COLLABORATING FOR IMPACT
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
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Social scientists at Warwick seek to produce research that provokes debate, informs policy, changes practices and improves industry.

We want our work to make a real difference to society, the economy and people’s lives. Our goal can only be achieved through close collaboration with engaged stakeholders who can guide and shape our research to make it as impactful as possible. It is through collaboration, co-production of research and knowledge exchange that social sciences research can really benefit society.

This booklet showcases just a few of the collaborative projects in which our research is being applied to inform the work of charities, policymakers, NGOs and businesses. Funded by the Warwick Impact Acceleration Account, which is supported by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), each project demonstrates the lasting relationships we are making with non-academic organisations with a view to benefiting their work and the lives of the people they work with.

We are always seeking opportunities for new collaborations and we hope that these case studies will inspire new discussions for future partnerships.

Professor Matthew Nudds, Chair of the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Warwick
Creating decent work for Scotland

Professor Chris Warhurst and Dr Sally Wright, Institute for Employment Research

Partners: Oxfam Scotland, University of the West of Scotland

In-work poverty affects around 50% of working age adults in Scotland. Such poverty is caused by a number of factors, including low wages, job insecurity or irregular hours.

In 2015, Oxfam Scotland undertook a project to better understand these factors, interviewing 1,500 low paid workers in Scotland to find out what decent work means to them. They asked the Institute for Employment Research (IER) at Warwick to apply their expertise in this field to the project. Collaborating through a series of advisory meetings and secondments, IER worked with Oxfam to design, develop and implement a bespoke conceptual framework for decent work which underpinned Oxfam’s data collection. The framework was incorporated into a co-authored report which set out what low-paid workers in Scotland value as important when seeking decent work, and made specific policy recommendations for how the lives of low-paid workers in Scotland might be improved.

The collaborative work of the project team achieved significant impact in shaping Scotland’s policy on decent work. The findings from the project
were showcased at a launch event held at the Scottish Parliament and were outlined at the Scottish National Party Conference in 2016. Project partners gave evidence to the House of Commons Scottish Affairs Committee and the Scottish Government’s Fair Work Convention. Following some of the recommendations outlined in the report, the Scottish Government established a Strategic Labour Market Group, chaired by the Minister for Employability and Training. The Group has the directive of developing the Scottish Government’s Labour Market Strategy, looking particularly at lowering unemployment, creating a skilled and engaged workforce and developing a sustainable working population.

The project has also shaped debate about employment in Scotland and throughout the UK. The report has been cited numerous times in government reports, print and broadcast media and social media. Beyond Scotland, the project team has given evidence to the Welsh Assembly Fair Employment Enquiry. Work from the project has also featured in a report to the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), the professional body for HR and people development. The CIPD is now planning to use the report to develop its own job quality survey, and to feed measures developed by IER for the report into its response to the Taylor Review of Modern Working Practices.
After China, Bangladesh is the second largest textile producer in the world, with over 5,000 factories employing 4 million workers.

The textile industry generates 80% ($24.5 billion) of the country’s total annual exports but a series of industrial disasters, including the Rana Plaza factory collapse in 2013 which killed over 1,100 people, has highlighted deep-rooted safety problems.

Research has shown that effective social dialogue - defined by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) as negotiation, consultation and exchange of information between employers and workers on common issues - can improve safety in the workplace. The Ethical Trade Initiative (ETI) is developing a programme to pilot social dialogue within Bangladeshi factories and is collaborating with Warwick Business School (WBS) to co-design a scalable ‘social dialogue strategy’ for its member organisations, including major retailers such as Tesco, Marks & Spencer and John Lewis.

The collaborative project aims to derive lessons from the pilot programme for ETI members to use to evaluate social dialogue in their supply chains. Professor Donaghey is an expert on employee voice, which provides a solid academic foundation for developing social dialogue. Drawing on previous research into the response to the Rana Plaza disaster, the team will co-develop theoretically-informed indicators to monitor social dialogue in factories and identify areas for intervention.

Stakeholder engagement is integral to the project design. In June 2017, WBS and the ETI, along with the ILO, held a workshop for ETI corporate members, trade unions and NGOs to present initial findings and gain feedback on how social dialogue can be developed in supply chains.

In the long term it is ultimately anticipated that more suppliers will implement social dialogue in their workplaces. In addition, the project aims to establish a strategic, longstanding partnership between WBS and the ETI to enable the co-production of larger research programmes.
Addressing the prison crisis: from research to practice

Dr Anastasia Chamberlen, Department of Sociology
Partner: Safe Ground

The current prison crisis has been described as the worst since the late 1980s, with recent increases in violence, drug abuse, self-harm and suicide. Over-crowding, staff shortages and cost-cutting have resulted in prisoner riots, greatly threatening the wellbeing of both prisoners and staff.

Although these issues are of growing concern to Government, public understanding of prison life is often low, and laced with misconceptions and prejudices. Dr Anastasia Chamberlen is working with Safe Ground, The Centre for Crime & Justice Studies and The Howard League for Penal Reform on a project to raise public awareness of prisoner experiences and inform prison policy.
The team collaborated with over 10 different arts organisations working in the criminal justice system to host a public arts event designed to give a voice to former prisoners through art, drama, music and poetry. The event aimed to highlight problems in the prison system and challenge preconceived attitudes towards life behind bars.

In a second event, the team will bring together a range of stakeholders, including prison staff, magistrate judges, academics, charities and former prisoners, to devise a set of policy recommendations to inform the Ministry of Justice’s review of prisons. This event will also include artists, with the aim of facilitating a more inclusive conversation about issues generally considered difficult to talk about and agree on.

By bringing stakeholders together to approach the challenge of prison reform from new perspectives, this collaborative project is combining knowledge and experience to inspire sustainable change.
Using online data to inform the generation of official statistics

Dr Suzy Moat and Professor Tobias Preis, Data Science Lab, Warwick Business School (WBS)

Partner: Office for National Statistics

In a series of recent studies, the WBS Data Science Lab, headed by Suzy Moat and Tobias Preis, has provided evidence that online data, collected via sites such as Google and Flickr, could be used to help measure human behaviour. The Lab is collaborating with the Office for National Statistics Data Science Campus on a programme of work to transform research insights into practice and determine how they could be used to inform the generation of national statistics, such as tourist or visitor numbers.

Raising awareness of bullying risks faced by children and young people with disabilities

Dr Stella Chatzitheochari, Department of Sociology

Partner: Anti-Bullying Alliance

Dr Chatzitheochari’s research has shown that children and young people with Special Educational Needs and other disabilities are at an increased risk of school bullying. To raise awareness of this risk among public and practitioner audiences, Dr Chatzitheochari consulted with the Anti-Bullying Alliance to produce a short animated video. The Anti-Bullying Alliance helped to disseminate the video, as well as incorporating it into their online resources on disability bullying. As a result, the video was featured by Teacher Toolkit, one of the most influential blogs on education in the UK, and has been used in an online anti-bullying youth conference organised by Eastside Community Heritage in London. The project team have also received enquiries from teachers and schools who plan to use the video as a resource in their anti-bullying initiatives.
Improving the processes used to manage the review of criminal cases

Professor Jackie Hodgson, Criminal Justice Centre, School of Law

The Criminal Cases Review Commission (CCRC) has processed and reviewed over 20,000 applications since its initiation in 1997. In order to manage the large number of applications it receives, the CCRC has implemented changes to speed up the review process, including a more streamlined process for reviewing criminal cases where the applicant has not previously appealed their conviction - many of which are cases where the original plea was guilty. Drawing on a long-standing research relationship, and examining the impact of their earlier research on current procedures and outcomes, experts from the Criminal Justice Centre at the Warwick School of Law are evaluating these processes to understand their effectiveness. The aim is to support the CCRC to develop practices that are efficient but do not compromise the quality and fairness of their services.

Targeting prevention in domestic abuse suicides

Professor Vanessa Munro, School of Law

For some time, Refuge have been campaigning for a new law which would hold perpetrators of domestic violence responsible for manslaughter if their behaviour drives a victim to suicide. As part of this initiative, Refuge approached Professor Vanessa Munro - an expert in evaluating the adequacy of criminal justice responses to vulnerable victims of gender-based violence - to work with them to evidence the scale of suicidality amongst their clients, and to explore any patterns, precursors or mitigating factors to domestic violence suicide identifiable from their case files. Through semi-structured interviews, the researchers will also review the adequacy of existing criminal justice and social service responses, and mental health provision, to this very vulnerable population. The collaboration aims to improve risk assessment processes and increase support to suicidal victims of domestic abuse. It also aims to situate calls for legal change, in respect of perpetrators’ liability for suicide, within the broader context of an understanding of victims’ experiences.

Partner: Refuge
Piloting a therapeutic writing group for survivors of sexual abuse

Dr. Jeannie Wright and Dr. Ravi Thiara, Centre for the Study of Safety and Wellbeing, Centre for Life Long Learning

Partner: Safeline

Research has shown the benefits of expressive writing in individual counselling and psychotherapy contexts. However, there is a lack of evidence on the effects of facilitated writing groups led by charities or counselling agencies. Dr. Jeannie Wright and Dr. Ravi Thiara applied for funding to support a 10 week pilot writing group, facilitated by Safeline, a Warwickshire-based charity providing support to survivors of sexual abuse. They interviewed participants to evaluate the effectiveness of the writing group and identify areas for development. They have produced a report and a policy briefing with recommendations to inform the future implementation of therapeutic writing groups, and have offered training and support to practitioners working in this area.

UK Gas Security Forum

Professor Mike Bradshaw, Warwick Business School

The secure and affordable supply of natural gas is an essential element of UK energy security.

Today, the UK imports about half of its natural gas requirements and by the late 2020s this could reach over 70%. Brexit will also add new challenges to the UK’s gas security. To address these challenges, Professor Mike Bradshaw has created the UK Gas Security Forum - a network of academics, industry organisations, think tanks and NGOs involved in UK energy policy and the UK gas supply chain. The aim of the Forum is to inform Brexit negotiations and develop a post-Brexit UK gas security strategy.
Helping parents of young children with developmental disabilities promote their child’s wellbeing

Dr Vasiliki Totsika, Centre for Educational Development, Appraisal and Research

Partners: Mencap, The Challenging Behaviour Foundation and Cerebra

Parents of children with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) have expressed a need for more parenting information, and especially information that focuses on positive outcomes in their children rather than just discussing their limitations. To address this need, researchers at the Centre for Educational Development, Appraisal and Research (CEDAR) are developing a booklet for parents of children with IDD to discuss the aspects of family life that promote child wellbeing. They are working closely with Mencap, the Challenging Behaviour Foundation and Cerebra to develop the booklet in line with the needs of parents and children and to produce something accessible and useable. The aim is for the booklet to be used by charities as a resource to support parents, making a significant difference to smaller charities working in the area who do not have the provision to develop such support materials themselves.

Supporting young people in their transition from education to employment

Professor Kate Purcell, Institute for Employment Research

Partners: Prince’s Trust, SEED Creative Academy, North Warwickshire and South Leicestershire College

Young people increasingly face precarious pathways into employment from education. Researchers at the Institute for Employment Research (IER) investigated the changing experiences of young people transitioning from education to employment, with a focus on the Midlands. They are working with a range of partners to develop workshops and training materials to support young people in making career decisions. Alongside an online toolkit, the training workshops will give young people an introduction to the job market and help them make informed decisions about their future careers. The training will also provide information to careers practitioners on how best to support young people in their search for employment.
Support for impact collaborations

The projects in this booklet have been funded by the Warwick ESRC Impact Acceleration Account.

This grant provides funding for collaborative projects, networking, secondments and the translation and dissemination of research.

The University also supports collaborative impact projects through the bi-annual Warwick Impact Fund.
Get in touch

If you have a project that would benefit from research input, or would be interested in combining forces to increase the impact of your work, we’d like to hear from you.

The University of Warwick Impact Managers can put you in touch with specialist academics within the Faculty of Social Sciences who can support your projects and help shape practices, policies and ideas.

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This booklet is funded by the Warwick ESRC Impact Acceleration Account grant reference: ES/M500434/1