ESRC – SHAPING SOCIETY
Social science research aids growth, promotes innovation, informs policy and shapes society
Who we are

The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) funds research into the big social and economic questions facing us today. We are a public body and receive most of our funding through the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS). We support independent, high-quality, relevant social science research.

What we do

We direct funding to research, resources and training that make the most difference to people’s lives.

We help to tackle the biggest challenges society faces through a combination of partnerships, new ways of funding research and involvement with some of the world’s most ambitious research programmes. Our research informs policymakers and practitioners, and helps make businesses, voluntary bodies and other organisations more effective.

- **Research**: We support over 5,000 researchers and postgraduate students in academic institutions and independent research institutes.
- **Training**: We invest in high-quality research training and development opportunities to produce skilled researchers.
- **Partnerships**: We work collaboratively with the other six UK research councils and Innovate UK to fund cross-disciplinary research and innovation. We also build strategic partnerships with academia, the public and private sectors and civil society.
- **Infrastructure**: We drive the expansion of the UK’s data infrastructure and support cutting-edge methodological developments.
- **International leadership**: We foster international collaboration with a wide range of partners from around the world.
- **Engagement and communications**: We work to make our research accessible to our stakeholders and the wider public, to highlight and generate impact to inform policy.

What is social science?

Social science is the study of society, how we behave and interact, and our impact on the world around us. In other words, just about everything that really matters to our society.

Social scientists study a huge diversity of subjects including healthcare, education, economics, environmental change, ageing, politics, crime and governance.

Social science research makes a difference. It shapes public policy and contributes to making the economy more competitive, as well as giving people a better understanding of 21st-century society. From big ideas to the most detailed observations, social science affects us all every day: at work, in our leisure time, in school, when bringing up our children, when we are ill – even when we retire.

Find out more about us at [www.esrc.ac.uk](http://www.esrc.ac.uk)

ESRC is committed to identifying and funding the very best research, including innovative and potentially transformative research
ESRC in figures

309 events throughout the UK, with over 36,500 visitors during the Festival of Social Science 2017

16,000 subscribers in 80 countries read our Society Now magazine

606 new collaborations

We leveraged £29 million in additional income from government, industry, public sector and charities

£169 million spent on research and infrastructure

£46 million invested in skills training

55,000 Twitter followers at February 2018
How we make a difference

SOCIAL SCIENCE AIDS GROWTH

Creating jobs and contributing to the economy
The discovery and analysis of a distinctive 'enterprise belt' surrounding Birmingham was directly used by policymakers and business leaders to extend the reach of the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). Through combined public and private funding, it is estimated that by 2026 the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (GBSLEP) will create over one million square metres of space for businesses, up to 96,000 jobs and generate £14 billion gross value-added growth.

Research by Professors John Bryson, Peter Daniels and Michael Taylor
Read more at: www.esrc.ac.uk/news-events-and-publications/impact-case-studies/birmingham-enterprise-belt-research-is-creating-96-000-jobs

Making ports sustainable
A Knowledge Transfer Partnership, co-funded by ESRC with the Natural Environment Research Council and Innovate UK, developed an Environmental Management System that safeguards business activities. The framework assists more sustainable maritime operations and increased annual sales turnover for Falmouth Harbour Commissioners by £163,000 and reduced annual costs by £174,000. The partnership led to a 43% increase in annual profits, with forecast profits over three years of £1.22 million. It also provided vital safeguarding of three core business activities which amounted to an estimated £2.7 million over the project life cycle. A new integrated management system was also developed, leading to Falmouth Harbour

Commissioners achieving ISO 14001 Accreditation for environmental management.
Research by Harriet Knowles
Read more about the research at: www.esrc.ac.uk/news-events-and-publications/impact-case-studies/making-ports-sustainable

Increasing turnover and business expansion
App development company Hippotrix increased its turnover by 300% with help from an ESRC student placement. The student’s research – which focused on early-years apps and encompassed knowledge from the performing arts, developmental psychology and pedagogy – was instrumental in getting additional funding from Creative Scotland to support the company’s major expansion. It also led to collaborations with major new UK partners and development for five new apps.

Research by Dr Ben Fletcher-Watson
Watch a video about the research at: youtu.be/liazgugHjKk

ESRC supports the highest quality postgraduate training across the UK social science community
SOCIAL SCIENCE PROMOTES INNOVATION

Improving English learning for millions
ESRC researchers have pioneered major advances in English language teaching, in particular the creation of the British National Corpus (BNC) – a 100-million word collection of modern British English – and its successor, the up-to-date BNC 2014. The BNC has been used to create the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary – selling over 35 million copies worldwide and providing language tests for more than 600,000 students annually, in more than 60 countries. Other work has contributed directly to the Home Office Secure Language Test for immigrants. Development of a semantic coding tool to detect attitudes in texts has been used by (among others) the Home Office to study the language of violent extremists, and Canadian police to detect adults involved in online grooming of young people.
Research by ESRC Centre for Corpus Approaches to Social Sciences
Read more about the research at www.esrc.ac.uk/news-events-and-publications/impact-case-studies/research-improves-english-learning-for-millions

Cutting costs with white street lighting
ESRC-funded research led to the adoption of white light in residential roads and urban centres throughout the UK – each year saving 113 gigawatt hours of electricity, over £10 million in costs and reducing UK CO2 emissions by 45.5 megatons. The research examined whether white street lighting provided a better quality of lighting than the traditional yellow or orange lighting. It showed that the same lighting benefits as traditional orange sodium lighting could be achieved using white lighting with lower illuminance. The research fed into revision of the British Standard for street lighting for subsidiary roads, permitting lower illuminance white lighting. The research was also used to support current levels of street lighting, with potential for longer term impact on crime prevention and public safety.
Research led by Professor Tadj Oreszczyn and conducted by Peter Raynham
Read more about the research at www.esrc.ac.uk/news-events-and-publications/impact-case-studies/cutting-costs-with-white-street-lighting

Securing water supply with smart hand pumps
Over 60,000 rural Kenyans have benefited from ‘smart’ hand pumps using mobile phone technology and remote monitoring, combined with a community-based payment model and local maintenance, to ensure secure water supplies. The ESRC and Department for International Development (DFID)-funded research has been recognised and cited by Kenya’s Water Services Regulatory Board as a groundbreaking approach that could be applied across Kenya. The smart hand pump model is also being considered by UNICEF for scaling up across the East and Southern Africa region.
Research led by Dr Rob Hope
Read more at: www.esrc.ac.uk/news-events-and-publications/impact-case-studies/secure-water-supply-with-smart-hand-pumps

The ESRC’s portfolio of world-leading longitudinal data resources provides a unique set of evidence for researchers to inform decision-making
SOCIAL SCIENCE SHAPES SOCIETY

Responding to the Ebola crisis

In the early days of the 2014 Ebola crisis, some humanitarian response teams found themselves under attack from the people they were trying to help. A team of anthropologists set up the Ebola Response Anthropology Platform (ERAP), an online portal for live information and dialogue with communities. ERAP has been accessed by more than 16,000 users and shaped response activities in Sierra Leone, such as locally appropriate Community Care Centres, safe burials and vaccine trials. ERAP members also influenced UK response strategy and joined three core World Health Organisation committees.

Research led by Professor Melissa Leach
Watch a video about the research at youtu.be/WA75K532u7s

Protecting and empowering children online

Children’s use of the internet has rapidly increased, transforming their access to information, global participation and learning tools – but also introducing new threats to personal safety. The project UK Children Go Online was the first large-scale study on the potential risks and benefits of online use for children, looking at how 9-19 year-olds access and use the internet. Findings from the project led to the establishment of the UK Council for Child Internet Safety and informed the UK’s first Child Online Safety Strategy, introducing e-safety as a topic in the curriculum. The project developed two new treatments and training for multidisciplinary staff such as psychologists, nurses, probation officers, who are now offering treatment nationally across more than 30 UK forensic hospitals. The treatment programme now plays a central role in the care, sentence planning, and discharge and parole decisions.

Research led by Professor Theresa Gannon
Watch a video at www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y6VW4iSh-HU

Pioneering treatment for firesetters

Every week, criminal firesetting in the UK causes 65 casualties and costs over £40 million. Groundbreaking research on deliberate firesetting has resulted in the first effective treatment programme for offenders, which is being adopted by Australia, North America and Europe. The research produced the first comprehensive theory of deliberate firesetting and the first standardised treatment for the 1,500 firesetters convicted in England and Wales each year. Following treatment, offenders are 3.5 times more likely to reduce their interest in starting fires. The project developed two new treatments and training for multidisciplinary staff such as psychologists, nurses, probation officers, who are now offering treatment nationally across more than 30 UK forensic hospitals. The treatment programme now plays a central role in the care, sentence planning, and discharge and parole decisions.

Research led by Professor Sonia Livingstone
Read more about the research at www.esrc.ac.uk/news-events-and-publications/impact-case-studies/protecting-and-empowering-children-online

ESRC's international research has been instrumental in helping the lives of the poorest people
SOCIAL SCIENCE INFORMS POLICY AND PRACTICE

Support against adolescent to parent violence
Research prompted the first formal government policy recognition of adolescent to parent violence, and a collaboration with the Home Office and Youth Justice Board led to the 2015 government guidance and advice for professionals working within health, education, social care, housing, policing and youth justice. The policy guidance and research findings are now being used to inform the training and practice of thousands of practitioners, as well as offering guidance for housing providers nationwide in cases of disruptive behaviour and potential family evictions.
Research by Professor Rachel Condry
Read about the research at: www.esrc.ac.uk/news-events-and-publications/impact-case-studies/support-against-adolescent-to-parent-violence

Changing the policy mindset on cycling
Despite government encouragement, and unquestionable economic, health and social benefits, relatively few British people have been getting on their bikes. ESRC-funded research set out to investigate why, and over the past six years the researcher has played a pivotal role in promoting cycling-friendly planning and policy to transport decision-makers, policymakers and the public. The research has had direct impact on cycling policy in London and beyond, improving guidance for designing cycling infrastructure in London and leading to the creation of ‘cycle superhighways’ with segregated cycle tracks. The researcher introduced cycling ‘near misses’ police reporting, and helped develop the online Propensity to Cycle Tool to support transport planners and policymakers in deciding where cycling has the greatest growth potential.
Research led by Dr Rachel Aldred
Watch a video at youtu.be/eZ26Oa7RfIE

Changing stop and search legislation in Scotland
Doctoral research revealed very high levels of stop and search incidents in Scotland – targeted disproportionately at teenage boys, undertaken without scrutiny or accountability, and largely carried out without reasonable grounds for suspicion. The research sparked a wide debate, resulting in a 93% reduction in stop searches and seizures between August 2013 and December 2015. The findings led to the Scottish Parliament passing the 2015 Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act which abolished non-statutory stop and search and created a statutory Code of Practice.
Research by Dr Kath Murray
Watch a video about the research at youtu.be/m6B-pDZQfuE

ESRC research plays a major role in informing government policy, from welfare and benefits to health and education
Find out more

Festival – Our annual Festival of Social Science takes place across the UK via public debates, conferences, workshops, interactive seminars, film screenings, virtual exhibitions and much more.

Blog – Read our blog and find out what our community is talking about:

Scoop.it – See how our research has been making the headlines:

Facebook – Follow us and connect with our community:

Email alerts – Sign up to receive email updates on a range of topics, including funding opportunities, news, events, case studies and publications:

Twitter – Find out about the latest ESRC features, case studies, press releases, events and funding. Seen something interesting? Tweet and let us know:

Youtube – View our videos which present our latest research and impacts:

Website – Our website gives you free access to expert opinion, informed debate, features and research findings:

Society Now

Global challenges
Making the case for co-operation

Boundary changes
Redrawing the UK political map

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