

QUALITY

IMPACT

INDEPENDENCE

# ESRC strategicplan

2009-2014

GLOBAL  
ECONOMY

DELIVERING IMPACT THROUGH SOCIAL SCIENCE

HEALTH  
WELLBEING

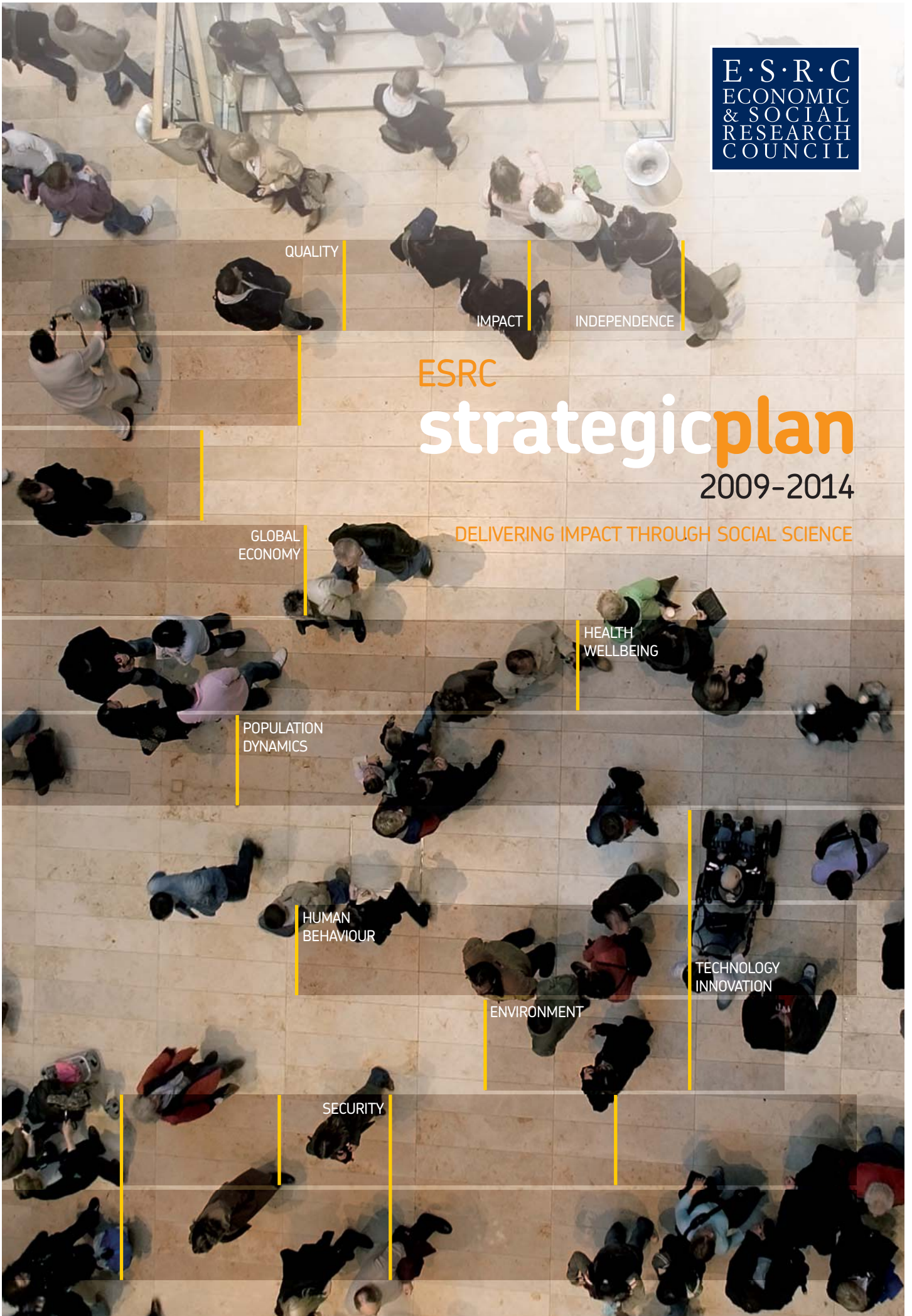
POPULATION  
DYNAMICS

HUMAN  
BEHAVIOUR

TECHNOLOGY  
INNOVATION

ENVIRONMENT

SECURITY





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# foreword

Mapping the causes and consequences of change in this complex and dynamic world is a huge task. So too is identifying tools to manage risk, finding remedies for ills and preparing society for further change in future. This is the challenge facing social science and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

Social scientists deepen and expand collective understanding of where we are and where we are heading. Evolving empirical knowledge of our socio-economic environment is the basis of sound decision-making by governments, businesses and charities, as well as communities, families and individuals.

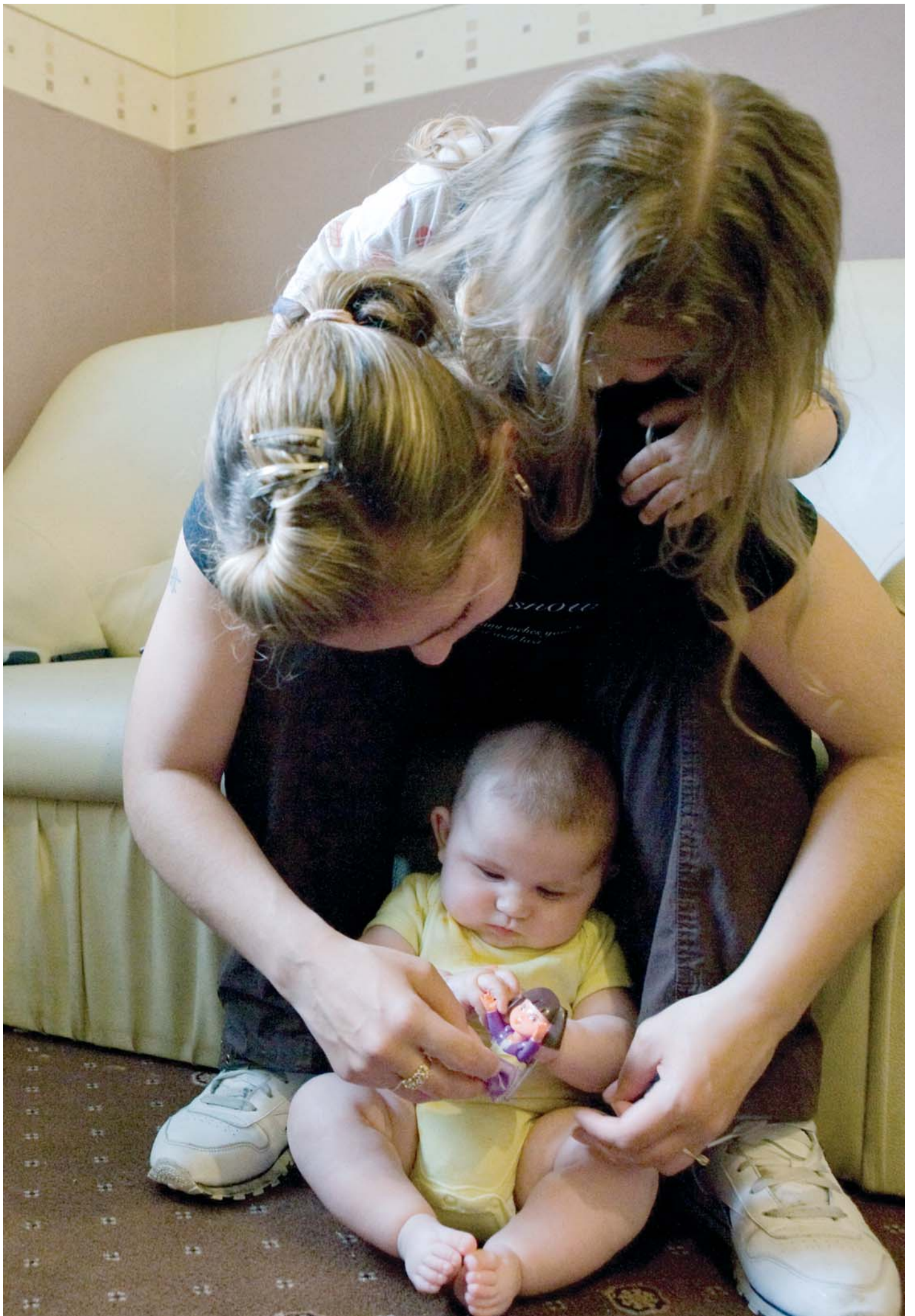
Although much effort must be made to sustain the health of individual disciplines, the social scientist's value is increasingly realised in interdisciplinary work. The natural and physical sciences are extending the boundaries of technical possibility, for instance in nanotechnology, genomics, or adaptation to environmental change and moves to a low carbon economy; alongside this we need to understand the social and economic implications of such advances. This, too, is science. Elucidating behaviour – economic, political, social, cultural is not 'soft'; this research is now distinctly rugged.

The ESRC exists to fund and train the people for these vital tasks, and to ensure they apply the most advanced and appropriate methods using the best possible data. As a result we need to invest in high quality datasets and research infrastructure. Opportunities must also be provided for the best UK social scientists to work with the best researchers in other countries.

Our Strategic Plan 2009-2014 sets out our prospectus for what social science can and must do over the next five years.

**Our economic and social environment is complex and changing. The global economic crisis demonstrates the interconnectedness of human behaviour. Surface impressions deceive. Apparently stable structures can suddenly break down.**





# overview

The ESRC shapes and defines society's sense of itself, guides the creation of new social knowledge and collaborates with those who make policy and executive decisions in government, business and the third sector. Our continuing commitment is to find and fund the very best research through the varied opportunities we offer.

Our mission is:

- To promote and support world class research and related postgraduate training in the social sciences
- To advance knowledge and provide trained social scientists who meet the needs of users and beneficiaries, thereby contributing to the economic competitiveness of the UK, the effectiveness of public services and policy and the quality of life
- To provide advice on disseminate knowledge about and promote public understanding of, the social sciences.

## Quality

Scientific excellence is a core value. The ESRC only funds proposals judged by experts to be of the very highest quality. We encourage exciting and innovative research ideas from both early career researchers and distinguished professors. Our portfolio includes work within single disciplines, research which combines disciplinary approaches, the advance of theory, and research aimed at developing practical applications.

## Independence

Independence is essential to producing reliable results. The ESRC has to be able to work without compromise or political bias with diverse partners in the UK and abroad, ranging from policymakers to business, academics and community leaders. The best researchers are in demand and work best in conditions of intellectual freedom: the ESRC must remain free to pursue an independent, scientifically-led research agenda, reflecting the wider needs of society.

## Impact

The ESRC expects that all the research it funds will be high quality and of scholarly distinction, but we are also committed to increasing its non academic impact and benefit to the UK in public policy, economic prosperity, culture, and quality of life. We set out the ways in which we will maximise impact in the second half of this Plan. These include the close engagement with potential research users before, during and after the research process, and a flow of people between research and the worlds of policy and practice.

## Leadership and Collaboration

The ESRC leads. It raises the UK's scholarly profile abroad; develops methodologies for evaluating impact; foments the exchange of knowledge.

Collaboration is essential in studying and resolving complex challenges. It may take the form of research teams, interdisciplinary research, international projects and agreements with business, government or third sector organisations. We encourage collaborative relationships within the social sciences and in work with the other Research Councils. Research informed by international perspectives can also add to the richness of social science research and understanding.

## Our Strategy

After extensive consultation we identified seven areas of strategic challenge for economic and social research. Some build on our existing investments and help consolidate knowledge. They also recognise emerging areas for social science. They are:

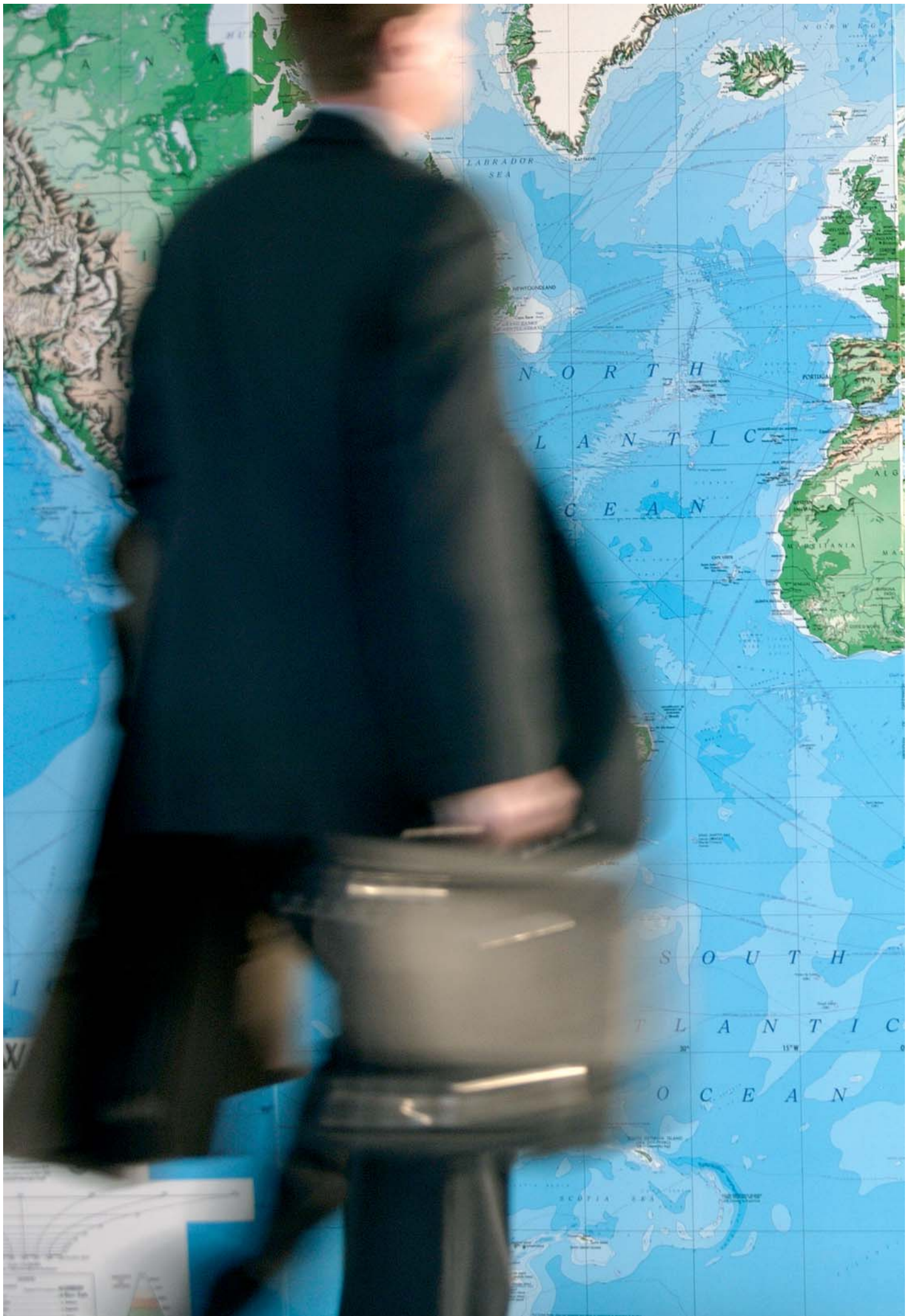
- Global Economic Performance, Policy and Management
- Health and Wellbeing
- Understanding Individual Behaviour
- New Technology, Innovation and Skills
- Environment, Energy and Resilience
- Security, Conflict and Justice
- Social Diversity and Population Dynamics

In each area our strategic aim is to stimulate and steer the creation of knowledge that will have a tangible economic and social benefit. We measure success by pursuing five objectives in each area. Each of these objectives will extend the reach of our people, their work, the tools and methodologies they apply and their collaboration with other stakeholders in science, government, business and the community. They are:

- Impact through world class social science research
- Impact through skilled people
- Impact through world class infrastructure
- Impact through international leadership
- Impact through partnerships

Under each challenge we note achievements from the previous Strategic Plan period and priorities for 2009-2014. The priorities support the Government's *Ten Year Framework for Science and Innovation*, enabling the UK to continue to provide world class independent social science which impacts on the economy and wellbeing in the UK and beyond. In the second half of this plan we provide more detail on the five impact objectives.





# the strategic challenges

## Global Economic Performance, Policy and Management

The collapse of confidence in the world financial system will shape the research agenda for a long time. The full extent of the damage to the global economy remains unclear. Governments have been forced to intervene in the economy, overturning the economic orthodoxy of the last 30 years. The boundaries of public and private are being redrawn as new economic regimes are created. The recession puts renewed pressure on understanding the causes of poverty and what policies reduce it. Through research centres and grants, ESRC funded social scientists have already been active in these areas, giving us the opportunity to build on and deepen what is already known.

Governance has proved inadequate in the face of the spiraling complexity of financial innovation. Social scientists will increasingly be expected to examine the causes and the resulting economic and social distress, and suggest remedies. Social science can help determine which parts of our system remain viable, design governance to avoid future collapses, and look for new ways to enhance economic performance in the context of scarce public funds. Analysis of the nature and performance of international institutions, in particular the international financial system, will be needed to help develop a new regulatory regime.

The challenges facing social science are:

- Calibrating the impact of greater governmental involvement in the economy and understanding how the boundary between public and private action may be redrawn
- Understanding individual investor and consumer behaviour within a highly volatile global economic context, not just on the basis of 'rational actor' models, but also behavioural understanding of markets: the shared understandings and expectations that emerge among participants in, say, valuing and trading complex financial instruments
- How policymakers can ensure that market governance mechanisms effectively address risks, for both individuals and businesses

- How to improve the capacity of and movements between the wide range of infrastructure networks, such as roads, rail, energy and electricity, requires social science input as well as technology
- The impacts of globalisation, both in the short run as demand falls and job losses escalate, and in the longer term if and when growth increases again (with parallel shifts in demand and supply if the economies of countries such as China and India continue their high levels of growth).

To address these challenges social science will use new international data resources and comparative methods. Increased investment will be required, including studentships geared to the economic opportunities and risks agenda. Interdisciplinary collaborations will seek to explain the co-evolution of global economic performance, environmental sustainability, security, and human health and wellbeing, and the role of individual and collective behaviour in economic events.

Global economic instability cuts across almost all the other key challenges for social science set out here. Within *Environment, Energy and Resilience* there are questions on whether economic recovery will reinforce or impede environmental objectives. How the UK provides for a high skill economy with businesses competing in an ever more demanding global environment will intersect with the *New Technology, Innovation and Skills* challenge. Links with the *Security, Conflict and Justice* challenge are likely to emerge from understanding how risks to security from turmoil in the global economy may be turned into opportunities for developing harmony between peoples. Links to the *Health and Wellbeing* and *Social Dynamics and Population Diversity* challenges will arise from the possible consequences of the economic downturn on health and demographic change.

There are also outstanding opportunities for the ESRC to work with other Research Councils and the Technology Strategy Board (TSB). For example, work with the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) on securing resilience of the UK economy in addition to work with the Technology Strategy Board on securing high value from global markets and production chains.

## Achievements 2005-2008

- Influencing economic policy, contributing to debate on financial markets, globalisation, productivity and the economic downturn
- Contributing to knowledge about alleviating world poverty through the ESRC/Department for International Development (DfID) initiative, an international scheme involving research organisations from both the UK and developing countries
- Advancing understanding of where and how the public and private sectors of the economy intersect, and providing evidence about how best to organise and deliver public services.

## Priorities for 2009-2014

By 2014 the ESRC will have:

- Invested in major new research aimed at understanding of macro-economic performance and how markets, institutions and policies interact to sustain competitive advantage in the global economy
- Funded work on the impact of public policy interventions on individual and institutional responses to global crisis, for example in their saving and consumption

- Identified evidence on how to improve global governance of economic activities for the sake of enhanced wellbeing
- Funded substantial new research with DfID on reducing poverty among the poorest countries in the world
- Expanded its investment in the provision of international datasets, such as those available from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund
- Worked with the follow up to the Council for Science and Technology report on infrastructure to ensure that the economic and social implications of developing the UK's infrastructure are fully integrated with the technology
- Through the further funding of key longitudinal data resources developed a deep understanding of individual and household responses to the rapidly changing economic climate
- Promoted access to data resources within specific emerging economies
- Led an initiative to strengthen capacity in macro economics. This will include ring-fenced studentships and post-doctoral fellowships.

### CASE STUDY

#### Paving the Way for the Minimum Wage

The work of the Centre for Economic Performance has made a significant contribution to the evidence base for a National Minimum Wage. In the early 1990s, their work was critical in providing evidence that the assumption that a minimum wage would necessarily lead to job losses was wrong. The Centre's research also became critical to informing the Low Pay Commission on the appropriate level of the Minimum Wage, and was fundamental to the recommendation that the Minimum Wage should be increased above the level of inflation over the four-year period 2003-06. It has been estimated that over 12 million workers have benefited from the introduction of the Minimum Wage, at a total wage-bill impact of about £1.2 billion.

### CASE STUDY

#### Personal Tax and Benefit Changes

The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) had an important influence on the debate around the abolition of the ten per cent income tax band. As part of the April 2008 inquiry by the Treasury Select Committee, the IFS used their tax and benefit model of the UK (TAXBEN) to provide a comprehensive analysis of the effects of the tax change - both in terms of tax distribution, potential numbers of household who could benefit, and public finance implications. The committee highlighted the IFS' contribution in the report, citing the 'invaluable quantitative evidence and associated analysis'.





## Health and Wellbeing

Avoidable health problems caused by social and economic factors are central to understanding huge differences in life expectancy – both between countries, where the gap can be over 40 years, and within the UK itself where the gap can be over 20 years for communities just a few miles apart.

Maintaining and promoting physical and psychological health and wellbeing for all the population is a pre-condition of a more prosperous and cohesive society. Marked inequalities in health remind us how far we are from achieving the goal of health and wellbeing for all. Lower levels of wellbeing and ill health hold back employment and productivity, and make public services more difficult and costly to provide.

Social science has demonstrated that individuals in less advantaged positions are more likely to suffer poor health. Research has also shown that childhood circumstances as well as material and environmental disadvantage over an individual's lifecourse can have long-term implications for health. The relationship between social, economic and environmental drivers of health has been shown to operate not only within national boundaries but also, increasingly, between countries, as integration of the global economy develops.

How ill-health links to poverty is a global concern. Social and economic development in parts of Africa and Asia is held back by preventable disease and disability. Furthermore, the health sector itself can become a generator of poverty. Market-driven health sector reforms in middle and low income countries may shift the burden of payment to patients and pull them into poverty. More than ever, social science is needed in the study of health systems.

The challenges facing social science include:

- The consequences of the global economic downturn for health and wellbeing
- The local, national and global social, economic and environmental causes of improved physical and mental health and wellbeing across the lifecourse, particularly in light of an ageing population
- What underpins resilience in the face of ill health and wellbeing
- The social and economic dimensions of predicting, preventing and responding to threats from existing and new infectious diseases and other health challenges

- The long run socio-economic consequences of ill health and poor wellbeing
- Identifying and developing evidenced, effective policies and interventions that lead to improved health and wellbeing and reduce health inequalities.

Work addressing such challenges can also be strengthened by considering the activities of other Research Councils, conceptually in areas relevant to health innovations such as systems biology and in gene-environment interaction (epigenetics), population health sciences and in application areas including obesity, addiction and dementia.

Utilisation of national and international data resources, including the growing wealth of cohort, other longitudinal and administrative data is critical, as is developing new and innovative ways of combining diverse datasets in order to understand health and wellbeing.

This challenge will complement the work of *Understanding Individual Behaviour* by investigating the socio-economic drivers of individual health behaviours and identifying interventions that address them. Links to *Global Economic Performance, Policy and Management; Security, Conflict and Justice*, and *Social Diversity and Population Dynamics* point to the need for new social scientific understandings of the way pandemics may spread and the effectiveness of counter-measures, and for more equitable healthcare systems that do not impoverish the sick. Health policy is taken up in *Social Diversity and Population Dynamics* and, particularly in occupational health in *Global Economic Performance, Policy and Management*. Additionally, interventions on global ill-health will provide synergies with *Security, Conflict and Justice*, and *Environment, Energy and Resilience*.

Where medical interventions alone are insufficient we now have the methods, data and concepts for the social science of health and wellbeing, especially when it comes to improving life chances and reducing inequalities. Social and medical science work best in partnership. To this end, the ESRC will strengthen its collaborations with the Medical Research Council (MRC), Department of Health, Office of Strategic Co-ordination of Health Research (OSCHR), charities and patient groups.

### Achievements 2005-2008

- Enabling practitioners and policymakers to tackle complex public health issues, through five new co-funded centres of excellence
- Through a new, innovative international research centre securing better understanding of how health and wellbeing are related to personal and professional skills and to employment and social participation. This work relies on our unique, world class longitudinal birth cohort studies
- Co-ordinating social scientists and scientists in genomic science and technology, promoting public dialogue, in which research connects with discussion of policy and bringing social science into decision making.

### Priorities for 2009-2014

By 2014 the ESRC will have:

- Invested, with partners, in the social science underpinning of interventions to promote improved physical and psychological wellbeing, better social care, healthy ageing, and the reduction of obesity and infectious disease
- Developed with national and international collaboration, a comparative programme on how to reduce physical and psychological health inequalities
- Maintained its investment in the internationally renowned series of birth cohort studies; developed a new birth cohort study beginning in 2012; and promoted access to the data it will produce through a dedicated Birth Cohort Facility
- Promoted access to and use of e-health records through collaboration with the OSCHR and other relevant partners; and through the development of virtual safe settings
- Built research capacity through studentships, fellowships and training opportunities at the interface of biomedical and social sciences.

#### CASE STUDY

##### Responding to Domestic Violence

A groundbreaking study on domestic violence has shaped policy and directly impacted on the lives of mothers and children. Professor Audrey Mullender's research from the ESRC's Children five-16 Research Programme has informed debates about legal reforms to child care legislation, resulting in amendments to the Children Act 1989. It has also influenced policy initiatives and frameworks, such as the Department for Children, Schools and Families' programme *Every Child Matters*. In addition her findings have affected the design and delivery of services to children and young people from local government and charities, as well as the development of materials used in direct work with mothers and children.

#### CASE STUDY

##### New Rules for Welfare

The significance of work to wellbeing is well established. A review of the welfare system to consider ways of enhancing employment, by Professor Paul Gregg from the Centre for Market and Public Organisation, fed directly into the Department for Work and Pensions' white paper on welfare reform December 2008. The research was commissioned by the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to look at how more people can be helped off benefits and into work. Professor Gregg's report, *Realising Potential*, looks at the requirements currently placed on the unemployed and calls for a new attitude to parents with young children and those on incapacity benefit who could work in the future.









## Understanding Individual Behaviour

People vary in how they behave and make decisions and we need to integrate the insights and methods from contemporary biology and medical sciences with those of social scientists in seeking to understand individual behaviour. Social science enables a focus on understanding those decisions by individuals in the context of family, neighbourhood and social relations more generally.

For example, we need to know how individuals perceive risks to their health. Take screening: although preventative screening can bring benefits, it can embed a false sense of security in some people, leading others to be fatalistic: both responses can lead to increased risk to health. To plan preventative healthcare we need to know how and why individuals behave differently in response to such information.

Research is starting to bring better knowledge of some behaviours. However, links between social, biological and environmental factors and individual behaviours, choices and outcomes are still far from clear. We need to understand how diverse factors fluctuate and compound over people's lives and how they can be predicted, managed or influenced. Specific challenges include:

- Interdisciplinary understanding of the interplay between predispositions, values, actions and possible interventions to improve, for example, the quality of financial decision-making or reduce criminal and anti-social behaviour
- How multi-level interventions at individual, household, community and societal level may be most effective
- Enhancing data sources to integrate social, environmental and bio-medical data to model multi-level influences on individual behaviour
- Identifying and measuring the strengths and limitations of particular influences on individual responses to change.

Breakthroughs are likely to come as much from combining techniques as combining knowledge. As well as ensuring the sustained prosperity of individual disciplines, further investment in relevant interdisciplinary training, especially at post doctoral level, will be essential.

The ESRC will work closely with other Research Councils in deepening our understanding of behavioural choice, for example with the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) on environmental behaviours, the MRC on health inequalities, the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council on biological influences on behaviour, and with the TSB and the EPSRC on future skills and creativity.

These biological and multi-level social influences are the subject of sustained attention in our other challenges. *Global Economic Performance, Policy and Management* fundamentally involves understanding the decisions made by individuals around the world. Within *Environment, Energy and Resilience*, there is a need to address perceptions about the value of environmental goods and services and people's usage of these. Whether insights into behaviour really enable reductions in health inequalities has crucial implications for the *Health and Wellbeing* challenge. How people learn is central to the *New Technology, Innovation and Skills* challenge of increasing creativity and breadth of skill.

## CASE STUDY

### Gauging Financial Risk Online

Award-winning psychological research, led by Professor Nick Chater of the People at the Centre of Communication and Information Technologies Programme, has underpinned the development of Electronic Financial Advice (e-advice) software, which delivers computer-based feedback on financial decisions. A new cognitive model of decision-making under risk was developed alongside a prototype online financial system based on user behaviour and e-advice support. The commercial spinout company Decision Technology provides a range of research for the private sector, particularly the financial and retail sector.

## CASE STUDY

### Helping Surgeons Perform

Surgeons' operating skills are honed using research by Dr Nick Sevdalis at the Centre for Economic Learning and Social Evolution. He has developed methods to assess decision-making skills by surgeons in a simulated operating theatre using high fidelity surgical mannequins and full operating theatre teams. This work is leading to the development of reliable assessment tools and training interventions for surgeons' decision-making and communications skills. Sevdalis has also been modelling surgical risk estimation and choice of surgical procedure by expert and novice surgeons. A method to provide individualised feedback on decision-making has been exploited successfully by the Royal College of Surgeons.

## Achievements 2005-2008

- The National Prevention Research Initiative has provided better understanding of how individuals behave to inform the primary prevention of cancer, coronary heart disease, and diabetes.
- Innovative cross-disciplinary research drawing on social and medical sciences resulting in improved knowledge of how brain functions affect wellbeing
- With the Responsibility in Gambling Trust, providing understanding of the effects of gambling and of the ways in which society can respond by regulation and services.

## Priorities for 2009-2014

By 2014 the ESRC will have:

- Followed up exploratory investments with grants for cross disciplinary research on behaviour with inherent risks, for example in finance and purchasing, as well as criminal and anti-social behaviours
- Invested in the potential for new interventions at societal, community, family, and individual levels to affect individual behaviour across a wide range of substantive areas
- Enhanced the ability to analyse individual and household behaviour and to develop and evaluate policy interventions by funding new world leading data resources such as Understanding Society and the 2012 Cohort Study
- Through cross-disciplinary collaborations, developed multi-method approaches to the analysis of data from panel and cohort studies, enhancing the power to understand the complexities of behaviour
- Built new interdisciplinary capacity by targeted studentships and postdoctoral fellowships in collaboration with other Research Councils.

## New Technology, Innovation and Skills

Contemporary economies rely on innovation. Already, 40 per cent of the UK's value added arises from knowledge-intensive services and high-tech manufacturing. The economic downturn offers scope to rebalance the economy as investment moves into areas where the UK may have or may be able to build comparative advantage. Economic resilience depends on the capacity of people, firms and governments to innovate. Individuals need new kinds of expertise, technical skills and understanding. Firms must develop, adopt and adapt cutting edge services, products, processes and ways of working. Governments need to create policies and set frameworks for innovation and address the social, technical and ethical challenges set by biological, nano-, communication and other technologies. Emergent technologies can challenge our understanding of what government can do, what constitutes an organisation, even what it means to be human.

Social scientists need to play active roles in innovation, demonstrating how social, economic and political drivers shape new technologies. Research has helped to explain why some new technologies enjoy public confidence and rapid uptake while others do not and how outmoded linear models of innovation can be replaced by more useful open ecosystem based models. Our evidence has also demonstrated how innovative teaching can stimulate interest in science and how well designed education technologies enhance learning. In the area of skills, social scientists have shown how and why early years education contributes to lifelong opportunity as well as the benefits of learning throughout life.

However there is more that the social sciences can contribute. In a time of global instability the UK needs to be well placed to develop and exploit new technologies and enhance the range of skills needed to drive the UK economy forward. Challenges include:

- The opportunities and threats of the explosion of human interaction on the internet and related technologies (particularly mobile technologies) and how future semantic web based technologies can underpin both economic and learning opportunities and open up new platforms for civic participation in contemporary democracy

- The social drivers and implications of developments in ubiquitous computing, nano-technologies and bio-technologies, particularly in criminal justice, transport, health and social care
- Determining how apparently autonomous technologies in areas as diverse as finance and defence can be regulated, governed and made accountable
- Skill development at all levels from initial numeracy, language and communication to advanced post graduate science, mathematics and engineering to lifelong learning in the workplace to meet the social, cultural and economic needs of society.

This challenge links to *Global Economic Performance, Policy and Management*, for example in how new technologies contribute to economic prosperity while submitting to global governance. There are also connections to *Understanding Individual Behaviour* including, for example, how people behave in technology mediated environments (like the internet) and how people and organisations develop long-term skills relevant to an increasingly dynamic knowledge intensive economy; to *Environment, Energy and Resilience* around the potential for socially viable technologies in environmental protection; to *Security, Conflict and Justice* where there are issues around cyber-security, identity management, and the acceptability of the use of technologies for security purposes; and to *Social Diversity and Population Dynamics* where the potential – and dangers – of web-based technologies for the renewal of democracy remains unclear.

In all this the ESRC will look to collaborate with business, industry, all of the other Research Councils and the TSB. All are concerned with the problem of how to secure the design, diffusion and governance of new technologies. Here social science has the potential to provide essential insights.





## Achievements 2005-2008

- Investigating how lifelong learning promotes economic competitiveness and social cohesion, including the social and cultural foundations of learning, knowledge production and transfer, and innovation, within the context of a changing economy.
- Through the promotion and support of world class theoretical, empirical, policy- and practice-oriented research, contributing to global innovation processes by shaping and exploring how they work both in the UK and within an international comparative context.
- Improving learning throughout the lifecourse, by building capacity in high quality educational research and bringing different research methods together. In addition research on technology enhanced learning will improve the quality of formal and informal learning, and make accessible forms of knowledge that were previously inaccessible.

## Priorities for 2009-2014

By 2014 the ESRC will have:

- Provided, with partners, a sustained body of research and knowledge transfer on the challenges and opportunities from open, holistic systems of innovation
- Worked with partners on development and impact of key technologies including nano-technologies, renewable energy, health care technologies, and the next generation of the digital economy
- Through funding largescale studies such as the Workplace Employees Relations Survey, developed a deeper appreciation of the evolving skills requirements needed for the UK to sustain competitive advantage
- Exploited the potential of new technologies for research itself by promoting methodological developments, the application of new methodologies to the exploitation of data resources and innovation in e-infrastructure.

### CASE STUDY

#### Putting Skills into Business

The Centre on Skills, Knowledge and Organisational Performance research on skills policy and economic development had an important impact on the Scottish Skills Strategy, influencing its direction. Research on the links between workforce skills, business improvement and economic development has also shaped policies beyond the UK. Findings from the Centre were influential in the development of Skill Ecosystem projects in Australia. The projects support partnerships between trainers and industry that focus on improving workforce capacity and the use of skills.

### CASE STUDY

#### Game Time for Pupils

A software tool enabling teenagers to create their own computer games has been developed by Professor David Buckingham, as part of the People at the Centre of Communication and Information Technologies Programme. Letting pupils use the MissionMaker application in the classroom has helped researchers identify key elements of game literacy and develop teaching materials for the principles of game design. The MissionMaker is now used in over 200 schools and is part of the Institute of Education's Masters programmes. The software is being developed further by a company for the commercial market.



## Environment, Energy and Resilience

By 2030 global demand for energy and food is predicted to double. A bigger world population, up by two billion, will put additional pressure on water and other resources. Environmental and climate change over the next 50 years will pose important threats, to food security, to health, and to economic prosperity around the world.

Urgent, dramatic and far reaching action is required now to mitigate and adapt to environmental change. Energy use, security and trade, food and water consumption and greenhouse gas emissions are all social and economic issues. The recession throws into sharper relief whether we need to make trade-offs, or exploit synergies, between environmental goals and economic aspirations.

Social science has provided evidence on the costs of environmental change and the impacts of interventions to reduce emissions. It has led to new environmental and energy policy options. Challenges and questions include:

- How to underpin the transitions to a low carbon economy and a more climate resilient society
- Identifying ways to secure safe, sustainable and affordable energy, food and water supplies
- Understanding perceptions and beliefs around the value of energy and environmental goods and services
- Development of sustainable environmental practices and policies for international agencies, governments at multiple levels, business, communities and individuals, and the structural, institutional and behavioural changes needed to implement them
- How environmental knowledge is understood when the modern world suffers from 'information overload'
- Understanding perceptions of the risks from environmental change and natural hazards and development of interventions to strengthen resilience
- Shaping environmental regulation and the roles of governments, markets and civil society.

The ESRC will fund high impact research while developing theory and methods drawing on the full range of disciplines. We aim to build a new generation of skilled researchers and new data resources.

This challenge connects widely with others. Ensuring that recovery from the current global slowdown strengthens the emerging green economy, rather than undermining progress towards emission targets has links to *Global Economic Performance, Policy and Management*, and *New Technology, Innovation and Skills*. The link with *Social Diversity and Population Dynamics* is in understanding how population growth and movement challenge objectives for greater sustainability. There is also strong connectivity with *Security, Conflict and Justice* in terms of the impacts of environmental change on energy and food security, and the need to strengthen the resilience of communities, businesses and individuals to environmental changes as well as other potential threats.

The ESRC will be deeply involved in the multi-agency Living with Environmental Change Programme, and the Research Councils' Energy Research Programme, where the social science contribution is critical to achievement of overall programme goals. We will work with the TSB, for example on its low carbon buildings innovation platform.

### Achievements 2005-2008

- Advancing climate change policy by improving both the evidence base for decision-makers and the tools and implementation strategies available to them
- Providing authoritative information and leadership on sustainable energy systems, through rigorous, interdisciplinary research that engages with policymakers and practitioners to identify sustainable, economically efficient ways of achieving energy transition
- Providing evidence on the sustainable development of food chains and rural land use, and engaging in an ambitious programme of related knowledge exchange with businesses and national and regional policymakers
- Contributing to processes and outcomes that are more resilient, sustainable, socially just and favourable for the poor through research that explores the pathways by which technologies, ecologies and social systems interact in development.



## CASE STUDY

### Putting a Price on Nature

Researchers from the Centre for Social and Economic Research on the Global Environment have developed a methodology for assessing the economic value of freshwater and marine environmental systems. The results are now being applied by the Environment Agency to the marine environment and the management of catchments, as required by the EU Water Framework Directive. The Centre's research has led to a more cost-benefit based approach to implementation of the Water Framework Directive in the UK, compared to most other EU countries.

## CASE STUDY

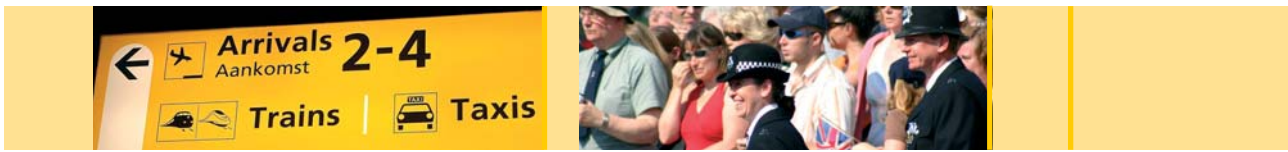
### Waste management

How Britain disposes of its waste has become an urgent issue. Research led by Professor Simin Davoudi has been instrumental in shaping government policy on waste management by investigating how policy and political pressures are influencing current processes across England. The findings have been central to new government guidance on waste policy. Both the Department of Communities and Local Government and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs have responded by strengthening the role of regions in developing waste planning policy.

## Priorities for 2009-2014

By 2014 the ESRC will have:

- Played a lead role in developing and delivering research on the drivers and implications of environmental change under conditions of uncertainty, the financing of sustainability, and on appropriate public and private responses to both mitigate and adapt to change
- Examined the impact of the economic downturn and measures to combat it on long-term environmental change goals
- Invested, with partners, in understanding how environmental behaviours, practices and policy can be changed to promote sustainable use of resources
- Collaborated internationally to understand the complex interdependence between alleviating global poverty, sustaining economic and social development, building societal resilience to environmental change and reducing the human impact on natural systems
- Funded research with other Research Councils and partners to increase food security in the UK and globally
- Worked with the follow up to the Council for Science and Technology report on infrastructure to ensure integration of social and economic issues with the technological challenges
- Worked with partners on developing a common framework for geo-spatial data, which will enable better monitoring, simulation and development of interventions to promote sustainability
- Built research capacity through funding studentships and fellowships at the interface of environmental and social science jointly with the NERC.



## Security, Conflict and Justice

Conflicts between states have become less frequent, however threats to the security of individuals, communities and states remain. Territorial and ideological conflicts are overlain by struggles about identity and justice which have led to the break up of states and violence between and across countries and regions. Competition over resources, coupled with the recession and increasing scarcity of water, energy and food, has the potential to trigger new forms of conflict. New technologies offer the promise of preventing and mitigating insecurity, but can also enable criminal activity. There is nothing predetermined about these multi-dimensional and multi-level threats to security. To understand how and why potential security threats result in real harm, and what interventions are most likely to improve threat prediction and avoid, reduce and manage risks, is an urgent task for the social sciences.

Under the *New Security Challenges* programme, the ESRC has been examining the changing nature of security and risk, for example funding research on understanding the causes and processes of radicalisation and violence in contemporary society. We will build upon this to seek a greater understanding of the nature and causes of insecurity, the origins and dynamics of conflict, and the role of social justice, allowing us to develop better strategies for resolving conflicts and promoting security.

Security, conflict and justice are inherently linked. Security is a broad concept, operating at multiple levels from the individual to global, and requires coherent action across a wide range of issues. The challenge is about understanding the causes of insecurity, including criminal and terrorist activity, and developing effective means for promoting security, addressing vulnerabilities and encouraging resilience. Research will explore the contemporary drivers of insecurity; why competition sometimes develops into violent conflict; the nature of contemporary conflicts, how they might be resolved and the effects mitigated; and how social injustice perpetuates insecurities. It explores how notions of self, community rights, ethics and competing ideas of justice can be incorporated into new ways of predicting, managing and avoiding insecurity. These are demanding research challenges which will require novel interdisciplinary approaches, complementing traditional security studies with new perspectives on issues such as the ethics and the engineering of new security technologies. The research should generate quantitative and qualitative data as well as outputs of scholarly, economic, social and policy value. The challenges include:

- How significant challenges such as poverty, environmental change, technological and demographic trends, and the economic downturn affect security
- Understanding how personal and group behaviours affect security and conflict responses, and how local conflicts in particular communities can spread and have broader consequences
- Understanding why social injustice triggers largely non-violent responses in some settings and more violent responses in others
- How, why and when security and justice strategies are likely to succeed or fail
- Reducing insecurity through improved resilience in communities and in the public and private sectors, including protection of critical infrastructure
- Exploration of the changing patterns of conflicts and how they might be prevented and resolved and their effects contained.

We will address this agenda through the funding of high quality, high impact, independent research with development of theory, data and methods. Through the cross-council *Global Uncertainties: Security for All in a Changing World* programme, which is led by the ESRC, we will take this work forward in partnership with all other Research Councils, government departments, and the TSB. This effort will be underpinned by investments to build a new generation of researchers with interdisciplinary skills, as well as exploiting the skills and knowledge of existing scholars to engage with policymakers and other users of research. We are engaging in close collaboration between ESRC challenges for social science, other RCUK programmes, such as the *Living with Environmental Change* programme, and international research.

This challenge has links with all six of the other challenges, for example with *Global Economic Performance, Policy and Management* and *Environment, Energy and Resilience* in terms of understanding emerging economic and environmental threats to security, and with *New Technology, Innovation and Skills* and *Social Diversity and Population Dynamics* in terms of developing and achieving acceptable social and technological solutions to improve security for all.

## Achievements 2005-2008

- Funded research with the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and Foreign and Commonwealth Office to better understand radicalisation and violence
- Supported research into new security challenges covering a wide range of areas, from conflict in cities, the globalisation of private security, the role of military force in the security of civil society through to the media and psychological dimensions of human security.

## Priorities for 2009-2014

By 2014 the ESRC will have:

- Developed and funded in partnership with other stakeholders a portfolio of high impact, interdisciplinary research contributing to UK security objectives, including new initiatives on food, water and energy security
- Helped to build a stronger, more integrated interdisciplinary security research community, and accelerated the co-ordinated pull-through of research outputs into policy, practice and commercialisation through its leadership of the RCUK *Global Uncertainties* programme
- Funded research with national and international partners on potential reforms of international institutions, and how new, or radically reformed, arrangements for multi-level governance can address the competing demands from states, religious, ideological or national movements, and other actors
- Identified and addressed key gaps in social science data resources and capacity to underpin work on security, conflict and justice.

## CASE STUDY

### Controlling without Confronting

Studying behaviour at football matches has helped understand why some situations spark aggression and riots. Dr Clifford Stott has shown that avoiding the use of heavy-handed tactics, such as automatically sending out a riot squad for crowd control, can help maintain control in potentially hostile situations. A less confrontational atmosphere is created if the police are wearing normal uniforms, move in pairs and interact with the crowd. This approach makes people feel like the policing has been appropriate – even if arrests do need to be made. Dr Stott's research has been included in a European Union handbook on controlling violence at international football matches, and he is now helping to set up a pan-European police training programme on match safety.

## CASE STUDY 2

### Improving security in war-torn countries

As part of the New Security Challenges Programme Professor Paul Collier has studied security risks in post-conflict countries. His research with colleague Anke Hoeffler indicates that a recovering economy is a crucial element for sustained peace, while an external military force (such as the UN peacekeeping operations) can be an effective way of deterring further conflict. Professor Collier's work has led to significant input in international policy; he was appointed Senior Advisor to the Prime Minister's Africa Commission which reported to the G8 summit in 2005, as well as Advisor to the World Bank and Resource Person for the UN Secretary-General's High Level Panel on Security.







## Social Diversity and Population Dynamics

Local, national and transnational communities are being formed and re-formed at unprecedented speed. Changing patterns of migration, economic opportunity, environmental change, fertility, ageing and new family and household dynamics interact with complex consequences. Understanding the extent and implications of these changes will be essential if we are to seize the opportunities for economic resilience, opportunity and wellbeing that diversity and change can bring, and this will require novel contributions from the social sciences. Inequality which may be compounded by the recession challenges solidarity both within countries and between them. Rapid social change demands rethinking of how societies define and pursue collective goals – through public, private or third sector organisations at various scales, from neighbourhood to regions, state and transnational.

Research will be essential to measure change both within the UK and globally. For example, there is evidence that declines in childbearing observed in the 1990s throughout the world have stalled in recent years with major implications for future demands for food and other natural resources. In addition, understanding the extent and motivations for migration to and from the UK remains a challenge.

The ESRC will also enhance knowledge about complex and often deeply embedded differences in practices, ethnicity, and belief alongside class, locality and gender. It will build understanding of the different ways in which people value, respond to and interact with diversity. It will also focus on the implications of these challenges for the quality and renewal of western democratic systems. Diversity and inequality may 'fracture' society, exclude some groups from traditional forms of civic engagement and belonging, and corrode the fabric of democracy or it may stimulate new forms of representation and participation and enhance our practice of democracy. We need to reconsider collective identities (e.g. the debate on 'Britishness'), the structures of government (from local to transnational), the policy interventions (e.g. renewing the scope of equalities policy), and the modes of political participation (including new web-based technologies) that are capable of addressing these challenges. Most critically, we need to identify and to test the interventions which will impact quickly and positively on inequality.

This research agenda is methodologically challenging and theoretically refreshing. It will require the harnessing of existing and new datasets and of disciplines within and beyond social science to the understanding of social diversity. It will also push methodological boundaries, connecting quantitative and qualitative research agendas to new experimental methods, and doing so through carefully designed comparative analysis. It will also open up new ways to engage the public in research and in identifying ways to bring about beneficial change.

Fundamental challenges include:

- How policies on migration, fertility, social mobility, and local, national and international economic management affect and are affected by social groups
- How shifting demographic trends – ageing populations, greater female employment, growing migrant communities – impact on the delivery of public, private and third sector services
- How to promote collective wellbeing while engaging the confidence and participation of diverse populations
- How diverse populations in particular places create, innovate and use technologies to promote connectivity and cohesion.

The changes in international demography – population increases, migration and ageing, challenge how we live and act together in specific places. Particularly important links for work under this challenge include with *Environment, Energy and Resilience* on understanding how communities can secure access to safe and affordable food and water. There are also links to *Security, Conflict and Justice*, in terms of how diverse communities can minimise violent conflict while sustaining rights for all. Further understanding how connected communities will enhance learning opportunities for sustainable economic recovery also contributes to the *New Technology, Innovation and Skills* challenge.

The ESRC will work with: the MRC, other Research Councils, government and charities on fertility, lifelong health and wellbeing; and the AHRC and the EPSRC on connected communities.



## Achievements 2005-2008

- Contributing to the improvement in the quality of life of older people. Interdisciplinary research reveals the dynamic interplay between ageing individuals and their changing technological, cultural, social and physical environments – local, national and global – and means for overcoming the consequent constraints on the quality of life of older people.
- Creating better understanding of the causes of population change, democratic processes and the implications for economic welfare and social support at the national, local, household and individual level. By examining issues such as fertility, motherhood, childlessness, childcare, health and wellbeing, employment and demographic change, identity, ethnicity, segregation, religiosity, political and social values and constitutional preferences, cohabitation, mobility and education.
- Advancing understanding of religion in society by exploring the role of religion in shaping our lives, questions of belief, human culture and wider society. This is being achieved through fostering collaborative endeavours across the arts, humanities and social sciences by supporting research of the highest quality and international significance.

## Priorities for 2009-2014

By 2014 the ESRC will have:

- Undertaken research on the levels, and the implications of the pace of change in these levels, of childbearing globally
- Continued to work on the dynamics of migration into and from the UK
- Provided new evidence on the role played by neighbourhoods and communities in enhancing economic, cultural and educational opportunity and on the interventions necessary to achieve greater security, prosperity and a less fractured society
- Developed a clearer understanding of the challenges of democratic renewal in the UK and beyond, and worked with government at all levels to tackle those challenges
- Harnessed key longitudinal resources to further extend short, medium and longer term understanding of social diversity and population dynamics

- Utilised and combined new and existing survey and administrative data to reveal the interplay of migration, ageing, fertility and place in enabling individual and family resilience
- Facilitated access to population records to inform research by developing and implementing a new programme to disseminate the data from the 2011 UK Census of Population and to encourage the linkage of those data with a wide range of other sources of data (qualitative, quantitative, administrative and born digital) to address research questions across a wide spectrum of areas.

### CASE STUDY

#### Supporting Families

The impact of the Government's welfare reforms on expenditure patterns in low-income families with children has been examined by the Centre for Market and Public Organisation. The Centre's analysis was referenced in the 2005 Pre-Budget Report document *Support for Parents: the best start for children* and in the 2006 annual Department for Work and Pensions strategy document *Opportunity for All*. Charities such as Save the Children used the research to highlight the higher prices paid by the poor for basic necessities such as fuel and banking. In 2007 the research was also used in testimony to the United States House Committee on Ways and Means as relevant to the formation of a US anti-poverty strategy.

### CASE STUDY

#### Improving Older People's Lives

The charity Help the Aged has used findings from Professor Thomas Scharf's research into older people and social exclusion in their 'Stop pensioner poverty now' campaign. The research informed the development of the campaign, as well as the charity's work relating to fear of crime. The research team has also facilitated on the ground co-operation between Help the Aged and community groups in the study areas, leading to the charity's engagement with Pakistani and Somali communities in Manchester and Liverpool in order to improve older people's living conditions.





# maximising impact

The social sciences are essential to developing the international competitiveness of UK business and the wellbeing of citizens in the UK and beyond. Providing a high quality social science knowledge and evidence base, which is at the heart of the ESRC's mission, is fundamental to addressing a range of economic and social issues within the UK and globally. To achieve this, active two-way dialogue and collaboration between social scientists and potential users throughout the research process and beyond is crucial.

Scientific excellence is a core value throughout the ESRC, and is a prerequisite for effective knowledge transfer. We support the highest quality research, train the researchers of the future, and make sure that they have the methods, data and other resources they need to produce deep insights into economic and social questions.

The ESRC creates and supports impact through its five strategic objectives:

- Impact through world class social science research
- Impact through skilled people
- Impact through world class infrastructure
- Impact through international leadership
- Impact through partnerships

The concept of 'impact' in the social sciences applies to all sectors: public, private and third. It embraces economic and societal impact in the sense of direct and often quantifiable economic benefits; wider social impacts that will benefit society more generally such as effects on the environment, public health or quality of life; and impacts on government policy, the third sector and professional practice.

These wider aspects are crucial. There is a significant cost to the public purse of a failed policy and significant benefit from a successful one. Many of the policies of the last decade in relation to benefits and family tax credits, for example, have been informed by rigorous social science research, most of it funded by the ESRC. Similarly, public sector productivity and a healthy workforce are as important to the UK's economic wellbeing as increased profits in the private sector. We believe that social science research can and should have ongoing and significant impacts.

Engaging with potential research users from the earliest stage of the research process is a key factor in helping to ensure the findings are subsequently taken up and exploited. Our work has shown that sustained contacts with users are the most important determinants of policy impact. It is important that researchers and policymakers share a mutual understanding of the relevance of each other's interests and activities, helping to deepen understandings of the way in which academic research can add value and offer insights to key issues of concern for policymakers.

The flow of people, researchers and users between sectors is one of the most effective mechanisms for knowledge exchange and facilitating dialogue to develop connections and understanding.

The ESRC understands that delivering impact is only possible through collaboration with other stakeholders in and beyond the social science community. Support and incentives for engagement with policy, business and third sectors by researchers are needed. The ESRC is committed to developing mechanisms to enable researchers to maximise the impact of research, such as the Follow on Fund. We encourage researchers actively to consider the pathways to impact that might be developed through the life course of research and we are improving the monitoring and capturing of the impact of the work we fund.

The following pages include a description of each objective, case studies which demonstrate the breadth of impact ESRC funded research can have, and future priorities to enhance and strengthen the impact of our work.







# strategic objectives

## Impact through World Class Research

To maximise impact it is essential to stimulate creativity and adventure in research. This involves encouraging innovative theory and research methods across the social sciences and requires investment in both fundamental and applied research. Our aim is also to support new and dynamic interdisciplinary research where it has the potential to drive forward breakthrough science or provide powerful innovative insights into complex applied problems. As part of this, extending partnerships with other Research Councils to embed social science at the heart of all collaborative work will be key, particularly in the existing cross-council research challenges. In addition to supporting research on our own key research challenges, we will continue to fund outstanding social science within all areas of our remit. As well as investing in new high impact research, we will, through mechanisms such as the Follow on Fund, work to exploit and optimise the impact of the research which we have already supported.

Given the global context in which we live, it is important to promote more internationally focussed research, helping us to develop a deeper understanding of the wider world and greater knowledge of how that impacts on the UK.

Forming strong partnerships with key stakeholders in the public, private and third sectors is also essential to maximising the impact of our research. It will allow us to co-produce research with other stakeholders and disseminate research outcomes direct for optimal impact. Our aim is to deepen and extend what is already an excellent track record. In recent years we have established an impressive number of collaborative research initiatives with a wide range of partners through our collaborative Ventures funding. These include, for example, the Wellcome Trust, Hewlett Foundation, Cancer Research UK, the TSB, and an extensive number of Government Departments.

Individual researchers must also maximise the impact of their research and the ESRC will support them in this by, for example, building on the early success of the Follow on Fund, which provides targeted funding for research impact. All researchers will be encouraged to demonstrate how they will generate impact through active engagement with a wide range of stakeholders during the lifetime of their grant. User engagement strategies will be more directly assessed through the application process.

## Future priorities

By 2014 the ESRC will have:

- Actively extended innovative research across all our modes of funding
- Driven forward exciting new interdisciplinary research, particularly through the deep integration of social science across the RCUK research challenges
- Expanded the impact of our research beyond the academic community through extending our portfolio of collaborative initiatives
- Enhanced the impact of individual grants, by placing greater emphasis on user engagement in our application and assessment procedures
- Strengthened the capacity to undertake international research, through initiatives to enhance comparative research methods.

## CASE STUDY

### Safe Web Space for Children

Professor Sonia Livingstone's research *UK Children Go Online* has had a substantial impact on the design of safeguards to protect children from harmful material on the internet, as well as exposing how much young people are exposed to such material. Based on her research, Microsoft developed educational material which they distributed to every secondary school. Virtual Global Taskforce, an alliance of law enforcement agencies working to prevent online child abuse, also used her work in their public safety materials. The findings have been used by the Home Secretary's Task Force for Child Protection on the Internet to review self regulation procedures, including the forthcoming guidelines on social networking for children.

## Impact through Skilled People

The supply of highly skilled people is critical in sustaining the long-term health and development of a world class social science research base as well as a competitive, knowledge based UK economy. By taking the strategic lead in driving up the quality of postgraduate training the ESRC has had a major impact on the development of the social science skills base within the UK. This now ranks with the best training provision across the world. In addition, by launching the first grants, postdoctoral and mid career fellowship schemes alongside major investment in the researcher development initiative, we have taken the lead in providing structured training opportunities for social scientists across the rest of the research career:

Over the next five years we will continue to uphold our major investment in training and skills development to recruit and retain the most talented people by offering diverse and flexible training to researchers at all points of their career. By doing so the ESRC is committed to sustaining the long-term health of the social science research base, with a particular emphasis on targeting skills deficits in key shortage areas such as quantitative methods.

The transfer of skilled people between the sectors remains one of the most potent mechanisms for maximising impact. The ESRC has made major progress through supporting a variety of knowledge exchange schemes such as CASE studentships, Knowledge Transfer partnerships and user fellowships. We intend to extend and deepen these schemes through developing an increasingly flexible set of exchange opportunities which meet the needs of the public, private and third sectors. Embedding transferable (employability) skills training across our schemes is also a priority, to ensure we are supplying the most highly skilled people to support innovation and growth in the broader economy and society.

## Future Priorities

By 2014 the ESRC will have:

- Further improved the quality of postgraduate skills development through the introduction of more flexible, innovative training programmes, delivered through a revised postgraduate training framework
- Reduced supply side skills and research capacity deficits, by targeted initiatives in areas such as quantitative methods
- Extended training and development opportunities for early and mid career researchers through further funding of first grants, postdoctoral and mid career fellowship schemes
- Created a more flexible and adaptable workforce, by expanding and integrating transferable skills development into postgraduate training and other early career development schemes
- Driven forward knowledge exchange through the expansion of the range of opportunities for researchers to work in other sectors. This will include short term placements, fellowships and collaborative studentships with government departments, the business and third sectors
- Given every ESRC-funded postgraduate student the opportunity of an internship in industry, government or the third sector.

### CASE STUDY

#### Reduced drug risk

An ESRC-funded collaborative CASE studentship between the University of Plymouth and Plymouth Drug and Alcohol Action Team has influenced new drug-related policy and practice locally. Research by Steven Parkin, with supervisor Dr Ross Coomber, revealed how places produced risks, how policing and other service activities displaced rather than resolved risk, and led to new practice such as locating safe injecting outlets in places of need. The Action Team are planning to embed annual CASE applications in their forward planning, while partner teams in Devon and Cornwall also are looking to support applications with Dr Coomber.



## Impact through Infrastructure

To maximise the impact of our research it is vital that we equip social scientists with leading edge research methods and the very highest quality datasets. Through major strategic investment by the ESRC the UK now has a world class data infrastructure and an international reputation for developing some of the most groundbreaking methodological tools and techniques.

It is essential that we build upon these strengths. In an ever more complex and rapidly changing world we must develop and utilise bigger multi-variable datasets and more sophisticated research methods if we are going to be able to answer increasingly complex research questions. Continuing major investment into our portfolio of world leading longitudinal surveys is key, providing one of the most powerful tools for capturing and understanding social and economic change. Exploitation of the huge research potential that is increasingly available from existing data sources, such as transactional and health data, is also vitally important. Our aim is to exploit the potential of existing datasets, be they qualitative, quantitative, visual, administrative or born digital, through innovative data linkage and to provide new ways to disseminate them as widely as possible. A major priority is to ensure that our data strategy is underpinned by a commitment to provide safe and secure access not only to all of our data resources but also those provided by other organisations.

As we extend and develop our world class data infrastructure, we will continue to exercise a substantial impact beyond the social science research base. Our datasets offer an unrivalled evidence base for direct use by the public, private and voluntary sectors, helping to shape and inform government policy and business decisions. We will continue to meet the needs of all our stakeholders by working in collaboration through the multi-agency UK Data Forum and the National Data Strategy.

The ESRC will continue to develop and mainstream new quantitative and qualitative research methods across the social science community. A priority will be sustained support for our existing world leading investments in this area where appropriate and extending our work into new areas including how to collect, merge, manage and mine ever more complex data resources at a national and international level.

### Future Priorities

By 2014 the ESRC will have:

- Identified and delivered data priorities for the social science community and other key stakeholders through the further development of the National Data Strategy
- Radically extended opportunities for high quality, interdisciplinary research and policy analysis through the development of major data resources. This will include development of the world leading longitudinal studies such as the *Understanding Society* Survey and 2012 Birth Cohort Study, alongside the improved access to key administrative and transactional related data resources
- Driven forward new standards in data access and security, supported by a campaign of public engagement
- Enhanced the capacity to create, integrate and analyse quantitative, qualitative, administrative, visual and born digital datasets through the development of pioneering new research methods
- Greatly extended our ability to assess the impact of our research on policy and practice through the innovative application and development of evaluation methods.

## CASE STUDY

### Understanding Poverty

The Research Centre on Micro-Social Change used data from the British Household Panel Study to examine how individuals' and families' income and pay changes from year to year. The research has led to a far better understanding of how poverty and low pay persist, and the factors influencing social mobility. The findings have informed policies for combating child poverty, the reform of the UK tax system, and the Department for Work and Pensions' 'Opportunity for All' programme.



## Impact through International Leadership

The ESRC has played a key international leadership role within the social sciences. It has driven forward collaboration with a wide range of international partners, and through a number of joint schemes enabled UK social scientists to work with the most renowned international researchers from around the world on some of the most challenging global issues as well as enabling researchers globally to interact with the UK's world leading social scientists. As well as bringing researchers on individual grants, we have funded major international research programmes, including for example, our partnership with the Department for International Development to address poverty alleviation in the developing world and with the Hewlett Foundation to explore economic and social development in Africa. UK social science, and the ESRC, also have a leadership role in promoting and developing social sciences in countries where they are less prominent, including contributing to develop methodology and assisting with training and development.

The aim over the next five years will be to further enhance the UK's world leading position by extending our collaborations to a wider range of international partners to facilitate world class research partnerships and research impact. This will be achieved through further bi-lateral arrangements and by working for example with the RCUK offices in India, China and the US. We will work to encourage international mobility for researchers at all stages of their career. In addition, a vital priority will be to take the strategic lead in developing international research infrastructure through co-ordinating the production and sharing of key global data resources.

## Future Priorities

By 2014 the ESRC will have:

- Enhanced opportunities for collaborative research within Europe by supporting the strategic and operational development of the European Research Area and by optimising opportunities with European institutions and with key national partners in Europe, including through the Norface network
- Extended the potential for UK social scientists to collaborate with North American, Chinese and Indian researchers and with other leading and emerging social science strengths in Asia, Latin America, Africa, Australasia, and Central and Eastern Europe
- Strengthened development of global research partnerships through lowering the barriers to joint international application and peer review processes
- Radically expanded the international mobility of early career researchers through targeted international networking initiatives
- Expanded opportunities for international research through widening and promoting access to international data resources.

## CASE STUDY

### Research Crossing Borders

The ESRC is playing a leading role in removing barriers to international collaboration. This includes forming a number of lead agency agreements with national agencies in other countries, to allow for a single decision making process between both organisations and encourage research projects across borders. This builds upon the leading role taken in the development of an International Common Application Process with sister agencies in Germany, Austria and the Netherlands. On behalf of the UK Research Councils the ESRC is also piloting a new policy allowing a non-UK partner to be a full participant in a bid for funding – particularly valuable in enabling collaborations with researchers in countries with low levels of funding for social sciences.

## Impact through Partnerships

Over the last few years, building partnerships with all sectors has been a strategic priority for the ESRC and will continue to be so over the next five years. Strategic engagement with our stakeholders has helped us ensure that we can maximise the impact of all our activities. We now have in place a series of key partnerships with government departments through which we have shaped and co-funded research initiatives, identified and delivered data priorities and co-sponsored a series of collaborative studentship schemes. The ESRC also has an excellent track record in working with other partners. For example, working with the Barrow Cadbury Trust and Office for the Third Sector to fund a major new research centre and research capacity building programme working with third sector organisations to identify and deliver key research needs. Similarly, we have driven forward our Business Engagement Strategy and are now supporting research initiatives which will foster direct collaboration with key business sectors such as retail and financial services.

Sustaining and developing this strategic leadership role will be a vital priority to ensure that we can drive home the full impact of economic and social research on policy and practice. Over the next five years we will radically extend our collaborative research activities with a wider range of organisations through our Ventures fund and through our people transfer schemes. We will also work directly with HEIs and Learned Societies to

positively promote the value of social science research beyond the academic community. A key focus will be to collaborate with the RCUK Science and Society Unit and, where appropriate, through our own initiatives to foster stronger public engagement to help shape and direct our activities. Individual academics and institutions must also deliver engagement. However, we cannot be blind to the context in which they operate, which means working with others on incentives to achieving impact on policy and practice, such as with the Higher Education Funding Council for England on the development of the Research Excellence Framework.

### Future Priorities

By 2014 the ESRC will have:

- Extended and deepened existing strategic partnerships and knowledge exchange networks across the public, private and third sectors
- Built upon our successful strategic partnerships with government departments, the Office for National Statistics, other Research Councils and the Joint Information Systems Committee to extend the UK's world class data infrastructure. This will include continued co-funding of key new investments such as Understanding Society and 2012 Birth Cohort Study
- Continued investment in collaborative research with users through our Ventures scheme, our people exchange schemes and other joint initiatives
- Developed new and innovative knowledge brokerage mechanisms to deliver social science to policymakers and practitioners including through the use of new technologies
- Built a demonstrable and convincing evidence base of the impact of social science by extending our evaluation impact studies
- Worked with HEIs and Learned Societies to identify how best to maximise the value of social science research across all sectors
- Embedded public users within ESRC processes by involvement within our governance structures.

### CASE STUDY

#### Drive for Safety

A partnership between Cranfield University and Arriva Passenger Services, sponsored by the ESRC and the TSB, improved bus driver training and safety awareness. The research project led to the development of a simulator for new bus drivers, a psychometric driver assessment, and safety guidelines at bus depots. As a result the company's insurance claims were reduced by over £1 million, staff turnover was reduced from 24 per cent to 20 per cent, and absenteeism went down from 6.1 per cent to 4.5 per cent. A spinout company is exploiting the commercial potential of the Bus Driver Risk Index, the psychometric assessment of bus drivers' reactions.



The Economic and Social Research Council is the UK's leading research and training agency addressing economic and social concerns. We aim to provide high-quality research on issues of importance to business, the public sector and Government. The issues considered include economic competitiveness, the effectiveness of public services and policy, and our quality of life.

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

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