State of anxiety
Insecurity in a modern world

Keeping the flow: Managing water resources

Festival time: Social science goes public

Alan Gillespie: The Chair and the City
Welcome
to the spring issue of Society Now, the ESRC’s regular magazine which showcases our funded research and the impact of social science.

What makes us secure? This might have been easier to answer in times gone by, but now society has gone global, and our concept of security has become both more complex and less tangible. Old certainties have fallen by the wayside, leaving us with the challenge of facing this new, uncharted world – with both new opportunities and risks. Our main feature looks at today’s security challenges and how we can tackle them.

March is the month of the annual ESRC Festival of Social Science, and we are marking this with a feature about the Festival and upcoming events. The In Focus supplement is highlighting how social science research contributes across the whole of society – towards a productive economy, a healthy society and a sustainable world.

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

Editor, Arild Foss

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Society Now IN FOCUS
DELIVERING RESULTS
The supplement highlights the value of ESRC-funded research and social sciences in general to society. It includes an introduction by ESRC Chief Executive Ian Diamond; an interview with Sir Howard Newby, President of the Academy of Social Sciences; and examples of how research findings have contributed to our lives.
WEEDS, PESTS AND diseases cause serious damage to crops, leading to a reduction in yields and lower-quality food. As demand for food and competition for land rises, it is vital that crop losses are limited. Chemical protection has provided effective control of crop losses in recent years. Alongside chemical fertilisers and improved crop genetics, it has helped to increase crop yields dramatically over the last six decades. However, there is now a need to develop complementary alternatives, and researchers from the Rural Economy and Land Use Programme have been exploring the potential of – and barriers to – alternative pest management approaches.

“Alternatives to chemical pesticides are needed because overuse of them leads to pesticide resistance and affects biodiversity and water quality,” says Dr Alastair Bailey. “Heightened EU regulations are also leading to the withdrawal of many pesticide products. Hence, complementary approaches are required to reduce use and preserve the efficacy of those valuable pesticides that are still available to sustain food production systems.”

Many farmers already use a variety of techniques, such as rotation of crops and choosing pest-resistant crop varieties, to help reduce pesticide use. But on their own, such techniques are less effective than when combined into an Integrated Pest Management (IPM) programme. New technologies also exist that can be used in IPM approaches. These include land use change to promote pest predators and parasitoids, and non-toxic crop protection treatments such as ‘semiochemicals’ that can boost and direct natural biocontrol activity, and biopesticides that act directly on the pest. Semiochemicals and biopesticides can both be used in place of chemicals to control pest population peaks.

Research into economic barriers to the commercial use of these biocontrol practices and other pest management techniques highlights the key role played by government policy in the adoption process. In recent years the government has introduced policy incentives to support farmers in changing some land use practices. But, argues Dr Bailey, the promotion of IPM is not an explicit aim of these agri-environment schemes and remains a missed opportunity for policymakers.

“We believe agri-environmental schemes could be redesigned so that, for example, biocontrol is an explicit objective, and farmers receive extra incentive points for habitats that provide overwintering sites, alternative prey, or a source of pollen and nectar for pests’ natural enemies. Crucially, crop protection management plans, redesigned to place greater emphasis on IPM-focused approaches, could be reintroduced. “This latter step would help farmers think more clearly about the benefits of habitat manipulation both for themselves and for wider society. Using agri-environmental policy to push IPM could produce a real ‘win-win’,” Dr Bailey concludes.

“Alternatives to chemical pesticides are needed because overuse of them leads to pesticide resistance and affects biodiversity.”
IN BRIEF

RETIREMENT BEHAVIOUR
Britain’s ageing population is increasingly diverse. This study will explore the key strategies of ethnic minority groups in relation to retirement and their attitudes to saving. The research is based on major existing datasets as well as focus groups and interviews with individuals from ethnic minority groups, including Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Black Africans, Black Caribbeans and a White British control group.

ESRC grant number RES-000-22-3836

IN COURT FOR CARE
Under child protection procedures introduced in 2008, local authorities must now send parents a formal invitation to attend a meeting before applying to the court for care proceedings (unless a child needs immediate protection). This study will examine how local authorities use these new procedures, their success in diverting cases from courts and their impact on cases that do go to court.

ESRC grant number RES-002-23-2226

A FORUM FOR CHANGE
After email, online discussion forums are one of the most popular ways for people to interact online. This study will advance previous research that found users can feel their lives ‘transformed’ in a very positive way by their engagement in online forums. Researchers will investigate the implications of transformational forum use for users’ wellbeing and its impact on their lives offline.

ESRC grant number RES-000-22-3800

Benefits of offshoring overlooked

NEW RESEARCH INTO how firms and regions adjust to globalisation suggests that the commonly held negative view of ‘offshoring’ may be misplaced. Researchers at the Centre for Economic Performance at the London School of Economics have been investigating not only offshoring, but other ways in which firms adjust their behaviour in response to globalisation.

Understanding how firms respond is, researchers argue, crucial to the formulation of appropriate government industrial policies. “To date, the often-held view has been that offshoring, in which companies transfer many routine tasks to be done by unskilled but cheaper workers overseas, has only negative consequences for the jobs of workers in the UK and that it should be discouraged,” Professor Henry Overman points out. “However, this study suggests that there may be good reasons for UK firms to offshore their lower skilled manufacturing jobs, as this may actually help us retain firms’ higher skilled activities within the UK.”

The study indicates that reducing employment in some unskilled routine tasks in ‘rich’ countries helps sustain and reinforce employment in core, higher skilled activities in such countries. In other words, the efficiency benefits generated by offshoring low-skilled work lead firms to invest and hire skilled workers in rich countries.

“The policy implication for developed countries is that by making it more difficult for global firms to cut employment in routine and unskilled jobs, policymakers in countries like Spain and France, to take a couple of recent examples, make their economies unattractive for global firms to locate there,” Professor Overman argues. “Put simply, policies to prevent offshoring and the loss of domestic employment might backfire because they make that country very unattractive as a place for a firm to base its HQ and other ‘high value added’ activities.”

Of course, some high-skill jobs are now being offshored as well: think about Indian software programmers, who perform tasks that complement the most innovative work being done in developed countries. The same logic works in this case, too: policies that prevent western companies from tapping into this pool of qualified workers to undertake the most routine aspects of the trade may ultimately encourage companies to transfer all their activities to India.

Contact Professor Henry Overman, London School of Economics Telephone 020 7955 5681 Email H.O.Overman@lse.ac.uk ESRC Grant Number RES-165-25-0014 Part of the World Economy and Finance programme
Speech skills crucial for reading

WHICH SKILLS ARE most critical for early reading development? Researchers measured sensory, motor and cognitive skills of some 440 children at school entry and collected follow-up measures of reading at later ages before concluding that speech and auditory skills are crucial predictors of reading development at the end of the reception year. Motor skills, IQ, working memory and processing speed have only an indirect influence on literacy for this age group. Findings for year 1 children suggest that although speech and auditory skills are crucial in the very first stages of reading development, once children have begun to read their success in reading does all the work in predicting later outcomes.

This project is, in the long term, expected to have an impact on the screening and assessment of reading difficulties as well as interventions to prevent or remedy these difficulties.

Tackling youth unemployment

HOW EFFECTIVE IS vocational training in combating youth unemployment? This is a particularly pressing question in Latin America, where youth unemployment is triple the unemployment rate of adults in the region. A new study conducted at the Institute of Fiscal Studies’ Centre for the Evaluation of Development Policies set out to evaluate a training programme aimed at improving the outcomes for young adults in Colombia.

While early interventions and improvements in the quality of education may be key for long-term poverty alleviation, they may reach young people too late – close to the end of their schooling or in their early post-schooling years. Vocational training may therefore be the best chance to improve labour market prospects, but to date there has been little reliable evidence on this relationship.

The study indicated that the 2001-2005 Youth in Action programme had large effects on in-classroom and on-the-job training for a group of 18 to 25-year-olds from the two lowest socio-economic groups. The programme raised earnings and employment; women offered training earned about 18 per cent more than those not offered training, while men earned about eight per cent more. The programme’s success may be due to its role in matching and placing workers by providing information to both sides of the market. Subsidies are given to private training centres that then choose the type of courses offered and have to find private firms for the on-the-job part of the training.

Overall, as Professor Orazio Attanasio says: “Cost benefit analysis of our results suggests that the programme generates much larger net gains than those found in developed countries. Given the high returns to training, the question remains why similar types of programmes are not more widespread and why people do not take advantage of existing training opportunities. Lack of information and credit constraints are two likely causes, but this remains an open question.”

IN BRIEF

WONT TO WORRY

Chronic worrying is a feature of most anxiety-based mental health problems, and is characterised by ‘catastrophising’ of worries and by persevering with a worry bout for longer than non-worriers despite increasing distress. Researchers will investigate how personality factors (such as poor problem-solving confidence) influence worrying, and aim to contribute to the development of therapeutic interventions for worry-based mental health problems.

BIOTERRORISM POLITICS

The ‘politics of bioterrorism’ and the policies and policy networks developing around biosecurity are the subject of a new research programme. Key questions include how biothreats have been framed in the policy discourse since 9/11, and what evidence is drawn upon in the evaluation of biothreats. Researchers anticipate that reshaping thinking about biothreats may lead to alternative policy options for responding to such threats.

WORKING ON OBESITY

An association has been found in some studies between overweight children and parental employment. Researchers will analyse large-scale secondary datasets (such as the National Diet and Nutrition Survey) and will also employ a range of qualitative methods with parents and children aged from two to ten to understand social processes influencing healthy and unhealthy diets of children.
IN BRIEF

INSIDERS OR OUTSIDERS
Parents of children from mixed racial or ethnic backgrounds constitute one of the highest lone parent groups in the UK, and their families are overwhelmingly headed by lone mothers. Research suggests it is often their status as ‘insiders’ or ‘outsiders’ in their neighbourhoods that is significant for this family group. Researchers will explore the everyday experiences of 30 lone mothers of children from mixed racial and ethnic backgrounds.
ESRC grant number RES-000-22-3723

HOUSING ECONOMICS
This fellowship will explore the determinants of home ownership and the macro-economic consequences of government policies on home ownership. It will investigate how differences in the relative value of owning and renting across households can explain observed mortgage default behaviour and how government policies to encourage home ownership and forestall defaults affect outcomes at the household and regional levels.
ESRC grant number PTA-026-27-2395

FIRST-TIME FATHERS
Policy interest in fatherhood in the UK has been growing over the past few decades. Using a combination of event diary, telephone and face-to-face interviews, this project will explore the barriers and enablers men experience as they make the transition into first-time fatherhood, with a view to identifying ways of better supporting men during this time.
ESRC grant number RES-000-22-3964

CEOs’ foreign payout

THE NUMBER AND value of foreign acquisitions by UK companies since the mid-1980s has increased dramatically. But recent research suggests that corporate acquisitions of foreign targets result in lower shareholder wealth than those of domestic targets. Such findings have prompted new research into whether CEOs gain larger private benefit – in the form of enhanced compensation packages – from foreign acquisitions.

Findings reveal that, regardless of how the firm performs, CEOs involved in foreign acquisitions do indeed receive a higher level of compensation than those CEOs involved in domestic acquisitions. Findings further indicate that foreign institutional block investors have a significant and negative impact on CEO pay level unlike domestic institutional investors. This finding suggests that foreign institutional investors provide more active monitoring during the post-acquisition period than their domestic counterparts.

Disabling ignorance

PRIMARY SCHOOLS NEED to do more to change the way children think about disabled people, according to new research from the Centre for Disability Studies at the University of Leeds. The study found that many non-disabled children have a poor understanding of disability. Typical misconceptions were that disabled people can’t work, are unlikely to marry or have children, and have tragic and short lives.

Researchers further found that many primary schools did not do enough to challenge these views. “All primary schools in England are supposed to have a Disability Equality Scheme in place that, amongst other things, includes the school’s plan to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people,” says Dr Angharad Beckett. “Only 30 per cent of the schools surveyed actually had a plan in place that included that dimension.”

But the researchers also found that once the issues around disability were explained to children, negative attitudes were easily dispelled and more positive attitudes generated. “The challenge is how to encourage and support primary schools to teach children about disability and promote positive attitudes,” says Dr Beckett. Many teachers in the survey felt they had neither the time nor the appropriate expertise.

“Schools need good quality resources, which are available but do not appear to be reaching schools; a clearer understanding that disability awareness easily can be built into the curriculum; and the confidence to deal with these issues, so that by the time children reach secondary school, their attitudes towards disabled people are based on fact rather than misunderstanding.”

Contact Dr Angharad Beckett, University of Leeds
Telephone 0113 343 4409
Email A.E.Beckett@leeds.ac.uk
ESRC Grant Number RES-062-23-0461

Contact Dr Neslihan Ozkan, University of Bristol
Telephone 0117 928 8439
Email N.Ozkan@bristol.ac.uk
ESRC Grant Number RES-000-22-2571
THE NOVEL USE of a little-used statistical technique from the medical sciences is providing important insight into the lifestyles and health-related behaviours of Britain’s older men. Findings from this two-year study are currently informing the work of the British Heart Foundation and could contribute to public health interventions among older people, as well as informing policy relating to healthy, active and ‘successful’ ageing.

Based on the British Regional Heart Study (a survey of middle-aged men from 24 British towns), researchers set out to investigate the relationship between lifestyles (including smoking history, drinking and physical activity) and other social and environmental factors over the period 1978 to 2003.

“Multiple Correspondence Analysis gave us an innovative way of visually representing major features of a complex set of data,” says Professor Ian Rees Jones. “One of our most striking findings was the enduring relationship between people’s social class and their lifestyles, and the very strong patterning that appears virtually ‘locked in’ by a person’s social context.”

The study shows that smoking, exercise and alcohol consumption among men aged between 60 and 70 appears to be influenced by their behaviour when aged between 40 and 59, and that this is class related. For example, long-term adherence to healthy lifestyles is most prevalent among middle class men living in southern towns, while unhealthy behaviours are particularly associated with working class groups and men living in northern towns.

Findings also point to the crucial interaction between the pathways into retirement (as well as access to material resources such as pensions) and older people’s levels of health, wellbeing and social involvement. These patterns show a strong contrast between groups experiencing voluntary retirement and groups experiencing retirement related to illness and periods of unemployment.

Researchers believe these findings have important implications for future public health and policy interventions. “Our research emphasises that a person’s capacity to change their health behaviours is strongly related to their class and social context,” adds Professor Jones. “In the long term it seems likely that ‘high level’ interventions aimed at improving access to education and housing, and increasing income and pension levels, will have a more profound effect on population health than interventions aimed at changing an individual’s health behaviours.”

Contact Professor Ian Rees Jones, Bangor University
Telephone 01248 382232
Email i.r.jones@bangor.ac.uk
ESRC Grant Number RES -062-23-0477

Contact Dr Paul Armsworth, University of Tennessee
Telephone US + 1 865 974 9748
Email p.armsworth@utk.edu
ESRC Grant Number RES -227-25-0028
Rural Economy and Land Use programme funded by ESRC, BBSRC and NERC

Class barriers to successful ageing

UPLAND ECOSYSTEMS SUPPORT traditional rural industries like hill farming, are home to species and habitats of conservation concern and provide a wealth of ecosystem goods and services. But, says a new study, the uplands are currently undergoing significant upheavals and policymakers need to understand how ongoing policy changes are likely to affect hill farming communities and ecosystems.

Researchers from the Rural Economy and Land Use programme examined hill farming in the Peak District National Park. Findings confirm that delivering rural policy in the hills today depends on agricultural subsidies and the additional support provided by agri-environment schemes. These latter payments are designed to encourage farmers to provide ‘public goods’ such as improved habitats for particular species or public access for recreation. Both these schemes are undergoing major changes.

“Subsidy schemes could be designed more effectively to provide benefits for biodiversity,” concludes Dr Paul Armsworth. “For example, there could be benefits in allowing payment rates to vary across space or to vary with the amount of biodiversity provided. In addition, ecological effectiveness could be improved by designing incentives which encourage spatial co-ordination across several farms, while the cost effectiveness of agri-environment schemes could be enhanced by recognising the different costs which farmers face in ‘producing’ environmental benefits.”

Contact Dr Paul Armsworth, University of Tennessee
Telephone US + 1 865 974 9748
Email p.armsworth@utk.edu
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Better schemes for the uplands

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ARE INTERACTIVE WHITEBOARDS (IWB) a useful tool for supporting children’s collaborative learning? Researchers based at the Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge investigated what happened when an interactive whiteboard was used by groups of primary school children aged between eight and ten.

Twelve teachers and their classes took part in the research. The teachers developed a series of science activities on the IWB which allowed the children to consider options, plan activities and to make joint decisions. Previous research has found that group work in school is often unproductive because children need to develop the skills for working well together. Hence, an important part of this project was that the teachers worked on ways of helping the children to talk and work effectively in groups.

“We found that the IWB does offer some very useful and distinctive facilities for supporting children’s discussion and science learning, but only so long as the teacher helps children develop the appropriate skills for collaboration and discussion before they use it, and offers them suitably designed tasks which make best use of the board’s possibilities,” says Professor Neil Mercer.

“Some of this could be achieved using pen and paper, but the IWB makes these things much easier because of the way the material can so readily be shared (within the group), retrieved, modified and stored,” he continues. “It was also very apparent that using the IWB motivated the children. By highlighting the benefits of using IWB in this way, as well as pointing out its limitations, we believe our findings should be useful for IWB designers, software producers, teachers and researchers.”

Contact Professor Neil Mercer, University of Cambridge Telephone 01223 767392 Email nmm31@cam.ac.uk ESRC Grant Number RES-000-22-2558

CONTACT Professor Eric Emerson, University of Lancaster Telephone 01524 592264 Email eric.emerson@lancaster.ac.uk ESRC Grant Number RES-000-22-2874

Tackling poverty for disabled children

DISABLED CHILDREN ARE significantly more likely to grow up in poverty than their non-disabled peers. “It is often assumed that the health and social inequalities faced by families supporting a disabled child are a direct result of the ‘burden’ of care associated with disability,” says Professor Eric Emerson. “This new study adds to a growing body of evidence that challenges that assumption.

“While there is no doubt that bringing up a disabled child is associated with some specific stresses – and some specific joys and rewards,” he continues, “it appears that much of the disadvantage faced by families supporting a disabled child may be attributed to their reduced capabilities and reduced access to social and material resources. As such, improving the life opportunities of disabled children may critically depend on non-‘disability-specific’ support that enhances the capabilities and access to resources of these families.”

Contact Professor Eric Emerson, University of Lancaster Telephone 01524 592260 Email eric.emerson@lancaster.ac.uk ESRC Grant Number RES-000-22-2874
Scottish lessons in education

THE ELECTION OF a (minority) nationalist government in Scotland in May 2007 raised questions about the ways in which nationalism might be used as a resource in policy-making by the new government. Would the SNP government try to create support for its policies by connecting to national sentiment? Findings from a new study reveal that under the SNP government, education policy seems to be combining ‘inward’ references to fairness and equality with global economic policy in a distinctive way. Outward comparison and referencing have also been used to align Scotland with comparators in education beyond the UK. “These discursive shifts have been central to SNP strategy in education and, although there is little evidence of major legislative change in this field, the shift in discourse is highly significant and both reflects and contributes to real change in relations and perceptions,” Dr Margaret Arnott points out.

Inmates happy with diversity

MOST PRISONERS APPEAR to be comfortable with diversity, although tensions between ethnic groups and resentment of institutional race equality approaches are common.

Research carried out by Dr Coretta Phillips of the London School of Economics (LSE) explored how prisoners’ ethnic identities helped them cope with prison life, and whether such identities informed a social pecking order and the formation of gangs. Specifically it explored the influence of prison practices on prisoner and group identities.

The LSE research – comprising ethnographic studies conducted in Kent over eight months each at a young offenders’ institution and an adult male prison – found that, superficially at least, there was an acceptance of diversity among prisoners, with some welcoming it. There were no gangs in either institution, and no religious or ethnic pecking order. However, prisoners tended towards same-ethnicity friendships, and formed groups providing physical protection, for sharing, and for access to items such as mobile phones and drugs. Although racist undercurrents led to conflict and division, prisoners lived in harmony much of the time.

Dr Phillips commented: “We found that the younger prisoners tended to be more attached to their neighbourhood than to their ethnicity, with local allegiances giving them a sense of self and of belonging beyond the prison walls. By contrast, older prisoners tended to see themselves more in paternal and family terms, and it was notable that among these prisoners the ability to resolve disputes without violence was valued.”

GAY FATHER FAMILIES

Previous studies of children raised by same-sex parents have focused almost exclusively on families headed by lesbian mothers rather than gay fathers. This study will examine the psychological development of children growing up in families headed by gay fathers. Family relationships will also be examined from the perspective of the child by means of standardised interview and psychological assessments.

ESRC grant number RES-000-22-3928

ASYLUM ACTIVISM

A new study will compare the approaches of different pro-asylum organisations in Britain and the United States using questionnaires and interviews. The project aims to facilitate dialogue between different types of asylum activist organisations in order to promote best practice and the mitigation of risks, and examine the dilemmas that asylum advocacy organisations face either side of the Atlantic.

ESRC grant number RES-000-22-3834

INVESTIGATING AUTISM

This project aims to establish whether or not individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) have a diminished capacity for prospection (imagining future events), imagination and navigation. Two studies will be conducted to assess these three capacities using modified versions of already established behavioural paradigms. Standardised ASD diagnostic assessments will be used to quantify the severity of ASD features.

ESRC grant number RES-000-22-3192
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Our standard of living is generally high, life expectancy is steadily increasing, we enjoy a welfare state other parts of the world could hardly imagine – but a sense of security is still elusive. Our panel of commentators looks at security challenges facing us in today’s world.

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WE HAVE BECOME part of a global community where faraway events can affect us for good or ill, directly or indirectly. The impact of the financial market collapse in 2008 is still felt across the world. Climate change, pandemics, population growth and scarcity of essential resources of food, water and energy are issues where we are all ultimately vulnerable – even in rich, developed nations.

In the traditional domain of ‘national security’, the risk of inter-state conflict is much reduced both in the ‘West’ and elsewhere, and we spend less time worrying about nuclear war between superpowers. The terrorist threat has reappeared in new forms linking activities abroad with domestic dangers in ways that challenge distinctions between domestic and international policy-making and the capacity of governments to act in ‘joined-up’, agile ways.

The revolution in communications and information handling introduced new possibilities in the sharing of knowledge, trade and how we interact as individuals, consumers and citizens. But it also poses new risks, both in the vulnerability to shocks of ‘just-in-time’ economies or to deliberate cyber-attack.

Our history has seen much hardship, poverty and health risks in day-to-day life. At the same time, lives were lived out in smaller communities with close ties to neighbours, and issues were close and immediate. Today, media coverage and web technology ensure we are connected and confronted with events without necessarily having the power to affect them. Power is draining from nation-states to institutions at the European and global scale. The effectiveness of such governance mechanisms and their connectedness to us as individuals and voters are major issues.

Indicators such as life expectancy, standard of living, income and state welfare provisions generally show how we live in a very secure part of the world. The risk of nation-threatening conflict is low by historical standards. But security and risk are not simply matters of fact and probability analysis. They reflect perception and misperception and the recalibration of expectations in successive generations. How are understanding and expectations shaped? And how can social sciences and other areas of knowledge help us better understand the range of issues I have barely touched on here?

The RCUK research programme Global Uncertainties; Security for all in a Changing World [see page 14] is examining how security challenges can be prevented or mitigated. Through more knowledge we can learn about the nature of security, in turn supporting governments in the transition to a world where global issues, their governance and handling are likely to be of ever-greater importance.

Efforts to anticipate and plan for risk events are intended to reassure the public and convince them to believe that they are secure. Organisations are under pressure to be seen to be doing something in anticipation of risk. Risk regulation and planning are ways of transforming uncertainties into risk through classification, calculation and control. But there are risks attached to these risk governance measures. For example, they may offer false assurance leading to over-confidence and misplaced legitimacy. They may also waste valuable resources because of the high volume of hypothesised risks, many of which are exaggerated or are false predictions. Moreover, these strategies may reduce the ability of organisations and societies to cope with the unexpected. Risk anticipation in the interests of security may conflict with other values. For example, some anti-terrorism measures have led to civil liberty concerns from human rights activists.

It is perhaps for these reasons that some argue for a repositioning from expectations of total security and resilience to a more balanced approach, which accepts that zero tolerance is neither achievable nor even desirable. But how successful organisations can be in terms of lowering expectations and accepting that risks cannot always be identified and governed in advance of their happening remains to be seen. The private sector may well be more successful than the public sector, where rationalities of success may be difficult to tame and very difficult to reverse.

CONTEMPORARY SOCIETIES ARE marked by expectations that we can anticipate future risks and that we should be able to control them. This leads government and businesses to devote sometimes considerable resources to risk prevention and contingency planning in the interests of security.

Efforts to anticipate and govern risks have resulted in a number of organisational developments, such as the creation of meta risk management or business continuity departments. Prominent public sector examples of this include the UK’s Civil Contingencies Secretariat and the US Department of Homeland Security, both established in the wake of 9/11. Their remits embrace counter-terrorism and also non-terrorist risks such as natural disasters, and they are tasked with risk prevention as well as planned response and recovery plans.

Public and private organisations have often adopted formal risk tools and perspectives in an effort to avoid the repetition of previous risk events and to help to identify and manage new risks. These efforts are prompted by moral imperatives that see organisations as having a duty to protect publics from risk events. Also important are the political imperatives to act and attempt to avoid blame. Blame management is a matter of growing political and bureaucratic concern and may lead to risk aversion, which may make it difficult to accept resilience strategies over anticipatory ones.
SAFE AND SECURE?

**BORDER CONTROL AND REFUGEES**

*Donna Covey, Chief Executive of the Refugee Council*

**BORDER SECURITY HAS been central to much of the debate around asylum and migration. Even some of the more progressive commentators on immigration have suggested that better treatment of refugees and migrants once in the UK should be linked to a tightening of our borders. Much of this is related to keeping numbers down, particularly in relation to undocumented migrants and people seeking asylum. But a key consideration, particularly over the last ten years, has been one of security and the potential of terrorism and security breaches.**

As a result, a series of measures have been introduced to tighten borders and control migration flows. UK Border Agency officials have been stationed on the borders of France and Belgium to prevent anyone from heading to the UK illegitimately or to claim asylum. Airline Liaison Officers have been despatched to ports in transit countries such as Kenya and Greece, charged with preventing people from getting on planes to the UK if it appears that they might claim asylum here. Visa regimes have been introduced for countries like Zimbabwe where previously no visa was needed to come to the UK.

Yet refugees – those most likely to get caught up in this web of interception measures – are far and away more likely to be the victims of terrorism, state-sponsored or otherwise, than the perpetrators of it. Preventing them from getting to safety in the UK presents a danger to life, not for national populations but for the refugees themselves.

Paradoxically too, the ‘war on terror’ itself has had the effect of creating refugees, whether we consider the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq or hardening fundamentalist attitudes in Iran. Far from preventing refugee flows, international efforts to control and prevent terrorism can contribute to a need for international protection for those who oppose their own regime.

Here in the UK, the failed bomb attacks on London transport in July 2005 (following those that were successful two weeks before) were carried out by four young men, three of whom had come to the UK as refugees – a fact that was emphasised repeatedly in the media. Evidence then came to light that none had held extremist views prior to their arrival in the UK, and the focus shifted towards efforts to combat the rise of extremism in this country. However, despite this, many sections of the press sought to portray asylum and terrorism as inherently linked. A sense that asylum seekers pose a security threat has lingered among the public, contributing to a more general feeling of hostility towards asylum seekers and refugees, and creating the space for ever tougher asylum policies to be introduced.

A key challenge for the future, therefore, will be to ensure that measures designed to combat extremism, along with the frequently hostile public debate on asylum, do not hinder efforts to ensure the successful and harmonious integration of refugees. The biggest and most serious impact on refugees across the globe will be the struggle they face to get to a place of safety in a world where security threats continue to worsen, yet countries find ever more ingenious ways of building walls to keep the unwanted out. We must make sure that in this fearful environment we continue to ensure our borders have doors for refugees fleeing for their lives.
THE NATURE OF SECURITY
Gordon Corera, security correspondent for BBC News

THE ATTEMPTED TERRORIST attack on Detroit on Christmas Day 2009 provides as clear an example as any of the need for serious multi-disciplinary research on the issue of security. At first sight the threat itself came from what might be called the ‘traditional’ end of the spectrum. But the questions thrown up by the incident underline the extent to which definitions of security need to be broadly reviewed. What kinds of technology can find explosives hidden in new ways? What kinds of support or interventions in Yemen can help the country defeat Al Qaeda? How does radicalisation occur within the UK – and how can it be detected and prevented? How can governments better deal with the vast amounts of information flowing into them in order to ‘connect the dots’? These are just a few of the questions for which the answers are either unclear or complex. There is a clear need for a serious research base to inform policy and debate and to challenge existing assumptions.

The incident may have returned the challenge of terrorism to the front of the agenda, but the notion of security has become increasingly stretched in recent years, particularly since the end of the Cold War. Food security, energy security, climate security, bio-security and cyber-security have all joined the more traditional notions of ‘national security’ which have focused on terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Now, as reflected in the government’s National Security Strategy, the focus is on human security – protecting people – and not just on protecting the state. So how broadly should the boundaries be drawn? Is flooding a security threat? Or is it just a natural risk? And when does pandemic flu shift from being a health issue to a security threat? The complex, interdependent nature of modern security threats makes definitions harder but no less important if we are to understand how governments and the public can best respond.

There is also the question of whose security we are talking about. In the modern world, are we comfortable talking about purely ‘national’ security without regard to the security of people in other countries? If there is one lesson of recent years it is the interdependent nature of our globalised world, where a failed state thousands of miles away can become a sanctuary for those targeting our lives, or where economic distress, banking failures or poor regulation in one region can spread like a pandemic flu without care for borders. The domain of cyber-security is another area where the dark underbelly of globalisation can easily be exploited by a range of nefarious groups and individuals. Climate change can easily be placed in a category of its own, but the consequences of climate change, for instance in resource competition and people flows, are likely to further highlight the relative lack of global governance and strong institutions. Dealing with this range of challenges will also require clear thinking on the ethics of security and its relationship to liberty. How far can intervention in one area be justified in terms of increasing security somewhere else, either within one country or internationally?

Questions are legion when it comes to security, and the field of play is never static. The questions cut across borders and across academic and research disciplines. Trying to answer them will require new thinking and new ways of thinking, but the demand for answers is intense.
DEALING WITH SECURITY threats in today’s society has become more complex, since it involves issues transcending borders and cultures. International crime, terrorism, climate change, scarcity of water or food, poverty, pandemics or energy supply are all security issues that need to be tackled on an international level. The RCUK Global Uncertainties Programme is examining the drivers of insecurity and how they can best be prevented or managed.

The programme focuses on six core themes: ideologies and beliefs; threats to infrastructure; terrorism; cyber-security; proliferation of chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and explosive weapons and technologies; and transnational organised crime. The research presented on these pages highlight some of the breadth of the Global Uncertainties Programme.

BUILDING TRUST BETWEEN NUCLEAR STATES
Nuclear weapons are one of the major threats to global security. Professor Nicholas Wheeler from Aberystwyth University looks at how new policy agendas can be aimed at promoting trust in dealing with the future of nuclear weapons. Trust is a central issue in relations between states, but has still been a neglected concept in international relations – limiting viable alternatives to a nuclear-armed world.

This project aims to develop an interdisciplinary approach to the challenge of building trust between nuclear adversaries, and identify the ideas and beliefs that promoted trust in some cases of nuclear rivalries but not in others.

USING SCRIPTS IN STRATEGY
Addressing issues of security policy through introducing ‘strategic scripts’ as both a concept and a phenomenon in relation to conflict in the 21st century, is the aim of Professor Sir Lawrence Freedman’s research. He will apply the concept of strategic scripts to two contrasting areas of security policy where strategy plays a great role: the current push for substantial nuclear disarmament and radical political violence. The project will also consider the wider role of strategic scripts as a device for translating research into policy, evaluating the distinctive feature of policy-making in areas of actual or potential conflict from other areas of public policy.

SUPPORT FOR ISLAMIC MILITANCY
Since 9/11, religious fundamentalism and militancy have been central in the research on terrorism. Most research on the causes of Islamic militancy has focused on radical Islamic groups, exploring the role of religious texts and socio-economic deprivation.

However, as Dr Masooda Bano from the University of Oxford points out, in order to
understand Islamic militancy it is essential not just to study the radical groups but also the basis for their popular support. Dr Bano focuses on the religious education system of female madrasas in Pakistan, which have spread substantially in the last three decades. Initial fieldwork suggests that the demand for a madrasa education is a result of the insecurity parents feel about the secular education system and the spread of liberal values in society through the media. Global uncertainties can therefore link to the reinforcement of radical religious beliefs at the local level, and potentially strengthen support for international terrorism.

WHEN REFUGEES BECOME A SECURITY ISSUE
Another researcher, Dr Anne Hammerstad from the University of Kent, also looks at perceptions of security, but from a rather different angle. She asks why refugees and asylum seekers are often perceived as threats to security, rather than as victims of human rights abuse deserving humanitarian charity. If how we describe an issue has an impact on how we respond to it, what are the consequences of treating this as a security issue both for the security of forced migrants themselves, the states and communities receiving them, and the humanitarian staff aiding them? Dr Hammerstad’s research includes a comparative analysis of the perceptions on forced migration held by the governments of the UK and South Africa.

ONLINE SECURITY
An increasing number of cases of cyber-terrorism and cyber-crime have led to a growth in research and debate about the internet as a source of threats and insecurities. UK academics are working together with industry to control the flood of personal data online that can threaten the security of people’s identity. The EnCoRe (Ensuring Consent and Revocation) project will provide individuals with intuitive mechanisms that allow them to control the use of their personal information held by others. The team of e-privacy experts from IT and the social sciences aims to provide businesses with cost effective and efficient methods for controlling the use, storage, location and sharing of personal data.

WORKING TO PREVENT TORTURE
Researchers from the University of Bristol are examining the effectiveness of the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention Against Torture (OPCAT), which provides for independent bodies to visit places of detention. The visits could play an important part in combating torture. The states which ratified this Protocol committed themselves to setting up these independent bodies which have ‘unrestricted access’ to all places of detention, the power to interview detainees as well as anyone else, and to make necessary recommendations to the respective authorities. The research examines how states decide which national institution to set up under OPCAT, what factors play a part in their decision and which features are most likely to make an effective national mechanism. To date, researchers from this project have provided input to more than 30 countries worldwide, advising on how to bring legal systems into compliance with the Optional Protocol and ensuring that the independent body corresponds to OPCAT requirements.

The Research Councils UK ‘Global Uncertainties: Security for all in a Changing World’ Programme is investing £135 million to co-ordinate and fund high-quality, multidisciplinary research in response to global security challenges. Launched in 2008 and intended to run until 2018, the programme aims to help governments, businesses and societies understand the complex nature of security threats by fostering collaboration between researchers and policymakers. Web http://www.globaluncertainties.org.uk
UNLIKE DEVELOPED COUNTRIES, developing countries are ‘growing old before growing wealthy’. The World Health Organisation estimates that within 15 years 75 per cent of the world’s population aged over 60 will be living in developing countries. Yet, ageing is at the margins of development policy and practice, and the potential and needs of older people often go largely unnoticed.

Researchers from the New Dynamics of Ageing programme and their international partners have studied over 800 ‘below poverty line’ households in Chennai, Southern India, to understand how older people support themselves or access support from their families and the state.

The lives of families living in the slums of Chennai have been radically transformed by changes in the economy. Today, poor families are increasingly choosing to send their children to school instead of work. This makes ‘below poverty line’ families very dependent on the incomes of older people. As they need to contribute to family income and pension provisions are inadequate, many older people have found it necessary to work in the informal economy. The study found that one-third of 60-69 year olds and one-fifth of 70-79 year olds were working.

Yet, many town planners and policymakers don’t recognise older people’s economic contribution to families and the city as a whole.

This lack of support makes it more difficult for the elderly to eke out an existence.

India has possibly the highest concentration of old-age poverty worldwide. Sixty per cent of older people’s access to subsistence is fragile and 30 per cent live below the poverty line. India’s population is rapidly ageing, which raises important policy issues in a country where the vast majority of the population cannot save for their old age.

The research project is bringing these ‘ageing’ issues to the attention of policymakers using publications, workshops, public hearings and informal and formal meetings with officials, elected representatives and experts, as well as the photo exhibition ‘We too contribute! The elderly poor and Chennai’s economy’. This has contributed to raise public awareness of older workers’ contribution to the economy.

Drawing attention to this economic contribution is very timely as Chennai is launching its urban renewal programme and the Chennai Master Plan 2010-26. By helping people recognise older people’s economic contribution to the city, researchers hope that future planning decisions (eg decisions to restrict, move or clear street vending areas) will take account of the livelihood needs of the elderly.

The project has placed the issue of inadequate pension provision for the elderly higher on the policy agenda. Researchers found that 97 per cent of the elderly poor pay house rent that is more than the pension they receive. “Most elderly persons who are poor have to earn a living until they die,” asserts researcher Dr Penny Vera-Sanso. The study is bringing this stark fact to the attention of policymakers, and challenges the negative view of older people as a ‘burden’ rather than an important and productive resource.
The Society Now In Focus supplement gives an in-depth look at ESRC-funded research projects, programmes and activities

DEVELOPING RESULTS

■ The ripple effect of research
■ Science going social
■ Social science achievements
■ Excellence with impact

THE RIPPLE EFFECT OF RESEARCH

Professor Ian Diamond ESRC Chief Executive

This In Focus supplement highlights the impact of social science and ESRC-funded research. As the UK’s largest organisation for funding research on economic and social issues we support over 4,000 researchers and postgraduate students in academic institutions and independent research institutes. The ESRC research centres, programmes, ventures and initiatives reach across both disciplines and national borders, creating a huge potential for positive ‘ripple effects’ from a large and growing body of research evidence.

As the ESRC’s Chair Alan Gillespie says in the ‘Voices’ interview on page 26 of this issue, all of social science is about society and people. Social sciences are therefore in the unique position of bringing direct benefits to individuals – to you and me. How we live, our health, our finances, our homes and our wellbeing are all affected by the way society is structured and managed. The UK funds much of the best social science research in the world and hosts many of the best social scientists. Their work deepens and expands our collective understanding of where society is and where we, as a global community, are heading.

Social science research has a real impact on the world that we live in by providing insights that, for example, inform new policies and practices, as well as providing the basis of assessing existing initiatives. The success of innovation, be it in the public, private or third sectors, is dependent not only on research evidence about current practice and the potential of improvements, but also on knowledge about how to optimise implementation and uptake in the targeted area.

Without high-quality research we will not be able to provide robust evidence for the public, private and third sector. However, without the drive and focus to meet the costs of research excellence we will not be able to maintain the current world-class quality of UK social science.

On the other hand, excellence in research will also need to be followed by impact. With public spending under increased scrutiny it is natural to ask how funded research can contribute to a prosperous society – either directly or indirectly. There is an understandable demand from the public to see for themselves the impact of research investments on society, as well as on their own lives.

We are highlighting how these research impacts can be found in three key areas – contributing to a productive economy, a healthy society and a sustainable world. These are all areas that directly impact on us as individuals, and where research-driven improvements can change our lives for the better.

As the following pages of this In Focus supplement show, social science research provides a wide range of findings across all sectors of society; valuable evidence that can be used to improve policy and practice. Research knowledge provides a vital tool – both for a productive and prosperous economy, for health and wellbeing, and for a secure and sustainable world.

SOCIAL SCIENTISTS DEEPEN OUR COLLECTIVE UNDERSTANDING OF WHERE SOCIETY IS AND WHERE WE, AS A GLOBAL COMMUNITY, ARE HEADING
With the many challenges faced by society, research has a crucial role to play. Sir Howard Newby, President of the Academy of Social Sciences, talks to Sarah Womack about how social science is making its mark.

As the world enters a new decade, the social sciences – which help us define, comprehend, and often change the way we live – occupy an important but not entirely comfortable place. Influential in both state and private spheres, forming as they do the foundation of much government and corporate thinking, the role of the social sciences is pivotal to the understanding of society and the success of policy implementation. Its findings also contribute tens of billions of pounds to the UK economy every year.

One only has to look at the inexorable rise in management consultancies; social science frequently gets translated into bestselling products in the private sector, with management consultants acting as ‘knowledge brokers’, turning social science research into a form they can readily sell to clients. But still it is stigmatised, derided as less rigorous than natural science or formal science, and dismissed as ‘opinion masquerading as fact’.

Yet, as the physicist David Kresh wryly noted, understanding atomic physics is child’s play compared with understanding child’s play. And if populations are to be persuaded to change their behaviour so that the worst consequences of, say, global warming, can be avoided, social scientists will be at the helm.
Sir Howard Newby, Vice Chancellor of the University of Liverpool and President of the Academy of Social Sciences, is in no doubt that social science has a fundamental role to play as society confronts challenges as diverse as terrorism, war, welfare, poverty, disease, multiculturalism, identity, penal policy, family life, immigration, child welfare and social care of the elderly.

Just look, he says, at the impact that the ‘best’ social science has already had. “Best examples relate to where detailed and rigorous empirical data gathering is allied to strong, innovative theoretic thinking,” Sir Howard emphasises. He points to a number of concrete examples, from the child cohort surveys from 1946 onwards, which were used to develop a much fuller understanding of child development and the importance of family life, to the application of game theory in economics and the regulation of public utilities.

“One could also look to the British empirical tradition of social policy and welfare, whereby you start from detailed studies – Charles Booth, Joseph Rowntree – flowing through into policies like welfare-to-work,” he adds. “The present government’s social policy and employment agendas are heavily influenced by social science.”

Other examples include town and country planning; and in the wake of the foot-and-mouth and BSE outbreaks, the social sciences provided a perspective on how answers to such issues required a combination of natural science with an understanding of the economic consequences and social acceptability of what might be involved. A range of other successful projects, from eradicating illiteracy through the use of synthetic phonics and boosting children’s self-esteem as ‘good readers’, to helping the unemployed re-enter work, have all grown out of social science research.

Sir Howard acknowledges, however, that there remains a distrust of the subject which can work against its triumphs. It remains the case, for example, that the social sciences – which include anthropology, economics, political science, psychology and sociology – are often referred to as the ‘soft sciences’. “Most individuals have to deal in a ‘lay’ way with what social scientists have to do, which is to make sense of the world around them,” he explains. “At one level, everyone thinks they are an expert at understanding the social science world, and there has always been this risk that social science is dismissed.”

Sometimes, social science researchers are themselves to blame, particularly where there hasn’t been enough distinction between results and personal opinion, he adds. But the main reason that social science struggled to attract the recognition of natural science and formal science was that the raw data – the factual evidence – was never self-evident. “It always requires interpretation unlike, say, particle physics where a fact is fact – although even as I say that, in some areas of the natural sciences that is no longer quite as clear cut as it used to be. Think of climate change,” Sir Howard points out.

He insists that social science is just as rigorous as the other sciences, although there is often more room for debate than in, for instance, the natural sciences. “The natural sciences close off debate between different theoretical understandings by experimental testing, direct observation. The social sciences do not tend towards closure. They are about debate. To that extent there are aspects of social science which have more in common with the humanities than they do with the natural sciences.”

Sir Howard knows about debate, having had extensive experience in higher education. He started his career as a university lecturer in sociology and was Chief Executive of the Higher Education Funding Council for England where he was involved in the development of policy on public engagement with science and technology.

Looking to the future, he possesses a visionary conviction that social science will and should be at the forefront, and that social science research will be the source of major advances during the next decade. “We still don’t know enough about what is going on in society. We probably know, in certain respects, less now about what is happening in some of our communities than we did 20 or 30 years ago, because too much academic social science has become too abstract and theoretical and not sufficiently grounded in solid empirical observation.

“But there will be a swing back towards that. The grand challenges about issues such as health and climate change demand an interdisciplinary approach – not just within the social sciences but between the social sciences and other disciplines. The future of the social sciences will depend a great deal on our ability to engage in that kind of research culture and demonstrate that we add value to it.”

By Sarah Womack, former social affairs correspondent, the Daily Telegraph
Social science and ESRC-funded research has provided valuable contributions to society across all sectors. Here we highlight a selection of research investments and findings over the last 70 years, supporting a productive economy, a healthy society and a sustainable world.

### Social Science Achievements

#### Healthy Society

- **1940s** A report by the economist William Beveridge paved the way for the National Health Service.
- **1950s** Social science research on wage-related state pensions led to the Pensions Act of 1959.
- **1965** The National Child Development Study starts, tracking the lives of 17,000 people. Its findings have an important impact on policy.
- **1970** Research shows that the strongest influencer of child literacy at age seven is social background.
- **1982** Data collection for the first Birth Cohort Study begins.
- **1990s** The National Child Development Study starts, tracking the lives of 17,000 people. Its findings have an important impact on policy.
- **1991** The Social Science Research Council – now the Economic and Social Research Council – is founded.

#### Sustainable World

- **1965** The Social Science Research Council – now the Economic and Social Research Council – is founded.
- **1969** The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) is formed to study the fiscal system.
- **1970** The Industrial Relations Research Unit is established to offer insights into the concerns of industry and commerce.
- **1982** The First Green Budget by the IFS is published to act as Green Paper for the Finance Bill.
- **1990s** The National Index of Multiple Deprivation, developed by an ESRC researcher, is used annually to allocate billions in government spending.
- **1991** The British Household Panel Survey provides valuable data for research and policy.

#### Productive Economy

- **1940** The Social Science Research Council – now the Economic and Social Research Council – is founded.
- **1969** The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) is formed to study the fiscal system.
- **1972-2009** UK researchers contribute world-class evidence to the UN Conference on Climate Change in Stockholm, Rio, Kyoto and Copenhagen.
- **1990** The Centre for Economic Performance, one of the leading economic research groups in Europe, is formed.
- **1991** The ESRC Centre for the Microeconomic Analysis of Public Policy is inaugurated at IFS.

- **1970** The First Green Budget by the IFS is published to act as Green Paper for the Finance Bill.
- **1991** The Centre for Social and Economic Research on the Global Environment (CSERGE) plays a key role in researching sustainable development in the EU.
- **1991** The ESRC’s Global Environmental Change Programme is launched, providing policy advice on environmental issues.
1996 The ESRC Health Variations Programme makes a significant impact in targeting deprived groups in public health campaigns.

1997 Findings from the Violence Programme have influenced debates about violence in policy areas such as Northern Ireland, domestic violence and racism.

1997 The Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion, which has influenced the Labour government’s policies, is founded.

1997 Research shows that upgrading adult basic skills leads to improved employment, health and social outcomes.

1999 The Sure Start Programme for pre-school children is influenced by research showing long-term consequences of childhood disadvantage.

2000 The Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research is founded. It aims to develop sustainable responses to climate change.

2000 By applying game theory, the Centre for Economic Learning and Social Evolution helps the Treasury raise £22.5 billion in an auction of radio bandwidths for mobile phones.

2001 Findings from the Children 5-16: Growing into the 21st Century Programme are taken up by the Department for Education & Skills.

2001 The Millennium Cohort Study aims to understand the social conditions surrounding birth and early childhood.

2003 Paid maternity leave rises from 18 to 26 weeks, informed by research on how maternal employment in the first year of life impacts on child development.

2006-2007 Research on the dangers of smoking leads to the UK smoking ban.

2008 Understanding Society, a major longitudinal research study, replaces and incorporates the British Household Panel Survey.

1995 Over the next two decades, the ESRC funds a range of centres and programmes studying environmental change and sustainability.

2000 The Centre for Economic Performance was fundamental to the recommendation that the Minimum Wage should be increased above the level of inflation over the four-year period 2003-06, benefiting over 12 million workers.

2008 The UK Innovation Research Centre investigates how innovation can help the UK meet the social, environmental and economic challenges it faces.

2009 ESRC economists advise the government on the economics of recession and the Budget.

During the 1990s and the 2000s ESRC launches a number of investments, including the Financial Markets Group Research Centre, the Centre for Business Research, the Centre for Economic Policy Research, the Advanced Institute of Management Research and the World Economy and Finance Programme.

Research from the Centre for Economic Performance was fundamental to the recommendation that the Minimum Wage should be increased above the level of inflation over the four-year period 2003-06, benefiting over 12 million workers.
Here we present a few examples of how ESRC research provides findings that contribute both to a productive economy, a healthy society and a sustainable world.

**EXCELLENCE WITH IMPACT**

**RESEARCH FOR A PRODUCTIVE ECONOMY**

The effects of recession are felt in all parts of society. In order to counter the impact we need to know what can be learned from research findings – from previous recessions, from market behaviour and policy impacts. The ESRC funds a range of economic research which has been instrumental in shaping economic and social policies, in analysing the government’s fiscal forecasts and tax and spending decisions, and in advising the government on the Budget.

The work of the ESRC Centre for Economic Performance helped pave the way for the UK’s national minimum wage, introduced in 1999. The Centre found no evidence that the minimum wage led to large job losses. Assessing the impact of the minimum wage in 2007, the Centre found that it had raised the real and relative pay of low-wage workers, narrowed the gender pay gap and had positively influenced pay for one in ten workers. It has been estimated that 12 million workers have benefited from the minimum wage at a total wage bill impact of about £1.2 billion.

A review of the welfare system by researchers from the Centre for Market and Public Organisation benefitted those outside employment. Commissioned by the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, it focused on how more people can be helped off benefits and into work. It looked at the requirements currently placed on the unemployed and called for a new attitude to parents with young children and those on incapacity benefit who could work in the future. The report proposed a more personalised regime with more responsive and clearer sanctions and recommended that the government should proceed towards replacing the existing benefit structure with a single working age benefit.

Unemployment hits younger workers particularly hard. They are more likely to be entering the labour force for the first time and to be on temporary contracts. They often have less experience, thus finding fewer vacancies, and are often the first to be cut by companies seeking to reduce costs. Research by the Institute for Fiscal Studies confirms this fear: unemployment is most widespread for 18 to 24-year-old workers, whose unemployment level grew at a rapidly accelerating rate over the course of 2008. As this raises concerns about the danger of these young people being permanently ‘scarred’ by their bad first experiences of the labour market, government policies need to address this issue.

A critical analysis of recession-related lay-offs comes from research by the Advanced Institute for Management on business responses to the recession in the early 1990s. Not surprisingly, the primary response of firms that considered themselves seriously threatened by the recession was cost control, mainly through labour reorganisation: employment cuts, wage growth cuts and business unit closures. Financial responses – disposing of assets, reducing dividends and rescheduling debt – took the backseat to cost control. The workforce took the brunt of the adjustment. Recessions can provide firms with an excuse: it is easy to blame the recession for lay-offs when they are really a way to make long-needed productivity-changing improvements. Research suggests that firms cannot cut their way out of the recession but must grow their way out. Since growth will not come by competing on cost, it is essential to move up the ‘value chain’, offering ever more valuable products and services. This demands innovation and not simply in terms of products and processes, but also in terms of practices and organisation.

The recession’s impact on individuals, businesses and governments will not disappear in the near future, but research helps us to find ways to deal with its negative consequences and provides recommendations that will help us improve our responses to future recessions.
Happiness and health are on top of most people’s list of priorities. Central to government agendas, these two issues engage researchers across the disciplines. A fulfilling job, independent living, friends and holidays, a good diet and restful sleep are some of the answers people give to what makes them happy and healthy. But there are underlying factors, less evident but highly relevant, that influence whether or not we are happy and healthy.

For the past six decades, longitudinal studies such as the British Household Panel or the Millennium Cohort Study have sought to identify these factors. Tracking thousands of people’s lives, collecting quantitative and qualitative data ranging from blood samples to the number of friends people have, these studies allow large-scale comparisons of people’s lives and backgrounds and provide comprehensive insight into information on population trends.

Longitudinal studies have influenced policy – and public attitudes – in major ways. Findings such as the fact that lifetime smokers in the 1946 cohort were three times more likely than people who had never smoked to have died by the age of 60 led to the smoking ban in 2006.

Obesity, responsible for premature deaths each year, is another major contemporary health issue of concern to policymakers. Birth Cohort studies have shown that obesity rates are rising; that obesity is a risk to our health, both physical and mental; and that our socio-economic background and eating habits as children can greatly influence whether we become overweight as adults. Findings using the 1958 National Child Development Study showed that children with overweight parents were more likely to become obese adults. They also gained weight at a faster rate from early adulthood and continued to do so throughout adult life. These findings were integrated into health campaigns to make them more efficient.

Education and family policies have been shaped by data which found that social class is a major influence on children’s attainment by the age of 22 months. The Millennium Cohort study showed that the vocabulary scores of children of graduates were 12 months ahead of those with the least educated parents. However, parental involvement in a child’s schooling for a child aged between seven and 16 is a more powerful force than family background, size of family and level of parental education. Parents’ interest in their child’s education has four times more influence on attainment by age 16 than socio-economic background. Conversely, educational failure is increased by a lack of parental interest in schooling. The key role of parenting and family life in shaping longer term outcomes of individuals has encouraged government to provide greater support to families.

Birth cohort evidence also revealed the need for early intervention in mental health problems. Early mental health problems can have a range of serious consequences in later life, including emotional problems in adulthood, poor educational achievement, lower earnings, marital problems, teenage parenthood and criminal activities. Unlike physical health conditions that tend to increase with age, mental health problems frequently start early in life. Studies showed that of those with mental health problems at 26, half had first developed a psychiatric disorder by the age of 15. Decision-makers responded to these findings with a commitment to undertake early intervention to prevent worsening mental health problems emerging in adulthood, and to establish strategies to promote good mental health and wellbeing.

Government policies and campaigns aim at increasing levels of health and wellbeing in the population. While this is an incredibly complex task, it is not impossible. Longitudinal and birth cohort studies provide important evidence upon which government initiatives can build.
RESEARCH FOR A SUSTAINABLE WORLD
Environmental change, conflict and population movement affect the world as a whole, connecting people living thousands of miles apart. Controversial cartoons published in one country may spark violence in countries far away. And the reluctance of one country to take action regarding carbon emissions may jeopardise another country’s livelihoods.

Many of the issues that affect our lives today are very complex due to their global scale and interconnectivity. They ignore the boundaries of nation-states and the range of national politics, their effects and outcomes are highly unpredictable and frequently require urgent action.

Researchers working on the topic of sustainability – a broad term that includes environmental, social and economic issues – often engage in interdisciplinary and international collaborations in order to address its complex nature.

The importance of collaborative efforts is exemplified by the Living with Environmental Change research programme (LWEC), funded by a partnership of organisations with the aim of providing policymakers with information to manage and protect ecosystem services. Some of the main research areas include risk-based predictions of environmental change; sustainable technologies and infrastructure; and analyses of costs, benefits and impacts of mitigation and adaptation responses.

Similarly, the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research works to develop sustainable responses to climate change through multidisciplinary research and dialogue on both a national and international level. It was actively involved in providing data and consultation to the Copenhagen Climate Change Conference. In one of the centre’s recent reports, researchers looked at the economic benefits of international co-operation in mitigating climate change. A global deal, when compared to unilateral action, results in slightly higher GDP and employment, and significantly lower carbon prices.

A similar focus on the benefits of emission reductions was provided by a major international study led by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical medicine. It suggested that many measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions will have positive health impacts. These additional benefits will offset at least some of the costs of climate change mitigation. For example, in low-income countries, inefficient traditional solid fuel stoves create high levels of indoor air pollutants. National programmes to introduce low-emission stove technology could avert millions of premature deaths, and constitute one of the strongest and most cost-effective climate-health linkages. Similarly, cutting emissions through more walking, cycling, and reduced car use will bring substantial health benefits, including reduced cardiovascular disease, depression, diabetes and dementia.

Environmental change has already led to a more intense competition for resources. The consequences of this – national and international conflicts, migration, radicalisation and terrorism – are major concerns. The multidisciplinary RCUK Global Uncertainties Research Programme seeks to explore the security implications of pressures on the environment and resources, poverty and inequality, terrorism and conflict, transnational crime and potentially serious pandemic disease. How notions of security and insecurity develop in individuals, communities, states and international domains, and the reasons that lead to radicalisation and transnational political violence, are some of the topics explored.

The challenge of international poverty reduction, central to the management of these global uncertainties, is the focus of a joint funding scheme of the Department for International Development and the ESRC. The aim of the scheme is to enhance the quality and impact of social science research addressing the key international development goal of reducing poverty among the poorest countries and peoples of the world. Researchers investigate issues relating to economic development and quality of life in less developed countries with the potential for impact on policy and practice for poverty reduction.

The Earth Charter defines a sustainable global society as being founded on ’respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace’. Social science research provides essential knowledge to develop a sustainable world.

To find out more, visit http://www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk
IN THE WEAK winter sunlight of Denmark in December 2009 I stepped from a train into the bright new city of Ørestad, a futuristic Copenhagen suburb built on principles of sustainability, education and community. It seemed the ideal location to inspire policymakers and heads of state who were gathered for the 15th Conference of the Parties of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC COP15). The robot-driven metro train closed its doors behind me and glided silently away.

Then I heard the banging of drums and the megaphone-led chant and reply of protesters. I ducked below banners made from paint-scrawled bed sheets, I dodged between hawkers of leaflets, bags, organic sandwiches, and a hundred other issues barely related to climate change as I understand it. And then I stopped and did not move for hours. A huge, unmoving queue snaked alongside anti-terrorist barricades protecting a huge prefabricated building. I had stepped from Scandinavian civilisation into organisational chaos. By week two, COP15 disorder had descended into geopolitical distrust and confusion.

The UNFCCC aims to stabilise greenhouse gases to avoid dangerous climate change. Begun in 1992 it gave birth to the Kyoto Protocol, which comes to an end in 2012. The important purpose of the COP15 meeting in Copenhagen was to deliver a coherent and ambitious agreement, ‘a Copenhagen Protocol’, to address human-made climate change.

Unfortunately, in terms of addressing climate change in any useful way, COP15 clearly failed and the UNFCCC did not deliver. There was no overarching agreement that all big-emitter nations would cut their carbon dioxide emissions. That COP15 failed was perhaps no surprise, but deep down many – including me – had hoped that their pessimism was misplaced.

Instead of a COP15 agreement, what the world got was a Copenhagen Accord. It is not a United Nations document and was drafted separately to the UN by Brazil, China, India, South Africa and the United States. The EU and its nations were essentially sidelined. Most delegates (and the 5,000 journalists) did not know that the Accord was being drafted. The G77 developing nations stated that it “secured the economic security of only a few nations”. Only China is on record as citing it as a positive outcome.

Though the Copenhagen Accord is far from what many had hoped for, it may achieve more in a few months than the UNFCCC has in its 18 years. It invited all nations to submit emission reduction targets and plans for low-carbon economic growth by the end of January 2010. By the time this is published we will know which countries have joined the Accord.

The UNFCCC is not science or evidence-based. It is about global geopolitics in the raw. And of the science that does exist, it seems inadequate compared with the scale of the challenge. What is missing is the science of what to do about climate change at an international and national level. How, practically, do policymakers, business and civil society at a vast scale urgently and radically reduce emissions, both to get low-emissions technologies deployed and to make the transition to low-emission lifestyles? These questions are cross-cutting and interdisciplinary, as is any significant climate change research.

The one topic all governments agree is that they will not compromise economic growth – yet business is not officially allowed to engage in negotiations.

“All governments agree they will not compromise economic growth – yet business is not officially allowed to engage in negotiations”

In my opinion, avoiding less than two degrees of global climate change is now a political and scientific fiction. As a self-confessed unrealistically wishful supporter of the UNFCCC process, and because the Copenhagen Accord was so negatively received, I find myself now hopeful of business. The necessity of mitigating and adapting to the impacts of now inevitable climate change will be the mother of societal and technical innovation. Therefore, the UNFCCC and climate change research have to get so much better at engaging with business. And back in the future city of Ørestad the principles of sustainability, education and community are restored – now that COP15 politics have left town.

Asher Minns is Manager of the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research, based at the University of East Anglia. The centre is funded by the ESRC, the Natural Environment Research Council and the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council.

Email a.minns@uea.ac.uk Web http://www.tyndall.ac.uk
Votes in the balance

With a general election coming up, does the UK electoral system deliver a fair result? Times have changed for ‘first-past-the-post’, says Professor John Curtice

It looks as though this year’s general election will not just be a tough test for our politicians, but also for first-past-the-post advocates, this quality means that voters themselves directly determine who forms the government (not some backroom coalition deal negotiated after the election), while subsequently it is clear who is responsible for whatever goes right – or wrong.

So why is the Commons electoral system now apparently in danger of not living up to its billing, even if the Conservatives do eventually emerge with a large lead?

Three developments have in fact gradually eroded the ability of first-past-the-post to deliver what its advocates value. It is no longer very effective at stopping third parties from winning votes or seats. There are fewer marginal seats than before. And the system treats Labour much more favourably than the Conservatives.

At the 1951 election, just three per cent of the vote went to parties other than Conservative and Labour. Only nine MPs did not belong to one of the two main tribes. In contrast, at the last election, nearly a third of the vote was cast for one of the third parties, and no less than 92 MPs – or as many as one in seven – were neither Conservative nor Labour. The Liberal Democrats, in particular, have become more successful at building up areas of local strength, and thus at turning votes into seats.

Having more third party MPs itself inevitably increases the likelihood of a hung parliament.

Meanwhile, however, between the 1950s and 1980s, Britain gradually split politically into two halves – the northern and more urban half of the country where Labour are at their strongest, and the southern and more rural parts where the Conservatives find it easiest to win votes.

As a result there are now, as compared with the 1950s, about one-third fewer constituencies in the middle of the political spectrum – fewer seats likely to be won by whichever of Conservative or Labour wins most votes nationally, even if their lead is only a small one. A narrow lead for one party in votes is less likely to be sufficient to give it a big lead in seats.

Nevertheless, a three-point lead was still sufficient to give Tony Blair a majority in 2005. It is highly unlikely, though, to be sufficient for Mr Cameron. For the third change to have happened is that the system nowadays treats the Conservatives relatively harshly. Despite the introduction this year in England and Wales of updated constituency boundaries, thanks to continued population movement the average Conservative constituency will still have at least 4,000 fewer people on the electoral register than the average Labour one. Meanwhile, the difference in turnout between the typical Labour and Conservative seat has widened at recent elections – to as much as seven points last time around – thereby widening yet further the difference in their respective sizes.

To these inequities has been added yet another ingredient. In the 1990s Labour’s vote became markedly more efficiently distributed across the country. As a result, in the event of a dead heat nationally Labour would, on current patterns, win at least 25 more seats than the Conservatives with a majority of less than ten percentage points.

The combined effect of these three developments on the voting system is stark. Unless one or more of them is reversed this time around, then a very wide range of Conservative leads – of anything between zero and 11 points – could well produce a hung parliament. It looks as though this year’s general election will not just be a tough test for our politicians, but also for first-past-the-post.
Still hitting the ceiling

As we approach International Women’s Day on 8 March, Professor Pooran Wynarczyk finds that women still are a minority in senior academic positions.

Since the turn of the millennium there have been tremendous efforts to tackle the gender imbalance in academia. As a result of equal opportunities legislation in education and employment, formal discrimination against women has generally been removed. In 2007 the Gender Equality Duty (GED) was enforced, placing a duty on institutions themselves to publish a gender equality scheme. It should include impact assessments on all policies and practices, including the gender pay gap, and development of an action plan with targets, dates and assigned responsibilities in consultation with trade unions.

Over the past two decades, we have also witnessed considerable efforts and funding devoted to the development of numerous measures and initiatives to address the gender imbalance, as well as major improvements in the statutory provision of maternity and paternity leave and flexible working in favour of women. So why does the gender imbalance, in spite of some improvements, continue to be so persistent – particularly beyond the ‘glass ceiling’ at senior, professorial and executive levels?

There are several professional, institutional and personal barriers that continue to prevent equality for women in academia – including institutional sexism, stereotyping, long hours culture, work-life balance, caring responsibilities, lack of formalised, affordable and accessible childcare facilities, and limited access to female role models and mentors.

Women who wish to pursue progressive careers in academia can generally be subject to adverse ‘weed-out’. They often find they have to work harder and be better qualified than their male counterparts to be selected or promoted to high positions, or face difficulties when it comes to entering male-dominated networks of information exchange, becoming active researchers, or leading grant applications. Seniority in academic positions for women tends to require more items of merit and come at a relatively greater age.

Above all, the process of gender differentiation begins at a very early age. Children as young as five already have stereotypical beliefs about what constitutes men’s and women’s work. It is clear that the home and school environment influences young girls’ vision of their role in society, but also their degree of assertiveness, experimentation, self-motivated exploration and risk-taking – important features in the lives of successful academics. These factors influence girls’ choice of subjects at school and their subsequent capabilities and confidence to pursue a career in academia. This is before taking into account work-life balance and the overt nature of a male-dominated culture in the academic community.

Harriet Harman, Minister for Women and Equality, recently said that “the change we need is the change which recognises that for women to take time out with a young baby or to work flexible or part-time hours on return from maternity leave is going to be the actual way of the future”. While equal opportunities, work-life balance policies and a flexible work schedule all appear to offer a more attractive working environment for women, it seems that these policies, on a part-time basis, do not necessarily help with career progression for women, it seems that these policies, on a part-time basis, do not necessarily help with career progression for women, it seems that these policies, on a part-time basis, do not necessarily help with career progression for women, it seems that these policies, on a part-time basis, do not necessarily help with career progression for women, it seems that these policies, on a part-time basis, do not necessarily help with career progression for women, it seems that these policies, on a part-time basis, do not necessarily help with career progression for women, it seems that these policies, on a part-time basis, do not necessarily help with career progression for women, it seems that these policies, on a part-time basis, do not necessarily help with career progression for women, it seems that these policies, on a part-time basis, do not necessarily help with career progression for women, it seems that these policies, on a part-time basis, do not necessarily help with career progression for women, it seems that these policies, on a part-time basis, do not necessarily help with career progression for women, it seems that these policies, on a part-time basis, do not necessarily help with career progression for women, it seems that these policies, on a part-time basis, do not necessarily help with career progression for women, it seems that these policies, on a part-time basis, do not necessarily help with career progression for women, it seems that these policies, on a part-time basis, do not necessarily help with career progression for women, it seems that these policies, on a part-time basis, do not necessarily help with career progression for women, it seems that these policies, on a part-time basis, do not necessarily help with career progression for women, it seems that these policies, on a part-time basis, do not necessarily help with career progression for women.

“There are several professional, institutional and personal barriers that continue to prevent equality for women in academia.”

In my opinion, the gender imbalance captured in current statistics and media headlines masks the excellent contributions that are already being made by women to the academic community in research and teaching, and thereby to the public as a whole. Existing research and policy tend to focus mainly on the barriers to participation, which could actually have an adverse effect and discourage women from pursuing a career in academia. Less attention is paid to identify success factors, and there is a lack of focus on how some women have managed to overcome barriers and ‘have it all’. If successful women academics are neither visible nor seen to be enjoying a rewarding and progressive academic career, they are unlikely to be able to act as role models for further recruitment, retention and progression of women – at a time of increasing demand for teaching and research in the academic community.
Here we present an at-a-glance overview of the key issues in Britain today. In this issue our focus is on population. All statistics are from the Office of National Statistics unless stated.

Who we are

UK POPULATION By 2029 the UK population will increase from 61 million to 70 million.

39 is the average age in the UK. West Somerset has the oldest average age, with 52 years. Oxford has the lowest median age, with 29 years.

79 is the average life expectancy in the UK, which corresponds with the EU average. In comparison people live, on average, to 83 in Japan, 67 worldwide and 32 in Swaziland.

11% of state-funded secondary children have a first language other than English. The top five foreign languages spoken in the UK are Punjabi, Urdu, Bengali, Gujarati and Somali.

30.2m of the UK population are male

31.2m of the UK population are female

“TO BE YOURSELF IN A WORLD THAT IS CONSTANTLY TRYING TO MAKE YOU SOMETHING ELSE IS THE GREATEST ACCOMPLISHMENT” Ralph Waldo Emerson

2.58 is the average birth rate worldwide. 1.96 is the birth rate in the UK. 84% of the population are White British.

75 70 65 60 55 50 45 40 35 30 25 20 15 10 5 0

3.5 3 2.5 2 1.5 2007 1971

“Other
Lone parent: dependent children
Couple: one or more dependent children
Couple: no children
One-person household: over state pension age
One-person household: under state pension age

© iStockphoto
1 in 10

Nearly one in ten British people lives part or all of the year abroad. There are more British living abroad than there are foreigners living in the UK.

Source: IPPR

“I dislike feeling at home when I am abroad”

George Bernard Shaw

Where we are

THE POPULATION OF THE UK

Scotland 8%
Northern Ireland 3%
England 84%
Wales 5%

MOST POPULAR DESTINATIONS FOR BRITISH EMIGRES

Source: IPPR

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“Where thou art, that is home”

Emily Dickinson

4.1m foreign nationals live in the UK.

1 in 9 people living in the UK was born abroad.

0.9% The UK’s share of the world population.
WATER IS A basic requirement for life. In the West, access to a mains water supply is regarded as a right. Yet in developing countries, just access to clean water – let alone piped – is a luxury. Increasing population growth means demand for safe-to-use water is greater than ever before, but a lack of regulation has created problems. More than 1,500 cubic kilometres are produced worldwide, but instead of reusing this for energy and irrigation, wastewater is being discharged untreated. As a result, human and environmental health is at risk from pollution, now and in the future.

The global challenge over water quality is the focus of this year’s World Water Day on 22 March. Co-ordinated by the United Nations, the overall goal of this year’s campaign is to improve water quality, not only quantity. The governance of water resources and its impact on poor nations has been investigated by a number of investments funded by the ESRC.

The ESRC Centre for Social, Technological and Environmental Pathways to Sustainability (STEPS) is focused on developing alternative approaches to ensure water and sanitation practices are equitable and sustainable globally. The huge toll from disease spread by contaminated water is highlighted by the STEPS report *Liquid Dynamics: Challenges for Sustainability in Water and Sanitation*. Diseased water is killing up to 6,000 babies daily in urban and semi-urban areas. Not even terrorism generates devastation on such a scale.

The report also highlights the gulf between government promises and the everyday reality of conditions facing the poor and marginalised. The social, political and distribution issues that underlie water ‘scarcity’ are often ignored. The result? Ineffective policies. There is also often confusion between different global agencies on how to define sanitation targets, according to the report. “The result is often policies and interventions that promote singular views of ‘progress’ in water and sanitation. Yet such progress often fails to address sustainability, or to meet goals of poverty reduction and social injustice,” the paper concludes.

One solution to the growing water crisis is addressing the growth of water-hungry crops in areas of the world where the water supply cannot meet demand. Central Asia continues to produce export cotton from plantations which have decimated the Aral Sea. Professor Tony Allan from King’s College London was the first researcher to identify this concept of ‘virtual water’ which drains precious water resources. He devised a system for measuring how much water is used in food production and manufacturing. For example, 1,700 litres of water are needed to produce just 500g of rice.

The system has been widely adopted, although Professor Allan says water scarcity is a hugely political issue. Some governments are better than others in admitting they have a problem. “Virtual water is a silent process, which successfully provides a solution for water shortages. But politics determines if people are prepared to take notice,” Professor Allan explains.

Professor Tom Franks and Dr Frances Cleaver from Bradford University’s Splash Water Governance...
Research Group have been looking into how water governance is shaped by arrangements for different groups of people, and propose a framework for analysing the different factors influencing access to water. Their work has been showcased through an ESRC-funded seminar series called Water Governance – Challenging the Consensus. These seminars highlight how drawing up criteria for measuring the impact of water governance has been grossly neglected.

The governance of water resources depends on many factors. These include the ability of humans to access water, the technology that supplies it, and the natural environment, such as the level of rainfall or drought. The UN’s Millennium Development Goals committed nations to produce plans for integrated water resources management by 2005. So how effective have the plans been in benefiting the poor?

Professor Franks and Dr Cleaver’s research shows how a person’s gender or caste has a huge impact on the ability to access water. So governance, they argue, should be seen from a social viewpoint, not just from a technical/managerial one.

“Understanding how water access is negotiated at the water point on the basis of gender, kinship or caste, for example, would help us to understand the likely impact and outcomes of more formalised institutional arrangements,” say the researchers.

In the aftermath of the credit crunch, policymakers are struggling to adapt existing policies to very different economic circumstances. Known as policy ‘dismantling’ or ‘deregulation’, this process involves key trade-offs. These trade-offs apply to environmental policies in managing natural resources – including water.

The ESRC-funded Centre for Social and Economic Research for the Global Environment at the University of East Anglia is running a major study into policy dismantling called CONSENSUS (Confronting Social and Environmental Sustainability with Economic Pressure: Balancing Trade-offs by Policy Dismantling or Expansion). Led by Professor Andrew Jordan, this compares patterns of change in social and environmental policies between 1976 and 2005. The project covers 24 countries which are members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. The findings will not be published until February 2011, but Professor Jordan says preliminary data already shows that dismantling in the environmental sector is very different to that in the social field. “When it is completed, our work should offer policymakers a clearer understanding of the various ways in which dismantling can be pursued and the most significant obstacles that need to be overcome to make a genuine impact.”

The politics of water governance are complex. What these ESRC-backed projects demonstrate though is an urgent need for more regulation over the management of wastewater. Also, governments need more insight into exactly how the poor access water, and should not just rely on imposing water management policies from above.

Sophie Goodchild is an editor on the Evening Standard
Enter the festival

Travel through suitcase memories, recreate parties and photograph fear in the ESRC’s Festival of Social Science this month. Explore how social science research influences our lives with these examples of events.

SUITCASE MEMORIES
The focus of this interactive event is a large suitcase, looking like it has been packed in a hurry. The suitcase is a portal to a journey through young people’s experiences of flooding and flood recovery, showing the audience how flooding impacts on children and local communities. Current science predicts that climate change will increase the frequency of extreme weather events, such as flooding.

The contents of the suitcase, belonging to a fictional young person from Hull, all relate to young people’s experiences of the 2007 Hull flood. Storyboards, interview transcripts, posters and an interactive game of snakes and ladders will allow pupils to explore how it feels to be affected by an extreme weather event, enhanced by music and sound effects. Poles create a ‘no entry space’ like those used on flooded homes, displaying archive photographs of the flooding.

BRINGING THE PARTY HOME
This multimedia exhibition will recreate festival and party experiences with a ‘real’ party happening in the evening. The event is based on research about the ways in which young adults relate to the forms of branding, marketing and consumption at festivals and free parties. Five hundred music festivals will take place in the UK this year. Marketed as a temporary escape from everyday life, in which festival goers can ‘be themselves’, they have become increasingly managed environments, shaped by corporate interests. In contrast, free parties, taking place in warehouses, squats, forests and fields, are produced by young people without, and sometimes opposing, corporate involvement.

Using photographs and interactive objects, the exhibition allows visitors to explore cultural practices that are significant to many young people, and to engage with broader concerns about the commercialisation of leisure and community spaces.

PHOTOS OF FEAR
How do people interact with the landscape they live in? What scares them? Where do they feel uneasy? Fear of crime is a major issue in urban areas, and realising what provokes this fear is essential to reduce it. Everyone inhabits a ‘personal landscape’, and in order to fully understand people’s perceptions and attitudes it is necessary to look at the different influences affecting this landscape. These can be long-term personal factors such as family relationships, or one-off events such as encountering a scary dog.

Equipped with cameras and notepads, locals from Sheffield will explore their neighbourhoods. Through the pictures and texts they produce, they will be encouraged to express their attitudes towards the places they live, document their experiences of fear and share them with others. The results will be used to produce a web exhibit which documents fear in the landscape.

AFTER THE RAIN
Lancaster, Morecambe, Milnthorpe
16, 17, 19 March
Audience type Schools

FESTIVALS AND FREE PARTIES:
A MULTIMEDIA EXHIBITION
Bristol 13 March
Audience type General public

FEAR AND LOATHING IN SHEFFIELD:
PUBLIC FEAR IN AN URBAN LANDSCAPE
Sheffield 13 and 17 March
Audience type General public
SPEAKING HANDS
Gesticulating might be more common in other parts of the world, but Britons also use their hands when speaking – usually spontaneously, without being aware of it. Gestures are central to communication. They fill a number of functions in communication and conversation, enhance understanding and often reveal knowledge earlier than speech.

This workshop offers children and adults the chance to participate in ‘hands-on’ playful activities to experience the importance of gestures in communication. All tasks are adapted from those actually used in research on gesture. Participants will initially carry out the tasks ‘normally’, then without using their hands and finally using just their hands. This will allow them to experience just how much we rely on using our hands when speaking and how much information the gestures convey in conversation. The workshop will also raise awareness about people who rely extensively on non-verbal communication because of language problems.

COPING WITH EMERGENCIES
Flooding, swine flu, ‘war on terror’ – young people today have grown up in a world surrounded by news about emergencies, threats and scares. During the Cold War emergency exercises were a regular occurrence in schools, but today’s generation is rarely asked what to do in an emergency. Professionals are concerned about how much people expect to rely on organisations and the government in an emergency situation.

At the ‘Emergency Exercise 2010’ young people will take the role of professionals in a drama simulation of an emergency preparedness exercise taking place at a secret, iconic site. Filming of the exercise and the participants’ contributions to a blog will then feed into research that examines the pedagogical principles underlying preparedness campaigns.

WORKING FOR EMPLOYMENT
Unemployment and its negative impacts on society will be an important issue for social policy at national, regional and local levels. As unemployment rates continue to rise, policymakers are grappling with how to allocate limited resources and design the right interventions to help people find work in very difficult circumstances.

In the format of a Question Time debate, an expert panel of leading politicians, social commentators and researchers will discuss the impact of ‘worklessness’ across generations. New research will be used to inform the debate about questions such as how resources are being spent, the growing involvement of third sector providers and employers and how young people in the UK and other European countries perceive inequality.

SPEAKING WITH AND WITHOUT YOUR HANDS
Manchester 20 March
Audience type Schools

EMERGENCY EXERCISE 2010
Chichester 18 March
Audience type Schools

POST-RECESSION BLUES
London 18 March
Audience type Specific interest

The Festival of Social Science 2010 is taking place from 12 to 21 March in more than 40 UK towns and cities. The events range from conferences, workshops, debates and exhibitions to film screenings, plays, policy briefings and much more. For more information, visit the Festival website at www.esrcfestival.ac.uk.
The Chair, the City and the case for research

HEATHER STEWART Your doctorate was in economic geography; that’s become a very fashionable subject in the past ten years, but wasn’t it a rather unusual mix in the 1970s?

ALAN GILLESPIE Arriving at the ESRC, I’m a social scientist coming home. I did a PhD on the economy of Northern Ireland, looking at the pattern of unemployment and the differences between the West and East of the province. This was hugely relevant in policy terms, a consequence of politics and locational influences. That was a time when geography was going through an immense change, from qualitative and descriptive to powerful quantitative analysis. Cambridge, along with Bristol, was leading that revolution in geography. I remember very clearly going into the geography department in Cambridge one morning and we had boxes of soil to examine; the next day there were a hundred Casio calculators to do chi-square tests!

Today, most types of geography are very quantitative and analytic. At one level I’m rather an empirical person, and at another level I’m interested in the big picture worldwide.

HS Do you think all social science research should have a potential application to contemporary political debate?

AG At the end of the day, all of social science is about society: its people, their jobs, their incomes, their housing, their ageing – therefore actually all of social science should reach into observing aspects of society, and I would be very keen to see more and more of our work having an impact on policy formation.

I would quickly say, not all our research is applied research; some is basic research. We have to fund research to help develop new methodologies and new analytical tools. But I think we have a primary emphasis on policy and relevance. There’s another word I like, and that’s ‘engagement’: fully relating research findings to the realities of society. The ESRC has about £200m of taxpayers’ money being used – it is right and proper to look for findings and outputs from that that could influence government, private sector policy and third sector policy. Incidentally, I think it would be a wonderful time to be a PhD student – you can walk down the street and see a hundred subjects you could write a PhD on.

HS I must ask you, as someone with a long career in the financial sector, what your feelings have been as you’ve watched the financial crisis erupt over the past two years?

AG I had over 30 years in the banking industry, ending in September 2008. It was a wonderfully fulfilling career with three of the finest banking organisations in the world.

On the evening I left Ulster Bank in 2008, having dinner with friends, I remarked that all three of the firms I worked with – Citigroup, Goldman Sachs and RBS (Ulster Bank’s owner) – were currently receiving massive public assistance to keep the plumbing of the financial system going. One would never have thought that one day, all three would be on public support. That shows how the financial world has changed.

HS What do you think were the causes of the crash?

AG We saw throughout this last decade a phenomenal build-up of capital formation in the world, and acute imbalances as a consequence. The use of communications in a global information environment allowed investors anywhere in the world to participate, and the capital markets were super-charged by securitisation. The consequence of these factors, with the recruitment of extremely able people – mathematicians, scientists – to the financial profession; you put all that together, and look what was created: complexity, excessive leverage.

“It is right and proper to look for findings and outputs that could influence government, private sector policy and third sector policy”
without the banking disciplines of appropriateness and ‘know your customer’. The banking system ended up constructing complex investments and selling them to investors who shouldn’t have been buying them. This ballooned out of control.

**HS** Do you think the authorities reacted to the crisis in the right way?

**AG** I think that we have had a remarkably rapid, expedient and largely effective response by governments around the world: governments who had never done this before. We have a financial system that has been cauterised, and it is starting to recapitalise itself quite quickly.

I suspect economics has become too preoccupied with modelling complexity. There needs to be a return to the study of macro-economic behaviour.

**HS** Do you think the generous bonuses many City workers are still being paid?

**AG** The whole issue needs to be dealt with. Over the 30 years of my career, I have been a beneficiary of a rewards culture in the City that is very different from other walks of life. Today I believe this is out of line – people get rewarded on the upside, and don’t get penalised on the downside, and that needs to change.

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**HS** What did you think about Adair Turner’s claim, that much of what the City does is “socially useless”?

**AG** That is a very challenging, provocative statement. My response would be that there are significant parts of the City that are all about mobilising capital and making it available to those who need finance – to you and me as homeowners, to small and large businesses and governments. In my estimation, much of what the City does is socially valuable.

**HS** Should economists take some of the blame for failing to spot the crisis coming?

**AG** If you look at all those who have been put on the line as we have asked “did they miss something?”, we have identified the regulators, boards of directors of banks, senior executives on Wall Street, and some of the smartest investors in the world. We should add to that list the intellectuals – academics, business schools.

I suspect economics recently has become too preoccupied with modelling complexity, with the power of super-computing whereby thousands of variables are processed through complex models. There needs to be a return to the study of macro-economic behaviour.

**HS** So what lessons should economics as a profession learn from that?

**AG** As we enter 2010 and reflect on what the research priorities should be, I would be interested to see more and more academic economists take a greater interest in studying capital flows and the financial system at large. This would enable academic economists to again play a critical role in advising government and business.

**HS** Finally, how will you make the case for the ESRC maintaining its funding, at a time when any new government will be keen to find savings?

**AG** The UK has a very strong position in the social sciences and the ESRC plays a critical role in allocating funding to research priorities. The areas where our nation is hurting right now are around unemployment, family finances, mortgages and pensions, accompanied by profound social changes in the family life. These are the key national issues which need to be researched. I have no doubt that the case for the social sciences is robust indeed.

Heather Stewart, economics editor, the *Observer*
CHAIR ANNOUNCED FOR LWEC BUSINESS ADVISORY BOARD

Colin Drummond (left), Chief Executive of Viridor, Executive Director of Pennon Group plc and Chair of Environmental Sustainability Knowledge Transfer Network, has accepted the position of Chair of the Living with Environmental Change (LWEC) programme’s new Business Advisory Board. LWEC is an unprecedented partnership of UK research and policy-making organisations with a commitment of £1 billion of funding over ten years. The Business Advisory Board will help to ensure that the UK will get the full economic benefits from this major government investment, by providing strategic business input and advice on how to achieve the greatest impact from current and future activities. For more information, visit http://www.lwec.org.uk

CMPO READER APPOINTED TO WHO HEALTH EQUITY GROUP

Sonia Bhalotra, Reader in Economics at the Centre for Market and Public Organisation, has been appointed to a new health equity research group at the World Health Organisation. She was selected from 450 nominees to the Scientific Resource Group on Health Equity Analysis and Research. Some 15-20 members have been selected from among academia, NGOs and government on the basis of their knowledge and expertise on equity and health. The honorary appointment is from October 2009 for two years, after which it may be extended to five years.

PROFESSOR ON NATIONAL FAITH PANEL

Professor Paul Weller (left), an award holder under the ESRC/Arts and Humanities Research Council’s Religion and Society Research Programme, has been appointed as one of 13 advisers on a national ‘faith panel’. “Each adviser has an outstanding track record of achievement. Together they will help inform government on the views and values of faith communities, enabling us to learn from the unique insights that faith groups bring to contemporary issues,” says Communities Secretary John Denham.

ESRC COUNCIL MEMBER APPOINTED

Lord Drayson, Minister for Science and Innovation, has appointed Mr Paul Grice (above right) as the newest member to the ESRC Council. Paul Grice is the clerk and Chief Executive of the Scottish Parliament, which is responsible for delivering all services to the parliament and its members. He has worked in the devolved parliament since its inception in 1999. Previously Mr Grice worked for the Department of Transport and subsequently for the Department of the Environment on bus deregulation, railways policy and local government finance. He has a wide range of interests in the area of social policy including local government finance, urban regeneration and constitutional policy. Paul Grice has been appointed to Council for a period of three years from 28 October 2009 to 31 July 2012.

NEW YEAR HONOURS FOR SOCIAL SCIENCES

■ PROFESSOR ROBERT GEORGE BURGESS
Professor Robert George Burgess, Vice-Chancellor, University of Leicester and Chair of the East Midlands Universities Association, has been awarded a Knights Bachelor for services to higher education. Professor Burgess is a former Council member of the ESRC and Chair of its Postgraduate Training Board.

■ PROFESSOR CHRISTOPHER JOHN SKINNER
Professor Christopher John Skinner, FBA, Professor, Southampton Statistical Sciences Research Institute, University of Southampton, has been awarded a CBE for services to social science. Professor Skinner has led a number of major initiatives to enhance methodological capacity in social science research, including his role as Director of the ESRC-funded National Centre for Research Methods.

■ PROFESSOR FIONA DIVINE
Professor Fiona Devine, Professor of Sociology, University of Manchester has been awarded an OBE for services to social science. Between 2003 and 2007 she was an ESRC Council member and Chair of its International Advisory Committee. She was on the board of New Opportunities for Research Funding Co-operation in Europe and a member of the Governing Council of the European Science Foundation.

■ PROFESSOR ALAN ALEXANDER
Professor Alan Alexander, Emeritus Professor of Local and Public Management, University of Strathclyde, has been awarded an OBE for services to social sciences. He was an ESRC Council member from 2003 to 2009.

■ NIGEL KERSHAW
Nigel Kershaw, Chief Executive of Big Issue Invest and Chairman of The Big Issue received an OBE for services to social enterprise. He was a Michael Young Prize panel member in 2008.
Transnational Families

This innovative book provides an overview of the emergence of new understandings of ethnicities, identities and family forms across a number of ethnic groups, family types, and national boundaries. Researchers from the ESRC Families and Social Capital Research Group have examined families’ lived experience and used the concept of social capital to explore how these families manage to maintain close and meaningful links.


Prosperity Without Growth

Professor Tim Jackson from the ESRC Research Group on Lifestyles, Values and Environment shows that it is necessary – and possible – to have increased and widespread prosperity without economic growth. The book is a revised and updated version of Jackson’s controversial study for the Sustainable Development Commission, an advisory body to the UK government. Since the report was published, President Sarkozy has asked world leaders to join a revolution in the measurement of economic progress. Sir Nicholas Stern has warned “at some point we would have to think whether we want future growth.”


Gender Inequalities in the 21st Century

Taking the new global economy into account, the expert contributors to this book examine the various conflicts between different types of feminisms, revise old debates about ‘equality’ and ‘difference’ in the gendered nature of work and care, and propose new and innovative policy solutions. The book is edited by members of the ESRC Gender Equality Network.


Learning, Work and Social Responsibility

In ‘knowledge-based’ economies, we are engaged in a lifelong competition for livelihoods. Policies to encourage lifelong learning are based on the view that individuals must learn new things primarily to secure employment in an ever-changing world – but these policies have also opened up unsustainable inequalities. Professor Karen Evans is Strand Leader at the ESRC Centre for Learning and Life Chances in Knowledge Economies and Societies.


INTERNATIONAL BENCHMARKING REVIEW OF UK PSYCHOLOGY

In order to benchmark the quality and impact of UK Psychology against international standards, a partnership between four of the UK Research Councils, the British Psychological Society, the Experimental Psychology Society and the Association of Heads of Psychology Departments has been formed. This high-profile review will highlight the standing and contribution of UK Psychology against international benchmarks. It will identify ways of enhancing performance, capacity and impact, and promoting future research agendas.

The ESRC is leading this review, which is the fifth in its series of assessments benchmarking the UK sciences against international standards. For more information, visit http://www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/Support/Evaluation/ibr

FOLLOW-ON FUNDING SCHEME

The first round of 2010/11 opens on 1 March and closes on 29 April 2010. The scheme offers Follow-on Funding awards of up to £100k (at 80 per cent FEC) for a maximum of 12 months through three closed calls per year. Application is only through the Joint Electronic Submission system. Applications must show how current or previous research can be taken forward to show an impact on policy or practice. For more information, visit http://www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/opportunities/current_funding_opportunities/fof.aspx

ECOSYSTEM SERVICES TO REDUCE POVERTY

The £40 million Ecosystem Services for Poverty Alleviation (ESPA) programme has been launched. This pioneering research programme aims to strengthen the knowledge and understanding we need to develop resilient ecosystems, and will also provide the evidence and tools for decision-makers to manage ecosystems sustainably and in ways that will help to reduce poverty. ESPA is funded by the ESRC, the Department for International Development and the Natural

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Environment Research Council. It is accredited under the Living with Environmental Change research programme. For more information, visit http://www.nerc.ac.uk/research/programmes/espa

WELSH SCHOOLS WELCOME BUG MAN
The ‘nit nurse’ may be a thing of the past, but the ‘bug man’ has been welcomed at schools all over Wales. Microbiologist Wojciech Waliszewski has been helping school students get an insight into the risks posed by pathogens such as E.coli O157 and other food-borne infections. Based at Bangor University, he is part of an interdisciplinary research project investigating the risks of E.coli O157, funded by the RCUK Rural Economy and Land Use Programme. Over 475 pupils, aged between 12 and 17 years, in 15 schools, have taken part in the workshops.

WORLD ECONOMY AND FINANCE RESEARCH PROGRAMME CONFERENCE
The World Economy and Finance Research Programme’s conference, ‘Picking up the Pieces: Challenges for Policy and Theory in the Years Ahead’, was held on 28 January in London. The event explored how financial markets can be reshaped and public finances can be returned to balance after the global financial crisis. Speakers included economists from the Bank of England and HM Treasury, as well as Greece’s Minister of Economy and Finance (2004-2009), George Alogoskoufis. A report was published, presenting the main findings of the programme. For more information, visit http://www.worldeconomyandfinance.org

NEW UKCRC STUDY PROMOTES ACTIVE LIFESTYLES
Increases in levels of physical activity by residents in the Connswater area of east Belfast will be the target of a new five-year £800,000 Queen’s University study. Face-to-face surveys with 2,000 people living in the Greenway area will be conducted in early 2010 and again in 2013/4. Participants will be questioned on their physical activities and attitudes to exercise, health, smoking and drinking habits, as well as their social life, housing, employment and education. The results of the project will help other groups across the UK to develop their own plans to promote more active lifestyles. For more information, visit http://www.ukcrc.org/home

ESRC SUPPORTING ABU DHABI ECONOMIC RESEARCH
The Abu Dhabi government has signed an agreement with the ESRC to support the new Abu Dhabi Economics Research Agency (ADERA), forming a link between the research communities of both countries. The ESRC has also advised and assisted in the development of ADERA’s strategy, research schemes and procedures. ADERA-funded research will generate a substantial increase in understanding the development of Gulf Co-operation Council economies, which will support the implementation of effective policy to promote growth, particularly as Gulf economies diversify away from dependence on oil revenue.

PUBLIC SERVICES PROGRAMME – FINAL CONFERENCE
The final conference of the Public Services Programme, ‘Public Services in the 2010s: Prosperity, Austerity and Recovery’, was held on 11 December in London. The event drew on the lessons of the programme’s research and explored how this knowledge can be applied to the challenges of managing public service performance in the 2010s. Keynote contributions were given by Sir Gus O’Donnell (Cabinet Secretary) and Martin Weale (Director of the National Institute of Economic and Social Research). For more information, visit http://www.publicservices.ac.uk

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

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

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EDITOR IN CHIEF Jacky Clarke jacky.clake@esrc.ac.uk
EDITOR Arild Foss arild.foss@esrc.ac.uk
ASSISTANT EDITOR Debbie Stalker debbie.stalker@esrc.ac.uk

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