

# Society Now

**PLUS!**  
**Society Now  
IN FOCUS**  
*8 page supplement*  
**Innovation, skills  
& technology**

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**ESRC RESEARCH MAKING AN IMPACT**  
SUMMER 2010 ISSUE 7



## A helping hand?

### Aiding development in poor countries



**Rude  
awakening: Our  
straight-talking  
society**



**Paul  
Whiteley:  
The politics  
of voting**



**Dad of  
our time:  
Modern  
fatherhood**

# Welcome

to the summer issue of *Society Now*, the ESRC's regular magazine which showcases our funded research and the impact of social science.

The impact of the recession is felt across the globe – nowhere more so than in the developing world. Adding to declining income from trade is the threat to cutbacks in foreign aid. Our main feature on page 10 looks at how aid delivers when it comes to long-term development in poor countries, and where it is the most effective.

The magazine's 'In Focus' supplement in this issue focuses on innovation, skills and technology – key areas to drive economic growth in a financially challenging climate.

This will be the first issue of *Society Now* that is published fully online, using a dynamic PDF presentation as well as a print-friendly version. With this online publication our aim is to reach an even wider readership.

I hope you will 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**

### INNOVATION, SKILLS & TECHNOLOGY

This supplement highlights research within the ESRC strategic challenge on New Technology, Innovation and Skills. We look at skills development, how innovation can strengthen the economy, and the challenge of turning research into revenue.



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## Tapping older workers' experience

RECENT INDUSTRIAL TRAINING policies in the UK have prioritised the vocational training of 'older workers'. This focus reflects population predictions that over the next 25 years an increasing number of older people will be willing, able and in many cases obliged for financial reasons to remain in paid employment after the age when they might have retired. But how should older workers' learning and development best be supported? Researchers explored the employment of older workers in a range of organisations from Scotland's hospitality sector and visitor attraction centres in a new 18-month study. Findings indicate that in terms of older workers, workforce development might best be focused on utilising existing skills rather than acquiring new ones.

"In this study we explored the learning strategies of older workers within organisations to identify how government, industry bodies and employers might improve the 'cultures of learning' within enterprises to support the continued development of this important age group," explains Dr Roy Canning.

"We found that older workers are generally highly valued employees within organisations, particularly for contributing with their experience as former employees from related

enterprises and for their informal support of colleagues," Dr Canning continues. "They are also generally seen as reliable with excellent customer service skill-sets and a strong work ethic. Moreover, contrary to expectations there appeared to be few conflict-related issues associated with older employees and their usually much younger managers. Interestingly, in many cases older workers were very much the sort of people who fit in with what

**“ Older workers are generally seen as reliable with excellent customer service skill-sets and a strong work ethic ”**

the hospitality industry is looking for. They are flexible and can work seasonal and odd hours for competitive wages, as the post-retirement job often is a supplement for their pension."

Findings further suggest there is no need to try and shape the occupational identity of older workers. A good fit can be achieved by recruitment and selection followed by appropriate training and development. Training and development interventions for older workers should, on the most part, concentrate on team building, skill utilisation within collaborative practice and encouragement of self-directed learning. "There is a need to prioritise skill

utilisation rather than skill acquisition in the case of older workers," Dr Canning points out. "This is about valuing their experience and acknowledging the role older workers can play as informal mentors to younger staff."

The 'revolving door' approach to training, where every employee attends standardised courses in order to comply with basic legislative requirements or company policy, may not always be appropriate to the needs

of the more experienced worker. They may benefit from a more customised approach to learning based on the recognition of their prior experience and work roles. In essence, Dr Canning concludes, this means taking a more learner-centred approach to their training. ■

*For more information on skills development and innovation see the 'In Focus' supplement which appears at the end of this magazine*

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 ESRC Grant Number RES-000-22-2506

## IN BRIEF

### DESIGNING HEALTHY TOWNS

Planners are increasingly called upon to 'return to their public health roots' and design healthy towns and cities. This project examines the role of the built environment in anti-obesity policy and aims to investigate how planners are resolving the imperative to 'act now', given the lack of evidence about how to design healthier towns.

ESRC grant number RES-000-22-3780-A

### MISSING PEOPLE

The realities involved when people 'go missing' will be explored in a new study which examines this issue from multiple perspectives, using the voices and opinions of the police, families and the returned missing people themselves. The study aims to understand more about how people go missing, where they go and how the police and families respond to such events.

ESRC grant number RES-062-23-2492

### AT RISK OF BEING BULLIED

While about ten per cent of all 11-18 year olds are bullied 'sometimes' at school, pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN) appear to have a 50 per cent risk of being bullied. A new study will explore the extent of bullying experienced by pupils with SEN and the relative risks of being bullied according to the different categories of SEN.

ESRC grant number RES-000-22-3801



## University-business contact faces constraints

IN RECENT YEARS there has been an increasing focus on the role universities play in the economy and their impact on promoting innovation, productivity and social welfare. To date, however, there has been a 'prescriptive' view of university-business interactions narrowly focusing on technology transfer.

Although technology transfer may be important, suggests a major new study, it would be wrong to concentrate solely on the opportunities for commercialisation of science through mechanisms such as patents, licences and spin-outs.

"Our findings show that technology transfer through such mechanisms is important, but this presents an incomplete representation of the wide process of knowledge exchange that takes place between academics from all disciplines with partners in the private, public and third sector including charities, voluntary organisations and social enterprises," researcher Michael Kitson points out. "We believe it is also necessary to focus on the more diverse and varied impacts of business-university knowledge exchange relations.

"Evidence from our case studies and survey responses from more than 22,000 academics and 2,500 businesses indicates the numerous mechanisms through which academics are engaging with society," continues Mr Kitson. "These include a range of people-based, problem-solving and community-orientated activities. The importance of diversity is also apparent. We found

that different universities have different strengths and impacts on local and regional development."

The study pinpoints, however, a range of constraints that prevent or deter business-university interactions. The major constraints are lack of resources to manage interactions, lack of public policy programmes to encourage interactions, difficulty in identifying partners, and insufficient benefits from interactions. Academics identified a similar pattern of constraints, the most important being bureaucracy, lack of time and insufficient rewards.

"Although the evidence from our survey shows that academics are engaged in a wide range of knowledge exchange activities, it also suggests some areas for caution," Mr Kitson warns. "The major constraint on interactions is lack of time. And there may be little capacity left in the university system for a greater level of interaction between academics and external organisations – especially if the system has to bear the impact of cuts in public expenditure in the near future." ■

*For more information on skills development and innovation see the 'In Focus' supplement which appears at the end of this magazine*



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## Speaking with many tongues

THE INCREASING LINGUISTIC diversity of the UK attracts much interest, yet little is known about the numbers of people who speak different languages. Research into the languages spoken by London state school pupils in 2008 finds around 60 per cent to be English speakers. However, over 40 languages were spoken by more than 1,000 pupils, with Bengali, Urdu and Somali the top three languages spoken. Interestingly, in terms of educational inequality 'black Africans' and 'white other' pupils are among the low attainers. But language provides an extra dimension to this inequality: for

example, within the black African category English, Yoruba and Igbo speakers appear among the high attainers. Within the 'white other' group, Spanish, English, Greek, Serbian/Croatian/ Bosnian and French are among the high attainers. ■

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## Child mortality not linked to lowest status

ABOUT TEN MILLION children die each year before their first birthday and one quarter of these deaths occur in India. Previous studies have shown that the largest burden of death is borne primarily by poorer people within poorer countries. But a major new study challenges conventional wisdom that socio-economic status is overwhelmingly important in determining child mortality rates.

"In India Muslims have poorer socio-economic status than Hindus," says Dr Sonia Bhalotra. "They are a minority group which, it has been argued, may have poorer access to public services. Nevertheless, they have persistently achieved substantially higher child survival rates than Hindus. This remarkable fact has so far escaped attention and analysis."

As low- and high-caste Hindus exhibit higher child mortality rates than Muslims, it seems unlikely that socio-economic status explains the difference. This is confirmed in the

analysis, which suggests that some of the difference may be on account of a lower degree of son preference and healthier behaviours among Muslims. "While this may explain some of the difference, perhaps the key point is that nothing that is commonly measured and included in models of mortality can explain the Muslim advantage in survival," Dr Bhalotra points out.

This said, a policy implication of the project is that investments in girls can bring down average infant mortality rates, both directly and also through improving the health of mothers. The results also indicate that infant mortality risk in a poor population may be increased by a vegetarian diet, for example if lentils (a source of protein) are unaffordable. ■

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## IN BRIEF



### FEELING IN CONTROL

People who feel that they have some degree of control over their lives and things that happen to them are psychologically healthier than those who feel helpless and that life just 'happens' to them. Distortions of feelings of control are linked to depression and suicide.

Researchers will study how mood affects the basic learning and memory processes that contribute to feelings of control. ESRC grant number RES-062-23-2525

### POLITICS OF DIVERGENCE

As a consequence of devolution, policy is now discussed within Scotland with little reference to equivalent discussions in England. Has the advent of devolution set in train a process whereby social and political attitudes in Scotland are growing apart from those in England? Research on a module of questions included on the 2010 British and Scottish Social Attitudes survey will help address this issue.

ESRC grant number RES-000-22-4108

### WORKING FROM HOME

What is the impact on female unemployment of uneven technological progress – specifically the structural transformation from manufacturing to services and the market of home production? Researchers will investigate the impact of both developments on the rise of female market hours of work. These developments appear to be 'women-friendly' because women are more likely to work in services and are the main providers of home services.

ESRC grant number RES-000-22-4114

## IN BRIEF



### UK POLICING ABROAD

Since 1989, the UK police have been involved in peace support operations within post conflict states. Researchers will interview police who have been involved in these operations in places such as Kosovo, Iraq and Afghanistan on the critical issue of community policing, and examine UK policing practices as a blueprint for democratic police reform.

ESRC grant number RES-000-22-3922

### EYEWITNESS ASSISTANCE

Visual identification plays an important role in the investigation of crimes, and eyewitness evidence can play a major role in prosecutions. This study will undertake a detailed statistical analysis of the outcome of video identification parades conducted in a sample of Scottish and English police forces in 2008-2009. Researchers will develop a draft identification package for police forces based on up-to-date psychological research.

ESRC grant number RES-189-25-0110

### MIGRANT NETWORKS

This study focuses on the UK Chinese community and explores the nature and extent of family and social networks both within and outside the Chinese community in the UK, as well as any connections with families or communities in Hong Kong. The findings will shed light on how these relationships affect the use of health and social care.

ESRC grant number RES-000-22-3656

## Pregnancy and drug use

DRUG-USING WOMEN are highly motivated by pregnancy to seek treatment for their drug problem, concludes a new qualitative study from the University of Kent. Based on interviews with pregnant substance-misusing women, antenatal staff and specialist drug workers, findings reveal that pregnancy is sometimes the first time that women acknowledged their drug use to health professionals. "All those interviewed reported that either pregnancy or the birth of their babies was a spur for their re-engagement with drug treatment services,

a 'turning point' which made them re-evaluate their drug use and the shape of their lives," says Dr Polly Radcliffe. "But unlike the middle-class male opiate users whom studies have found overwhelmingly recover naturally, the women interviewed referred to drug treatment services as crucial in the development of their non-addict identities." ■



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## More ethnic is more healthy

ETHNIC MINORITIES may experience some benefits from living in more ethnically dense areas, shows new research. To date, UK studies have shown consistent inequality between the health of ethnic minorities and that of white people, with poorer socio-economic position and exposure to racism leading to poorer physical and mental health for ethnic minority people. But, say Dr Mai Stafford, Dr Laia Bécarea and Professor James Nazroo, new findings suggest that the concentration of ethnic minority people in particular areas (the 'ethnic density') may mitigate against some of these effects.

Researchers analysed three nationally representative datasets: the 2005 and 2007 Citizenship Survey, the Fourth National Survey of Ethnic Minorities, and the 1999 and 2004 Health Survey for England. "While some of our findings were inconclusive and ethnic density performs differently across ethnic groups, our evidence clearly showed that ethnic minority people living in areas of higher ethnic density reported experiencing less racism, and were less detrimentally

affected by experienced racist events," Dr Stafford points out.

Researchers found a tendency for the detrimental impact of racism on health to decrease as ethnic density increased, suggesting that ethnic density may buffer against the impact of racism on health. The protective benefits of ethnic density for some ethnic groups appear to extend to lower rates of psychotic symptoms, a reduced likelihood of exceeding sensible drinking recommendations, greater respect for ethnic differences and people in the area getting on well together.

"Overall, our study indicated an ethnic density effect on psychological outcomes, although an effect for physical health outcomes was less clear," Dr Stafford explains. "We have also added to the weight of evidence pointing to the detrimental impact of racism on health." ■



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## Councils need to manage public expectations

BETTER MANAGEMENT of people's expectations regarding public services such as rubbish collection and road gritting could lead to improved levels of satisfaction, says new research. Indeed, public dissatisfaction may stem from people's high expectations, rather than reflect any objective measure of the performance of local services.

"Our study found that people's satisfaction with public services is affected by a variety of factors, and that levels of satisfaction could be improved by managing users' expectations," says Professor Oliver James at the University of Exeter. "Expectations of what public services should deliver have significant influence on public opinion of the quality of services," he continues. "Providing the public with information about the cost and performance of local public services can also have an impact on satisfaction levels."

Drawing from a model of attitudes towards local government services in England based on a national survey, the study found that the probability of people reporting satisfaction with local council services rises from less than 20 per cent to over 60 per cent when their expectations are met or exceeded.

Another strand of the research demonstrates that provision of public information about the cost and performance of local public services such as that provided in

Comprehensive Area Assessments (CAAs) can make local citizens revise their attitudes towards services, making them more in line with the 'objective' data.

In an examination of the standards of evidence for assessing public service performance, the researchers found that CAAs did not always provide an adequate basis for measuring the performance of managers. "Politicians may be fooled by the randomness of CAAs into blaming managers for deterioration, or, conversely, for rewarding them for improvement that is not of their making," Professor James says.

Overall, the findings suggest potential for dialogue between government and its citizens about expectations and performance. "These research findings have high salience at a time of fiscal restraint, when spending on services is unlikely to increase at a similar rate to that in recent years, making service improvements more difficult to achieve," Professor James points out. "If citizens and service users are not to be disappointed, they may have to contribute more to public services and revise their expectations down." ■

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## Promoting parks

DESPITE A FINE LEGACY of garden squares, parks and cemeteries, since the 1930s Liverpool has seriously neglected its green space inheritance, states a new study. While local people's needs for parks are as great now as they were in the past, the management of urban green space "has not been seen as a priority by the City Council", researchers conclude.

A pilot survey from Liverpool's Newsham Park highlighted people's concerns with criminal behaviour and dangerous dogs as well as feelings of exclusion among certain vulnerable groups, including pensioners, children and lone women. The survey also identified local people's concerns that parks were not being appropriately maintained, as well as a sense of nostalgia for the park's former glory days.

"This project provides the first systematic study of the history of parks and open spaces in Liverpool," says Professor Robert Lee. "We have raised awareness of policy issues relating to the future strategy for parks and open spaces by demonstrating their historical contribution to the health and welfare of local communities as well as highlighting current concerns of park users. Our feasibility study suggests the need for a review of the current management of parks in the city and the practical implementation of the existing Parks Strategy." ■

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## Authorities become more risk-aware

IS THE DEVELOPMENT of a 'compensation culture' in the UK and Ireland affecting the delivery of public services? Commentators have suggested that spiralling claims for compensation are having adverse effects on the financial health of public service providers and on their capacity to deliver public services efficiently and effectively. "There is a perception that some activities are too risky for local authorities to undertake, and that others must be managed defensively," suggests Professor Simon Halliday.

However, new comparative research into road maintenance in local authorities in Ireland and Scotland finds that claims of a rising 'compensation culture' in relation to roads are exaggerated. Claiming rates appear to have been broadly stable over the last decade. Researchers find that local authorities are adopting a two-track approach to compensation claiming. So, in addition to reducing the likelihood of liability arising, public authorities are also seeking to minimise the impact when liability does occur. "It's generally thus a case of local authorities becoming more risk-aware and risk-responsive as opposed to risk-averse," Professor Halliday concludes. ■

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## Parents in prison cause long-term problems

AROUND 125,000 (about one per cent) of children under 18 have a parent in prison in England or Wales. The possible effects of parental imprisonment on children is an issue of increasing social concern, Dr Joseph Murray says. "Our systematic review of evidence suggests that children of prisoners have about twice the risk of antisocial behaviour and poor mental health outcomes compared to children without imprisoned parents," he states.

What plausible explanations may account for this finding? Research suggests that parental imprisonment can cause many problems for the family left behind – including difficulty in organising childcare, loss of family income, stigma, trouble maintaining contact with the imprisoned parent, and home, school and neighbourhood moves. Children and parents can become distressed by the separation and children may respond by acting out or becoming withdrawn, anxious or depressed.

But children of prisoners are often highly disadvantaged even before their parent is imprisoned, and this disadvantage might cause their behavioural outcomes, rather than parental imprisonment itself. In particular, studies from several countries suggest that parental criminality is a strong predictor of children's own criminal behaviour, and this might be the driving factor.

Evidence from an English cohort study shows that parental

imprisonment predicted boys' delinquency even after controlling for parental criminality and other childhood risks. A study in Sweden revealed that parental imprisonment predicted children's own criminal behaviour, but, unlike in England, the effects of parental imprisonment disappeared after accounting for the criminality of the parent. "This cross-national difference may have been the result of shorter prison sentences in Sweden, more family-friendly prison policies, a welfare-orientated juvenile justice system, an extended social welfare system, and more sympathetic public attitudes toward crime and punishment," Dr Murray explains.

Evidence from Switzerland indicates that childhood aggressive behaviours were influenced by other types of family stress in infancy, such as illnesses and accidents of primary care-givers, parental conflict, household instability, and economic strain. Based on a national British study, the researchers also found that very early life events are quite strong predictors of crime in adulthood. "These complementary studies point to a cycle of antisocial behaviour and negative life events that flow from childhood into adult life and across generations," Dr Murray concludes. ■

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## Lives interrupted

YOUNG MEN IN CUSTODY feel that the criminal justice system interrupts their whole lives, according to a new 14-month research project into the impact of the criminal justice system. Findings indicate that prior to incarceration, the young men's education and employment had been disrupted by protracted court proceedings. During incarceration, interruptive factors included moves to different prisons and inconsistency of available courses across prisons. Beyond custody, the young men felt

that incarceration would have an impact on continuing education and job opportunities. "The force of the system, they said, interrupted not only education, but employment and family and social networks too," concludes prison ethnographer Dr Anita Wilson. ■

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## 'League table teaching' limits independent learning

TEACHING PRACTICES adopted to ensure that schools perform in league tables may not be conducive to helping maths students make a successful transition to A/AS level maths and beyond.

Research carried out in two sixth-form colleges and four schools explored whether the transition from GCSE to post-compulsory education posed a particular barrier to pupils' progression in maths. Findings show that where teachers 'take control' of the learning (a practice believed to achieve league table success), little room is left for some pupils to develop 'self-directing' learning skills. Once at college, these students often face demands for independence of learning and conceptual understanding

(particularly in algebra) for which they are unprepared.

"College teachers often misunderstand what these students know and are able to do in mathematics," explains Dr Paul Hernandez-Martinez. "Teachers report that what helps students are practices where students take control of their own learning, such as projects, students' explanations of mathematical concepts and class discussion. We conclude that some practices on both sides of the transition are not designed to develop the skills that many students need." ■

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## IN BRIEF



### GYMNAST DIET PRESSURES

How much of a problem are eating disorders among UK gymnasts? Researchers, in partnership with British Gymnastics, aim to investigate this issue, which is timely given the pressures on UK athletes when London hosts the 2012 Olympics. Recommendations will be made regarding policies to improve the welfare of gymnasts trying to achieve their potential. ESRC grant number RES-000-22-4021

### BRAZIL'S NEW ECONOMY

In the mid-1990s, Brazil began an unprecedented process of economic restructuring. This study examines the relationship between economic restructuring on one hand, and the accelerating environmental degradation, crime, industrial concentration and regional inequality on the other. Each of these areas represents a barrier to the sustainability of the process of economic restructuring. ESRC grant number RES-238-25-0008

### BETTER CRITICAL CARE

In response to reports on preventable deaths, South East Coast Ambulance NHS Trust has developed a new breed of critical care paramedics (CCPs) to improve care among ill and injured patients. Researchers will evaluate CCPs from perspectives including improvements in clinical outcomes, economic efficiency, and CCP training and competence. ESRC grant number RES-173-27-0187



# First aid or lasting aid

Twenty-five years after Live Aid, aid for poor countries is under siege from the global recession. While the case for emergency relief is obvious, is long-term aid beneficial for poor countries? Our panel of commentators examines the case of aid and development



## THE DEMAND FOR EFFECTIVE AID

**Dr Peter Boone, Research Associate at the ESRC Centre for Economic Performance and Chair of the foreign aid charity Effective Intervention**

AID, AS WE KNOW IT, is at a watershed. The developing world is growing fast and changing. The former wealthy world is sinking in debt. The need for aid in today's poor nations is on the decline, while the appetite for giving aid will wane. Will this evolve into a healthy process for reforming aid, or will aid pass, like the coal mines and steel mills of our own history, into an unpleasant decline before disappearing into history books? The answer to this question will depend on the vision of our politicians, and the public pressure applied to make aid work better. We can surely spend less and still achieve much more.

Today over \$100 billion annually is provided by wealthy nations to over 100 poorer nations. The sums are clear, but the results are not. The great global successes with poverty reduction – first China, and now India – received miniscule foreign assistance throughout their development. These nations are credited with bringing one-third of the world's population out of poverty. It is the past heavy recipients of aid, such as the small sub-Saharan African countries, who are not succeeding. More sophisticated analyses of aid suggest similarly: nations that get more aid, holding all else equal, fare no better than nations that get less.

Africa is, despite its poverty, endowed with great commodity wealth. The arrival of new Chinese and Indian demand for these commodities is already buoying sub-Saharan Africa's growth. The better managed nations will be awash with funds that can be used to improve health, education and build infrastructure. This is why our aid industry must change. Throughout our short aid history, donors

have provided aid to national governments, picking and choosing countries according to their poverty, historical ties, and political necessity. We similarly abandoned those nations mired in social and political troubles where the art of giving is tough, and we have few mechanisms to reach isolated communities out of favour with national governments.

It is troubled nations like Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Ethiopia and Somalia that will have difficulty building governments that benefit from world growth or fight poverty well. There are thousands of 'disenfranchised' minorities throughout Africa, Asia and India who are cut off from opportunities due to multi-level discrimination that guarantees a cycle of illiteracy, innumeracy, poor health services and poverty. These are the regions and countries where aid will be needed in the future.

Today's aid industry, with its focus on government-to-government assistance and weak project implementation and monitoring skills, does not have the capacity to wage this war of the future. To fight this war we need to take three major steps: first, we should review the global map of poverty and wind down aid to the many national governments where aid is no longer needed. Second, we should specialise in working with populations who lack national government support. This will often be the only means to help the extreme poor win greater opportunities as the world grows wealthier around them. Finally, we should abandon the relentless debate over whether to give more aid, for the more important and realistic demand that aid should be made more effective.

Smaller, more efficient steel mills that reached niche markets proved winners over the behemoths of the antiquated steel industry. The same will be true for foreign assistance: we need smaller but more efficient aid.



## TACKLING THE BARRIERS TO GROWTH

**Max Lawson, Oxfam Head of Development Finance**

**HAND UP OR HAND-OUT?** This question has dominated recent discussions on aid, with critics claiming that billions given to poor countries failed to deliver economic growth and may even have been held back. It is a seductive argument – ‘despite aid, much of Africa remains poor’ – particularly at a time when rich country governments are under unprecedented pressure to tighten their belts. But, as Oxfam’s report *21st-Century Aid – Recognising Success and Tackling Failure* shows, it does not stand up to scrutiny.

Aid is not perfect (what is?) and if it is to improve we have to recognise its faults. Despite recent improvements, too much is still spent on dubious consultants or given with the aim of supporting the donor country’s national interest rather than to reduce poverty. And yes, we need to step up the fight against corruption to ensure that money reaches those who need it. But 21st century aid that is predictable, strengthens public services, helps hold governments to account and empowers local people is already making a massive difference, and has the potential to do more.

Here are some facts: aid has helped to put 33 million more children into school than ten years ago. Millions of lives have been saved by HIV medicines and the distribution of bed nets to protect men, women and children from malaria – both paid for by aid. Each of

these statistics is made up of countless individual stories of lives saved or transformed for the better, but each also has a wider economic benefit. Numerous studies have shown the importance of improved education to countries’ economies. Malaria alone is estimated to cost Africa £12 billion every year in lost growth. If education, health, agricultural development and basic infrastructure such as a clean water supply are crucial to economic growth, then for many poor countries aid is the only viable source of the necessary investment.

We would all like to live in a world where aid is no longer needed, but suggestions that trade, domestic taxation or borrowing on the international capital markets could take its place are, in the short term at least, wildly optimistic. Poor countries suffer from unfair trade rules that restrict their ability to grow, and lose billions of pounds every year to offshore tax havens tolerated by rich nations. The recent economic crisis and past debt crises show the folly of poor countries relying on international capital markets to fund vital public services. If global financial markets can destabilise Greece, then what chance does Gabon have?

To get the best out of aid we need to address both its faults and the barriers to growth in poor countries. As well as fair trade rules and a crackdown on tax havens, that also means action to limit climate change and to protect poor countries from the excesses of financial markets. Only when these problems are addressed will a world without aid become a realistic possibility.



## POVERTY, AID AND SECURITY

**Professor Jude Howell, Director of the ESRC research programme Non-Governmental Public Action**

**AID HAS ALWAYS** been closely linked to the foreign policy, commercial and security interests of donor countries. With the end of the Cold War and the stark political-ideological rationale for aid, donor agencies were able to put poverty reduction at the forefront of their agendas. Within a decade, however, the security interests of Western governments once again led to the overtly strategic use of aid. The increasing blurring of boundaries between aid and security post-9/11 poses challenges for the effective use of aid for long-term sustainable development.

Global and national political leaders have asserted that poverty, deprivation and terrorism are related. This in turn has underpinned closer co-operation between global security, military and development agencies at the international level, the creation of new co-ordinating structures and positions, and the adoption of common approaches such as ‘whole-of-government approach’ or ‘fragile states’.

The relationship between aid and security is also mirrored in the closer interaction between aid, foreign policy and security agencies within national states. The US National Security Strategy of 2002, for example, emphasised the importance of the ‘three Ds’ – development, diplomacy and defence. Another indication of this close interaction is the increase in aid flows since 9/11 to countries on

the front-line of the ‘War on Terror’ such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Ethiopia and Pakistan.

At the local level the increasing security focus of aid can be seen in operations such as counter-terrorist assistance, more aid for education in Muslim majority countries, and support for curriculum reform in madrassas. It is also evident in increasing military engagement in developmental activities in Iraq and Afghanistan as part of a ‘hearts and minds’ counter-insurgency strategy.

Though President Obama has renounced the language of the ‘War on Terror’, counter-terrorism measures invoked in the name of national security continue to impinge upon aid objectives, policies and practices. First, the new checks put in place since 9/11 to ensure that aid money does not fall into the hands of supposed terrorist organisations, or sympathisers, undermines relations of trust between aid organisations and their partners. Second, humanitarian workers have become increasingly concerned that military intervention in development has blurred the lines between civil and military action, ultimately endangering humanitarian aid workers’ lives. Finally, the overarching concern with global and national security creates a dilemma for aid agencies that seek to prioritise poverty reduction as the ultimate criterion for determining aid objectives, flows and operations. Crucial to achieving this is the relative autonomy of aid institutions from military and political institutions. In a nutshell the security concerns of Western governments detract from fashioning aid policies that genuinely give priority to improving wellbeing across the world. ►



## EMPOWERING THE POOR

Richard Miller, Chief Executive of ActionAid

CAN AID HELP with long-term development? If we give the wrong types of aid, or don't work closely with local partners, then the impact can be minimal, or even damaging. But if we give not just more aid, but better aid, then the difference can be long lasting and life changing. Aid is only part of development, but it makes a critical difference.

ActionAid's approach to development is to focus on the root cause of global poverty: injustice and unequal power relations. Imbalances in power hurt the poor and excluded who can't enjoy their basic human rights. When the powerful deny the rights of the weak, then they also deny poor people the resources and opportunities they need to escape poverty.

When poor and excluded people, particularly women, assert their rights then they can start to gain influence in their communities and countries. This is the only way long-term change can be sustained. In practical terms this means the citizens of developing countries need to be responsible for decisions about where money is spent, what the priorities are and how to fund it. They have to hold their governments to account at all levels.

In Sierra Leone ActionAid has trained parents and teachers to track how school budgets are spent. When a school in western Sierra Leone found the government was renegeing on paying subsidies for each child, they lobbied the government for the money that was their due. Instead of disappearing into officials' pockets the money went on vital school repairs.

Simply building schools isn't enough to transform children's lives. Providing an education means the government must be committed to maintenance,

providing books and paying teachers' salaries, so ActionAid works with school management committees. Adult literacy programmes provide a springboard, as with greater self-confidence and dignity people learn to access information and demand services which are theirs by right.

Getting aid right is just part of the development process. Long-term development means looking at the whole picture: aid, governance, debt and trade, and working to get the voices and rights of poor people better heard in all of these areas.

Governance is vitally important. Many developing countries suffer from dirty elections, with politicians using vote buying, voter intimidation and ballot fraud to get and keep power. They are effective tactics for politicians, but not so for their countries. While properly conducted elections result in better economic policies, badly conducted elections see no improvement.

To combat dirty tactics in Nigeria's 2007 general elections ActionAid ran a 'No to Election Violence' campaign. Campaigners ran town meetings, handed out leaflets and did street theatre, all aimed at getting citizens to vote, and vote out violent politicians. Their efforts were then independently evaluated by the Centre for the Study of African Economies, which reported a 'consistent and statistically-significant reduction in actual violence' in the campaign areas. There was a ten per cent increase in voter turnout, and violent politicians got fewer votes.

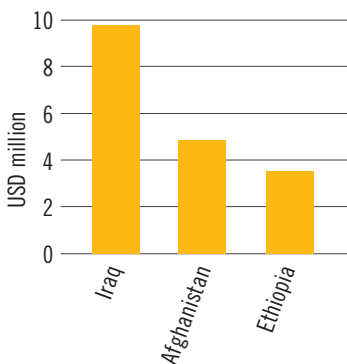
Non-governmental organisations recognise the increased importance of measuring impact and being as accountable as possible. The next phase of ActionAid's strategy will take into account our 'Taking Stock' process which is a frank and open assessment based not just on the views of our donors and supporters, but also the poor and vulnerable people with whom we work.

## Aid facts

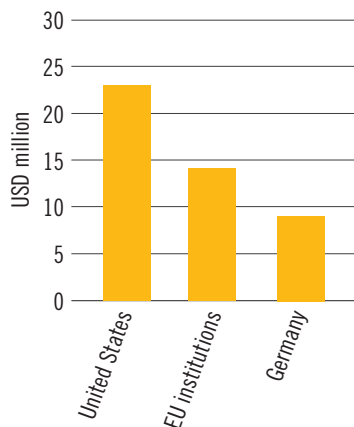
The West spent \$2,300,000 million on foreign aid over the last five decades

Source: *Share the World's Resources*

TOP THREE DEVELOPMENT AID RECIPIENTS IN 2008 (IN USD) Source: OECD



TOP THREE DONORS 2008 (IN USD) Source: OECD



0.7% of UK gross national income will be spent as official development assistance every year from 2013 (the percentage agreed on in 2000 Millennium Development Goals)

Source: *Department for International Development*

About 80 to 85 per cent of developmental aid comes from government sources

Source: *OECD*



## AID IN THE GLOBAL RECESSION

Professor Allister McGregor, Head of the Vulnerability and Poverty Reduction Team, University of Sussex, and former Director of the ESRC Wellbeing in Developing Countries Research Group

AT THE GLENEAGLES G8 summit in 2005 international donors made specific commitments to increase their official development assistance to around \$130 billion by 2010. However, now that we are in the midst of the greatest global recession since the Great Depression aid commitments are being scaled back, to the extent that the OECD estimates a shortfall of \$18 billion on that commitment. We stand on the brink of putting decades of development progress into reverse.

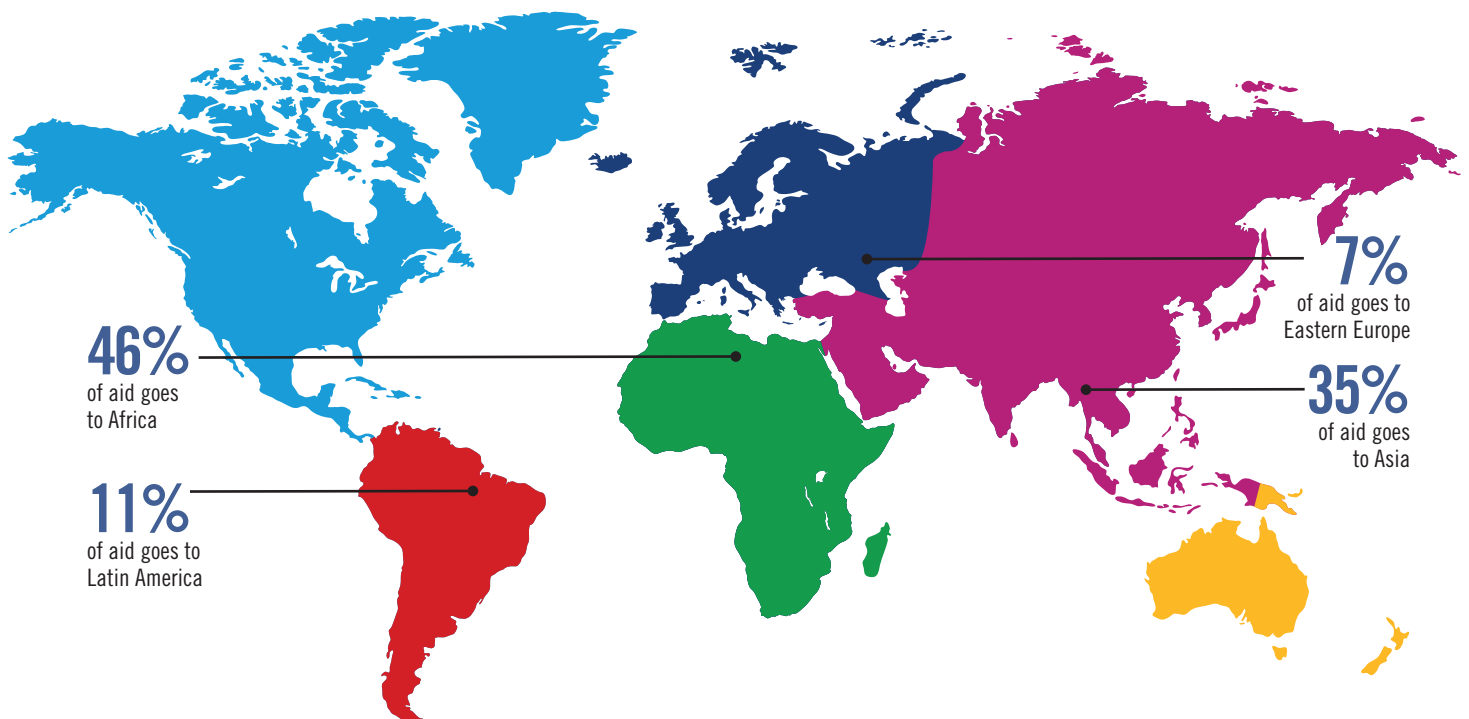
The story of recent development has been a mixed one. On the one hand we have seen good progress in growth and economic performance in many countries, but on the other there are concerns that the persistence of poverty and growing inequality represent serious threats to meaningful development. At the same time there is a perception we have entered a period of global instability where crises, whether caused by the global economy, climate change or by violent conflict, are becoming more common. Such crises both push the already poor deeper into poverty and increase the vulnerability of many others.

Some claim that the impact of the recession on developing countries has been nowhere near as bad as we might have feared, and others argue that some developing countries have proven to be remarkably resilient in maintaining growth. But much of this kind of assessment is only possible because the costs of coping with this crisis thus far have been borne by poor and vulnerable people at levels below the radar of most formal statistical assessment systems.

High food prices, job losses and increased costs of production have made it harder for people to feed their families well, to access good healthcare and to maintain the regular school attendance for their children. Qualitative studies tell us that even where countries have been 'resilient', the costs to individuals and households in their day-to-day lives may have been damagingly high.

The coping strategies that households and individuals have had to adopt have reduced their resilience to withstand further economic shocks, and are beginning to erode the foundations for future development progress. The World Bank estimates that the number of people living on \$1.25 per day or less will increase by some 64 million, compared with a no-crisis scenario. Global unemployment hit a record high of 212 million people in 2009 and is expected to go even higher during 2010, according to the International Labour Organization. Figures on hunger and nutrition are equally grim, estimating that the recession has deprived an additional 100 million people of access to adequate food, with more than one billion people currently undernourished.

As donor country governments begin to tackle high levels of public debt and lower their fiscal stimulus efforts, they are faced with a complex set of challenges in how they proceed with their official aid policy. The first challenge is to recognise the adverse impacts of the recession in many developing countries, and that this is precisely the time when levels of aid must be maintained to avoid profound development reverses. The second is to ensure that aid over the next years is delivered in ways that are dedicated not just to meet the emergency needs of those affected by crises, but also to rebuild resilience at the level of the individual, the household and the community. ■



Source: OECD



# People moves



With increasing global population migration, trends and data are becoming increasingly important. **Pamela Readhead** marks World Population day by taking a look at research carried out at the ESRC Centre for Population Change

**M**IGRATION POLICY is a topic that cropped up regularly during the general election campaign, and has relevance to many other policy areas including employment, poverty reduction, education and health. The United Nations' World Population Day on 11 July aims to raise awareness of the effects of increasing levels of international and internal migration, and the consequences for development policy.

The demographic and socio-economic impact of migration is one of four research themes to be tackled by a multi-disciplinary team at the new ESRC Centre for Population Change (CPC). The £5 million Centre was launched last year with the aim of improving our understanding of the key drivers and implications of population change within the UK. It is a joint initiative between the University of Southampton and a consortium of Scottish universities, in partnership with the Office for National Statistics and the General Register Office for Scotland.

"Understanding the implications of the changing patterns of migration, fertility, ageing, and family and household dynamics in our society is essential if we are to develop appropriate policy responses at the national, regional and local level,"

**Population patterns are heavily influenced by international and internal migration**

says Centre Director Professor Jane Falkingham at the University of Southampton. "This includes everything from providing adequate services to school children through to the design of pension schemes that accommodate today's increasingly mobile population."

The Centre brings together academics from a broad range of disciplines including demography, economics, geography, gerontology, sociology, social policy and social statistics. Accordingly, the research methods range from in-depth qualitative studies of individual demographic behaviour through to complex statistical and economic modelling.

Dr James Raymer, at the School of Social Sciences, University of Southampton, argues that our current understanding of population change is limited by the availability, quality and consistency of data. As part of the CPC research, Dr Raymer and his team are developing a methodology for the statistical modelling of population change over time, which they hope will give a far clearer picture of current and future patterns in the UK.

The model will take account of key transitions such as changes in place of residence, employment, partnerships and health. It will also offer a snapshot of population change at a local level and across sub-

groups by age, sex and ethnicity. The researchers hope this new tool will provide policymakers with information to understand the migration patterns of specific groups, such as white and non-white, young and elderly, first- and second-generation immigrants, skilled and unskilled, and the employed and unemployed.

One of the key drivers of local and national population change is migration. It is clear that people move for many reasons, often associated with family, work or amenities. However, statistics on these flows are often confusing or non-existent, Dr Raymer explains. The reason is twofold: First, there is no consensus on what 'migration' is and who is a 'migrant'. Second, a migration event is rarely measured directly, but is often inferred from data about residence. Matters are made worse because countries, within the UK and across the EU, use different methods of data collection.

In an earlier ESRC-funded study Dr Raymer and his colleagues addressed the data gap by combining existing migration data from censuses and population registers in England and Wales. Each of these data sources had limited value for understanding population changes over time and across groups. Censuses, for example, only take place every ten years and are published three to four years later. General purpose surveys, on the other hand, often do collect migration data but, because of relatively small sample sizes, they are usually inadequate below the national or broad regional levels. Population registers may also be used to track migration flows, but they seldom contain much demographic or socio-economic detail.

An additional problem is that the measurement of 'migration' is not consistent across various data sources, Dr Raymer explains. "Migration events, which can occur several times in a single year, are captured by population registration systems, while changes in residential status from one point in time to another are captured by censuses and surveys. So these two data collection systems

People are moving around more than ever – on a local, national and international level

Dr Raymer is also leading an international team of researchers on a NORFACE project to develop an integrated model for estimating migration flows between EU member states. As part of the €29 million research programme Migration in Europe: Social, Economic, Cultural and Policy Dynamics, he has been awarded a grant to provide a general framework for modelling migration flows between European countries in the context of inconsistent, inadequate and missing data.

The focus is on estimating recent international migration flows using data primarily collected by Eurostat and other publicly available sources, as well as qualitative information from experts. "At present, there has been little research on combining international migration data to provide overall pictures of population movements," Dr Raymer explains. "The proposed research will apply Bayesian statistical methods to harmonise and correct for inadequacies in the available data and to estimate completely missing flows."

Estimates of migration flows are needed so that governments have the means to improve planning policies for particular social services, or at influencing levels of migration. This is important because migration is increasingly the major factor contributing to population change. "Our understanding of how or why populations change also requires reliable information about migrants. Without this, the ability to predict, control or understand that change is limited," concludes Dr Raymer. ■

Pamela Readhead is a freelance journalist

**i** The ESRC funds a range of centres, programmes and resources addressing research on population and trends. For example:  
 Centre on Migration, Policy and Society [www.compas.ox.ac.uk](http://www.compas.ox.ac.uk)  
 Centre for Population Change [www.cpc.ac.uk](http://www.cpc.ac.uk)  
 Census of Population programme [www.census.ac.uk](http://www.census.ac.uk)  
 Understanding Population Trends and Processes [www.uptap.net](http://www.uptap.net)

**One of the key drivers of local and national population change is migration, but statistics on these flows are often confusing or nonexistent**

capture two different types of migration data – 'migrations' and 'migrants'.

In another study at CPC Dr Jackie Wahba and Dr Christian Schluter are investigating whether recent migrants 'crowd out' natives or earlier generation immigrants in the UK working population. They will also explore the role of social networks in helping migrants find jobs. The same team has been awarded a two-year grant from NORFACE (the part ESRC-funded New Opportunities for Research Funding Agency Cooperation in Europe programme) to explore what drives migrants in Europe to leave home, return, stay away and migrate legally or illegally.



# ESRC IMPACTS

## Fairly paid aid

For further ESRC Impact Case Studies visit  
[www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/strategicplan/achievements](http://www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/strategicplan/achievements)

Unfair pay practices for aid workers are challenged by ESRC/DFID research, leading to a new global task force promoting equity in organisations

**O**N AVERAGE, EXPATRIATE AID workers get four times more money than local employees for doing the same work. And that is not because of different levels of experience or skills, but rather because expatriates simply come from higher income economies. This is revealed by the research project ADD-UP (Are Development Discrepancies Undermining Performance?), funded through the joint ESRC/Department for International Development (DFID) Scheme for Research on International Poverty Reduction. The research has been instrumental in setting up a Global Task Force for Humanitarian Work Psychology to combat these inequalities.

According to the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, local and expatriate workers should be on similar pay scales. Project ADD-UP tested the impact of pay discrepancy on local workers' motivation in the health, education and business sectors of six countries: Malawi, Uganda, India, China, the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea. The project, which is led by Professor Stuart Carr at Massey University and Professor Mac MacLachlan at Trinity College Dublin, found that dual salaries create resentment, perpetuate

dominance and injustice, and undermine pride in low-income countries.

By bringing together the first global task force to tackle the issue, ADD-UP has made a convincing case for the need for change. The task force is an international network of researchers and practitioners from ten low- and high-income countries who have talked to professional workers and representatives from aid, government, educational and business organisations.

The research team argues that the role and impact of organisations and organisational cultures should be given much more attention. Data from ADD-UP shows that organisations play a central role in enabling fair pay and promoting the perception of greater work justice and equity. While poverty reduction policies commonly focus on economic development to overcome material deprivation, ADD-UP shows that organisational and industrial psychologists have an important role to play in working with aid organisations.

The task force promotes the use of organisational psychology and raises awareness of humanitarian work psychology among international aid and development organisations. It aims to achieve this by applying humanitarian principles to work settings of international organisations, such as the United Nations, the International Labour Organisation and the OECD.

The research team has just made its first full submission to the United Nations through the UN's call for fresh perspectives – *Keeping the Promise* (UN, 2010). This UN publication reflects the Task Force's mission by calling for greater attention to organisations and the human factors in organisational work. ■

Local workers in a European Union aid compound in Zwedru, Liberia



*Aid Salary Discrepancies and Development Workers' Performance*

ESRC Grant Number RES-167-25-0169

Web [poverty.massey.ac.nz/#addup](http://poverty.massey.ac.nz/#addup)

Project ADD-UP brings together an international team of psychologists, sociologists, management experts, educationalists, and economists from ten different countries. It is co-ordinated by Professor Stuart C. Carr (Poverty Research Group, Massey University, New Zealand) and Professor Mac MacLachlan (Centre for Global Health, Trinity College Dublin, Ireland).

For further information on the Global Task Force for Humanitarian Work Psychology, see [www.humworkpsy.org](http://www.humworkpsy.org)



# Our right to know

The Freedom of Information Act aims to increase openness and transparency in decision-making. It has only partially succeeded, says **Professor Robert Hazell**

All the major parties in the UK hold transparency to be the key to improving government and its relationship with the public. Freedom of Information (FOI) legislation aims to create this transparency by allowing the public to request information from a range of public authorities. However, the leak of MPs' expenses, triggered by an FOI request, shows that FOI may have unintended consequences for politicians.

Britain's FOI Act covers more than 100,000 public bodies. There have been around 100,000 requests per year, of which around 30,000 go to central government. Together with my colleague Ben Worthy I have sought to evaluate whether the objectives of FOI, as set by politicians, were being achieved and to assess the impact of FOI on the working of Whitehall.

FOI has two core aims: increasing openness and transparency and increasing accountability. Its four secondary aims flow from them: improving decision-making in government, improving public understanding of government decision-making, increasing public participation and increasing public trust in government.

The Act has achieved its core objectives but not the secondary ones. It has increased transparency, as the amount of information released has significantly increased, and the government is now more open. Across a range of subjects, from ministerial gifts or visits to the prime minister's country residence through to Common Agricultural Policy payments, the government is sharing more data. FOI has also strengthened accountability. It has been used by the media, MPs and campaigners to obtain explanations across a range of subjects from nuclear submarines to financial policy-making.

FOI has not improved government decision-making. Other initiatives, such as evidence-based policy-making, have had a much greater impact. Nor has it increased public understanding of government decision-making. Few requesters use the Act to access papers about decision-making, and newspapers rarely report disclosures that do so. Public participation has not increased as a result of FOI, as few people use it and those who do are often already engaged in the political process.

Newspaper reporting also explains why FOI has not increased trust. The small percentage of stories generated by FOI often concern poor behaviour, apparent government failure or negligence. This is often exacerbated by resistance from public authorities. This is not a failing of FOI but more about a hostile relationship between parts of the media and government, in which FOI becomes another weapon.

Many officials expressed concern that FOI may have a negative impact upon how government works, but it has not adversely affected the working of Whitehall. We found no evidence that FOI undermined collective cabinet responsibility, or ministerial accountability to Parliament. Civil servants are no less willing to give free and frank advice, and civil service neutrality is not jeopardised.

Nor has FOI caused a 'chilling effect', the idea that FOI means officials make fewer or less full records of meetings, or make decisions in non-recorded ways (by face-to-face meetings or over the telephone). When information is not properly recorded or circulated, it is due to factors other than FOI, such as leaks, the changing nature of decision-making owing to fewer resources, or increased use of electronic communications.

“Public participation has not increased as a result of FOI, as few people use it and those who do are often already engaged in the political process”

Our research challenges some common misperceptions about FOI. First, despite the focus on officials and requesters, the media are central players. Not only are the media key users of FOI, but given that so few people make FOI requests, they are the key conduit for shaping public perceptions of the Act. Second, in spite of the hope that FOI will find equilibrium, FOI never settles down. In terms of bureaucratic routine and a body of case law, it may, but at a wider political level it never does. Both sides will 'play games' and there will always be controversy. Third, FOI as a whole is not troublesome; a few high-profile FOI cases cause disproportionate effort, media attention, public controversy and political pain. Finally, FOI does not increase public trust, thanks to the media's largely negative reporting, exacerbated by government resistance to media requests.

The Freedom of Information Act can therefore be said to have been partly successful in terms of increasing transparency and accountability – but it has not met the goal of improving decision-making or building trust from the public. ■



Professor Robert Hazell is Director of the Constitution Unit at University College London. He led the ESRC-funded research project *Evaluating the Impact of Freedom of Information in the UK* with Research Associate Ben Worthy.

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Web [www.ucl.ac.uk/constitution-unit/research/foi/index.htm](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/constitution-unit/research/foi/index.htm)



# Football identities

Like few other sporting events, the World Cup inspires enthusiastic flag waving – but it is more than a matter of national pride, says **Professor Kath Woodward**

**F**ootball matters, as the euphoric build-up to the 2010 World Cup in South Africa demonstrates. In spite of initial anxieties about whether South African fans would want to or could afford to buy tickets, it was a sell-out on the first day.

Football, like most sports, is a global phenomenon in which sport, commerce and the media are enmeshed. Global sport offers high profiles to its star performers – and none more so than in football. How do national identifications work in the contemporary world of globalised, fluid sporting affiliations, where commercial interests and celebrity superstars dominate the sporting agenda and national attachments might appear to have been diluted?

Most of the top Premiership clubs in the Football League have very few English or British players, if any. Fair-weather fandom has taken

“ Football can be a source of national pride and identification – even in times of blurred boundaries and transnational affiliations and mobilities ”

over from traditional support, although there is still strong resistance to the dominance of foreign owners of clubs, as in the case of Manchester United. Many clubs retain a strong local fan base, but clubs often seem to matter more than country.

The English Premiership rules, not only in the UK, but, for the top five or six clubs, in the global arena. The stars of top clubs are celebrities in many parts of the globe, for example in China and in Africa. At the African Cup of Nations there have been more displays of the colours and strips of these clubs than of African nations among the crowds. In spite of the enormous enthusiasm, many fans prefer to watch the English Premiership on satellite television than to attend local games.

As the BBC World Service *Fast Track* programme demonstrates, there is special interest in the African players who play in the Premiership, like Emmanuel Adebayor of Togo and, most notably, Didier Drogba of Ivory Coast. But Ivory Coast matters more than Chelsea in the attachments that are made among fans, even if Chelsea is the medium through which Drogba has become famous. Fans have pride in their nation through their heroes who play in Europe as well as in the national team.

Sport is often configured around heroic narratives as well as those of celebrity, and it is the stories of heroes that lend themselves to national cultural identifications. Sport offers imagined communities, often represented on satellite television, where heroes as well as celebrities are made. These heroes are not only media fabrications, but belong to specific histories and places, even if they no longer reside there.

Sport also offers avenues of resistance, embodied in boxers like Muhammad Ali. Boxing has many such figures caught up in struggles against racism and in using sport as a route out of poverty. Football feeds hopes and aspirations, but is also implicated in political struggles, as in the case of women's football in Iran, where participation in sport can become part of a struggle even if that was not its initiating impetus. Sport has long been a site for the marginalisation and exclusion of women, and at some points the merging of masculinity with national identities has, and still does, marginalise women's sport. Supporters of the national team in, for example, cricket or football may not even know that there is a women's international competition taking place, let alone know their own nation's rankings.

National attachments are complicated. Nations do support and defend sporting heroes at times of crisis. The 800-metre champion Caster Semenya has been defended by her South African supporters after questions were raised regarding her gender.

Sport has the capacity to draw people in to its emotional flows and intensities as well as to entertain, and the discipline that goes into high achievement and the collective activity of its embodied pursuits mean that a sport like football can be a source of national pride and identification – even in times of blurred boundaries and transnational affiliations and mobilities. National attachments can be conservative and even reactionary, as some debates about the deployment of the flag of St George by England fans linked to behaviour at grounds and in the environs of grounds have shown. Such attachments, however, can also be productive, as we are witnessing in South Africa in 2010 when the World Cup comes to Africa for the first time. ■

**i** Professor Kath Woodward of the Open University specialises in gender identities and sport. She is an Affiliated Academic Member of the ESRC Centre for Research on Socio-Cultural Change.

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# The test of time

Compulsory driving tests were introduced 75 years ago – but are in need of an overhaul to meet modern demands, argues **Dr Lisa Dorn**

The infrastructure of our society is underpinned by extensive and frequent car use, but the age of mass motoring came at a price. By the 1930s motoring had become more affordable and increasingly popular, but in 1934 7,343 people were killed with only 2.4 million vehicles on the road. The compulsory driving test was introduced on 1 June 1935 to combat the rising levels of fatalities – and within a year road deaths had fallen by nearly a thousand.

Seventy-five years later there have been few changes to the driving test, yet in 2008 2,538 people were killed on UK roads, with over 30 million vehicles registered. This represents the lowest annual number of casualties since official records began in 1926. The question is – what are the road safety benefits of the current driving test? Is it still fit for purpose?

In recent decades, there have been many advances in road and vehicle engineering and the road environment, including a tenfold increase in traffic. Vehicle performance has improved dramatically, requiring ever more ingenious safety features to mitigate the effects of a crash. We also have widespread use of sophisticated in-vehicle technology such as mobile phones, with the potential to severely distract a driver's attention. In recent times, key contributors to crash involvement reflect fundamental changes in our society, with around one in six people killed on UK roads being the result of drink driving and around 20 per cent with illegal drugs in their system at the time of death.

There is little evidence that passing a driving test means novice drivers are safe; indeed they are more at risk of crash involvement post-test than at any other time in their driving careers. Research shows that for the first six months after the test, nearly 20 per cent reported having a crash and 70 per cent had a near miss. The ability of the test to identify those drivers that go on to be involved in a crash is rather limited – no relationship has been found between the number of faults committed on the driving test and crash involvement.

Knowledge of rules and traffic laws is often used as a measure of driving safety, and the driving test includes a theory component. However, increased knowledge seems to have little bearing on whether or not someone is likely to be involved in a crash. Findings indicate that driving records were no different for drivers who passed a traffic law test compared with those that did not take the traffic law test. Recent research

shows no association between a road safety-based knowledge test and collisions.

The reason for the poor relationship between test components and crash involvement is because liability depends on many factors other than driving standards. Young drivers in particular are over-represented in crash statistics, probably due to their increased exposure to risk. There are also well-documented attitudinal and behavioural factors associated with risk-taking, especially in the presence of peers. Young drivers also lack the ability to observe relevant information and judge traffic situations. This begs the question whether the current driving test is still fit for purpose in our modern car-based society.

Researchers have recommended greater focus on hazard-perception training as part of driver

“ Increased knowledge seems to have little bearing on whether or not someone is likely to be involved in a crash ”

licensing. Driver education software companies have developed online cognitive tasks to train key skills including eye-scanning abilities in realistic video-based driving environments. Another important improvement would be to increase post-licence driving experience among new drivers while limiting risk exposure. Graduated driver licensing allows drivers to gain experience under less risky driving situations including restrictions to night driving, passengers in the car, motorway and blood alcohol limit. Post-licence driving experience is associated with up to 50 per cent reduction in crash rates in the first six months of driving.

Ninety-four million driving tests have been carried out in the UK since 1935 and it remains one of the essential ingredients for road safety. The driving test can be relied upon to impart basic vehicle-control skills, but should not be expected to improve road safety directly. There is no doubt that it could reflect the current driving landscape and contribute more. Most importantly, the future driving test should promote the development of self-evaluation skills. ■

*i* Dr Lisa Dorn is a Reader in Driver Behaviour and Training at Cranfield University. Her research includes studies on driver behaviour under the ESRC/TRRL Psychology of Road User Behaviour programme.

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# THE UK BY NUMBERS BUSINESS

Here we present an at-a-glance overview of the key issues in Britain today. This issue our focus is on **business**. All statistics are from the Office of National Statistics unless otherwise stated

## Ownership and structure

**88.7%**

of businesses have less than ten employees

**65%**

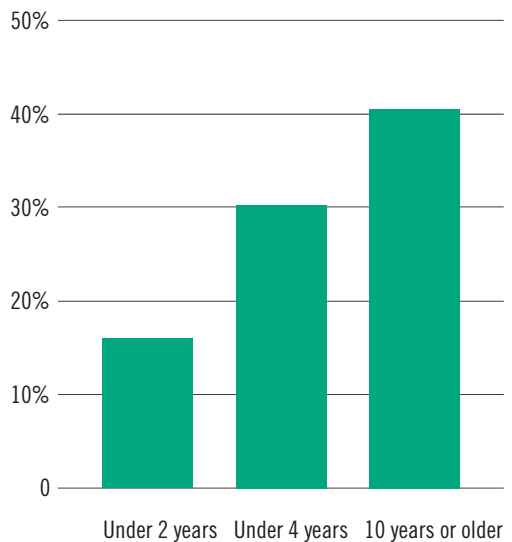
The percentage of UK private sector enterprises made up of family firms

Source: Institute for Family Business



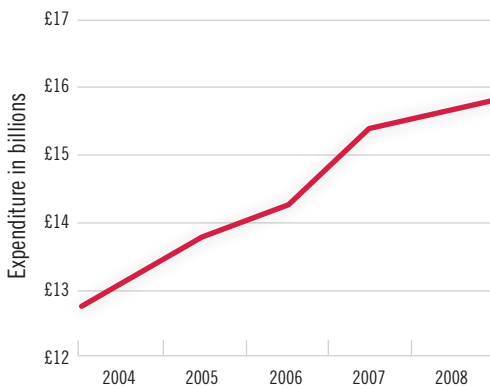
*“Eat and drink with your relatives; do business with strangers”* Greek proverb

### AGE OF BUSINESSES IN THE UK

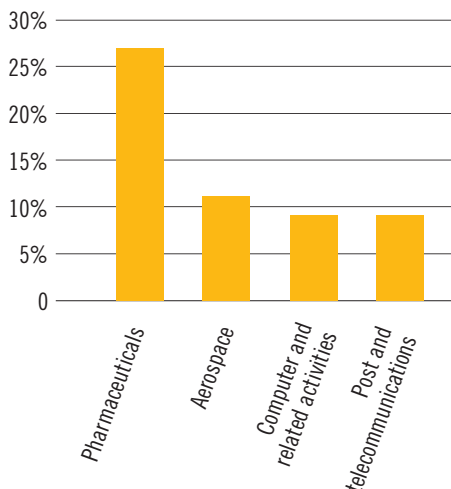


## Research and development

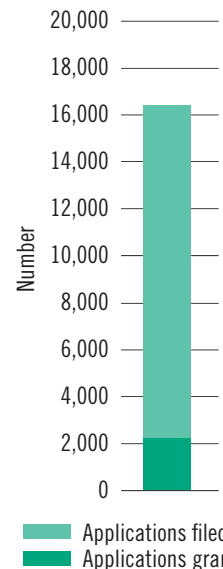
### TOTAL R&D EXPENDITURE



### MAIN AREAS OF R&D EXPENDITURE



### PATENTS Source: Intellectual Property Office



*“Drive thy business or it will drive thee”* Benjamin Franklin

# Gender

**14%**

of businesses with employees are majority women-led

Source: Government Equalities Office

**8.3%**

The percentage of patents awarded to women by the European Patent Office (2008)

Source: European Commission



## AVERAGE TURNOVER (MALE-VERSUS FEMALE-LED BUSINESSES)

Source: Government Equalities Office



# Import and export

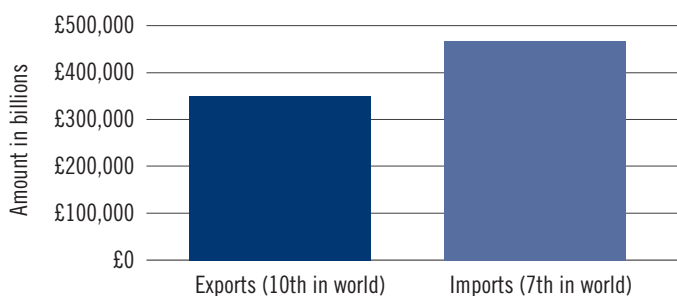
**£224,316m** Total value of UK exports for the 12 months ending December 2009 Source: HM Revenue and Customs

**10.5%** Decrease in total value of UK imports for the 12 months ending December 2009 compared to previous 12 months Source: HM Revenue and Customs

*“Business? It’s quite simple. It’s other people’s money”* Alexandre Dumas

## UK IMPORTS AND EXPORTS (2009)

Source: Central Intelligence Agency



# Insolvencies

**19,077** The number of liquidations in England and Wales in 2009 (increase of 22.8% on 2008)

Source: The Insolvency Service

**1 in 114** active companies went into liquidation in 2009

Source: The Insolvency Service



# Developing dad



From breadwinner to family man – the role of ‘dad’ is undergoing a radical makeover in our changing society. Marking 100 years of Father’s Day on 20 June this year, **Sarah Womack** explores the redefinition of fatherhood

**W**HEN Gordon Brown left Downing Street, he referred to the job of prime minister as the second most important job he had held.

Across the Atlantic, and Barack Obama’s bid for the US Presidency was built on a book-cum-calling-card *Dreams From My Father* about his absent father. “All my life, I carried a single image of my father,” Obama wrote. “One that I had later tried to take as my own. The brilliant scholar, the generous friend, the upstanding leader. A year after his death(...) I realised how even in his absence, his strong image had given me some bulwark on which to grow up, an image to live up to, or disappoint.”

This is the father-friendly rhetoric of the 21st century leader, but how much is it the reality of the everyday 21st century dad? For while men may feel their role as a father comes first, few would probably express such sentiment in the competitive workplace (even Mr Brown waited until he had quit his job). And millions of men abandoned by their fathers would find

Gordon Brown with his wife Sarah and sons John and Fraser, following his resignation statement in May

it hard to articulate that experience in quite so positive a way as Obama.

ESRC-funded research explores these issues and looks for answers. For Dr Jonathan Ives, the very issue of absent fathers has been behind the upsurge of interest – public and political – in modern fatherhood. Dr Ives, of Birmingham University’s Centre for Biomedical Ethics, is leading a study of men’s experiences of first-time fatherhood, from the 12th week of pregnancy to eight weeks after birth. He says fatherhood has become highly politicised.

“David Cameron claims that Britain is ‘broken’, and lays part of the blame on the fact that many children are growing up without strong father figures,” he says. “The message is that many of society’s ills are caused by ‘deadbeat dads’. It’s a simple, strong message, drawing on a range of wider social narratives, and has led to fatherhood becoming a political problem that can be solved by policy-making. ‘Fix fatherhood, fix Britain’ – it sounds flippant when put like that. Fatherhood is complex and

*Fathers are expected to attend the birth of their children and to have a stronger physical and emotional presence*



individual. Rightly or wrongly, politics can’t deal with that level of subtlety.”

According to Julia Brannen, Professor in Sociology at the Institute of Education, University of London, a ‘seismic change’ is underway for the role fathers play in the family. The strong breadwinner model of fatherhood dominated the last century, she explains. But since the post-Second World War rise in working mothers, greater importance has been placed on fathers who are expected to attend the birth of their children and have a stronger physical and emotional presence.

However, British fathers work the longest hours in Europe. “While fathers in Britain now have a right to two weeks paid paternity leave, they do not have a right to flexible hours when their children are young, but only the right to ask for



© iStock Photo

it," she says. "They also lack paid parental leave available to fathers in other European countries."

Professor Brannen's study, *Fathers across three family generations in Polish, Irish and UK origin white families*, is charting yet another strand of the complex issue of fatherhood: the conflicts migrants experience in providing for their children. Like the Irish who came to Britain before them, Poles are often employed in insecure and tough manual jobs. They work long hours and face hostility and, even more than in previous migrant generations, have difficulty finding affordable housing. Perhaps because of the strong religious roots they share with the Irish, they also tend to bring traditional values to parenting. "A major concern for them is that their children retain a sense of Polishness. Polish fathers often travel long distances to take their children to Polish Saturday schools and churches," Professor Brannen points out.

While the role of fathers has shot up the agenda, is it always the case that families benefit if the father is there? A separate study suggests the answer is no. According to Dr Lynne Harne of Bristol University, the role of some men in the lives of children – specifically in the wake of marital or relationship breakdown – can be harmful. Hers was the first UK study of violent men focusing on their fathering practices. Almost half identified themselves as serial abusers in that they had also been domestically violent in second families. A fifth also had convictions for physical abuse of children or their children were on a child protection register.

After the Children Act 1989, family courts established a legal presumption that contact

**A 'seismic change' is underway for the role of fathers in the family**

with the non-resident parent – usually the father – was in the best interests of children in nearly all circumstances, and statistics indicate that in less than one per cent of cases are fathers denied contact by the courts. Yet domestic violence may be involved in a majority of disputes over child contact on separation, Dr Harne points out.

"Government policies have tended to accord more social value to fathers' care than mothers' care, arguing that fathers are crucial to children's educational and mental health outcomes, although there is no firm evidence for this except in economic terms. A major concern of the state has been that fathers make an economic contribution to the upbringing of children," she says.

With changing trends in family structure, both the role and impact of fatherhood is under increasing focus and debate. And as Father's Day reaches its 100th anniversary, fathers across the UK are likely to concur with Gordon Brown: being a father is their most important role. ■

**Sarah Womack is former social affairs correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph***

**i** *The moral habitus of fatherhood: A study of how men negotiate the moral demands of becoming a father*

Contact Dr Jonathan Ives

Email [j.c.ives@bham.ac.uk](mailto:j.c.ives@bham.ac.uk)

*Fathers across three family generations in Polish, Irish and UK origin white families*

Contact Professor Julia Brannen

Email [j.brannen@ioe.ac.uk](mailto:j.brannen@ioe.ac.uk)

*Violence, Power and the Meanings of Fatherhood in Issues of Child Contact*

Contact Dr Lynne Harne

Email [lynne.harne@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:lynne.harne@bristol.ac.uk)



# Putting it bluntly



Modern society is just as polite as in previous times, but the modern trend for ‘straight talk’ is clashing with our natural sense of propriety. **Warwick Mansell** explores recent ESRC research on impoliteness and whether we are indeed heading towards a ruder society

**R**udeness can sometimes feel as if it is all around us in public life, from the calculating acerbity of Anne Robinson in the BBC’s *The Weakest Link* to the bluntness of political interviewers attempting to get a minister to answer the question. But what counts as being impolite? Why are some remarks taken with offence, and others not? Do different cultures react differently to potentially impertinent comments? And are modern social interactions really more impolite than those of past generations, as is sometimes claimed?

Remarkably, perhaps, the academic study of impoliteness has only really got going in the last ten years. One person now taking it forward is Dr Jonathan Culpeper at the University of Lancaster, who recently completed a three-year ESRC-funded research fellowship on the subject. His findings are fascinating. To start with, there is contention around the definition of impoliteness. For example, Dr Culpeper’s forthcoming book on his research, *Impoliteness: Using Language to Cause Offence*, highlights the debate over

Recent research focuses on whether society today is any less polite than it was in the past

whether people have to intend to be impolite for it to count as impoliteness. Does someone have to mean to cause offence to be seen to have acted discourteously?

Some eight out of the 13 previous academic definitions of impoliteness quoted by Dr Culpeper do include this element. “People – both academics and the general public – do put a lot of value on the notion of intention in making up their minds about whether someone acted nastily or not,” says Dr Culpeper. “Where I disagree is when they turn intentionality into the be-all-and-end-all of impoliteness.” He cites an example of a vice-chancellor who, sitting next to a woman at a music concert, asked, “When’s it due?” The woman replied, after a pause, “I’m not pregnant”. Although he had not meant to cause offence, Dr Culpeper says this is a case where it could still be considered impolite. People hold others responsible when they do not speak with due care.

His research sheds new light on this question through its methodology, which includes a study of impoliteness ‘diaries’ and questionnaires completed



– such as saying ‘please’ – are still strong today. But they are clashing with another development: the encouragement of people to speak their mind, advocated through phenomena such as psychotherapy and an often forthright corporate culture. “The notion of the benefit of ‘beating around the bush’ – being polite in what is often seen as a stereotypically English way – is under siege from a new set of values, saying ‘express yourself, let it all hang out,’” says Dr Culpeper.

His research has also generated international comparisons. In China, for example, the participating students were most likely to report feeling upset by remarks that flouted their sense of equity: that people had a right to be treated by others as they would like to be treated. In England, however, students were more likely to be offended by ‘losing face’, for example by attacks on their personal appearance. The book suggests that cultural differences between the countries, with China accentuating reciprocity and England favouring individualism, may be important.

Finally, Dr Culpeper’s work takes on the ‘myth’ that impoliteness is debased and unthinking language. Although many insults are ‘banal’, he says there are some instances of great creativity. His work analyses recordings of *The Weakest Link*, showing how the presenter, Anne Robinson, deploys a range of linguistic tricks – from metaphor to alliteration – in humiliating her contestants for sport. It also shows how those setting out to offend for entertainment can win plaudits, where there is an audience, for the inventiveness of their insults.

Dr Louise Mullany, associate professor of sociolinguistics at the University of Nottingham, says that until the late 1990s, academics in this broad field had been more interested in what makes people want to co-operate with each other, or to be polite. Dr Culpeper had studied these notions systematically from the reverse perspective. “This is one of the first attempts to put some meat on the bones of this idea of impoliteness,” Dr Mullany says. “It gives us some tools to unpick and understand what people have said to us when we feel offended. It is therefore very valuable.” ■

by 500 young people in five countries, and an analysis of expressions associated with impoliteness in the two-billion-word Oxford English Corpus.

The questionnaires asked respondents – all university undergraduates – questions in relation to recent episodes they reported of experiencing impoliteness. They were asked how bad they felt as a result, and whether they thought the person meant to upset them. The study found only a slight correlation between a belief that someone meant to be offensive, and how hurt the individual felt.

Dr Culpeper’s work also addresses the question of whether people are becoming ruder. An analysis he carried out with Dawn Archer at the University of Central Lancashire, of court reports and stage plays from 1640-1760 shows that behaviour modern Britons would now count as brusque was prevalent then. In half of the interactions analysed where one person made a request of another, the research found that

Is Anne Robinson’s acerbic persona on *The Weakest Link* an example of a more impolite society?

Warwick Mansell is a freelance journalist

**i** *Impoliteness: Using Language to Cause Offence*  
Contact Dr Jonathan Culpeper Email [j.culpeper@lancaster.ac.uk](mailto:j.culpeper@lancaster.ac.uk)  
ESRC Grant Number RES-063-27-0015

**The notion of being polite is under siege from a new set of values, saying ‘express yourself, let it all hang out’**

no attempt was made to soften the demand – such as ‘give me water’ – with words such as ‘please’.

Dr Culpeper cites a recent argument by Professor Deborah Cameron at the University of Oxford that there may be good reasons why we perceive society to be becoming ruder, whether it actually is changing in this way or not. Specifically, social norms which developed in the Victorian era and saw people encouraged to be less direct with their demands



© PA Photos



# Election man



With the break-up of the two-party dominance and the first coalition government since the Second World War, these are interesting times for Professor Paul Whiteley. The Co-Director of the British Election Study talks to **Sophie Goodchild** about the end of class politics, voting decline and how governments can make us happy

**SOPHIE GOODCHILD** *Tell me why you first became involved in social science and election research?*

**PAUL WHITELEY** I guess I just found the world of politics hugely interesting. Party activism, elections, the relationship between the economy and political support (for a particular party): all of those areas fascinate me. I actually started out as an economist at Sheffield University, which was very useful but rather dry. Shortly

after graduating I decided to do a Masters degree and opted for political science at the University of Essex.

**SG** *How has this field changed since you got into this area, both academically and in society?*

**PW** The early research on electoral politics in Britain was done in the 1960s by David Butler who is now in his 90s. Back then the emphasis

**PW** Hugely important, especially in the context that fewer people are voting. The most recent election represents an increase in turnout compared with 2005, but not much of an increase. It is vital that we try and understand why. A crucial component is the reluctance of younger people to vote. We think this election was no exception in turnout for 18- to 25-year-olds. My view is that young people have to 'learn' to vote. Perhaps if they go along with mum and dad then they will continue to vote in later life. Otherwise the danger is you have a minority continuing not to do so in their 30s and 40s.

It's all part of the wider problem that British politics needs to be reformed and upgraded. Election research is just a small part of this. The layman's view of government is that it's an organisation stuck up there in Whitehall passing laws. Much of government is not about passing laws at all. It's about persuading people to do

“ People look at their vote choices like selecting goods in a supermarket. You can just jump ship and try another political party ”

things differently, such as stopping smoking. Parties can only govern if they have legitimacy and are listened to, not if there's a widespread feeling of alienation. So it's vital that researchers investigate what the electorate is thinking.

**SG** *One criticism of social research is that it's stating the obvious. Give me an example that truly challenges our assumptions about the relationship between people and government.*

**PW** Here's something that's not obvious that emerges from our research: governments can make people happier. Yes, we know that family relationships make people happier, and having social ties. Health is a big indicator of this. But one area which has been neglected is the role of government in our wellbeing.

We've been investigating this using data from our Election Survey. Effective delivery at grassroots level can make people happier. Policy is thought of as something that happens at aggregate level, such as unemployment – but it turns out that micro-level delivery is more important. It really matters to an individual's sense of life satisfaction.

For example, we ask people the question 'have you or your family had to call the police over the last year?' You get a percentage of people who say 'yes.' Then you ask: 'Were you satisfied with the way you were dealt with? Did the police do a good or bad job?' You can apply this to healthcare as well, and education. Did your doctor listen to you? If your child is going to state school, how easy was it to talk to the teacher?

was on class politics. The working classes voted Labour, the upper classes Conservative. The model was fairly simple and static. That's all changed, with class politics playing a pretty small role now. The emphasis is more on dynamic factors such as changes in the economy and in leaders. The model is shifting all the time, which makes it more interesting. And there's no longer a two-party system like in the 1950s and 1960s. There used to be hardly any Liberals in Parliament. Now they're in government. People look at their vote choices like selecting goods in a supermarket. You can just jump ship and try another political party. The number of people living alone is increasing and that means a more individualistic society. The world of work is also very different with a decline in trade unions.

**SG** *How important is social science and election research for the development of democracy and governance?*

**SG** *To what extent is there a danger that excessive polling in the run-up to the election can influence the electorate?*

**PW** I don't believe that's the case. People decide how to vote by spending time talking to other people such as friends and family. In France they ban polls in the interim period before election night. What happens is that only the elite knows what is going on. The public is left in the dark so the process becomes undemocratic. If governments are a bit insecure about their own legitimacy they commission polls. The government has also been a huge source of commissioning surveys to find out what people really want. And the media also have a voracious demand for polls. Their readers want to know what others are thinking.

**SG** *Nick Clegg was riding high in the polls before the election but only secured 57 seats. Doesn't this demonstrate that opinion polls are meaningless?*

**PW** It was a surprise that the Liberal Democrats didn't do so well, but it doesn't really mean the polls were off. It's early days but we think one of the reasons for this fall in vote was that young people don't vote. Imagine a pollster going out and asking about voting intentions. The young people say 'I'm going to vote Lib Dem' and the result is a huge upsurge in the polls. But then the young people don't actually vote. That's probably why the Lib Dem vote fell.

**SG** *This was the first election where all three major party leaders took part in a televised debate. Do you think that these debates are a legitimate part of the democratic process?*

**PW** It's a constant refrain that people should concentrate on the issues. I don't agree. Take a really complicated political issue such as the current financial crisis. Most people don't understand it. They're not economists and they have a lot more important things to do. They just know something rather nasty has happened. But they're faced with the dilemma of 'who am I going to vote for, who's going to fix the problem?' A good rule of thumb is to look at the leaders and think 'who do I trust most?'

“ It's not superficial to focus on the leaders. Every election from now on is going to have a leadership debate. It's an essential part of the political process ”

It's analogous to the football team and the manager. If the team is losing consistently then you get another manager, a guy you trust. So it's not superficial to focus on the leaders. Every election from now on is going to have a leadership debate. It's an essential part of the political process. ■

Sophie Goodchild is an editor on the *Evening Standard*

Despite a reported increase in voter numbers in 2010, turnouts are still low



# News briefs

## RCUK NATURAL HAZARDS MITIGATION PROGRAMME

The UK Research Councils (RCUK) is commissioning a new interdisciplinary programme of research on natural hazards resilience and mitigation. The new investment of £7 million will run for five years and will support new interdisciplinary natural, physical and social science research. The goal of the programme is to build physical, social and economic resilience in earthquake-prone and volcanic regions, by reducing risks from multiple natural hazards. Updates on the progress of the programme will be available, in due course, via the ESRC website.

## PEER REVIEW COLLEGE MEMBERSHIP

Over the last two months, the ESRC has been holding briefing events for the members of the new Peer Review College. The college will have 1,500 to 2,000 members from academic and non-academic backgrounds and will cover most grants and awards. It will provide a more effective means for reviewing research applications by improving the overall response rate of reviewers, reducing processing time for proposals. The full membership of the Peer Review College can be downloaded here: [www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/How/peerreview](http://www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/How/peerreview)

## RESEARCH ETHICS GUIDEBOOK

The online Research Ethics Guidebook, developed from a three-year initiative by Dr Janet Boddy and colleagues at the Institute of Education, University of London, is a free resource, addressing ethics throughout the research process. The guidebook is intended for early career researchers, including doctoral students, but it also offers a useful resource for those who train, supervise and support other researchers. For more information, visit [www.ethicsguidebook.ac.uk](http://www.ethicsguidebook.ac.uk)

## WORKING ACROSS BOUNDARIES: ANALYSING RISK AND REGULATION

The ESRC Centre for Analysis of Risk and Regulation (CARR) held

a one-day conference at Whitehall on 25 June. This event marked the end of the ESRC Centre grant. The conference highlighted CARR's achievements in areas where risk events have challenged public and private sector organisations across the globe. One of these challenges included understanding and the implementation of risk-based approaches to regulation. For more information visit [www.lse.ac.uk/collections/CARR/events/previousSeminars/conference.htm](http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/CARR/events/previousSeminars/conference.htm)



## UNEVEN ECONOMIC GROWTH IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

In many developing countries economic progress has been slow. The ESRC Centre for Competitive Advantage in the Global Economy, launched on 2 June 2010, has been established to focus research on how markets, institutions and public policies interact to create and sustain successful economic performance. Research will examine how different countries have handled global success and the diverse impact this has on the general wellbeing in a country. For more information visit [www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/economics/research/centres/cage](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/economics/research/centres/cage)

## INNOVATION, SUSTAINABILITY, DEVELOPMENT: A NEW MANIFESTO

Forty years after The Sussex Manifesto helped shape thinking on science and technology for development, the ESRC Centre for Social, Technological and Environmental Pathways to Sustainability and its partners have created a new manifesto. The manifesto recommends innovative ways of linking science and innovation to the development

for a more sustainable future. A reduction in poverty can only be achieved if there is an essential shift in how we think about and perform innovation. Ideas and perspectives were shared at the launch event on 15 June. For more information visit [anewmanifesto.org/section/manifesto-project](http://anewmanifesto.org/section/manifesto-project)

## KEY CONCERNS ON GIVING

Giving and philanthropy were on the agenda at a one-day conference on 18 June in London. The ESRC Centre for Charitable Giving and Philanthropy, together with its five participating universities and the National Council for Voluntary Organisations explored issues around how donors choose charities and causes, as well as what factors determine household giving. Leading researchers presented and discussed research around trends in charity distribution as well as effectiveness in philanthropy. For more information, visit [www.cgap.org.uk](http://www.cgap.org.uk)

## AHRC/ESRC PUBLIC POLICY FELLOWSHIPS

The ESRC and the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) are pleased to announce a co-funded pilot Public Policy Fellowship Scheme. Public Policy Fellowships will provide opportunities for social science and arts and humanities researchers to spend time within partner organisations to undertake policy-relevant research, to develop research skills and facilitate knowledge exchange within government, public sector organisations and various academic networks. For more information, visit [www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/opportunities/placement/AHRC\\_ESRC.aspx](http://www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/opportunities/placement/AHRC_ESRC.aspx)



# EVENTS

2-4 AUGUST 2010

## WISERD Qualitative GIS conference

The conference at Cardiff University will consider the emerging issues and possible futures of Qualitative geographic information systems (GIS). It will bring together interested people from a wide variety of disciplines in order to discuss some of the theoretical and methodological challenges in moving Qualitative GIS forward, to consider the possibility of an international and collaborative research agenda and working group for Qualitative GIS, and to work towards new and shared outputs. For more information, visit [www.wiserd.ac.uk/training-events-2/conferences/qualgisconference](http://www.wiserd.ac.uk/training-events-2/conferences/qualgisconference)



1-3 SEPTEMBER

## Medical Sociology Group annual conference

This conference celebrates the group's international links, exploring and comparing developments within Medical Sociology. Plenary speakers will be Professor Carl May from Newcastle University and Professor Anne Rogers from the University of Manchester. The conference will provide delegates with the opportunity to discuss the discipline's 'hot topics' within a real community of medical sociologists. For more information, visit [www.britisoc.co.uk/events/medsoc](http://www.britisoc.co.uk/events/medsoc)

6-9 SEPTEMBER

## Intensive care research summer school

An increasing number of patients are surviving an episode of critical illness that requires intensive care (ICU) treatment, and ICU survivors and their families face many challenges. Research collaborations across disciplines have the potential to improve healthcare practices and inform social science theory and methodological developments. Aimed at early career researchers from social science and practice-based healthcare, the summer school aims to build international collaboration, create networks and provide high-quality methods-teaching opportunities. For more information see [www.crf.ac.uk/events/summerschool.html](http://www.crf.ac.uk/events/summerschool.html)

# People

## PROFESSOR GERDA REITH



Professor Gerda Reith from the University of Glasgow, Professor of Social Science and Director of the Gambling Research Group, has been appointed

as Chair of the Research Panel of the Responsible Gambling Strategy Board. The board is an independent body that advises the Gambling Commission and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, on priorities for research, education and treatment issues related to gambling. For more information, visit [www.rgsb.org.uk](http://www.rgsb.org.uk)

## PROFESSOR GEORGE KOLANKIEWICZ



Professor George Kolankiewicz, Co-managing Director for the ESRC Centre for East European Language Based Area Studies

(CEELBAS) has been appointed to join the International Advisory Board of the Institute of Global and European Integration Studies at the Corvinus University of Budapest. This will allow CEELBAS to enhance its existing links with Corvinus University and further develop its international profile.



## PROFESSOR STEVE YEARLEY

Professor Steve Yearley, Director of the ESRC Genomics Forum, was formally inducted into the Royal Society

of Edinburgh in May this year. Professor Yearley was elected for his interdisciplinary research on the social aspects of science and technology and for his innovative work in engaging citizens with policy issues relating to the environmental and life sciences.

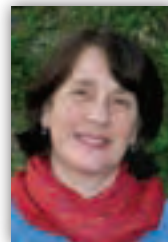
## PROFESSOR PER-OLOF WIKSTRÖM



Professor Per-Olof Wikström, Director of the ESRC-funded Peterborough Adolescent and Young Adult Development Study, has been

awarded a fellowship by the American Society of Criminology (ASC). The fellowship 'recognises persons who have made a scholarly contribution to the intellectual life of the discipline, whether in the form of a singular, major piece of scholarship or cumulative scholarly contributions'. The award will be presented in November at the 2010 ASC annual meeting in San Francisco.

## DR ANN LE MARE



Dr Ann Le Mare has been awarded the 2010 Michael Young prize for her work on the impact of fair trade on the wellbeing of women, businesses and organisations

in Bangladesh. The prize money of £6,000 will help her communicate her research findings to businesses and organisations, and to produce a booklet for fair trade workers and schools in Bangladesh and in the UK.



## DR AMMON SALTER

Dr Ammon Salter, Research Director of the UK Innovation Resource Centre, has been appointed to the European Commission's High-

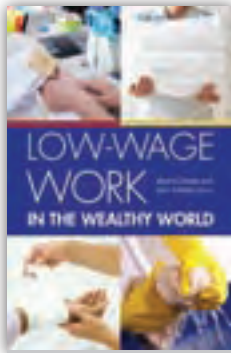
Level Panel on the Measurement of Innovation. Dr Salter was nominated by the European Commissioner for Research and Innovation, Ms Máire Geoghegan-Quinn. The panel will advise on indicators to measure Europe's progress towards a more innovative economy, capturing research and innovation performance in EU member states.

# Publications

## Low-Wage Work in the Wealthy World

This book presents research from the ESRC Centre on Skills, Knowledge and Organisational Performance and the Russell Sage Foundation on the extent and causes of low-wage work. The topic is examined through comparative case studies across five industries: retail sales, hospitals, food processing, hotels and call centres. These case studies also demonstrate the various pressures on national employment models; pressures that contribute to the deterioration of pay and working conditions for many workers.

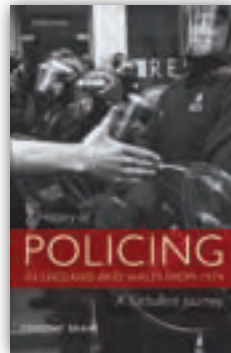
■ *Low-Wage Work in the Wealthy World* by Jérôme Gautié and John Schmitt. Published by Russell Sage Foundation. ISBN 978-0-87154-061-4 (Hardback), 288pp, \$45.00. For more information, visit [www.russellsage.org/publications/books/090728.556071](http://www.russellsage.org/publications/books/090728.556071)



## A History of Policing in England and Wales from 1974

In 1974 local government reforms became the catalyst for the introduction of a new police service structure. The years since then represent one of the most turbulent periods of British political, economic and social life. It was a time of great change, and the police service was at the centre of those changes. This book written by Dr Timothy Brain, a former Chief Constable and ESRC Communication and Information Committee member, offers a thoroughly researched historical analysis of key events and policies that shaped the police service during this period.

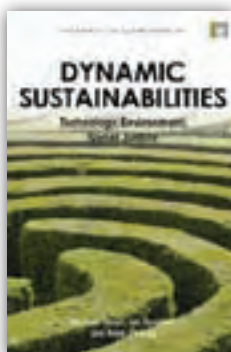
■ *A History of Policing in England and Wales from 1974: A Turbulent Journey* by Timothy Brain. Published by OUP. ISBN 978-0-19-921866-0 (Paperback), 496pp, £39.99. For more information, visit [ukcatalogue.oup.com/home.do](http://ukcatalogue.oup.com/home.do)



## Dynamic Sustainabilities

Linking environmental sustainability with poverty reduction and social justice, and making science and technology work for the poor, have become central practical, political and moral challenges of our times. Yet despite growing international attention and investment, policy attempts often fail. This book lays out a new pathways approach to address sustainability challenges. It is part of the 'Pathways to Sustainability' series, based on the work of the ESRC Social, Technological and Environmental Pathways to Sustainability Centre.

■ *Dynamic Sustainabilities: Technology, Environment, Social Justice* by Melissa Leach, Ian Scoones and Andy Stirling. Published by Earthscan Ltd. ISBN 978-1-84971-093-0 (Paperback), 224pp, £19.99. Visit [www.earthscan.co.uk/?tabid=102326](http://www.earthscan.co.uk/?tabid=102326)



## Climate Change Policy in the European Union

Researchers at the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research have published the first book that gives an account of the evolution of mitigation and adaptation policy in the European Union over the last 30 years. Drawing on a variety of detailed case studies, this volume offers an unrivalled account of how different actors struggled with the complex governance dilemmas associated with climate policy-making.

■ *Climate Change Policy in the European Union: Confronting the Dilemmas of Mitigation and Adaptation?* edited by Andrew Jordan. Published by Cambridge University Press. ISBN 978-0-52119-612-3 (Hardback), 304pp, £60.00. For more information, visit [www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)



# EVENTS

13-16 SEPTEMBER 2010

## UK e-Science All Hands Meeting 2010

The ninth UK e-Science All Hands Meeting provides a forum in which information on e-Science projects from all disciplines can be communicated and where the capabilities being developed within projects can be demonstrated. It aims to strengthen the community that engages in e-Science research, improve the impact of e-Science achievements on all disciplines and create opportunities for synergy, resource pooling and shared facilities. For more information, visit [www.allhands.org.uk](http://www.allhands.org.uk)

16 SEPTEMBER 2010

## The economic return to education

Over the last two decades advances in econometric methodology and the availability of large micro datasets have afforded researchers new tools and better data when it comes to quantifying the economic return to education. Leading academic economists and policymakers will evaluate what we know, what we do not yet know and the direction in which the literature is moving. For more information, visit [www.bristol.ac.uk/cmpo/events/2010/education/index.html](http://www.bristol.ac.uk/cmpo/events/2010/education/index.html)

20-22 SEPTEMBER 2010

## International Data Sharing Conference

This three-day conference brings together the genomics community to discuss the technological, legal, ethical and social controversies and challenges raised by open access policies. These policies are re-configuring scientific practice and have the potential to adversely affect the interests of a number of stakeholders, while at the same allowing rapid scientific advancement. For more information, visit [helix.medsci.ox.ac.uk/data-sharing-international-conference-1](http://helix.medsci.ox.ac.uk/data-sharing-international-conference-1)



# Know society. Society Now

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

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

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ESRC also issues a bi-monthly e-newsletter aimed at the academic community, containing information on funding opportunities, corporate news, community updates and events. For more information and to sign up, visit:

**[www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/enews](http://www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/enews)**

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# INNOVATION, SKILLS & TECHNOLOGY

- The skills the UK needs
- Getting to business
- Skills to innovate
- The role of universities

**Society  
Now  
IN FOCUS**



## THE SKILLS THE UK NEEDS

Professor Ken Mayhew Director of the ESRC Centre on Skills, Knowledge and Organisational Performance

**I**N THE AFTERMATH of the general election we can expect to see significant changes on the UK education and training scene, partly due to new government policies and partly due to the stringent limitations on public spending. Therefore it is a good time to consider what skills the UK really needs and what the state, as opposed to employers and individuals, should pay for.

There are two broad objectives for policy: to enhance economic performance, and to achieve a wider distribution of skills to improve the labour market prospects of as many people as possible. Considering economic performance, we can distinguish between skill shortages (difficulties employers might experience in recruiting workers); skill gaps (perceived shortcomings in the skills of current employees); and latent skill gaps (what extra skills and capabilities employees would need if their employers adopted 'higher quality' product strategies).

Distributional objectives can be many, but would include a concern to give all children a 'fair start' in life within the formal education system, and a desire to give people already in work a 'second chance' if they had left formal education with limited human capital.

When should the government pay? Here there is an important distinction between the formal education system and work-based training. There is little disagreement that the state should provide a publicly financed school system. The issue becomes cloudier when we consider post-compulsory formal education – how should the costs of higher education be shared, for example?

On work-based training, traditional economic analysis is clear. The state should only step in with taxpayers' money when market failure is present. Private employers will invest in training up to the point where the private marginal gain equals the private marginal cost – but this will produce less than the socially optimal amount of training if there

is a possibility that a trained worker will leave the present employer.

The target-led approach of recent government policy and an emphasis on the UK's performance in international qualifications league tables have meant that subsidies clearly extend beyond correcting such conventional market failures – subsidising training both for perceived current needs, but also apparently to address latent skill gaps. Some of the rhetoric of government documents evinces a suspicion that employers are not sensible enough to train for their own present purposes. This same rhetoric emphasises the need for as many organisations as possible to move to high-skilled, high value-added production if the country is to be successful in the global economy.

But what skills do we really need? Relatively few firms experience skill shortages, and such shortages are more about flaws in the recruitment process than an unavailability of labour with particular skills. More

### *SKILLS ARE NOT SUFFICIENT ON THEIR OWN. THEY NEED TO BE PART OF A BROADER APPROACH TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT*

firms report skill gaps but very often these turn out to be deficiencies in soft skills. Furthermore, there is growing evidence of under-utilisation of skill. It seems that we are trying to produce the skills that the UK ought to need were we producing more skill-intensive products. Skills may be a necessary condition for achieving the high skills vision, but they are not sufficient on their own. They need to be part of a broader approach to economic development.

There is scope for the new government to embrace such an approach, whilst, in pursuit of fiscal rectitude, there are areas of current activity that could be cut out entirely without great loss. However, the power of vested interests makes a 'salami slicer approach' more likely. ■

[www.skope.ox.ac.uk](http://www.skope.ox.ac.uk)



# GETTING TO BUSINESS

Innovation is not only about products and technology, but also about process, management and skills. **Phil Thornton** talks to Professor Joanna Chataway about the challenge of converting research into revenue

**T**HE SCALE OF THE economic financial downturn in the northern hemisphere, and the continuing scar of poverty and malnutrition in the South have highlighted the urgent need to harness innovative ideas. The challenge is to ensure that groundbreaking research being done in British universities is converted into successful products and applications.

As Co-Director of Innogen (the ESRC Centre for Social and Economic Research on Innovation in Genomics), and Director of Innovation and Technology Policy at RAND Europe, Professor Joanna Chataway is perfectly positioned to discuss the cusp between academic output and productive exploitation of results. “Innovation is increasingly essential to business because we operate in the context of a knowledge society, and innovation is at the root of successful performance in many sectors,” she says.

*INNOVATION IS NOT ONLY PRODUCING NEW THINGS, BUT PRODUCING THEM IN A DIFFERENT WAY THAT MAKES THEM ACCESSIBLE TO A RANGE OF PEOPLE*



Workers packing pharmaceuticals at the Bharat Biotech plant in Hyderabad, India

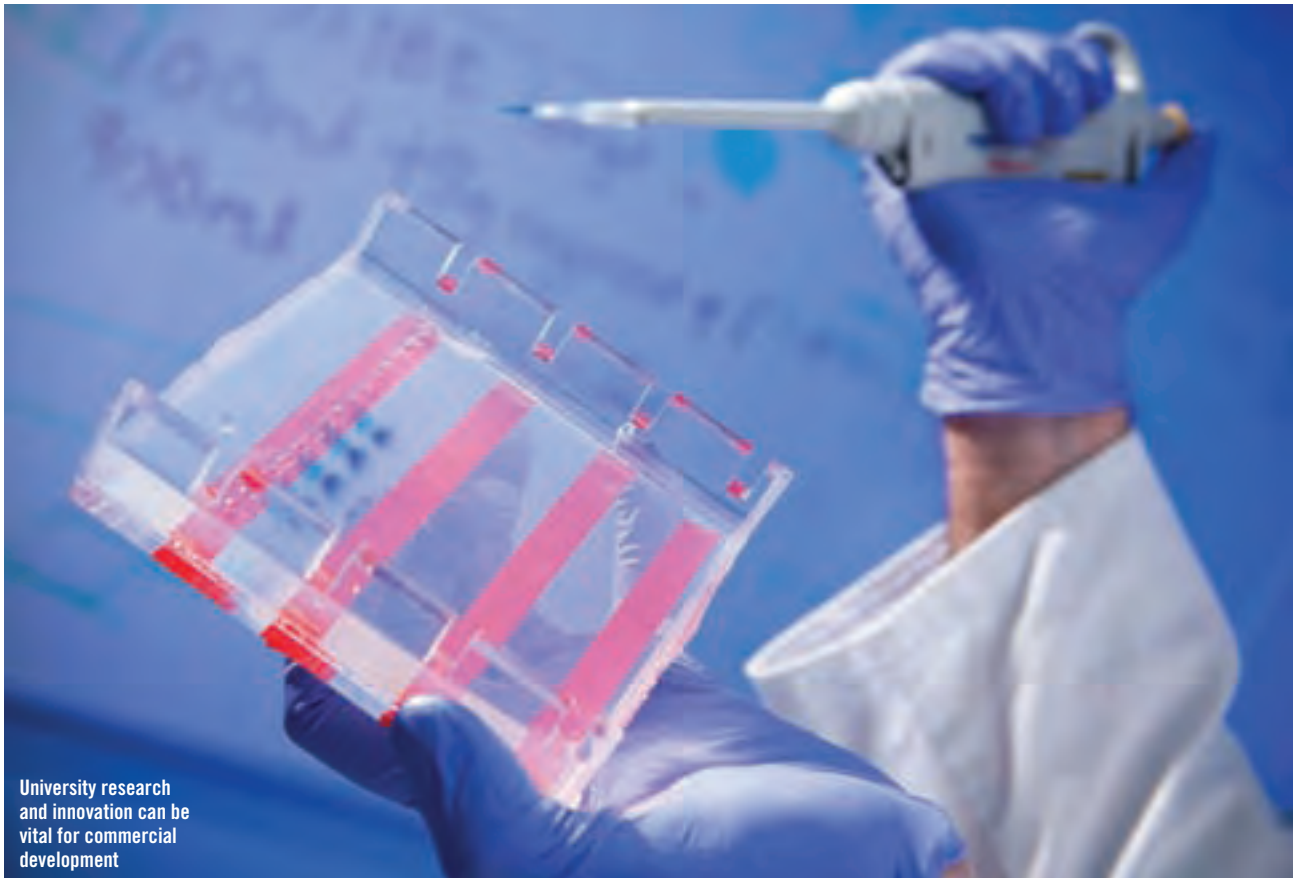
The ESRC Innogen Centre, a collaboration between the University of Edinburgh and the Open University, is now in its tenth year of producing cutting-edge research into genomics-related science and technology. RAND Europe, an independent, not-for-profit research organisation, seeks to improve innovation policy decisions based on research, evidence and analysis. Professor Chataway says the two institutions cover much of the same territory, but start from a different place. “Innogen starts with some intellectual questions and RAND begins with policy questions, but the research that takes place has a lot of overlap.”

She believes it is important to dispel myths around innovation. “Universities’ role in innovation in particular is thought of as being about test tubes and high-end ‘whizzy stuff’ – a new science-based discovery every five minutes – and to some extent it is, but there are new models emerging,” she says. “Recently it has become apparent that the dynamics between innovation, and successful business and commercial activities have changed.”

The fast-growing economies of China and India demonstrate the benefits of focusing innovation on changing the way products are made, delivered and marketed, to take account of the relatively low incomes of consumers. Professor Chataway highlights the efforts of the Indian pharmaceutical industry to produce lower-priced generic versions of medicines designed in the West that are essential in tackling the country’s health priorities. “There’s a lot of innovation in that, because innovation is not only producing new things, but producing them in a different way that makes products accessible to a wide range of different people,” she points out. “It is a different model, and what we in the UK can learn from it is that knowledge exchange between universities and businesses needs to revolve more around introducing management, product development and technical skills as well as new science and technology.”

Back home, she believes both universities and businesses need to change the way they handle innovation. First, they need to understand where innovation sits within the other’s operations. One key difference is the timeframe: while academics may see their research as a project extending over years or even decades, for a business the horizon is usually much shorter. Businesses often need outputs more quickly than universities can deliver.

However, there is a more significant mismatch, which is the different understanding between academics on one side and public and private bodies on the other, over what



University research and innovation can be vital for commercial development

innovation is. “An academic comes up with an idea and the research delivers something wonderful and exciting, and they think ‘why wouldn’t the whole world appreciate this?’” Professor Chataway says. Businesses, however, want to be confident that the idea can be profitably exploited. Charitable foundations need to know that the innovation can be adapted to the context within which they are working.

The answer may be in new spaces in which public and private sectors can share visions, perspectives and skills. Professor Chataway applauds a recent report by Cambridge entrepreneur Herman Hauser that called for ‘translational infrastructure’ – a network of elite national technology and innovation centres. “I can see its appeal,” she says. “We need to create a space and these tech centres provide that.”

But some universities face a more basic challenge – dealing with issues that are commonplace in business. Professor Chataway believes academics often struggle to understand what businesses look for in a potential partner. “For a lot of universities it is a problem – managing relationships with businesses in a timeframe that businesses demand, writing contracts in a way that businesses understand, right down to individual academics being able to explain the idea in a language that non-academics can understand.”

Another potential hurdle is the division of intellectual property rights. Professor Chataway believes universities may have gone too far in ‘patenting everything’, that

too much patenting could backfire and stop businesses engaging fully with universities. However, she believes corporations need universities more than ever.

“In pharmaceuticals all the easy wins have gone,” she says. “The science is more difficult and you need more brains and different brains to tackle the problems, and people coming at it from all angles. Companies constantly need to refresh themselves with exposure to new ideas and new thinking, and that makes linkages with universities ever more important.”

## *COMPANIES CONSTANTLY NEED TO REFRESH THEMSELVES WITH EXPOSURE TO NEW IDEAS AND NEW THINKING*

She highlights collaboration between Wyeth/Pfizer, the pharmaceutical company, and Scottish medical schools and health boards, to discover, develop, and distribute innovative diagnostics and treatments as a positive example.

Professor Chataway believes the key to transferring innovation and delivering the greatest impact is to take a systemic approach. “Understanding that innovation is rooted in systems, and creating virtuous systems that encourage and facilitate relationships is absolutely key,” she says. “In the end innovation is about relationships.” ■

[www.genomicsnetwork.ac.uk/innogen](http://www.genomicsnetwork.ac.uk/innogen)

Phil Thornton is lead consultant at research house Clarity Economics

## SKILLS TO INNOVATE

Skills, innovation and technology are recognised as important drivers for a growing economy. How do we pave the way for research transfer into society, maximise impact from innovation and encourage skills development? The following pages present a small selection of relevant ESRC-funded research



Cambridge University's solar car racing team at the World Solar Challenge in Australia

### UNIVERSITY COLLABORATION BOOSTS INNOVATION

A study of the impact of universities and other higher education institutions on the innovativeness and competitiveness of three specific regions (Wales, the north west and the east of England) finds that collaborations between firms and universities have a 'positive and significant' effect on firm innovation. "Firms with university collaboration are four times more likely to innovate compared to those without," Professor Jeremy Howells of the Manchester Institute of Innovation Research points out.

"The effect on organisational innovation was less, but still significant," he continues. Although universities may not be the initial favoured collaborators for firms, there is a significant and appreciable influence on innovative performance when such collaboration does occur. Interestingly, the analysis of data drawn from more than 370 firms and 18 universities reveals that both formal and informal university collaborations (such as conferences, meetings and workshops) were equally important to innovation outcomes.

The study shows that the most numerically important benefit of working with universities was to be found in the development of new methods, skills and techniques. "However, there are also important impacts arising from such collaboration in terms of improved profitability and market share," Professor Howells states. ■



ESRC Grant Number RES-171-25-0038

Part of the Impact of Higher Education Institutions on Regional Economies joint venture

Web [ewds.strath.ac.uk/impact](http://ewds.strath.ac.uk/impact)

### SCIENTISTS AS ENTREPRENEURS

How do entrepreneurial opportunities arise and what are the processes that enable them to create value? In a wide-ranging, two-year research fellowship, Professor Gerard George of Imperial College London has investigated the critical issue of technology commercialisation and entrepreneurship. The project offers insight on topics ranging from how scientists can manage their careers to include successful technology commercialisation in their academic roles, to the processes by which start-ups can become competitive in international markets.

Professor George highlights the human side of technology transfer and commercialisation in his co-authored book *Inventing Entrepreneurs: Technology Innovators and their Entrepreneurial Journey* (2008). Based on interviews with scientists and case studies of successful and failed commercialisation attempts, Professor George distinguishes between the journeys of the scientist and the technology commercialisation pathway.

"Scientist-entrepreneurs who carefully manage their individual role identity – or how they are perceived by colleagues as performing certain managerial functions such as raising money or becoming the company CEO – tend to be more satisfied with outcomes, whether the business itself succeeded or failed," Professor George points out.

"Not every scientist is well-suited to adopt entrepreneurial roles," he continues, "and the greater the discord between what they believe they should be doing (for example, lab research) versus what needs to be done to build a successful company (such as fundraising, product development and

so on), the less successful their attempts at technology commercialisation.”

One of the ways in which universities can unlock the value in their technology portfolio is by being more strategic in how they encourage scientists to commercialise their inventions, suggests Professor George. “There are multiple options that scientists can explore, decide on their comfort level and select entrepreneurial journeys that maintain their roles as scientists first and entrepreneurs next,” he concludes. ■

**i** ESRC Grant Number RES-331-27-0011  
This project is an AIM fellowship  
Web [www.aimresearch.org](http://www.aimresearch.org)

## FROM STEM CELL RESEARCH TO THERAPY

The prospects and challenges of stem cell research and cell transplantation in the fields of diabetes and neuroscience have been investigated in a two-year research project undertaken at the Centre for Biomedicine and Society, King’s College London. “My particular focus has been the dynamics of movements between the ‘bench and the bedside’ – in other words, the application of laboratory-based science to new clinical therapies, which is known as translational research,” explains Professor Steven Wainwright.

Based on interviews with scientists and clinicians in the UK and US, including some of the first social science interviews with leading stem cell experts, researchers considered how a new medical technology might be encouraged or prevented from diffusing from the lab to the clinic. “We have highlighted the emergence of what some scientists describe as ‘a new paradigm of stem cell research’ – the ‘disease in a dish’ approach – where human embryonic stem cells will be used as tools for unravelling the mechanisms of disease to enable the development of new drugs, rather than directly in stem cell transplant therapies,” Professor Wainwright points out.

“However, we also demonstrated how translational

research inevitably entails a struggle for power between the different standpoints of ‘rigorous academic science’ and ‘relevant medicine’.” ■

**i** ESRC Grant Number RES-350-27-0001  
This project is a Social Science Stem Cell Initiative fellowship.  
Web [www.york.ac.uk/res/sci/introduction.htm](http://www.york.ac.uk/res/sci/introduction.htm)

## THE CRUCIAL SKILLS OF A LEADER

Whenever a group of people interact a leader-follower relationship almost always emerges. But what makes one person lead and another follow? And does leadership benefit the group? Researchers from the University of Kent set out to explore those leadership questions in three different settings.

This project investigated co-ordination games in which individuals stood to benefit from co-ordinating their behaviour, but doing this was not easy. “Together, the three games provided an opportunity to see how the emergence of leadership depends on the particular problem faced by a group, and how well leadership helps groups overcome a co-ordination problem,” explains Dr Edward Cartwright.

The performance of volunteers in these co-ordination games enabled researchers to draw some conclusions about leader-follower interaction within groups. “We found that leadership can help the group co-ordinate but only in the right conditions,” Dr Cartwright points out. “We also learned that the actions of a leader are crucial in determining how successful leadership will be. The more leaders contribute, or sacrifice for the group, the more likely the group will co-ordinate.”

Researchers believe this study will help in terms of understanding fashions and trends in consumer purchasing, strategies of financial traders and the success and failure of business leaders. ■ ▶

**i** ESRC Grant Number RES-000-22-1999



Good leader-follower relationships are vital to business success



Workplace courses have been successful in engaging 'hard-to-reach' adults

## LITTLE IMPACT FROM BASIC SKILLS LEARNING

The Labour government's Skills for Life initiative has not significantly improved the economic performance of participating companies, or their workers' literacy, according to the UK's first large-scale study of basic skills learning in the workplace.

Over the past few decades, ministers have argued that improving the working-age population's basic skills in literacy, numeracy and information technology will increase employability and earnings, raising productivity in the process. All four UK countries have, in recent years, provided generous funding for adult basic skills courses, including £5 billion allocated to England's Skills for Life initiative; and have prioritised courses in the workplace for adults in low-skilled jobs.

The impact on learners and their organisations of these government-funded workplace literacy programmes have been investigated by researchers from King's College London and the Institute of Education, London. "Our findings indicate that workplace basic skills courses are having little impact in their current form," says Professor Alison Wolf. A year after students had taken the Skills for Life course, there were no statistically significant improvements in literacy for English-speaking employees.

The study also found no permanent legacy of workplace training. "If the courses were as valuable as the government claimed, you would expect employers to carry on with their own money," Professor Wolf observes. "But in fact, not one of the employers who received free on-site courses continued them after government funding ended." Managers in participating firms and organisations admitted that they did not expect direct productivity benefits from basic skills courses. Only about half of managers who provided feedback felt there had been positive impact. This was usually on workers' confidence; not a direct economic effect.

However, researchers did find that workplace courses were successful in engaging 'hard-to-reach' adults and changing their attitudes towards learning. The number of participants who went on to do further courses was significantly larger, statistically, than for people in similar jobs in the country as a whole. More than half said that they read more, and three-quarters felt differently about adult education as a result of the course.

One of the main reasons for the initiative's lack of impact, researchers conclude, is that the courses were simply not long enough. While school children receive 200 hours of direct instruction every term, over many years, participants on the Skills for Life courses received an average of 30 hours teaching. ■



ESRC Grant Number RES-139-25-0120  
Part of the Teaching and Learning Research Programme  
Web [www.tlrp.org](http://www.tlrp.org)

## NANOTECHNOLOGY AND THE PUBLIC

Nanotechnology operates in the realm of the unimaginably small – one to 100 nanometres – where familiar chemical elements may exhibit enhanced or novel properties. This could revolutionise materials science, computing, environmental management, medicine and many other fields. But alongside the benefits, there may be risks associated with exposure to enhanced or novel nanomaterials. Given such uncertainties, the adequacy of regulations to protect workers, the public and the environment has been much debated.

The ESRC Centre for Business Relationships, Accountability, Sustainability and Society looked into the control of nanotechnology in 2008-09 for the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. The research focused on current and future corporate social responsibility in the British nanotechnology industry.

The research identified a number of factors that may affect how voluntary approaches to risk management will evolve in the near future. Such measures involve investment, and larger companies are more likely to regard them as feasible. But in smaller companies, several other factors can make a difference to attitudes and practices. Senior management can take responsibility for embedding relevant values within a company's research and development activities. Whether or not individual companies have access to the technical expertise they require to address toxicological and other data gaps is also important. In addition, the extent to which companies up and down the supply chain collaborate in sharing data and risk research, and in formulating best practice, is highly significant.

The research also showed that smaller nanotechnology companies tend not to engage the public in their activities. As time goes on and more research is done, public debate about the benefits, risks and uncertainties of nanotechnology is likely to grow. This raises the question of how far, and in what ways, business, academia and regulators are prepared to engage with the public. ■

 Web [www.brass.cf.ac.uk](http://www.brass.cf.ac.uk)

## HIGH SKILLS, LOW WAGES?

Improving the skills of the workforce stands at the heart of Britain's economic policy. To its many proponents, the creation of world-class skills is the route to economic prosperity for all. Britain has the potential to become a 'magnet economy', attracting a disproportionate share of the global supply of high-skills, high-wage jobs.

While the economic crisis has shaken this faith in the power of 'human capital', there is little evidence of an alternative vision. Research by Professors Phillip Brown and David Ashton of the ESRC Centre on Skills, Knowledge and Organisational Performance, and Professor Hugh Lauder of the University of Bath, suggests that new thinking is urgently required.

In nearly 200 interviews with corporate executives and senior policymakers in seven countries, including India and China, the team investigated whether the conventional view of the global economy finds support in the actions of leading transnational companies and the national strategies of emerging economies. They identify four major trends converging to create what they call a global auction for cut-price brainpower.

The first trend is the explosion in education: a doubling in the number of university-level enrolments around the world in just ten years, driven by the expansion of higher education in China, India and Russia.

Second, companies no longer divide their human resources strategies between high-skills 'head' nations and 'body' nations restricted to low-skilled employment. The home base remains a key location for co-ordinating corporate strategies, but the trend is towards greater experimentation with high-skills, high-value work in low-cost locations.

Third, while companies will continue to depend on clever people with clever ideas, 'permission to think' will remain the preserve of the few in many organisations. This is because competitiveness is typically seen to depend on

the capture and standardisation of knowledge previously locked in the heads of high-skilled workers.

Fourth, despite the rapid expansion in the supply of highly qualified workers, many corporate executives believe they are in a 'war for talent', a competitive struggle to attract and retain those defined as top performers and 'high potentials'.

The problem in creating a shared prosperity is that having a world-class workforce is no longer a decisive source of competitive advantage because other countries are adopting the same approach. According to the researchers, it is how the capabilities of the workforce are combined in innovative and productive ways that holds the key – along with a recognition that income inequalities cannot be addressed solely through the job market. ■

 ESRC Grant Number RES-000-23-0287

## SUCCESSFUL PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRAINING

The ESRC-funded Centre for Learning and Life Chances in Knowledge Economics and Societies has provided insight into how local authorities can use Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act to achieve both economic goals and social cohesion. Research by Professor Alison Fuller and Dr Sadaf Rizvi on a scheme introduced by Southampton City Council reveals that private businesses can help the long-term unemployed through new regeneration initiatives that incorporate pre-employment training.

The researchers evaluated the innovative use of Section 106 agreements by Southampton City Council. These are usually private agreements negotiated in the context of planning applications between local planning authorities and persons with an interest in a piece of land, in order to enable development which would otherwise be unacceptable in planning terms. Southampton City Council granted permission for the development of a new store – on the condition the company guaranteed interviews to jobseekers who had completed a special pre-employment training course.

The research demonstrates the link between the training course and the success of the jobseekers in securing jobs. The training course provides interview techniques, background on the company and exercises designed to help individuals identify their strengths and weaknesses.

While many training schemes already exist for the unemployed, previous studies have shown that workless people often have problematic experiences of jobs and finding employment. In the case of Southampton, a 'provider network' proved successful in delivering the initiative in a bid to reduce unemployment.

The study shows that boosting economic progress and improving social welfare are not mutually exclusive, and that Section 106 agreements can be used to achieve this. These insights will help improve welfare-to-work policies, as they demonstrate the benefit of a co-ordinated approach to pre-employment preparation in helping people obtain and retain jobs. ■

 Web [www.llakes.org](http://www.llakes.org)



# THE MULTI-FACETED ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES

Professor Alan Hughes Director of the UK Innovation Research Centre

**I**N THINKING ABOUT the roles that universities play, it is helpful to consider four core contributions. The first is the role that universities play in educating undergraduates and graduates and the impact this makes – not only through the development of their specific capabilities and skills, but to the wider cultural development of society.

Second, universities produce a wide range of knowledge in the form of scholarly publications and patents, which is disseminated through a multitude of pathways, including books, publications, conferences, the digital media and patent publication.

Third is the important role that universities play in a variety of problem-solving activities identified through interaction with external organisations in the private, public and third sectors, including collaborative research, contract research, informal advice and consultancy.

Finally, there is what may be termed a ‘public space role’ which helps underpin the other three and provides a variety of institutional activities through which universities and external organisations can exchange ideas and discover areas of common interest, such as curriculum development and problems which may be resolved by collaborative research. This latter interplay in particular allows a fruitful link to be made between fundamental research inspired by considerations of use and the pursuit of fundamental understanding per se.

From a commercial point of view fundamental research may be regarded as ‘upstream activities’, compared to ‘downstream research’ concerned more or less solely with use. Such distinctions colour much of the current policy debate. Recent research has, however, focused attention on the kinds of public space and institutional developments that can maximise the benefits to UK society of university funding, and has emphasised the fruitful interplay between the pursuit of fundamental understanding and of use – and the conditions which sustain that interplay.

In relation to private sector innovation it is, for example, a common and very old refrain that while our university system is internationally excellent in terms of conventional research criteria such as academic citations per head of the university community, the transition to commercialisation is weak, and that the university ivory tower is not effectively connected into applications. Recent research suggests that the picture of the academic operating in splendid isolation is deeply misleading and that the problem lies elsewhere. A survey of over 20,000 academics in all disciplines in all universities in the UK

([www.cbr.cam.ac.uk/pdf/AcademicSurveyReport.pdf](http://www.cbr.cam.ac.uk/pdf/AcademicSurveyReport.pdf)) reveals a deep and wide pattern of engagement with the private, public and third sectors.

There are some variations, of course. Engineering academics are more likely to be engaged in both commercialisation practices and in external relationships with the private commercial sector. Medical and biological sciences tend to have a relatively high set of external interconnections with public sector organisations reflecting the role of the National Health Service in the UK. Arts and cultural universities tend to be more heavily involved in a range of community cultural activities involving the performing arts, music, exhibitions, creative arts and design. These interactions are generated and developed into fruitful activities after initially primarily informal contacts, which in themselves are not necessarily begun with the pursuit of particular commercial objectives. In fact, the more

## *A SURVEY OF OVER 20,000 ACADEMICS IN THE UK REVEALS A DEEP AND WIDE PATTERN OF ENGAGEMENT WITH THE PRIVATE, PUBLIC AND THIRD SECTORS*

access to university contacts is seen as necessarily mediated through formal transactions such as patenting and licensing, the less inviting the use of informal interactions may appear.

The problem in relation to commercialisation lies not in the width of academic interactions, but in their depth and the capacity of the UK private sector to absorb and invest in risky long-range developments, and to work effectively in early-stage development activities with universities. The UK lacks the key international players to fulfil this role in many emerging sectors, and, compared to the USA and Far East economies, has a more fragmented and less strategic use of public procurement and public funding of intermediate institutions ([www.cbr.cam.ac.uk/pdf/WP396.pdf](http://www.cbr.cam.ac.uk/pdf/WP396.pdf)).

A medium- to long-term commitment to identifying funding excellence and variety upstream across the full range of disciplines is essential if the UK is to benefit in the widest cultural sense from its excellent university sector. If essential economic and commercial benefit is to be obtained, that commitment must be combined with a selective and strategic use of funding downstream through public procurement and investment in intermediate organisations spanning the university-private sector boundary. ■

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