Referendum time
Will this be the most important vote of a generation?

Migration: Looking for answers to the crisis
Budget: Sizing up the winners and losers
Voices: How Social science contributes to our security
Society Now, the ESRC's regular magazine which showcases the impact of the social science research we fund.

This issue is focused on the Europe referendum, migration, the recent budget, and biosocial science. With a few weeks to go before the referendum on the UK's membership of the European Union, is this shaping up to be the most important vote of a generation?

The Mediterranean Migration Research Programme, launched in September 2015, is starting to report its findings. What does UK social science tell us about the migration issue?

We look at the Institute for Fiscal Studies' (IFS) analysis of Chancellor George Osborne's March Budget presentation – who are the winners or losers?

Professor John Hobcraft explains biosocial science – the study of how our behaviours and experiences alter our biology, and our biology plays a part in shaping our behaviours.

And Professor Paul Taylor looks at the major security challenges society faces and the contribution of social science to helping us become more secure.

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

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Contributors

John Hobcraft is Professor of Social Policy and Demography, University of York
Dr Matthew Johnson is a lecturer in politics at Lancaster University and a regular commentator on British cultural politics
Professor Melissa Leach is Director, Institute of Development Studies and former Director, STEPS Centre
Dr Cara Booker is Research Fellow and Deputy Director of Graduate Studies at iiser at the University of Essex
Professor Paul Taylor is Director of the ESRC Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats (CREST)
Dr Simon Usherwood is Senior Lecturer in Politics at the University of Surrey, and senior fellow on the UK in a Changing Europe initiative
THE UK’S FOOD waste problem is galvanising agreement between retailers, policymakers, NGOs, activists, campaigners and consultants, says research from the Sustainable Consumption Institute (SCI) at the University of Manchester.

One third of the food currently produced for humans to eat is wasted. Until recently, responsibilities for food waste were pushed onto the shoulders of individuals and households. “Initial responses either blamed consumers for their assumed lack of concern and cooking skills or else positioned food waste as a matter of consumer choice and behaviour change,” says project leader Dr David Evans.

But research by SCI shows that the issue is much more complex. A survey of 2,800 consumers shows that conventions generally seen as positive – cooking from fresh ingredients, the nuclear family meal, and eating with friends and extended family – are more likely to give rise to surplus food, which is at risk of becoming waste.

Moreover, since 2012, austerity, food price inflation, food poverty, the growing use of food banks, and concerns about food security, environmental sustainability and climate change, have all come together to transform responses to the challenge of food waste reduction.

“Our research suggests that a surprising multi-stakeholder coalition has rapidly developed around this issue and there is broad consensus among retailers, activists and policymakers,” explains Dr Evans. “Crucially, there is recognition that we must move beyond ‘behaviour change’ and recognise, and advocate for, distributed responsibility.”

Supermarkets, who are directly responsible for only five per cent of food waste, are taking measures to help suppliers and customers waste less. Current initiatives include the introduction of guaranteed minimum orders for suppliers, better redistribution of surplus food to charities, improved packaging and a clearer focus on helping consumers to avoid waste.

The reasons for supermarkets getting on board are complex, but they do believe customers care about food waste and inactivity could lead them to shop elsewhere. Among all stakeholders, researchers identified a sense of moral outrage regarding food waste and a genuine shared desire to tackle the problem. “It will be interesting to see if this move beyond behaviour change and the cohesion between parties that are usually rather antagonistic is indicative of broader change in how retailers and their stakeholders approach other social or environmental issues,” says Dr Evans.

Campaigners and retailers agree on food waste ‘outrage’

Campaigners and retailers agree on food waste ‘outrage’
IN BRIEF

BLOWING THE WHISTLE
Four-fifths of people in the UK believe they would speak up if they witnessed serious corruption in their organisation. But while whistleblowers perform a vital role, many are forced to leave their organisations and struggle financially. Researchers will examine what happens to whistleblowers and explore interventions that help existing and future whistleblowers by providing advice on income generation and rebuilding careers.
ESRC grant number ES/N007085/1

INTEREST GROUPS
The influence of interest groups in politics poses a potential threat to democracy. Theory suggests that groups most likely to be represented will have concentrated economic interests or intensely held beliefs that may result in policies at odds with general public opinion. ‘Agendas and Interest Groups’ is a comparative project that will address concerns about the role of interest groups in setting policy.
ESRC grant number ES/N018915/1

REFERENDUM RESOURCE
Weekly summaries and analysis of official and unofficial EU Referendum campaign materials form one strand of a project aimed at improving understanding of the European Union and the UK’s relationship with it. Through original research and a wide range of outputs, this Fellowship aims to help people make more informed decisions in the June 2016 Referendum on membership of the EU.
ESRC grant number ES/N015479/1

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ESRC grant number ES/N015479/1

INITIAL TRAINING FOR early years professionals should include guidance on how to use tablets effectively and how to choose apps suitable for under-fives, says a study of pre-schoolers’ use of apps. Parents, too, need further guidance and support on choosing apps for young children, and family digital literacy programmes should be developed which can be offered by early-years settings and schools.

“All the evidence tells us that the right age-appropriate apps can promote play and creativity in the under-fives and help them build a broader range of skills and knowledge such as problem-solving, prediction and logic: all skills important for science, technology, engineering and mathematics subjects,” explains researcher Professor Jackie Marsh.

Currently, a quarter of pre-schoolers have no access to tablets in their homes. And, in a survey of 2,000 parents of under-fives, only three percent of parents reported that their children had access to a tablet when at school, nursery or in their childminders’ home. “Clearly there’s a danger that these children will be left on the wrong side of the digital divide,” says Professor Marsh.

But survey findings suggest that simply ensuring greater access to tablets is not enough. “We found pre-schoolers were using tablets on average about 80 minutes a day, but were surprised by how much they were using apps such as Angry Birds, Candy Crush and Temple Run which are not appropriate in that we observed that they foster little creativity and learning when pre-schoolers use them,” she explains. Moreover, some parents did not monitor under-fives’ app use sufficiently well. Safety settings to ensure safe access to the internet were not always employed: nine per cent of parents admitted their children had been exposed to content that made them uncomfortable and 10 per cent of children had made an in-app purchase by accident.

“Age-appropriate apps have a range of benefits for young children but we can’t just leave them to it,” she insists. “Given the extent to which young children who live in households with tablets use them, we would recommend much more support and guidance for parents offered by health visitors, parenting organisations, childminders and early-years settings on how to choose apps for this age group and how to support children in using them. Also, while more early years settings need to ensure preschool children have access to tablets, early-years practitioners also need more training in the use of apps to support creativity and learning.”

Contact Professor Jacqueline Marsh, University of Sheffield
Email j.a.marsh@sheffield.ac.uk
Telephone 0114 222 8166
Web www.techandplay.org
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Early years professionals need more apps training
Racism takes its toll on child wellbeing

Children’s health and development is adversely affected by racism, says recent research from the ESRC International Centre for Lifecourse Studies at University College London. “There’s now a compelling body of evidence linking racism with poorer health and development in children, something which has long-term implications for their wellbeing,” says researcher Professor Yvonne Kelly.

Researchers looked at the social, emotional and physical development of children and discovered links between the racism their parents experience and behavioural problems, poor performance on tests of cognitive ability and obesity. In the first study of its kind, researchers explored how mothers’ experience of racism affected the physical and mental health of more than 2,000 five-year-olds in the Millennium Cohort Study. Findings show that children with mothers who had experienced racism first hand were around one and a half times more likely to be obese than children of mothers who had not. Children living in areas where the mothers described racism as common were more likely to have social and emotional difficulties and performed worse in tests.

“Racism needs to be firmly in the mix of priorities to tackle when policymakers are trying to ensure the health and happiness of the UK’s children,” Professor Kelly concludes.
IN BRIEF

TACKLING SANITATION
The lack of decent sanitation in densely-populated low-income urban settlements in Africa is an important cause of under-five mortality, through diarrhoeal diseases. Despite significant investments by governments and international donors in bringing sanitation to low-income households, adoption of improved sanitation has been low. Building on literature that stresses the importance of social networks on influencing individuals’ behaviour, researchers will explore the potential for more effective interventions.
ESRC grant number ES/n006984/1

‘HONEYPOT BRITAIN’
There is a perception among parts of the public that migrant workers come to the UK to claim benefits – a phenomenon described by the tabloid press as ‘honeypot Britain’. Researchers will examine exactly what migrants are entitled to under EU and UK law, how many migrants claim benefits and the experience of being an EU migrant coming to the UK.
ESRC grant number ES/N015436/1

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY
Brazil has one of the most rapidly ageing populations in the world and increasing levels of obesity and other conditions associated with a lack of physical activity are emerging as a public health priority. This study will develop policy tools, partnerships and evidence for increasing physical activity levels of older adults in Brazilian cities with the aim of benefiting economic development and wellbeing.
ESRC grant number ES/N013336/1

History lessons on child sex abuse

FOR MORE THAN a century, policymakers, the criminal justice system and press have missed numerous opportunities to act on child sexual abuse, according to a recent review of the past social, legal and political responses to the problem. In 1925, for example, an important Departmental committee on Sexual Offences against Young People made key recommendations to tighten the law and protect children. Yet legal objections meant that it took many decades before young people’s rights were fully recognised. The press, too, first highlighted the evils of child prostitution in 1885 yet has since missed numerous opportunities to define and highlight child sexual abuse as a problem.
Researchers say their findings on historical abuse will contextualise current public inquiries and contribute to future policymaking.

Africa overlooks ‘slum superstars’

GOVERNMENT TEACHERS AND education officials in developing countries too often believe that children from poor families with illiterate parents lack talent and ability. Contrary to this belief, a new study based in the slums of Dar Es Salaam in Tanzania identified children with extraordinary and exceptional abilities and potential. “Currently the contribution of these children to economic growth and development is wasted because no-one believes they exist,” says researcher Professor Pauline Dixon.
In an 18-month project, researchers collected data from 24 teachers, nearly 2,000 children and 17 government schools as well as 200 parents to investigate how ‘giftedness’ is currently regarded in a low-income setting in Dar Es Salaam. Children took part in a range of creativity and IQ tests as well as describing what they thought of their own intelligence. The children were also asked to identify three children in their class they thought were gifted giving the reasons why.

Although the children were taught mostly by rote, test scores reveal that they were just as creative as Western children, including some with exceptionally high ability. “Prior to our research some educational officials as well as teachers held the belief that poor children could not be gifted,” says Professor Dixon. Indeed, when researchers told one father that his daughter was very talented, he refused to believe it, explaining that he thought only the rich could be talented.
“It is important that we dispel this myth as too few development experts believe that part of the solution to poverty can come from the poor themselves, says Professor Dixon. “Our research reveals an enormous waste of human capital if the resource of gifted ‘slum superstars’ remains untapped.”

Contact Professor Pauline Dixon,
University of Newcastle
Email pauline.dixon@ncl.ac.uk
Telephone 0191 208 5047
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NEW RESEARCH INTO the relationship between memory, identity and wellbeing in older people could lead to better support for people with dementia.

Changes in memory, as people grow older, can have a major impact on daily life and relationships with others. As well as forgetting simple day-to-day tasks, people can forget personal and life events.

“This type of memory – autobiographical memory – plays a central role in our sense of identity and we wanted to explore how it would relate to wellbeing,” explains researcher Dr Clare Rathbone of Oxford Brookes University.

As part of this three-year study, researchers tested 32 younger and 32 older adults on their memory, sense of identity and wellbeing. Surprisingly, perhaps, findings show that general forgetfulness, a common experience among many older adults, is not related to wellbeing at all. “Not being able to remember things or life events to the same extent as younger people didn’t mean older people felt unhappier with life,” Dr Rathbone points out. “Rather, we found that older people tended to be happier with their descriptions of ‘who they were’ and having a positive view of their self-image or identity was key to their wellbeing. Among younger people, the same relationship between identity and wellbeing did not occur.

When their memory performance was tested, younger participants in the study were able to remember more than older participants. But, interestingly, although older people scored less highly on memory tests, even when older people reported only very positive memories, this was not related to their general wellbeing. “Our results suggest that wellbeing in older age does not depend on what you remember, or even how good your memory is – what is crucial is how you conceptualise your identity in the present moment,” says Dr Rathbone.

These findings could, researchers suggest, pave the way for future research aimed at supporting wellbeing in people with very severe memory impairments and even dementia. “Having a sense of identity does not require complex memories for support,” she says. “By finding new ways to help older people develop more positive views of themselves in the present moment it may be possible – despite memory loss – to support wellbeing in later life.”

Alcohol does not affect victims’ rape evidence

FOllOWING A NEW study from the University of Leicester, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and Leicestershire Police are working to develop national guidelines for interviewing sexual assault victims who were intoxicated during the crime.

Research, led by Dr Heather Flowe, suggests that even if a victim was drunk at the time of a sexual assault, they can still accurately remember details of the crime. In the study, researchers examined the influence of alcohol on remembering an interactive hypothetical sexual assault in a laboratory setting. Female participants completed a memory test 24 hours and four months later.

“Although intoxicated participants reported fewer pieces of information about an assault, the information they did provide was just as accurate as sober participants,” says Dr Flowe.

It is a long-held misconception that victims and witnesses who are intoxicated are not able to give as good an account as they would when sober, she says. By working with the CPS and police the research team aims to improve the quality of how testimony is gathered from sexual assault victims, which could result in a higher rate of prosecutions.
Multi-platform media poses challenges

TODAY, MORE CONTENT is accessible, in more formats, on more devices, for more people than ever before. But quantity does not necessarily mean quality. Research into how media companies are transforming from single sector (eg, print or broadcast) to digital multi-platform suppliers of content highlights a tendency in some cases to re-use a narrow pool of material.

Many media companies embarked on multi-platform strategies when, because of recession or competitive pressures, their budgets were constrained, says Professor Gillian Doyle. Although investment in new equipment and skills has improved cost-efficiency, what has made the journey to multiplatform feasible is, in many cases, recycling of output rather than any wholesale increase in productivity.

While adding to a cornucopia of media content, multi-platform expansion also poses challenges for media pluralism. “Pluralism is about having different voices in the media,” she says. While some argue there is no need to worry about promoting pluralism in a digital era, Professor Doyle disagrees. “More volume is not the same as better and more diverse,” she says. “We are not talking about supplying cars or baked beans, but the avenues through which people form their ideas about how the world works. I’m not convinced recent developments in the sector adequately serve these ends.”

Positive house moves do not disrupt early childhood

MANY PARENTS WORRY that the disruption of moving home may be harmful to young children, but research from the Centre for Longitudinal Studies suggests that house moves which are good for the family do not appear to jeopardise child development.

Analysis of more than 14,000 UK children born in 2000-01 and followed by the Millennium Cohort Study finds that 40 per cent had moved at least once by the age of five and five per cent had changed home more than three times. Researchers examined the children’s experiences of moving in relation to their scores on cognitive assessments, and whether they had any behavioural problems at age five. Findings confirm that it is events such as family disruption and loss of employment, along with social disadvantage – indicated by low education, poor physical and mental health of the mother, low family income, not owning the home and living in disadvantaged areas – that account for the apparent adverse association of child development with moving.

While residential mobility does not necessarily equate with undesirable instability, this does not mean it is never detrimental, say researchers. Children whose moves did not improve their living space or area were more likely to have behavioural problems and marginally worse vocabulary scores than non-moving children.

Moreover, the housing scene has changed since the mid-2000s. A decade on, moving home could prove more detrimental if moves are ‘forced’, due to housing becoming more unaffordable. “The question remains as to whether the current lack of affordable housing and reduction in rent subsidies in the UK will increase the number of young families moving for negative reasons,” says Professor Heather Joshi. “Policies should enable families to move to meet changing needs, without undue stress. We must also ensure that support for children during their ‘early years’ includes suitable housing for low income families.”
Coalitional presidentialism costs

COALITIONAL PRESIDENTIAL DEMOCRACIES in Africa, Latin America and post-communist Europe, where a president whose party is without a majority in the lower house of parliament seeks a durable cross-party alliance, are already common and expected to increase.

In the first cross-regional study of coalitional presidentialism, researchers interviewed 350 MPs from emerging democracies in Armenia, Benin, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Kenya, Malawi, Russia and Ukraine. Findings suggest that the anticipated ‘difficult combination’ of multiparty politics and presidential systems has not created political stability, but strengthened presidents’ policy decisiveness. Researchers warn that the dominance of presidential coalitions has produced democratic costs which could create longer-term problems.

Health policy neglects potential of online patient communities

GOVERNMENT, THE NHS and professional healthcare bodies have embraced social media networks as dissemination tools, but frequently overlook their potential for peer-to-peer support by people with chronic illness, says a new study of how people with diabetes use social media.

“Lifelong self-care is critical for people with diabetes, which means they have a lot to gain from asking questions, joining communities and sharing information on networks like Facebook,” says researcher Dr Nelya Koteyko. But, based on a major study of social media and healthcare, researchers conclude that policymakers regard social media as a tool for delivering information to aid choice, rather than an opportunity for peer support.

Government caution is unsurprising given the potential risks of providing more direct support online for healthcare professionals, the difficulties of determining who would pay for digital healthcare and concerns around patient confidentiality.

Co-researcher Dr Daniel Hunt says: “By retreating from providing care through social media, the government both misses opportunities and devolves risks onto the public and non-government organisations. Crucially, without a change in policy and working practices to reflect how the public use new media, our healthcare professionals will remain out of the loop with emerging patient practices.”

IN BRIEF

INTENSIVE CARE STUDIES
Recruitment of Intensive Care Unit (ICU) patients to take part in clinical research poses significant challenges, not least because many patients are unconscious and unable to consent.

Researchers aim to investigate stakeholders with recent first-hand experience of ICU treatment and research to inform good practice on recruitment and consent to future ICU studies.

ESRC grant number ES/N006372/1

MANAGING BY NUMBER
Public service policymaking activities and administrative control are increasingly structured around numerical calculations ranging from cost-benefit analyses to rankings and ratings.

Researchers will scrutinise relationships between quantification, administrative capacity and democracy across three policy sectors (health/hospitals, higher education, criminal justice/prisons) and across France, Germany, the Netherlands and the UK.

ESRC grant number ES/N018869/1

UNIVERSITY INEQUALITIES
Inequalities in university access, attainment and labour market outcomes persist.

New research aims to understand the association between parental socio-economic status and student drop-out rates, degree class, employment, earnings and participation in post-graduate education over the last decade.

Researchers will investigate how inequalities arise and what interventions could reduce them.

ESRC grant number ES/M008622/1
Ready for the referendum?

Simon Usherwood of the ESRC UK in a Changing Europe initiative gives his opinion on the implications of David Cameron’s negotiation of the UK’s terms of membership of the EU, and how the various in or out camps are shaping up pre-referendum. Will this turn out to be the most important vote of a generation?

AND SO IT finally begins. Two years after David Cameron’s Bloomberg speech, where he committed to holding a referendum on the UK’s membership of the European Union (EU), we now have a date: 23 June.

Before considering the value of Cameron’s ‘settlement’ with the European Council in February, it is perhaps useful to dwell on how he came to find himself in this position in the first place. Even on the most generous interpretation, Cameron does not hold strong opinions on the European Union, other than that it holds the potential to distract him (and his government) from other things. If the main work of the current Conservative administration is to reshape the British state, then the EU is only one element within that.

Unfortunately, for Cameron, many in his parliamentary party disagree on this ordering of things, especially on the back benches. Thus, while he has tried to ‘stop banging on’ about Europe, they have recognised that he is biddable on points of policy. From his first decision as party leader in 2006 to withdraw Tory MEPs from the European People’s Party through the Bloomberg speech itself, all can be read as an effort to get his back benches in order.

All of this is a necessary prelude to understanding how Cameron found himself sweating out two days in Brussels in February, to agree a deal that, on the face of it, is nothing much to behold.

Legally, the settlement lacks much substance. The entire package is described as ‘legally binding’, but it also made clear that it will not enter into effect until the UK formally notices the EU that it wishes to remain a member, ie, after the referendum. Only then will its various provisions be pursued, and most of those are simply commitments to open legislative procedures, which leaves them at the mercy of other member states, the European Parliament and, eventually, legal challenge before the European Court of Justice.

In more substantive terms, the text covers four main areas. On Eurozone governance, there is agreement that the Eurozone and the ‘outs’ will respect each others’ positions, with the latter able to ask for more debate of relevant issues if they have concerns. But there is no veto power implied therein.

On sovereignty, the European Council reiterates its 2014 agreement that the phrase ‘ever closer union’ does not, in itself, imply any further integration, although this also does not mean that member states are not bound by all the other, substantive provisions of the treaties. If a majority of national parliaments have a problem with a legislative text, then they can block it. But, given that most member states are parliamentary democracies, it is hard to see any such legislation passing the Council in the first place.

On competitiveness, there is agreement that this should be pursued, by securing more trade agreements internationally, continued rigorous enforcement of existing subsidiarity provisions, and the checks to make sure that smaller businesses are not over-burdened.

Finally, on welfare, there is the possibility of indexing child benefit paid to EU nationals living in other member states, whose children do not live in that state, to the cost of living in that state, from 2020 onwards. This will only apply to new migrants and will not be extended to other benefits. Member states will also be ‘reminded’ about their powers to remove EU nationals who abuse free movement, including criminals.

It is only on the safeguard mechanism that the UK has any special provision (everything else being available to all member states): The European Council accepts that Britain is already in an...
‘exceptional situation’ with regards to the volume of intra-EU migrants, which would allow it to apply transition restrictions to in-work benefits over a seven-year period.

The most useful summary is thus the European Council’s own comment that this is ‘within the treaty framework’, ie, it is not a fundamental, or even a limited, change in the UK’s relationship with the Union. At best, it is a clarification of the margin of manoeuvre that exists, bar the safeguard mechanism, which will need some careful legal work not to fall foul of the Court of Justice.

So far, then, so bad. But to look at the settlement in narrow legal terms would be to misunderstand the British referendum debate.

As research has repeatedly shown, the British public is neither very knowledgeable nor very bothered about the EU: European integration has not had a high profile as an issue since the mid-2000s, when the Constitutional Treaty’s death at the hands of French and Dutch voters killed off the post-Maastricht cycle of integration. At best, it is understood through the lenses of other issues, such as immigration, the economy or welfare.

This matters because Cameron has long relied on the impression of renegotiation counting for much more than the substance. Just as the 1975 referendum was not fought primarily over Harold Wilson’s renegotiation, so the 2016 vote will not hang primarily on Cameron’s settlement. Instead, the campaigns will be about the value and costs of membership in much broader brushstrokes. And in that, Cameron has laid the ground well.

The EU referendum has been presented by many as the most important vote in a generation

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First, by conceding that he would not whip his party or Cabinet on the issue, he has reduced the risks associated with making this a referendum on his own popularity. Instead, he can share a stage with political figures across the centre of the spectrum and deny the Leave camp the resources of the two main political parties.

Second, the clear signposting of his renegotiate-and-vote strategy has allowed the Remain camp to form a single organisational pole around which to build. Even if Stronger In has not got the extended track record of campaigning that many on the Leave side do, the avoidance of challenger organisations has given it a much clearer path to official designation by the Electoral Commission.

Finally, by holding back his own campaigning, Cameron has allowed for a more accommodating space for Remain arguments to develop. Even though he has taken on this role, he will be just one voice among several making the case, alongside several colleagues who might have taken against him.

The Leave campaign, by contrast, faces a more difficult time. Despite the stronger mobilisation to date, and the much better honed lines of argument, the organisational challenges seem more daunting.

In part this is a problem of personalities. The British Eurosceptic movement has always suffered in this regard, with deep divisions between the ‘fundamentalists’ (who oppose membership no matter what) and the ‘realists’ (who take a more opportunistic approach), to borrow from the literature on challenger parties.

But, more profoundly, this is a problem of alternatives. Beyond a dislike of EU membership, the Leave camp is deeply split on what should come instead. Is it about turning our back on the world and finding somewhere tucked away, or are we to become a ‘Singapore on steroids’, riding the waves in search of global opportunities?

To a certain degree, such divisions do not matter. The evidence from other EU-related referendums is that they are won by broad coalitions, articulating diverse messages to specific audiences. Just as Cameron will do well not to make it about his views, so too will the Leave camp do well by embracing their diversity. In an age where the media has become more atomised and personalised, such diversification is both possible and desirable.

The EU referendum has been presented by many as the most important vote in a generation and there is something to that. Whether it will result in a national debate about the UK’s place in the world is something that remains to be seen.

The Bloomberg speech itself can be read as an effort by David Cameron to get his back benches in order
Walk anywhere today and you are likely to see a group of teenagers sitting together but with their eyes on their smartphones, usually accessing some social media network. The use of social media among UK adolescents is higher than in other age groups and is increasing. As the increase in social media use increases in this age group, their levels of wellbeing are amongst the worst in Europe. Are these two trends linked in any way? Are UK young people less happy if they use more social media?

Using data from the ESRC Understanding Society: the UK Household Panel Study, we found that adolescents who used social media one to three hours on a normal school day were more likely to have lower levels of happiness. Additionally, they were also more likely to have more social and emotional problems. We also looked at patterns of use by age and gender among these 10- to 15-year-olds and found that girls used more social media than boys and use increased with age. If the trends of decreasing wellbeing, increasing social media use and this link between the two are persistent and affect each other over time, we have the potential for having a generation of young people with low levels of wellbeing who will grow up to be adults with low wellbeing.

When I presented this information to our university’s parent network the question we kept returning to during our discussion was ‘What can parents do to reduce use?’ This is such a difficult question to answer as each child is different and the reasons why they are engaging with social media might be different – and may actually be increasing their wellbeing. Some studies suggest that young people who use social media for informational purposes, or with friends with whom they have high-quality relationships, increase their wellbeing compared to those who interact with friends they might not know as well, or have never met. This would suggest that parents speak to their children about who they are interacting with when they are on social media apps or websites.

While parents are the obvious targets for engaging young people in a discussion about their social media use patterns and who they are engaging with, there are other avenues to explore. One, which has been suggested in a report by the Strategic Society Centre, based on this research, is the producers of social media platforms. What, if any, responsibility do they have to their consumers to inform them of the risks to their wellbeing as a result of high levels of use? If we approach this in a manner similar to previous public health issues, action from these firms is necessary. Car seat belts, removal of lead from paint, and pasteurisation of milk all required changes from the industries that produced the products and these changes have had major impacts on the health of the population.

“...The long-term relationship between social media use and wellbeing is not fully understood...”

The irony of the situation is not lost – we would be asking social media developers to encourage their largest and most valued consumers to reduce their social media use. But, as it might be the quality of friendship of the interactions rather than the time spent on them, perhaps a reduction is not necessary; instead, a combined effort by parents and firms to educate young people about the most effective and healthy ways to engage with social media. However, as the research suggests, it might be time spent on social media, and perhaps the addition of usage timers or reminders to take a break after a certain amount of time might be useful in reducing time on social media and may lead to participation in other activities that might increase current and future wellbeing.

Just as other industries were necessary in making large-scale public health changes, social media firms will be necessary if current trends hold and this becomes a greater public health issue. The long-term relationship between social media use and wellbeing is not fully understood, so we need to act now rather than waiting until the effects are too great or long-lasting. We need to understand how wellbeing and social media use affect each other to begin to reverse the ongoing trend of unhappy young people in the UK.

Contact Dr Cara Booker, University of Essex
Telephone 01206 873026
Email cbooker@essex.ac.uk
Web www.understandingsociety.ac.uk

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Going global

The new Global Challenges Research Fund will bring together the UK research communities, governments and international partners to tackle the most pressing and life-changing issues in developing countries. Jeremy Neathey, ESRC’s Deputy Director for Research and International, explains.

The Autumn 2015 Comprehensive Spending Review not only outlined the Government’s spending priorities for UK research but also included the launch of the new £1.5-billion Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF). The fund will be delivered over the next five years to enable the deployment of the UK’s research strengths, across all disciplines, and across UK research councils, to help meet social, environmental and health challenges across the world.

What are the fund’s aims?

The key aim of the GCRF is to promote the welfare and economic development of people in developing countries and is part of a new Official Development Assistance (ODA) strategy for the UK.

The fund will be used to support research into multiple challenges and objectives through a mix of strategically driven programs and UK researcher-generated projects. Challenge areas will be selected due to their strategic relevance to ODA objectives and the quality of proposals as assessed through competitive processes.

How does the GCRF differ from existing government research funds?

As well as the GCRF there are a range of funds for development-relevant research across Whitehall, including the Newton Fund, Ross Fund, Fleming Fund, and the ODA-eligible research budgets of DFID, Defra, Department of Health, and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. The challenge is to ensure that these funds are used in complementary ways without unnecessary duplication. The GCRF differs from the Newton fund, for example, in that the Newton fund only applies to countries on the (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) list and requires match funding from partners in the country where the research is taking place.

Some initial work has already been done within the research councils to identify topics that are likely to form the basis for initial research priorities but there will also be extensive consultation with stakeholders both within the UK and in developing countries themselves to refine those priorities. This will also raise awareness of the fund within the countries themselves.

What type of research approaches will be funded?

There will be two core components to the funding: Multidisciplinary Challenge Fund – This stream will address challenge areas that require a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary research approach and investigate topics such as antimicrobial resistance, or conflict, migration and risk.

Single discipline strategic programmes and bilateral collaborations – Not all challenges require multidisciplinary approaches. It will be vital to complement the multidisciplinary fund with a parallel focus on research projects and capability development in focused topic areas or through new bilateral partnerships. These programmes or collaborations could examine programme themes such as making rural places and developing cities and economies work better; or expansion of health research programmes.

One key aim of the GCRF is that research collaborations should be broadened to include not only established national research organisations but also NGOs, charities or business – not the usual organisations that apply for development grants. The longer-term aim is to build research capacity in countries and also research infrastructure.

Why is social science important in international development research?

The ESRC has extensive and valuable experience in funding international research, particularly international development research. This includes work with governments, the private sector, major international donors and the aid ‘industry’ itself.

Social science research also represents, for many lower income countries, a relatively untapped resource for development, and it can provide evidence and insights at the level of individuals, local networks, institutions and societies.

The ESRC’s strategy under the GCRF should encompass the commissioning and management of excellent science, but also concerted efforts to support the enhancement of social science capabilities within developing countries themselves. In this way, the ESRC’s ambition in delivering the GCRF should not only be to deliver excellent social science for development, but to support the strengthening of social science in countries as a valuable development end in itself.

The ESRC international team is highly experienced in managing funding calls for research of this kind and their experience means we will be able to start managing allocation of the fund immediately. Initial funding is available and a call will go out later in 2016 for projects to start in 2017. The aim is for the ESRC to announce specific funding calls in late Spring/early Summer which will be advertised on our website.
Zika Virus is the latest emerging infectious disease epidemic to hit global headlines. First identified in Uganda in 1947 and transmitted mainly by the Aedes aegypti mosquito, the virus is now spreading rapidly across Latin America and beyond. Many cases just have flu-like symptoms, but the virus is also blamed for complications such as Guillain-Barré syndrome and, most significantly, a dramatic upsurge in birth defects, including thousands of cases of microcephaly in Brazil since October 2015.

The Zika story bears many characteristics of what has been termed ‘the global outbreak narrative’. A mysterious microbe emerges ‘out of Africa’ or ‘out of Asia’ and spreads rapidly in an interconnected world to threaten ‘us all’. The outbreak narrative typically concludes with the heroism of an international response, as medics, epidemiologists and humanitarian agencies unite to put science, power and money behind halting the outbreak.

We have heard versions of this narrative many times – with H5N1 avian flu, SARS, H1N1 ‘swine flu’, and in 2014-15 with the Ebola crisis in West Africa. The speed with which the World Health Organisation categorised the Zika epidemic as a ‘health emergency of international concern’, mandating inter-governmental response, is surely no coincidence. Blamed for doing this several months too late for Ebola, they understandably do not wish to be caught out again.

But, as our work in the ESRC STEPS Centre on epidemics has shown, global outbreak narratives may dominate but they are always partial. Other stories need to be brought to light, and social scientists can play key roles in finding, researching and revealing their significance. So what other narratives deserve more attention around Zika?

One concerns the dilemmas of policymaking under scientific uncertainty. The Zika epidemic presents many puzzles and mysteries. What are the actual dynamics of transmission, and the roles of mosquito ecologies and human-human, including sexual, routes? To what extent is the virus actually responsible for the upsurge in birth defects – and what other immunological, social or environmental factors might be involved? The vital science around these and other questions is a work in progress and fraught with ambiguities, raising real questions for how policy and communication should proceed. When the government of El Salvador advised all women in the country not to get pregnant until 2018, was this due precaution, or overreaction? As scientific controversies in many other arenas have shown, openness about uncertainty, and deliberation by scientists, policymakers and publics, is a less risky route than false confidence that may prove unfounded and undermine trust.

A second narrative shows the Zika crisis less as a dramatic new event than an exposure of longstanding system failures and social faultlines. In Brazil, the Aedes mosquito has proliferated amidst deeply inadequate sewage systems, unplanned urban development and poor access to drinking water, making it necessary to store it. Those most affected are the poorest people. As local commentators have emphasised, Zika is unmasking a country characterised by huge inequalities and a fragile public health system. And it is exposing societies whose religious moralities oppress women and undercut reproductive rights.

A third narrative shows the possibility that community-led responses, local knowledge and cultural logics might hold vital keys to understanding and defeating the Zika epidemic. This was the big story that eventually emerged through the Ebola crisis, assisted by international networks of social scientists such as those we convened in the Ebola Response Anthropology Platform (www.ebola-anthropology.net). We do not yet know whether citizen responses might help turn the Zika crisis around – but the detailed engagement and dialogues with local communities that can find out needs to happen.

Effective preparedness and response to emerging epidemics needs good global health governance, effective public health systems, and rapid response capacity. While the value of social science in all of these is increasingly appreciated our contribution must go beyond simply adding the social and cultural to established responses, to reveal and explore the less-told stories too, and to show why they matter.
UK SOCIETY IN 2016 has been encapsulated in the ESRC’s annual photographic competition, Focus on Society. Now in its third year, the competition asked young people aged 14-18 to take a shot that demonstrates how they see the world around them from a social science perspective. More than 850 children from across the UK took part, entering a vast range of inspiring and thought-provoking images taken with cameras, mobile phones and tablets.

In March, at a ceremony at the Espacio Gallery in London, the overall winner was announced as Joanne Gallagher who took home the overall prize of £200. Joanne’s photo, ‘Stand up for who you are’, looked at issues surrounding transgender.

Other awards, totalling £2,800, were presented to six category winners, and five judges’ choice awards. Judges of this year’s competition were ESRC Council Member Karin Woodley, Chief Executive of Cambridge House, a South London charity established in 1889 by Cambridge University to tackle poverty and social injustice; Sophie Batterbury, Head of Pictures at The Independent, i and The Independent on Sunday newspapers; Jacky Clake, Head of Communications for the ESRC; Ollie Smallwood, a portrait and documentary photographer; and Jodie Krause, an Art Foundation in Design and Media student who has won awards at the last two ESRC photographic competitions.

This year’s categories included Cradle to the grave; There’s no place like home; Green and pleasant land; From rags to riches; and Variety is the spice of life – which opened the opportunity for photos covering a wide range of subjects such as family, economy, politics, culture, health and sustainability.

In addition to the prizes, each of the winners’ photos were showcased at an exhibition at the Espacio Gallery in Shoreditch, London.
Opposite, clockwise from top right:

Stand up for who you are: Joanne Gallagher, Reepham High School and College, Norwich, Norfolk
Winner: Variety is the spice of life category; Overall competition winner
Dismal days: Dina Sharer, Hasmonean High School, Barnet, London
Variety is the spice of life category; Judge’s favourite: Jacky Clarke
Doing things differently: Kiya Jordan, Loreto Sixth Form College, Hulme, Manchester
Winner: From rags to riches category
We are the creators: Natasha Wigman, Amersham School, Amersham, Bucks
Joint winner: Green and pleasant land category
1,642,500 nights: Ella Tilley, St Catherine’s School, Twickenham, Middlesex
Winner: Cradle to grave category
Not just black and white: Tegan Johnston-Brunn, Farnborough Sixth Form College, Farnborough, Hampshire
There’s no place like home category; Judge’s favourite: Ollie Smallwood

Above, clockwise from top right:

Every beginning has an end: Scarlett Armstrong, Amersham School, Amersham, Bucks
Cradle to grave category; Judge’s favourite: Karin Woodley
Rooted on Roundway: Olivia Arnold, St Augustine’s Catholic College, Trowbridge, Wiltshire
Joint winner: Green and pleasant land category
Shower: Olivia Reynolds, Reepham High School and College, Norwich, Norfolk
There’s no place like home category; Judge’s favourite: Jodie Krause
Portraits of Amod, Sally and Izzy: Stanley Chick, Chatham & Clarendon Grammar School, Ramsgate, Kent
Variety is the spice of life category; Judge’s favourite: Sophie Batterbury
Sussex by the sea: Anne Daly, Peacehaven Community School, Peacehaven, East Sussex
There’s no place like home category, Winner: Mobile device
Mein Nimra Shahid, Surbiton High School, Kingston-upon-Thames, Surrey
Winner: There’s no place like home category

www.socialscienceforschools.org.uk/photography-competition
CAN WE UNDERSTAND choices and behaviours without combining neuroscience and social science? Can we understand employment and social relationships without attention to mental and physical health, and the underlying biological pathways? Can biologists and medical scientists ignore the roles of social and economic experiences in the study of health and disease, or the study of genomics? In all cases the answer is predominantly no, whether for ‘no brain’ or ‘disembodied’ social science or for ‘asocial’ medicine or biology.

The need for biosocial science is most evident for understanding the pathways and mechanisms involved for any process or behaviour. Feedbacks across levels ranging from molecular biology to macro-level contexts (‘cells to society’ or ‘neurons to neighbourhoods’) all matter in shaping individuals and their responses to experiences. A biosocial research agenda demands collaboration across the biological, medical and social sciences.

The AB(B)CdE of the article title refers to Alleles, Brains, Bodies, and Contexts interplaying with the individual through Development and Experience over the life-course.

Contexts and ‘social’ Experiences are core elements of much social science research. Contexts include both structural elements, such as gender, class, ethnicity, schools and work, or neighbourhoods, and inter-personal ones such as family, friends, and peer groups. These can alter the Experiences of an individual, whether through constraints on opportunity or, for example, through bullying or partnership breakdown.

Much social science research examines the consequences of adverse experiences through the life-course in shaping outcomes and behaviours. There is considerable interest in persistent effects of adverse experiences, for example short and long-term consequences of poverty or parental divorce, or ‘scarring’ and health effects of spells of unemployment. Persistence of these effects is partly through ‘biological embedding’ whereby the adverse experiences ‘get under the skin’ to alter biology at one or more levels. This biological embedding can include lasting physiological responses in the body, lasting cognitive and affective changes in the brain, and deeper epigenetic or other molecular responses on the genome.

There is already considerable evidence for biological embedding of adverse experiences: income or class is clearly associated with allostatic load (wear and tear on the body which grows over time when the individual is exposed to repeated or chronic stress) as a pathway to disease. And harsh parenting and child poverty have been linked to lasting epigenetic changes.

But how does experience get biologically embedded? Experience of poverty has to operate through channels that act as pathways to embodiment: stress, diet, disease, health behaviours, memory, and exercise are examples. The embodiment may be modified by personality, immune systems, or the genome.

Biology can also get ‘outside the skin’ to affect behaviours, choices and outcomes. At a high level mental and physical health have strong reciprocal associations with lifestyles, choices and social inequality. There is growing evidence on genetic differential susceptibility to environments and parallels have been drawn to comparisons between orchids (environmentally reactive) and dandelions (less reactive). For example, children with more ‘reactive’ alleles (one of a number of alternative forms of the same gene) show a greater deterioration in behaviour when their fathers leave
Sometimes these are combined into measures such as indicators of stress or inflammation. Tissue samples that can be used to assess health, are also ‘biomarkers’ derived from blood or other weight, grip strength and exercise levels. There performance, indicators of depression, height and and physical measures now include cognitive studies to encompass biomeasures. direct mental extending its ‘jewel in the crown’ longitudinal UK Birth Cohort studies are a critical evidence base. experiences often do matter a lot. The long running behaviours, and what pathways are involved. Early experiences exert stronger roles on biology and the key questions are whether early or more recent life to shape cognitive and physical decline. Among studies and the older birth cohorts are exploring how biology and experience interplay throughout life to shape cognitive and physical decline. at the other end of the life-course, ageing studies and the older birth cohorts are exploring how biology and experience interplay throughout life to shape cognitive and physical decline. Among the key questions are whether early or more recent experiences exert stronger roles on biology and behaviours, and what pathways are involved. Early experiences often do matter a lot. The long running UK Birth Cohort studies are a critical evidence base.

The ESRC has invested significantly in extending its ‘jewel in the crown’ longitudinal studies to encompass biomeasures. Direct mental and physical measures now include cognitive performance, indicators of depression, height and weight, grip strength and exercise levels. There are also ‘biomarkers’ derived from blood or other tissue samples that can be used to assess health, such as indicators of stress or inflammation. Sometimes these are combined into measures of incipient ill health such as ‘allostatic load’ that indicate systemic signs of health deterioration. At the molecular level DNA has been genotyped for several studies and attention is also turning to deriving epigenetic markers, such as methylation (DNA is the blueprint but epigenetic changes alter how this gets translated into proteins and reflect the impact of experience on the genome).

As part of its ongoing commitment the ESRC developed its Framework to Enable Biosocial Research (2014). This stressed the need for ‘Building Partnerships, Resources and Capacity’. A particularly fruitful institutional partnership has been developed with the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council. This has led to an exciting jointly funded £3-million portfolio of eight research projects on social epigenetics and a significant step towards greater capacity-building through a jointly commissioned Biosocial Centre for Doctoral Training that will be awarded later this year. Work continues to build similarly fruitful partnerships in the biosocial domain with the MRC.

Biosocial science is at the threshold of exciting and innovative developments. There is clearly a need to strengthen training and capacity-building to enable effective communication, mutual respect and understanding for interdisciplinary collaboration. Extending awareness and use of the core biosocial longitudinal resources among social, medical and biological scientists is essential. Further targeted multi-disciplinary initiatives are required to leverage high-quality research with impact from the current extensive resource investments.

Many new domains and initiatives will emerge as biosocial science matures and demonstrates importance and impact. A promising example is the interplays of behaviours, choices and lifestyles with cognitive and social/affective neuroscience, for example covering behavioural neuroeconomics, partnership and reproductive behaviours, or effective education. There will also be demand for improved social science measurement and for extended and repeated biomeasures, covering longitudinal changes in blood analytes and epigenetics within individuals and their links to experiences.

The core goal is increased understanding of pathways and mechanisms involved in individual development and response to experiences over the life-course. This will enable improved targeting of interventions, with policies that take account of previous life experiences and social and biological embedding, and lead to more precise ways of reversing these consequences.
RAIL USAGE
Passenger journeys on the rail network have more than doubled since rail privatisation, from 735 million in 1994/95, to 1.65 billion journeys in 2014/15.

RAIL JOURNEYS IN 2013/14, BY REGION
The number of rail journeys in the United Kingdom was the second highest of any country in the European Union in 2014. Germany was the only country to record more with a total of 2.7 billion rail journeys.

NUMBER OF RAIL JOURNEYS IN 2013/14, BY REGION

**SHORT-DISTANCE RAIL SERVICES**

- 44% of adults had used short-distance rail services in the previous 12 months with journeys most often made for days out, shopping and visiting friends or relatives.
- Overall, 74% of users and 61% of non-users rated the quality of short-distance rail services positively. Users rated the cost of fares for short-distance rail services more positively than in 2012 (up from 22% to 34%).

**LONG-DISTANCE RAIL SERVICES**

- Overall, the DfT estimates that 30% of adults had used long-distance train services in the previous 12 months. The most common purpose of long-distance rail journeys was visiting friends or relatives.
- The most popular reasons given for using long-distance rail were that it was quicker by train (42%) or it was easier by train (40%).
**PERFORMANCE/INFRASTRUCTURE**

For 2014/15, 89.7% of trains were ‘on time’ in Great Britain. The proportion of long-distance trains ‘on time’ remains lower than the regional and London and South-East services.

The length of route open to all traffic in 2014/15 in GB was 15,760km. In 2014/15, 33.5% of the route was electrified, compared to 22.7% in 1985/86.

There were 2,552 passenger stations in GB in 2014/15. In 2014/15, carbon emissions per passenger km fell by over 21%.

The average age of rolling stock in GB at the end of 2014/15 was 20.2 years.

**FINANCE**

In 2014/15, government support to the rail industry was £4.8 billion. This comprised the £3.8 billion grant paid to Network Rail, and a £1.1 billion grant for Crossrail. Train operating Companies paid a premium of £0.8 billion.

In 2014/15, franchised train operators received £8.8 billion in revenue from passengers. 31% came from off-peak tickets, 28% from anytime/peak tickets, and 24% from season tickets. The remainder came from other ticket types.

**SAFETY**

From 2010-2013 the UK ranked second out of 28 European countries that submit data to the European Railways Agency, in both the average number of accidents and the average number of fatalities and weighted serious injuries per million train kms. Ireland is the only country to rank above the UK.

There were no passenger or staff fatalities due to train accidents in Great Britain in 2014/15 for the eighth year running.

**PASSENGER NUMBERS / STATION USAGE**

The 10 stations with the highest number of entries and exits in Great Britain in 2014/15:

- **WATERLOO** 99,201,604 ↑ 1%
- **VICTORIA** 85,337,996 ↑ 5%
- **LIVERPOOL STREET** 63,631,246 ↑ 1%
- **LONDON BRIDGE** 49,517,854 ↓ 12%
- **CHARING CROSS** 42,978,890 ↑ 7%
- **EUSTON** 42,952,298 ↑ 2%
- **PADDINGTON** 35,724,684 ↓ 2%
- **BIRMINGHAM NEW STREET** 35,312,788 ↑ 5%
- **KING’S CROSS** 31,346,862 ↑ 5%
- **STRATFORD** 30,974,204 ↑ 17%

Entries and exits per station for the 2014/15 financial year, with percentage change from 2013/14:

- **WATERLOO** 99,201,604 ↑ 1%
- **VICTORIA** 85,337,996 ↑ 5%
- **LIVERPOOL STREET** 63,631,246 ↑ 1%
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- **STRATFORD** 30,974,204 ↑ 17%

**SAFETY STATISTICS FOR 2014/15**

- **332** FATALITIES
- **558** MAJOR INJURIES
- **13,156** MINOR INJURIES

- **3** Passengers
- **296** Passengers
- **3** Staff
- **175** Staff
- **293** Suicides
- **50** Suicide attempts
- **33** Other public
- **37** Other public

**SHOCK/TRAUMA** 1,075

**SUICIDE ATTEMPTS** 937

**TRAIN TICKETS**

Overall, 29% of rail users and 21% of non-users thought that there were too many ticket types available when travelling by rail.

Thirty-one per cent of users claimed to have fully understood the different types of tickets available, with 29% who said that they did not understand. Two in five users said they partly understood the different types of tickets available.

Almost half (45%) of those who purchase rail tickets said they normally did so at a ticket office; 37% said they normally purchased their tickets online from a website.

The majority of users (85%) rated the ease of purchasing tickets using their main method of purchase positively.
THE SUMMER OF 2015 will be etched in the memory for most as a time when the eyes of the media first turned to the ‘migrant crisis’. We witnessed the tragedy of the hundreds of thousands of people fleeing their homes in the search for safety by whichever means they could – often leading to disastrous outcomes as they endeavoured to cross the treacherous Mediterranean from unstable North African states.

The issue is vast and complex – but, crucially, is not appeasing. According to The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), winter has not stemmed the flow of people deserting their homeland. By the turn of 2015, the number of people seeking asylum in the European Union reached 1,255,600 – more than double that of the previous year. And in March 2016, UNHCR stated that 135,711 people had reached Europe, by sea, since the start of 2016.

They state that the conflict in Syria is the biggest driver of migration. But violence in Afghanistan and Iraq, abuses in Eritrea, as well as poverty in Kosovo, are also causing people to look to begin their lives elsewhere – quite often in Western Europe.

So what is the role UK social science can play in tackling the issue?

This was the question set out by the ESRC back in May 2015 when it launched its first call under its Urgency Grants Mechanism, with co-funding from the Department for International Development (DFID).

The Council was looking for leading UK social scientists to conduct research with migrant and refugee populations who entered Europe across the Mediterranean.

Within the space of just a few months the Mediterranean Migration Research Programme was launched, and in September £1 million was split between eight projects:

- Transcapes: transient populations transforming the European political space – Dr Antonis Vradis, Durham University
- Unravelling the Mediterranean migration crisis (MEDMIG) – Professor Heaven Crawley, Coventry University
- EVI-MED – Constructing an evidence base of contemporary Mediterranean migrations – Professor Brad Blitz, Middlesex University
- Precarious trajectories: Understanding the human cost of the migrant crisis in the central Mediterranean – Dr Simon Parker, University of York
- Documenting the humanitarian migration crisis in the Mediterranean – Professor Elspeth Guild, Queen Mary, University of London
- Crossings the Mediterranean Sea by boat: Mapping and documenting migratory journeys and experiences – Dr Vicki Squire, University of Warwick
- Missing migrants and deaths at the EU’s Mediterranean border: Humanitarian needs and state obligations – Dr Simon Robins, University of York
- Transitory lives: An anthropological research of the migration crisis in the Mediterranean – Dr Elisabeth Kirtsoglou, Durham University

Craig Bardsley, Head of International Development Research at the ESRC, explained: “Given the unprecedented levels of migration across the Mediterranean in the spring and summer of 2015, and the catastrophic death toll that resulted, there was an urgent need for new research to better understand the dynamics and drivers of the crisis.”

And some six months on since the Mediterranean Migration Research Programme was launched, the findings of this ‘new research’ are beginning to come to light.

Warwick: Dr Vicki Squire and her team have assessed the impact of government policy interventions from the perspective of migrants and refugees themselves. The first phase of the project is based on 150 in-depth qualitative interviews, conducted since September 2015 across three Mediterranean island arrival points: Kos, Malta and Sicily. On the basis of these interviews, the project has drawn attention to ineffectiveness of deterrent policies, particularly given the partial knowledge of these policies by people on the move. The project has also emphasised the complexity of migratory journeys, with many involving stops along the way. Findings indicate that a clear-cut migration strategy from the start is rare, with multiple conditions prompting movement. Dr Squire explains: “The project therefore shows there is not a singular ‘migration crisis’, but diverse experiences of this.”

Deaths of migrants at sea will only stop once legal and safe means of migration are available.
Findings show that a clear-cut migration strategy from the start is rare, with multiple conditions prompting movement. In February the team launched their first phase policy suggestions in Brussels, highlighting four key recommendations: Replace deterrent border control policies with interventions that address the diverse causes of irregular migration; Revise migration and protection categories to reflect the multiple reasons that people are on the move; Open safe and legal routes for migration, and improve reception conditions and facilities; Improve rights-oriented information campaigns across neighbouring, transit and arrival regions.

York: The impact of the failure of European authorities is evident in the data collected from families of missing migrants by Dr Simon Robins and his team. Families from Tunisia, Syria and elsewhere have been interviewed and confirmed that they are living with ambiguity, not knowing if their loved one is dead or alive.

The situation of families suffering from the trauma of ambiguous loss is often characterised by depression, anxiety and family conflict. Most have no contact with either their own authorities or European states through which they can explore routes to learning the truth about the fate of their relatives, prolonging their suffering. Despite being a large-scale humanitarian crisis, the problem of missing migrants is one of the few aspects of this crisis that the EU authorities can effectively address with no threat to their sovereignty.

So far, the findings from Dr Robins’ team show that European states and regional organisations should prioritise the collection and centralisation of post-mortem data from the bodies of migrants who die at their shores, and the creation of mechanisms to reach out to families in states of origin to collect ante-mortem data that can permit identification. The project will use its data to advocate for such approaches.

Coventry: Professor Heaven Crawley and her team are undertaking the first large-scale, systematic and comparative research on the experiences and motivations of those who crossed the Mediterranean in 2015. Data has been collected from 500 refugees and migrants, as well as more than 100 stakeholders, with the fieldwork taking place in 10 sites across four countries (Italy, Greece, Turkey and Malta). The team’s initial findings, recently presented in Oxford, suggest that the failure of policy responses to the current crisis are due in part to underlying assumptions about why people are on the move and the journeys that they take.

Findings show:
- There are significant differences in the nationality, age, gender, family units, educational and employment backgrounds, duration and cost of journey of those crossing Central and Eastern Mediterranean routes.
- Although the increase in the scale of flow of people is partly explained by the deteriorating situation in Syria, the drivers of migration to Europe are complex and multi-faceted.
- Whilst public attention has been captured by journeys across the sea and through the Balkans, many people have been displaced or were migrating for longer periods of time.
- Refugees and migrants often lack information about migration policies in particular countries, and the decisions about where to go are more often based on a whole range of intervening variables and opportunities that arise on the journey or by those who facilitate the journey.

York: Dr Simon Parker and his team have examined the policies and practices that affect migrants’ routes and their condition whilst on land and sea, within and at the borders of the EU.

The first phase involved conducting over 80 in-depth qualitative interviews with migrants who have crossed the Mediterranean and arrived in Sicily and in Greece since September 2015. They have also interviewed smugglers, border guards, coast guards, humanitarian aid-workers, first reception operators, and city mayors.

A report is due in April concerning the deadly effects of the ending of the Italian Mare Nostrum operation in early 2015, arguing that the crossing of the central Mediterranean became much more dangerous as a result of the EU’s decision to prioritise border control, which left a huge gap in rescue capabilities.

The report will make several recommendations: chiefly that deaths of migrants at sea will only stop once legal and safe means of migration are available. It suggests that in the absence of such a policy, it is the minimum duty of EU member states to continue effective Search and Rescue operations that may limit the deaths resulting from the European Union’s policies of closure.
ALTHOUGH 2020/21 MAY become part of the austerity era, with public cuts of about £10 billion, the Government is still steering for a budget surplus by 2019/20 – even if economic clouds are gathering.

A gloomy economic outlook from the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) has given the Chancellor much less wriggle-room than expected – with a forecast going from a modest budget surplus to a black hole almost twice the size, in the space of four months.

“The Chancellor made rather too much of the £27 billion the OBR found down the back of the sofa in November,” commented Paul Johnson when the IFS presented their analysis the day after the Budget announcement.

“What Mr Osborne didn’t tell us is that rather than finding £27 billion, the OBR lost £56 billion down that same sofa. As it happens, the total loss to the sofa across the two fiscal events is £29 billion,” he said.

Lower growth than expected
The reason for this downgraded forecast is changes in assumptions about future growth in productivity – leading to lower economic growth over the rest of the parliament.

According to the IFS, if the Chancellor aims to reach his target of clearing the gap between tax income and Government spending before 2019/20 he’ll need to make further spending cuts of £3.5 billion – but so far we don’t know where that money will come from.

In the Budget he unveiled a range of new measures, with major ones including:

- Increasing tax-free personal allowance to £11,500
- Raising the threshold for paying 40p tax to £45,000
- Freezing duties on fuel, beer and cider, but increases for tobacco
- Cutting corporation tax to 17 per cent by 2020
- Cutting capital gains tax from 28 per cent to 20 per cent for top rate taxpayers
- Introducing a new sugar tax on soft drinks
- ISA limit raised to £20,000 (from around £15,000)
- New Lifetime ISAs for those under 40 (offering £1 from the government each year for every £4 saved).

Fifty per cent chance of hitting target
Overall, the Budget announcement shows how a budget surplus by 2019/20 remains an overriding priority – even if it entails tweaking between fiscal years, such as moving corporation taxing so the revenue is shifted into 2019/20, or scheduling a sudden burst of public spending cuts for the same year.

“The focus on the 2019/20 target is obvious throughout,” says Johnson in his comments to the analysis.

"The increases in threshold for tax-free personal allowance will also come with a price tag

“There is no net tax increase over the period as a whole, yet there is a tax increase of over £6 billion in 2019/20 specifically. Capital spending increases in 2017/18 and 2018/19, but falls in 2019/20. There is no proposed additional spending cut in 2018/19; there is a £3.5 billion cut plus an extra £2 billion imposed on public sector employers in 2019/20.”

However, even these strategic tweaks might not be enough to balance the books in time.

“(The Chancellor’s) chances of having a surplus in 2019/20 are only just the right side of 50:50,” suggests Johnson. “If the deficit hasn’t completely gone by then, it will – dreadful economic news aside – be nearly gone. That will represent a huge turnaround over the decade.”
Scrapped cuts and sugar tax

The proposed cuts to personal independence payments, which would hit disabled people, were quickly scrapped by the Chancellor after fierce opposition – adding another £1.3 billion a year to the welfare budget. However, according to OBR figures this will not prevent the Government from achieving its budget surplus target, but merely reduce the overall surplus.

One of the measures attracting attention was the introduction of a ‘sugar tax’ on soft drinks, to protect children’s health in particular. But it could have unintended consequences.

“Only around 17 per cent of added sugar consumed comes from soft drinks, though the proportion in households with children is a little higher. Obviously the soft drinks tax won’t have any impact on the other 80-plus per cent of sugar consumption – indeed it might increase it as people move away from soft drinks to other sugary products,” warns Paul Johnson.

Instead of having a tax per gram of sugar which rises in proportion with the sugar content, the tax will be triggered at specific thresholds, and be most costly for drinks containing 4g of sugar per 100ml – while more sugary drinks are taxed at a lower rate.

Freezing the fuel duty

While duty on beer, spirits and cider was frozen, the IFS analysis singled out the freeze for petrol and diesel duty as particularly notable. “After six years of freezes (ie, cuts in real terms) one must begin to wonder whether these duties will ever rise again, especially given current low oil prices. Real duties are now back at levels not seen since the mid 1990s. Add in the effects of improved efficiency, and the cost of a driving a mile in a new car is now at easily its lowest level since then,” Johnson points out.

“Given that fuel duties bring in a handy £28 billion a year this has to be a big worry for the Treasury.”

Tax-free for low earners

The increases in threshold for tax-free personal allowance will also come with a price tag: raising the threshold to £11,500 (in April 2017) will cost £2 billion. Further up the income scale, raising the higher rate threshold for 40p to £45,000 carries a cost of £0.5 billion.

“This latter move should stop the numbers (of people) paying higher rate tax from rising beyond five million – but it will still leave the numbers two million higher than was the case back in 2010,” Johnson adds.

Looking at Budget outcomes in terms of income distribution, the IFS analysis showed that it’s the richest 20 per cent who will do best out of the measures that were announced – both in cash terms and as a proportion of income. Those towards the top of the income distribution gain the most, while most people towards the bottom remain largely unaffected.

The status for the UK economy remains tentative and vulnerable to future shocks. “If there was another downgrade in fiscal forecasts of a similar magnitude (as the recent adjustment) and the Chancellor did wish to remain on course to deliver a budget surplus in 2019–20, then this would surely require more real policy change – presumably incorporating at least some permanent tax rises and specific spending cuts,” predicts Paul Johnson.
Is the world a more dangerous place today than it has been for a long time – or is it just our perceptions that have changed?

Our perceptions of threat and our expectations around what security we deserve are evolving, as is the nature of the threat itself. The landscape is shaped by global factors, such as geopolitical events and abuses of scientific innovation, and by local factors, such as community grievances and criminal activity. One of the significant contributions of the economic and social sciences is to better understand and anticipate this changing landscape so that governments and society can be better prepared.

Do we have unrealistic expectations of how secure we are?

It is unfortunately common for people to have unrealistic expectations of how secure they are.

Today’s challenges are a combination of longstanding threats that have evolved into new forms

For example, in 2013, the UK National Audit Office estimated the annual cost of cyber crime as more than £18 billion, and that 80 per cent of attacks would be prevented if people can be persuaded to implement simple computer ‘hygiene’. This makes it important to develop interventions and technologies that allow people, businesses and governments to act in a more secure way without compromising privacy or standard of living. This is a social science problem. Its about understanding why people act the way they do and what can be changed within society to enable them to act more securely.
Is it possible for a society to offer both privacy and security?

Yes, it is possible, but the solution almost inevitably involves a trade-off: our law enforcement and security services need information to be able to make judgements about whether or not somebody is a threat. They currently obtain this within a framework of legal restrictions and independent scrutiny that are designed to protect privacy. As society attaches greater value on privacy, so the proportion of information that is encrypted and therefore inaccessible to investigators increases. This may be where as a democracy we want to end up with our privacy. But it is not clear to me that we have truly understood what this means for our security, nor that we have had a sufficient public debate about what the trade-off means.

What are the major security challenges of our time?

Today’s challenges are a combination of longstanding threats that have evolved into new forms, such as the violence we continue to see in Northern Ireland, and relatively new threats, such as the large-scale cyber attacks that target UK Intellectual Property. The challenge is to stay one step ahead of these threats. To not only be tackling the imminent threats but also to be investing long-term through the refinement and development of new knowledge and techniques. The value of this investment can sometimes be harder to quantify – a challenge much of social science faces – but I remain convinced it is critical if we are to ensure a safe society in years to come.

Is countering security threats first and foremost about people, not about technology?

Yes, people will remain at the heart of our efforts to counter security threats for the foreseeable future. To be clear, technology is an enabler. It has radically changed how we collect and examine data, and how we implement security. But tackling security threats requires multi-agency co-operation, it requires making sense of very different forms of evidence, and it requires judgements about risk and proportionality that cannot easily be served solely by technology. In what areas can CREST and social science contribute to Government efforts to tackle security threats?

Social science can help us understand the complex individual and social factors that lead people and governments to attack our interests, as well as what might lead them to resist. Through research we can also better understand how to create societal and organisational cultures that encourage secure practices and make such attacks more difficult. The other area where social science is making a valuable contribution is in the investigation of threats. Research can help uncover the nature of decisions and team-working in fast-moving, high-risk environments, as a way to make practice more efficient and improve the welfare of personnel. It can also help us understand when, where and how people co-operate, which provides the evidence base for developing, for example, interview techniques that enhance memory recall and make deception easier to spot.
VER THE PAST three years, the concept of the nation state and the shared cultural understandings which underpin it, have been examined in a participatory project involving people from two groups which are increasingly alienated from their respective states: people from Ashington, Northumberland, which has seen its traditional source of livelihood decline in the wake of the dissolution of the mining industry; and people from Aboriginal Australian communities around Brisbane, which have seen their traditional lives destroyed during colonialism.

The project, which is an application and examination of ideas developed during an ESRC PhD Scholarship and articulated in Evaluating Culture (Palgrave Macmillan 2013), has involved the groups acting as small-scale political entities while embedded in each other’s communities over the course of month-long visits.

The project emerged at a time when the future of the UK as a state is increasingly under question as a result of emerging nationalisms. This includes the North of England, where Jeremy Corbyn has attempted to reach out to an electorate ‘deceived’ by George Osborne’s proposal to create a ‘northern powerhouse’. And also the support for a post-Election petition to allow the North to secede from the UK and join a ‘New Scotland’.

The co-researchers’ work highlighted not simply that Aboriginal Australian people have never identified with the Australian state, but also that, increasingly, the Ashington participants and many people in the North East more generally, do not feel ‘English’ in any meaningful sense. Indeed, increasingly they feel distant from or even hostile towards ‘England’, which several in the project equated with London and the Home Counties.

It was felt that the North is attacked by ‘England’ for its aberrant dialects, behaviours and social ills. Much effort was made by the Ashington co-researchers to explain to the Aboriginal participants that they did not feel part of such an England and that to describe them as English was to assume a homogeneity which had never been present.

This rejection of Englishness, and Britishness with it, should not be surprising. National identity is not fixed. It is constantly under production and needs to be sustained by political bodies. The development of nationalised industries and universal health, education and welfare systems was central to the building of an overarching British identity during the mid-20th Century post-War consensus. Those institutions were achievements which most citizens supported and from which most could feel some sense of collective pride. In communities like Ashington they provided a secure foundation upon which relatively stable, productive forms of collectivism developed.

With the decline of these UK-wide institutions, one of the key bases of post-War nation-building is being removed. As a consequence, the notion of Britishness is being supplanted by identities shaped by those derived from nation-building activities in the constituent territories.

As the popularity of the petition suggested, the nationalism of the SNP looks much less like the banal flag-waving of days gone by and much more like a social democratic nation-building movement grounded in resisting a neoliberalism which undermines the collective interests of those outside financial sectors in the South East of England. People can be attracted to nation-building movements like that whether or not they are Scottish, especially when there has been no comparable movement in England.

The communities’ work on identity shows that people have no essential identification with the state in which they live.
NEW SENIOR RESEARCH FELLOWS TO ANALYSE UK-EU RELATIONSHIP

The ESRC has appointed seven new senior research fellows to its ground-breaking initiative on UK-EU relations ahead of the country’s referendum on membership of the European Union – The UK in a Changing Europe. The initiative is contributing to policy and political debates and delivering independent social scientific research to key stakeholder groups.

The new fellows are some of the world’s leading authorities on Britain’s relationship with Europe.

They include: London School of Economics’ (LSE) Professor Damien Chalmers; University of Cambridge’s Professor Catherine Barnard, who advised the British government on its review of the balance of competences between the UK and the EU; and Dr Angus Armstrong, director of macroeconomic research at leading independent think-tank the National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR).

The new fellows will join the nine senior fellows who are already part of the initiative, bringing the total to 16. They will work closely with director, Anand Menon, Professor of European Politics and Foreign Affairs at King’s College London, across a wide range of projects.

The fellows will provide evidence and analysis across a wide range of issues facing the UK and EU, such as foreign and security policy; banking and financial services; social policies; and the impact of EU law.

The seven new fellows are:

- Dr Angus Armstrong of NIESR, who is running the project EU membership and the ‘British dilemma’
- Professor Catherine Barnard of the University of Cambridge, for the project ‘Honeypot Britain’: The lived experience of working as an EU migrant in the UK;
- Professor Damien Chalmers, London School of Economics (LSE), for the Resituating EU Law project;
- Dr Sara Hagemann of the London School of Economics, who is running the project Role of national parliaments in a changing European Union;
- Dr Alison Harcourt from the University of Exeter, for the project The UK communication industries: the impact of a proposed UK Brexit from the EU;
- Dr Simon Usherwood from the University of Surrey, for the Mapping the EU referendum debate project;
- Professor Richard Whitman of the University of Kent, for the project The interrelationship of UK and EU foreign policy: costs and benefits.

For more information see: ukandeu.ac.uk

NEW CENTRE TO MEASURE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF UK ENERGY, WATER, ENVIRONMENT AND FOOD POLICIES

Finding new ways to understand how the lives of people in the UK are affected by government decisions is a central aim of the new Centre for the Evaluation of Complexity Across the Nexus (CECAN).

The new national research hub, initiated by a consortium of leading UK bodies, will be developing new ways to measure the effectiveness of domestic policies on energy, water, environment and food (the ‘nexus’), and how they affect wider society.

The focus of CECAN will be to pioneer, test and promote evaluation approaches and methods across the energy, environment and food nexus where complexity presents a challenge to policy interventions, and so contribute to more effective policymaking.

Based at the University of Surrey and launching on 1 March 2016, CECAN has been backed by £2.45 million of funding provided by the ESRC and the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) in collaboration with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra); the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC); the Environment Agency (EA); and the Food Standards Agency (FSA).

The centre will foster an ‘open research’ culture of knowledge exchange founded on a growing network of policymakers, practitioners and researchers – whilst at its core will be a strong group of experienced academic and non-academic experts.

Each member of the core CECAN team is an expert in their particular research area, has worked with or for policymakers or in policy-relevant areas, and is a methodological pioneer who in his or her own way has contributed to and created cutting-edge methodological approaches to understand these complex problems.

Supplementing the core centre team, a network of academic and non-academic fellows and associates will join the centre. They will offer expert advice on areas that need specialist input for particular policy initiatives and innovations.

Work at CECAN will include developing and enhancing methods for evaluation of policies in complex settings; piloting these methods on a range of evaluation projects; organising educational programmes for practitioners, academics and policymakers; and publishing guides and toolkits for evaluators, those commissioning evaluations, and policy audiences.

Nigel Gilbert, Professor of Sociology at the University of Surrey and Director of CECAN, said: “We expect to have a substantial impact on how public policies are formulated, monitored and evaluated. The centre brings together an outstanding team from universities in the UK, Europe and the United States, as well as business consultancies and institutes that provide evaluation services to government.”

For more information see: www.thenexusnetwork.org/centre-for-the-evaluation-of-complexity-across-the-nexus-announced
People

NEW YEAR HONOURS 2016
A number of prominent social scientists and ESRC grant holders have been honoured in the New Year Honours list.
Knight Bachelor
Mr Paul Grice, Clerk and Chief Executive, Scottish Parliament and former ESRC Council member. For services to the Scottish Parliament and voluntary service to Higher Education and the community in Scotland
Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire
Professor Henrietta Moore, Director, Institute for Global Prosperity; Chair, Culture, Philosophy and Design, University College London; and former ESRC grant holder. For services to Social Sciences
Commander of the Order of the British Empire
Professor Paul Boyle, former ESRC Chief Executive, and current President and Vice Chancellor, University of Leicester. For services to Social Science
Professor Karen Mumford, former ESRC grant holder. For services to Economics and Labour Market Diversity
Professor David Ulph, Professor of Economics and Director of the Scottish Institute for Research in Economics, University of St Andrews, and former ESRC grant holder. For services to Economics and Social Sciences
Officer of the Order of the British Empire
Professor Susan McVie, Professor of Quantitative Criminology, University of Edinburgh and Director of the ESRC-funded Applied Quantitative Methods Network (AQMeN). For services to Social Sciences

PROFESSOR JOHN URRY
We are sad to report the death of Professor John Urry on 18 March. Professor Urry was instrumental to creating the world-leading sociology department at Lancaster University and was a former Head of the Department, Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences, and University Dean of Research. Professor Urry also made a significant contribution to the establishment of the Academy of Social Sciences.

INVESTIGATING HOW SOUTH AFRICAN CITIES CAN LEAD THE WAY FOR THE AFRICAN CONTINENT
Four new studies aiming to analyse how South African cities can mould a sustainable future for the nation and the wider African continent have been awarded more than £1.8 million from the ESRC and the National Research Foundation (NRF) of South Africa. In the future South African cities will have a fundamental role to play in developing sustainable pathways for Africa, including the potential to act as test-beds in urban growth, economic development, and environmental innovation.

Urban Transformations in South Africa will support four projects, headed by world-leading experts in their field, to look at the challenges South African cities face in overcoming legacies of segregation and inequality.

Each of the studies will also investigate the cities’ positions in global flows of trade, finance, people and resources which can mean that they face greater challenges in urban development around manifest issues such as job creation and growth, housing and infrastructure, as well as social and environmental resilience.

Part of the Newton Fund – a £375-million fund provided to the Research Councils as part of the UK’s Official Development Assistance (ODA) commitment to develop science and innovation partnerships that promote the economic development and welfare of developing countries – the Urban Transformations in South Africa project has awarded just over £1.6 million of ESRC funding, in addition to 5.9 million RAND (equivalent to more than £255,000) from NRF, to the following projects:

**Changing socio-spatial Inequalities: Population change and the lived experience of inequality in urban South Africa**

Professor Christopher Lloyd (University of Liverpool) and Professor Ivan Turok (Human Sciences Research Council)

The project focuses on geographic inequalities in South Africa, involving a collaborative partnership between researchers in the UK and South Africa. The main objective of this project is to examine the interplay between urban spatial transformation and social attitudes towards inequality, attachment to place, and social inclusion.

**Community-led upgrading for self-reliance in South Africa: Integrated construction and environmental management systems in informal settlements**

Dr Maria Christina Georgiadou (University of Westminster) and Dr Claudia Loggia (University of KwaZulu-Natal)

The project will focus on the processes and techniques involved in ‘upgrading’ slums in and around Durban. The overarching aim is to investigate current practices of community involvement in improving their homes and neighbourhoods to formulate integrated and collaborative strategies that suit local needs.

**Living the urban periphery: investment, infrastructure and economic change in African city-regions**

Dr Paula Meth (University of Sheffield) and Professor Alison Todes (University of the Witwatersrand)

The project compares two city regions in South Africa with Addis Ababa in Ethiopia. The specific objective is to understand how urban transformation in the peripheries of these African cities, particularly in terms of infrastructural investments and economic change, is shaped, governed and experienced, and how these processes impact on urban poverty.

**Urban transformation in South Africa through co-designing energy services provision pathways**

Dr Federico Caprotti, (King’s College London) and Professor Harold Winkler (University of Cape Town)

This project will look to help transform energy pathways in urban areas of South African municipalities. The project’s objective is to move towards integrated energy strategies in different cities, with a view to reducing carbon intensity, increasing the electrification of specific neighbourhoods, and combating energy poverty.
Publications

Empire of Things

What we consume has become the defining feature of our lives: our economies live or die by spending, we are treated more as consumers than workers, and even public services are presented to us as products in a supermarket. In this monumental study, historian Frank Trentmann unfolds the extraordinary history that has shaped our material world, from late Ming China, Renaissance Italy and the British empire to the present. Wide-ranging and richly detailed, Empire of Things explores how we have come to live with so much more, how this changed the course of history, and the global challenges we face as a result.  ■ Empire of Things by Frank Trentmann. ISBN 978-0713999624, (hardback), 880pp @ £20.40. For more information see: www.penguin.co.uk/books/65961/empire-of-things

The Life Project

In March 1946, scientists began to track thousands of children born in one cold week. No one imagined that this would become the longest-running study of human development in the world, growing to encompass five generations of children. Today, they are some of the best-studied people on the planet, and the simple act of observing human life has changed the way we are born, schooled, parent and die. This is the tale of these studies and the remarkable discoveries that have come from them. Touching almost every person in Britain today, they are one of our best-kept secrets. ■ The Life Project: The Extraordinary Story of Our Ordinary Lives by Helen Pearson. ISBN 978-1846148262, (hardback), 416pp @ £13.60. For more information see: www.penguin.co.uk/books/195897/the-life-project

FOURTH DIGGING INTO DATA CHALLENGE

The Trans-Atlantic Platform (T-AP) is launching a groundbreaking pilot programme: the T-AP Digging into Data Challenge. Based on previous collaborations, the Challenge is aimed at supporting projects that address social science and/or humanities research questions through the development and innovative application of tools and methods for capturing and analysing ‘big data’.

The T-AP, an EU-funded Platform encouraging and facilitating increased co-operation between funding agencies in Europe and the Americas, has enabled the Digging into Data Challenge to be expanded in terms of the number of funders (from 10 to 16), the number of countries (from four to 11), and the overall ambition. Whilst the core goal of Digging into Data remains the same – to help create the new research infrastructure for 21st-century scholarship – an increasingly digital and interconnected world presents new challenges of scale that require specific attention in order to unlock their research potential.

Examples of previous challenge winners include:
- Trees and Tweets: developing tools to analyse big data from family trees and tweets to understand patterns of large-scale migration and language variation in the UK and the US.
- IMPACT: establishing an online, web-assessable, computerised database of radiological studies of ancient Egyptian mummies.
- DiLiPaD: developing tools to compare, visualise and analyse the extensive court records of more than 157,000 individual trials held over 240 years at the Old Bailey.

This exciting opportunity is open to international projects comprising teams from at least three participating countries seeking to address any social science/humanities research question by using large-scale, digital data analysis techniques, and show how these techniques can lead to new insights.

The deadline for final applications is 29 June 2016. ■ For more information see: diggingintodata.org/awards/2016/news/announcing-t-ap-digging-data-challenge-2016

EVENTS

6 MAY

Youth mental health and wellbeing, Seminar 5

This seminar will focus on digital technologies and innovations that have been implemented into practice to promote young people’s mental health and wellbeing. The seminar provides an opportunity for researchers, health professionals, industry, policymakers, young people and family members to learn about emerging technologies that are making an impact on young people’s health nationally. www.nottingham.ac.uk/research/groups/mental-health/projects/youth-mental-health.aspx

18 MAY

ESRC Strategic Network: tackling obesity with Big Data, Seminar 3

This is the third of four seminars held by the ESRC Obesity Strategic Network, to explore how Big Data can best be used to understand and tackle obesity. The seminar will be presented by Jaap Seiddel, Pablo Monsivais and Claire Griffiths. The panel discussion will be facilitated by Christina Vogel and include seminar speakers along with Graham Clarke, Thomas Burgoine and Darren Daly. www.cdrcc.ac.uk/research/obesity/network-meetings

15 JUNE

Managing, sharing and archiving social science research data

This workshop is designed in particular for ESRC grant-holders, researchers and research managers at ESRC research centres, who are expected to archive their data with the UK Data Service for future re-use. Also other researchers interested in archiving data to make them available for re-use or as evidence for a published paper will benefit from this workshop. www.ukdataservice.ac.uk/news-and-events/eventsitem/?id=4489

22-26 AUGUST

International Population Data Linkage Conference

This unique conference is designed to provide researchers, policymakers, practitioners, administrators, regulators, and data guardians opportunities to learn more about the cutting-edge work on linking disparate population-scaled datasets that is underway across the world, together with a chance to showcase their own achievements, and to listen to talks from international leaders in the field. www.ipdlnconference2016.org

INFORMATION & UPDATES

SPRING 2016 SOCIETY NOW 31
Making sense of society

The ESRC magazine *Society Now* aims to raise awareness of our research and its impact. It addresses a wide range of readers, from the MP to the businessperson, the voluntary worker to the teacher, the public through to the social scientist, and is published four times a year (spring, summer, autumn and winter).

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

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

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Web: www.esrc.ac.uk

@ESRC

Economic and Social Research Council
Polaris House
North Star Avenue
Swindon SN2 1UJ
Tel: +44 (0)1793 413000
Fax: +44 (0)1793 413001

EDITOR IN CHIEF Jacky Clake jacky.clake@esrc.ac.uk
EDITOR Nick Stevens nick.stevens@esrc.ac.uk
SUB-EDITOR AND RESEARCHER Debbie Edginton debbie.edginton@esrc.ac.uk
INFOGRAPHIC Tidy Designs