The social sciences are essential to understanding human behaviour, the wellbeing of citizens and promoting sustainable growth. Social science research generates vital knowledge that informs policy, helping us navigate our way through the world as individuals and as a society.”

David Willetts MP, Minister for Science and Universities
SOCIAL SCIENCES AT LEEDS – OUR AMBITIONS

■ To produce knowledge with impact that shapes regional, national and international policy, public debate and professional practices.
■ To advance the integration of social sciences methodologies and concepts within cross-disciplinary research themes and programmes across the social sciences and beyond.
■ To enhance the capacity of social sciences research to produce knowledge with impact that shapes regional, national and international policy, public debate and professional practices.

SOCIAL SCIENCES AT LEEDS – WHAT MAKES US DISTINCTIVE

There are currently over 300 social scientists at Leeds with a combined research income in excess of £33m. In RAE 2008, the majority of the submission for the social sciences was judged to be world leading or internationally excellent (3* and 4*) with particularly strong performances in the fields of geography and environmental studies, business and management studies, social policy, education, law and psychology. The QS World University Rankings by subject (2013) also reflects the global status of social science at Leeds with Geography 19th; Education 27th; Communication & Media Studies 35th and Law; Politics and International Studies and Sociology all in the top 100.

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 healthcare and wellbeing, ageing populations, climate change, economic growth and sustainability.

Social scientists at Leeds have a wide range of expertise, distributed across six faculties, including disciplines such as:

■ Business and Management
■ Employment
■ Education
■ Finance
■ Care
■ Equality
■ Diversity
■ Gender
■ Racism
■ Ethnicity
■ Ageing
■ Public Policy
■ Policy Studies
■ Disability
■ Law
■ Governance
■ Economics
■ Politics
■ International Relations
■ Global Development
■ Security and Justice
■ Health and Wellbeing
■ Sustainability
■ Citizenship and Belonging
■ Cities and Social Justice
■ Spatial Analysis
■ Transport Studies
■ Climate Change
■ Socio-technical Systems
■ Designs
■ Energy
■ Communication, Media and Culture
■ Linguistics
■ Social History
RESEARCH EXCELLENCE WITH IMPACT

The portfolio of social science research at Leeds includes a number of large-scale, highly prestigious research projects that have attracted significant external funding and delivered lasting impact. Some examples include the:

- Centre for Climate Change Economics and Policy – www.cccep.ac.uk
- National UK INDEMAND Centre – www.eued.ac.uk/UK-INDEMAND
- Financialisation, Economy, Society, Sustainable Development (FESSUD) project (fessud.eu), led by the Business School, is currently the largest social science research project funded under Framework 7

Spatial modelling and consumer markets

In an impact case study for the 2014 audit of research excellence (REF) we describe how spatial modelling approaches developed in the School of Geography at Leeds have been applied across a range of commercial and public benefit organisations. The models and analytical methods can be used as a basis for network optimisation, investment appraisal, impact evaluation, regulatory planning and many other forms of policy analysis. Our work has been taken up by many global blue chip commercial organisations (e.g. Ford, Exxon, HSBC, Adidas, Asda-Walmart, GlaxoSmithKline) working through a spin-out company, GMAP Limited, which was established by the University of Leeds but is now owned and managed independently as part of the CallCredit Information Group.

Birkin, Clarke, and other members of the Centre for Spatial Analysis and Policy in the School of Geography (www.geog.leeds.ac.uk/research/csap/), have published extensively regarding both the methods and applications/outcomes of this applied research activity. The research continues to evolve through research council funding in the National Centre for Digital Research, National Centre for Research Methods, and our latest award of a Consumer Data Research Centre in the Economic and Social Research Council Big Data Network.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO METHODOLOGY

We also have an impressive array of methodological skills – Leeds hosts one of the existing six NCRM nodes in geo-spatial analytics: TALISMAN (School of Geography). Our expertise in the management of large data sets and quantitative methods are also underscored by the recently awarded ESRC Consumer Data Research Centre. Other notable strengths in research methods include realist evaluation methods to evaluate social and health policy and the analysis of longitudinal qualitative data pioneered via the Timescapes project.

ESRC Changing Lives and Times project

The Timescapes programme (www.timescapes.leeds.ac.uk/), led by Director, Bren Neale, was designed to advance Qualitative Longitudinal (QL) research methods and data resources. The programme has played a major role in building capacity in QL methods and secondary data resources across the social sciences in the UK and beyond. QL research offers a new dynamic approach to social enquiry. It tracks people and groups over time to discern the mechanisms that shape trajectories into and through life course processes or social conditions such as crime, poverty or social disadvantage. In the process it sheds light on the dynamic intersection of individual and structural factors, bringing lived experiences and policy responses into closer alignment. The original network of Timescapes projects explored the dynamics of family and personal lives, revealing for example, how grandparents sustain a parenting role in low income communities and the challenges that arise for young fathers who enter early parenthood. The datasets generated for this study have been gathered together to form the Timescapes Archive, a sustainable resource that offers rich potential for cross project secondary analysis. New networks based on QL research and archiving have since developed, including the Changing Landscapes for the Third Sector Study.
iBUILD (Infrastructure Business models, valuation and Innovation for Local Delivery)

iBUILD, which officially began on 1 August 2013, focuses on the networks of roads, energy, water, transport, waste and ICT that support all the services which have a direct effect on the social, environmental and economic wellbeing of our society.

Funded by a £3.5 million grant from EPSRC and ESRC, the four-year project has also received £1.8 million support from industry and government agencies. The consortium of three universities – Leeds, Newcastle and Birmingham – was awarded one of only two Infrastructure Business Models grants in the UK.

As cities, local authorities and local enterprise partnerships are given more powers to raise finance for infrastructure delivery, they need robust new business models to accelerate infrastructure-related economic growth locally, whilst meeting EU environmental targets. iBUILD’s recommendations will have a direct influence on Government policy decisions. The Leeds team is working collaboratively to exploit the wealth of expertise across the campus, ensuring that the UK’s ageing network of roads, pipes and sewers can be adapted and improved to meet the demands of the future.

INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH

One of our key strengths is our 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. The multidisciplinary focus of our research is reflected in numerous collaborations that span across the social sciences and beyond, for example:

1. iBUILD (Infrastructure Business models, valuation and Innovation for Local Delivery), a partnership between Engineering, Business and Environment, funded by the EPSRC and ESRC.

2. EPSRC funded Innovation Knowledge Centre in Regenerative Therapies and Devices, involving academics from the social sciences in partnership with Medicine and Health and Engineering – www.medical-technologies.co.uk/

3. ESRC funded Consumer Data Research Centre, a collaboration involving academics from Business and Environment.

Leeds also has a reputation for investing in transformational interdisciplinary research projects such as the Building Sustainable Societies project which is developing new knowledge to address the major social and economic challenges facing contemporary societies across the globe, notably in the fields of work, healthcare and security. It draws leading social scientists from across the Faculty of Education, Social Sciences and Law, the Faculty of Medicine and Health, and the Leeds University Business School (LUBS).

Visit www.bss.leeds.ac.uk for further information.
LSSI provides cross faculty support for the social sciences which is targeted around three key priorities:

- Developing interdisciplinary research excellence
- Impact, knowledge exchange and user engagement
- Training and capacity building for early career researchers

1. Developing interdisciplinary research excellence

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

a. Supporting interdisciplinary research networks

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 were keen to develop and/or extend research partnerships. The workshops are designed around emerging research themes, such as Big Data; EU funding sources; new opportunities which are at the intersection of the social sciences and the humanities; and potential collaborations between the social sciences and Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM). They also provide a useful forum for colleagues to share best practice and identify potential collaboration opportunities.

Lunchtime conversations enable researchers to engage with two senior colleagues – one from the social sciences and one from STEM – discussing their ideas for an interdisciplinary approach to contemporary research.

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Perceptions and behaviours related to leisure activities

Perceptions and behaviours related to leisure activities is a seed corn funded project led by Kishore Budha (School of Design) and Alison McKay (Engineering) and involves an interdisciplinary research group interested in older adults’ wellbeing. The project includes specialists in many areas across the University, including branding and marketing, mechanical and electronic engineering, psychology, and ageing and exercise studies. They conducted a pilot study with older adults on perceptions and behaviours related to two leisure activities (exploring the city and shopping) in city centres, with a focus on identifying barriers to mobility and participation.

The team shared the findings from the pilot study at one of our lunchtime conversations and had the opportunity to engage with academics from a range of disciplines. The outcomes of the study are now being used to apply for follow-on funding.

“This has been a great incentive to transform what was only an idea that two of us had discussed during lunchtime, into an ambitious interdisciplinary project. We are aware that this is just the beginning: bridging disciplinary perspectives and developing shared languages with non-academic partners is a huge challenge. But we are motivated and this seed corn funding has enabled us to realise our ambitions.”

Dr Tornaghi (School of Geography)
b. Facilitating new interdisciplinary research collaborations
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, LSSI established a seed corn funding initiative to stimulate new interdisciplinary research activities. The principal aim of the scheme is to encourage research staff from different disciplines to come together to explore some of the most pressing research challenges facing society.

c. 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. This is especially for larger grants and cross council initiatives where novel world class multidisciplinary approaches are required and where substantial institutional support is needed. A recent success is the ESRC funded Consumer Data Research Support Service on Big Data.

d. Exploiting external networks
Beyond the University, the Institute also has strong links to the N8 Social Sciences Research Partnership and White Rose Consortium.

The N8 Social Sciences Research Partnership is a collaboration of the eight most research intensive universities in the North of England: Durham, Lancaster, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Sheffield and York. Working with industry, the N8 aims to maximise the impact of this research base by identifying and coordinating powerful research collaborations across the North of England and beyond.

A recent success from the N8 is an award from the College of Policing Innovation Capacity Building Fund to the N8 Policing Research Partnership. This seeks to enable and foster high quality, independent research and to facilitate research-based contributions to public debate, policing policy, governance and practice. Securing this funding constitutes an important kick-start to our emergent collaborations, helping to ensure that research questions, problems and their resolution are co-created by academics and non-academics from the outset.

Visit www.n8research.org.uk for more information.
2. Impact, knowledge exchange and user engagement

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

LSSI works closely with the University funded sector hubs, supported by over £6 million of investment, to provide a focused and strategic gateway to developing partnerships with industry and other partners. Most notably for the social sciences is the funding of Care-Connect: The Social Care Innovation Hub (care-connect.leeds.ac.uk/), although many other examples can be found across the social sciences. This investment has led to user impact in the following areas:

Research led by Professor Sue Yeandle, Director of CIRCLE, the Centre for International Research on Care, Labour and Equalities, on working age carers has focused policymakers’ attention on carers’ contributions to society, their role in the health and social care system, and the issues they confront in reconciling paid work with unpaid care. The research findings have: (a) provided a vital evidence base, shaping policy work of the national charity, Carers UK, (b) influenced Government policy formation and evaluation, including playing a direct role in shaping the Government’s National Care Strategy in 2008, and (c) informed wider policy and parliamentary debate supporting carers of working age.
The goal of maximising the impact of our research is further supported by the LSSI Masterclass Series. Our aim is to use this as a platform to stimulate discussion and creative thinking around some of the difficult policy challenges facing local, national and international governments and to focus on how we can work together to address these challenges through research evidence, scholarship, knowledge transfer and innovation. These events are open to staff, students and external organisations from the public, private and third sectors.

Keynote presenters include prominent guest speakers (such as the Chief Executive of Leeds City Council and the Director of the Centre for Public Health Excellence, NICE) offering expert knowledge and insight into major challenges facing front line service providers.

**Enhanced medical leadership: increasing clinicians' involvement in health management**

Around the world policy initiatives have aimed to increase the engagement of clinicians in the management of health services and research has shown that this contributes to improved patient healthcare. Ms Rebecca Malby, Director of the Centre for Innovation in Health Management (www.cihm.leeds.ac.uk), led on the development of a Toolkit for ‘Developing Productive Relationships between Management and Medicine’; this resource offers a way of improving productive working between doctors and managers. The findings have been distilled into training and educational material which has been delivered to National Health Service (NHS) staff and guidance which has been used by NHS organisations to improve practice. Collectively, this work has contributed to improved and more efficient patient healthcare in several NHS trusts.

**NUDGE Theory**

Judging Nudging: Choice Architecture and Social Norming in Public Health, with Professor Mike Kelly, Director of the Centre for Public Health Excellence, National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE).

This event explored how NUDGE theory can be applied to change behaviour and its role in the public health and wellbeing agenda and policy development.
3. Training the next generation of researchers

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

a. White Rose Doctoral Training Centre

The White Rose Doctoral Training Centre in Social Sciences (DTC) was established in January 2011 with an investment from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). The DTC provides a national training centre for postgraduate researchers in social sciences, including the award of 48 studentships per year. By combining the expertise of the universities of Leeds, Sheffield and York, the DTC delivers excellent supervision, first-class training and vibrant intellectual environments for postgraduate research students.

The DTC offers a comprehensive collaborative training programme that goes beyond a traditional PhD, offering advanced training in essential areas such as the use of quantitative secondary/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 wrdtc.ac.uk/ for further information.

b. Student-led seminar series

PhD students have access to a range of additional events to support their research and career development. LSSI supports an interdisciplinary seminar series, specifically for postgraduates, to present and discuss aspects of their work with other postgraduate students in an informal environment. The series includes contributions from students from across the social sciences.

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 internship during their period of study.”

LSSI provides these opportunities by funding students to work in a research capacity on a short term project with an external organisation.

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Case study:

Daniel Edmiston, from the School of Sociology and Social Policy, recently undertook a research placement to explore how current and forthcoming welfare reforms are likely to impact on households affected by learning disabilities.

This project aimed to validate the collective experience of households affected by learning disabilities and served to evaluate existing services and provision provided by Chapeltown Citizens Advice Bureau and Leeds City Council.

Chief executive of Chapeltown Citizens Advice Bureau, Nick Morgan, said:

“This report highlights the fantastic achievements that this project has made and the real difference to lives that good advice can provide. Helpfully the research also points to areas that can be improved upon for the benefit of those in our communities that have learning difficulties or disabilities.

With the current and forthcoming welfare reforms, the services provided by organisations like Chapeltown Citizens Advice Bureau will become even more important to protect those most vulnerable to social exclusion and deprivation.”
Case study:

Lee Beniston graduated from the University of Leeds in 2008 with a BSc (Hons) in Bioscience and was awarded a three year interdisciplinary PhD project that is cosupervised by members of the Leeds University Business School and University of Leeds Faculty of Biological Sciences. The host organisation needed to understand what kind of sustained societal economic impacts of one of their projects on local communities in Yorkshire and The Humber.

“I gained significant experience in working independently and using my own initiatives. For example due to the sensitive nature of the research (at a time when many organisations experienced funding cuts) I found it much more challenging to establish trust and gain access with potential interviewees in a short space of time.”

Jo Crossley, Business in the Community said:

“I would like to thank you for such a thorough and comprehensive piece of research. You have provided us with excellent baseline evidence in terms of the sustained direct and indirect impacts for community organisations. Your research will be circulated to the chairs in the first instance and then the member firms. In addition, armed with your research I am going to talk to the Big Lottery again to see if there are any funding opportunities.”

Projects might involve:

- 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
- gathering evidence, writing reports and responding to government consultation exercises/informing policy making.

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

The scheme has been popular and has proved to be effective in improving a student’s employability and injecting innovative ideas into the host organisation – www.lssi.leeds.ac.uk/lssi-placement-fellowship-scheme/
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For further information about LSSI and the work we do please visit www.lssi.leeds.ac.uk