Understanding and influencing society

Social scientists at Leeds are addressing some of the most important challenges of our time.

Our research is influencing policy and practice in diverse areas including: climate change, population trends and ageing, migration, economic growth and prosperity, social justice, security and conflict, global politics, international development, and data analytics.

The breadth and depth of our academic expertise, together with our interdisciplinary approach, and our capacity to build productive external partnerships means that Leeds is able to offer real solutions to these issues and other pressing societal grand challenges.

At the same time, our investment in training postgraduate and early career researchers means that Leeds will continue to be a world-leader in advanced skills and methods training for the social scientists of the future.

At the heart of these activities and driving change is the Leeds Social Sciences Institute (LSSI). We aim to encourage, support and enable research by fostering cross-disciplinary working and facilitating external partnerships.

The Institute has been formally designated as a university-wide ‘platform’ that will play a key role in delivering research goals identified in the University’s Strategic Plan. In particular, that means contributing to Leeds’ reputation as an outstanding research university through producing world-class research that delivers knowledge with impact.

In collaboration with research leaders across the University, the LSSI team is advancing the implementation of the ambitious Social Sciences Research Strategy, which is aligned with the University’s Strategic Plan. Our aim is to produce ‘knowledge with impact’, that shapes policy, public debate, and professional practice. We also aim to support the training and development of the next generation of social science leaders and advance the integration of social sciences methodologies and concepts across the social sciences and beyond.

This strategy is being driven by the LSSI team, which includes Deputy Directors, Paul Routledge, Professor of Contentious Politics and Social Change (Environment), and Jennifer Tomlinson, Professor of Gender and Employment Relations (Leeds University Business School), supported by LSSI Research and Innovation Development Manager, Josine Opmeer, the LSSI Co-ordinator, Sophia Kennedy, White Rose DTP Leeds Coordinator, Elisa Coati, and Support Assistant, Susan Darlington.

Professor Adam Crawford
Director, Leeds Social Sciences Institute

“The social sciences have a critical contribution to make, in helping us understand, imagine, and craft a more sustainable future for all.”

UNESCO Director-General, Irina Bokova
There are currently over 300 social scientists at the University of Leeds with a combined research income in excess of £20 million.

The quality of social sciences research is reflected in the assessments achieved in the Research Excellence Framework 2014. We are ranked amongst the top 10 universities in the UK, for research impact in the social sciences, with particularly strong performances in law, politics and international studies, business and management services, and social work and social policy.

In terms of the quality of research (as measured by overall grade point average) the University was ranked 15th with over 79% of the submission judged to be world-leading or internationally excellent.

Our combination of scale, breadth and quality is one of our key strengths. Our academics are passionate about applying their research findings to develop new ideas, skills, and to contribute to major issues facing society, such as ageing populations, healthcare and wellbeing, economic growth, climate change, and sustainability.

Social scientists at Leeds have a wide range of expertise distributed across five faculties, addressing key societal issues such as:

**WHAT MAKES US DISTINCTIVE**

**BUSINESS & LAW**
- Social justice, economic sustainability
- Modes of governance and regulation in global societies
- Sustainable and responsible organizations
- Global and strategic marketing
- Business and consumer decision-making
- Applied economics management and finance
- Credit management
- Law, distributed computer systems & services
- International law and business

**EDUCATION**
- Children and young people, inequalities
- Learning, leadership and educational policy
- Childhood and inclusive education
- Science and medical education
- Language education
- Mathematics education

**ENVIRONMENT**
- Sustainable societies, inequalities, social justice
- Social exclusion
- Environmental management and policy
- Spatial analysis
- Social justice
- Sustainable cities
- Energy security and policy
- Participatory research systems and technology

**HEALTH**
- Nutritional health, physical activity and wellbeing
- Health, technologies and social practice
- Health, medicine and society
- Health, technological analyses of health, medicine and society
- Health, technologies and social practice
- Health, technological analyses of health, medicine and society
- Health, technologies and social practice
- Health, technological analyses of health, medicine and society
- Health, technologies and social practice
- Health, technological analyses of health, medicine and society
- Health, technologies and social practice
Delivering outstanding research with lasting impact is at the heart of Leeds’ Social Sciences Research Strategy.

By engaging with partners within the Leeds City Region, and beyond, we are addressing major challenges, including: climate change, sustainability, data analytics, work and employment relations, law and social justice, community housing, health and well-being.

At a national and international level our partnerships are delivering impact. An ongoing relationship with the engineering consultancy, Arup, for example, has enabled important research into asset management in collaboration with the Business School and Department of Civil Engineering, while a partnership with the Institute for Transport Studies is looking at smart transport systems.

Much of the research we undertake is in collaboration with the public sector (e.g. local, regional, national government and EU authorities, police forces and NHS), third sector organisations (UN, World Bank, Age UK and various community groups), and private business (IBM, M&S and Zoopla). Policy impact is wide and varied, spanning professional regulatory bodies, legal frameworks, political and economic resources across varied geographical regions, cultures and societies.

Our case studies demonstrate the breadth of impact achieved by our social scientists. From within our region to the global stage, our researchers are influencing policy and delivering directly usable outputs, knowledge translation and public engagement.

CASE STUDY: SECURING OUR GLOBAL FINANCIAL FUTURE

Research into how finance and financialisation have dominated the European economies and societies has been the focus of a five-year, 8 million euro, EU-funded research programme, involving 15 partners and co-ordinated by the University of Leeds.

Findings from the programme, called Financialisation, Economy, Society and Sustainable Development, have been presented at a range of international conferences, including a high profile meeting at the Bank of England with speakers from the European Central Bank and European Commission.

Professor Malcolm Sawyer, of Leeds University Business School, co-ordinated the research. “Our research has confirmed the pervasive and often damaging effects of financialisation, and the urgent needs of major reforms of economic and financial policies to ensure that the financial sector better serves the interests of society and environmental sustainability.”

The programme culminated in a major conference in Brussels attended by policy-makers and academics, at which were presented policy recommendations for a financial system better serving the economy, society and the environment.
Across the University, more than 150 researchers are engaging with global issues such as: strengthening global peace; security and governance; tackling poverty; and promoting global prosperity. Major collaborations include strategic partnerships with non-government and civil society organisations (Amnesty International, Save the Children, intrac and governments from around the world).

**CASE STUDY: RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT IN SYRIA**

International responses to humanitarian crises often depend on a relatively straightforward principle: the responsibility to protect (R2P), which requires intervention from the international community if state intervention fails.

In Syria, this principle has not been acted upon, and researchers at Leeds’ School of Politics and International Studies have embarked on a research programme to find out why.

Jason Ralph, Professor in International Relations at Leeds and a Marie Curie Research Fellow, explains: “In Syria, there have been differing interpretations of what R2P means. Some of these have been more useful than others, but it’s clear that what is required is a more imaginative, yet still pragmatic, approach – and one that goes beyond military intervention. In particular, we need a more generous asylum policy.”

The research programme will culminate in an international conference at Leeds, in autumn 2016, which will be attended by representatives from the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, the Office of the UN Secretary General, and the Joint Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide and on the Responsibility to Protect.

Research is also taking place alongside an ESRC-funded seminar programme focusing on R2P themes.
Interdisciplinary research

One of our key strengths is the ability to make connections across and beyond the social sciences, bringing together academics from a range of disciplines to advance our research thinking around particular problems. This approach supports the University's strategic focus on multidisciplinary research and is reflected in numerous collaborations.

Leeds also has a reputation for investing in world-leading, sector-facing, interdisciplinary networks. The University has invested in a number of co-ordinating structures and initiatives including the University Research Themes (Health, Water, Food, Energy, Culture and Cities) and University Platforms (the Astbury Centre for Structural Molecular Biology, Leeds Social Sciences Institute (LSSI), Leeds Institute for Data Analytics (LIDA) and the Priestley International Centre for Climate). More details on each can be found on the University website: www.leeds.ac.uk/info2000/research_and_innovation

CASE STUDY: UNDERSTANDING SUSTAINABLE PROSPERITY

Leeds researchers are founding partners in a new research centre set up to investigate principles of sustainable prosperity.

Sustainable prosperity means the capability of individuals to flourish within the constraints of available resources. The Centre for the Understanding of Sustainable Prosperity brings together 12 academic organisations to engage in a variety of research projects relating to this theme.

At Leeds, researchers have embarked on a five-year project focusing on the relationships between arts and culture at three locations in the UK: Islington, Stoke-on-Trent, and Hay-on-Wye. In particular, they are looking at what drives people to pursue careers in the cultural sector and how they achieve sustainable work-life balances.

Professor Kate Oakley, Director of Research at the School of Media and Communication, explains: “These are three very different locations, which can all tell us something valuable about what are the barriers to entering the cultural sector and about how the people who manage to overcome those barriers achieve balance and richer connections with their community.”

The team has reported to the All Party Parliamentary Group on Limits to Growth and also contributed to high-level meetings and workshops aimed at influencing policy in this area.
CASE STUDY: NEW COMMUNITY SPACES

An ambitious experiment to transform our urban environments and create new spaces for people to meet, articulate ideas, and engage in social action, has been set up in Leeds by a multi-sector partnership.

Called Leeds City Lab, the group is hosted in the city’s Open Data institute and its ambitious goal is to use the principles of co-production to design a blueprint for the community facilities of tomorrow. Co-production aims to bring different working practices and perspectives together to produce innovation.

Initially funded through the N8 Research Network and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), the group, which includes partners from the University, charity and public and private sectors, brings insights to the project from many different areas.

Paul Chatterton, Professor of Urban Futures, in the School of Geography, says: “There’s a real desire to have some new spaces in the city centre where people from all different sectors can come together and organise themselves around the issues that matter to them – when we start to listen to each other about how we approach these challenges, then we start to unlock potential.”

leedscitylab.wordpress.com

Contributions to methodology

We have an impressive array of methodological expertise and skills in data analysis that inform work with and across the social science disciplines. For example, our expertise in managing large data sets and quantitative methods, for example, is underscored by the ESRC Consumer Data Research Centre, now also part of the Leeds Institute for Data Analytics, LIDA (lida.leeds.ac.uk/research/consumer-data-research-centre). Leeds was also chosen to host one of the existing six ESRC National Centres for Research Methods in geo-spatial analytics, called TALISMAN (School of Geography). Other notable strengths in research methods include realist evaluation (realism.leeds.ac.uk/). These have been used to evaluate social and health policy challenges, the analysis of longitudinal qualitative data, pioneered via the Timescapes project. In addition, Leeds is renowned for initiatives such as Leeds City Lab and N8 Policing Research Partnership which also demonstrate our expertise in co-production, bringing together experts from different fields to generate knowledge and effect change.
The Leeds Social Sciences Institute supports and enhances social sciences at Leeds, fostering research collaborations, promoting partnerships and building skills capacity.

The Institute provides cross-faculty support for the social sciences which is targeted around three key priorities:

- Developing and promoting interdisciplinary research excellence
- Maximising impact, knowledge exchange and user engagement
- Delivering skills training and capacity building
1: DEVELOPING AND PROMOTING INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH EXCELLENCE

As a recognised University-wide, cross-disciplinary Platform and a key component in the University’s Research and Innovation Strategy, the LSSI works closely with the other University Themes and Platforms, in delivering the University’s Strategic Plan. To this end, LSSI identifies ‘focus areas’ where there is critical mass and existing interdisciplinary strengths – examples include inequalities and social justice; migration and mobility; social, economic and environmental sustainability; and security and conflict.

The Institute has introduced several key innovations to support and develop interdisciplinary research:

Interdisciplinary research
networks and collaborations

Networking is a hugely valuable way of identifying opportunities to work across disciplines. LSSI supports initiatives to encourage people to make the most of these opportunities, such as dedicated workshops and informal lunchtime discussions.

Our workshops are aimed at researchers who are keen to develop or extend research partnerships and share best practice. The workshops are designed around emerging themes, such as inequality, migration and new potential collaborations between the social sciences and humanities, and Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM).

Our approach also presents an exciting opportunity to harness the expertise of researchers to establish new interdisciplinary teams to tackle complex, real world problems. In partnership with Research and Innovation Service (RIS), LSSI established a seed corn funding initiative – [further details available at lssi.leeds.ac.uk/social-sciences-impact-acceleration-account/] to stimulate new interdisciplinary research activities. Our aim is to encourage research staff from different disciplines to come together to explore some of the most pressing research challenges facing society.

CASE STUDY:
CROSSING BORDERS FOR MIGRATION RESEARCH

More than 50 researchers from across the social sciences and beyond have joined together with policy-makers, businesses and civil society groups to promote social change and inclusion through migration research.

The Leeds Migration Research Network is developing collaborative research projects and has also secured funding for a seminar series during 2016/17, focusing on “Who/What is a good/bad migrant?”

The network draws together and builds upon existing research strengths in this area at Leeds. Projects already underway include an examination of linguistic and cultural transformations in super-diverse wards in four UK cities, undertaken in the School of Education and an investigation into ethnic population projections, in the School of Geography.

Professor Chris Forde, who set up the network, says: “Migration is something we hear about daily in the news, but it’s been a growing area of academic research for a number of years and one that is particularly relevant to interdisciplinary approaches.”

“Our network is bringing together perspectives on migration from across the university to harness geographical, sociological and health perspectives. We’re also working closely with external bodies, such as Leeds City Council and specialist migrant support services to help shape our approach and ensure its relevance.”

For more information, visit: mrn.leeds.ac.uk/
Co-ordination of large scale, multidisciplinary research grant applications

LSSI supports the development of large interdisciplinary research grant applications in response to research council calls, co-ordinated by our recently appointed Research and Innovation Development Manager.

Support is especially targeted at larger grants and cross-council initiatives where novel world class multidisciplinary approaches are required and where substantial institutional support is needed. A significant success is the ESRC funded Consumer Data Research Centre on Big Data.

Beyond the University the Institute also has strong links to the N8 Research Partnership, a collaboration of the eight most research intensive universities in the North of England: Durham, Lancaster, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Sheffield and York. www.n8research.org.uk/

We are developing an internationalisation strategy to promote interdisciplinary social science excellence at the University. This will help to forge new relationships, and to strengthen existing ones, with other social science institutes around the world.

CASE STUDY: SHAPING FUTURE POLICING

A partnership between police forces, police and crime commissioners and universities in the north of England is developing new approaches to policing and crime reduction.

In its first year of operation, the N8 Policing Research Partnership (N8 PRP) launched a Policing Innovation Forum to explore innovation in specific areas, such as cybercrime. A number of small grants have been awarded to support innovative research collaborations.

The partnership also held its first Knowledge Exchange Conference, ‘The Workforce of the Future in Policing’. Police officers, representatives of the Police and Crime Commissioners as well as academics came together to discuss the issues facing police workforces, and ways of addressing them.

The five-year project is funded by a total of £7.2 million combining a research grant from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and project partner contributions.

Professor Adam Crawford, Director of the N8 PRP, says: “There’s an immense appetite for greater collaboration between policing partners and universities to co-produce cutting edge new research and apply existing knowledge in ways that address real life problems and deliver social outcomes.”

n8prp.org.uk/
CASE STUDY: TACKLING THE DIFFERENT FACES OF INEQUALITY

Inequality is rarely an isolated experience, contained within employment, in education or in access to services. Taking an interdisciplinary approach to exploring the issues and challenges around inequality is therefore particularly important.

At Leeds, more than 60 academics across 30 research centres are tackling inequality issues in areas such as healthcare, gender and transport and the environment. Within this context, the Inequalities Research Network was set up to enable researchers from a variety of disciplines to examine challenges from a more holistic perspective.

Dr Ghazala Mir, leading the network, says: “We want to focus our research around the ways that people actually live their lives and the reality is that people can experience inequalities simultaneously across many different areas.”

A series of workshops attended by academics and representatives from voluntary organisations, local authorities and the West Yorkshire Police and Crime Commission kick-started the network by identifying areas where a holistic approach might be valuable. Researchers are now working on interdisciplinary research proposals based around three identified themes: transport, Islamophobia and mental health.

www.lssi.leeds.ac.uk/inequalities-network/
2: MAXIMISING IMPACT, KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE AND EXTERNAL ENGAGEMENT

We continue to build bridges between our research community and external organisations as a means of developing meaningful research collaborations that address relevant issues and challenges facing practitioners and policy makers.

External engagement and impact are advanced via the investment in the LSSI managed social sciences Impact Acceleration Account (IAA) which forms part of the ESRC IAA network. The social sciences at Leeds are well placed to develop critical research and tools to tackle key global as well as national and local challenges and finding strategies to combat/remedy these is therefore a critical strand of research across our disciplines and in which we can influence policy agendas.

Developed in association with the ESRC, the IAA will run until 2019 and is welcoming applications for funding for high quality research impact projects across three strands of activity:

- Responsive mode impact fund providing flexible funding for cross-disciplinary projects that demonstrate strong user engagement
- Knowledge exchange fellowships facilitating the movement of people between external organisations and the University that build and strengthen relationships
- PGR research placements supporting short-term external placement opportunities for postgraduate researchers

This externally-focussed approach has already delivered significant impacts.

For more information and to download an application form, visit the LSSI website: lssi.leeds.ac.uk/
CASE STUDY: LOW CARBON FUTURE FOR LEEDS

Leeds City Council is collaborating with University experts to establish ways of reducing carbon emissions and addressing issues of fuel poverty caused by rising gas and electricity prices.

Dr Tom Knowland, Head of Sustainable Energy and Climate Change at the City Council joined the university on a 12-month secondment funded by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council’s Impact Acceleration programme (EPSRC IAA).

Dr Knowland worked with a number of MSc and PhD students on short term projects around low carbon themes. He established working relationships with other university partners leading to more than 25 collaborative ideas for longer term research projects into low carbon initiatives and contributing to the development of the Leeds Committee on Climate Change, funded by the LSSI IAA.

“We need to build a resource-efficient, climate resilient city, which will be a better place to live for all of us, but will also make us more competitive and better able to ride out future economic shocks,” says Dr Knowland. “Partnerships between the University and the City Council could be a profitable way to tackle these issues close to home, as well as producing research outcomes that are of global benefit.”

CASE STUDY: TRANSFORMING URBAN ENVIRONMENTS

Most of us live in cities, within infrastructures that are continually increasing in complexity. Challenges such as congestion, poverty, disease, food and water supply all need to be addressed by cross-sector teams with expertise in many different areas. Often, however, these teams do not have the necessary skills or capacities required to bring about effective change.

Leeds researchers have set up a programme called TRUE (Transformational Routemapping for Urban Environments), which aims to design a toolkit that organisations can use to build teams which match the complexity of the project being addressed. Funded by the EPSRC, TRUE brings together social scientists in the fields of geography, linguistics and psychology with civil engineers to devise the toolkit.

The programme builds on the work done with local and regional organisations in the City Lab project (see page 6) to build projects using co-production principles. Working with 12 organisations nationwide, from the university, private, public and third sectors, the researchers will start by working with stakeholders in Leeds to identify key issues and devising a methodology for addressing them.

“If you try to do anything within a society, from setting up a Scout group to tackling inequality, you need to align the capability of your team to the complexity of the challenge,” explains Professor Paul Chatterton, who is leading the TRUE project. “This toolkit will help organisations do that, and will also be freely available online.”
3: DELIVERING SKILLS TRAINING AND CAPACITY BUILDING

The Institute has an important role to play in capacity building by developing and offering high quality skills training to social scientists across the institution, as well as facilitating networking events, particularly for early career researchers and postgraduate students. Key opportunities for social scientists include:

a. White Rose Doctoral Training Partnership

The White Rose Social Sciences Doctoral Training Partnership in Social Sciences (DTP) was established in January 2011 with an investment from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). The DTP provides a national training centre for postgraduate researchers in the social sciences, including the award of 60 studentships per year. By combining the expertise of the Universities of Leeds, Sheffield and York (and pockets of excellence in Bradford, Hull, Manchester Metropolitan, and Sheffield Hallam), the DTP delivers excellent supervision, first-class training and vibrant intellectual environments for postgraduate research students.

The DTP offers a comprehensive collaborative training programme that goes beyond a traditional PhD, providing advanced training in essential areas such as the use of quantitative secondary and administrative data in social science research. Our students also have the opportunity to apply for studentships which are linked to partners in the private, public or third sectors.

Visit www.wrdtc.ac.uk for further information.

CASE STUDY: IMPROVING FOOD SECURITY

Elizabeth Harrison was funded by the White Rose DTP to research natural resource management and food security issues in Zimbabwe. Through the DTP she was able to visit Zimbabwe to get first-hand knowledge of how farmers in rural villages manage their livelihoods.

Since completing her PhD, Elizabeth has secured a job, working in Malawi as a Government Services Associate with the non-profit organisation, One Acre Fund. The Fund helps farmers improve their practices, optimising use of their land, and getting better prices for crops.

"The experience I gained while working on my PhD has been invaluable in understanding what it’s like to be a small scale rural farmer, and that’s really enabled me to fit into the role here in Malawi,” says Elizabeth.

“One of the main advantages of working within the White Rose DTP was the flexibility I had to use my funding to get relevant fieldwork experience. The Centre also offered some fantastic training programmes in areas such as fieldwork preparation and research and also great opportunities for networking.”

wrdtc.ac.uk/
b. Leeds University Q Step Centre

The Leeds Q-Step Centre is part of a £19.5 million national programme which aims to inspire the next generation of quantitative social scientists.

Funded by the Nuffield Foundation, the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), Q-Step is being adopted by 15 UK universities to deliver specialist undergraduate programmes, including new course, work placements and pathways to postgraduate study.

Expertise and resources are shared across the higher education sector through an accompanying support programme, which will also forge links with schools and employers.

Led by Professor Chris Forde, the Leeds Q-Step Centre is working with the University’s Social Science Schools Engagement Team, to run aspiration-raising activities including an ESRC Festival of Social Science and a University Festival of Arts and Humanities.

Other activities are aimed at building capacity amongst staff and PG research students in Advanced Quantitative Analysis across the social sciences. Opportunities for Undergraduates include the Summer Research Project Placement Scheme, which enables second year students to collaborate with research staff on a live research project.

For more information go to www.qstep.leeds.ac.uk

c. Enhancing skills and career development – LSSI Placement Scheme

Leeds is at the forefront of innovative developments, such as the 2012 Wilson review of university-business collaboration which recommended that: “All full-time PhD students should have an opportunity to experience at least one 8-to-12 week placement during their period of study.”

LSSI provides these opportunities through its Placement Scheme, part of the Institute’s Impact Acceleration Account, which funds students to work in a research capacity on a short-term project with an external organisation.

Projects might involve:

- Gathering evidence, writing reports and responding to government consultation exercises/informing policy making
- Surveying or interviewing users or providers of relevant services to identify ways in which they could be improved
- Evaluating a project or scoping out the potential for a new project which aims to bring social or economic benefits to a particular community.

Our students have benefitted from working with organisations such as Leeds City Council, Business in the Community, West Yorkshire Probation Trust and Chapeltown Citizens Advice Bureau.

Popular with researchers, the scheme has proved effective in improving students’ employability, as well as injecting innovative ideas into the host organisation.

www.lssi.leeds.ac.uk/lssi-placementfellowship-scheme