



“Valuing” the Social Sciences. An agenda for hard times

*8th. COMPASS Research Colloquium
10 July, Statistics New Zealand*



COMPASS
RESEARCH CENTRE

FACULTY OF ARTS
THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND

Whare Wānanga o Tāmaki Makaurau

Professor Peter Davis
University of Auckland
and COMPASS Research Centre

www.compass.auckland.ac.nz

Outline



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Whare Wānanga o Tāmaki Makaurau

- ▣ Are these “hard times”?
- ▣ Making knowledge claims
- ▣ Improving our methods
 - ▣ Inference by design
 - ▣ Making it count
- ▣ Assessing and increasing impact
- ▣ Concluding thoughts
 - ▣ “Public” social science
 - ▣ A professionalising agenda

“Straws in the wind”

- Political
 - Public statements favouring STEM (Minister)
 - (Temporary?) Discontinuation of “Health and Society” strand within MBIE (previously MSI, FoRST)
- Research funding
 - Ferociously competitive Marsden
 - HRC with greater clinical and biomedical emphasis
 - Complex selection processes (NSC, CoREs)
- Public sector
 - Very tight public sector (e.g. contracts)
 - Greatly reduced intake to COMPASS methods school

10 National Science Challenges

Some Social Science Aspect

1. Ageing well
2. Better start
3. Healthier lives
4. High-value nutrition
5. Technological innovation for growth

Limited Social Science Aspect

1. Biological heritage
2. Land and water
3. Sustainable seas
4. Antarctica
5. Resilience to natural disasters

World Economic Forum (Davos) – Top 10 Global Risks, 2014

1. Fiscal crises
2. Unemployment
3. Water crises
4. Income disparity
5. Climate change
6. Extreme weather
7. Governance failure
8. Food crises
9. Financial failure
10. Political/social instability

Role of the Social Sciences – 40 Years

- Gibson report (1970)
 - “recommended that the Council develop a social science arm to foster development of research activity” (Neil Lunt PhD Thesis, 2004, p. 20)
- Gluckman discussion paper (2011, p.15)
 - “Social science is not well constituted within the New Zealand science system and across or within those ministries and agencies that need such information to develop policy options”.

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“Knowledge Claims” in Social Science – Some of the Issues

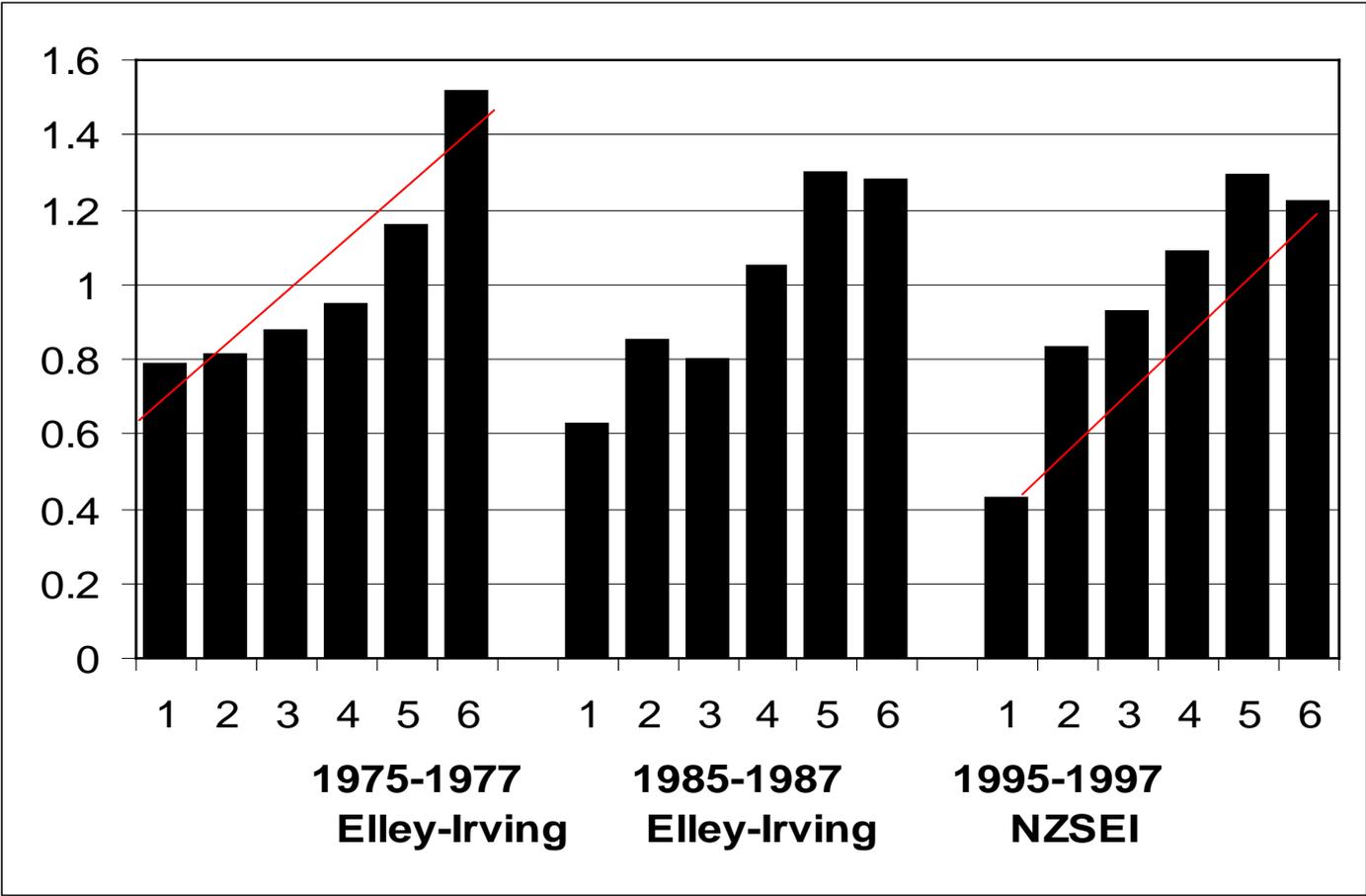
1. By its nature, social science/sociology detects patterns beyond everyday observation
2. “Common sense” can lead you astray
3. Common mistakes can be made in public debate (e.g. not comparing “like with like”)
4. Governments are looking for “evidence”

1. Patterns “below the surface” – Death Rates by Occupational Class

RII=1.8

RII=2.1 DeDa

RII=2.3



2. “Common sense” can be astray – Improving Driver Education



OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S SCIENCE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Towards better use of evidence in policy formation: a discussion paper

Sir Peter Gluckman KNZM FRSNZ FRS
Chief Science Advisor to the Prime Minister

April 2011

Driver education: misplaced confidence

It would appear intuitive that formal driving education within the school curriculum would reduce the high rate of road accidents that teenagers experience. Indeed there has been much advocacy for such programmes over the years in various countries – from politicians, families of road victims and insurance companies. But when such programmes were introduced in both Europe and the US, it became evident that these initiatives either had no beneficial effect on, or even actually increased, the accident rates of young people.

Formal evaluation with controls showed that driver education does lead to earlier licensing, but provided no evidence that driver education reduces road crash involvement and suggested that it may lead to a modest but potentially important increase in the proportion of teenagers involved in traffic crashes. An earlier study from New Zealand in the 1980s reached similar conclusions.

This negative view of such programmes was initially vehemently rejected by some advocacy groups, but the scientific view became compelling and has been integrated into policy. The data do not even support driver education as a rationale for accelerating the passage through graduated licensing systems. Why does this counterintuitive outcome occur? In part because it leads young people to wanting to get their driver licence at an earlier age, and in part because it can lead to over-confidence in people who are already at a stage of their lives when they are most likely to engage in risk-taking activities.

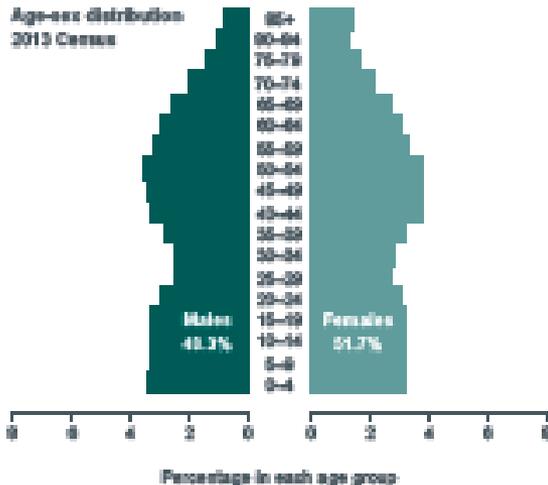
This is a classic example of why an evidence base is desirable even when what seems like ‘obviously sensible’ new programmes are introduced, and of why programmes should be introduced in a pilot fashion capable of evaluation. The assumption that formal driver education would be of value led to investment in programmes which in fact did more harm than good.

3. Common mistakes in public debate

Closing gaps favour young (NZ Herald)

By [Vaimoana Tapaleao](#), [James Ihaka](#), [Simon Collins](#), Harkanwal Singh
5:30 AM Monday Mar 17, 2014

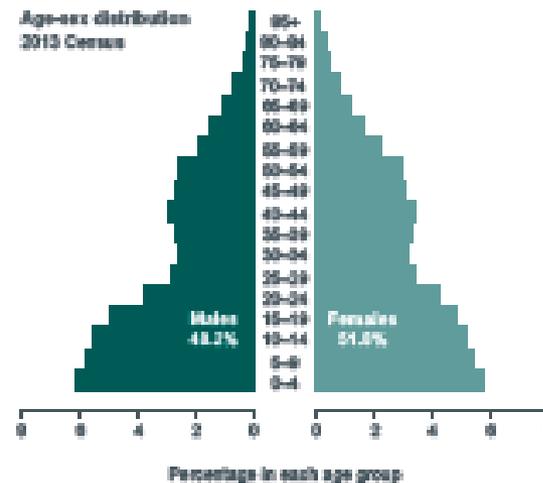
41.0 years
Median age of people who identified with at least one European ethnicity in 2013



Gaps that are barely budging

* Imprisonment rate - gaps may close in 1170 years.

23.9 years
Median age of people who identified with Māori ethnicity in 2013



4. Governments and “evidence”



HM Government

What Works: evidence centres for social policy

March 2013



**Alliance
for Useful
Evidence**

SQUARING THE CIRCLE

EVIDENCE AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

Derrick Johnstone

May 2013

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Journal of
the European
Economic
Association



Celebratory Issue

January 2013 Vol.11 S.1

HOW IMPORTANT IS SELECTION? EXPERIMENTAL VS. NON-EXPERIMENTAL MEASURES OF THE INCOME GAINS FROM MIGRATION

David McKenzie
World Bank

John Gibson
University of Waikato

Steven Stillman
Motu Economic and
Public Policy Research

Abstract

How much do migrants stand to gain in income from moving across borders? Answering this question is complicated by non-random selection of migrants from the general population, which makes it hard to obtain an appropriate comparison group of non-migrants. New Zealand allows a quota of Tongans to immigrate each year with a random ballot used to choose among the excess number of applicants. A unique survey conducted by the authors allows experimental estimates of the income gains from migration to be obtained by comparing the incomes of migrants to those who applied to migrate, but whose names were not drawn in the ballot, after allowing for the effect of non-compliance among some of those whose names were drawn. We also conducted a survey of individuals who did not apply for the ballot. Comparing this non-applicant group to the migrants enables assessment of the degree to which non-experimental methods can provide an unbiased estimate of the income gains from migration. We find evidence of migrants being positively selected in terms of both observed and unobserved skills. As a result, non-experimental methods other than instrumental variables are found to overstate the gains from migration by 20–82%, with difference-in-differences and bias-adjusted matching estimators performing best among the alternatives to instrumental variables. (JEL: J61, F22, C21)

Test, Learn, Adapt:

Developing Public Policy with Randomised Controlled Trials

Laura Haynes

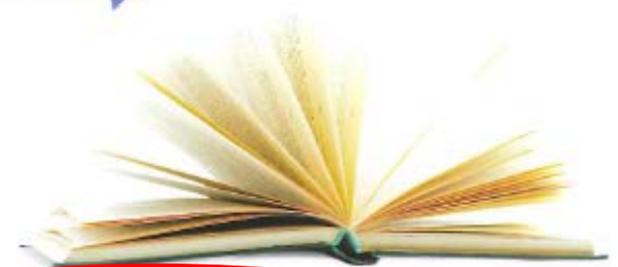
Owain Service

Ben Goldacre

David Tongerson

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Behavioural Insights Team

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Data Inference in Observational Settings

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SAGE Benchmarks in Social Research Methods

Edited by **Peter Davis** *University of Auckland*

Most social research is carried out in observational settings: that is, most social researchers collect information in the 'real world' trying to do as little possible to alter the circumstances of study. However, there is a fundamental problem with this kind of research, in that it is very hard to draw 'causal' conclusions, because of the complexity and obduracy of social reality. This is not just a problem for social scientists interested in policy or social action. It applies across the board, more generally, because it becomes difficult to know, without the conditions for credible inference, what conclusions can be drawn from any piece of empirical research that aspires to be anything more than descriptive of social phenomena.

Drawing from a variety of sources - from logicians and philosophers, to applied statisticians, computer scientists, econometricians, epidemiologists and social researchers - this collection provides an invaluable resource for scholars in the field.

Volume One: Background

Volume Two: Analytical Techniques

Volume Three: Temporal Relations

Volume Four: Experimental Analogues

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 **SAGE**

Avendano



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journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/socscimed

Short report

Correlation or causation? Income inequality and infant mortality in fixed effects models in the period 1960–2008 in 34 OECD countries

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ABSTRACT

Income inequality is strongly associated with infant mortality across countries, but whether this association is causal has not been established. In their commentary in this issue of *Social Science & Medicine*, Regidor et al. (2012) argue that this association has disappeared in recent years, and question the premise of a causal link. This paper empirically tests the impact of income inequality on infant mortality in a fixed effects model that exploits the evolution of income inequality over a 38-year period, controlling for all time-invariant differences across countries. Data came from the Standardized World Income Inequality Database, containing yearly estimates for the period 1960–2008 in 34 countries member of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), linked to infant mortality data from the OECD Health database. Infant mortality was modelled as a function of income inequality in a country and year fixed effects model, incorporating controls for changing economic and labour conditions. In a model without country fixed effects, a one-point increase in the Gini coefficient was associated with a 7% increase in the infant mortality rate [Rate ratio (RR) = 1.07, 95% Confidence Interval (CI) 1.04, 1.09]. Controlling for differences across countries in a country fixed effects model, however, income inequality was no longer associated with infant mortality (RR = 1.00, 0.98, 1.01). Similar results were obtained when using lagged values of income inequality for up to 15 years, and in models that controlled for changing labour and economic conditions. Findings suggest that in the short-run, changes in income inequality are not associated with changes in infant mortality. A possible interpretation of the discrepancy between cross-country correlations and fixed effects models is that social policies that reduce infant mortality cluster in countries with low income inequality, but their effects do not operate via income. Findings highlight the need to examine the impact of more specific social policies on infant mortality.

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Introduction

During the last decades, a wide array of studies has examined the association between income inequality and health in high-income countries. The rationale behind these studies is that income inequality, independent of individual income, is associated with population health, so that more equal societies have better health and lower mortality (Hale, Howden-Chapman, Salmon, Woodward, & Mackenbach, 1999; Kaplan, Pamuk, Lynch, Cohen, & Balour, 1996; Lynch et al., 2001; Navarro et al., 2003; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2011). Although income inequality is indeed consistently correlated with overall mortality across countries, whether this association is causal has been brought into question by a series of studies showing that in many instances, the association does not consistently hold when controlling for potential confounders (Mellor & Milyo, 2001). There is disagreement, however, on the right choice of confounders and methodological approaches, as this often determines the direction and strength of the association (Glymour, 2008; Kawachi & Blane, 2001; Mellor & Milyo, 2001; Zimmerman, 2008).

A noticeable exception is the association between income inequality and infant mortality. As suggested by Regidor et al. (2012) commentary in this issue of *Social Science & Medicine*, analyses based on data for the last decades of the 1970s and 1980s show a consistent association of income inequality and mortality, presumably as a result of welfare policies that promote income

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Fixed Effects – Inequality and Mortality

- Income inequality related to infant mortality
 - Strong ecological association income inequality with infant mortality across countries - but is it causal?
- Fixed effects controls variation across countries
 - Approach relies on changes in inequality within countries over time – 34 OECD countries over 48 years, Gini and IMR.
- Gini changes not associated with IMR changes
 - Possible that social policies reducing IMR cluster in relatively egalitarian countries, but their effects are not via income.

Avendano

Year-to-year correlation: Income inequality and infant mortality, 1960-2009

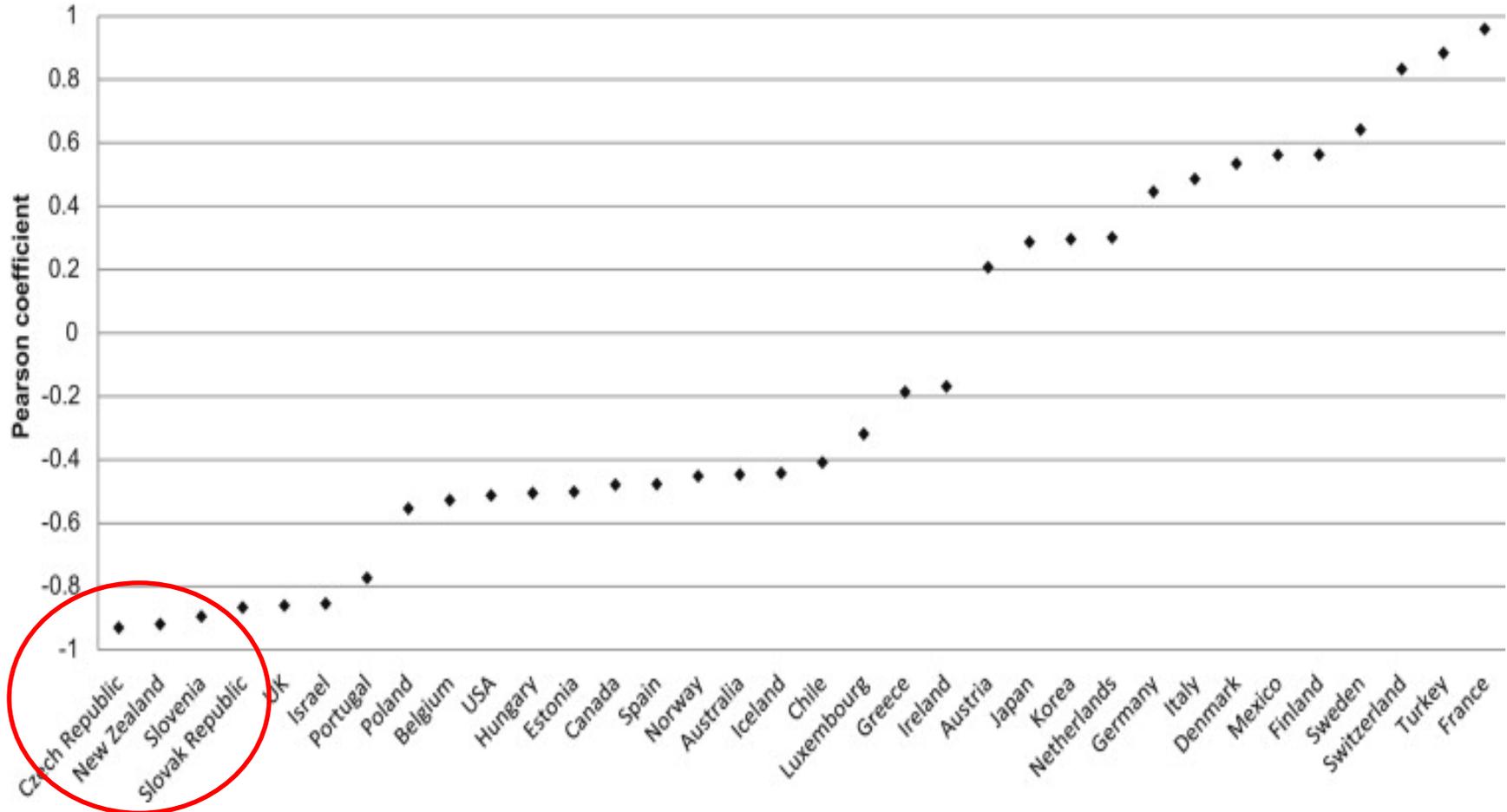


Fig. 3. Within-country year-to-year Pearson correlation between household income inequality (Gini) and infant mortality rates in 34 OECD countries for the period 1960–2008.

Strully et al.



Effects of Prenatal Poverty on Infant Health: State Earned Income Tax Credits and Birth Weight

Kate W. Strully,^a David H. Rehkopf,^b and Ziming Xuan^c

Abstract

This study estimates the effects of prenatal poverty on birth weight using changes in state Earned Income Tax Credits (EITC) as a natural experiment. We seek to answer two questions about poverty and child wellbeing. First, are there associations between prenatal poverty and lower birth weights even after factoring out unmeasured potential confounders? Because birth weight predicts a range of outcomes across the life course, lower birth weights that result from poverty may have lasting consequences for children's life chances. Second, how have recent expansions of a work-based welfare program (i.e., the EITC) affected maternal and infant health? In recent decades, U.S. poverty relief has become increasingly tied to earnings and labor markets, but the consequences for children's wellbeing remain controversial. We find that state EITCs increase birth weights and reduce maternal smoking. However, results related to AFDC/TANF and varying EITC effects across maternal ages raise cautionary messages.

Keywords

infant health, poverty, Earned Income Tax Credit

In life course models of stratification, early-life environment is crucially important. Exposure to poverty and negative environments during critical stages of early life can negatively affect children's future developmental trajectories (e.g., cognitive and physical development), which may have lasting negative effects on educational attainment and adult earnings (Duncan and Brooks-Gunn 1997; Wagmiller et al. 2006). According to recent research, prenatal poverty and birth weight are important variables in life course processes of stratification (Conley, Strully, and Bennett 2003; Cramer 1995). As a measure of health at the start

of life, birth weight is a general indicator of a baby's in-utero environment and development, and maternal poverty during the prenatal period is a robust predictor of lower birth weights (Bennett 1997). Low birth weight can in turn predict a range of negative

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<http://as.sagepub.com>



Natural Experiment – Welfare and Health

- Do work/income incentives affect infant health?
 - It is hypothesised that work/income schemes will raise incomes and employment for unmarried mothers with high school or less, and in turn improve infant health.
- Using a “natural experiment” design
 - Variation between US states in introduction of income/work incentives to estimate effects prenatal poverty/infant health.
- Labour market, incomes, birth weight, smoking
 - Schemes increased employment 19%, incomes 32%, increased infant birth weight, slightly reduced smoking

Model of Pathways

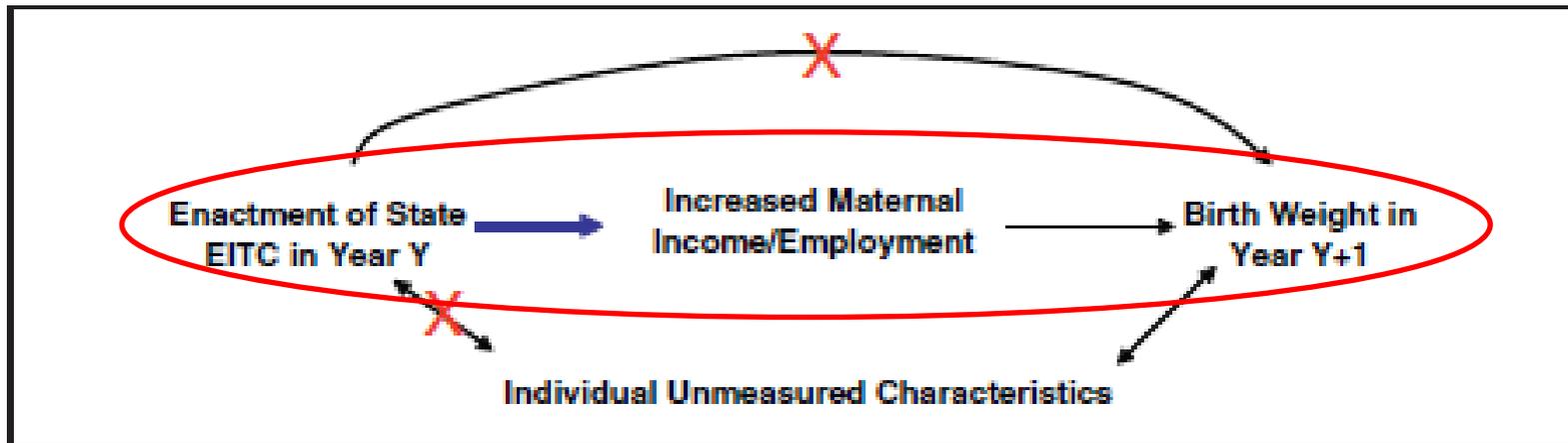


Figure 2. State EITCs as a Natural Experiment

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The Problem – British Academy

A POSITION STATEMENT

SOCIETY COUNTS

Quantitative Skills in the Social Sciences and Humanities

1. The British Academy is deeply concerned that the UK is weak in quantitative skills, in particular but not exclusively in the social sciences and humanities. This deficit has serious implications for the future of the UK's status as a world leader in research and higher education, for the employability of our graduates, and for the competitiveness of the UK's economy.

THE PROBLEM

2. The UK has traditionally been strong in the social sciences and humanities. In the social sciences, pride of place has gone to empirical studies of social phenomena founded on rigorous, scientific data collection and innovative analysis. This is true, increasingly, of research in areas of the humanities. In addition, many of our current social and research challenges require an interdisciplinary approach, often involving quantitative data. To understand social dynamics, cultural phenomena and human behaviour in the round, researchers have to be able to deploy a broad range of skills and techniques.
3. Quantitative methods underpin both 'blue skies' research and effective evidence-based policy. The UK has, over the last six decades, invested in a world-class social science data infrastructure that is unrivalled by almost any other country. Statistical analyses of large and complex data sets underpin the deciphering of social patterns and trends, and evaluation of the impact of social interventions.

The Solution – “Nuffield Initiative”



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[Nuffield Foundation](#) » [News](#) » [£15.5 million for quantitative methods training for social science undergraduates](#)

[News listing](#)

£15.5 million for quantitative methods training for social science undergraduates

16 October 2012

The Nuffield Foundation, the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) have launched a major new £15.5 million programme designed to promote a step-change in quantitative methods training for social science undergraduates in the UK.



£15.5 million will be invested over five years.

Over a five-year period, up to 15 specialist centres will receive funding to provide quantitative skills training in social science disciplines. The aim is to produce a cohort of quantitatively-skilled social science graduates, as well as to embed long-term institutional change to provide more and better quantitative methods training in UK universities.

The programme is a strategic response to the critical shortage of quantitatively trained social scientists in the UK, which has led to employers across all sectors unable to recruit people with the skills to apply quantitative methods to evaluating evidence and analysing data. A summary of the evidence of this shortage is presented in a [position statement published by the British Academy today \(Society Counts\)](#), which is welcomed by the funders of this new programme.

See also

[Further information about the Quantitative Methods Programme](#)

In the media

[Blog by Sharon Witherspoon on the Guardian HE network](#)

[Cash for quantitative and qualitative change, Times Higher Education, 18 October 2012](#)

[Quantitative easing, Times Higher Education, 18 October 2012](#)

[Cash boost for quantitative social science skills training, Research Fortnight Today, 18 October 2012](#)

The quantitative skills shortage

[British Academy position statement Society Counts](#)

[Learned society and professional bodies statement on quantitative skills \(PDF\)](#)



[Printer-friendly version](#)

Rectifying the 'quantitative deficit' in social science. A modest proposal!



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Te Whare Wānanga o Tāmaki Makaurau

Peter Davis and colleagues
COMPASS Research Centre [www.compass.auckland.ac.nz]

Public Seminar, VUW
Institute of Policy Studies
Friday 12 November 2010



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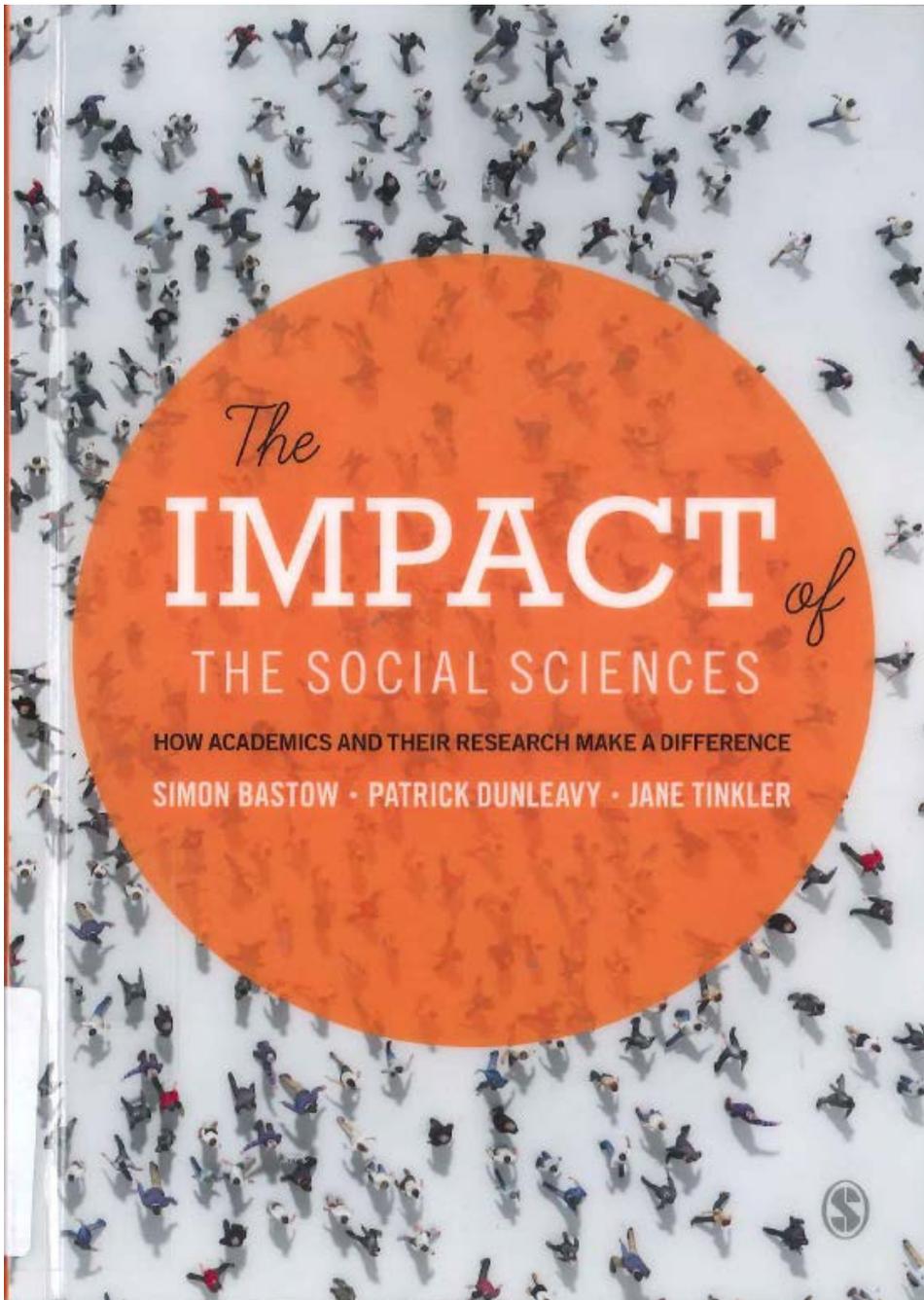
Some “Clarifications”

- What I am NOT saying is
 - **ALL** social science disciplines are equally afflicted by this “deficit”
 - Psychology, Economics, Management (?) seem to be OK
 - There is **NOBODY** with quantitative skills in any department
 - There are notable exceptions, but true of some departments
 - Quantitative skills must **DISPLACE** qualitative ones
 - Students need both sets of skills – they should be “ambidextrous”!
 - Students should do courses taught by **STATISTICIANS**
 - This would scare them off and they would miss substantive issues
- What I AM saying is
 - We are nearing the point where graduates lack **CRUCIAL** skills
 - Our disciplines are in danger of becoming **ONE-DIMENSIONAL**
 - Unless we take this seriously, others will gladly **TAKE THE WORK!**

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The

IMPACT *of*

THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

HOW ACADEMICS AND THEIR RESEARCH MAKE A DIFFERENCE

SIMON BASTOW · PATRICK DUNLEAVY · JANE TINKLER



Figure 1.1 The social sciences and how they relate to other disciplines

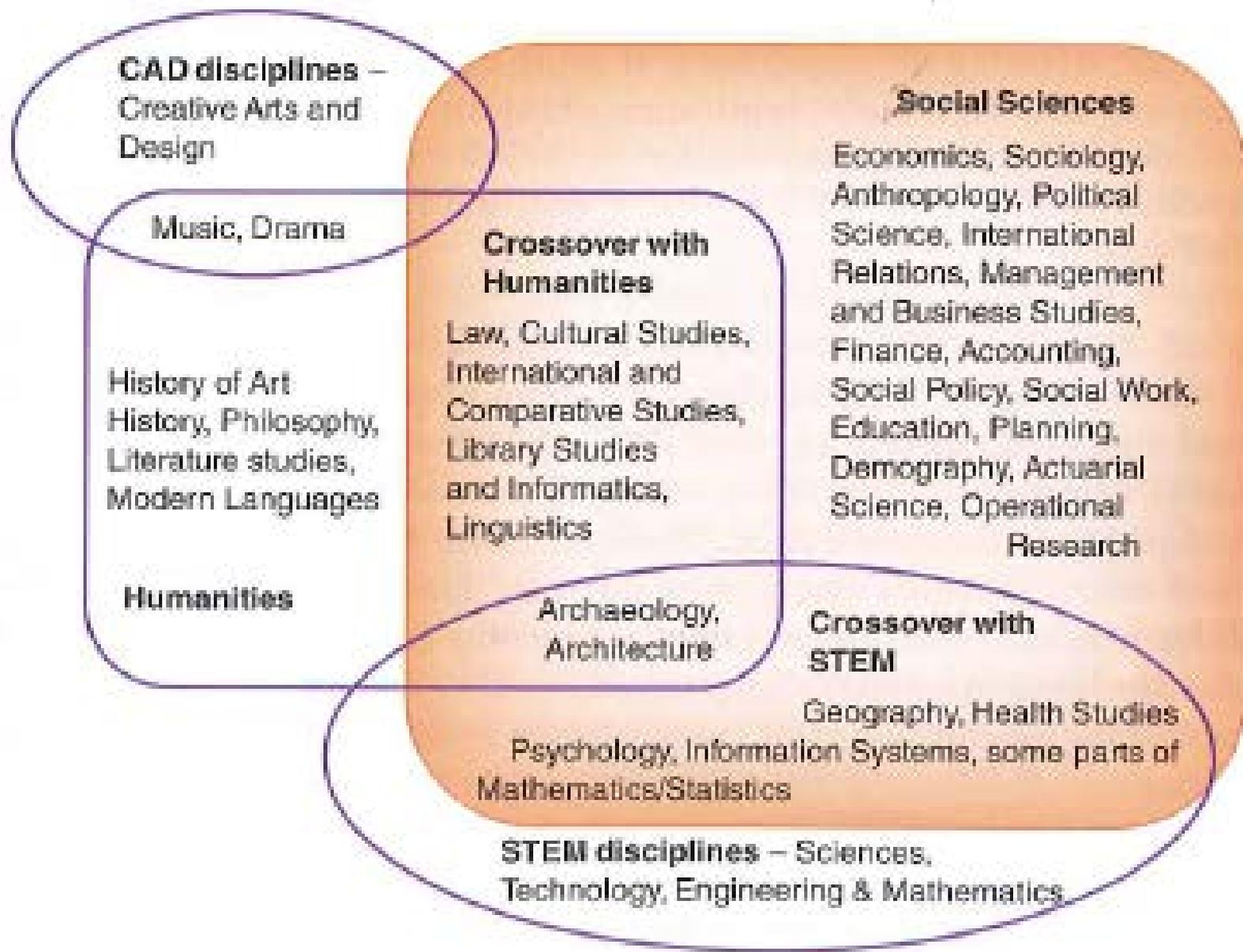


Figure 1.3a The numbers of students in UK universities, by discipline groups for academic year 2010–11

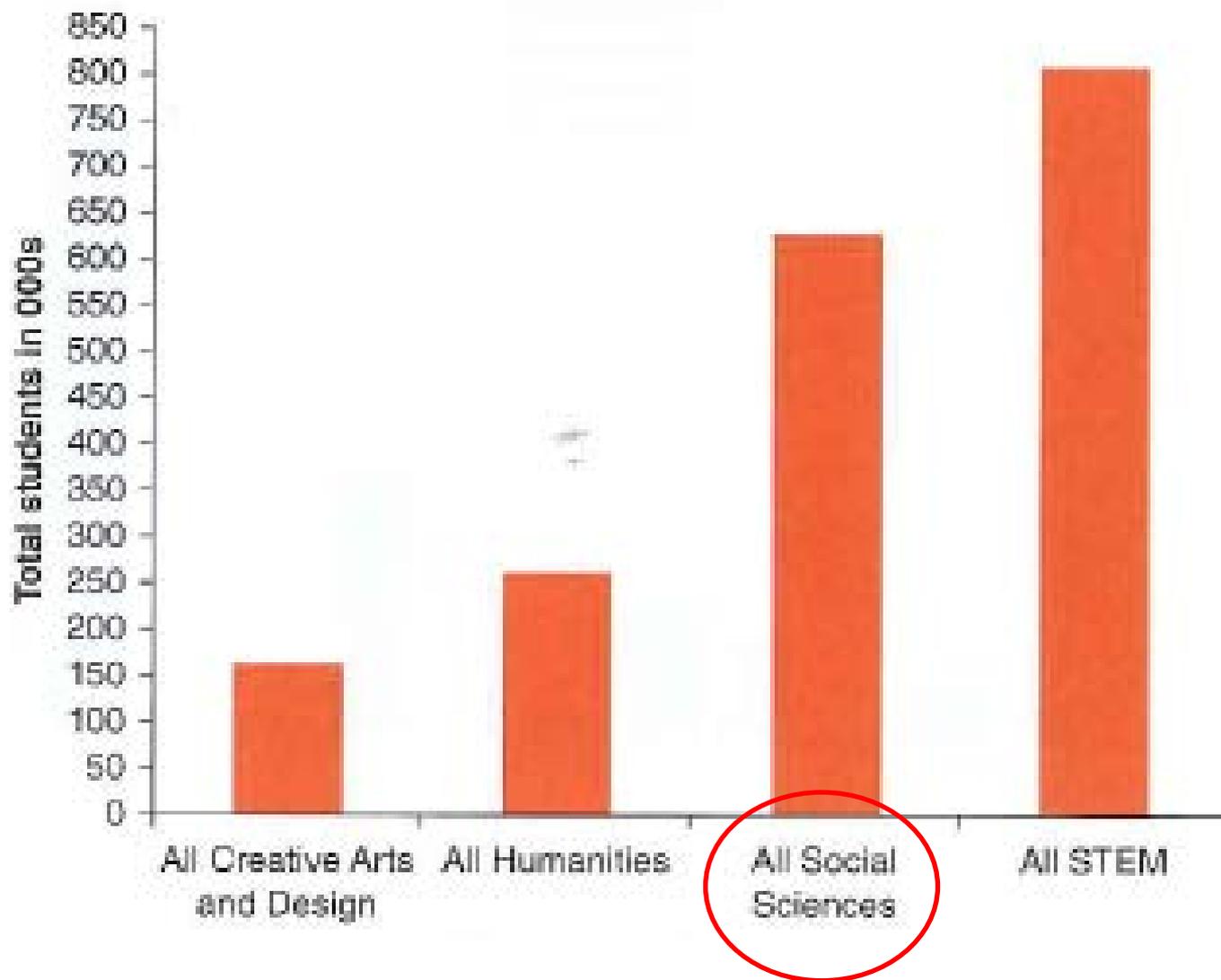
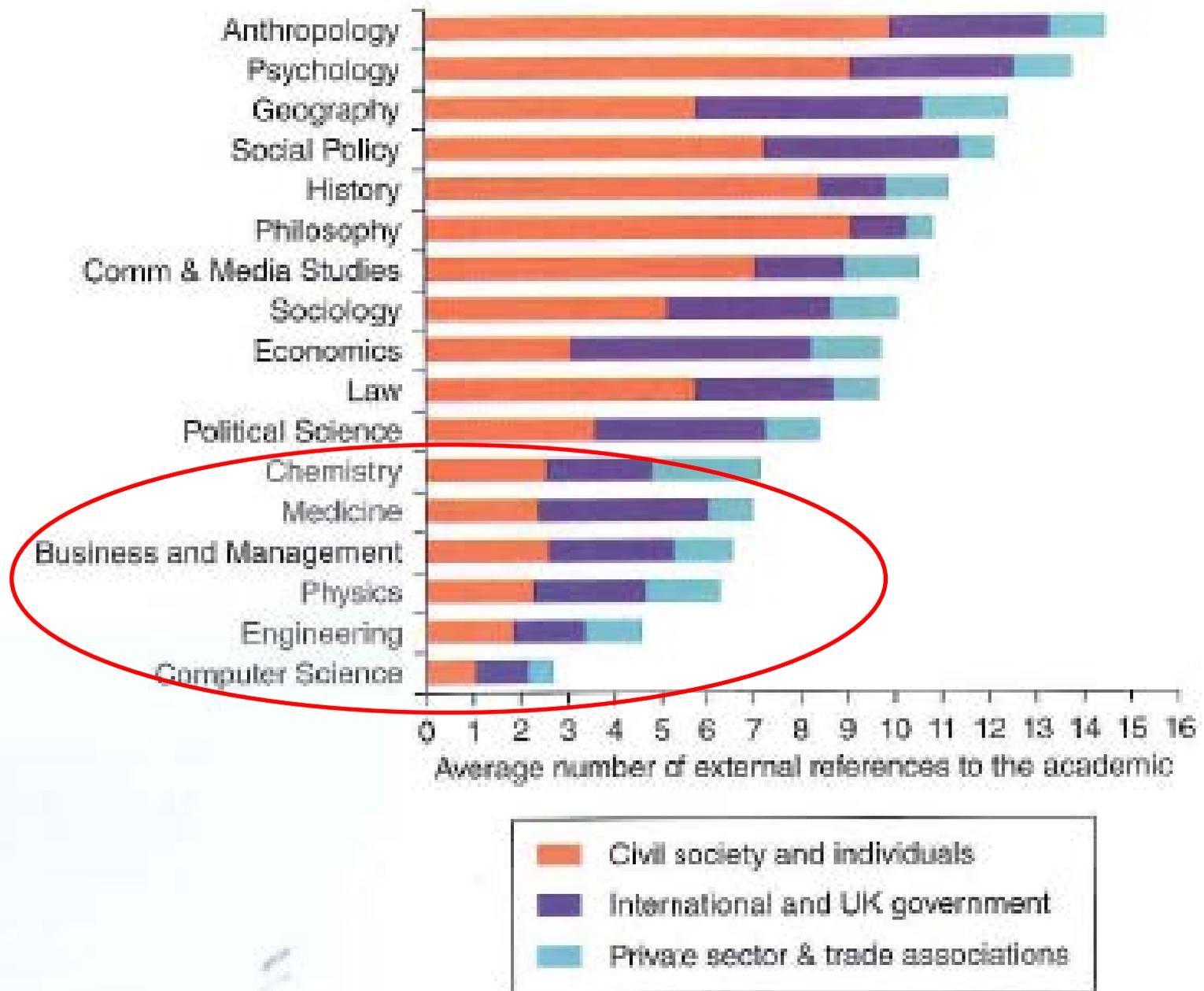


Figure 1.6 Estimated value of research grants and contracts to UK universities in 2010–11, by type of donor and discipline area

Source of funding (in £ millions)	Creative Arts and Design	Humanities	Social Sciences	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Maths	All Disciplines
Quality-related (QR) research funding from HEFCE	78	135	312	1,033	1,558
Government research councils	14	45	138	1,428	1,625
Total internal government	92	180	450	2,461	3,183
Total as percentage (%)	3	6	14	77	100%
UK civil society	2	19	53	838	912
UK government	6	4	144	622	776
<i>Government outside the UK</i>	4	6	90	293	393
UK industry	3	1	47	224	275
Other sources	2	4	37	111	154
Industry outside the UK	0	0	15	122	137
Civil society outside the UK	1	3	15	106	125
Total external funding	18	37	401	2,316	2,772
Total as percentage (%)	1	1	14	84	100%
Total for all internal and external sources	110	217	851	4,777	5,955
Percentage of total grants and contracts	2	4	14	80	100%

Figure 2.14 Average number of 'external society' mentions per researcher, by discipline



Academic influence elements

1. Average articles published per year
2. Average books and book chapters published per year
3. Total number of citations of these publications
4. Top cited publication
5. Number of academic citations
6. h-index

External visibility elements

7. Total number of Google references
8. Proportion of references in the external domain
9. Number of research reports found
10. Proportion of references in civil society domain
11. Visibility in the gov.uk domain
12. Visibility in UK and international press

Figure 2.17 Using external visibility and academic output scores to chart impact groupings

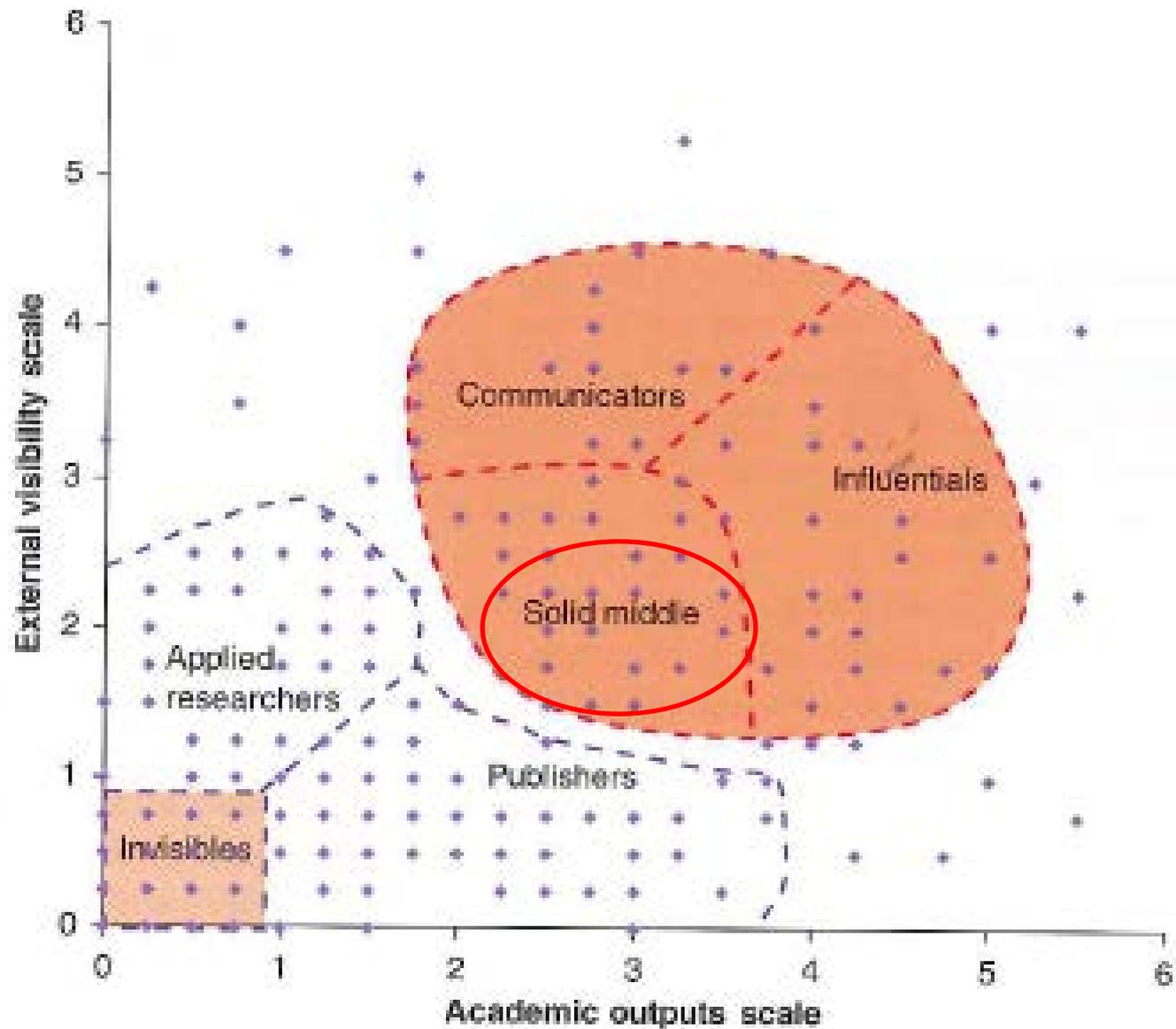
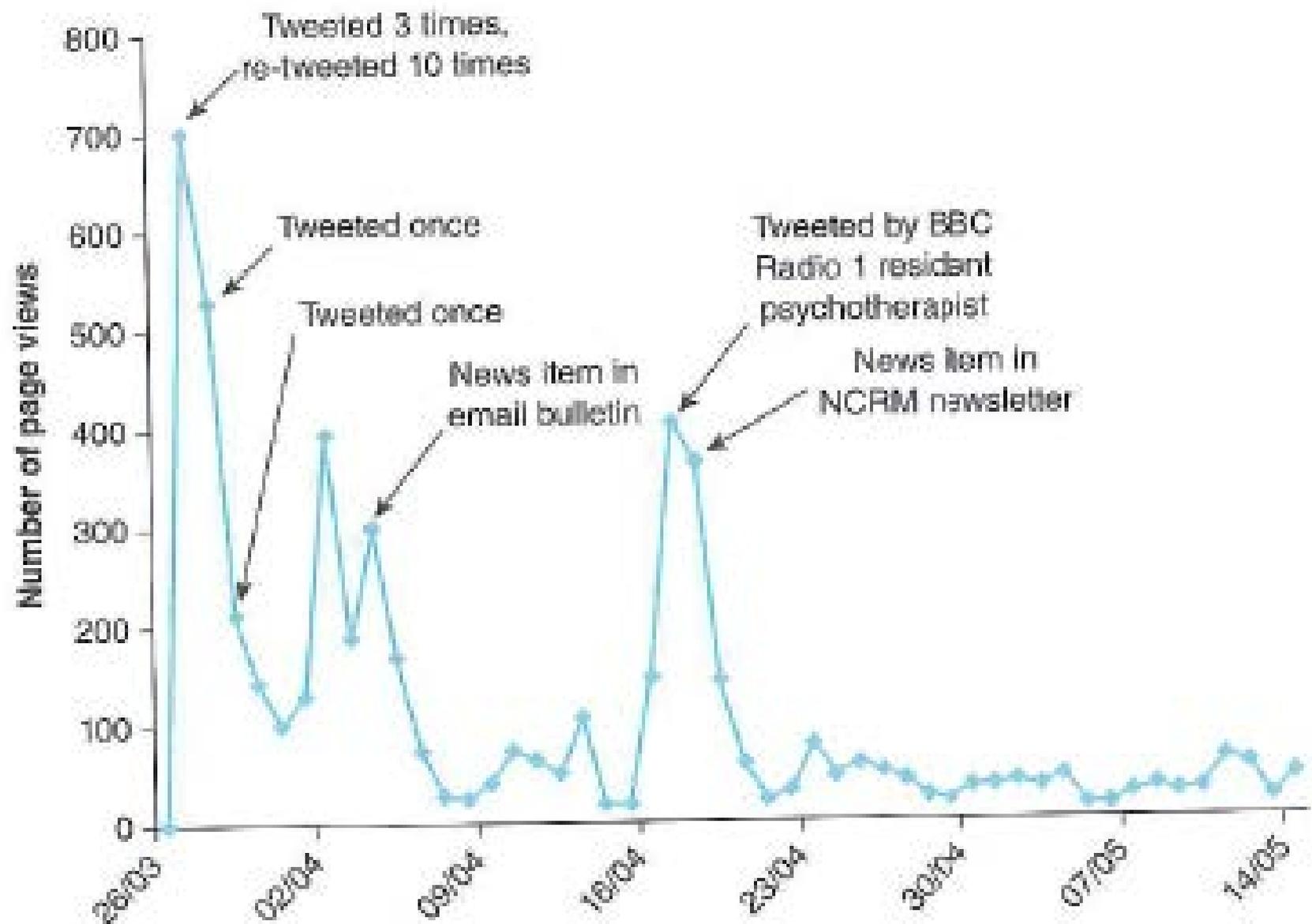


Figure 6.9 A combined ranking of results for government, UK domestic and international

	From our survey of university departments (see Figure 6.5)	From our Google search of academics (see Figure 6.7)	From our Google search in the gov.uk domain (see Figure 6.8)	TOTAL indicative ranking (sum of all columns)
Social Policy	2	2	1	5
Economics	3	6	3	12
Geography	7	5	2	14
Medicine	1	1	13	15
Sociology	9	4	4	17
Business and Management	5	7	11	23
Law	4	9	10	23
Psychology	11	3	9	23
Political Science	12	8	5	25
Engineering	6	12	14	32
Anthropology	15	11	6	32
Media Studies	14	15	7	36
Computer Science	8	13	17	38
Physics	13	10	16	39
Chemistry	10	14	15	39
History	16	16	8	40
Philosophy	17	17	12	46

Figure 8.17 Impact of tweeting on downloads of an academic paper in 2012



Outline

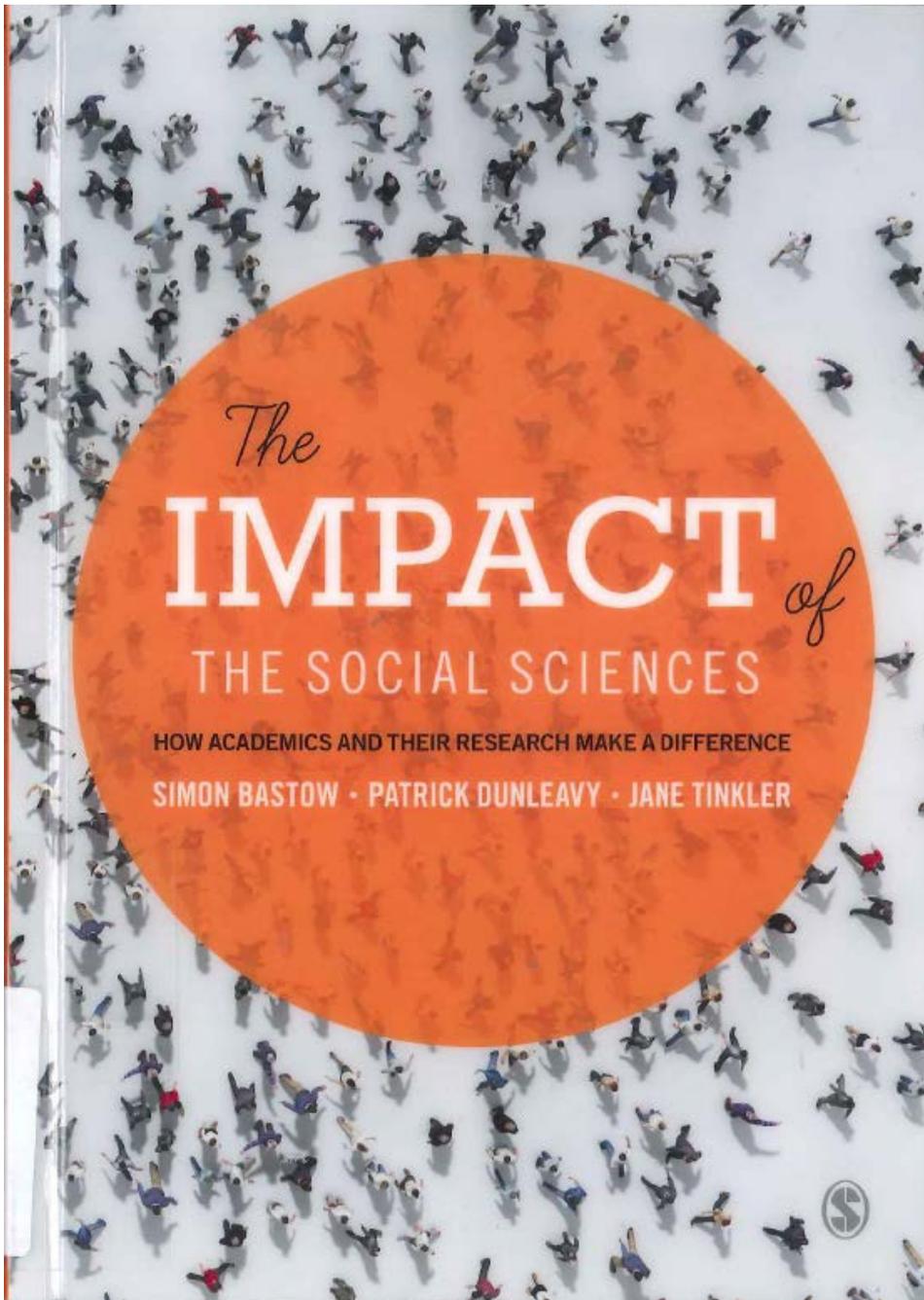


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Five Rules for the Public Practice of a Professional Social Science

1. Engage with public actors and issues
2. Conduct strategic research and publish it
3. Save your data and make it available to others
4. Link your work to broad analytical frameworks
5. Use advanced methods that generate insights



Economic and Social Research Council Shaping Society

Impact case studies



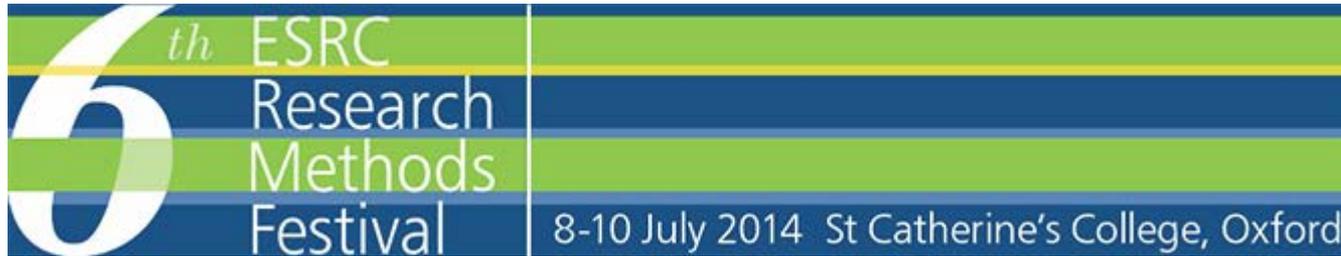
A selection of case studies highlighting ESRC research impact in various areas of society. The views and statements expressed in the case study publications are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the ESRC.

Celebrating Impact Prize winners

See the case studies and videos

Research impact videos

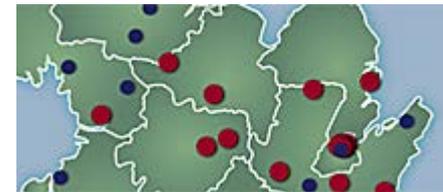
Creating impact through the social sciences



Social Science for Schools



ESRC Doctoral Training Centres



A POSITION STATEMENT

SOCIETY COUNTS

Quantitative Skills in the Social Sciences and Humanities

- The British Academy is deeply concerned that the UK is weak in quantitative skills, in particular but not exclusively in the social sciences and humanities. This deficit has serious implications for the future of the UK's status as a world leader in research and higher education, for the employability of our graduates, and for the competitiveness of the UK's economy.

THE PROBLEM

- The UK has traditionally been strong in the social sciences and humanities. In the social sciences, pride of place has gone to empirical studies of social phenomena founded on rigorous, scientific data collection and inductive analysis. This is true, increasingly, of research in areas of the humanities. In addition, many of our current social and research challenges require an interdisciplinary approach, often involving quantitative data. To understand social dynamics, cultural processes and human behaviour in the round, researchers have to be able to deploy a broad range of skills and techniques.
- Quantitative methods underpin both 'hard skills' research and effective evidence based policy. The UK has, over the last six decades, invested in world-class social science data infrastructures that is unrivalled by almost any other country. Statistical analyses of large and complex data sets underpin the deciphering of social patterns and trends, and evaluation of the impact of social interventions.

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Improving social well-being through education, research and innovation

£15.5 million for quantitative methods training for social science undergraduates

14 October 2012

The Nuffield Foundation, the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) have launched a major new £15.5 million programme designed to promote a step-change in quantitative methods training for social science undergraduates in the UK.

See also
Further information about the Quantitative Methods Programme
In the media
Blog by Sharon Witherspoon on the Quantitative Methods Programme
Cash for quantitative and qualitative change, Times Higher Education, 15 October 2012
Quantitative casing, Times Higher Education, 15 October 2012
Cash boost for quantitative social science skills training, Research Funding Tracker, 14 October 2012
The quantitative skills shortage
British Academy position statement Society Counts
Learned society and professional bodies statement on quantitative skills (PDF)
Prize body review

Over a five-year period, up to 10 specialist centres will receive funding to provide quantitative skills training in social science disciplines. The aim is to produce a cohort of quantitatively-skilled social science graduates, as well as to embed long-term institutional change to provide more and better quantitative methods training in UK universities.

The programme is a strategic response to the critical shortage of quantitatively trained social scientists in the UK, which has led to employers across all sectors unable to recruit people with the skills to apply quantitative methods to evaluating evidence and analysing data. A summary of the evidence of this shortage is presented in a position statement published by the British Academy today (Society Counts), which is welcomed by the members of this new programme.



Adding Value to Publicly-funded Data

10.15 Preliminaries – Peter Davis

- Introduction
- Valuing Social Science

11.15 The use of public data

- Adjusting for linkage bias in the Census longitudinal cohort
- *Dr. Barry Milne, Senior Research Fellow (Associate Director)*
- Rebalancing the care for older people
- *Roy Lay-Yee, Senior Research Fellow*

12.30 LUNCH BREAK

[including demonstration of policy tool]

13.15 Modelling and software development

- Simario: An R package for dynamic micro-simulation
- *Jessica McLay, Research Officer*
- A knowledge laboratory of the early life-course
- *Dr. Barry Milne, Senior Research Fellow*

14.45 CONCLUSION