

# ISER NEWS



## World class socio-economic research and surveys

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There are real health risks in being underweight or obese

## Prevalence of the painfully thin among UK unemployed

### New study reveals many jobless medically underweight

**A new study of the unemployed, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, has found they have a substantially increased risk of being medically underweight, compared to similar people who had not recently been unemployed. The difference was more pronounced for longer term jobseekers, men and people from lower-income households.**

The research, by Dr Amanda Hughes and Professor Meena Kumari at the Institute for Social and Economic Research at the University of Essex, followed the health and work circumstances of over 10,000 work-age adults in the UK's largest household panel study, *Understanding Society*, interviewed annually between 2009 and 2013. The research compared Body Mass Index (BMI) at the end of the study period between people who were currently unemployed, people who had recently been unemployed, and people who had not recently been unemployed.

The results will be of significant interest to policy makers and health practitioners looking at the national trend towards obesity, but also shed new insight on the established link between long-term unemployment and an increased risk of chronic illness or dying. The research suggests being underweight could play a previously overlooked role.

Key findings included:

- Jobseekers were more likely to be underweight than the never-unemployed.
- Jobseekers were less likely to be overweight than the never-unemployed.
- Non-smoking jobseekers were more likely to be obese but smoking jobseekers were less likely to be obese.
- Longer-term jobseekers, unemployed men and the unemployed from less affluent backgrounds were most at risk of being underweight. *Continued overleaf*



University of Essex

*Continued from previous page* Dr Amanda Hughes said: "There are real health risks in being underweight or obese, and this may help explain the high rates of chronic disease and mortality among jobseekers. The results were surprising because it is often assumed that long-term unemployed people are heavier than people in work, for example because it is harder to eat healthily on a very restricted income.

Our results suggest that, while there is more obesity among non-smoking jobseekers, unemployed people are also at substantially increased risk of being medically underweight. This research will be important to policy makers because for both obesity and underweight we identify particular groups – non-smokers for obesity, men and those from poorer backgrounds for underweight – for whom the risk is especially stark."

The research is published in the April edition of the journal *Preventive Medicine* and available online now at [www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/research/publications/524078](http://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/research/publications/524078) ●

## EUROMOD analysis of policies in European Commission reports

**New analysis using EUROMOD, ISER's microsimulation model, has been published as part of the annual cycle of country reports by the European Commission.**

The Commission publishes a series of country reports for each Member State, analysing their economic and social policies. It then provides EU governments with country-specific recommendations for the next 12-18 months.

EUROMOD has been used to assess the impact of policies in 10 different countries in the 2017 European Semester country reports. The 10 countries are Denmark, Spain, France, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Austria, Poland, Slovenia and Sweden.

The European Semester provides a framework for the coordination of economic policies between the countries of the European Union. It allows the EU member countries to discuss their economic and budget plans and monitor progress at specific times throughout the year.

Professor Holly Sutherland, Director of EUROMOD, University of Essex, said: "It is very gratifying to see our work being used to improve the evidence base in the formal process for assessing the effects of policies in Europe, and ultimately to contribute to better policy-making."

# Announcing the appointment of our new ISER Director

**We are delighted to announce the appointment of Professor Emily Grundy as Director of the Institute for Social and Economic Research at the University of Essex**

**Professor Grundy, currently Professor of Demography at the London School of Economics, will join ISER as Director and Professor of Population Science in October 2017, in succession to Professor Nick Buck.**

Prior to her appointment at LSE, Professor Grundy was Professor of Demography at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (LSHTM), where she is now an Honorary Professor. She previously led a National Centre for Research Methods node, based at LSHTM and has collaborative links with a range of universities in the UK and elsewhere in Europe.

Her research is focused largely on the social support and intergenerational relationships of older people and on trends and differentials in later life health, disability and mortality. She has a particular interest in associations between family trajectories and health and disability at older ages.

Professor Grundy is a Fellow of the Academy of the Social Sciences and has various national and international roles, including serving as Council Member for Europe for the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population and Chair of the UK Population Investigation Committee.

Professor Heather Laurie, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research) at the University of Essex, said: "We are absolutely delighted to be welcoming Emily Grundy as the next Director of ISER and Professor of Population Science. ISER is a flagship social research institute that is responsible for the management of *Understanding Society*, the UK Household Longitudinal Study, as well as being home to the ESRC Research Centre on Micro-Social Change and EUROMOD, our groundbreaking EU microsimulation project. Emily brings with her a wealth of experience in the field of demography adding another dimension to the world-class interdisciplinary research carried

out within ISER. Under Emily's leadership we expect ISER to continue to grow in stature and reputation and to produce the next generation of high quality evidence-based research to inform current policy challenges and our understanding of the complex world in which we live."

Professor Grundy said: "I am really excited to be joining ISER and the University of Essex. ISER has been at the forefront of both leading data collection and data analysis and interpretation for many years and has served as a model for many international institutes. The synergies with other activities at the University of Essex, and the support ISER has received from the University, have contributed greatly to its success. I look forward to working with colleagues in ISER and the rest of the University to help maintain and develop further the role and reach of ISER as a world leading institute." ●



Professor Emily Grundy

## Ethnic minorities and the British political system: new research on engagement and representation

**New research from the Universities of Essex and Manchester on how ethnic minorities are engaging as voters and how they are represented within the British political system will be presented at a seminar in Westminster in October.**

Dr Nicole Martin (ISER, University of Essex) will present 'Ethnic Minority Voters in 2015: A Breakthrough for the Conservative Party?' and Dr Maria Sobolewska (University of Manchester) will present her study 'Which ethnic minority candidates represent the views of ethnic minority constituents, and why?'. Dr Rebecca McKee (University of Manchester) will present 'How MPs respond to their ethnic minority constituents. Substantive Representation of Ethnic Minorities in the UK Parliament' followed by a panel discussion chaired by Tom Clark, editor of *Prospect* magazine.



Twins have intrigued humankind for more than a century

## Twin births: a new study finds that they're not so random after all

**A new study of more than 18 million births across 72 countries finds that, contrary to previous thinking, twin births are more likely in healthier mothers with healthier behaviours**

The study by Professor Sonia Bhalotra at the Institute for Social and Economic Research with Professor Damian Clarke at the Universidad de Santiago de Chile is new evidence to challenge the idea that twins are random and has important policy implications showing the health of mothers is crucial. The new study is also very relevant to other social scientists who use data on twin births and singleton births to examine other issues such as nature versus nurture.

Professor Bhalotra said: "Twins have intrigued humankind for more than a century. Scientists use data on identical twins to assess the importance of nurture relative to nature. However our new research has found that the distribution of twins in the population is skewed in favour of healthier women with healthier behaviours which means they are more likely to spend more time on parenting (or nurturing) behaviours."

Many countries have implemented policies to encourage or discourage birth rate rises, so understanding of how fertility influences child development or women's careers is important in reviewing such policies. It has always been presumed that twin births are quasi-random, or independent of characteristics of the mother that influence the environment in which children are reared, or the mother's preferences over labour supply.

We have found new population-level evidence that challenges this. Using 18,652,028 births in 72 countries, of which 539,544 (2.89%) are twins, we found that the likelihood of a twin birth varies systematically

and substantially with the mother's health and socio-economic condition. This research is meaningfully large, and widespread.

We can see the mother's health and socio-economic state is important in both richer and poorer countries, and it holds for all available markers of maternal condition including health stocks and health conditions prior to pregnancy (height, body mass index, diabetes, hypertension, kidney disease), health-related behaviours in pregnancy (healthy diet, smoking, alcohol, drug-taking), exposure to stress in pregnancy, and availability of prenatal care. We also found the higher levels of education are associated with higher levels of twin births, probably because education leads to uptake of new health-related information for women.

It is known that twin births are not strictly random, occurring more frequently among older mothers, at higher parity and in certain races and ethnicities, but as these variables are in practice observable, they can be adjusted for. Similarly, it is well-documented that women using artificial reproductive technologies (ART) are much more likely to give birth to twins and ART-use is recorded in many birth registries so, again, it can be controlled for and a conditional randomness assumption upheld. Our finding is potentially a major challenge because maternal condition is multi-dimensional and almost impossible to fully measure and adjust for. For instance, foetal health has been shown to be a function of whether pregnant women skip breakfast, whether they suffer bereavement in pregnancy,

## Queen's Birthday Honours

Professor Nick Buck, Director of ISER, has welcomed the recognition of two key figures in ISER's history in this year's Queen's Birthday Honours.

"Shamit Saggat, Professor of Political Science and Public Policy at ISER, Director of the South East Network for Social Science Doctoral Training Partnership and Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research) at the University of Essex, was awarded a CBE for services to Social Science and Public Policy. Within ISER he was responsible for establishing the *Understanding Society* Policy Unit. The Policy Unit assists with bespoke analysis of *Understanding Society* data to enable better policy making and recommendation to government departments and the third sector.

Professor Jonathan Gershuny, Professor of Sociology at the University of Oxford and Director of the Centre for Time Use Research, was awarded a CBE for services to Social Science and Sociology. He was Director of ISER from 1993 to 2005 and had a huge impact in creating the institution as we now know it and in ensuring its success.

Congratulations to both of them. The awards are very well deserved."



Shamit Saggat



Prof. Jonathan Gershuny

their exposure to air pollution, and a host of other such variables.

The underlying hypothesis is that twins are more demanding of maternal resources than singletons and so conditions that challenge maternal health, be they long-standing under-nutrition (marked by height) or pregnancy behaviours (like smoking), are more likely to result in miscarriage of twins.

Overall, our results imply that the distribution of twins in the population is skewed in favour of healthier women with healthier behaviours which are likely to be positively correlated with preferences for child quality, with parenting (or nurturing) behaviours and with women's labour force participation."

Research Paper, IZA Discussion Paper No. 10405 (December 2016) *The Twin Instrument* by Sonia Bhalotra and Damian Clarke can be downloaded at [www.iser.essex.ac.uk/research/publications/524079](http://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/research/publications/524079) •

# Four charities to benefit from new initiative using *Understanding Society* data

**The scheme provides up to £5,000 worth of support for policy relevant research that uses the study's data**

**Four third sector organisations will receive support through *Understanding Society's* Research Voucher Scheme.**

Many charities depend on good evidence to pursue their mission, influence key stakeholders or plan ahead. With much richer survey and administrative data now publicly available, charities have access to new opportunities for policy learning and influencing social change through better insights.

Of the diverse research ideas submitted for the *Understanding Society* Research Voucher Scheme, the selection panel chose three projects for support. These will exploit some of the key benefits of *Understanding Society* such as its longitudinal panel design, household focus, youth survey and multi-topic content.

**Young Women's Trust (YWT): Pathways to economic inactivity amongst young women**

The organisation supports and represents disadvantaged young women (aged 16 to 30). An area of concern has been why economic inactivity within the UK is disproportionately high amongst young women – 274,000 are economically inactive compared to 179,000 young men (ONS, 2016). With economic inactivity being associated with long-term scarring effects, better research evidence is needed to improve current policy and practice.

YWT want to examine the different pathways to economic inactivity, with a range of possible factors at play: work history; educational attainment; caring responsibilities; and the presence of disability. Quantitative research utilising *Understanding Society* will be

supplemented (separately) by qualitative research with young women.

**Child Poverty Action Group: The financial and subjective impact of transitions into parenthood**

CPAG works on behalf of one in four children in the UK who are growing up in poverty. Within the context of fundamental changes to the UK benefit system, precarious employment and projections about possible growth in child poverty, the organisation is interested in understanding how financial security for different households changes as a result of parenthood and which families are most vulnerable to insecurity and poverty. Understanding the impact of parenthood on measures such as income, managing bills, hours worked, subjective financial situation and childcare could help inform future policy towards child support and child poverty.

The research is particularly well-suited to using longitudinal data as it depends on examining family financial circumstances before, during and after having children. The findings will feed into CPAG's Secure Futures project, which is developing fresh ideas on a social security system fit for the 21st century that prevents poverty – reviewing first principles and focusing on children.

**The Children's Society and Barnardo's: Children's mental health in the transition from childhood to adolescence – predictive and protective factors**

The two charities are collaborating on a research project, having initially submitted separate

proposals on the distinct but overlapping concepts of children's wellbeing and mental health. It is estimated that 850,000 children have a mental health problem. The primary aim of the research is to uncover different trajectories of mental health among adolescents, and to understand better which factors are associated with better mental health outcomes among 10-15-year-olds.

Working with *Understanding Society*, a key feature of the analysis will be to identify predictive and protective factors, particularly 'everyday factors' such as exercise, diet, family relationships, bullying, screen time, etc. some of which may be more malleable to influence through programmes, schools and family life.

*Understanding Society* is working additionally with The Children's Society to provide quantitative analysis of factors they have identified that could potentially be linked to self-reported wellbeing of young people. The charities are interested in both generating clear messages for policy makers and examining how, through their services, they could promote better mental health.

Raj Patel, Acting Director of the *Understanding Society* Policy Unit said: "Each of these three research projects is well suited to the use of *Understanding Society* data. As a longitudinal study it tracks people over time. Rather than getting a one-off sense of what is going on at a particular point in time, longitudinal data can draw a moving picture of how things evolve over time. By examining how key events in people's lives or their behaviours impact on outcomes and the factors that matter, the research projects hope to shed new policy-relevant insights on important issues affecting young people and families." ●

## £300,000 British Academy grant to study poverty and health links

**The British Academy has announced significant funding for a ground-breaking research programme looking at poverty and health in Brazil.**

Entitled 'Welfare Dependence and Poverty Traps: Evaluating the contribution of health shocks and health policy using administrative data', the research will be led by Sonia Bhalotra, Professor of Economics at ISER.

Professor Bhalotra said: "The objective is to investigate the extent to which public health provision enhances the capacity for social protection. The poor are more vulnerable to disease, and poor health can perpetuate poverty and welfare dependency. We will contribute new evidence on synergies between income support and public health, relevant to sustaining cash

transfers on a wide scale, especially under austerity.

We also contribute to work on sustainable cities insofar as we study epidemics that diffuse more rapidly in dense urban areas. Previous attempts to identify causal effects of health on poverty have been frustrated by the poor being more likely to suffer health shocks, making it hard to isolate cause from effect. We will address this challenge by analysing administrative individual longitudinal data on the entire population of welfare recipients in Brazil, linked to hospital, clinic and vital statistics data, and using exogenous variation in local epidemic infection rates.

Why Brazil? First, Brazil is home to the largest conditional cash transfer programme

in the world, Bolsa Familia (BF), serving 50 million people, accounting for 20-25% of the population and costing 0.5% of GDP p.a., though, despite the conditionalities, most of the poor remain in poverty for years. Second, Brazil was a forerunner among developing countries when, in 1990, soon after returning to democracy, it committed to providing universal health coverage. (This implies that our estimates of impacts of health shocks on welfare dependence are likely to represent lower bounds of effects in developing countries with limited public health insurance.) Third, we have (privileged) access to administrative data (CadUnico) from the Brazilian Ministry of Social Development, which track families eligible for welfare over time since 2001."



Children's cognitive and social skills increase with the more time they spend with their mothers

## More time with mum may be better for children's development

**The more time a mother spends with her child between the ages of three and seven, the better that child's cognitive and social skills will be, according to a new study published in the *Economic Journal***

**The researchers also found first-born children tend to benefit more from early investment of mothers' time than children later in the birth order.**

The research was conducted by Professor Emilia Del Bono from the Institute for Social and Economic Research at the University of Essex, Professor Marco Francesconi from the University of Essex and Professors Yvonne Kelly and Amanda Sacker from University College London. The study analyses representative data on more than 8,000 children and their mothers, and finds that the positive effect of mothers' time investment on early child outcomes is quantitatively large. It corresponds in magnitude to 20-40% of the advantage that young children get from having a mother with a university degree as opposed to having a mother with no qualifications.

The researchers also find that the level of education attained by a mother and the birth order position of her child within the family (oldest, youngest, etc) has an effect on early years development.

For example, time spent doing educational activities, such as reading, between the ages of three and five with a mother who has been educated beyond the minimum school leaving age, leads to an increase in verbal skills at age seven that are significantly greater than those

achieved by children whose mothers are less well educated.

In addition, early time investment by the mother in first-born children is more productive than in subsequent children. Mothers are also likely to change how much time they spend with their children in the early years in accordance with how those children are progressing.

The study is the first to look at the effect of time spent with mothers on their children. It uses data from the UK Millennium Cohort Study (MCS) based at the Centre for Longitudinal Studies. The MCS is a nationally representative longitudinal study of infants born in the UK between September 2000 and January 2002.

Co-author of the study Professor Marco Francesconi said: "Our results emphasise that the time spent by mothers with their children has a noticeable influence on early child development.

Mothers are also likely to change time investments over the early years of life of their children in response to earlier outcomes. When this is the case, the socio-economic gradient in outcomes observed at later points of children's lives may be driven by variation both between and within families.

This suggests that there may be limited scope for later policy interventions that aim to affect mothers' time availability or inform them about the effectiveness of their time investments." •

## Retention and progression in work: what do we still need to know?

Professor Mike Brewer presented new research at a workshop in May, jointly organised by the ESRC Research Centre for Micro-Social Change and the ESRC Centre for the Microeconomic Analysis of Public Policy (CPP), and funded by the Nuffield Foundation.

Getting people to stay in work and progress up the earnings ladder is an aspiration of all political parties. As Universal Credit extends in-work conditionality to more workers over the rest of this Parliament, the Department of Work and Pensions will have a mechanism allowing it directly to encourage, cajole or help workers to earn more. However, most evidence is that returns to experience in low-skilled jobs are very low, and there are as yet few proven policy interventions that help workers progress in the labour market.

The half-day workshop provided opportunity to reflect on what has been learnt since the UK government started discussing in-work conditionality, and what remains a priority for research, and new results from research funded by the Nuffield Foundation on how financial incentives can encourage job retention amongst lone parents.

## ISER commissioned to play key role in the European Social Survey

**Experts from ISER have been commissioned to take over responsibility for sampling and weighting of the huge European Social Survey.**

The European Social Survey (ESS) is an academically-driven cross-national survey that has been conducted across Europe since its establishment in 2001.

Every two years, face-to-face interviews are conducted with newly selected, cross-sectional samples. The survey measures the attitudes, beliefs and behaviour patterns of diverse populations in more than 30 nations.



# Evidence to Select Committee inquiry into children's mental health

**Evidence from new ISER studies into the factors affecting children's wellbeing has been published as part of the inquiry by the Health Select Committee into children and young people's mental health and the role of education**

The research, by Dr Cara Booker and Dr Gundi Knies, used both longitudinal and cross-sectional analysis of data collected from the 10-15-year-olds participating in *Understanding Society* to unpick the issues and circumstances affecting the happiness of young people in this age range.

Key findings in the ISER evidence submitted were as follows:

## Understanding causes and influences

In order to help children with socio-emotional difficulties or to prevent them from developing socio-emotional difficulties, it is necessary to understand the causes and influences on their wellbeing. Understanding their behaviours, attitudes and socio-economic status is crucial to unpicking the causes of socio-emotional difficulties.

At the moment there is only one source of data available for longitudinal analysis of children's subjective wellbeing – *Understanding Society*, the UK Household Longitudinal Study. This is the largest household panel study in the world, combining socio-economic information with reported attitudes and behaviours collected annually. The uniqueness of *Understanding Society* lies in offering repeat observation of subjective wellbeing measures from children themselves. The data are used by ONS and researchers to examine influences and effects and to measure

children's subjective wellbeing. More could be done to link with administrative data sets such as health and education. *Understanding Society* has made a start by linking rich individual, family and household data with the National Pupil Database for England but administrative data linkage with other stages of education is equally important.

The government departments of health and education could give greater priority in allowing researchers to link administrative data to *Understanding Society* data to better understand the changing nature of children's wellbeing in the UK and its effects on health, education and other outcomes.

## Eating and health

The researchers' cross-sectional analysis of *Understanding Society* has found that healthier eating was associated with lower odds of socio-emotional difficulties, while increased fast food consumption was associated with higher odds. Smoking, drinking and low sport participation were all associated with socio-emotional difficulties. They found that health-protective behaviours were associated with happiness while health-risk behaviours were associated with socio-emotional difficulties.

## Screen-based media – games, social media and TV – has an impact on children's wellbeing

They found that overall, young people participating in heavy use of screen-based

## Evidence for new policy on improving lives of workless families

The Department of Work and Pensions has published a new strategy for helping workless families and improving the lives of an estimated 1.8 million children in the UK who live in workless households, based on evidence from *Understanding Society*.

The DWP worked closely with the *Understanding Society* Policy Unit based at ISER to analyse data collected from families participating in the study. A spokesperson said: "We used the *Understanding Society* survey for the majority of the analysis in this paper. It not only provides a rich range of information on families, but follows families over time. This enables a longitudinal perspective of disadvantage and worklessness."

media were less happy and more likely to have socio-emotional difficulties than moderate users. Chatting on social networking websites more was associated with lower odds of happiness and higher odds of socio-emotional difficulties. Using games consoles was associated with higher odds of socio-emotional problems. Higher total screen-based media use was associated with lower odds of happiness and higher odds of socio-emotional difficulties. Greater participation in sport was associated with higher odds of happiness and lower odds of socio-emotional difficulties.

## Ethnicity, age and gender

Longitudinal analysis of *Understanding Society* data finds differences between ethnicity, age and gender when examining declining levels of wellbeing in young people. In the early teens, ethnic minority males are happier than their White British counterparts while the opposite is true for females. As they age, all children get less satisfied with life but for girls this effect starts at age 11 and is more pronounced for ethnic minorities.

## Poorer children are unhappier

Children become less satisfied with their life in years when their family income is lower, and at any point in time, children with lower household income are unhappier than their counterparts with a higher household income.

## Living with biological parents

Children living with both biological parents show higher levels of life satisfaction than those living with just one parent.

## School holidays

Children are less satisfied with their life during the school holidays. ●



Screen-based media has an impact on children's wellbeing

# Hate crime and its violent consequences: ISER evidence to Select Committee

**Findings from a new ISER research project investigating the prevalence of racial harassment in the UK, and its impact on the health of victims, have been published as written evidence to the Home Affairs Select Committee inquiry into hate crime and its violent consequences**

**The research evidence, submitted by Dr Alita Nandi and Dr Renee Luthra, is a unique insight into the prevalence of ethnic and racial harassment and the consequences for victims.**

The project is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) under the Secondary Data Analysis Initiative. It uses *Understanding Society*, which includes an Ethnic Minority Boost, to understand how ethnic minorities in the UK experience harassment and its impact on their lives.

'The prevalence and persistence of ethnic and racial harassment and its impact on health: a longitudinal analysis' looks at levels of harassment among ethnic minorities living in England between 2009 and 2014 and the association of such experiences with mental health or mental distress and whether there are individual or community level resources that may help ethnic minorities buffer against this. ISER evidence found:

- Around one in ten ethnic minorities report experiencing ethnic and racial harassment at least once in the last year; this prevalence rate is higher, at around 15%, for some groups.
- Almost double the number of ethnic minorities report feeling unsafe or avoiding public places.
- Ethnic minorities who report experiencing ethnic and racial harassment as well as those who report living in fear of it, report worse mental health than those who neither experience nor live in fear of it; the association is stronger for those who experience ethnic and racial harassment.
- There are very few observable and measurable factors that protect ethnic minorities against the mental health costs of ethnic and racial harassment; these are having more close friends and higher levels of personality traits – conscientiousness and openness to experience. ●

## Ecuadorian new microsimulation model training

Government training for using ECUAMOD, the tax-benefit microsimulation model for Ecuador, based on ISER's model, EUROMOD, was held at the Instituto de Altos Estudios Nacionales (IAEN) in Quito in February. The course was led by H. Xavier Jara Tamayo from ISER in collaboration with Marcelo Varela, Mauricio Cuesta, and César Amores from the IAEN. Participants included representatives from a wide spread of government institutions, including the Central Bank and the Ministries of Economic Policy and Finance, as well as local universities.

The event was part of the UNU-WIDER-funded SOUTHMOD project, which financed the development of ECUAMOD and microsimulation models for selected developing countries to analyse the effects of tax and benefit policy scenarios, based on EUROMOD, ISER's microsimulation model for the EU28 countries. ●



## New epigenetic data launched at The Royal Society for Public Health

**New epigenetic data released this month will combine with *Understanding Society's* existing biomarker, genetic, social and economic data to provide a rich and powerful research resource.**

Social, behavioural and environmental scientists might be interested in epigenetics based on the premise that one's social, behavioural and environmental circumstances can modify which aspects of the genome are expressed and which are not. Speakers at the launch included Professors Michaela Benzeval and Meena Kumari from ISER, University of Essex, and Professor Marcus Pembrey, Emeritus Professor of Paediatric Genetics, Great Ormond Street, Institute of Child Health and Bristol University. ●

## Academic evidence for Parliament on selective education

The Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST) has published a new evidence briefing on the impact of selective schooling citing research from ISER and new studies using data from *Understanding Society*.

The POSTbrief provides a brief overview of methodologically robust studies on state-funded selective schools that select the majority of their intake on academic criteria. Professor Emilia Del Bono's recent study of the impact of grammar schools on a generation of children in Aberdeen is among the evidence cited, alongside a study led by Professor Simon Burgess using data from *Understanding Society* revealing an increase in social inequalities in areas with selective state schooling.

The Government announced funding for new English grammar schools in the Budget in March 2017.



*Understanding Society* asks the EU Referendum question

## Why did the UK vote to leave the EU?

**A selection of researchers will be given unique early access to data on EU Referendum attitudes from *Understanding Society*, the UK Household Longitudinal Study, collected during 2016.**

When wave eight began in January 2016, *Understanding Society* started asking its participants 'whether the UK should leave the EU or remain a member' and it will continue asking the EU Referendum question until the end of 2017.

In order to better inform policy and public debate, the data generated from the EU Referendum question is being made available to a limited number of researchers from April 2017. The research produced will be shared at a London symposium in December 2017, in collaboration with the ESRC's Britain in a Changing Europe project.

# Understanding Society Scientific Conference

Tuesday 11 to Wednesday 13 July 2017, University of Essex

The *Understanding Society* Scientific Conference will provide an international forum for the exchange of research based on longitudinal household panel studies with Professor Sir Richard Blundell, Professor Hilary Graham, Heather Wardle and Professor Lucinda Platt as keynote speakers.

Key features of *Understanding Society* will also be showcased, including sessions on: geographically linked data; exploiting biomarker data in economics research; making use of the ethnic and immigrant and ethnic boost samples; family dynamics; household finances and their measurement; using harmonised BHPS-*Understanding Society* datasets; genetic markers as instrumental variables; and epigenetics in *Understanding Society*. Survey methodology sessions are also confirmed, covering the role of interviewers in survey measurement, and longitudinal survey participation, and there will also be a practical session on the Cross-National Equivalent File, which includes BHPS and to which *Understanding Society* has now been added.

Further presentation topics and poster sessions will be confirmed in April, and a draft conference programme will be published when registration opens. 'Drop-in' sessions will be held during the conference for data users, to enable researchers to maximise their use of *Understanding Society* data.

ISER's survey experts will be available to answer queries on topics such as the use of weights, using linked administrative data, combining social and biological data for research, questionnaire content and survey management, and the *Understanding Society* Innovation Panel.

Pre-session training sessions are planned on Monday 10 July including one covering the use of weights and sample design indicators in *Understanding Society*.

Conference delegates will also have plenty of time for networking at the social events, which will include a drinks reception on Tuesday 11 July and dinner on Wednesday 12 July.

#usociety17 ●



The *Understanding Society* Scientific Conference will be held in Colchester



Professor Mike Brewer

## ESRC Impact Prize: Outstanding Impact on Public Policy

ISER's Deputy Director and Director of MiSoC, Professor Mike Brewer, was runner-up for the prestigious ESRC Impact Prize for Outstanding Impact on Public Policy.

This prize is given for 'rigorous quantitative research into tax, benefits, poverty and living standards over the last 17 years that has changed debate and shaped policy, most recently on Universal Credit.'

## Conference on migration

The ESRC Research Centre on Micro-Social Change and the Department of Sociology at the University of Essex will host a one-day workshop on 5 October on 'Emerging Questions in Migration Research'. [www.iser.essex.ac.uk/events](http://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/events)

The Institute for Social and Economic Research is based at the University of Essex and receives funding from the university and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

Established in 1989, the Institute incorporates the ESRC Research Centre on Micro-Social Change (MiSoC) and The Microsimulation Unit, which is responsible for the EUROMOD project.

ISER is home to *Understanding Society*, the UK household longitudinal study which collects information annually, providing valuable new evidence about the people of the UK, their lives, experiences, behaviours and beliefs.

If you are interested in finding out any more about the articles in this newsletter or about ISER's work, please contact Louise Clarke Cullen at [lcullen@essex.ac.uk](mailto:lcullen@essex.ac.uk)

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