

ACADEMY
of SOCIAL
SCIENCES

CAMPAIGN
for SOCIAL
SCIENCE

Beyond the ballot:

social science insights on eight key policy challenges



S

Beyond the ballot:

social science insights on eight key policy challenges

ACADEMY
of SOCIAL
SCIENCES

CAMPAIGN
for SOCIAL
SCIENCE

Beyond the ballot:

social science insights on eight key policy challenges

Ed Bridges
Steve Grundy
Theresa Flach



 Sage

The Academy of Social Sciences promotes social sciences in the UK for public benefit. We showcase, champion and advocate for the social sciences, raising awareness of their immense influence and evidence-based insights, helping to secure a flourishing future for them. We convene, broker and facilitate sharing of evidence and insight, drawing on the expertise in our Fellowship of leading academics and practitioners and in our learned society members.

The Academy's Campaign for Social Science demonstrates how social science improves public policy, society and all our lives. It highlights the value of applied social science research and advocates for its greater use in decision-making and in government.

To contact us, please email:

media@acss.org.uk for media enquiries

office@acss.org.uk for general enquiries

Or call +44 (0) 300 303 3513

For further information, see:

www.acss.org.uk

X (formerly Twitter): [@AcadSocSciences](https://twitter.com/AcadSocSciences) and [@CfSocialScience](https://twitter.com/CfSocialScience)

The Academy of Social Sciences is a company registered in England, number 3847936, and a registered charity, number 1088537.

CAMPAIGN
for SOCIAL
SCIENCE

Academy of Social Sciences
c/o Knox Cropper LLP
5 Floor, 65 Leadenhall Street
London, EC3A 2AD
+44 (0) 300 303 3513



1 Oliver's Yard
55 City Road
London EC1Y 1SP

2455 Teller Road
Thousand Oaks
California 91320

Unit No 323-333,
Third Floor, F-Block
International Trade Tower,
Nehru Place
New Delhi 110 019

8 Marina View Suite 43-053
Asia Square Tower 1
Singapore 018960

© Campaign for Social Science 2025

Apart from any fair dealing for the purposes of research, private study, or criticism or review, as permitted under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, this publication may not be reproduced, stored or transmitted in any form, or by any means, without the prior permission in writing of the publisher, or in the case of reprographic reproduction, in accordance with the terms of licences issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency. Enquiries concerning reproduction outside those terms should be sent to the publisher.

**British Library Cataloguing in
Publication data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-03-620809-7 (pbk)

DOI: 10.4135/wp.241115

Contents

Executive summary	4
Background	4
Learning points	6
Foreword	8
Introduction	10
Health & Social Care	13
Health inequalities	15
Other elements of healthcare	16
Social care	17
Mental health and wellbeing	18
Inequalities & Welfare	21
Taxation and welfare	23
Race, faith and gender dimensions	27
Housing	31
Reforming private housing	33
Reforming social housing	35
Macroeconomics	39
Investment building on existing strengths	41
Productivity	42
Fiscal policy	43
Macroeconomics with social and civic responsibility	44
Regional Equity & Growth	47
Perspectives from Wales	49
Perspectives from the northeast of England	50
Perspectives from the southeast of England	52
Place-based policy and regional growth	52
Borders & Migration	55
Migration research	57
The politics and polling of migration	58
Welcoming and integrating migrants	60

Knowledge & Technology	63
Artificial Intelligence	65
Higher education	66
Social media	68
Energy & Climate	70
Progress on net-zero targets	72
Social problem, social solutions	73
The role of individuals and communities	74
Sustainable energy	76
Additional climate change challenges	77
Conclusion	80
Appendix A: list of contributors	83
Event series	83
Written contributions	85

Executive summary

Background

In a year of pivotal elections around the world, the 2024 UK General Election was one of several which heralded a change of government. The new UK Prime Minister has [described his government's inheritance](#) as “not just an economic black hole, [but a] societal black hole”. Their approach is to focus efforts on five cross-cutting missions: economic growth; leadership in clean energy; reducing crime and violence; reducing barriers to opportunity for young people; an NHS fit for the future.

With their understanding of our society, economy, civic culture, places and behaviours, the UK's social scientists – in universities and the wider worlds of practice, including in national and local government – are uniquely well-placed to help tackle these specific missions. By summarising existing knowledge and what works, and articulating the very best evidence based on the latest research, they can meet the needs of a new government who will want to develop policy which can drive change for the better, based on evidence-informed approaches. Furthermore, cross-cutting missions are likely to place new demands on both joining up evidence and engaging with multi-disciplinary evidence across a wide range of disciplines and sectors. Such an approach, at scale, was well illustrated in the recent COVID-19 pandemic.

Against a backdrop of social and economic challenges for whatever new government was elected, the [Campaign for Social Science](#), the outward-facing advocacy arm of the Academy of Social Sciences, convened a dialogue with the UK social science expert community in the nine months running up to the election. Under the title of *Election 24: ideas for change based on social science evidence*, we sought to foreground social science perspectives, research and evidence relevant to public policy in the run up to the UK General Election.

The purpose of the project was twofold, and this report summarises the outcomes.

Our contributions centred around eight policy themes



1 Health
& Social Care



2 Inequalities
& Welfare



3 Housing



4 Macro-
economics



5 Regional equity
and growth



6 Borders
& Migration



7 Knowledge
& Technology



8 Energy
& Climate

Throughout the Election 24 series, we ...

... commissioned **43 articles** from social science researchers and practitioners via our online hub.

... partnered with **four organisations** to host **seven online webinars**.

... worked with **five institutional supporters** of the Campaign for Social Science to hold **seven in-person events** in different cities across **three nations** of the UK.

... involved contributions from **34 of our Fellows** from UK universities, among 114 contributing practitioner and academic experts.

Firstly, through events and comment pieces, we sought to showcase the breadth of policy-applicable insights from social science research and practice across a range of eight themes that are relevant to the new UK Government's missions and broader policy agenda. In doing so, the report underlines the great potential of social science research to help shape policy and practice and the willingness of the social science expert community to apply their knowledge to informing solutions as well as to understanding issues. We urge policymakers to consider a breadth of social science evidence that includes but also looks beyond economics and behavioural sciences. The eight themes emphasise a wide range of social science methodologies (quantitative, qualitative, longitudinal, field surveys, case research, action research and so on) which grapple with unravelling causes and effects in multivariate and dynamic systems.

Secondly, while this report does not make specific policy recommendations, many individual contributions and the included case studies do put forward proposals, informed by evidence, which the incoming UK Government may want to consider alongside other evidence as it develops policy. The selected examples are by no means exhaustive and are the views of the individual authors and not of the Academy. Where the report does make suggestions – through the following learning points – it does so in an effort to improve the intersections of evidence, practice and policy.

We encourage the UK Government to consider the five learning points below as they embark on a new and demanding mission-led approach.

Learning points

Whilst this report does not make specific policy recommendations, we have documented five overarching areas of consensus, from the expert contributions, for improving the intersections of evidence, practice and policy – which we encourage the UK Government to consider.

- **In setting cross-cutting missions, the UK Government will benefit from policymaking processes and infrastructures which incorporate a broad range of evidence in ways that are transparent and robust.** This will be the subject of a future report by the Academy of Social Sciences. The project is researching structures, approaches and mindsets in UK Government and the potential opportunities for better harnessing evidence – in particular, social science evidence – more fully, consistently and effectively. We are keen to put forward ways for social scientists to work with government to deliver better outcomes for citizens through a strong social science voice within a broader evidence-led policymaking and implementation process.
- **The new UK Government would benefit from a more joined-up approach to policymaking.** It is apparent from all the themes we explored that no major policy area exists in isolation. Health outcomes are heavily influenced by wider social factors. Housing policy will be determined at least partly by strategies for regional growth. Social inequalities are inextricably linked to macroeconomics. Yet far too often, policy debates happen in a vacuum or in silos. With the new UK Government already adopting a clearer focus on social issues and a ‘mission-led’ approach to tackling them, there is an opportunity to rethink the Whitehall policy machine to ensure better interconnectedness across departments, leading to a more integrated and consistent approach to policy development.
- **Greater attention to the evidence base underpinning controversial and contentious policy areas could lead to calmer and more reasoned deliberation.** In many of our themes, there may be specific policy levers which need to be pulled to effect change in citizens’ lives. In others, equally important is the language and rhetoric used by politicians and the media to frame the parameters for debate. This is particularly true, for example, on policy discourses about migration or welfare, where legitimate political debate has often, in recent years, lacked robust evidence to underpin it. Making space to hear, disseminate and interrogate the evidence informing policy could help temper the tone of the national debate on controversial issues.

- **There is still significant scope for policy innovation by drawing on successful practice from the devolved nations and regions.** We have had national devolution across the four UK nations in the modern sense for over 25 years, and devolution to English city regions for over a decade with the creation of combined regional authorities. The new UK Government has already signalled its commitment towards further devolution of power with proposals for an English Devolution Bill. But our contributors indicated there is still untapped potential. This report showcases multiple examples of innovative policy practice from across the UK's nations and regions. Whilst those solutions may sometimes have been tailor-made to fit a specific set of local circumstances, in others they are scalable and potentially transferable and could be explored to advantage in other areas.
- **Policy development and discourse should include adequate space and time for social and societal elements to be fully explored.** Policy debates on some topics – for example, on climate change or AI – are dominated by technological considerations. Often, there are important broader social considerations which get lost within the debate. Climate change, for example, will require elements of social adaptation, and in some instances costs to individuals, as we change our behaviour to allow resources to be managed more effectively or we redesign towns and cities to reduce reliance on fossil fuels. Incorporating AI into our lives will be as much about building public trust in new systems by having effective ethical and regulatory frameworks as it will be about developing the technology itself. Without adequate social science research and its effective applications, there is a danger that technological solutions by themselves will not deliver the widespread benefits society needs.

Foreword

How to create wealth and distribute it fairly? How to make principled democratic government work effectively and responsively so that citizens believe in it? We may know the risks of climate change that so menaces life on Earth, but how is a response to be organised that will win sustained popular support? What is causing the slowdown in productivity nationally and internationally with such damaging economic consequences? What are the best ways to counter disinformation and hate crime? What is the future of work? How to help our children to learn – and what? How to ensure that most basic of human rights – a roof over our heads?

There are so many vital questions in need of compelling answers. These questions sometimes crowd in and almost overwhelm us. But help is at hand. For many years there has been a body of men and women who know how to set in-train finding answers – social scientists. Social science is the umbrella term for the family of academic disciplines that seek out the evidence and data that illuminate the economic, social and political worlds around us, to inform our understanding and devise better solutions to the varied challenges facing society. Now social scientists are needed more than ever, and they have even better honed tools and vastly more data on which to draw to supply answers. As this collection of analyses and suggested interventions demonstrates over eight ‘sets’ of issues, social science is ready to step up to the plate. The social science disciplines grew out of the turmoil of the European Enlightenment and Industrial Revolutions. The great Enlightenment philosopher, Immanuel Kant, urged his readers to “dare to know” and follow the logic of reason based on evidence. It was a mindset that first unleashed the power of science driven by empirical knowledge to reveal the secrets of nature which would drive forward the Industrial Revolution, but then it jumped across academic forcefields. As urbanisation and industrialisation progressed, bringing acute social and political ills in their wake, society demanded a parallel evidence-based approach to relieve the accompanying social and human distress.

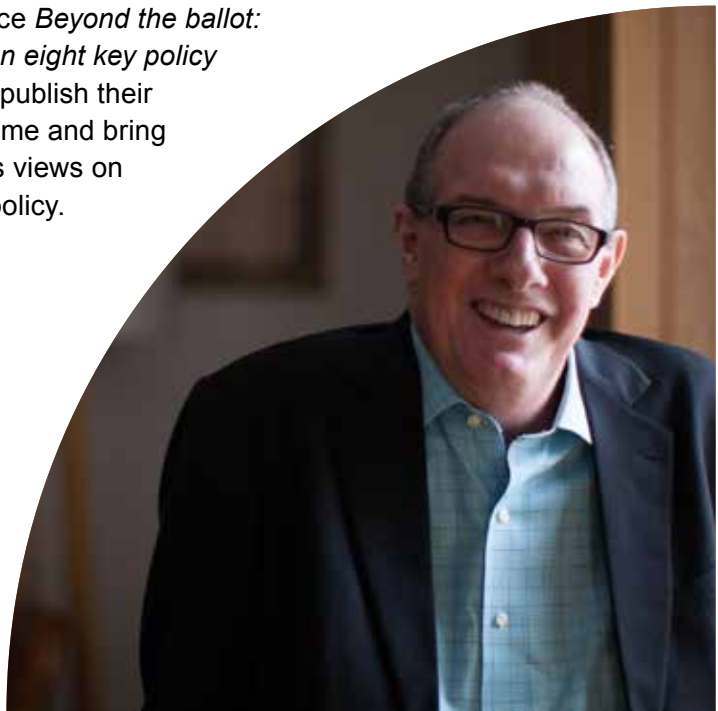
This was the era of Montesquieu, Voltaire and Rousseau, who inspired the study of democratic government; Adam Smith, father of economics; and Auguste Comte, father of sociology. All were what we would now understand as early social scientists, consumed with answering the same questions that beset us today, if in very different contexts – how to create a good society, how to understand the process of wealth creation and how to order effective governance

that commanded the assent of citizens. And so, the social science tradition has grown, deepened and flourished, notwithstanding inevitable ebbs and flows. In economics there has been the Marshallian, Keynesian and Friedmanite revolutions. Societally there have been successive interrogations into how to create stronger ties that bind us together fairly, while politically the perennial issue is how to ensure good, responsive government, good law and an engaged citizenry.

In the run-up to, and aftermath of, the 2024 UK General Election, it was, and remains, clear that Britain stands at a crossroads. Although the performance of some parts of our economy and society offers grounds for hope – the plethora of company start-ups in new technologies, the research standing of our leading universities, the international attractiveness of our service industries, the rootedness of many of our public institutions – too much is going wrong, as the following pages exemplify. Public and private investment have consistently underperformed for decades, unrelieved by Brexit – the cumulative economic impact is there for all to see. Equally our society is pockmarked with inequalities and acute failures in our public services. Housing is a particular black spot. The debate over immigration remains divisive and unresolved. Against this backdrop of growing concern that too little in our country works as it should, our colleagues in the Campaign for Social Science launched Election 24 to enlist the insights of leading social scientists at a series of public events and through a series of blogs. We felt what they had to say was even more pertinent, given the new Labour government and the challenges it faces. Hence *Beyond the ballot: social science insights on eight key policy challenges*, in which we publish their contributions in one volume and bring together their consensus views on evidence, practice and policy.

Enjoy and reflect.

Will Hutton
President of the
Academy of Social
Sciences



Introduction

2024 has been a year of change, elections and political upheaval throughout the world. The UK General Election is just one of many prompts for analysis about the collective challenges we face and how best to address them. In these key moments, social scientists play an important role as part of wider multidisciplinary efforts to identify effective, equitable and affordable policy solutions. In recent months, the Academy of Social Sciences¹ has highlighted the critical yet under-developed role of the UK's social sciences in its current research, development and innovation system,² and also the significant societal impacts of social science research across the whole of the country.³

It was against this backdrop that the Academy sought to provide a social science lens on selected contemporary UK policy challenges, to equip political parties and broader civil society with an understanding of the breadth of evidence that the social sciences can bring, and to exemplify that with information and insights for evidence-informed decisions in selected mission areas. Our [Campaign for Social Science](#) led a pre-election project that sought to foreground social science perspectives, research and evidence relevant to public policy in the run-up to the UK General Election on 4 July 2024. By the time the election was called on 22 May, our project had engaged thousands of people across a series of in-person and online events and written articles, and covered a broad range of highly relevant topics from borders and migration to climate and energy. Our contributors comprised a blend of academics and practitioners, including people who have served as ministers and as senior officials within government, resulting in a range of perspectives on policy challenges from different and sometimes competing standpoints. There are also examples across the eight themes where polling from social scientists has provided challenging insights, showing that public perceptions run counter to what is often commonly thought on issues such as immigration and taxation.

This report is an illustrative summary of those different contributions, both at an

¹[About us](#): The Academy of Social Sciences exists to promote social sciences in the UK for public benefit. We showcase, champion and advocate for the social sciences, raising awareness of their immense value and helping to secure their flourishing future. Our [Campaign for Social Science](#) demonstrates how social science improves public policy, society and all our lives. It highlights the value of applied social science research and advocates for its greater use in decision-making and government.

²Wilsdon, J., Weber-Boer, K., Wastl, J. & Bridges, E. (2023) [Reimagining the recipe for research & innovation: the secret sauce of social science](#), London: Sage / Academy of Social Sciences.

³Wagner, S., Rahal, C., Spiers, A. et al (2024) [The SHAPE of research impact](#), London: British Academy.

individual level and with learnings from the series as a whole. It seeks to fuel fruitful and positive dialogue with the new UK Government about how evidence and insights from across all 16 major disciplines⁴ of the social sciences can be applied to help address the major policy challenges of our time, to the benefit of citizens. Inevitably, some of those disciplines feature more strongly than others within the chapters that follow, not least because so much of the election debate focussed on topics with a clear social lens. Nevertheless, this report reflects the breadth of social science insight on a range of different domains which were central to the new Labour government's manifesto – issues such as social inequality, climate change and modernising public services.

The new government's mission-led approach to policy offers an opportunity to learn the lessons of effective policymaking demonstrated during COVID-19, when the more visible presence of social science and multi-disciplinary perspectives helped to develop quick and effective policy responses to major social challenges. It is clear that the UK's world-leading social science base has helpful and relevant insights for Labour's [five missions](#) which are inherently problem-focussed and interdisciplinary. Solving the policy challenges which lie behind them will necessarily involve the synthesis of diverse forms of evidence; if progress can be made towards this aim, the outcome will be stronger policy and implementation which will improve the lives of citizens. We are not advocating for government to adopt all policy recommendations in this report – they are the views of the individual authors – but we do hope they will demonstrate the breadth of the offer from social sciences and inspire policymakers to draw upon the evidence and ideas available both within and beyond this report.

We are not alone in making this case and seeking to provide research evidence and practice-based insights for policymakers. Good practice can already be found in the [UK Government's 'What Works' Network](#), the [Universities Policy Engagement Network](#), and the [Civic University Network](#), amongst others – all have played an important role in helping to apply research evidence for the public good. This report seeks to complement these by bringing a specific social science focus, and to do so in a timely manner soon after the UK General Election as the government shapes the current parliamentary session.

The report is structured around eight themes, most of which map directly onto the new UK Government's missions and/or prominent areas of discussion during the election campaign itself. Across each theme, we have summarised the analysis of our contributors (a full list of whom can be found in **Appendix A**) and sought

⁴The social science disciplines [include](#): anthropology, architecture & planning, business & management, criminology, development studies, economics, education, human geography & environmental studies, law, politics & international studies, psychology & behavioural sciences, regional studies, sociology, social work and social policy.

to set out for policymakers the areas on which there was a degree of consensus. We have also provided an illustrative case study for each theme, showcasing how social science research and practice are improving the lives of citizens with evidence-informed policy in practice. Over the coming months and years, we will continue to bring together policymakers with academics and practitioners from the social sciences to explore some of these policy areas and the challenges of implementation. We will share even more multi-disciplinary knowledge and insight from across the social sciences, adding to our own [policy briefing series](#).

This Parliament – in which more than half of all MPs have social science backgrounds – has a vibrant, strong and willing social science sector in universities and beyond at its disposal, bringing perspectives and understanding of people, society, economy and place from across our disciplines. Making effective use of its applied strengths and multi-disciplinary perspectives will be pivotal as the new government seeks to deliver effective policy for citizens.

Health & Social Care



At the 2024 election, as with so many before it, health was consistently top of voters' lists of concerns. A record 7.6 million people are on waiting lists for elective care across the UK, life expectancy and healthy life expectancy are stalling, and nearly 2.6 million people of working age are economically inactive due to ill health. Health is also the largest single area of government spending – almost £1 in every £5 is spent on healthcare – and growing.

To these challenges facing the new government, we can also add a social care system struggling to cope with an ageing population and increasingly geographically dispersed family support units, and a growing mental health crisis, particularly amongst younger people.

COVID-19 demonstrated to many policymakers the critical nature of the social sciences in supporting healthcare, with social scientists offering essential insights into society as part of the efforts to promote vaccine take-up and explain the rationale behind lockdown restrictions and social distancing. But their relevance does not end there, and social sciences can inform ongoing health and social care policy.

Key takeaways from our contributors

- Financial investment into health and social care alone is not enough; we need a comprehensive, joined-up strategic approach. Health is influenced by wider social determinants such as housing, poverty and unemployment. Only by joining the dots between policy areas will progress be made. Social sciences can offer deeper insights into this interconnectedness.
- Targeting certain parts of the multi-layered healthcare system could act as quick wins to ease pressure elsewhere. Investment into primary care frontline services such as GPs and pharmacy services could help alleviate pressures in acute care and social care.
- Addressing staffing issues is central to transforming health and social care. The low status, low pay and working conditions of care workers are a key factor in the health and social care crisis. Reframing social care as a career with prospects rather than a minimum-wage job could help create a bigger pipeline of care workers.

Health inequalities

The [very first webinar in our series](#) saw [Professor Trish Greenhalgh](#) (University of Oxford) and [Professor Petra Meier FAcSS](#) (University of Glasgow) discuss health inequalities. Some of the key points are set out below:

- The UK is one of the most unequally developed countries in terms of life expectancy – a boy born in one of the most deprived areas of Scotland will live 45 years in good health and 23 years in poor health (68 total), compared to 70 years of good health and 12 years of poor health (82 total) for a boy born in one of the wealthiest areas of the country.
- Issues around health inequalities and life expectancy are interlinked with issues around economic productivity, care responsibilities, workplace performance and others – meaning that problems we conceptualise as health issues are also matters of social justice, intergenerational dependence and economic growth. Good health cannot solely be the responsibility of the NHS – it needs a cross-government and multi-agency systems-led approach.
- Prof. Greenhalgh quoted from a [well-known paper by Professor Sir Michael Marmot](#) containing a list of ten instructions which would all reduce health risks, but which emphasise just how difficult behaviour change actually is:
 - 1 Don't be poor. If you can, stop. If you can't, try not to be poor for long.
 - 2 Don't live in a deprived area. If you do, move.
 - 3 Don't be disabled or have a disabled child.
 - 4 Don't work in a stressful, low-paid manual job.
 - 5 Don't live in damp, low-quality housing or be homeless.
 - 6 Be able to afford to pay for social activities and annual holidays.
 - 7 Don't be a lone parent.
 - 8 Claim all benefits to which you are entitled.
 - 9 Be able to afford to own a car.
 - 10 Use education to improve your socio-economic position.

All ten are determinants of health, but all ten also relate to things people cannot readily change. Most can only be addressed through policy changes aimed at targeting wider inequalities – employment rights, better social housing, increased funding for public services and so on.

Recommendations from the session included attending to the upstream causes of ill-health which lie outside the healthcare system, taking bold steps to reduce poverty, and improving equity of opportunity in every aspect of society. It was also suggested that, although we have much better technology to identify likely effects of policies on health (e.g. how will an increase in the energy price cap affect mental health?), those technological tools need to be used more frequently, and more

openly. Finally, [in a separate written piece by Prof. Greenhalgh](#), she recommends strengthening primary care, since it remains the cheapest way to improve the health service as a whole. She highlights how GPs are not just the gatekeepers who control access to specialist care; they are also generalists who get to know their patients well and manage most conditions without onward referral.

Other elements of healthcare

Some of the other written contributions covered broader elements of NHS and community health provision, including preventative care:

- [Dr Imelda McDermott](#) (University of Manchester) [in her post](#) explores policy challenges across general practice and community pharmacy. She puts forward several recommendations for developing a sustainable healthcare workforce, including leveraging community pharmacies, noting that community pharmacies are usually located in more deprived areas and hence can improve access by patients often in greatest need.⁵ She highlights initiatives like [Pharmacy First](#), started in January 2024, enabling patients with minor ailments to be seen directly by pharmacists, without needing to be referred by GPs, for seven common conditions, and a future policy direction could involve pharmacists independently prescribing medications.
- [Dr Sarah Gillborn](#) (University of Birmingham) [argues in her piece](#) that BMI (Body Mass Index) measurements as part of the National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP) in England do more harm than good. The NCMP was introduced in 2006 to analyse childhood obesity trends at population level and provide a mechanism for direct engagement with families by mandating state-maintained schools to measure the BMI of all pupils in Reception (aged 4–5) and Year 6 (aged 10–11). However, the NCMP’s own annual reports reveal there has been no significant positive change in rates of childhood obesity since the programme’s inception, and Dr Gillborn argues that the reliance on BMI reproduces harmful and evidently incorrect assumptions of health as directly related to weight, reinforcing harmful notions of the ‘ideal’ body and contributing to eating disorders and mental health difficulties. She recommends abolishing the use of BMI as a measure of health and instead focussing on broader initiatives to combat poverty.
- In a [related piece about public health](#), [Dr Aweek Bhattacharya](#), Research Director of the Social Market Foundation, discusses individual-level and population-wide public health interventions, providing social science evidence for their efficacy and recommendations to the next UK Government. Modelling conducted as part of the ACE-Obesity study found

⁵ Fuller, C. (2022) [Next steps for integrating primary care: Fuller Stocktake report](#), Whitehall: NHS England / NHS Improvement.

that, on average, population-wide regulatory interventions saved 1.7 times as many health-adjusted life years as programme-based measures.⁶ Dr Bhattacharya argues that more interventionist policies on public health tend to be more effective – taxing harmful commodities, reducing their availability (for example, through licensing restrictions) and regulating their marketing have the greatest effect. By contrast, educational and informational campaigns tend to be less effective.

Social care

Successive UK Government administrations have promised – and in some cases tried – to reform England’s social care system; meanwhile, Scotland and Wales are seeking to move towards their own national care services, whilst Northern Ireland merged health and social care in 1973. Despite all this, social care in all four nations often remains a ‘poor relation’ in a messy system, with regulations overseen by national governments and delivered at local authority level, often with significant involvement from the private or third sectors. Alongside this is a major workforce challenge. In 2021–22, there were 165,000 vacancies in the social care system, an increase of 55,000 on the previous year; a vacancy rate of 10.7%.⁷ This reflects major recruitment and retention problems, exacerbated by low pay and a lack of status.

These were just some of the issues explored by our contributors:

- [Professor Jon Glasby FAcSS](#) and [Professor Catherine Needham FAcSS](#) (both University of Birmingham) [write in their article](#) that, just as the House of Lords Adult Social Care Committee has argued, adult social care is too often ‘invisible’ and seen as a ‘burden’ on scarce resources.⁸ They talk of the importance of changing the narrative and positioning social care as a form of social and economic investment we make in ourselves as a society – helping us all to live chosen, meaningful lives and to flourish in our relationships, friendships and local communities. They end their piece by quoting directly from the same House of Lords report and its stark challenge: *“Adult social care affects the lives of over 10 million people in England, including those who draw on care and support, unpaid carers and paid care workers. Over the coming years it will affect all of us, one way or another. It’s everyone’s business ... [Fundamental] changes are necessary for us all to live ordinary, meaningful lives, and to create the kinds of communities where we all look out for one another.”*

⁶ Ananthapavan, J. et al (2018) [Assessing cost-effectiveness of obesity prevention policies in Australia](#), Melbourne: Deakin University.

⁷ Workforce Intelligence (2023) [The state of the adult social care sector and workforce in England](#), Skills for Care website.

⁸ House of Lords Adult Social Care Committee (2022) [A “gloriously ordinary life”: spotlight on adult social care](#), UK Parliament website.

- [Dr Jennifer Dixon](#), Chief Executive of the Health Foundation, [writes in her piece](#) about the obvious need to increase social care investment, but also argues that insuring older people against the catastrophic costs of social care could be done by implementing existing policy on the statute book – the core principle behind the Dilnot Commission’s recommendations, previously accepted by the UK Government but not yet implemented.
- [Dr Jane Lethbridge](#) (University of Greenwich) discusses [in her article](#) three solutions for addressing the UK’s social care crisis. Amongst other things, she raises the importance of professionalising care work, arguing that social care work must have high professional standards and good pay, terms and conditions. Beyond the retention of existing workers, Dr Lethbridge argues that building a sustainable future care workforce requires the recruitment of young people into the social care sector through tailored programmes. Several social services organisations in Europe have, for example, set up schemes which encourage young people to volunteer and gain experience of social services work.
- At our [event in Southampton](#), [Professor Jagjit Chadha FAcSS](#) (National Institute of Social & Economic Research) set the issue of social care against the wider context of intergenerational inequality. He highlighted that the UK had moved from a situation where pensioners were the poorest people in society 40 years ago to a situation where they’re now a broadly well-off demographic in comparison with younger people. We need to address generational inequity but without forcing older people to lose their financial stability. At the same event, [Satvir Kaur](#) (now Labour MP for Southampton Test, but at the time Leader of Southampton Council) explained that local authorities can no longer cope with rising demand for adult social care. If we want our older people to live for longer and live healthier, we need to address more than just social care – we also need to improve areas like transport and housing.

Mental health and wellbeing

Our [event in Cardiff](#) examined broader issues around wellbeing, against the backdrop of Wales being the only UK nation with distinct legal architecture to protect the wellbeing of future generations. In a wide-ranging discussion covering issues such as young people’s mental health, social wellbeing and loneliness, two specific contributions stood out:

- [Professor Stephan Collishaw FAcSS](#) (Co-Director for the Wolfson Centre for Young People’s Mental Health) spoke of the major and growing problem of young people’s mental ill-health, including loneliness, with a third of 15-year-old girls in the UK reporting feeling lonely.

- [Professor Chris Taylor](#) (Professor of Social Sciences at Cardiff University) picked up on the same theme of loneliness. Policymakers tend to focus on community infrastructure (which is tangible and measurable) rather than personal feelings like loneliness (which is subjective and ethereal), and we risk losing track of what really makes a difference to people's sense of wellbeing because of this.

Panellists highlighted how investment in young people's mental health tends to pay dividends across the life course – not just in health but also in a range of other domains. Even relatively modest levels of support for young people leads to happier, healthier adults who can contribute to society in a multitude of ways.

Case study: Adult social care in the four UK nations – lessons and challenges

A recent book by Prof. Catherine Needham FAcSS & Patrick Hall, *Social care in the UK's four nations: between two paradigms*, charts how all four UK nations have attempted reform of social care, but in general have been poor at learning from each other's experiences. Their research is based on 65 interviews with policymakers and sector leaders from the four nations and analysis of 31 key policy documents.

They conceptualise five care crises:

- 1 **A crisis of demand** – because of an ageing population
- 2 **A crisis of family** – because of changing structures and overloading of carers
- 3 **A crisis of the state** – due to underfunding but also a lingering paternalism
- 4 **A crisis of the market** – because of profit extraction, and unstable / inadequate provision
- 5 **A crisis of the community** – caused by a voluntary sector struggling to stay afloat

Amongst the authors' analysis, some key points emerge:

- There is no existing mechanism for 'risk pooling' (as is the case for the NHS) for social care in any of the four nations. This does mean that services can be more personalised, as the care model will be more bespoke around each individual's needs, but it also results in vastly differing experiences of the services they receive.
- England and Wales have each gone for 'big bang' legislation, whereas Scotland has had a more incremental approach, allowing time for learnings to be made. Wales and Northern

Ireland have not had robust enough institutions to take advantage of their 'small nation' status.

- Cuts in other policy areas end up having a knock-on impact on social care. This is particularly true in local government, where cuts to things like housing and transport can lead to people becoming more dependent on the care system.
- Any national care service (NCS) won't be free at the point of use and won't end the outsourcing of care, so the public might end up feeling deceived because of how it's been sold.

Amongst the authors' conclusions are:

- All four nations have reformed their care systems and are on the brink of further reform.
- Scotland has gone furthest over the last 25 years, but this may have led to an overloaded system.
- None of the four nations are explicit about how to balance the competing desires to be more standardised and centralised on the one hand, and more differentiated and localised on the other.

Inequalities & Welfare



The UK has one of the highest levels of inequality in Europe, with wealth disparities rising within and between our nations and regions. The widening gap between rich and poor has led to stagnating social mobility and pressures on the welfare system. Inequality is seen across education, work, healthcare and culture, and as such requires a multi-agency approach to address it fully. But before we can do so, we must identify and understand it – something which social scientists are well placed to do.

Our contributors also examined other areas of inequality, including race, faith and gender. To take race as an example, the last Census indicated that 82% of people in England and Wales were White British; a figure which is projected to drop to 62% by 2061. Understanding and reversing racial inequalities will clearly be a major policy priority for any government, but will require strong political leadership based on robust evidence.

Key takeaways from our contributors

- There is a wealth of information available from the social sciences to illustrate the extent and intricacies of inequality in the UK across a range of determinants – from gender and race to geographical location and migration status. This information is essential for understanding the issues, ahead of developing policy and approaches to address them.
- Taxation is a key policy lever to unlock the resources needed to address inequality. There is a broad consensus from social scientists about the need to raise funds through taxation to tackle inequality through the provision of public services and welfare, but there is also clear public preference for taxing wealth rather than income. It should also be noted that attitudes around welfare and taxation have shifted significantly in the last decade.
- A joined-up, multi-agency approach is required to tackle inequality. Inequality is evident across many different areas, including healthcare, employment and education, and a comprehensive, joined-up approach is needed. Government cannot solve inequality on its own; business and media have roles to play too. Independent advocates, such as commissioners, can be a useful tool when working towards better equality.

Taxation and welfare

A [joint webinar with the National Centre for Social Research](#) in January 2024 focussed on public views and voter attitudes towards taxation, public spending and welfare, drawing on data from the British Social Attitudes 2023 survey.⁹ Key points included:

- [Professor Sir John Curtice FAcSS](#) (University of Strathclyde) highlighted that historical British Social Attitudes data shows an increase in support over the last decade for raising taxes to expand public services, driven by the public's perception that the NHS is in crisis and must be better resourced. He explained that dissatisfaction with the delivery of public services such as healthcare may be the reason why the public has not reacted against the expansion of the state triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic and conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East.
- [Professor Ben Baumberg Geiger](#) (King's College London) offered further evidence on public attitudes, focussing specifically on perceptions towards welfare policies. He explained that there was a sharp rise during the late 1990s in anti-welfare attitudes, which refer to the belief that benefit claimants are 'undeserving' of help. This changed from around 2013, and there are now lower anti-welfare attitudes than at any time since the British Social Attitudes survey began measuring those views. Approximately 45% of people disagree with the statement that 'benefit claimants do not deserve help'. While no single cause for this swing in voter attitudes can be determined, parliamentary welfare reforms from 2010 to 2015 and a less hostile political and media landscape may be driving factors. Yet voter attitudes are ambivalent and not strongly pro-welfare, with only about 10% of people considering welfare as one of their top three issues facing the country, and public support remaining for some specific cuts to welfare, including harder conditionality for the long-term unemployed.
- Our panel agreed that, while the new UK Government would be navigating a difficult fiscal landscape, it can generally follow public opinion on taxation and welfare rather than having to persuade it. The caveat is that misconceptions about the welfare system are still widespread and require addressing. An example is the belief that benefits are predominantly for those not in work – whereas the reality is that most benefits are claimed by people who are working.

The Academy co-hosted a public lecture by Liam Byrne MP on his new book, [The inequality of wealth: why it matters and how to fix it](#). Held at the University

⁹ British Social Attitudes (2023) [BSA 40: poverty](#), National Centre for Social Research website.

of Birmingham in December 2023, the event saw Liam discuss how household wealth has grown a hundredfold since the 1970s and is now at around £12.5tn – and that the distributional disparities continue to increase rapidly. Key points included:

- The majority of the population want to see wealth inequality reduced, with 79% of people believing that the wealth gap in the UK is too big.¹⁰
- When it comes to addressing wealth inequality, taxation is a key tool. Firstly, income and capital gains taxes could be equalised, and secondly, inheritance tax could leverage funds to reduce wealth inequality. These funds could be used to provide vehicles like new child trust funds, learning from the experience of the previous child trust fund scheme which was easy to cancel because it was too small. It would be politically easier to maintain such a scheme if a larger amount of money was made available to a smaller number of people in greatest need and if it was made available to young people at a strategically critical point in their lives.
- Most sovereign wealth funds return around 8% on investment, which far outstrips the returns most individual investors can achieve. Such funds can be good vehicles for investing and growing tax revenue to support policies like Universal Basic Capital (UBC) schemes.

Additional evidence-informed written contributions by leading social science experts provide further insights into wealth taxation. These include:

- [An online article](#), co-authored by [Dr Elliott Johnson](#) (Northumbria University), [Professor Daniel Nettle](#) (Newcastle University and Institut Jean Nicod), [Professor Kate Pickett FAcSS](#) (University of York), and [Professor Matthew Johnson FAcSS](#) (Northumbria University), set out to explain why the UK is in an era of ultra-insecurity. The authors found that while citizens favour small increases in income tax compared to present levels, their strong preference is for new wealth and carbon taxes and increases in corporation taxes. Each of these taxes tackles the relative increase in wealth compared to wages, which has left workers facing quality-of-life deterioration that has not been experienced by those who can live off wealth. Taxes on those at the very highest levels of income distribution could be used to fund Basic Income, and although such a benefit would be universal and flat, its net impact is targeted at those at the middle and lower end of income

¹⁰ Social Mobility Commission (2017) [Social mobility barometer: public attitudes to social mobility in the UK](#), London: Social Mobility Commission.

¹¹ Johnson, E., Reed, H., Nettle, D. et al (2023) [Treating causes not symptoms: basic income as a public health measure](#), London: Compass.

distribution.

- On a similar theme, [Professor Sir Julian Le Grand FAcSS](#) (Marshall Institute for Philanthropy and Social Entrepreneurship), [discusses in his piece](#) how few young people have access to capital in the form of financial and property wealth, either directly through gifts or inheritance, or through their parents. His suggestion of Universal Basic Capital (UBC) would see the state make a one-off grant to every citizen at birth, at the age of majority, or at some later point in their young adult lives. UBC may be the same for all, or a minimum amount plus a top-up for citizens who are on low incomes, have low wealth holdings or are otherwise disadvantaged. It is financed either from general tax revenues or by a wealth tax, such as a tax on inheritances or on wealth-holdings.
- Adding to the discussion on wealth taxation, [Dr Marcos González Hernando](#) (UCL) and [Dr Gerry Mitchell](#), independent consultant, [explore in their post](#) how the idea that children should be better off than their parents has stopped sounding convincing to the public, even the well off. While few agree on where a 'riches line' is, the disparities at the top are extreme. Those earning a top 5% income (£82,200), or even 3% (£104,000), are further away from someone on a top 1% income (£183,000) than they are from the median earner (around £30,000).¹² In a highly unequal society, the top 1% may fit with our perception of 'rich', but not necessarily the top 10%. There is clear support for taxing wealth rather than income, moving the burden from employees to the genuinely rich.¹³

We also welcomed contributions on the topic of reforming social security, including:

- [Professor Jane Millar](#) (University of Bath) [writes in her article](#) that means-testing, conditionality rules and benefit deductions built into the welfare system have led to deteriorating social security in the UK, reinforcing child poverty. She suggests that reforming the benefits system for families with children should see Child Benefit increased and returned to a simple, universal financial contribution to the cost of raising children for all families. She proposes that the Higher Income Child Benefit Charge be abolished as it adds significant administrative burden to families and HMRC, and creates very high marginal tax rates.^{14, 15} She also argues against the benefit cap and

¹² González Hernando, M. & Mitchell, G. (2024) [Uncomfortably off: why addressing inequality matters, even for high earners](#), Bristol: Policy Press.

¹³ Advani, A., Chamberlain, E. & Summers, A., [A wealth tax for the UK](#), UKRI, Atlantic Fellows, Cage.

¹⁴ House of Commons (2023) [The High Income Child Benefit Charge](#), UK Government.

¹⁵ Brewer, M., Handscomb, K. & Kelly, G. (2022) [Inconsistent incentives: how the overlap between Universal Credit and the High Income Child Benefit Charge limits work incentives](#), Resolution Foundation website.

¹⁶ Stewart, K., Reader, M., Aldridge, H. & Patrick, R. (2022) [How do the benefit cap and the two-child limit interact?](#), Benefit Changes & Larger Families project website.

the two-child limit to deliver relief to the poorest families.¹⁶ Looking at social security more broadly, the Department for Work & Pensions dealt effectively with a huge influx of Universal Credit (UC) claims during the COVID-19 pandemic, largely because it had stripped away anything not related to the assessment and payment of benefits. Directing the system back to this core purpose should be the base of social security reform.¹⁷

- [Professor Jagjit Chadha FAcSS](#) (National Institute of Economic and Social Research) [with his contribution](#) examines the well-documented poor performance in UK productivity and explores why it is not generating sufficient prosperity across the country, as reflected in stagnating real-term wages.¹⁸ He argues that the impact on low-income households could be reduced with no deterioration in the medium-term sustainability of the UK's fiscal position if, instead of an energy price cap on the average household, a sliding price cap raising marginal costs for households using more energy shifts the onus onto better-off households. The right response to a temporary negative income shock is to smooth it with public borrowing and a slower movement to higher tax, given the structural deficit. Prof. Chadha suggests that this needs to be accompanied by a long-term commitment to public investment in physical and digital infrastructure and in human capital and the health service to address the continual slide in the net worth of the public sector and in the UK's net international investment position, triggered by the post-financial crisis self-imposed constraint on fiscal policy.
- Focussing on child health and wellbeing, [Professor Sir Michael Marmot](#) (UCL) [discusses in his article](#) how health is only partly dependent on healthcare, because the social determinants of health – the inequities in power, money and resources which shape the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age – play a crucial role too. Sir Michael uses examples, including that of Finland, where child poverty used to be higher than in the US, but which now has one of the lowest rates of child poverty, to explain how fiscal and social policy – tax dollars – can reduce child poverty. He adds that good child development should be considered alongside child poverty. The average spent on children aged 0–5 years in countries in the OECD is about US\$6,000 per child. In Norway, it is a little over \$12,000. In the UK, it is around \$4,000, with the US even lower at closer to \$3,000. Sir Michael ends by asking whether that is where the UK wants to be as a country.

¹⁷ Department for Work and Pensions (2020) [DWP's response to the coronavirus outbreak](#), UK Parliament website.

¹⁸ Chadha, J. & Samiri, I. (2022) [Macroeconomic perspectives on productivity](#), Working Paper #030, Manchester: The Productivity Institute.

- Contributing to the topic of how inequality shapes the social determinants of health, [Professor Judith Phillips OBE FAcSS](#) (University of Stirling) [highlights in her piece](#) that wealth inequality influences how ageing is experienced. The poorest live the shortest lives, often in bad health, which reflects an accumulation of disadvantage across the life course.¹⁹ People from ethnic minority backgrounds fare the worst with the gap widening across the population between those in good health and wealth and those without, exacerbated by spatial inequality between the north and south of the UK. She states that there is a need for a joined-up approach across government and initiatives akin to the Welsh Government's Older Peoples' Commissioner, an independent advocate for older people in policymaking.

Race, faith and gender dimensions

For the [Campaign for Social Science Annual SAGE lecture](#) in November 2023, [Professor Gary Younge FAcSS](#) (University of Manchester) began by exploring the race-based challenges in the UK in the 1960s. He discussed how the Commonwealth Immigration Act was passed in response to British prejudice demanding there should be fewer migrants from the colonies – even though at the same time the UK Government was also in great need of migrant labour to ensure public services could be delivered. Prof. Younge went on to say that many of the same paradoxes can be found today, and that one example of this is the media conflating issues of asylum and immigration and treating immigration as a problem. In reality, in the year ending September 2023, asylum seekers comprised 7.5% of all immigrants, and those arriving by small boats made up just 3.5%, so even if the previous UK Government administration had achieved its objective of 'stopping the boats', it would have barely made a dent in immigration figures. This comes at a time when there are one million vacancies in the British workforce, particularly in the care sector, that aren't being filled. This means that a consensus on immigration has emerged in the name of 'electoral reality' that sits in direct contradiction to the actual reality.

[Professor Jane Green FAcSS](#) (University of Oxford) delivered a response to Prof Younge's lecture, highlighting the key role of social scientists in pursuing and promoting facts and evidence, to speak out, and most of all, to not become part of the problem by buying into cynicism and disengagement. Both speakers agreed that improvements to the architecture and fabric of the state and public services are essential for changing the narrative, as the UK's decaying infrastructure has made it harder to have effective public engagement.

Separately, evidence-informed written contributions by social science experts add further insights to the discussion on how the new government can address

¹⁹ Department of Health & Social Care (2023) [Chief Medical Officer's annual report 2023: health in an ageing society](#), Westminster: UK Government.

race-based challenges, as well as those relating to faith and gender. These included:

- [Dr Pier-Luc Dupont](#) (Swansea University), [Dr Thomas Sealy](#) and [Professor Tariq Modood FAcSS](#) (University of Bristol) draw on the landmark Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain (CMEB) report [with their contribution](#) discussing how multiculturalist policies can promote greater race- and faith-based integration.²⁰ One of the ideas put forward in the CMEB report was that the ‘national story’ should be reimagined to account for the multiple cultural influences that have shaped the evolution of British society. A more inclusive national identity than the post-national route favoured by interculturalists should be advocated. This aligns with the (then) Conservative government’s Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper of 2018, which focussed on faith and cultural diversity in schools.²¹ Two practical suggestions put forward by the authors include universal and rigorous inspections of education academies to promote multiculturalism and inclusive teaching practices, and focussing on accommodating ethnic and religious identities in the public sphere through reforming the culture of public institutions such as the police and requiring schools and businesses to publish race-related student/employee data.
- Adding to the discussion on race in business, [Monder Ram OBE FAcSS](#) (Aston University) [explores in his post](#) the integral role of Ethnic Minority Businesses (EMBs) in advancing social mobility. Developing a more supportive policy environment which actively consults and involves EMBs can address their diverse needs, he suggests. This includes bridging the research-policy gap, tackling structural racism and constraints that EMBs face such as limited access to markets, financing, and supply chains (rather than focussing on individual skills), and fostering inclusive support networks which integrate ethnic minority businesses into mainstream support networks through partnerships with larger companies.
- On gender equality in the UK, [Professor Vicky Pryce FAcSS](#) (Centre for Economics and Business Research), [in her contribution](#) draws on data suggesting that while motherhood isn’t the only reason for gender inequality, it does account for a large percentage of the pay gap, just under 8% for full time employees and 14.3% for all employees including those who work part-time in the UK.²² Government interventions, including enforcing the

²⁰ Dupont, P., Sealy, T. & Modood, T. (2023) [The relation between multiculturalism, interculturalism and cosmopolitanism in UK diversity politics](#), *Identities: global studies in culture & power*, vol. 30, issue 6, pp. 785–804.

²¹ Department for Housing, Communities & Local Government (2019) [Integrated Communities Strategy green paper](#), Westminster: UK Government.

²² White, J. (2023) [Gender pay gap in the UK: 2023](#), Office for National Statistics website.

right to maternity leave and protecting jobs thereafter and implementing shared paternal leave, can address gender inequality and improve women's employment and wages. Meanwhile, pay transparency can allow for comparison and time-sensitive gender quotas for executive positions (varied to reflect legacy realities) to ensure development pipelines for women. Quotas should also be extended beyond boards, as more women on boards does not appear to have as big an impact as more diverse representation at executive levels (Chief Executive, Director etc). High childcare costs are also increasingly cited as a reason for women leaving employment. Ensuring adequate funding for nurseries is essential so that the governmental free-places scheme is not negated by more nurseries closing and inadequate provision.

- [Dr Lauren McCarthy](#) (City, University of London) and [Dr Scott Taylor](#) (University of Birmingham) [discuss in their post](#) another aspect of gender-based challenges in the UK: misogyny in the workplace. They argue that workplaces reflect the societies in which we live, making tried-and-tested legislation and educational initiatives to tackle structural misogyny at a societal level a key solution. The Scottish Government has, for example, started this process, commissioning and building on the Kennedy Review.^{23, 24}

²³ Working Group on Misogyny & Criminal Justice (2022) [Misogyny: a human rights issue](#), Scottish Government website.

²⁴ Working Group on Misogyny (2023) [Reforming the criminal law to address misogyny: consultation](#), Scottish Government website.

Case study: How might a wealth tax work?

The Wealth Tax Commission's report (October 2020) – [*A wealth tax for the UK*](#) – states that it has been nearly half a century since a wealth tax was last seriously considered in the UK. Yet fifty years on, much has changed in the UK's economic circumstances, the technological capacity to administer a wealth tax, and the requirements for disclosure of offshore wealth. Written by Dr Arun Advani, Dr Emma Chamberlain and Dr Andy Summers of the London School of Economics (LSE), the report draws on data to discuss how public attitudes show a clear desire for wealth to be taxed more, relative to labour. Work on public attitudes carried out as part of the research of this Commission showed a clear preference for any tax increases to fall on wealth rather than income.

The report considers how a one-off wealth tax and annual wealth tax measure up against the key principles of (1) the tax should raise substantial revenue, (2) it should do so efficiently, (3) it should also be fair, (4) the tax should be difficult to avoid and (5) a wealth tax should achieve these objectives better than the alternatives.

1 A one-off wealth tax would be economically efficient. Since it is based on wealth at a (past) point in time, a one-off wealth tax does not distort behaviour. In contrast, income taxes on employment and self-employment reduce incentives to work, capital taxes reduce investment and corporation taxes encourage companies to reduce (UK-taxable) profits. A one-off wealth tax is feasible to design for the UK, but its delivery from inception to full operation would be a major undertaking. Although one can point to entirely new taxes introduced within the recent past, there are none on this scale. Nevertheless, we have seen in relation to Brexit and COVID-19 that HMRC and HM Treasury are well capable of acting expeditiously, when given proper resourcing and government backing. PAYE was introduced – using only paper records – while the Second

World War was still ongoing. Times of crisis are opportunities to think big.

2 If the only goal of an annual wealth tax is to raise (relatively) more tax revenue from people with wealth, this does not necessarily require a new wealth tax. Based on its ability to achieve the principles above, the report recommends that **instead of an annual wealth tax, the UK Government should reform existing taxes on wealth, in particular inheritance tax, income tax (on investment income), capital gains tax and council tax.** These taxes currently lack a clear set of objectives, and their design creates large distortions. Implementing any of these reforms requires legislative time and political capital, but all are likely to be administratively easier than a broad-based annual wealth tax.

Housing



There is little doubt that the UK faces significant challenges around housing. There is a need to build more homes, especially more affordable and social housing, as well as more homes retained under council ownership. There are also significant issues around second homes, under-occupation and ineffective allocation of the existing housing stock. To this we can add the large numbers of people who are homeless or in temporary accommodation. The poor standard of the accommodation in which many are forced to live also presents health and safety risks.

There are, however, potential practical and affordable solutions to these challenges. Our social science experts identified several areas of apparent consensus about ways forward. For example, our contributors tended to agree that there is a need for a more coherent housing and planning strategy to address the full range of interconnected challenges, as suggested in [A road map to a coherent housing policy](#) (see case study below), and common support for some elements which might be included in such a strategy.

Key takeaways from our contributors

- The UK needs a coherent housing strategy and policy to address problems that are interconnected but can cut across different UK Government departments.
- There is a clear need for new council and social housing, to enable local authorities to build more houses and retain those already in public ownership.
- Housing must be made more affordable in the long term, while benefit changes in the shorter term can support the one-third of private renters who now rely on housing benefits to bridge the gap between their incomes and rising rents.
- Other, more radical solutions deserve consideration. These might include increasing council tax, uprating current property values, providing downsizing support such as grants, reducing or abolishing stamp duty, and delivering smaller homes through actions such as infill building. Other proposals included abolishing no-fault evictions, regulation of in-tenancy rent increases, and targeted work to improve the standards of the 1.4 million rented homes in poor condition.

Reforming private housing

Against the backdrop of the housing emergency unfolding across the UK, the Campaign for Social Science hosted [an event in May 2024](#), asking how the different nations and regions of the UK might learn from each other about the problems and solutions to the current housing emergency.

- [Professor Glen Bramley FAcSS](#) (Heriot-Watt University) was one of several panellists to mention the challenge of under-occupation, suggesting that reforming council tax bands, which have remained unchanged in England since 1991, is one policy lever that should be considered. More broadly, the panel felt that, culturally in the UK, we tend to view homes as investments rather than places to live, so there is a need to provide other routes for investing in one's future without adding to existing housing shortages and crises.
- [Professor Nick Gallent FAcSS](#) (UCL) explored the problem of second homes and their impact on rural housing markets. He highlighted the distinction between second homes (which extract properties from the regular housing stock and are often only used seasonally) and holiday lets (which can be an important source of local business income). Measures to tackle the consequences of second home ownership have already been introduced in Wales, where council tax rates have been increased for second homes as a means by which to ensure more money is put back into the local economy by those taking housing stock out of the local community. In addition to second home ownership, the panel collectively debated the Airbnb challenge, agreeing that there is currently a lack of enforcement of existing regulation across the UK. Other countries have taken steps to ensure that Airbnb owners are sufficiently taxed by insisting that rental incomes are shared with tax authorities.
- Focussing on London, Shelter's Chief Executive [Polly Neate CBE FAcSS LLD\(hc\)](#) talked of the difficulty of navigating the capital's housing market, with house prices around 12 times the average London salary, a significant decline in the availability of family homes (50% less than in 2017), and the highest annual rent increases since records began.²⁵ This makes buying and renting in London increasingly unaffordable, with homelessness and rough sleeping rising and London boroughs spending £90m per month on temporary accommodation.²⁶ Solutions are being developed in Scotland, where private renter rights have been reformed and improved.

Evidence-informed written contributions by social science experts expanded on, and added to, the possible housing policy solutions. These included:

²⁵ Office for National Statistics (2022) [Housing purchase affordability, UK: 2022](#), ONS website.

²⁶ London Councils (2024) [£90m monthly spending on homeless accommodation 'threatens to bankrupt boroughs'](#), London Councils website.

- [Professor Tony Crook FAcSS](#) (University of Sheffield) and [Professor Christine Whitehead FAcSS](#) (LSE) [proposed in their contribution](#) waiving the Stamp Duty Land Tax (SDLT) for over 65s. Doing so, they argued, would help address under-occupation by increasing demand for smaller, more appropriate homes and releasing larger housing stock for younger family households. The authors also advocated greater security of tenure and suggest indexing in-tenancy rent increases, and called for better housing standards and more resources for local authorities to enforce them. These resources could be gained by bringing council tax bands up to date with current values, which would, in their view, be fairer and enable hard-pressed local authorities to raise more funds.²⁷ While this may be unpopular, they argue that, without such changes, the poor will continue to pay more, local services will remain underfunded, and there will be no way of making local tax revenues rise in line with prices. More broadly, the authors called for a more coherent and integrated approach to housing policy which sees government departments and other organisations jointly committing to core objectives.²⁸
- Adding to the discussion on providing appropriate housing options for older people, [Professor Judith Phillips OBE FAcSS](#) (University of Stirling) [highlights in her piece](#) that more age-appropriate housing for healthy cognitive living needs to be built to ensure people are well connected to their local communities and have easy access to services, including health and care. Every planning authority in England should, for example, produce an Older People's Housing Strategy, [similar to that in Scotland](#).
- [Professor Anne Power](#) (LSE) [highlights in her contribution](#) ways in which the UK might address its housing shortage. One seemingly obvious answer is to build more homes on available land, where necessary in the green belt, as urban extensions – but this can lead to several problems, including high energy use and the loss of natural environments and habitats. A potential alternative solution is addressing under-occupation, particularly among older households in the owner-occupied sector. A large driver of under-occupation is the tax treatment of owner occupying: the more space there is in your principal home, the more capital you gain. Since there is no capital gains tax on people's primary residences in the UK, people regard housing as a form of saving. Furthermore, council tax is charged not on the current value of homes but on their value in 1993, when property values were far lower. Some suggested measures which could make a practical difference include increasing council tax by adding higher tax bands above the current A rating ([as is being proposed in Wales](#)).

²⁷ Adam, S., Hodge, L., Phillips, D. & Xu, X. (2020) [Revaluation and reform: bringing council tax in England into the 21st century](#), Institute for Fiscal Studies.

²⁸ Whitehead, C., Crook, T. & Scanlon, K. (2024) [A road map to a coherent housing policy](#), London: London School of Economics.

Prof. Power outlines possible policy levers through which to address under-occupation and housing shortages, including: uprating current property values and providing downsizing support such as grants; reducing or abolishing stamp duty, which has to be paid when a house is bought and sold, and can act as a deterrent to moving; and providing smaller homes in areas where people want to live which are near to their existing networks. One way to provide these smaller homes and address the housing shortage more broadly, without large-scale building sites moving into green belts, is infill building. According to a capacity study in London, the most densely built-up city in the country, there are countless small sites of half an acre, that could each accommodate 6–12 homes. There are also multiple larger sites, not officially counted, which could add up to 50 homes each. There is a constant flow of infill sites as uses change, but many are simply left unused. Councils, housing associations, and small- and medium-sized building companies could use these sites for small development. However, there is also potentially an issue with developers holding unused ‘landbanks’.²⁹

Reforming social housing

During the Campaign for Social Science’s [event in May 2024](#), [Professor Glen Bramley FAcSS](#) (Heriot-Watt University) looked at social housing and the role of the planning system in addressing key challenges. He pointed out there is huge regional variation within England as to how quickly a household in the social housing sector might be rehoused – and that the south of England was particularly pressurised. He explained how the levels of new housing required to address the current shortfall has remained consistent over the past few years and that, if applied rigorously, planning obligations could fund the social and affordable housing needed. Additionally, he called for the Right to Buy to be paused, as has already happened in Scotland and Wales, to keep affordable social homes in the local market.

Other contributors elaborated on the need to build more social homes and social housing reform more broadly:

- According to research by the National Housing Federation (NHF) and Crisis, the UK needs to build 90,000 social rented homes per year, for at least the next decade, to meet the backlog.³⁰ [Kate Henderson FAcSS](#), Chief Executive of the NHF, [argues in her article](#) that we must put an end to short-term, piecemeal approaches to housing and planning policy and commit to a nationally coordinated, properly funded long-term plan for housing,

²⁹ Spratt, V. & Parsley, D. (2023) [Gove slams housebuilders hoarding almost a million plots of land as completely unacceptable](#), iNews, 23 June 2023.

³⁰ Bramley, G. (2018) [Housing supply requirements across Great Britain: for low-income households and homeless people](#), London: National Housing Federation.

based on ambitious and measurable outcomes for people in housing need. Central to this plan must be the delivery of social rented homes, which she suggests is the only genuinely affordable housing by design. She highlights research published by the NHF and carried out by the Centre for Economic & Business Research which reveals the full socio-economic impact of building social housing. In the first year alone, the construction of these homes would directly support nearly 140,000 jobs and the initial government investment would be fully paid back in eleven years.³¹

- Beyond addressing the shortage of social homes in the UK, the standards of the social housing system must be elevated, [Dr Hannah Absalom](#), independent consultant and ESRC Fellow at the University of Birmingham says [in her post](#). Her article explains that, while the powers of the Regulator for Social Housing and the Housing Ombudsman in England have been enhanced following tragedies such as the Grenfell Tower fire, the new government must monitor the progress of the implemented reforms, which aim to elevate the standards of home quality, complaint management and professional accreditations for housing practitioners. Dr Absalom recommends the embedding of social and emotional learning (SEL) in the training of resident-facing staff and senior decision makers.³² She further outlines that the history of resident involvement in decision-making has led to a patchwork of participatory practices which should be redesigned to address confusion of residents and landlords and reflect recent advancements in participatory governance. Finally, she points out a critical issue in resident treatment stems from overlooking the social and psychological impact of allocation processes and repairs in shaping a sense of home, which could be improved through the development of Social Return on Investment (SROI) measures for repairs and allocation processes.
- Social housing also has a role to play in helping us address challenges around homelessness and an increasing dependence on temporary accommodation. In 2023, it was estimated that 3,898 people were sleeping rough across England, an increase of 27% on the previous year; the number of people sleeping rough is now 61% higher than it was ten years ago and 120% higher than when data collection began in 2010.³³ Furthermore, the number of people in temporary accommodation is the highest on record, at 109,000 households.³⁴ This comes as 1.2 million households are on waiting

³¹ Cebr (2024) [The economic impact of building social housing](#), London: National Housing Federation.

³² Absalom, H. (2023) [Rethinking regulated housing in England: home as an emotional place](#), TAROE Trust, University of Birmingham / Centre for Wellbeing.

³³ Crisis (2024) [Rough sleeping rises by 27% as the homelessness crisis deepens across England](#), Crisis UK website.

³⁴ UK Government (2024) [Statutory homelessness in England, July to September 2023: temporary accommodation](#), UK Government website.

lists for social housing, whilst the UK is going backwards every year on addressing the problem, due to an annual net loss of social homes.³⁵ Many people on low incomes simply cannot afford anywhere suitable to live, and 1.4 million rented homes are in poor condition with inadequate heating and a lack of modern facilities. Out of these, 777,000 have a hazard that poses an immediate risk to health and safety. These statistics – outlined in a [written contribution](#) by [Polly Neate CBE FAcSS LLD\(hc\)](#) and Hannah Rich of Shelter – convey the urgency of addressing the UK’s housing crisis.

³⁵ UK Government (2024) [Statistical data set: live tables on rents, lettings and tenancies](#), UK Government website.

Case study: A roadmap to a coherent housing policy

The Family Building Society commissioned the LSE to work on a set of independent reports exploring the contradictions and perverse incentives inherent in the current housing policy framework and putting forward a set of suggestions for a more coherent, strategic approach.

Published in January 2024, [*A road map to a coherent housing policy*](#) called on politicians, key national and local government departments, and the Bank of England to cooperate on solving England's current housing crisis. Written by Christine Whitehead FAcSS, LSE and Tony Crook FAcSS, University of Sheffield, with Kath Scanlon, LSE, the report states that the core to a coherent housing policy is to ensure that all relevant departments and agencies work more closely together.

The **short-term** objective is to bring existing proposals together into a more coherent and consistent package. The report's recommendations for improving the use of existing stock and helping to make housing more affordable in the short-term include:

- Complete local plan coverage showing where new homes can be built – as provided for in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act.
- Reform Section 106 and Community Infrastructure Levy arrangements to ensure more effective provision of affordable homes and infrastructure.
- Begin to use the tax system more effectively to improve the allocation of the housing stock, starting with second homes and short-term lettings.
- Carry forward the Renters Reform Bill to ensure greater security but also introduce a more workable

approach to in-tenancy rent adjustments, ensuring an appropriate standard of decent homes and more effective enforcement procedures.

- Waive Stamp Duty Land Tax for downsizing 'elders' to encourage them to move to suitable housing.

In the **longer term** it is necessary to build cross-department and, if possible, cross-party agreement about long-term objectives and feasible ways forward. These should concentrate on ensuring a more effective and distributionally acceptable use of the existing stock, making sure that land is available for a wider range of new developments and the necessary infrastructure is provided.

Macroeconomics



Like many economies, the UK economy has had its fair share of challenges in recent years, including the financial crash of 2008, the impact of Brexit, the shock of COVID-19 and, more recently, the cost-of-living crisis and rising food and fuel prices, driven in part by conflicts in Ukraine and elsewhere. The new government has indicated its priority will be to rebuild a strong and resilient economy to support its mission-driven agenda, but it will be doing so in unpropitious circumstances.

The Campaign for Social Science's [Living Standards](#) and 'Levelling Up' hub has already spotlighted some of the relevant social science research, whilst the [Campaign for Social Science Annual SAGE Lecture 2022](#) saw Torsten Bell FAcSS (then Chief Executive of Resolution Foundation, now Labour MP for Swansea West) use compelling data to explain the impact of the UK's high inequality and low growth economy.

This series built on these foundations, and included ideas and policy recommendations relating to increasing investment and productivity, fiscal reform, and socially responsible macroeconomic approaches to getting the country back on track. However, they did so, knowingly, against the backdrop of a profoundly challenging fiscal climate and difficult economic choices. As such, many of the solutions proffered are longer-term measures.

Key takeaways from our contributors

- Research evidence underlines the links between a fairer society, a more resilient economy and the need for inclusive growth. Targeted investment from public and private sources can help build on existing strengths in, for example, the services sector and technology, AI and green energy. Research shows that socially responsible macroeconomic policy delivers better results, and happy and healthy workforces are more productive.
- The success of the UK economy does not rely on one industry or location. The solution to the UK's low productivity problem will require a raft of measures deployed nationally, regionally and locally – all of which combine to push up productivity levels, and not just in and around London but throughout the nations and regions. Major UK cities outside London have a significant role to play as engines for regional growth.
- Short-termism can hinder economic growth; instead, we need long-term policy and targets. The need to move away from short-termism and deficit bias and to aim for longer-term sustainable fiscal policy and rules was evident in most contributions.

Investment building on existing strengths

Although the UK economy has had to weather a number of storms over recent years,³⁶ the nation has retained several strengths which could be built on in the long term to transform the country's economic prospects. A strategic approach to targeting investment where it most matters and can have the greatest impact will be vital, as will balancing that aim with the shorter-term requirement for any measures to be affordable and realistic.³⁷ The series includes examples of the kind of advice and support that social science can offer to the new UK Government, including:

- [Professor Sarah Hall FAcSS](#) (University of Cambridge, and UK in a Changing Europe), [proposed three evidence-backed investment measures](#). Prof. Hall focussed on finding solutions to the link between the UK's profound regional inequality and the fact it has the biggest variations in productivity in the OECD, underperforming second cities,³⁹ and manifold issues caused by the investment stasis in the aftermath of the 2016 Brexit referendum.⁴⁰ Potential solutions put forward include: harnessing the UK's skilled workforce, especially in the services sector where the UK is already strong,⁴¹ and investing in generating and using these skills in its second cities and towns; leveraging those skills in new services activity, especially in high-productivity sectors such as technology and AI; and investing in the development of green industries where the UK already has a strong track record, notably in harnessing offshore wind.
- Investment in a new Sovereign Wealth Fund could potentially be a way to stabilise the UK's economy and generate wealth for future generations, although such funds are not without their risks. [Professor Hisham Farag](#) and [Professor Santosh Koirala](#) (both from University of Birmingham), and [Professor Biwesh Neupane](#) (University of Strathclyde) [wrote for the series](#) about the opportunities and challenges presented by Sovereign Wealth Funds and offered some useful advice for investing in such funds sensibly and ethically. For example, they suggested that, in creating and managing Sovereign Wealth Funds, it's essential to appoint board members with societal distinction who can contribute positively to Environmental, Social & Governance (ESG) performance⁴²; to ensure that political interference is

³⁶ UK in a Changing Europe (2024) [The state of the UK economy 2024](#), London: UK in a Changing Europe.

³⁷ Menon, A. & Portes, J. (2023) [The international economic environment is changing – and the UK could be left behind](#), UK in a Changing Europe website.

³⁸ Westwood, A. et al (2024) [How is regional inequality affecting the UK's economic performance?](#), Economics Observatory website.

³⁹ Stansbury, A., Turner, D. & Balls, E. (2023) [Tackling the UK's regional economic inequality: binding constraints and avenues for policy intervention](#), Harvard Kennedy School.

⁴⁰ Haskel, J. & Martin, J. (2023) [How has Brexit affected business investment in the UK?](#), Economics Observatory website.

⁴¹ Hunsaker, S. (2023) [UK trade tracker Q4 2023](#), London: UK in a Changing Europe.

⁴² Farag, H., Koirala, S., Luo, D. & Rao, S. (2022) [Do titans deliver the promise? Societal recognition and responsible corporate decisions](#), SSRN website.

avoided and boards can operate independently and avoid managerial short-termism, investment myopia and poor operational efficiency⁴³; to ensure that reputational risks are mitigated, for example, by screening investee firms and, when working across borders, prioritising investment from countries with transparent practices and higher standards of national governance.

Productivity

The UK faces a major productivity challenge, having suffered much slower growth than comparable countries since the global financial crisis. It languishes in the lower half of the OECD rankings, well below France, Germany and the US. [The Productivity Institute](#) has drawn on social science research to show the size and scale of the problem and points to ways forward based on evidence, for example in its [Productivity Agenda](#). There are many factors which combine to cause stagnant growth and low productivity. Under-investment is certainly one well-known and discussed factor, but there are less familiar causes on which social science can shed more light, including:

- [Professor Sir Cary Cooper FAcSS](#) (University of Manchester) [in his article](#) connects improved wellbeing at work to productivity and increased gains at a macroeconomic level. In his piece, Prof. Cooper points out that mental ill health at work, the sickness absence, high labour turnover, and poor productivity that goes with it, costs the UK economy tens of billions of pounds annually. He emphasises the importance of mental capital⁴⁴ and the link between stress at work and employee health and productivity,⁴⁵ pointing to tried and tested, fully evaluated examples of good practice.⁴⁶ Among the recommendations put forward by Prof. Cooper is the idea of a Challenge Fund for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), supported by the Department of Business covering half the cost, to enable SME leaders to access consultancy support to develop health and wellbeing strategies, which would in turn increase productivity. A related proposal was to allow tax breaks for large employers who provide health and wellbeing support for their staff, as well as for the SMEs in their supply chain. These ideas, backed by research evidence, suggest that policy measures can have simultaneous macroeconomic gains as well as social benefits.
- [In his piece for the series, Professor Richard Werner](#) (University of Winchester) suggested that creating and supporting more local banks could

⁴³ Farag, H., Marshall, A., Neupane, B. & Koirala, S. (2023) [The toxic triangle of state, stake, and institution: sovereign wealth fund ownership and firm ESG reputation risk](#), ECGI Global website.

⁴⁴ Cooper, C., Goswami, U., Sahakian, B. J., Field, J. & Jenkins, R. (2009) [Mental capital and wellbeing](#), London: Wiley-Blackwell.

⁴⁵ Bevan, S. & Cooper, C. (2021) [The healthy workforce: enhancing wellbeing and productivity in the workers of the future](#), Leeds: Emerald Publishing Limited.

⁴⁶ Day, A. & Cooper, C. (eds) (2024) [The Routledge companion to mental health at work](#), London: Routledge.

contribute to job creation and productivity. First outlining the perceived and actual role and function of banks,⁴⁷ Prof. Werner explained that, rather than moving existing money around, banks generate the money supply through loans,⁴⁸ so it matters what type of banking system we have. Prof. Werner points out that the UK's banking sector contains a small number of big operators, which often results in loans being issued more cautiously, to the benefit of bigger businesses and the detriment of smaller ones. He suggests only small banks lend to small firms⁴⁹ and therefore proposes that the UK should establish 30 new local commercial banks across the country, with 50% of each owned by a local charity to prevent takeovers, and that these banks should lend only to small local firms. Prof. Werner also calls for a simplified regulatory and licensing system for these smaller banks. The potential advantage of these measures to create and enable small banks is to increase support for smaller local businesses which, as has been the case in Germany, for example, can lead to increased productivity and stronger economic performance nationally.⁵⁰

Fiscal policy

The new UK Government, like its predecessor, will face significant fiscal challenges, not least around low productivity, as outlined above. Experts from the [Economics Observatory](#) have suggested that increasing productivity would improve public finances and therefore enable greater fiscal leeway to help policymakers provide vital government services more effectively. The Economics Observatory has also called for the incentivising of long-term economic stability within a reformed fiscal framework. For example, fiscal rules could be revised to include targets on public sector net worth alongside the debt-to-GDP ratio.

The series provided clear evidence-informed ways to improve fiscal management in the UK, including from [Gemma Tetlow](#), Chief Economist at the Institute for Government. She writes [in her article](#) that we must move away from short-termism, expediency and deficit bias, and set rules which improve fiscal sustainability.⁵¹ She proposed that the new UK Government should set out a comprehensive fiscal strategy where debt and deficit targets are not ends in themselves, and should be tools used in ways consistent with and supportive of broader government objectives. She also argued that there should be just one

⁴⁷ Werner, R. (2016) [A lost century in economics: three theories of banking and the conclusive evidence](#), International Review of Financial Analysis, vol. 46, pp. 361–379.

⁴⁸ Werner, R. (2014) [Can banks individually create money out of nothing? The theories and the empirical evidence](#), International Review of Financial Analysis, vol. 36, pp. 1–9.

⁴⁹ Mkhair, A. & Werner, R. (2021) [The relationship between bank size and the propensity to lend to small firms: new empirical evidence from a large sample](#), Journal of International Money & Finance, vol. 110.

⁵⁰ Lai, S. et al. (2023) [Bank competition and corporate employment: evidence from the geographic distribution of bank branches in China](#) Journal of Banking & Finance, vol. 154.

⁵¹ Debrun, X. & Jonung, L. (2019) [Under threat: rules-based fiscal policy and how to preserve it](#), European Journal of Political Economy, vol. 57, pp. 142–157.

fiscal event per year, alongside a new regular cycle of spending reviews setting plans for five years which are reviewed every three years. Fiscal rules could be improved by treating investment differently from current spending and specifying targets as ranges rather than point targets to reduce constant tinkering. She also made the case for expanding the remit of the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) to improve scrutiny of fiscal policy. This would include enabling the OBR to consider more broadly progress against fiscal sustainability, rather than a pass/fail judgement.

Macroeconomics with social and civic responsibility

Several contributors focussed on policy that could potentially make the country more prosperous and more resilient while also better connecting macroeconomic strategy and policy with social and civic concerns. For example:

- [Dr Edward Jones](#) (Bangor University) [wrote for us](#) about the potential benefits of redesigning and transforming declining high streets to boost productivity, but also provide social benefit by making the high street for everyone.⁵² Firstly, he suggests reforming the business rates system and effectively affording local councils the power to set appropriate taxes that relate to the area's productivity and better reflect the financial performance of businesses. He proposes a land-value tax⁵³ that would encourage the owners of land on the high street to take more of an interest in the productivity of the land they own.⁵⁴ Linked to this, Dr Jones also advocates empowering local authorities to make compulsory purchases of sites at below market value and allow these to be used by local communities to provide social benefits directly and accessibly on the high street. This would potentially address the common issue of over-priced and under-used properties on the UK's high streets. It would also enable communities to decide how they want to use their own high street.⁵⁵ These suggestions effectively connect economic growth to social activity and benefit.
- In [her piece](#), [Reema Patel](#), Head of Deliberative Engagement at Ipsos, set out some of the key findings from deliberative engagements which have garnered public opinion on a range of key topics, including addressing the cost-of-living crisis and tackling low productivity. In both cases the public view is that fairness and inclusivity must be central to the policies implemented by the new UK Government. For example, a Citizen's Economic

⁵² Mary, S. (2017) [High streets for all](#), London: Mayor of London / Greater London Authority.

⁵³ Farris, N. (2016) [What to do when main street is legal again: regional land value taxation as a new urbanist tool](#), University of Pennsylvania Law Review, vol. 164, no. 3, pp. 755–777.

⁵⁴ Kumhof, M., Tideman, T., Hudson, M. & Goodhart, C. (2021) [DP16652 Post-Corona balanced-budget super-stimulus: the case for shifting taxes onto land](#), Centre for Economic Policy Research discussion paper, London: CEPR Press.

⁵⁵ Ntounis, N., Sønderland Saga, R., Warnaby, G., Loroño-Leturiondo, M. & Parker, C. (2023) [Reframing high street viability: a review and synthesis in the English context](#), Cities, vol. 134. .

Council, led by Ipsos and King's College London,⁵⁶ found that people strongly favoured fair taxation and redistributive measures aimed at rewarding labour and targeting unearned income and wealth as the best way to tackle the immediate effects of the cost-of-living crisis, whilst also moving towards a fairer society more generally. There were also calls for longer-term thinking in policy design to increase the resilience of the UK economy and safeguard against future crises. Deliberative workshops held in Manchester and Birmingham as part of [The Economy 2030 Inquiry](#) revealed that residents wanted transformative change in their city regions⁵⁷ to boost productivity, but that this should involve inclusive growth strategies with opportunities for all citizens and a strong sense of social and civic responsibility.

- Finally, [Professor Sayantan Ghosal FAcSS](#) (University of Glasgow) [outlines in his piece](#) the idea of a new Economic Bill of Rights to put human vulnerability, dignity and freedom at the core of economic institutional reform, and in so doing put the UK economy on a fair, sustainable and more stable footing. Prof. Ghosal argues that many in our society have seen their incomes and prospects stagnate and their jobs replaced with less stable employment, and that in high-income countries such as the UK, rising inequality has been met with a backlash against globalisation and immigration and a shift towards nationalism. His recommendation is for a new macroeconomic approach with a clear connection to social and civic concerns.

⁵⁶ Holmes, C. et al (2023) [The Citizen's Economic Council on the cost of living: final report](#), London: The Citizen's Economic Council.

⁵⁷ Burchardt, T. Goatley, T. & Judge, L. (2023) [Talking trade-offs: deliberations on a higher-productivity future in the Birmingham and Greater Manchester urban areas](#), London: The Economy 2030 Inquiry.

Case study: Ending the toxic blend of high inequality, low productivity and slow growth.

Published in December 2023 and using an abundance of social science data, [*Ending stagnation: a new economic strategy for Britain*](#) is the final report of [The Economy 2030 Inquiry](#). The report proposes ten macroeconomic measures, based on research data which could form a coherent attempt to address major, long-standing issues in the UK economy, including high inequality, low productivity and slow growth:

- 1 Export of services.** Build on the country's strengths as the world's second biggest services exporter, but also protect high-value manufacturing in European supply chains.
- 2 Increased productivity in the UK's second cities.** The UK's second cities have productivity levels below the national average and behind the levels of European comparators. They should be centres of high-value service industries.
- 3 Increased public investment.** Public investment in the UK is nearly 50% lower than the OECD average. Public investment needs to be increased to 3% of GDP.
- 4 More longer-term business investment.** In UK business and industry, investment is too often short-term. Pressure on managers from more engaged owners and from workers sitting on boards should encourage longer-term investment.
- 5 Make 'Good Work' available everywhere.** The Good Work agenda must be extended to all towns and more employment sectors. This will help address poor working conditions and poor pay, and resultant low productivity.
- 6 Creating a more equal UK.** For example, enabling better pay for low earners in hospitality, paid for by higher prices that would mostly affect better-off households.
- 7 Sharing prosperity.** For example, ensuring benefit levels rise with wages and keep pace with prices. Cuts since 2010 have reduced the incomes of the poor by almost £3,000 a year in real terms.
- 8 Better taxation.** Including taxing not just earnings but also other sources of income and wealth. Wealth has risen from three to over seven times national income since the 1980s.
- 9 Making finances more resilient.** Higher growth and higher taxes to improve public services, and increased investment through higher savings domestically rather than borrowing from abroad.
- 10 Catching up with comparator nations.** If the UK matched the average annual income of Australia, Canada, France, Germany and the Netherlands, the typical household would be £8,300 better off.

Regional Equity & Growth



Public policy over the last decade has increasingly focussed on more bespoke solutions for the UK's regions and nations. This has seen greater attention being paid to the importance of place-based agendas which understand and reflect local context when developing policy solutions, and in developing resilient local institutions and approaches to support them. What was previously referred to as 'levelling up' may soon be rearticulated by the new government, but the central challenge will remain: how best to distribute growth so that every nation and region of the UK feels the benefit and can more clearly define and direct their future prosperity.

Our own report in 2021, *The place to be*, examined some of the ways in which social sciences are helping to improve places in the UK, and emphasised the contribution of leading social science departments in universities across all four UK nations to their local and regional communities. The Election 24 series built on that, exploring UK-wide issues but also garnering perspectives from the different nations and regions via events held in locations across the UK. We also received written contributions from some leading experts on place-based policy and regional growth.

Key takeaways from our contributors

- Some of the most effective place-based solutions for addressing regional economic inequalities have been developed by communities. There is a need for targeted ground-level investment into interventions co-designed and co-produced with communities, bottom up rather than top down, with robust regional governance.
- Place-based partnerships between major anchor institutions have a significant role to play. This might mean partnership-working between local industries, universities and local government to embed social responsibility into strategy – not just for economic growth but also for wider community investment and community wellbeing.
- Much greater intervention is required to respond to the scale and depth of existing regional inequalities. Our contributors emphasise that a joined-up, holistic approach is required, with infrastructure projects (e.g. development zones/quarters) needing to be matched by sustained engagement with, and support for, broader long-term community-level initiatives.

Perspectives from Wales

Our very [first event in the series](#), held at Cardiff University in October 2023, explored how public policy might do more to uplift the collective wellbeing of Wales. The wide-ranging discussion highlighted how businesses can be important community actors, but how more could be done to encourage and support action.

[Beth Cummings](#) and [Dr Fern Davies](#) (both from Swansea University's School of Management) spoke about their research exploring the responsibilities of business and the ways in which they seek to give back to communities. Very often, activities tend to rely heavily on one person within an organisation who is passionate and strives to make that business 'purposeful'. In policy terms, there are opportunities for more of this to be engineered through tendering/ procurement policies, and in Wales this is helped by interventions such as the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act and the Community Partnerships Act – which give a legal framework to what government can expect from private-sector partners. Research also indicates that small firms – which make up a disproportionately high segment of Wales' businesses – are particularly good at acting in community-orientated and socially responsible ways, but they often do so in ways that are under the radar, or that are termed or described differently. In contrast, big companies have a clearer model for doing and communicating their corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities.

All panellists agreed that working with businesses to embed social responsibility into their strategies and planning is an important element of building broader community wellbeing.

In a [separate event](#), at Swansea University in February 2024, representatives from the three parties holding seats in Wales (Welsh Labour, the Welsh Conservatives and Plaid Cymru) responded to questions drawn from a round-table conversation among social science researchers earlier in the day. Key points included:

- Carolyn Harris MP (Welsh Labour, Neath & Swansea East) contended that recent job losses at Tata Steel in Port Talbot have been a textbook example of policy failure, arguing that a Labour UK Government would need to ensure that any growth to the Welsh economy benefits Wales. In contrast, Tom Giffard MS (Welsh Conservative, South Wales West) argued that if the UK Government hadn't stepped in, the Port Talbot steelworks' job losses would have been far worse.
- The panel discussed the relationship between the Senedd and Westminster. Andrew Jenkins (Plaid Cymru candidate for Neath & Swansea East) said

that greater attention should be given to the [recent report by the Independent Commission on the Constitutional Future of Wales](#), which said that independence is a “viable solution”. In contrast, Carolyn Harris MP argued that a Labour UK Government and Labour Welsh Government would have a much more joined-up approach, better sharing of ideas and mutual respect.

Although our political panel could not reach a consensus on many points of discussion, one area of agreement from all three politicians was that regional economic growth in Wales remained a stubborn challenge for parties at all tiers of government, and that the fractious relationship between the Labour-led Welsh Government and Conservative-led UK Government had played a role in this. Repairing the relationship between the UK Government and the Welsh Government was a consistent theme of the discussion.

Perspectives from the northeast of England

On 6 February 2024, we co-hosted [a half-day event with Newcastle University](#) and Insights North East, exploring a range of different kinds of inequalities and setting the challenge to work towards achieving a more equal region. The programme included presentations and discussions from nine speakers on a range of topics, such as: how to make investments in innovation infrastructure more inclusive; social prescribing with children; universal free school meals and pupil premium; fair pay; public health; and the role of local government. Insights from the programme included:

- 35% of children and young people in the northeast of England live in poverty, 67% of those are in working families. Median pay in the northeast is the lowest in the UK, at least £40 per week lower than in any other region.
- There have been high-profile and high-budget developments such as the [Newcastle Helix](#), a landmark city quarter built for international tech and science businesses development, but this has not offered adequate employment opportunities for local people. In fact, since it arrived, the gap has widened slightly between the percentage of local people employed in the scientific and technical industries compared to the percentage across the whole of England.⁵⁸
- Community-level interventions have arguably been more impactful. There was praise for the [Zone West](#) programme, which offers children in the West End of Newcastle the opportunity to connect with professional link workers and mentors to explore their interests and skills to develop confidence. Using a social prescribing model, the programme connects children to a range of development opportunities and activities. Impact analysis by Newcastle

⁵⁸ Office for National Statistics (2022) [Business Register & Employment Survey](#), ONS website.

University shows a significant improvement in participating children's emotional functioning, language form and content skills, school attendance and overall school performance. It was recommended that the model should be scaled up to reach more children across the city and that there should be an improved referral network to ensure that children most in need are included.

- Research from the Healthy Living Lab at Northumbria University has examined policy interventions on free school meals (FSM). In many places, the eligibility criteria for receiving FSM are complex and often children in families that receive Universal Credit still don't receive the meals to which they are entitled, sometimes due to a failure to register. 11% of eligible pupils are not registered for means-tested FSM. The number of children missing out could be reduced through automatic registration linked to the benefits system. The failure to ensure that all eligible children are registered for FSM not only costs the children and their families but the schools too, since as a result, they miss out on Pupil Premium funds they would otherwise receive. Overall, auto enrolment for means-tested FSM would bring an extra £23m per annum into the region.
- Issues such as the one above are compounded by the fact that England currently lacks a national child poverty strategy – it last had one in 2017. Meanwhile, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland each have an active child poverty strategy which acts as a framework for understanding and addressing the problem. Developing an updated child poverty strategy for England should be a priority.
- Of all UK regions, the northeast currently has the lowest percentage of employers paying the real Living Wage. Across the Northeast and Tees Valley Combined Authorities, only 0.9% of employers with at least two employees are Living Wage accredited. The challenge is to significantly increase this percentage. According to the Smith Institute and Living Wage Foundation, if 25% of employers in the northeast region paid the real Living Wage, it would boost the regional economy by £74m.⁵⁹
- Investing in preventative health would relieve pressure on the NHS and boost economic growth by tackling the underlying social and economic determinants of poor health. The health economy in the northeast is worth around £7bn per year, with much of this currently being spent on treating avoidable illness.

⁵⁹ Hunter, P. (2021) [The Living Wage dividend: maximising the local economic benefits of paying a living wage](#), London: The Smith Institute / The Living Wage Foundation.

Perspectives from the southeast of England

In November 2023, we co-hosted a [panel discussion at Southampton University](#) examining the issue of sustainable growth through a discussion on a range of topics, including climate change, migration, AI/technology and the wellbeing of future generations. It was a productive discussion drawing on local examples, but two particular panellist contributions resonated:

- [Professor Jagjit Chadha FAcSS](#) (National Institute of Economic and Social Research) emphasised how sustainability has different interpretations: it could mean economic sustainability (end to boom and bust), or it could be about how to raise living standards for those in the bottom deciles. However, in the long term, it's fundamentally about what we produce, what resources we use to produce those things and the impact that has on people and the planet. Growth is not a bad thing in and of itself, provided it brings about an improvement in living standards – but currently, living standards in the UK lag behind many international counterparts.
- [Councillor Satvir Kaur](#) (now the Labour MP for Southampton Test) drew on her experience from being Leader of Southampton Council. At a local level, the council needed to draw in investment to have a growing and resilient local economy – but it also had to do more to invest in infrastructure. That led to a sustained focus and investment in areas like housing – building homes that the council already knew would need to be retrofitted in the years ahead to make them more energy efficient.

Place-based policy and regional growth

Within our blog for this project, we published a series of contributions from leading social science experts and practitioners with evidence-informed insights on how regional economic growth might be pursued, or how more effective place-based policy approaches could be developed. These included:

- Professor [Paul Ormerod](#), Chair of the Rochdale Development Agency, [argues in his piece](#) that tackling spatial inequalities across the UK could help to achieve the UK Government's goal of making the country “a beacon of science, technology, and enterprise”.⁶⁰ A key strategic goal of recent Conservative administrations has been to increase productivity and innovation. However, the productivity levels of cities and city regions outside London remains low. The OECD notes there is a marked gap between the productivity in second-tier cities in the UK and those in other countries.⁶¹ One prototype approach is the Atom Valley Mayoral Development Zone, set

⁶⁰ Prime Minister's Office, (2023) [Prime Minister's plan to build an innovative economy](#), UK Government website.

⁶¹ Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (2020), [Enhancing productivity in UK Core Cities: connecting local and regional growth](#), Paris: OECD Urban Policy Reviews.

up by Greater Manchester Mayor, Andy Burnham.⁶² Led by a partnership of developers, industrialists, universities and local government, the aim is to deliver large-scale regeneration and build a nationally significant industry cluster around advanced manufacturing in one of the most deprived parts of the UK. It will be closely integrated with Greater Manchester's internationally significant concentration of R&D and innovation assets in sustainable advanced materials and industrial digitalisation, which are predominantly, but not exclusively, located around the University of Manchester. Prof. Ormerod suggests this model could be replicated in the main city regions of the UK.

- [Professor Sherilyn MacGregor](#), [Professor Matthew Paterson](#) and [Dr Helen Holmes](#) (all from the University of Manchester) [write in their contribution](#) about the Joined-up Sustainability Transformations (JUST) approach and argue for connected strategies covering net-zero and levelling-up policy. JUST moves our attention away from nationwide, top-down policies to place-based, co-produced strategies for transformational change.⁶³ This addresses inequalities and marginalisation where they are lived and experienced, but also goes beyond the focus on 'behaviour change' by mobilising the energy of communities that are often already engaged in myriad initiatives to address inequalities and climate action simultaneously. 'Joined-up' research and action need to start with the potential that exists at this community level. The authors recommend embedding a stronger element of democratic participation so that initiatives are co-designed and co-produced to respond to the needs of local communities, working with local people to deliver JUST in ways that support and empower marginalised populations in 'left-behind' areas to achieve a more equitable and sustainable low-carbon future.
- [Professor Sarah Ayres FAcSS](#) and [Dr Jack Newman](#) (both University of Bristol) [write in their piece](#) about evidence-informed ideas for improving urban development, based on their involvement with the research project [Tackling Root Causes Upstream of Unhealthy Urban Development \(TRUUD\)](#). They argue that the role of central government must shift from micromanagement to strategic oversight, passing funding and decision-making to lower tiers of government. Coordination should be carried out by a cross-government body responsible for strategy and monitoring, but ultimately, the delivery must be done at the local level. They concluded that, after the General Election, if the incoming UK Government can embrace cutting-edge social science, cross-government working and have faith in devolution, there could be solutions available to complex social problems that do not rely simply on finding lots more money.

⁶² Disclosure: the author is the Chair of the Atom Valley MDZ board.

⁶³ British Academy (2023) [Understanding the role of place in environmental sustainability](#), London: British Academy.

Case study: how social sciences are helping to improve places across the UK

A 2021 report by the Academy of Social Sciences, *The place to be*, drew on 24 different examples from across the nations and regions of the UK to illustrate how university-based social scientists are making places in the UK better – ‘levelling up’ economic and social outcomes.

The report cited social scientists helping:

- Local businesses to improve their productivity and economic prospects
- Consumers and small businesses to get better and more equitable access to loans and finance
- Cities and regions to improve their attractiveness to new industries and investment
- Cities to plan for better retail shopping and better local transport
- Cities to plan better and more flexible housing for people as they age
- Local authorities to plan their services better and more efficiently by understanding their local populations
- Health authorities and other public authorities to address local COVID-19 patterns
- Health authorities to deliver better results in preventative health work
- Local schools to achieve better educational outcomes for pupils
- Local police forces to address issues such as knife crime, crime hot spots, domestic violence, paramilitarism and crime
- Local policymakers to obtain better evidence about the impact of proposed policies

The report offered six conclusions:

1 Social sciences matter for ‘levelling up’. Using social science makes a difference to ‘levelling-up’ plans and

outcomes.

- 2** Virtually every social science discipline – economics, geography, demography, political studies, business and management, education, sociology, psychology, social statistics and others – has a part to play.
- 3** University-based social scientists often do this work as part of the civic mission of their university, a role that universities take seriously and which many fund themselves to make their areas better.
- 4** Results often arise when funding from universities and local businesses or local authorities is based on long-term partnerships. Having clear and stable funding to support this work matters.
- 5** Social scientists increasingly use complex data, often working with computational social science experts to make sense of social characteristics, patterns of behaviour, or data that links economic, social and physical statistics. COVID-19 showed how essential these data can be. We need more social scientists with these skills, and even better and more accessible data for them to use.
- 6** Local areas would benefit further if there was more co-ordination in support, more partnership working across institutions in particular areas, and more learning about what works.

Borders & Migration



Elections are rarely fought on one single topic, but parties may seek to frame election discourse so it focusses on issues central to their party's agenda – with media coverage only serving to reinforce this. Just as 2019 was portrayed by the Conservatives as 'the Brexit election', 2024 was characterised by Reform UK as 'the immigration election', with debates around migration featuring prominently throughout the campaign. Yet although immigration has generally retained high political saliency in the UK, narratives around the topic are frequently characterised by low levels of evidence and high levels of misinformation.

Against this backdrop, our contributors sought to outline evidence which could offer insight on a debate which too often generates much heat but little light. With the new government already scrapping the controversial Rwanda scheme, our events and written pieces provide examples of the breadth of social science evidence relating to migration and some evidence-informed contributions by social scientists as to what might happen next.

Key takeaways from our contributors

- Whilst there are no straightforward policy answers to the UK's current challenges on migration, there was unanimity amongst our contributors that better understanding of relevant evidence, and a willingness to use it to inform the public debate on migration, is essential to change the dynamic and the tone of current discourse.
- Effective political leadership is critical on migration. There has been an active resistance to considering evidence within political discourse on migration because the politics of asylum has become so toxic. There is a need for greater honesty about what is driving migration and more detailed explanations of the challenges and complexity of any workable solutions which would address these drivers.
- Politicians should resist the temptation to claim they've been successful on migration when they haven't. Doing so undermines trust in the political system and drives people to seek more radical solutions.

Migration research

Our [webinar examining migration issues](#) started with an extended presentation from [Professor Heaven Crawley](#) (United Nations University Centre for Policy Research (UNU-CPR)). As one of the world's leading experts on migration, Prof. Crawley began by looking at migration in a global context. She acknowledged that migration has become a touchstone political issue which interacts with a swathe of other areas – including (but not limited to) housing, employment and healthcare. It cannot therefore be viewed in isolation – it is linked to broader social changes associated with late-stage capitalism, changes in public service provision associated with a rapidly ageing population, and changes in how we communicate with each other.

Within a UK context, Prof. Crawley argued:

- International migration to the UK as a proportion of global population has stayed fairly constant over the last 30 years, but numbers have obviously risen as the global population has increased.
- In 2022, there was net migration into the UK of 606,000 people, most of them legally. The proportion of refugees and asylum seekers within that figure is relatively low – particularly compared to the equivalent figures for the Global South – but attracts disproportionate media and political attention. More than 70% of all refugees globally are hosted by countries in the Global South and that figure was closer to 85% until the Russian invasion of Ukraine.
- There is a huge underlying assumption, reflected in political discourse, policy and media representation, that people are 'pulled' or drawn to the UK by benefits or the possibility of work. In reality, the 'push' factors are more significant, with conflict and human rights abuses more prominent factors causing people to seek asylum. Furthermore, the majority of people who apply for asylum (72% in 2021) are recognised as being genuinely in need of protection and are granted refugee status.

[In her written contribution](#), [Dr Erica Consterdine](#) (Lancaster University) discusses key immigration challenges and policy recommendations for the next UK Government. Her recommendations chime with Prof. Crawley's:

- There is a need to take a whole systems approach by establishing a single enforcement body for labour rights and ensure joined-up policymaking through the cross-government structure.^{64, 65}

⁶⁴ Sehic, A. & Vicol D. (2023) [Systemic drivers of migrant worker exploitation in the UK](#), London: Work Rights Centre.

⁶⁵ Owen, J., Thimont Jack, M., Iacobov, A. & Christensen, E. (2019) [Managing migration after Brexit](#), London: Institute for Government.

- We have to implement a rights-based approach, noting that equitable collectivist cultures have more successful immigration policies because there is less inequality, and therefore the public worry less about immigration.⁶⁶

The politics and polling of migration

The [webinar](#) also looked at how migration is viewed by both the public and policymakers, acknowledging that no decisions are made within a vacuum.

[Professor Paul Whiteley FAcSS](#) (University of Essex) gave his insights on the statistics and polling around migration:

- In the year ending June 2021, ONS estimates suggest that six million people living in the UK had the nationality of a different country (9% of the total population). Net migration started to rise in the 90s and has accelerated since then – with a particular recent jump in the aftermath of COVID-19.
- Public perceptions of what issues are politically salient change (often quite wildly), and immigration is no exception. At any one time, three or four issues will dominate political discourse, and these are the ones on which parties will generally focus. Despite the ebb and flow of opinion, immigration has generally retained high political saliency, with the public largely being skewed in favour of wanting to reduce net migration.
- The communities that feel the most affected are not the most ethnically diverse ones, but the ones adjacent to them. They are the ones that need to see practical measures and for those to be properly communicated.

Lord David Blunkett FAcSS gave his reflections as a former Home Secretary in charge of migration policy, noting:

- Public misconceptions about migration are a significant challenge for future migration policy.
- The Commonwealth Immigrants Act 1968, which commanded broad cross-party consensus, reflected migration changes within the UK that the public could see. In contrast, in 2015 following mass migration from Syria to the EU, the narrative was hijacked by the far right for political ends in the build-up to the Brexit referendum.
- During his own time as Home Secretary, Lord Blunkett sought a holistic approach – setting up (with the UNHCR) the United Nations Gateway. Had it been expanded, that would have provided a much better resettlement

⁶⁶ Keith, M. & LeVoy, M. (2021) [Designing labour migration policies to promote decent work](#), Brussels: Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants.

route than we have now and provided political 'cover' for making long-term decisions.

- Politicians need to understand the underlying tensions of migration and consider:
 - How to explain migration figures in a way that doesn't feed fear
 - How to stop the public's fear of change from undermining rational policies
 - How to make rational, evidence-based decisions
- The public view can be distilled down to 'control' – they want to be satisfied that the UK Government can dictate and decide how many migrants the UK takes. In reality, the UK Government cannot control demand, it can only control supply – but policy needs to be (and be seen to be) fair and equitable.

In a separate piece, Dr Heather Rolfe FAcSS, Director of Research and Relationships at British Future, [writes in her piece](#) that using evidence – including of public attitudes – could calm the debate on immigration and pave the way for constructive policy solutions. She highlights research showing that UK attitudes to immigration are among the most positive internationally and have moved significantly in a positive direction for almost ten years⁶⁷:

- In August 2023, the British Future/Ipsos immigration tracker survey found two-thirds of people are dissatisfied with the way the UK Government is dealing with immigration, the highest level in the tracker's history. Attitudes to asylum seekers and refugees are currently polarised, and so is the asylum debate.⁶⁸ Workable solutions are needed. British Future developed [ten policy proposals](#) which research suggests could gain broad public support. Guided by the principles of 'control and compassion', they include faster decisions, more and safer returns, a new humanitarian visa and cooperation with the EU.⁶⁹
- Policies on immigration for work could meet employer needs and public preferences. Policymakers often assume the public wants less immigration and employers always want more. Yet evidence suggests that the public recognises the need for employers to recruit from outside the UK.
- Almost eight in ten people are in favour of maintaining or increasing the overall number of migrant nurses and doctors. Almost three-quarters support this approach for social care and seasonal agricultural workers. Perhaps

⁶⁷ UK in the World Values Survey (2023) [UK attitudes to immigration: how the public became more positive](#), London: King's College London.

⁶⁸ British Future (2023) [Dilemmas of control: findings of the immigration attitudes tracker 2023](#), London: British Future / Ipsos.

⁶⁹ Katwala, S. Rutter, J. & Ballinger, S. (2023) [Control and compassion: a new plan for an effective and fair UK asylum system](#), London: British Future.

most surprisingly, a majority of people would also support at least continuing current annual numbers of migrant recruits in construction, teaching, universities, road haulage, hospitality and IT.

Welcoming and integrating migrants

We featured two articles by academics from the Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS) at the University of Oxford, examining migrants' experiences after arriving in the UK. The [first article](#), by Jacqueline Broadhead and Denis Kierans, explored how to improve approaches to welcoming and integration within migration policy. The [second article](#), by Lucy Leon and Jacqueline Broadhead, offered solutions to the serious issue of migrant destitution and exclusion. Their recommendations included:

- **Recognising welcoming migrants as a permanent function of local government.** The positive experience of local government-supported resettlement indicates the need to recognise welcoming as a permanent function of local government. Acknowledging the severe financial strain many councils are under, shifting funding from short-term per capita schemes to a mainstream funding settlement would allow councils to plan for and build up their capacity, including in relation to a long-term housing strategy.^{70, 71}
- **Implementing a comprehensive framework for welcoming.** Integration cannot only be the responsibility of local government. The Inclusive Cities Framework provides one option for a comprehensive planning framework over five thematic areas, which local councils and other organisations can use to structure their work and make the case for a more proactive approach to welcoming.
- **Ensuring the spending system is sustainable.** The current system is very expensive and inefficient.⁷² Shifting reactive and crisis-driven spending (including on asylum hotels) to a proactive, devolved system of local and regional partnerships, as advocated by [the Commission on the Integration of Refugees](#), has the potential to produce better outcomes for newcomers and local communities – breaking even after three years and providing £1.2bn per year to the UK economy after five years.
- **Improving governance structures for tackling destitution.** The 'no recourse to public funds' (NRPF) condition has been seen as a niche policy

⁷⁰ Ogden, K. & Phillips, D. (2023) [The 2024–25 local government finance settlement: the real pain is still to come](#), Institute for Fiscal Studies website.

⁷¹ Broadhead, J. (2022) [Building an infrastructure for community led welcome in the UK: learning from the mobilisation of the Homes for Ukraine scheme](#), Oxford: COMPAS.

⁷² National Audit Office (2024) [Investigation into asylum accommodation](#), London: National Audit Office.

issue, without central or local government leadership. As rates of destitution soar, failing to tackle this issue prevents local government from meeting priorities around ending homelessness and child poverty. Drawing on Scotland's Ending Destitution Together strategy, central government should develop a cross-government UK-wide strategy to tackle migrant destitution, in partnership with local government, the voluntary and community sector and people with lived experience.⁷³

- **Empowering and funding local government.** If the NRPF policy is to be maintained, local government should be supported and empowered to develop its support for destitute families and eligible adults, with central government providing dedicated funding to deliver this parallel welfare safety net. Statutory guidance in Scotland and Wales needs to be reviewed and better implemented, and guidance should be drafted for England and Northern Ireland.

⁷³ Equality, Inclusion & Human Rights Directorate (2023) [Ending Destitution Together: progress report – year two 2022–2023](#), Edinburgh: Scottish Government.

Case study: NatCen immigration portal

The National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) has carried out a series of initiatives (some discrete, others part of broader studies) [exploring the impact of immigration and evaluating interventions to support future policy development](#).

Outputs include:

- [‘Immigration: Changing attitudes, policy preferences and partisanship’](#), a chapter within the British Social Attitudes 41 report. Using data from three different surveys, this chapter examines how attitudes to immigration have evolved over the past two decades, whether we are seeing increased polarisation in attitudes, and whether the public and supporters of different political parties are united or divided over the policy initiatives the current UK Government has taken in response to the recent sharp increase in migration.
- [‘Public attitudes towards immigration and minority ethnic groups’](#) was a report which found that attitudes towards immigration and ethnic minority groups were mixed. UK adults were more likely to feel positive ‘in general’ towards Black people, immigrants and Muslims than to feel negative. A majority of people reported they would feel comfortable with having people from these groups married to a relative, living next door, or as their boss. However, there were sizeable minorities with more negative attitudes. 6% of people felt negatively ‘in general’ towards Black people, 16% towards Muslims and 20% towards immigrants.
- [‘Evaluation of the New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy in Scotland’](#) was a study exploring what the [New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy](#) achieved between 2018 and 2022. The strategy was warmly welcomed by those who were aware of it, and it was felt to have led to greater collaboration and coordination between local authorities, the third sector and partners. However, measuring the direct impact of the strategy was often difficult. Research participants also found it difficult to link an overarching strategy with every activity or initiative happening at a local or project level.

These reports represent a few elements of NatCen’s broader work carrying out rigorous social policy research, including compiling statistical insights for governments such as the English Housing Survey, Health Survey for England, National Diet and Nutrition Survey and the Scottish Health Survey.

Knowledge & Technology



The new UK Government will need to navigate a plethora of questions on technology, innovation and education. Much has already been written about the opportunities and threats of Artificial Intelligence (AI), and how policymakers will need to think carefully and act decisively to ensure its adoption benefits society as a whole. Some of those solutions will be determined by the expertise that the UK has at its disposal, including in the graduates and researchers at our universities – but here, too, there are challenges to overcome. Dwindling numbers of international students in recent years (partly because of policies designed to reduce numbers) have been a contributing factor in the wider financial storm facing our Higher Education ecosystem. Some argue that a fundamental rethink of what the modern university is for and how it might best deliver for society is required – but it will need to happen at pace and under pressure, as many institutions find their traditional business models coming under immense strain.

Against this backdrop, we invited contributors to explore not just AI and technology, and some of the continued societal change arising from increased social media use within our daily lives, but also to consider the wider hinterland of knowledge and education.

Key takeaways from our contributors

- The UK's current funding crisis in higher education will require long-term solutions; a standing commission could help to break the current deadlock. In the short term, there are some 'quick wins', particularly around international student arrangements, which could be part of a package of stopgap measures.
- Regarding AI, our contributors urged caution from policymakers, and in particular stressed the need for any AI policy to adequately consider the needs of society alongside (if not above) the needs of those developing the technology. The extent of human responsibility for what AI creates and delivers needs to be codified, and we will need ethical and regulatory frameworks in place to govern it. Issues like AI watermarking and ensuring traceability are critical, but not yet adequately mainstreamed into policy discourses.
- Legislation needs updating to adequately reflect how social media has become an inescapable part of our lives. This should be in line with the UK's international peers to ensure consistency of enforcement.

Artificial Intelligence

[Our webinar in February 2024](#), held in conjunction with Sense About Science, examined the politics of AI, shortly after the UK Government's AI Safety Summit and the accompanying [Bletchley Declaration](#). Our panel explored how the incoming government might position itself as a global leader on AI regulation and security, how persuaded (and persuadable) the public might be about the merits of AI, and how technology could be adopted in ways that are socially equitable.

- [Professor Kaska Porayska-Pomsta](#) (University College London) challenged the conception of AI as a completely new phenomenon. AI has been developing within the realm of education for 50 years, drawing on different disciplines, including social sciences. Intelligent tutoring systems have been shown to be at least as effective at improving educational outcomes in one-to-one scenarios as traditional teaching methods, particularly for STEM subjects. There is evidence that adaptive environments which support learners by considering their motivational and emotional states are much more effective than those which do not – detecting and interpreting those factors allows for a more appropriate scaffold within educational environments.
- [Professor Fraser Sampson](#) (Centre for Emerging Technology & Security at Sheffield Hallam University, and the UK Government's former Biometrics & Surveillance Camera Commissioner) expanded on the challenges of AI regulation. Lawyers have spent a lot of time thinking how to fit existing legal concepts around AI – but Prof. Sampson argued this was the wrong question. Existing legal concepts are ill-suited to deal with this fundamental societal change. Elements of sociological research and teaching will also have to be reset, particularly on topics such as crime, where new technology will change the landscape beyond recognition. The biggest regulatory risk is assuming the answers can be found in what we've already built in a pre-AI world. He ended by asking how we regulate and train people for a world of AI, when everything upon which we've based those things in the past is out of date and unfit for purpose.

The panel reached two key conclusions:

- There is a renegotiation required to establish where human responsibility lies in relation to AI. The Horizon scandal at the Post Office was a reminder that humans need to take responsibility for mistakes that systems make on their watch. Codifying this is vital so we know what elements are decided by tech, and which elements are the ultimate responsibility of the humans who design and use them.

- We must be careful not to conflate regulation and ethics – in China, there is plenty of regulation, but not in ways that many in the West would feel comfortable with. Furthermore, discussions about AI capability need to consider social implications, which presents a political challenge of engaging and equipping the public.

Separately, we [hosted an article](#) co-authored by three PhD students (Rebecca Jenkins, Ruben Lamers James and Anne Hausknecht) involved with the Trust in User-generated Evidence ([TRUE](#)) project at Swansea University. Their project is about improving awareness of the potential impact of synthetic content, or ‘deepfakes’, and trust in real, authentic, user-generated evidence used in prosecutions of human rights violations. The authors examine how user-generated evidence is increasingly used in prosecutions before the International Criminal Court, as well as in the domestic prosecution of international crimes in several countries around the world. They set out four recommendations:

- 1 Increasing digital literacy – enabling individuals (from laypeople to journalists and policymakers) to spot deepfakes and evaluate user-generated evidence based on its source, history, digital features and content – can only strengthen democratic practices.
- 2 Ensuring traceability, taking steps to ensure the provenance of user-generated content.
- 3 Requiring watermarking to clearly label AI-generated content – this has already happened in the US, where federal agencies have to use such watermarking.⁷⁴
- 4 Reforming criminal law, for example, by criminalising the creation of deepfake pornography, including deepfake child sexual abuse images, so that police and lawyers can be trained to detect and try offenders.

Higher education

We hosted three written pieces from leading experts on policy around higher education, at a time of considerable anxiety about the business model underpinning whether universities in England (and other parts of the UK) is sustainable.

- [Professor Chris Millward FAcSS](#) (University of Birmingham) [argues in his piece for us](#) that a standing commission is needed to break the deadlock in higher education. He notes that in the Australian higher education system,

⁷⁴ The White House (2023) [FACT SHEET: President Biden Issues Executive Order on Safe, Secure, and Trustworthy Artificial Intelligence](#), White House website.

tuition fees and teaching grant levels are updated annually, with different amounts being set for groups of subjects based on cost, demand and public priorities.⁷⁵ He points out that standing review bodies already exist in a UK context to address issues such as public sector pay, priorities for migrant labour and the effectiveness and pricing of drugs in England.^{76, 77, 78}

- [The Rt Hon Jo Johnson](#) (King's College London) [examines in his article](#) the thorny topic of international student recruitment. He recommends reforming the graduate visa route, acknowledging that abolishing it entirely would be a mistake and instead proposing three reforms to maintain political and public support for international student recruitment. Firstly, he proposes introducing application fees as a proven means of filtering out weak and unserious applicants. Secondly, he suggests that institutions should require tuition fee payments up front to help weed out the minority of students who may plan to drop out, and who may look at the price of a visa and deposit as a low-cost way of securing entry to the country. Finally, he proposes that institutions mandate that maintenance funds be held in escrow to address rogue practices by unscrupulous agents. He argues that adopting this package of measures, all rooted in evidence, would help the sector withstand calls for the abolition of the Graduate Route in the heat of election campaigns.
- [Professor Simon Marginson](#) (University of Oxford) [writes in his article](#) that even if university institutions are stable, the quality of teaching and learning within them has long been highly unstable and is now rapidly trending downwards. He recommends three interventions to boost learning quality:
 - Shared public and private funding should be reinstated. Universities produce both public and private benefits. A core principle would be a 50/50 split in the cost of the educational unit of resource, between direct government grants and reduced student fees underpinned by income-contingent loans.
 - Tuition fee determination and the public/private funding split should be depoliticised, with the UK Government continuing to determine the total funding available for financing the educational unit of resource and the funding system supervised by an independent public agency whose remit can sustain a stable 50/50 split.
 - The tuition loans system should be restructured to ensure that most

⁷⁵ Australian Department for Education (2024) [Funding clusters and indexed rates](#), Australian Government website.

⁷⁶ Office of Manpower Economics (2023) [About Pay Review Bodies](#), UK Government website.

⁷⁷ Migration Advisory Committee, [News from the Migration Advisory Committee](#), UK Government website.

⁷⁸ National Institute for Health & Care Excellence, [Latest from NICE](#), NICE website.

loans are repaid, with the money saved in unpaid loans used to finance direct government subsidies, reducing the fiscal instability fostered by high and unknowable levels of student debt.

Social media

- [Dr Verena Brändle](#) and [Dr Charlotte Galpin](#) (both at University of Birmingham) [write in their article](#) about how social media disinformation, forms of online marginalisation and violence, and electoral interference are associated with democratic backsliding around the world.⁷⁹ They suggest three tangible steps the UK Government might take to address the current shift:

1 Updating legislation: In the UK, the Online Safety Act should be extended to require data access for researchers and expand Ofcom's remit to enforce this.

2 Introducing closer collaboration between Ofcom and researchers: The UK's new Online Safety Act only stipulates that the broadcast regulator Ofcom should produce a report into researcher access to social media data, with no mechanisms to actually require it to do so.

3 Improving coordination with the EU: The next UK Government should cooperate and coordinate more closely with the EU on Digital Services.

⁷⁹ Shaw, A. (2023) [The global assault on LGBTQ rights undermines democracy](#), Chatham House website.

Case study: Trust in User-generated Evidence (TRUE)

The [TRUE project at Swansea University](#) has adopted an innovative interdisciplinary methodology at the intersection of law, psychology and linguistics to develop the first systematic account of trust in user-generated evidence.

Across the world, millions of photographs and videos depicting mass human rights violations have been, and will continue to be, created and shared online. Legal systems have already begun to use this content in prosecuting those responsible, including at mass atrocity trials in Sweden, Germany, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the International Criminal Court, and at UN Human Rights Council-mandated commissions of inquiry, fact-finding missions, and investigations. At the same time, the public is increasingly confronted with examples of 'deepfakes': hyper-realistic images, videos or audio recordings created using machine learning technology, which are only likely to become more advanced and difficult to detect as the technology improves.

Many have raised concerns that the rise in deepfakes will lead to mass mistrust in user-generated evidence, and that this in turn will decrease its value in legal proceedings. This may well be the case, but no study has yet tested that assumption. The TRUE project seeks to fill this gap by exploring the impact of deepfakes on trust in user-generated evidence in accountability processes for human rights violations. It does so by working

across disciplinary boundaries but with social scientists at the forefront, including from Law and Experimental Psychology, bringing to bear their disciplinary expertise on a salient contemporary policy challenge.

Amongst its future work packages will be jury simulation exercises to analyse what terms jurors use in deliberations to indicate the perceived trustworthiness or otherwise of user-generated evidence, and the terms used to indicate concerns that evidence might be a deepfake. The project has also developed a guide to assist judges and other decision-makers in their assessment of open-source information, by explaining some of the most common open-source investigative techniques.

Energy & Climate



Tackling climate change is likely the biggest existential challenge facing not just the UK, but the world. We are already seeing increasing examples of the devastating impact of humanitarian emergencies caused by or significantly affected by climate change, with the [World Health Organisation](#) stating that 3.6 billion people already live in areas highly susceptible to climate change, and that by 2050 climate change is expected to cause approximately 250,000 additional deaths per year from undernutrition, malaria, diarrhoea and heat stress.

Climate change is a multifaceted problem requiring swift, thorough research-informed solutions from a range of disciplines, including the social sciences. Society has caused climate change, and it has social solutions. This is amply illustrated in the work of organisations which featured prominently in our programme, such as the [Climate Change Committee](#) (CCC), which monitors and advises the UK Government on its progress towards meeting the targets of its framework, and the [Centre for Climate Change & Social Transformations](#) (CAST). Furthermore, our own [Climate and Sustainability hub](#) showcased potential research-based solutions which were built on in this series.

Key takeaways from our contributors

- According to the CCC, the UK has never been on track to reach net zero; in fact, we are on course to break the 1.5°C global warming threshold. Key areas where we need to make rapid progress towards being more sustainable are farming, transport, buildings, power, energy networks and industry.
- As the new UK Government develops its long-term strategy to address this, it will need a coherent plan for engaging the public. The public is concerned about climate change, and there was consensus from our experts that we need to build on the growing sense of public concern and couple it with hope, directly involving people in some of the practical solutions via an ‘urgency plus agency’ approach.
- The public’s main priority for environmental policies is that they be fair, with citizens being far more willing to make changes in their own lives if they see action by corporate polluters, for example. The UK Government should bear this in mind as it develops a cohesive plan for engaging the public.

Progress on net-zero targets

In November 2023, we co-hosted [a panel discussion with the University of Glasgow](#), examining domestic and international challenges in climate policy.

The event took place just ahead of COP28 in the United Arab Emirates and also reviewed progress since COP26 in Glasgow in 2021. The panel examined where we stand in the UK and internationally in the transition towards net zero, including specifically reviewing the progress being made in public policy to limit the increase in global warming to 1.5°C.

The keynote speaker was Chris Stark, then Chief Executive of the UK Climate Change Committee, and the panel included Claire Mack, Chief Executive of Scottish Renewables, Colin Pritchard, Sustainability Director for INEOS Grangemouth, and Patrick Bayer, Professor in Environmental Sustainability & Democracy, University of Glasgow. There is [a full record of the keynote address](#) on our Election 24 hub, but key points included:

- Chris Stark explained that, globally and domestically, the 1.5°C global warming limit is unlikely to be met unless we address our usage of fossil fuels. The UK has been doing relatively well in terms of decarbonisation of the power sector, but it has not performed so well in all other sectors, including farming and transport, specifically air travel. The focus should be less on inventing new technologies and more on developing policies, to enable us to properly implement technologies/solutions we already have. The UK does not currently have a sufficient policy programme in place to quadruple the rate of carbon reduction that will be required to meet our 2030 target. According to the CCC, we need to reduce demand for high-carbon products, develop low-carbon electricity supplies, reduce use of fossil fuels, and remove carbon already in the atmosphere. Key areas to focus on are transport, buildings, power, energy networks and industry.
- The panel discussed the tension between climate and energy goals that are necessarily long-term, and the short-term nature of political cycles. There are upfront costs of transitioning to greener energy, but there are savings longer term and opportunities to export skills, expertise and technologies, should the UK invest in becoming a world leader. The quicker we make the required transitions, the cheaper it will be.
- Panellists agreed that business and industry are keen to make green transitions and would prefer stability and consistency of policy rather than a relaxing of regulations and continual flux.
- A key point of consensus was that, as well as using different forms of energy, we need to reduce demand – a social solution requiring behaviour change,

every bit as important as technical solutions.

Social problem, social solutions

Technological change alone will not be sufficient to meet our carbon targets. We need considerable behaviour change by businesses and consumers. Most measures to reach net zero will require behaviour change by the public, including how we travel, eat, shop and work.

In March 2024, we [hosted a webinar](#) examining how behavioural science can inform efforts to engage the public with climate change, and how policy choices can drive social action to achieve net zero. The webinar was chaired by [Professor Birgitta Gatersleben](#) (University of Surrey) and involved a presentation from [Professor Lorraine Whitmarsh MBE](#), Director of the UK Centre for Climate Change & Social Transformations (CAST). It was co-hosted with the [ACCESS network](#), a five-year interdisciplinary programme funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) that works to raise the leadership, profile and impact of climate and environment social science.

Key points from Prof. Whitmarsh's presentation included:

- February 2024 was the warmest and wettest on record, making it clear that if we are to tackle the climate crisis, nothing short of societal transformation is required. The 'techno-optimistic' framing of UK climate policy pins a lot of hope on technology providing solutions (zero emission planes, electric cars etc), but the [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change](#) (IPCC) and others have stated that technological change will not be enough. At least some behaviour change is needed, and some of it will be quite profound.
- The good news is that the public is reasonably well engaged with climate issues, and this engagement hasn't been substantially damaged by social crises around COVID-19 or the cost of living. But research shows that the public need to perceive climate policies as being both equitable and improving their quality of life before they will buy into them.
- Crucially, though, to change individual behaviours we will need 'upstream measures' to change the context in which individuals' personal decisions are made. For example, congestion charging has reduced car use in London by 33%. Policymakers are encouraged to consult the evidence on behavioural science and climate change and overcome hesitancy about measures that can drive the required behaviour changes, even if it risks unpopularity.
- A strong focus is needed on high-impact behaviours around mobility, food and energy use, with the focus being not just on individual consumers but

also on action at the professional, political and community level.

- Co-designing interventions with communities is vital, especially when these interventions achieve co-benefits. Where possible, information should be framed around the needs and values of communities.

The role of individuals and communities

A key takeaway from the webinar outlined above was the need to engage the public more fully in efforts to tackle climate change, in many cases through embracing positive behaviour change. Some of these points were expanded upon in written contributions to our series:

- [Dr Iain Soutar](#) and [Professor Patrick Devine-Wright](#) (both of University of Exeter) [write in their post](#) that managing energy within local areas can help reduce local energy costs and the need for infrastructure investment.^{80, 81} They also outline how developing local low-carbon energy systems will not be possible without broader and deeper engagement with citizens, households and communities. This is because it implies the adoption of unfamiliar innovations and new behaviours within homes, new infrastructures and local organisations taking on new responsibilities relating to green energy supply which require community support. They recommend that policymakers and industry leaders work with communities to create local energy systems.
- [Dr Rebecca Windemer](#), Planning and Communities Lead for Regen, echoes the same recommendation, [highlighting in her article](#) research showing that involving communities in decision-making processes for renewable energy projects increases their willingness to accept new developments,⁸² which is especially crucial in the planning stages of infrastructure projects.⁸³ Dr Windemer also explains that part of the challenge is to maximise community benefits from developer-led projects.
- [Dr Steve Westlake](#) and [Dr Caroline Verfuert](#) (both from Cardiff University and the Centre for Climate Change & Social Transformations) [write in their piece](#) about the need for more inclusiveness, arguing that the public must be fully invested in rapid, society-wide transformations if the UK is to meet its

⁸⁰ Soutar, I., Devine-Wright, P., Rohse, M. et al (2022) [Constructing practices of engagement with users and communities: comparing emergent state-led smart local energy systems](#) *Energy Policy*, vol. 171.

⁸¹ Aunedi, M. & Green, T. (2020) [How can Smart Local Energy Systems help the wider energy system?](#), Energy REV website.

⁸² Windemer, R. (2023) [Acceptance should not be assumed: how the dynamics of social acceptance changes over time, impacting onshore wind repowering](#), *Energy Policy*, vol. 173.

⁸³ De Luca, E. et al (2020) [Explaining factors leading to community acceptance of wind energy: results of an expert assessment](#), *Energies*, vol. 13, no. 8.

net-zero targets.⁸⁴ They argue that, although electric cars, heat pumps and perhaps carbon capture and storage will have an important role to play, these measures alone will not be sufficient.⁸⁵ Good leadership will also be crucial, and while, to some extent, the UK has led the way with passing the world's first climate legislation and establishing the CCC,⁸⁶ positive action from the new government is vitally important through its policy decisions relating to climate and energy.

- [In her piece](#), [Rachael Orr](#), CEO of Climate Outreach, underlines that climate change is as much about people and society as it is about natural science. The article points to research demonstrating the power of framing climate change in terms of our responsibility to young people and future generations,^{87, 88} and describes a need for empathetic communication and genuine dialogue with those directly affected by policies. Like other contributors, Rachael emphasises the need for fairness in making climate-related transitions and for a nationwide strategy for public engagement, flagging research as helpful for informing such a strategy.⁸⁹
- The theme of public engagement is also [flagged in this article](#) by [Sophy Bristow](#), from the Centre for Climate Engagement at the University of Cambridge. She makes the case for uniting communities and empowering local policymaking,⁹⁰ describing the critical role that local planning authorities play in addressing climate change. Local actions often have an ability to unite communities around a shared goal in ways which are difficult to achieve at a national level, especially in times of political division.
- [In her article](#), Reema Patel, Policy and Engagement Lead for Ipsos, describes deliberative public dialogue commissioned by the UK Government Office for Science and Sciencewise, providing a tangible example of public engagement on the climate change issue.⁹¹ The exercise shows that citizens accept the role of technological innovation but are concerned about over-reliance on specific technologies, especially when this may exacerbate

⁸⁴ Moore, B., Verfuert, C., Minas, A. et al (2021) [Transformations for climate change mitigation: a systematic review of terminology, concepts, and characteristics](#), WIREs Climate Change, vol. 12, issue 6.

⁸⁵ Committee on Climate Change (2020) [The Sixth Carbon Budget: the UK's path to Net Zero](#), London: Climate Change Committee.

⁸⁶ Dudley, H., Jordan, A. & Lorenzoni, I. (2022) [Advising national climate policy makers: a longitudinal analysis of the UK Climate Change Committee](#), Global Environmental Change, vol. 76.

⁸⁷ Marshall, J., Lu, J., Ideas, Z., Leiserowitz, A. & Brookes, T. (2023) [Later is too late](#), London: Potential Energy Coalition.

⁸⁸ Climate Outreach (2024) [Common ground on climate change](#), Climate Outreach website.

⁸⁹ Orr, R. & Powell, D. (2023) [Towards a UK public engagement strategy on climate change](#), Oxford: Climate Outreach.

⁹⁰ Ruiz-Tagle, S. (2023) [Empowering planning authorities to combat climate change](#), Centre for Climate Engagement website.

⁹¹ Patel, R., Meshor, K., Pizzol, S. & Fotiadis, I. (2022) [A net zero society: a public dialogue on scenarios and pathways](#), London: UK Government Office for Science.

social and economic inequalities. She suggests that policy should balance environmental objectives with considerations of affordability, equality and community engagement.

Sustainable energy

Energy use and supply is central to efforts to stabilise climate change. The energy sector is responsible for a large share of the emissions that have caused the issues we now face. Replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy sources is crucial if we are to address those issues. But there are challenges to overcome in doing this. Some of our contributors focussed on those challenges, and the opportunities for making headway:

- In their piece mentioned above, Dr Iain Soutar and Professor Patrick Devine-Wright describe the need for local low-carbon energy systems. They recommend placing low-carbon energy technologies within people's homes and neighbourhoods, framing the adoption of technologies such as heat pumps and electric vehicles as being just as important as the generation of wind and solar power in decentralising energy systems and reducing local energy costs.
- In a similar vein, Rebecca Windemer's piece (also outlined above) argues for increased community ownership of renewable energy, with the suggestion of empowering communities to develop renewable energy projects so they directly benefit from energy generation in their local area. This was based on research showing that community-owned projects can provide benefits, such as increasing social cohesion, empowering residents, boosting local economies and increasing knowledge.⁹² Through policies and financial incentives, such as grants and low-interest loans, government can facilitate a significant increase in community-led initiatives.
- [Professor Gavin Bridge](#) (Durham University) and [Dr Gisa Weszkalnys](#) (London School of Economics) [wrote a piece](#) about issues with the UK's offshore oil and gas regulation. Currently, the objective of this regulation is to maximise the economic recovery of hydrocarbons, but they suggest this no longer serves the public good and reform is needed.⁹³ In their view, an objective to maximise offshore fossil fuel extraction is impossible to align with climate emergency commitments,⁹⁴ and they recommend abandoning the objective to Maximise Economic Recovery (MER). The piece also

⁹² Stewart, F., Ford, R., Sumaria, P. & Evans, R. (2023) [Leveraging local and community energy or a just transition in Scotland](#), Edinburgh: Climate Exchange.

⁹³ Durham University (2023) [Fraying ties? Networks, territory and transformation in the UK oil sector](#), UK Research and Innovation website.

⁹⁴ Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (2019) [UK becomes first major economy to pass net zero emissions law](#), UK Government website.

calls for an end to what it describes as an apparent fixation on issuing new licences for companies to extract petroleum. It recommends comprehensive regulatory reform with a view to actively managing the decline of offshore gas and oil extraction.

Additional climate change challenges

The series also included expert contributions on a range of other aspects of the climate change crisis and some of the challenges and opportunities we face in addressing it:

- [Professor Alison Anderson FAcSS](#) (University of Plymouth) explored climate change education in schools, [arguing in her post](#) that climate change and sustainability topics should be embedded across the school curriculum more broadly, rather than being found only in their current locations within science and geography subjects.
- [Dr Helen Holmes](#) (University of Manchester) offered considerations for the new UK Government on waste policy, writing [in her contribution](#) that there is currently a persistent focus on behaviour change in waste-related policy at the expense of recognising and addressing the impacts of wider systems, circumstances and contexts.^{95, 96} Her recommendations to improve waste disposal policy included implementing standardisation across the plastics supply chain, measures to determine the best end-of-life fate for different forms of plastic packaging and to better understand what happens to household waste at the micro level and the implications of this.⁹⁷
- [Dr Candice Howarth](#) (Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment at the London School of Economics) [demonstrates in her article](#) why we must better prepare ourselves for extreme heat events caused by climate change. Dr Howarth argues that there is insufficient research, policy or action in the UK to ensure communities, businesses and infrastructure are prepared for and can adequately respond to this issue.⁹⁸ She recommends redesigning infrastructure to include a range of measures which can help keep places cool – for example, ‘cool pavements’ that better reflect sunlight, increased shade, and more green and blue infrastructure

⁹⁵ Holmes, H. (2024) [The materiality of nothing: exploring our everyday relationships with objects absent and present](#), London: Routledge.

⁹⁶ Holmes, H. (2018) [New spaces, ordinary practices: circulating and sharing within diverse economies of provisioning](#), *Geoforum*, vol. 88, pp. 138–147.

⁹⁷ Holmes, H., Shaver, M., Holmes, T. & Kortsens, K. (2023) [Tackling household plastic waste: best practice for a circular plastics economy](#), University of Manchester website.

⁹⁸ Climate Change Committee (2021) [Independent assessment of UK climate risk](#), Climate Change Committee website.

⁹⁹ Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment (2023) [The 2022 heatwaves: England's response and future preparedness for heat risk](#), London School of Economics website.

such as trees and bushes by the roadside and ponds. She also points out that local authorities, emergency services and utility companies in the UK only just managed to respond to heatwaves in 2022 and did so with stretched resources.⁹⁹ She calls for a National Heat Resilience strategy which can coordinate a coherent approach to making ourselves better prepared for extreme heat events.¹⁰⁰

- [Dr Pamela Buchan](#) (University of Exeter) [writes in her piece](#) about how the new UK Government could improve marine sustainability, recommending that they follow research which suggests developing ‘marine citizens’¹⁰¹ and enabling people to have more marine experiences and develop a stronger attachment to and interest in our seas.^{102, 103}

¹⁰⁰ Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment (2023) [Policymakers must be much better prepared for heatwaves in London](#), London School of Economics website.

¹⁰¹ Buchan, P., Evans, L., Pieraccini, M. & Barr, S. (2023) [Marine citizenship: the right to participate in the transformation of the human-ocean relationship for sustainability](#) PLOS One, vol. 18, no. 3.

¹⁰² Buchan, P. (2021) [Investigating marine citizenship and its role in creating good marine environmental health](#), Exeter: University of Exeter.

¹⁰³ Buchan, P., Evans, L., Barr, S. & Pieraccini, M. (2024) [Thalassophilia and marine identity: drivers of ‘thick’ marine citizenship](#), Journal of Environmental Management, vol. 352.

Case study: UK Energy Research Centre

Each year, the UK Energy Research Centre uses social science research data to analyse the UK's energy policy and make recommendations about what to do next. The [2023 review](#) was published in December 2023, spotlighting what the policy priorities for the next UK Government should be. This is in the context of the UK currently looking very unlikely to hit its 2030 target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 68% and reach net zero.

Key policy recommendations are summarised below. Based on data analysis, the review urges the new UK Government to consider the following:

- **Manage the technical viability and economic impact of the energy network** as we switch from gas to low carbon supply, rather than focussing on maximising domestic supply via expanding North Sea oil and gas production. UK demand for fossil gas is set to fall as households transition to low carbon heating and industry is electrified. The new energy system needs to be resilient to avoid sustained high energy prices.
- **Maximise delivery of local energy solutions** such as council-led insulation programmes and heat networks. The local approach would deliver regeneration, jobs and improvements to the energy performance of buildings. Local authorities have a key role to play but currently are under-powered and under-utilised. A clear framework for local and regional energy planning is a must.
- **Invest in electricity networks.** We need a major shift in how networks are planned and regulated. The UK needs to ensure that it can transport renewable energy from generation point to usage point and that distribution systems can accommodate for heat pump and electric vehicle uptake.
- The UK is bottom of the European table for heat pump adoption, and delaying the ban on new gas boilers has also been unhelpful. **The UK Government should increase finance for heat pump installation** and make a strategic decision about the role of hydrogen in heating.
- Develop a comprehensive 'Green Transport Deal' and **promote public, active and shared transport.** Switching to electric vehicles won't be enough on its own.
- **Develop a long-term strategy to decarbonise industry.** Prioritise financial support for switching from fossil fuels, enable faster access to upgraded grid connections, and reduce electricity prices so the UK can benefit from new technology which with current energy prices aren't commercially viable.
- **Increase funding to research the impact of renewable technologies.** The UK Government must consider biodiversity and environmental protection in its energy plans. We need to understand the implications for natural capital as we change land use and management to generate renewable supplies of energy.

Conclusion

This report has, we hope, highlighted the immense value and range of insight that social science research and practice can contribute to informing evidence-based policy. Drawing together the views of over 100 social scientists across eight topical themes, closely aligned to the new UK Government's missions and broader policy, it has foregrounded policy-applicable, evidence-led insights and suggestions to prompt further discussion about the role of social science research in policymaking. It has also showcased a range of methodological approaches, demonstrating the breadth of tools at the disposal of social scientists in collecting objective evidence.

It represents the starting point for an important conversation between government and social scientists about how our disciplines might best respond to the emerging needs of the nation in the years ahead. This report has showcased some of the valuable work already being done by academics and practitioners (some of whom have either direct or indirect experience of working within government) to understand social problems and identify workable policy solutions – but there is much more we can do. Under a more mission-led approach to policymaking, the role of evidence will be increasingly important, and there are valuable lessons from the pandemic about how the social sciences can respond, at pace, to the need for practical, affordable interventions which can improve the lives of citizens. Furthermore, as set out in this report and elsewhere,¹⁰⁴ social scientists are adept at working across disciplinary boundaries to tackle societal problems, which will be an inherent requirement of any 'mission-led' approach.

To reflect the fact that this report is a prompt for further dialogue, we are not making specific policy recommendations – although many individual contributions, by their nature, suggest evidence-informed ideas for policy development. Instead, we have documented five overarching areas of consensus arising from the various expert contributions, which we encourage the UK Government to consider as means for improving the intersections of evidence, practice and policy:

- **In setting cross-cutting missions, the UK Government will benefit from policymaking processes and infrastructures which incorporate a broad**

¹⁰⁴ Wilsdon, J., Weber-Boer, K., Wastl, J. & Bridges, E. (2023) [Reimagining the recipe for research & innovation: the secret sauce of social science](#), London: Sage / Academy of Social Sciences.

range of evidence in ways that are transparent and robust. This will be the subject of a future report by the Academy of Social Sciences. The project is researching structures, approaches and mindsets in UK Government and the potential opportunities for better harnessing evidence – in particular, social science evidence – more fully, consistently and effectively. We are keen to put forward ways for social scientists to work with government to deliver better outcomes for citizens through a strong social science voice within a broader evidence-led policymaking and implementation process.

- **The new UK Government would benefit from a more joined-up approach to policymaking.** It is apparent from all the themes we explored that no major policy area exists in isolation. Health outcomes are heavily influenced by wider social factors. Housing policy will be determined at least partly by strategies for regional growth. Social inequalities are inextricably linked to macroeconomics. Yet far too often, policy debates happen in a vacuum or in silos. With the new UK Government already adopting a clearer focus on social issues and a ‘mission-led’ approach to tackling them, there is an opportunity to rethink the Whitehall policy machine to ensure better interconnectedness across departments, leading to a more integrated and consistent approach to policy development.
- **Greater attention to the evidence base underpinning controversial and contentious policy areas could lead to calmer and more reasoned deliberation.** In many of our themes, there may be specific policy levers which need to be pulled to effect change in citizens’ lives. In others, equally important is the language and rhetoric used by politicians and the media to frame the parameters for debate. This is particularly true, for example, on policy discourses about migration or welfare, where legitimate political debate has often, in recent years, lacked robust evidence to underpin it. Making space to hear, disseminate and interrogate the evidence informing policy could help temper the tone of the national debate on controversial issues.
- **There is still significant scope for policy innovation by drawing on successful practice from the devolved nations and regions.** We have had national devolution across the four UK nations in the modern sense for over 25 years, and devolution to English city regions for over a decade with the creation of combined regional authorities. The new UK Government has already signalled its commitment towards further devolution of power with proposals for an English Devolution Bill. But our contributors indicated there is still untapped potential. This report showcases multiple examples of innovative policy practice from across the UK’s nations and regions. Whilst those solutions may sometimes have been tailor-made to fit a specific set of

local circumstances, in others they are scalable and potentially transferable and could be explored to advantage in other areas.

- **Policy development and discourse should include adequate space and time for social and societal elements to be fully explored.** Policy debates on some topics – for example, on climate change or AI – are dominated by technological considerations. Often, there are important broader social considerations which get lost within the debate. Climate change, for example, will require elements of social adaptation, and in some instances costs to individuals, as we change our behaviour to allow resources to be managed more effectively or we redesign towns and cities to reduce reliance on fossil fuels. Incorporating AI into our lives will be as much about building public trust in new systems by having effective ethical and regulatory frameworks as it will be about developing the technology itself. Without adequate social science research and its effective applications, there is a danger that technological solutions by themselves will not deliver the widespread benefits society needs.

For the new UK Government (and its devolved counterparts) to succeed in their policy missions and to base policies on the best evidence and understanding available, social science evidence and insights will not only be needed but must be available in a timely and accessible manner. We welcome the opportunity to discuss with governments of all four UK nations how best the Academy of Social Sciences can help support their need for understanding and evidence, drawing on our unique network of Fellows and Learned Society members, and the wider social science community.

Working together, we believe the social science community can act ever more effectively in the years ahead as a force for good, and for the ultimate benefit of citizens, as governments seek to address some of the pressing policy challenges now and in the years ahead.

Appendix A: list of contributors



The Campaign for Social Science would like to express our gratitude to all those who contributed to this series, either through their participation in our events as chairs or speakers, or by providing written pieces for our online hub. The full lists below of contributors include hyperlinks to the events and the written pieces – they can also be accessed via the [Election 24 online hub](#).

Where we have listed contributors' titles, these reflect the role they were undertaking at the time they contributed to the series rather than positions to which they have moved subsequently.

Event series

- [Reducing health inequalities: from evidence to policy](#), 17 October 2023, online webinar
 - Prof. Bobby Duffy (FAcSS), King's College London (chair)
 - Prof. Trish Greenhalgh, University of Oxford
 - Prof. Petra Meier (FAcSS), University of Glasgow
- [Migration: the research, the polling and the politics](#), 25 October 2023, online webinar
 - Dr Heather Rolfe (FAcSS), British Future (chair)
 - Lord David Blunkett (FAcSS), former Home Secretary
 - Prof. Heaven Crawley, United Nations University Centre for Policy Research
 - Prof. Paul Whiteley (FAcSS), University of Essex
- [Celebrating lifelong wellbeing in Wales](#), 26 October 2023, Cardiff University
 - Prof. Chris Taylor (FAcSS), Cardiff University (chair)
 - Prof. Stephan Collishaw, Cardiff University
 - Beth Cummings, Swansea University
 - Dr Fern Davies, Swansea University
 - Dr Hefin Gwilym, Bangor University
- [Still on track for net zero? Domestic and international challenges in climate policy](#), 14 November 2023, University of Glasgow
 - Prof. Patrick Bayer, University of Glasgow (chair)
 - Claire Mack, Scottish Renewables

Prof. Colin Pritchard, University of Strathclyde
Chris Stark, Chief Executive of the UK Climate Change Committee

- [Can we achieve sustainable growth?](#), 23 November 2023, University of Southampton
Prof. Chris Armstrong, University of Southampton
Alice Brock, University of Southampton
Prof. Jagjit S. Chadha (FACSS), National Institute of Economic and Social Research
Prof. Jane Falkingham (FACSS), University of Southampton
Councillor Satvir Kaur (Council Leader and Labour councillor, Southampton City Council)
Councillor Daniel Fitzhenry (Conservative group leader, Southampton City Council)
- [Campaign Annual Sage Lecture with Professor Gary Younge on political 'realism' in an election year](#), 28 November 2023, online webinar
Professor Gary Younge (FACSS), University of Manchester
Professor Jane Green (FACSS), University of Oxford
- [Liam Byrne lecture on wealth inequality](#), 30 November 2023, University of Birmingham
Honorary Prof. Liam Byrne, Labour MP for Birmingham Hodge Hill & Solihull North
- [The rise and fall of anti-welfare attitudes, and what it means for welfare reform in 2024 and beyond](#), 24 January 2024, online webinar
Prof. Imogen Tyler (FACSS), Lancaster University (chair)
Prof. Ben Baumberg Geiger, King's College London
Prof. Sir John Curtice (FACSS), University of Strathclyde
- [Can we achieve a more equal North East?](#), 6 February 2024, Newcastle University
Will Hutton (FACSS), Academy of Social Sciences (chair)
Sara Bryson, Tyne & Wear Citizens
Dr Jenna Charlton, Newcastle University
Claire Crow, Healthworks
Amy Harhoff, Durham County Council
Tom Hall, South Tyneside Council
Dan Jackson, North East and North Cumbria NHS Integrated Care Board
Prof. Louise Kempton, Newcastle University
Prof. Liz Todd (FACSS), Newcastle University

- [Priorities for action on AI: what does the social science evidence say?](#), 7 February 2024, online webinar
Tracey Brown OBE (chair)
Prof. Kaska Porayska-Pomsta, UCL
Prof. Fraser Sampson, Sheffield Hallam University
- [What's at stake for Wales in the UK General Election?](#), 9 February 2024, Swansea University
Dr Matthew Wall, Swansea University (chair)
Tom Giffard, Conservative MP for South Wales West
Carolyn Harris, Labour MP for Neath & Swansea East
Andrew Jenkins, Plaid Cymru candidate for Neath & Swansea East
- [Behaviour change and the climate emergency: policy choices to drive social action](#), 7 March 2024, online webinar
Prof. Birgitta Gatersleben, University of Surrey (chair)
Prof. Lorraine Whitmarsh MBE, University of Bath
- [Housing: is anywhere in the UK getting it right?](#), 22 May 2024, online webinar
Gavin Smart (FACSS), Chartered Housing Institute (chair)
Prof. Glen Bramley (FACSS), Heriot-Watt University
Prof. Nick Gallent (FACSS), UCL
Polly Neate CBE (FACSS) LLD(hc), Shelter

Written contributions

- Dr Hannah Absalom, University of Birmingham – [Empathy in every home: emotionally sensitive approaches to English social housing](#)
- Prof. Alison Anderson (FACSS), University of Plymouth – [How the education system can help to fight the climate crisis](#)
- Dr Aveek Bhattacharya, Social Market Foundation – [Following the social science? What politicians can do to improve public health](#)
- Dr Verena Brändle and Dr Charlotte Galpin, University of Birmingham – [Democracy today requires access to social media data](#)
- Prof. Gavin Bridge, Durham University, and Dr Gisa Weszkalnys, London School of Economics – [Offshore oil and gas extraction: reform the Petroleum Act](#)
- Jacqueline Broadhead and Denis Kierans, University of Oxford – [The future of welcoming in the UK](#)
- Dr Pamela Buchan, University of Exeter – [Citizens of sustainable seas](#)
- Prof. Jagjit S. Chadha (FACSS), National Institute of Economic and Social Research – [Fixing the mix](#)
- Prof. Sir Cary Cooper CBE (FACSS), University of Manchester – [Enhancing mental capital and wellbeing at work](#)
- Prof. Hisham Farag and Prof. Santosh Koirala, University of Birmingham, and

- Prof. Biwesh Neupane, University of Strathclyde – [Sovereign Wealth Fund: navigating the dichotomy of good and evil](#)
- Dr Jennifer Dixon, the Health Foundation – [A healthier Britain: priorities for health and social care](#)
 - Prof. Catherine Durose, University of Liverpool; Prof. Sarah Ayres (FACSS), University of Bristol; Prof. John Boswell (FACSS), University of Southampton; Prof. Paul Cairney (FACSS), University of Stirling; Dr Ian C Elliott, University of Glasgow; Prof. Matthew Flinders, University of Sheffield; Prof. Steve Martin, Cardiff University; and Prof. Liz Richardson, University of Manchester – [Positive public policy – a new vision for UK Government](#)
 - Prof. Sayantan Ghosal (FACSS), University of Glasgow – [The case for fundamental reform](#)
 - Sarah Gillborn, University of Birmingham – [It doesn't measure up: tracking kids' BMIs needs to end](#)
 - Prof. Jon Glasby (FACSS) and Prof. Catherine Needham (FACSS), University of Birmingham – [Adult social care: 3 steps to achieve 'a gloriously ordinary life'](#)
 - Dr Marcos González Hernando, UCL, and Dr Gerry Mitchell, Independent Consultant – [The complaints and insecurities of the relatively well-off should not be taken lightly](#)
 - Prof. Trish Greenhalgh, University of Oxford – [Health policy and the evidence base from social science](#)
 - Dr Helen Holmes, University of Manchester – [Binning it: is it time to move on from behaviour change in waste policy?](#)
 - Dr Candice Howarth, LSE – [Feeling the heat – preparing better for extreme temperatures](#)
 - Rebecca Jenkins, Ruben Lamers James, and Anne Hausknecht, Swansea University – [Trust in evidence in an era of deepfakes](#)
 - Dr Elliott Johnson, Northumbria University; Prof. Daniel Nettle, Newcastle University and Institut Jean Nicod; Prof. Kate Pickett (FACSS), University of York; and Prof. Matthew Johnson (FACSS), Northumbria University – [A socially secure, fully funded Britain: evidence on Basic Income and wealth tax](#)
 - The Rt Hon Jo Johnson, King's College London – [Quality, quality, quality: international student reform plan](#)
 - Dr Edward Jones, Bangor University – [History shows the way to save the high street](#)
 - Prof. Sir Julian Le Grand (FACSS), Marshall Institute for Philanthropy and Social Entrepreneurship – [A springboard for new citizens: Universal Basic Capital and a citizen's day](#)
 - Lucy Leon and Jacqueline Broadhead, University of Oxford – [Delivering a safety net to tackle rising migrant destitution](#)
 - Dr Jane Lethbridge, University of Greenwich – [Professionalisation, funding & public engagement: 3 ways to address the UK's social care crisis](#)
 - Prof. Sherilyn MacGregor, Prof. Matthew Paterson and Dr Helen Holmes,

- University of Manchester – [Why we need connected strategies for net zero and levelling up](#)
- Prof. Simon Marginson, University of Oxford – [Turning back the apparently inevitable decline in university quality](#)
 - Prof. Sir Michael Marmot, UCL – [Build back fairer: put equity of health and wellbeing at the heart of all government policy](#)
 - Dr Lauren McCarthy, City, University of London, and Prof. Scott Taylor, University of Birmingham – [Tackling misogyny at work: Legal and educational solutions](#)
 - Dr Imelda McDermott, University of Manchester – [Building a sustainable healthcare workforce for the future](#)
 - Prof. Jane Millar (FACSS), University of Bath – [Reaping the benefits of Social Security reform](#)
 - Prof. Chris Millward (FACSS), University of Birmingham – [Why we need a standing commission to break the deadlock in higher education](#)
 - Polly Neate CBE (FACSS) LLD(hc) and Hannah Rich, Shelter – [Housing: a system in meltdown](#)
 - Prof. Paul Ormerod (FACSS), Rochdale Development Agency – [A place-based way of increasing national productivity](#)
 - Prof. Judith Phillips (FACSS), University of Stirling – [Opportunities of ageing: back to the future](#)
 - Dr Pier-Luc Dupont, Swansea University, Dr Thomas Sealy and Prof. Tariq Modood (FACSS), University of Bristol – [Reviving multiculturalism, reuniting Britain](#)
 - Prof. Anne Power, LSE Housing – [Restoring not destroying communities](#)
 - Prof. Vicky Pryce (FACSS), Centre for Economics and Business Research (CEBR) – [The economic case for gender equality in the workplace and the need for further government action](#)
 - Monder Ram OBE (FACSS), Aston Business School – [Ethnic minority businesses as a key to social mobility and levelling up](#)
 - Dr Heather Rolfe (FACSS), British Future – [It's good to talk, but also to listen. How listening to the public can add light rather than heat to the immigration debate](#)
 - Dr Iain Soutar and Prof. Patrick Devine-Wright, University of Exeter – [Deficient engagement risks eroding public consent for low carbon local energy systems](#)
 - Gemma Tetlow, Institute for Government – [How can the next government improve fiscal management in the UK?](#)
 - Prof. Richard A. Werner, University of Winchester – [Bringing back the Wonderful Life: using local banks to boost job creation, productivity & competitiveness](#)
 - Dr Steve Westlake and Dr Caroline Verfuërth, The Centre for Climate Change and Social Transformations – [Climate change 2024: the need for more inclusion, fairness, and leadership](#)

