

The Impact of Social Science Research

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INTRODUCTION

Fiona McAllister, Policy Officer, Academy of Social Sciences

The Academy of Social Sciences has a mission to promote social sciences in the UK for the public benefit. An important aspect of this work is to demonstrate the impact and value of social science research to society, the wider economy and policymaking, which we have been doing through our *Making the Case for the Social Sciences* series of booklets since 2010. This series explores topical issues in social science and policy through brief reviews of impactful studies drawn from across the social science disciplines. The booklets have been launched in Westminster with senior Ministers in attendance and have become an important source of knowledge brokerage in the United Kingdom.

Building on our *Making the Case* series, in the lead-up to the 2013 spending review (which sets priorities for the financial year 2015/16), we asked our member Learned Societies and the Universities who contribute to the Campaign for Social Science to send us examples of research with impact. We listed three preliminary headings to bear in mind:

1. Research as producing counter-intuitive findings (i.e. producing results that contradict a 'common sense' view and which can only be gained through systematic research)
2. Research which has a clear cost-benefit calculation attached or which has led directly to a cost saving/prevention of ineffective spending
3. Research which has had a direct impact on the formulation of legislation, or a change in the law.

We received a high level of response to this call, and included some key examples in our response to Government on priorities in science and research to inform the spending review. Our community is clearly committed to excellence in research, and to engaging in policy-relevant work. We are therefore delighted to be able to share more of the case studies we received in this new publication, generously funded

by SAGE.

The case studies show how research can contribute to growth and innovation, and how particular findings can aid in savings to the public purse and/or investment in more effective policies than may otherwise be possible. The studies often illustrate the ability to analyse individual and social capital gains, alongside financial calculations, which makes social science research so fundamental to effective (and cost-effective) policymaking. We also include studies showing social sciences' contributions to public understanding which can feed directly into practice, enhancing public services.

It is vital that the key role of social sciences in generating evidence, and translating that evidence into policy and practice, is understood. As a recent US publication, *Using Science as Evidence in Public Policy*,¹ says: 'every field of science produces usable knowledge but explaining whether, how and why that knowledge is used is the task of social science'.

The Academy of Social Sciences is dedicated to bringing high quality evidence to bear on the issues and policies of the day. We thank all the researchers and institutions who have helped make this publication possible and provided permission for their work to be shared here. We have grouped our case studies under the headings identified as priorities for Government in the Coalition's recent *Mid-Term Review*. We think you will agree that they make a valuable contribution to both the knowledge base and the policymaking environment in Britain today.

Note

1. National Research Council (2012). *Using Science as Evidence in Public Policy*. Committee on the Use of Social Science Knowledge in Public Policy, K. Prewitt, T.A. Schwandt, and M.L. Straf, Editors. Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.

FIXING THE ECONOMY

Connecting Universities to Regional Growth

Professor John Goddard OBE AcSS et al, Newcastle University

Building on a strong body of academic and policy research, Professor John Goddard and his colleagues at the Centre for Urban and Regional Development Studies (CURDS) have successfully managed to build an understanding of the role and importance of universities as key players in their local socio-economic environments.

Their research has also improved the knowledge of policy makers and practitioners about the drivers and barriers to the effective mobilisation of universities for the benefit of their local areas, and more importantly, understanding how to build capacity to overcome these barriers.

'The significance of this has been to bring direct social and economic benefits to regions which are now better able to harness the potential in their universities to contribute to economic growth,' says Professor Goddard. 'Using the concepts and frameworks developed at CURDS, we have assisted the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to devise a methodology for its reviews of higher education in city and regional development.

'Participating in these reviews has led to specific impacts for the regions, which in many cases enthusiastically implemented recommendations aimed at improving interactions between

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universities and their local socio-economic environments. For example, as a result of participating in the OECD review, the Värmland region of Sweden created an on-going programme of actions to promote cluster development by linking universities and regional authorities to stimulate innovation in the local companies involved.'

In light of this international experience the CURDS team has been contracted to support the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills in developing its approach to the design and allocation of European Structural Funds for innovation activities, expected to be worth up to £6bn for the UK during 2014-2020.

Extending Working Life: Behaviour Change Interventions

Dr Andrew Weyman *et al*, University of Bath

Increasing longevity and changes in pension arrangements increase the likelihood that people will need to remain in work longer. Andrew Weyman and colleagues were commissioned by DWP to address the question as to how people may be best encouraged to extend their working lives.

There are significant attitudinal and structural challenges to the notion that working longer is beneficial. Currently, many people exit the workforce significantly before reaching State pension age, either through choice, diminishing health status or as a consequence of employer policies.

Employers are key actors in influencing people's decisions over working longer. People are more likely to remain employed in later life where this embodies choice and flexibility (e.g. availability of part-time hours) and where work is configured in ways that are a good fit with later life orientations to work; non-work commitments (e.g. caring commitments) and capacity to work (e.g. health status). The authors use a 'decision architecture' or 'nudge' perspective to

characterise how employer policies and practices impact on employee decisions over extending working life, retirement planning and pension choices.

A key finding is that individuals are more likely to react to options presented to them, than to actively seek out choices. For example, if employers offer flexibility, employees are more likely to extend their working lives; if offered auto-enrolment in pensions, people tend to stay in the scheme, but they are less likely to choose an opt-in scheme.

A key challenge for Government is finding ways to motivate employers to adopt policies and practices that take account of the needs of older workers. Currently, there is limited good-practice guidance available to employers on how to support, motivate and manage older workers. This research has contributed to Government thinking on the challenge of meeting the needs of our ageing population.

Travel to Work Areas

Professor Mike Coombes AcSS, Newcastle University

Centre for Urban and Regional Development Studies
Professor of Geographic Information, Mike Coombes, leads a research team pioneering new methodologies which have refined the concept of Travel to Work Areas (TTWAs) and set new standards for the analysis of local social and economic statistics.

The basic concept of the TTWA is the local labour market area. By using data on TTWAs, government agencies can confidently assess the relative need of different local areas in allocating large sums of public money. Using other areas could result in a misallocation of funds because their areas are not comparable: for example, the city boundary of Newcastle upon Tyne excludes all its neighbouring areas, while that of the City of Sunderland includes other towns like Washington.

The research involves defining boundaries such that few people cross a TTWA boundary when they commute from home to work. Commuting patterns are getting more complex, so TTWAs have to be revised when there is new information available (from the Population Census).

Professor Coombes explains that: 'TTWAs reflect the commuting patterns of over 20 million people, and these indicate the real economic building blocks of the country which are obscured by standard administrative areas.'

TTWAs have also been used in analyses that challenge some of the underlying assumptions of current industrial policies, and in particular to highlight potential spatial implications of those policies. For example, in the 2010 'Fair Deal for the North' Smith Institute inquiry report, TTWAs are taken as the most appropriate units of analysis in its assessment of government policies to promote jobs and growth in the North of England.

National statistics agencies, academics and policy makers have followed TTWAs as the 'best practice' in labour market definitions, recognising the importance of using appropriate areas in the analyses which underpin delivery – and academic critiques – of local economic development policies.

IMPROVING PUBLIC SERVICES

Older People: Holistic Service Delivery

Peter Watt and Iain Blair, Universities of Birmingham and Warwick

LinkAge Plus tested out practical approaches to support the vision of independent and engaged old age, across eight pilot areas in the UK.

Benefits from the LinkAge Plus approach fall into three areas: Firstly, there are benefits to both taxpayers and older people from an holistic approach to service delivery, where voluntary and statutory sectors work together to improve access, remove duplication and share resources. Secondly, the LinkAge Plus approach facilitates key services to support independence and improve the wellbeing of older people, in a cost-effective manner. Thirdly, the pilots demonstrated that information and access to services can be improved through both partnership working, and innovative approaches to outreach.

Where sufficient evidence exists to construct detailed costs and benefits, these have been used to build an illustrative example demonstrating the potential advantages of adopting a LinkAge Plus approach. Among the key findings are:

- An holistic approach to service delivery requires some

up-front investment over the two-year pilot period but quickly brings net savings, breaking even in the first year after the investment period.

- The net present value of savings up to the end of the five -year period following the investment is £1.80 per £1 invested.
- LinkAge Plus can facilitate services that are cost-effective in their own right, including reduced falls associated with balance classes and home adaptations.
- Combining the costs and benefits of these services with the holistic approach to service delivery increases the net present value in the example to £2.65 per £1 invested.
- There are benefits to older people themselves monetised at £1.40 per £1 invested.

The costs and benefits embody a large number of assumptions from pilot data and wider evaluation literature. Nevertheless, many of the assumptions are conservative, and the illustrative example omits many benefits which are not quantified, but are likely to be strongly positive.

Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime

Professor Lesley McAra and Professor Susan McVie, University of Edinburgh

The Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime (ESYTC) is a longitudinal study of pathways into/out of offending amongst a cohort of young people in the city of Edinburgh. Established in 1998, it is one of the largest single-age cohort studies of its kind and has been influential worldwide. It has been funded by grants from ESRC, the Nuffield Foundation and the Scottish Government. Data collection includes six annual self-report surveys from cohort members, official records from police and other agencies, surveys of parents and teachers, a community survey, and a Geographic Information System incorporating census and police recorded crime data. A follow-up survey (age 24/25) was completed in 2011 for a sub-sample of the original cohort.

The quality of the ESYTC research has been enhanced by linking self-report offending data with official data on both juvenile and adult criminal justice processes.

Robust analysis has resulted in four key discoveries:

- Involvement in serious offending is strongly linked to multiple aspects of vulnerability and social adversity amongst young people.

- Early identification of at-risk children is an imprecise and inappropriate use of formal controls and risks recycling young people around the justice system, and irreversibly stigmatizing them
- Pathways out of offending are influenced by critical moments in the early teens, particularly school exclusion.
- Appropriately targeted diversionary strategies can facilitate desistance from serious offending.

These findings have directly influenced youth justice policies in the UK and Ireland – for example steering Scottish Government strategies away from intensive contact with those seen as at risk of offending, and towards diversionary tactics. The authors were also consulted during the deliberations of the Independent Commission on Youth Crime and Antisocial Behaviour, established in 2009 for England and Wales. Barnardo's drew on evidence from the study in their campaign for a review of the age of criminal responsibility.

Trust Between Police and Muslim Communities

Dr Basia Spalek, University of Birmingham

The police play a key role in strategies designed to prevent violent extremism. This research looked at how the relationship between police and Muslim communities works in practice. The study finds that approaches work when police have a long-term commitment to the community, build trust, and are seen as people of integrity. Yet there is always a tension between the police working as 'partners', and being seen as 'spies' feeding security information. As distinctions between the role of the police and the security services blur, this danger increases, and security interventions into a community can jeopardise work building trust.

The team found through interviews and focus groups in London and Birmingham, that identifying vulnerability (risk of becoming involved with violent extremism) and engaging communities in this, whilst also addressing the risks and needs of community members themselves, was difficult. Looking for signs of such 'vulnerability' risks stigmatizing Islamic beliefs and practices.

Contrary to stereotypes, the research found that 'Islamism' is by no means one thing, nor the single most important factor in leading to violence. A key element in 'radicalisation' is the belief that violence is a necessary and effective mode of action, and that belief is likely to be influenced by popular images of 'masculinity' derived from cultural and 'secular' sources. Islamic justifications can be used by those who are seduced by the idea of violence, as well as being a motivator in its own right. Therefore, a more nuanced approach to both 'radicalisation' and strategies for dealing with violent extremism, is needed.

The research highlights the utility of information-sharing on effective community-based policing. Other countries have been dealing with the problem for longer, and further funding will cover two international workshops to bring together experts, and to develop a research hub for on-going exchange.

Helping Public and Private Sectors Utilise Census Material

Professor David Martin AcSS *et al*, University of Southampton

This is a Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) case study adapted with kind permission from the series on Geographical Research Impact, available at www.rgs.org/makingthecase

Government, businesses and communities are among those able to make better decisions, save money or enhance profits, and target services and other support more effectively at the areas which need them.

Professor David Martin of the University of Southampton has improved tools which allow more effective analysis of information from census data. The work has been further extended by collaboration with the Office of National Statistics (ONS).

Using Geographical Information Systems (GIS) technology, Professor Martin created an automated method in which 200,000 small geographical Output Areas (OAs) of around 300 people each are generated based on postcode 'territories'. Unlike ward-level data, OAs have much more consistent population size and reasonable homogeneity of households, enabling patterns of inequalities, ethnicity and housing to be

much more easily identified and tracked over time. This, in turn, has meant that spatial policy decision-making and allocation of funds has been underpinned by much stronger and accurate data. One of many examples in application is in the use of aggregations of OAs in the multiple deprivation index. An extension for the 2011 census has been the creation of an entirely new set of workplace zones, which will be used for the publication of data about workers and workplaces.

As well as being developed for use in 2001 and 2011 censuses, output areas (OAs) have also been widely adopted and developed further for use by the ONS's Neighbourhood Statistics Service. Providing data free to the public means that anyone looking for information about the community around them, whether school governors, GPs, church volunteers or charity workers, are able to source this information readily and at no cost. The website regularly gets two million page views a month. It helps the government to deliver on its commitment to open data and to community empowerment, and helps to realise significant economic and social benefits by enabling businesses and non-profit organisations to build innovative applications and websites using public data.

BUILDING A BETTER SOCIETY

Young Adult Carers

Professor Saul Becker AcSS, University of Nottingham

Pioneering research on a hidden group of informal carers – 'young adult carers' (YACs) aged 16-24 – has rapidly increased awareness amongst policy audiences, practitioners and wider publics, led to YACs' recognition in policy and

practice, and resulted in the development and provision of new services both in the UK and internationally. Newly developed psychometric instruments for measuring children's and young people's caring roles and outcomes are being

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widely used: for assessing and evaluating YAC's caring activities and for delivering services with measurable outcomes.

The research reveals the large number of YACs in the UK (5.3% of all young people) and their experiences at home, in their communities and in education. It shows how demands on young people to care increase with age, how schools may not provide adequate support, and how caring commitments can constrain educational and employment opportunities.

The use of the psychometric instruments has enabled YACs' needs to be assessed, evaluated and addressed. One self-report measure shows the amount of caring activity undertaken by the young person. Another provides an index of both positive and negative outcomes of caring. These

instruments provide an evidence base for policy and interventions, and for evaluation.

Interim findings from the research informed the 2008 National Carers Strategy (England), which signalled concern for YACs' transitions to adulthood. The study has also influenced the Coalition Government's refresh of the National Carers' Strategy for England, and the Scottish Government's 2010 Young Carers Strategy. Major grant funding programmes for young carers have raised the upper age of eligibility from 18 to 24 so as to include provision for YACs. New services for YACs have been developed across the UK and internationally. In 2013, the Care and Support Bill for England stated that local authorities should consider young carers' current needs, and how these needs might change post-18, to aid transition planning – a key recommendation of the YAC research.

Helping Policy Makers Plan for Ageing

Professor Ray Hudson AcSS with Claire Johnson and Sarah Jackson, University of Durham
& Professor Phil Rees, University of Leeds

This is a Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) case study adapted with kind permission from the series on Geographical Research Impact, available at www.rgs.org/makingthecase.

Although an ageing population brings challenges in the provision of social care, health care and appropriate housing, opportunities exist for economic development. A major part of the research undertaken by a multi-disciplinary team drawn from the N8 universities, led by Professor Ray Hudson of the University of Durham and including geographer Emeritus Professor Phil Rees, University of Leeds, was to model and forecast patterns of demographic change in the North between 2011 and 2036 at varying spatial scales. The work included new projections for different ethnic groups drawn together with other studies of predicted changes to the labour market, and to housing, health and social care.

To date adaptation to demographic change has focused on national policy changes. For example a policy objective to maintain the current balance between those in the 'labour force' and those in retirement would require people to work

longer on average. The N8 research shows how the effects and consequences of change will vary depending on varying demographic and socio-economic conditions within different locations. It highlights the need for targeted support and policy responses at Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and Local Authority (LA) levels, and for national policies to give greater consideration to their sub-national impacts.

Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) in the North are already beginning to use the research findings within their work, for example by giving a higher priority to finding economic opportunities that may arise from an ageing population. The research has also helped the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) to decide to investigate the role of entrepreneurship amongst over 50s.

Another important legacy of this research, that should be invaluable to LEPs and LAs as they seek to address these policy challenges, is a wealth of spatially disaggregated demographic and socio-economic data which is now publicly available.

Better Targeted Spending on Deprived Area

Professor Brian Robson AcSS, University of Manchester

This is a Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) case study adapted with kind permission from the series on Geographical Research Impact, available at www.rgs.org/makingthecase. The research was also previously reported in the first issue of the Academy's series, 'Making the Case for the Social Sciences'.

People in some of the poorest areas of the country are benefiting from work led by the urban geographer Professor Brian Robson. His research has enabled more focused targeting of financial assistance aimed at 'regeneration' in these communities. This also means more efficient spending. Professor Robson's work, undertaken on behalf of the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), has helped local authorities to identify more accurately which particular areas are in greatest need of

financial assistance or different types of intervention and therefore make better use of their scarce financial resources.

Professor Robson's research has empirically developed a new way of classifying and differentiating deprived areas in terms of their different functional roles. This is closely related to whether the people moving into or out of an area are moving 'upmarket' or not.

Areas where residents are becoming more 'upmarket' (in coming to them or when they leave) were identified as requiring less attention and support. This means that financial assistance from local authorities can be more effectively focused on the most deprived areas, those where people move in or out of an area from other equally or more

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deprived neighbourhoods. These areas are ones which are not improving on their own, a result of a lack or absence of any personal financial investment from the residents themselves.

The DCLG's latest 'Regeneration Framework' has incorporated this classification scheme and it is now being used widely by local authorities.

STANDING TALL IN THE WORLD

Women in Post-Trafficking Situations in Nepal

Professor Nina Laurie and Professor Diane Richardson, Newcastle University

Nepal is one of the leading sources of sexually trafficked women in South Asia, with estimates of 12,000 to 100,000 women trafficked annually. There are many Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) working to help and repatriate these women.

For many, experiences following repatriation can be just as traumatic as their trafficked experience, which is why Professors Nina Laurie and Diane Richardson led an interdisciplinary collaborative research team to study this issue, with Dr Janet Townsend, Dr Meena Poudel and the anti-trafficking NGO - Shakti Samuha - founded and run by post-trafficked women (www.posttraffickingnepal.co.uk).

The project, funded by the ESRC, is the first to consider the post-trafficking experiences and the challenges faced by returnee women, highlighting how the complex social, political and economic exclusions they encounter make creating a new life and livelihood extremely difficult. Most are rejected by their families, their communities and the state.

The research has shaped the Department for International Development's (DFID) new anti-trafficking regional programme. The research team acted as reviewers for this

programme's Terms of Reference and Professor Laurie has served on the appointment panel for its monitoring and evaluation team.

It has also improved practice for securing poverty alleviation by developing more appropriate policy assessment mechanisms. Activities, including an activist workshop and a final project policy workshop in Kathmandu, stimulated the policy debate on citizenship and stigma within government, quasi-government organisations and NGOs.

These research outputs led to the Chair of the Nepali Fundamental Rights Committee requesting case study examples of returnee trafficked women's exclusion from existing and proposed citizenship rules, which were then presented to the Nepal constitution drafting committee.

The impact of the research is also evident in its use by the American Bar Association to formulate policy and improve the quality of witness protection services.

Briefings have also been given to EU and UK MPs about the research findings, and the implications of Nepal's proposed new constitution for returnee women's citizenship rights.

Democratising Water Governance and Management

Professor Esteban Castro, University of Newcastle

For Professor Esteban Castro, the current global water crisis is not the result of water scarcity or a lack of technology and expertise in the efficient management of water. Rather, the main causes are social, ethical and, predominantly political.

Professor Castro leads the WATERLAT research network (www.waterlat.org), whose principal objective is to contribute to identifying and implementing solutions which will help to stop environmentally unsustainable practices, and improve water governance.

He notes that, 'although Latin America has the world's largest availability of freshwater resources, according to the World Bank, around 11% of the population still lacks access to clean water and 26% has no adequate sanitation facilities. Inequality in access to water is a major issue in the economic and social development of communities across Latin America.

'We need to develop forms of water governance and management that are grounded on the principles of equality and sustainability. This also means overcoming boundaries to bring

together expertise from across the social, natural and technical sciences, and to involve users, communities and citizens in the process.'

Professor Castro's research is cited in the document that forms the basis for Brazil's National Basic Sanitation Law. He is also a regular expert advisor for several federal institutions in Brazil, including the National Secretariat of Environmental Sanitation, the National Health Foundation, the Institute for Applied Economic Research (IPEA), a federal public foundation linked to the Strategic Affairs Secretariat of the Presidency in Brazil, and the National Association of Municipal Water and Sanitation Utilities (ASSEMAE).

Professor Castro has been awarded a grant of €1 million from the European Commission under the 7th Framework Programme for a new project entitled DESAFIO ('challenge' in Portuguese – www.desafioglobal.org) which focuses on the development of socio-technical innovations to support the democratisation of water management and access in Brazil, and Latin America more generally.

Improving the social performance of microfinance globally

Professor James Copestake and Dr Susan Johnson, University of Bath

Improving the Impact of Microfinance on Poverty: an Action Research Programme (Imp-Act) ran from 1999 until 2005. This work - carried out in Asia, Latin America and Africa, but also including microfinance initiatives in the USA and Eastern Europe - had an immediate impact on performance of microfinance institutions (MFIs), in providing practical measures of client poverty and in showing the impact of MFI services on individuals, households and communities.

The research has rapidly grown in impact. By 2010, 405 MFIs with 44 million borrowers were using social performance management techniques. The majority of their clients are women with the median MFI reporting 29% of members below a US\$2 per day poverty line. This indicates major improvement in MFI's ability to meet poorer clients' needs.

Copestake and Johnson's work indicated which evaluation tools and strategies would be most cost-effective for MFIs, without large resources to devote to performance measurement. Their work has influenced the continuing activities of the Imp-Act Consortium ([http://www.imp-](http://www.imp-act.org/)

[act.org/](http://www.imp-act.org/)) and the Social Performance Task Force (<http://sptf.info/>), which engages with microfinance stakeholders to develop and promote standards and good practices for social performance management and reporting.

In establishing the importance of the 'double bottom line' (financial and social) for MFIs, the research has enabled the sector to respond better to recent economic and sectoral crises. Heavy promotion of growth had led to products inadequately tailored to the needs of poorer clients, with excessive and non-transparent interest rates, draconian loan recovery tactics and over-emphasis on credit relative to savings and other services. These crises weakened faith in the capacity of competitive markets populated by narrowly profit-oriented agencies to deliver fair, inclusive and sustainable financial services and strengthened the uptake of Imp-Act tools and ideas, enhancing MFIs' ability to serve the poorest clients best.

Other publications by the Academy of Social Sciences

Making the Case for the Social Sciences

A series of themed booklets of stories of social science research that has had an impact.

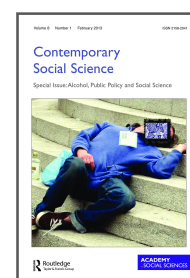
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