Can travel change the world?

Ben Page: Polls, policy and Ipsos MORI

Understanding Society: the world’s biggest panel survey

The health impact of climate hazards
Welcome

WELCOME TO SOCIETY NOW, the Economic and Social Research Council’s (ESRC) new regular magazine which highlights ESRC-funded research and the impact of social science.

This issue covers a wide range of topics, from the cover feature on travel, to climate hazards, education and panel surveys, and opinion pieces ranging from children’s TV to space travel. I am also pleased to introduce the first In Focus supplement, which presents an in-depth look at ESRC activities in the third sector.

I hope you find the magazine enjoyable and informative, and I welcome feedback and ideas for content.

Editor in Chief, Jacky Clake

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THE SCALE OF problem online gambling may not be recognised by the government, gambling industry, researchers and support agencies, according to a major new study of internet gambling. The British Gambling Prevalence Survey 2007 suggests that rates of problem gambling in the UK may be as low as half a per cent. But, argues researcher Professor Gill Valentine, the extent to which online gambling is contained and self-corrected within families suggests that the scale of the problem may be greatly underestimated. Those who seek formal help or publicly acknowledge an online gambling problem may be only the tip of a significant iceberg.

Researchers undertook an online survey of more than 600 internet gamblers followed by in-depth interviews with 26 self-identified problem internet gamblers (20 men and six women). Some 92 per cent of respondents were male. They were predominantly white, aged between 25 and 44 years old, and employed. Most (80 per cent) lived with at least one other person. Spending on online gambling was significantly higher than spending on offline gambling.

Some 9.4 per cent of respondents identified what they were doing as problematic in that their gambling had shifted from a pleasurable pastime to a compulsion in which they chased losses and in doing so escalated, rather than solved, their debt problems. “Problem gamblers’ also admitted that gambling was starting to impact on their employment and relationships, that they felt less able or unable to stop, and experienced physical side effects.

The study reveals that online gambling is facilitated by today’s individualised ways of organising family life, says Professor Valentine. Respondents were successful in making their gambling ‘invisible’ by carving out time and space away from the family to gamble in secret. Indeed, pathways out of problem gambling commonly required a fundamental shift in visibility for the gambler.

“Problem gamblers need to become visible for not doing something they were doing invisibly before,” Professor Valentine says. “This means they are able to take part (and be visible) in both formal and informal organisations, such as self-help groups and financial organisations. In effect, once the gambler begins to address their gambling they are more available to be helped. Family support is crucial in forging pathways out of gambling, but the extent to which gambling is contained and self-corrected within the family means that the scale of this problem may well be underestimated.”

This study has implications for the gambling industry and support agencies. Researchers suggest that the industry and government must continually monitor the potential impact of the marketing and provision of internet gambling in order to fulfil their commitments to act responsibly.

Those who seek formal help or publicly acknowledge an online gambling problem may be only the tip of a significant iceberg. The study reveals that those who are most in need of help are likely to be the most invisible. It is only at the point that they surface as problem gamblers that they are likely to become visible to support agencies. However, problem gamblers currently have a limited understanding of the range and nature of specialist support that is available, often drawing on stereotypes of Alcoholics Anonymous that actually deter them from accessing help from formal agencies.
At risk on the road

UK ROAD USERS face such a diversity of risks and have so many different needs that no single policy approach to ‘ideal safe travel’ can exist, conclude researchers Dr Fiona Magowan and Professor Hastings Donnan of Queen’s University, Belfast. Each category of road user – eg, pedestrians, drivers, motorists, cyclists – perceives risks in the way they move through the city by day and by night in quite different ways.

For example, the needs of a car driver for easy access to a car park may be different to those of a pedestrian in negotiating a car park. Moreover, experts’ views of risk may differ from those of the general public. Signs, for example, may remind bus passengers not to alight from the bus until it has stopped, but no advice is given on how to manage the transition of walking down the bus while it is slowing to a stop. Many consider this movement potentially riskier and certainly more difficult to manage than actually leaving the bus.

Research further shows that so-called and designated ‘safe spaces’, such as dragon’s teeth outside schools, school drop-off zones, sleeping policemen in residential areas, pedestrian crossings controlled by lollipop people and large shopping centre car parks, are covered over with labels of ‘safety’ without necessarily decreasing the potential for risk.

Ongoing changes to traffic management technologies, the Highway Code, road safety strategies and driving tests have major impacts on all road users. However, each category of road user tends to assess risk in terms of the degree to which other road users adhere to or confound the rules and obey or disobey technologies. Policymakers currently view rights to the road partly in these terms and partly in terms of broader agendas of ideal safety conditions.

But, researchers conclude, the diversity of risks and the many contested perspectives on the roads means there cannot be a singular approach to ‘ideal safe travel’. This reality must be taken into account within training programmes, road safety organisation awareness materials and in planning and policy-making.

Difficulties persist for social housing

WIDE-RANGING PROBLEMS relating to social housing nominations and the knock-on effects on re-housing vulnerable households, including the homeless, persist, despite new social housing initiatives. Researchers from the University of Bristol reached this conclusion following a study of the allocation of social housing, focusing in particular on what participants defined as ‘problematic nominations’.

In terms of social housing provision, local authorities (LAs) have re-housing obligations but many have a limited stock of accommodation to fulfil these obligations, explains researcher Professor David Cowan. Registered Social Landlords (RSLs), on the other hand, have limited statutory obligations but have a supply of housing stock and sometimes all the social housing stock in an area. Today’s allocation process works through nomination agreements between LAs and RSLs.

“Our study identifies problems and tensions in the nomination process between local authorities and registered social landlords,” Professor Cowan points out. “Problems can arise in particular cases where nominations are made by local authorities for re-housing people whose behaviour and/or life-style may be thought to pose problems for the landlord.

Further difficulties occur where social landlord policies exclude households from their properties.”
Care burden increases for families

GOVERNMENT REFORMS to the provision of care for older people living in the community have disproportionately shifted the burden of care squarely onto the family, friends and neighbours of those older people who require assistance to live independently in their own homes, according to new research.

Demographic changes, notably increases in the size of the very old population (85 years and older), mean that the number of older Britons needing assistance with Activities of Daily Living (ADL) such as washing, dressing, cooking and cleaning has increased considerably over the past 25 years. Most care is provided by ‘informal, unpaid’ caregivers, predominantly close relatives and friends, but some also receive assistance from health and social services and/or pay for help privately.

Changes to statutory services for provision of long-term care to older people in the 1990s led to policymakers’ concerns that formal services would not only act to supplement the care already provided by family and friends, but serve in some instances to replace it. Those fears have proved unfounded, says researcher Dr Demi Patsios.

Between 1980 and 2001 the number of people receiving ADL-related help from other household members decreased substantially, yet the amount of ADL-related care from relatives living outside the household almost quadrupled. In addition, the level of support provided by friends and neighbours almost doubled. In the same period the number of older people (65 years and over) using a health or social service provider for their care needs decreased by 40 per cent. On the other hand, the number of older people paying for private help increased by more than 300,000. Taken together, the number of older people using health and social services went down by one third, whereas those using private paid help to meet their care needs quadrupled.

“Consistent and increasing responsibility for caring for older people by family, friends and neighbours, or expecting older people or their families to pay for their care needs without financial and practical help from government, is no longer sustainable,” argues Dr Patsios. “Government must find new ways to assist and support older people and their carers in order to improve not only the quality of life of older people but also of those who care for them.”

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IN BRIEF

MAPping MILITARY AIRSPACES

In terms of investigating land, sea and space, geography has a long tradition. To date, however, little research has focused on the geographies of airspaces and their militarisation by those states with hegemony over these spaces. New research will provide the first in-depth geographical theorisation and analysis of military airspaces. The project will focus on case studies from the United States and the UK.

ESRC Grant Number RES-063-27-0154

VETS AS REGULATORS

Recent animal health crises have highlighted the need for effective regulatory practices and techniques to control the spread of animal diseases. Vets are seen as trusted and effective advisors by policymakers and the industry. This study will investigate how vets act as regulators, how regulation contributes to job satisfaction, and the animal health benefits that arise from regulation.

ESRC Grant Number RES-000-22-2578

REPETITIVE BEHAVIOURS

A new longitudinal research project aims to increase understanding of repetitive behaviours in children. Restricted and repetitive behaviours (RRBs) such as repetitive motor movements, routines and rituals are common in all young children. But this study will help child-health and education professionals detect when change, or lack of change, in RRBs is atypical for a child’s age and level of development.

ESRC Grant Number RES-062-22-2771
IN BRIEF

CHILD HEALTH IN IRAQ
In 2006 and 2007 the Iraq Family Health Survey was conducted in all parts of Iraq, except for a few very unsafe areas. The questionnaire focused on child health, including illness, health care and household deaths. The study will focus on the link between child household poverty and health. The findings will be invaluable in the design of child health services.

CO-OPERATIVE CRIME
Very little research has been conducted on group crime in England. In order to advance the literature on co-offending and inform evidence-based policy to address it, this project aims to disseminate findings from a large-scale quantitative study of co-offending in South Yorkshire. The research will provide a detailed descriptive profile of co-offending and present predictive models of co-offending outcomes.

SPEEDIER TB DIAGNOSIS
Diagnosis of tuberculosis, the main cause of adult infectious death, requires the examination of several sputum samples and patients need to visit services several times. Patients can only initiate treatment after diagnosis. More efficient diagnostic approaches are being developed with support from the World Health Organisation. This study will assess whether these accelerated approaches could increase access to treatment.

Cleaners happy to embrace political action

THE LIVING WAGE CAMPAIGN, a new form of working class politics, is making progress among a potentially unlikely group of workers: contract cleaners. Contrary to expectations, new research finds that contract cleaners are willing to join a trade union and take part in a political campaign to demand better wages and conditions of work. Moreover, the experience of political engagement has a profound impact on the identity of those who take part. Cleaners interviewed during this research spoke of having more confidence, greater purpose and a sense of leadership.

London has had a living wage campaign — led by a broad-based coalition called London Citizens — since 2001. The campaign has spread from hospitals to the finance houses of Canary Wharf and the City, to universities, art galleries and hotels. Under pressure from the campaign, Ken Livingstone, the former Mayor of London, put resources into a living wage unit at City Hall and used a team of researchers to establish the annual living wage figure for London (currently £7.45 per hour — the National Minimum Wage is £5.50 per hour). It is estimated that about one in five workers in London falls into the gap between the national minimum wage and the income needed to survive.

Researchers examined the living wage campaign in respect to London’s contract cleaning industry. “The project highlighted the extent to which the London cleaning industry depends upon the supply of low-wage migrant labour,” researcher Professor Jane Wills points out. In one building at Canary Wharf, researchers found that the 105 cleaners came from 29 different countries. Many complained about the wages and conditions of work in the cleaning industry but were often more exercised by a perceived lack of respect.

However, many contract cleaners were willing to take part in the campaign for a living wage, which has proved remarkably successful in terms of wage rises and improvements in sick pay and holiday time for some 5,000 workers in the industry. Researchers highlight reasons for this success, including the consolidation of the cleaning industry over the past 20 years and the potential for the community coalition to work with contractors to secure more money from the main clients (finance houses, public sector institutions etc).

“Being led by a community coalition that includes churches, mosques, schools and trade union branches has also allowed the demand for a living wage to spread from the workers directly affected to a wider alliance,” Professor Wills states. “This means that traditional class politics (demands over wages and conditions) have become community and even metropolitan issues as the demand for a living wage is raised in a plethora of urban spaces, as well as being taken up by the Mayor.”

Researchers conclude that the living wage campaign points to the potential to create new political identities. The campaign has successfully mobilised large numbers of contract cleaning workers, many of them new migrants to the UK. This has been possible by developing new political strategies to organise beyond the workplace, to exploit the weak spots of a subcontracted economy, and to connect workers to a wider community coalition.
A NEW STUDY of transsexuals hoping to obtain sex-reassignment surgery through the NHS suggests that current interview techniques by clinic psychiatrists may be causing unnecessary distress.

Transsexualism is a ‘Gender Identity Disorder’ (GID) in which persons exhibit a strong and persistent cross-gender identification and a persistent discomfort with their sex or a sense of inappropriateness in the gender role of that sex. Treatment for the majority of transsexuals consists of taking high doses of ‘cross-sex’ hormones and (usually, but by no means always) undergoing ‘sex reassignment’ surgery.

Before transsexual patients can be referred for surgery, they must meet several ‘eligibility’ and ‘readiness’ requirements (including living full time within their preferred gender role for at least one and preferably two years) and must be assessed by at least two psychiatrists at the Gender Identity Clinic (GIC).

New research based on 194 one-to-one psychiatrist-patient consultations at Charing Cross Hospital GIC explored some of the tensions and misunderstandings played out during these consultations. Interviews conducted with a sample of 21 patients after their assessment sessions show that patients reported the manner of certain doctors to be ‘friendly’ and ‘approachable’ while other doctors were ‘hostile’ and ‘aggressive’. Less positive interactions occurred when, for example, psychiatrists overtly challenged patients’ answers or displayed scepticism about the truth, correctness or realism of the patients’ views of themselves or their situation.

The study looked in depth at one specific questioning strategy: the use of hypothetical questions (HQs) concerning ‘worst-case’ scenarios – for example, ‘what would you do if you couldn’t proceed to surgery?’ Researchers found that such worst-case HQs tended to be used when the psychiatrist was testing a patient’s commitment to its limits. However, while such techniques were beneficial to psychiatrists as a validation of their diagnosis and treatment recommendations, researchers question whether this technique (and other practices described as ‘less positive’ by patients) are successful from the point of view of a patient, who may be left feeling threatened, depressed and unsupported.

Most of the sample of 21 patients who reached the end of the treatment process admitted that while they may at the time have experienced a particular doctor’s manner as aggressive or hostile, ultimately they realised the importance of being challenged when making such a life-changing decision. “This ‘fear of failure’ is a significant finding,” says researcher Dr Sue Maguire, “in that it should alert policymakers to the need for support for young people, as well as financial incentives and attractive provision in order to encourage and sustain their participation in formal learning or training activities.”

The study further concludes that one way of preventing young people from entering dead end jobs would be to introduce legislative changes that would prevent employers from recruiting school-leavers without offering accredited training.

Learning fears for teens in dead end jobs

FEAR OF FAILURE holds back many of the 16- and 17-year-olds who leave school, enter employment and participate in no formally recognised programme of further education or training.

A new study reveals that many of the job-without-training (JWT) group attached high value to education and training, but their own personal experiences had marred their views about their abilities to progress through this route. Going back into education or training involved ‘taking risks’, not only in terms of the drop of income that would result from leaving work, but also in terms of the apprehension and insecurity felt about what this might involve.

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Part of the Identities and Social Action programme
UK FARMERS AND growers face the challenge of using more environmentally acceptable methods of crop protection while maintaining food quality, productivity and profitability. To date, much agriculture and food debate has polarised between the use of conventional farming methods, including chemical pesticides, and organic farming. Now, says researcher Professor Wyn Grant, there is a viable ‘middle way’: a chance to reduce chemical inputs using Integrated Pest Management (IPM) based on biological control agents such as naturally occurring fungi, bacteria or viruses.

Researchers from the University of Warwick looked in depth at microbial bioinsecticides (part of a group of microbial biopesticides) for the control of insect pests. These microbial biopesticides are applied in much the same way as chemical pesticides, but offer several advantages such as low impact on non-target organisms, compatibility with other natural insect enemies and limited toxic residue.

Despite the advantages offered by microbial biopesticides, their uptake has been very poor in the UK. “A key problem,” argues Professor Grant, “is that insufficient products are available on the market. This is partly due to regulatory barriers. The regulatory system in the UK was developed in accordance with a chemical pesticides model which does not facilitate the registration of biopesticides.” This situation contrasts with the United States, where a large internal market, generous financial support by the government and a clear mission by the US Environmental Protection Agency to facilitate biopesticide registration is smoothing the path for biopesticides.

In the UK, a Biopesticides Scheme introduced by the Pesticides Safety Directorate (PSD) in 2006 is working to improve regulatory innovation. But, says Professor Grant, shortcomings in the EU system of recognition are proving a significant barrier to the growth of a European-wide market for biopesticides. The absence of a functioning system of mutual recognition between member states means that there is no effective internal market comparable with that of the United States, which has a much higher rate of biopesticide registration and adoption. This makes it hard for small and medium sized enterprises, which are typical developers and producers of biopesticides, to secure economies of scale.

“Possible solutions could include the adoption of eco-zones throughout Europe whereby a product approved in, say, the UK could automatically be eligible for use in other countries,” Professor Grant suggests. “Another idea is that the EU approves a separate registration route for biopesticides which is not based on the chemical pesticides model. It is also crucial that the Pesticides Safety Directorate press ahead with its scheme to improve regulatory innovation.”

A further key role, however, could be played by supermarkets. At present, major supermarket chains claim they are under pressure from consumers to minimise pesticide residues. Indeed, some retailers state that they wish to cultivate a greener image than competitors as part of a marketing strategy. This has led some to prohibit or control the use of pesticides that have already been fully approved by the UK regulatory system.

“As a result, growers are faced with differing demands from different retailers that go beyond the regulations and add considerably to the complexity of managing their business,” Professor Grant says. Retailers, with one or two exceptions (Marks & Spencer and Sainsbury’s) have been reluctant to take a proactive role in recommending the wider use of biopesticides.

“If retailers were to get behind biopesticides, then this would provide a real impetus to produce more of these products,” Professor Grant concludes.

“Supermarkets key for biopesticides?”

At present, major supermarket chains claim that they are under pressure from consumers to minimise pesticide residues.”

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Illustration Jenny Cook
**School meals need parental support**

Very low levels of parental involvement in the UK school meal system are acting as a brake to school food reform. Case studies of school meal procurement in Italy, the UK and the United States find the UK to have the lowest levels of parental involvement. In New York, the School Food Partnership provides an arena for parents, students and administrators to discuss school food and educate the community about nutrition. In Italy, even more formal governance mechanisms are available for parental participation in the shape of the Canteen Commissions (formed by parents), which provide feedback on children’s reaction to the food and play a role in monitoring the system by, for example, checking food labels and food expiry dates.

In the UK, where no formal mechanism is in place to involve parents, evidence suggests that children are more willing to try new foods at school due to peer pressure, but overall this does not have a major effect on their food habits. Rather, research shows that the healthy eating message received at school is counteracted by many parents’ negative views of the changes introduced, particularly in relation to the higher costs of the meal, smaller portion sizes, lack of variety and, most significantly, the idea that school food reform is depriving children of their freedom of choice. Parental negativity is associated with a widespread decrease in the take-up rates of school dinners in the UK which, combined with increasing costs, undermines the viability of school catering services. Researchers conclude that a stronger public ethic of care is needed to fashion new generations of knowledgeable food citizens.

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**Marriage rules OK**

Across Europe, the proportion of never-married individuals in cohabiting relationships is rising. According to government projections, by 2031 more than 30 per cent of never-married people aged 18-59 in Britain will be in cohabiting relationships. But new research suggests that marriage remains the ideal for many. Analysis of British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) data of 5,500 households reveals that two thirds of men and women report no positive advantage in living as a couple rather than being married. Only childless men and women are more likely to report advantages in living together rather than being married. But, when questioned about their future intentions, three quarters reported that they were planning to, or probably would, get married.

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**Drug use in pregnancy**

How do women who misuse substances experience antenatal services? A new study will explore how these women are assessed, monitored and treated, and how they manage and react to these processes. Researchers are particularly interested in how substance misusing women are able to balance their identities as mothers-to-be and substance misusers, and the extent to which they are able to engage with antenatal services.

ESRC Grant Number RES-000-22-2794

**Housing wealth and household finances**

Housing wealth accounts for 60 per cent of household wealth in the UK. Using microdata and methods data from the United States and the UK, this research explores the impact of housing wealth on households’ indebtedness, ability to cope with unexpected adverse financial outcomes and ability to start a small business.

ESRC Grant Number PTA-026-27-1664

**Literacy in the deaf**

Many deaf children find reading and spelling difficult, with the gap between deaf and hearing peers tending to widen with age. Cochlear implantation (CI) has been shown to facilitate the development of spoken language and possibly the process of learning to read. But evidence regarding the effect of CI on literacy is inconsistent, hence this project will provide a systematic study of CI and literacy attainment.

ESRC Grant Number RES-000-22-2947
IN BRIEF

BEATING A BAD START
This project aims to understand the factors that produce adults who do not require social work intervention despite non-ideal childhoods. Researchers will focus on three sets of adults: those who came from the Caribbean to Britain to rejoin their parents; those who grew up in families of mixed ethnicity; and those who sometimes took responsibility for their parents as translators.

ESRC Grant Number RES-051-27-0181

PLAYING THE MARKETS
Recent technological advances have widened access to real-time trading transactions beyond established institutions. This study will analyse recordings of trading, observations and interviews. The project will study how technology influences non-professional market participation, how this affects market dynamics, and how lives are influenced by broader access to real-time transactions.

ESRC Grant Number RES-062-23-1204

COGNITIVE DECLINE
New statistical methods will be used to analyse the University of Manchester Longitudinal Study of Cognition, a study that examines changes in cognitive function in old age. These will provide answers to a number of important questions in the field of cognitive decline, depression and Alzheimer’s disease in elderly people. The new methodology will be implemented into a statistical programme available online.

ESRC Grant Number RES-000-22-2921

Reforms strengthen House of Lords

THE HOUSE OF LORDS is gaining new levels of policy influence and has been strengthened by the reforms of 1999, says a new study. In 1999 Labour legislated to remove the great majority of hereditary peers from the House of Lords. This was presented as the first stage of a two-stage reform, but the second stage is still awaited. It was therefore seen as a partial and inadequate change, but might its importance have been understated?

There is a long history of failure on Lords reform, researcher Dr Meg Russell points out. Reform in 1958 to introduce life peers, also then considered inadequate and long overdue, proved to be important and enduring. The 1999 reform removed the most clearly anachronistic element of the chamber’s membership. It also ended the Conservative party’s dominance, leaving the balance of power with Liberal Democrat and independent cross-bench peers. Has the 1999 reform resulted in the chamber being seen as more legitimate?

“Our central conclusion, contrary to what many predicted at the time, is that the 1999 reform was significant and has strengthened the House of Lords,” says Dr Russell. The study found that four out of ten government defeats in the chamber result in an outcome being negotiated that is closer to the position of the Lords than that of the government. Moreover, the House of Lords is more likely to ‘win’ such battles on major policies. Given that the Lords has defeated the government over 400 times since 1999, this suggests it is having an important policy impact. It further seems clear that government defeats are only the tip of the iceberg in terms of the chamber’s influence.

More often, government offers concessions in order to avoid defeat, taking on board objections raised by peers. Such results could be controversial, given that the House of Lords continues to be unelected. This study concludes, however, that there is considerable support for the chamber’s intervention in policy, and that it is widely seen as being more legitimate than it was before 1999. Such views are strongly held by peers, to some extent by MPs, and by the public. The media is also reporting the Lords more positively, with support growing in the liberal broadsheets as a result of its stance on topical issues such as civil liberties.

En route to intimacy

CAR TRAVEL OFFERS both driver and passengers an opportunity to reach surprising levels of intimacy, according to a new study of the UK’s car travellers. Based on video recordings of six typical journeys undertaken by a mix of car-sharing work colleagues, families, friends, sports clubs and city car club members, researchers found car journeys to be notable, and sometimes remarkable, for the depth and profound nature of the conversational topics raised, and their therapeutic effects.

Car sharing, the study reveals, can become one of the significant steady relationships people have in their lives, not least because it can last many years. Car sharers have a peculiar relationship: not quite flatmate, not quite friend, not quite neighbour, nevertheless in instances exemplifying qualities associated with each. Car sharers, researchers conclude, have levels of knowledge of one another more generally understood to exist in marriages, long-term partnerships and the most close-knit friendships.
GETTING MORE PEOPLE into university is a government priority. But until recently it has been a policy wish that has been underlain by precious little research. Now the ESRC Teaching and Learning Research Programme has filled some of the gaps with the results of seven research projects, funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England, on widening higher education participation in England.

One of the seven projects, led by Dr Anna Vignoles of the Institute of Education in London, showed that though there are more students than ever in higher education, a child’s chance of getting to university is still heavily influenced by family background. A unique analysis of data on all English school-leavers shows that people with the same levels of sixth-form achievement are admitted to university in similar numbers. The problem is that children from poorer backgrounds attend schools with lower levels of achievement. This suggests that it is the quality of early secondary school education that needs addressing, rather than issues such as student debt.

Another project, led by Dr Alison Fuller of the University of Southampton, produced some of the first data on people who have qualifications that could take them to university but who decide not to go. They found that these tend to be thoughtful people with family and job commitments who are living stable lives. They have taken a positive decision not to go to university, often after consulting friends who are graduates. If universities are serious about tempting these people into higher education, they will need to develop accessible courses supported by employers that lead to recognised qualifications. If employers do not get involved, people will not see the advantage of higher education for their salaries or career prospects.

The people the government would like to participate tend to have vocational qualifications rather than A-levels. But a study by Dr Geoff Hayward and colleagues from the University of Oxford shows that these people are less likely to be admitted to university, partly because universities are less familiar with their qualifications. Parity of esteem between entry qualifications is a myth. The best thing students coming from vocational education and training can do to increase their chance of getting to university is to add some more academic qualifications to their CVs.

Professor Gill Crozier of the University of Sunderland has watched what happens to students once they enter higher education, looking at a range of students admitted to old and new universities and to a further education college teaching degree-level courses. She found that people who go to college or university usually find it a positive experience that raises their sense of control over their lives, as well as teaching them something. But the nature of the experience depends on where they go. At older universities, students are accommodated by the college, get most of their social life from it and have personal access to academic support if they need it. At newer institutions, staff tend to be less accessible, except perhaps online. More importantly, students often have family and work responsibilities. They spend less time on the campus, visit it in a highly functional way, and are unlikely to base their social lives there.

The lesson is that, in England at least, higher education participation has grown, but an equal and diverse system has yet to emerge.

Martin Ince, media fellow at the Teaching and Learning Research Programme
Open skies, open minds?

Fifty years ago the age of international travel was heralded by BOAC and the world’s first transatlantic jet passenger service to New York. Since then we have taken to the skies and landed in remote corners of the world in ever increasing numbers. Has this mass movement made us more open to other people – or has it merely served to cement cultural divisions?

The Importance of Being There

Martin Davidson CMG, Chief Executive, British Council

Air travel was the great connector of the 20th century. However, international connections between people will only develop good relations and mutual understanding if there is enquiry, interest and engagement on the part of the traveller. If, having just flown half way around the world, we are still seeking the first Irish pub, followed by an English breakfast and a fish’n’chips supper, then something has been lost: an opportunity gone to replace familiarity and reassurance with curiosity and an appreciation of cultural difference.

Today, thanks to the exponential growth of the internet, we are only ever a few clicks away from cheaper flights to new destinations, and the statistics are compelling evidence of the demand: the Office for National Statistics confirms that the number of passenger kilometres flown by UK airlines in 2005 reached 287 billion. But this does not tell the whole story.

Last year the British Council commissioned Ipsos MORI to produce an index on the international outlook of young people around the world. We asked 11-16 year olds in ten countries with internet access in the household a range of questions, and the UK scored lower than nine other countries, including the USA. Over a quarter of schoolchildren asked did not feel that it was important to learn a foreign language for their future working life. Clearly we are travelling more, but are we understanding each other less?

My view is that at a time when our ability to be globally competitive is determined by our ability to be globally conversant, it is vital that we encourage our young people to have an interest in and engagement with the world around them. The opportunities are there.

Take ‘Global Xchange’ as an example. It is a pioneering, cross-cultural, volunteering programme for young people we run jointly with VSO (Voluntary Service Overseas). From South Wales to Kazakhstan and from Luton to Dhaka, it has provided opportunities for 18-25 year olds from the UK and 18 other countries to work with each other on community programmes, developing their skills and increasing intercultural understanding. This programme is breaking down cultural barriers and enabling new, more insightful perceptions and relationships to develop.

This approach could be described as people-to-people diplomacy, and although new media enables us to connect with friends, family, colleagues (and strangers) all over the world – both quickly and cheaply – there is no substitute for being there: moving further to connect better.
A NEW CULTURE EXPERIENCE
Mark Tanzer, Chief Executive of ABTA (Association of British Travel Agents)

THE IMAGE OF the Brit abroad eating a fry-up and making no attempt to speak the local language is one that is deeply rooted in our national psyche, but it is really no longer justified. It is true that we are not always the best travellers in the world and that we do often take refuge in re-creating a little Britain abroad, as British-themed pubs the world over bear witness. However, the Britain of today has changed out of all recognition to that of 50 years ago and our love affair with foreign travel has contributed significantly to that change.

In the post-war years only the well off could afford to head overseas, but it was also in the 1950s that the first foreign package holiday took place. Over the following decades millions of us took advantage of low cost, high quality holidays, which provided many with their first experience of a foreign culture in person. Initially, for practical reasons, these holidays centred on the Mediterranean, but with the introduction of ever more fuel-efficient and large aircraft, far flung countries in all parts of the world have become accessible and convenient.

When we returned home we found aspects of the UK wanting. One indication of this would have been a trip to a British supermarket in the 1960s. To modern tastes the choice of food on offer would have been shockingly narrow, but over the years Brits have developed a taste for the food they have enjoyed on their trips abroad and retailers took note. Many more people wanted to make their holiday experience more permanent and hundreds of thousands of Brits now own property abroad.

As we move into a new century, customer habits are changing. Going abroad is no longer a novelty; we are becoming hungrier for new experiences, which are being catered to by an ever more mature and diverse travel industry. Thousands of young Brits now routinely spend a year abroad working and getting fully immersed in a foreign culture. These cultural interchanges can only help to dispel misconceived preconceptions and develop a more profound understanding of other nations’ ways of life and viewpoints.

As the cliché goes, travel broadens the mind. This may not be true for everyone, but for the vast majority it is a rich and rewarding experience that we take advantage of in the form of 70 million trips each year.

LOCALS AND COSMOPOLITANS
Professor Anthony Heath, researcher within the ESRC Identities and Social Action Programme

SOCIOLOGISTS HAVE LONG made a conceptual distinction between ‘locals’ and ‘cosmopolitans’. Robert Merton introduced the distinction in 1948 in his study of individuals in a small east coast American city which he named Rovere. While the ‘localite’ confined his interests to the community and saw Rovere essentially as the sum of his world, the ‘cosmopolitan’ was oriented to the world outside Rovere.

Increasing travel both for business and leisure, the increasing use of email and access to the internet have surely increased the proportions of people who have cosmopolitan orientations outside their home town. We can see echoes of this in people’s national identities and also in their conceptions of the nation. There is a small but increasing number of people, for example, who would now define themselves as being European rather than (or more often as well as) being British, English, Scottish or Welsh. Ethnocentric and ‘exclusive’ conceptions of the nation are increasingly being replaced among younger generations by much more inclusive conceptions with blurred boundaries, and by a more welcoming attitude to newcomers.

However, it would be quite wrong to think that regular and widespread foreign travel and foreign holidays have turned us into a nation of cosmopolitans. The evidence, as usual, is much more complex. Large-scale representative surveys, such as the government’s Citizenship Survey and the British Social Attitudes Surveys, regularly ask people about the strength of their sense of belonging to different geographical units. These surveys show that a sense of belonging is not an either/or matter. Many people simultaneously feel closely attached both to their local community and to Britain as a whole, while it is only a small minority as yet who feel closely attached to Europe. As so often, the trends over time tend to move with almost glacial slowness.

Furthermore, there is continuing differentiation within the society. It is among the most highly educated, affluent members of younger generations that we can expect to find the most cosmopolitan orientations, and these are probably the people most likely to travel abroad for work, to have friends from overseas and indeed to marry across national boundaries. But among the less educated, the less affluent and the elderly, orientations are likely to remain of a relatively local character.

What we are seeing therefore can perhaps best be characterised as a gradual shift on average towards a more cosmopolitan outlook, but at the same time there is also gradually increasing differentiation and complexity.
THE PEOPLE’S MOVEMENT

Bridget Anderson, Senior Researcher and Programme Head at the ESRC Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS)

IN JUNE 1948 the *Empire Windrush* docked at Tilbury. The *Windrush* offered cheap transport to Britain for those who wanted to come and work in the UK. While it steamed on its way, there were those who argued in Parliament that they should be turned away. But they were British passport holders, and so began a new post-war generation of migrants to Britain.

Sixty years later the movement of people, it seems, has never been easier. Cheap flights between Stansted, Luton and eastern Europe have been booming. Some migrants even commute between Polish and British cities. And the movement is far from one way. Gap year students from Britain backpack all over the world, from Thailand to Kenya, Australia to Chile. Young people from Leeds work in timeshare in Tenerife and bars in Sydney.

But this is only the movement of certain types of people. In practice, movement for those who are ‘low skilled’ or seeking asylum is ever more difficult. It is not simply that these people cannot afford the cost of a flight from Senegal to Heathrow, but that immigration controls make entry to the UK ever more difficult for those from countries outside the European Union.

Ease of movement seems to have led to public concern that jobs and services are ‘taken’ by migrants, particularly since EU enlargement in 2004. Policy is increasingly cast in terms of ‘making migration work for Britain’ partly in an attempt to allay these fears. In fact, EU nationals are largely exempt from immigration controls and cannot be discriminated against in employment. Opportunities for travel from the UK, and our increasing reliance on importing goods and services, does not, however, seem to counter the concern in the public mind around the negative impacts of immigration and diversity.

Airlines have been drawn into the politics of migration. This began with the introduction of carrier sanctions in 1987, whereby airlines – and other carriers – pay a fine for every improperly documented traveller using their services. This made airlines more cautious about whom they allow onto their planes, and led to criticisms of the undermining of the right to asylum.

However, dependence on air travel and on airlines can also make it more difficult to deport migrants. Though flights are cheap, the average total cost of deporting someone from the UK is now estimated by the National Audit Office at £11,000. This makes the cost of deporting the Home Office estimated 500,000 overstayers positively eyewatering. But airlines do not always consent to being used for deportation purposes. Airlines in Europe are now being targeted for ‘direct action’ by activists concerned about government deportation policies. One airline has refused to carry failed asylum seekers from the UK out of “sympathy for all dispossessed people in the world”.

Technological developments are not in themselves sufficient to enable easy movement in our ever smaller world. They are mediated by politics, now as at the time of the *Windrush*.
THE GOLDEN AGE OF TOURISM
Simon Calder, Senior Travel Editor, The Independent

THE TOP PRIORITIES of aircraft engineers, at least for one of the UK’s leading international airlines: safety, of course, but after that ‘given’, the two big concerns are seat recline and inflight entertainment screens. Those are the issues that annoy passengers the most. That presents a couple of depressing dimensions about our view of the world: that while indulging in journeys that previous generations could never contemplate – except when going off to war – we worry most about (a) sleep and (b) when awake, immersing ourselves in the protective cocoon of safe British culture, from Leona Lewis to the Vicar of Dibley.

Look at the destination map and anyone who celebrates internationalism will get even more despondent. The two most glittering prizes for UK travellers are the curious siblings of Las Vegas and Dubai, both three-dimensional illusions. The former allows you to travel the world in air-conditioned sanctuary; the latter, which has been described as Las Vegas-on-Sea, serves up skyscrapers and sangria with a twist – as some British visitors discover to their considerable disadvantage, the Emirate underpins its cultural differences with draconian laws.

Yet I celebrate the jet age with joy. The mass movement of people across the planet has proved overwhelmingly beneficial. The host communities may find themselves having to accommodate the strange ways of people from the wealthier parts of the world, and on (too) many occasions have seen their communities disrupted by the desperate desire for tourist dollars, but they have been enriched and often enlightened by tourism.

I genuinely believe we are living in the golden age of tourism. Courtesy of low-cost air travel, the basic commodities of sun, sea and sand are available to all but those in the lowest income brackets. Even the far side of the world is accessible. When Freddie Laker’s Skytrain first opened up America for British travellers, I was a farm labourer at the end of the runway at Gatwick. It would have taken 11 weeks to earn enough to fly to New York and back. Today, despite the high price of oil, you can easily find a return flight to Sydney for under £800, representing about 13 days’ work at the national minimum wage.

Australia’s largest city, say some, is merely a prettier, warmer version of Britain – conveniently overlooking the immense diversity and dynamism Sydney has earned from Asian migration flows. But the more travel patterns change, the more places remain the same – in the sense that Asia, the Americas and Africa remain exciting and exotic, even though they are firmly in our personal atlases of possibilities.

Perhaps the greatest change, though, has come in our attitudes to Europe. The two biggest low-cost airlines, easyJet and Ryanair, focus on taking Brits to the Continent. They have done far more than any EU initiative to stimulate our interest in the cultures and cuisines, languages and landscapes on our doorsteps. But when you are on your cheap flight to somewhere you can neither spell nor pronounce at the far end of planet Ryanair, don’t bother looking for the seat recline or inflight entertainment screen.

“According to the law of custom, and perhaps of reason, foreign travel completes the education of an English gentleman”
Edward Gibbon, historian (1737-1794)
ON FRIDAYS WHEN I went home to Stockport and shopped in Asda it was odd to think I’d spent the week in the House of Commons. Being a ‘new girl’ was a bit weird, but the people were fantastic and parts of the building were like Hogwarts,” says Nicola Headlam, who spent three months on a placement in Westminster, funded by the ESRC.

The work in the Parliament and Constitution Centre at the House of Commons Library fitted in with Nicola’s thesis, on how the reform agenda at the national level filters down to local government. She is in her third year on an ESRC CASE (Collaborative Awards in Science and Engineering) studentship at the School of Environment and Development, University of Manchester.

“It was really good to see at close quarters how central government works,” she said. “I went to loads of select committees and was so impressed by the amount of genuine thinking that goes on at that stage. It was also useful to see how debates pan out and how to ‘read’ them.”

Nicola heard about the ESRC scheme last Christmas when she bumped into someone who had been on a placement. “He was so enthusiastic I followed it up immediately and started at the end of January,” she says. “The only downside was the long commute back at the weekend.”

A chance meeting at Christmas inspired Nicola to apply for a placement at the House of Commons Library

Her work involved researching information for MPs, which meant a new style of writing. “It’s always useful to learn a new ‘voice’,“ says Nicola, who already had some experience of journalism. “The library staff are real experts who write in a cool, neutral, clear way, with great attention to detail and grammar. MPs call this ‘library speak’!”

One of Nicola’s tasks was to prepare a ‘standard note’ on local area agreements, a topic that was discussed in both Houses of Parliament. She also attended Prime Minister’s Questions on Gordon Brown’s birthday and the key debate on the new EU treaty. Nicola made the most of her time in London: “I crammed in as much as I could, going to meetings run by think-tanks, making all sorts of contacts, as well as singing with the Parliament choir. The opera gala at a concert in Chelsea was a wonderful experience – as my father says, if you’re in Aladdin’s cave you don’t take a tea break!”

Nicola has a few words for applicants. She strongly advises taking the time out in the second year, because: “It is hard to come back to a chapter you wrote four months ago after living in a faster environment. It takes time to settle back in to the academic rhythm.” She also warns that you have to manage your expectations and schedule of work to ensure you get the most out of your few months. “People are too busy to be looking over your shoulder so it would be possible to be quite slack.”

Nicola further recommends taking advantage of the structured training opportunities offered by the House of Commons Library. “It’s really helpful. I did several courses on subjects like using archives and the bill process. They were well organised and are relevant to my PhD.”

The time in Westminster also had unexpected highlights: “On Anzac Day I looked out towards Whitehall and saw a load of waltzing Mathildas, and another time I saw my sister marching past on a teachers’ demonstration,” she recalls.

Pamela Readhead is a freelance journalist

The ESRC Placement Fellows Scheme allows social science researchers to spend time in an organisation to undertake policy-relevant research and upgrade the research skills of ‘partner organisation’ employees. For more information please visit http://www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/opportunities/current_funding_opportunities/placement_fellows_scheme.aspx
The Society Now In Focus supplement gives an in-depth look at ESRC-funded research projects, programmes and activities.

THE THIRD SECTOR

PIONEERING SOLUTIONS

Martin Brookes, member of the ESRC Council and Chief Executive of the charity New Philanthropy Capital

I am delighted to introduce this first In Focus supplement which highlights third sector activities. The academic and research communities are coming ever closer together, offering the promise of greater understanding and appreciation of the work of third sector organisations. The ESRC is playing a crucial role in this effort, as this supplement demonstrates.

The ‘third sector’ includes voluntary and community organisations, charities, social enterprises, co-operatives and mutuals that are ‘value-driven and that reinvest their surpluses to further social, environmental or cultural objectives’, according to the Government’s definition. The sector has pioneered innovative and enterprising solutions to social problems. This is not new. From the charitably funded public bath houses of the 1800s to cutting edge behavioural techniques pioneered by today’s autism charities, the third sector has always been able to go beyond the public and private sectors to meet people’s real and pressing needs.

This understanding of what its users need is one reason why third sector organisations are increasingly being contracted by government to shape and deliver public services. Voluntary action has reflected and helped shape public opinion on important issues from slavery to feminism to climate change. Swathes of commonly held views and opinions – and legislation – were first reflected in the third sector.

Yet despite this importance, third sector research efforts have not been fully co-ordinated. This holds the sector back. I have always held the belief that research can help organisations become more effective. Research enables third sector organisations to establish and share best practice and new approaches to tackling social and economic problems. It gives a better understanding of trends and motivations behind charitable giving. And it supports the third sector in measuring and demonstrating the impact of their work.

For a long time the third sector was not given sufficient attention as an object of research. Academics working on the sector were, and to a large extent still are, scattered across the country, and researchers within charities and other organisations tended to be isolated.

Carrying out research is not enough. As well as objects of analysis, it is also imperative that the third sector is seen as an audience for research. Only by sharing research findings with the third sector can lessons be learned. The third sector as an audience for research has also historically been neglected. Whether research is around fundraising, charities’ capital structures, the habits of volunteers, the third sector workforce, or determining the impact of activities, vital questions abound and demand attention.

This balance is being redressed and the ESRC is keen to encourage the development. In this supplement you will see examples of some of the research projects supported by the ESRC. Two ESRC research centres are now established: the Centre for Charitable Giving and Philanthropy and the Third Sector Research Centre.

The Centre for Charitable Giving and Philanthropy will produce high quality, independent empirical research to understand the supply of funds to the third sector. The Third Sector Research Centre will draw together research expertise and resources to build an evidence base on the sector and on its impact. Each will contribute to better databases to support future research.

These research centres form a key part of a broader engagement strategy within the third sector, encouraging social enterprise through a new generation of third sector researchers, capacity building and knowledge exchange. The third sector is now very much an ESRC partner.

The long-term end will be a mainstreaming of the third sector within research. The ESRC takes this strategy seriously, ensuring the research it funds is aimed at and used by the third sector. I joined the ESRC determined to get it to focus more on the third sector. I found an organisation already addressing this challenge. Long may this continue, with research and the third sector feeding off of each other in a virtuous circle.

Martin Brookes, New Philanthropy Capital

THIRD SECTOR ORGANISATIONS ARE INCREASINGLY BEING CONTRACTED TO SHAPE AND DELIVER PUBLIC SERVICES
FROM FAITH-BASED groups to co-operatives, third sector organisations have always been powerful forces for change in society. Yet their role is changing and so is their influence. The number of charities alone in the UK has soared from 120,000 in the mid 90s to over 160,000 today. To survive the competition, many have adopted high pressure techniques to recruit donors. Ministers are also keen for the third sector to play a greater role in running services traditionally managed by the private or public sector.

The ESRC has helped fund a range of new studies into the impact and role of the third sector. These include the impact of branding for charities, the role of faith-based groups, how co-operatives combat poverty and staffing retention in care homes.

THE BRAND OF CHARITIES

BIG-NAME COMPANIES like Coca Cola and Sony know brand identity is crucial for healthy sales figures. But little work has been done on the role branding plays in the not-for-profit sector and what ‘charitable brand values’ mean. Researchers at the Bristol Business School at the University of West of England have been talking to donors to discover how brands influence their ‘giving’. The nine charities chosen include those highlighting causes such as animal welfare, children and visual impairment.

Common perceptions about third sector branding include the belief that it can help charities raise funds more efficiently. Yet few facets of charity brands are genuinely distinctive and people often find it difficult to distinguish between causes.

The findings are striking. Donors found that values such as compassion, honesty and dedication had a huge influence on their support, but these qualities have zero influence on how much people donate. Key factors such as the emotional and intellectual stimulation a charity gives were other factors high on the agenda of donors as well as the charity’s influence.

There was also no noticeable link between how a charity was viewed and the amount people gave. Instead, a person’s income, age and gender influenced the size of the donation. But researchers did identify a relationship between a charity’s values and the proportion that someone was willing to donate from their charitable ‘pot’.

Professor Adrian Sargeant, who is now at Indiana University in the US, led the Bristol study. He had identified four key messages for charities, which include the need to be genuinely distinctive in what is an increasingly crowded market. Seeming identical to others, he says, means they are ‘doomed’ from the outset.

Failing to devise a message that is attention-grabbing means they will appear ineffectual, bland and part of the ‘increasing charity clutter’. To make their mark, charities must not develop their brands in isolation. Instead, they must study the competition and go one better.

Sophie Goodchild, an editor on the Evening Standard
CO-OPERATIVES AGAINST POVERTY

Co-operatives differ from charities and other non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in that they are membership-led and their purpose is to provide people with goods or services.

Combating poverty is a key role for co-operatives. Yet the impact of co-operatives is limited because of neglect of the sector at national level and reduced autonomy of co-operatives. It also means new sectors have to compete with NGOs. So how much impact do they really make in this area? This issue has been investigated by experts at Stirling University in Scotland as part of the ESRC’s Non-Governmental Public Action Programme.

Dr Johnson Birchall and Richard Simmons aimed to identify any advantages that the co-operative sector might have over NGOs. They have also examined why it is that policymakers have largely overlooked the impact of both short-term and chronic poverty-combating strategies used by co-operatives.

Their research was partly based on how the self help business sector has tackled poverty in three countries: Uganda, post-tsunami Sri Lanka and Bosnia, where agricultural co-ops have aided reconstruction after the civil war.

The results of the study will be published in October and will be used as guidance for the Committee for the Promotion and Advancement of Co-operation. But what has already emerged in the course of the research is that co-operatives do make a significant contribution to poverty reduction, though other interventions are also necessary. There is a role for government in providing the right kind of environment and for NGOs in undertaking development work among poorer people which involves their participation.

TAKING CARE OF CARE WORKERS

With life expectancy rising, caring for Britain’s ageing population is of increasing importance, especially as recruitment and retention of staff is a major problem. The University of Sheffield has been working with Anchor Trust, a not-for-profit organisation providing support, care and housing to older people. Their aim has been to improve the quality and cost of service delivery.

The result is a new staff ‘audit’ system which is now being used in care homes across the UK. Interviews with staff and senior bosses have given researchers an insight into the best ways of hiring and keeping care workers. This enables managers to retain staff by determining satisfaction levels and workforce concerns.

Pam Enderby, Professor of Community Rehabilitation at the University of Sheffield, led the project. She believes that the benefits of the project are twofold: “By looking at the underlying problems of recruitment and retention in the healthcare sector, it improved the partners’ performance in this area and also allowed us to develop our academic knowledge,” she said.

HELPING ON FAITH

Faith-based groups are another important part of the third sector. Organisations like the Salvation Army have always been key in providing services to the homeless and destitute, even after the founding of the welfare state. But little work has been done on the difference ‘faith’ makes to people using these services.

Dr Sarah Johnson and Deborah Quilgars, from the Centre for Housing Policy at the University of York, have researched the similarities and differences in morality-based approaches between faith groups and secular voluntary groups. They have also examined how changes in governance services for faith-based organisations have impacted on their relationships with secular and other providers. Their findings will be published early in 2009.

Dr Johnson says the study will improve understanding of how the value bases of different agencies shape what is provided and how it is provided for vulnerable groups such as the homeless. She says: “Most importantly, the study will provide an opportunity for homeless people to comment on what they consider to be the key differences between faith-based and secular services. It’s vital their voices are heard when reflecting on the future of faith-based providers within the homelessness sector.”

Conceptualizing brand values in the charity sector
ESRC Grant Number RES-000-22-0623

The role and potential of co-operatives in the poverty reduction process
ESRC Grant Number RES-155-25-0077

The difference that ‘faith’ makes, faith-based organisations and the provision of services for homeless people
Web http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/chp/Projects/faith.htm

Anchor Trust care staff management (Knowledge Transfer Partnership)
Web http://www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/KnowledgeExch/KTPs.aspx
POLICY: THE GROWING DEMAND FOR EVIDENCE

Campbell Robb, Director General of the Office of the Third Sector

My involvement in the third sector is based on a firm belief in its capabilities to transform communities from within, to provide services that meet people’s needs, and to secure social and environmental change. It is a belief that is confirmed by experience, and it is one that is shared by many. And yet I would be the first to agree that there is much more that we need to do to document the sector’s strengths and weaknesses, and to make that evidence much more widely available and relevant to users’ needs.

Today’s third sector is a large and important part of our society. The total combined income of charities stood at £31 billion in 2005/6, with social enterprises bringing in £26 billion at the start of that period. Government and funders are increasingly looking to voluntary organisations or social enterprises to effect social change, as well as for insight into policy challenges. And individual citizens are continuing to support their work, with 78 per cent of people surveyed reporting having given to charity within a four-week period prior to a recent survey.

The third sector deserves some credit for this success. Few people would dispute that third sector organisations have been driving social change and transforming people’s lives for centuries, and in many areas the third sector has clearly demonstrated that it is able to meet the needs of communities and individuals in flexible and innovative ways.

However, it remains true that much of the evidence on what the third sector does is still informal or anecdotal. Despite the pathfinding work of researchers both in academia and the sector itself, we do not yet have an overall picture of the sector that is as robust or as comprehensive as it ought to be, and the research that does exist is not always sufficient. This matters, because if the third sector is to continue to expand its influence, we will need to push ahead in developing a more accessible evidence base to underpin it.

I sense that there is an increasing appetite for that evidence. With the third sector now featuring in performance targets for local and national government, there is renewed demand for fine-grained and locally relevant information on the sector. More robust and accessible evidence on the sector’s strengths and weaknesses will support better commissioning by the public sector. And the sector’s role in helping to develop stronger communities is rightly being recognised, as is the distinctive contribution that social enterprise has to offer, both of which factors bring increased demand for supporting research and analysis – and the sector’s role in campaigning and advocating for change is at its strongest when backed by solid evidence.

Developing this evidence base is a formidable task, and it will take some time to achieve, but I believe some of the important building blocks are already coming into place. The Office of the Third Sector is currently working with Ipsos MORI to deliver a new survey of over 100,000 third sector organisations, to measure progress towards a key policy target – developing a local environment for a thriving third sector – and to give local decision makers more evidence and better insight into what is working and what isn’t.

We are also delighted to be working with the ESRC, co-funding, with others, two new practically focused research centres: the Third Sector Research Centre, led by Professor Pete Alcock at Birmingham University, which will provide real capacity for exploring the big issues in third sector research, and the Centre for Charitable Giving and Philanthropy, led by Professors Jenny Harrow and Cathy Pharoah, to widen the evidence available to support the UK’s culture of giving.

What does all this mean for the sector itself, and for those it serves? On one hand it represents a challenge, for the popular refrain that the best research will be done ‘with the sector not on it’ is true, and yet a culture of evidence gathering and analysis is not yet deeply rooted throughout the sector. But it also presents a great opportunity to strengthen the sector’s hand, in fundraising and working with commissioners, in campaigning for change, and in running their organisations for the benefit of people and places.

There is an exciting future for third sector research, and I hope that both researchers and practitioners will rise to the challenge.
RESEARCH: ENHANCING THIRD SECTOR ANALYSIS

Professor Pete Alcock, Director of the ESRC Third Sector Research Centre

The Third Sector Research Centre (TSRC) is part of a broader commitment by the ESRC and the Office of the Third Sector (OTS) to expand the research base on third sector issues. The Centre is jointly managed by myself at the University of Birmingham and the Deputy Director, Professor John Mohan, at the University of Southampton.

The work of the Centre is linked to the activities of three planned Capacity Building Clusters (CBCs) which will deliver CASE (Collaborative Awards in Science and Engineering) studentships, Knowledge Transfer Partnerships, research placements and research advice and support in conjunction with practice-based agencies within the third sector. The TSRC is also part of a broader commitment by the ESRC and OTS to expand the research base on third sector issues, which also includes the Centre for Charitable Giving and Philanthropy with its hub based in the Cass Business School at City University. Collaborative working across all these investments is planned.

The ESRC and the OTS are investing in these research centres, and in particular in the TSRC, because of their belief that research on the third sector, and research capacity within it, has been relatively under-developed in the UK. This compares with the United States and continental Europe, where a number of research centres devoted to exploration and analysis can be found and where the data available about the sector is more extensive and more detailed. The TSRC will therefore be aiming to enhance both analysis and capacity within the UK over the next five years, and will be aiming to ensure that this provides the basis for a permanent and sustainable centre for continuing research on the sector.

There are a number of key priorities that flow from this initiative and the Centre is planning activity to address all of them.

First there is the need to develop and maintain an extensive and accessible database on the sector. This will involve the creation of a large quantitative data archive, which will be a resource for a range of research activities with the Centre; and the long-term aim is to develop quantitative resources, which will be made more widely available to researchers across the country.

The Centre will also establish a large qualitative sample to provide a resource for detailed analysis of the shape, structure and development of a broad range of different organisations and agencies. Both the quantitative and qualitative databases will also provide the basis for longitudinal description and analysis of the sector and the organisations within it – such research must now provide ‘moving pictures’ as well as ‘snapshots’ of the world.

Second, the Centre will provide reflection and analysis of the theoretical and policy contexts of third sector activity. There is a need to define, and refine, what we understand by the third sector and related concepts such as civil society, voluntary action and social enterprise. The Centre will engage directly with policymakers and the policy-making process in order to provide a robust and critical evaluation of policy and practice as it develops across the sector.

Third, the Centre must work closely with the third sector and the major stakeholders and key agencies within it. There will be formal partnership links with key sector agencies, who will be involved in, and will inform, the developing research agenda. The Centre will also engage in a wide-ranging process of knowledge transfer and dissemination across the sector, employing two research and knowledge brokers to work exclusively on this. This will also aim to provide support for capacity building and enhancement of all research activity across the sector. Linked to the work of the CBCs, the Centre has made a commitment to work with, and not just on, the third sector.

Finally, the TSRC is committed to expanding and extending the range and reach of research activity as the Centre develops. We will work with researchers in other institutions to develop, and secure support for, additional research and evaluation activity. In particular, this will include working with partners in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to develop complementary research specific to the context of the devolved administrations and, where possible, draw on the support of the agencies of devolved government. In this way the Centre will ensure that its research has a UK reach.

There is a need to define what we understand by the third sector and related concepts such as civil society, voluntary action and social enterprise

The Third Sector Research Centre is co-funded by the ESRC, alongside the Office of the Third Sector and the Barrow Cadbury Trust, with a joint investment of £10.25 million over the next five years. For more information on the Centre’s activities, see page 7 of this supplement.
For a sector that prides itself on the ability to identify new or unmet needs in society, you won’t be surprised to hear that many voluntary and community organisations are already users of research. Whether they are providing services, funding new or innovative projects, or lobbying for social change, there is an increasing awareness that research-based evidence has to be at the heart of what we do.

However, there is a need to develop research and methods around third sector issues. Indeed, there is a sometimes worrying preference for personal experience and instinct over evidence. And the sector’s capacity to use research is pretty uneven: some of the bigger charities have large research teams and are well practised at integrating research with policy and practice; but a long tail of smaller organisations finds the research and evidence agenda confusing and expensive. Some have had their fingers burnt by being researched without having taken part in the wider research process.

Users have been poorly served in the past, both by official statistics and academia. Browse through official statistics and you will be hard pressed to find much detail about the size, scope and activities of the third sector, despite limited evidence suggesting that this is now a significant group of entities. In the case of academia, the lack of a disciplinary anchor for voluntary sector studies has meant that it has appeared disparate and has not been funded. The NCVO, the Charities Aid Foundation and others have plugged this gap to an extent by undertaking research and by building links between academics in the field and policymakers and practitioners. The major investments of the ESRC and others are particularly welcome therefore. I believe they will meet user need.

Given quite this context, what is it that users need from the research community? It’s worth mentioning at the beginning that different organisations will have different thematic interests – health, education and so on – and that these users will continue to look to social science to address the challenges they face. However, users will also be looking to social science to address generic questions, the most obvious of which is who and what we are and what do we achieve, both as individual organisations and collectively.

As users, we are now looking to social science to widen and deepen our understanding of the sector’s dynamics and ecology and, ultimately, its impact. In particular, we need a better understanding of some quite diverse component parts, from community groups to social enterprises. Better basic statistics can then help us answer more policy-focused questions: how and why the sector is changing; how organisations in the sector compare with those working in the public or private sectors; whether we can trace the impact of government policies on the sector and explore the relationships between the sector and the state in its different guises; how the sector has developed over time – and how it will develop into the future.

The last question is particularly pertinent. In a time when the sector has clearly changed it can be surprisingly difficult to get a detailed understanding of the breadth and pace of change, which is vital for users such as trustees. We also need better guidance on methodology: as a sector we have not made best use of our resource by trying to map different universes with different methods. Users are also looking for methodologies around measuring or assessing impact, possibly one of the most commonly asked questions of NCVO’s research team. As more scrutiny is placed on the sector more users will be looking for help in this area.

Users don’t want research that is just on the sector: they want research with and by the sector. It is vital that academics develop close working relationships with the sector to ensure that research is informed and informs. Dissemination is not enough: engagement is the watchword. The new research centres’ focus on engagement with users is particularly welcome, and I am optimistic that a balance can be struck between user engagement and the need for the rigour and dispassionate analysis that are characteristic of academic independence. The current initiatives represent a significant opportunity to develop the understanding of practitioners, policymakers and academics. Users recognise the value of evidence, and with a commitment to user engagement they will give their full support.

The National Council for Voluntary Organisations is the largest umbrella body for the voluntary and community sector in England with sister councils in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Visit http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk
**FINDING THE FACTS**

October 2008 saw the launch of two new ESRC research centres focusing on the third sector, forming a major part of the ESRC’s engagement in the sector.

**THE THIRD SECTOR RESEARCH CENTRE**

The Centre will receive a total joint investment of £10.25 million over the next five years. Its purpose is to conduct research and analysis to strengthen the evidence base for the entire third sector, including charities, social enterprises and small community organisations. It will work to deliver research into the effectiveness and impact of third sector organisations; mapping of the sector, and an enhanced understanding of its dynamics; specific research programmes of direct relevance to third sector policy and practice.

“This is a very exciting development,” said Phil Hope, Minister of the Third Sector, when the Centre was announced. “This will be a Centre for the whole sector, with academics working alongside charities, social enterprises and small community associations to develop the evidence base on the sector and the impact it has on people’s lives.”

The Third Sector Research Centre (TSRC) has been established and co-funded by the ESRC, alongside the Office of the Third Sector and the Barrow Cadbury Trust. It is a joint venture between the University of Birmingham, where it is administratively based, and the University of Southampton, with contributions also from Kent and Middlesex. The Centre is directed by Professor Pete Alcock, and jointly managed by the Deputy Director, Professor John Mohan, at the University of Southampton.

The work of the TSRC is linked to the activities of three planned Capacity Building Clusters, which are funded for five years and will deliver CASE studentships, Knowledge Transfer Partnerships, research placements and research support, together with practice-based agencies within the third sector.

“This is an exciting new opportunity to provide an extensive and robust research resource for the third sector,” says Professor Alcock. “We will work closely with both policymakers and practitioners in building capacity and engagement.”

**THE CENTRE FOR CHARITABLE GIVING AND PHILANTHROPY**

The Centre supports high quality independent research aimed at influencing policy and practice decisions in the UK as well as developing the necessary evidence base to better understand charitable giving and philanthropy issues. It aims to help third sector organisations, government and business to better understand why and how individuals and businesses can give, helping to increase and target giving to support the public good.

The Centre is co-funded by the ESRC, the Office of the Third Sector, the Carnegie UK Trust and the Scottish Government, with a total joint investment of £2.2 million over five years.

The centre is split into three spokes:

- **Individual and Business Giving**, led by Professor Charles Harvey and based at the Hunter Centre for Entrepreneurship, University of Strathclyde.
- **Charitable Giving and Social Redistribution**, led by Professor John Mohan at the University of Southampton and Dr Iain Wilkinson at the University of Kent.
- **Institutionalised Giving Structures**, based at Cass Business School and the University of Edinburgh; this spoke will be led by Professor Jenny Harrow and Professor Stephen Osborne.

“The Centre will act as a co-ordinating hub,” says the Centre Director, Professor Jenny Harrow at Cass Business School, City University. “It is a unique partnership between Cass, the National Council for Voluntary Organisations and the University of Edinburgh.”

Charitable giving is a major source of funding for the third sector. The Centre will help us understand the motivation for giving and the reasons why people choose to give in particular ways.
SECTOR RESOURCES

An overview of ESRC research activities and collaborations relevant to the third sector

PUBLIC SERVICES PROGRAMME
http://www.publicservices.ac.uk
Funded for a period of five years from November 2004 to October 2009, the programme is directed by Professor Christopher Hood, based at Oxford University. Its research is focused in the delivery, performance and quality of public services.

NON-GOVERNMENTAL PUBLIC ACTION
http://www.ise.ac.uk/collections/NGPA
A research programme centering on public action by and for disadvantaged people, undertaken by non-governmental organisations and other non-government actors. It is directed by Professor Jude Howell at the London School of Economics.

RELIGION AND SOCIETY
http://www.religionandsociety.org.uk
Directed by Professor Linda Woodhead at Lancaster University, this is a joint funded research programme, with the Arts and Humanities Research Council. It aims to foster collaborative research across the arts, humanities and social sciences, to build capacity in the study of religion, to engage interested parties beyond the academy, and to further understanding of religion in a complex world.

CENTRE FOR LEARNING AND LIFE CHANCES IN KNOWLEDGE ECONOMIES AND SOCIETIES (LLAKES)
http://www2.ioe.ac.uk/ioe/cms/get.asp?cid=18911
The centre is based at the Institute of Education and is directed by Professor Andy Green. It investigates the role of lifelong learning in promoting economic competitiveness and social cohesion, and in mediating the interactions between the two domains.

CENTRE FOR BUSINESS RELATIONSHIPS, ACCOUNTABILITY, SUSTAINABILITY AND SOCIETY (BRASS)
http://www.bristol.ac.uk/cmpo
An interdisciplinary research centre, aiming to understand how to make progress towards a more sustainable society and economy by combining expertise from Cardiff University’s Business School, the Law School and the School of City and Regional Planning. It is directed by Professor Ken Peattie.

INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR LIFE COURSES STUDIES IN SOCIETY AND HEALTH (ICLS)
http://www.ucl.ac.uk/epidemiology/icls/index.htm
Directed by Professor Mel Bartley of University College London, the centre will investigate the human life course influences on health and wellbeing, using the longitudinal datasets that are on open academic access. The idea of health will be extended to include wellbeing and social cohesion, and in mediating the interactions between the two domains.

CENTRE FOR MARKET AND PUBLIC ORGANISATION (CMPO)
http://www.bristol.ac.uk/cmpo
Based at the University of Bristol, the centre combines expertise in economics, geography and law, with core funding from both the ESRC and the Leverhulme Trust. Directed by Professor Steven Burgess, its objective is to study the interaction between the public and private sectors.

UNDERSTANDING SOCIETY
http://www.understandingsociety.org.uk
The UK’s major new household panel study is the largest study of its kind in the world. It is designed to give us a much better understanding of life in the UK and how it is changing. The study is directed by Professor Nick Buck at the Institute of Social and Economic Research.

UKCRC PUBLIC HEALTH RESEARCH CENTRES OF EXCELLENCE
http://www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/opportunities/current%5Ffunding%5Fopportunities/ukcrc.aspx
This is a joint initiative supported by several major funders to develop a co-ordinated approach to improving public health research by funding a number of Centres across the UK. The aim of these Centres is to build academic capacity, boost infrastructure and encourage multi-disciplinary working in public health research in the UK.

NATIONAL PREVENTION RESEARCH INITIATIVE
http://www.mrc.ac.uk/ForResearch/ResearchFocus/NationalPreventionResearchInitiative/MRC001981
This is a national initiative made up of government departments, research councils and major medical charities that are working together to encourage and support research into chronic disease prevention.

NCRI SUPPORTIVE AND PALLIATIVE CARE RESEARCH INITIATIVES
http://www.mariecurie.org.uk/forhealthcareprofessionals/palliative_care_research/NCRISupportiveandPalliativeCareResearchCollaboratives
The initiative will support research which will be of direct benefit to lung cancer patients. Dedicated funds were pledged by National Cancer Research Initiative partners to support a call for proposals in research in this area.

IDENTITIES AND SOCIAL ACTION
http://www.identities.org.uk
This is a five year research programme, which will run from 2004 to 2008 and is directed by Professor Margaret Wetherell at the Open University. 25 research projects based at universities across the UK will deepen our understanding of the processes involved in the making of selves, groups and communities.

NEW DYNAMICS OF AGEING
http://www.newdynamics.group.shef.ac.uk
The programme is a seven year multidisciplinary research initiative with the ultimate aim of improving quality of life of older people. The programme is a unique collaboration between five UK Research Councils. It is based at the University of Sheffield and directed by Professor Alan Walker.

LOCAL AUTHORITIES RESEARCH COUNCIL INITIATIVE (LARCI)
www.larci.org.uk
The initiative aims to bring local authorities and the Research Councils into closer partnership. The Research Councils are major public investors in research in the UK, and fund a large amount of research relevant to local government policy and practice, which includes third sector research.
Deaf in the 21st century

As interaction with the mainstream increases, the Deaf community faces unprecedented challenges and opportunities, says Professor Bencie Woll

During the first week of October every year, the British Deaf Association’s Learn to Sign Week encourages the public to learn British Sign Language (BSL). When the Government in 2003 recognised BSL as a language in its own right, it also marked that this is the language of Britain’s Deaf community, an identifiable social and linguistic group.

For members of the community, being Deaf is not a medical condition but an experiential, social and attitudinal state. An upper-case ‘D’ is used to distinguish ‘Deaf’ as a cultural, linguistic and social identity from ‘deaf’ as an audiological status. Although most of the estimated 60,000 members of the Deaf community have a hearing impairment, their degree of hearing loss is irrelevant, in the same way that darkness of skin colour is irrelevant to Black community membership.

The Deaf community is constantly changing. Until the 1980s, most Deaf children were educated in residential special schools. Today, most Deaf children are educated in mainstream schools. This change has had considerable impact on the self identity of young Deaf people and their use of BSL. Developments in technology, such as text messaging and signing and subtitling on television, have changed Deaf social patterns.

There has been an enormous increase in the numbers of hearing people learning BSL and other forms of signing in recent years. Around 15,000 adults take NVQ qualifications in BSL annually. The current fad for the use of ‘baby sign’ with hearing children has spawned an extensive industry of books, classes and courses, and seen the introduction of signs to primary schools and to children’s television.

However, this rosy picture conceals deeper causes for concern. The Deaf community hit the headlines late last year when the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill was introduced in the House of Lords and Baroness Deech commented: “I hope that your Lordships will be pleased that the deliberate choice of an embryo that is, for example, likely to be deaf will be prevented by Clause 14.”

Clause 14 states that persons or embryos that are known to have a genetic abnormality with a significant risk of developing a serious physical or mental disability, a serious illness, or any other serious medical condition “must not be preferred to those that are not known to have such an abnormality”.

Strikingly, several commentary and explanatory notes and consultation documents related to the Bill also specifically singled out deaf people as the target group of this clause. A furious debate erupted in the media.

As ‘Stop Eugenics’ (an organisation set up to campaign against the Clause) points out, the mistaken impression is given that, generally, deaf people are on a mission to use genetic technology to create deaf babies. They point out that Clause 14 could be interpreted as coming into contradiction with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and ask who decides what diseases or conditions are serious enough to prevent people making use of assisted fertilisation.

The House of Commons Research Report on the Bill reports that Ministers were shocked by the strength of opposition from members of the Deaf community. As a result of the campaign, the Government agreed to remove references singling out deafness from the explanatory notes (though not to change the Clause itself).

“The deaf community hit the headlines late last year when the human fertilisation and embryology bill was introduced”

It is clear that the consultation exercise carried out prior to publication of the Bill completely failed to recognise that Deaf people value their sign language and culture, rather than considering themselves as individuals with defective genes.

Any study of the Deaf community, like other minority communities, cannot be separated from a study of its relationship with the majority language community that surrounds it. At the beginning of the 21st century, there are two contrasting futures. On the one hand, there are pressures, such as the decrease in opportunities for Deaf children to use BSL with their peers as a result of the move to mainstream education, and a possible decrease in the Deaf population as a result of medical intervention and advances in genetics.

On the other hand, there is increased interest and demand from the hearing community for courses in BSL, increased use of BSL in public contexts such as television, and increased pride of the Deaf community in their distinctive language and culture. The future is finely balanced.
Can kids learn from tv?

There are educational benefits to be earned from children’s television, argues Dr Jane Herbert, but we need to understand how to access them.

CHILDREN’S TELEVISION OFTEN receives bad press. Phrases such as “visual voodoo” or “ban kids’ television” dominate the media, often leaving parents feeling confused and guilty for allowing their children to engage in an activity that we as adults frequently enjoy ourselves. In the face of these negative viewpoints, it is easy to forget about the educational aspects contained in many television programmes. During their television viewing children are exposed to programmes focusing on skills such as learning letters and numbers, problem solving, or the importance of helping and friendship. As they get older, programs such as Blue Peter focus children’s attention on issues such as conservation, recycling, looking after pets and preparing food. Although the content is clearly valuable, it is important to consider whether television is actually an effective medium for helping children develop their skills and knowledge base about the world.

As Blue Peter celebrates its 50th anniversary, the question seems simple: do children actually learn from television? Any parent whose child has come to them asking for a glue stick and a cereal box after watching a craft activity on Blue Peter will undoubtedly say yes. Research on learning from television also indicates that within the first two years of life, children show evidence of learning simple actions from television when tested for retention 24 hours later. Despite this early ability to imitate from television, however, children acquire less information from television, and appear to remember it for a shorter period, than if the information is presented through face-to-face interactions with real people, even into middle childhood.

What makes learning from television difficult? For a start, children have to learn that television is a symbol of reality. Young infants do not seem to appreciate the difference between an object presented on television and a real object. For example, 9-month-olds will try to grab toys presented on a video screen while 19-month-olds will point at the toys but not try to reach for them. Unless children appreciate this difference television cannot serve as a source of information about the real world. An additional difficulty is that the objects shown on television are two-dimensional images. The amount and quality of the information obtained from two-dimensional images compared to three-dimensional objects is likely to be impoverished, making it harder for children to relate this information to real objects encountered later.

Intuitively, television is generally less engaging than a real-life interaction. Special effects such as bright colours, laughter, or applause are often used to draw attention to the screen, but we don’t know whether these features actually improve learning from television. We have probably all experienced times when we’ve been looking at the television screen and suddenly realised that we have no idea what programme we’ve just been watching. Looking is clearly not the same as learning. Furthermore, watching is not the same as hands-on experience. Television viewing is largely a passive experience, whereas children, just like adults, learn and remember more if they are able to explore while they are learning.

Assuming that we value the educational opportunities provided by television, is it possible to improve its effectiveness? Repeated viewing is one method shown to improve learning and retention for televised information, even in infants as young as 12 months of age. So the constant pleas that children make to watch their favourite videos time and again do appear to have some benefits! There is also some suggestion that children learn more from a programme if they are watching with an adult, who can provide their attention and understanding. In general, however, our knowledge of how to improve children’s learning from television is still in its infancy.

It is important to acknowledge that television consists of both educational and entertainment aspects. There may be times when a short period of entertainment is all we and our children are looking for. However, there is enormous opportunity for television to provide children with skills and experiences they might not encounter within their home or school environment. Perhaps the best possible combination is a format where both education and entertainment are combined into one programme. If children enjoy watching the programme and we, as adults, enjoy watching it with them, then the opportunities for learning will surely be increased.

Dr Jane Herbert specialises in children’s developing learning and memory capacity, and is leading the ESRC-funded research project Fine-tuning the Picture: Learning from Television (ES/J005993/1). She can be contacted at j.s.herbert@sheffield.ac.uk.
I WAS 20 YEARS old when Neil Armstrong set foot on the Moon. In the middle of the Vietnam War, with disappointment in the Wilson Labour government and concerns over nuclear war growing, I was pretty cynical: why was the money for the Apollo programme not being spent on solving real problems, like world hunger and poverty?

But even I was unable to tear myself away from the TV as the Eagle landed. Images of the ‘Earth-rise’ from the Moon were simply spellbinding, and – perhaps for the first time – we really saw the Earth for what it was: a fragile planet in a vast expanse of empty, sometimes hostile, space; the one place where humans really were at home, and somewhere we should all treasure and take care of.

On their return to Earth, Armstrong and his co-astronauts Buzz Aldrin and Michael Collins received rapturous welcomes. They were heroes of what was going to be a new age of space exploration. We really were “boldly going”. But there were just half a dozen more lunar landings – the programme was cancelled after Apollo 17, which landed in 1972 – and we have not been back since. America’s citizens had, after all, not really got on board with Apollo, or if they had, they had got off again after just a few stops.

A generation later, and half a century after NASA was founded, the major space agencies are all talking big talk about going back to the Moon and even onwards to Mars. Humankind is entering a new age of voyages of discovery that will rival those of the 17th and 18th centuries, if the rhetoric is to be believed. So where are the Brits?

Actually, nowhere. Official UK policy with respect to human space flight is that we don’t do it. “The Government remains content with past decisions on human space flight and will review future activity on merit,” was the response to the House of Commons Select Committee on Science and Technology when they assessed UK space activity in 2007. Not much change there, then.

Undaunted, a month later, the British National Space Centre (BNSC) published the report of its Space Exploration Working Group, recommending that the Government prepared for human space exploration “by securing flight opportunities for British astronauts within the next decade”. So are we, or are we not, in for a change after all?

There are very good reasons why the UK has been cautious about human space missions. Right up there among the various reasons for not being involved are the costs. In money terms, it is several times more expensive to send humans to the Moon or to other planets than it would be to send robots there. UK-designed robots and instruments give a far greater scientific return, pound for pound, than putting money into astronauts and their expensive life support systems. It could also be argued that while we might all have been very sad at the loss of the Mars explorer robot Beagle II, at least no one died as a result of its demise.

But the Commons Select Committee, the Government and BNSC alike acknowledge the inspirational effect of human space missions, over and above what can be achieved by robots. Ordinary Britons, it is argued, will be uplifted if we have a bold programme of exploration that involves British astronauts on their way to the Moon, and later to Mars. School students will be inspired to take up science – including the physical sciences – to the benefit of themselves, science and UK plc. Maybe this will be the value-added effect that tips the balance towards human exploration of space.

“Ordinary Britons, it is argued, will be uplifted if we have a bold programme of exploration that involves British astronauts on their way to the moon”

Space exploration, especially if it is to involve humans, is for the long term. If it is to be funded, ordinary taxpayers will have to be on board right to the end of the line. So what do our fellow citizens really think about these 21st century voyages of discovery? Will they really get on board? And what do they think of the ethical and environmental considerations of going to other worlds – natural wildernesses potentially every bit as fragile as Antarctica – and setting up shop there? The truth is that we don’t really know.

Here is where the ESRC could play a key role. We need a programme of research that draws out, in a systematic and rigorous fashion, what UK citizens really feel about human space exploration, what they are prepared to pay for it, and under what conditions they would like to see it go ahead.

Professor Steve Miller at University College London is Director of the European Science Communication Workshops (ESConet), and contributes to the ESRC’s Science in Society strategy.

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Web http://www.ucl.ac.uk/sts/index.htm
Web http://www.esconet.org
Here we present an at-a-glance overview of the key issues in Britain today. In this issue our focus is on energy production and consumption.

**THE UK BY NUMBERS**

**ENERGY**

“**I shall make electricity so cheap that only the rich can afford to burn candles**”

Thomas Edison, inventor of the electric light bulb

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**Consumption**

- **35.4%** of energy use is accounted for by the household sector. *Source: Office of National Statistics*
- **87%** The rise in average household expenditure since 1990. *Source: Office of National Statistics*
- **40%** less energy is used when washing clothes at 30°C as opposed to 40°C. *Source: Energy Saving Trust*
- **£600** Fit all the lights in your house with energy-saving bulbs and you could save around £45 per year and £600 over the lifetime of all the bulbs. *Source: Energy Saving Trust*

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**NUMBER OF APPLIANCES OWNED BY HOUSEHOLDS BETWEEN 1976 AND 2006**

*Source: Market Transformation Programme*

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<th>Year</th>
<th>Refrigerators</th>
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<th>Televisions</th>
<th>Radios</th>
<th>DVD Players</th>
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**VEHICLE FUELS & LUBRICANTS**

**ELECTRICITY**

**GAS**

**LIQUID FUELS**

**SOLID FUELS**

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*SOCIETY NOW AUTUMN 2008*
Energy sources

“If sunbeams were weapons of war, we would have had solar energy centuries ago”
George Porter, Nobel Prize-winning chemist

CO2 Emissions

1,900
The number of times you could fill the Albert Hall with the CO2 saved if everyone in the UK fitted one energy-saving light bulb. Source: Energy Saving Trust

4%
increase in energy consumption, including electricity, by UK companies and the public sector (1990-2006). Source: Office of National Statistics

38.3
million tonnes of carbon equivalent of residential CO2 emissions from road transport. Source: DEFRA Global Atmosphere Statistics

5%
decrease in household energy CO2 emissions from 1990-2006, largely due to electricity generators switching from coal to gas or nuclear fuels. Source: Department for Business, Enterprise & Regulatory Reform

27%
of renewables generation in 2007 was from wind. Source: Department for Business, Enterprise & Regulatory Reform

7.9%
of the UK’s electricity supply came from renewable sources in 2007, with 4.9% from Renewable Obligation (RO) eligible sources. Source: Department for Business, Enterprise & Regulatory Reform

9.2%
increase in the use of energy from carbon fuels by UK companies and the public sector (1990-2006). Source: Office of National Statistics

“Our objective is nothing less than a sea-change in energy efficiency and consumption”
Gordon Brown, Prime Minister
LIKE MOST WESTERN societies, the UK is undergoing considerable socio-economic change, including an ageing population, increasing diversity of ethnic background and rising instability in both working careers and family life. Understanding these developments is vital for telling us about ourselves and the chances that our hopes and aspirations will be fulfilled. It is also an essential prerequisite for effective policies, be those concerned with running the economy or implementing a local nursery. Policies to promote pre-school care, to invest more in education, to support families, to emphasise preventive health, to assist lone mothers into employment and to develop welfare-to-work schemes for the unemployed have all been informed by research evidence that has come from longitudinal studies like the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS).

Since the autumn of 1991, the BHPS has tracked the lives of a representative sample of the population – 10,000 individuals in 5,000 households. Longitudinal studies of this kind collect data about different times in individuals’ lives, and across generations, linking evidence from different points in the lives of parents and their children.

The BHPS, which is run by the Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISER) at the University of Essex, regularly collects data about each sample member and his or her household. Such panel surveys provide unique information on the persistence of such states as child poverty or disability; on factors that influence key life transitions, such as marriage and divorce; and on the effects of earlier life circumstances on later outcomes. They also support research relevant to the formation and evaluation of policy, and enable improved and more reliable analytical techniques – something that cross-sectional data, which are based on only a single observation of each individual, cannot support.

The BHPS has changed both our understanding of society and the way that we go about trying to understand it. But as our understanding grows and as society changes, demands for new kinds of information increase. In response to this, the ESRC has commissioned ISER to lead the development of Understanding Society, a major new household panel survey. The design team includes colleagues from the University of Warwick and the Institute of Education. The project partner responsible for implementing the survey is NatCen, the National Centre for Social Research.

Understanding Society will be the largest and most ambitious survey of its kind in the world, with a total sample size of around 100,000 individuals in 40,000 households across the UK. It will provide valuable new evidence about the people of the UK – their lives, experiences, behaviours.
and beliefs – and it will enable an unprecedented understanding of diversity within the population.

*Understanding Society* contains seven key features that reflect its scientific rationale, and which can be exploited to generate major innovations in research:

- **SAMPLE SIZE**
  The target sample of 40,000 households is large enough to provide a unique opportunity to explore issues for which other longitudinal surveys are too small to support effective research. It will permit analysis of subgroups such as teenage parents or disabled people. It will also make it possible to judge the importance of local factors in creating opportunity and fostering wellbeing, and to assess the effects of geographical variation in policy. The increased sample size will also allow ‘high-resolution’ analysis of events in time, and permit researchers to investigate the consequences of rare but important events.

- **HOUSEHOLD FOCUS**
  Data will be collected on all members of sampled households and their interactions within the household. This has major advantages for important research areas such as consumption and income (where within-household sharing of resources is important) or demographic change (where the household itself is often the object of study).

- **A FULL AGE RANGE**
  *Understanding Society* will complement existing age-focused studies sampling elderly people (such as the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing) or young people (such as the 1958, 1970 and 2000/1 birth cohort studies), and provide a unique look at behaviours and transitions in mid-life. Moreover, the large sample size means that all cohorts can be analysed at a common point in time.

- **INNOVATIVE DATA COLLECTION METHODS**
  *Understanding Society* will involve continuous development in data collection methods, benefiting from the experience of other longitudinal surveys and from the introduction of new technologies.

- **BROAD, INTERDISCIPLINARY TOPIC COVERAGE**
  While meeting the needs of ‘traditional’ quantitative social science disciplines such as economics, sociology and social policy, it will also serve other disciplines (in both social and medical sciences) and make possible a much wider set of methodological approaches.

- **ETHNIC MINORITY RESEARCH**
  The UK is much more diverse than it was even in 1991. The ethnicity strand in *Understanding Society* recognises the increasing prominence of research into ethnic difference for our understanding of the make-up of UK society and issues of diversity and commonality.

- **BIO-MEDICAL RESEARCH**
  *Understanding Society* will support the collection of a wider range of bio-markers and health indicators than any previous social science focused survey. This data should enable medical and social sciences to work together to resolve longstanding issues such as the social determinants of ill-health, the social consequences of morbidity, and the balance between nature and nurture in determining individual behaviour.

*Understanding Society* is a bold scientific venture, enabling us to learn from our past, continually to know about our present and to better understand and, ideally, perhaps even to help shape our future.

Romesh Vaitilingham, economics journalist
The hidden climate hazard

While extreme weather, storms and droughts grab the headlines, climate hazards can also create hidden long-term effects. The health impact is not widely recognised but is starting to show. Mandy Garner reports on the latest ESRC research.

EXTREME CLIMATE EVENTS are becoming more frequent and in their wake they trail a swathe of economic and social problems, nowhere more so than in developing countries. However, many of the social problems associated with climate hazards, particularly the long-term health consequences, have received little attention from either policymakers or researchers.

Dr Roger Few, Research Fellow in the Overseas Development Group at the University of East Anglia, says one of the reasons for the lack of research is that climate change studies have been dominated by people with an environmental science background.

Dr Few, whose research project Climatic Hazards, Health Risk and Response in Developing Countries was funded by an ESRC Fellowship, says: “You can almost name the health and climate specialists on the fingers of one hand. This is because the traditional focus in hazards research has been on people’s economic livelihoods – issues around food production and agriculture, shelter and displacement. Health is interlinked with all these but there has not been enough attention paid to it.”

He believes that this is partly due to the way academic disciplines are structured, which doesn’t allow for linking up different areas. However, he says, it is also true in policymaking, with health institutions less integrated in risk management structures. Yet the health impact of extreme events like floods can be severe, including infectious waterborne diseases like cholera and long-term effects like malnutrition if food production becomes affected.

In developing countries the health service...
is often struggling to cope with daily issues and finds it difficult to devote resources to long-term planning. Dr Few’s research shows that the general population does not rate health issues as a priority either. As part of his fellowship, he has been conducting research in areas of Vietnam and Mexico that have been much affected by extreme climate events, asking households about perceptions of their health impact. Dr Few says: “There is always a risk of getting waterborne diseases anyway. What happens is that this risk is increased. It is an increased risk of something they could get at any time, whereas the damage to their house has a very particular impact.”

The research found that public awareness of health risks was generally high, but that this did not necessarily lead to action to mitigate the effects. This was generally because of a lack of resources. Most people were more concerned about economic threats than health ones and their ability to respond effectively to hazards was also affected by cultural issues. For example, in Mexico, some indigenous people found it difficult to accept the idea of adding chemicals to water to purify it as this went against their traditional methods of dealing with waterborne disease.

The research also suggested some ways forward through increased health education, particularly of children, and other health promotion initiatives. It recommended that health could take a central role in co-ordinating preparedness planning as it provides a bridge between other support services, such as transport and water supplies. Greater partnership and co-ordination between local, regional and national agencies would also improve health outcomes.

The budget in developing countries is low for health prevention as most of the health budget goes to big city hospitals. In rural areas there is little in the way of treatment so prevention assumes a bigger role. “If you go to a small health clinic, they generally consist of a room, a chair and possibly a bed. There is very little equipment on show,” Dr Few says. “Most of what you see is health promotion posters.” Apart from the cost of staffing health promotion, it is very low on costs. “There is not much money for curative work so it is arguably even more cost effective to do health promotion in such places than it is in developed countries.”

One significant finding from the research was that mental health was mentioned on several occasions as a potential health threat. “Stress is only slowly emerging onto the policy agenda in developing countries,” says Few, who points out that stress is likely to be greater than in developed countries because people stand to lose more from climate hazards. They will have no insurance, and risk losing their livelihood, their livestock – even their lives. Moreover, any treatment for stress is likely to come through external intervention.

Dr Few’s research has created substantial interest, particularly in Vietnam, where there is very little similar research. His report has been translated and reported widely, and has led to invitations to present the research at conferences, including an inter-ministerial conference of South East Asian health ministers.

Dr Few is also setting up an international research network on environmental health and development. A website is being set up later this year and an international conference held at the University of East Anglia in 2009. “It is an attempt to bring together for the first time a variety of disciplines whose work focuses on the interconnection of environment, health and development,” says Dr Few.

Things may be beginning to change in climate hazard planning.

Mandy Garner, freelance education journalist and former features editor of The Times Higher Education Supplement
Ben Page, big polls and best policies

“Call us adaptable social investigators.” Ben Page, Chairman of the Social Research Institute at Ipsos MORI, talks to David Walker about the global scale of activities, mix and match research, and what to do when you find yourself in a lift with Gordon Brown…

David Walker: How would you describe what you do: is it social science?

Ben Page: We are doing huge social surveys, to extremely high standards, such as the evaluation of New Deal for Communities, which involves 19,500 random probability interviews in the poorest wards in England, or large-scale surveys of witnesses and victims. We have a contract to survey five million GP patients a year for the Department of Health. So yes, we’re doing serious social science.

We collaborate with academics, for example from Cardiff, Sheffield, the London School of Economics (LSE) and Manchester. We model data; investigate theoretical propositions, such as the apparently close inverse relationship between ethnic fractionalisation and perceptions of local health services. We do £10 million a year of qualitative research, ranging from one-to-one depth interviews with refugees through to large scale deliberative events involving hundreds of people. But we’re not an academic body. Even though we spend five to ten per cent of our budget on research and development, policy analysis and thought leadership, we have to respond to the market.

We recruit a range of graduates, from people with humanities degrees through to social science PhDs and graduates of the research methods MA at the LSE. For example, my colleague Patten Smith, Director of Research Methods, is an acknowledged expert. But career paths vary. We need everyone from technical experts to people managers and lots of project managers. In September we had to shift 20 million pieces of paper as part of a research project that required buying futures options on paper supply and huge logistical issues – different skills from a qualitative researcher.

David Walker: You do social studies but aren’t yourself a trained social scientist…

Ben Page: I read modern history at Oxford, where I learnt about Sebohmin Rowntree and social inquiry, John Snow and public health, and early social researchers. It taught me how to absorb a huge amount of data about an issue, distill it and focus on what mattered. On moving to London I noticed a job advertised in the back pages of Time Out interviewing for market research agency NOP and before long found myself on a sofa next to Bob Worcester as he shouted at the television during the 1987 general election. MORI, as the firm then was, has completely changed in the time since.

My domain includes all social research and work for government and the public sector, which is the bulk of our business. I lead our public sector practice worldwide, and one of the most interesting things for me over the last couple of years has been discovering that Britain is a world leader in the type of research we do. We recently opened a social research institute in Australia, which is growing rapidly; we have extensive networks of offices across Latin America and North America and we are launching our Scandinavian Social Research Institute in November.

In terms of data collection we use an extremely wide range of methods. We hold deliberative events. We employ a field force of 1,500 who conduct face-to-face interviews. Our ethnography team makes films, for example studying drinking habits. We run usability laboratories to test new websites. We use people who are homeless to conduct interviews on our behalf with homeless people. Methodologically, in other words, we mix and match. We’ll work with NHS staff to find out why the take-up of cervical smears among Bengali women is low; we’ll often work with academics where we will be involved in designing and executing the data collection as part of a collaborative inquiry or evaluation.

David Walker: So how would you describe your relationship with professional social scientists based in universities?

Ben Page: Close, and the differences are blurring.

“One of the most interesting things for me has been discovering that Britain is a world leader in the type of research we do.”
Quite a few academics are effectively running consultancy businesses for public services. We are perfectly at home with sociologists and political scientists, though obviously we are a profit making organisation – we have no state funding. One of our broader goals is to enrich the world’s understanding of survey research. We collect a lot of data that enhances our common knowledge of society and social dynamics, and we have a publishing programme. We have good relations with academic social science, providing data to exacting standards to guarantee reliability where academics are in the lead, such as the evaluation of the New Deal for Communities programme.

I suppose one difference is that we aren’t working in the same framework. We are realistic about how politicians have to make decisions. We are willing to have a point of view. Say our work throws up a correlation – we found that no primary care trust serving an ethnically heterogeneous area showed high levels of patient satisfaction. I will point it out to clients perhaps more robustly than an academic would. It’s sticking my neck out, speculating openly about the reasons, whether they are to do with demography or service provision.

We have to work in real time. You can’t wait for two years to deliver a report. While it would have academic interest, people who have to make decisions need timely information. I wish we could make them be much more systematic in evaluating pilots, having random control groups and so on, but we can at least give them the best possible advice within the window they have. We sit on mounds of data collected for local authorities when they operated the Best Value regime of performance assessment. There’s not much point in looking at it seven years on. The regime has been replaced. Best Value is in the past and there were so many initiatives interacting it’s very hard to prove additionality of one element.

We need to pay attention to detail but not be obsessed by it. It’s no good, if you’re in a lift with David Cameron or Gordon Brown, to tell them about sampling frames or error margins; you have to tell them what the findings mean. Research skills are not an end in themselves. The purpose, Marx said, is to change the world, not just understand it.

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David Walker, editor of Guardian Public magazine and chair of the ESRC’s Communication and Information Committee

**VOICES BEN PAGE**

**DW** Does government listen when you make presentations of survey findings?
**BP** Well I am asked to speak to enough seminars! I think government could make better use of the survey data it collects, with more cross- and meta-analysis of different projects. Because we work for every department, and have a wide reach and scale, we can see the opportunities that someone in an individual department might simply be unaware of.

It can take years for ideas to percolate through. We, like all researchers, love to come up with new findings, but we don’t spend enough time disseminating what we know. It’s the same as with Easterlin’s work [Richard Easterlin produced a seminal 1974 study of the relationship of income and happiness] – it only got popularised decades later. We first started telling local authorities that there was a relationship between effective communications and what people thought of them in the 1980s – it wasn’t till 2003 that the Local Government Association made it official doctrine!

**DW** What sort of relationship do you have with the ESRC?
**BP** I have sat on various advisory groups and we work on ESRC projects with universities. I’d love to be able to apply for research grants – oh the luxury of being able to reinterpret data, to spend time going back over what we know! I sometimes think we, including the ESRC, should stop new research for a year and make more sense of the datasets we already have, and ensure the findings have been effectively disseminated.

Ever since I was an undergraduate I’ve been fascinated by housing and the effect of physical environment on people’s attitudes and social character. We are sitting on a million records of people’s assessment of their quality of life. How is that affected by where they live, high-rise, walkways, gardens and so on, as opposed to simple income? I’d love to rework it alongside house condition surveys and new measures on design quality to see what relationships there are. We are building, or at least were building prior to the housing bust, redbrick boxes. Is that the same as creating Thamesmead all over again, or is it really just about raising incomes?

David Walker, editor of Guardian Public magazine and chair of the ESRC’s Communication and Information Committee

**DW** Your company has benefited from Labour’s enthusiasm for research and surveys. Are the good times over?
**BP** We’ve grown in the past decade, along with other providers of social research. The growth started with John Major and the Citizen’s Charter, pushed by interest in performance management and, after 1997, more interest in evidence and policy evaluation. But there’s a global trend to pay more attention to users’ perceptions, to be more systematic in policy analysis and evaluation, and I don’t think it’s going to be abandoned. Public spending won’t grow as it has but, when the Tories win a general election, I don’t think ministers will stop being interested in what people think. Conservative councillors, who are now in the majority in England, are just as enthusiastic about research, perhaps more so, than traditional Labour members, because they want to use private sector disciplines to deliver what tax payers want.
Publications

Journal of Cultural Economy
The Journal of Cultural Economy is part of the Culture, Economy and the Social publishing programme of the ESRC Centre for Research on Socio Cultural Change. Its concern is with the role played by various forms of material cultural practice in the organisation of the economic and social systems, and of the relations between them. It will provide a unique interdisciplinary forum for work on these questions from across the social sciences and humanities.

Managing to Improve Public Services
Managing to Improve Public Services is an output of the Advanced Institute of Management Research. It shows how management can be harnessed to improve a range of public services. Advancing both theory and practice beyond traditional public administration and ‘new public management’, it considers the interrelationships between governance and public management.

Women and Employment: Changing Lives and New Challenges
This new book examines 25 years of change in women’s employment and addresses the challenges facing women today. It provides new empirical research that advances our understanding of the challenges posed by women’s employment in our changing society and draws out the policy lessons that could improve economic and social wellbeing.

Body Shopping: The Economy Fuelled by Flesh and Blood
Body Shopping: The Economy Fuelled by Flesh and Blood highlights the clear ethical, legal and social issues in which our bodies are being turned into commodities. It aims to bring important and vital questions out of commercial secrecy and into public debate.

A New Politics of Identity
Ethnic, religious and national identities, which have come under pressure in a globalised world, are scrutinised in A New Politics of Identity. The book questions whether it is possible to embrace the sense of belonging and rootedness that these identities give and still cultivate human solidarity based on principles of common humanity.

Regenerating London: Governance, Sustainability and Community
The latest thinking on urban regeneration in London is explained. Engaging with social, economic, and political structures of cities, Regenerating London highlights paradoxes and contradictions in urban policy and offers an evaluation of the contemporary forms of urban redevelopment.


Body Shopping: The Economy Fuelled by Flesh and Blood written by Donna Dickenson, University of Edinburgh. Published by Oneworld Publications. ISBN 978-1851685912 (Hardback), 320pp, £16.99. For more details visit http://www.genomicsnetwork.ac.uk/egenis


Regenerating London: Governance, Sustainability and Community edited by Rob Imrie, Loretta Lees and Mike Raco, King’s College London. Published by Routledge. ISBN 978-0415433679 (Hardback), 336pp, £85.00. For more details visit http://www.kcl.ac.uk
THE OPENING OF THE RCUK INDIA OFFICE
The Research Councils UK (RCUK) Office in India is launched by Ian Pearson MP, Minister for Innovation, Universities and Skills, on 20 October 2008. An exciting programme of events to celebrate the launch has been organised to run from 19 to 21 October at a variety of locations throughout New Delhi. Delegates from the worlds of academia, industry and policy-making have been invited to attend a series of talks, meet potential collaborators and visit key Indian research institutions. For further information on the RCUK Office in India email ruck.india@rcuk.ac.uk

TWO NEW RESEARCH CENTRES
The Centre for Charitable Giving and Philanthropy, based at City University and directed by Professor Jenny Harrow, was launched early October 2008 by Phil Hope MP, Minister for the Third Sector. The first UK centre of its kind, it is being funded by the ESRC, the Office of the Third Sector, the Scottish Government and the Carnegie UK Trust.

October 2008 will also see the launch of a new Third Sector Research Centre dedicated to analysing the impact of the sector’s activities. Led by the University of Birmingham and working in partnership with the University of Southampton, the Centre is funded by the ESRC, the Office of the Third Sector and the Barrow Cadbury Trust. For more details see this issue’s In Focus supplement or visit http://www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/index_voluntary.aspx

LOOKING FOR DATA ON HEALTH?
Health issues cover a wide range of topics and cut across many academic disciplines. The Economic and Social Data Service (ESDS) has created a suite of web pages designed to aid researchers who are looking specifically for data on health and health behaviour. Data have been collected and are made available via the ESDS on topics as varied as the experience of illness, child development, access to care, lifestyle behaviour, subjective wellbeing, diet and nutrition, immunisation, and attitudes towards health service provision. For more details visit http://www.esds.ac.uk/themes/health

ALSPAC USER GROUP
The ALSPAC User Group is a resource aimed at extending and supporting the use of the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children (ALSPAC) data for social scientists. The user group website has now gone live and provides information about the resource tailored to the interests of social scientists. The ALSPAC study originally recruited around 14,000 pregnant mothers in 1991/2 and has followed the children born and their families ever since, with regular sweeps for data including social, health, child development, psychology, education, geographical and bio-medical data. The ALSPAC User Group runs a monthly seminar series and a biennial workshop with presentations about the resource and the results of research with the ALSPAC cohort data. For more information visit http://www.bristol.ac.uk/alspac-social-sciences

PEOPLE
Lord Adair Turner leaves the ESRC, while Professor Andrew Watkinson becomes a director of LWEC

LORD ADAIR TURNER LEAVES THE ESRC
We regret to announce that Lord Adair Turner has stepped down from his post as Chair of the ESRC in order to take up his new appointment as Chair of the Financial Services Authority (FSA). The Council would like to take this opportunity to publicly thank Lord Turner for his contribution to the ESRC, both as Council chair and as an ordinary member of Council over the past four years. We wish him every success with his new challenge at the FSA.

DIRECTOR FOR LWEC APPOINTED
Professor Andrew Watkinson, former Director of the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research and a Professor in the School of Environmental Sciences at the University of East Anglia, has been appointed as Director of the ‘Living With Environmental Change’ (LWEC) research programme. The LWEC will be studying ways for society and individuals to adapt to the environmental changes that we face now and in the future.

Professor Watkinson’s current research focuses on interdisciplinary aspects of climate change, ecology and coastal zone management, with particular emphasis on how science informs policy. He is also Chair of the NERC/ESRC/DFID advisory committee on Ecosystem Services and Poverty Alleviation, an initiative forming part of the LWEC programme, and so already has experience of working with most of the LWEC’s partners.
DEBATING MATTERS – JUDGES NEEDED

As part of its young people’s programme, the ESRC is pleased to sponsor Debating Matters, an innovative and engaging approach to debating. The topical debates and challenging format appeal to students from a range of backgrounds. This national competition places the students as the debaters and the experts as the judges. ESRC researchers are welcomed and encouraged to act as judges for these evening events. If you are interested, email Melanie.Knetsch@esrc.ac.uk

BRITAIN IN 2009 MAGAZINE

Showing the diversity of ESRC-funded research around the state of the nation in 2009, the magazine is a mixture of academic opinion pieces alongside informed journalistic writing. Features in this edition will include: the environment and trying to live sustainably at an individual and a society level; poverty and inequality; the future of the British economy; synthetic biology; health inequalities and much more. Britain in 2009, on sale from November 2008.

LARGE GRANTS

The ESRC Large Grant scheme provides funds for experienced researchers requiring longer term funding or extended support for research or research infrastructure. Four grants were funded in the last competition, which address important social and economic issues, both within the UK and globally. Successful applications include: Professor Michael Devereux’s project from Oxford University, whose team will study Emotion Regulation of Others and Self: A Collaborative Research Network. For more details visit http://www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk

BIRTH COHORT STUDIES

A groundbreaking new research facility will enable unprecedented understanding of how economic, social and biological factors combine to shape human behaviour. Birth Cohorts is a set of studies that tracks a large sample of babies from birth into adulthood, gathering information on their lives as they grow up. The new facility is a collaboration between the ESRC and the Medical Research Council. The resource will expand the series by creating a new cohort to extend the series over a further 12 years. The study will follow a group of newborn infants in 2012 and investigate how pre-natal influences, as well as the interplay of genetic and environmental factors, affect development. For more details visit http://www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk

MAPPING CAREER PATHS

More information about work life after graduation is needed to map outcomes and impact from investments in research training. The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) is expanding its survey of the Destinations of Leavers of Higher Education (DLHE) to include questions for research graduates. This year’s longitudinal DLHE survey will be out in December, and the HESA is keen to gain responses from as many as possible of the research graduates who responded to the 2005 survey after graduation. For more details visit http://www.hesa.ac.uk/index.php/content/view/112/154

EVENTS

24-26 OCTOBER 2008

Models of Interaction in Bilinguals

The international conference on Models of Interaction in Bilinguals is hosted by the ESRC Centre for Research on Bilingualism in Theory and Practice. The Centre is the first research centre in the UK to focus specifically on bilingualism. For more information visit http://www.bilingualism.bangor.ac.uk

1-2 NOVEMBER 2008

Battle of Ideas 2008

The Battle of Ideas 2008, with headline sponsorship from the ESRC, will be a two-day festival of high-level, thought-provoking debate organised by the Institute of Ideas and hosted by the Royal College of Art. The Battle of Ideas’ mission is to expand the boundaries of public debate by organising conferences, discussions and publishing written conversations and exchanges. For more information visit http://www.battleofideas.org.uk

24-25 NOVEMBER 2008

Improving Teaching: Enhancing Learning

The Improving Teaching: Enhancing Learning conference is a two-day event connecting evidence, practice and policy. Highlights include keynote speeches from leading practitioners, researchers and policymakers, various workshops and seminars, exhibitions, the interactive zone and publications. It is run by the ESRC Teaching and Learning Research Programme. For more information visit http://www.tlrp.org/conference/2008
A new magazine for ESRC

Society Now is the new regular ESRC magazine focusing on raising awareness of our research and its impact. Aimed at a wide range of readers from the MP to the businessperson, the voluntary worker to the teacher, the public through to the social scientist, it is published three times a year (spring, summer, and early autumn).

Society Now replaces The Edge magazine and the ESRC newsletter Social Sciences and offers a readable, intelligent, concise overview of current issues concerning society.

In addition to Society Now earlier this year we launched a bi-monthly e-newsletter, containing corporate news and funding opportunities aimed at the academic community. If you would like to sign up for the new ESRC e-newsletter you can register at: http://www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/enewsreg

The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) funds research into the big social and economic questions facing us today. We also develop and train the UK’s future social scientists. Our research informs public policies and helps make businesses, voluntary bodies and other organisations more effective. Most importantly, it makes a real difference to all our lives.

The ESRC is an independent organisation, established by Royal Charter in 1965, and funded mainly by the Government.

More at http://www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk

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