Great Expectations:

the Social Sciences in Britain

Commission on the Social Sciences

March 2003

The social sciences and their interface with the enterprises with which they interact are the subject of many different views – and expectations (see title of this report):

'Social science should be at the heart of policy-making. We need a revolution in relations between government and the social research community – we need social scientists to help determine what works and why, and what type of policy initiatives are likely to be most effective. And we need better ways of ensuring that those who need such information can get it quickly and easily'

David Blunkett, (then) Secretary of State for Education, speaking at the ESRC Annual Conference in February 2000

'… comment (even in 'serious' newspapers) tends to trivialise social science research or to deliberately seek out obscure work for parody'

President of the British Sociological Association, writing to the Commission in August 2002

'The social sciences today are in a serious crisis which gets less attention than it should. It is threatened on several fronts. One danger is that it becomes trivial and mechanical… An opposite (although related) danger lies in the purposeless sophistication one finds within parts of mathematical economics ... However, the most serious danger for the social sciences is a tendency to become pretentious and uncontrolled. The abstractions start living their own lives'.

Jon Elster, *Vitenskap og politikk* (Science and Politics) (1989), pp. 11-12. (imperfectly translated from Norwegian by H. O. Melberg)

Note: The Commissioners drew on their experience of a range of social science disciplines across a number of work settings. The report reflects the views of Commissioners as individuals but not necessarily those of their employers. Though there was inevitably some minor divergence of views between individual Commissioners on particular matters, the whole report has been agreed by the Commission.

A copy of this report may be found on the web site of the Academy of Learned Societies for the Social Sciences at http://www.the-academy.org.uk/

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Executive summary and our recommendations

Key points from the report

- The social sciences in the UK are extensive, diverse and influential. At any one time, around 4.25 million 11 to 19 year old students study them in schools (up from 3.25 million because of the introduction of compulsory citizenship to Key Stage 4). Around half a million students study them in universities. Total university annual income from the social sciences is of the order of £2.8 billion, of which about 20% is for research; we have been unable to quantify social science expenditures in the private sector but these could be substantial. Many social scientists are now in key positions in government, business, the media, the civil service and the voluntary sector as well as in academia.
- By all available measures, British research in the social sciences is ranked second only to the USA.
- Official measures show social science teaching in universities to be of high quality.
- Employment levels of social scientists are at least average for graduates and are better than that of physicists.
- There are significant problems with the exploitation of social sciences research in government, local government, commerce, the voluntary sector and the media. These come about because of 'interface management' and communication problems, though the caution of some academics towards close engagement with practitioners is a source of great disappointment to many users of social science research.
- The *average* quality level and utility of university research in business and management studies is unacceptably low and must be enhanced.
- There is a growing crisis of supply of top quality academics in economics and in business and management studies but also in other social sciences (and elsewhere in academia). It is caused by the attractions of alternative, better-resourced opportunities – not *just* low salaries though these are the major factor.
- The academic treadmill, driven by excessive accountability burdens, the Research Assessment Exercise and other factors, has reduced the originality and quality of much academic research and constrained interaction with various communities.
- Other big issues are the need for more internationalisation of research, the need for multidisciplinary working and the up-sizing of social sciences research from a cottage industry approach to include some larger scale projects. We see the need to change mechanisms to facilitate international collaborations in research and in data-gathering and to enhance certain types of multidisciplinary working. We believe that legacy effects and mind-sets have led to social sciences research funding being mostly in relatively small packets. This has hampered social scientists from fulfilling their full potential contributions to enhanced understanding and to major policy issues.

Sixty recommendations for actions by relevant parties are made to improve the situation (see below).

The report

This report came about because of a proposal by the Academy of Learned Societies for the Social Sciences to review the state of the social sciences in the United Kingdom (we use 'Britain' as a convenient short-hand throughout the report). However the report is entirely independent of the Academy or any other body. It is the work of a group of Commissioners recruited by public nomination (see Annex 1). The report has not been seen prior to publication by any of the bodies which helped to fund it (the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF)) or by the bodies whose roles are reviewed herein – except for checking of the factual accuracy of sections of descriptive text.

Our work

The terms of reference of the Commission were to define the current nature, focus, status, health and contribution to society of the social sciences in Britain; to identify shortcomings in regard to the social sciences' health and contribution to society; and to set out a programme of action, capable of implementation by each of the various players according to their role and resources, which will improve any shortcomings.

Throughout the extended period of the review we sought to be as transparent as possible. Discussion papers were put on a web site and comments invited; a formal call for evidence was made to the social science and user communities through the press and the web site, with specific invitations to 43 learned societies. We met with a range of bodies representing the users or beneficiaries of the social sciences, academics, the British Academy, a range of research funders, research centres, think tanks and many other enterprises. Over 200 people helped us (see Annex 2). In addition, we assembled the most complete known set of statistics to describe the scale, funding and success of the social sciences from a variety of official and other sources. The scale and complexity of what was discovered are reflected in the length of this report.

The social sciences

We initially reviewed the environmental context in which the social sciences operated in Britain, including global trends. From this we proceeded to define what we conceived of as the social sciences – we were clear from the outset that the term 'social science' is a misnomer given the huge range of interests, ways of operating, research methodologies and value systems extant. We concluded that there was no alternative to making a definition based on a set of academic disciplines. Some were easily recognised – such as economics, politics and international affairs, social policy and administration, social work and sociology. Some parts of other disciplines, notably geography and psychology, were also clearly identifiable as social sciences. We decided that very substantial parts of education and business and management studies were now properly regarded as part of our subject group. In addition, highly variable (but sometimes large) proportions of anthropology, area studies, archaeology, built environment and town and country planning, communication, culture and media studies, history, law, library and information management, linguistics, some aspects of medicine, other studies and professions related to medicine, nursing, philosophy and statistics were properly regarded as part of the social sciences. We found operationalising any numerical partition of disciplines to be totally impossible, partly because of our partial knowledge and partly because of the pre-classified data which we were able to get. Thus we concentrated in most cases on the most obvious 'candidates' – the first nine in the list above plus anthropology and law – adding the others where it was appropriate and possible. It is obvious therefore that all aggregate statistics about the social sciences are indicative rather than definitive.

What are the social sciences for and what have they contributed?

We tried to define what the social sciences are for in such a way that it gave us criteria to assess their state of health. We saw them as having a dual purpose: to enhance the wealth of the UK and its peoples; and to enhance the quality of life (using a broad definition of the latter).

As a Commission, we have been surprised in discussions with those outside of academia just how little is known of the contributions of the social sciences to society. For this reason, we collated examples of where groups of British social scientists or individuals have changed or influenced policy and practice. These serve to underline the vast range of areas of everyday life, as well as academic interest in theory, covered by our subject matter – ranging from the very local community to the global stage.

Partly as a stage-setting exercise and partly because it was a surprise to some Commissioners, we have also explored the impact of devolution on the social sciences and vice versa. We were struck by how important the social sciences are becoming to the work of recently devolved administrations in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales and to the work of some regional bodies in England. Though the staff numbers involved are presently relatively small, the desire of these governments to engage intimately with social sciences seems rather different to that in some parts of Whitehall. We think there is something to learn from some of their practices, and make recommendations to that effect.

What is the nature of British social sciences?

At any one time, there are around 4.25 million students taking subjects wholly or partly of the social sciences in schools. At GCSE level, geography is the market leader whilst at A level GCE, it is increasingly being challenged by business and management studies and psychology. The numbers and proportions of school level students studying certain subjects with a social science component at this level have, however, declined significantly over the last few years; this is most marked in economics but also applies to political studies and sociology. Opinions differ on whether this matters. We have reviewed how government changes to and plans for the reform of the 14–19 curriculum have impacted or might impact on the social sciences e.g. through the introduction of citzenship as a statutory part of the secondary curriculum.

The social sciences at university level are funded at about the level of £2.8 billion per annum (about a fifth of all university income), of which about 20% is for research. The bulk of this comes from the public purse but a very major contribution is made by postgraduate students paying their own fees (especially in business and management studies).

At university level, about half a million students (a quarter of the total) are taking university courses in social sciences. Whilst some universities are massively over-subscribed, the system as a whole seems to be about in balance – though this overall picture conceals considerable regional variations and differences between different universities. Differences certainly exist between subjects e.g. statistics has shown a sharp decline in numbers. The largest numbers studying social science-related subjects at university level are in business and management studies and in education i.e. the numbers of students are greater at the more applied end of the subject spectrum. Different social science subjects at university are differentially attractive to the two genders to a marked extent. The structure of social science education appears to differ greatly by discipline, with the more vocational subjects having higher proportions of Masters degrees, many of these taken on a part-time basis.

Graduates across the social sciences as a whole appear to do at least as well as the average graduate in terms of job placements and salary. Unemployment rates for social science graduates are slightly lower than the national average and significantly better than those for physics students.

The numbers of students gaining Masters degrees and PhDs have expanded greatly in recent years in many social science areas, both for home and (especially) non-UK students. Overall, the British PhD programmes in the social sciences have proved attractive to overseas students against fierce international competition, with education and business and management studies growing particularly rapidly. There is however a particular dearth of postgraduate study at PhD level by home students in economics where most effort goes into training overseas students, many of whom seem unlikely to stay in the UK. To attract more high calibre British students, we recommend a further very substantial rise in PhD stipend in 'shortage subjects' to the average initial social sciences graduate salary (around £18,300).

We considered the problems of staff recruitment and retention. We believe there is a major problem of appointing and retaining high quality staff in at least economics and business and management. It also occurs in some other subjects to a smaller but significant extent. This is exacerbated in high cost regions. Salaries are not the only factor but we are clear that salaries in shortage/high cost areas need to rise significantly in response to market pressures and make some suggestions of the minimal level in difficult-to-fill areas.

How good are British social sciences?

We reviewed a host of evidence – RAE results for the social sciences, various international comparators including bibliometrics and a variety of views of knowledgeable people. The conclusions were unambiguous: British social sciences are highly regarded internationally. Generally we score or are regarded as second only to the USA in terms of volume and quality of research. There are some variations – for example, many economists are in despair about what they see as the progressive decline of their subject's international standing and quality. This is attributed to the difficulty of recruiting top staff and good research students (see above). There are also plausible claims that 'top universities' find it much easier to recruit good staff across the social sciences because of prestige, lower average teaching and administrative loads, etc – so there are significant across-HEIs variations as well as those between disciplines.

We have studied the impact of the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) on research and researchers in the social sciences. Overall, the disciplines involved did very well – better than the rest of the academic community. But the nature of the RAE assessment has led to a number of significant deleterious effects and has fostered game-playing to maximise achievement of high grades. We make recommendations on the way forward to the committee currently reviewing the RAE. Though we are clear on the need for some 'big social science research' akin to projects in the physical sciences (see last section below), the case for further research concentration in the social sciences is weak. Much top calibre research is currently done in small departments or even in some cases by individuals. We also believe that there is a danger of stultifying new research strengths by giving too low funding to developing departments (e.g. those who have moved to 4 status in the 2001 RAE). Our greatest concern in regard to social science research is on that carried out in business and management studies. On all the evidence available to us, this is *on average* well below the calibre of other research we studied; its practical utility was also strongly questioned by supposed beneficiaries. We support the efforts made by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and other bodies to enhance the situation but call for further action by those primarily responsible.

ESRC has done well in the last two Spending Reviews; it has demonstrated to government's satisfaction the importance of social science research. We are, however, concerned about the future capacity for research outside universities given the academic focus of ESRC-funded research training and a deeply worrying lack of quantitative skills (which ESRC has set out to enhance; but more needs to be done).

The evidence from the Quality Assurance Agency is that the huge bulk of social science teaching at university level is of good quality. We summarise this but, given these official findings, make no recommendations for any specific changes in teaching in the social sciences.

If the social science community is generally convinced of the merits of UK social sciences research, government is somewhat more ambivalent. From 1997 onwards there has been a much more responsive government attitude to the possible contribution of the social sciences. Social scientist researchers in government have risen rapidly in numbers (though it has proved difficult to recruit enough quality economists). Many contracts for research in social sciences have been placed with universities and other contractors. But – whilst a number of academics are highly respected – government ministers and civil servants were scathing about some of the work they receive. This is claimed all too often to speak naively of policy issues, demonstrate little or no awareness of current policy, is over-technical and sometimes needs drastic editing to make it readable to key players. A complicating factor is the rather different time scales on which academics and policy-makers often work.

We do not believe that all of the (undoubted) problems can be laid at the doors of academics; government also contributes through a lack of awareness of how to get the best out of non-civil servants, making impossible demands on occasions and having inconsistent and sometimes poor procurement policies. We see this in part as classic 'interface management' and communication problems. We make recommendations to minimise these problems, including the major expansion of a new secondment scheme.

One fundamental issue which faces all those commissioning research and many consumers of its results is the mismatch between the nature of the questions to be addressed and academic structures. Typically research questions as defined by those outside academia are 'cross-cutting'; rarely can any one discipline or practitioner address it successfully. As think tanks have pointed out, the structures and the multiple commitments of most academics in universities can put academic social scientists at a real disadvantage in meeting 'real world needs'. We believe there are important lessons to be learned from these criticisms and make some recommendations in this regard.

It is also clear to us that the progressive erosion of uncommitted time in universities – not just (but particularly) in the social sciences – has had severely deleterious effects. Many staff are stuck on a relentless treadmill of teaching, administration and production of papers to submit to the RAE. Despite the UK having individuals whose ideas shape global thinking, too few new ideas are generated or seen by research funders. Some research as a consequence is pedestrian or incremental; some is duplicative; a substantial fraction of it is carried out in weekends and holidays. We see the need to create 'thinking time' as one crucial contribution to improve the ills that we have identified. Some recommendations are made to funding bodies for more fellowships akin to those under the ESRC AIM scheme. And we argue that radical changes to contracts of some (perhaps all) academic staff towards an American model of '9 month contracts' would be beneficial.

Reaching out to society

Despite the huge range of work carried out by social scientists, we were struck by how little seemed to be known to the media and other stakeholders. This is a serious problem: it represents a waste of public resource and a loss of potential societal contribution from many committed individuals and teams. We have examined many aspects of this, including the nature of 'intermediaries' in the media and the disinclination of some academics to publish outside key journals, and make a host of recommendations for mitigating the problem. More generally, we believe there is a great need to 'market' social sciences more effectively: the lack of awareness of our contributions is widespread and influences what we get asked to do and what impact we have.

Social science practitioners

A characteristic of the social sciences is that there are a large number of individuals directly or indirectly applying what they have learned in their academic disciplines in the National Health Service (NHS), in government at all levels, in the voluntary sector and elsewhere. We reviewed some experience of practitioners in a sample of organisations – the NHS,

charitable organisations, local authorities and think tanks. From this we drew some conclusions on the difficulties many practitioners find in extracting ideas from the academic community to inform or steer their work and the need for greater interaction. We make appropriate recommendations to the various parties involved.

Who speaks for the social sciences?

Entirely properly, many individuals and groups in the social sciences advance their own points of view. But we have identified a lacuna – there is presently a deficit in the 'spokesmanship' at the highest level for the social sciences. We argue strongly that government, and society more generally, would benefit considerably from having a parallel activity to that provided for the physical sciences by the Royal Society. The British Academy, the Academy of Learned Societies for the Social Sciences and the ESRC all provide some elements of it but the totality does not match what is required. Given the importance which government attaches to the social sciences' contribution and the existing expenditure, we believe that it is wise to make a modest investment in 'cloning' this aspect of the Royal Society's role and recommend how to pilot a scheme. We also urge the various parties involved to work together since 'big issues' now frequently span the physical sciences, engineering and new technologies, medicine and the social sciences. The linear model of three abutting but otherwise non-interacting enterprises – basic science, inventions leading from it to new technologies and then ensuring social acceptability – is long since discredited; the social sciences need to be involved from the outset.

Looking ahead

In a concluding chapter we review some of the major questions (e.g. how much social science does Britain need?) which have been addressed in part under different headings earlier. We also look ahead, identifying three major areas where change should or must occur in the social sciences. These are in the internationalisation of research (which has trans-national funding implications for both research and data collection), multidisciplinary working and the lack of ambition of social science research compared to that in 'big (physical) science'. We have concluded that the area where the working together of those from different disciplinary backgrounds operates most effectively is at the postgraduate level. We see US schools of public policy achieving much in this regard and look forward to more of these being created in the UK. Finally, we attribute the 'cottage industry' nature of almost all social science research to historical legacy and established mind-sets rather than the nature of the problems that should be addressed. We urge a radically new approach to produce an additional, very different, type of social science research.

Recommendations

These are grouped by the organisation(s) to which the recommendation is made. The number within square brackets indicates its position in the text.

Recommendations to government

1. The devolved administrations should consider how best to reinforce the world class social science research in HEIs in their country (which is presently below that elsewhere in the UK) [p50];

2. Whitehall government, as an entity (perhaps through the Cabinet Office), should implement mechanisms akin to those now being run by the devolved governments to foster joint engagement with the social sciences academic community [p50];

3. The Welsh Assembly, the Northern Ireland Assembly, all Whitehall departments (preferably collectively) and all English Regional Development Agencies should publish research priorities (as in Scotland) [p51];

4. Whitehall and devolved governments should co-ordinate and harmonise how they advertise research opportunities (via a web site) and the procurement procedures to be used in all except the most unusual of cases [p81];

5. The OST and research councils should ensure that the PhD stipend should be set in shortage areas around the average initial social sciences graduate salary (£18,272 in 2001/02) [p66];

6. Government should fund and otherwise support universities in such a way that significantly augmented, if differentiated, salaries can be paid in shortage areas to ensure recruitment and retention of top quality staff [pp66, 84];

7. Government should match US practice in scrapping any prohibition on augmenting the salary of tenured academics who successfully apply for grants from research councils and other government-sourced funding bodies from within the grant (this must operate in conjunction with appropriate changes to staff contracts – see 23 below) [p84];

8. Greater mutual understanding and knowledge transfer should be ensured through the creation (or enhancement of an existing) programme of both-way secondments between staff in academia and those in government [p81];

9. The Strategy Unit's successful practice of bringing in academics to work on committees should be extended to the rest of government [p71];

10. Government should accept the principle of a channel for social science advice parallel to that provided by the Royal Society [p106];

11. Government should fund a national spokesperson role for the social sciences as well as for the physical sciences and engineering, initially on a pilot basis [p107];

12. The National Statistician, acting as Head of the Government Statistical Service, should publicise in one place which multi-national statistical datasets are already available and how to access them. We also recommend that he publicises GSS plans to enlarge the range of internationally consistent and national social science data available [p116];

Recommendations to the funding councils

The following criteria should apply in creating a new system following the review of the RAE:

13. So far as the social science subjects are concerned, it should take account of assessment criteria which reflect the views of the social science community and its beneficiaries, rather than being uniform across the whole of academia. These criteria should not disadvantage those working in any academic field, whether applied or theory-based, regionally- or nationally-focused [p55];

14. It must does not discourage multidisciplinary modes of working [p117];

15. Fewer rather than more Units of Assessment should apply but there might well need to be more than one social sciences Unit of Assessment [p56];

16. The rewards gradient between those who get most and those who get least should be less steep than in the 2001 RAE (where this ratio was set at 9:1 rather than the 4:1 in the 1996 RAE), at least for the social sciences [p56];

17. To avoid stasis, improvers and those with manifest potential (e.g. those who have moved to 4 from a lower grade) should be supported [p56];

18. The 'rules of the game', including the financial model, should be known beforehand [p56];

19. The load involved in creating and assessing submissions should be less than in the exhausting 2001 Exercise which had high opportunity costs [p56];

In addition:

20. HEFCE and the other funding councils should review the funding band allocation of teaching funds on a subject by subject basis, at least in the social sciences where it causes a number of severe but avoidable problems [p66];

21. The reduction in uncommitted 'thinking time' in universities has had serious effects on the originality and innovativeness of research and teaching. To reduce the problem, fellowships in the social sciences should be created so as to ensure that – rather than the small number of fellowships provided annually under AIM and from other sources – there are at least 250 available annually on a nationally competitive basis [p83];

Recommendations to universities

22. Vice-chancellors and deans of business schools should take simultaneous steps to raise the academic quality of research in their schools and to enhance its applicability, given the low ratings much of it has received both by academics and the business community [p78];

23. HEIs should explore changing their staff contracts and systems to incentivise the winning of more research funds and, through it, to enhance the salaries of successful, research-active staff (in conjunction with 7 above) [p84];

24. Universities should support their staff in acquiring 'media-savvy' skills and contacts, formally recognising that successful dissemination of research findings is in the interests of the individual and institution alike [p91];

25. Deans of social science faculties across the UK should study the nature and successes of think tanks and seek to emulate their desirable features [p99];

26. University vice-chancellors should explore how, as part of their regional strategies, they can encourage their social science staff simultaneously to meet the emerging need for regionally-focused research and to harvest the funds which exist (or may well soon exist) to support it [p50];

27. Any discipline that does not hold periodic meetings of heads of (university) departments should do so, following the good practice of those such as the economists, geographers and sociologists, and monitor the health of and lobby for their discipline through this channel [p80];

Recommendations to the Economic and Social Research Council

28. ESRC, together with the other research councils as appropriate, should begin to prepare a programme of social science research for the next Spending Review. This should be designed to tackle selected major challenges with resources up to an order of magnitude larger than the norm in the British social sciences, and extending over a decade-long period if necessary [p119];

29. Perhaps in conjunction with relevant Northern Ireland, Scottish and Welsh executives, the ESRC should commission a short review to draw out examples of best practice and learn lessons from events since devolution [p51];

30. As an experiment to explore the potential of a multidisciplinary 'research hotel', the council should fund the bringing together on one site of a multidisciplinary group to tackle part of one ESRC research programme [p82];

31. ESRC (with universities) should make strenuous further marketing efforts to minimise the damaging lack of understanding of what the Council seeks to do and of how it operates on the part of the academic community [pp110, 112];

32. ESRC should carry out a review of the new PhD 1+3 system as soon as the first cohort emerges from it, taking into account the wider need rather than simply that of universities. In addition, it should monitor student demand and progress up to this point [p57];

33. ESRC should begin discussions with appropriate major businesses such as Experian to make some commercial sector data more widely available to academic researchers, both for the UK and beyond [p116];

34. ESRC should commission a substantial study to measure by bibliometric means the internationally distinctive nature and the relative strengths and weaknesses of British research in the social sciences [p56];

35. Council should explicitly debate the extent to which the research it supports should be directed (e.g. through many initiatives) as opposed to that based on unsolicited applications from the academic community. It is crucial to publish the thinking behind the results [p110];

36. ESRC (and other funders) should prompt the creation of networking models such as that pioneered by the Centre for Economic Policy Research (CEPR) in economics within other appropriate academic disciplines [p99];

37. ESRC should enhance its media training programme, concentrating particularly on social scientists under about 35 years of age, to foster long term gains [p91];

38. ESRC should review its ways of operating with a view to speeding its research grant award process, using an explicit risks and rewards assessment framework, recognising that highly innovative research is often risky [p112];

39. ESRC Council should review the appropriate balance between small and large grants and programmes [p112];

40. ESRC should reassure itself that the existing mechanisms to get new Council members – especially lay ones – engaged from the earliest possible moment are appropriate [p112];

41. In the interests of transparency, the minutes of Council meetings should be published, restricting excluded confidential material to a minimum [p105];

42. The REGARD database of ESRC-funded research should be replaced with something which can and will be used by a range of outside organisations and individuals – without the need for great expertise and familiarity with the dialects of the social sciences [p112];

Recommendations to the Academy of Learned Societies for the Social Sciences and its component Societies

43. Discipline-specific bodies – sometimes (but not always) the learned societies concerned – should all monitor school-level popularity of their subjects and make representation where necessary to government to ensure that no changes to the curriculum adversely affect the volume and quality of social science provision in schools. The Academy of Learned Societies for the Social Sciences may wish to consider whether it should take an overview of the situation annually and lobby accordingly [p80];

44. Other learned societies and disciplinary groups in the social sciences should study the success of the Royal Economic Society and other professional groups and research teams in economics in creating networks of users and media 'friends' and specialists [p91];

45. The Academy of Learned Societies for the Social Sciences, along with other representative bodies, should set up a special programme to educate journalists and editors in the protocols and methods of social inquiry [p91];

46. Further reviews of the health of the social sciences such as this should be carried out periodically [p113];

Recommendations to groups of bodies

47. The Director General of the Research Councils and the chairs of the Research Councils should jointly agree a public statement of the division of responsibility between the DGRC and the Councils [p105];

48. The Strategic Forum for the Social Sciences should, as a matter of some urgency, discuss how best to market the social sciences collectively and implement co-ordinated plans for each of its component bodies [p107];

49. The Strategic Forum for the Social Sciences in the UK should also consider how best to create some mechanism for international collaboration in research funding and specifically for the fostering of cross-national comparisons. The research funders within this body should thereafter revise their rules to make international partnerships easier to set up and operate, especially beyond the level of pairs of 'lone researchers'. Public sector research funders – notably the ESRC and the British Academy – should agree formally on ways of working with their funding counterparts overseas (not just in the EU) and should jointly fund excellent projects with minimum bureaucracy [p115];

50. All funding bodies – certainly the publicly funded ones – should publish a classification each year of the quality of research applications considered and funded by them, preferably ranked on a simple common scale [p81];

51. A small 'ginger group' should be created with membership provided by the Confederation of British Industry, by the Strategic Forum for the Social Sciences and by Universities UK (UUK) to consider how best to build better relationships between the social sciences and the private sector and to publicise and encourage good practice [p82];

52. Research funders in general should invest in the formation of a new class of 'translators' or intermediaries to enhance understanding of academic work in the public and the mass media. The highly successful seed-corn funding of the CEPR could serve as a good prototype within disciplines outside of economics [p91];

53. Each university and each funder should have an explicit and public policy on how it will seek to foster multidisciplinary working, and this should be made public within and outside of the organisations. In universities, successful collaborations with people in other disciplines needs to be taken account of in promotion assessments and appraisals [p117];

54. The Academy of Learned Societies for the Social Sciences, ESRC, JRF, the Leverhulme Trust and the Nuffield Foundation should meet to decide – then take appropriate action – on how best to bring together academics and practitioners on a much larger scale [p117];

55. The Academy of the Learned Societies for the Social Sciences should be invited to join the informal body set up by the Royal Society, the British Academy, the Royal Academy of Engineering and the Academy of Medical Sciences to plan joint contributions as appropriate to government calls for advice [p107];

56. Local authority associations, plus the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA), should discuss with appropriate university representative bodies such as UUK whether there are barriers to joint appointments of practitioners/academics akin to those in health areas and, if so, find ways to circumvent them and foster such dual working [p99];

57. Professional bodies in the relevant areas should discuss with the relevant disciplinary bodies (e.g. the British Sociological Association) how best to ensure that academic research is made available in a form which is helpful to the professions [p99];

Recommendations to individual social scientists

58. Each and every social scientist should have his/her own web site and up-date it regularly as a ‘shop window’ for what they do with public and other funds [p91];

59. Social researchers should ‘grit their teeth’ and continue making efforts to reach out and ‘sell’ their work to the media and the public since better understanding of such research findings is in the best interests of society [p91];

60. The UK’s massive voluntary sector is a fruitful and ‘under-worked’ area for research [p97].

Preface

It has been claimed that the twenty first century will be 'the social sciences' century'. The rationale behind this bold claim accepts that science and technology have underpinned many material improvements in the quality of lives of people across the world and are set to enhance those of many others. But the big issues which now exist are, on this hypothesis, mostly about how human beings and societies interact, how they conduct their affairs and how they capitalise on diversity in society. We have some sympathy for this view, having seen areas where the social sciences have already made major contributions to life in Britain in particular. Yet the world of the social sciences mirrors the complexity of the world outside academia. Rarely are causes of events or policies clear-cut. Evidence can take many forms and can be contradictory. Windows of opportunity open briefly for those who are opportunistic enough to seize them. Most issues are connected to many others and unintended consequences are easy to generate from spurious correlations or inferences. Whilst this situation is commonplace, nowhere is it more true than in the social sciences.

Indeed the very term 'social sciences' – whilst widely used in the media, in universities, in government and elsewhere – means many different things to different people. It is typically seen as being about people, about their relationships and conflicts, about human institutions and governance, about the efficiency, competitiveness, fairness and justness of societies and about the quality of life experienced by different groups of people. Understanding – and hopefully improving – all of these are what the social sciences are about.

Beyond that terminological difficulty, we observe huge variations amongst social scientists in their philosophy, value systems, questions regarded as important, research methodology and engagement with executive agencies to improve matters. On top of that, most social science provision is still provided through a set of disciplines which appeared or prospered in the mid-twentieth century or earlier. Increasingly these as entities do not individually relate well to the nature of the 'big questions'; as a consequence, shifting alliances of individuals based in different institutions has become the norm for some social science. In addition, some excellent social science is inherently multi-national as well as multidisciplinary. This at the very least complicates getting any comparable data on input resources or outputs, let alone outcomes which arise from the work of social scientists. And to add some further complication to any analysis, the perception of the social sciences varies hugely between different people: for instance, we have found almost as many opinions about them as all the journalists and lay folk to whom we have spoken!

Complexity, inter-working, plurality, even some 'fuzziness' are the inescapable characteristics of anything important in the real world. We have set out to examine and understand what we see as some of the key aspects of the social sciences. We intend that this analysis will lead to wider understanding of them, plus the fostering of appropriate expectations on the part of researchers, the users of that research and the public more generally. We make recommendations which we believe will enhance various aspects of the situation and the value of the social sciences in Britain. We trust that readers accept this report in the spirit in which it is produced – that there is much to celebrate in the contributions of the social sciences to British life but that things can certainly be improved in ways which we seek to define.

Acknowledgements

I am very grateful to the Commissioners who contributed much to the report. They identified issues, leads and sources of information and constructively criticised the on-going work and drafts of the report. The Commissioners are listed in Annex 1.

I am also grateful to the Academy of Learned Societies for the Social Sciences for proposing the idea to review the social sciences in Britain. Professor Ian Forbes, the chairman of the Academy, and Professor Peter Glasner have been especially helpful. The task took longer than envisaged because of exogenous factors but the journey was never less than fascinating. The great bulk of people with whom we interacted are committed to at least some aspects of the social sciences, even if they are sometimes impatient with some of the *status quo*!

A report of this kind could only be produced with the help of many people. First and foremost amongst these are the individuals and organisations who have helped us through supplying information and, in many cases, talking to us about some aspects of the social sciences. A full list of those who helped and are prepared to be identified is set out in Annex 2.

An important contribution to the report was the public meeting we held soon after the Research Assessment Exercise results were published. We used this as a means of helping to gauge the research strength of the social sciences. I am grateful to the speakers at that meeting; to Libby Langley formerly of the Academy for help in organising the meeting; to the Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers) for providing the venue free of charge; and especially to my City University colleague Dr Xeni Dassiou who provided the summary notes.

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Finally, this report would certainly not have been produced at all had it not been for the sterling efforts of Kathy Hamilton who was employed as Secretary to the Commission – in effect my assistant and researcher – for a year. She has been impeccable in creating order out of chaos, often against the odds.

David Rhind
March 2003

Section A

Discussion of the evidence and our recommendations

1 Introduction

The shape, content and recommendations of this report can only be understood through a brief description of the context.

1.1 How the report came about

This report arises out of a decision by the Council of the Academy of Learned Societies for the Social Sciences. The Academy is an organisation with a dual structure which seeks to foster the social sciences in Britain. It comprises 43 learned societies and (presently) a set of some 359 distinguished social scientists drawn from a variety of disciplines and elected by their peers to be academicians. Following the formal launch of the Academy, it seemed to be an appropriate moment to review the status and health of the social sciences in Britain and the chairman was invited to take this forward. After inviting nominations from all learned societies for Commissioners – and receiving suggestions of nearly 100 distinguished individuals – a team of 12 Commissioners was selected to provide balance and wide experience. Quite deliberately that team included individuals from outside the research and teaching community: 'consumers' of social science research therefore played an important role. It is important to stress two other matters. The first is that in no sense did a Commissioner represent his or her constituency; we sought – and got – contributions and analysis uncoloured by partisan considerations. Finally, this report is a report of the Commissioners; they – and they alone – are responsible for it. The Academy has been helpful on a number of fronts, including making available the report on its web site, but has not sought to impose any views and is not responsible for any opinions herein.

1.2 The environmental context

A number of changes in the environment render this a useful time to review the social sciences. These include:

- The existence of a UK government committed to change of many aspects of society and its institutions and which has publicly committed itself to the centrality of evidence to underpin this change process;
- The changes to the constitutional structure of Britain. Devolution has created new demands, objectives and a changed allocation of resources which are impacting on the social sciences rather more than on the physical sciences;
- The changing attitudes of many individuals about the institutions in which they work and what they do, manifested in the growth of problem-oriented organisations such as 'think tanks'. Multidisciplinary groups, working on short-term projects and seeking to influence policy, have become much more commonplace;

- The widening recognition that aspects of the social sciences are central to innovation, to the successful development of new products, services or institutions and knowledge management and dissemination – rather than being simply the 'back end' of a technological or political process. The social sciences have become recognised (in some quarters) as part of the creativity process rather than the source of explanations on why things went wrong. Their potential contribution to science policy (e.g. on Foot and Mouth disease) is also now widely appreciated;

- The funding arena has mutated. All recent governments – the chief source of funds for the social sciences – have become more strategic in what they fund. The 1993 *Realising Our Potential* (ROPA) White Paper for instance set out clearly that the broad aims of research council funding were to increase the wealth of the country and enhance the quality of life. Though it is impossible to define with precision the total funding applied to British social sciences, that channelled through the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) has increased rapidly since ROPA. The proposals in the January 2003 White Paper will also change the funding landscape, especially between universities;

- The move towards a service-based economy, with a consequent emphasis upon communication and analytical skills, on innovation of new products and services and on awareness of competitive pressures, i.e. the so-called Knowledge Economy;

- The advent of digitally-based communications and publications has helped to transform the way in which social scientists – and many others – work. International collaboration on a daily basis is now commonplace for some researchers. Rapidly widening access to data sets over the web, facilitated by changes in UK government policies since late 2000, is helping to re-shape what problems can sensibly be tackled. New developments such as grid computing seem likely to provide as much future impetus to some types of social sciences as have Geographical Information Systems over the last 20 years;

- The globalisation of economies through changing technologies, the creation of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the Rio (and succeeding) conference(s), the growth of global financial institutions and many other interacting developments has led to many more big problems impinging directly on the British government and people. The issue of international migrations and refugees is just one example;

- The 'nationalisation' and 'internationalisation' of the social sciences themselves, with much more widespread working relationships between academics and practitioners than existed 30 years ago, and more international comparative work underway;

- The 'massification' of the British Higher Education system has enlarged dramatically the number of people who have been exposed to research and training. Social science is relatively inexpensive to teach and the component disciplines have often been attractive to students. As a consequence, the social sciences have expanded considerably in British universities since the 1960s and many of the students are now in senior positions in business, government and the voluntary sector as well as in education. The down-side of this massification is the move to much higher numbers of students per staff member, resulting in less time for creative scholarship, the increasing use of large lecture classes, standard texts and teaching assistants;

- The growth of an audit culture throughout British society. This has led to widespread use of external review, imposition of bureaucratic rules for behaviour and 'box ticking', all causing a diminution of reliance on professional judgement. Together with the massification of Higher Education (above), it has led to a dramatic change in the nature of the academic's job.

1.3 Our aims, objectives and audience

We have sought to:

- Define the current nature, focus, status, health and contribution to society of the social sciences in Britain;
- Identify shortcomings in regard to the social sciences' health and contribution to society;
- Set out a programme of action, capable of implementation by each of the various players according to their role and resources, which will improve the situation.

This report is of course only a 'snapshot' at a particular moment in time. The objectives cited above will need to be re-visited periodically given that change is endemic in many of our systems.

Our primary target audience is those who support and benefit from the work of social scientists. Social scientists themselves are also an important audience. We have sought to identify the strengths of British social science but also what can – with external help – be improved. Many of our recommendations can only be brought about by government and the other funding organisations, by individual universities and by policy-makers and -informers. But a number can only be achieved by partnerships between some of these bodies.

To achieve the desired effects, we have consciously sought to avoid social science 'insider terminology' wherever possible. We have set ourselves the aim of being understandable to the reader of the *Economist* or the listener to the *Today* programme.

1.4 How we operated

Openness has been the key to our approach. The initial invitation to nominate Commissioners – sent to all learned society and academician members of the Academy of Learned Societies for the Social Sciences, as well as to many other bodies and publicised through the press and the ESRC web site – was a conscious precedent for what followed. We publicised our 'first cut' agenda via the Academy's web site and invited comment on that and on discussion papers as they appeared. We sought written or face-to-face responses to sets of questions we put to various stakeholders and interested individuals. We visited a number of organisations; these visits included those to meet government officials and ministerial advisers in Belfast, Cardiff and Edinburgh. We have held many other informal as well as formal discussions. The Commission or subsets of it met 24 times to consider draft papers and set actions. The final report was drawn up from the results of all the previous work and relevant material discovered in the literature, and was approved by the Commission as a whole.

It will be evident from the contents of this report that we have sought and used quantitative evidence wherever available. Sole reliance on that evidence however would have led to a very lop-sided report. There are inconsistencies in the way data are assembled and classified by different sources and many of the most interesting questions are not amenable to statistical analysis. For this reason we have also drawn upon the views of many different, experienced individuals, seeking to triangulate their views with those of others and ignoring any (often subconscious) vested interests. The result is a tapestry woven from many different sources of information. To that extent this report inevitably mimics some of the characteristics of much work in the social sciences.

1.5 UK vs elsewhere

The UK is only a set of islands in a limited physical sense. At the global level, we are subject to the tides of international competition in goods, services and ideas. We are influenced by the spread of standardised new technologies (see Section 1.2). We receive the benefits and are subject to the constraints arising from membership of bodies such as the United Nations, the WTO and the European Union (EU); our membership of the EU also means our social science activities are shaped by the European research frameworks and consequent funding. In Anglo-Saxon capitalism, the very nature of national ownership of the means of production is often a curiosity: the shareholders and stakeholders may be scattered across the world. And most British academics are – at least at the individual level – strongly connected with others of similar interests in other countries. But we are not simply passive players: we are intimately engaged in seeking to influence many events and structures – some through military or diplomatic action, some (e.g. the European research framework) through a variety of other means. Global scientific collaborations are now commonplace (especially in the physical sciences).

In addition to being subject to some of the same factors as many social scientists outside the UK, we also recognise that much thinking has been going on by these colleagues about the nature of and future for the social sciences (see, for example, Martinotti 1999, OECD 1999, 2000, 2001a, 2001b, Van Langenhove 2001 and UNESCO 1999). A recent event to manifest this was the meeting on the future of the social sciences in Vienna in December 2002 organised by the International Social Sciences Council which was attended by 300 people. But most studies have suffered by being simply collections of belief by those involved – usually a small number, even if often highly distinguished, individuals (e.g. Gulbenkian Commission 1996, ESTA 1997). The evidence base has often been modest (at best).

It is therefore obvious that, whilst we are primarily focused on the UK, we must also take into account developments elsewhere. In this we have been helped by having two Commissioners based in Canada and France and from the highly internationalist experience of all the others. We cite the results of a number of international comparisons. And we have also approached it indirectly e.g. via consideration of the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) results which were benchmarked against global excellence via the inclusion of non-UK researchers in the process.

1.6 Previous work

In compiling this report, we have seen a number of other studies which bear on the social sciences, such as the Gulbenkian Report (Gulbenkian 1996) or the Bennett Report (BA 2002) on postgraduate training in the social sciences and humanities. Some of these – such as the review of the Social Science Research Council carried out for Sir Keith Joseph in 1982 – are period pieces with limited relevance to the present day. We identify the most significant of the reports in the list of references. We are also aware of many other relevant developments at present e.g. the British Academy's forthcoming study of the contributions of the social sciences and humanities to the Knowledge Economy. In general however we have not sought to create an academic treatise: documents are cited only where they have made a distinctive and telling contribution to the work of the Commission.

1.7 The structure of the report

We have split the report into two parts. The first is the discussion of evidence and views that we have assembled from the many different sources and from numerous discussions cited in the acknowledgements. It contains the conclusions we have drawn and the recommendations we make. The second section underpins this discussion: it summarises many statistical findings, even though these are not straightforward because of the multiplicity of classifications etc. used by different bodies.

2 What are the social sciences and what are they for?

> “In every rich country, roughly half of all government spending goes on social services of various kinds: exploring the need for such services, and ways to deliver them more efficiently and humanely, have always been pre-occupations of social scientists.”
>
> Frances Cairncross, Chair of the Economic and Social Research Council, giving the Birley lecture in City University, London in March 2002

Given the above, the role of social sciences seems obvious. But it is somewhat more than a utilitarian one implied by the quotation. Moreover, defining the subject before we analyse the present situation and make recommendations for improvement is not simple in the case of the social sciences – for reasons which will become clear. This chapter then sets out to clarify both the nature and the roles of the social sciences.

The problem is that there is no commonly agreed definition or shared understanding of what constitutes the social sciences in aggregate – though there is general agreement that certain parts of some academic disciplines (e.g. sociology) are a social science. We in the UK are not of course alone in having difficulty in agreeing what the social sciences comprise. For instance, the Gulbenkian Commission (1996) encountered many of the same problems, seeing this as primarily a reflection of the evolution of the social sciences, the institutionalisation of various disciplines and changes in the nature of key scientific questions. Oba (1999) summarised various OECD and UNESCO definitions of the social and behavioural sciences, all based upon collections of disciplines.

2.1 A bureaucratic perspective

That all this is not new (or even unique) to the contemporary social sciences is illustrated by the quotation below:

> “Perhaps wisely, the [Heyworth] Committee did not enter into controversial questions of the lost frontiers, plural jurisdictions, prospectors’ claims, and demarcation disputes that enliven the conduct of these restless disciplines.”
>
> The **Times** leading article, 3 June 1965, reproduced in Nicol (2000)

In recent years in particular, there has been a blurring of disciplinary boundaries especially following rapid developments in biological sciences and in environmental sciences. But the disciplinary fuzziness of what constitutes the social sciences is very long-established. Prior to the setting up of the Clapham Committee (Nicol 2000), Sir Edward Mellanby, secretary of the Medical Research Council, argued in 1944 that there was a ‘need which will increase in post war years for provision of research also in fields of applied economics, statistics and industrial psychology, all of which may generally be classified under the heading of sociology’ (Nicol 2000, p7). When the University Grants Committee (UGC) set up a sub-committee to advise on social sciences, the initial members were set up to represent

economics, economic history, political science, anthropology, sociology, geography and Scotland (Nicol 2000, p29). In 1947, that sub-committee produced a list of those studies which came within the social sciences, shown here in Box 2.1 (Nicol 2000, p31):

Box 2.1
The UGC 1947 view of the social sciences

Economic theory and organisation

- Accounting
- Commerce
- Economics (pure and applied)
- Industrial relations

Economic and social history

- Politics
- International relations
- Politics and social theory
- Public administration (including local government)

Sociology

- Social anthropology
- Social psychology (social science and social training)
- Sociology (general and applied)
- Criminology

Statistics and demography

- Demography
- Statistical theory (in its applications to the social sciences)
- Economic and social statistics

Other subjects (if any) – illustrated by some aspects of law

The Heyworth Committee – whose 1965 report led to the foundation of the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) – considered that it was concerned with research employing the methods used by social sciences 'as this term is understood in universities' (Nicol 2000, p73). At its inauguration in 1963 and as a rough guide to the fields of interest, it specified 'economics, economic statistics, social statistics, demography, sociology, social psychology, social anthropology, social administration, political science including government, social geography, and social medicine'. It also said it would look for evidence concerning the application of social sciences amongst: 'administration (public, industrial and social, including military), education, employment and industry, government and law (particularly criminology and penology), medicine (public health, social medicine and social psychiatry), and the social sciences. Historical studies would be included if they were of contemporary social and economic relevance' (Nicol 2000, p73); the definition of the social sciences continued to plague the committee throughout its work (Nicol 2000, pp74–75).

Early in its life, the SSRC set up subject committees in a number of areas, reflecting the perception of the prime areas of social science research. In 1967 these covered economics, political science, social anthropology, sociology and social administration, psychology, social and economic statistics, management and administrative studies, economic and social history, and human geography and planning (Nicol 2000, pp100–102).

Finally, by way of this review, SSRC's successor body – the Economic and Social Research Council or ESRC – indicated to the Commission in 2002 that the disciplines to which it devotes funding include area studies, computing and methodology, economic and social history, education, economics and econometrics, housing studies, human geography, international relations, linguistics, management and business studies, planning, political science, psychology, science, technology and innovation, social policy, socio-legal studies, sociology, and multi- and interdisciplinary studies.

2.2 A historical perspective

One major debate amongst social scientists over the last 50 years has been the extent to which these should be seeking the rigour, replicability and predictive capacity traditionally associated with the natural sciences[1]. During the immediate post-war decades, there was considerable optimism as to the capacity of social scientists to achieve scientific rigour. Bell (1982, p4) summarised their development in the US in the following way:

> "In theory, the social sciences became ahistorical and analytical; in detail they became empirical; and in method largely quantitative."

This account would probably have fitted Sweden as well as the US, but in the UK the picture was more mixed, with somewhat less effort to draw a firm dividing line between universalising and law-seeking disciplines and those concerned with the individual and the unrepeatable, and with a greater place for qualitative methods. Thirty years earlier, however, Barbara Wootton, the Left-leaning economist, was convinced that 'progress' in the social sciences depended on their becoming more 'scientific': more methodologically rigorous and above all more quantitative – in short, more 'hard'. The main point at issue for Wootton and for many others adopting this line of argument was the need to expunge values from the social sciences. Wootton herself was anxious to eschew the moral judgements employed by so many of the most dominant analysts and practitioners dealing with social problems in the early part of the twentieth century.

The Gulbenkian Commission operated in the period 1994/95 on a rationale which is summarised in their own words in Box 2.2. In particular, it demonstrated considerable antipathy to empiricist and logical positivist ways of looking at the world, concluding that:

> "... the most severe problems have been with the three more nomothetic social sciences [economics, sociology and political science]. In taking the natural sciences as a model, they nurtured three kinds of expectations that have proved impossible to fulfil as stated in universalist form: an expectation of prediction; an expectation of management; both in turn premised on an expectation of quantifiable accuracy."
>
> (Gulbenkian Commission, 1996, p50).

That Commission felt that the current problems were such that a fundamental restructuring of the social sciences, away from traditional disciplines, was essential. This, they said, was much better done by working social scientists 'bring[ing] their revised intellectual perceptions of a useful division of labour into line with the organisational framework they necessarily construct' (Gulbenkian Commission 1996, p96) – rather than having re-structuring done for them by administrators. They made four suggestions for ways forward:

1 We ignore for the moment the complex, contested and more nuanced nature of the world of physical science at least when it is involved in topics like the BSE epidemic.

- The bringing together of scholars from different disciplines for a year or so to work on specific urgent themes;
- Establishing time-limited integrated research programmes within universities that cut across traditional lines and have specific objectives;
- The compulsory appointment of professors jointly between two departments, with full rights and responsibilities in both;
- Joint work for graduate students, taking courses and doing work in two or more departments.

This Commission accepts that the 'academic division of labour' in the social sciences causes a number of problems (which we address later – see Box 2.2 and Chapter 9). But we are not sympathetic to the draconian opinions about the failures of economics, sociology and political science as expressed above. We take as axiomatic that good social science will often embrace both quantitative and qualitative approaches and that prediction is an important element of some work. All such work must however be done to high standards, as judged at least by experts in those domains. And we do not separate out 'management' as some external domain, believing some of it to be an important part of – and founded within – good social science (see below). Our approach to fostering work which addresses contemporary issues from a multidisciplinary perspective is set out later.

Box 2.2

The development of the social sciences and their problems, according to the Gulbenkian Commission (1996)

'The nineteenth century saw a double development vis-à-vis the social sciences. First there emerged the idea of the 'three cultures'... the natural sciences at one end, the humanities ... at the other end, and the social sciences in the middle (for some history being part of the social sciences, for others it being part of the humanities). Secondly, the social sciences were in turn divided into distinct 'disciplines'. The names that were finally and widely agreed upon were (besides history) economics, political science, sociology, and anthropology... Neither of these two processes – the dividing of knowledge into three cultures; the subdivision of the social sciences into a series of specific disciplines – was uncontested. There were significant movements of intellectual resistance, but in the period that went from 1850 to 1960 approximately, the pattern described here won out.

One of the reasons it won out is that it became institutionalized, in three forms: a) within the universities, as chairs, departments, courses of instruction, academic degrees, and above all students; b) at the national and international level, as associations of scholars in particular disciplines and as journals devoted to particular disciplines; c) in the great libraries of the world, as categories of classification of scholarly works. This organizational institutionalization served to make more difficult any subsequent intellectual reorganization.

In the years after 1960, this intellectual consensus began to break down. It broke down on both fronts. The various 'disciplines' of the social sciences began to overlap incredibly to the point that the intellectual distinction between them seemed to have very little basis either in theory or in practice. And in addition, the sharp distinction among the 'three cultures' broke down. On the one side, the line between the humanities and the social sciences was being undermined by the increasing 'historicization' and hence 'contextualization' of the humanities, matched by the increasing willingness of social scientists to acknowledge 'humanistic' issues and methods. And on the other side, the line between the natural sciences and the social sciences was being undermined by the 'new sciences' and their emphasis on irreversibility (the arrow of time), the impossibility of precision, and the centrality of complexity, all of which made them seem closer to the reality of the social sciences...

But these intellectual developments of the last 30 years were not matched by comparable organizational developments, in part because it is not easy to budge strongly entrenched organizations, and in part because those who were unhappy intellectually about the old epistemological premises were not sure what they should advocate organizationally. The consequence has been a sort of massive worldwide drifting, in which more and more scholars feel dismayed at the state of the social sciences, but very little is being done collectively to change the situation.'

Source: web site of the Fernand Braudel Center at http://fbc.binghamton.edu/gulb.htm

The historically evolving political context and the expectations of the social sciences on the part of ministers has also been of great significance to their resourcing (and hence evolution). The last official inquiry into the (then) Social Sciences Funding Council some 20 years ago (Rothschild, 1982) was peppered with the word 'disappointment'. The relatively high hopes of the immediate post-war decades faded during the last quarter of the twentieth century. Indeed, the SSRC experienced large budget cuts in the early 1980s, as did similar organisations in both the USA and France (Flather, 1987). In the UK and the US these were due in large measure to a political climate characterised by marked hostility to and/or suspicion of the social sciences. As Mrs Thatcher famously remarked: 'There is no such thing as society'. The ramifications of this rippled far beyond academia; we have been told repeatedly by senior staff in government departments that government policies in the 1980s led to a missing generation of researchers and analysts who would now be expected to be leading figures in government. We attribute some of the communication problems described later to this shortfall of leaders.

2.3 Views submitted to the Commission

We have had numerous views made known to us – both explicitly and implicitly – and seen many others on the nature and proper role of the social sciences. Those on the social sciences as a whole have generally been at a high level of abstraction but strongly supportive, if acknowledging the vast heterogeneity contained therein. Where the views have been more focused they have often been trenchant, concentrated on one particular discipline and either strongly supportive or strongly critical. Two examples of such strong views from the literature are quoted below:

> "… when common sense and economics conflict, common sense is almost always wrong … Most people are economic illiterates … the true strength of economics … lies in its application of the scientific method to human society. Many critics simply do not like the idea that society is amenable to any non-cultural form of study … No other intellectual discipline provides the same enlightened pragmatism."
>
> Diane Coyle, **Financial Times**, 27 October 2002

> "... many [European] university teachers of sociology have themselves carried out little, if any, sociological research outside of libraries; the tradition of 'writing books out of books' remains strong; and data-free sociological discourse on the fashionable issue of the day (post-modernity, globalisation, gender and sexuality) seems increasingly to be the staple of sociology courses."
>
> ESTA (1997)

Many of the views submitted to us have argued the merits of the existing disciplines as crucibles in which new thinking is forged and within which new academics and practitioners are trained. Others have cited the stifling conservatism imposed by these – often Victorian – structures and their irrelevance to a world where facing the challenges frequently requires multiple viewpoints, including those from the physical science and technology domains. In the views of some with whom we have spoken, the rigidity of university departmental structures – buttressed by external factors like the RAE and internal and external expectations on the nature of research training – is ill-fitted to meeting these challenges.

In an interesting submission, Forbes has argued that 'the...majority of social science enquiry has to deal with subjects and objects that are... like a series of moving targets that have a habit of fading in and out of view, according to a complex set of dynamics that will always defy categorisation, with new targets requiring urgent attention appearing at any given moment...most social phenomena are non-linear in nature, with daunting levels of complexity and interculturality'. He has argued that there are four kinds of social science:

- Speculative and emancipatory – including philosophical, theoretical and critical work;
- Communicative – through field work, teaching, publishing (e.g. text books) and dissemination of research outputs;
- Technical – focused largely on the ability to predict and explain;
- Practical – focused on problem-solving and the application of knowledge to policy.

In reality, of course, these overlap significantly. And much the same could readily be argued for the physical sciences allied to engineering and new technologies.

Newby and others have highlighted the old-style view – still present in some thinking – that sees social sciences as a 'back-end fix' to the problems arising from new scientific developments. It can be parodied by 'we have invented this, now find a market for it' or 'we have invented this but it has a few unfortunate side effects. How do we get people to accept it?' Put so crudely, this is of course indefensible, even laughable, but the view still exists and is important because of the perception of the social sciences which it exposes – even amongst highly sophisticated individuals. We note some improvement in the situation. For example, the government's two large Foresight exercises differed dramatically: the first was very largely technologically-driven whilst the latest one incorporated somewhat more social science in the setting of the starting point and in various scenarios (the ESRC-sponsored publication by Scase (2000) was a particularly helpful contribution).

2.4 The Commission's views

Such views as those of the Gulbenkian Commission cited above are guaranteed to outrage some social scientists – notably, but not solely, economists and statisticians. There is therefore no single view point which commands support and it is unreasonable to expect to find one given the complexity of the issues.

Based on the above and taking account of the (often contradictory) material submitted to us, we seek to answer the two questions combined in this chapter's title plus one other fundamental one. Even before that however, we emphasise three of our fundamental views:

- It is not very meaningful to talk about 'social science' given the huge range of approaches and value systems held by active social scientists and concerned lay people. Throughout this report we will use 'social sciences' to reflect this heterogeneity;
- The social sciences are of modest value purely as a mind exercise. We see an increasing need for more empirical (and especially quantitative) research;
- The social sciences contribute best to central concerns of society (see below) by being involved in 'big questions' from the very outset, rather than as a 'back-end fix'. This places responsibilities for continuous engagement with those outside academia – no doubt to different degrees – on *all* social scientists. It also ensures that the community must make strenuous efforts to eradicate any misperceptions on the social sciences which exist in such quarters.

2.4.1 What are the social sciences for?

Here we restrict ourselves to some simple concepts, essentially based on those embedded in the 1993 Science White Paper *Realising our Potential*. It suggested that the role of science and engineering in general (it neglected social sciences) is to:

- Enhance the wealth of the UK and its peoples;
- Enhance the quality of life.

These were also the main drivers behind the cross-cutting review of science and research launched in June 2001 (see http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/Spending_Review/spend_ccr/spend_ccr_science.cfm). So far as the social sciences are concerned, we include in the latter role:

- The benefits which scholarship can bring to individuals, both in financial and non-financial terms through better understanding. We accept of course that 'Understanding is not truth, is not a law, does not necessarily enable prescription and may vary from group to group and place to place' (Jane Lewis, a Commissioner);
- The benefits of a more civilised, globally aware and tolerant populace and communities of such peoples. This is achieved through the education and training of many social scientists and through 'laying out the contours of informed and considered debate' (Doreen Massey);
- The value of constructive debate about values as well as different means to ends and trade-offs between different options. In short, some social scientists should provide a source of independent critical commentary. Uniformity of views is rarely desirable in a pluralist society;
- Some element of intellectual endeavour in the social sciences as an end in itself. We do not of course accept that this is sufficient in itself to justify 'anything goes'. But a civilised society is one which devotes some resource towards matters which have no foreseeable utilitarian value.

In short, we see the social sciences having both utilitarian and non-utilitarian values. The two primary, high level objectives of government policy – largely unchanged in substance between Conservative and Labour administrations – are however linked, not least because of the social sciences. Quality of life issues are not simply about personal choices: they depend in part on the wealth of society and how that wealth is distributed. And they embrace issues like safety from crime, good governance and regeneration – all of which need resourcing, in part at least from public funds. Finally, we have stressed a focus on the benefits to the UK. However, this certainly does not mean we can ignore developments elsewhere which impact on the UK (see Section 1.2) or from which we can learn; parochialism is not an option.

2.4.2 What are the social sciences?

We concluded at the outset – and did not deviate from that view – that there is no simple or unambiguous specification of the social sciences. To define it strictly in disciplinary terms is to face the same problems encountered by all of those committees cited above. Two contemporary examples will suffice: British psychology broadly includes strong elements of biological sciences as well as others of social sciences and geography is broadly and generally sub-divided into human and physical geography, the latter with strong physical science traditions and approaches. There is enormous debate about how much of law is a social science. Whilst many current academics in statistics departments conceive of themselves as essentially mathematicians, the original meaning of statistics denotes something much more related to social and economic policy and many professional statisticians are employed on that basis[2]. The boundary between the humanities and the social sciences is much debated, especially over economic and social history. The Wellcome Trust considers that its work on biomedical ethics, the history of medicine, its public engagement activities and a considerable part of its 'Health consequences of population change' programme have a strong social sciences content – along with some of the psychiatric work funded by its neuroscience panel. And opinions on whether business and management studies is part of the social sciences vary enormously, both within and outside the community immediately concerned.

Moreover, none of this is static. Economics as a discipline grew out of the faculties of law in Germany and France. The neurosciences are having increasing impacts on many areas of psychology. One area of considerable change is social work and social policy and administration: major restructuring of departments has occurred due largely to market forces manifested in changing student numbers with new areas of research including sexuality, abuse and violence which typically involve 'hard to access' groups. More generally, the government's view is that some big issues span the physical and social sciences – and perhaps the humanities – and it has provided cross-cutting funding for them (notably work on the genome project, see OST/DTI 2002). This will certainly lead to mutation of existing disciplinary boundaries.

If a disciplinary criterion is inadequate or inappropriate for definition, can we differentiate the social sciences on the basis of common ideology, consistent methodologies employed or the particular kinds of research questions tackled by academics and others? The short answer is no, for here too is enormous heterogeneity in each element. Indeed it is clear to us that the social sciences as construed below are more heterogeneous in many of their characteristics than are the physical sciences or even the arts and humanities. This applies both between academic disciplines and within some of them at least. Examples of this heterogeneity are legion, as in the many more disparate views expressed by social scientists than by other groups to the Roberts Committee reviewing the future of the Research Assessment Exercise.

2 The Royal Statistical Society charter of 1834 says the Society was established to 'collect, arrange, digest and publish facts, illustrating the condition and prospects of society in its material, social and moral relations'

Whatever our inclinations, we were also constrained by the classifications used by others and by those of the available statistics. These place heavy restraints on the analysis and comparisons which are possible. But in Section B we have sought to summarise the characteristics of the social sciences and of its component parts, including always the core disciplines (see below) and – as appropriate and possible – those that also overlap the humanities or physical sciences.

In the event, we therefore concluded that the only feasible approach to a working definition was one based upon existing university disciplinary building blocks. We are convinced that the internal heterogeneity within subjects requires us to be inclusive in disciplinary terms, differentiating where possible (e.g. between the two strands of geography). We set out in Box 2.3 the disciplinary areas which we considered to contain some significant element of social sciences; those marked with an asterisk are the ones we have largely focused upon and for which the bulk of statistics are provided later. We recognise that this may lead to some over-counting in terms of resources, staff and students involved but have sought to minimise that, to highlight situations where it may have occurred and to disaggregate figures wherever possible. We also recognise that the institutionalisation of social science (and other) disciplines has some real disadvantages; we address this later.

There is little unanimity of views on the detail of this allocation of disciplines, in whole or part, to the social sciences. Many lawyers look askance at being seen as part of this grouping. As another example (and despite the Royal Statistical Society charter), the chair of the relevant RAE Unit of Assessment (UoA) panel covering statistics assured us that very little social science had been included in the submissions to his panel. The huge bulk of them were focused on statistical methodology. Nevertheless we see statistics as an important contributory element to the social sciences and express our concern later (see Chapter 5) on the rapid decline in numbers of students studying it at university level. We have seen work by actuarial scientists that is clearly in the social science domain whilst accountancy departments sometimes operate from within social sciences faculties and increasingly work on such issues as corporate governance and new forms of institutional controls.

A tempting model is to see the social sciences as onion-like, layered with theory and certain core disciplines at the centre and application areas or fields of applied endeavour as the outer layers. Thus – it might be argued – economic or sociological theory is the ultimate base on which education and business and management studies depends. There is certainly something in this: management and business schools have cannibalised and renamed many elements of theory long taught in other subject areas. Organisational behaviour, for example, bears many similarities to organisational theory taught in sociology departments. But again the model is too simplistic: subjects like geography contain an eclectic mixture of self-generated theory and ideas generated from other disciplines, countries and practices. Understanding the world does not always come about from the import of someone else's theory. We are clear therefore that the onion model is not an appropriate one. Rather we see the social sciences as a web of associated and overlapping entities, across which ideas, theories and methodologies are transmitted through the work of individuals and groups. Whatever the historical origins of the social sciences, it is no longer sensible to think of a set of core, theory-rich disciplines plus a set of others which rely on them for intellectual fodder, and which simply use this in a specific application domain.

In essence, then, we have come to see the social sciences as about 'disciplined curiosity about societies in which we all live', leading to the creation and sharing of social knowledge. In addition, we recognise that social sciences focus both upon underlying theory and on public policy and practice affecting the life of individuals and groups within society. And we celebrate the pluralism of the social sciences, believing that it is helpful in challenging orthodoxy and necessary given the complexity of society. As we emphasised

earlier, none of this should be taken to endorse a view that 'anything goes', that any social science is worthwhile; there is good and bad social science just as there is good and bad work in the physical sciences and in all fields of human endeavour. The key challenge is in distinguishing what is good or valuable and what is erroneous, misleading, or simply duplicative and unnecessary.

Box 2.3
Disciplines which in whole or in part are within the social sciences

- Anthropology*
- Area studies
- Archaeology
- Built environment and town and country planning
- Business and management studies*
- Communication, culture and media studies
- Economics and econometrics*
- Education*
- Geography*
- History
- Law*
- Library and information management
- Linguistics
- Some aspects of medicine
- Other studies and professions related to medicine
- Nursing
- Philosophy
- Politics and international studies*
- Psychology*
- Social policy and administration*
- Social work*
- Sociology*
- Statistics and operational research

2.5 Who are the stakeholders in the social sciences?

Given that we now know (approximately) what are the social sciences, it is important to define those to whom they are important. In practice, many of the key players are also important stakeholders. Based on our discussions with many interested parties, we believe that the most important of these are as set out in Box 2.4. It will be self-evident that the interests of all the organisations and individuals involved will not always coincide. Moreover, none of these are homogeneous entities: in no sense does central government take a single view of the relevance and the contribution of the social sciences. Tensions on policy issues between government departments and between them and the Prime Minister's office are inevitable; these are sometimes manifested in their approach to evidence and to the purveyor or messenger. Thus it is unsurprising that the stakeholders, let alone the players, should proffer different analyses of the state and health of British social science and remedies for any supposed ills. We have set out to assess the different viewpoints, test their validity in so far as relevant evidence exists, and weight the views accordingly.

Box 2.4
Stakeholders and key players in the social sciences

- Central government and devolved governments who seek social science findings and advice:
  - Individual central departments (e.g. HM Treasury, Cabinet Office, ONS) and policy ones (e.g. DTI/OST, Home Office, DEFRA, DTLR, FCO, DfES); Scottish Parliament, Welsh and Northern Ireland Assemblies and their Executives;
  - Some Executive Agencies, NDPBs (e.g. CRE);
- National bodies
  - Funding Councils: HEFCE, SHEFC, HEFCW;
  - Research Councils: ESRC and the other research councils;
- Non-governmental funding bodies e.g. Joseph Rowntree and Nuffield Foundations, and the Leverhulme Trust + many (thousands of) charities and voluntary bodies who make use of social science-trained skills or findings;
- Local government, which draws upon social science expertise and knowledge (but probably only to a minor extent?);
- The 'Fourth Estate' – press/media – who benefit from new research and act as intermediaries in translating social science findings to a wider audience;
- Universities as corporate institutions. These have a vested interest in their staff producing research and students of widely recognised quality + a responsibility for these staff;
- University staff, especially social scientists, who are contracted to carry out research and teaching and whose personal and departmental reputation is closely tied to success in national reviews of each;
- University students taking social sciences courses. They will benefit from courses recognised as of high quality and prestige, which inculcate competences welcome in the market place. The employability and rewards however, differ significantly after courses in different disciplines;
- Professional and statutory bodies in relevant fields. These have a duty and an interest in ensuring that all students seeking professional certification should meet certain publicised standards of competence. They also have an obligation to ensure their standards and other requirements have not become ossified or unrealistic (e.g. in terms of staff: student ratios with current funding levels and the changing modes of teaching and learning);
- Learned societies in the relevant fields. These will seek to ensure the health of their discipline area, to publicise new developments and to attract new entrants;
- The citizenry – which can benefit from rigorous social science research underpinning democratic debate and the availability of skills carried into the workplace by new graduates.

3 What have the social sciences contributed to British society?

The social sciences permeate public debate, policy-making – at all levels – and intellectual life in Britain. Given the five million or more students educated in the social sciences at university level since the 1960s and the acknowledged need to create a more inclusive, safe and fair society, this is scarcely surprising. But numbers of people educated in a particular way or with particular skills is not a convincing argument on the contribution of social sciences. Moreover, much of the contribution of the social sciences appears invisible to the lay public. That fraction which is reported in the media often appears because it is a convenient way of selling newspapers or for political ends rather than for general elucidation (see Chapter 6).

We have been struck by how little is known about the contribution of the social sciences amongst the lay public. Thus, though self-evident for many social scientists, these contentions need to be substantiated for those outside academia. An easy way to do this is to cite historical figures who incontrovertibly changed our world. Two such individuals are described in Box 3.1. But contemporary examples also abound. This section sets out a number of examples, ranging from the micro- to the macro- scale, from local through regional and national to international. Other examples are scattered throughout the text.

We argue that contributions are made in many different ways. They do not always arise from publishing academic papers in leading journals. They arise equally through the hosting of seminars attended by key influencers (see Section 7.4 on think tanks); we note that all three major political parties make use of academics in policy formation and in education of staff and senior politicians. The Royal Economic Society's 2002 report on inter-generational mobility in Britain – or the lack of it since 1970 – was used by the broadsheet press to indicate that social change had stalled. Some of the ESRC programmes – such as the Whitehall Programme – have been widely hailed as influential. Significant contributions can also arise from consultancy and contract work for government and other bodies, some of which is never put into the public domain for confidentiality reasons. They include work done at local and regional level in the community (see Chapter 4 on devolution). Perhaps least obviously they are manifested – often years afterwards – in social scientists becoming major public figures in Britain or elsewhere: the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Secretary of State for Education and Skills are both social scientists. Thabo Mbeki (President of South Africa) is a social sciences graduate from Sussex University whilst LSE claims no less than 28 past or present heads of state amongst its former staff and students.

We said earlier that the primary roles of the social sciences are to enhance the wealth of the UK and its peoples and to enhance the quality of life. The latter was widely interpreted, embracing personal intellectual development, maximising societal harmony and fostering challenges to orthodoxy where that was limiting desirable developments. It is against these criteria that we have selected our examples.

3.1 Social scientists and 'big issues'

At the highest level, academic social scientists – though not necessarily British ones – have played important roles in developing and popularising concepts and ways of proceeding which are now taken for granted. These include gender issues, globalisation and social exclusion.

Gender issues. Influential work by social scientists in this area has been undertaken from a variety of theoretical perspectives. Major theoretical advances were made in the 1970s, consolidated by more empirically-based studies in the 1980s and a marrying of both in the 1990s.

Examples of research on gender issues that have informed policy and practice include that on:

- Gender segregation in the labour market – raising awareness and understanding of the extent to which gender remains a key organising principle in all its sectors;
- Equal pay – in particular analysing the shortcomings of the legislation and existence of discriminatory pay grading systems: research was commissioned for and evidence given to the Equal Opportunities Commission's Equal Pay Task Force and the Kingsmill report on equal pay;
- Domestic violence – identifying the extent and nature of this previously largely hidden issue;
- Gender budgeting – social scientists in the Gender Budget Group analyse the allocation of Government resource for their effect on women. They identify how seemingly 'neutral policies' can in fact be biased, usually to the disadvantage of women;
- Educational achievement.

Globalisation – 'the accumulating consequences of the annihilation of distance' (Dore 2001) – has been a process at work for over five centuries but its pace has speeded greatly in recent years. According to Dore (2001), only five of the 271 books in the Harvard University Library in mid–2000 with globalisation in the title had been published before 1990 and 85% date from the last half of the 1990s. As with many other concepts, there is imprecision of what is intended by the term. But academic researchers have shown that global markets are not as integrated as is often portrayed; that its role in reducing national autonomy in economic policy is highly varied; that it equalises earnings for the educated but it multiplies inequalities between those and the less-well-educated; that growth of international governance is hesitant and growth of a transnational 'world society' is slow (Dore 2001). That said, the globally available technologies now available and changing consumer preferences have begun to have some dramatic effects: British geographers have highlighted the new spatial model of distributive manufacturing whereby large numbers of small and very flexible assembly plants are being built close to the main nodes of consumer demand, replacing in part the old giant manufacturing plants. Others like Barrett, Hughes and Meier have looked from the specific to the generics of globalisation by, for example, looking at the way that the cut flower industry links the shifting aesthetic tastes of western consumers (from the desire for new kinds of flowers to the growing global popularity of St Valentine's Day) with the flower fields of countries like Kenya and Colombia – all achieved through an enormous global geography that constantly flies flowers to the flower markets of Amsterdam and onto supermarket shelves.

Social exclusion has been an explicit focus of government policy since 1997 – after a long history of being debated by American and British academics. Hills, Le Grand and Piachaud (2002) have shown that the definition of the term is contested. Hence there is also debate about the factors – individual, community, national and global – responsible and the agencies which have responsibility for tackling the problems. It seems that in the UK there are several dimensions of deprivation and participation: exclusion on the grounds of one of consumption, production, political activity and social engagement does not correlate strongly with exclusion on the others. It follows from all this that government policy has to be multi-stranded e.g. both universal and area-based schemes are needed – and this is what has become enacted. One such example is the work of Kempson and her colleagues at Bristol University on the tendency of financial systems to deny access to people with low incomes. This led the government to pressure the leading banks to offer basic bank

accounts to anyone who wants them – a facility taken up by hundreds of thousands in the first few months of operation (but see Box 5.3).

Box 3.1
Two key social scientists from the past

William Beveridge

William Beveridge was educated at Balliol College, Oxford. He was sub-warden of Toynbee Hall 1903 – 1905, and leader-writer on 'social problems' for the *Morning Post* 1906 – 1908. From 1905 to 1908 Beveridge was a member of the Central (Unemployed) Body for London, and was also the first Chairman of the Employment Exchanges Committee. He was a member of the Board of Trade 1908 – 1916 and Director of Labour Exchanges 1909 – 1916. In 1919 he retired from the civil service and was Director of the London School of Economics until 1937. As Chairman of the Social Service Inquiry, he published his report *Social Insurance and Allied Services* in 1942, recommending that the government should find ways of fighting the five 'Giant Evils' of Want, Disease, Ignorance, Squalor and Idleness. In 1945 Prime Minister Attlee announced he would introduce the Welfare State outlined in the 1942 Beveridge Report. This included the establishment of a NHS in 1948 with free medical treatment for all. A national system of benefits was also introduced to provide 'social security' so that the population would be protected from the 'cradle to the grave'.

John Maynard Keynes

Arguably the most influential economist of the 20th century, John Maynard Keynes was a man of many and considerable talents. After graduating from King's College, Cambridge, Keynes entered the civil service and simultaneously managed to work on a dissertation which earned him a fellowship at King's College.

Following the outbreak of World War One, Keynes joined the Treasury. In the wake of the Versailles peace treaty, he published *The Economic Consequences of Peace*, in which he criticised the exorbitant demands for war reparations from defeated Germany and prophetically predicted a German revenge. During the inter-war years, Keynes amassed a considerable personal fortune from the financial markets and, as bursar, increased the King's College chest tenfold. His best-known work, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*, was published in 1936 and became a benchmark for future economic thought. With the advent of World War Two, he again worked in HM Treasury where he played a decisive role in the negotiations that were to shape the post-war international economic order, the Bretton Woods system and the setting up of the International Monetary Fund.

3.2 Some contemporary social science examples of 'big issues'

The following examples are chosen to show the range of British social sciences, in particular areas of controversy and how some at least have had strong influences on public policy and practice.

Children at risk. Until the mid–1990s there was a great emphasis on trying to ensure that any apparently risky situations involving children were investigated, analysed and (possibly) led to child protection registration. Research by Farmer and Owen at Bristol University showed that this heavy-handed approach frightened and alienated some parents – and even sometimes increased the risk to children. The research provided clear proposals for better guidance, notably through emphasising family support and only steering the 'heavier

end' cases into the child protection system. Published by Her Majesty's Stationery Office, this research – along with other projects sponsored in a Department of Health programme – led to a major policy shift in child welfare policy and practice.

Family policy. Two new family forms that have emerged over the past 25 years are families headed by lesbian mothers and families created by assisted reproduction procedures including *in vitro* fertilisation (IVF), donor insemination, egg donation and surrogacy. Research by Professor Susan Golombok at City University on the consequences of such changing family structures for parenting and child development has helped underpin a number of national policies. It was commonly assumed that children with lesbian mothers would be at risk for psychological problems and would show atypical gender development. Systematic studies of children raised in such families have demonstrated that these assumptions are unfounded. As a result, lesbian mothers are no longer denied custody of their children when they divorce and are no longer excluded as potential adoptive parents. In fact, the new Adoption Act will allow lesbian couples to adopt children jointly, thus giving these children the security afforded the adoptive children of heterosexual couples should they lose one parent through separation or divorce. Research on families with children conceived through assisted reproduction has also contributed to policy decisions associated with the welfare of the child – including the counselling of prospective parents, the payment of gamete donors and surrogate mothers, eligibility for treatment and the number of embryos that may be used in IVF procedures.

Obviating conflict. The Centre for Conflict Analysis is a loose network of scholars from the UK, Australia, Canada, the USA, Germany and South Africa. The Director is Professor A.J.R Groom of the University of Kent. The Centre has been in existence since the mid–1960s. It has organised facilitation seminars (usually a series of such meetings over a period of months or years) with the participation of top-level decision-makers in a number of conflicts including Cyprus (e.g. Presidential advisor level), South Africa (e.g. in cooperation with the Centre for Inter-group Studies and Professor H. W. van der Merve in the 1980s, and involving political leaders from the ANC, Inkatha, National Party and the Broederbund, and funded by the Quakers), Northern Ireland (e.g. political leaders), Falklands/ Malvinas (e.g. MPs from both countries) and Moldova. Such a facilitation seminar involves individuals with close links to the leadership of the parties in dispute who speak in a personal capacity. All participants take part in all aspects of the seminar together. The facilitators are academics who are not necessarily experts on the particular conflict but who have expertise on the causes, processes and means of resolving conflicts. The meetings are entirely private. There is no official record or public statement so that everything is confidential. Funding usually comes from foundations, often Quaker ones, though some has been official.

Enhancing good governance. Members of the department of politics and international relations at Kent University have been active in training programmes at the request of various governments. For example a number of courses were held in Eritrea to train future and actual cadres in the period 1993 to 1996 with Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) funding. Other training has been undertaken through the auspices of the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), and there have been briefings for FCO personnel e.g. the new UN Ambassadors. The department has good working relations with the research department of the FCO. In addition, ESRC has sponsored much research work on governance (see Rhodes 1997).

Economics and auctions. Professors Binmore (UCL) and Klemperer (Oxford) led the Economic Learning and Social Evolution (ELSE) team which contributed centrally to the British auction of 3G telecom licences. This was the biggest auction ever held, raising £22.5 billion or 2.5% of UK GDP. Based on three objectives – to assign the radio spectrum efficiently, to promote competition and to realise the full economic value (subject to the other objectives) – various strategies were set and tested in the three years prior to the auction in 2000. Much of the fundamental work, however, preceded the auction and was funded by ESRC and the Leverhulme Trust.

Economic performance. The Centre for Economic Performance (CEP) is an interdisciplinary research centre at LSE established in 1990 by the ESRC. It studies the determinants of economic performance at the level of the company, the nation and the global economy by focusing on the major links between globalisation, technology and institutions (above all the educational system and the labour market) and their impact on productivity, inequality, employment and stability. It comprises some 100 research staff and associates and 10 support staff. The senior staff are drawn mainly from LSE faculty. They work with a core of 30 research staff from a range of disciplines: economics, industrial relations, social psychology (Aston University), and geography. Around 30 postgraduates mainly from continental Europe are registered for the PhD, working in apprenticeship mode on centre research projects and on their own theses at the same time. Major research contributions are also made from a network of 40 associate staff based at Stanford, Wisconsin, Oxford, Dublin, Madrid, Sussex and Bristol universities as well as LSE.

The centre's research in the 1990's on long-term unemployment, drawing in part upon US work, has formed the intellectual basis underpinning the New Deal, the Working Families Tax Credit and the Minimum Wage. Its work on skills, especially numeracy, formed the basis for the National Skills Audit and the reform of apprenticeship. Its staff have been actively involved in policy advice, with Layard advising the DfES on the New Deal; Nickell, Bean and Buiter on the Bank of England Monetary Policy Committee; Metcalf on the Low Pay Commission; Gregg a senior adviser at the Treasury; Steedman an adviser to the DfES on apprenticeship; Venables advising the House of Lords and a former director of the World Bank Trade Research (2000) on globalisation; Quah advising the Bank of England on monetary analysis.

Urban policy. The 1994 work of Professor Robson of Manchester and colleagues proved instrumental in the then Conservative government's development of the Single Regeneration Budget programme which rolled together a range of funding streams and gave local authorities a more central role in the delivery of regeneration. His initial development of the government's Index of Deprivation was used to allocate resources to local authorities for competitive regeneration programmes. This has subsequently been developed by researchers at Oxford who produced the Index of Multiple Deprivation used to determine which areas qualify for discretionary regeneration-related resources. In 2000 – and for the Labour government – the Robson, Parkinson and Maclennan *State of English cities* report played a key role in shaping policy. Published alongside the government's Urban White Paper, it fed into some of the urban policy framework that the Paper introduced. Along with co-workers, Robson is also a member of the Urban Sounding Board which has advised successive Ministers on urban policy, including the format and content of the government's big Urban Summit to take stock of where policy is going.

3.3 Contributions of individual social scientists

The number of possible examples here is legion. Individuals like David Held, Saskia Sassen, Richard Sennett, Nigel Thrift and John Urry have dynamised debates around the world. We have selected a few to demonstrate the pool of talent that exists – and which is exploited by governments and various other bodies. Their contribution is often made through putting their knowledge and skills to practical ends.

David Butler, a fellow of Nuffield College, Oxford, has been associated with the Nuffield election studies since 1945 and has been the author or co-author of each one since 1951. He is well known for his election commentaries on television and radio, and he has written widely on British, American and Australian politics. His renowned election series covers every post-war British election, provides an authoritative, readable description and analysis of the background, the campaign and results. Advertised in both the Conservative and Labour Party bookshops, the series of books has been described by Andrew Adonis in the *Times Literary Supplement* thus: 'No British election is complete without David Butler.

His Nuffield studies, a unique cocktail of analysis, narrative and insider insight, are the authoritative guide to post-war electoral politics'.

Cary L. Cooper, BUPA professor of organisational psychology and health in the Manchester school of management, is a world leader in the field of occupational stress. His many books, including *Organizational Stress* and *Workplace Bullying*, have strongly influenced organisations in the public and private sector, trade unions and other bodies responsible for health and well-being at work. His contributions on the European and global level have been numerous e.g. he has reviewed research on 'workplace violence in the health sector' globally for two UN agencies, the International Labour Organisation and World Health Organisation. His strategy paper for the EU, *Stress Prevention in the Workplace*, assessed the costs and benefits to European organisations of managing workplace stress.

Lord Currie is an economist and one-time dean of social sciences at Queen Mary, University of London. He was one of the original 'six wise men' advising the (then Conservative) Chancellor of the Exchequer. David Currie was deputy dean of the London Business School until 2000 when he joined City University as dean of the Cass Business School. In 2002, he became Chairman of Ofcom – which *The Guardian* described as 'the single most important public sector appointment of the last decade' – whilst also continuing as dean of the Cass School.

Anthony Giddens, director of LSE, is the most widely cited contemporary sociologist in the world. He is the author or editor of more than thirty books that have been translated into some thirty-five different languages. Giddens's writings range well beyond the field of sociology itself. He has written on social theory, the history of social thought, class structure, elites and power, nations and nationalism, personal and social identity, the family, relationships and sexuality. He was one of the first authors to take up the concept of globalisation (in the mid–1980s). His 1998 BBC Reith Lectures, later published as *Runaway World*, helped introduce the debate about globalisation to a wide audience in a range of countries. His impact upon politics has been particularly profound. He popularised the notion of the third way in political thinking, and his ideas have influenced social domestic parties across the world. His advice has been sought by political leaders from Asia, Latin America and Australia, as well as from the US and Europe. He has had a major impact upon the evolution of New Labour in the UK.

Sir Peter Hall, the doyen of UK town and country planners, has advised both Conservative and Labour governments. Perhaps his most celebrated effort was to prompt the development of Enterprise Zones in the 1980s, designed to create something like the freeports of places like Singapore. His 1960s book on *The containment of urban England* was a powerful underpinning of the green belt and new town idea and his succession of research and books on London has strongly influenced both national and metropolitan government over 40 years.

Heather Joshi, professor of economic demography at the Institute of Education, has researched the place of women in the family and the British economy for the past two decades. This has led to a model of lifetime incomes which puts a cash figure on the effects of motherhood and of the different incomes and pensions of men and women, taking into account various histories of family building and educational attainment. Other work includes studies of the impact of family background on children's development. The work, some of which was done for the Cabinet Office, has strongly influenced government policy. She is leading the team running the Millennium Cohort Study, the first national birth cohort – or life history – study for 30 years. It is following the development of 20,000 children born in 2000.

Duncan Maclennan of the department of urban studies, Glasgow University, has had a continuing impact on housing policy (both in Scotland and south of the border). He was director of the ESRC Cities Programme and was then adviser to the First Minister of Scotland in the Scottish Parliament. Whilst at the Scottish Executive he played leading roles in writing Scotland's Urban Policy document, shaping the 2002 Housing Act (including

the reform of Right-to-Buy legislation) plus the transfer of Glasgow's council housing to not-for-profits, and he led the review of Scotland's cities. He ran the Rowntree Area Regeneration programme, many of whose projects fed into the development of the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal.

Doreen Massey of the Open University has long worked on various aspects of the theorisation of 'space' and 'place'. These interests have involved a major critique of globalisation, plus much original work on uneven regional development and the 'reconceptualisation of place'. What makes her contribution distinctive is that it ranges from the philosophical and largely conceptual through to the directly political. Her work has been recognised world-wide, such as by the prestigious French award of the *Prix International de Geographie Vautrin Lud* as well as the Victoria Medal of the Royal Geographical Society.

Lord Plant, as professor of politics at the University of Southampton from 1978 to 1993 and also from 1999 onwards, wrote *Political Philosophy and Social Welfare*, *Politics, Theology and History* and many other books influential in shaping national policy. He is currently president of the National Council for Voluntary Organisations, chairing the group monitoring welfare reform. He also chairs the Fabian Society's tax commission. He has chaired the Labour Party's Commission on Electoral Systems. Professor Plant is also active in the Church of England and he chaired the Winchester Diocese Working Party on Faith in the City.

Theresa Rees of Cardiff University is an expert in education and labour market policies, especially in theoretical, policy and practical aspects of the approach to gender equality known as 'gender mainstreaming'. She has been a long-term consultant to the European Commission and various European governments in relation to policy fields such as higher education, training, labour markets, regional economic development, and most recently science policies. This has included working with some candidate countries as they prepare to meet the EC's requirements on gender equality to join the EU. She is also involved with the work of the National Assembly for Wales in its commitment to pay 'due regard' to equality of opportunity for all.

Amartya Sen, now working in Cambridge University before returning to Harvard, won the 1998 Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences for his contribution to welfare economics. This ranges from social choice theory, poverty and welfare indexes, distribution, the study of famine, individual welfare, and collective decision taking. His work restored an ethical dimension to economics. In social choice theory his research has elucidated the circumstances of collective decision making, for example in voting. His construction of welfare and poverty indexes has resulted in enhanced understanding of poverty, inequality, unemployment, and the underlying economics and values behind famine. His work has strengthened the development of rational choice and cost-benefit analysis, and he has advanced development economics with his analysis of the choice of technology in developing countries.

Janet Trewsdale, Senior lecturer in economics at Queen's University Belfast, is Chairman of the Northern Ireland Economic Council (NIEC). She is also Chairman and a director of the Northern Ireland Economic Development Office. The NIEC is a body unique in the UK. It is an independent advisory body set up by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in 1977. Following devolution in 1999, it reports to the First Minister and has a wide remit to provide advice on the development of economic policy for Northern Ireland. Its membership includes trade unionists, industrial and commercial interests and independent members drawn from society generally. She is a past vice-president of the Royal Statistical Society.

Yezid Sayigh. Negotiation, especially where multi-culturalism is a crucial factor, is a crucial skill. In 1991–1994 Dr. Sayigh of Cambridge University formed (and headed) the Palestinian delegation to the Working Group on Arms Control and Regional Security (part of the multilateral Arab-Israeli peace talks). He constructed an informal training programme in which Palestinian graduates could acquire basic familiarisation plus a series of two-week

educational seminars on strategic studies, diplomacy, and foreign policy. The British Council then provided MA studentships in the UK for selected candidates, some of whom later went on to work with the Palestinian Authority (PA), the World Bank, the Swiss Overseas Development Agency, and other bodies. Later he was recruited as an external consultant to the PA to work, *inter alia*, on governance and public sector institutional reform, under contract varyingly to the Department for International Development, the European Commission, and the World Bank. His 1999 co-authored report is commonly regarded by the contracting agencies and wider international donor community as the benchmark document on Palestinian reform.

3.4 Conclusions

Based on this small sample, there can be no doubt about the immense contributions of social scientists to society and public life in the UK. Often invisibly, the work of the 30,000 academics and a larger number of practitioners help make real the claim that this is the 'social sciences century'.

4 Social science and devolution

Whatever its democratic and political legitimation, devolution has already had profound effects on the way in which the social sciences are perceived, exploited and funded by government in different parts of the United Kingdom. And, moreover, the opportunities for social scientists to make important contributions to the success of their countries and regions are increasing as a direct result of devolution. We have been surprised how much ignorance there is about the development of devolution and its effects on the social sciences. We do not believe that a new nirvana has been created by devolution or that there is an ideal role model for social sciences in the devolved countries and regions. But we do believe that the attempt to 'start afresh' has led to developments which have interesting lessons for the UK as a whole. Hence we report on these in some detail.

The Commission took detailed evidence from researchers and policy-makers in Belfast, Cardiff and Edinburgh and had discussions in some of the English regions. In each, policy-makers emphasised the impact of what they called 'the information age' as well as the range of opportunities for social science research and involvement in the policy process. In this a number of factors were identified as contributing to and illustrating the changes that are taking place:

- The departmental need for data to inform and justify policy;
- The ways in which the pressure for devolution has led to a need for greater accountability and transparency in government;
- The demands from the EU for research to inform policy priorities in relation to structural funds;
- The increasing requirement for 'peer review' and evaluation of projects and policies.

Social science research in the devolved countries seems weak when contrasted with England, where almost all of the major research departments of the UK are to be found. However these changes have had many impacts upon the nature of, and potential for enhancing, social scientific work.

It is often forgotten that higher education funding has also been devolved: funding systems in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland operate with priorities that differ slightly from each other and from those of HEFCE. For example, the Higher Education funding councils for Wales (HEFCW) and Scotland (SHEFC) have introduced competitive funding schemes aimed at building research capacity capable of dealing with local social and economic needs. The general constitutional arrangements are separate and distinct, with Scotland having the most extensive levels of devolution and Wales the least. However, there are ways in which experience and expertise is being shared through the Inter-Parliamentary Research Network.

Finally the regions of England – except London – do not have regional assemblies though their Regional Development Agencies are all making use of social science inputs to different degrees and in different ways. Because of this heterogeneity, we now discuss each geographical unit in turn.

4.1 The Welsh experience

Pre-devolution and the creation of the Assembly, public policy for Wales was made in Whitehall, and the Welsh Office was essentially an executive arm of government. As a consequence, the resources devoted to analysis and policy formulation were modest in the extreme. Even now, the scale of Welsh government is small in size by comparison with UK central government: there are about 4,000 civil servants in Wales, of which perhaps 250 are concerned primarily with policy. Compared with the 80 economists in Scotland, Wales presently has only 10. Though there are equivalents of Whitehall entities – the Strategic Policy Unit, reporting to Cabinet, has similar modernising government and other responsibilities to the (former) Performance and Innovation Unit (PIU) – the size of the units is relatively small. The identifiable annual spend on social research is around £5 million but the totality of social sciences research expenditure will be somewhat larger than that. Despite the 'Welsh deficit' in research funding – while 5% of the UK population live in Wales, it receives only 3% of RAE funding – the Assembly fully funded the results of the 2001 RAE.

The Welsh Assembly has more limited powers than its equivalents in Scotland and Northern Ireland. It has no tax raising powers and its policy involvement in key areas such as transport is limited. However, it has significant scope in relation to education and health policy, in the general area of economic regeneration, and on issues relating to social exclusion. In this it has revealed itself capable of innovative and 'joined up' policies particularly in relation to community development, health and primary care, equality and diversity and student policy. In each of these areas, policy has been informed and influenced by social science research.

Even apart from its powers, the Assembly differs substantially from Westminster. The committee structure mirrors the Cabinet roles and the relevant minister is a member of that committee (but does not chair it). Each committee has a policy development, review of secondary legislation and scrutiny role. The posts of Special Advisors were advertised and those appointed went through a Nolan process. Some other relevant developments which have occurred since devolution are:

- Committees and Assembly Members have been given a research capacity;
- Ministers wish to be guided – and be seen to be guided – in policy formulation by evidence, but are impatient to take action to ameliorate problems;
- Research contract opportunities are advertised both across the UK and internationally;
- A series of seminars based in the Assembly and presented by researchers from Cardiff University have been introduced;
- The Permanent Secretary chairs a committee of vice-chancellors as part of a conscious attempt to bring government and academia closer together;
- An Economic Advisory Panel on Economic Development, chaired by an academic and involving others, advises the First Minister. It has defined a set of economic research priorities which are now being implemented;
- Genuine attempts are being made to enhance strategy integration using 'best practice' tools in order to deal with issues that are inherently multidisciplinary.

The presence of the new Assembly, with its clear responsibilities and funding priorities, has created an enormous opportunity for the development of social science research in Wales. Given the previous dearth of government expertise and knowledge, there is a considerable need for a finer geographical granularity and a deeper understanding of how economic and social processes operate at a sub-Wales level. This need has been accentuated by two overarching concerns:

- The general level of poverty in Wales. The South Wales valleys and West Wales are recognised by the EU as one of the poorest regions in Europe and qualify for Objective One levels of support. Welsh GDP currently stands at 80.5% of the UK average. Parts of Wales have some of the highest economic inactivity rates in the UK, a significant proportion of which relates to various forms of physical incapacity;
- The profound effects of de-industrialisation and the associated weakening and erosion of a Welsh civic society capable of debating issues of social need and priority.

In this context, the social sciences have begun to make a significant contribution to social and economic development. Social scientists serve as Assembly Members and ministers, they work as advisors in a number of capacities, they conduct policy-relevant research and assist in the assessment of projects. Examples of these developments include:

- The role played by economists in the Welsh Development Agency and their contribution to key policy developments aimed at raising Welsh GDP;
- The funding of Professor Peter Townsend to produce a major report on health inequalities and resource allocation;
- The enhancement of the Welsh sample in the British Household Panel Survey (co-funded by the ESRC) to assist statistical comparisons within Wales;
- The involvement of 20 social scientists from Cardiff University in a project commissioned by the Assembly to examine the likely consequences of steel plant closures in 2002.

All that said, it is clear that many problems still exist and some of these are identical to those elsewhere. For instance, we were assured by government staff that there is a poor understanding of what research relevant to Wales goes on in HEIs. Perhaps surprisingly given the scale of Wales, there are few routine contacts between Assembly Members, civil servants and academics. Unlike the situation in Scotland, the Assembly does not publish its research priorities, so even interested academics have difficulty in knowing what to propose.

An abiding conclusion, however, is that devolution has created a policy crucible in Wales, and from this there is a hunger and demand for social science knowledge, expertise and understanding.

4.2 The Scottish experience

The Scottish Parliament represents a major step toward devolved government. It has extensive powers and responsibilities and builds upon the expertise of the old Scottish Office. By May 2003 some 50 Bills will have gone through the Scottish Parliament, most requiring significant background research commissioned or carried out by the Scottish Executive or through Parliament itself.

The Scottish Executive has seven departments – Education, Health, Justice, Finance and Central Services (FCS), Environment and Rural Affairs, Development, and Education and Lifelong Learning. FCS acts in part like the Whitehall Cabinet Office. The need for cross-cutting analyses and 'joined up government' is well-recognised; as elsewhere, it seems rather more difficult in practice than theory.

Research teams are spread throughout the Executive – the old Central Research Unit having been closed down. Since devolution, the numbers of social researchers has doubled to 60 and continues to grow. Total expenditure on social research is of the order of £8 million per year but other significant sums are spent on economics and so on across the Executive. Thus the true figure for social sciences research expenditure by the Executive will be considerably higher. Because of their small population base, the local authorities in Scotland seem to have less research capacity or even contracting capacity

than in England. It is relevant that, in contrast to Wales and Northern Ireland, Scotland has a powerful higher education sector that extends beyond the established research capacities of Edinburgh and Glasgow universities. This provides greater critical mass than exists in the other countries, but even that is sometimes marginal (see below).

The Scottish Executive and Parliament have a variety of close relationships with social science researchers. Most of the short time scale research carried out is done under contract by Scottish academics or in-house by the Executive, often with contract staff hired on short-term contracts from universities. The Executive has been pleased with the quality of staff hired but the pool of talent is small. There are tensions between awarding contracts to organisations outside Scotland whilst at the same time seeking to build critical mass of local expertise which understands the Scottish policy dimension. Particular areas of concern are in the small scale and fragmented capacity of business and management and of economics in universities, but fragmentation is generally a Scottish characteristic. The RAE is widely seen as having reduced the incentives for regionally-based work, especially on regional economies. There is an embryonic local development of think tanks to meet the need which they fulfil in London.

Devolution has had some very obvious effects pertaining to social sciences. The need to underpin Bills in Parliament is one of them but, more generally, the scrutiny of Executive action by the Parliament has raised the need for public justification and the need to respond quickly. In addition, the Parliament and Executive are now subject to much higher levels of lobbying by local authorities and many other bodies. There is a consequent need for analysis of the cases being made. In addition, the geographical granularity of the questions being posed is much finer – the characteristics of much more local geography are central to policy now, leading to the need for larger sample surveys and much else. This has been exacerbated by the results from the 2001 Census of Population which showed major decreases in population in some parts of Scotland, with consequent financial and other adjustments needing to be made and justified. The setting of targets for the Executive to achieve has highlighted the need for better information with which to measure progress, and so enhanced the collection of social science data. Another consequence of devolution has been the boost to comparative research. The interactions with public servants in Wales and Northern Ireland are now much stronger but, in addition, the Parliament and Executive see many appropriate comparators with German Lander and other regions in mainland Europe.

Since devolution, the media in Scotland has changed very considerably. Perhaps paradoxically, there has been a seven-fold expansion of correspondents based in London as well as much more scrutiny of what the Scottish institutions are doing. Yet the quality of presentation in the media of the evidence base for, as well as the intent of, policies is a matter of concern to Parliament and the Executive. Some journalists do not seem able to interpret these accurately. The size of the Scottish university community also means that there are relatively few media-experienced academics to make cases or debate issues in public.

Links between the Executive and universities are patchy but improving. Some real successes exist, e.g. the University of St Andrews has set up a 3 day course for administrators and specialists in the Executive on evidence-based policy, using a case-study approach. The Centre for Educational Sociology at the University of Edinburgh has been involved in extensive research with the Scottish Office and the Scottish Executive. Based on this, Raffe (2002) has described the issues involved in managing the interface between Scottish policy-makers and research (see Section 5.6.3). The Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee in the Executive has brought together policy-makers, academics and think tanks (from England) on a quarterly basis to discuss the implications of research findings for policy. In the full day sessions, academics are asked to make presentations with half on the evidence base, a quarter on the policy implications and the rest on what else needs to be known to guide future policy agendas. Apart from the knowledge transfer involved, this has helped to break down barriers between civil servants and academics.

4.3 The Northern Ireland experience

In terms of governance, Northern Ireland (NI) is more similar to Scotland than it is to the Welsh Assembly because of its legislative powers. The NI Assembly differs however from Scotland in its legislative remit and in its staffing structure. NI has a constitutional coalition and does not have an adversarial backbench. That said, many Bills are derived substantially from the Westminster ones pertaining to other parts of the UK.

The impact of devolution led to a greater demand for research and researchers, with significant rises in the number of Government Social Research staff, notably in the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency. The Assembly also wanted, and got, an independent, impartial research service which is used by *all* parties. Pros and cons of an issue are analysed and provided and the results can then be used by Members or Parties as they wish. There is a right to challenge a report but this rarely happens. All this is particularly important in an arena where the press is sectarian and often fiercely critical.

Devolution has changed the committee structure and the balance of responsibilities. There used to be a large democratic deficit: many of the members came from local councils with little time to be concerned with national issues. At that time, civil servants seem to have had considerable *de facto* power. There is now much more scrutiny by Assembly Members at all levels.

All research officers are required to have a higher degree. Crucial other requirements for those serving as researchers seem to be good communication skills (new graduates typically have better written than verbal skills), the ability to make presentations and debate issues (often in a highly-charged situation) and an understanding of the Assembly, of policy formulation and of the language and *modus operandi* of the civil service. In discussion, it became clear that, whilst the Assembly could develop the technical skills of its recruits, its officers felt that there was a real weakness in their analytical capacities. It was argued that universities should give more time to the importance of analysis in their educational programmes.

More research is done in-house than in Scotland, in part because of the small pool of external expertise (with only two universities) and the problem of conflicts of interest liable to arise with individuals active in NI society. Despite the small scale of the research operations in NI, there have been some real successes arising from good social science work. One example is the Employment Quality Review which led to some sweeping changes in equality legislation in NI. This was commissioned by the Standing Advisory Commission of Human Rights which advises the First Minister (in circumstances current at the time of writing it advises the Secretary of State). The result was some of the strongest quality legislation in Europe.

Finally, NI has been unique in the UK until very recently in having one core institution which is heavily dependent on social science research and thinking. This is the Northern Ireland Economic Council, originally set up by the Secretary of State in 1977. Following devolution in 1999, it reports to the First Minister and Deputy First Minister. It has a wide remit to provide independent advice on the development of economic policy for NI and achieves it partly through reports with specific policy recommendations. Membership of the Council includes business, trade union and independent members and it is chaired by a university social scientist (see Section 3.3). One example of the success of the Council is the effect of its detailed analysis of the Assembly's economic policy document *Strategy 2010*, checking its assumptions and data. As a consequence of the debate that followed the publication of this critique, the policy was amended and made more robust and realistic.

4.4 The situation in England's regions

While the situation in the English regions is very different, there has been a significant change associated with the introduction of Regional Development Agencies (RDAs). The role of these agencies is generally limited to issues of regional economic development although London has a regional assembly. In these changing contexts, some social scientists have made significant contributions, in particular to the development of regional strategies. For example, in the North East two social scientists from Durham University (Professors Cockerill and Hudson) played a key role in the development of ONE North East's Regional Economic Strategy. Both served as the members of the Task Group (Cockerill as Chair) that shaped the content of the strategy, emphasising the importance of knowledge and institutional innovation and performance as central to the region's future prosperity and well-being. As elsewhere, this simply represents a continuation of long-term commitments by a few academics with a regional focus: Hudson at Durham University has been involved for over 20 years in working with and for local authorities in North East England to understand the processes of decline in the coal mining industry and to devise strategies to regenerate former coalfield communities.

As another example (of many), Brendan Nevin (who was at Aston University) carried out a major study of the collapsing housing markets in the big northern cities. His regional work led directly into national policy through government's current experiment with the Housing Market Renewal Fund. This is being developed in nine pilot areas in England. In one of the rare cases of skills transfer, Nevin has now left academia to work for Stoke-on-Trent on its Housing Market Renewal Fund.

As this example suggests, not all regionally-based work in the social sciences is focused in a narrow geographical way. The prime example of this is the work of the Centre for Urban and Regional Development Studies (CURDS) at Newcastle University set up by Goddard and co-workers in 1977. During the 1980s, CURDS's work focused in particular on the role of technological change in regional development and its impact on the potential for economic growth. This work was especially influential at the European level. It contributed to the incorporation of an innovation dimension in the European Commission's regional policy, a theme subsequently taken up by the UK government in various programmes. The insight was developed in later work on the role of university-industry links as a potential stimulus to growth in lagging regions. This notion has been taken up as a policy theme by almost all of the RDAs created in England in 1999. CURDS's research has stressed the importance of strong regional institutions as a necessary condition for regional development. Recent work has contributed to the broader debate about the appropriate forms of devolved regional governance for England in the light of central government's proposals to create elected assemblies where these are wanted, partly reflecting the leading role of the North East in these developments.

ESRC and the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) jointly set up a pioneering regionally-focused project – the Regional Research Laboratories – in the late 1980s. These were designed to assemble and integrate data on each region, to bring together researchers to work on cross-cutting issues, provide access to 'state of the art' computer tools for data analysis and display, and to disseminate their work and resources. Today, some 15 years later, only the Manchester (NWRRL) and London (SERRL) research laboratories still seem active thanks to the project-based funding model used.

Yet the sort of work described above (and the work of individuals outlined in Chapter 3) seems to remain something of a rarity. Relatively few social scientists are engaged with research and policy formulation at the regional level. The most surprising manifestation of this shortcoming appears to be in London. Despite the presence of some 42 higher education institutions (HEIs) in the national capital employing over 50,000 academics, despite the long-standing work of LSE's Greater London Group and the hugely respected expertise of particular individuals like Professors Travers and Glennister, there is widely held to be a deficit of research focused on the metropolis. This has been cogently argued by the Chief Executive of Camden (which won the award of best local authority in the UK in 2002) who said:

> "... by comparison with other major cities around the world, the academic community...is less engaged in the affairs of the city than one would reasonably expect...What about the long term economic impacts of congestion charging? How will house prices be affected? ...Will the impact be different south of the river where the congestion charging zone will embrace some deprived areas of Southwark? Where is the serious analysis of options open to government to tackle the crisis of affordable housing in London, whether through fiscal policy or regulation? Has Right to Buy legislation in any way contributed to this crisis?...Does the whole of the academic community in London really believe the population growth projections in the Mayor's London Plan? To what extent do staff recruitment and retention problems derive from national pay bargaining? Who is challenging the operation of the Barnett formula at the theoretical level?"
>
> Source: letter from Steve Bundred to Chairman of the Commission, 15 October 2002

That he is not alone in such thinking is suggested by the creation by the Greater London Authority (GLA) of its own research group (GLA Economics) led by an eminent economist, Bridget Rosewell; this is commissioning a model of the London economy. Work by members of the GLA staff – not by academics – was what first revealed the growth of 600,000 in London's population since 1989 and forecast a further 700,000 growth by 2013 (against the situation of declining urban population almost everywhere else in Britain except Leeds). The policy and financial implications of this work have been immense.

Moreover, the London Development Agency and local government are not alone in feeling there is a deficit in research capacity applied to the region. As this report is written, discussions on the issue are going on between the Higher Education Funding Council – whose CEO (a distinguished social scientist) has argued that all HEFCE's policies must now be 'region-proofed' – the DfES, the Learning and Skills Councils and the chairs of the RDAs. There seems to be a clear consensus that there is a need to set up a research group modelled on CURDS in each region. A putative Regional Research Capability Fund is also under discussion.

We might reasonably question why such action is necessary given the galaxy of social science talent available in universities in each region. It is possible but unlikely that this is all the fault of academics: the understanding of contemporary HEIs and academic work is for instance extremely modest amongst many business people and civil servants. But it seems quite clear that there is an unfulfilled hunger for regionally-oriented research work, mostly of an applied nature – but which can none-the-less be intellectually challenging – which academia is not meeting. Indeed, increasing use is being made of major management consultancies for such work. We have heard it argued that such research work already does exist and that the problem is that practitioners simply do not know where to look for it (put at its most charitable). We do accept that much more research of relevance has often been done than is appreciated by the user community and that 'knowledge intermediaries' – individuals or institutions – may well be needed (see Chapters 6 and 7). But there remains a deficit in the work done which is focused on the needs of regional policy-makers and the like.

Why this is so is a pertinent question, not least because of the increasing HEFCE emphasis on regions (see HEFCE 2001): HEFCE has explicitly recognised that their allocation of additional student numbers, plus the HE Reach Out to Business and the Community (HEROBC) and widening participation programmes should properly reflect regional considerations. In no small part it seems a problem of inadequate communication, awareness and networking between the various parties. But, as we indicate in other parts of this report, the problem arises because there are few positive incentives for academics

to become engaged with such work. Those who can publish research in top grade international journals obtain prestige and other rewards by so doing. Such journals (many US-based) are not normally disposed to publish regionally-based work (especially from outside the USA). This is particularly true in economics but is also true elsewhere. The RAE, currently being reviewed (see Section 5.2.1 and elsewhere), has if anything strengthened the disincentives to regionally-oriented work – ironically shortly before it has become of compelling importance in policy and practice. We make recommendations on the importance of regional work in this regard later but, for the meantime, **we recommend to university vice-chancellors that they explore how, as part of their regional strategies, they can encourage their social science staff simultaneously to meet the emerging need for regionally-focused research and harvest the funds which exist (or may well soon exist) to support it.**

4.5 Our overall conclusions

We make no apology for devoting a significant fraction of the report to social sciences and devolution. It is clear to us that the changes set in train in 1999 have been quite substantial – to an extent unappreciated yet in some parts of Whitehall and amongst many social scientists. Moreover, our visits and discussions enabled us to see some common issues much more clearly because of the smaller scale of operations than in England.

We have been struck in our meetings with officials and ministerial advisers about the single-minded focus on 'what matters is what works'. There is only minor evidence of legacies in the historic differences of approach based on different ideologies.

That said, we saw many examples of the tension between evidence-based policy and community-influenced policy. As an example, there are often geographical trade-offs between a higher proportion of development money going into areas of current and likely future success (thereby likely to attract in-migrants) and more going into ameliorating the problems in areas of low outward migration and high unemployment to meet local demand.

The disparity between short-term needs for social science research results by politicians and the concern by academics to carry out scientifically respectable work over a longer time horizon is just as marked in the devolved administrations as it often is in central Whitehall! But there is a recognition amongst senior officials that research infrastructure and capacity needs to be fostered, particularly where existing provision is not world class. We find this encouraging but, given the social science RAE results for Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales described in Section B, **we recommend that the devolved administrations consider how best to reinforce the world class social science research in HEIs in their country (which is presently below the UK average).**

Nowhere in the devolved administrations did we find any interest in or intention of withdrawing from national/international levels of scrutiny of research assessment or from competition for funding via research councils. We welcome that approach.

We were surprised how, despite the fact that officials and politicians typically knew almost everyone else in these groups in the much smaller administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, neither group knew many academics (or vice versa). We were encouraged however at the imaginative steps taken in each of the devolved administrations to remedy this shortcoming and **we recommend that the Whitehall government, as an entity (perhaps through the Cabinet Office), seeks to implement equivalent devices to foster joint engagement.**

The ESRC devolution programme, although it was late to be initiated and was originally seen by many as 'political correctness', has come to be regarded as exemplary by most people in the devolved administrations; it continues until 2005. Many of the projects however seem 'atomised' and have focused on very geographically-specific points. We are convinced that there is much to be learned by a new over-arching study of the regional

governance in Britain now that devolution has run for several years. **We recommend that ESRC – perhaps in conjunction with the relevant executives – commissions a short review of the situation to draw out examples of best practice and learn lessons from events since devolution.**

We also recommend that the Welsh Assembly, the Northern Ireland Assembly, all Whitehall departments (preferably collectively) and all English Regional Development Agencies should publish research priorities (as in Scotland); this should be associated with a web site which shows all up-coming research contract opportunities in a harmonised format.

5 The health and value of British social sciences

5.1 Sources of our evidence

No one source of evidence is adequate. We have examined the following sets of evidence:

- External measures:
  - Research quality, as measured by the RAE and by citation analysis;
  - Teaching quality in universities;
  - Recruitment and retention of staff;
- External opinions from interested parties;
- Internal views of individual social scientists or learned societies.

The rest of this chapter summarises this evidence and presents views of the social sciences – or parts of them – as seen by some key stakeholders in different sectors: governments, business and the professions.

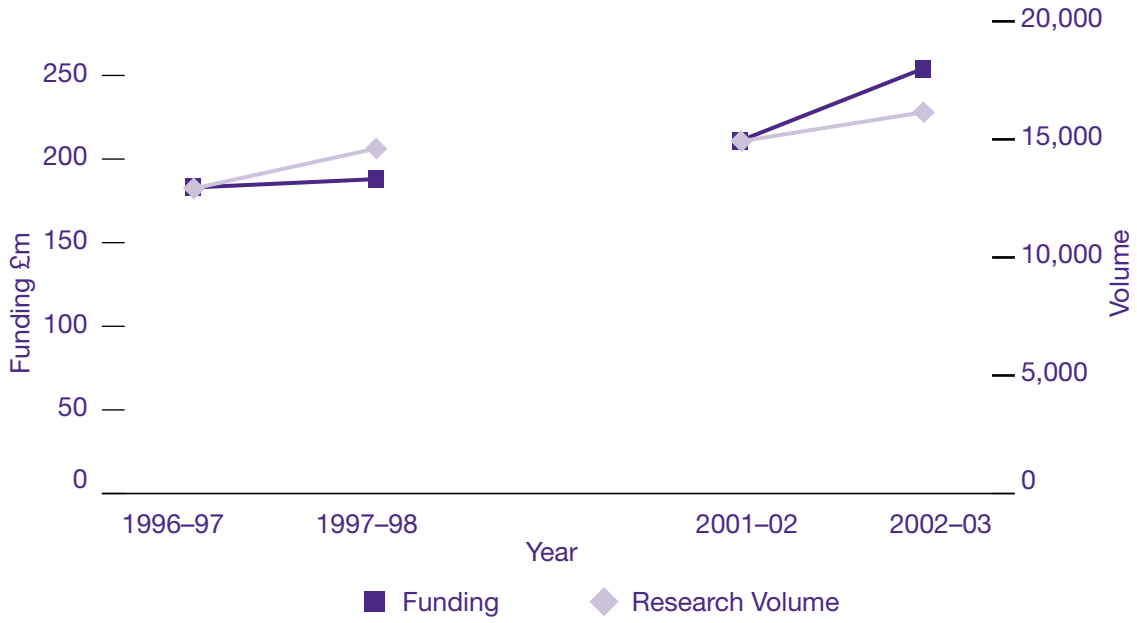
5.2 External measures and peer assessments of research quality

Here we have two main measures, the 2001 RAE and a bibliometric analysis. The first has the advantage of being a nation-wide snapshot covering every department and every research-active academic in the UK, carried out to defined specifications and with some international quality control. Its purpose is to rank the quality of research carried out in every department – considered along with others in its Unit of Assessment (UoA) – against a set of criteria and to provide a quantitative ranking which can then be used for funding. The latter measure comprises international statistics on the frequency with which papers are produced by UK and other authors.

5.2.1 The 2001 Research Assessment Exercise (RAE)

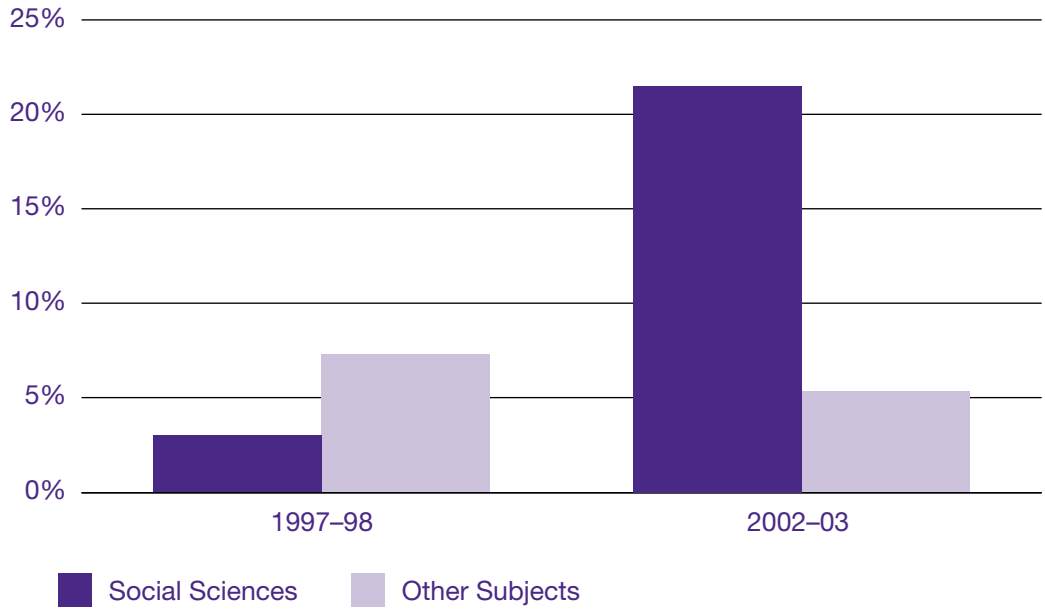
At first sight, the results from the RAE suggest the social sciences did very well. Figures 5.1 and 5.2 show that – had the results been funded on the same model as in 1996 – there would have been substantial funding gains relative to other subject areas, reflecting the relatively high quality of the social sciences. If fully funded, research funding as a whole in social sciences would have increased by 21%, as opposed to 5% for other subjects (the figures for the previous round were 3% and 8% respectively). The rate of funding would increase in almost all social science UoAs, contrasted to a decrease experienced by many disciplines in the previous RAE round. This is a result of the 2001 results and a 1996 decision taken by the Funding Council Board to even out inequalities among UoAs on the basis of cost.

Figure 5.1 Social Sciences QR Funding and Volume in staff FTEs



Source: HEFCE

Figure 5.2 Percentage change in QR funding post–2001 RAE, assuming full funding under the 1996 model



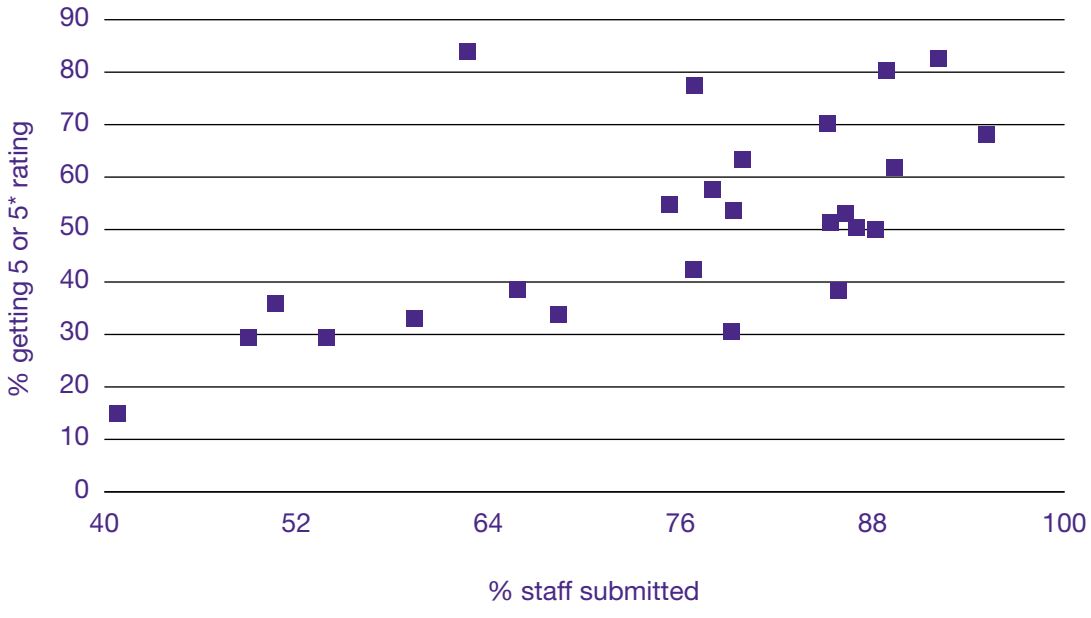
Source: HEFCE

Following publication of the results of the 2001 RAE in December of that year, we held a meeting of some 70 social scientists. This led us to conclude the following on the RAE process and its implications for the health of the social sciences:

- Overall, the RAE has significantly changed the nature and quality of British social science research – and hence of subjects themselves. It had led to the excision of many research-inactive staff and the differential growth of already good units. To that extent it has had a 'cleansing effect'; in places like the London Business School it has supported a much tougher policy on granting tenure. By and large those from 5 and 5* departments saw the RAE as being fair and a sensible way of assessing quality – a view not shared by others!;

- The greater sums 'won' by social sciences are to be welcomed but these may not be manifested in many universities because of HEFCE's revised funding allocation and the need to safeguard – at least in the short term – other 'loser' subjects;
- Many argued that the RAE had fostered certain homogeneities, multiple publishing of the same material and short-term research at the expense of pluralism, longer-term work and the demise of research monographs. It had applied the same criteria across the entirety of academia when physical sciences, social sciences and the humanities are not best judged on this basis. It was argued that the numerous UoAs had discouraged the submission of work that spanned disciplinary boundaries and hence fostered conservatism. And the process had encouraged 'game playing' to obtain the best results (see below);
- The RAE was predicated upon particular concepts of research and assessments of its value. For instance, many social scientists who have research and practitioner engagement with local communities told us how the perceived RAE system bias against such work led to it being run down. Regionally-orientated research may be of real significance and value (see Chapter 4) but (it was again argued) was often under-valued by RAE national panels;
- Panels' interpretations of the funding councils' guidance seemed to vary considerably in practice. It was evident that individual members of a single panel even differed on what constituted excellence, especially 'international excellence' with the 4/5 boundary being assessed very differently by different panels. Either economics is much poorer in global terms than other social sciences subjects or the panel was more 'Scrooge-like'. As a result, it is impossible to interpret the RAE results – especially simply in statistical terms – across the many panels. Figure 5.3 shows the huge variation amongst the host of UoAs which overlap the social sciences as previously defined. Law is the major outlier at the top of the graph;
- Considerable evidence of creativity exists whereby universities sought to maximise their results on the basis of previous experience with panels (e.g. the 1996 statistics panel was widely held to have favoured methodological developments rather than social statistics), or inference of rigour (e.g. a number of universities in 2001 submitted economics departments to the business and management UoA);

Figure 5.3 Selectivity and international excellence amongst different social science UoAs.



Source: HEFCE publications and HERO website

- The RAE UoA boundaries are misleading in many cases, especially where interdisciplinary work is commonplace (e.g. linguistics and psychology); in such cases, individuals or groups have a choice to submit to where they think best. Measuring the overall size and significance of research in a discipline can thus be enormously complicated;

- Interdisciplinary work is more acceptable in some subjects than others; in some, it is regarded as being less rigorous and praise-worthy and more difficult to assess than research in the core of a subject. This is particularly the case in the smaller subjects;

- Innovation in new research areas and methods is often from newly created units; existing 'star groups' in York and Warwick which have emerged in the last 20 years would not stand a chance of succeeding if they were launched in today's financial regime. A (current) 'winner takes all' scenario has emerged even in relatively inexpensive subjects; 'brand image', finance, attractiveness to overseas students and RAE grade are all inter-connected. The social sciences community is clear on the need to fund 'improvers' as well as established stars;

- The use of international advisers and user panels seemed to vary considerably in practice between different panels; some dissatisfaction was expressed and the need for more resources to make this work better, plus steps to increase the awareness by overseas researchers of the process, were requested for the next RAE.

Substantive findings about UK social science research proposed at the meeting were:

- Much of the work surveyed by panels was very Euro-centric, even UK-centric in parts. Some of this was driven by funding opportunities from the UK government and the EC. Allied to the reduction in funding from other countries (e.g. Japan and Taiwan), this has damaged the survivability of many minority subjects (such as Asian studies) which nevertheless have major ramifications for public policy, etc in the UK;

- There is too much research funded in pre-defined areas (e.g. ESRC's Thematic Objectives) which stifles diversity and in particular 'blue skies' research;

- Critical mass in the social sciences can be manifested in different ways. Perhaps surprisingly, student numbers may be a good indicator: without financial resilience provided by significant student bodies, some subjects (e.g. population studies) may head for extinction;

- The nature of effective publications clearly differs from one subject to another. In some subjects, commercial publishing based on projected market sales is absorbing publication effort; in others (e.g. economics) publications in major journals were the major determinant of research success but conscious efforts were made to assess the quality of new people to the system;

- What is missing in the academic social science community – and which is necessary to promote good, innovative research – is staff time. The pressures of teaching are extreme in many departments; for many, research is a weekend or out-of-hours activity. The ability to buy out time would be very beneficial;

- Research concentration is not as essential in the social sciences as in the physical sciences where expensive equipment is needed.

From all of this, we **recommend** that – if the RAE review process is to change (which is now apparently mandated) – the following criteria should apply in creating a new system:

- **It should take account of assessment criteria which reflects the views of the social science community and its beneficiaries, rather than being uniform across the whole of academia. These criteria should not disadvantage those working in any academic field in the social sciences, whether applied or theory-based or working at international, national or regional level;**

- **Fewer rather than more UoAs should apply but there might well need to be more than one social sciences UoA;**
- **The rewards gradient between those who get most and those who get least should be less steep than in the 2001 RAE (where this ratio was set at 9:1 rather than the 4:1 in the 1996 RAE and with half the research grades not funded at all), at least for the social sciences (which do not require access to large equipment or very large critical mass in all research);**
- **To avoid stasis and ossification, improvers (e.g. those who have moved to 4 from a lower grade) and those with potential should be supported so as to continue to improve;**
- **The 'rules of the game', including the funding model, should be known beforehand;**
- **The load involved in creating and assessing submissions should be less than in the exhausting 2001 Exercise which had high opportunity costs.**

5.2.2 Bibliometric analysis of social sciences research outputs

Given the significance attached to the bibliometric analyses by Lord May, President of the Royal Society, in the course of the 2000 Spending Review – which helped to produce the first significant increase in science funding for many years – we were keen to carry out a parallel exercise in the social sciences. We were surprised to learn how little appears to have been done in the social sciences in Britain.

Our wish was buttressed by seeing such studies as that of the Canadian Observatory on Science and Innovation (COSI, 2002) which sought to define Canadian social science strengths through bibliometric methods. That study was based on the Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) for the period 1981 to 2000. Some 54,769 papers published in 2000 were included in the Index. Of these, 55.5% originated from the USA, with Britain in second place (13.8%), Canada third (5.8%), then Australia (4.2%), Germany (4.1%), Netherlands (2.9%), France (2.2%), Sweden, Spain and Israel (1.4% each). The 7,581 total British social science publications recorded in 2000 represented a 106% increase over that in 1981 and an actual increase in the global proportion produced by British authors. The relative British national productivity is much higher than the corresponding shares in the physical sciences or engineering.

We sought professional advice on carrying out such a survey for the Commission, with extensions to assess the productivity per research-active social scientist and an impact assessment of the results. The feedback from respected UK experts was that the Canadian methodology was open to question (and did not in any case go as far as we desired): there are many difficulties in achieving a good coverage of social science literature (Hicks 1999) in general because of the high number of publications in book form and the many in national publications that are badly covered in the SSCI. Moreover, the SSCI is said to be strongly biased to US publications and practices; non-coverage in the SSCI has a big depressant effect on citation numbers. Finally, the resources needed to carry out a major study were beyond those available to the Commission.

Even acknowledging the shortcomings and likely biases in the use of the SSCI, it seems clear that the Canadian study reinforces other evidence included in this report: British social science produces a larger volume of output than anywhere else except the USA. We do not know quantitatively however how good it is or how much academic or other impact such work has – it may simply represent the output of a larger cohort of social scientists in Britain than elsewhere except the USA. More work should therefore be done to understand just how influential are the many products from British social scientists. Accordingly, **we recommend that ESRC commissions a substantial study to measure the internationally distinctive nature and the relative strengths and weaknesses of**

British social science by bibliometric means. This must include measures of impact and influence of UK work, carried out if necessary over extended time periods. It must also set out the limitations of using citation analyses in this way.

5.2.3 The adequacy of research training in the social sciences

It is obvious that the training of researchers is of paramount importance, both for universities (as future teachers and researchers) and outside academia in professional practice. The requirements may, however, be rather different. We observe elsewhere that, for government and many commercial organisations, research carried out as part of a Masters degree may be entirely satisfactory: the PhD is often seen as 'over-kill' and may even induce habits (such as filling relatively relaxed time scales) which are inimical to the needs of the employer. We are concerned that there is now a reduced number of studentships available for Masters degrees of this type given ESRC's decision in 1999 to devote more resource to PhD studentships and to impose a 1+3 year structure (i.e. a one years Masters course focused on research methods followed by a three year PhD). Based on representations made by the non-academic sector, we are not convinced that the balance of resource is ideal and believe this merits a review. We therefore **recommend that ESRC should carry out a review as soon as the first cohort emerges from the new system, taking into account the wider need rather than simply those of universities. In addition it should monitor student demand and progress up to this point.**

Evidence presented elsewhere (e.g. see Section 5.4) makes it clear that there is also a genuine problem of replacing retiring academic staff in some social sciences with new entrants, and with creating adequate research capacity. So far as the future staffing of universities is concerned, however, we have not analysed matters in depth because of the recent investigation by the British Academy (BA 2002). The BA's Review Committee undertook the Review in two stages. In the first stage, it gathered official statistical evidence and undertook a large-scale survey of all heads of department in the humanities and social sciences. A total of 721 heads of department from 129 institutions responded to the survey. In addition, the Committee consulted all those with an interest in the funding and support of postgraduate research. It received submissions from the following: 34 subject associations and other representative bodies; the AHRB and the ESRC; 11 other funding agencies; and four universities with institutional case studies.

The BA found evidence of an emerging crisis of recruitment to PhD research and subsequent academic and research careers. This involved the increasing difficulty of attracting good quality UK PhD students in the humanities and social sciences. There are severe disincentives to undertaking a PhD and entering an academic career. These disincentives are primarily financial, as well (it was argued) as insufficient numbers of PhD stipends in the humanities and social sciences, and an academic profession that is poorly paid. This is already having an impact on the recruitment of PhD students and academic staff. The BA has found evidence of major difficulties for subjects that include business and management studies, economics, education, law, modern languages, politics, and psychology. After the launch of the initial report on 21 September 2001 at a consultative conference attended by senior representatives from universities, employers, the civil service and funding bodies, feedback was elicited. The BA's recommendations to government and other relevant parties were reviewed in the light of this feedback in 2002 and now are:

- Increase the number of PhD studentship awards available in the humanities and social sciences;
- Allow phased waiving of student debt;
- Introduce greater flexibility:
  - a less rigid PhD structure;

  - support more complex projects (including support for 4 year PhD studentships);
  - attract and fund part-time research students with relevant professional skills;
  - foster collaboration between institutions at a regional level in the provision of teaching expertise and of library and other research resources to benefit both students and institutions;
  - support areas of shortage;
- Increase the number of postdoctoral fellowships;
- Improve academic pay and conditions;
- Develop initiatives to support areas of strategic national need (in endangered and in emerging subject areas).

The similarity of most of these to our own recommendations in regard to creating research capacity for universities – based on complementary evidence – is reassuring.

5.2.4 Quantitative and qualitatively-based research and training

The issue of quantitative as opposed to qualitative approaches in the social sciences generates much heat in any discussion – and has done at least since the 1960s. We are clear that the approaches to be used are those most suited to a particular problem – rather than what suits the researcher. On the other hand there is much circumstantial and some direct evidence to support two contentions:

- That the UK social sciences community is good by international standards in qualitative research (e.g. see Forbes et al 2002);
- That there is a deficit of quantitative skills in the UK social sciences (and elsewhere – hence the setting up of the Smith inquiry by ministers into mathematics and statistics education). We were repeatedly told of this deficit, even in areas like criminology.

Following a proposal by the then Chief Executive, Dr Gordon Marshall, in 2000 ESRC formally recognised the need for an initiative to raise skills in quantitative methods in UK social sciences. Its response was to embed a number of actions in different programmes. Thus, quantitative skills are fostered in the first year of the 1+3 new research training (see above); a £5.3 million programme involving both training and research methods was launched; the importance of such methods is emphasised to referees as well as grant applicants; and a co-ordinating centre of research methods is being set up. All this should also be seen alongside a ramping up of investment in the creation of social sciences databases. In addition, however, the original analysis also struck a chord throughout Europe. Members of the Standing Conference for the Social Sciences of the European Science Foundation echoed the sentiments in Dr Marshall's paper with respect to their own countries and called for a pan-European initiative. As a result, ESRC has coordinated a proposal for a set of quantitative methods training workshops for European social scientists. This will be supported by the European Science Foundation and by scholars from eleven European countries.

We are clear that actions to foster quantitative skills are an important contribution to British social sciences. We commend ESRC for its initiatives in this area.

5.3 Teaching quality

British academia has been subject to much greater investigation of the quality of teaching, and the student experience generally, than occurs in any other country in the world. The system has been heavily criticised by many academics as imposing huge burdens which

reduce teaching and research time alike and by being an unsafe measure of academic teaching quality. Indeed, the system has now been changed after criticism of its cost-effectiveness. Elsewhere we take up the serious issue of pressures on staff time through undue burdens of accountability and the costs this imposes on the system. For now, however, we take the results from the Teaching Quality Assessment exercise carried out in every department across England and Northern Ireland by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) as the best and most comprehensive independent source of teaching quality information. We summarise below as direct quotations from the relevant QAA report the headlines for those subjects where reports are available and are germane to our concerns.

Business and management

The quality of HE in business and management is satisfactory and is approved in 158 of the 162 providers considered. There is, however, wide variation in the quality across the institutions. This ranges from provision which is highly commended to a small proportion which suffers from major shortcomings in need of urgent improvement [this applies almost solely to provision by Further Education Colleges (FECs) rather than universities; the average grade for HEIs was 3.7 out of a maximum of 4 whilst that in FECs was 3.3]. The greatest strength across the system is in student support and guidance. The weakest overall aspect is in quality management and enhancement. Source: QAA QO5/2001

Economics

The quality of education in all 60 universities is approved and the reviewers find the quality to be good and sometimes excellent. The overall quality of teaching is high, with clear strategies, varied methods and extensive use of information technology (IT). Marking is rigorous, consistent and at an appropriate level. [Other] assessment practices are weaker. Just over half of the providers have robust and constructive quality management systems – the weakest aspect overall. Source: QAA QO1/2001

Education

A total of 77 universities and colleges offer a range of programmes; the quality of provision is approved in 76 of them. Twenty-six per cent of the providers achieved a perfect score (4/4) in all six aspects of provision. Over 60% of institutions operate with a clearly articulated strategy for teaching, learning and assessment. Education programmes are notable for successfully integrating theory and practice and encouraging practitioners to reflect on their own practice. New technology is applied successfully in a minority of programmes. Student progression and achievement are generally high. In half the institutions there is scope for improvement in the application of quality assurance systems e.g. the views of students were not always sought. Source: QAA QO10/2001

Geography

The subject is attractive to the students and is taught by well-qualified, enthusiastic, caring and professional staff. Of the 78 providers of geography programmes in England and Northern Ireland, including six which combine geography and environmental studies, 42 were visited of which 25 (32% of the total providers) were assessed as excellent. All of the remainder were assessed as satisfactory except for one provider which was deemed to be unsatisfactory and is to be revisited. Geography departments have clearly articulated aims and objectives which are well matched to institutional missions and which are carried through into curricula and syllabuses. Geography is characterised by the wide diversity of provision. There has been a growing commitment to providing students with transferable skills related to subsequent employment. However, links with employers have not been well developed in most cases. Most geography students are traditional GCE A-Level entrants with high grades. Geography departments have made little effort to widen access. Source QAA QO11/95

Politics

This subject has demonstrated a high level of achievement during the reviews. Twenty-three per cent achieved the maximum possible score for all six aspects of provision.

Curricula vary widely depending on the focus and culture of the provider. They are generally well-designed and successfully develop transferable and analytical skills. Teaching and learning in politics are generally of high quality (though assessment procedures are sometimes not made clear to students and are not always clearly linked to learning outcomes). There is scope for improvement in the effectiveness of the quality procedures. Source: QAA QO7/2001

Psychology

There are 85 institutions offering psychology. The subject attracts large numbers of applicants of which a majority are women; students with non-traditional entry requirements are well represented. Reviewers found the provision to be good overall and often excellent. A high proportion of graduates progress directly into employment or to further study, and unemployment rates are correspondingly low.

Most undergraduate programmes are accredited by the British Psychological Society (BPS). Although the BPS does not dictate the content of the curricula, it requires coverage of core topics, limiting the potential variation of undergraduate curricula. Postgraduate curricula are more distinct, although accreditation continues to impose certain constraints. Practitioner doctorates, long established in clinical psychology, are developing in other areas, including counselling and occupational psychology. Staff research and, for some programmes, staff practice in applied fields ensure the currency and relevance of curricula. Most providers encourage a wide range of key transferable skills, often embedded in the curriculum. The quality of teaching is high, with clear objectives, appropriate strategies and some examples of innovation. Assessment practice is generally sound, employing a range of methods. Weaknesses were identified in the assessment process in a significant number of institutions. Quality management and enhancement was the weakest aspect of provision overall, with only 40% of providers awarded [the top] grade 4. Progression and completion rates are good for undergraduates and postgraduates. Source: QAA QO5/2000

Social policy and administration

The overall picture of the quality of education in social policy and administration that emerges from an analysis of the assessment reports is a very positive one. All the 19 institutions visited were providing education of at least a satisfactory quality and 68% of institutions visited (38% of the total providers) were judged to be providing education of an excellent quality. The assessors were impressed by the provision in most institutions of up-to-date, relevant and, in many cases, intellectually stimulating and challenging syllabuses. A wide range of courses and options is available in many programmes, building on a secure core of social policy concepts and frameworks. A notable feature of social policy and administration courses is the successful integration of current staff scholarship and research into curriculum development and into teaching. Staff are well qualified for the wide range of courses being taught. There needs to be a greater emphasis on vocational relevance in some programmes. More attention needs to be paid to the acquisition by students of transferable skills, including IT skills in particular. Source: QAA QO9/95

Sociology

Analysis of the quality assessment reports affirms that, overall, the quality of sociology provision is good. All institutions provided sociology education that was approved by the assessors. The assessors were impressed by the provision in most institutions of up-to-date, relevant and challenging courses. A wide range of options is available in many programmes and most enable students to develop a secure foundation in the discipline. There was considerable evidence of the successful integration of both scholarship and research into the curriculum and into teaching and learning. Sociology providers are diverse in their approaches to teaching, learning and assessment and in the emphasis given to theory, research skills and the exploration of social structures. Positive features include: well-organised and presented teaching, providing students with clear objectives and stimulating content; flexibility and choice across the curriculum; innovative methods involving enthusiastic students; research-led curricula; good handbooks; flexible access and opportunities for mature students; low drop-out rates and good support systems,

including central services; detailed induction procedures and effective tutorial systems; a high level of access to good IT resources; and detailed quality assurance systems. For the benefit of students, many providers need to review the amount of time given to methodological areas and research skills. Source: QAA QO 8/96

From this we conclude that – with the exception of some concerns in some institutions (very largely in further education colleges) so far as business and management is concerned – the officially measured quality of teaching in the main social sciences disciplines seems generally to be of excellent quality. Individual vice-chancellors, deans and heads of department – to whom public reports on an individual subject study basis within each HEI are provided for any necessary action – have strong incentives to fix any problems identified by the QAA. Given all this (and whilst we completely accept that there is never room for complacency), we do not feel the need to make any recommendations in regard to teaching quality in the social sciences.

5.4 Recruitment and retention of social sciences staff

A thriving set of disciplines will have enough staff turnover to at least maintain the volume of research and teaching carried out by the community, whilst also at least preserving – preferably enhancing – the quality of the work carried out and the intellectual vigour of the community. Intuitively, the social sciences seem particularly vulnerable given their rapid expansion in the 1960s and 1970s and consequent impending retirements.

To obtain a qualitative summary of the views of senior academics on recruitment and retention issues, we commissioned an investigative reporter to speak to a sample of heads of departments who would agree to go on the record. His findings are summarised in Box 5.1.

Box 5.1
Is there a recruitment and retention problem in the social sciences? The views of some leading players interviewed for the Commission

Two years into the 'social science century,' are university departments managing to recruit and retain academic staff of the highest quality? It depends on who you talk to.

In the most prestigious universities, sociology and politics departments are finding it relatively easy to attract top-quality researchers. Some are even cherry-picking staff from America. But economics, and business and management departments in the same universities are struggling to fill academic positions. And as soon as you move beyond the privileged world of the elite universities, the difficulties in recruiting good scholars begin to deepen and spread.

In economics, the recruitment crisis begins at postgraduate level. Newly-minted economics BAs tend to find the prospect of three or four years of penury as a PhD student less than enticing. Most turn their backs on academia and head for jobs in the financial sector. So university departments are forced to trawl the globe for postgraduates. 'We're having to go further and further afield to get people,' says Abhinay Muthoo, head of economics at the University of Essex.

This is not a problem in itself, of course – there is nothing to suggest that foreign PhD students are inferior to the home-grown variety. The difficulty comes when this international band begin to look for jobs. Having few ties to Britain, they are inclined to go where the money is, even if that means leaving the country.

‘Because of the lack of British PhD students, we have to compete in a world market for junior staff,’ says Richard Jackman, convener of the LSE’s economics department. ‘It’s not like most economic activities, where there is a native labour force.’

In this world market, British departments find it almost impossible to compete against their more moneyed American counterparts. As Professor Muthoo explains: ‘For a lectureship post, we get about a hundred applications – quite a few from the US. They come here and get excited by the intellectual atmosphere and the quality of the department. But then they say to us: “I’m going to get twice as much at an American institution that is academically inferior.”’

Economics PhDs are also attracted away from academic jobs by the government, the Bank of England, World Bank, and the OECD. These organisations tend to pay better than the universities. They also offer researchers greater intellectual freedom and influence than they might enjoy in the financial sector.

Although economics faces a particularly severe recruitment challenge, it is not the only discipline to have felt the cold winds of domestic and international competition in recent years. Departments in other fields have also become dominated by foreign students, and they too complain of losing talented junior staff to overseas universities and non-academic employers.

‘Our brightest students are not going for postgraduate degrees as much as they used to,’ says Caroline Humphrey, head of social anthropology at Cambridge. ‘It’s simply impossible for many to continue because they don’t get grants. We have a good-sized PhD body – about eighty students – but 85–90% of them are from overseas. It’s difficult to maintain a healthy profession when there’s not a bigger flow of British students.’

It is the same story at the LSE, where the anthropology department has seen a drop in the number of British postgraduates. At Essex, head of sociology Lydia Morris points to a similar problem. ‘We’re not producing a generation of home-grown sociology graduate students,’ she says. ‘That’s our real recruitment issue.’ These departments have a high international profile and tend to attract unusually large numbers of foreign students. But because they send disproportionate numbers of students on to academic jobs, the lack of British PhD students in them has implications for the whole sector.

Sociology and anthropology departments also lose gifted PhDs to think tanks, development agencies, and the government. This trend has accelerated at Sussex, according to Luke Martell, who is head of sociology. ‘Nowadays,’ he says, ‘more people who do PhDs and were planning on having an academic career are instead doing other things. They find fault with the conditions of work in academia – long hours, too much bureaucracy, too much change.’

Some believe that the mass retirement of academic staff in the next few years will create a seller’s market in which departments will struggle to recruit junior lecturers. To make matters worse, American universities will be facing a demographic time-bomb of their own and will be hungry for gifted young academics. In this scenario, the dwindling numbers of British social science PhDs seeking university jobs (but see Section B, 10.2.3) may turn out to be a severe problem.

For the moment, though, disciplines like anthropology, sociology, and politics are not facing the same general recruitment crisis that economics and business management are experiencing. Department heads suggest two reasons for this.

The first reason is ideological. In disciplines such as sociology and anthropology, which hold the understanding of human actions to be more valuable than the creation of wealth, PhD students tend to accept – albeit grudgingly – that pay is less important than intellectual satisfaction. As Luke Martell explains: ‘It’s the nature of the sociology student. They aren’t doing it with the intention of earning huge amounts of money in the future, and they are willing to enter professions where salaries are relatively low.’ In business-oriented disciplines, on the other hand, students are inclined by training to measure their worth in terms of earnings.

The second explanation, which is probably more important, has to do with the nature of the competition. Economics PhDs not only get more attractive job offers from outside academia than do anthropologists; they also get better offers from overseas universities. A middle-ranking American institution is likely to pay little more than $40,000 for anthropology and politics lecturers, but the same university will gladly shell out $60,000 – $70,000 [said by some economists to be higher – and this for a 9 or 10 month contract] for economics PhDs. So while virtually all British social scientists could increase their salaries by crossing the Atlantic, only some would see a dramatic improvement.

Some British universities have responded to international competitors by feeding more money into the worst-hit subject areas. Leading the way is the LSE's economics department, which now pays new PhDs more than £40,000 a year. As convener Richard Jackman explains: 'We don't feel it's inappropriate for us to try and remain in the top level. Both we and the government believe that there should be some departments in this country that are up to the best in the world.' But the department still finds it almost impossible to compete against the richest American institutions.

It has been argued that universities should be given more leeway to increase salaries of academic staff in shortage subjects. This would undoubtedly help to ease the recruitment crisis in economics. But it might help less in departments that are experiencing more specific shortages. Education and sociology departments fill most of their positions relatively easily, but (like other fields) they often struggle to recruit skilled statisticians.

The variation that can exist within a discipline is particularly clear from the case of psychology. As R. J. Snowden, head of psychology at the University of Cardiff, explains: 'There are certain areas of the discipline where we have terrible problems with recruitment. In fields such as occupational, clinical, and forensic psychology – anywhere there's a commercial branch to the occupation – it's almost impossible to recruit at an academic level.'

The premium placed on academics with 'real world' skills is a particular problem for the new universities, which place a greater emphasis on vocational learning. The former polytechnics were among the most enthusiastic proponents of the social sciences in the 1970s, but many are now moving away from traditional subjects. The University of Central England (UCE) has ceased to offer degrees in economics and is no longer looking to fill posts in politics and sociology. John Rouse, dean of law and social sciences at UCE, reckons that the future lies in more applied fields such as criminal justice. These are, of course, the very fields where competition from non-academic employers tends to be strongest.

If social science departments are finding it increasingly difficult to recruit scholars at the beginning of their careers, how well are they managing to hold on to older, more established staff?

Again, it depends on the institution and the subject. Caroline Humphrey says that although senior staff in the Cambridge social anthropology department have received generous offers from US institutions, most have decided to remain. The department has even recruited top-level researchers from America. 'People do value the relative academic freedom here,' she says. 'It's much less full of politicised position-taking.'

Senior staff are not, in general, as mobile as junior staff. They will usually only move if they think that their quality of life will dramatically improve as a result. Charles Stafford, head of anthropology at the LSE, says that most senior academics in his department could double their salaries (and escape the London property market) by moving to America. But he perceives a greater threat from the general dislike of 'busy work'. 'There's a feeling that the quality of the job has gone down,' says Dr. Stafford. 'They have to put up with the sort of time-wasting work that senior colleagues in the US don't have to deal with.'

Again, economics suffers the worst retention problems. Many lose professors to the US. And even when departments do manage to hold on to senior staff, it's clear that this is just an interim solution to a deeper crisis. As Richard Jackman says: 'You get the feeling that we're hanging on because of inertia and loyalty to the institution. We're not investing in the future.'

Joel Budd

All such personal views – however coloured by everyday experience – are inevitably partial. Fortunately there has been a system-wide recent review of the staffing situation in universities. HEFCE publication 2002/43 reported a study into the trends in HE staff numbers from 1995 to 2000, and projections of staff numbers forward to 2010 under a range of scenarios. The study was designed to assess the future relationships between staff numbers and recruitment levels across the sector. It did not address, though it did recognise, the problems that can be created by staff moving from one institution to another and the specific problems that can arise for particular institutions, or groups of institutions, within certain regions. The report says that:

- There was an overall 6.5% increase in staff numbers over the period 1995 to 2000, mostly in subjects allied to medicine (52.2%), computer science and related areas (29.7%), creative arts and design (22.4%), biological sciences (15.4%), 'other physical sciences' (15.2%), education (13.3%), business and administrative studies (13%), law (12.1%) and social, political and economic studies (10.9%) – with substantial declines in engineering and some other areas;
- The proportion of staff on temporary contracts was stable at around 14%;
- The proportion of staff on lecturer grades declined whilst those on professorial grades increased;
- The proportion of staff aged 50 or over increased overall from 35 to 41% but should stabilise;
- The proportion of female staff increased from 26 to 31% and will continue to rise;
- The number of recruits required to sustain the academic industry is very sensitive to any overall growth in staff numbers. Even small increases in staff numbers entail very large increases in the numbers of recruits.

The report describes the difficulties in estimating what the required growth in staff will be. Nonetheless, it is suggested that – under any reasonable set of assumptions consistent with government policy – the required growth in staff numbers will be substantial in part because of the demographically-driven growth in student numbers in coming years. But if these numbers do not 'turn up', the report concludes that for all subjects other than mathematics, physics and engineering 'the results of the projections are unambiguous: they show that current recruitment levels are more than enough to maintain current staff numbers' (HEFCE 2002, p. 28).

The study was based on statistical modelling but did not involve any assessment of the difficulties in recruitment. However, the issue was considered using the evidence from a series of surveys carried out into recruitment and retention commissioned by HEFCE, the Standing Conference of Principals (SCOP), the Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA) and UUK. These surveys found that, whilst there was not a general problem with retention of academic staff, there were problems in those subjects where there were higher paid opportunities outside the HE sector, for example in computing, accountancy, law and economics. They also showed that the loss of small numbers of senior high calibre staff could have a large impact. Recruitment difficulties were found to be more general, especially when trying to recruit more senior staff. Further, recruitment difficulties were shown to be increasing over the period of the four surveys from 1998 to 2001.

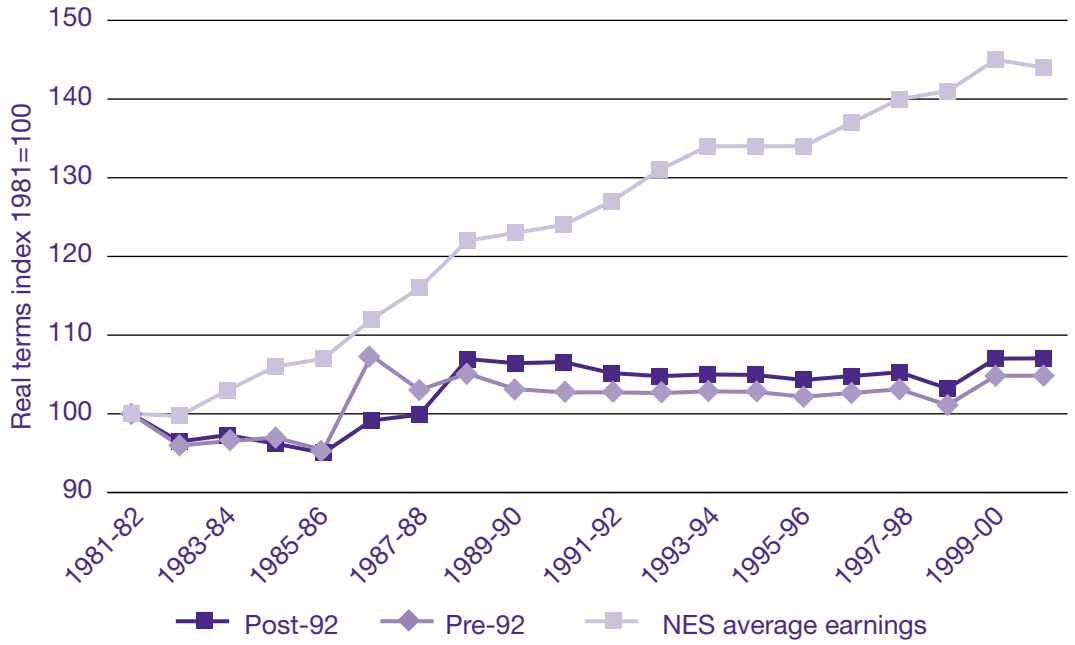
A superficial reading of some of the press summaries of the HEFCE publication might lead to the idea that 'there is no problem' unless the numbers of staff required are actually to rise (from recruitment of more students). Such a conclusion is not supported by the submissions made to us. Based on these, we believe that:

- It is much harder to recruit certain categories of new staff in London than in some other parts of Britain. Average house prices are a major factor: these differ by a factor of three between London and the North East;
- There is a need to take account of quality variations in the staff recruited. The numbers of applicants in some disciplines where there are well-paid alternatives is sometimes low and choice is heavily constrained;
- In some subjects (notably economics) many of those appointed are non-British. Whilst in itself this may not necessarily be a problem, it can lead to any applied research undertaken being focused on countries other than the UK;
- The present relationship between staff and student numbers may not be sustainable. Many social science staff feel they are teaching large numbers of students to support loss-making departments outside the social sciences – with the consequence that this restricts severely their scholarship and research. To remedy that situation, there will therefore need to be an increase in staff numbers in these subjects over and above what any growth in student numbers might suggest. As the HEFCE report showed, such additional growth would entail very large increases in the recruitment rates.

In addition, we have much anecdotal evidence and some statistical support for staffing problems in economics (see Boxes 5.1 and 5.2). There are some 1,400 economics faculty in British universities (see Table 10.2). Seventy-nine economics PhDs were awarded in 2000/01 to British-domiciled students; another 200 were awarded to non-British students (see Section B, 10.2.3). For reasons we give above and in Section B, we suspect many of the latter will return home and many of the former will never take up academic jobs, at least in the UK. Our best evidence is that a maximum of 20 or so per annum will take up academic posts under present conditions; this may be a generous estimate given past experience at LSE, Nottingham and other top departments. We are certain therefore that there is a very real problem in attracting British students of a suitable calibre into an academic career in economics. Something of the same problem exists in business and management, though there the general problem is to attract high calibre people back after they have been successful in business and industry.

We believe (see Box 5.2 and BA 2002) that similar if less obvious problems exist in a number of other disciplines, at least so far as attracting very high quality individuals – the future leaders of those disciplines – are concerned. This is buttressed by several indicators, such as the inability of one private foundation to disburse about 20% of their research funding in 2001–02 because of a lack of high quality proposals. At the root of the matter are academic salaries; Figure 5.4 shows how academic and related salaries in universities have diminished in relation to average earnings over many years. On one Cambridge part-time Masters course for (typically) 40 year old police superintendents, the 'pupils' earn 50% more than the full professors teaching them. Salaries, though, are not the only factor even if they are the major one: increasing staff loads (especially in administration as a partial consequence of new quality and other accountability systems), a perceived loss of status within the community at large and a diminution in the concept of public service are also held to be significant factors.

Figure 5.4 Academic and academic-related pay and average earnings* 1981–2001 (in real terms), subdivided by pre- and post-1992 universities.



*Average of all full-time employees (manual and non-manual)
Source: AUT; New Earnings Survey (NES)

We see no solution to the economics (and the more general) problem without much better incentives. The raising of the PhD stipend to a minimum of £12,000 as a consequence of the Roberts SET review (Roberts 2002) and the 2002 Spending Review is very welcome, but will still be inadequate in the case of economics students. It cannot, in any case, be decoupled from the modest taxed salary they would subsequently earn as a university lecturer. Given all this, we are led to the conclusion that market-driven PhD stipends and university salaries are the only solution to recruiting and retaining top quality staff. However it is done, **we recommend to the OST and research councils that the PhD stipend should be set in shortage areas at around the average initial social sciences graduate salary** (£18,272 in 2001/02 – see Section 10.3). **We further recommend that, to ensure appropriate future academic leadership, government funds universities in such a way that significantly raised, if differentiated, salaries can be paid in shortage areas to ensure continuity of supply of able staff;** we make some proposals in Section 5.9.6 on what these might need to be to recruit and retain good new staff.

More generally, we believe that there is a need to review the funding levels per student associated with different disciplines. The existing discipline-based banding of funding was introduced in 1994 (HEFCE C6/94) and the world has moved on significantly since then. It takes no real account of market need (e.g. to recruit and retain good quality business and management staff). In so doing it either cripples the quality of certain lowly funded disciplines or encourages cross-subsidisation and lack of transparency in the internal funding allocations in universities. **We therefore recommend that HEFCE and the other funding councils review the funding band allocation on a subject by subject basis**, at least in the social sciences.

5.5 Opinions from interested parties

Here we consider evidence and opinions from international and national bodies.

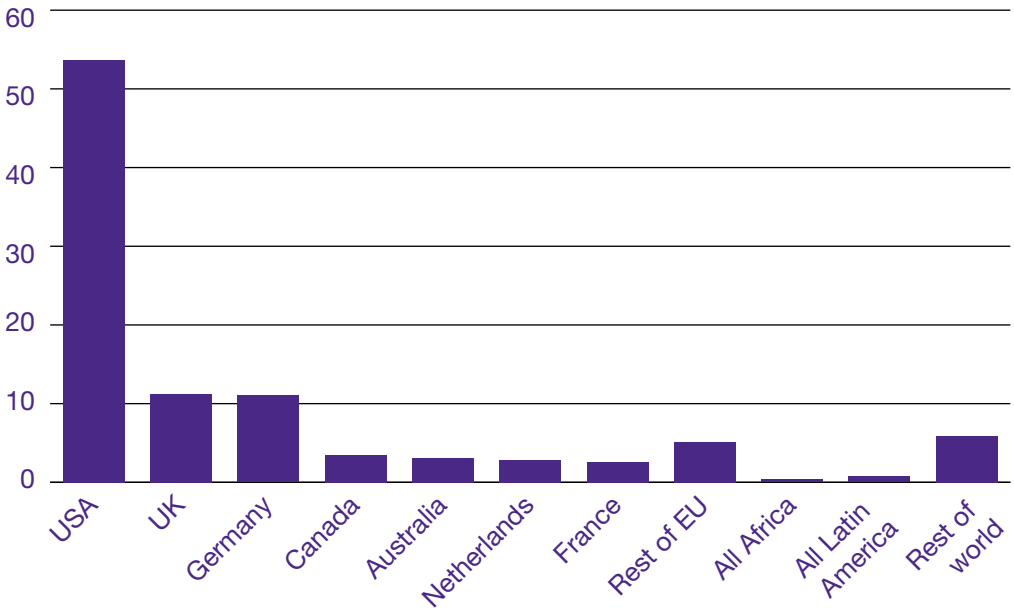
5.5.1 International sources of evidence

Two groups of (substantially non-UK) academics have recently provided information, some of it circumstantial, which bears on the health of Britain's social sciences. These are the

editors of the International Encyclopaedia of Social and Behavioural Sciences and a sub-group of distinguished foreign academics quizzed under an ESRC-sponsored project.

The multi-national encyclopaedia is the largest social science publishing work of recent years – perhaps ever. Published in 2001, it amounts to some 16,696 pages in length plus two volumes of indexes – a total of 26 volumes. Contributions were sought from a global range of authors on topics defined by the team of editors. Over 3,800 individuals contributed text. Figure 5.5 shows the geographical distribution of contributions by the country of affiliation of the first author. Some of these affiliations are potentially misleading e.g. through nationals of various countries working in centres such as the European Research Centre in Italy. A number of the affiliations disguise nationals of Third World countries working in First World ones. It is also entirely likely that the distribution of authors is partially influenced by the distribution of the contacts of the editors. Overall, however, the scale of the enterprise is such that the message is clear and convincing: the UK is seen as a major power globally in the social and behavioural sciences, tying with Germany for second place behind the (apparently) hugely dominant USA.

Figure 5.5 The percentage of contributors to the International Encyclopaedia of Social and Behavioural Sciences by first author's national affiliation.



Source: calculated from the list of authors.

The second indicator arises from a report by the Academy of Learned Societies for the Social Sciences for the ESRC (Forbes et al 2002). Based on a questionnaire and telephone discussions, it focused on research that can only be done at an international level. The study sought to identify where the UK was already seen to be strong and what fruitful avenues of future international research existed. Its conclusions are rather tentative (since it is based on only 38 respondents) and may even be biased (nearly two-thirds of respondents were from the UK). No response was received from any economist. But the responses received included those from extremely distinguished editors of top quality international journals who see research results from many countries of the world. Some of the key findings were:

- Non-UK respondents regard UK social sciences research as world class in many areas, though a global leader in relatively few;
- The major comparator country is the USA – which dominates social sciences research – but the UK is seen as 'first everywhere' in the European Research Area;

- The UK has a particular strength in qualitative analysis and in the application of social sciences research to policy-making (compare this view, largely that of senior non-UK social scientists, with those expressed in Section 5.6);
- Intergroup and intercultural relations was the highest rated of UK research.

5.5.2 Views of employers and related organisations

The bulk of opinions from employers and organisations representing them fall into two distinct camps. The first of these relates to education, training and research specifically in business and management topics; this is addressed in Section 5.7.1 with relevant statistics set out in Section B. The other relates to core competences expected of all graduates[3] – the ability to work in teams, analytical and (especially) quantitative skills plus the ability to articulate clearly the key issues and solutions in speech, writing and presentations (see, for instance, many Learning and Skills Council Regional Skill Audits). Other than skills which are manifestly vocational (e.g. economics for some parts of the financial services industries or which relate to chartered membership of a profession), we have not detected any other requirements from employers which are specific to social science graduates.

We must however report the views of many members of one particular group of organisations who are trenchant about the social sciences in particular and about many academics and academic structures in general. These views come from think tanks – bodies which are sometimes competitors to academic groups and which are even seen by a few academics as largely parasitic, drawing out and popularising work from academic journals. We deal with them in more detail in Chapter 7. It is sufficient here to say that some are staffed at senior levels by former academics who claim to have grown weary of the constraints of a university environment. These were characterised as the rigidities of administration and academic hierarchies, allied to (allegedly) glacial speeds of investigations.

Finally, one area where there was a huge disparity between many academics and other parties was in regard to the nature of social science research. Other than many economists (see next section), our academic colleagues were keen to point out the successes and influence of past research and to emphasise the strong performance of UK social scientists in many disciplines. As a Commission, we accept and celebrate that British social sciences are strong in many respects. But we were struck by the strength of feeling and the degree of consistency of opinion about the poor quality of a surprising proportion of research grant applications. Some research funders, referees for proposals (including business and other lay people), think tanks and a variety of other bodies such as the Association of Research Centres in the Social Sciences (ARCISS) plus a number of senior academics criticised strongly what was done or proposed by some academics. The most common observations were that some proposals were amateur in their focus, in defining the problem to be tackled, and in the methodology to be used, or were simply aiming to repeat previous work or tackle trivial issues. It was widely argued that too many researchers were precious in their approach and outlook and were unaware of relevant work going on outside their own narrow discipline. The alleged lack of any truly new ideas or approaches was frequently emphasised. Is this simply rent-seeking on the part of academics trying to give research contract funders what they think they want or is it representative of the social sciences more generally? Opinions diverged strongly on this question. It should also be said that we heard some similar criticisms of research applications in areas outside the social sciences even though proposals in these areas are more difficult for lay people to assess.

5.5.3 Views of individual social scientists or learned societies

Perhaps unsurprisingly, these views differ enormously – but economists are much more despondent about their discipline than all others. A forceful but quite typical view is expressed in Box 5.2; this is echoed in surveys of heads of departments of economics.

3 CSU/AGCAS (2002) reports a survey that indicates 50% of job advertisements for graduates do not now demand any particular degree subject but do require certain core competences.

Box 5.2
The deep problems with British academic economics

British economics is in a mess. Quality, in my judgement, has dropped dramatically over the last twenty years. We were a real power in economics research. Now we are second-rate.

First, Britain is terribly short of young lecturers whose work is going to change economics. People are not doing original things; they merely follow what the young Americans do. This is just my view and some will disagree with it, but mine is backed up by a look at the Social Science Citation Index which shows that our people under 40 years old are not being cited. Go back twenty years and look up, by contrast, the young David Hendry, Steve Nickell, Angus Deaton (now left for the US), Avinash Dixit (now left for the US), and so on.

Second, Warwick's best undergraduates have no interest in being university lecturers. They are starting City jobs on £35,000 with a signing-on bonus of £10,000. It is the same in other universities.

Say we think more broadly. The best source of information on the quality of British science comes from the Institute for Scientific Information (ISI). ISI is in the process of preparing a list of the top 200–250 researchers in a set of 21 fields. Of the approximately 110 personal records published to date in each of 11 categories, Britain shows up poorly compared to the United States. A list of star scientists – leaving caveats aside these are the best 1200 or so scientists in the world today – can be found on the internet at isihighlycited.com.

So how does Britain do? Nowhere nearly as well as the United States, but better than other European nations, is the answer.

The data show that, of the 1,200 top scientists around the globe, the great majority are in the US. We have approximately 80, Germany approximately 65, and France 30.

Of the 100 top physicists in the world, only 2 are in Britain. In molecular biology and genetics, we have just 3 of the world's star researchers. In microbiology, 8 of the world's leading scientists are at Harvard Medical School, and 71 in the United States. By contrast, the British Isles has 6. In engineering, 4 of the top one hundred researchers are working in British universities.

The economics data are not yet out, but ISI tell me that they will be published early in 2003, and I believe the numbers will show the same pattern, and perhaps be even more extreme. If we look at the work of Tom Coupe, a Belgian, whose work is probably reliable, we find something interesting but disturbing: of the 200 most-cited economists in the world, only 7 now work in British universities.

Andrew Oswald, Professor of Economics, Warwick University

5.6 Governments and the social sciences

We show in Section 10.4 that the great part of the funding for the social sciences comes directly or indirectly from central government. Some of this research funding is channelled through the dual support system or response-mode grants and there is – crucially – no direct government intervention in the content of university-level courses. Thus there is still considerable autonomy on the part of social scientists in higher education to teach and research in areas of their choosing. Despite this, there are some indirect pressures on staff to carry out work in particular areas and topics, many of real interest to governments; moreover, many of the problems faced by governments are of primary importance to many social scientists. For this reason, we now report on the findings of many discussions with government employees.

5.6.1 Government perceptions of social science research work

Given the half million or so people who work in the departments and Executive Agencies in Whitehall-based government – let alone those in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales – it is no surprise that there is a variety of within-government views about the contribution of the social sciences. But we were surprised how many common elements arose in our discussions and in documents submitted to us which were based on discussions across Whitehall, buttressed by some discussions in the devolved administrations.

On the plus side, there are many good examples of productive relationships between the social science community and government. The view of officials is that in some areas at least this situation is strengthening. Some examples where this has worked well have already been cited (Chapter 3). The contributions of many academics as specialist advisers to Parliamentary Select Committees are incontrovertible. Thus some key social scientists are well respected, trusted and regularly consulted in Parliament and the civil service alike. Some politicians do understand that only rarely can social science give unequivocal answers. Despite this lack of immediate utility, the climate is propitious for social science contributions. In 2000, the then Secretary of State for Education said that:

> **"Social science should be at the heart of policy-making. We need a revolution in relations between government and the social research community – we need social scientists to help determine what works and why, and what type of policy initiatives are likely to be most effective. And we need better ways of ensuring that those who need such information can get it quickly and easily."** [4]

But the image of social science is quite often not a positive one in central government or with ministers. Indeed the same Secretary of State went on to complain that:

> **"[social science researchers] address issues other than those which are central and directly relevant to the political and policy debate;...[and] fail to take into account the reality of many people's lives...some of the most gifted and creative researchers seem to have turned away from policy-related issues, preferring to work on questions of little interest outside the research community."**

This problem does not arise from a need to 'agree the government line' – a mistake that some academics tend to make. It does mean being up-to-date and 'street-wise'. But making successful contributions also has a lot to do with a willingness to weigh apparently contradictory evidence and come to a judgement, to be engaged in systematic review processes, and with delivery and approach and how that comes across. Valued social scientists tend to be recognised experts in their field but, equally important, they are in touch with government agendas, in tune with the realities of the political and policy-making environment and able to present information clearly, concisely and in a non-jargonistic way. It is easy to find an official who has been on the receiving end of a commissioned report or paper which speaks naively of policy issues, demonstrates little or no awareness of current policy, is impenetrable and needs drastic editing to make it readable to key players.

An important aspect of all this is the ability to respond when the information is needed and to apply knowledge flexibly to novel situations, rather than reiterating past nostrums. In a Utopian world, politicians might seek advice of social scientists before they start thinking about policy development or reform, but the reality of policy-making is not like that: when they need answers, they need many of them very quickly. If the precise answer is not

4 David Blunkett, (then) Secretary of State for Education, speaking at the ESRC Annual Conference in February 2000

available, they need academics to act as experts and use their expertise and experience. The informed advice of an expert is almost certainly better than uninformed speculation. Sadly, in the views of many government officials and some ministers, many academics do not seem comfortable in such a mode of operation and fear being 'tainted' by the world of government and politics.

In an era when politicians have come to focus on evidence, there is a particular appetite for 'hard facts and figures', though it is readily acknowledged in most of government that some questions are not amenable to simple quantitative analysis and the social sciences cannot always provide incontrovertible evidence. Of great importance is an understanding of the needs of an audience for any evidence or knowledge: much interesting information is irrelevant to specific needs and academics are not always good at filleting their work in this way. In practice, many problems also arise through poor communication between advisors or consultants and officials and ministers – often these are much more serious than those over substantive issues.

Is this a problem for academics or for government – or both? We incline to the latter view having seen evidence of where it has worked well in practice in the Cabinet Office's Strategy Unit. Academics have been brought in to work with others from government and beyond on a host of projects, stimulating debate and shaping policy. **We commend this practice and recommend it to other government departments.** Our conclusion is that the most common problem is a (significant) communication and 'interface management' one, rather than disinterestedness (or worse) on each side. In part this has arisen from the shortfall in appointment of social researchers in government in the 1980s who would now be leaders in their areas.

All of the above suggests we need much better links and relationships between policy-makers and academics. That is the view of the Commission. Yet this is not invariant. There are a number of situations where some separation is not only respectable but desirable. In some areas of international relations such as foreign policy, for example, the acutely political nature of many issues and the inevitably contested nature of what is in the national interest can make deep academic engagement an inappropriate activity. Overall, however, we reiterate our belief: there is a need for improving the interaction between academia and policy-makers.

5.6.2 Government's need for trained social scientist staff

Central government looks to universities to provide social scientists who are well-trained in the techniques of research and analysis. This is manifested in the growth of the Government Economic and Social Research Services – the GES for instance grew from 605 to 705 staff in the 9 months after January 2001. It does not necessarily mean trained to PhD level. Indeed, for many purposes the ability to hunt for relevant information, to assess the likely reliability of it, to carry out simple statistical summaries and to interpret and present it in clear ways – usually working against the clock – is seen as part of the core competences of any new graduate. It is, however, generally accepted that researchers and analysts in government departments benefit from training to Masters level – indeed many have it already. This market need is replicated elsewhere but the balance of funding for research training by, for instance, the ESRC is directed on that to PhD level.

Government frequently finds recruitment difficult: there is rarely a shortage of applicants, just too few suitably skilled applicants. As a result, there were still over 100 junior level vacancies in GES in mid–2002. In particular there is a deficit of quantitative analytical skills amongst the applicants for government research posts, recognised in the 'Adding It Up' report by the (former) Performance and Innovation Unit (PIU, 2000). We note that ESRC has made strenuous efforts to tackle this shortcoming but obviating the problem is not a short-term matter.

Whilst there are many acknowledged pockets of excellence in academic social science, the prevailing view in a large part of central government is that too much of the research and analysis produced by academic social scientists is at best unexciting, at worst simply not up to standard. In the area of social research, a surprising amount of the creativity in research methods seems to come from the commercial research sector or from work by US academics. For example, US academics have led the way on much of the methodological development needed to evaluate policy pilots and have made much of the running on systematic review techniques. A frequent complaint in government is that much poor social science seems to get through the peer review net; another is that creativity and innovation are often lacking; yet another is that many academics are unable to create a good research tender.

On the other side, we know of ill-specified invitations to tender with absurd completion dates; we have been told of apparently bizarre choices of contractors with low research reputations; we know of government departments unwilling to pay the full costs of projects (a problem which extends far beyond the social sciences); we observe different practices in informing the world outside on priorities and forthcoming projects, let alone bureaucratic processes; and we have seen many instances where the understanding of a research environment is inadequate on the part of those in central government. We have also been told by officials of the difficulty of knowing who is good in a particular field.

It is clear to the Commission that these problems need addressing by both the academic community and the government policy-making and analytical communities. Government is not always clear about what it wants from academics and does not always make it easy for them to contribute. Policy timetables often lead to short timescales for research; this is a fact of life but it seems to us that there is scope for more forward planning in the commissioning timetable. Central government procedures can also work against close co-operation between the researcher and the department. Some departments are certainly much better than others about consulting on and communicating their research needs and in some cases there is scope for developing a more constructive dialogue and a better understanding with the wider research community. Similarly, government procedures for research commissioning can be baffling; no two departments seem to operate the same procurement process and problems are compounded when the tender process is poorly run or requirements badly specified. Some of these shortcomings are acknowledged by government and action is being taken. But what we certainly do believe is that there is a very major need to build better understanding between social scientists – in much larger numbers than at present – and policy-makers, researchers and analysts in government. That overseas academics believe UK social scientists are particularly good at policy-relevant research (see Section 5.5.1) may well be true by international standards but real improvement is still possible.

5.6.3 How social sciences do or do not influence government policy

The section above describes government's views on social sciences and scientists. In the course of the Commission's work, we have seen many studies on the nature and success of evidence-based policy and practice work on governments. We note Nutley's (2002) conclusions, based on a survey by Bullock in 2001, that:

- Government departments typically make use of domestic and international research and statistics, policy evaluation work, economic modelling and expert knowledge;
- There is a hierarchy of evidence in use, the perceived apex being randomised control trials with observational studies and professional consensus accorded much lower credibility;

- In health care it is relatively easy to identify efficiency or effectiveness criteria. 'Desired outcomes' are sometimes unambiguous. It is widely accepted that biased outcomes and ineffective outcomes often come from less methodologically rigorous approaches;

- In contrast, other sectors such as education, criminal justice and social care are 'riven with disputes as to what constitutes appropriate evidence and divisions between qualitative and quantitative paradigms'. This partly reflects the multiplicity and contested nature of the outcomes sought.

In a highly relevant paper based on 30 years of experience of working with government, Raffe (2002) said that researchers, practitioners and policy-makers inhabit different 'normative worlds'. The normative world of research has objectives which are summative; its timetables are long-term and its agendas relatively unbounded. The criteria of good research are validity and originality, with the researcher in control. In the normative world of policy, the aims of research vary greatly, timetables are shorter and less predictable and agendas are bounded by policy concerns. The criteria of 'good research' are 'helpfulness' and a concern for its consequences; it is assumed that the policy-maker should control research in the public interest. In the normative world of practice, research has formative objectives, a short-term timetable and pragmatic agendas; the criterion of good research is utility. To be valued by those involved, such research should be independent, up-to-date and in touch with the everyday realities of practice.

Whilst recognising that these worlds are different, we have also concluded that part of the problems identified result from a lack of adequate communication (though some useful guidance does exist for academics e.g. McGrath 2001). We have also formed views on the nature of the policy-informing process. These views have major ramifications for social scientists. There are some significant differences between the way in which social scientists can best operate in a policy domain in different parts of the UK (see Section 3), but most of what follows is generic.

The academic community has been extolling the value of systematic knowledge arising from research for enlightened and effective policy-making for well over 50 years. We have numerous historical examples where major social scientists have become highly influential in policy-making, sometimes through their actions as well as their scholarship and research (Chapter 3). Yet the interactions between systematic knowledge and policy-making are complex, sometimes lagged in time and occasionally operate through percolation and indirect – rather than direct – influence. New knowledge seldom leads directly to policy changes, though it sometimes does. Perhaps as a consequence, there is often some disappointment across the social science community at the lack of interest they perceive on the part of policy-makers. That this should occur with a government which – at early stages in policy-making at least – is much more interested in evidence to support and inform policy than many of its predecessors, is very striking. Clearly the disappointment of each side about the other summarised above needs addressing – and we make recommendations to do so in the following pages.

We have encountered many different views and expectations of how research in the social sciences underpins the formation of policy by governments at all levels. Some of this seems to us to be ill-informed, even naive. Because of this, we set out below how we see matters working, using some examples from criminology. Inevitably this draws upon the experience of Commissioners and others operating mainly at national level. But some of it applies at all levels.

In one way at least, however, matters are more realistic than a generation ago. In 1993, Howard Newby, then Chair of the ESRC, wrote:

> "Twenty years ago social science would have made the arrogant claim that it alone could produce solutions to social and economic problems according to some rational model of social engineering. However, as we now know all too well, social science does not provide solutions for policy-makers in that way."[5]

It is important to draw a distinction between researchers' specialised knowledge and their personal beliefs and policy preferences. Few people, at least outside the heat of political battle, disagree with the proposition that sensible policy-making should take account of systematic evidence. Few people outside academic circles, however, believe that researchers' personal beliefs and preferences about policy are entitled to any special weight. Many policy issues implicate moral values, political philosophies and practical considerations on which reasonable people disagree. Indeed, politicians have simultaneously to cope with both 'evidence' from systematic research and preferences of the populace which may well seek local benefit rather than national-level rationality. Research in both the UK and USA showed that Neighbourhood Watch schemes and the widespread use of CCTVs have little provable impact on crime rates yet governments continue to fund such programmes – the only logical rationale is to accept that people wish to have such facilities even if they do no significant good. For this reason we prefer use of the term 'evidence-informed policy' to the more usual term 'evidence-based policy'.

Several filters separate knowledge from policy. One is the filter of prevailing paradigms. Until widely accepted paradigms shift, pre-existing research is not found acceptable and indeed may not get any hearing. Another filter is the prevailing ideology. For instance, clear majorities of the population support the use of capital punishment – this despite research which shows capital punishment often has little deterrent effect. Such research is widely seen as irrelevant or is disbelieved. More generally, some public officials believe that crime is controllable through changes in the severity or certainty of punishment and seem not to be open to evidence that suggests the contrary. Short-term political consequences are another filter: few elected politicians in Britain would now risk being perceived as 'soft on crime' whatever the evidence or their own personal views might be. Finally, short-term bureaucratic considerations and a lack of incentives to take risks form another filter separating policy from knowledge (though we acknowledge attempts by Conservative and Labour governments to minimise such characteristics). Research findings are rarely so clear and the foreseeable benefits from change so compelling as to make the need for a policy change self-evident. The fear of unintended consequences also plays a role.

Allied to all this is the nature of policy-making in government which – as we have already pointed out – is often carried out on timescales out of synchronisation with academics' views on the need for careful thought and detailed analysis. Taking care to be right – and defensively so – is important for politician and analyst alike but what differs is the judgement of how much effort and care is justified by the circumstances. Another factor, as we also argued earlier, is that there is a communication problem between many academics and government officials and a common misunderstanding of what is achievable and needed. Finally, it is rare for policy-relevant work to be absorbed by 'the system' very quickly. A good example is described in Box 5.3.

These filters are real but certainly do not mean that policy-making is impervious to influence from research findings. They *do* however mean that influence is often indirect and partial and that researchers need to give considerable thought to how findings are disseminated – and how they can best inform policy-making. Finally, we are clear that

5 Newby, H. (1993) 'The Social Sciences in a Post-White Paper World'. Lecture given at the Centre for Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences, University of Wales, College of Cardiff.

government can do much to improve the way it interacts with and extracts valuable information from social science researchers. As we have said earlier (see Section 5.6.1), communication and 'interface management' issues are at the heart of the problems identified and improvement is a matter for both sectors.

Box 5.3
The gestation period for exploitation of academic research and consultancy: an example

The outcome reported in Section 3.1 from Kempson's work on the tendency of financial systems to deny access to people with low incomes was hardly a 'fly-by-night' piece of policy-making. To have influence took persistence and stamina. The saga began in 1997 with a meeting with the Social Security Minister and representatives of the leading banks to discuss widening access to banking. That meeting led to two linked studies which tried to identify the characteristics of people without bank accounts, and how that absence affected their lives. In turn, these studies led on to further work on the best ways of tackling financial exclusion. Kempson was then appointed to a Treasury team working on access to financial services which gave the *imprimatur* to the idea of basic bank accounts. She then worked with the leading banks and the Post Office to design the new accounts. This phase included testing the basic bank accounts in one area of Bristol. In turn, the Personal Finance Research Centre became involved in a Financial Services Authority initiative to promote the new accounts, including even helping with the design and testing of new leaflets. Ms Kempson was then seconded to the Bank of England on a part-time basis to do further work. One of the interesting aspects of doing policy work is that it can lead to unexpected by-products. So work by Kempson that showed that the variable that had the greatest effect on not having a bank account was being in receipt of government benefits was an important stimulus to the government decision to pay all benefits and pensions by automatic transfer beginning in 2003. Behind all this, however, is another important point: one reason for the rate of adoption of the work was that it had deleterious effects on others – notably in removing a key source of income from rural post offices. Ultimately the trade-off was a political decision.

5.7 Business and the social sciences

Much of the feedback we have received from the business community refers only to what goes on in business and management faculties. This is not surprising: the attempts to bring business and academia together – notably through regional groupings such as RDAs – have revealed gross ignorance about the other party as a widespread phenomenon. What is surprising is that many (though not all, since a number are governors of HEIs) business leaders have only the haziest idea of what universities are for, what they do and how to relate to them. A common view is that most are pallid imitations of 1960s Oxbridge. Though many academics have misconceptions about business, typically under-estimating the intellectual demands of running successful businesses, the problem seems to us to be less severe than the other way around (a point made forcefully at a London First meeting by Lord Marshall, chairman of British Airways). We regard this lack of understanding as largely a failure on the part of the universities to proselytise and address it in Chapter 6.

5.7.1 Business and business education

> "About 1 in 8 of all UK HE students study business and management … According to … UCAS, business and management studies proved the most popular subject at degree level for full-time students starting in autumn, with new enrolments up nearly 7% on last year and more than 20% higher than the next most popular subject … One in five of all taught postgraduate students study business and management."
>
> ABS (2002)

We have noted elsewhere that business and management studies are, in part at least, an important element of the social sciences. Many concepts under-pinning these studies are derived from economics, psychology, sociology or other parts of the social sciences. Yet there is more criticism of this area than of any other area of the social sciences.

The statistics indicate that there are a number of excellent business schools in Britain. The London Business School is consistently in the top 10 in the global Master of Business Administration ranking lists produced by the *Financial Times*, and 13 others are in the top 100 in 2003. But it is widely recognised that all is far from well. As a consequence of continuing concerns on the quality of British leadership and management, the Council for Excellence in Leadership and Management was founded by the Secretaries of State for Education and Employment and for Trade and Industry in April 2000. An advisory sub-group on Business Schools (BSAG) was spun off in June 2001. They showed that there were 110 Business Schools in Britain in 2001, 47 being departments or schools in pre–1992 universities, 38 in post–1992 universities, 10 private institutions and five set up as quasi-independent bodies (e.g. Ashridge Management College). Its report (BSAG 2002) included recommendations that:

- Management research needs redirecting towards an agenda which is more responsive to the needs of practising managers. Knowledge transfer from researchers to practitioners should be a high priority;
- More research is needed into the performance and productivity impact of management education;
- First degrees in business and management should include the development of practical skills and work experience;
- Financial support is needed for the training of entrants to Business School teaching from a variety of backgrounds;
- All universities should permit business academics to retain a specific volume of consultancy earnings…business schools should be allowed to pay market rates for their staff.

This then took a very utilitarian viewpoint – despite half of the sub-group being deans or former deans of business schools. Their concerns are perhaps most strongly made in relation to research:

> "... all is far from well in the world of business and management research ... Employers, while liking the idea of management research, are strongly critical of the current situation. Their perceptions of Business School research are that most of it is of no relevance to practice; it is published in academic journals in inaccessible language; researchers come into companies to collect data but do not give back enough benefit to the company; too much research reports past changes and too little creates new ideas."
>
> BSAG (2002, p26)

Yet, despite this view that existing research is too academic (in the pejorative sense), ESRC statistics suggest that it is not of high academic quality either. The business and management disciplinary grouping had a low percentage of submitted staff in the RAE (see Table 10.2) – despite including a number of economics departments which seemed to submit there to avoid tough competition elsewhere. 'The category has the lowest percentage success rate amongst ESRC response mode grant applications: in 1999/2000 psychologists and economists were three times as likely to be successful in ESRC applications as business and management staff [see also Table 10.24 in Section B]. These two subjects also have ten times the number of publicly funded research projects per RAE active member of faculty. Even when large publicly funded programmes of management research have been conducted they seem to deliver little to practitioners or the delivery takes too long (e.g. recent ESRC programme on 'Innovation')' (BSAG 2002, p25). Finally, the projects which are funded by ESRC in the business and management research area have the lowest proportion of 'excellent' or 'good' ratings of any completed research funded by ESRC.

In summary, research in business and management seems overall to be seriously inadequate on two counts – academic quality *and* utility for practitioners. Recognising this, ESRC have set up jointly with EPSRC the Advanced Institute of Management (AIM) programme costing £18.7 million over 5 years. Its characteristics are that it is a fellowship scheme designed to free-up the time of existing research-active staff, with buy-out of between 60 and 100% of staff time. Unusually, it pays overheads – the first time ever for fellowships. There is also £150k per successful applicant for development of next generation research capacity – to be used as the successful bidders see fit. Interdisciplinary working is encouraged for this is research *on* management and business, not just research *in* these areas. 'Rigour and relevance' is to be the guiding principle in allocation of funding. We welcome the ESRC's innovative approach though we believe that much more needs to be done because of the tension between serving two masters – the cause of high quality, 'leading edge' academic research and the needs of business – which is probably more acute in this than in any other social science field.

Government's response to the Centre for Excellence in Management and Leadership report said little about research other than welcoming the ESRC's plans for AIM and the work of relevant ESRC research centres. It did however emphasise that:

> "...through these actions, we can generate a much better evidence base on the impact of management and leadership skills and actions on organisational effectiveness...But simply making available lengthy research reports...will have no impact. The evidence will need to be made available in short, compelling and useful forms, through formats and intermediaries that have credibility and impact."
>
> (DfES/DTI 2002, p13)

This echoes a concern about the focus of some research and the effective dissemination of research results which has run through all our investigations. We address the latter issue more specifically in Chapter 6.

Finally, though, while there may seem to be little of direct import for the academic sector (other than the business and management community) in the government's Spending Review paper, there is much of indirect effect. There is a clear intent to enlarge the focus on employability of students in Higher Education, using levers such as the HEFCE strategies and funding flowing from them (DfES/DTI 2002, p22). This is also demonstrated through government's focus on skill enhancement through RDAs and the Learning and Skills Councils plus their Frameworks for Regional Employment and Skills Actions (FRESAs), on regional centres of excellence in management and leadership, and on changes to the school curriculum to give all students in the 14 to 19 age group some opportunity to develop leadership skills. The indications are that RDAs will become of increasing importance to HE, not least through funding of certain types of regionally-relevant research. Though the detail of these initiatives differ between the countries within the UK, there is common ground on the overall needs. In short, universities will be receiving students with very different aspirations and skills and operating in rather different policy domains if all this proceeds according to plan. Universities and colleges have also been encouraged to ensure that 'undergraduates of all disciplines [should] have the option of acquiring some management and leadership skills' (DfES/DTI 2002, p31).

All of this has three major implications for social sciences. These are that:

- This particular part of the social sciences has been heavily criticised for the shortcomings of its research and the (alleged) qualities of its graduates. Since many aspects of teaching in business and management manifestly draw upon research in other areas of social sciences, this criticism is likely to have wider ramifications;
- The environment in which social sciences operate will probably change at all levels – school, undergraduate and postgraduate;
- This is a text-book example of how policy-making, fostered by unease about a crucial contributor to the UK's economic performance, leads to new initiatives, changes in funding streams and even to wider changes to the environment in which universities in general and social sciences in particular will have to operate.

These findings can not be ignored. We therefore **recommend that vice-chancellors and deans of business schools take steps to raise simultaneously the academic quality of research in their schools and to enhance its applicability**. We recognise this is a difficult pair of linked objectives but the results are of fundamental importance to the UK as well as themselves.

5.8 Social science education and training of the general public

In Chapter 10.2 we cover at considerable length the trends in student numbers and quality – so far as this can be assessed from exam results – at school and undergraduate level. The main points to arise from this analysis are:

- An average of 435,000 GCSE exam papers have been taken each year over the last decade in subjects which involve significant amounts of social science. Only business studies, geography and history are studied by large number of candidates; these three subjects each account for over 10% of all GCSE exams sat whereas the other five 'social science subjects' account for only 0.5% of exams sat. The absolute numbers taking economics, social science (as a single subject), political studies, psychology and sociology – all of which started from a low base – have declined very significantly over the period;

- At A level, some 163,000 exams have been sat on average each year over the last decade. Three groups of subjects exist. The first consists of those showing rapid growth. Business studies more than doubled the number of examinees and psychology almost tripled its equivalents over the decade. In contrast, the numbers sitting A Level economics has collapsed to under half its 1991 value and those in political studies declined to about two-thirds of the equivalent value. The third group consists of geography, history and sociology which have declined gently to between 80 and 90% of their 1991 values;

- About a third of students who take business studies at GCSE go on to take it at A level, but only 14 to 20% of students continue with geography and history. In contrast, many students pick up economics, political studies, and psychology, with numbers 24 times larger than the GCSE ones for political studies and 3 times larger for the other two. Only around 10% of students tend to continue with mathematics beyond the compulsory stage of studying it for GCSE;

- All this implies that, at any one time, there are around 4.25 million 11 to 19 year old school students studying significant parts of what we take to be the social sciences. Allowing for growth in areas like business studies over the last decade, we can reasonably infer that the number of pupils who have had some exposure to the social sciences in the last 20 years is well over 15 million. It is no surprise then that some aspects at least of the social sciences have become relatively well-known over this period.

There is some debate about whether the numbers of students taking a subject at GCSE or even A level is of any significance to the well-being of a particular discipline. Geographers and sociologists by and large see a strong cohort as being highly advantageous. In contrast, many staff in politics seem unmoved by the decline in numbers studying the subject at school. Economists are the most extreme; their general view seems to be that studying economics at school can be a severe disadvantage for later academic study of the subject! The Royal Economic Society has launched two projects to enhance the teaching in school of economics.

All of these are of course the views of those with vested interests. There is the contrary view that society will benefit from having a large number of students who – whilst not proceeding to advanced levels – understand the rudiments of these subjects. Indeed it can be argued that these form vital components of the government's agenda for preparation for adult life as a good citizen. We incline to the latter view and draw the attention of the DfES and its equivalent bodies in the devolved administrations to these matters.

Following the Green Paper on 14 – 19 education published in 2001 (DfES 2001) and the subsequent consultation, government published its White Paper *14 – 19: opportunity and excellence* (DfES 2003a). The main points of this relate to 14 – 16 year-olds:

- English, mathematics and science remain compulsory. All students will also continue to be taught citizenship, religious education, sex education, careers education and physical education;

- Information and communications technology will remain compulsory for now, although such skills will increasingly be taught through other subjects;

- All students will learn about work and enterprise;

- All students will be entitled to study another language, a humanities subject (such as history), an arts subject, and design and technology;

- There will be a much stronger emphasis on vocational education;

- Young people will also be entitled to study literacy, numeracy and computer skills until 19 to level 2 standard (GCSE or equivalent).

The government is also to review the nature and structure of A levels and explore a possible baccalaureate replacement. These curriculum changes will require further consultation and approval from Parliament and will not take place before 2004/05 at the earliest.

The only mention in the White Paper of any social science relates to the plan to introduce 'hybrid' GCSEs with a common core and optional vocational or general units. The Qualification and Curriculum Agency is developing pilot GCSEs for teaching from September 2003 in areas related to science and geography to test out different approaches to 'hybrid' qualifications. It may well be of course that modest amounts of social sciences are incorporated in citizenship. In general all this seems to presage a further diminution of the presence of social sciences in schools. We are concerned at this and **we recommend that all discipline-specific bodies – sometimes (but not always) the learned societies concerned – should monitor the school-level popularity of appropriate subjects and make representation where necessary to government to ensure that no changes to the curriculum adversely affect the volume and quality of social science provision in schools. The Academy of Learned Societies for the Social Sciences may wish to consider whether it should take an overview of the situation annually, subject to available resources, and lobby accordingly.**

At undergraduate level, about 25% of all HE students study the social sciences – as we have defined them. On a very much more restricted definition, about 10% of all students study social studies. We have observed (Figure 10.6 in Section B) severe declines in the number of students studying economic and social history, social policy and administration, and statistics. Significant increases have occurred in anthropology, linguistics, psychology, social work, and sociology.

We know that there are heads of (university) departments meetings for most disciplines and that some of these at least monitor closely the popularity of their subjects and share good practice – despite the fact that they are ostensibly in competition. **We recommend that any discipline that does not have such a structure should erect one and follow the good practice of those such as the economists, geographers and sociologists.**

5.9 Conclusions

This long section has set out many sets of evidence and opinions from those carrying out social science research and teaching, from those funding it, from a number of potential or actual beneficiaries and from various other interested parties. It needs to be considered as a whole with the detailed statistics and other evidence set out in Section B.

We have made a number of specific recommendations at appropriate stages in the chapter. But here it is appropriate to bring a number of things together at a higher level, noting that there are a number of paradoxes evident.

5.9.1 What is good quality research in the social sciences?

The first of these paradoxes is that of research quality. There is much evidence of the high quality of certain British research, and overwhelming evidence of the volume of output produced by social scientists in the UK. Yet there is too much criticism of the poor quality of some research and of the way it is brought to the attention of those who might benefit (addressed separately in Chapter 6) to be ignored. As summarised in our earlier discussion of research capacity, one major private research funder underspent its available resources in 2002 by 20% because of the relative dearth of high quality applications. Assessing the quality of research is never trivial and different parties have different criteria on which to do it – and different vested interests in the results. In an ideal world we would have a set of criteria by which poor quality research and research proposals could readily be identified. That experienced individuals can usually detect poor quality work or proposals easily – though adjudicating on proposals of moderate quality is much more difficult – suggests that

this might even be possible. But we are unable to find any agreement on what constitutes *good* research. What is highly praised and funded by research councils is partly influenced by accepted norms which differ between (and sometimes within) different disciplines. These vary by time as the people who act as gate-keepers change and as new knowledge becomes discovered and understood. Imperfect as it is, we can see no alternative to peer review systems for judgement of quality of publicly-funded academic research, complemented by the input of the views of potential beneficiaries. Of course, where government or some other body is funding research directly then it is entitled to set the criteria for assessment of quality. The only way forward we can see is to foster transparency and require turnover in those assessing research grant applications. The latter already occurs by virtue of the fixed tenure of individuals on research council committees. But **we recommend that *all* research funding bodies (and certainly all publicly-funded ones) should publish a classification each year of the quality of research applications considered and those accepted by them, preferably ranked on a simple common scale.** This will over time give greater confidence in the quality of social science research.

5.9.2 Bridging the academic/government gap

The second paradox is that British and overseas academics are clearly convinced that the UK leads in producing work which successfully underpins much public policy – and we have given examples where this is manifestly true. Yet we have evidence of considerable dissatisfaction on the part of local, devolved and central governments with much of the help they get from social scientists – some of whom are allegedly unaware of the context or even of other work, are oblivious to the needs of the commissioner, who sometimes come with ideologically pre-ordained answers and who in some cases are incapable of expressing conclusions in a way which makes them useable. This is harsh criticism and clearly does not apply to all social scientists. Moreover, we have seen examples of some arrogance on the part of government research commissioners and poor practice in commissioning (e.g. ludicrous time scales for bidding or an unwillingness to pay for the real cost of work, including overheads).

We believe this indicates problems on both sides which can not be reduced significantly without a number of actions, covering both the identification and procurement of research and its exploitation. Accordingly, **we recommend that:**

- **Whitehall and devolved governments need to co-ordinate and harmonise how they advertise research opportunities and the procurement procedures to be used in all except the most unusual of cases.** A common, web-based register of up-coming opportunities would be helpful;
- **Greater mutual understanding and knowledge transfer is ensured through a programme of both-way secondments between those in academia and government.** Such a scheme has already been launched through an initiative of the Academy of Learned Societies for the Social Sciences with the Home Office but it needs to be broadened to embrace many other departments and appropriately resourced to become a success. This is so important that it should be taken forward by the Cabinet Office.

5.9.3 Links with the private sector

The private sector provides jobs for many of the graduates in the social sciences, often complaining that the individuals are not immediately ready for work through lacking certain skills. Research in the social sciences under-pins – usually long afterwards – the operations of many commercial entities, be they banks, insurance companies, human resources consultancies, marketing functions or others. A number of private sector bodies also hold databases (e.g. on aspects of the lifestyle of millions of people) which are not generally available to the social sciences community – though we have seen examples where this might be possible, despite a number of confidentiality constraints.

Despite this obvious inter-dependency, the links between the social sciences and the business sector are conspicuous by their absence, except at the individual level. This is astonishing and regrettable. **We recommend the creation of a small 'ginger group' with membership provided by the Confederation of British Industries, by the Strategic Forum for the Social Sciences and Universities UK to consider how best to build better relationships and to publicise and encourage the practice.**

5.9.4 Inter-, multi- and cross-disciplinary working

There is almost no dispute about the necessity of addressing 'big issues' through a combination of social science (and others in many cases) skills (see, for example, Gulbenkian Commission 1996). The disciplinary structures on which most universities are still built can easily create a 'stovepipe mentality' in training, teaching and research which constrains approaches and solutions to problems. It would be wrong, however, to pretend that all universities are still rooted in a situation which grew up 50 years or more ago. Cross-disciplinary work has led to the emergence of new disciplines such as behavioural finance and economic sociology. There are many examples of multidisciplinary work tackling issues such as crime and poverty, often in particular geographical areas. The actions of research funders such as ESRC have given incentives for multidisciplinary working – indeed we were told that ESRC *requires* it in applications for research centres (which, if rigorously adhered to, is probably 'a bridge too far'). And there have been some cases where previous structures have been abolished and wholly new forms of organisations have been created; the staff pooling arrangements at the British Geological Survey, whereby departments were abolished, staff 'belong' to the legal entity and are 'purchased' by particular projects is just one example of what has to be done by scientific organisations.

In essence it is a matter for each organisation how it chooses to organise itself. But we believe that the need to foster multi-skilling in individuals and an ability and willingness to work with colleagues from different disciplinary backgrounds is highly important – and will impact on the sustainability of almost all organisations (think tanks have of course developed some of this to a fine art and universities can learn something from them: see Section 7.4). In Section 2.2 we summarised the suggestions made by the Gulbenkian Commission to reduce 'stove-piping': all have some merits and will work to different extents in different circumstances. But we believe that, of those, the bringing together in one place of scholars from different disciplines for a period of some months to work on specific urgent themes has something to commend it. ESRC has explored at various times the concept of a research hotel. We think this could be promising – provided it is a research factory rather than a hotel! We urge that it is piloted. As an experiment, therefore, **we recommend that the council should fund the bringing together on one site of a multidisciplinary group to tackle part of one ESRC research programme.** This will need to run for an adequate period (e.g. three months) to make a difference and members will probably need to meet every day. It should help to identify the practical problems of a research hotel and give indications of whether the model might be more widely applied. We return to more fundamental aspects of multidisciplinary working in our conclusions to the report in Section 9.4.2.

5.9.5 Creating thinking time

We have had much comment – from all sources – that many social scientists seem to be on a tread-mill of work which has led to much research being incremental rather than the development of new ideas. The manifestations of this are not only less and poorer research (see below) but the diminution of many other voluntary activities. It is now much more difficult to find peer reviewers for journal papers or research grants than was true a decade ago; as a consequence, the Natural Environment Research Council is to pay honoraria to referees of grants. Taking on offices (e.g. in learned societies) which do not contribute directly to departmental benefit or additional resources is now much more uncommon. We believe this problem is widespread, whatever the (incorrect) stereotypes of the languid life

of academics. Thus one key factor in the future success of British social science – perhaps even more acutely than in the rest of academia (since staff teaching loads are heavier) – is the energy- and morale-sapping effects of university administration and the lack of time to think creatively. Diary exercises of the way in which academic staff expend their time show that, for many, the other commitments make research or serious thinking a weekend activity. The report of the Better Regulation Task Force on the burden of unnecessary 'red tape' was accepted by government in January 2003, with a university vice-chancellor as chair of a group to reduce it. This will be a non-trivial task – not least because reducing many manual tasks will require investment in new information systems – but we welcome that development. Here we concern ourselves with two proposals for carving out time for creative thinking and the creation of sufficiently large blocks of time for sound research. Both of them involve competitive allocation of funds. In addition, however, we are clear that this is also a responsibility of university vice-chancellors and deans: they have a responsibility to maximise this precious element within the available resources – at least for those who would use it best.

The academic tread-mill generated by the RAE (see below) has had some overall benefits but has progressively helped to remove opportunities for significant amounts of time devoted to such thinking – since there is no measurable 'output'. Sabbatical leave is designed to provide some of this but is rare in many universities, is often funded by sharing existing workloads amongst remaining staff and is increasingly subject to the delivery of very specific products to help RAE entries. It does not of course necessarily award the best cases nationally since it is (often very) locally awarded. It is therefore an inadequate mechanism to meet the needs we have identified. We are therefore delighted with ESRC's plans for fellowships under the AIM scheme (Section 5.7.1) that will enable individuals to buy out significant parts of their time. We also know of limited schemes run by other bodies, such as the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. **We recommend that these are extended so as to ensure that – rather than the 10 or so fellowships provided annually under AIM by ESRC and the modest number of others provided by the British Academy, ESRC, Leverhulme, Nuffield and other funders – there are at least 250 per annum available on a nationally competitive basis to the social sciences** (i.e. equivalent to about 1% of all social sciences staff annually). Funding for these would be most appropriately provided by the funding councils (and we recognise that such a scheme might well have to embrace the humanities and physical sciences as well).

The second proposal is also to the government and the research councils but also necessarily involves the employers of staff viz. the universities. It would probably have to apply system-wide. In the USA, academic staff may be on 9, 10 or 12 month contracts. The 9 month model is standard for academic faculty in research universities where their salaries are paid over 12 months but all merit awards, promotions, etc are made on the basis of the 9 month performance. Typically, the 9 month period is treated as half teaching and half research-related; it is generally possible to buy out part of the teaching from other funds though without any net increase in salary for this period. The advantage to the staff member comes in being able to augment his or her own salary in the remaining three months of the year. They are able – and expected – to raise money to support their research. This is facilitated by grant-awarding bodies like the National Science Foundation, the National Institutes for Health and NASA allowing grant applications to include an element for the Principal Investigator's own salary. This is forbidden in Britain, apparently due to Treasury concerns over double payment from public funds of the same staff. In so doing, however, the successful US applicant creates time for him- or herself free from other university duties, enhances their base salary, but becomes legally as well as professionally committed to producing 'product'. This is widely acknowledged to have strong incentive effects. The main disadvantage is that it reduces any fixed pot of money which is available for research assistants and the like. But the clear consensus is that it professionalises and improves research overall. Indeed it also increases the total money brought into universities for research since academics have a vested interest in finding new sources. And it should enhance recruitment and retention of top quality research-active staff. It would therefore be a good development.

We recognise that this would have significant implications for the academic year and might complicate administration within universities. It would be important that this only applied for research funds brought into the university; simply adding to personal consultancy would not meet our multiple objectives. It also requires a change in the contracts of staff with their employers but the opportunity to do this could arise through existing discussions of re-structuring of university pay scales through the Joint Negotiating Committee for Higher Education Staff (JNCHES) committee. In the first instance this might best be done by agreement between staff and the university where mutual benefit could be identified, rather than across all academic staff – but that is simply a matter of tactics. **We therefore recommend that government should scrap any prohibition on the salary of tenured academic grant applicants being paid for from grants made by research council and other government-sourced funding bodies. And we recommend that HEIs explore changing their contracts and systems to incentivise the winning of more research funds and enhance the salaries of successful, research-active staff.** It is important to ensure that the extra money is directed at the individual principal investigator rather than as extra support for the university.

5.9.6 Recruitment and retention of staff

We believe that – not withstanding the easily misunderstood conclusions of a HEFCE report – there is already a great problem and there is going to be still more in recruiting and retaining academic staff in certain social science disciplines. (There are often just as great problems with support staff but that is generic to a university, not specific to the social sciences). The problems are most obviously acute in economics and in business and management studies but we believe it is more widespread than that. Resolving this is not simply a matter for government since universities typically now have diversified their sources of funding (e.g. including that from students). We see no solution to this other than in additional funding of HE from a number of sources, including government, and we recognise that greater differentiation of salaries on more market-based (e.g. subject, regional and employer brand image and financial status) criteria are inevitable. The government's White Paper of January 2003 (see Section 9.1) identifies the problem of staff remuneration and contains some measures for ameliorating it (e.g. 'golden hellos'). But at first sight these seem inadequate. We are clear that, under current circumstances, the median salaries of senior professors in economics and in business subjects need to be at least around £80,000 in London and new lecturers in these subject and geographical areas probably need to be paid no less than £40,000 if we are to attract top calibre British – let alone overseas – candidates. (All of these would of course be subject to meeting suitable performance criteria). Such salaries (and often higher ones) are already paid to senior medical academics; the social sciences need similar treatment to prosper. Though the funding for a significant hike in median salaries will inevitably come from multiple sources, only government – in the practical form of the Secretary of State for Education and Skills and his department, together with the equivalents in the devolved administrations and their funding council agents – can lead in this matter. **We therefore recommend that government re-examines the recruitment and retention issue as a matter of urgency.**

6 Social sciences and the outside world (aka society)

In earlier parts of this report we have made clear our confidence – and that of many others – in the intrinsic quality of much British social science. However, we also summarised frustration on the part of social scientists that their work is inadequately appreciated and used, or even misrepresented. And we have summarised the views of many in government and elsewhere that communication skills are often lacking in many social scientists. We therefore regard the issue of communication and engagement with the non-academic world as of huge importance. Failure to improve the present situation will ensure continuation of this shared frustration, an on-going waste of public resource and under-achievement against the objectives we proposed for the social sciences in Section 2.4.1.

In writing this we have drawn upon the experience of a number of senior journalists (including a member of the Commission) plus various surveys. As always in this inquiry, we have found some variation in expert views but in this case these are minor compared to the commonality of views.

6.1 Introduction

In his presidential address to the British Association Science Festival in September 2002, Sir Howard Newby discerned an 'anti-intellectual' mood in modern Britain, suspicious of the enterprise of science and its methods. He urged scientists to fight back. They had to engage, to converse, to be more present in society's ongoing conversations. 'All too often scientific communities treat the public with at best condescension and at worst as a threat.' Newby's remarks were aimed primarily at biologists, chemists and other physical scientists but they apply just as much to social researchers. They ought to have a head start for their very business is society. Too often, however, society appears deaf to those engaged in studying it. Analysis and explanation of behaviour goes unread and unheard by the very people whose behaviour has been under scrutiny. The shame of this is that they miss an opportunity to learn about themselves, perhaps to be enlightened. And the social scientists miss vital feedback from those whom they study. In summary, if the scientific study of society is to enlighten anybody, it needs first of all to be transmitted. That may require greater effort by social scientists to communicate (and not just 'disseminate'). It may also entail greater willingness by the public and its proxies in the mass media to listen.

6.2 The nature of the problem

Social scientists, unlike physical scientists, have been reluctant to engage in a conversation about communication among themselves, let alone with society at large. There is as yet no real equivalent to the 'science in society' argument. Yet communication is as much a problem for social researchers in particular disciplines. Our abiding impression is one of deficit. Too few of the results of social inquiry get returned to society. The picture varies between the disciplines. Many learned societies have made strenuous efforts to enhance the situation – notably the economists, geographers, psychologists, political scientists and sociologists. The track record in economics is stronger than most; economists seem better able to get their messages across in the media and to the public at large. They have extensive networks leading in and out of their discipline. Perhaps the reason for that is intellectual. Economics has been more successful than other disciplines in offering simplifying frameworks, providing a better supply of models for understanding reality.

Perhaps the public and media find that other social disciplines make the world more – rather than less – complicated and are shunned as a result. Yet it is hard to escape a sense, even in economics, that much more of the fruits of inquiry and reflection could be made available – in an accessible form – to the public and its proxies in the media.

We know that social scientists do not figure much in the media. One survey found half of social scientists had been contacted by journalists of any kind during the previous three years (Brymon and Deacon 1996) though that does not indicate any elicited contribution was used. The same survey found the media was more curious about social science than social scientists were about using the media to communicate: only 21% of the sample of social scientists had proactively sought journalists' attention. Large numbers of social scientists have never sought media engagement; vastly greater numbers have written academic papers than have written in the public prints.

We lack reliable data on how much social science gets through to the public at large. This is an omission in social science inquiry which is itself significant, for it may well be a signal of the indifference of (some at least) social scientists to their impact on the wider world. We can, however, find some rough and ready indicators. *The Guardian* newspaper, with a daily circulation of about 400,000 copies and a large online presence, is usually classified as an 'upmarket' or 'broadsheet' newspaper. Its readership is relatively affluent and relatively well educated. How much social science does it communicate? *The Guardian Editnet* archive produced 5230 stories, in the year to October 1, 2002, in which 'research' was mentioned. For comparison, 'Tony Blair' figured in some 3,300 stories and 'Big Brother' in 521. Stories about research were spread across the paper, in the education section as well as the finance and home news pages.

The search term 'social research' turned up 79 stories during the year to October 2002, featuring reports of research from the ESRC, Market & Opinion Research International (MORI), the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the National Centre for Social Research. The term 'economic research' elicited 28 stories. These figures are broadly similar for the same search done on *The Times'* editorial archive (64 and 29 respectively).

Stories mentioning the ESRC numbered 27 (16 in *The Times*), concentrated in *The Guardian's* Analysis column, its finance and education pages and its Society section. By comparison, JRF elicited 48 results (27 in *The Times*).

The word 'sociology' elicited 154 stories in a year – many containing only random mentions unrelated to research output, e.g. stories about student numbers in different subject areas. Sociology and research together elicited 66 mentions (in *The Times* 91 and 31 respectively). Sociology of course has a political history and connotations. We searched *The Daily Mail* archive for the year to August 2002 and found 27 stories mentioning sociology, many of them negative in tone.

As a search term 'economics' elicited 4,657 stories in *The Guardian*, but the measure was boosted by the appearance of the word in the title 'economics correspondent' and 'economics editor' – itself indicating the importance of certain journalists in certain positions as gate-keepers in the flow of knowledge. The terms 'economics' and 'research' together elicited 765 mentions. By comparison, 'economics' elicited 1,350 stories in *The Daily Mail* for the slightly earlier 12-month period. Other social science disciplines showed varied results: in *The Guardian*, 'psychology' elicited 465 stories, 'psychology' and 'research' together 139. Of course such searches may very well understate the level of 'permeation' of social sciences into the media: sub-editors are notorious for excising what they deem to be irrelevant (such as the source or funder of the research). We have been told by many people in the media that social science work is widely publicised in the broadsheets and publications like *The Economist*. But to us as a Commission the general penetration seems deeply disappointing.

The media, even broadsheet newspapers, love personalities so we looked at mentions of some individual social scientists. Milton Friedman, the economist, secured 11 mentions

while such home-grown social science talents as Robin Blackburn merited 5 mentions. Tony Giddens, Director of the LSE, secured 18 (13 in *The Times*), most of them stories about politics rather than social research and one an article in *The Guardian* by Giddens himself. Martin Weale, director of the National Institute for Economic and Social Research, had 7 stories mentioning him (two fewer in *The Times*).

On the basis of this simplistic analysis, there seems to be no close correlation between academics who are highly regarded by their peers and those who make frequent contributions to the media. Citation counts of academic papers in the social sciences show high ratings for a frequently cited professor of sociology in a 5* department. In *The Guardian*, however, he elicited 2 stories, one about new postgraduate courses at his college and the other about citation indices. Another high scorer on citation indices, a legal philosopher based in both top class US and UK HEIs, elicited 7 stories – one noting his birthday and another an article by him.

Perhaps a more interesting measure would address the take-up of social science ideas. In *The Guardian* the notion 'social capital', which has been taken up by government ministers and their advisers, secured 19 mentions in a year. The more esoteric idea 'cultural capital' received 8 mentions. By comparison, 'productivity growth', had 17 mentions.

These are, of course, very crude measures. In any meaningful sense they tell us very little about the quality of public knowledge of social science and little about its quantities. They do suggest, however, that general acquaintance with the products of social science research, let alone social science researchers, is severely limited. The very phrase 'social research' probably does not mean much even to relatively well-informed people. That is not to say that some disciplines, notably economics and psychology, do not have their own communications networks which may operate in parallel with the 'open' media: they do. But it does point to a deficit in public knowledge of what are the social sciences.

In one sense of course, this may not matter. A Cardiff University study of the public's knowledge of climate change, the MMR vaccine and biotechnology carried out for the ESRC noted that lack of knowledge does not prevent people from holding opinions (http://www.esrc.ac.uk/esrccontent/PublicationsList/whom/whofirst.html)! The public, evidently, hold views about prices and prisons whether or not they have ever read about any relevant economic or criminological research. This, some would argue, is the curse of social science: people feel scant need to know more of phenomena they 'know' in their social existence. The problem thus becomes how to communicate counter-intuitive or subversive knowledge. In a paper in the *Economic Journal*, Caplan (2002) talks unhesitatingly of 'intellectual error' resulting from public ignorance of the findings of economists' research. He argues that because public opinion suffers from severe economic illiteracy, democracy tends to supply economic policies that leave much to be desired. Not all (non-economist) social scientists would be as forthright in asserting that they possess the truth, but most would agree there is a problem: social life might be conducted more sensibly, and public policies might be better founded, if social science research were more widely disseminated and better understood.

6.3 The causes of the problem

If there is a dissemination and understanding gap, how far are social scientists themselves to blame? In a world where web use is ubiquitous, relatively few social scientists (or even academics more generally) have their own web site to set out their contributions; this is singularly unfortunate and is easily corrected. Beyond this, however, we do believe there is a lack of media awareness on the part of some – perhaps too many – social researchers. On the face of it that is puzzling – media studies, informed by social research, have expanded mightily in recent years. But, as Ian Hargreaves – former editor of *The Independent* – told us, few social scientists (or, indeed, any academics) seem to have any familiarity with the business of media production or the attitudes and way of working of

journalists. The latter may be part of the problem. Social scientists can and should do much more to disseminate their own research results. We address *how* in the last section of this chapter. But it would be wrong to assume the fault is all on that one side.

Many social scientists think what they do is of little interest to the media – 50% of the sample in the survey mentioned above responded that they found it difficult to get the media interested in their work. Why should that be? Intuitively one might imagine the subject matter of much social inquiry and that of journalism is similar; despite methodological differences, the subject of both approaches is behaviour and social reality. But some social scientists report overt hostility to their work by journalists and, as we have seen, they cut rather insignificant figures in the world as reported by journalists.

Part of the reason is that newspapers and most broadcasters – the BBC is a special case – operate in commercial environments. Editors would force their journalists to work differently if market forces decreed it. Short of some drastic change in the attitudes of newspaper buyers and television watchers, it is hard to see how newspapers could be pressured into adopting different attitudes. However, we need to find and exploit ways in which the media might be more receptive to the output of social research.

One problem is editorial attitude. Even on broadsheet newspapers, a kind of anti-intellectualism prevails, suspicious of abstract or 'difficult' ideas, ignorant of scientific method and heavily biased towards inference over hypothetico-deductive procedure. In addition, certain newspapers betray ideological biases, antagonistic to the social research enterprise. In some newsrooms a 'know nothing' attitude is displayed. It says, we 'know' social reality and have no need of intellectual inquiry. Certain newspapers also specialise in reports that mock the seeming obviousness of social scientific findings. The same newspapers also dislike findings that are critical of the socio-political *status quo* or appear to favour (by paying attention to) minority groups.

Another problem is journalistic capacity, especially when it comes to the appreciation and practical handling of numbers. As an occupational group journalists are highly educated. According to a recent survey, 98% have first degrees and 43% have postgraduate qualifications. According to a survey by the Journalism Training Forum in July 2002, many journalists undertake post-qualification study. But it seems their skill sets rarely include quantitative methods. A survey by John Martyn of the University of Surrey Roehampton for the Royal Statistical Society showed this clearly. The most accurate and comprehensive reporting and discussion of official statistics and other surveys occurred in *The Financial Times*, *The Times*, *The Guardian* and *The Independent* on weekdays and *The Sunday Times*, *The Observer* and *The Independent* on Sundays. *The Evening Standard* is important because of its large metropolitan readership and the timing of its daily publication. Only *The Economist* of the weeklies provided authoritative coverage and that could sometimes be decisive. Its rankings of the world's official statistical agencies based on judgements of objectivity (i.e. lack of political interference), reliability and relevance of the numbers published had global effects.

Martyn found that journalists rarely distinguish between sample and census-type statistics, usually focus on very short-term changes and write up only a few topics (in order of frequency: the economy, health, unemployment and education). Recurring phrases which suggested deep cynicism on the part of the journalists included 'lies, damned lies and statistics', 'the truth behind the statistics', 'nothing more than a statistical glitch', 'statistical tricks of the trade' and 'dazzling statistical magic'. Martyn was forced to the conclusion that 'trouble' shooters' and intermediaries skilled in press matters were essential if statistics (or other quantitatively-based conclusions) were to be used more effectively in the media.

Finally, social scientists complain of journalists' attitudes. They are said to be uninterested in social scientific methods and intolerant of conceptual sophistication. Journalists are said to want to 'use' academics as cheap sources of information, to divulge sensitive details of the subjects of research and to ride roughshod over the fine detail of research.

6.4 Some remedies

6.4.1 Social scientists as personalities or generic experts

Too few social scientists are brought in by television producers as expert witnesses. Too few social scientists have celebrity or occupy a prominent place in public consciousness. More social scientists could take the role of 'spokesperson' for their disciplines. The way history has been popularised successfully on television may well be worth studying. Research institutions and universities could try to groom colleagues who show themselves to be effective practitioners of the televisual arts. Their colleagues would in turn have to be tolerant of the rewards given stars (and the often random process by which such stars are created), but the elevation of individuals in public consciousness could benefit the social sciences as a whole.

6.4.2 Extending the place of social science in popular culture

Television drama and soap opera does have cognitive dimensions. The Kaiser Family Foundation found that half of the (20 million plus) regular American viewers of the medical drama *ER* said they gained new knowledge about health from the show. According to *Newsweek* of 7 October 2002, after one *ER* scene on human papilloma virus, national awareness of it jumped greatly. It is perhaps unlikely that script writers for *East Enders* or *Coronation Street* are suddenly going to cast an anthropologist – but there may be ways in which social science ideas or references could be insinuated into plots. This might require some discreet lobbying of shows' producers.

6.4.3 Building on success

Some research institutions have established reputations as valued sources for the media, and play a vital role in informing public conversations about policy, events and socio-economic trends. Among these is the Institute of Fiscal Studies. Its characteristics are the availability of its researchers to respond to public and media inquiries, a willingness to explain, timely provision of information and articulate presentation of recondite material. The ESRC commissioned a collection of case studies entitled *Heroes of dissemination* (Walker 2001), intended to show that you can be both a successful social scientist and media-friendly – though it should be noted that economists were over-represented in the sample. Other useful ESRC-commissioned advice is contained in Gabor (2001) and Vaitilingam (2001). One of our Commissioners, the head of the equivalent of ESRC in Canada, is firmly of the view that ESRC 'does dissemination' better than the great bulk of similar bodies. But we are still of the view that more could with benefit be done by that key body and others (see below).

6.4.4 Programmes for dissemination

Traditionally funders of academic research were unconcerned about the 'consumers' of social scientific work. The assumption was that research would issue in journal articles or possibly monographs, circulate within the company of fellow researchers, and eventually 'trickle down' through a variety of mechanisms. In recent years, however, funders have begun to insist that researchers make specific efforts to convey their results to wider audiences – but are still remarkably unprescriptive about how, to whom and the measures of success.

The ESRC asks those it funds to make some effort to contact the media or plan seminars. It does some direct dissemination work, putting out media releases and assisting with the training of researchers in media techniques. It says all of its programmes have extensive communications plans. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation, among the philanthropic funders of social research, insists that results are disseminated and pioneered by producing a series of *Findings* written in accessible language and circulated widely outside the research community. We have heard much praise from all sectors for the effectiveness and influence of these Rowntree publications (e.g. see Section 7.1).

How much more could be done to make knowledge of developments in the social sciences available to the wider world? The answer is both more and less. A substantial body of research work is 'internal'; it has to do with methodology, with intra-disciplinary disputation or with knowledge that is properly 'hermetic'. The trick is in distinguishing such work from research that can and should be disseminated more widely, then making a more determined effort to communicate findings on the latter – not just to intermediaries in newspapers and broadcasting but directly to the interested public. We would place emphasis on planning: building in a plan for communication at the very earliest stages in the conceptualisation and funding of social and economic research. A more sophisticated understanding of media practice and interests is certainly required. Alongside this must be realism, for some research will never be suitable for generic distribution. There is nothing shameful about restricting publication of *some* research to smaller groups – and adapting communication techniques accordingly. Much more sophistication may need to be shown by researchers or (see below) more work placed in the hands of skilled intermediaries.

6.4.5 A new class of intermediary?

We already have models of effective dissemination of research, thanks to specialist intermediaries. The British Psychological Society and the Royal Economic Society have created 'translation' mechanisms. Research output is assayed well in advance of academic publication and communication possibilities explored. A specialist is employed to consider media opportunities, write press releases, contact journalists or devise alternative means of communicating results to intended audiences. The Centre for Economic Policy Research (CEPR) is universally acknowledged to have been hugely successful in both bringing together key individuals from disparate sectors and also acting as an intermediary (see Box 7.2). On the other hand, some other learned societies and many universities seem to have been rather ineffective in organising 'professional' dissemination. Given the scale and diversity of the social sciences and the particularity of its remit, the ESRC cannot manage all the necessarily specific sets of relationships between research producers and their audiences (and specialist proxies in the media). Other organisations – including the Academy of Learned Societies for the Social Sciences and *all* its component learned societies – have an important role to play.

6.4.6 Incentives to communicate

Social researchers must be given inducements to engage in the sometimes fraught and time-consuming business of communication. The incentive system built into the RAE often seems to exclude wider, more discursive use of research. Universities – either consciously or unconsciously – have favoured the business of winning high grades through 'playing the RAE game' over giving recognition and kudos to the business of wider communication (we make recommendations on future RAEs in Section 5.2.1). In our view, knowledge transfer has to be made a specific objective of research institutions and universities: we note the government's commitment to this in the 2003 White Paper but that is largely focused on work in the physical sciences. Social researchers' suspicions of media practice and culture have also played a part in discouraging them from presenting their material or seeking to influence or inform debate. Behind this, however, may lay a puzzling lack of self-confidence which appropriate training, coaching and mentoring can minimise – especially amongst younger people. This personal development is a responsibility of employers, research funders and individuals alike; action by any one party is unlikely to make material changes across the system.

6.5 Conclusions

'Bad blood' exists between many social scientists and journalists who, for better or worse, are gate-keepers for the passage of their work into the public domain. A number of social scientists have been wounded by their contacts with the media (Haslam and Bryman 1994) and there is no pretending that relations can be quickly repaired. Nor indeed, is there much appetite on the part of the media to make any special effort to reach out to social scientists. But we believe it vital, for the general good – let alone the effectiveness of social research – that some better relationship is established between the producers of social knowledge and insight and the knowledge intermediaries, notably those in the media.

We therefore recommend that:

- **Other learned societies and disciplinary groups in the social sciences study the success of the Royal Economic Society and other professional groups and research teams in economics in creating successful networks of users and media 'friends' and specialists;**
- **Research funders in general invest in the formation of a new class of 'translators' or intermediaries between academic work and the common understandings of the public and the mass media.** The highly successful seed-corn funding of the CEPR could serve as a prototype within disciplines outside of Economics;
- **The ESRC enhance its media training programme, concentrating particularly on social scientists under about 35 years of age to foster long term gains;**
- **Universities support their staff in acquiring 'media-savvy' skills and contacts, formally recognising that successful dissemination of research findings is in the interests of the individual and institution alike;**
- **Each and every social scientist have his/her own web site and up-date it regularly as a 'shop window' for what they do with public and other funds;**
- **The Academy of Learned Societies for the Social Sciences, along with other representative bodies, set up a special programme to educate journalists and editors in the protocols and methods of social inquiry;**
- **Social researchers 'grit their teeth' and continue making efforts to reach out and 'sell' their work to the media and the public since better understanding of such research findings is in the best interests of society.**

7 Social science in practice

We can conceive of two extremes – differing in the level of operations – in which research results and practice intersect. These are at the level of national policy in central or the devolved governments and at the local level in Local Authorities, NHS Trusts or in individual voluntary organisations. As Nutley (2002, p2) has said, none of this is new:

> "... the specific character of the relationship between social research and social policy in Britain was shaped in the 19th and 20th centuries ... The 1960s represented a previous high point in the relationship between researchers and policy-makers. However, during the 1980s and early 1990s there was a distancing and even dismissal of research in many areas of policy ... the landslide election of the Labour government in 1997 ... revitalised interest in the role of evidence in the policy process."

We have discussed many aspects of how research in the social sciences intersects with central and devolved governments earlier in this report. Here we will focus on areas other than the central government policy domain. Before then, however, it is important to acknowledge valuable initiatives in evidence-based (or 'evidence-informed' as we argue in Chapter 5) policy and practice. DfES has set up a Centre for Evidence-Informed Policy and Practice in Education based within the Institute of Education. ESRC has created a Centre for Evidence-Based Policy and Practice (*EvidenceNetwork)* with its hub at Queen Mary, University of London and a network of subsidiary centres across the country (see http://www.evidencenetwork.org/home.asp and Box 7.1). These and other developments – though at an early stage – have energised work on how social science can contribute to the work of practitioners.

7.1 The local government domain

The role of social science research is highly variable across local authorities (LAs), depending in part on their size and scale of responsibilities. In substantial organisations, however, there is a significant amount of research – often done from secondary sources – and local survey work carried out. The typical situation is of very short projects, run over short time horizons, often with small sample sizes and expected to produce 'good enough' results (rather than excellent ones). In general, these studies are required to enlighten issues for senior officers. Unsurprisingly, these require the research officer to be pragmatic and to appreciate that they are working in a political environment even though the increasingly strong focus on evidence constrains local political 'horse-trading'.

We were told that the skills normally acquired in a social science course, such as defining a research question to be explored, how to evaluate evidence and how to communicate the findings, were crucial to success in the role of research officer. Technical skills in demand are an understanding of sampling and survey design, of some basic descriptive and inferential statistics and (increasingly) of Geographical Information Systems. Since there is little career progression possible in research in LAs (or more generally in the public services), it is fortuitous that some of these skills also seem to fit the individuals concerned for policy work and subsequent management positions.

Box 7.1
The ESRC Evidence-Based Policy and Practice network

This comprises the units summarised below. The enterprise is designed to:

- Act as a starting point for accessing social science research publications relevant to policy and practice;
- Be open to users in the research community, the voluntary sector, local and central government, public agencies and commercial organisations;
- Provide search tools and a referral framework to enable users to pursue their enquiries;
- Be a forum for debate and discussion of issues and problems in relation to evidence-based policy.

	Entity title/focus	Base
Hub	The ESRC UK Centre for Evidence-Based Policy and Practice	Queen Mary, University of London
Node	What works for children	City/Barnados/York
	Centre for neighbourhood research	Glasgow/Bristol
	Centre for Evidence-Based Public Health Policy	Glasgow/Lancaster/Liverpool
	Centre for Economic Evaluation	Institute for Fiscal Studies
	Research Unit for Research Utilisation	St Andrews
	Centre for Evidence in Ethnicity, Health and Diversity	Warwick/De Montfort
	Systematic Reviews in Social Policy and Social Care	York
	Centre for Comparative European Policy Research	Centre for Economic Policy Research

The driver for much research and intelligence in LAs is, we discovered, the need to implement major policies such as 'best value' and 'evaluation'. Actions arising from major funding initiatives like Neighbourhood Renewal Strategies, the Single Regeneration Budget and Housing Action Zones all require evaluation. Indeed this has been a fruitful source of revenue for many university departments (especially in the post–1992 universities), since the skills to do manifestly independent assessments are not always available in the LA. Some work however is almost always done within the individual LA, such as modelling the effects of funding allocations (e.g. area-based funding of community teams in the social services) or seeking early warning indicators of rapid neighbourhood decline. Perhaps curiously, such applied research functions have increased in number and size in many LAs – despite general budget constraints – largely because of the need to obtain efficiency and operate in a way which has local legitimation. The need to find and involve 'hard to reach groups' such as disaffected young blacks or lone mothers has also increasingly proved essential.

The strong impression we have gained, however, is that a very large proportion of academic social science research is of little direct value to such practitioners. Much of it seems to these practitioners to be so context-free as to offer no help (this even to former academics now working in LAs). Indeed, the most frequent printable description about the academic literature we heard was 'frustrating'. ESRC-funded work seemed to be virtually unknown (other than some of that by the *EvidenceNetwork*; see above); the existence of the Local Authority Research Council Initiative (LARCI), established in 1997, was wholly

unknown to those with whom we spoke in the LA sector. The shining contrast was the work of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and, in particular, its *Findings* publications. These are read at all levels in local communities and LAs and frequently cited by activists to councillors and officers. Those who were aware of the RAE were scornful about the alleged absence of any real user input into the process and the poverty of 'real world' work by many academics.

7.2 The National Health Service (NHS) domain

It has long been clear that good health is influenced strongly by many factors, not just physiological ones. Thus, the preamble to the 1946 World Health Organisation constitution defines health as 'a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity'. Table 7.1 suggests the range of factors which influence health, many of them subjects of social science concern.

Table 7.1 Factors allegedly influencing health

Fixed	Social & Economic	Environment	Lifestyle	Access to Service
• Genes	• Poverty	• Air quality	• Diet	• Education
• Sex	• Employment	• Housing	• Physical activity	• Social services
• Ageing	• Social exclusion	• Water quality	• Smoking	• Transport
		• Social environment	• Alcohol	• Leisure
			• Sexual behaviour	• NHS
			• Drugs	

Source: Bolnick (2003)

There is also a political geography to the provision of health care, as Table 7.2 shows in contrasting the environment in which the US and UK health systems have to operate – even though they have comparable goals of cost, quality and access.

Table 7.2 The contrasting political (and other) environments in which health systems operate

US Environment	UK Environment
• Free market ideology	• Social democracy ideology
• Personal autonomy	• Social solidarity
• Presidential system	• Parliamentary system
• Provider-centered power	• Bureaucrat-centered power
• Professional paternalism	• State paternalism
• Disbursed political decision-making	• More centralized political decision-making

Source: Bolnick (2003)

In a UK context, the role of social sciences in the NHS is significant, if often hidden, and is growing. For example, the Conservative government's 1991 NHS reforms, involving a split between purchasing (commissioning) care and providing it, did force health authorities – as purchasers – to take an evidence-based approach to identifying problems and allocating resources accordingly.

Beyond the allocation of resources on a rational and defensible basis, there is a long-standing British interest in the social determinants of health. Health professionals and policy-makers are more involved in looking at evidence on causes, and on what might be done to ameliorate inequalities. An example of work on social determinants is the ESRC

Health Variations programme. The Medical Research Council has funded for many years a medical sociology unit (at Glasgow) and other units engaged in social science research. The Health Development Agency (formerly the Health Education Authority) also commissions much systematic research, though focussed more on the impacts of interventions than on 'blue-skies' work on inequalities. The scale of the NHS research budget is such that even small proportions of it devoted to work involving social sciences can be very significant: a recent example is the 'service delivery and organisation' research programme, run out of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. This programme is focused on evaluating the impacts on health professionals and users of different ways of configuring services and of innovations in service delivery.

A characteristic of some parts of the medical system is the joint appointment of clinical academic staff by universities and NHS hospital trusts; they are expected to practice, research and teach in their areas of expertise. This practice was promoted by the Richards Report (CVCP 1997) which recognised the importance of developing clinical academic career pathways and the need for Higher Education, the clinical service and the NHS to work together. It has been extended in recent years beyond the medical profession into nursing and allied health professions (in which there is now much social science). The increasing emphasis on 'preventive health' and shifts of clinical care into community and primary care require further development in new sectors. Such joint appointments vary widely in frequency and are not without difficulties arising from two related but different paymasters. But at their best they provide a superb way of transferring new research findings into practice and enthusing students through practical examples. It seems to the Commission that the model is capable of beneficial extension in other fields.

A very important change in the NHS with ramifications for the social sciences is the advent of Primary Care Trusts (PCTs). These are now the main providers of primary care and community health services, as well as commissioners of secondary health care and key NHS players in the boards which set joint local health and social care service priorities. Traditionally teaching, research and development activities have been poorly supported in primary health care. There is little research expertise in these services compared with hospital services in universities. To help rectify this, the NHS has proposed that, within each Strategic Health Authority, one PCT should be designated as the lead on teaching and another on research, each developing expertise on behalf of the other trusts in the authority. We have therefore a potentially fertile new framework for the interaction between academics and practitioners in the health domain.

An aim of the NHS agenda is now to deliver a 'seamless service' for patients, at least for their needs (but not always their 'wants'). This means that patients should be able to be treated by whoever is appropriate within hospitals; they should be able to move between hospital and community without gaps or stumbling blocks in communication about their needs; the people caring for them, whether in hospital or home, should be well-informed about previous interventions by carers; and there should be an agreed individual plan for their future care. Central to all this however is the need for inter-professional working and, under-pinning it, inter-professional learning. The challenges to achieving these are manifold: different funding streams, disparate professional bodies, and the fact that nursing and midwifery education are often separated geographically and institutionally from medical and dental education. The evidence is also that such inter-professional learning is not a simple matter: first year medical, dental and nursing students have been shown to have deeply stereotypical notions of each other's professional groups, which impede their ability to work successfully together. In itself this is a social science problem. But we have seen imaginative examples of programmes to create 'teams of people rather than tribes' as urged by a Department of Health report in 2000. We suspect that the inter-professional debate and these experiments have valuable lessons for social science disciplines more generally.

7.3 The charitable and voluntary sector domain

According to the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO), there are about 135,000 general charities in the UK with an annual income of about £13 billion. These are of interest to us for two reasons:

- They form a distinctively different source of research funding, focusing on areas of research which are supported by voluntary and public subscription;
- These charities are also users of the research to help steer their own activities.

A report on research relationships between charities and the HE sector, carried out for HEFCE (HEFCE 2002b), showed that charity funding of HE is comparable in volume to all research funded by the research councils and, within the medical and related fields, charities fund significantly more than these councils. The report concluded that much of the work funded was of high academic quality and relevant to national needs. Charities were sometimes seen as more flexible, innovative and unconventional than public funders and able to bring academics and practitioners together more readily. Some regional and locally-based charities provide funding for less-research-intensive universities and have enabled them to launch research programmes prior to bidding for research council support. Charities are also seen by HEIs as less bureaucratic than research councils.

The volume of all charity-funded research in UK HE in 1999–2000 was £484 million, some 25% of all HEI research grant and contract income – greater than that from UK government departments or from EU contracts. Such funding by charities has grown by 200% over the 11 years to 1999–2000. The lack of overheads on this research funding has caused many complications for UK HEIs but this is being addressed by government in the 2002 Spending Review outturn. A major part of this funding goes into medical research but it also plays a significant role in the social sciences and humanities. Based on HESA statistics, about 12% of all research grant and contract income of HEIs in 2000–01 came from charitable sources for the social sciences as we have defined them in Chapter 2 of this report. Table 10.16 in Section B shows the English situation in more detail. It can be seen that the fraction going to the 'core' social sciences is modest. This, however, is swollen in practice because much of that going to nursing – a rapidly developing research area – and other professions allied to medicine can reasonably be construed as social science.

In general – though this is a huge generalisation – charities reported that they were pleased with the work done for them including the dissemination of research findings. But two particular areas of concern expressed were on shortcomings in project management and career development of staff.

The charities and voluntary organisations are 'consumers' of this substantial body of research which they and other people commission. It seems that social science skills are widely used across the sector, particularly where advocacy or information provision is a key function. The many small organisations clearly face more challenges in this respect than larger ones. Campaigning and advocacy work now needs to be based on robust research, much (but not all) of it using secondary information sourced from elsewhere. Any case for receiving additional resources needs to be based – and be seen to be based – on compelling, well-researched arguments. Increasing media scepticism has also necessitated investment in research.

The result is that organisations need social science research skills in three generic areas: commissioning and managing research, research evaluation, and the dissemination of research results. Thus a children's charity might study the efficacy of a particular policy intervention and possibly lobby accordingly; an aid charity might study the economics of the coffee market and seek to understand the impact of tariff charges on the recipients of its aid. The head of research at the National Council for Voluntary Organisations believes that there is presently a deficit in the sector of skills for evaluating past or contracted-out research and its relevance. Beyond that, however, many organisations are increasingly being asked to

evaluate the outcomes and impact of their work, yet lack the skills to undertake (or more likely, to commission) such work. We have heard from various sources that the quality of this evaluation work is presently patchy at best.

Finally, we became convinced that the sector itself is massively under-researched. For an entity of its size, we were able to find only modest amounts of research analyses and publications (e.g. on charitable giving). Thus **we recommend to academic social scientists that they will find the voluntary sector a fruitful field of research.**

7.4 Think tanks

In many respects 'think tanks' are now the investigative bodies of choice for some policy-makers. They interact with and often partially consist of practitioners. Social sciences of one sort or another are the basis of most of what they do. Organisations such as Civitas, Demos, the Fabian Society, the Institute for Public Policy Research, Politeia and the Social Market Foundation now play a very significant – sometimes crucial – role in shaping government policy and public perceptions on social and economic issues.

Think tanks vary enormously in every respect – focus, mode of operations, funding, relationship to government and to academia, staffing and much else. CEPR (see Box 7.2) has, for instance, been described as a 'think net' of academics rather than a think tank on conventional lines. All successful think tanks do share a common focus on 'big issues'; most need to seek funds from whatever source is available; all operate through extensive networks of contacts and each can (and does) deliver ideas or reviews to a time scale set by the needs of the funder. Some have close relationships with academia – the Centre for Reform for instance takes up to six interns annually from universities and most of the senior staff studied social sciences. Many think tanks, however, have very fragile finances and bankruptcies have occurred from time to time. In some cases at least, they are unlike any teaching-based organisation: they are (necessarily) driven on a project basis, often on very short time scales and move on rapidly to another topic for which funding can be raised. All are located close to the main market for their work – London (although embryonic ones are now operating in Cardiff and Edinburgh). Box 7.2 sets out the characteristics of four rather different think tanks from within the group with whom we talked. Some obvious questions arise – for example why were more of these organisations not set up within some entrepreneurial universities? Though there are some 'problem-oriented networks' operating within the EU and with ESRC support, why is there no equivalent of CEPR in other social science fields? Why are relatively few academics actively engaged with think tanks?

Box 7.2
Some think tanks

Centre for Economic Policy Research: CEPR is a non-profit, educational charity. It was founded in 1983 to 'promote independent, objective analysis and public discussion of open economies and the relations between them' (Portes and Yeo 2001). Annual expenditure is of the order of £2 million. This is raised from a multiplicity of sources since there is no endowment; ESRC gave partial support in the early years and CEPR is now one of its EBP nodes (see Box 7.1). Much of the current funding for specific research programmes comes from the European Commission Framework Programme (Research Training Networks, etc). CEPR's activities span research projects and programmes, with associated conferences and workshops; outputs are disseminated in publications, public discussion meetings, and briefings for the policy community, the private sector and the press. It now coordinates the activities of an international network – an invisible college – of over 650 research fellows, affiliates and associates, based primarily in universities. No research work is done at its London headquarters where 23 staff deal with the development funding, administration of research and

organisation of publications and meetings. There is a strong emphasis on quality control through the selection of fixed term (mostly young) research fellows who lead research activities. One quarter of these are from the UK; most of the rest are based in mainland Europe. It has been claimed that CEPR's work has influenced developments as profound as the European Monetary System, the Single European Market, central bank independence and the enlargement of the EU.

The Work Foundation: Formerly the Industrial Society, this is an independent charity which exists to improve working life. It is part research institute, part business consultancy and part advocate. The team includes employment experts, economists, commentators and researchers. The research team is an integral part of the Foundation and has 12 permanent staff as well as freelance support hired as per project. The research is 'reality-based' and aims to generate practical strategies and solutions to improve the quality of working life. There is a strong emphasis on 'making a difference'. The majority of the work comes from consortium research projects because business is their prime focus, but their work spans all organisations and sectors, public or private. They work in partnership with organisations and their strategic goals to deliver excellence in the work place. Many of their projects are carried out in collaboration with other consultants, e.g. they are working with Microsoft and PricewaterhouseCoopers on iSociety – a major programme of research on the impact of ICT on social and economic life. The Work Foundation is a facilitator of end-user dissemination. Outputs are disseminated in publications: reports, briefings, journals and 'think pieces', and their advocacy team is involved in lobbying, events, media contact and dialogue with decision-makers. They are committed to being a best-practice employer and encourage staff development in all areas.

The Royal Institute of International Affairs (aka Chatham House): the RIIA was founded in 1920 to analyse international issues. It is membership-based and exists to help stimulate debate and research on political, business, security and other international issues. The enterprise as a whole has a gross turnover of approximately £4 million. Twenty-five per cent of funding comes from membership subscriptions (both individuals and corporates), 50% from research programmes (which get their money from charitable grants, corporate and other donations), and the remaining 25% from publications, conferences and endowments. Due to this external support, the Institute is crucially able to remain free of all government and political interests. It has a series of 10 research programmes with 60 Associate Fellows spread across them. The RIIA has its their own academic journal, *International Affairs*, and also produces a monthly magazine which covers topical issues with a circulation of approximately 8,000. Other forms of dissemination include briefing papers and reports, books, Chatham House papers, and discussion papers as well as workshops, conferences and study groups which involve experts, officials and government advisers.

The King's Fund: this is an independent charitable foundation, founded in 1897, which aims to improve the health and health care of Londoners. Most of their income is from investments established over 100 years ago. Other sources of income include fees for education and leadership development courses; grants and fees to support policy research and analysis; sales of King's Fund publications and other works through the bookshop; and charges for the use of their conference and catering facilities. Its activities include research, policy analysis and development work which are done either in-house or through grants given to other health-related organisations (where around £2 million is distributed annually). They carry out policy analysis on the basis of other people's research as well as on new research of their own. The King's Fund is a leading provider of programmes to senior executives and clinicians in the NHS. It is also active in lobbying government and others to affect change. Outputs are disseminated widely through the media, events and publications.

The best think tanks have a sharp focus, high productivity, good connections, considerable influence, relative lack of historical baggage, and speed of action – and a clarity of purpose and recognition that they are not generally involved in fundamental academic research. We entirely accept that some operate at a level of analysis which is wholly inappropriate for research-active universities. But the best of them have some lessons for us.
We recommend that deans of social science faculties across Britain should study the nature and successes of think tanks and seek to emulate their desirable features. This may require some initial investment from individual HEIs to establish 'within-HEI think tanks', justified on the enhanced brand recognition and value added by a successful operation. Such enterprises may only prosper, however, if they have more freedoms than traditional academic units in terms of staff contracts, salary and firing capacity. It may also be sensible to foster both-way secondments between academic staff and think tanks as part of a general policy for enhancing staff mobility (see also Section 9.1).

7.5 Conclusions

There are a number of generic conclusions which we draw from this brief review. These are:

- The role of social sciences is increasing in importance in many practitioner domains. A lot of this is not obvious since it is embedded in operational and policy domain work in a multiplicity of organisations. In part, this has been a consequence of the move towards evidence-based approaches driven by central government policies on best value for money, etc;
- There is a widespread frustration amongst many practitioners at the inaccessibility of much of the academic literature they encounter – and praise for those individuals and organisations (e.g. the Joseph Rowntree Foundation) which seek to minimise the problem. Given this, it seems we need more skilled intermediaries to translate academic theory into material meaningful to practitioners – as well as greater awareness in authors of context and user needs;
- There is clear evidence that social science skills – of framing problems in a way which can be rigorously assessed, the assembly of evidence, its analysis and some forms of presentation – are highly valued by many bodies employing professional staff;
- The effectiveness of networking models as used by CEPR in economics and by various think tanks is clear. We believe that these could be extended further and **recommend that ESRC and other funders should prompt the creation of similar entities within other appropriate academic disciplines**;
- There may well be merit in extending the joint appointment model employed in some health arenas to local government and voluntary bodies.

We therefore **recommend that local authority associations, plus the Improvement and Development Agency, discuss with appropriate university representative bodies such as Universities UK whether there are barriers to such joint appointments and, if so, find ways to circumvent them and foster such dual working.**

We also recommend that professional bodies in the relevant areas discuss with disciplinary bodies how best to ensure that academic research is made available in a form which is helpful to the professions. This may involve employment of skilled 'translators' or enhanced communication to academics of the needs and capacities of users to absorb research findings, often whilst working under considerable pressure 'at the coal face'.

8 Who speaks for the social sciences?

We have seen in Chapter 2 that the social sciences form a hard-to-define entity. Even within individual disciplines there are often many different methodological approaches, different aims, and different value systems; the boundaries of such disciplines are usually imprecise and mutating. Different disciplines are often misleadingly characterised by stereotypes, yet their common focus on 'disciplined curiosity about societies in which we all live' ensures there is something meaningful called the social sciences.

It is inevitable in a highly competitive world that all entities need to have spokes-people. Some of this is required for dealing with the media (see Chapter 6). Such spokespersons are not difficult to identify at some levels in the social science hierarchy of entities (Table 8.1). Yet there is lack of clarity about who speaks at the national level for the social sciences – quite unlike the situation in the physical sciences where the Royal Society reigns supreme and speaks for these sciences (it is funded by government via a Parliamentary vote to the extent of £25.7 million per annum in 2002). In the field of engineering, the situation is less clear-cut. The Royal Academy of Engineering provides one strong voice, but the Engineering Technology Board (and previously the Engineering Council) and a plethora of 34 professional bodies and institutions also represent their members and the greater engineering enterprise in British and other fora, seeking to influence government policy and lobbying where appropriate. All this is in addition to the many disciplinary and academic bodies involved.

Table 8.1 The existing spokespersons for the social sciences

Level	Spokesperson(s)
Social sciences as a whole	Academy of Learned Societies for the Social Sciences, British Academy, ESRC?
Group of related entities e.g. of research centres in multiple disciplines such as ARCISS	Agreed spokesperson
Discipline (e.g. economics, psychology, statistics)	Learned Society (e.g. RES, BPS, RSS)
Department	Head of department or appointed spokesperson
Research team (may be virtual and cross-institutional)	Team leader
Individual	Individual

At the national level, some plurality is inevitable: thus individual learned societies in the social sciences will respond to matters which affect their interests or where they have relevant specialist expertise. But their advice may not coincide with that from other learned societies and other bodies. In addition, the sources of their funding may well make it difficult for some entities to be independent and be seen to be so.

Despite all of the above, we are agreed that there is a deficit in who speaks for the social sciences at a high level in Britain. We see two different aspects of this – which need to be handled somewhat differently. The first of these is in putting forward considered views to government and other parties on the big issues of the day. The second is to act in a corporate marketing role for the social sciences; as we have seen in earlier chapters, there are many misunderstandings or lack of awareness of this group of disciplines.

As a consequence, we now review the present roles of those bodies which can be seen as key players. We then make some recommendations on how to improve the two deficits and minimise any possible, wasteful duplication.

8.1 The British Academy

The British Academy (BA) was formed in 1902 under a Royal Charter after an abortive attempt to widen the scope of the Royal Society. The heading of the Charter describes the BA as being 'for the promotion of historical philosophical and philological studies'. It sets out the objectives of the BA as 'the promotion of the study of the moral and political sciences, including history, philosophy, law, politics and economics, archaeology and philology'. The current mission of the BA is to serve as the national academy for the humanities and the social sciences, promoting, sustaining and representing advanced research' (see http://www.britac.ac.uk/). Its officers see it acting as the counterpart to the Royal Society.

The BA deals with 'pure' rather than 'applied' social science, as well as the humanities, and is not primarily concerned with policy issues unless these relate directly to the research they support. Research sponsored or supported by the BA may well, however, turn out to have implications for public policy or provide understanding of the context and constraints within which policy decisions will be made. Thus the BA's concerns are those addressed by DfES, DCSM, the Home Office, HMT, DTI/OST and many other government departments – perhaps an even wider canvas than that of the physical sciences. It is also difficult to anticipate where what is initially seen as scholarship and pure research will become of pressing practical relevance: the expertise of Islamic experts, now much in demand post-September 11th 2001, is just one example.

The BA does not seek to shape what universities do; its view is that disciplinary leaders decide what is best for their discipline and that disciplines are the primary building blocks of universities. In part as a consequence of this and because its fellows are not formal representatives of anything – they are selected because of their high quality research – the BA is very nervous about taking up a lobbying role in relation to government.

Two separate groups exist within the BA, one for social sciences, the other for humanities. Each organises its elections to fellowship and all other business relating to the disciplines held to exist within them. The BA is restricted by statute to election of only 35 new fellows per year. There are 18 disciplinary sections; in addition, there is a Fellowship Standing Committee specifically charged with overseeing interdisciplinary areas and minority subjects. Every five years there is a structural review of its disciplinary sections and committees. These committees make funding decisions, annually review the mix of subjects, the areas where work is undertaken, etc.

Recognising that the nature of the social sciences is increasingly interdisciplinary, the BA is currently planning two large-scale programmes (running for periods of approximately 7 years) which would be highly interdisciplinary. Areas where overlap may encourage profitable collaboration with the physical sciences include bioethics.

Some 20 years ago, the social sciences were not getting adequate recognition in regard to election of fellows. That situation has now changed: there is a 50:50 balance between fellows elected on the basis of their research in the humanities and social sciences (the ratio of those elected to the size of the community seems more generous than that of the Royal Society which elects 35 new fellows each year from over 200,000 in the 'pool'). Some 20% of fellows work (or worked – see below) in Oxbridge or London; some 77% are associated with pre–1992 universities. In 2002 there were around 272 social scientist fellows out of a total fellowship of about 764 i.e. 35.6%, compared to 31.5% in 1997. Any change in the overall balance of membership is slow in registering because fellows are elected for life. Those social scientists in the BA make applications for research almost in proportion to their membership, with a success rate closely matching that of the applications.

The resources of the BA arise mostly from government. In 2002/2003, these amounted to £13 million. Perhaps surprisingly, government has not approached the BA for advice (though recently the Director General of the Research Councils has commissioned a study). We detected some evidence of emerging proactivity on the part of the BA in dealing with public policy issues – such as the Bennett Report (BA 2000) on research training and the forthcoming one on the contribution of the social sciences and humanities to the Knowledge Economy.

The BA officers we met made it clear that the BA had no formal links with learned societies or with practitioners and saw the role of the Academy of Learned Societies for the Social Sciences as being an important one in these respects. One area of common interest between the two bodies is in public promotion and understanding. The BA has a Public Understanding Committee which seeks to raise awareness of the relevant issues through public lectures, seminars and other means. But the resources available amount to only one officer (c.f. six in the Royal Society).

8.2 The Academy of Learned Societies for the Social Sciences

The idea for an academy of social science came from the Association of Learned Societies in the Social Sciences (ALSISS). The latter was formed in 1982 as an association and 'umbrella body' of learned societies in the social sciences. Its formation was prompted by the need to defend them against the attacks of Sir Keith Joseph (see also Section 1.6) and a general climate of government hostility to the role of social sciences in society. In the early 1990s, ALSISS reviewed its remit and began to think about the future of the social sciences. In his presidential address in 1992, Peter Glasner marked the 10th anniversary of ALSISS by proposing a move from a reactive to a proactive organisation. This included a distancing from the 'narrow political exigencies of the day' and a requirement 'to encompass all the different levels of the [social science] provision and delivery of social science knowledge, and not just those relating to its more obscure frontiers'. The culmination of this policy was a decision to develop a new academy. The Academy of Learned Societies for the Social Sciences was duly launched in 1999, with 62 founding academicians and 41 learned societies.

The rationale for launching such an academy was a perception that the social sciences needed a dedicated institution to represent *all* the social sciences, and both academic and practitioner social scientists working in the public, private and voluntary sectors.

As those involved with this Academy saw it, the British Academy represents the humanities and only some academic aspects of the social sciences. The published aims of the new Academy are to:

- Promote excellence in research, education and service to the community;
- Encourage multidisciplinary social science;
- Represent the social sciences to government, research councils, business, and international bodies;
- Enhance the work of scholars and practitioners;
- Work for the advancement of the social sciences in understanding today and shaping tomorrow.

The Academy has two colleges, one of learned societies and the other of academicians, plus a Council elected from the two colleges (in which representatives from learned societies are in a majority). The academicians are nominated by the learned societies and existing academicians, with the constraint that one-third are practitioners. There are now

359 academicians and a 'steady state' target of around 700 is planned. There are now 43 learned societies in membership, covering a very wide range (see http://www.the-academy.org.uk/ for the latest information).

Funding for the Academy is very modest indeed by the standards of the British Academy. It derives from subscriptions from learned societies and from Academicians, from fund-raising, consultation work and various other activities. Despite this, the Academy has been pro-active and productive, as shown in Box 8.1.

Box 8.1
Some activities of the Academy of Learned Societies for the Social Sciences since 1999

Responding to consultations:

- The Department of Trade and Industry's *Foresight, Ageing Population Panel: The Age Shift – A consultation exercise*
- Wales Higher Education Review
- Various ESRC consultation exercises on, e.g., Thematic Priorities, the Research Colleges, postgraduate training
- The British Academy review of the current state of postgraduate studies in the humanities and social sciences
- The House of Commons Science and Technology Committee review of short term research contracts in science and engineering
- Genetics and Human Behaviour: the ethical context (Nuffield)
- HEFCE (Follett) Copyright Library Enquiry
- The Quinquennial Review of the Research Councils: Stage 2
- The Joint Funding Bodies' (Roberts) Review of Research Assessment
- Review of Ethics and Social Science Research

Seminars, conferences and lectures held on the following topics:

- Intellectual Property Rights
- Peer Review
- Ethics and Research Guidelines
- Health Inequalities
- EU Framework Programme V and Framework Programme VI (4 seminars in all)
- Citizenship Education
- Using Intergroup Contact to Promote Intergroup Harmony

The Interchange Scheme

Creation of a new scheme to facilitate the interchange of social scientists for periods of 3 to 12 months between the Home Office and the university sector, launched in May 2002.

The New Zealand-UK Link

This inaugural £10,000 scheme is intended to support comparative social and policy research that strengthens the relationship between the two countries.

Academicians of the social sciences include the Chief Social Researcher and the Chief Executive of the ESRC. Many academicians serve on government advisory boards, research council boards and on the councils of community and charitable organisations. The Academy is a member of the Strategic Forum on the Social Sciences for the UK, and of one of the ESRC's Research Colleges and its Framework Programme VI Priority Seven Network.

8.3 Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)

Much has already been said of ESRC (see, for example, Section B) and more is said in Chapter 9. Here we will restrict ourselves to its role as spokesperson for the social sciences in the UK, rather than its main role as the supporter of competitively judged research proposals. We start, however, with its published aims – to provide high quality postgraduate training and research on issues of importance to business, the public sector and government – and its mission which is as follows:

- To promote and support, by any means, high-quality basic, strategic and applied research and related postgraduate training in the social sciences;
- To advance knowledge and provide trained social scientists who meet the needs of users and beneficiaries, thereby contributing to the economic competitiveness of the United Kingdom, the effectiveness of public services and policy, and the quality of life;
- To provide advice on, and disseminate knowledge and promote public understanding of, the social sciences.

ESRC's roles in practice are inter-twined in complex and subtle ways. We can summarise this as follows:

- Through its Royal Charter ESRC is an independent body;
- It receives virtually all of its funding from government via the Office of Science and Technology in the Department of Trade and Industry;
- The great bulk of its expenditure is allocated competitively to universities on the basis of bids made by academic social scientists, some for parts of advertised programmes and some under the 'response mode' grants scheme and some for research training, notably for PhD scholarships;
- It has a Council appointed by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, comprising academics and a large minority of lay people, including many from the business community, operating under an independent chairman;
- Its Chief Executive reports to this Board – but also, under the Research Councils UK structure recently inaugurated, to the Director General of Research Councils;
- Like all other research councils, ESRC is expected to fund only top class research and to monitor the success and impact (in which ESRC has been a pioneer) of what it funds, not least in regard to its accountability for public funds in its care;
- It is clearly in the interests of all research councils to demonstrate that they fund work of high quality, of interest to their stakeholders (of which government is the largest) and which is widely known and has high impact;
- It is probably a minority funder of research training (taking all other sources into account, including those from individual universities) but has had huge leverage on all such training through insistence on system-wide compliance with its own rules.

This set of factors places research councils in general and ESRC in particular in a somewhat difficult position – and one which, though not new, is becoming increasingly

complex. After the First World War, the Haldane Principle was defined to ensure that the duly elected government – whilst it had a right and responsibility to set science policy – would not interfere in defining what the research councils should actually fund in any detail. This has been periodically reiterated, most recently in the 2002 Quinquennial Review of the Research Councils. Private conversations have suggested that the last time this principle was challenged was in the 1980s. Nevertheless ESRC is, in effect, simultaneously a cheer leader for the social sciences, the most influential assessor of the academic quality of social science research, a guardian of the public purse and an entity ultimately dependent on the support of ministers. We recognise the inevitability of much of this but there is now too much ambiguity on who actually runs research councils and considerable suspicion on the part of the academic community and elsewhere on this point. **We therefore recommend that the Director General of the Research Councils and the chairs of the research councils jointly agree a public statement of the division of responsibility between the DGRC, each Council and their Chief Executives. We also urge in the interests of transparency that the minutes of Council meetings be published, restricting excluded confidential material to a minimum.**

ESRC then, already speaks for the social science community in regard to the research it funds and *de facto* for the social science research training in the UK. It does not and cannot speak for the undergraduate training of social scientists – let alone any school level education. Though it has an interest in all postgraduate education, a large proportion of this is in Masters degree courses (notably in business and management, education and some vocational areas) which are largely funded by students or their employers. The reduction in Masters level funding by ESRC in the last decade has further diminished its ability to speak with authority in this area. It can be argued that no one needs to speak for such enterprises in that the market itself operates adequately. In practice, however, that is not true – as we have seen in government's concerns about the quality of training of teachers and business' concerns over the role of business schools. There are also other, individual organisations like AMBA (the accrediting organisation of universities running MBAs) which speak forcefully in defence of their members' interests.

8.4 Discussion of the options for a social sciences spokesman

We consider first the crucial role of providing a single channel of advice to government. In this regard, ESRC undoubtedly has an important role and has been called on frequently to provide evidence to Select Committees of Parliament and many other bodies. But ESRC can not be the spokesperson for the whole of social science. In particular, ESRC as an entity can not be a spokesperson acting as an independent advisor to government or arbiter on matters which pertain to policies past or present (though some of its Centres might well be involved in this role and a number of individual learned societies with critical mass could perhaps do so). Because it has simultaneously to represent the merits of social science research to its paymaster, regulate what is acceptable in much of this research, allocate government's money and ensure good value for the public funds which it allocates, it is not independent enough of government to provide the necessary advice.

One other option for the locus of a spokesperson is in the secretariat of the Strategic Forum for the Social Sciences in the UK. This group involves the ESRC, government, the British Academy, charitable agencies and the Academy of Learned Societies in the Social Sciences. This has already proved useful for discussions over important issues like the putative independent ethical scrutiny of research proposals. But it has no formal or legal status or guaranteed continuity. What is needed is a more permanent and properly resourced body.

To act as a spokesperson for the social sciences as a whole would require the following:

- Additional government-funded resource to those currently available. All of the eligible candidate organisations are inadequately funded for such a role;
- Government and other parties must see a value in seeking advice from such an enterprise – which will require something of a culture change from the present situation. But given government's huge emphasis on the importance of the social sciences (see Chapters 3 and 5), and the frequent comment that senior officers find it difficult to identify sources of good advice, the need for a coherent channel seems unarguable. **We recommend that government does accept the principle of a channel for social science advice parallel to that provided by the Royal Society.** The present situation is highly fragmented, unclear and inefficient;
- The social sciences community as a whole must have confidence in the expertise available through, and the legitimacy of, the chosen channel;
- The existing bodies – which are in some degree of competition (and none will fade away willingly) – are, where necessary, willing to act in partnership for the greater good. That greater good lies in ensuring the greater contribution of social sciences to society.

The two obvious candidates for the role – if such conditions could be met – are the two academies. The British Academy is the senior one, distinguished by the extraordinarily selective process of electing fellows – only about 15 social scientists per year are elected from across all the relevant disciplines in Britain (covering over 25,000 academic staff in universities). It already receives government funding but is not called upon for advice and chooses quite deliberately to focus largely on pure research. The Academy of Learned Societies for the Social Sciences has a fellowship which in the short term will be rather larger than that of social scientists in the BA and will include practitioners as well as learned societies; it has already demonstrated a commendable commitment to speaking for its community. However, its resource base is miniscule and it is thus susceptible to changes of personnel who support it on a voluntary basis.

8.4.1 Thinking more laterally

There is another dimension, however, to this question. The way in which representation of the sciences and the humanities is partitioned in Britain has come to seem increasingly anachronistic. Examples where this makes no sense are legion. These include areas such as risk assessment, where human behaviour in response to nuclear accidents or train disasters owes much more to psychology than it does to 'hard statistics' – as the work of Wynne, Salter, Grove-White and O'Riordan at Lancaster, Nottingham and East Anglia universities has shown. The best medium-term public policy to minimise AIDS outbreaks is now recognised to lie in treating it both as a social and a medical phenomenon and through fostering changes in sexual behaviour. The investigations of the BSE epidemic and of the merits of genetically modified foods would, it seems to us, have benefited greatly from social science inputs – but in an integrated way rather than through production of yet another parallel report. Such a need for cross-cutting work has already been recognised by the president of the Royal Society. He is clear, for instance, that there is often no rational way of proffering advice to government without recourse to a series of costed options, and that economists may have a role to play in future work of the Society.

As a Commission, we are clear that British science in general needs to be much more 'joined up' in the way in which we offer advice from the science community. The reality, therefore, is that we need to find ways not only of two existing bodies working constructively together – but rather three (and possibly five in so far as the Royal Academy of Engineering and the Academy of Medical Sciences are to be involved). We cannot pre-ordain how this might best be done: that is a matter for those involved to work out for themselves, to the satisfaction of all. We note that the Royal Society, the British Academy, the Royal Academy of Engineering and the Academy of Medical Sciences already meet

informally to discuss matters of common concern. From this comes joint submissions of evidence when appropriate. We therefore **recommend that the Academy of the Learned Societies for the Social Sciences be invited to join this body to plan joint contributions, as appropriate, to government calls for advice.**

8.4.2 Piloting a way forward

That said, we are also clear that the level of funding of independent advice in the social sciences is too small. The action proposed above will not produce material benefit unless there is some re-dressing of the financial balance between the physical and the social sciences. **We therefore recommend that government should fund a national spokesperson role for the social sciences as well as the physical sciences and engineering.** We believe this need not be expensive; in our view an initial resource of the order of a million pounds per year would transform the current situation. It would enable a small core staff to be maintained, enhanced 'foresight and horizon scanning' activities, properly collated responses to government proposals and other relevant actions to be undertaken.

We think the case for proceeding thus is compelling. But what should be the channel, where would the staff sit and how should the funding be disbursed and accounted for? Both of the obvious organisations have advantages and complementary strengths. We therefore propose a novel initial pilot arrangement designed to bring about the necessary long term solution. In the first instance, the resourcing proposed above might best be held by one government department (e.g. DTI/OST or Cabinet Office) in a single pot from which the BA and Academy of Learned Societies for the Social Sciences can draw on the basis of jointly agreed proposals (even if only one party does a particular piece of work). This unusual arrangement should only persist for a period – say three years – at the end of which government should use consultants to review the situation. The intention would be that within that period the two organisations should have agreed a way of working for the long term future and the money would then be made available on the normal grant in aid basis.

Two other conditions need to be met for this situation to work well. In the medium term, other sources of funding should also be sought for specific projects to buttress the independence of the advice providers, i.e. we urge use of the Royal Society model. In addition, we believe that the social sciences spokespersons should build closer relationships with the private sector and professional bodies to avoid any over-concentration on academic interests.

8.5 Marketing the social sciences

We have argued above and in earlier chapters that there is a real deficit of understanding and awareness about the social sciences. This is in no one's interests. Many bodies already contribute to enhancing the situation, e.g. ESRC proselytises on behalf of the research it funds and urges its social scientist funding beneficiaries to make known their work – and hence enhance awareness of the social sciences. All this certainly has a spill-over effect for the social sciences as a whole. We are much the better for it. But the need is much greater than what is currently being achieved.

We have heard with interest of what has happened in Canada: the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council has set out to market the work and importance of its entire constituency aggressively. One manifestation of its success is a trebling of press reports in three years.

We concluded that the need is such and the resources for it so disseminated that some co-ordination is essential. **We therefore recommend that the Strategic Forum for the Social Sciences should, as a matter of some urgency, discuss how best to market the social sciences collectively and implement co-ordinated plans for each of its component bodies.**

9 The future of the social sciences

> “We are in a growth sector in a growth industry. The public appetite for education in many forms is relentlessly increasing...In addition, people want decisions to be better informed...The complexity and variety of human endeavour means we will never reach the end of the social sciences. What a lucky profession social scientists are in.”
>
> Frances Cairncross, Chair of the Economic and Social Research Council, giving the Birley lecture in City University, London in March 2002

We have made a number of specific recommendations earlier in the text. Here we end with a higher level overview and some other recommendations.

9.1 Strengths and weaknesses

As we have shown, the social sciences in Britain are large: the community includes about 30,000 university staff and many thousands more practitioners. Over 2 million students have graduated from HEIs in the social sciences in the last 30 years. Social sciences now inform and underpin a large measure of public policy-making. Results from social science research support enlightened public debate in general and enhance the lives of many individuals. The quality of the great bulk of British social science is highly respected outside the UK, and in some areas we may be world-leaders. Various government departments have accepted that the social sciences – or at least some social scientists – can bring important insights and evidence to bear on intractable social and economic challenges; this has been manifested in above-average increases for research funding of the social sciences (see Section 10.4.5).

Yet the situation is far from perfect. In part this is because the social sciences share a number of problems with most other parts of universities. The 40% reduction in funding per student over a decade up to 2001, allied to the entry of students who were less well-prepared for traditional modes of study, has led to large reductions in the time available for serious research by academic staff. Review mechanisms such as the RAE have clearly had some effect in reducing risk and innovation through minimising work which spans disciplinary boundaries; the incentives have been to play to the interests and knowledge of those in disciplinary ‘stove pipes’. In one important respect the social sciences have suffered worse than some other subjects: as the numbers of applicants for some physical sciences declined precipitously, many social science faculties were asked to help support loss-making subjects (in some cases while re-structuring was carried out, but in other institutions on a seemingly permanent basis). All of this is of course complicated by the long periods over which degrees can be phased out, the interest of government in maintaining certain intellectual capacity and skills in areas such as engineering and physics, and the growing activism of RDAs in regional provision.

As we completed our investigations, the government published its White Paper on Higher Education (DfES 2003b). Together with the accompanying funding letter, this is arguably the most important one of its kind for more than a decade and it addresses some of the

issues we believe to be important. In a number of respects it is still subject to being converted into detailed proposals, notably in regard to the concentration of research funding. This will happen over a number of months but we include a preliminary tabulation of where it relates to our key recommendations (Table 9.1).

Table 9.1 The 2003 Higher Education White Paper and our initial comments

The White Paper	Our initial comments
Research selectivity is favoured, with the post-hoc creation of heavily funded elite departments selected from within those with 5* rating	We have argued against the need for excessive concentration in the social sciences where expensive equipment and critical mass is not so important as in the physical sciences
Capital investment for research and teaching infrastructure	Strongly welcomed
Additional funding for staff salaries and removal of ring-fencing of some additional funds; universities expected to use this differentially in areas of greatest market need	We welcome this but the scale of the funding seems much too small to make a significant difference
Funding for academic fellowships	We welcome but await further details to see if these match the needs of the social sciences
Collaboration between universities encouraged	We have highlighted instances where this already occurs and agree there is scope for more in the social sciences
Links with business to be encouraged	Agreed – we have urged this action

Some of the problems we have identified are shared with other subjects at universities. All the information we have seen indicates strongly that the mobility of social (and other) scientists and those in the arts and humanities between academia, government and business is less than is desirable. We know of individual examples – for instance of Betsy Stanko being seconded from Royal Holloway to the Cabinet Office – but these are relatively small in number. Government has provided some incentives to ameliorate what is widely agreed is a significant problem. But a battery of techniques needs to be brought to bear to influence the situation in any serious way. We strongly favour secondments between HEIs, government departments and local authorities, the NHS, charities, research funders and business. There are a series of obstacles to such secondment. Even within the academic community for instance, the different pension schemes disadvantage some permanent moves between old and new universities. But these obstacles must not be allowed to vitiate mobility. We have made some recommendations on high priority areas.

In addition, however, some other problems exist in parts of the social sciences which are distinctive. The most obvious ones relate to areas which are closely identified with the economy, such as economics and business and management studies. It is well-known that the former has huge problems in recruitment of new staff: LSE, for example, has only appointed 4 British lecturers out of some 35 tenure-track appointments in the last 20 or so years because of the dearth of high calibre British applicants. We have summarised the significant external-to-academia criticism of business and management studies in Chapter 5. But these two areas are not alone: we believe real improvements can be effected across the social sciences by a number of actions which we detail below. In most cases, however, this is not solely a matter for HEIs or staff therein: many parts of different governments and other stakeholders must be involved to effect the desirable improvements.

One of the most frequent objects of the comments we received is the ESRC. This is unsurprising since it is by far the largest funder of academic research in the social sciences. We have discussed it under many headings in this report. Box 9.1 summarises these bouquets and criticisms. In general, ESRC came out well from our analyses but there are a number of areas where we believe it can improve. Our responses can be seen in the recommendations we make below and elsewhere, collected together in the front of the report.

Here, however, we single out one big issue on which there are profoundly opposing opinions across all of those with whom we have consulted. This relates directly to the purpose of ESRC (and, indeed, to the other research councils). It is alleged by many (mostly, but not only, academics) to be increasingly a sponsor of policy-relevant applied research for government; under these circumstances a strong user focus makes sense. It is also widely held within the academic community that some of this work is of dubious quality; the metrics used to show otherwise are questioned. This applied orientation is held to account for ESRC's success in obtaining more funds from government. But ESRC's charter indicates that it is to be a sponsor of scientific infrastructure and 'frontier research', driven by a concern for the highest quality work. Its current manifestation embraces both of these roles and appears to be a pragmatic response to sets of pressures from the different communities. For the Commission, ESRC is nothing if it is not supporting world-class and innovative research; that is a necessary condition for success (and we acknowledge that such work is supported by the Council).

We understand the process by which ESRC periodically reviews its Thematic Priorities, engaging with the academic and a variety of user and other communities. This process has been praised by the House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology. But we see the Council at some risk of becoming a *de facto* branch of government through all the pressures arising from government's concern to obtain manifest value for money and evidence on which to base policy. At the very least the question of what ESRC is for and what drives it should be discussed in the public domain. Thus, **we recommend that ESRC's Council should explicitly debate the extent to which the research it supports should be directed (e.g. through many initiatives) as opposed to that based on unsolicited applications from the academic community.** We believe it is crucial to publish the thinking behind the results and any subsequent discussions with OST on this matter (which we recognise has implications far more widely than for the ESRC alone). It is also a matter for Council to be confident that the quality of work done in different sectors and through different mechanisms is high; elsewhere we recommend that there should be an annual published summary of the quality assessments of all the research it supports and of the bids made to it.

One other finding, which surprised some at least of the Commissioners, was the lack of understanding of what ESRC seeks to do and of how it operates on the part of the academic community. We have received a significant number of submissions which contain serious factual errors on these matters; indeed, we have perceived a series of myths to have grown up. ESRC already runs a number of 'roadshows' which seek to explain the role and work of the Council to groups meeting in different universities (though the attendance is highly variable). **We recommend that universities and ESRC make strenuous further efforts to minimise these damaging misconceptions.**

Box 9.1

The community view of ESRC, according to multiple submissions to and discussions with the Commission. Note that these comments, arising from many different submissions, are not entirely consistent

Bouquets

The Devolution, Whitehall, Democracy and Participation and Future Governance Programmes

Its campaign to enhance quantitative skills amongst social science researchers

Achieving good settlements in successive Spending Reviews and on their leadership of some pan-research council programmes

The AIM programme of business fellowships

Its attempts to bring together people from different disciplines in research programmes (but many still operate within disciplinary silos within the programmes)

Pioneering early work with NERC on setting up regionally-focused research

Complaints

Its bureaucracy – allegedly slow to operate (e.g. in decision-making on grant applications compared to other funders, though the evidence for this is mixed). The bureaucracy seems partly because of its over-heavy concern to be able to justify accountability for public funds to an extent that delays or makes impossible innovative research

ESRC is too close to government in defining its objectives and too much resource devoted to centrally-set research programmes rather than responsive mode

Over-great obsession with users and dissemination; ESRC's main role should be to support world-class research, irrespective of its short-term practical value

ESRC achieves too little by way of recognition in key influencing publications (and compares poorly with JRF). Though it involves some media training as part of its research training events, this is too little to be effective and ESRC's message about what it wants is too muted

Its risk-averse nature; funding is rarely of new ideas and is usually for incremental development (and sometimes duplication) of previous work

Too much resource is allocated to small and short-term projects. (It is however widely accepted that some of these should be available for new academics)

The focus on user needs is very patchy and this and emphasis on dissemination is simply a charade/fig leaf to please government ministers; nothing much really gets done

Assessment of the impact of ESRC projects is done much too early

Complaints *continued*

Contrary to the received wisdom, links between ESRC and government are little better than a decade ago – some of the concordats with government departments have not yet borne fruit

The REGARD research results database is simply incapable of use by journalists and other non-academic researchers

By re-focusing on PhD programmes (leading to a reduction in the number of Masters degrees funded) ESRC has played to the academic community rather than employers who want some research skills but not to the level or type of those traditionally required in research training through a PhD programme

ESRC is an academic enclave. Lay members of Council are a minority and find it difficult to become engaged quickly because of the arcane language and procedures (and complexity of the field)

ESRC has few substantive, effective relationships with the private sector

The Byzantine difficulty of obtaining multi-national funded research grants (see Section 9.4.1)

In relation to the above criticisms (which are not addressed elsewhere) and where we believe the comments have substance, we recommend that:

- **ESRC reviews its ways of operating with a view to speeding its research grant award process, using an explicit risks and rewards assessment framework, and accepts that innovative research contains inherent risk;**
- **ESRC should reinforce its marketing to the academic community.** A very significant proportion of the comments we received were ill-founded and based on perceptions rather than reality;
- **the Council should review the appropriate balance between small and large grants and programmes;**
- **ESRC should reassure itself that the existing mechanisms to get new Council members – especially lay ones – engaged from the earliest possible moment are appropriate;**
- **The REGARD database should be replaced with something which will and can be used by a range of outside organisations and individuals – without the need for great expertise and familiarity with the dialects of the social sciences.**

9.2 How much social science does Britain need – or deserve?

The desirable size, nature and focus of the social sciences in Britain is a matter of strongly held opinion. There is no sound way to answer this question other than to assert two propositions:

- That any civilised society needs *some* challenge to orthodoxy and some means of enlightening citizens. These are matters which the social sciences are particularly good at providing;

- Market forces operate – albeit rather spasmodically given imperfections in the knowledge base and the sometimes contradictory objectives of stakeholders – to fashion the nature and size of the social sciences. Thus, students elect to study for one degree rather than another (or not at all). Government and other funding bodies put research out to contract; the volume put out and the nature of the requirements shape 'the industry'. For the Commission then, there is no rational way of saying that the sector as a whole is too large or too small. It is what evolution, available funding and the acts of social scientists make it.

What Britain needs of course is not just *enough* social science, but social science that is of *high quality*. Most (but not all) statistics we have been able to garner (see Section B) describe the totality or the average situation. We do not doubt that there is some poor quality social science research and practice. We would be very surprised if this is any more prevalent than in the physical sciences (though we know of no meaningful comparison). But more importantly, we believe that the competitive and regulatory mechanisms already in place, tuned as a consequence of our recommendations, will progressively reduce any poor quality research or teaching. The last twenty years have demonstrated that such mechanisms can effect great change. The danger is rather that these mechanisms are so draconian that they excise new and controversial ideas and anything which does not contribute to the 'tick box' culture. Excessive concentration of research – geographically, institutionally or in subject terms – is not wise. The government's White Paper presages still greater research concentration in the UK. We do not agree that this is necessary or desirable in the social sciences and make appropriate recommendations in regard to the RAE. Given all this, other changing circumstances and the danger of unintended consequences of changes of policy and practice, **we recommend that a review of the health of the social sciences such as this is repeated periodically in the UK**. It is not for us to name our successor body!

9.3 Research funding

In one area at least, however, we could influence the size and shape of the social sciences – through the volume of funded research. Ignoring that which is funded by private foundations (a matter entirely for them what they fund), this falls into two main categories. The first involves consideration of that fraction of the government's science vote applied to the social sciences. Overall, we believe that the present level of funds available for support of research through the science vote (i.e. competitively through research councils), is appropriate given the current framework (but see Section 9.4.3). Indeed, we note that research councils other than the ESRC are now supporting work in areas previously considered outside their remit (such as in financial modelling by EPSRC); some co-ordination to minimise duplication of effort is obviously desirable but we value plurality in funding sources and outlooks. We congratulate ESRC on achieving good settlements in successive Spending Reviews and on its leadership of some pan-research council programmes. We recognise that this achievement reflects good management as well as a recognition of the importance and value of the social sciences on the part of government. Some submissions have argued that all this has been achieved by ESRC becoming too closely associated with government's beliefs and needs, with a focus on the short term. In general, we do not believe this to be a fair criticism though we do believe that ESRC is unnecessarily cautious in some of its actions, has been unduly slow in operating and imposes over-burdensome accountability on its grant holders.

Earlier in the report we have welcomed the additional resource put into the ESRC. We think this can be used to good effect. In the short term, however, we have two concerns about it – involving the capacity of some of the existing social science infrastructure and the 'lop-sided' nature of the social science research which has grown up. Both of these are addressed below.

The second type of research funding relates to the QR element of university funding. This is determined through the RAE's determination of research quality, followed by an assignment of funding based on the grades awarded to each university department. As we have shown in Chapter 5, the out-turn from the 2001 RAE – under-pinned by the evaluations of non-UK researchers – showed the social science sector to have improved even more than many others. Whilst there are puzzling variations from one UoA to another, the inescapable conclusion is that much of British social science is good (or better) and that good social science is not concentrated solely in a few large HEIs. The inability of the English Funding Council to fund research at pre–2001 levels immediately after the RAE is deeply disappointing and has damaged some very good departments around the country. We look to the government and the funding councils to rectify the situation; discussions on the funding of the 2001 RAE and on its successor are underway as this report was finalised. As we have argued in Section 5.2.1, the funding gradient – with three of the seven grades not being funded at all and the top grade being funded at 9 times the lowest funded level (compared to a factor of 4 in the 1996 exercise) – is inappropriate for the social sciences. We would also welcome the more subject-oriented model of future RAEs proposed by ARCISS and others and now being considered by the RAE review team. We have argued that reinforcing fossilisation of existing research strengths and rendering impossible the growth of new ones is a bad idea: hence the RAE review needs to avoid it. Dynamism is inevitable in the research arena and should not be curtailed; there should be no holidays from competition for resources or prestige by anyone.

All that said, there is clearly scope for improving the quality of some research. We suspect this is equally true of many other sectors, not just the social sciences – but that is our focus of attention. We were told publicly by some funders, but privately by more, that many grant applications were poorly prepared. Some senior staff who had received grants previously were complacent and expected the process to be a formality; many applications were prolix and not focused to an extent that it is impossible to work out what is the research problem, how it is to be approached and solved. To complicate matters still further, referees' reports in the social sciences – as a result of the plurality of viewpoints and values cited earlier – are much more heterogeneous than in the physical sciences. It might be argued that the entire panoply of referees, assessment panels and other quality control checks would ensure that only the highest quality research would get funded via research councils. We think that is unlikely: each council has an incentive to spend the totality of its money and to show success from as many projects as possible. On the other hand, we also believe that some research based on lateral thinking, often across disciplines, is unlikely to get funded because the pressures – or the perceived pressures – to conform are too great. We recognise this is a tricky balance to get right. But we make some specific recommendations on this below, designed to provide incentives to produce greater clarity in research fund applications and in subsequent research.

Where we *do* believe there is a significant problem is in the UK capacity for carrying out research. We have argued in Section 5.4 – and made various recommendations – that the HEFCE study on the recruitment and retention of academic staff is somewhat misleading, at least so far as the social sciences are concerned. In common with the authors of BA (2000), we believe that there is already a dearth of high quality new entrants to many of the social sciences – and not just to economics and business and management though that is where the problem is most acute and obvious. This also involves the volume and nature of research training.

9.4 Looking ahead

It will be obvious from all that proceeds this final section that the social sciences in Britain are heterogeneous but large in scale, high in quality on many international comparisons and have considerable impact. But as we have said earlier, there are many things we think can be improved; better links with the private sector (see Section 5.9.3) forms one of them. Here we concentrate on three other big issues which, if tackled collectively, will re-shape social sciences to overall benefit.

9.4.1 Internationalisation

We set out in Chapter 2, and elsewhere, how we see the social sciences – as in many other areas of science and business – becoming much more international. This is both inevitable and, in part at least, 'a good thing'. But there are few good examples of research programmes where this is facilitated by funding sources or structures. The best specific example of multi-national work is probably the 19 nation European Social Survey, led by the UK in the person of Professor Jowell. This academically-driven social survey is designed to chart and explain the interaction between Europe's changing institutions and the attitudes, beliefs and behaviour patterns of its diverse populations. The survey employs the most rigorous methodologies. It is funded via the European Commission's 5th Framework Programme, with supplementary funds from the European Science Foundation which also sponsored the development of the study over a number of years. That it could be launched at all is an astonishing achievement given the barriers encountered. More generally, EC-funded projects have made major contributions to the totality of UK social sciences in recent years – but these are often highly bureaucratic and often do not pay appropriate overheads (a matter of real concern now that the UK government has recognised the need to pay them on research grants).

The ESRC and its equivalents have set up the European Collaborative Research Project in the Social Sciences. We are told – reliably – that getting funds by bidding unilaterally to one source in the UK, whilst overseas partners bid quite separately to equivalent bodies elsewhere, is fraught and rarely succeeds. The following quotation from the ESRC web site illustrates the difficulties:

> "All awards will be offered conditional upon the funding outcome of the application from the other countries involved. To be eligible under the protocol the application must be successful in at least three of the signatory countries...Should the application be successful in a minimum of three signatory countries, but unsuccessful in say a fourth, then discussions would take place as to whether the project is still viable without the unsuccessful partners... There are no central co-ordinator or central funds. The co-ordination will be handled by the researchers themselves. The management and co-ordination costs should be distributed among the participating countries. .. and not met by the national body funding the partners who were providing the intellectual leadership to the project."

Moreover, all the evidence we have is that the USA is the leading nation in much social science research and other countries outside the EU (such as Canada and Australia) are strong in some areas. We are clear, therefore, that there needs to be some better mechanism for international collaboration in research funding and specifically in fostering of cross-national comparisons. It may be that there is scope for a European-wide approach funded by Brussels as part of the European Research Area which also looks outward to collaboration with other countries. Indeed, we understand talks are currently underway on the possible creation of a pan-European Research Council; we suspect this will have a difficult and prolonged birth given national interests across the continent.

We believe all this requires some thought and action by British agencies first, and any solution must not be constrained to collaboration restricted to Europe. This is primarily a matter of the funding and the rules under which it is allocated. **We therefore recommend that the Strategic Forum for the Social Sciences in the UK consider how best this might be done and the funders within this body revise their rules to make international partnerships easier to set up and operate, especially beyond the level of pairs of 'lone researchers'. We further recommend that public sector research**

funders – notably the ESRC and the British Academy – agree formally on ways of working with their funding counterparts overseas (not just in the EU) and *jointly* fund excellent projects.

There is one other matter which inhibits some international research, especially that based on cross-national comparisons. This is the constraint imposed by the inconsistencies between national databases. An extreme example from another domain is the national basis of calculating altitude (usually by reference to mean sea level, determined through a 'nationally representative' tidal gauge, which led to apparently bizarre results for adjacent countries). This has now become global after the introduction of the Global Positioning System. There are also international agreements and protocols for harmonisation of collection of meteorological data. Most of the social science statistical databases available to researchers are, however, assembled from national datasets compiled to national specifications (though the influence of Eurostat, OECD and UNESCO has had some harmonisation effects). Organisations like the International Division of the US Bureau of Census have long sought – with difficulty – to assemble broadly comparable global datasets, such as of population. The European Social Survey (see above) is one of the relatively few large scale multi-national surveys yet carried out. Even where data exist, however, finding them or accessing them has proved frustrating to many researchers (the ESRC-funded R-Cade initiative based at the University of Durham was a pioneering attempt to provide access to Eurostat data in a convenient and inexpensive form).

So the data environment is not conducive to quantitatively-based cross-comparative research. We recognise that enhancing the present situation is inevitably a matter largely for national governments, working together with international bodies. But one collection of British organisations is central to such enhancement – the Office for National Statistics and its counterparts in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. The National Statistician speaks for Britain in international discussions and negotiations. **We recommend that the National Statistician, acting as Head of the Government Statistical Service, should publicise which multi-national statistical datasets are already available and how to access them. We also recommend that he publicises GSS plans to enlarge the range of internationally consistent (and national) social science data available.**

Finally, we have been struck by the extent to which commercial (e.g. lifestyle or economic) databases are now routinely used in commerce and how some of these are multi-national in scope. Whilst often not as fastidiously created as those for national statistics (they are designed to be 'fit for commercial purposes') some of them are extensive – covering tens of millions of individuals – and are up-dated continuously. We have seen examples of where – despite the obvious commercial and other confidentiality constraints – these have been used by academics on a pilot basis for research. We think there is considerable potential here and **recommend that ESRC should begin discussions with major commercial players such as Experian to make some such data more widely available, both for the UK and beyond.**

9.4.2 Multidisciplinary working

Again we have commented earlier on inter- and cross-disciplinary working (e.g. Section 5.9.4). But we have also advocated the need for intimate multidisciplinary working with the physical sciences and engineering and technology sector (Section 8.4.1). At the heart of this is the fact that many of the problems with which society seeks help are quintessentially ones which cut across traditional disciplines – the very disciplines within which many social scientists are almost exclusively trained. The Gulbenkian Commission (1996) and various others have urged major restructuring of the social sciences to adjust to contemporary realities. We share many of their concerns and some of their hopes: but intellectual urging of change in the complex system will do little. Here (and earlier) we make recommendations which will affect change through the different agents. For us, there are several requirements if the situation is to be improved:

- The requirement that different languages or social science dialects used by different disciplines are translated so inter-discipline communication is facilitated;
- Greater awareness of the norms, value systems and common methodologies in each part of the social sciences within other parts;
- More inter-working of academics and practitioners occurs.

It should be said that some disciplines are rather more open to working across existing boundaries than others; geographers and sociologists in particular have long trampled upon the intellectual territory claimed by others. Economists have increasingly worked – usually bilaterally – with psychologists, health professionals, accountants, and pension and corporate governance specialists. We are also not so concerned about disciplinary specialisation at undergraduate level: most first degree students benefit from an unambiguous home and a coherently planned education and training at the outset of their career (though we note alternative views to this, as manifested in the course structures at the University of Surrey). It is at postgraduate level and beyond where the problem is a particularly serious one. We have debated the proposal that the relative lack of multidisciplinary working in the UK may simply reflect the relative paucity of numbers of schools of public policy in the UK compared with the USA (but see Box 9.2 for a recent UK example; LSE is also of course a *de facto* example). We suspect that existing incentives will bring more such schools into being – though the disciplinary under-pinnings and organisational structures will be very heterogeneous.

Actually improving the situation needs leadership, resources and other incentives, and the fostering of greater awareness of 'the big issues' as seen by stakeholders outside the academic community. The proposal in Section 9.4.3, if implemented, could be an ideal way to engage a range of players and foster inter-working. Even without that, however – and recognising the valuable work already done by ESRC through some of the work driven by its thematic objectives – we believe there is much greater scope for multidisciplinary working. This needs to operate in research training as well as in research itself. And it will work best by getting non-traditional partnerships going, e.g. psychologists looking at national gambling policy, not just economists or a range of social scientists researching the compensation culture now becoming evident in Britain, not just lawyers.

We believe this is a matter for all those with leverage – those organising research training on the ground, university deans and vice-chancellors plus funders of all types (including all governments). **We recommend that each university and each funder therefore has a policy on how it will seek to foster multidisciplinary working, and that this should be public within and outside of the organisations.** In universities, successful collaborations with others needs to be taken account of in promotion assessments and appraisals.

A major factor in discouraging interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary work is of course the RAE. We have seen and reported ample evidence for that (see Section 5.2.1). We therefore **recommend most strongly that the review of the RAE takes this into account and the replacement positively fosters such modes of working.**

Bringing together practitioners with academics already works well in restricted arenas. The task is to enlarge those arenas and make it commonplace, with practitioners as well as academics from one disciplinary background talking to practitioners *and* academics from another. The only vehicle we can see for this is to bring together the Academy of Learned Societies for the Social Sciences – which expressly includes practitioners – with research funders to find ways of making this commonplace. **We therefore recommend that the Academy of Learned Societies for the Social Sciences, ESRC, JRF, Leverhulme and the Nuffield Foundation meet to discuss how this might be achieved.**

Box 9.2
Approaches to multidisciplinarity

Different universities have created their own approaches to addressing 'big, cross-cutting questions'. The days have gone when whole, totally new schools or faculties were created by bringing in an entire cadre of new staff. The approach now is typically to brigade existing units together to obtain academic synergy and (usually) some economies of scale. The choice of units reflects both conscious choice and historical legacy; building on local strengths and competitive advantage is the sensible norm. There is thus no standard model.

A good example of this is in Kings College, London (KCL). Here the pre-existing school of education and the departments of war studies, geography, and management were brought together in a new school of social sciences and public policy. Because of historical factors, these departments included staff trained originally as sociologists, psychologists and in other social science disciplines. Whilst the existing undergraduate courses continue largely unchanged (for the moment), there are major new research-level interactions and new postgraduate courses. These involve both inter-departmental collaboration and *ad hoc* groups of individuals. The school's plan steers appointments of new staff. KCL embarked on this course to gain synergies, to play to existing strengths in applied social sciences – and to reflect a view that significant multidisciplinary work at undergraduate level is a mistake. The prevailing view is that such students need to be trained in some depth in one discipline: to do otherwise leads to 'dumbing down'.

9.4.3 Going beyond a cottage industry

The social science industry in academia alone in the UK is about a £2.8 billion one. Yet the average ESRC response mode large research grant is £133k and runs for 28 months whilst the small grant averages are £36k and 15 months (the gestation period for obtaining approval for such successful grants may exceed half the length of the grant). Grants from other funders are rarely, if ever, much larger. The average funding for entire ESRC programmes of research carried out over three to five years is about £4 million[6].

It is true that ESRC Centres can run for up to 10 years – but usually on a frequent review basis sometimes every two or three years. The longest-running financially-supported research-related enterprises have actually been the ESRC data centres including some high quality and valuable longitudinal studies. As an important aside, these have played a key role in preserving and making accessible to the academic community (and even to government itself) major government data sets such as the population census. This reflects a historical failure of government to safeguard and make readily available in an integrated way its own data. New developments inside ONS – such as the Neighbourhood Statistics Service, created as a direct response to a need identified by the Social Exclusion Unit – seem a major step forward. ESRC will have to ensure that, irrespective of its vital historical role, it does not now duplicate what government (at last) is doing to meet its responsibilities.

Outside of the 'official domain', social science research is highly fragmented and modest in scale: the largest by far of the 70 member organisations in the Association of Research Centres in the Social Sciences (ARCISS) is the National Centre for Social Research, with an annual turnover of about £20 million. Most other independent research centres have incomes of £1 million or less.

6 We note that the Teaching and Learning Research Programme, funded to the tune of £26m by the Higher Education Funding Council for England, the Scottish Executive, the Welsh Assembly, the Northern Ireland Executive and the Department for Education and Skills, has some of the characteristics we advocate. It involves practitioners and government staff as well as academics, involves networks of collaborative funding and the money is expended in large project chunks – albeit over 8 years so the yearly spend is somewhat less than we think desirable for 'big social science'.

All this contrasts with the scale of research enterprise in the physical and engineering domains. Research activity in the social sciences is, by comparison, a cottage industry. Moreover, it is structured and operated as a relatively low risk enterprise – multiple, relatively small operations, some (according to a number of our respondents) of modest intellectual scope but each dutifully delivering five centimetre thick reports, many of which then simply go on the shelf.

Is this inevitable and appropriate? Does it simply reflect the inherent nature of the social sciences or the funding horizon set by the government's two yearly Spending Reviews? We do not believe that either of these are substantially true. Indeed, we think that the present scale and nature of social science research is because it has always been like that and because of the mind-set of those involved. We believe that, given the challenges to which the social sciences can meaningfully make a valuable contribution, a greater degree of ambition is entirely appropriate. If not a social science 'moon shot', we believe that some basic thinking about how to 'change gear' in the social sciences is long overdue. It is inescapably linked to the concept of risk: we believe that bigger gains can only be made by taking some bigger risks in research. The potential risks do of course have to be considered before embarking on a major enterprise. But we see much existing research as small-scale and incrementalist because that suits auditors and minimises career risk for those who get lacerated when things go wrong rather than praised for what goes right.

We do not believe that this can be done outside the context set by Section 9.4.1 or 9.4.2. It will also be dependent on the growth of capacity and of certain skills presently in short measure (such as the lack of quantitative competences being addressed under the ESRC Programme – see Section 5.2.4). For these reasons and because of the scale of funding required, this is primarily a matter for the public sector in the first instance. So **we recommend that ESRC, together with the other research councils as appropriate, should prepare a programme of social science research for the next Spending Review which is designed to tackle selected major challenges with resources up to an order of magnitude larger than the norm in the British social sciences and extending over a decade-long period if necessary.** It should include both directed and responsive mode work so that the funders and academics can both contribute to the content and orientation of the programme as it evolves. The programme however should consist of 'chunky parts' rather than a myriad of small scale projects and it must be firmly led. Whilst we believe that the scale of the challenges are such that a good bid for extra money could be created by the next Spending Review, we recognise that *some* contribution may have to come from ESRC's existing baseline. Any bid will of course be subject to intense and proper scrutiny by government and through some form of peer review. It will be subject to the same complications as other major projects which span more than one Spending Review. And the dissemination, publicising and exploitation of the successful work will be even more important than usual given the scale of the resources to be employed. But we would be deeply disappointed and surprised if research – and all the exploitation and raised awareness that goes with it – in the British social sciences was appropriately continued simply in its present, mostly small-scale, form.

Section B

The nature, scale and financial support of the social sciences in Britain – a statistical summary

10 The nature, scale and financial support of the social sciences in Britain – a statistical summary

Introduction

How many people in Britain are currently engaged in learning about the social sciences and the implications of what they are learning? How is this changing? How many people are actively and consciously involved in testing existing social science knowledge, creating new knowledge and propagating such knowledge – and are there any trends? How good are all the people involved? And who funds social sciences in Britain, how much money is involved, how do the social sciences fare compared to other branches of science and the humanities, what are the bases on which the resources are allocated and what effect do these have on the different disciplines and knowledge creators? We seek to answer these questions in this section so as to underpin the wider discussion in Section A of this report.

10.1 The social science community

Those making up the social science community may be there by virtue of training or by employment. Many of those controlling expenditure on social and economic research – or even carrying it out – in government, for example, may have come to such a role from initial training in other disciplines (usually quantitative in nature). Despite this difficulty, we seek below to give some indication of the scale of the workforce which is engaged in the social sciences in some way or another.

10.1.1 The academic social science community

The most obvious and most easily defined group is that of academic staff and researchers in the social sciences. We have two different sources of evidence in this regard – the HESA statistics on university staffing and the numbers of staff notified to the 2001 RAE (though different classifications of staff are employed). Table 10.1 shows the number of staff in HEIs who are classified as working within two departmental groups. This shows that the numbers of staff employed in these areas have grown quite rapidly overall, largely as a result of the spectacular increases in the numbers of female staff employed.

Table 10.1 Staff in UK HEIs working in areas spanning the social sciences

Departmental Group	Teaching and research			Research only		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
Administrative, business and social studies	4,725	11,750	16,295	1,178	1,458	2,636
	5,350	12,125	17,455	1,390	1,505	2,895
	13.2%	3.2%	7.1%	18.0%	3.2%	9.8%
Education	2,124	2,878	5,002	246	169	415
	2,520	3,070	5,590	335	235	565
	18.6%	6.7%	11.8%	36.2%	39.1%	36.1%

Source: HESA Resources of Higher Education Institutions 1997/98 (above) and 2000/01 (below), Table 16, with percentage change over the period. 'Administrative, business and social studies' also includes catering and hospitality management and librarianship, communication and media studies.

The number of research active staff by the main social science Units of Assessment (UoAs), as indicated by the RAE 2001 submissions, are set out in Table 10.2.

Table 10.2 Size and research intensity of RAE UoAs, based on submissions to 2001 RAE for A and A* staff in post only.

	Total number of A and A* research active staff (FTEs)	% staff submitted	Mean staff size (A + A*)	# units submitted
Business and management studies	2,412	45.8	26.3	97
Education	1,963	42.5	24.6	83
Law	1,288	53.4	22.5	60
Psychology	1,234	64.4	17.6	73
Geography	1,151	73.6	19.2	62
Politics and international studies	1,077	79.3	16.2	69
Social policy and administration	926	68.4	20.4	47
Sociology	822	63.1	17.9	48
Economics	798	57	20.4	41
Social work	364	44.8	12.8	30
Town and country planning	351	51.7	12.9	28
Overall	12,386	54.6		

Source: HEFCE and HERO RAE statistics web site

The range of research intensity in different disciplines is obvious, ranging as it does from a level of about the mid–40% in the more applied and newly research-active areas to much higher levels in others. Economics, however, is something of an anomaly – the low level of staff submitted is attributed by many economists to a tough line taken at departmental level or to increasing difficulty in attracting good staff (accompanied by a number of submissions from such departments to the business and management UoA which was anticipated to be less rigorous in its assessments). There are a number of imponderables in this summary. For example, a number of those in education, law and psychology would not regard themselves as social scientists. But these will probably be balanced to a first order of approximation by those in anthropology, area studies, archaeology, built environment, communication, culture and media studies, history, library and information management, linguistics, some aspects of medicine, other studies and professions related to medicine, nursing, philosophy, and statistics and operational research whom we have neglected to count but who we have identified as having some social scientists amongst their number (Box 2.3).

In totality, both of these tables suggest that there is of the order of 25,000 academic and research staff in HEIs who work in areas which are wholly or partly social sciences. In addition, there were a further 6,800 research students, research staff and research-related technicians reported to the 2001 RAE in the social science disciplines we have identified; some of these are undoubtedly related to the physical and life science aspects of subjects like geography and psychology but a reasonable assumption is that about another 5,000 individuals are active in research in the social sciences in British HEIs at any one time. In practice, the community is larger than this because of part-time contributions from occasional lecturers. This is particularly commonplace in business and management studies where practitioners' inputs are highly valued; the numbers of staff in this category may well be larger than the total number of core staff in these disciplines.

Thus, at least 30,000 individuals are involved at any one time in teaching and/or researching in the social sciences. Added to this are those who practise as social scientists in other sectors such as the NHS, the rest of government, in consultancy and elsewhere.

The age profile of these academic staff is set out in Table 10.3. Education has by far the oldest workforce, with geography and psychology at the other end of the spectrum. Business and management studies and education have the great bulk of their staff between 36 and 54.

Table 10.3 Age profile of full-time academic staff in 2000–01

	Wholly institutionally financed			All other sources of finance		
	Mean age	% <35 years	% ≥ 55 years	Mean age	% <35 years	% ≥ 55 years
Psychology and behavioural sciences	42	28	13	32	71	2
Business and management studies	45	16	15	36	51	6
Geography	42	32	16	32	72	1
Social studies	44	22	15	36	53	5
Education	48	7	21	41	31	10
Total across all subjects	45	19	17	35	59	3

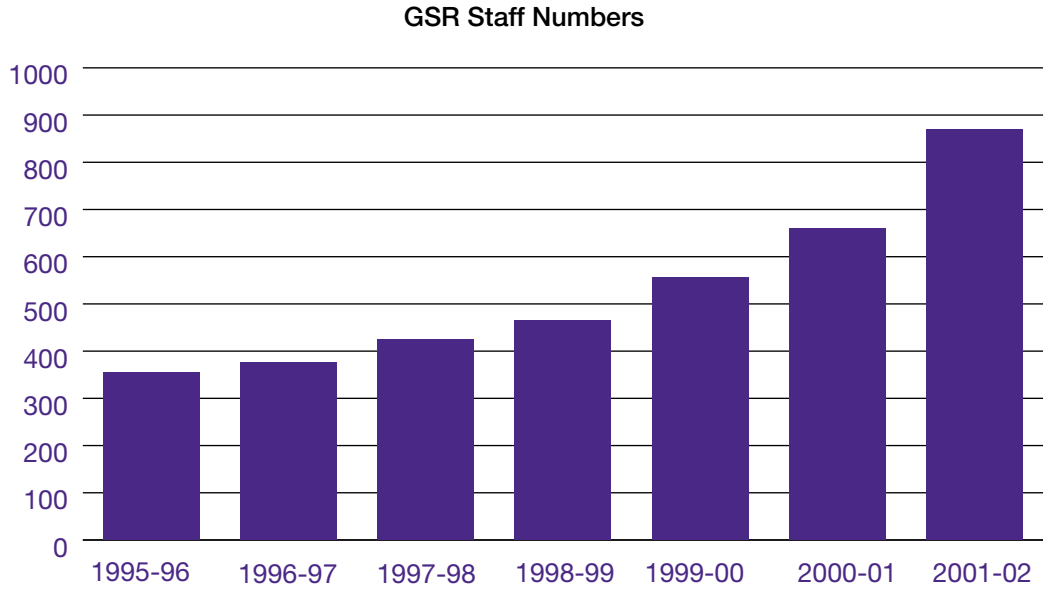
Source HESA Resources of Higher Education Institutions 2000–01, Table 18b.

10.1.2 Social scientists in government

Calculating the numbers of social scientists working in government is somewhat more difficult. The numbers employed in the government's Social Research, Statistics and Economics Services are easily obtained: as of 2002, there were over 850 Government Social Research (GSR) research officers, and as of February 2003 there were 963 GSS statisticians, approximately 300 psychologists, and 850 GES economists. The growth in numbers of GSR staff over a 7 year period are set out in Figure 10.1; growth in all areas has been rapid – with numbers of researchers in GSR more than doubling in the five years since April 1997. The growth elsewhere would have been at least as great as this had the supply been forthcoming: as of mid–2002, there were about 100 vacancies at junior level for economists which could not be filled because of a shortage of suitable candidates.

These statistics, however, tell only a very partial story. They describe people in posts in these services. Some of these employees have not arrived from conventional social science training. In the Government Statistical Service, for instance, a number of appointments have been made of engineers, accountants and others with a quantitative background. On the other side, very large numbers of social scientists have been employed by governments – at all levels – after graduation and will inevitably put some of their knowledge, training and values into practice across government. The numbers in this category are very large. We know also that the numbers of research officers in different government departments vary considerably, with no apparent reason other perhaps than variations in how staff are classified. In short, the numbers of professional social scientists working as researchers in central government is of the order of 2,000 and rising. Many others trained as social scientists are spread throughout the 500,000 or so staff in the civil service. It is worth noting that the numbers of social scientists appointed in a professional capacity is also rising rapidly (from a very low base) in the devolved administrations (see Chapter 4), and also that a number of specialist advisors to ministers are drawn from the social sciences.

Figure 10.1 Growth in numbers of staff in the Government Social Research service



Source: GSR Annual Report 2001–02

We have no knowledge of the numbers of social scientists employed as researchers in local government but suspect it is relatively small. On the other hand, many individuals with professional qualifications in relevant areas (e.g. social work) are employed in such governments. In times past, many geographers, town planners and others were employed in local government. The numbers of new entrants to these roles have fallen off in the last decade.

10.1.3 Other social scientists in employment

Table 10.4 sets out the number of members of other chartered bodies together with the membership of the larger learned societies. The latter is of course an imperfect guide to the numbers of active individuals since it includes in some cases those who have an amateur interest and those who are retired. It will also include some double counting because of any duplicate membership. In some cases, membership is open to those simply with an interest in the field.

Table 10.4 Numbers of individuals in some of the professional or statutory bodies related to the social sciences

Accrediting organisation	Category	Number in category
ARCISS	(Institutional) Members	> 140
British Educational Research Association	Members	> 1,300
British Society of Criminology	Members	950
British Psychological Society	Registered Chartered Psychologists	10,505
	Members	> 34,000
Royal Economic Society	Members	> 3,300 (60% of whom live outside the UK)
Royal Statistical Society	Members which includes	7,200
	– Fellows	6,500
	– Chartered Statisticians	1,500
Royal Geographical Society (with IBG)	Chartered Geographers	Minimal – new development as of April 2002
	Fellows	13,300

Sources: various, largely from web sites of the bodies concerned

The bulk of these contain some academic and some non-academic members. The British Society of Criminology, for example, has 44% of its members amongst research/teaching staff in universities, 19% who are full-time professional researchers, 20% in the design and delivery of criminal justice policy or administration and the remainder are postgraduate students in criminology or related disciplines.

10.2 Social scientists in training

Here we consider the situation in schools and universities separately.

10.2.1 Social science education in schools

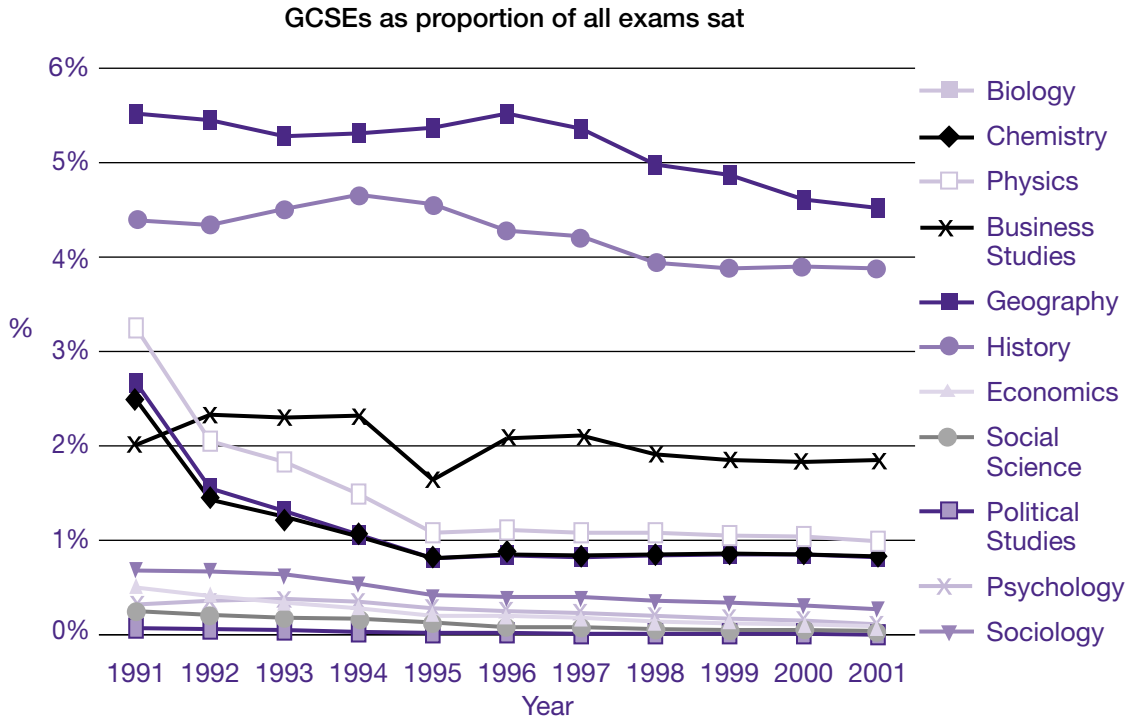
We use the numbers of UK students taking public examinations as a proxy for interest in and commitment to particular parts of the social sciences. In itself this biases the answer since not all students take examinations. Figures 10.2 and 10.3 show the proportions of students taking examinations in subjects which are largely or partly social sciences (proportions are used to avoid problems of changing size of the total student numbers); some other subjects are included for comparison. The large difference in the absolute number of candidates between these two examinations reflects of course the difference in the number of subjects taken at GCSE and A level examinations and the internationally low UK continuation rate of students at age 16.

At the GCSE level, only business studies, geography and history are studied by large number of candidates; these three subjects account for over 10% of all GCSE exams sat whereas the other five 'social science subjects' account for only 0.5% of exams sat. The absolute numbers taking economics, social science (as a single subject), political studies, psychology and sociology – all of which started from a low base – have declined very significantly over the period. Economics, for instance, has declined to one quarter of its size a decade earlier, sociology and psychology to half of the original number of exam entrants and political studies to a less than 10% of the corresponding figure in 1991.

At A Level, the picture is rather different. Here three groups of subjects exist. The first consists of those showing rapid growth. Business studies more than doubled the number of examinees and psychology almost tripled its equivalents over the decade. In contrast, the numbers sitting A Level economics has collapsed to under half its 1991 value and those in political studies declined to about two-thirds of the equivalent value. The third group consists of geography, history and sociology which have declined gently to between 80 and 90% of their 1991 values – though all three initially rose from that value so their decline from the peak figure is a little larger. The decline in geography and history is normally ascribed to the consequences of the changing nature of the National Curriculum.

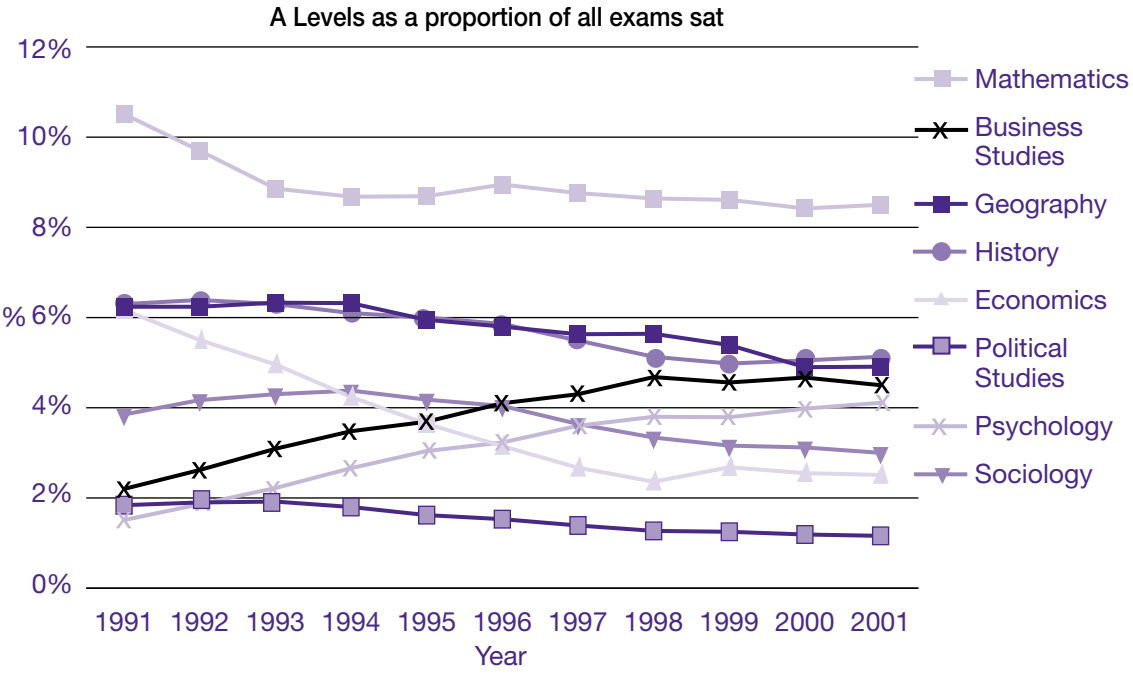
We also know that many students take geography and some other social science-related subjects up to Key Stage 3 (i.e. typically up to age 14), and that citizenship – which includes some aspects of social science – has now become compulsory up to Key Stage 4 (or 16 years of age). This manifestly swells the number of students studying some aspects of the social sciences to around 4.25 million at any one time (up from 3.25 million prior to the introduction of citizenship) and at least 15 million over the last 20 years.

Figure 10.2 The proportion of candidates taking GCSE examinations from 1991–2001 in subjects related to the social sciences (with some comparators)



Source: AQA Exam Board and the GCE Inter-Group Statistics for GCSE

Figure 10.3 The proportion of candidates taking A level examinations from 1991–2001 in subjects related to the social sciences (with mathematics and history as comparators)

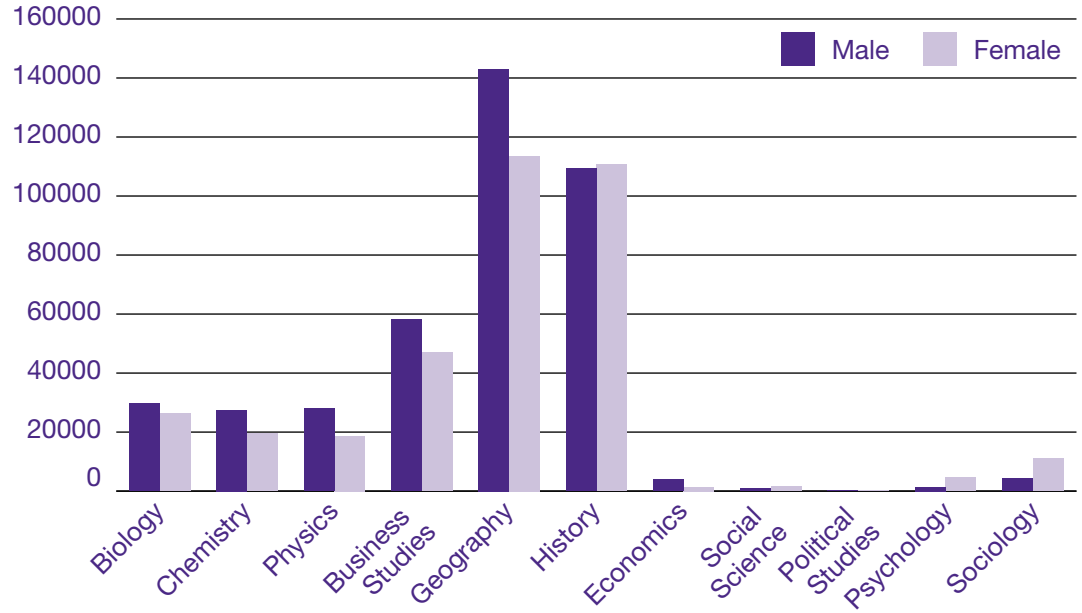


Source: AQA Exam Board and the GCE Inter-Board Statistics for A-levels

By looking at the numbers of candidates who sat GCSE in 1999 and the numbers of candidates who sat A levels in 2001 and making reasonable inferences, we can get some indication of the movement of students between subjects. About a third of students who take business studies at GCSE go on to take it at A level, but only 14 to 20% of students continue with geography and history. In contrast, many students pick up economics, political studies, and psychology, with numbers 24 times larger than the GCSE ones for political studies and 3 times larger for the other two. Only around 10% of students tend to continue with mathematics beyond the compulsory stage of studying it for GCSE.

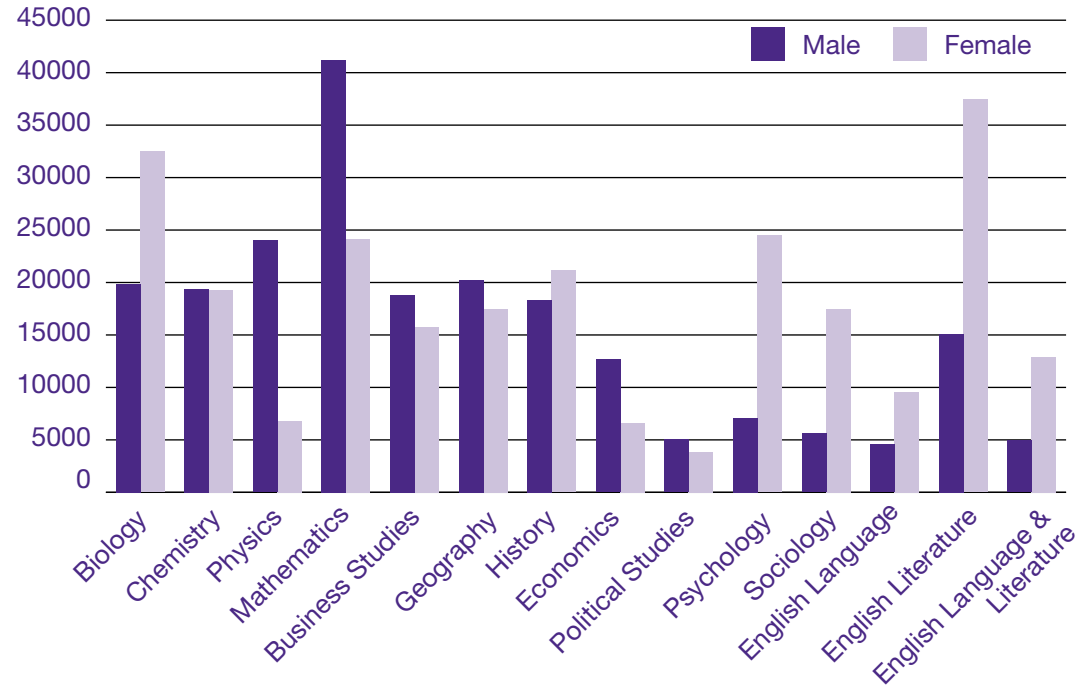
It is striking that the gender balance differs greatly between social science subjects, as it does in many other subject areas. Figures 10.4 and 10.5 show the gender split of candidates sitting GCSE and A level subjects in 2001. The ratio of male to female in these subjects has only varied significantly over the decade in GCSE business studies and economics, falling from 56% and 37% female in 1991 to 45% and 26% respectively in 2001. Between 50% and 54% of all examinations sat over the decade were by females. These figures show that, at GCSE level, business studies, geography, economics and the physical sciences attract a high proportion of male students, while social science (as a single subject), psychology and sociology are substantially a female preserve. These proportions continue into A levels for the social science subjects, though with a higher proportion of females taking economics at A level than at GCSE. In contrast, there is a significant change in the physical sciences and mathematics at A level, with physics and mathematics being substantially male preserves, biology attracting many more females than males, and with a gender balance in chemistry. Over two-thirds of english candidates at A level are female.

Figure 10.4 2001 GCSE examinations by gender



Source: AQA Exam Board and the GCE Inter-Group Statistics for GCSE

Figure 10.5 2001 A level examinations by gender



Source: AQA Exam Board and the GCE Inter-Board Statistics for A-levels

Summary: an average of 435,000 GCSE exam papers have been taken each year over the last decade in subjects which involve significant amounts of social science. This is no less than 8% of all GCSE exams taken. At GCE A level, some 163,000 exams have been sat on average each year over the last decade. All this implies that, at any one time, there are around 4.25 million 11 to 19 year old school students studying significant parts of what we take to be the social sciences. Allowing for growth in areas like business studies over the last decade, we can reasonably infer that the number of pupils who have had such exposure to the social sciences in the last 20 years is in excess of 15 million. It is no surprise then, that some aspects at least of the social sciences have become relatively well-known over this period.

10.2.2 Social science education and training at undergraduate level

Here we consider the size of the undergraduate and postgraduate community, together with the competition for places and calibre of the applicants at the undergraduate level of education.

10.2.2.1 The number of undergraduate students in the social sciences

Table 10.5 shows the total number of home or EU students as funded by HEFCE for England. An approximate conversion to the whole UK – assuming that a like fraction of the total student numbers pertains in Scotland and Wales – is given by scaling these figures appropriately (Annex 4). Care must be taken in comparing these to other figures in this report because of the slightly different classifications and methods of counting used by different bodies.

Table 10.5 The numbers of full-time equivalent undergraduate students by HEFCE cost centre (this includes some students who are funded by other bodies (e.g. NHS,TTA) and overseas students)

	YEAR				
Cost Centre	1995–96	1996–97	1997–98	1998–99	1999–00
Business and management studies	143,469	146,468	146,940	145,000	147,200
Geography	16,691	17,456	17,425	17,265	17,585
Social studies	138,216	136,713	134,244	129,703	133,046
Education	87,242	88,222	84,691	79,759	77,631

Source: HEFCE

An alternative way of looking at this is shown in Table 10.6. This emphasises the sensitivity of the definition used for the social sciences. Restricting it only to 'social studies'[7] (and hence ignoring all business and management, education and law, some substantial part of which we believe is a social science) ensures that the size of the social sciences in British HEIs reduces from a quarter of all students to 7% of the British students. From henceforth, we will use the inclusive definition.

7 Economics, sociology, social policy & administration, social work, anthropology, psychology (without significant element of biological science), geography (unless solely as a physical science), politics, other social studies, balanced combinations within social, economic & political studies

Table 10.6 Social science students in British HE in 2000/01 as a proportion of the total

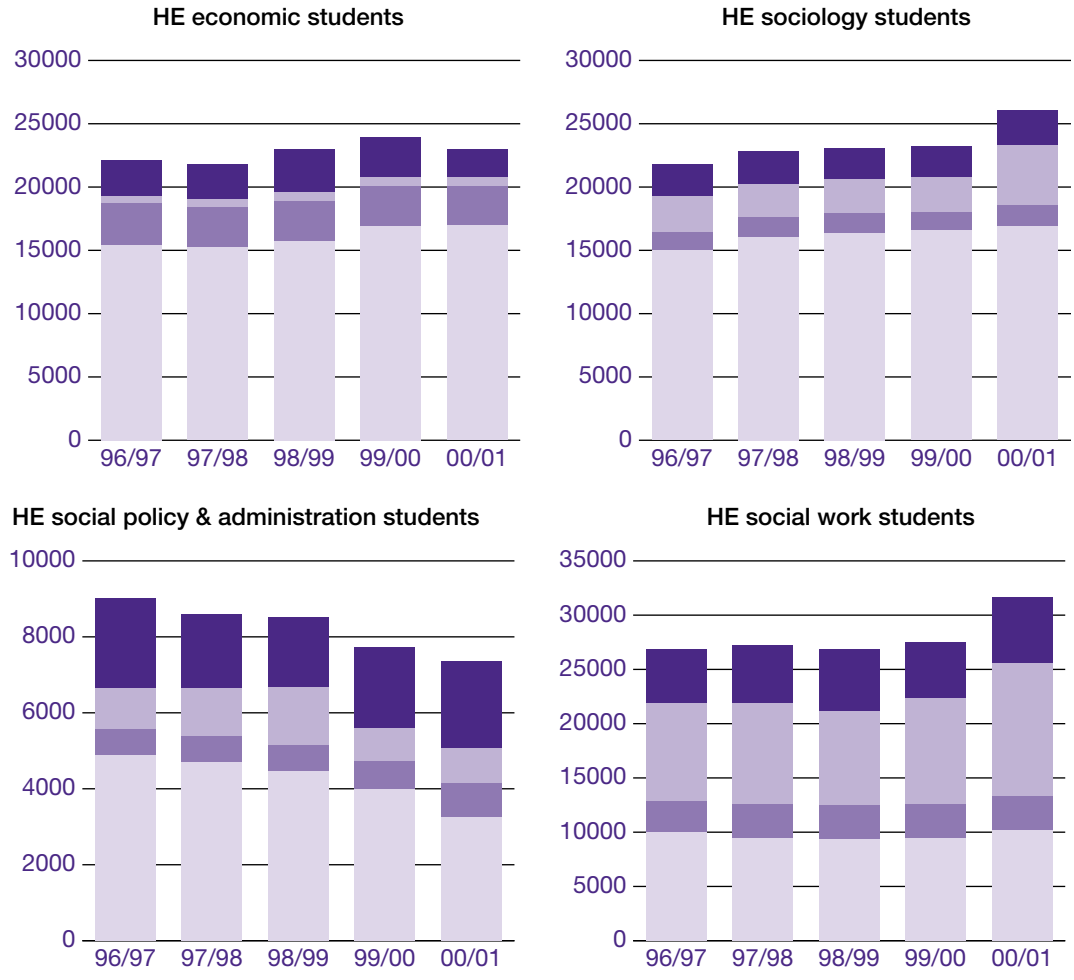
	Total HE students	Full-time UGs	Full-time PGs	Part-time UGs	Part-time PGs	UK Total	Other EU Total	Overseas Total
Total – all subject areas	1,990,625	1,037,880	172,285	504,045	276,410	1,759,755	94,575	136,290
Social sciences as % total	25.1	22.4	38.9	15.0	45.2	24.5	27.1	31.1
Social studies as % total	7.1	7.7	9.6	4.7	7.7	6.9	8.9	8.4

Source: HESA Students in Higher Education Institutions 2000/01, Table 2

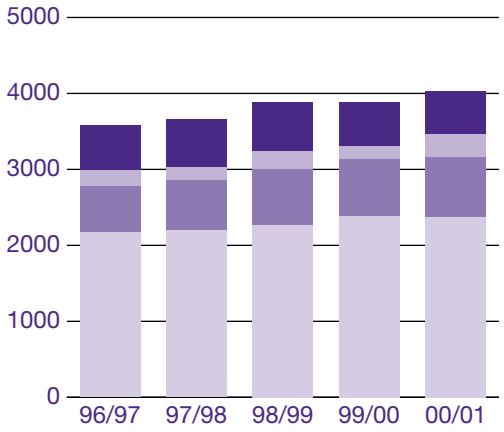
A more detailed breakdown of funded student numbers by individual discipline is given in Figure 10.6. This shows the numbers of students of different types for each subject area which we have considered to have some social science elements, along with some comparator ones. It is striking for example how much decline has been experienced in the numbers of students studying statistics.

The numbers on the vertical axes vary considerably, reflecting the scale of operations of the subjects concerned. It is clear that business and management studies – a very broad category – and education dwarf the numbers of students in all the other subjects under consideration. The structure of the student bodies also differs significantly: history, for instance, has a much higher proportion of part-time undergraduates than does geography. On these figures, however, it would be difficult to believe other than the great bulk of social science in the undergraduate curriculum is imparted through business and management studies and education.

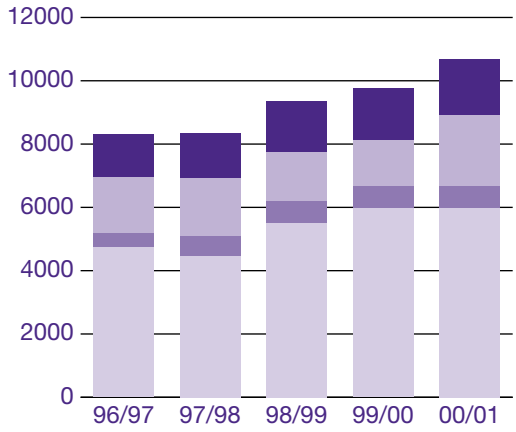
Figure 10.6 HE students by subject of study.



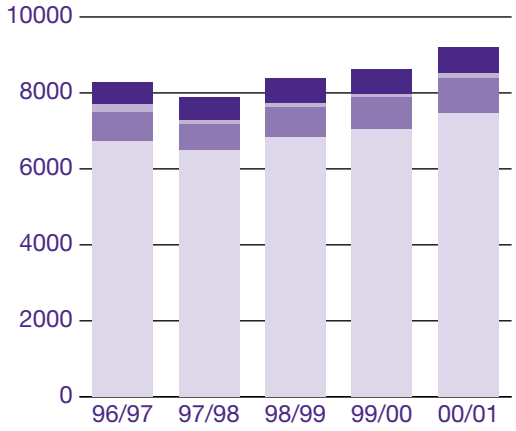
HE anthropology students



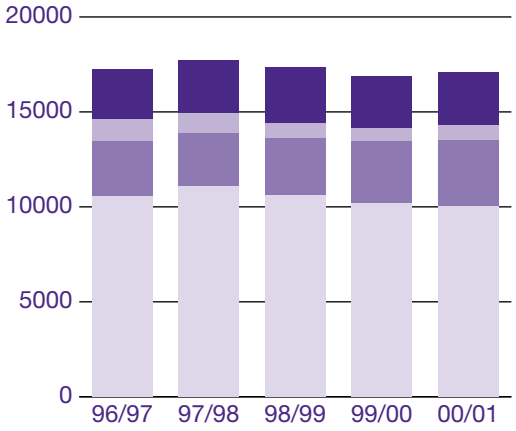
HE psychology students



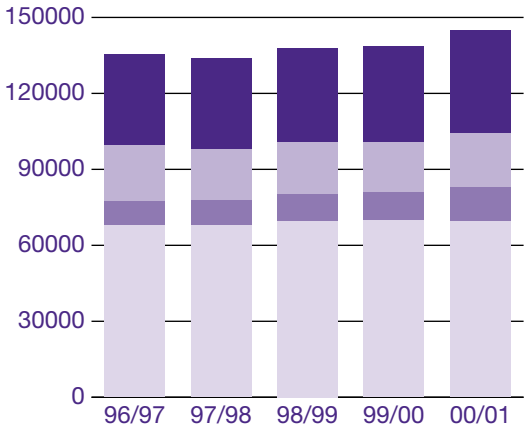
HE geography social science students



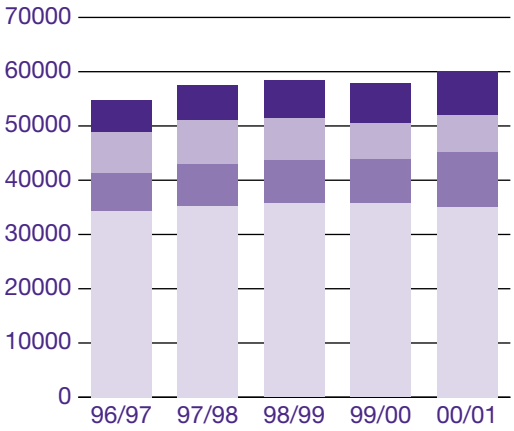
HE politics students



HE business & management studies students



HE law students



Note these are actual students rather than Full Time Equivalent students

X-axis shows the Academic Year

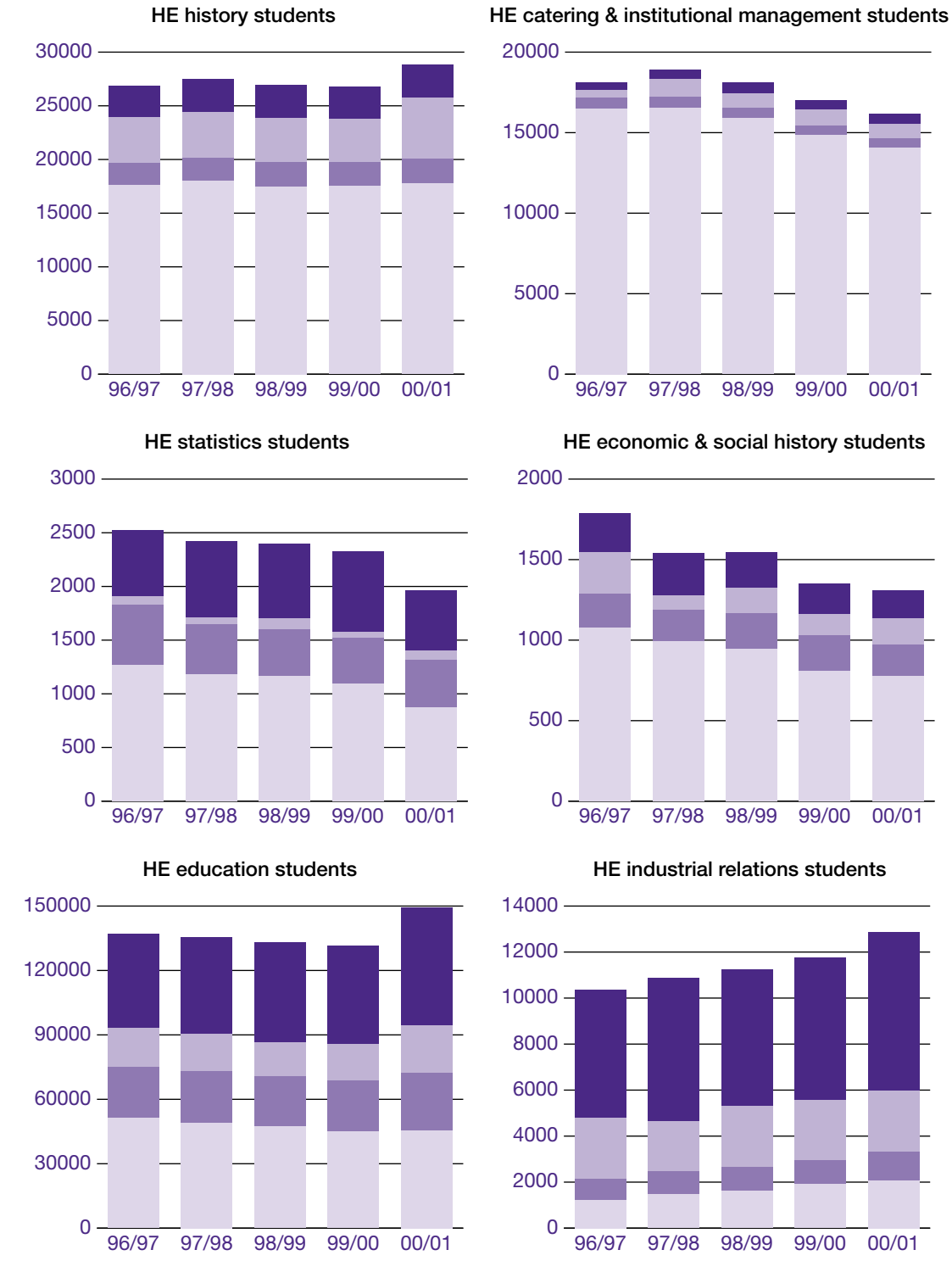
Y-axis shows the Number of Students

Part-time postgraduates

Part-time undergraduates

Full-time postgraduates

Full-time undergraduates



Note these are actual students rather than Full Time Equivalent students

X-axis shows the Academic Year

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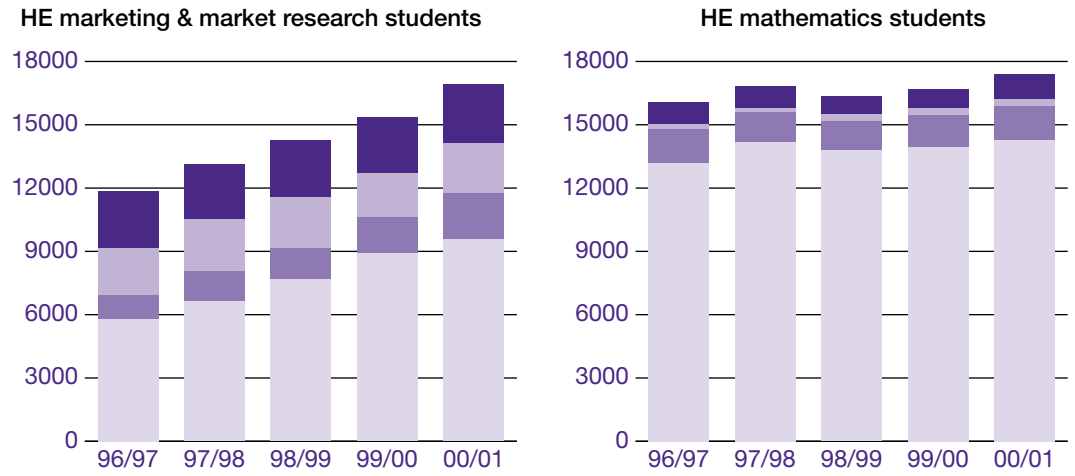
Part-time postgraduates

Part-time undergraduates

Full-time postgraduates

Full-time undergraduates



Source: HESA

10.2.2.2 The competition for places

Table 10.7 shows the numbers of applications by individuals to a Higher Education first degree course and acceptances, together with the ratio between them for the year 2001. Table 10.8 shows the trends in the ratio of such applications to acceptances over an eight year period.

Interpretation of these figures is not straightforward again thanks to classification effects (e.g. if a student applies for different subjects in his/her choices to different universities, only the majority subject area is encoded); the figures also include those who opted initially for an undifferentiated social science degree then changed later. The application figures also exclude students who are accepted via non-traditional routes. Thus in some cases the statistics show lower initial applicants than final acceptances.

Nevertheless, the picture and trend is clear: apart from business and management studies, institutional management and social work, the subjects with social science components have no national superfluity of applications for the places available. The ratio of applicants to acceptances has been declining in all subjects except economics and social policy and administration. In some cases this reflects an increase in capacity e.g. in business and management studies. In others, the story is rather different. We know that the most popular departments have many more applicants than they can accept; this suggests that the less popular departments suffer a shortage of students, at least until such time as those unsuccessful in their preferred choices cascade down the system or perhaps enter it during the clearing process. But the reality of the situation is still more complicated than that – some top research (and teaching) departments do not find it easy to attract applicants because of the university's location, brand image or other factors; they have to resort to the clearing process to get student numbers. As in all sectors of universities, the market is an imperfect one.

It is evident that economics and politics at university are substantially a male preserve. On the other hand, law, psychology, social policy and administration, and (especially) social work and sociology attract much higher proportions of females.

Table 10.7 Applications and acceptances to full-time undergraduate courses in different subjects in 2001

2001 Applications and Degree Acceptances

	Applications			Degree Acceptances			Applications: Degree Acceptances
	Male	Female	**Total**	Male	Female	**Total**	
Anthropology	168	461	**629**	235	583	**818**	0.77
Bus. & admin studies combinations	938	912	**1,850**	1,389	1,297	**2,686**	0.69
Business & Management Studies	14,217	14,771	**28,988**	9,690	10,187	**19,877**	1.46
Economic & Social History	28	31	**59**	83	78	**161**	0.37
Economics	4,018	1,790	**5,808**	3,696	1,578	**5,274**	1.10
Education (total)	2,376	11,892	**14,268**	2,433	11,531	**13,964**	1.02
Geography	1,495	1,485	**2,980**	1,369	1,467	**2,836**	1.05
History	3,624	3,217	**6,841**	3,261	2,997	**6,258**	1.09
Industrial Relations	24	52	**76**	54	193	**247**	0.31
Institutional Management	2,409	2,272	**4,681**	1,497	1,476	**2,973**	1.57
Law	6,102	10,350	**16,452**	5,120	8,819	**13,939**	1.18
Marketing & Market Research	1,047	1,527	**2,574**	1,098	1,566	**2,664**	0.97
Politics	1,522	1,058	**2,580**	1,671	1,185	**2,856**	0.90
Psychology	231	1,233	**1,464**	433	1,936	**2,369**	0.62
Social Policy & Administration	207	576	**783**	192	737	**929**	0.84
Social Work	517	2,781	**3,298**	382	2,009	**2,391**	1.38
Sociology	991	3,205	**4,196**	1,160	3,393	**4,553**	0.92
Total of All Subject Areas	214,502	239,331	**453,833**	153,215	176,003	**329,218**	1.38
Biology	1,938	2,960	**4,898**	1,825	2,872	**4,697**	1.04
Chemistry	1,846	1,251	**3,097**	1,739	1,320	**3,059**	1.01
Engineering	16,226	2,476	**18,702**	16,855	3,096	**19,951**	0.94
English	2,382	6,493	**8,875**	2,168	5,932	**8,100**	1.10
Mathematics	2,420	1,443	**3,863**	2,509	1,497	**4,006**	0.96
Physics	2,376	587	**2,963**	2,116	496	**2,612**	1.13
Statistics	49	35	**84**	148	115	**263**	0.32

Source: UCAS. Note that applications and acceptances to geography and psychology are for courses identified as primarily social science in nature.

Table 10.8 The ratio of applications to acceptances for different subjects over an 8 year period where significant changes have occurred

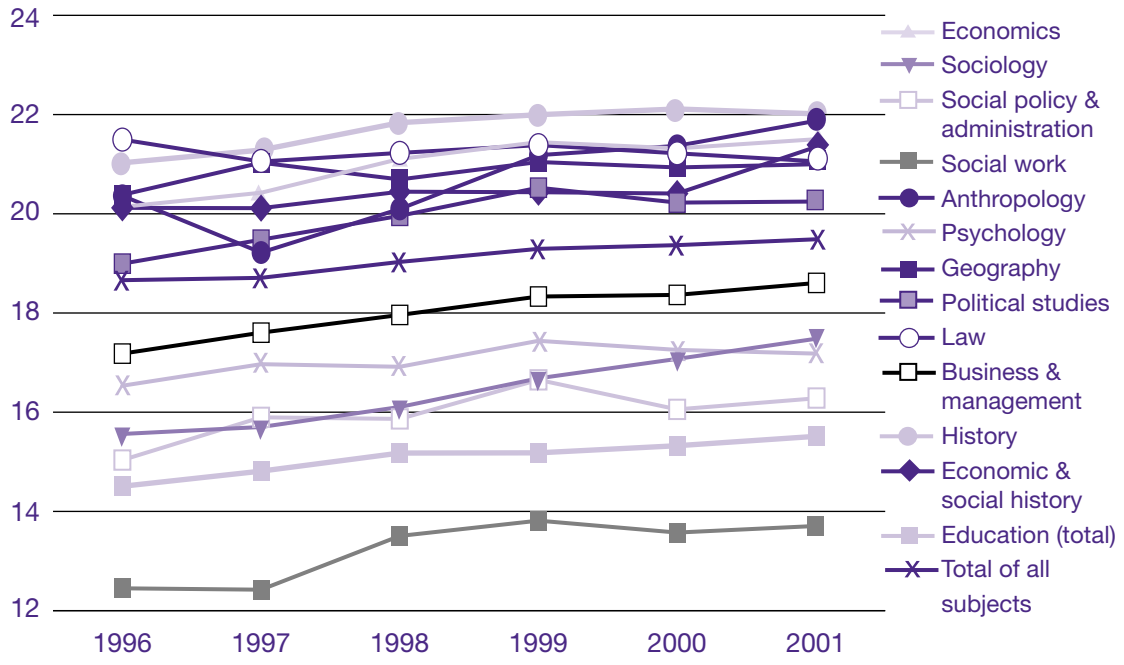
	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Business & management studies	2.62	2.28	1.95	1.81	1.72	1.63	1.55	1.46
Education (total)	2.26	2.02	1.89	1.75	1.60	1.44	1.40	1.02
Law	1.76	1.59	1.42	1.31	1.32	1.29	1.25	1.18
Social work	1.99	2.19	2.15	1.99	1.88	1.65	1.45	1.38
Engineering	1.29	1.22	1.20	1.12	1.13	1.11	1.10	0.94
English	1.51	1.45	1.35	1.35	1.30	1.27	1.19	1.10
Total of all subject areas	1.64	1.58	1.53	1.49	1.47	1.44	1.42	1.38

Source: UCAS Note that the statistics for social work in both Tables 10.7 and 10.8 are particularly complex to interpret because of the classification of and inter-relationship between those arriving on courses through three entry routes – non-graduate, graduate and postgraduate. The first of these is about to be phased out.

10.2.2.3 Variations in the academic calibre of new undergraduates

The calibre of entrants to university courses varies greatly between social science disciplines and over time. The most common indicator used to measure academic calibre are A level scores (though these do not operate in Scotland). Figure 10.7 shows how A level average grades (obtained by summing 10 for each A, 8 for each B, etc) on entry to courses differ between disciplines and over time. The average A level grade in 2001 was 19.5 across all subjects; it is obvious that anthropology, economics, economic and social history, geography and law attract students with higher A level grades than this average. On the other hand, business and management, psychology, sociology, social policy and administration and social work attract higher proportions of less academically able students overall. It should however be noted that a number of students proceed to certain social science courses other than through the A level route: this is particularly true of social work (where the numbers of undergraduates is a low proportion of the total and many of them are studying part-time – most training is at postgraduate level after a different undergraduate or other qualification).

Figure 10.7 Mean A level grades on entry to various social science subject degree courses



Source: UCAS

10.2.2.4 University undergraduate output quality

The outputs from different university courses vary considerably in terms of quality, if one assumes that all degrees are of equal difficulty. This is of course an untenable hypothesis but the proportion of first class honours degrees awarded in the social sciences is much more parsimonious than in the physical sciences (see Table 10.9). With the exception of physics and maths – both of which are outliers – there is a modest level of correlation between average A level grades on entry to subjects and the proportion of first class degrees awarded.

Table 10.9 Percentage of first degrees that were awarded first class honours in different subjects

Subject	1994–95	2000–01
Biology	7.5	9.8
Physics	18.8	23.7
Mathematics	19.2	23.4
English	9.4	9.7
Economics	5.4	9.0
Sociology	3.4	4.1
Social policy & administration	4.0	5.0
Social work	4.6	4.6
Anthropology	8.9	10.1
Psychology	6.2	5.9
Geography	4.0	7.3
Politics	3.6	6.6
Law	3.3	4.3
Business & management studies	3.1	4.2
History	6.9	9.1
Economic & social history	3.3	3.8
Education (total)	5.6	6.0

Source: HESA

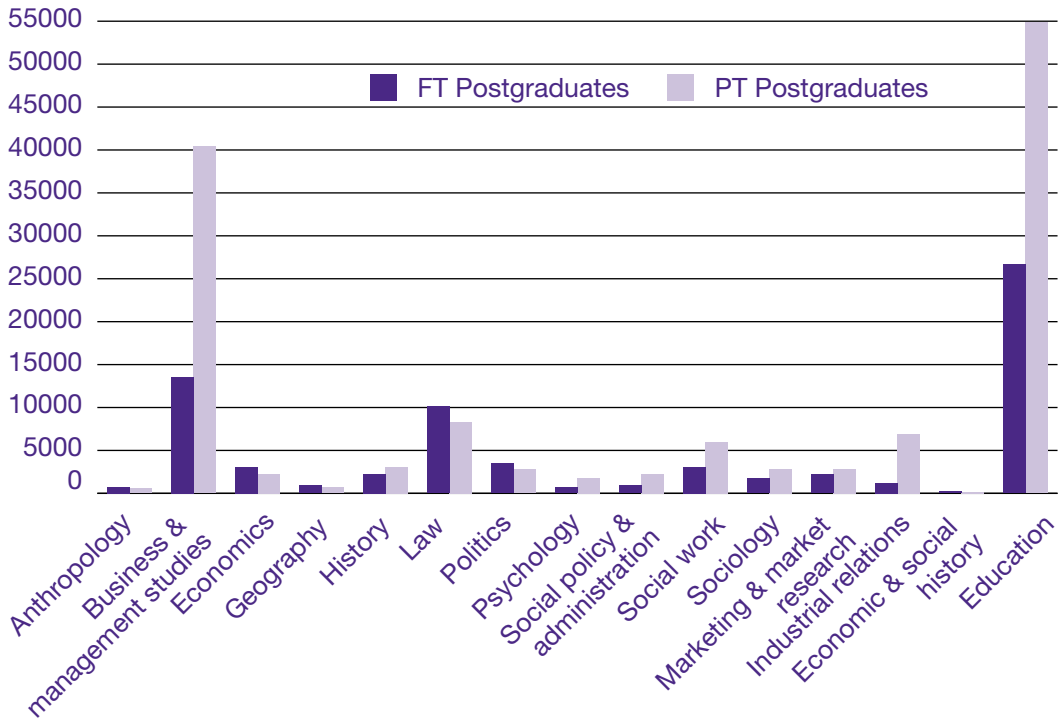
Summary: It is clear that, at any one time, of the order of quarter of a million full-time undergraduate students and 80,000 part-time undergraduate students are studying what we have taken to be the constellation of the social sciences. This leads to about 26% of all first degrees awarded. In practice, the number will be larger than this because of subsidiary subject selections. Across the UK social sciences in higher education as a whole, the average A level entry grades approximate to the national average for all subjects. But the entry quality across the university system varies considerably from one social science subject to another and from one university to another – at least in so far as can be assessed on the basis of A level results. The most 'difficult to get into' subjects are history, law, anthropology, economics, economic and social history, and geography. Over the last decade, there has been some reduction in the attraction of social policy and administration and economic and social history and an increase in the attractiveness of psychology, sociology, social work and marketing and market research.

Finally all of these statements relate to system-wide averages; there is considerable diversity – as there is for every university subject – between the attractiveness of 'the top departments' and those which appear lower in the league tables. The A level grades requested by one sociology department in Britain are 3 As whilst another asks only 2 Ds. In many respects this variation is greater than that between subjects.

10.2.3 Social science education and training at postgraduate level

At postgraduate level – where the vast majority of students are self-funded or supported by employers rather than the state – the picture is even more stark, albeit for a different reason. Figure 10.8 shows the absolute numbers of full- and part-time postgraduates in a range of disciplines. The dominance of Masters and Diploma level study in business and management studies and in education is evident, especially by part-time study. A similar if less extreme situation exists within law and social work. In essence, these may be regarded as courses with a strong and obvious vocational element. In the case of law at least, these include short (e.g. one year) conversion courses for those – often very able – students who studied a different subject entirely at undergraduate level. Many mature business studies students also take Masters degrees after studying quite different subjects at undergraduate level but, unlike law, this often occurs after several years of work. In essence, we see a situation where the traditional social sciences disciplines are static or slowing growing in size whilst the numbers in newer, often more applied, social sciences have grown such that they dominate.

Figure 10.8 Full- and part-time post graduate students in different disciplines in 2000/01



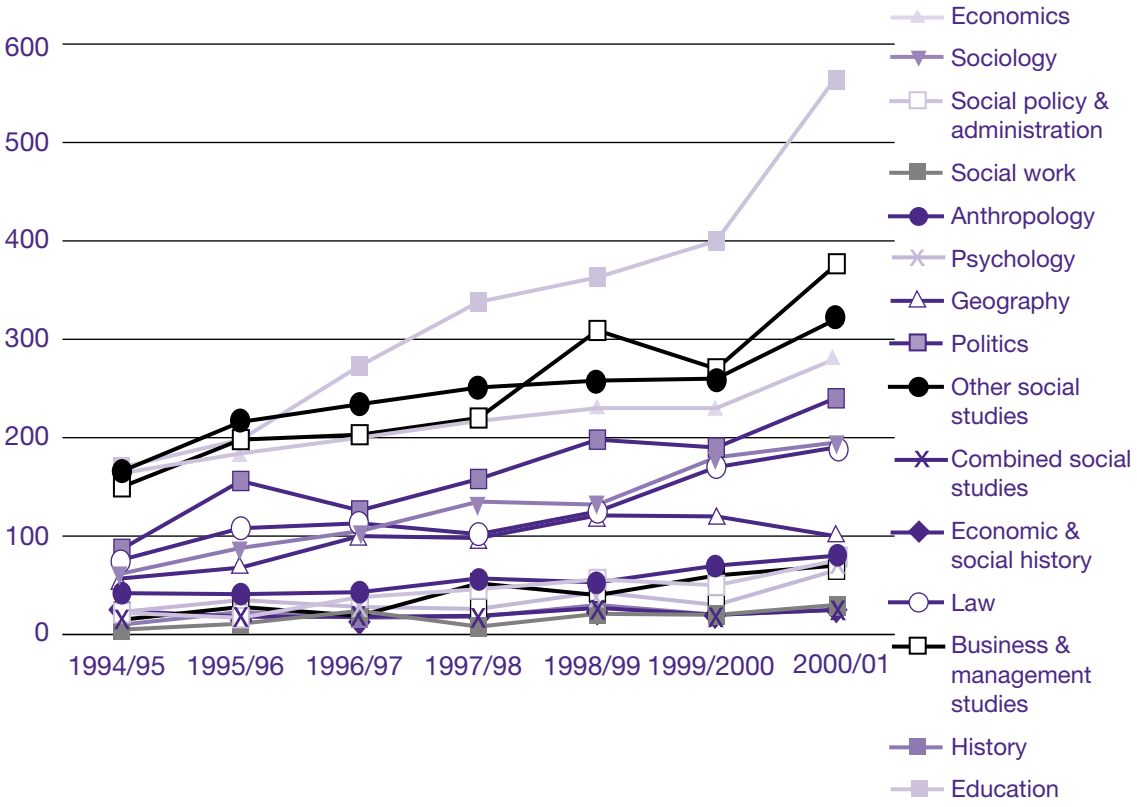
These figures include all students studying in UK HEIs, irrespective of whether studying for PhDs or Masters and lower qualifications (e.g. diplomas), and irrespective of their country of origin. So Table 10.10 shows the proportion of higher degrees awarded which are PhDs. The disparity between the social sciences and humanities and the physical sciences is marked; PhD study is still much more common in the latter, in part because Masters degrees are much less common. Figure 10.9 shows the total number of PhDs gained in British universities and Table 10.11 shows this broken down by region of domicile and by type of qualification obtained.

Table 10.10 The percentage of higher degrees obtained which are doctorates.

Subject	1994–95	2000–01
Physics	53.4	66.9
Mathematics	51.3	55.3
Biology	53.7	53.1
History	27.0	23.0
English	19.3	21.2
Economic & social history	13.7	17.9
Sociology	12.1	20.4
Geography	35.0	19.2
Anthropology	16.0	15.8
Economics	14.2	14.6
Psychology	7.9	11.5
Politics	8.5	10.0
Social policy & administration	5.0	9.9
Law	5.9	5.0
Business & management studies	2.1	3.2
Social work	0.8	2.3
Education	5.5	12.0

Source: HESA

Figure 10.9 The numbers of completed PhDs in British universities over time by subject



Source: HESA Students in Higher Education Institutions 1994/95 – 2000/01

The most striking feature of Figure 10.9 and Table 10.11 is the overall increase: a factor of 2.5 more PhDs were awarded annually at the end of the seven year period shown compared to the beginning. In terms of absolute numbers, this is most evident in the number of PhDs awarded in education and in business and management studies. Ignoring these and those subjects with very small numbers, the next greatest growth by far has been in sociology and politics but there have been spectacular percentage growths in some other subjects, usually from a small base. About half of all PhDs awarded are now for UK-domiciled students, a small decrease over 7 years.

This overall increase masks significant differences at individual subject level, none more than in economics: the number of economics PhDs has grown from 164 in 1994–95 to 279 in 2000–01 – somewhat less than the growth rate for the rest of the social sciences. But even this increase has not involved any significant increase of UK-domiciled students (from 62 to 79). The great bulk of the successful economics PhD candidates – some 72% – are now from outside of the UK. Almost identical numbers of successful PhD candidates to those from the UK come from the rest of Europe and a larger number still come from the rest of the world. Of all the major subject groups, economics has the lowest proportion of British students and one which has declined significantly over a six year period. Only geography shows a similarly significant increase in overseas PhD graduates.

As Table 10.12 shows, politics is overwhelmingly the most masculine of PhD social science subjects, followed by economics, with anthropology, psychology and social policy and administration the most attractive to females.

In terms of supply therefore, we see an academic enterprise which, judged on numbers produced (in the absence of any measures of quality), is increasing in size so far as UK PhDs are concerned. This situation is most clear in politics and sociology but is very different indeed in economics.

All of the above is merely descriptive of the number of PhDs being awarded. What number of these degrees we ‘need’ is another matter. It is impossible to answer this question in terms of the national need as a whole, but we can say something meaningful about the need for such PhDs so far as the academic profession – where the PhD has typically been seen as a necessary precursor of an academic career in teaching and research. It has been argued that there is no need for an increase in supply of ‘replacement academics’ except in areas such as some sciences and engineering (HEFCE 2002a). For reasons explained in Section 5.4 we do not think this is credible; the situation in economics is particularly severe. The situation is even worse if we take quality into account (for which we have only anecdotal information). We discuss this in more detail in Chapter 9.

Table 10.11 The numbers of PhDs gained in British HEIs by subject of study and domicile

	1994–1995			2000–2001					
	Total	UK nat.	%UK nat.	Total	UK nat.	Other EU	Other Overseas	%UK nat.	% growth 1994/95 to 2000/01
Social, economic & political studies									
Economics	164	62	37.8	279	79	82	118	28.3	70.1
Sociology	62	42	67.7	197	131	13	53	66.5	217.7
Social policy & administration	22	15	68.2	76	48	5	23	63.2	245.5
Social work	5	4	80.0	32	28	2	2	87.5	540.0
Anthropology	42	16	38.1	81	35	12	34	43.2	92.9
Psychology (without significant element of biological science)	15	12	80.0	68	57	5	6	83.8	353.3
Geography (unless solely as a physical science)	57	40	70.2	101	57	17	27	56.4	77.2
Balanced combinations within social, economic & political studies (excl. law)	24	9	37.5	26	12	2	12	46.2	8.3
Politics	87	34	39.1	238	104	32	102	43.7	173.6
Other social studies	23	14	60.9	66	38	8	20	57.6	187.0
Social, economic & political studies total	501	248	49.5	1,164	589	178	397	50.6	132.3
Law	76	27	35.5	192	77	26	89	40.1	152.6
Business & admin studies									
Business & management studies	150	87	58.0	375	184	56	135	49.1	150.0
Marketing & market research				14	9	3	2	64.3	
Industrial relations	3	2	66.7	7	4	0	3	57.1	133.3
Catering & institutional management	17	13	76.5	28	13	7	8	46.4	64.7
Land & property management	5	3	60.0	1	1	0	0	100.0	-80.0
Balanced combinations within business & administrative studies	4	1	25.0	5	2	0	3	40.0	25.0
Humanities									
History	166	94	56.6	319	211	27	81	66.1	92.2
Economic & social history	10	6	60.0	24	17	3	4	70.8	140.0
Education total	170	106	62.4	565	366	33	166	64.8	232.4
Grand total of social science subjects	**1,102**	**587**	**53.3**	**2,694**	**1,473**	**333**	**888**	**54.7**	**144.5**

Source: HESA

NB Some Business and Admin subjects which are clearly not social sciences have been taken out

Table 10.12 Percentage of those completing a PhD in 2000–01 who were female

	% Female
Social, economic & political studies	
Economics	34.1
Sociology	52.8
Social policy & administration	61.8
Social work	53.1
Anthropology	65.4
Psychology (without significant element of biological science)	63.2
Geography (unless solely as a physical science)	40.6
Balanced combinations within social, economic & political studies (excl. law)	57.7
Politics	28.6
Other social studies	51.5
Total	44.4
Law	41.1
Business & admin studies	
Business & management studies	32.5
Marketing & market research	35.7
Industrial relations	14.3
Catering & institutional management	35.7
Land & property management	0.0
Balanced combinations within business & administrative studies	20.0
Humanities	
History	38.2
Economic & Social History	45.8
Education (total)	55.2

Source: HESA

Summary. At postgraduate level, the outstanding findings are:

- The dominance in student numbers in business and management studies and in education – the more applied end of the social sciences;
- The low proportion of postgraduate degrees in the social sciences compared to the physical sciences which are PhDs, reflecting in part the large number of (often self-funded) Masters degrees taken;
- The substantial growth in the numbers of students studying and completing PhDs – amounting to nearly 145% over six years though the growth rate varies greatly by subject;
- The fastest growth has been in education PhDs, with business and management studies also growing rapidly;
- The large proportion of overseas students included in these figures – ranging from economics (with nearly three-quarters of its PhDs being non-UK nationals) to social work (with only 12.5% of its PhDs in the same category). About half of business and management PhDs are awarded to non-UK nationals;
- The gender balance of those being awarded PhDs varies greatly between subjects of study: from (social science) psychology and social policy and administration (over 60% female) to economics (34% female).

10.3 Employability of social scientists after graduation

Getting a secure understanding of what jobs students do after graduation is not simple. The First Destination Statistics – the most obvious source of what happens to undergraduates after graduation – are known to be somewhat unreliable. They relate to the situation six months after first graduation and are complicated by the variable proportion of students going on to postgraduate study and by the lack of any information on whether the jobs secured are, in some sense, graduate level ones (e.g. some graduates may take clerical jobs as a 'fill-in'). Fortunately CSU/AGCAS (2002) have produced a summary based on a number of sample-based surveys (including the government's Labour Force Survey). This is reproduced as Table 10.13 and used as the primary source here even though it only provides detailed information for graduates from a few social science disciplines.

Since the only results directly relevant to this study of 31 subjects by the CS/AGCAS (2002) review are for 5 social sciences subjects (see below), education-based subjects and business and management studies, it will be clear that the social sciences perform well on these key criteria.

Table 10.13 The rank position of students from various social science disciplines in the best 10 (of 31) disciplines on 3 criteria.

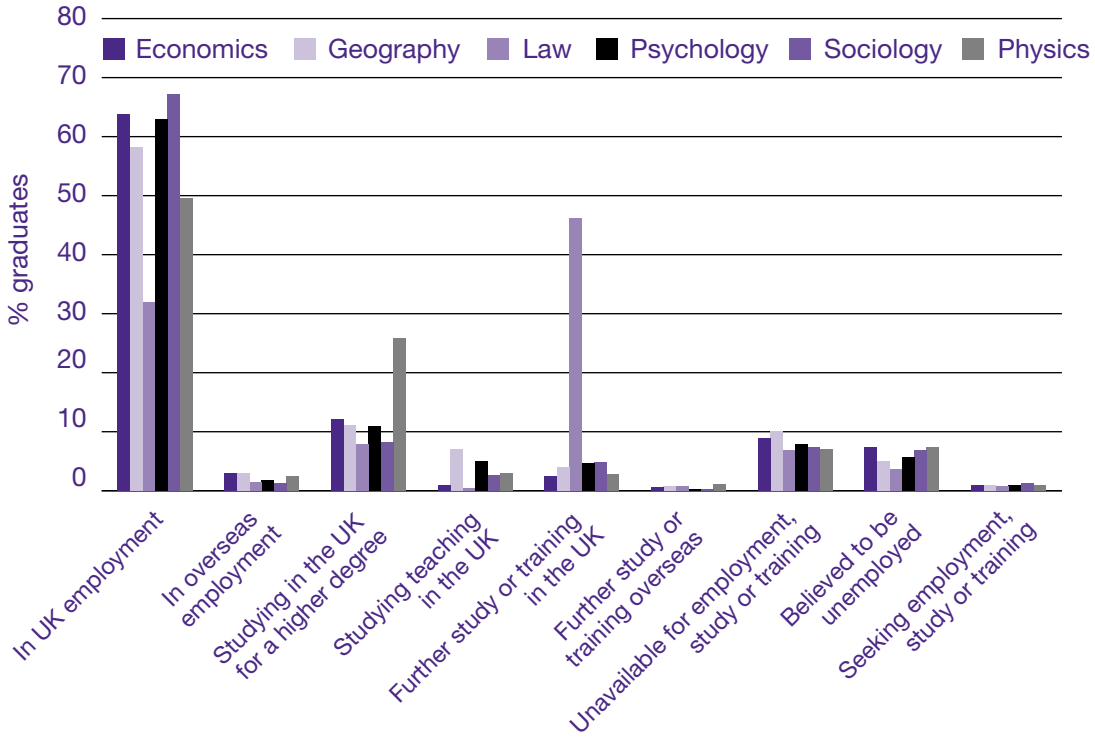
Criterion	Rank	%
Employment		
Business and management studies	3	75.7
Unemployment		
Law	2	3.7
Geography	4	5.0
Psychology	6	5.6
Further Study		
Law	2	55.2
Geography	9	22.9

Source: CSU/AGCAS (2002)

Figure 10.10 shows the proportions of 'social science graduates' working six months after graduation. In 2001, 55.7% of social science graduates were in employment six months after a first degree; sociology graduates had the highest in-work figures. In contrast, the immediate employment prospects for physics graduates are much worse. The social science figure is not as high as figures for graduates as a whole (67.7%), but this is because of the higher than average numbers going on to further study. Over half those who graduated with a law degree went on to further study (56.4%, the majority to qualify for the legal profession). Around a quarter of geography (23.0%) and a fifth (20.9%) of psychology graduates also went on to further study. The unemployment rate for social science graduates is lower than for graduates as a whole (5.4% as opposed to 6.3% in 2001) – and significantly less than for graduates from the sciences (6.9%). Longitudinal studies clearly show that the percentages of social science graduates entering employment catch up with graduates as a whole between 18 months and three years after first degree graduation.

Average starting salaries for social science graduates (as defined above) was £18,272 in 2001/2, somewhat higher than for graduates as a whole at £17,515. The 'Moving On' survey of graduates 3 years after graduation shows that social science graduates continue to earn a salary in line with graduates as a whole.

Figure 10.10 Graduate status in 2001 6 months after graduation

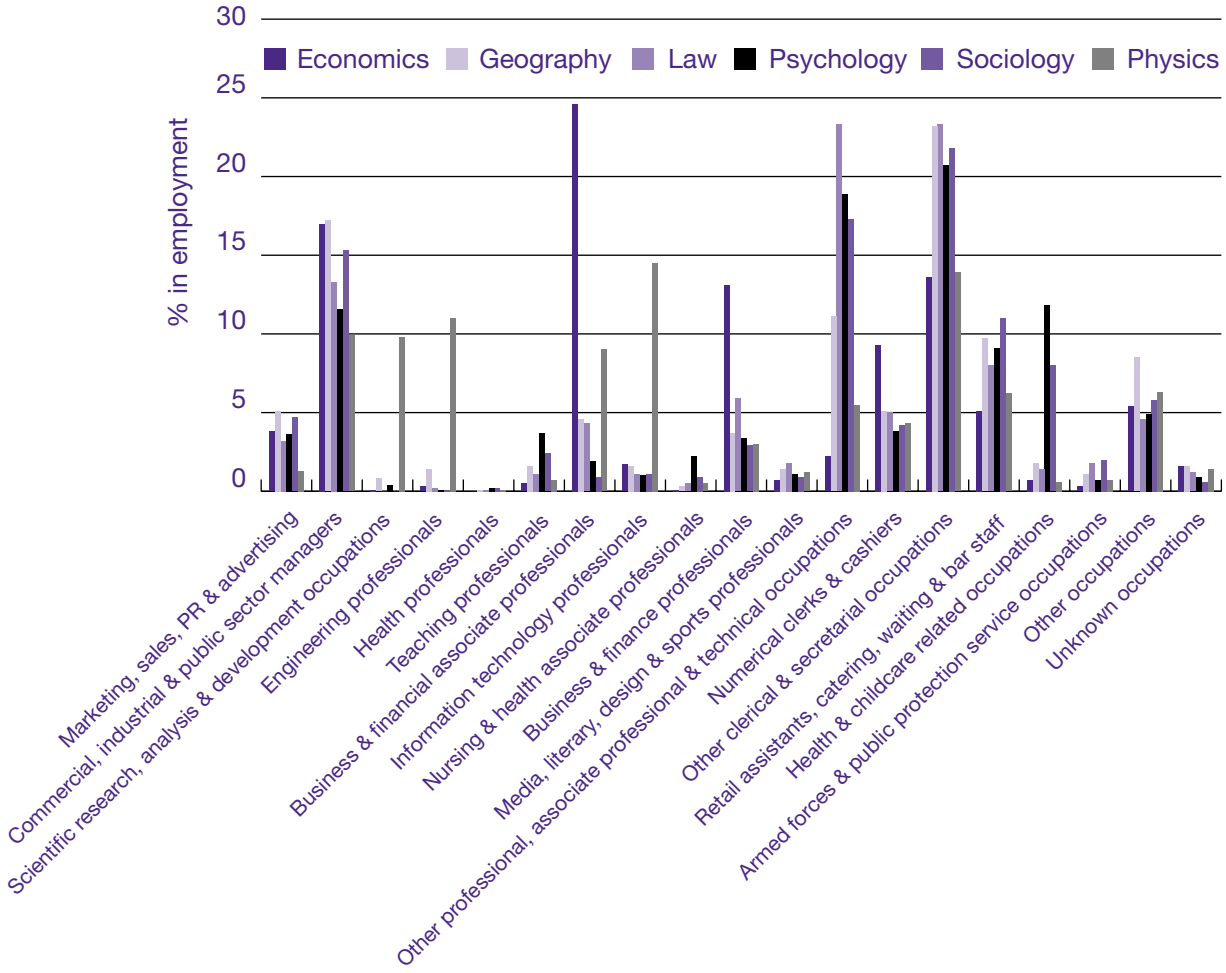


Source: CSU/AGCAS (2002)

Perhaps more interesting – and based on a sample survey – are the jobs which graduates are doing. Figure 10.11 shows the types of work secured. Another survey of graduates 18 months after graduation ('Working Out'), shows that over 60% of social science graduates were working in jobs appropriate for their skills and qualifications. They were also 'very' or 'reasonably' satisfied with how their careers were developing.

It can be seen from Figure 10.11 that social science graduates embark on a wide variety of employment. There is a predictable concentration of economists as business and finance professionals (24.6%, compared to 4.2% of graduates as a whole) or as business and finance associate professionals (13.1% c.f. 2.9%). But the bulk of social science graduates are employed as commercial, industrial and public sector managers, in professional, associate professional and technical occupations or in 'other clerical and secretarial occupations'. This is a quite different profile to that of graduates from physics who are spread across a wider range of occupations, with a modal concentration employed as IT professionals. Longitudinal studies show that business services, health and social work, and education are the favoured sectors of employment for social science graduates in the long term. There are, however, some surprises in the more detailed figures: for instance, though 'other professional, associate professional and technical occupations' was the modal concentration (18.9%) of psychology graduates, only 3.7% became psychologists and 2.5% clinical psychologists, with the bulk becoming welfare, community and health workers (at least in the short term).

Figure 10.11 Job sector destinations in 2001 of new graduates 6 months after graduation for social science graduates (including physics graduates for comparison)



Source CSU/AGCAS (2002)

10.4 Who funds the social sciences?

The total sums of money expended on British social science are not easy to define. That said, we can record some of the funding sources and levels and estimate some others – though some of our assumptions are inescapably heroic. All of the figures which follow should therefore be treated as indicative rather than definitive ones.

10.4.1 Funding of teaching

The bulk of this arises from the funding council grants to universities and student fees. It is not straightforward to calculate; the assumptions used are given in Annex 4. Based on the latest available figures provided by HEFCE and HESA, along with the use of HEFCE price bands for undergraduate courses, the total teaching funds supplied to or generated by universities in the UK are shown in Table 10.14. Given the nature of the assumptions made, these are simply first order estimates – no more and no less; the total could well be £200 million out given the nature of the assumptions.

The predominant source of income varies from subject to subject. Overall, however, nearly £4 in every £10 seems to arise from home undergraduates (see Annex 4), followed in order of income by part-time home students studying for Masters and PhDs (especially in business and management and in education), then full-time home students studying for Masters and PhD degrees and then overseas students studying for Masters and PhD degrees.

Table 10.14 Teaching income (from all sources) generated by different subject areas in the social sciences in Britain

		Total resource (£'000)
Subject area	Ug Price Group	2000–01
Psychology and behavioural sciences	B/D	182,598
Business and management studies	D	889,184
Geography	C	92,712
Social studies	D	581,637
Education	C/D	429,322
Total 'social sciences'		2,175,453

Source: see Annex 4

Based on these and the other figures cited in this section, we have made some bold assumptions and sought to estimate the total expenditure annually on social sciences in Britain. For the present purposes, we have included all teaching expenditure on business and management teaching as a social science. The results are set out in Table 10.15.

Table 10.15 UK funding source for social science teaching activity

Funding source	£ million
Total teaching funds as identified in above table and in Annex 4	£2,175
NHS contributions	Partially subsumed in funding council estimates above, but allow another £150 for nursing, etc social sciences contributions
Private sector contributions, e.g. courses run for industry	Unknowable – probably small except for Executive Development courses in business schools. Assume £50 for social science elements
Total identified funding for social science teaching	£2,375

Source: see Annex 4

Since the public purse directly funds much of the undergraduate course provision and also many education postgraduate and some other Masters courses, it seems as if over 50% of this total arises from that source. Much of the remainder arises from student fees, especially those at Masters level and from overseas students.

10.4.2 Funding for research

A previous attempt to define this (CHES 1992) argued that the total social science research funding was then about £196 million per annum, of which £93 million came from the then University Grants Committee block grant for research and a further £73 million was obtained by universities and polytechnics in research grants and contracts, mostly from central government and research councils. No less than 121 charities funding some social science research were identified, mostly expending sums less than £100,000. The bulk of the research funding was expended on broadly strategic research; only about 16% overall of spending was on basic research. Government departments funded almost no basic research whilst, at the time, ESRC was assessed to be devoting nearly 30% of its spend on this category. Education and health and welfare received the greatest levels of funding. Some areas, e.g. research resources and methods, economics, business and management and human development relied very substantially on ESRC funding.

Table 10.16 shows the total research grants and contracts funding of the 'core' social sciences. This shows that the total funding in 2000–01 reported by HEIs to HESA for these areas was about £203 million or a million pounds greater if the income generated by administrative and academic services was pro-rated from the grand total in relation to the ratio of social sciences to total income. In practice, we can show that this is likely to overstate the total in one respect and understate it in others. It is obvious that some of the income for psychology and geography would be generated from within the physical sciences. But we also know that some research councils other than ESRC fund some research in social sciences areas. As a conclusion, we take the total social sciences research income from research funders as about £200 million.

Table 10.16 Research grants and contracts – breakdown of income in £'000s by cost centre HEFCE sector total 2000–01

	Source of income								
Cost centre	OST Research Councils	UK-based Charities	UK Cent. Gov't/ Loc Auth Health Hospitals	UK Industry/ Commerce/ Public corps.	EU Gov't	EU Other	Other Over-seas	Other	TOTAL
7 Psychology and behavioural sciences	10,652	9,036	5,204	2,169	1,478	269	746	644	30,198
27 Business and management studies	6,023	2,656	9,896	8,468	4,701	1,285	1,537	1,043	35,609
28 Geography	4,002	1,636	5,036	1,867	2,578	151	759	168	16,197
29 Social studies	20,318	10,432	33,794	7,414	6,053	730	4,888	2,438	86,067
34 Education	5,942	5,619	18,250	1,396	1,812	49	661	1,326	35,055
Total	46,937	29,379	72,180	21,314	16,622	2,484	8,591	5,619	203,126
Share of total academic, admin & central services	103.1	71.7	975.8	125.2	323.7	35.1	22.4	620.4	1546.2
Grand total income	47,040	29,451	73,156	21,439	16,946	2,519	8,613	6,239	204,672

Source: HESA Finance Statistics Return, Table 4

The proportion of social sciences funding varies greatly by income source. In charities, for instance (Table 10.17) it represents only about 3% of the total, even though it has been growing steadily in recent years.

Table 10.17 The range of disciplines or fields supported by charities in England

		£ ('000) charitable income p.a.				%
Disciplines	UoA no.	1995-6	1996-7	1997-8	1998-9	1998-9
Medical	1-9	200,178	212,682	231,530	245,372	69
Nursing and PAMs	10-11	3,140	3,010	3,264	3,899	1
Scientific	12-16,18-32	62,868	68,902	73,656	78,123	22
Social sci & policy	33-44	9,233	10,451	10,953	11,599	3
Arts & humanities	45-67	7,239	7,614	7,555	7,727	2
Animal health	17	3,222	3,605	3,847	4,095	1
Education	68	3,781	4,272	3,963	4,875	1
Other	36,69	1,385	1,356	1,654	1,392	0
Total		**291,047**	**311,891**	**336,421**	**357,082**	**100**

Source: HEFCE Research Activity Surveys for the four years to 1998–99.

Table 10.18 Approximate total research funding (£m) in the social sciences in Britain in 2001

Dual support element for university funding if fully funded (source: HEFCE – see Figure 5.1)	225
Total income to HEIs from ESRC and other research council expenditure on research, research training and research resources (including administration); purchase of social science research work or consultancy by government departments; funding under EU research and innovation activities related to the social sciences; spending by charities and trusts and private sector sources.	200
Total identified social science research funding	c.425

About £21 million of HEI research income in the social sciences appears to arise from private sector sources (see Table 10.17) i.e. about 5% of the identified total. The rest comes from the public purse in various forms. What is not included here of course is any internal private sector expenditure on such (typically applied) research or development, even though this manifestly exists in banks, the rest of the financial services sector, major retailers, etc.

10.4.3 Capital development primarily devoted to the social sciences

Capital funding is still more difficult to ascertain and allocate, not least because some infrastructures are shared between social sciences and other parts of universities. In addition, some parts of it arise from government via funding councils, some comes through special schemes run under the research councils' aegis (e.g. the Joint Infrastructure Fund – but with some contribution even for social sciences from the Wellcome Trust), some comes from HEI's own capital funds or from loans, and some arises from fund-raising. LSE, for instance, has spent significant sums in recent years on refurbishing property with funding from a large variety of sources. Oxford's Said Business School benefited from a donation of £20 million. On the other hand, many universities have balanced their books in recent years by under-spending on the creation and maintenance of their estates – as the Treasury transparency review seems to have shown. So any estimate made probably under-represents the money which is actually needed to be spent to maintain social sciences infrastructure on a sound basis.

10.4.4 Total funding of the social sciences

From this – admittedly highly speculative – set of estimates, we can draw some first order conclusions. These are:

- The scale of income from the social sciences in universities and other HEIs is at least of the order of £2.8 billion per annum. Other expenditures exist but we have no acceptable means of estimating them, e.g. private sector internal expenditure on social science research and development in geo-demographics and areas related to personal profiling. As one example, the £1 billion turnover GUS-owned Experian firm has built enormously large databases of individuals and their consumption habits and financial status: it has classified more than one-seventh of the world's population into demographic categories for target marketing. Much of the methodology to achieve this derives from past social science research; Experian carries out considerable in-house development, working on occasions with academics as consultants;
- About 20% of the identified income relates to research, with the remainder on teaching of one kind or another (though this ratio is highly dependent on the assumed fee levels for postgraduate courses). About 95% of research income in the social sciences within universities come from public sources;

- Moreover, the bulk of *all* social sciences incomes come out of the public purse. If postgraduate course fees are excluded, the public sector contribution is hugely dominant;

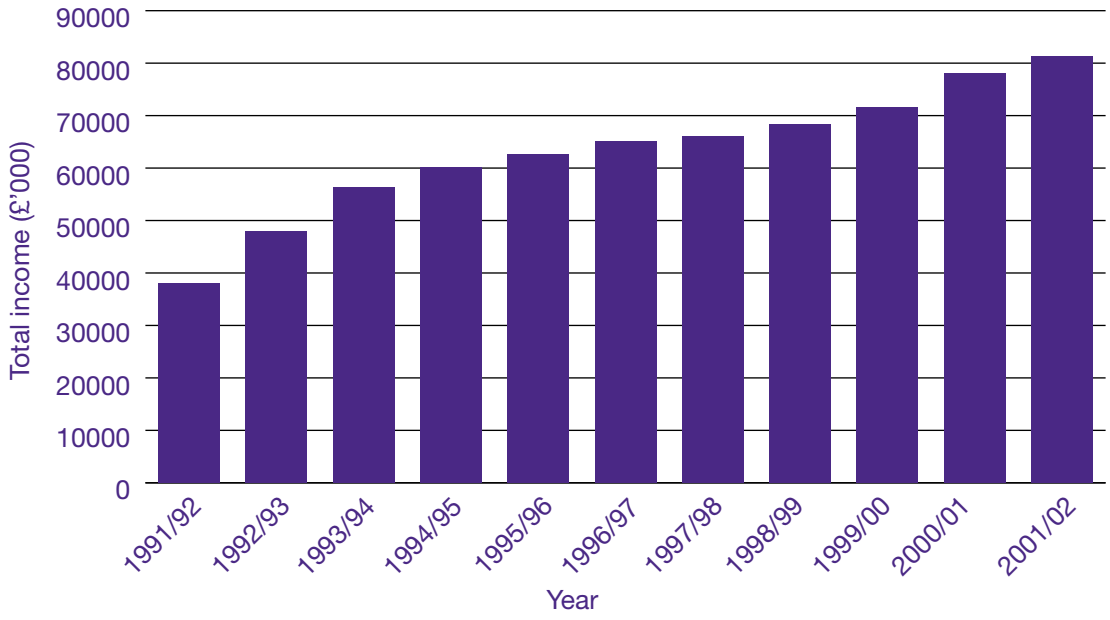
- A test of reasonableness is to compare income with reported expenditures. Social sciences income as defined for teaching amounts to about 29.6% of the total HEFCE teaching funds and fees. In terms of direct academic costs (excluding overheads, costs charged to research grants, etc) the equivalent figure is 26.3%. The possible reasons for the difference may include some cross-subsidies of loss-making subjects such as engineering and medicine. This would repay further investigation.

10.4.5 Trends in funding

Some of these sources of social sciences funding are relatively stable. Thus, teaching funds are part of the national teaching allocation and – other than where national policy changes rapidly (as in 2003) – changes system-wide are unlikely to be more than 1% per annum. In research terms, the results of the RAE are episodic and have historically been stable in inter-RAE periods; the changes in research funding for the social sciences under a fully-funded post–2001 RAE are shown in Figure 5.1. This shows that, against competition from other subject areas, the social sciences overall should have gained about 20% extra annual research funding.

One other indicative measure of the perceived importance of the social sciences is given by funding to ESRC, both absolutely and as a portion of the funds allocated to all research councils. Figure 10.12 shows ESRC income over 11 years. This shows substantial growth in cash terms – some 115% greater at the end of the period compared to the start of it. Even allowing for inflation, this is a significant advance.

Figure 10.12 Growth in ESRC income from all sources (almost all from central government)



Source: ESRC

In fact, the additional commitment to ESRC is even more interesting than it first seems. Table 10.19 shows the budget figures for all the research councils up to 2005–06, drawn from a series of Office for Science and Technology documents. These indicate government intentions after internal debate (as opposed to final expenditure which may be influenced by timing and other considerations). ESRC is by far the lowest funded of all research councils. But the table shows the clear ramping up of expenditure for the social sciences in the last few years. Thus, as a consequence of the 2000 Spending Review, ESRC gained a greater proportionate rise in its budget than any other research council. Following the setting of a new baseline for 2003–04, ESRC again has the largest proportionate budget increase of any research council for the next three years. It is also noteworthy that ESRC has a prominent position in four major cross-council bids and will lead the joint programme on rural economy and land use. As a result of the Roberts Review (2002), the PhD stipend will rise to a minimum of £12,000 per annum by 2005–06.

Table 10.19 Research council budgets in £million

	SR 2000								SR 2002 resource		
	1996–97	1999–00	2000–01	2001–02	2003–04	% change 96–04	% change 96 to 00	% change 01 to 04	2003–04	2004–05	2005–06
BBSRC	177.4	198.3	203	214	250.2	41.0	11.8	23.3	267.9	284.5	321.2
ESRC	63.7	69.8	71.2	74.4	91.5	43.6	9.6	28.5	94.0	102.3	116.6
EPSRC	378.2	397.6	410.9	436.2	489.9	29.5	5.1	19.2	468.2	486.0	534.0
MRC	282.7	304.5	319.2	349.6	387.2	37.0	7.7	21.3	415.3	434.6	473.0
NERC	164.7	178.5	181.8	192.9	216.8	31.6	8.4	19.3	297.9	307.6	329.0
PPARC	191.9	196.3	200.7	206.3	232.2	21.0	2.3	15.7	257.3	267.3	282.3

Note these are as set on a yearly basis (or three yearly after the 2000 Spending Review) but numerous in-year amendments occur to the figures. The projected figures for 2003 onwards are derived from OST (2002) and exclude capital whilst the others are derived from the OST web site. The new NERC and PPARC figures for 2003–04 onwards include the transfer of DTI functions to them, notably the British National Space Centre.

10.4.6 Concentration of social science funding

Teaching funds are allocated separately in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland on the basis of different criteria. But all universities within the same country get approximately the same for teaching social science undergraduates. Charges to students from outside the EU and to postgraduates operate on a 'what the market will bear' principle. Thus LSE, with 44% of its students from outside of the EU, charges nearly £10,000 per full-time overseas undergraduate student as compared to £2,632 received for the standard social studies equivalent home student. Postgraduate courses for an MBA range downwards from the £40,500 charged at LBS (for a 2 year programme) to around £9,000 for a one year MBA programme in one of the new universities. Most other social science postgraduate courses are priced between £3,000 and £12,000, with very different mean values for courses in different sectors – MSc degrees in economics command fees of around £11,000 in highly ranked universities whilst most courses in social sciences in relation to health matters command much lower fees. Some multi-faculty universities are much more postgraduate than others: those who have 30% or more of their students as postgraduates have far more revenue (and hence capacity to spend on staff salaries, etc) than those with under 10% of their students in this category – especially if their brand image enables them to charge premium prices. It is evident therefore that, notwithstanding the standard undergraduate fee income for home students, there are very large variations in social science teaching income between British universities. This (together with other factors) impacts greatly on their ability to recruit and retain staff of the highest quality.

If there are variations in funding of teaching, there are still greater ones in regard to research income. Table 10.20 shows the top 10 universities so far as receipt of ESRC funds is concerned – probably the most prestigious source of competitive research funds in the social sciences. These 10 accounted for 41% of all ESRC's funds in 2001–02: about 170 institutions are eligible for ESRC support. Table 10.21 shows how the ESRC research funding is massively skewed towards the old universities.

Table 10.20 The largest consumers of ESRC research and related funds in 2001/02

University	% total ESRC spend	University	% total ESRC spend
Essex	8.8	**Manchester**	3.3
LSE	6.9	**Institute of Education**	3.1
UCL	3.9	**Edinburgh**	2.7
Oxford	3.7	**Bristol**	2.7
Cambridge	3.5	**Cardiff**	2.5

Source: ESRC Annual Report 2001/2

Table 10.21 The distribution of ESRC funding between different types of institution in 2001/02

	% of total ESRC research expenditure	% of total ESRC research training expenditure
Old universities	78.0	89.7
New universities	6.0	4.9
Independent Institutions	4.8	0
Institutes of HE	0.5	0
Research councils	0.1	0
Other	10.4	5.4

Source: ESRC Annual report 2001–02

A similarly skewed (but not identical) funding distribution arises from the Research Assessment Exercise. Table 10.22 shows the top-rated (5*) departments in each of the core social science UoAs as defined in Chapter 2. Out of the total of 50, four are in Wales, three are in Scotland and none are in Northern Ireland. Fourteen are in London. Though there are many departments rated of national and partly of international excellence (4 and 5 in the RAE) across Britain, this geographical disparity must give some cause for concern, not least to the devolved administrations (see Chapter 4).

Table 10.22 The top-ranked departments in the core social sciences in Britain[8], based on the results of the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise

UoA					
Psychology	Bristol Newcastle UCL	Birmingham Oxford	Cambridge St Andrews	Cardiff UW Bangor	Glasgow York
Geography	Bristol UCL	Durham	Edinburgh	Open University	Royal Holloway
Law	Cambridge Queen Mary	Durham Southampton	Keele UCL	LSE	Oxford
Anthropology	LSE	UCL			
Economics and econometrics	Essex	LSE	UCL	Warwick	
Politics and international studies	Essex	Kings College London	Oxford	Sheffield	UW Aberystwyth
Social policy and admin	Kent	LSE			
Social work	Bristol				
Sociology	Essex Surrey	Goldsmiths College	Lancaster	Loughborough	Manchester
Business and management	Lancaster	London Business School	Warwick		
Education	Bristol	Cardiff			

Source: HERO web site

This geographical skewness is much less obvious in the ESRC-allocated funding shown in Table 10.23. This suggests that, despite the pattern of top ranked (and hence funding council-funded) university departments, Scotland and Wales do only slightly worse than might have been expected on a per caput basis. Northern Ireland is well below what might be expected from ESRC funding and this supports the policy implications already raised above.

Table 10.23 The geographical distribution of ESRC funding.

	% of total ESRC research expenditure in 2001/2	% of total ESRC research training expenditure in 2001/2	% UK 2001 population
England	87.3	87.6	83.7
Scotland	8.2	7.5	8.6
Wales	4.1	4.9	4.9
Northern Ireland	0.4	0	2.8

Source: ESRC Annual Report 2001/2.
Note: 'Other' category ignored; these figures only deal with geographically identified expenditure.

Finally, there are also significant variations in levels of funding given by ESRC to different disciplines, reflecting in part their size and research proclivity (manifested in the number of research grant applications) and their assessed quality (manifested in the success rate of those submitted). Table 10.24 shows the success rates of applications to ESRC by

8 as defined in Chapter 2.

members of different disciplines, these statistics being used by ESRC for internal monitoring purposes. These can usefully (and approximately) be compared with the numbers and proportion of research-active staff in different RAE UoAs (see Table 10.2). Over recent years the success rates in business and management studies in particular have been far below the general level. This has led to the ESRC AIM initiative (see Chapter 5).

Table 10.24 The disciplinary categories used internally by ESRC and the success rates of total research funding won by them

Discipline	% Success rate		Rank order
	2001/2	2000/1	2001/2
Area studies	50%	67%	1
Environmental planning	50%	21%	1
Statistics and computing & methodologies	50%	22%	1
Human geography	48%	29%	4
Linguistics	44%	41%	5
Economic and social history	43%	53%	6
Economics	40%	48%	7
Social policy	40%	26%	7
Sociology	35%	31%	9
Social anthropology	35%	44%	10
Political science and international relations	33%	50%	11
Socio-legal studies	31%	36%	12
Education	28%	27%	13
Psychology	27%	35%	14
Interdisciplinary studies	17%	0%	15
Management and business studies	16%	21%	16
Average success rate	32.4%	35.1%	–

Source: ESRC.

As indicated earlier, the funding of undergraduate teaching is approximately equal per British undergraduate student for all UK HEIs. This situation manifestly does not apply in regard to all other nationally allocated funding streams, viz. research funding on the basis of the RAE or research funding from the ESRC plus that from overseas students. The funding from the RAE is now highly selective – with a ratio of 9:1 between the highest (5*) and the lowest (3a) funded grade. Thus there are massive variations in the funding 'won' competitively by social science academic units. We have indicated earlier that some top class research in the social sciences is carried out by individuals or small groups: the need for critical mass is much less than in the physical sciences. Nevertheless, this huge disparity of resource seems certain to reinforce the existing pattern of excellence.

10.5 Conclusions

This extended analysis of the anatomy of the social sciences in Britain is inevitably unsatisfactory because of the problems with data, definitions of the entities under examination and much else. In particular, the financial calculations must be seen as indicative rather than definitive. That said:

- We have been able to show the scale of the enterprise. At any one time there are about 4.25 million 11 to 19 year old students taking social science courses at school. At lower level (GCSE) examinations in school, the greatest numbers of students studying social science material do so through geography; at A level GCE, geography is increasingly being challenged as market leader by business and management studies and by psychology;

- The numbers and proportion of school level students studying certain subjects with a social science component have declined significantly over the last few years; this is most marked in economics but also applies to political studies and sociology;

- We also know that there about half a million students (a quarter of the total) taking university courses in social science in any one year. As measured by A level grades, there are substantial variations in input quality of undergraduate students to the different disciplines in the social sciences and between different universities: whilst some universities are massively over-subscribed, the system as a whole seems to be about in balance – though this overall picture may well conceal considerable regional variations;

- The largest numbers studying social science-related subjects at university level are in business and management studies;

- Different social science subjects at university are differentially attractive to the two genders to a marked extent;

- The structure of social science education appears to differ greatly by discipline, with the more vocational subjects having higher proportions of Masters degrees and many of these being taken on a part-time basis;

- The numbers of students passing Masters degrees and PhDs have expanded greatly in recent years in many social science areas, both for home and (especially) non-UK students. There is however a dearth of postgraduate study at PhD level by home students in economics in particular where most effort goes into training overseas students, many of whom seem unlikely to stay in the UK. Overall, however, the British PhD programmes have proved attractive to overseas students against fierce international competition;

- Graduates in the social sciences as a whole appear to do at least as well as the average graduate in terms of job placements and salary. Unemployment levels suffered by social science graduates is less than the national average and significantly better than those for physics students. Sociology students appear to have the best immediate employment record;

- Economics is an exception on several counts: the number of students studying it at A level has declined precipitously and the numbers of good UK graduates wishing to work for government or study for PhDs has simply not kept pace with the demand. There is much anecdotal evidence that this is because many economics students get much better paid jobs in commerce after doing an undergraduate or Masters course;

- The scale of the funding of British social sciences at higher education level is much larger than had previously been appreciated: of the order of £2.8 billion income to HEIs per annum, about 20% of which is paid for research and the great bulk of that identifiable coming from the public purse;

- Moreover, the proportion and volume of the science vote dedicated to the social sciences are both getting larger as government favours them in funding of research, especially where this is carried out in conjunction with other areas of science.

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Katherine Hamilton was Secretary of the Commission from April 2002 to March 2003.

Professor Ron Johnston FBA AcSS, University of Bristol, was Secretary of the Commission in the initial stages but resigned for health reasons, fortunately short-lasting.

Annex 2
Individuals who helped us

A number of these individuals responded on behalf of organisations in which they hold office, rather than in a personal capacity.

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Judith Wood
Prof. Peter Wood
Prof. Tony Woodiwiss
Sir Tony Wrigley

Note: we apologise if this list inadvertently omits contributions made by any individual

Annex 3
The International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) and Frascati Manual definitions of the social sciences

The International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) was designed by UNESCO in the early 1970s to serve as "an instrument suitable for assembling, compiling and presenting statistics of education both within individual countries and internationally". It was intended to apply across the board rather than to the specific conditions found in individual education systems. It classifies educational programmes according to levels and fields of study. The classification is used by most national authorities and by many international organisations, including the OECD and Eurostat.

ISCED identifies 21 fields of study, 19 of which (15 at levels 6 and 7) are in higher education. The fields fall into a small number of broad groups. *Social and behavioural science* covers the following disciplines: social and behavioural science; economics, political science, sociology, demography, anthropology, psychology, geography, and studies of regional cultures.

A finer breakdown of the fields of science and technology (SandT) was conducted during the revision for the *1993 Frascati Manual* (OECD, 1994) on the measurement of research and development (RandD) resources. Under social sciences, the Manual includes psychology, economics, educational sciences (education and training and other allied subjects), other social sciences [anthropology (social and cultural) and ethnology, demography, geography (human, economic and social), town and country planning, management, law, linguistics, political sciences, sociology, organisation and methods, miscellaneous social sciences, and interdisciplinary, methodological and historical SandT activities relating to subjects in this group]. Physical anthropology, physical geography and psychophysiology should normally be classified with the natural sciences.

To reflect developments in the field of education, ISCED was revised in November 1997. The fields of study have also been changed to remove overlaps and were increased from 21 to 25 to include new fields. In the new classification, the field of "social and behavioural science" covers the following disciplines: economics, economic history, political science, sociology, demography, anthropology (excluding physical anthropology), ethnology, futurology, psychology, geography (excluding physical geography), peace and conflict studies and human rights. "Studies of regional cultures", formerly under the social sciences in the initial version of ISCED, have been replaced by "areas studies", which now come under the humanities.

Source: Oba (1999), citing official publications by UNESCO and OECD.

Annex 4
Assumptions used in calculating social science incomes

Assumptions made by HEFCE in generating the table below:

1. The student data includes amendments made to the HESA student record following HEFCE's annual HESA HESES comparison exercise.

2. All students returned in the student record, who are active at any point in the academic year, are included in the FTE calculation. This includes outgoing exchange students. We have included students on a sandwich year out, but have halved their FTE, on the basis that they do not attract the same level of costs as students studying at the institution (these students are identified separately in the data). Dormant students, students studying wholly outside the UK, and incoming exchange students are excluded.

3. The data have been summarised using the cost centre identifier. Where the cost centre has been returned as '99', a mapping of subject code to cost centre has been applied to assign students to an appropriate cost centre. This may not be the cost centre where the costs have actually been assigned, but it represents the best assignment that can be applied. (Note that this will only apply to a relatively small proportion of students; the majority of students are assigned to cost centres in the record.)

Time series of student data by cost centre (excludes FE and sandwich exchange students)

Cost centre	Year	Total student FTE	Full-time ug Home & EC FTE	Full-time ug Overseas FTE	Part-time ug Home & EC FTE	Part-time ug Overseas FTE	Full-pg Home & EC FTE	Full-time pg Overseas FTE	Part-time pg Home & EC FTE	Part-time pg Overseas FTE
07 Psychology and behavioural sciences	1998-99		22,330	635	4,172	56	2,201	329	1,579	38
	1999-00		22,273	688	4,486	49	2,476	378	1,790	57
	2000-01	31,679	21,875	607	4,231	45	2,582	385	1,899	55
27 Business and management studies	1998-99		77,971	7,098	15,323	463	7,086	5,478	20,827	624
	1999-00		78,766	7,438	15,836	471	7,338	6,845	20,473	1,328
	2000-01	135,929	77,101	7,610	16,263	400	7,563	7,397	18,565	1,030
28 Geography	1998-99		14,195	236	996	23	955	447	287	34
	1999-00		13,953	229	1,478	24	1,010	444	278	52
	2000-01	17,337	13,671	211	1,629	12	1,020	460	284	50
29 Social studies	1998-99		84,180	7,534	12,635	827	10,824	5,684	6,579	612
	1999-00		82,418	7,779	14,989	257	11,465	5,973	6,527	474
	2000-01	127,410	79,571	6,777	15,272	224	12,037	6,439	6,648	442
34 Education	1998-99		29,662	1,131	9,800	202	17,107	1,418	17,416	869
	1999-00		28,395	584	10,353	484	17,071	1,284	16,346	1,102
	2000-01	77,944	27,912	1,149	10,454	276	18,409	1,471	17,052	1,221

Source: HESA student records 1998–99, 1999–2000 and 2000–01.
NB: Student numbers in the above table differ considerably to some of those in Section B for two main reasons. Firstly, FTEs are used here c.f. actual bodies counted in the earlier section. In some instances for part-time students, FTEs can equate to only around 10% of actual student numbers. Secondly, cost centres may include different subject lines than we have used elsewhere; this is most notable in geography and psychology where the physical and biological courses are included in these figures.

Assumptions made in calculating the actual incomes by cost centres:

1. The inclusive definition of social sciences in the text is used viz. it includes business and management studies, law and education, as well as (in this case) all parts of psychology and geography. We have, however, ignored various other disciplines which have some element of social sciences involved in some courses e.g. statistics. The net effect is probably to overstate the income on the one count but to understate it on the other, not least because conservative estimates of some postgraduate course fees have been assumed (see below).

2. Psychology is funded as a mixture of band B and band D; given the national average of about 50% in each, band C has been taken as a reasonable approximation of the mean funding. The undergraduate full-time fee for subjects in funding bands C and D (covering all the social sciences as defined) are £4,098 and £2,732 respectively; to incorporate the London premium paid for about 20% of the system, the base D figure has been inflated to £2,800 and C and B adjusted accordingly. Part-time fees *per FTE* are assumed on a national basis to be the same as full-time ones plus a 5% premium. Fee levels are irrespective of source, i.e. some students contribute up to £1,100 to the cost of full-time undergraduate fees. Education is funded at a mix of C & D and it is assumed that funding here is 50% C and 50% D;

3. Postgraduate fees for social science courses, even for Masters courses, vary hugely from as little as £2,800 to as much as £24,000, depending on the nature of the course and the brand image of the institution. Typical fees for PhD programmes are, however, around £3,000;

4. EU students pay the same fees as UK ones at undergraduate level; HEIs typically charge the same fees for other EU students as UK ones at postgraduate level. But overseas students are typically charged much higher levels of fees. An average undergraduate fee of £7,000 is assumed, based on a survey of HEI web sites. Whilst the same fee is charged to overseas students as to home ones for many postgraduate courses by many HEIs, this is not generally true at lower fee levels; for this reason, a 20% premium has been assumed in calculating overseas postgraduate student fees.

Summary of assumptions made

Undergraduate Resource Levels	£2,800	D	assumes 20% students in London
	£4,200	C	
	£5,600	B	
Part-time resource premium = 5%			
Long Course premium for postgraduates = 20% (assumed at 80% of 25%)			
Overseas undergraduate Fee	£7,000		
Postgraduate Top-Up Fees above Standard Resource Levels			
Psychology/Geography/Education	£1,000		
Social Science (Including Law)	£3,000		
Business School	£8,000		
Postgraduate Overseas Premium	20%		

Assumed resource levels

	Total HE income from these sources	ug home income	ug overseas income	ug p/t home	ug p/t overseas	pg masters +PhD income home	pg masters PhD income overseas	p/t pg masters PhD income home	p/t pg masters PhD income overseas
Cost centre									
Psychology									
(mix banding B/D)	4,608	4,200	7,000	4,410	7,350	6,040	7,248	6,342	7,610
Business (band D)	5,465	2,800	7,000	2,940	7,350	11,360	13,632	11,928	14,314
Geography (band C)	4,490	4,200	7,000	4,410	7,350	6,040	7,248	6,342	7,610
Social Science (band D)	3,849	2,800	7,000	2,940	7,350	6,360	7,632	6,678	8,014
Education (mix banding C/D)	4,519	3,500	7,000	3,675	7,350	5,200	6,240	5,460	6,552
Total Resource England									
Psychology	145,961	91,875	4,249	18,659	331	15,595	2,790	12,043	419
Business	742,844	215,883	53,270	47,813	2,940	85,916	100,836	221,443	14,743
Geography	77,844	57,418	1,477	7,184	88	6,161	3,334	1,801	381
Social Science	490,419	222,799	47,439	44,900	1,646	76,555	49,142	44,395	3,542
Education	352,192	97,692	8,043	38,418	2,029	95,727	9,179	93,104	8,000
Totals	**1,809,260**	**685,667**	**114,478**	**156,974**	**7,034**	**279,954**	**165,282**	**372,787**	**27,084**
		38%	6%	9%	0%	15%	9%	21%	1%

Of these figures, that for undergraduate home income is much the most certain – and amounts to about 38% of the calculated total. The sensitivity of these figures can be estimated in various ways. For instance, if there was to be a 10% change in the postgraduate and overseas student numbers this would change the totals by £97 million.

These figures pertain only to English HEIs. An approximation to the total for the whole UK system can be obtained by scaling up all by UK direct expenditure for each cost centre divided by that in England in 2000-01. This produces the following percentage increases for each cost centre: Psychology 25.1%, Business 19.7%, Geography 19.1%, Social Science 18.6% and Education 21.9%.

	Total UK HE income from these sources	ug home income	ug overseas income	ug p/t home	ug p/t overseas	pg masters +PhD income home	pg masters PhD income overseas	p/t pg masters PhD income home	p/t pg masters PhD income overseas
Psychology	182,598	114,936	5,315	23,342	414	19,510	3,491	15,066	524
Business	889,184	258,412	63,764	57,232	3,519	102,841	120,701	265,068	17,647
Geography	92,712	68,385	1,759	8,556	105	7,338	3,971	2,145	453
Social Science	581,637	264,239	56,263	53,251	1,953	90,794	58,283	52,653	4,201
Education	429,322	119,087	9,804	46,832	2,473	116,691	11,189	113,494	9,752
Totals	**2,175,452**	**825,058**	**136,906**	**189,214**	**8,463**	**337,174**	**197,635**	**448,426**	**32,557**

Acronyms used

3G – Third generation
ABS – Association of Business Schools
AGCAS – Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Service
AHRB – Arts & Humanities Research Board
AIM – Advanced Institute of Management
AMBA – Association of Master of Business Administration
ANC – African National Congress
AQA – Assessment & Qualifications Alliance
ARCISS – Association of Research Centres in Social Sciences
ALSISS – Association of Learned Societies for the Social Sciences
AUT – Association of University Teachers
BA – British Academy
BBSRC – Biotechnology & Biological Sciences Research Council
BPS – British Psychological Society
BSAG – Business School Advisory Group
BSE – Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (Mad Cow Disease)
CBI – Confederation of British Industry
CCDESC – HEFCE Cost Centre Description
CCTV – Closed Circuit Television
CEML – Council for Excellence in Management & Leadership
CEO – Chief Executive Officer
CEP – Centre for Economic Performance
CEPR – Centre for Economic Policy Research
CHES – Centre for Higher Education Studies
COSI – Canadian Observatory on Science & Innovation
CRE – Commission for Racial Equality
CSU – Higher Education Careers Services Unit
CURDS – Centre for Urban and Regional Development Studies
CVCP – Committee of Vice-Chancellors & Principals (now Universities UK)
DCSM – Department of Culture, Media and Sport
DEFRA – Department for the Environment, Food & Rural Affairs
DfES – Department for Education and Skills
DGRC – Director General of Research Councils
DTI – Department of Trade & Industry
DTLR – Department of Transport, Local Government & the Regions
EBPP – Evidence Based Policy & Practice
ELSE – Economic Learning & Social Evolution
EPSRC – Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council
ESRC – Economic & Social Research Council
EC – European Commission

EU – European Union
FCO – Foreign & Commonwealth Office
FEC – Further Education Colleges
FRESAs – Frameworks for Regional Employment & Skills Actions
FTE – Full Time Equivalent
GCE – General Certificate of Education
GCSE – General Certificate of Secondary Education
GDP – Gross Domestic Product
GES – Government Economic Service
GLA – Greater London Authority
GSR – Government Social Research Service
GSS – Government Statistical Service
GUS – Great Universal Stores
HE – Higher Education
HEFCE – Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEFCW – Higher Education Funding Council for Wales
HEI – Higher Education Institution
HERO – Higher Education & Research Opportunities
HEROBC – Higher Education Reach Out to Business & the Community
HESA – Higher Education Statistics Agency Ltd.
HESES – Higher Education Students Early Statistics Survey
HMSO – Her Majesty's Stationery Office
HMT – Her Majesty's Treasury
ICT – Information & Communication Technology
IDeA – Improvement & Development Agency
ILO – International Labour Organisation
ISCED – International Standard Classification of Education
ISI – Institute for Scientific Information
IVF – *in vitro* fertilisation
JIF – Joint Infrastructure Fund
JNCHES – Joint Negotiating Committee for Higher Education Staff
JRF – Joseph Rowntree Foundation
LA – Local Authority
LBS – London Business School
LDA – London Development Agency
LSE – London School of Economics & Political Sciences
MA – Master of Arts
MBA – Master of Business Administration
MMR – Measles, Mumps, Rubella
MORI – Market & Opinion Research International, Ltd
MP – Member of Parliament
MRC – Medical Research Council
NASA – (US) National Aeronautics and Space Administration
NCVO – National Centre for Voluntary Organisations
NDPB – Non-Departmental Public Body
NERC – Natural Environment Research Council
NHS – National Health Service

NIEC – Northern Ireland Economic Council
NSF – (US) National Science Foundation (US)
NWRRL – North West Regional Research Laboratory
OECD – Organisation for Economic Cooperation & Development
ONE North East – regional development agency for the North East of England
ONS – Office for National Statistics
OST – Office of Science & Technology
PA – Palestinian Authority
PAMs Professions Allied to Medicine
PCT – NHS Primary Care Trust
PG – Postgraduate
PhD – Doctor of Philosophy
PIU – Performance & Innovation Unit, Cabinet Office
PPARC – Particle Physics & Astronomy Research Council
QAA – Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
QR – Quality-related research (HEFCE term)
RAE – Research Assessment Exercise
RDA – Regional Development Agency
REGARD – ESRC's research outputs database
RES – Royal Economic Society
RIIA – Royal Institute of International Affairs
RGS – Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers)
ROPA – Realising Our Potential Awards Scheme
RSS – Royal Statistical Society
SCOP – Standing Conference of Principals
SERRL – South East Regional Research Laboratory
SET – Science, Engineering and Technology
SHEFC – Scottish Higher Education Funding Council
SR – Spending Review
SSCI – Social Science Citation Index
SSRC – Social Science Research Council
TTA – Teacher Training Agency
UCAS – Universities' and Colleges' Admissions Service
UCEA – Universities & Colleges Employers Association
UCL – University College London
UG – Undergraduate
UGC – University Grants Committee
UN – United Nations
UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific & Cultural Organisation
UNITAR – United Nations Institute for Training & Research
UoA – Unit of Assessment
UUK – Universities UK
WDA – Welsh Development Agency
WHO – World Health Organization
WTO – World Trade Organisation