Boundary changes
Redrawing the UK political map
Welcome

to the Autumn issue of Society Now, the ESRC’s regular magazine which showcases the impact of the social science research we fund.

This issue continues the analysis of the referendum vote to leave the EU with a discussion of the political, legal and economic implications of a ‘hard’ or ‘soft’ Brexit.

We explore ‘nexus thinking’ which considers the direct and indirect impacts of extreme weather on different sectors.

Luke Sibieta of the IFS assesses the costs and benefits of government proposals to expand the number of grammar schools across England.

Opinion pieces look at how social science can unpick arguments to find the real story behind policy decisions; and why the opinions of experts have been rejected during and after the EU referendum.

Elsewhere, Professor Ron Johnston looks at the effects of the proposed Parliamentary constituency boundary changes. And we talk to the ESRC’s new Research Director Professor Tony McEnery, who explains corpus linguistics and its contribution to society, and his aspirations in his new role.

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Over one million children in the UK have a parent with serious depression. These young people have a greatly increased risk of developing a psychiatric disorder themselves, but poor outcomes are not inevitable, says a new Cardiff University study. Research into the factors which can increase mental health resilience in young people suggests that preventative interventions could help ‘buffer’ children who face high familial risk.

Previous studies indicate that offspring of parents with depression are at least three times more likely than non-depressed parents’ offspring to develop a range of mental health disorders with adverse health, educational and social outcomes, including risk of suicide. But the Cardiff University findings indicate that resilience is not uncommon with around one in five of a sample of some 300 high-risk children showing sustained good mental health. “In fact, this ‘resilient’ group showed better mental health than the general population of adolescents who had no experience of living with a depressed parent,” says Dr Stephan Collishaw.

Researchers identified five clear factors linked to resilience. Positive expressed emotion of a depressed parent, the emotional support provided by the other parent, the young person’s own confidence, good quality social relationships and regular physical exercise all predicted good mental health. “Crucially, we discovered that resilience requires multiple protective factors to be present,” says Dr Collishaw. “The presence of one or two of these factors is not sufficient on their own to make a difference. Rather, multiple protective factors – four or five – are required for high-risk children to be free of mental health problems.”

These findings have clear implications for families affected by parental depression. Not all parents with depression receive treatment, and not all treatment is successful. Moreover, depression is often chronic or recurrent. “Understanding resilience mechanisms is important because it can help in the design of effective preventative interventions,” Dr Collishaw explains. “At present preventative interventions typically focus on specific mechanisms in isolation such as psychological therapies or social interventions. But we show that multi-modal interventions that enhance protective effects across multiple domains are needed.”

Simple changes to existing interventions could have substantial benefits, for example, promoting frequent physical exercise, involving fathers in family-based interventions, and engaging with schools to help facilitate good social relationships. Efforts should also focus on reaching at-risk children via, for example, online psychoeducation. Researchers are currently developing and evaluating an online package to help with mood and wellbeing (and depression) in young people which they aim to roll out across health, education, social and youth services.
Government needs to recognise household debt

MOST UK POLITICIANS, policymakers and economists know that household debt is a problem, but do nothing about it, says Dr Johnna Montgomerie, lead researcher on a knowledge-exchange project exploring the emerging politics of debt in Britain. “Household-level debt is a matter of strategic policy silence in contemporary Britain and the void in public policy understanding and responses to indebtedness is having devastating consequences,” she says.

“Government should recognise debt is a systemic problem to be tackled through economic policy rather than as, at present, trying to depict indebtedness as a ‘personal’ problem which can be addressed through social policies such as improving individuals’ financial literacy,” says Dr Montgomerie.

Evidence suggests that most household debt is not due to profligacy, but results from relatively short-term income reductions arising from unemployment, illness or redundancy. “Even three-month periods of joblessness can tip household finances over the edge leading to years of financial difficulty,” she says.

Financial difficulty is now the leading cause of family breakdown in the UK. Moreover, evidence points to clear links between indebtedness and mental health problems. “Our analysis of those living with debt and depression suggests that unless policymakers learn to empathise with those struggling with entrenched financial and psychological problems, attempts at changing behaviour through approaches like cognitive behavioural therapy will fail,” says Dr Montgomerie. “Depressed individuals already feel responsible for their own poverty and failure, but the government is only offering attempts to inculcate even greater personal responsibility.”

One solution, say researchers, is for the government to stop pretending that financial education is the answer to levels of household debt which are currently on a par with UK government debt. Innovative policy solutions include the introduction of mechanisms to enable households to swap their high-cost debt for lower cost debt more reflective of the government’s own borrowing rate – currently 0.25 per cent. Additionally, government could offer a financial stimulus to households through tax and PAYE breaks – in other words, ‘quantitative easing’ aimed at directly easing households’ debt burden.

“Government has its head in the sand over the issue of household debt,” says Dr Montgomerie. “This one issue blights society and the economy, and tackling it would have multiple benefits for us all.”

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Scheme boosts cycle training

‘BIKEABILITY’ is a £11-million flagship government cycling training scheme that reaches half of children in England in their final years of primary school. A study of the uptake and impact of Bikeability finds that offering the scheme in schools boosted uptake of child cycle training and reduced inequalities in participation rates across social groups. But even when schools did offer the scheme some inequalities in uptake persisted, with White, affluent or sporty children more likely to take part. Recent initiatives such as providing ‘pool bikes’ aimed at children in poorer schools who do not have their own bike may help reduce some of these inequalities, researchers say.

Using a natural experimental design, the study also found no evidence that, in the short term, children cycled more frequently after the training. Longer follow-up is needed, however, as effects could plausibly emerge during the transition to secondary school.

Low expectations key to shared housing success

Managing expectations is crucial to the success of shared living arrangements, suggests recent research into what life is like for those who share a house with people who are not family members.

Most who share housing with non-kin in the UK do so in shared rentals and private lodging arrangements, usually as young adults, but increasingly at other points in the lifecourse too. “These arrangements have become more commonplace in recent years, not primarily through choice, but largely in response to rising housing costs and the impact of recession,” says researcher Professor Sue Heath. Researchers find, however, that both ‘intentional’ and ‘unintentional’ sharers face very similar challenges regardless of context. “We found that the high expectations and deep personal investments often linked to intentional sharing could exacerbate the more challenging aspects of sharing, and heighten a sense of disappointment if expectations were thwarted,” says Professor Heath. “But sharers with low expectations often found their hopes exceeded.”

As shared living is clearly on the increase, then greater awareness of the factors which enable shared housing to work and how this should be achieved is increasingly important, researchers conclude.

IN BRIEF

A JUSTICE GAP
Government research has consistently shown a justice gap in relation to sexual and domestic violence, forced marriage, and ‘honour-based violence’. The ‘justice gap’ refers not only to the dropping out of cases but also to the wider gap in understanding of what justice means. Researchers will explore how victims/survivors perceive justice and what a victim-focused justice agenda for gender-based violence would look like.

ESRC grant number ES/M010090/1

SECURE RELATIONSHIPS
Difficulties in forging secure bonds with others can affect relationships, confidence and wellbeing. Researchers will introduce strategies that couples can adopt, including communication strategies that strengthen trust, and perception exercises that aid positive reinterpretations of interactions. The effect of these security-enhancing strategies will be examined over time.

ESRC grant number ES/N013182/1

HIGHER EDUCATION
Higher education and the scientific research associated with universities are highly important to UK society and government. Funded initially for five years, the Centre for Engaged Global Higher Education (CEGHE) will conduct research designed to transform understanding of Higher Education (HE) in its economic and social contexts. Findings will interest government, policymakers, public agencies, HEIs, the media and public.

ESRC grant number ES/M010082/1
**Effective child protection in Sierra Leone**

**IN BRIEF**

COMMUNITY-DRIVEN ACTION on behalf of vulnerable children can be an effective, sustainable means of supporting children who are at risk of violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation, according to a recent two-year research project.

“Previously, it had been thought that the best way to support vulnerable children was through programmes driven by child protection specialists,” explains researcher Professor Michael Wessells. But an alternative approach of community-driven, fundamental work developed and tested in two similar, rural chiefdoms in Sierra Leone, which included collaboration and linkages with the national child protection system, has produced promising results in terms of reduced teenage pregnancy.

“The field needs less reliance on expert-driven approaches and much wider use of slower, community-driven approaches to child protection,” he concludes.

**BIG DATA CHALLENGES**

In an increasingly digitised world, technological developments and the collection, storage and use of ‘big data’ pose unprecedented challenges for the protection of human rights. A new research programme aims to ensure that the use of technological developments and big data are compatible with the ideals of human rights protection and can even have a positive impact.

ESRC grant number ES/N012236/1

**ESCAPING POVERTY**

How important is psychological support such as life planning, confidence building and strengthening social awareness in helping poor women leave poverty behind? Researchers will explore a Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) programme which targets the ultra-poor to establish whether psychological support to poor clients is adding value by strengthening or speeding up progress out of poverty.

ESRC grant number ES/K005783/1

**SMART GOVERNANCE**

The SmartGov research project assesses the value of ICTs for engaging citizens in the governance of sustainable cities. Based on three case studies undertaken in Utrecht, Curitiba and Glasgow, the study aims to present findings in the form of a research-based knowledge system for government officials which can be used to enhance sustainable urban governance and service delivery.

ESRC grant number ES/N011473/1

**School measures merit caution**

PROGRESS 8, THE Government’s new headline measure of school progress, will determine the rankings in this year’s ‘school league tables’ which will be published in January 2017. But Progress 8, like previous progress measures and school league tables more generally, should be viewed with more scepticism and interpreted more cautiously than has often been the case to date, suggests new research from the University of Bristol.

Based on secondary analyses of the Government’s pupil and school level performance data, researchers cast a critical eye over the two most recent headline measures of school progress: Contextual Value-Added (2006-2010) and Expected Progress (2011-2015).

Findings reveal that schools’ league table positions changed dramatically as the Government switched from Contextual Value-Added to Expected Progress. “Schools with low attaining intakes and serving disadvantaged communities dropped massively down the tables, while Grammar schools and others with high attaining intakes soared upwards”, says researcher Dr George Leckie.

Progress 8 attempts to address some of the problems of Expected Progress, but researchers believe it is still flawed. For example, Progress 8 will continue to ignore school differences in pupils’ socioeconomic and demographic backgrounds when they enter their schools. This is problematic given the substantial impact such differences make on school rankings.

“We need to be more realistic about these measures and more aware of their limitations,” Dr Leckie states. “While school league tables do contain some useful information, we believe they are best used as tools for school self evaluation and as a first step towards identifying successful school policies and practices. Also for identifying schools performing unexpectedly poorly for the purpose of careful further investigation. Even then, school league tables will be of most use when combined with other sources of school information.”

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Asylum support system increasingly fragmented

SYLUM SEEKERS’ accommodation in the UK is evaluated in terms of the profit it generates rather than the wellbeing of those being housed, says recent research into the enforced placement of asylum seekers through dispersal – the process that identifies where asylum seekers should be housed.

In the first study into the UK’s provision of asylum accommodation since it was privatised in 2012, researcher Dr Jonathan Darling examined accommodation and support provision in Birmingham, Cardiff, Glasgow, and Sunderland, exploring the effect that changes to asylum accommodation and service provision are having on asylum seekers, refugees, stakeholders and local authorities. Findings suggest that the asylum support system has grown increasingly fragmented, creating a dependency on limited charitable provision in some parts of the UK.

“Successful dispersal requires clear and effective communication between local authorities, the Home Office and support organisations, but the introduction of private contracts for accommodation has made it harder to identify those responsible for specific properties and for resolving issues, and that the pressing need for effective communication with local communities before dispersal occurs is often overlooked.

“Dispersal has become a policy seen as disempowering for local authorities and third sector groups,” Dr Darling argues. “Yet these agencies contain the key local knowledge essential to successful dispersal. Moving forward, dispersal should be open to regular review involving discussion of what the aims of dispersal policy are, how those aims are met and measured, and whether the current model is fit for purpose. We need stronger communication between actors involved in dispersal, longer-term planning of dispersal support services, and stronger political leadership in refuting the idea of asylum seekers as ‘burdens’ to be transferred between authorities, regions and countries.”

Asylum support system increasingly fragmented

Helping us think before we buy

JOINT RESEARCH BY the University of Sheffield and the London College of Fashion into how to promote more sustainable consumption in the fashion and energy industries finds that many consumers feel detached from the processes that bring electricity, gas and water into their homes and put clothes into shops for them to buy.

“For clothing, this means people do not always appreciate the social and economic footprint their clothing decisions leave, which can lead to ‘bad’ choices or ‘surplus’ purchases being made,” says psychologist Dr Christopher Jones.

Researchers from the TRANSFER knowledge exchange project undertook a range of public engagement activities to investigate novel, collaborative solutions to encourage more conscientious consumption of energy, water and clothing. The ‘Making it Real’ exhibition at Trinity Shopping Centre, Leeds explored the manufacture of a T-shirt to make the processes and people involved more real to consumers. “If retailers can better highlight how their goods and services are manufactured this may make people think twice before making purchases they will not value, and raising consumer awareness of the impacts of their consumption,” says Dr Jones.
AUTISM IS DIAGNOSED more today than ever before. Forty years ago people saw autism as an incredibly rare condition with just one in 2,500 children diagnosed. Today, in the UK, some statistics put that figure as one in a hundred. In a two-year study, researchers from the University of Exeter explored the rising diagnosis of development disorders, including autism and attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). “Our study questioned whether there really are more children with the symptoms that underpin autism and ADHD or if the rise is solely due to increasing awareness, and changing diagnostic criteria and practice,” says researcher Dr Ginny Russell.

The study was based on secondary data analysis of two UK cohorts a decade apart (1998 and 2008). Findings suggest that, together with the expected rise in autism diagnosis, there are more children with the behaviours and symptoms that underpin autism in 2008 compared to a decade earlier.

“Our findings are intriguing because they go against the consensus that the higher proportion of children diagnosed simply reflects a wider net due to clinicians now being better at recognising autism,” Dr Russell explains. The consensus view also arises from the fact that the diagnostic criteria for childhood development disorders has widened to include less severe cases and, today, autism diagnosis is made in younger children than ever before, also increasing the number of children diagnosed with autism.

Dr Russell says: “These findings are potentially controversial because they may reflect a true increase in the proportion of children who have traits and behaviours associated with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Alternatively, shifts in parent and teacher recognition and reporting of such traits may explain the findings. More research is needed to distinguish between these two possibilities since we believe our results indicate that debate over increasing prevalence of ASD is ongoing.”

RISING DIAGNOSIS FOR DEVELOPMENT DISORDERS

JUST OVER 150 professional women working within the Royal Aeronautical Society, the Royal Air Force and Airbus have joined a mentoring initiative designed for women by women, arising from a knowledge-exchange partnership between these three founding partner organisations and the University of the West of England. This scheme will be open to all professional women working in aviation and aerospace industry by the end of 2016.

Known as alta, the mentoring scheme aims to address the practical challenges faced by women working in an industry where their representation as engineers is the lowest across the EU (8.7 per cent compared with 30 per cent in Latvia).

“We were in contact with 250 women across the industry who identified a number of challenges for women working in a male-dominated environment,” says Professor Susan Durbin. “These include the perception by others that engineering is not suitable for women, the lack of fit between being a mother and pursuing a career as an engineer, and the fact that engineering is not being sufficiently promoted by schools and careers advisors.”

The alta scheme offers online mentoring underpinned by bespoke mentor/mentee matching software that pairs mentees with mentors according to their needs and online mentor training. The flexibility of the scheme is particularly important as many of the members are employed away from home, such as those in the RAF.
IN BRIEF

PUBLIC SERVICES
Over the past 30 years governments have tried to capitalise on Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) to run public services previously delivered by the state ranging from public libraries to schools. Some argue that CSOs can now be viewed as the contractual arm of the state, providing services rather than advocacy. A new seminar series will explore the impact this may have on CSOs’ independence and intentions. ESRC grant number ES/N009096/1

MALIAN HEALTH CARE
Free primary healthcare in Mali has, according to a previous study, substantially increased Malian households’ use of this care. Research now indicates that some of this care may be unnecessary or mistargeted as children in government-run community clinics are often prescribed antimalarials and antibiotics they do not need. This follow-up study will identify the causes behind over-treatment and explore alternative treatment regimes. ESRC grant number ES/N00583X/1

SOCIAL INNOVATION
Social innovation involves new ideas for products, services and ways of working that meet social needs and create new social relationships or collaborations. Austerity can accelerate social innovation in cities but the implications for urban politics and governance are poorly understood. Researchers will study the impact of contrasting experiences of austerity on the urban governance of social innovation. ESRC grant number ES/N005988/1

Dementia factors identified

Blood pressure control, adequate physical activity, and maintenance of lung function could be key to tackling probably the two largest unsolved health problems of our ageing society: dementia and disability later in life, suggests new research from University College London.

Recent findings from the Whitehall II study which, since 1985, has provided a unique source of information on healthy ageing based on more than 10,000 UK men and women, suggest that a prevention policy to improve wellbeing and independent living at older ages should focus on three risk factors: physical inactivity, poor lung function and high blood pressure in mid-life.

Until now, the risk factors associated with both types of age-related impairment – dementia and disability – have not been known. In one of the first studies to examine physical functioning and cognitive functioning together, researchers investigated the later influences of 12 separate risk factors recorded when Whitehall II participants were 50 years old. Physical inactivity, poor lung function and high blood pressure emerged from the analysis as the mid-life risk factors most clearly and robustly linked to low cognitive and physical functioning 18 years later. If duplicated in other studies, these findings indicate that paying attention to health behaviours and risk factors in mid-life could help prevent dementia and disability.

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Nudge fails to increase volunteering

Sharing social information can increase charitable donations of money, but does not work to boost volunteering. A recent study examined whether sharing information about how others have volunteered including personalised feedback about individuals’ volunteering hours compared with others – and email endorsements from celebrities, politicians and students about the value of volunteering – could help increase the level of various forms of volunteering.

Findings do not show significantly beneficial effects of social information on volunteering levels, either in terms of hours contributed or numbers of people registering to volunteer. “This indicates the limits of such approaches in changing more sustained behaviours as opposed to one-off acts of giving money to charity,” says researcher Professor Peter John.
Hotter, wetter, windier – with a warming climate the forecast is not promising over the next years. Climate change is expected to increase the frequency, severity and extent of extreme weather events, such as coastal and inland flooding, heatwaves, coldwaves and hurricanes.

But the impact of extreme weather extends far beyond the immediate emergency response – including areas such as health and wellbeing, infrastructure, utilities, economy and livelihoods, in both short and long terms. Research evidence suggests that the financial costs and social impacts of weather events are set to rise.

These wide-ranging impacts show that although food, water, energy and environment are managed as separate sectors, they form a closely interlinked ‘nexus’ (Latin for ‘connection point’) – a connected system with a range of trade-offs, synergies and potential conflicts between each component.

Shocks to the nexus

Dr Candice Howarth at the University of Surrey is a Nexus Shocks Fellow under the ESRC-funded Nexus Network, and explores how shock events such as extreme weather have ripple effects throughout the food-energy-water-environment nexus.

“For example, an episode of heavy rainfall leading to significant flooding will impact local households and businesses; mobilise local and national emergency services in the immediate aftermath; affect physical and mental health and – in the longer term – the health sector; impact the insurance industry; and influence decision-makers when it comes to rapid response strategies,” she says.

The ‘nexus’ concept first gained international attention through a 2011 report on water security from the World Economic Forum. “Water lies at the heart of a nexus of social, economical, and political issues – agriculture, energy, cities, trade, finance, national security, and human livelihoods, within rich and poor countries alike,” the authors stated in the introduction.

Regardless of whether water, energy or food is being discussed, the main emphasis in nexus debates has so far been on natural resources, or the lack of them – while the social and political implications have been more overlooked.

“Water lies at the heart of a nexus of social, economical, and political issues”

“In order to build effective and sustainable responses to extreme events, it is crucial to have a good understanding and appreciation of the way different stakeholders are impacted by and respond to these impacts,” says Dr Howarth.

Nexus thinking

This is the key to so-called ‘nexus thinking’ – considering the direct and indirect impacts throughout the nexus, and the stakeholders they affect, rather than piecemeal initiatives which fail to take all affected sectors into account.

“To date, research and practice have focused on material and predominantly resource-focused domains. The explicit aim of various forms of ‘nexus thinking’ is to address the interconnections and trade-offs between sectors,” explains Cian O’Donovan, acting Co-ordinator of The Nexus Network based at the University of Sussex’s Science Policy Research Unit.

“For example, on the one hand, we might think about a farmer’s access to fresh water in terms of rights and justice. On the other hand, the same water may be a public or private good to be allocated through a market arrangement. Finally, an engineer might conceive of the same water as a hydro-infrastructure problem to be solved. How we think about these problems, and which forms of knowledge are mobilised in thinking, invariably affects the outcome of problem-solving.

“Nexus thinking might be useful not only in addressing complex technical challenges, but also in making clear the often deep issues of power and politics that go with these challenges.”

“There are different interpretations of what
nexus thinking is," adds Candice Howarth. “It can mean thinking specifically related to the energy-food-water-environment nexus, or more broadly thinking from different knowledge and expertise. But nexus thinking is a useful way to frame these issues, to better inform policymaking in response to nexus shocks.”

The shock impact of extreme weather

Dr Howarth is analysing strategic decision-making and risk management in the UK, looking at how nexus shocks are managed. Some of the key findings include:

- Decisions are often sector-limited in focus, failing to fully incorporate cross-stakeholder needs and processes. They can be taken with little consideration of impacts to other sectors or processes that other sectors have put in place.
- Decisions at national level may fail to consider implications for local or even international level.
- Decision-makers at the local and national levels have a tendency to focus on short-term and sector-limited problems and benefits, with less emphasis on long-term implications for the system as a whole.
- Decisions may not fully consider business supply chains which cut across and transcend national boundaries and governance.
- ‘Bottom-up’ participation from local communities is needed to design sustainable and resilient responses to nexus shocks.

Nexus approach in policy

The Centre for the Evaluation of Complexity Across the Nexus (CECAN), which is led by Professor Nigel Gilbert at the University of Surrey, and is part-funded by the ESRC, is testing nexus-based evaluation approaches and methods for effective policymaking.

"Nexus thinking addresses the interconnections and trade-offs between different sectors who view something as simple as water very differently", Professor Gilbert.

“Identifying what works in practice can be very difficult, especially with policies that cut across the energy, environment and food sectors – where urgent matters such as climate change, loss of biodiversity, poverty and challenges to health and wellbeing are entangled. We need new ways to evaluate policy in these situations.”

Candice Howarth, who also works with CECAN, has outlined several policy recommendations in her briefing on nexus shocks, including:

- There needs to be greater policy emphasis on strategic, proactive measures to mitigate extreme events, rather than reactive policies after the event.
- National and local policy responses should apply a ‘whole systems’ approach, taking into consideration how decisions are influenced by and affect various stakeholders and sectors.
- An integrated strategy could take the form of a national task force that promotes joint approaches, secondment schemes and stakeholder engagement.
- Policymakers should engage in information-sharing with other countries and regions experiencing extreme events, learning from their experiences and implementing lessons learnt.
- There should be increased collaboration between academics, policymakers and practitioners.
- Authorities need to raise citizens’ awareness of our dependency on infrastructure assets, and enable civilians to play a more active role in emergency response – for instance through national awareness campaigns and local community response groups.

“Extreme weather events will continue to impact a number of sectors whether directly or indirectly, in the short or the long term,” Dr Howarth points out. “Capturing evidence, expertise and resource at multiple levels will enable precautionary responses to be established and help build resilience before extreme events take place.”

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SOCIAL SCIENCE CAN play many useful roles in controversies over science and technology. The tricky bit is that what counts as ‘useful’ in any policy debate will often depend on the perspective. After all, it is inherent to democracy that different values and interests yield contrasting conclusions. This is especially so in controversies like the current one bubbling away around intense UK Government commitments to nuclear power.

There is of course, huge value in facilitating better understanding of why different perspectives disagree – and (where possible) identifying common ground. Beset by contending forces, it is understandable that hard-pressed policymakers will find it useful to understand how best to foster qualities of ‘trust’, ‘confidence’ and ‘acceptance’ around their own institutions and procedures.

For the most powerful incumbent interests in any given setting, social research can also play ‘useful’ roles in helping to justify, present or implement the most favoured policies. Here, social science can be a vital input to the ‘closing down’ of debate, allowing political attention to move on.

But what if the most powerfully-backed policies are actually (on deeper reflection), not a good idea and where the evidence base at the time was unduly shaped by vested interests and constrained imaginations? It is here that social science can play a further crucial role: helping to ‘open up’ policy debates where they are unduly ‘locked-in’. This focuses less on society as a target for policymaking, and more on the social processes of policymaking.

This syndrome is apparent in current debates over Hinkley Point C where the Government is planning to forge ahead with what its own data show to be a far more expensive low-carbon energy option than is offered by alternative renewable and efficiency resources.

With the UK enjoying the best renewable resource in Europe and holding a competitive advantage in crucial offshore industries, industrial policy arguments are also much better on renewables. The same applies to jobs. Compared to nuclear safety and security challenges, renewables are far less vulnerable. And ‘baseload’ arguments are repudiated even by National Grid. So officially-stated reasons for nuclear simply don’t stack up.

The contrasts with Germany are especially strong. Here, arguably the world’s most successful industrial country had a nuclear industry far larger and more successful than that of the UK, and a much less attractive renewable resource. Yet it is this country – with a strong record of far-sighted industrial policy decisions in the past – that has made the opposite move to the UK towards renewable energy, rather than the British ‘nuclear renaissance’.

One explanation for this contrast with Germany lies in the comparative circumstances of the two democracies. The post-war German constitution and a more critical political culture arguably make it easier for Germany to resist incumbent industrial interests and ease itself out of lock-in.

All the more crucial for being so neglected, there is a particular factor that seems to underlie the intense attachment of successive UK governments to civil nuclear power. This involves parallel commitments to maintain ‘nuclear submarine capabilities’. Without the cover provided by low-tier contracts in a civil nuclear construction programme, it seems the diminishing UK manufacturing sector would simply not be able to build these formidable technological artefacts. Nor could they easily be operated without civil infrastructures for research, design, training, maintenance and regulation.

So, a consequence of withdrawing from nuclear power might also be very serious for a particular (topical) version of British identity – in which nuclear military prowess supposedly allows the country proudly to ‘punch above its weight’ on the world stage. Yet, although this kind of reason for intense UK nuclear commitments is very clearly documented on the military side, it is entirely unacknowledged anywhere in official civil nuclear policy statements – or even in British energy debates more widely.

What this might mean for policy is a moot point. But it is by opening up this kind of wider discussion about power dynamics that social science can undertake its trickiest but arguably most useful task in a controversy. And with discussion otherwise so silent on this point in energy policy, it seems the stakes transcend nuclear debates alone – raising questions over the health of British democracy as a whole.
ONE OF THE most interesting and worrying elements of the Brexit debate was the manner in which expert opinion was to some extent dismissed and sidelined in favour of more emotive arguments. This has caused much post-Brexit angst amongst academics and to some extent reflects a core fault-line or challenge that may come to define the future of the social sciences in the UK.

Not only had the Leave campaign been founded on explicit rejection of expert advice but it also exposed (or created) a gap between academics and the broader public. Recent surveys have also suggested falling levels of public trust in ‘academics’ as a professional group and an increasing sense that they are part of ‘the elite’ (which in an anti-political context is a synonym for ‘the problem’).

No-one is saying that academics are to blame for the referendum result (democracy is a fickle, irrational and unpredictable game) but that academics possibly did not quite understand the game they were being expected to play. A slightly bolder argument is that the social and political sciences displayed a failure to learn from the core insights of the social and political sciences in recent decades, especially in relation to the link between emotion and fact.

Studies have repeatedly revealed how firmly held beliefs tend to be incredibly resilient in the face of conflicting ‘facts’ or ‘evidence’ and the more you bombard an individual, community or section of society with ‘data’, ‘facts’ and ‘research’ the more they are likely to hold on to those beliefs. The ‘problem’ then for academics within the Brexit debate was that they understandably adopted a facts-based approach that may well be the norm within higher education but which failed to find any traction in the emotive sphere of cultural politics and national identity.

The ‘facts’ were not grounded and the projected risk scenarios’ meant little to large sections of the public that thought they had little to lose. And although irrational from a scientific perspective, claims to ‘take back control’, ‘regain power’ and put the ‘Great’ back into all sorts of things including ‘Great Britain’ offered powerful emotional triggers that scholarship appeared unable to challenge or dissect. As a result, academics in favour of remaining were rapidly defined by the ‘leave’ campaign as part of an elite that benefited from exactly the ‘gravy train’ that Brexit was intended to bring to a halt.

How might the academic community respond? First and foremost, we actually know very little about the nature and impact of ‘expert rejection’ within the EU referendum or more broadly, and considered research is necessary to inform possible response strategies. Second, there is something to be said for academics receiving more professional training on ‘the art of translation’ and ‘engaged scholarship’.

In recent years the emphasis on broad research training within PhD programmes to produce well-rounded social scientists has undoubtedly had an incredibly positive effect. But if the professional responsibilities of social scientists to the public are to be increasingly emphasised then more specialist training on framing, engaging and managing communications and impact strategies must be provided (and not just to early career researchers).

“ Academics possibly did not quite understand the game they were being expected to play”

Some might question the role of academic experts within political debates and campaigns believing it better not to risk dirtying one’s hands within the grubby world of politics, especially if it involves locating research findings within emotive language. The tricky context for this ‘dirty hands, clean research’ argument is that ‘society’ seems to be demanding more evidence from academics that publicly-funded research is a worthwhile investment.

Squaring the circle need not involve dirtying one’s hands or ‘selling out’ in terms of risking the credibility of one’s research, but a more sophisticated and subtle understanding of the need to ground or frame the available facts and research within the ‘everyday lives’ of the public.

This would involve a more granular analysis, more refined prescriptions and an acceptance that issues that may be ‘positive’ in terms of aggregated effects across time can also be ‘negative’ when viewed from the short-term and immediate position of local communities. In short, maybe the Brexit campaign suggests that academics need to display just a little more adaptability and social awareness – possibly even a dash of non-partisan political cunning – otherwise the gap between the professors and the public is only likely to grow.
The main loser because of electoral equalisation will be the Labour party
majority in the 600-member House) and Labour 203. In Scotland the likely outcome is a reduction in the number of SNP MPs by five or six.

Labour has traditionally benefited substantially from variations in constituency electorates, winning seats on average smaller than the Conservatives’. Equalisation of electorates removes this pro-Labour advantage and widens the gap between the two.

Closing that gap will be difficult because of the marginality of the new seats. After the 2015 election there are fewer marginal constituencies than at any other contest since 1945, largely reflecting the collapse in Liberal Democrat support. The Conservative lead over Labour was less than 10 percentage points in just 44 seats. If Labour won all 44 it would still be in second place, with 276 MPs to its opponent’s 287. The recommended constituencies include 46 with a Conservative lead over Labour of less than 10 percentage points: if Labour were to win them all it would have 249 MPs to the Conservatives’ 273 – a wider gap between the two in a House with 50 fewer MPs overall.

These initial proposals are now out to public consultation and the political parties will seek to change the Commission’s minds in some places, amending their proposals to make some constituencies more favourable to their electoral interests. Changes are likely to be small overall, however, if substantial in some places, and the conclusions drawn here will almost certainly remain when Parliament votes on the final recommendations in late 2018. The new map will be very different from the current one; most MPs will face significant disruption to their seats and have to build relationships with new areas, perhaps with very different population make-ups and social, economic and cultural issues.

The main loser because of electoral equalisation will be the Labour party. It will be further behind the Conservatives than in the current House of Commons, and to become the largest party, let alone win a majority, in 2020 it will need to overturn leads of 10 percentage points or more in a substantial number of seats being defended by the Conservatives and SNP.

Could it have been different? An allowed variation of +/-10 per cent around the national average constituency electorate would have generated less disruption to the current map but such is the geography of support for the three main parties now – Conservative, Labour and the SNP – that many seats changing hands without very large swings towards one of the parties means that the current situation is deeply incised in the country’s geography.

What if the electoral register had been more complete, if it included the 1.8 million people removed in late 2015? Labour might have benefited slightly – as it would if the further six million missing voters were somehow identified and registered – but probably not by enough seats to make a substantial difference. The geography of party support underlying the current and probable new constituencies means a more divided country electorally than previously and makes the likelihood of change on the government front benches very unlikely without a major change in the pattern of voters’ preferences.

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It does appear that those who attend grammar schools do, on average, somewhat better than similar children in the comprehensive system. Grammar schools may thus be a way of improving the performance of very bright pupils. On the other hand, those in selective areas who don’t get into grammar schools do worse than they would in a comprehensive system. And as children from poorer families are significantly less likely to attend grammar schools, the expansion of grammar schools in the current form would seem more likely to reduce than increase social mobility.

Who gets in to grammar schools?

There are currently 163 grammar schools across England, mostly concentrated in particular local authorities like Kent, Buckinghamshire and Lincolnshire. Children from deprived backgrounds are much less likely to attend existing grammar schools than are better off children. Only about three per cent of pupils at existing grammar schools are eligible for free school meals (the most widely used indicator of poverty in schools), which compares with about 17 per cent of pupils in grammar school areas as a whole.

Children from poorer families are less likely to display high levels of academic performance at age 11. About 12 per cent of year seven pupils in grammar schools weren’t in the state system in year six, a figure which can rise to about 20 per cent in some selective local authorities. This compares with around two per cent in all state schools in England. This strongly suggests that a lot of children move from private schools into grammar schools at age 11.

Why is there such a stark social divide in grammar school attendance? First, we know that children from poorer families are less likely to display high levels of academic performance at age 11. In 2015, 25 per cent of pupils eligible for free school meals achieved Level five or above in Maths, compared with 45 per cent of pupils not eligible for free school meals. Second, even high achieving poor children are less likely to enter grammar schools. Amongst those getting the top scores in English and Maths at age 11 in grammar school areas (level five in both in English and Maths), only 40 per cent of children from poorer families went on to grammar schools, compared with 66 per cent of their richer counterparts. This effect could be down to lower applications amongst poorer children and or because they are less well-prepared for the test.

What are the effects of attending (and not attending a grammar school)?

There is robust evidence that attending a grammar school is good for the attainment and later earnings of those who get in. But there is equally good evidence that those in selective areas who don’t pass the eleven plus do worse than they would have done in a comprehensive system.

These results are found for example in papers looking at children born in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. One paper directly shows that earnings inequalities are wider for children born in selective areas during the 1960s and 1970s as compared with those born in comprehensive areas. This comes from a combination of higher wages at the top of the distribution for individuals who grew up in selective areas and lower wages at the bottom. However, there is only a limited amount we can learn from historical evidence as selective education at this time also coincided with many other differences in the education system. For example, there used to be a two-tier qualification system of O-Levels and CSEs and pupils at grammar schools were much more likely to be guided towards (the more prestigious) O-Levels. This was replaced by GCSEs in the mid-1980s, which are taken by almost all young people.

More recent evidence comes from the expansion of grammar schools in Northern Ireland in the late 1980s. This raised average attainment over Northern Ireland as a whole, with a 10 per cent increase in the number of pupils getting three or more A-Levels, driven mainly by improved performance amongst those newly able to go to grammar schools. But the reform also widened educational inequalities with a decline in the performance of pupils not able to go to grammar schools. Therefore, even though we no longer have a two-tier qualification system, selective education is still found to widen educational inequalities.

What are the likely effects of an expansion in grammar schools?

The current evidence says that if we expand the number of grammar schools, pupil performance and later life earnings are likely to improve amongst those who are newly able to go a grammar school. This is likely to improve the educational achievement of the brightest pupils,
which is an area where England certainly lags behind other countries.

The likely impact on social mobility is harder to predict. If the new grammar schools are like the current ones, then we would expect few pupils from poorer backgrounds to attend and would be thus unlikely to benefit.

But the new grammar schools might not look like the old ones. The government has explicitly said that it would seek to find new ways to ensure pupils from poorer pupils get to attend and wants to encourage grammar schools to work more with other schools in their local area. However, it seems likely that the only way of ensuring that a socially representative group of children attend grammar schools would be through a quota system. This would have obvious disadvantages. To date, we also know very little about whether across-school co-operation can have real effects in practice.

What other ways are there to improve social mobility?

This begs the question as to whether there are other, more proven, ways of improving social mobility. Two potentially effective strategies spring to mind.

First, we know that gaps in cognitive ability by socio-economic background open up early in life and are visible as early as age three, before continuing to widen throughout childhood. Preventing those gaps from opening up earlier in life might be more effective than seeking to remedy this later in life. There is much we need to understand about what effective early intervention would look like in practice, particularly in a UK context. However, there is also now a robust body of evidence suggesting that early interventions can have profound effects on child development, particularly if followed up with high-quality schooling throughout childhood.

Second, schools in London have some of the best exam results in the country, particularly amongst deprived pupils. Around half of pupils eligible for free school meals in inner London achieve five or more GCSEs at A*-C, double the proportion outside London. Furthermore, inner London has been particularly effective for high levels of attainment, with around 15 per cent of pupils eligible for free school meals achieving eight or more GCSEs at grade B or above in inner London, compared with six per cent outside of London. This high level of school performance has been put down to a variety of factors, including improved past primary school performance, greater numbers of high-achieving ethnic minorities and improved practices within and across schools (eg, greater collaboration, better leadership and extensive use of data).

Grammar schools do therefore seem to offer an opportunity to improve and stretch the brightest pupils, but potentially come at the cost of increasing inequality. There are potentially more effective strategies to improve social mobility including greater levels of early intervention and learning the lessons from the success of schools in London.
We present an at-a-glance overview of key issues. This issue our focus is on healthcare. Statistics from ONS Expenditure on Healthcare in the UK (2013) Department of Health Hospital Estates and Facilities (2013-14) and Patients Association waiting times (2015)

**THE UK BY NUMBERS**

**HEALTHCARE**

Between 1997 and 2009, total healthcare expenditure per person more than doubled, increasing by 7.5% on average each year. Between 2009 and 2013, growth in total healthcare expenditure per person increased on average by only 1.3% each year. This was due to a slowdown in growth of total healthcare expenditure, with changes in population growth having only a small effect on growth rate of healthcare spending per person.

**HOSPITAL ESTATES AND FACILITIES STATISTICS**

- The total land area, which includes all the buildings, grounds and gardens, has reduced at a rate of 4.8 per cent, from 6,707 hectares in 2012-13 to 6,387 hectares in 2013-14.

- On hospital food, the average cost of feeding one in-patient per day has increased by £0.61, from £9.87 in 2012-13 to £10.48 in 2013-14. This represents a six per cent increase.

- The average fee per hour for visitor and patient car parking in 2013-14 was £1.19 (for 389 hospitals sites that supplied data). This represents an average increase of 4p from 2012-13.

**VARIATIONS IN WAITING TIMES CONTINUE TO EXIST ACROSS THE REGIONS:**

- Waiting times for key surgical procedures are all above 90 days on average.
- The most significant rise has been seen in the mean average wait for cataracts – up from 69 days in 2013 to 93 days in 2014.
- Knee procedures continue to have the longest mean average wait at 107 days

- The shortest mean average waiting time for any procedure is found within the London region, at 85 days’ wait for cataract operations – still a lengthy time for any patient to wait.

- The Midlands and East of England region has the longest waiting times for knee replacement operations with an average of 113 days, six days above the national average.
Pharmaceutical products accounted for the largest share of household healthcare expenditure, with over one-third of health-related household final consumption expenditure going on products in this category, such as medicinal preparations, drugs, medicines and vitamins.

Therapeutic appliances and equipment, such as spectacles, hearing aids, prosthetics and wheelchairs, made up the next highest share, accounting for 19.7% of household consumption expenditure on healthcare.

Hospital services, which include all in-patient hospital services such as medical care, meals and accommodation charges, accounted for 18.0% of household final consumption spending on healthcare, the third highest share.

Other private medical services, including dental services, accounted for 12.0% of health-related household spending; out-patient medical services such as consultations with doctors or specialists accounted for 9.6%; paramedical services, which include private nurses, midwives, acupuncturists and other similar professionals, accounted for 3.5%.

VARIATIONS IN WAITING TIMES CONTINUE TO EXIST ACROSS THE REGIONS:

Total healthcare expenditure in the UK was £150.6 billion in 2013, having increased by 2.7% between 2012 and 2013.

Total spending per person on healthcare was £2,350 in 2013, more than two and a half times the level in 1997, when £941 was spent.

The average for OECD countries was 71.8%.

Total healthcare expenditure in the UK accounted for 8.8% of GDP in 2013. Total healthcare expenditure as a percentage of GDP rose sharply between 2008 and 2009, as GDP fell, but has decreased since 2009.

Total healthcare expenditure in the UK was £54.9 billion in 1997.

Total healthcare expenditure rose every year between 1997 and 2013.

Annual average growth rate of 8.1%

Annual average growth rate of 2.0%
In September world leaders met at the first ever high-level summit addressing large movements of refugees and migrants, with the aim of bringing countries together behind a more humane and co-ordinated approach.

Among those speaking at the two-day UN General Assembly were UK Prime Minister Theresa May – who called for a global clampdown on what she referred to as “uncontrolled migration” – and US President Barack Obama, who gave a passionate appeal for greater integration between nations in the face of global insecurity.

The ESRC also had representation from its Mediterranean Migration Research Programme, which consists of eight studies on refugee and migrant populations who have entered Europe across the Mediterranean.

Professor Heaven Crawley and the MEDMIG (‘Unravelling the Mediterranean Migration Crisis’) team presented their ongoing research which seeks to understand the reasons why refugees and migrants left their home countries to make the dangerous journey across the Mediterranean in 2015.

Speaking at a side-panel on ‘human rights protection in the context of large movements of refugees and migrants’, the MEDMIG team highlighted some striking findings:

- Eighty-eight per cent of those arriving in Greece via the Eastern Mediterranean route said that they left their homes because of persecution, violence, death threats or human rights abuse.
- Of this group, more than a quarter said the ‘Islamic State’ group (IS) played a significant part in their decision to leave, with many being detained, tortured or forced to watch beheadings.
- Sixty-six per cent of those arriving in Italy mentioned factors that could be described as ‘forced migration’ including violence, death threats and religious persecution. Those from West and East Africa most commonly left because of the threat posed by militia groups and terrorist organisations or indefinite forced conscription in Eritrea.
- Over 75 per cent of those who crossed via Libya experienced physical violence, and over a quarter spoke of experiences related to the death of fellow travellers.

“The vast majority of refugees and migrants who are on the move remain in their own countries and regions of origin. Those who came to Europe in 2015 did so principally because they had been driven from their homes and found it impossible to rebuild their lives elsewhere,” said Professor Crawley, from Coventry University.

The outcome of the Summit

The outcome of the UN General Assembly was the adoption of the ‘New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants’ which ‘expresses the political will of world leaders to protect the rights of refugees and migrants, to save lives and share responsibility for large movements on a global scale.’

It was heralded by United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon as “a breakthrough in collective efforts to address the challenges of human mobility”. As he praised Member States, he said the Declaration will mean “more children can attend school; more workers can securely seek jobs abroad, instead of being at the mercy of criminal smugglers, and more people will have real choices about whether to move once we end conflict, sustain peace and increase opportunities at home.”

By adopting the New York Declaration, Member States agree to commitments including: to start negotiations leading to an international conference and the adoption of a global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration in 2018; to develop guidelines on the treatment of refugees and migrants in vulnerable situations; to achieve a more equitable sharing of the burden and responsibility for hosting and supporting the world’s refugees by adopting a global compact on refugees in 2018.

More work still needed

The lead investigators of the eight Mediterranean Migration Research Programme projects have welcomed the progress made at the UN Summit.

The group insists more needs to be done however, and are calling for the rights of some of the most vulnerable people in the world to be upheld.

The academics say that action is urgently needed in three main areas:

- upholding the right of refugees to seek asylum
- safe and legal passage for refugees and migrants
- an affirmation of their rights without discrimination.

Brad Blitz, Professor of International Politics
at Middlesex University, states that his research is showing that if the Mediterranean had a safe and legal passage then many deaths would not occur.

“The Mediterranean is the most deadly sea route in the world for refugees. Of the 1.6 million who have tried to reach safety in Europe since the beginning of 2015, as many as 3,501 have died attempting the crossing this year alone,” he added.

Dr Simon Parker, Director of the School of Social and Political Sciences at the University of York, also cites the absence of safe and legal routes contributing to rising numbers of deaths at sea.

He states: “A number of other negative consequences occur too, including the encouragement of existing and the formation of new criminal networks; the impoverishment of individuals and families; and fractured journeys that lead to work and life uncertainties and precariousness for refugees across Europe.

Just five months since the UN Secretary General called for a ‘Global Compact on Responsibility Sharing’, the right to asylum is being systematically undermined.

The closure of Europe’s internal borders has created stranded and vulnerable populations who present increasing health, welfare, and social care challenges for receiving countries.”

Dr Leonie Ansems de Vries, Lecturer in International Relations at King’s College London, added that their research is showing “the erosion of fundamental rights on the part of those seeking humanitarian protection.

“Priorities have been made on security and border control at the expense of those seeking safety in Europe,” she added. “Migration management policies are infringing the rights of refugees and we have seen evidence of systematic campaigns of police brutality and mistreatment by state officials, including coast guards and border officials.”

Dr Vicki Squire, Reader in International Security at the University of Warwick, is also concerned about the effects of current policies and practices:

“People in precarious situations are being made increasingly vulnerable. They are subject to xenophobic violence and exclusion, yet lack protection and legal redress. This has a disproportional impact on groups such as unaccompanied children, who are regularly subject to confinement with adults who are not family members, often in mixed sex accommodation. They are especially at risk of being trafficked and exploited when there is a lack of co-ordinated support.”

Dr Elisabeth Kirtsoglou, of Durham University, states: “The slow asylum-seeking relocation and family re-unification processes create further layers of vulnerability among different refugee populations but more so among unaccompanied minors. Reception structures for minors remain inadequate in Greece despite the efforts of the government, local and international NGOs. Unaccompanied refugees under 18 years old are currently stranded in hotspots alongside adults and face daily the risk of suffering different forms of violence.”

Making an impact
As with all research, it’s important these findings are communicated loud and clear outside of academic circles.

With the publication of ‘Missing Migrants in the Mediterranean: Addressing the Humanitarian Crisis’, Dr Simon Robins’ team achieved just that.

The study – authored by academics from the University of York, City, University of London and the International Organization for Migration’s Global Migration Data Analysis Centre – shows that the bodies of many drowned or missing refugees and migrants are never identified, meaning families at home face never finding out what has happened to their loved ones.

The research findings received coverage from the BBC and the Guardian, among other publications in this country, as well as internationally with the Sydney Morning Herald featuring the study.

“Behind the visible catastrophe of shipwrecks and deaths in the Mediterranean is an invisible catastrophe in which bodies are found and not enough is done to identify them and inform their families,” says Dr Robins, a senior research fellow at the Centre for Applied Human Rights at the University of York.

“Under international human rights law, all states have an obligation to investigate any suspicious death. However we found that in many instances migrant deaths were not being investigated.” Dr Iosif Kovras, of City, was the Co-Investigator in the study. He said that “the impact of policy failures by EU authorities is most visible on the families of the missing in the countries of origin who remain in a state of limbo.”
The meaning of Brexit

Since the EU referendum there has been heated debate about the form Brexit will take. The Prime Minister has now announced a date by which she will trigger Article 50 and the process and options are becoming slightly clearer. By Brigid Fowler and Anand Menon

The months since the EU referendum have seen some clarification of the questions raised by the UK’s vote to leave. They have not, however, provided many answers.

The only exception may be timing. At the Conservative Party conference in October, Prime Minister Theresa May announced that the Government would trigger Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union – the EU’s exit clause – by the end of March 2017. There had been indications that a date in early 2017 was likely, but the Prime Minister had not previously committed herself to a deadline. Triggering Article 50 – by giving formal notification to the rest of the EU that the UK wishes to leave – starts the clock ticking on a two-year countdown, at the end of which the UK will cease to be an EU member unless some extension is unanimously agreed. In those two years, the UK and its soon-to-be former partners must tie up the loose ends of membership – an ever-growing list including, for example, the fate of the pensions of British EU staff, and budgetary programmes that outlive British membership. For Mrs May, this timetable both reassures pro-Leave voters and ensures that the UK will be out of the EU before the next General Election in May 2020.

Mrs May also announced that the Government would introduce a ‘Great Repeal Bill’ in the next Queen’s Speech, at the start of the 2017-18 parliamentary session next May. This will repeal the 1972 European Communities Act, which underpinned UK membership by giving EU law effect in the UK and providing for its supremacy over its UK counterpart. The ‘Great Repeal Bill’ will also, Mrs May announced, provide for the wholesale transposition into UK law of all EU law not already enshrined there, with the aim of ensuring legal continuity and comprehensiveness. What will become the ‘Great Repeal Act’ will take effect on the day the UK leaves the EU.

The ‘Great Repeal Bill’ is less significant than the media hype suggested, since such legislation was always going to be needed to effect a UK exit. Indeed, given that its major impact will be to transpose all EU law into national law, its name could be seen as oxymoronic.

However, the announcement of the Article 50 timing and Repeal Bill framework has thrown into relief the legal, constitutional and political complexities which Brexit involves. Agreeing on the scope of the withdrawal agreement is likely to be one of the first tasks of the two negotiating teams once Article 50 is triggered, and could on its own take several months. Meanwhile, even if a relatively straightforward overarching provision suffices for the purposes of the main Act, the transposition of EU law into UK law requires a vast and highly technical inventorying and amending exercise, with – in some cases – potentially tricky political implications. For example, what will be the status of the past case law of the European Court of Justice (ECJ)? What UK authorities will take over the roles of the European Commission and the panoply of EU regulatory and co-ordinating agencies? And what role might the devolved assemblies play, given that the Bill will engage devolved powers?

Most important, it is doubtful that either the UK-EU withdrawal agreement or the domestic legal and political adjustment task can be completed without clarification of the UK’s future relationship with the EU. Article 50 requires that the withdrawal agreement ‘take account of the framework’ for that relationship. There are differences of views, among lawyers and politicians, as to the extent to which the Article 50 withdrawal agreement could encompass arrangements for post-Brexit UK-EU relations, but it seems most likely that

The nature of Brexit will also be shaped by the UK’s relationship with the EU Customs Union

Home Secretary Amber Rudd has re-committed the Government to reducing net immigration, via tighter rules on recruitment of foreign workers and students.
two agreements will be required. However, it is doubtful that an agreement on future relations could be in place within two years. As a consequence, attention is turning to a possible transitional arrangement that the UK may be able to secure, to bridge the gap between membership and a long-term settlement.

Whether the UK’s post-Brexit relationship with the EU is initially transitional or immediately takes a longer-term form, the firming-up of the Government’s Brexit commitment and timetable has focused attention on the nature that that relationship will or should take. Here, the argument – which now dominates the policy debate – is usually characterised as between a ‘hard’ and a ‘soft’ Brexit.

‘Hard’ and ‘soft’ Brexit are defined in terms of the UK’s future relationship with the EU Single Market, the area in which goods, services, capital and people are in principle free to move without tariff or non-tariff barriers, under a unified body of EU law and the ultimate judicial authority of the ECJ. ‘Soft Brexit’ is usually taken to mean continued membership of the Single Market outside the EU, in an arrangement like that of Norway and the other non-EU members of the European Economic Area (EEA).

The hardest ‘hard Brexit’ is usually understood to mean the UK having no preferential relationship with the Single Market and relying only on World Trade Organisation (WTO) rules to govern its trade relationship with the EU. This implies not only the possibility of non-tariff barriers in services, critical to the UK economy, but also the imposition of tariffs on UK-EU trade in at least some goods.

Between these ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ extremes lies a Brexit that involves some form of preferential UK relationship with the Single Market, secured through one or several free trade or other economic agreements, providing for liberal relations in fewer or more sectors. Of the many such relationships secured by states around the world, the one that grants the most extensive Single Market access is that of Switzerland, which is the only one also to include participation in free movement.

The nature of Brexit will also be shaped by the UK’s relationship with the EU Customs Union. A Customs Union agreement with the EU secures tariff-free trade with the EU for the goods it covers, in return for the non-EU state applying the EU’s external trade policy to those goods. If the UK were fully outside the Customs Union as well as the Single Market, Brexit would be the ‘harshest’ possible.

The debate about ‘hard’ or ‘soft’ Brexit sharpened in the aftermath of the Conservative Party conference, because the rhetoric in Birmingham appeared to point to the former. Theresa May said that after Brexit the UK’s ‘laws will be made not in Brussels but in Westminster. The judges interpreting those laws will sit not in Luxembourg but in courts in this country. […] We are not leaving the European Union only to give up control of immigration again. And we are not leaving only to return to the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice’. Meanwhile, the Home Secretary, Amber Rudd, re-committed the Government to reducing net immigration, via tighter rules on recruitment of foreign workers and students.

With the pound falling sharply apparently in reaction to the Government’s position, the Conservative conference galvanised business and political representatives who want to see the UK retain its Single Market membership. Moreover, party conferences are notorious for playing to the gallery – many of the measures announced, such as the plan to force companies to provide lists of foreign workers, have already been shelved.

However, proponents of continued UK membership of the Single Market and Customs Union are likely to be in for a hard time. This is because the arguments over membership of the Single Market and Customs Union to a significant extent re-run the arguments of the referendum campaign itself. This allows advocates of a ‘hard Brexit’ to claim the mandate of the referendum result in their support. The ‘Leave’ campaign during the referendum said that Brexit would enable the UK to ‘take back control’ of its laws, its money and its borders, as well as the ability to make its own trade deals, while the ‘Remain’ campaign made its ultimately unsuccessful case largely in terms of the economic benefits of being in the Single Market. In this context, while the Government retains some wiggle room, the referendum campaign looks set to constrain its options well into the Brexit process.
The power of words

Professor Tony McEnery, previously Director of the ESRC Centre for Corpus Approaches to Social Science, is the ESRC’s new Research Director. He explains corpus linguistics and its contribution to society, how language is changing, and his aspirations in his new role.

In my research centre we have done this over a hundred years for American and British English. A consistent pattern has emerged – as American English changes, British English follows it after a lag. This applies to a whole host of changes – for example, to more informal usage with less use of titles such as ‘Sir’, ‘Mr’ and ‘Mrs’, or to certain modal verbs, typically ones which are very directive, becoming less and less frequent, eg, must and should.

What changes have you noticed in corpus linguistics (and research generally) in recent years, especially with the increasing amount of data that are now available?

Corpus linguistics in many ways pioneered the use of big data. When other approaches to language were looking to symbolic logic and introspection for their inspirations, linguists, and British linguists in particular, in the 1960s and 1970s were building the first big corpora. In those days big was a million words. Even so, analysing data sets of that size meant working with the assistance of computers. One major change is that big has got bigger over time! We now have multi-billion word corpora of English to work with. But our view through time has also got deeper. We now have large collections of text, readable by machines, from previous centuries. I have just finished a study using a billion words from the seventeenth century! In terms of major changes, the data revolution that swept through linguistics in the 1980s and 1990s is now sweeping through other research areas too, with effects every bit as profound and promising as those experienced in linguistics.
Much is made of the harmful aspects of digital social media (trolling, online abuse). But what are the positive aspects—do these media stimulate creativity and new uses of language?

Pro-social uses of language online are undoubtedly of value and are often the norm. Yet people are distracted by the negative. For example, I was struck recently by the reaction of an audience to which I presented some work relating to words such as Islamic, Islam and Muslims on Twitter. The study was based on every mention of these words on Twitter in a five-year period. When I asked the audience what themes the word Islamic was often linked to, a few people suggested things such as terrorism and other manifestations of violence. In fact the most common phrase that Islamic appears in is ‘Happy Islamic New Year’, a phrase used over and over again by the peaceful majority of Muslims worldwide who are using social media not to promote hate but to simply do what social media allows you to do—be social! When we consider how the press in particular focus on negative stories about social media we should always remember that news values are typically negative. Sadly, lots of people wishing one another Happy Islamic New Year is not deemed newsworthy, even though it is typical, because it is not negative.

You have worked on projects that look at swearing. Are we swearing more or less than we used to?

This is a question which is difficult to answer at present, simply because we lack the data to answer the question credibly. But a solution is coming. Swearing in everyday speech is difficult to capture in a machine-readable form which is easily searched. We did, with ESRC assistance, build a 10,000,000-word corpus of spoken British English in the early 1990s which was carefully transcribed from original recordings. This has proved to be a very valuable research resource—in fact British English is still unique in having such a resource. But building corpora of speech is expensive. However, it is precisely the data we need here—by comparing speech in the past to similar speech in the present we might be able to answer this question. We could, of course, ask for people’s opinions on the matter, but we know that people’s opinions of how language is used are pretty unreliable. Similarly we could look at writing, but the ability of people to get their views published in writing on the web now makes it difficult to compare the writing of now, which may include more swearing, to published written English of 20 years ago, when texts were subjected to more censorship. To answer this question we need to look at language in the wild, so to speak, in spoken language.
language over time. On a new ESRC project we have been working to do that, producing a 2014 match for the early 1990s speech data. That new corpus is being published in 2018, but for now let me trail a finding – there is early evidence from the data of real changes in the use of ‘bad language’. Probably the headline result in this area so far is that it looks like the F word, which used to be used more frequently by males, is now used just as frequently by females.

You run a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC). Have MOOCs achieved what they set out to do and offer unlimited participation and open access? And have ‘students’ realised the predicted benefits?

Even though we have reached out to around 40,000 people to date through this course, I am continually amazed – and humbled – by the number of people who come up to me at international conferences and want to say ‘hello’ because they have taken the course. They often tell me how the course changed their lives – they decided to do a PhD or switched their research focus because of taking the course. The delivery of mass training in corpus linguistics to these people has been a landmark in my academic career. I am particularly proud that the training has helped those who are too time-poor, or cash-poor to take the course with me in a traditional University setting. We have students in Afghanistan, Algeria, Iraq and across the developing world who have taken the course and were incredibly grateful that they could do so. This means so much to me and all of the people involved in the course.

Initiatives like Newton and GCRF hold the real promise to widen that experience of research – getting access to different views of the world, subject expertise and research contexts has been energising for me. I think that initiatives like Newton and GCRF hold the real promise to widen that experience of research. Yet there is another side to the coin – the benefit has been mutual and ongoing. For example, using EPSRC funding in the late 1990s I held a workshop in India to bring together those interested in computational and corpus linguistics for South Asian languages. While my work has moved on from the study of South Asian languages, that initial meeting gave rise to a regular conference at which ideas about the analysis of language by computers are traded, challenged and formed between researchers in South Asia and the rest of the world. I was changed and enriched by this experience, and so were the South Asian researchers. Because of it, other researchers are still engaged in that process of mutual exploration and development today.

That is the type of transformation in the research landscape that Newton and GCRF promise. I find that a terrifically exciting prospect.

What are your aspirations in your new role and the ESRC as we move toward UKRI?

My aspirations for my role are simple. First and foremost I want to help to bring forward the very best in social science research to the benefit of the UK and the world. I also want to make sure that, wherever possible, the social dimension of research is addressed and the research landscape is enriched thereby – for example, the development of a new technology holds as much promise as a focus for social science researchers as for researchers funded by EPSRC. UKRI will be enormously helpful in achieving my aspirations – social science must not be siloed. When I look at research programmes in the other research councils, I am struck over and over again by how the social dimension of much of that research is rich with possibility. UKRI will help us realise that promise.
ESRC LAUNCHES SOCIAL SCIENCE WRITING COMPETITION

The ESRC, in partnership with SAGE Publishing, is pleased to announce the launch of its 2016/17 writing competition – ‘Making sense of society’.

Open to ESRC-funded students, the competition is a chance to tell the world about their research, while honing their skills in writing for a general audience.

Now in its second year, the competition asks students to write 800 words about why their research matters, and how it helps us understand and make sense of society.

Entrants are encouraged to use their imagination to write an approachable piece that captures the interest of the public, engages people with their research, and demonstrates their writing and communication skills.

The competition celebrates and fosters the writing skills of the next generation of social scientists, whilst engaging the public with the incredible breadth and depth of social science research taking place throughout the UK.

All shortlisted entrants will be invited to the awards ceremony at the Royal Society, London on 21 March 2017, where the winner will receive a £1,000 cash prize, and the two runners-up £500 each.

All those shortlisted will take part in a masterclass on ‘how to get published’ delivered by SAGE Publishing. Their competition entries will also be published in print and online.

Entries will be judged by a panel of science communication experts. They include Martin Rosenbaum, member of the ESRC Council and an executive producer in the BBC Political Programmes department; Martin Ince, a freelance journalist specialising in research and higher education; and Tash Reith-Banks, Production Editor for the Guardian’s Science desk.

FOOD SYSTEM RESILIENCE PROGRAMME CO-ORDINATION AWARD ANNOUNCED

Global Food Security (GFS) and the Food System Resilience programme partners have announced that Dr John Ingram and his team at the Environmental Change Institute in the University of Oxford have been awarded the programme co-ordination award.

The Food System Resilience programme is a five-year interdisciplinary research programme aiming to address resilience of the UK food system in a global context.

The program co-ordinator will be instrumental in building links among the awarded research projects and other stakeholders, translating research outputs and raising the programme’s external visibility.

The programme is supported by the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC), ESRC, the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) and Scottish Government.

For more information see: www.esrc.ac.uk/funding/funding-opportunities/resilience-of-the-uk-food-system-in-a-global-context-call-2

CHILDHOOD OBESITY: PROVIDING THE RESEARCH

The Government childhood obesity report cites the finding that poorer children are nearly three times as likely to be obese, using data from CLOSER (Cohort & Longitudinal Studies Enhancement Resources). Other research using data from the Centre for Longitudinal Studies cohort studies also underpins the Child Obesity Strategy, including the Millennium Cohort Study.

This is one of several longitudinal studies supported by ESRC funding – but only part of ESRC-funded obesity research.

- The ESRC Strategic Network for Obesity is exploring how ‘big data’ such as retail data on food purchases, annual health surveys and gym memberships can be used to understand and tackle obesity.
- An ESRC-funded research project focusing on fast-food outlets developed a toolkit to help cut down on fat, salt and sugar in their food.
- ‘Buy one, get one free’ promotions of cheap, unhealthy foods are explored in our evidence briefing ‘Food price promotions and public health’.
- Research from the Centre for Market and Public Organisation has shown that poorer people are less physically active. Combined with a poorer diet, this can leave them more at risk of obesity than higher earners.
- The ESRC part-funds five UKCRC Public Health Research Centres of Excellence, including CEDAR – the Centre for Diet and Activity Research. Our evidence briefing ‘Supporting health and activity in schools’ was based on the SPEEDY (Sport, Physical activity and Eating behaviour: Environmental Determinants in Young people) study from CEDAR.
- Research from another of the UKCRC centres, Fuse (the Centre for Translational Research in Public Health), underpinned the evidence briefing ‘Cutting children’s exposure to unhealthy food advertisements’, exploring the amount of junk food ads aimed at children.
- The ESRC International Centre for Lifecourse Studies in Society and Health explores how different factors affect people's outcomes in life, including childhood health and wellbeing.
People

NEW ESRC ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS ANNOUNCED
The ESRC is pleased to announce that five new members have been appointed to join our advisory committees for two years from 1 September 2016. We look forward to working with our new members to deliver the ESRC’s strategy over the coming years.

Capability Committee
- Dr Andrea Hollomotz, University of Leeds. Lecturer in Social Research Methods, Disability and Deviance
- Professor Matthew Flinders, University of Sheffield. Founding Director of the Sir Bernard Crick Centre for the Public Understanding of Politics
- Professor Peter Hopkins, Newcastle University. Professor of Social Geography

Research Committee
- Professor Sarah Vickerstaff, University of Kent. Professor of Work and Employment
- Professor Richard Breen, University of Oxford. Professor of Sociology.

IFS RESEARCH DIRECTOR ORAZIO ATTANASIO WINS KLAUS J. JACOBS AWARD
Professor Orazio P. Attanasio, a Research Director at the Institute for Fiscal Studies, co-Director of the Centre for Evaluation of Development Policies at the IFS and Head of the Department of Economics at University College London (UCL), has been awarded the prestigious Klaus J. Jacobs Research Prize for his use of economic models and field experiments to assess and shape early child development programs and policies in low income countries. The Klaus J. Jacobs Research Prize rewards scientific work of high social relevance to the development of children and young people.

Specifically, Professor Attanasio was recognised for having ‘pushed research frontiers by using economic models in combination with field experiments to assess and shape health and education policies in early childhood development in low-income and middle-income settings’.

BRIENNA PERELLI-HARRIS WINS SOCIAL DEMOGRAPHY AWARD
ESRC Centre for Population Change scholar Brienna Perelli-Harris has been presented the Dirk van de Kaa award for social demography. The award, which honours outstanding achievements by an individual scholar in social demography was presented to Brienna for her outstanding research on cohabitation and childbearing across Europe.

Dr Perelli-Harris commented: “I am delighted to accept the Dirk van de Kaa award and gratefully thank the jury of Professors Arnstein Aasve, Elizabeth Thomson and Clara Mulder for selecting me. I also thank the Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute (NIDI) for their generous sponsorship of the award. It is a privilege to receive the award for my work, in particular my research on nonmarital childbearing which used quantitative and qualitative demographic methods to discover new insights about childbearing and has far reaching implications for policy across Europe.”

The Award is dedicated to the groundbreaking contributions of Dirk van de Kaa to the study of population including his work on the Second Demographic Transition. It also celebrates his efforts to co-found and build the European Association for Population Studies, notably as its first President.

PROFESSOR JAMES FENSKE WINS WILEY PRIZE IN ECONOMICS
Professor James Fenske of Warwick University was named by the British Academy and Wiley as the winner of this year’s prize for his academic excellence in the field of economic history, in particular the quantitative economic history of Africa. The prize, sponsored by Wiley, is worth £5,000 and is awarded annually for achievement in research by an outstanding early career economist. Nominations can be for research in any field of economics or economic history, and are made by Heads of Department of Economics (or equivalent) in UK HE institutions.

ESRC Launches 2017 Celebrating Impact Prize
The ESRC is pleased to launch the 2017 Celebrating Impact Prize. The Prize is an annual opportunity to recognise and reward the successes of ESRC-affiliated researchers and other ESRC associates who have achieved, or are currently achieving, outstanding economic and/or societal impacts.

This year there are six categories for the Celebrating Impact Prize:
Outstanding Impact in Business and Enterprise; Outstanding Impact in Public Policy; Outstanding Impact in Society; Outstanding International Impact; Outstanding Early Career Impact; and Impact Champion.

Applications are welcome from individuals or teams detailing the outstanding impact(s) of their research, knowledge exchange or impact generating activities. The competition is open to all researchers supported by the ESRC and associates (ie, individuals and organisations other than universities that are carrying out strategic commissioned work for the ESRC). Applications will be assessed through peer review by academics, engagement and knowledge exchange experts and research users. Shortlisted candidates will then be invited to an interview and the winners will be announced at the award ceremony.

A prize of £10,000 is awarded to the winners of each Outstanding category. And a prize of £10,000 is awarded to the Impact Champion category, which is open to researchers and non-researchers who are associated with the ESRC.

Please note that previously unsuccessful applicants or successful applicants may resubmit applications using a new application form and updated information.

The 2017 prize is now open for applications and the application deadline is 16.00 on 1 December 2016.

For more information on categories, for examples of previous category winners, or to apply, see www.esrc.ac.uk/impactprize
ESRC JOINS FORCES WITH ROCKEFELLER FOUNDATION AND NERC

The ESRC and Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) have joined forces with the US’s Rockefeller Foundation to support the UN’s 17 Global Goals, which aim to eliminate poverty and hunger and help fight climate change over the next 15 years.

The Rockefeller Foundation’s mission is to improve the wellbeing of humanity around the world.

The three organisations met in September in New York for their first steering group meeting. The collaboration will identify gaps in knowledge and research necessary to fulfil the ambitious global goals, which build on the progress made by the Millennium Development Goals. The MDGs expired at the end of 2015.

A primary objective will be to prioritise research and innovation for sustainable, resilient human development, and to mobilise resources and actions to support this, with the overall outcome that responsible management of the planet is recognised as a core requirement for advancing the global economy and improving the wellbeing of humanity.

One of the first steps for the organisations will be to:

- identify a research, innovation and research translation agenda in support of the UN Global Goals, focusing on gaps in knowledge and inter-disciplinary science that cut across multiple goals
- mobilise international commitments to funding and action to enable execution of the agenda
- initiate collaboration between and among international actors.

During the initiative, ‘Towards a Sustainable Earth: Environment-human systems and the UN Global Goals’, NERC, the Rockefeller Foundation and ESRC will encourage other key players to join them in supporting the necessary research to achieve the UN Global Goals.

The first international expert convening will be held in November 2016 with the resulting report published in early 2017.

POORER GIRLS OVER TWICE AS LIKELY TO START PERIOD BY 11

New research from the ESRC International Centre for Lifecourse Studies in Society and Health, led by Professor Yvonne Kelly, shows that girls from poorer families are two-and-a-half times more likely to start their period by the age of 11, than children from wealthier backgrounds.

‘Early puberty in 11-year-old girls: Millennium Cohort Study findings’ is the first study to look over time at whether, and how, a girl’s social and economic circumstances, and ethnicity might be linked to early onset of puberty.

The report, completed at the centre based at UCL, examined information from 5,839 girls who have participated in the Millennium Cohort Study which has been tracking the lives of 19,000 UK children born in 2000-01.

It found that:

- on average, girls who were heavier at age seven and suffered stress in early childhood were more likely to have begun menstruating by age 11
- those who had started their periods early also tended to have mothers with higher stress levels, were from single-parent families, and tended to have had some social and emotional difficulties themselves
- Indian, Bangladeshi and black African girls were most likely to have started their period at age 11, with Indian girls three-and-a-half-times more likely than white girls to have done so.

Early puberty is linked to numerous health outcomes including increased risk of poor mental health (in adolescence and throughout life), cardiovascular disease and some cancers. The average age for UK girls to start their menstrual cycle is 12 years and nearly 11 months. To identify markers for earlier menstruation, Professor Yvonne Kelly and the team of academics at UCL looked at a number of factors including income, weight, ethnicity, stress and parental situation.

They found that affluence was the largest indicator of whether a girl would start her period younger than others. For more information, see: adcbeta.bmj.com/content/early/2016/09/26/ archdischild-2016-310475

EVENTS

17 NOVEMBER

Political Economy of Systemic Risk

The Systemic Risk Centre at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) will hold a one-day conference to explore key aspects of the political process fundamentally shape systemic risk in the financial system. It features cutting-edge research from a range of scholarly traditions examining the political economy of systemic risk. www.systemicrisk.ac.uk/events/political-economy-systemic-risk-0

25 NOVEMBER

Labour force and annual population surveys users conference 2016

The user conference brings data producers and data users together to share updates on the development of the surveys and to showcase research that is being carried out using the data. The programme will contain a mixture of presentations from the ONS and researchers who use data from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and Annual Population Survey (APS). www.ukdataservice.ac.uk/news-and-events/eventsitem/?id=4729

9 DECEMBER

Crime Surveys User Conference 2016

The user conference brings data producers and data users together to share updates on the development of the surveys and to showcase research that is being carried out using the data. The programme contains a mixture of presentations from the ONS, Home Office and Scottish Government, and researchers who use data from the Crime Survey for England and Wales. www.ukdataservice.ac.uk/news-and-events/eventsitem/?id=4754

1 MARCH 2017

Exploring big data to examine employee health and wellbeing: a seminar series, Seminar 5

This seminar will explore the conditions of ethical and lawful monitoring of employee workplace practices for the purposes of identifying risk of poor physical and mental health. It will address the boundaries of legitimate/illegitimate monitoring and consider how employee trust and confidence in the benefits of monitoring may be achieved whilst avoiding the disbenefits. www.dew.group.shef.ac.uk/index.php/seminar-series/seminar-5
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

The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) funds research into the big social and economic questions facing us today. We also develop and train the UK's future social scientists.

Our research informs public policies and helps make businesses, voluntary bodies and other organisations more effective. Most important, it makes a real difference to all our lives.

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

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