Natural assets
The real value of Britain’s green and pleasant land
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 our main feature looks at land use and why any measure of the real value of land should include more than just the market value of agricultural produce.

We examine the recently introduced benefits cap – is it the best policy to cut the benefits bill?

Statistics are often quoted yet rarely understood. Why do we misuse statistics and how can standards be improved?

Research finds that women know less than men about politics and public affairs. Do they have less time to keep up with the news or is a legacy of past roles at play?

Why do people use the internet for cruel ends and what can parents, police and other organisations do to protect the vulnerable?

And Professor Gareth Myles discusses taxation and how national tax systems function in a global environment.

I hope you find the magazine enjoyable and informative.

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The views and statements expressed in this publication are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the ESRC.
ACROSS EUROPE, AND including the UK, people feel far more European than many Eurosceptics would suggest. A survey of over 30,000 respondents from all 27 EU member states finds that European identity is proving resilient to the unprecedented crisis that Europe has faced in the past few years. But a rift is growing between increasingly ‘European’ young people and an older generation who are less likely to identify with Europe, say researchers Dr Michael Bruter and Sarah Harrison.

“On a ten-point scale, the level of self-perceived European identity of the average EU citizen is 7.1”, explains Dr Bruter. Even in Europe’s most Eurosceptic countries, a majority of citizens feel European. In the UK, 55 per cent of Britons and 68 per cent of Northern Irish have an identity score of five out of ten or above.

“Many in the British media – and even some politicians – seem to think that so-called ‘Euro crisis’ could mark the beginning of the end for the European Union, at least in its political dimension, but what citizens tell us is quite different”, says Dr Bruter. A panel-study survey of a representative sample of British citizens between 2009 and 2012 reveals that levels of European identity in the UK are very stable over time. On a ten-point scale, they have only reduced by 0.2 on average over the whole period and actually increased for young citizens.

Age matters, it appears, even in the images that citizens associate with the European Union. While respondents aged 45 and above predominantly think that if the EU were an animal, it would be an elephant, the majority of 18-45 year olds would instead liken it to a lion. When asked to associate the EU with a key human flaw or quality, the over-45s’ top answer is ‘stupidity’ and for under-45s, ‘intelligence’. This, Professor Bruter argues, confirms an essential finding about the European identity of the British public. “Beyond rather meaningless averages, there is a tale of two publics, one fiercely non-European, and one of the largest proportion of highly ‘Europeanised’ people in the whole of Europe. What we learn here, is that beyond education, there is a generational rift on Europe in the UK, which is reinforced by the contrasting experience of EU citizenship by younger and older citizens in their everyday life”, he suggests.

Looking ahead, the study suggests even stronger ‘Europeanising’ in future. “Over 90 per cent of Europeans believe that their children and grandchildren will feel more European than them”, says Dr Bruter. Moreover, widespread support exists for broader EU citizenship rights such as EU-wide referenda and the direct election of a President of the European Council, even in the UK. “Overall, European identity is still seen as in the making, progressing, and evolving”, he concludes. “Europeanness is still perceived as part of our ‘future’ even more than our present.”
**IN BRIEF**

**BIG SOCIETY BENEFITS**
What opportunities exist for disabled people with learning disabilities to contribute to, and benefit from, the Big Society? Researchers from four UK Universities – Sheffield, Manchester Metropolitan, Northumbria and Bristol – will work with organisations for disabled people, activists and allies to discover how disabled people with learning disabilities are participating in their communities, in public services and in social action.

*ESRC grant number ES/K004883/1*

**NEW LIFE STUDY**
The Life Study is an innovative longitudinal study that will track social, health and biological information for up to 100,000 UK babies and their families from all walks of life through pregnancy, birth and early years. Developed by an interdisciplinary group of UK scientists, it will collect extensive information on the health, development and life circumstances of a new generation of UK children.

*ESRC grant number ES/L002353/1*

**RISING FOOD PRICES**
Global food price rises threaten to undermine progress in improving maternal and child health and nutrition. Evidence suggests even temporarily high food price rises affect the long-term development of children. Researchers aim to assess the effects of food prices on reproductive and child health and identify national, state and household responses that may mitigate or exacerbate the health effects of rising food prices.

*ESRC grant number ES/K013130/1*

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**Older people in the UK contribute not just cost**

OVER-EMPHASIS ON the costs of Britain’s ageing population rather than fully valuing older people’s contribution to society shows a widespread failure to understand the experience of ageing, concludes a major research project. “As a society generally we view ageing as a ‘problem’ which must be managed”, says Professor Philip Tew. “Our core finding is that ageing cannot be treated as a single, solvable social problem; policymakers need to assume less and listen more to what ordinary older people actually feel and think.”

Drawing upon mass observation diary-keeping, supplemented by reflective reading diaries kept by volunteer group members from the Third Age Trust, a team of Brunel University researchers set out to discover how 300 selected older people judged their lives, their treatment and how they were viewed, as well as assessing their reaction to policies affecting older people. Professor Tew says: “We sought to give voice to older people, a rare opportunity in a society frequently denying such people any opportunity to articulate views on key social and economic issues.”

This study’s findings challenge many of the current assumptions about older people voiced in a public policy debate which seems exceedingly wide of the mark. For example, not one individual raised fear of crime as an issue, nor did participants appear disproportionately prone to feelings of isolation and loneliness. Rather, many described ageing as a positive experience, a phase of greater confidence, peace and self-acceptance.

Many participants resented current policy narratives that emphasise the costs of an ageing population while ignoring the wide variety of contributions of older citizens, from paying tax to voluntary work and acting as carers for the young and old. Much resentment was voiced concerning ‘smash and grab’ policies aimed at either taking older people’s assets to fund residential care or removing certain key universal benefits such as free transport and swimming which help people remain active and socially engaged. Almost universal fear was expressed about poor NHS and residential care – based mostly on personal experience rather than anecdote – as well as considerable disillusionment with politicians and the policymaking process.

Overall, age-based stereotyping and discrimination were considered serious issues. Professor Tew concludes: “Clearly ageing is a unique experience for each individual. Many older people feel undervalued and marginalised by the political class. Actually they want greater recognition of their active role in society and more dignity.”

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Drug contracts on the rise

CONTRACT-LIKE AGREEMENTS between drug users and drug treatment providers are widely used within drug treatment services in England, says a new study. These agreements typically set out what is expected of the service users (eg, attendance, participation, providing samples for drug testing etc) and what the service will provide in return.

“One of the abiding challenges for drug treatment services is how to engage drug users effectively”, says researcher Professor Toby Seddon. “Findings show that the novel practice of contractual governance may have considerable potential but does raise important issues concerning justice and rights, for example, what a ‘breach’ of an agreement may consist of and the response to this breach. Clearly this important area of emerging practice raises significant theoretical and policy questions.”

Lap-dancing clubs ‘sexist’ but not a nuisance

LAP-DANCING CLUBS tend to raise public concerns about crime and disorder only when they are situated too near people’s own homes or local schools, according to a new study of lap-dance and striptease clubs in England and Wales. Research shows that many residents consider lap-dance clubs ‘lower the tone’ of neighbourhoods, but do not find clubs located in town centres inappropriate. Only one in ten respondents felt there is no suitable location for lap-dancing clubs.

“The research found that women, people over the age of 40, those who have lived in their current home for over five years and those with children are most likely to argue there are too many lap-dance clubs in their town. Opposition to lap-dancing venues appears mainly based on perceptions that clubs normalise sexism and promote anti-social behaviour rather than any direct experience of crime”, says researcher Professor Phil Hubbard.

“But our study did not uncover evidence that these clubs cause more nuisance or crime than other night-time venues.”

Not all clubs were perceived to have similar impacts on their locality. Some clubs were judged to be better managed and less likely to be lowering the tone, primarily based on their external appearance. Those viewed as ‘sexualising’ the street are most likely to cause offence, and create fear among those already fearful of the city at night”, says co-researcher Dr Rachela Colosi. The findings have already been used as evidence in licensing hearings where local councillors have been attempting to balance the concerns of local residents with the rights of licensees and business managers.

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Impact of protective measures

SPECIAL MEASURES FOR witnesses in rape trials – such as protective screens, live-links and video-recorded evidence – do not affect jurors’ evaluation of the evidence, says a recent study. Witnesses in criminal proceedings are generally required to give evidence ‘live’ in open court but, since 1999, some victims of rape have been granted more ‘witness-friendly’ trial arrangements.

Researchers explored whether the use of special protective measures affects juror decision-making. Based on simulation of four different rape trials, findings suggest that use of video testimony did not reduce the emotional impact of evidence compared to evidence given in person. Nor did special measures substantially affect jurors’ evaluations of the rape testimony or perceptions of trial fairness.

Faith learning largely invisible

MANY UK TEACHERS are unaware of the significant amount of out-of-school learning that takes place in faith settings, says a new study. Researchers suggest that mainstream schoolteachers need to know more about the knowledge and skills learned by children in their faith settings so they can support the whole child.

“Faith is highly important in the lives of many children and their families”, says researcher Professor Eve Gregory. “This is especially the case for families who have recently migrated to the UK, where the faith provides both community and individual support.” In this study, researchers set out to investigate how 16 children aged between four and 12 from the Bangladeshi Muslim, Ghanaian Pentecostal, Polish Catholic and Tamil Hindu communities became literate through faith activities in London between 2009 and 2013.

Findings show that the scope and nature of learning through faith-related activities in children’s lives is remarkable. Faith permeates children’s everyday lives, underpinning language and literacy activities, fostering both bilingual and biliteracy skills as well as logical reasoning, culture, social, artistic and creative skills.

“A significant amount of learning takes place in faith settings and we hope that teachers can see how much skill and knowledge this brings into the school setting and how they themselves can build on that”, says Professor Gregory. “Government reports are urging teachers to reach out to their communities to promote social cohesion. It would seem a matter of urgency for teachers to know more about children’s skills and knowledge developed through faith literacies if this aim is to become a reality in school.”

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Short prison sentences
a perennial problem

A NEW STUDY OF nearly 100 years of prison data custodial prison sentences finds that they were financially costly and ineffective in Victorian times and remain so today. Studies of prisoners today point to high rates of recidivism for those who have served short prison sentences and the inability of these sentences to reform or rehabilitate offenders. But the failed attempt to make short sentences ‘work’ goes back over 100 years, say researchers Dr Helen Johnston and Professor Barry Godfrey.

In this study, researchers examined the efficacy of prison sentences in reducing recidivism, the human costs of imprisonment for individuals, and the financial costs to government of maintaining prisons across nearly a century (1853-1945). Findings show that there was a re-conviction rate of 80 per cent for all Victorian prisoners and that those who received a short sentence for their first sentence had longer criminal careers and committed more offences. Some 65 per cent of offenders who received a short sentence re-offended within five months. Only convicts imprisoned for longer than ten years tended not to re-offend.

Examining the offending and prison lives of around 650 prisoners across almost 100 years, the study concludes, as contemporary commentators did at the time, that short sentences were very costly in financial and human terms and had little if any rehabilitative effect. In the past, as today, short sentences appear to have damaged chances of rehabilitation from the outset. “Our research shows that for over 100 years, the use of custody has cut away connections and support networks in the community”, argues Dr Johnston. “Sentenced offenders lose their residences, their jobs, and sometimes their family relationships as soon as they go through the doors of the prison. Given the legacy of evidence on the use of short sentences, it really is a wonder that anyone has any faith in them as a means of reform at all.”

It seems particularly perverse, researchers add, to continue with this ineffective policy in a time of austerity because the cost of imprisoning people for short periods is a significant drain on national resources (over £286 million in 2010 according to the National Audit Office).

“The key issue”, Dr Johnston says, “is that prison is doing contradictory things – reforming and rehabilitation as well as a punishment and deterrent – and all at the same time. Prison cannot do all of these things successfully now and, as this study shows, never has.”
Digital media is not currently living up to the hope that it would enable political parties to make their modern-day electioneering more participatory and grass-roots. Researchers from the University of Manchester explored the web content of political parties as well as Twitter, YouTube and Facebook and undertook interviews and surveys with voters and party web campaigners in a new study of how the internet is affecting electoral participation and campaigning.

Findings suggest that early optimism concerning the use of digital media needs to be tempered by realism. “A key question for us was whether the use of digital media is democratising campaigns by generating a more citizen-driven model that challenges the ‘top-down’ professionalised approach that dominated elections in the late 20th century”, explains researcher Professor Rachel Gibson. “Political parties in most older democracies are widely seen as having become more detached from the electorate, fewer people identify with them and are willing to take out membership. We wondered whether digital media and new technologies could help halt this trend by making campaigning more democratic and decentralised and help political parties to join forces with their supporters and involve them more directly in running the campaign.”

The research was based on the US 2012 experience and suggests that the direction of travel in digital campaigning is not necessarily one that makes participation a priority. Despite the highly interactive campaign of US presidential candidate Howard Dean in 2004 and migration of his internet advisors to the Obama machine in 2008, social media platforms in the most recent election served largely as treasure troves of data on individuals and their personal networks. Tools such as Facebook and Twitter now allow for an even more granular picture of the electorate to be built up and thus more effective targeting during elections.

In the UK, while the larger parties may view the internet as a new channel for their strategic Getting Out The Vote (GOTV) efforts, it is smaller parties such as the Greens that can benefit from putting it to organisational use by mobilising their activist base to recruit new supporters and encouraging more internal participation in party affairs.
Animated learning experiences

A PUPIL-INSPIRED animation, A Classroom Tale, is providing a pupil-friendly format to discuss how young people’s learning experiences can be improved. Previous consultation in Northern Ireland with 200 pupils (aged 12-15) had identified ten pupil-generated principles of what most helped them to learn and feel comfortable about being assessed in schools. For example, knowing what to do in any task or homework, getting detailed comments and a mark from the teacher, and not being made to feel embarrassed about work. In this project over 100 pupils in four pilot schools contributed their ideas, images and stories to A Classroom Tale based on their view of helpful and unhelpful learning. Evaluation of the animation by pupils, policymakers and teachers has been largely positive. Over 80 per cent of pupils saw the film as relevant to their experience as learners and 95 per cent of pupils identified with the main messages of the film.

The sleep benefits for memory

NEW EVIDENCE HELPS explain why poor sleep has negative effects on memory. In a study of sleep, dreaming and memory consolidation, researchers examined participants’ dream content to discover what memories the brain was consolidating during sleep. Based on the relationship of the content of dream to waking-life events, researchers conclude there is a seven-day period across which memories are consolidated, with most processing occurring one and five to seven days after events. Consistent good sleep may be needed to consolidate memory.

Students, shift-workers, new parents and others subject to sleep debt may find this research highly relevant, says researcher Professor Mark Blagrove. “Teenagers or students studying for exams might improve their learning and exam performance if they understood the importance of sleep to memory. Indeed, society as a whole could benefit if people improved their sleep quality and were hence able to learn more effectively.”

“There is a large number of people with mood disorders, either of anxiety or of depression, who may benefit from co-investigator Professor Matt Walker’s work on the connection between sleep quality and mood disorders”, says Professor Blagrove. Mood disorders and nightmares may result if emotional memory processing does not occur during sleep. Health professionals should be prioritising sleep in both prevention and intervention work, the researchers conclude.

Digital inequality

By combining the Oxford Internet Survey (OxIS) with the census and several special-purpose datasets, researchers aim to produce the first detailed geographic estimates of internet use in Britain. There are major geographic inequalities in internet access and use in Britain: For example, internet use in Scotland is 20 percentage points below the East Midlands. This project will investigate the geography of internet use and non-use.

Economic mobility

How mobile is UK society? Researchers aim to bring significant new insights to measuring how mobile UK society is today. The project will develop a picture of lifetime economic mobility in the UK and document the extent of biases that arise from estimates of mobility driven by using data at a single age. Greater understanding of intergenerational mobility will be of great benefit to policymakers.

Forced labour

A project on asylum seekers and refugees’ experiences of forced labour produced the first conclusive evidence of forced labour among migrants in the UK asylum system. This follow-on Knowledge Exchange Platform project will work with nine partner organisations involved in asylum-labour issues and develop strategies for tackling forced labour among refugees and asylum seekers.
Our national wealth is dependent on the natural environment. We rely on nature for the provision of food, water and raw materials, as well as services such as water treatment and flood defences. But, as highlighted in the UK National Ecosystem Assessment, the goods and services that nature provides are currently undervalued in economic decision-making.

Nearly three quarters of the land in the UK is agricultural, which includes land used for crops as well as grassland, mountain, moor and heathland. The total value of the goods produced from agricultural land to the UK economy is over £5 billion per year.

"It has been predicted that climate change effects may benefit agriculture in some parts of the UK."

But the world's climate is changing, and with it the UK's weather patterns. Extreme weather events have recently had an impact on UK agriculture, including drought, flooding, heatwaves and the freezing spring of this year.

"Food and water security are big issues here. Ecosystem services are vital to both food provision and water quality", says Professor Ian Bateman OBE, Director of the Centre for Social and Economic Research on the Global Environment based at the University of East Anglia.

Professor Bateman led the Economics team for the first phase of the National Ecosystem Assessment, which was the first analysis of the UK's natural environment in terms of the benefits it provides to society and continuing economic prosperity, within the context of climate change.

"Different aspects are valued in different ways. While food outputs can be valued using market prices, recreational values are assessed by looking at visitor behaviour and seeing how it responds as the type and quality of sites change", says Professor Bateman.

The Government has advised that farming practices must change to maintain UK food production in a changing climate and to supply the needs of a growing population. Important decisions must be made by both policymakers and land managers to achieve optimal use of agricultural land.

Land being used for crops in Britain has significantly increased, growing by 40 per cent from 1940 to 1980 and, since the Second World War, wheat yields have increased threefold. But these gains have negative impacts on ecosystems and the services they provide.

An estimated 97 per cent of semi-natural grassland has been lost in England and Wales due to the intensification of converting arable land. Between 1970 and 1998, biodiversity on agricultural land has declined by 43 per cent according to the Farmland Bird Index.

Degradation in ecosystem services, including species diversity, has impacts on agriculture. Professor Bateman explains: "Soil fertility combines with other types of inputs, for example fertiliser and machinery, to determine food output. But if ecosystem services are degraded then vital goods are eroded."

Professor Bateman and colleagues modelled the future of UK land-use using different climate change and policy change scenarios. The research also considered different regions based on their environmental characteristics like soil type, temperature and rainfall.

"Even within the relatively small area of Great Britain, variation in environmental conditions is sufficient to yield very substantial differences in agricultural productivity and, hence, land use", he says.

Typically, land use decisions are driven solely by the market value of agricultural produce. However,
this does not necessarily yield the best use of land from society’s perspective. “Our research shows how taking account of multiple objectives in a changing environment fundamentally alters decisions regarding optimal land-use.”

The team analysed the significance of changing land-use not only for agricultural production, but also for emissions and sequestration of greenhouse gases, open-access recreational visits, urban space and wild-species diversity.

It has been predicted that climate change effects may benefit agriculture in the UK, due to warmer, drier weather reaching colder, wetter regions, for example the upland areas of Scotland, Wales and North of England. But the effects vary regionally.

“While some areas will benefit from increased farm output, in the longer term this improvement may be tempered by increasing drought in the southern and eastern lowlands of England”, says Professor Bateman. “Here spatial targeting of policies can generate major gains.”

Professor Bateman also highlighted that the predicted benefits will not occur if there is an increased frequency of extreme weather events, such as occurred this summer. “This will cause droughts which will obviously impinge on food production.”

Our nation is heavily dependent on imported food and subject to the effects of climate change on the global food system. UK food self-sufficiency has declined rapidly in the past few decades, from almost 80 per cent in the 1984 to 60 per cent in 2010.

“There is also the wider issue that climate change globally may disturb the international balance of food supply and demand and raise prices”, warns Professor Bateman.

The team’s modelling revealed that a policy scenario favouring intensification of farming achieves the highest gains when comparing future food production in terms of market value alone. But this is not necessarily good for the UK as a whole.

Significantly, when environmental and social values are factored into the analysis the maximum food scenario delivers lower overall values than the current baseline. Here the policy scenario with the highest gains is one that supports sustainable use of natural resources. Results also show that conserving biodiversity incurs relatively low costs.

The research recommends implementing an approach that considers both the total value of land, rather than just the market value of agricultural produce, and targets different regions based on their environmental characteristics.

“We need to look at all of the values associated with land use and take them into consideration in making decisions”, says Professor Bateman.

But a new direction for land use decisions will not necessarily be easy to achieve. Implementing policy change comes with some major challenges.

The first challenge concerns the motivations of land managers. How can changes be delivered without encouraging land-use that is privately beneficial?

“In the UK, the obvious mechanism through which that goal could be achieved is reform of the European Union’s Common Agricultural Policy”, says Professor Bateman.

Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) payments to UK farmers are currently in excess of £3 billion per annum, with relatively little assessment of their environmental performance. Professor Bateman suggests securing the participation of land managers by reforming the CAP to a Payment for Ecosystem Services system, which would reward farmers for delivering ecosystem services.

The second challenge recognises the need for a mechanism to implement the suggested area-based targeting of policy. Varying policy from region to region would increase the pressure placed on both decision-making and administrative bodies.

A further challenge acknowledges the difficulty in targeting rewards for delivering ecosystem services, when the costs of doing so differ across regions and land managers.

Professor Bateman concludes: “If society wants to change land use it needs to be prepared to pay for it. Furthermore, if we want to increase food security in an increasingly uncertain world this is unlikely to be a costless operation.”
Social science studies all aspects of society and affects us all every day – at work, in school or college, within our communities, when exploring our identities and expressing our beliefs. Here's an opportunity to bring social sciences to the classroom: ‘Where do I belong?’ – the ESRC photo competition for young people.

We're challenging young people aged 14-18 to take a picture of where they feel they belong. Who am I? Where do I fit in – in my family, my community, the wider world? How do I see the world around me and what forms my opinions?

All winning and shortlisted images will be displayed in a ‘Where do I belong?’ exhibition that runs from 17-23 March 2014 as part of National Science and Engineering week.

Total prize fund: £2,800
Closing date for entries: Midnight, 9 December 2013
For more information and to enter: www.socialscienceforschools.org.uk/photography-competition
An element of the government’s welfare reform programme that has received much attention is the benefits cap for working-age families. The cap is being rolled out across the country at the time of writing, and is set at £350 per week for childless single people and £500 per week for other families. It will not apply to recipients of certain disability benefits or Working Tax Credit, or to families with earned income exceeding £430 per week.

Despite the hype, this is a policy that will affect relatively few families – 40,000, according to the latest government estimate – and consequently will save the government little money: about £185 million per year. To put this in context, other cuts to welfare during the fiscal consolidation are affecting millions of working-age benefit recipients, and will amount to more than £20 billion per year of reduced spending by the end of this parliament. But many of those who are affected by the benefits cap will lose substantial amounts: an estimated average of about £90 per week, or almost £5,000 per year.

How could families be in receipt of more than £500 per week in benefits? Put simply, they must have either a large number of children or high housing costs (or both). A couple with four children and no private income would be entitled to about £393 per week in Jobseeker’s Allowance, Child Benefit and Child Tax Credit. If they paid rent of £107 per week or more (plausible rent levels for those who rent privately or are in social housing in London), a Housing Benefit claim to cover this would mean that they hit the cap.

A smaller family could also be affected by the cap if they live in a particularly high-rent area such as London and consequently claim lots of Housing Benefit (for example, a three-bedroom household who rent privately in the highest-rent areas can cover rent of up to £340 per week via Housing Benefit). The Government’s Impact Assessment estimated that 69 per cent of affected families have at least three children, and 54 per cent live in Greater London.

What will the policy achieve, apart from reducing state benefit payments to about 40,000 families with many children and/or high housing costs, and is it the most effective approach? By Robert Joyce

“...The best-targeted response would surely be to change the specific benefit rates...”
something the Government would not be keen on, as it has said that it wishes to reduce couple penalties in the tax and benefit system.

Crucially, is a benefits cap the best approach to take to deal with benefit payments deemed excessive? If the government thinks that the system is giving some families overly generous benefit entitlements, it must believe that some benefit rates are inappropriately high. The best-targeted response would surely be to change the specific benefit rates responsible – in this case, this would point towards cutting the amount families receive for having large numbers of children and/or reducing the value of housing costs against which people can claim Housing Benefit.

The apparent simplicity of instead just placing a cap on total benefit receipt might look appealing, and may well be politically expedient. But it seems incoherent for a Government to set a system of benefits which it evidently thinks gives some families excessive entitlements, and to then attempt to ‘right this wrong’ with a cap.

If starting from scratch, this is surely not the approach one should want to take. And the Government is starting from scratch – the new Universal Credit is to replace almost all of the existing system of means-tested benefits and tax credits for those of working age. If it has a view on the maximum reasonable level of benefit entitlement for these people, then it should design Universal Credit (and in particular, the child and housing cost additions within it) to reflect that view. It is not clear what is gained from instead layering a cap on top of a system that is designed to allow higher payments.

The approach of tweaking particular benefit rates, rather than imposing a post hoc cap on total benefit receipt, would also force the Government to think carefully about (and be explicit about) the features of the current benefits system that it considers inappropriate. Apart from improving the quality of its solution to the perceived problem, this may also improve the quality of wider debate about the issue. After all, it would make clear precisely what the debate is about.

Robert Joyce is a senior research economist at the Institute for Fiscal Studies working in the Direct Tax and Welfare sector. His main research interests relate to income distribution and the design and effects of the tax and benefit system.

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THE RECENT RSS/IPSOS Mori report shows that the public’s ignorance of many of the key statistics in public life is second only to their distrust of statistics as such. At least this is coherent: why bother about something you don’t believe in!

Media professionals know this only too well: they focus on ‘the stories behind the numbers’ and use statistics, if at all, as a fetish that warrants the ‘scientific’ credentials of their argument. Any number will suffice. ‘Nine out of ten cats prefer...’ is nonsense, but it makes little less sense than most of the numbers in public discourse, from the Sun to the Financial Times.

If you doubt this, ask yourself the following three questions. What is the approximate size of the national debt? And of the national deficit? And what is the difference between a debt and a deficit? This has been the focus of British politics for the last five years, yet I doubt if one voter in a hundred has these figures to hand. Inspired by a Paul Krugman comment, Google recently surveyed US voters’ knowledge of its deficit. A vast majority thought it was rising, with 40 per cent saying it was rising fast. In fact it is falling rapidly.

This should not surprise us. We know that typically people form opinions and then become alert to ‘evidence’ that reinforces them, regardless of its quality or veracity. Cognitive psychologists such as Nobel laureate Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky have shown that the human brain can effortlessly construct convincing cause-effect stories from flimsy or just downright irrelevant material. We effortlessly ‘see’ stories in random noise.

It is possible that the origin of this lies in the evolutionary advantage of being alert to danger: that pattern of long waving grass might be a tiger and it is better to be safe than dinner. But such an account is, of course, itself an example of this cognitive bias. Conversely, the human brain finds statistical reasoning laborious, slow, error-prone work.

An earlier Royal Statistical Society (RSS) enquiry asked MPs a simple probability problem: what was the chance of two heads if a coin was tossed twice? MPs are continually making decisions that require them to weigh up competing probabilities, yet only 40 per cent answered correctly, even though the question was multiple-choice. I defy anyone to produce a copy of any newspaper that is free of some statistical howler. The Telegraph recently reported that there were 100 cod left in the North sea. Presumably the copy editor had neither eaten fish and chips recently, nor paused to ponder how one might possibly estimate such a tiny number in such a vast expanse of ocean. Had (s)he fancied a glass of wine with their fish supper, the Daily Mail it came wrapped in might have put them off. It recently declared that a glass of wine increased ‘the risk of death by 15 per cent’. Before you conclude that a bottle of wine is lethal, keep in mind that we all have a 100 per cent risk of death.

Statistical reasoning may be beyond journalists or MPs, but it lies at the heart of almost all science, because it is virtually the only way to produce forms of knowledge that can escape from human observers’ cognitive biases. One can think of the explosion of knowledge that has transformed the world over the last five centuries as the rise of statistical reasoning: the substitution of logical evidence-gathering, interpretation and testing for leaps of faith or dogma.

This is especially true of the social sciences where the signal method of the natural sciences – the experiment – is rarely possible and the alternative – systematic observation – is inherently
statistical. Such an approach to understanding the world is cumbersome, painstaking and slow: it sweats out useful knowledge in meagre drops rather than grand, persuasive narratives. But it has built the world we live in today. The arrival of ‘Big Data’ will re-inforce this, prompting Hal Varian of Google to declare that the ‘sexiest’ subject to study this century will be … statistics!

Politics and public debate is not the same as science, but it is impoverished by the routine abuse and misuse of statistics. A civil servant or journalist who writes gibberish can be given Sir Ernest Gowers’ Plain Words, or ridiculed in Pseuds Corner. In any event their ability to present, compare and analyse arguments will likely have been honed by several years of essay writing at university. But when they botch the numerical or statistical evidence it is less likely to be noticed. Partly this is because many of their colleagues will likely be fellow botchers.

Perhaps more important is that the devil is typically in the numerical and statistical detail, while public discourse inevitably centres on the bigger picture. This creates grand opportunities for making statistical mischief. The remedy for this sorry state of affairs lies in improving standards. Sloppy use of numbers should become as unacceptable as turgid prose or speech. This would also give the media a more critical edge, and the ability to critically assess the mass of numbers thrown at it by government, corporations, NGOs and even scientists.

Some of the responsibility for our current predicament lies with our education system.

Almost alone amongst developed countries, school pupils in the UK can stop studying maths at 16. Too many have a ‘bad experience’ of the maths they do study, and the maths curriculum itself is almost devoid of statistics. Other subjects (with the exception of Physics) restrict their maths content to remain ‘attractive’ to students and teachers.

One might expect universities to do better but recruitment competition discourages higher maths entry requirements. MPs might have done PPE at Oxford. Unless they’d followed the economics pathway their degree would have been statistics-free. In the social sciences less attention is paid to statistics in the UK than elsewhere as three recent international benchmark reviews have highlighted.

Things are, thankfully, changing. Fifteen Q-Step centres in UK universities start this month. These are part of a £19 million-programme to revolutionise social statistics training in the social sciences, funded by the Nuffield Foundation, the ESRC and HEFCE. Michael Gove has declared that all children should study maths until they leave school, and consultation is underway about how best to achieve that. The RSS Statistical Literacy Campaign, getstats, has developed training for journalists, managers and others. Perhaps the next step will be a statistical Ben Goldacre of bad numbers. Goodness knows there would be no shortage of material.

* The debt (currently around £1.4 trillion) is the total amount of the state’s liabilities or borrowing; the deficit (currently about £120 billion) is the annual excess (or surplus) of government spending over receipts.

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A CROSS EUROPE PEOPLE’S experiences of relationships are changing: cohabitation, either as a precursor or as an alternative to marriage, is increasingly common; a growing number of countries have now legalised same-sex marriage or civil unions; and among heterosexual couples the persistence of traditional gender roles in the home is coming under scrutiny as women’s participation in the labour force continues to rise.

But the prevalence of these changes and the extent to which they have gained acceptance in society continues to vary significantly across countries. Research using data from the European Social Survey (ESS), collected over the last ten years in more than 30 countries, sheds light on Europe’s evolving social and moral fabric. It demonstrates how people’s experiences of and attitudes towards relationships continue to be shaped by enduring differences in countries’ culture, history and institutional and legal frameworks.

The ESS finds, for example, that whereas only three per cent of people in Sweden say they disapprove of the decision to live with a partner without being married, in Ukraine a majority of people (54 per cent) do so. Research by Dutch scholars Judith Soons and Matthijs Kalmijn suggests that such attitudes matter; the value climate surrounding cohabitation can have a direct effect on the wellbeing of cohabiting couples.

Using ESS data collected between 2002/03 and 2006/07 they show that, across Europe, married people tend to have higher wellbeing, ie, to be happier and feel more satisfied with their lives than people who are cohabiting. This remains the case even after controlling for differences in the background characteristics of married and cohabiting couples.

The size of the wellbeing advantage associated with being married varies significantly across Europe. Cohabitation has the greatest negative effect on wellbeing in Central and Eastern European countries such as Romania and Bulgaria. In contrast, in a number of countries, including the Netherlands and Norway, wellbeing is as high among cohabiting couples as it is among married couples. Soons and Kalmijn demonstrate that the wellbeing gap between marriage and cohabitation varies in line with prevailing social norms; it is smaller in countries where cohabitation is more common and where fewer people disapprove of cohabitation.

Attitudes towards homosexuality also vary significantly across countries. The ESS regularly asks people how far they agree or disagree with the statement that ‘Gay men and lesbians should be free to live their own lives as the wish.’ Agreement with this statement has increased over the last ten years in most western European countries. But there is less evidence of change across central and eastern Europe where acceptance of homosexuality remains low.

One factor driving the change in attitudes in many countries may be the decision to legalise civil partnerships and/or same-sex marriage. It is notable that those countries which are most accepting of homosexuality, including the Netherlands, Sweden and Denmark, were among the early adopters of civil partnerships and have since legalised same-sex marriage. Acceptance is also high – and has grown most rapidly – in countries such as the UK and Spain which have more recently legalised same-sex partnerships. In contrast, in countries such as Slovakia, Estonia and Ukraine where no such legal recognition exists, attitudes towards homosexuality remain largely negative and, in some cases, have become increasingly so in recent years. These findings

Division of household labour between the sexes is most unequal in southern Europe

Research using data from the European Social Survey finds wellbeing in relationships and public acceptance of non-traditional relationships vary greatly across Europe
suggest that endorsing same-sex partnerships through legislation may be more than just a reflection of prevailing public opinion and could actually help to shape subsequent attitudes on homosexuality.

Rory Fitzgerald, Director of the ESS, comments: “The increasing tolerance towards homosexuals in much of western and northern Europe highlights one of the most important social and moral changes in Europe for some time. However, the increasing divergence between large parts of the East and West shows that the European continent is firmly divided on this issue. The debate around this issue and the forthcoming Olympics in Russia reflects these differences clearly.”

One of the greatest social changes across Europe in recent decades has been the increase in female participation in the labour market. But changes in women’s work patterns outside the home have not always been matched by changes in the way household tasks are divided between the sexes. Across Europe, it is still common for women to do the majority of housework, even when they work full-time.

The extent to which traditional gender roles persist within the home varies across countries. Findings from the ESS 2010/11 show that the division of household labour between the sexes is most equal in Scandinavia and most unequal in southern Europe. Whereas in Sweden women working full time are responsible for around 60 per cent of the total time couples spend on housework, in Greece this figure rises to nearly 80 per cent.

This pattern reflects different cultural expectations regarding the respective roles of men and women in society with people in southern Europe – both men and women – more likely to agree, for example, that when jobs are scarce men should have more right to a job than women. The unequal division of household labour in southern Europe is further underpinned by a lack of policy help for women who want to combine work and family life.

Interestingly, research into the so-called ‘double burden’ of paid and domestic work by Professor Jacqueline Scott from the University of Cambridge suggests that men may stand to gain from taking on more of the housework. She and Dr Anke Plagnol, now based at City University London, found that northern European men whose female partners did most of the housework were more likely to experience work-family conflict and had lower wellbeing compared with men who did their fair share. It is not known why this might be but perhaps men in this situation feel guilty for not pulling their weight or perhaps the unequal division of household tasks creates tension between them and their partner. Whatever the reason, evidence that greater equality in unpaid work is associated with enhanced wellbeing may strengthen the case for tackling gender inequality.

Rory Fitzgerald, ESS Director, comments: “These findings from the European Social Survey highlight that public attitudes on a range of important social and moral issues are likely to continue to evolve over time. The ESS provides an important tool though which to monitor this ongoing evolution and to articulate the beliefs and opinions of the population to policymakers throughout Europe.”

Acceptance of homosexuality has grown most rapidly in countries such as the UK and Spain which have more recently legalised same-sex partnerships.
Home media use

Telecoms revenues fell by £0.7bn to £38.8bn during 2012, as a £0.3bn increase in retail fixed broadband revenues, a £0.2bn increase in retail mobile voice and data service revenues, and a rise of less than £0.1bn in corporate data service revenues were offset by a £0.3bn fall in retail fixed call and access revenues and declining wholesale revenues. The UK television industry generated revenue of £12.3bn in 2012, an increase of 0.8% on 2011, while total UK radio industry revenue stood at £1.2bn in 2012, up by 2.7% on the previous year.

Source: Ofcom: The Communications Market 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Digital TV</th>
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<tr>
<td>Proportion of UK homes with digital TV Q1 2013</td>
<td>97%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minutes spent watching TV per day (person aged 4+)</td>
<td>241 (4 hours)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Proportion of homes with a DVR</td>
<td>53%</td>
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<th>Radio</th>
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<tr>
<td>Proportion of radio listeners with a DAB radio in their household</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of listener hours through a digital platform (DAB, online DTV)</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minutes spent listening to radio per day (among radio listeners)</td>
<td>170 (2 hours 50 minutes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of local radio stations broadcasting on analogue (excluding community stations)</td>
<td>338</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of community radio stations currently on air</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of national radio stations (analogue and DAB)</td>
<td>27</td>
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<th>Internet</th>
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<tr>
<td>Total household internet take-up</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of fixed residential broadband connections</td>
<td>21.7 million (Dec 2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of adults with broadband (fixed and mobile)</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of adults with mobile broadband</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superfast broadband take-up (proportion of non-corporate connections)</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average actual broadband speed</td>
<td>12.0Mbit/s (Nov 2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of homes with a PC or Laptop</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of people who use their mobile to access the internet</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of mobile broadband subscriptions (dongles/PC datacard)</td>
<td>4.917m (Dec 2012)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Whoever controls the media, controls the mind”  Jim Morrison

People are sheep. TV is the shepherd”  Jess C. Scott

Percentage of people who now live in a mobile-only household. Mobile subscriptions have reached 82.7 million
Percentage of homes that have Freeview on their main TV set. Freeview offers up to 50 digital TV channels
Percentage of adults with home internet who use social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest etc

More than half a million subscribers have signed up to 4G mobile services. There were more than 500,000 subscribers to EE’s 4G mobile service seven months after its launch at the end of May 2013. This represented around 0.5% of all UK mobile subscribers. Take up of superfast broadband services has doubled since June 2012, increasing from 1.9 million in Q2 2012 to 3.8 million in Q1 2013

Source: Ofcom: The Communications Market 2013
**Internet market share**
Over a million new fixed broadband connections were added in 2012. The total number of fixed broadband connections continued to grow in 2012, increasing by 5.4% year on year to 21.7 million.

**Fixed line call volumes market share**
The cost of a basket of residential fixed voice services increased in 2012. The price of a basket of residential fixed telephony services (based on average use in 2012) increased by 0.5% in real terms in 2012.

**Other media activities**
Fifty-six per cent of all UK adults claim to have ‘media stacked’ while watching television – engaged in activities on other devices not related to what they were watching at the time.

“Communications tools don’t get socially interesting until they get technologically boring” Clay Shirky

“People are sheep. TV is the shepherd” Jess c. scott

**Time spent on services**
Average time spent using a fixed phone to make or receive calls fell by 29% to ten minutes per day Source: Ofcom: The Communications Market 2013
EVERY NOW AND again in research, the unexpected happens. You find things that bear no relationship to what you hypothesised in advance, or what you were tracking. It just jumps out from the computer screen.

This is what happened to us in an ESRC-funded study of news reporting and public knowledge. We were focusing on how different ways of organising the media affect public knowledge. We hypothesised that public TV reports more hard and international news than commercial TV, and that knowledge of these topics would be greater in countries where public service broadcasting is strong. This is indeed what we found, in line with previous work that one of us had done.

But what was also in the data came as a complete surprise. It showed that in all ten countries, where representative samples of 1,000 adults were asked questions about people and events in the news, men know more about public affairs than women. The ten countries were Australia, Canada, Colombia, Greece, Italy, Japan, South Korea, Norway, the UK and US.

The questions asked varied in terms of ease and difficulty, and took account of differences of news reporting in different parts of the world. They included questions like the level of unemployment in each sample country, and the identity of the Taliban and the Secretary General of the United Nations, with four possible answers (one of which was correct). An unmistakable gender gap in political knowledge emerged that seems to be an international phenomenon.

The results of this study were reported around the world, from Colombia and Norway to Japan to Canada, as well as in the UK. But, in retrospect, they should not have been as much a surprise to us, and to the media, as they were. They are consistent with other research which shows that men in western democracies are more interested in politics, and have a greater sense of political efficacy, than women.

What gives rise to the inequality of political knowledge between men and women? One possible explanation is that women have less time. Knowledge of public affairs is closely related to the consumption of news. In nine out of the ten countries, women consume less news than men.

Yet surveys indicate women who go out to work also shoulder a disproportionate amount of work in the home. It may be that women just have less time and energy in which to keep abreast of the news. News consumption increases with age. Yet women of child-rearing age increase their news consumption at a later age than men.

“Women may just have less time and energy to keep abreast of the news”

Another explanation has to do with how the news is reported. Across the spectrum of media, in all ten countries public affairs news tends to be reported in terms of what men say and do. Overall, women are interviewed or cited in only 30 per cent of TV hard news stories in the ten countries. News is thus reported in a way that...
discourages a sense of connection with politics among women.

A third, overarching explanation is that gender differences in political knowledge are a legacy of the past. Women were once socialised into occupying domestic roles as wives, mothers and home-makers, whereas men were expected to be the principal breadwinner and to be dominant in public life. Although this ‘two spheres’ ideology has been rejected increasingly, as more women go out to paid work and participate politically, this ideology has left an enduring imprint in many countries. In Britain, for example, only one out of 11 Supreme Court judges, only four out of 100 FTSE CEOs, and only 24 per cent of MPS, are women.

But as women’s access to socio-economic resources increases, it would seem reasonable to assume that gender differences will tend to equalise. The evidence of this study is rather equivocal. On the one hand, women in wealthy countries with a high investment in education, such as the UK, are better informed about public affairs than women in a poor country like Colombia. Likewise women in countries high in the global gender equality ranking, like Norway, are better informed than their counterparts in countries like South Korea and Japan which are lower down the global ranking. Improvements in education and greater gender equality seem to go hand-in-hand with knowing more about public affairs.

But in these ‘advanced’ nations, men are doing even better. The knowledge gap between men and women – that is the difference between the correct answers to questions about public affairs between men and women – is actually higher in Britain than in Colombia, and this is true also in Norway compared with Japan and South Korea. This suggests that the past is casting a long shadow. The path to greater gender equality, in terms of political knowledge, is strewn with rocks and debris deposited from a previous age.

James Curran is Professor of Communications at Goldsmiths, University of London and Kaori Hayashi is Professor, Graduate School of Interdisciplinary Information Studies, University of Tokyo. Info: www.gold.ac.uk
Over 170 events are taking place for this year’s Festival of Social Science. The events run from 2-9 November 2013 and are held across the UK, offering a fascinating insight into some of the country’s leading social-science research.

The Festival is a great opportunity for you to explore how social science affects your life and benefits society. It also gives social scientists a unique platform to engage with the public in a creative format.

For more information on the events in your area, see: www.esrcfestival.ac.uk
I n recent years, online cyberbullying, trolling, and inciting people to commit suicide have increased. In 2013 there was a wave of reports of online rape, murder, and bomb threats, with child-suicides linked to cyberbullying and online extortion. Whilst it is desperately sad that it took even one case for this issue to finally reach general awareness, at last the question is being asked: how can we make the internet safer? There is no single answer to such a complex problem, but many smaller improvements can, collectively, advance online safety.

Education is vital, both for potential targets and those responsible for protection. At present, the charity Childnet does outstanding work, teaching schoolchildren to be safe and kind online. Online safety has also been introduced across the 2014 National Curriculum. For best effect, however, these lessons need to be appropriately supported, sufficiently detailed, and adopted across all schools.

The assistance that Childnet offers teachers could be underpinned with compulsory online safety training in all PGCEs, since too many teachers currently don’t feel confident when it comes to advising pupils on safe social network practices. Meanwhile, parents would benefit from training in spotting the signs of cyberbullying, keeping their children safe online, and learning about the many organisations that offer help and advice. These include BeatBullying, Childline, Get Safe Online, the Internet Watch Foundation, the Safer Internet Centre, the NHS, and the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP).

Whilst these organisations do invaluable work, they cannot be a standalone solution. Sites themselves need to offer the tools and support to keep us safe. While most social networks require registrants to enter into agreements forbidding abusive behaviour, beyond that, sites differ widely in the availability, sophistication, and transparency of their safety features. Some even appear to stonewall those trying to tackle online abuse.

Where cases become too serious for a user or site to deal with, we would naturally turn to the police. But while the Serious Organised Crime Agency (SOCA) does tackle cybercrime, its focus tends to divide between child sexual exploitation and online fraud. SOCA and the Police Central e-Crime Unit are forming a new National Cybercrime Unit, but it remains unclear whether online abuse will form part of this organisation’s remit. In short, it can be difficult to get appropriately trained police to seriously investigate online abuse.

Parents would benefit from training in spotting the signs of cyberbullying, keeping their children safe online.

Many of the Acts that cover abuse were created before the advent of major social networks, and so are imperfectly equipped to deal with the new behaviours that these sites have created. It is therefore worth considering whether these Acts need updating, or whether we actually need a new Online Communications Act that covers the increasing range of abusive behaviours on the internet.

Finally, across the European Union, the Safer Internet Programme is promoting self-regulation and already several high-profile corporations have signed up to a set of Safer Social Networking Principles. This is a great start, but these principles are purely voluntary, and whilst it would be inappropriate to enforce such principles across all EU-based social networks, we need to ask whether businesses profiting from online social networks should have similar duties of care towards their site users as businesses selling goods and services in the real world.

The internet can enhance our lives immeasurably through entertainment and education, but for some, the internet will primarily present itself as a means to achieve cruel, selfish, and even criminal ends. If we are to fully enjoy the benefits, we must work towards comprehensively improving online safety, and the handful of ideas above merely begin to scratch the surface of the ways in which we can achieve this.
When does corporate tax efficiency become tax avoidance?

HMRC recognises four types of tax compliance behaviour. ‘Tax planning’ is when a taxpayer responds as Parliament intended to a tax incentive. An example would be placing savings in an ISA to benefit from tax-free interest payments. ‘Tax avoidance’ is when tax liabilities are reduced using tax laws to obtain an advantage that Parliament never intended. Whether Amazon assigning its sales to an affiliate in Luxembourg qualifies as avoidance has to be tested against this definition and the relevant EU rules. This has to be distinguished from ‘abusive tax avoidance’ which occurs whenever activities are undertaken solely for the purpose of reducing the tax bill. The recent General Anti-Abuse Rule (GAAR) uses a double-reasonableness test to define abusive avoidance as arrangements ‘the entering into or carrying out of which cannot reasonably be regarded as a reasonable course of action, having regard to all the circumstances’. Arrangements that might be regarded as abusive include the formation of ‘hybrid entities’ which are affiliate companies that exist only to exploit differences in tax rules between countries or the use of financial engineering to create positions that only deliver benefits through tax reductions. The fourth type of behaviour is ‘tax evasion’ which is the false statement of tax liabilities. In short, tax planning becomes avoidance when less tax is paid than Parliament intended, and becomes abusive when unnecessary activities are undertaken to reduce the tax bill. The headline cases that have been reported in the media are all examples of tax avoidance but not of abusive tax avoidance.

Have companies have always worked so hard to minimise their tax liabilities or is this a new phenomenon?

Corporations now work so hard to reduce tax liabilities because of the increase in opportunities to do so and the gains that can be made. In an older, simpler world the possibilities did not exist so there was little point in making effort. What has caused the change is the increase in globalisation, the growth of the multinational, evolution in the nature of products, and new ways in which products are traded. Most cases of tax avoidance arise from multinationals making the most of international differences in tax rates and regulations. If the tax rate is lower in one country than another, it makes sense for transactions to be recorded in the low-tax country. The evolving nature of products and new forms of trading assist with this. Intellectual property (IP) has become a more significant component of products and it is very hard to place a fair price on IP. When a coffee company in the UK states that it has to pay a licence fee to an affiliate in the Netherlands for the IP in a brand of coffee it is very hard for HMRC to determine what this licence fee should be. The company can effectively choose its own licence fee to minimise tax liability. Similarly, the growth of sales over the internet has created a divide between the location of the purchaser and the place to which the sale of the product is assigned. Sellers can select the location to gain a tax advantage without altering the experience of the purchaser. Finally, financial instruments are now available that were unimaginable 30 years ago. This permits complex financial engineering to exploit tax differentials to the full. Companies now work hard to minimise tax liabilities because the potential gains are so significant.

Does the UK need to have a tax system that is favourable to companies to attract businesses and commerce. Or does globalisation mean companies can operate in one country but choose to pay their taxes elsewhere?

The consequence of globalisation and the internet is that the identification of where companies operate is becoming ever more difficult.

The growth of internet sales has created a divide between the location of the purchaser and the place to which the sale of the product is assigned.
companies operate is becoming ever more difficult. It is known where they are located and registered since this relates to a legal requirement. Identifying the location of a specific transaction is much more difficult. Even if the purchaser believes the purchase is made in the UK it could easily prove to be with, for example, an Irish affiliate. To a considerable degree companies can choose where to pay taxes by suitable locational choices. If the UK wishes to collect corporation tax as it currently operates it does need to ensure that there is an incentive for corporations to declare profit in the UK. Setting the UK corporation tax significantly above competitor countries will see profits relocated elsewhere. The difficulty with this argument is that if all countries follow this advice then tax rates will be driven down as each seeks to gain advantage. This is the ‘race-to-the-bottom’ that EU rules against harmful tax competition are designed to avoid.

Could corporate tax ‘avoidance’ have a knock-on effect on individual taxpayers’ morale and ethics (i.e., why should I pay tax in full when companies don’t bother)?

There is no formal evidence on this issue. The concept of tax morale has been found to be important in empirical studies and the social norms of tax compliance provide a convincing explanation of observed behaviour. The link that is missing is how the reporting of corporate behaviour affects tax morale. It is clear, though, that countries can become trapped in a position where the prevalent ethic is the non-payment of taxation. Corporate failure to pay the ‘fair’ amount of tax cannot but push an economy in this direction.

Has any research gone into whether there is a theoretical threshold of where tax levels are likely to become unsustainable (i.e., would trigger widespread tax refusal)?

The response to a tax can take several forms. Take, for example, an increase in the income tax. People can respond to this by working less hard, or moving to a less demanding occupation where pay is lower. Or they can engage in tax planning to reduce the tax liability. At the extreme, they can

His bike, afterwards stating that ‘he doesn’t pay road tax, I do’ — whereas there is no such thing as road tax.

There are many misunderstandings about tax in all parts of society. The recent press coverage of major corporations has reported the very high sales revenues of firms and the surprisingly small tax payments. Where this is mistaken is that corporations pay tax on profits not on sales, and a high value of sales does not necessarily imply profitability. Amazon, for example, made losses for many years before moving into profit. Going further back in time, a large media fuss was made over a hedge fund manager who ‘paid less tax than his cleaner’. The issue in this case was that the hedge fund manager paid a marginal tax rate of ten per cent whereas the cleaner paid a marginal rate of 25 per cent. This does not imply the manager paid less tax: for example, ten per cent of £2 million is forty times 25 per cent of £20,000. This confusion between the average rate, the marginal rate, and the amount of tax paid is commonplace and hinders discussion. The idea that the road tax (or car tax as it is now called) is collected to pay for roads reveals the time it can take for incorrect beliefs to be revised. The revenue from the tax was hypothecated to pay for roads between 1925 and 1936, but still surfaces 77 years later.
Individual attitudes toward tax compliance have a significant social element. This idea is captured by the concepts of tax morale, social custom, social norm, and network effects. All of these capture the idea that there is a socially-constructed and supported idea of what is acceptable and what is not. In this context, ‘acceptable’ relates to both sides of the social contract between the taxpayer and the state: what is paid in tax, and what is received from the state. When the behaviour of individuals is influenced by social factors there can be multiple potential equilibria supported by distinct sets of social beliefs. This permits societies that are a priori identical to settle into different equilibria where the social beliefs are self-sustaining and coherent with the tax rates and state provision. For a given society to move from one equilibrium (perhaps with low taxes and low provision) to another (with high tax and high provision) may simply not be possible without some external shock to social beliefs. If one looks at the level of public expenditure in the UK before and after the First World War there is clear evidence of a step increase. This has been attributed to an ‘inspection effect’ where many of the privations of pre-war living were exposed by the experience of war, and led to a change in social beliefs about the appropriate level of provision.

Would the UK population welcome much higher taxes if the level of public-funded benefits were far greater? A common finding in opinion polls is that a majority of the population are willing to pay a higher rate of tax if the revenue is used to fund the health service. The experience of elections is that a party that offers this option is not elected. Two explanations can be offered for these contradictory findings. It is possible that the answer to the poll is given because of social pressure to appear generous and kind-hearted to the pollster. Alternatively, the opinion poll may be eliciting the truth but the political promises on the use of revenue may not be believed. In economics the issue of credibility is an important one. The promises of political parties are unlikely to be judged credible, particularly on the uses of tax revenue. Behavioural economics has also shown that people can hold beliefs that are at variance to the facts. So it is possible that all people can believe that it is everyone except them that will benefit from increased government spending. These observations show why it would be difficult for such a change to receive support even without entering into the debate on whether public or private provision is best.

Does HMRC spend a disproportionate amount of resources on investigating small-scale tax avoidance (such as the landlord who doesn’t declare rental income) rather than large-scale tax frauds by individuals or companies? HMRC is charged with the objective of maximising revenue. This objective can only be achieved if HMRC makes a careful selection of who to audit with the intention of making the best use of audit resources. The actual strategy they employ for such a change to receive support even without entering into the debate on whether public or private provision is best.
News briefs

ESRC CELEBRATING IMPACT PRIZE 2014
Applications for the ESRC’s 2014 Celebrating Impact prize are now open.

The prize is an annual opportunity to recognise and reward the successes of ESRC-funded researchers who have achieved, or are currently achieving, outstanding impact in categories including business, society and public policy, with additional awards celebrating international impact, early career impact, and an impact champion of the year.

A prize of £10,000 will be made to the winner in each of the six categories, with £5,000 to each runner-up.

The categories are:
- Outstanding Impact in Business – research which has generated business impact through successful knowledge exchange and engagement
- Outstanding Impact in Public Policy – research that has contributed to the development of UK public policy, at local, regional or national government level
- Outstanding Impact in Society – research that has made a contribution benefiting society more widely or a specific group of the public
- Outstanding International Impact – research that has achieved impact at an international level in business, policy or societal issues
- Outstanding Early Career Impact – student researchers who have achieved or show potential in achieving outstanding impacts in any of the above categories
- Impact Champion of the Year – a nominated individual who has a significant personal track record in knowledge exchange and supporting and enabling impact.

For more information about the prize, including videos from previous winners, visit: www.esrc.ac.uk/impact-prize

EVALUATING SOCIAL SCIENCE
The report from a recent ESRC study, Evaluating the Business Impact of Social Science, is now available.

The report aims to understand how social science influences and improves business, and the mechanisms that researchers use to help create and encourage impact and innovation. The study focused on the contributions of three of the UK’s leading business/management schools which have received significant ESRC funding in recent years: Cardiff Business School, Lancaster University Management School, and Warwick Business School.

For more information, visit: www.esrc.ac.uk/research/evaluation-impact/research-evaluation/impact-on-business-by-business-and-management-schools.aspx

NEW UK STRATEGY FOR DATA RESOURCES
A new report supported by the ESRC sets out a strategy for developing a UK social-scientific research community that’s engaged with major developments in data resources. The UK Strategy for Data Resources for Social and Economic Research 2013-2018, produced through the UK Data Forum, identifies priority areas for developing the data infrastructure to meet current and future research needs, and to ensure that the research community has the capacity to take advantage of new data resource opportunities.

The strategy identifies areas where greater co-ordination and new initiatives will benefit both data producers and users. It also explores how to enable researchers to make fuller use of new and existing data resources by boosting quantitative skills training, access to methodological support, multidisciplinary training, and collaboration between academic, government and private sectors.

Production of the Strategy has been overseen by the UK Data Forum, which includes representatives from public and private sector organisations holding and producing data, research funders, and those responsible for data infrastructure. It monitors national and international developments in data resources, identifying collaborative opportunities and enabling new types of data to be made available for research. To download the strategy, see: www.esrc.ac.uk/images/UKDF-strategy-data-resources_tcm8-26806.pdf

WHAT WORKS CENTRE FOR CRIME REDUCTION
A consortium of eight universities will work in partnership with the College of Policing to support a programme for the ESRC-funded What Works Centre for Crime Reduction.

The consortium includes expertise from University College London (UCL), the Institute of Education (IoE), the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, Birkbeck, Cardiff, Dundee, Surrey and Southampton universities.

The government has selected the College of Policing to host the What Works Centre for Crime Reduction – part of a world-leading network of centres to guide decision-making in public services.

The commissioned work will develop academic capacity within the UK to map the existing evidence base for crime reduction, label it for quality, cost and impact, and make it easily accessible for practitioners and decision-makers.

The work will also look to establish UK universities as global providers of practitioner training in evaluating evidence of what works and how to use evidence to make effective funding decisions.
People

NEW ESRC PROFESSORIAL FELLOWS
The ESRC is pleased to announce the appointment of seven fellowships under the Professorial Fellowship Scheme 2012-13. The scheme is designed to support leading social scientists working in the UK, by providing them with the freedom to pursue their own innovative and creative research ideas.

The new fellows are Professor Matthew Watson from the University of Warwick, Professor Orazio Attanasio from the Institute for Fiscal Studies, Professor Beverley Skeggs from Goldsmiths, University of London, Professor Joel Felix from the University of Reading, Professor Mark Harvey from the University of Essex, Professor Elizabeth Meins from the University of York and Professor Celia Lury from the University of Warwick.

Professor Matthew Watson’s fellowship will explore the ways in which the market economy has become embedded in our everyday experiences.

Director of the ESRC Centre for the Microeconomic Analysis of Public Policy, Professor Orazio Attanasio’s fellowship will look to research child development in low-income families in Latin America and South-East Asia.

Professor Beverley Skeggs’ fellowship will explore the relationship between Value and value by looking at two domains: the Digital Domain where friendships are harvested by companies to generate economic value; and prosperity theology where the relationship between values and values is in a tight loop.

Professor Joel Felix’s fellowship will investigate the fiscal origins of the French Revolution.

Professor Mark Harvey is the Director of the Centre for Research in Economic Sociology and Innovation. His fellowship will focus on how different parts of the world are dealing with climate change, the depletion of finite energy and material resources such as oil, and a growing population with increasing and changing demand for food.

Professor Elizabeth Meins’ fellowship will look to develop and evaluate an intervention package which will help improve parents’ mind-mindedness – the ability to ‘tune in’ to what their baby might be thinking or feeling. The intervention will consist of an animated film, short book and smartphone app.

Professor Celia Lury is Director of the Centre for Interdisciplinary Methodologies at the University of Warwick. Her fellowship will allow her to investigate how methods of social research enact the world, and how they are evaluated by those who use them and by those whose activities they measure. She will also investigate whether these methods are remaking the social world through their organisation of constantly changing processes of connecting, converting, ranking and listing.

Each of the seven fellows will make a significant contribution to the development of social science, while also acting as a champion for ESRC and the social sciences, promoting their vital role in addressing current and future issues for modern society and the economy.

PHASE TWO OF SCOTLAND FELLOWS
The ESRC has appointed two new fellows and one new Centre to undertake research to inform the debate in the run-up to the referendum on Scottish independence.

The fellows and the Centre will join seven existing fellows as part of a wider programme of work addressing issues around the Future of Scotland and the UK. The research will provide evidence and analysis across the broad range of issues and policy areas affected by the Scottish independence debate. It will assist in planning across a wide range of areas which will be affected by the outcome of the vote, such as culture and identity, business intelligence and fiscal and monetary policy.

The first newly appointed fellow is Professor James Mitchell from the University of Edinburgh. His work will look at the implications of the referendum on the governance of the rest of the UK as well as on local governance in Scotland.

Professor Mitchell says: “While there has been considerable interest in these issues in Scotland, the implications for the rest of the UK have tended, at best, to focus on a narrow band of issues. There is a need, therefore, to broaden out discussion and to reach out to other parts of the UK to help inform understanding of the wider issues.”

The second fellow to be appointed is Professor Brad Mackay from the University of Edinburgh. He will investigate how the constitutional and political uncertainty surrounding the future of Scotland is influencing business decision-making. “The uncertainties caused by a referendum vote on Scottish independence may influence any number of business decisions, such as whether to invest, re-invest, expand, withdraw, locate or relocate business activity within or outside Scotland and the United Kingdom”, says Professor Mackay.

Also funded is the new Scottish Centre for Constitutional Change. The centre consists of a consortium of Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Stirling and Strathclyde universities as well as the National Institute for Economic and Social Research. Led by Professor Michael Keating, the centre will analyse the longer-term evolution of the Scottish economy and investigate its ability to face future economic, social, demographic and political challenges.

“Our centre will focus on two sets of questions: options for constitutional change and their implications, and the response of citizens and social and economic actors to the prospects of change and to change itself”, says Professor Keating.

www.futureukandscotland.ac.uk
Publications

The radicals’ city. Urban environment, polarisation, cohesion

Bringing together case studies from Belfast, Beirut, Amsterdam and Berlin, this book examines the role of the urban environment in social polarisation. Despite their socio-political differences, these cities are telling cases of social polarisation. The radicals’ city. Urban environment, polarisation, cohesion by Ralf Brand and Sara Fregonese. ISBN 97814094951600 (hardback), 216pp @ £49.50. For more information see: www.ashgate.com/isbn/97814094951600

Experimental Politics and the Making of Worlds

From the theatrics of the 1999 Seattle protests, to the rebel clowns at the 2005 G8 summit in Gleneagles and the antics of the Yes Men, the crossovers between art and politics have become more visible and prolific. This book explores an innovative form of creative and communicative politics: the ‘performativity of encounters’ as a strategy for facilitating new ways of being, relating and making worlds. The book shows how performative encounters intervene in global and local issues such as the privatisation of public space and resources, human mobility and corporatisation of education. Experimental Politics and the Making of Worlds by Anja Kanngieser. ISBN 9781409440642, (hardback), 188pp @ £49.50. For more information see: www.ashgate.com/isbn/9781409440642

Habitus and Drug Using Environments

This book provides a sociological analysis of public environments affected by injecting drug use. Drawing on ethnographic research across several locations, it offers a qualitative and phenomenological account of the social organisation of public settings used for the preparation and administration of illicit drugs, informed by interviews with both injecting drug users and those whose employment is directly affected by public injecting drug use. It sheds light on the ways in which health and place interact to produce and reproduce established hazards associated with injecting drug use. Habitus and Drug Using Environments by Stephen Parkin. ISBN 9781409464921 (hardback), 290pp @ £54.00. For more information see: www.ashgate.com/isbn/9781409464921

Research Design

Research design is of critical importance in social research, despite its relative neglect in many methods resources. Early consideration of design in relation to research questions leads to the elimination or diminution of threats to eventual research claims, by encouraging internal validity and substantially reducing the number of alternative explanations for any finite number of research ‘observations’. This new book discusses the nature of design; gives an introduction to design notation; offers a flexible approach to new designs; looks at a range of standard design models; and presents craft tips for real-life problems and compromises. And it provides the rationale for preferring one design over another in a given context. Research Design by Stephen Gorard. ISBN 9781446249024, (paperback), 232pp @ £24.99. For more information see: www.uk.sagepub.com/books/Book238004

EVENTS

21 OCTOBER

NDA Programme and Age UK research showcase of the decade

There is significant work to be done to be better prepared for ageing in our society. It’s crucial that all those who work in and for later life use latest evidence on ageing to support those preparations. The New Dynamics of Ageing (NDA) Programme and Age UK will provide a unique opportunity to present that evidence at this joint event. www.newdynamics.group.shef.ac.uk/showcase

23 OCTOBER

NCRM annual lecture by Paul Atkinson: Why do fieldwork?

Professor Paul Atkinson will reflect on research from across his career, arguing for the continuing relevance of rigorous field research, in contrast to more vaguely-specified ‘qualitative’ research. He will emphasise the multi-modality of social life and the necessity for forms of ‘thick description’ that is faithful to the multiple modes of social and cultural organisation. www.ncrm.ac.uk/training/show.php?article=4313

28-29 NOVEMBER

How to set up and run a data service: the challenges of social science data

This is a once-a-year opportunity to go behind the scenes and learn first hand from specialists at the UK Data Archive. Over two days, participants will learn about the strategies and practices used in the Archive’s daily work, with a focus on storing and sharing social science data, including microdata, aggregate, qualitative and historical data. www.data-archive.ac.uk/news-events

13-14 MARCH 2014

ESRC Seminar Series - The Big Society, Localism and Housing Policy

Held at the University of St Andrews, this seminar will explore the latest issues and debates in the emerging fields of housing, localism and the Big Society. It will benefit policymakers and practitioners, and offer an opportunity to extend existing working relationships and establish new ones. bigsocietylocalismhousing.co.uk
Know society. Society Now

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).

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