clinically feasible. It’s also acceptable to the populations it is aimed at – operating theatre professionals – and is carried out within healthcare settings, thus continuously testing and refining the external validity of conceptual models and metrics in the ‘real’ world of surgery. The research has allowed a truly multidisciplinary research group to be maintained over a number of years within the Clinical Safety Research Unit of Imperial College, in which psychologist researchers (Doctoral students, research assistants, and post-doctoral research associates) are working alongside clinical researchers applying robust psychological science to important clinical problems.

Traditionally, psychological research of this type was not published in mainstream surgical or other clinical journals and the clinical field was entirely unaware of the possibilities for robust assessment and training interventions that can arise from applied psychological research. However, this new research has featured in major peer-reviewed clinical outlets (e.g. Annals of Surgery), becoming an acceptable research avenue for both clinical and psychology-trained researchers.
The price of freedom

The Freedom of Information Act aims to make society more open and transparent but what happens when it’s used to impede research? Freedom sometimes comes at a price, as Gerard Hastings, Anne Marie MacKintosh and Linda Bauld explain.
who advised us that we had to respond fully to
the request by either providing the information or
explaining why we should not. The latter involved
careful study of the Act, consultation with our
funder, a detailed audit of all the many files we
held (the study in question has been going for ten
years with multiple stages of fieldwork) and an
assessment of whether or not it was appropriate
and responsible to release the data. We assessed
whether or not each item was exempt from
the act under provisions such as personal data,
confidentiality, commercial interests and data
intended for future publication.

This involved weeks of work, and resulted in
a massive return to Clifford Chance comprising
a detailed cover letter and fourteen separate
attachments – over 60 pages in total – plus copies
of three publications.

In essence, while we provided some
methodological information and supplied a
selection of publications that had emerged from
the research through normal peer-reviewed
academic channels, our response was that the data
themselves were provided to us in confidence by
young people and disclosure would breach our duty
of confidence to those young people. Furthermore,
disclosure of the data would prejudice our interests
as a research unit dependent on external grant
funding and future publication of the research.

Clifford Chance challenged our response
and the University was therefore required to
undertake an internal review: a Deputy Principal
had to examine our response in detail and check
we had done everything we should according to
the Act. This took several more days of work. The
University’s review upheld our initial response
and so everything then had to go to the Scottish
Information Commissioner for adjudication.

His response came back in July 2010 – some
nine months after the initial request. It rejected
the Clifford Chance request because it had not
disclosed the identity of its client (PMI).

We need not have bothered with our exhaustive
(and exhausting) response because Clifford Chance
had failed to notice this key difference between
Scottish and English legislation.

Unabashed by this error, two months later
PMI declared itself, repeated its request and added
in another request on a different study. And so
the whole process began again. This time we
argued that PMI was being vexatious, providing
as evidence a dossier showing how it had used
FOI legislation around the world to impede public
health researchers and policymakers.

Again there was an appeal, a review and – after
a further nine months – an adjudication from
the Commissioner. This time he said that he did
not find the claim vexatious and we should rely
on other exemptions in the legislation for our
response which, following further meetings with
senior officers and lawyers, we duly did. And
that’s where we are today – awaiting another nine
months of appeal, review and adjudication.

The stress of all this is considerable: we
are not lawyers and, like most civilians, find
the law abstruse and the overt threat of serious
punishment extremely disconcerting. Furthermore,
while we are part of a university – and hence a
public body under FOI legislation – we are in
reality a small academic research unit entirely
funded by external grants.

This funding operates on a tightly costed
project-by-project basis; the weeks of work we have
put into this FOI process have inevitably been
done at the expense of our day jobs. It is worth
remembering that as academics, a key part of our
day job is to disseminate our research through all
the normal, properly policed channels. Ironically
then, in this case, FOI is actually hindering public
access to information.

To add to the irony, the two projects PMI are
chasing are funded by a cancer charity. If we had
conducted our research as employees of that
charity, rather than of a university, we would be
untouched by FOI. This is because Parliament
realised that the onerous administrative burden
of FOI had the potential to decimate the third
sector. In the last two years we have learnt the
hard way that the same threat now looms over
academic research.

\[ \text{FOI requests by Philip Morris International through law firm Clifford Chance created weeks of work for Anne Marie Mackintosh, and Gerard Hastings and Linda Bauld (pictured above left)} \]

\[ \text{The right to know has to be balanced with the right to confidentiality} \]

Gerard Hastings, Anne Marie MacKintosh and Linda Bauld
are staff at the Institute for Social Marketing (ISM) and
the Centre for Tobacco Control Research, University of
Stirling and the Open University. ISM and the Centre for
Tobacco Control Research are part of the UK Centre for
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Excellence, part funded by the ESRC

iWeb: www.management.stir.ac.uk
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**Time to act**

While there have been major advances in the treatment of HIV, spending on prevention of HIV cases remains inadequate, argues **Professor Peter Aggleton**

The latest figures from the UK Health Protection Agency suggest that the number of people living with HIV in the UK will reach 100,000 in 2012. The same report indicates that if the estimated 3,800 UK-acquired HIV cases in 2010 had been prevented, it cost £32 million annually or £1.2 billion over a lifetime in costs would have been saved and the impact of HIV on the most affected communities substantially reduced. Among those most affected are gay and other men who have sex with men. After almost doubling in the last decade, 2010 saw the largest ever annual number of new HIV diagnoses (3,080) among such men.

Heterosexually acquired infections (a cumulative total of 53,000 cases) increased rapidly from 1999. The vast majority of such infections were diagnosed among those born abroad but, since 2003, there has been an increase in diagnoses (from 210 in 1999 to 1,150 in 2010) among heterosexuals who are likely to have acquired their infection in the UK. Yet ask the average person on the street and they are likely to say that HIV and AIDS have gone away, or are only problems in developing countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

The last 30 years have seen major advances in the clinical management of HIV. HIV in the UK has been transformed from a serious and near inevitably fatal diseases to a chronic illness for which highly effective treatment is available. But this has not been without its cost: a lifetime of antiretroviral treatment (ART) is estimated to cost between £280,000 and £360,000.

Against this background, a House of Lords Select Committee has recently issued a major report. Chaired by Lord Fowler who was responsible for the 1986 ‘Don’t Die of Ignorance’ campaign, the committee spent eight months examining how HIV and AIDS is being responded to in the UK. Its report concludes that spending on prevention is ‘woefully inadequate’. In 2011-12, the Government will spend only £2.9 million on national prevention programmes compared with £762 million on treatment. It is not simply the lack of spend on prevention that is concerning but the balance between the different activities that make up an effective HIV prevention package.

It is now well established that an effective set of measures to prevent HIV must be multi-faceted and substantial in scope. Single ‘magic bullet’ interventions simply do not work. Achieving and sustaining behaviour change (or in many cases the consolidation of existing behaviours that pose little or no risk of infection) is best accomplished by tackling both individual risk and broader social vulnerabilities. The latter include gender inequalities that make it difficult for women to insist on protection, and continued stigma and discrimination towards sexual minorities and people living with HIV. UNAIDS calls for a comprehensive, multi-component HIV prevention response attuned to the local epidemic, and delivered across a variety of contexts.

Health services and facilities have a central role to play in this respect, and have been heavily invested in over the last ten years. But HIV is a profoundly social disease: transmitted (in the UK) in social rather than clinical contexts, by sexual and drug-related practices that carry significance and meaning. HIV plays into the social inequalities that already characterise a community, triggering both positive (care, compassion and support) and negative (stigma, discrimination) responses. Understanding these structured vulnerabilities and effects is central to an effective response. This is an arena in which high-quality social science has a real contribution to make – not as the handservant to biomedicine, but as an important contributor in and of itself.

However, there has only been one large-scale, UK-focused funding initiative on HIV within the social sciences – and that was supported by the ESRC over 20 years ago. In UK higher education the social dimensions of HIV remains a somewhat marginalised and specialist interest, a situation which compares unfavourably with Australia and Canada, for example, which have long-established national research centres, well networked with State and National Governments, focusing on the social dimensions of the epidemic.

Here in the UK, we have been issued with a wake-up call. Now, not later, is the time to act.
IN RECENT YEARS the scientific establishment has been through something of a theological moment. With the combined effects of continuing public disquiet about the trajectory of technological change and a policy context that has increasingly emphasised strategic investments in research, scientists and scientific organisations have begun, perhaps like never before, to publicly defend the benefits of fundamental research and ‘basic science’.

In recent months these efforts have crystallised in a series of high-profile and effective campaigns to promote the vitality of science to the future economic prosperity of the UK. Responding to similar concerns, UK research-funding bodies have launched a series of strategic and cross-disciplinary research programmes. Covering areas of research as diverse as environmental change, energy and lifelong health these initiatives encapsulate a new argument about the value of research in the UK; that interdisciplinary and collaborative research can, through careful programme design, be brought to bear on the ‘grand challenges’ of the day.

But these initiatives represent a challenge for social scientists and the broader relationship between science and society. They focus attention on the ways in which these grand societal challenges are defined and framed and the kinds of collaborative roles that social scientists are increasingly taking in interdisciplinary research teams. Will this strategic approach, that seeks to encourage research on cross-cutting challenges, be framed solely in technical terms, as requiring scientific rather than social innovations? Will this approach represent an opportunity to open up innovation processes to a wider array of disciplinary perspectives and diverse viewpoints?

Against this backdrop, the results of a recently completed ESRC-funded project entitled Strategic Science: Research Intermediaries and the Governance of Innovation show the gravity of this challenge. Focusing on the development of research programmes in nanotechnology and synthetic biology, the results of the project reveal that while research councils and other funding agencies are increasingly taking an active role in shaping new research programmes – by delineating key research terms, building agendas and working to establish a core research community in emerging fields – a set of underlying policy narratives about the power of science to produce social progress continues to shape institutional practice.

The results of this research suggest that this ‘definitional work’, though often couched in technical terms, typically involves questions of fundamental societal significance. For example, the emerging field of synthetic biology is increasingly defined as the rational design of ‘biologically based parts, novel devices and systems’ and the redesign of ‘existing natural biological systems’. This definition shows the desire to make ‘engineering of biology easier and more predictable’ and is tied to a range of expected applications in areas such as biofuels and pharmaceuticals. In turn, this definitional work has the effect of tying the field to a largely unquestioned future.

The findings of the Strategic Science project suggest the challenge facing social scientists in an increasingly strategic policy context and highlight the importance of a thorough investigation of how new research programmes and questions are defined. A number of social scientists are making important steps in this direction – developing new modes of engagement and collaboration with the natural and physical scientists. For example, in the area of synthetic biology, an ESRC-funded network of social scientists (www.genomicsnetwork.ac.uk/seminars) are working to build a ‘post-Ethical, Legal, and Social Issues’ approach to the life sciences that explores the ways that scientific fields are constituted and sustained. This work will be an important step in reimagining the roles that social scientists may play in critical collaboration with their natural and physical science colleagues.
Here we present an overview of the key issues in Britain today. This issue our focus is on crime. All statistics are from the Ministry of Justice unless otherwise stated.

**Types of crime**

**212,784**  **15%**

There were 212,784 drug seizures by the police and the UK Border Agency (UKBA) in England and Wales in 2010/11, a five per cent decrease on 2009/10. Seizures of Class A drugs decreased by 15 per cent.

Source: Home Office

“Obviously crime pays, or there’d be no crime.”

G. Gordon Liddy

**Sentences and prison**

**87,501**  **-24%**

The prison population at 30 September 2011 was 87,501, an increase of 2,072 (almost two per cent) compared to 30 September 2010 when the total population was 85,429.

Since 2000 the number of re-convictions committed per hundred offenders (frequency rate) has fallen from 185 to 140.5 – a 24 per cent fall. Since 2008, the frequency rate has fallen 9.6 per cent.

Offenders sentenced by principal sentence (12 months ending March 2010)

“The most difficult crime to track is the one which is purposeless.”

Arthur Conan Doyle
Perception and detection

13.7%
Percentage of adults who perceived a high level of anti-social behaviour in their local area
Source: British Crime Survey

60%
Percentage of people who believe crime has risen across the country as a whole in the last few years
Source: British Crime Survey

28%
Percentage of people who believe that crime has risen locally has halved from 55 per cent in 1996
Source: British Crime Survey

Autumn 2011 riots

35%
By midday on 12 October, 1,984 people had appeared before the courts for offences relating to the August riots. Thirty-five per cent of adults were claiming an out of work benefit at the time of the disorder (compared to 12 per cent of the working age population in England in February 2011. Forty-five per cent of all offenders who were sentenced for an indictable offence in 2010 were claiming benefits)
Source: Home Office

Police

139,110
Number of Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) police officers in the 43 police forces of England and Wales as at 31 March 2011 (decrease of 3.2 per cent or 4,625 officers compared to a year earlier)
Source: Home Office

4.8%
There were 6,615 FTE minority ethnic officers in the 43 police forces of England and Wales as at 31 March 2011, 4.8 per cent of the total police strength
Source: Home Office
Alongside balancing the demands of combining paid work with child-rearing, working parents also contend with concerns, often reflected in the media, about the impact time spent working may have on their children. The prevailing belief has traditionally been that the more time parents – and particularly mothers – spend with their children, the better it will be for the child's development. And, equally, that by working, parents may in some way be neglecting their children. But new research conducted by researchers at the ESRC International Centre for Life Course Studies in Society and Health challenges that view.

The research looked at the impact of parental employment patterns over the first five years in relation to child behaviour at age five. The study of nearly 10,000 children in the Millennium Cohort Study – a multidisciplinary research project following the lives of around 19,000 children born in the UK in 2000/1 – found no significant detrimental effects on a child's social or emotional development if their mothers work during their early years. In fact the ideal scenario for children, both boys and girls, was shown to be where both parents lived in the home and both parents were in paid employment.

The study also looked at the impact of maternal employment in the first year of life, as well as employment across the first five years. “Some studies have suggested that whether or not mothers work in the first year of a child's life can be particularly important for later outcomes. But in this study we did not see any evidence for a longer-term detrimental influence on child behaviour where mothers were working when children were nine months old,” said Dr Anne McMunn, principal author of the study.

Dr McMunn and her team also found that there were gender differences in the relationships between parental employment in the early years and child behaviour at age five. She said: “Mothers who work are more likely to have higher educational qualifications, live in a higher income household, and have a lower likelihood of being depressed than mothers who are not in paid work. These factors explain the higher levels of behavioural difficulties for boys of non-working mothers, but the same was not true for girls. The relationship between maternal employment and child behaviour was significantly stronger for girls than for boys.”

Also, whereas boys in households where the mother was the breadwinner displayed more difficulties at age five than boys living with two working parents, the same was not true for girls. Girls in traditional households where the father was the breadwinner were more likely to have difficulties at age five than girls living in dual-earner households.

The authors do not know why the relationship between maternal employment and child behaviour is stronger for girls than for boys. Dr McMunn says: “We need to do further work to understand why the daughters of working mothers are less likely to have behavioural difficulties at age five compared with daughters of stay-at-home mothers. We might hypothesise that it has something to do with gendered role-modelling, but we would be speculating. We haven’t been able to look at that.”

As previous research has indicated, children in single-mother households and in two-parent households in which neither parent was in work were much more likely to have challenging behaviour at age five than children where both parents were in paid employment. Household income, however, and maternal characteristics can mitigate the effects of this.

Previous studies have concentrated on cognitive or educational development in children and where socio-emotional development has been addressed, this has not been looked at within the context of the employment of both parents.

A limitation of the study is that behaviour was reported by parents, usually mothers, so there may be some bias if working mothers are more likely than stay-at-home mothers to under-report behaviour problems. A next step for the authors will be to use an identical measure of behaviour at age seven which has been asked of the parent and the teacher.

Dr Anne McMunn leads a research project within the ESRC International Centre for Lifecourse Studies in Society and Health (ICLS) investigating the influence of parental divisions in paid employment and childcare, as well as stability and change in family structure, on the emotional wellbeing of children in the UK Millennium Cohort Study (MCS).

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Now available from WH Smith Travel and High Street shops, Waitrose, Waterstones and Marks and Spencer. Or order direct by emailing sales@azonelogistics.co.uk
Survey-based data collection methods underlie much empirical research in the social and economic sciences. Large-scale sampling and surveying of known populations is a tried and tested method used to create many of the major data resources supported by the ESRC. Understanding Society is a good example of such a resource, as are the Birth Cohort Studies and, at an international level, the European Social Survey.

Data collected by sample surveys are relatively expensive to compile. Whether through face-to-face or telephone interviews, the process is both time-consuming and costly. Cheaper web surveys are becoming increasingly popular, but for high-quality research in the social sciences these do not provide the same degree of control over the information collected that can be obtained via an interviewer-administered approach.

Response rates across all major surveys are falling, possibly because people are leading increasingly busy lives but also because of ‘survey fatigue’ – a lower willingness to co-operate as more organisations attempt to gather information from individuals by survey methods.

Data linking provides another approach that has the potential not just to add high value to existing surveys, but also as a means of creating new data resources which place no reliance whatsoever on survey-based methods. It takes advantage of our ‘digital footprint’ – the records we create as we go about our daily lives. These may record transactions we engage in, registrations we undertake, our communications with each other and web-based activity. Examples include administrative records (e.g., social security payments, income tax payments, school and college enrolments, hospitalisation and GP records), transaction records (e.g., mortgage payments, electricity billing, use of loyalty cards when shopping), internet activity such as web searching and use of social media, and remote sensing records (e.g., road transport sensing devices). While these examples reveal the diversity of the electronic information we generate, they share certain common characteristics:

- they are, in most cases, personal records – they may contain detailed information about an individual that could be misused if placed in the wrong hands;
- they are not designed specifically as research resources even though the information they contain might have research value;
- they belong, in general, to big datasets covering large segments of the population.

Issues must be resolved before data linkage is a regular part of developing data for research.

In the face of survey fatigue, how can researchers gather quality information? Data linking could not only add high value to existing surveys, but also create new data resources.

By Professor Peter Elias
Some countries have developed their use of administrative records to the point where these are now routinely substituted for the more traditional ways of generating data resources for social and economic research.

In Finland, for example, the population census is conducted not via the use of a census form delivered to households but from 30 different registers and administrative files. In the UK, it is within the devolved administrations that data linking has progressed to the point where it significantly enhances existing surveys and/or facilitates linkage across different types of administrative records. While these examples indicate the value of linked data, the approach towards more routine research use of data linkage procedures is rightly moving cautiously given the risks and problems involved. A number of important issues must be resolved before data linkage becomes a regular part of the process of developing data for research purposes. These include:

**Maintaining security, preventing abuse of linked data**

The personal nature of many of the types of data which constitute our digital footprint means that they could be misused in some way if they fall into the wrong hands. However, researchers require access to these data at a very detailed level if they are to be able to link them together and to understand their value as research resources. Careful controls over the conditions of access must be put in place to ensure that the data concerned are not used for inappropriate purposes or by unauthorised persons.

**The need for consent to link data**

For some categories of data and in some situations, legal and/or ethical considerations require that the individuals or organisations whose data are to be linked in some way should consent to this process. There is a need for clarification of this requirement and harmonisation of best practice in this area.

**Assessing the quality of linked data resources for specific research purposes**

It is often assumed that data from administrative sources give an error free, accurate record of the process from which they are drawn. This may not be the case. Given that such data are not designed for research purposes, their fitness for purpose as research resources must be carefully assessed.

**Gaining access to and use of data which may have commercial value**

Certain types of electronic records have significant commercial value. A good example is the loyalty card data generated by shoppers. Organisations may be reluctant to make such data available for research if they feel that this value may be exploited by competitors.

These are not easy issues to resolve. There has already been some progress on laying the foundations for what looks set to become a major new approach to data construction in the social and economic sciences. The ESRC has funded the Administrative Data Liaison Service and the Secure Data Service. The former service, managed by the University of St Andrews in conjunction with the Universities of Oxford and Manchester, houses and makes accessible to researchers a lot of information about the wide range of administrative data sources which are potentially available in the UK for research. The latter, which forms part of the ESRC-funded UK Data Archive at the University of Essex, provides a secure environment for data linkage and analysis, with remote access from UK universities.

Government departments and some private sector organisations have developed protocols that are designed to protect confidentiality and prevent inappropriate use of data in their safekeeping. However, there is, as yet, no systematic cross-departmental approach to issues such as the situations in which consent is required for data linkage, the procedures through which researchers may gain access and the requirements placed on researchers that will ensure that data security is maintained.

For this reason, the ESRC, together with the MRC and the Wellcome Trust, has set up an Administrative Data Task Force (ADT) designed to address these issues across a range of administrative data types which have potential research value when linked to other sources of information. Chaired by Sir Alan Langlands (Chief Executive, HEFCE) and with strong support across government, the ADT aims to make rapid progress to resolve these issues in ways which will help promote their safe and efficient use for research. A particular concern shared by all those organisations that hold personal data is that the public should be confident that their information is held securely, used appropriately and that no harm should ever arise from misuse of their data in any way.

This cross-departmental and cross-funding agency activity should be seen as the very beginning of the ways in which these new forms of digital information will change the landscape of social and economic research. While no-one is predicting that the traditional approaches to data collection will disappear, innovative use of the many new types of data that we create will be high on the research agenda over coming years.
In THE UK, the value of FTSE 100 companies has taken a severe battering as a result of the turmoil in the global markets. And across the Atlantic the US triple-A rating has been cut for the first time, reflecting concerns about the large budget deficit and the political infighting.

The global economic crisis is widely believed to stem in part from the lack of regulation of global financial markets and the inherent systemic risk – and likelihood of contagion – that this created. Because of this ineffective regulation, it was possible for a local problem – the US sub-prime crisis – to occur in one financial market and then cascade to other markets around the world.

In the European Union (EU) the quandary is how to square national sovereignty with international finance – and international debt. Since the launch of the euro in January 1999, the European Central Bank has been in charge of the monetary policy of the countries in the eurozone but the supervision of the policy is up to each EU country. This made it possible for the Italian government to dodge highly unpopular austerity measures while the government debt kept climbing.

“The role of the central bank is the major issue at stake in this organisational structure, in particular, whether supervision should be a responsibility of the central bank,” Luis Garicano and Rosa Lastra state in the Centre for Economic Performance (CEP) Discussion Paper Towards a New Architecture for Financial Stability: Seven Principles.

The researchers argue that a central bank needs to have responsibility both for monetary policy and supervision. The central bank will at any rate have to ensure financial stability, as it is the only institution which can take on the role as lender of last resort, and has the necessary clout to enforce actions. “It is necessary that the European Financial Supervisory authority or authorities be endowed with authority to overrule and direct the National Supervisors,” they add.

“If governments do not co-operate when dealing with an international crisis but instead...
behave strategically, this can lead to decisions that are ‘sub-optimal’ from a global perspective,” Friederike Niepmann and Tim Schmidt-Eisenlohr point out in the CEP CentrePiece article Bank bailouts in a global economy: the challenges for international cooperation.

They studied different co-operation regimes and analysed which countries gain or lose from them. Looking at the European Systemic Risk Board (ESRB) – a recently established European Union institution which has the task (among other things) of issuing recommendations on how to deal with banks in distress – they found that so far the ESRB has only reputational power. This is because, their research suggests, “a central authority that can prescribe a bailout, which then has to be financed by one country alone, always makes that country worse off compared with a situation where decisions are taken unilaterally.

They say: “Finding the right balance between the efficiency gains from financial globalisation, the preservation of national sovereignty and optimal co-operation when managing a crisis will remain a challenging task for policymakers worldwide.”

What happens when a country defaults on its debts? The ERSC research project Legal and Economic Aspects of Sovereign Debt Default: The Argentina Case examines the impact of the Argentine default in 2001 – looking at reputational incentives to repay debt, the relation between creditors and borrowers, sovereign debt restructuring and international regulation.

In another CEP Discussion Paper, Currency Unions in Prospect and Retrospect, JMC Santos Silva and Silvana Tenreyro consider the costs and benefits of joining a currency union such as the euro. Unlike estimates of the trade effect of other currency unions, they could not find “any statistically significant effects” on trade as a result of introducing the eurozone. They find that “in terms of financial integration, important changes in trends are observed with the introduction of the euro, particularly for cross-border holdings of bonds and equity”.

As part of the World Economy and Finance (WEF) research programme Dr Andrew Scott, Professor Albert Marcet and Elisa Faraglia have examined the optimal ways of managing government debt. In their research project Risk Sharing and Contingent Debt they conclude that it is very difficult to insulate fiscal policy from shocks by using the ‘complete markets’ approach to debt management – where the composition of government debt is chosen so fluctuations in market value offset changes in future deficits.

Another WEF project, Monetary Policy, Welfare and the Structure of International Financial Markets, looks at the issue of international assets. Today people in one country hold massive quantities of assets located in other countries, privately or through pension funds, insurance companies or government debts and assets. Professors Alan Sutherland and Michael Devereux have developed a new method of calculating optimal portfolios and analysing risk in an open economy model.

But as recent research from the Centre for Competitive Advantage in the Global Economy shows, an open economy can also provide some benefits. In the research project Openness, Protectionism and Britain’s Productivity Performance over the Long-run Professors Stephen Broadberry and Nicholas Crafts found that the open economy allowed 19th-century Britain to focus on the lucrative industrial and service sectors – and that protectionism introduced in the 1930s did not improve British industrial performance.

At the time of publication George Papandreou had resigned as Prime Minister of Greece in part because of a confidence vote over his plans to hold a referendum for the acceptance of the terms of a eurozone bailout deal. Mario Monti had also replaced Silvio Berlusconi as Prime Minister of Italy.

Ardil Foss is ESRC Senior Copy Editor
Economics made simple

Economics often seems impossibly complicated. Professor John Van Reenen, Director of the ESRC Centre for Economic Performance, gives some simple answers to commonly asked questions about the causes of the recession, the euro crisis, financial regulation, taxes and growth.

What really caused the recession? Was it failure of the global financial system or too much national debt – or a combination of both?

JVR It was certainly not to do with too much national debt. The underlying cause was a huge global imbalance between some regions of the world like China, Germany and Japan consuming too little (given the size of their economies) and others like the US, UK and Spain spending too much. The excess savings of the low spending countries were recycled by a dysfunctional financial system. This meant a relatively local problem – the US sub-prime crisis – sparked off a cascade of problems throughout the global economic system.

Is national debt necessarily a bad thing?

JVR No, it is a good thing to have some national debt, especially when a country needs to keep demand up during a deep recession. The world learned an important lesson from the Great Depression – cutting to balance the books in a recession is a recipe for prolonging it.

What exactly is a double dip recession? Has Britain experienced one before?

JVR This is when the economy seems to be recovering, but then falls back into negative growth. The main example of this was in the 1930-34 Great Depression, although arguably a milder form was seen in 1973-76 (see Figure 1 in blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/2011/08/02/slow-growth-not-new-normal).

Why does the crisis in the eurozone affect the UK?

JVR First, the eurozone is the main trading partner of the UK, so if it suffers a downturn our exports will take a major hit. Second, many UK banks hold debt in eurozone countries, so if there is a restructuring of debt, this will hurt UK banks.

What does it mean for Greece to leave the euro? What currency would it use instead?

JVR There is no precedent for a country doing this, but at the moment it is a distinct possibility as I can see no way that Greece can service its debt and there must be a restructuring. Greece could re-introduce its own currency which would devalue rapidly and cushion the economy to some degree, but it would generate turmoil in the Greek banking system as savers rushed to withdraw funds.

Banks have spent years trying to reduce risk in the financial system. What went wrong in 2008?

JVR The risk management systems in banks were clearly not working. They massively underestimated the chances of many assets falling in value at the same time (such as house prices falling in all regions of the US). The structure of incentives in banking encourages everyone from the trading floor to the board room to take excessive risk. For the trader, the annual bonus can be huge and the worst that can happen on the downside is to lose one's job. For the top bosses of large institutions that are ‘too big to fail’, they know that there is a good chance of being bailed out by the taxpayer.

Do you think a tax such as the Tobin tax could succeed in raising revenue for the government or would it, as critics claim, discourage financial institutions from operating in the UK?

JVR The arguments for the Tobin tax are completely confused. The aim of the tax should not be to raise revenue but rather to reduce the volatility of financial markets (especially in foreign exchange and shares). In principle it should do this as it is a tax on transactions, but of course there may be costs (reduced liquidity of markets) and lower stock prices (this happened when Sweden introduced one in 1989). It would do nothing to reduce the risks of financial crises which had entirely different routes (especially the ‘too big to fail’ problem). It is also not particularly good as a revenue raising idea. First, volumes of transactions fall. Second, other tax revenue falls (like capital gains – this happened in Sweden).

Are investment bankers very smart or just lucky gamblers?

JVR Generally it is a mixture of both ability and luck. The increase in the scale of funds managed meant that small differences in ability (or luck) could lead to tremendous rewards. Psychologically, bankers seem to believe that good fortune is due to skill and bad outcomes to luck. In retrospect, the luck component seems to have been underestimated!
One of the causes of inflation is too much money chasing too few goods. Why is the rate of inflation increasing now despite a slow-down in spending?

JVR The high inflation rate is being caused by a commodity boom. The rapid growth of China and India is driving up the costs of raw materials. Added to this, poor harvests and political turmoil in the Middle East have meant high food and oil prices. Domestic demand in the UK has little influence on these global events.

What policies could be effective in reducing employment. Does an obsession with capping immigration mean that some jobs will go unfilled?

JVR The net immigration cap of under 100,000 is a terrible idea. Since EU and outwards migration cannot be controlled and there was already little unskilled immigration the government is effectively reducing skilled immigration. This is leading to the UK putting off talented people coming and staying here. It is stifling the ability of our world-class universities to attract talent of faculty and of students. It is hard to think of a better strategy for stunting growth.

When do you think Britain will hit the bottom of this recession. How much worse will things get?

JVR I do not know for sure. Much will depend on how the euro crisis plays out and whether the richer countries will bite the bullet to protect the weaker ones and establish a larger bail-out fund. Around the world there is a need to stimulate demand in the short-run and have a credible deficit reduction plan in the medium run. Politicians in the US and Europe seem unable to deliver this necessary outcome.

What economic or fiscal policies would you pursue to encourage growth if you were Chancellor?

JVR The Coalition’s July 2010 Emergency Budget has ushered in the largest fiscal consolidation since the War – seven per cent of GDP by 2015/16 instead of Labour's five per cent contraction by 2016/17. In my view, this ‘Plan A’ was a mistake as it has depressed the economy at a time when the recovery was still fragile.

I would slow the consolidation in spending by increasing public investment projects, such as reinstating the cancelled school buildings programme. In the long-run a more industrial growth strategy is needed – what I call a ‘Plan V’ (blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/2011/08/02/slow-growth-not-new-normal).

How can the global economy continue to grow when the resources that support growth are finite?

JVR We have grown for much of the last 500 years so I don't see resource constraints as strongly binding. Many of the things that countries need to do to support growth are about removing restrictions which require political will rather than money. The major structural impediments in the countries like Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain are barriers to entry in many professions, high firing costs that protect 'insiders', excessive red tape and other product and labour market regulations that stifle growth. In the shorter term, the richer countries need to be careful that they do not prematurely start drastic austerity programs before growth is more secure. Co-ordinated austerity in the US, eurozone and UK will stifle global growth – not everyone can export their way out of recession.

Finally, why do economists always seem to disagree?

JVR Honest people have different views. Economics is not physics – this is what makes it interesting!
The ESRC Festival of Social Science 2011 – a week-long series of events celebrating the breadth of social science research in the UK – ran between 29 October and 5 November. Events the length and breadth of Britain offered insights into how social science research helps to mould social, economic and political policies, as well as the effect it has on our daily lives.

Now in its ninth year and co-ordinated by the ESRC, the Festival helps over 500 researchers connect with new audiences, including individuals from business, charities, government, teenagers, pensioners and parents. Feedback from event organisers highlights that apart from learning from the experience of holding an event, they also benefit from opportunities to network and gain a better understanding of individual perceptions of their research.

Events normally target one of four different types of audience: a general audience – perhaps in a shopping centre, a museum or in a national park; those with some knowledge and a specific interest in the research – such as a parent group or participants in a research project; professionals including local businesses, charities and government agencies; and schools or college students, with organisers working in conjunction with the teachers. But some also bring together quite disparate audiences to increase networking and stimulate new ideas.

Organisers have the freedom to not only be creative in their event design but also to try innovative approaches which suit the audience needs, and this has created a variety of different formats. From film screenings, talks, exhibitions and debates, to plays, workshops, seminars – even woodland and urban walks – the Festival has enabled the creative side of academics to blossom.

Some headline-grabbing subjects covered by this year’s Festival include vampires and synthetic blood, age stereotypes, parenting, the Olympics, and sex workers.

The ESRC also ran a flagship Festival event, ‘Celebrating the social sciences’, that showcased the impacts of social science research to an audience of over 100, including policymakers. Guest speakers David Willetts MP, Minister for Science and Universities, and Mark Easton, BBC News Home Editor, highlighted the impacts and the contribution of social sciences both at home and internationally.

Commenting on the Festival event in his blog, David Willetts said: “We should recognise and celebrate the social sciences and the enormous contribution the UK makes to a global body of knowledge. The social sciences vastly improve our understanding of the world around us – our society, our economy, our quality of life and public health – and most importantly they help us improve the outcomes of people from all backgrounds and areas of society.”

For more information on the ‘Celebrating the social sciences’ event, to download a copy of the ESRC Celebrating the social sciences booklet or to view the accompanying video, see:


For David Willetts’ blog, see:

DEMAND MANAGEMENT — LISTENING TO YOUR VIEWS

In June 2011 we introduced changes to our existing peer review practices and submission policies, as well as self-regulation with the academic community taking the lead in quality assuring and regulating the number of funding applications submitted to us. Our expectation is that this combination of self regulation and changes to our policies and processes will reduce demand.

We will continue with this approach until at least autumn 2012, when we will review progress. We conducted an extensive consultation exercise over the spring and summer, collecting views on what further steps might be taken to manage demand. The consultation offered four main options — individual researcher sanctions, institutional sanctions, institutional quotas and charging for the submission of applications. We received a positive response, including detailed comments from 44 institutions giving a valuable range of opinions from the social science community. Respondents supported our desire to avoid the need to take further steps. However, if these were needed, the vast majority of respondents judged that the fairest method would be to limit for a certain length of time the applications from researchers who consistently fail to meet our required standards. Given this clear message, it is likely that any further steps will reflect these views.

We remain confident that by working in partnership with HEIs there will be no need to take further steps. There has been a very positive response from institutions to our call for greater self-regulation, and we expect that this will lead to a reduction in uncompetitive proposals.

For more information see www.esrc.ac.uk/news-and-events/news/15034/demand-management.aspx

NEW DATA OFFERS EXCITING RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

Data from Waves 1 and 2 of the Understanding Society Innovation Panel are now available to download from the Economic and Social Data Service. The Innovation Panel is used to test questions, procedures and methods in a context that is similar to the main Understanding Society survey and other household panel surveys.

But with 1,500 households this data also has a sample size that is sufficiently large to enable quantitative evaluation in its own right. The data are unique in that they cover the longitudinal data, the retrospective histories about people’s lives before the start of the panel as well as the experimental and methodological data.

For more information see www.iser.essex.ac.uk/2011/09/15/new-innovation-panel-data-offers-exciting-research-opportunities

INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

We invited applications for the first round of the International Partnership and Networking Scheme, aimed at fostering the development of long-term relationships with overseas social scientists.

The scheme awards are intended to provide flexible support for a programme of activity with the objective of establishing sustainable collaborations, leading to the development of joint research proposals. This year we expect to make approximately £25,000 (100 per cent fEC) each for a period of between two and four years. Successful grants will be announced in February 2012. For more information, see www.esrc.ac.uk/funding-and-guidance/funding-opportunities/15752/ESRC_International_Partnership_and_Networking_Scheme_2011.aspx

CELEBRATING THE CENSUS

A one-day conference organised by the National Archives looked at all aspects of the census in its historical setting. The census is a rich source of information on individuals, families, communities and whole nations. It tells us about occupations, migration patterns, family size and structure, and much more. Speakers looked at the censuses of Scotland, Ireland and further afield as well as how to make use of the census in research.

INTERNATIONAL PHD INITIATIVE

We launched an international PhD initiative in November to support up to 150 ‘twinning’ arrangements between PhD students at ESRC Doctoral Training Centres and institutions in emerging countries including China. The initiative aims to build social science research networking to tackle global issues and concerns. For more information see www.esrc.ac.uk/funding-and-guidance/funding-opportunities

THE IMPORTANCE OF KNOWLEDGE BROKERS

‘Knowledge brokers’ are intermediaries who promote the use of academic research by non-academics, including policymakers, professionals, charitable organisations, business, industry and the general public. Many UK university social science departments and research centres are now employing dedicated knowledge exchange staff to ensure their research creates an impact in the outside world. The ESRC Genomics Policy and Research Forum is organising an event on 7 December focusing on knowledge brokerage in the social sciences. For more information see www.genomicsnetwork.ac.ukesrcgenomicsnetwork/events/title,24718,en.html

GLOBAL UNCERTAINTIES LEADERSHIP FELLOWS

The RCUK Global Uncertainties Programme announced a call for Leadership Fellows to develop a suite of activities to maximise the value and impact of the Global Uncertainties Programme, alongside personal research. The programme helps governments, businesses and societies to better predict, detect, prevent and mitigate threats to security, focusing on six core areas. For more information see www.esrc.ac.uk/funding-and-guidance/funding-opportunities/16083/latest-opportunity-17.aspx
People

DR STEWART RUSSELL

Dr Stewart Russell passed away on 17 September 2011. Dr Russell was senior lecturer in Science Technology and Innovation Studies at the University of Edinburgh and had wide-ranging interests in the social and policy aspects of technology, and particularly issues of energy innovation and governance. His work crossed the boundary between natural and social sciences to constitute the newly emerging field of Science, Technology and Innovation Studies.

A Cambridge graduate in physical sciences, Dr Russell moved to Aston University, Technology Policy Unit, to study the social factors shaping technological systems. His PhD involved analysis of the limited progress of combined heat and power technology in the UK in comparison with its mainland counterparts, rooted in differences in policy systems.

From 1988 to 2006, he was lecturer and then senior lecturer in Science, Technology and Society at the University of Wollongong, New South Wales, Australia.

In 2006 Dr Russell joined the University of Edinburgh, where he played a key role in developing postgraduate programmes in Science, Technology and Innovation Studies and interdisciplinary research programmes in the area of energy and environment.

He participated in the UK Research Councils Energy Programme Heat and the City, and was a member of the ESRC/Defra Sustainable Behaviours Centre and Deputy Director of the Edinburgh Research Centre for Social Sciences.

Dr Russell was also a consultant to trade unions, community groups and government, and at Edinburgh he developed an innovative Understanding Technology public lecture series with the National Museum of Scotland.

A passionate environmentalist, Dr Russell was planning a carbon-neutral house at the time of his death.

PROFESSORS JOHN VAN REENEN AND CAROL PROPPER

Professor John Van Reenen with co-author Professor Carol Propper have been awarded the Arrow Award for the best paper in Health Economics, published in 2010 for their paper Can Pay Regulation Kill? The prize is awarded by the International Health Economics Association. Carol is Professor of Economics of Public Policy at the University of Bristol where she helped found the ESRC Centre for Market and Public Organisation. John is the Director of the ESRC Centre for Economic Performance at the London School of Economics.

DR LORRAINE WHITMARSH

BRASS associate Dr Lorraine Whitmarsh, has accepted the invitation to join the Welsh Assembly Government’s Climate Change Commission for Wales. The Commission was set up in 2007 to bring together the main political parties, sector interests, delivery bodies, academics and climate change experts to support the delivery of the climate change agenda in Wales. The Commission’s purpose is to agree the action needed to address climate change, provide leadership in tackling both the causes and consequences of climate change and make recommendations to the Welsh Government.

PROFESSOR MARK SCHANKERMAN

The Global expert services and consulting firm Berkeley Research Group has announced Professor Mark Schankerman as one of two new directors in their London office. Mark has been appointed to provide expertise in competition policy, intellectual property, telecommunications, energy and other areas.

The appointment is an important step in enhancing the group’s ability to offer exceptional talent and experience to clients in the UK and throughout Europe. Mark Schankerman is a Professor of Economics and a Research Associate at the Centre for Economic Performance, London School of Economics.

PROFESSOR IAN BATEMAN

The Science Advisory Council (SAC) of Defra has appointed Professor Ian Bateman lead investigator on an ESRC-funded project Social and Environmental Economic Research into Multi-Objective Land Use Decision Making. SAC provides support to Defra’s Chief Scientific Adviser so that they can independently challenge and promote the use of evidence in policymaking. The appointment runs until August 2014.

PROFESSOR PAUL BOYLE

Professor Paul Boyle, ESRC Chief Executive, has been elected as the first President of Science Europe – a newly formed organisation that brings together 50 research-performing and funding organisations from across Europe.

Science Europe will promote the collective interests of its member organisations, and streamline the co-ordination of policies and activities.

Speaking about his new role, Professor Boyle said: “I am honoured to be elected as the first President of Science Europe. International collaboration is critical to finding solutions to the major challenges facing the world today. Science Europe will allow us to work together to address these challenges by providing a strong, single voice for research-funding and performing organisations in Europe.”
Publications

Enterprising care?

What does it mean to be a volunteer in the UK today? More and more is being expected of volunteers and the voluntary sector in the UK. This book, based on ESRC-funded research, seeks to add new insights into individual action in that part of the economy that is beyond the state and the market. The authors examine volunteering from the perspective of the individual, the organisation, and the community.

For more information visit www.policypress.co.uk/display.aspx?K=9781847427212&st1=unpaid+voluntary+action+in+the+21st+century&m=1&dc=1

Making modern mothers

Researchers from the ESRC Timescapes Qualitative Longitudinal Initiative address what motherhood means today. This book draws on interviews with new mothers and generations of women in the same family, and documents the transition to motherhood over generations and time.
By developing understandings of how becoming a mother changes women’s identities, it reveals unique insights into the transition to motherhood. The book also explores the trend to later motherhood and the experience of teenage pregnancy.

For more information visit www.policypress.co.uk/display.aspx?K=9781847426048

The Scottish National Party

This book is a study of the SNP immediately after it came to power in May 2007. It is based on an ESRC-funded survey of the entire membership and elite interviews with over 80 senior party figures. The study questions the value of the civic-ethnic dichotomy in understanding nationalism and the picture emerges of a coherent left-of-centre party that accepts the pragmatism of its leadership. While independence remains the key motivation for joining and being active, a sizeable minority see the party as a means of furthering Scottish interests.

For more information visit ukcatalogue.oup.com/product/9780199580002.do

The Migration Debate

Sarah Spencer, Deputy Director for the ESRC Centre on Migration, Policy and Society, contributes to one of the most contested issues in Europe. This book provides a well-balanced, critical analysis of UK migration policies, in a European context, from entry controls through integration and citizenship.
Exploring the pressures and constraints that have shaped the policy terrain, this overview offers policy options as the foundation for a better-informed public debate. The migration debate will be of equal value to policymakers and a multidisciplinary academic readership.

For more information visit www.policypress.co.uk/display.aspx?K=9781847422859

EVENTS

8 DECEMBER

The role of older citizens in community building

This seminar will focus on the unpaid voluntary work of older adults and will examine wider questions such as what are inclusive communities and how best can we achieve them, and how the interplay of childhood, family, community and wider society influences inequalities in wellbeing. This seminar is the first in a series of joint seminars with the Institute for Volunteering Research (IVR) and Northumbria University, focusing on various issues related to volunteering.
Visit www.esrc.ac.uk/funding-and-guidance/collaboration/seminars/archive/older-citizens-seminar.aspx

12 DECEMBER

Big Society – A Critical Reappraisal

This seminar will build on a previous event entitled Big Society Evidence Seminar, jointly organised by the Third Sector Research Centre (TSRC) and the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) in October 2010. The seminar will cover the Coalition Government and the Big Society policy agenda. It will review the impact of Big Society politics and policies eighteen months on from the 2010 election – in particular focusing upon the implications of the Big Society for third sector practice and the relationships between third sector organisations and the state. Visit www.tsrca.co.uk/newsandevents/events/BigSocietyAcriticalreappraisal/tabid/850/Default.aspx

19-24 JULY 2012

2012 International Convention on Science, Education and Medicine in Sport

The 2012 International Convention on Science, Education and Medicine in Sport is the 2012 Olympic Games’ associated scientific convention, taking place in Glasgow just before the Opening Ceremonies. The Convention will replace and expand the scope of the former four-yearly Congresses for sport scientists and academics. The event brings together sport and exercise scientists, world-leading experts and policymakers from all disciplines, as well as including extensive public engagement and publication programmes. For more information, visit www.icsemis2012.com
The ESRC magazine Society Now aims to raise awareness of our research and its impact. It addresses a wide range of readers, from the MP to the businessperson, the voluntary worker to the teacher, the public through to the social scientist, and is published three times a year (spring, summer and autumn).

Society Now offers a readable, intelligent, concise overview of current issues concerning society.

To subscribe to the magazine, please send an email including your full name and address to: societynow@esrc.ac.uk

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More at www.esrc.ac.uk

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