

MANCHESTER  
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The University of Manchester

# School of Social Sciences Research Showcase

**Researching Inequalities:**  
interdisciplinary perspectives  
and potentials

June 2024





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## An introduction from the School's Director of Research



Visit Andy's research profile



This booklet documents the proceedings and content of the inaugural annual Research Showcase event in the School of Social Sciences. The organising themes of this Showcase were chosen to reflect both the School's core business of research into and around inequalities – making it open to as many people as possible - and one of our strategic research priorities, which is to encourage more interdisciplinary working, both across the social sciences at Manchester, and beyond.

The final programme featured 16 speakers, including representatives from all eight departments in the School, who presented cutting-edge work on inequalities in the context of communities and housing, race and religion, gender, consumption, through the global supply chains and the dynamics of vulnerability, and across the life course. A closing panel of experts on interdisciplinary research, attached to School and Faculty research centres and institutes, then discussed both the challenges of working across disciplines and the opportunities this opens up for producing research that can better address key societal challenges.

In addition to highlighting the substantive themes of the Showcase, the day was also about bringing people together at the end of the academic year to celebrate the excellence and breadth of research that goes on in SoSS. More than 100 people attended the event, taking to the opportunity to meet and network with colleagues from different parts of the School, and starting conversations that might lead to new ideas, collaborations and projects in the future.

I would like to thank all presenters, panelists, chairs and the audience for their contributions on the day as well as those involved in producing and supporting the event.

**Professor Andy Miles**

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## A message from the Head of School



Visit Claire's research profile



This year's pilot showcase was a chance for colleagues from across the School to come together and share their research, and begin a dialogue around what interdisciplinarity looks like. It is the start of a conversation, and we hope to follow this up in future years. It was also a reminder of the range of brilliant, groundbreaking research happening across the School and of which we are rightly proud.

**Professor Claire Alexander**



## Housing and Community



Chair

**Dr Caroline Miles,  
Senior Lecturer in Criminology**

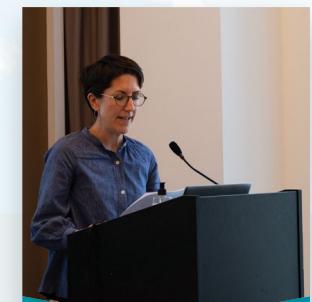
*'The opening panel on housing and communities featured three fascinating presentations exploring the lives of people living in compromised housing in the UK and internationally.'*

*'Common themes across the presentations included poverty, inequality and resilience, as well as the importance of engaging ethically with individuals and communities experiencing housing crises.'*

Visit Caroline's  
research profile



**Dr Constance Smith, Lecturer in Social Anthropology –**  
The afterlives of housing disasters in the UK and Kenya



Visit Constance's  
research profile



In her ongoing UKRI-funded project, *High-rise landscapes: afterlives of failure and rethinking urban futures*, Dr Constance Smith examines the social, political, and material aftermath of high-rise housing disasters in Nairobi and London. Combining urban anthropology with material studies, and urban design, the project sets out to engage critically with ideas of failure, foregrounding the voices of communities affected by housing disasters and recognising their expertise.

*'In 2017, a devastating fire broke out in Grenfell Tower in West London. On the same day, a seven-storey building collapsed in Nairobi. In different ways, both tragedies expose the injustices of urban politics, the volatility of construction materials and the disregard for regulations and planning.'*

*'They also provoke debates about widening urban inequalities and what a desirable and sustainable city should look like.'*



## Prof Nick Thoburn, Professor of Sociology – Brutalism as Found: housing, form, and crisis in the Robin Hood Gardens Council Estate



*Brutalism as Found* is a collaborative interdisciplinary project between Prof Nick Thoburn and photographer Kois Mia funded by the British Academy. The project focuses on the experiences of housing, architecture and demolition at Robin Hood Gardens, a Brutalist East London council estate inhabited for over 50 years by a multi-racial working-class population. Combining urban sociology, architectural theory, aesthetic philosophy and class analysis with the residents' own insights, the project seeks to impact against the stigmatisation of housing estates and their demolition.

*'In the prominent public debate about the estate's failings and impending demolition, its residents were either absent entirely or their voices were ventriloquised to support the estate's demolition. We centred the project around the inhabitants of the estate through interviews and portraits, asking about their experiences and interpretation of the estate, its social life, its architecture and their housing hopes for the future.'*

Visit Nick's research profile




## Dr Katherine Smith, Lecturer in Social Anthropology – Living with poverty and dependence in England



Dr Katherine Smith's research explores the changing dynamics of household economics in the context of austerity in England, and the everyday lives of people who live with poverty and are reliant upon state, neighbours, friends and kin for support. She critically engages with the concept of "dependence", discussing it as a relational ethic and analysing how relationships of dependence are formed, broken, and how they come to be defined as ones of dependence in the first place.

*'In the ethnographic context of Harpurhey in North Manchester, I treat dependence as a relational ethic that involves contending with and accounting for the conditions of poverty, the contingencies and choices that people navigate to make their lives liveable. By looking at "dependence", I am trying to contribute a new basis for critical engagement with one of the key rhetorical tools that is being used to restructure politics globally in the 21st century.'*

Visit Katherine's research profile





## Exploitation and Vulnerability



Chair

**Dr Iain Brassington,  
Senior Lecturer in Law**

*'These three talks were superficially on very different topics, but there was a striking consonance between them. Policies to address vulnerabilities require that we understand what we're talking about, that we can persuade stakeholders to adopt strategies that might mitigate vulnerabilities – and that we take care not to create further vulnerabilities down the line. The work shown here contributes to our understanding on all three fronts.'*

Visit Iain's research profile



**Dr Amber Darr, Lecturer in Competition Law –**  
The Sustainability Paradox: competition, modern slavery, and Global South farmers in the UK food supply chain



The Sustainability Paradox, as used by Dr Amber Darr, refers to how well-meaning sustainability informed legislation may have unintended consequences for small farmers in the Global South. By adopting standards required under the due diligence legislation, the UK led food value chains pass down to farmers the costs of meeting these obligations. Unable to bear these costs the farmers are either excluded from the chain or forced to consolidate to the detriment of their human rights, biodiversity and equality.

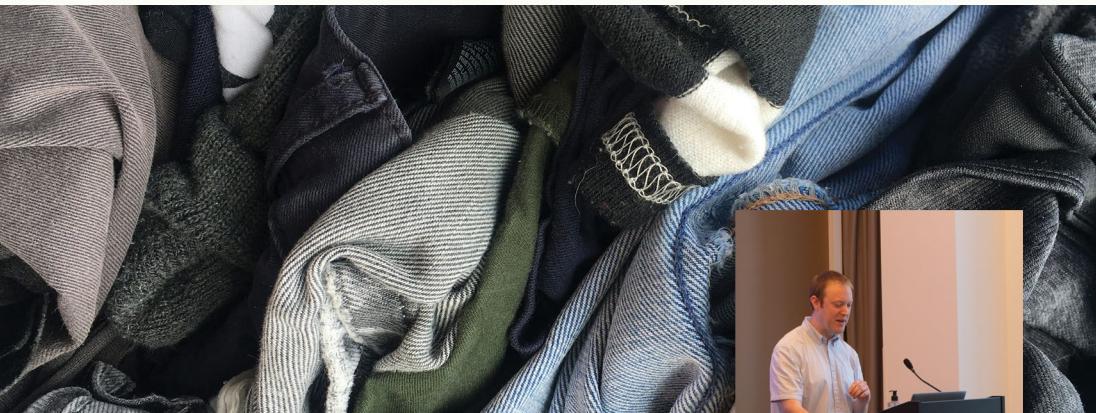
*'A lot of the focus of lead firms had missed the point that there is a human being or many human beings at the end of the supply chain that are being affected by these legislations in very practical ways. Putting the farmers in the centre of these discussions and making sure that sustainability initiatives are observed from their perspective is necessary to ensure these legislations create positive outcomes all round.'*

Visit Amber's research profile





**Dr Jonathan Davies, Lecturer in Criminology –**  
Modern slavery and digitisation in “fast fashion” supply networks: the transparency dividend



Visit Jonathan's research profile



Dr Jon Davies from the Department of Criminology collaborated with colleagues from the Department of Materials to assess the role of digital technology in preventing modern slavery in the UK's garment manufacturing industry. The lack of awareness and scepticism regarding digital tools like AI and Blockchain combined with fragmented and reactive legislation leaves workers vulnerable to exploitation and inequalities associated with fast-fashion business models.

*'Garment manufacturing workers face obstacles to experiencing decent work conditions. To cope with significant market price pressures imposed, small manufacturers tend to either downgrade their product value or lower the labour costs, which is essentially the fast fashion business model. Digital technology like Blockchain serve as a real-time ledger to increase accountability and trust across organisations. Unfortunately lack of awareness both of digital technologies and of approaches to tackling modern slavery limit the impact these technologies can have.'*



**Dr Indranil Dutta, Senior Lecturer in Economics –**  
Measuring Poverty and Vulnerability



Visit Indranil's research profile



Dr Indranil Dutta explores a novel approach to measuring poverty by incorporating the concept of vulnerability, defined as the risk of falling into poverty due to unexpected shocks. Unlike traditional measures, which focus solely on current economic conditions, this research emphasizes the ex-ante nature of vulnerability, predicting future poverty based on present circumstances.

*'This methodology provides a more comprehensive understanding of poverty, offering insights beyond the conventional frameworks, such as those used by the World Bank. It integrates poverty measurement with decision making under uncertainty. Moreover, this approach aligns closely with social policy in the UK, where housing policies, the criminal justice system, and the Care Act of 2014 all focus on supporting the vulnerable.'*



# Consumption



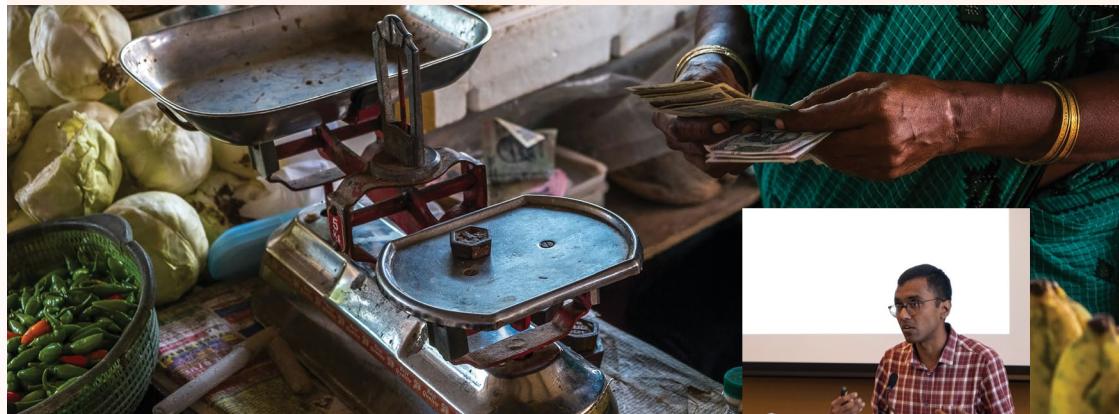
Chair  
**Prof Sophie Woodward,**  
**Professor of Sociology**

*'It was really exciting to see the potentials for interdisciplinary collaborations around research into consumption, in particular around everyday technologies and inequalities of access.'*

Visit Sophie's  
research profile



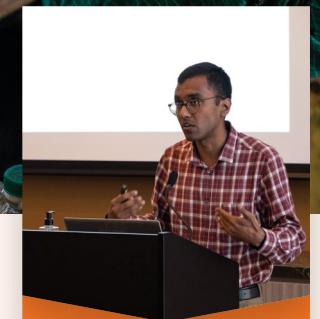
**Dr Aruni Mitra, Lecturer in Economics – Consumption inequalities in developed and developing countries**



Dr Aruni Mitra's research looks at consumption inequality in developed and developing country contexts. While the literature usually focuses on income inequality, Dr Mitra brings in the notion of consumption which not only depends on income but also on individual preferences and tastes and, by extension, the cultural and social context in which people live.

*'In the USA, we look at how inequality gets transmitted from one generation to the next. Because higher-income people have lower propensities to consume, what you find is that parents explain about 10% of inequalities in income but 30% in consumption in the children's generation.'*

*'In India, we see a different phenomenon where Scheduled Castes and Tribes are trying to catch up with the Hindu upper caste and consume more luxury items, whereas other religious minorities tend to save more. This is reinforced when crimes are committed against minorities who consume less to be invisible.'*



Visit Aruni's  
research profile





**Prof Amaresh Dubey, Hallsworth Visiting Professor and Prof Wendy Kay Olsen, Professor of Socio-Economics – Internet and digital divides by gender and social class in India**



Professor Amaresh Dubey and Professor Wendy Olsen offer an intersectional approach to the digital gender gap in India, looking at gender alongside other axes of inequalities such as caste and religion. Using data from India's household expenditure surveys (2014, 2018, 2022/23), their findings reveal significant gender gaps in ICT access, compounded by intersecting inequalities across social groups. This trend indicates a stagnation in digital inclusivity among women from minority social groups, calling for more inclusive digital policies.

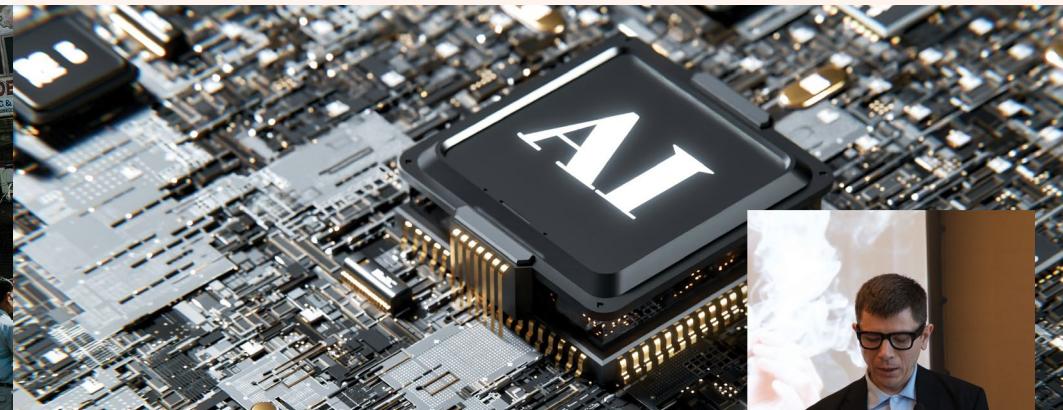
*'To address the digital gap, India has encouraged the distribution of mobiles and laptops in several states and local governments have also taken this approach. Despite these efforts, a large gender gap still exists and women from the minority social groups have seen no improvement in their access to ICT.'*



Visit Wendy's research profile



**Dr Filip Bialy, Research Associate in Politics – GPTing equality or how to be a socially responsible prosumer of Artificial Intelligence (AI)**



Dr Filip Bialy's posits that despite alarming discussions about AI, there is little political attention to its more immediate impacts on social life. His research underscores the complexity of addressing AI and equality, which encompasses treatment of different groups, distribution of AI benefits, access to digital devices, and influence over AI development and control. Dr Bialy argues against simplistic technological fixes for societal problems and emphasizes the need for proper regulation of AI development and deployment.

*'When we look at manifestos of major political parties in the UK, we see that the issue of AI is mentioned uncritically and in very vague terms. Talking about equality and AI is not only about benefits, but also about access and who controls its use and development for example. In political theory, we know that equality is a multidimensional concept and maybe politicians could use our insights to talk on this topic.'*



Visit Filip's research profile





## Race and Religion



Visit Bridget's research profile



Chair

**Prof Bridget Byrne,  
Professor of Sociology**

*'It was great to hear the three papers in this session which demonstrated the range of the important work in research on race and religion taking place in Manchester, using different methods, theoretical and disciplinary approaches and speaking to diverse communities of interest.'*



**Dr Patricia Irizar, Simon Research Fellow in Sociology –**  
The impact of racism on the mental health of ethnic minority people: direct and indirect pathways



Dr Patricia Irizar looks at the impact of racism across the life course on common mental disorders (CMD) during the COVID-19 pandemic, testing direct and indirect pathways. She uses data from the Evidence for Equality National Survey (EVENS) measuring experiences of racism across multiple domains and time periods. The data shows that chronic experiences of racism are linked to a threefold increase in the odds of CMD compared to no experiences. Additionally, racism was indirectly associated with CMD through heightened loneliness, isolation, and financial concerns.

*'What the study also found was that the type of racism experienced didn't matter, whether someone experiences hate crimes, interpersonal racism or institutional racism, the risk on mental health was the same across all domains. Chronic experiences of racism were also related to a greater risk of infection, more financial concerns, isolation; factors which, in turn, impacted mental health.'*



Visit Patricia's research profile





## Dr Andreja Zevnik, Senior Lecturer in International Politics – Antigypsyism, the last acceptable form of racism?



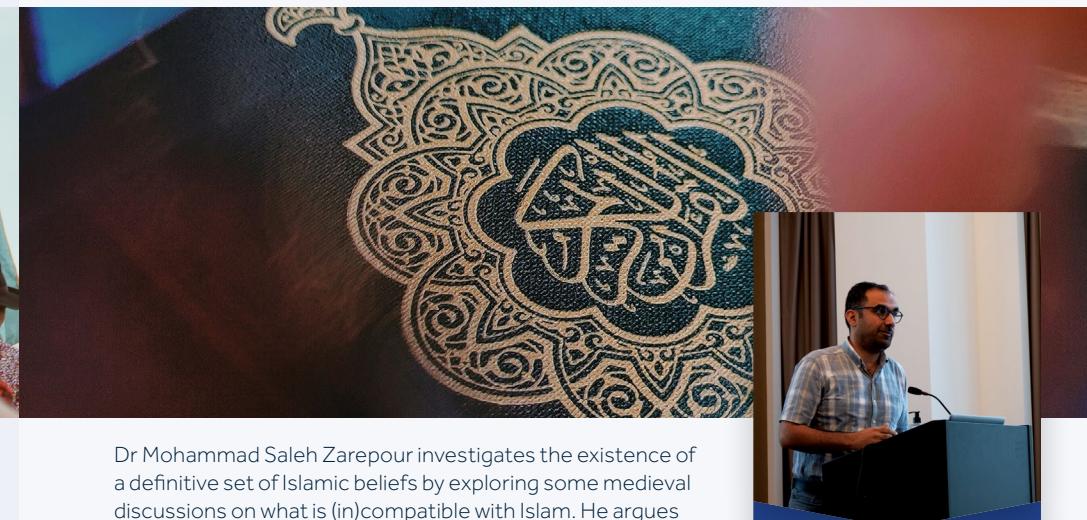
Dr Andreja Zevnik's current project aims to understand broader historical and contemporary (un)belonging of Roma in Europe and focuses on how the experience of anti-Roma racism impacts the ongoing inequalities experienced by the group. Experiences of racism by Roma people are normalised across Europe. Roma-negative representation in the media is heavily racialised but not recognised as such, instead they are framed as being about breaking the law, disrespect for majoritarian cultural values, or immigration.

*'Roma are an unbelonged community in Europe. They are the most discriminated group across the EU, and made viscerally visible by the policies and politics of the nation states. They also acutely placed or imagined as external to the European civilising narratives. Nation states are slow in adopting any meaningful legislation on antigypsyism, referring instead to discrimination, stigma and hate speech. They do not recognise antigypsyism as a specific form of racism.'*

Visit Andreja's research profile



## Dr Mohammad Saleh Zarepour, Lecturer in Philosophy – Diversity and Islamic Philosophy



Dr Mohammad Saleh Zarepour investigates the existence of a definitive set of Islamic beliefs by exploring some medieval discussions on what is (in)compatible with Islam. He argues that in some (though not all) cases and with respect to certain types of propositions, rational disagreements among epistemic peers (scholars with equal credentials) lead to scepticism about the truth of the disputed propositions.

*'By examining the diverse views of medieval Muslim philosophers regarding the claims that are essential to Islamic belief, I contend that these disagreements indicate a smaller and more varied set of universally accepted beliefs than commonly perceived, highlighting the rich diversity within the Muslim community.'*

Visit Mohammad's research profile





## The Life Course



Chair  
**Prof Mark Elliot,  
Professor in Social Statistics**

*'Kati Morosow giving her talk on paternity leave whilst holding an extremely active toddler wins an award as the most saliently contextualised talk that I have ever seen!'*

Visit Mark's  
research profile



**Dr Kingsley Purdam, Lecturer in Social Statistics**  
- Astride a grave: inequalities from beginning to end of life on low income



Dr Kingsley Purdam provided an overview of some of his research into inequalities over the life course with colleagues in the Department of Social Statistics. The research highlighted the striking inequalities from the beginning to the end of life including, for example, in birth weight, school readiness, educational outcomes, employment, financial security, civic participation, ageing, life expectancy and the affordability of funerals. Dr Purdam's use of creative visual images ensures the research reaches a wide audience.

*'The shocking inequalities across the life course including in health and life expectancy are long-term. Poverty and social inequalities are embedded in the UK society and successive governments have failed to tackle to the underlying causes. In some local areas life expectancy has stalled or even declined.'*

Visit Kingsley's  
research profile





**Dr Kathrin Morosow, Lecturer in Social Statistics –  
The impact of taking family leaves across Finnish fathers' wage distribution**



Visit Kathrin's research profile



Dr Kathrin Morosow's research looks at how taking parental leave impacts fathers' wages in Finland. The main findings of the research is that when fathers take paternity leave, there are no long-term negative effect on their wages. Solo paternal leave shows decreasing post-leave wage trajectories, but only for lower wage fathers. Dr Morosow hopes that this research will encourage fathers to take more parental leave and bridge the gender gap.

*'The motivation behind this research is that the gender revolution is not complete: women enter the workforce while still being responsible for household tasks and childrearing – a dual burden of paid and unpaid work. Mothers experience wage and career discriminations as a result of this gender imbalance. One way to counteract these negative effects is for fathers to enter the private sphere as well. If fathers were as likely as mothers to take parental leave then discrimination linked to motherhood wouldn't happen.'*



**Dr Claire Fox, Senior Lecturer in Criminology – To help or to hinder? "Troubled" youths, stigma and resilience**



Visit Claire's research profile



Dr Claire Fox's collaborative project explores young people's role in shaping society, focusing especially on young people in conflict with authority figures and critically engaging with the notion of resilience. Dr Fox argues that the actions taken by young people in those situations – such as resistance to change, passivity, or aggression – should be framed as ways that young people have developed as their own, less conventional manifestations of resilience, which help them cope with multiple challenging circumstances.

*'How these young people responded to challenges and complex relationships in their lives took various forms including alternative forms of resilience like passivity or protest. What I've been interested in is how these alternative forms of resilience can be harnessed and built upon and how these young people can be supported with more constructive interventions instead of ones that further reinforce stigmatising labels and the idea that they have failed and so on.'*



## Prof Elaine Dewhurst, Professor in Employment Law – Tackling inequalities across the life-course through art and research



Prof Elaine Dewhurst collaborated with social justice artist Suzanne Lacy, Dr Sarah Campbell, Manchester Art Gallery and an Advisory Group formed of women over 50 from Manchester's diverse communities to create The Uncertain Futures project. This participatory art and research project aims to uncover the intersectional inequalities faced by older women with respect to paid and unpaid work and create, in a collaborative way, policies which can ensure more certain futures.

*'Our participatory research methods meant that the women taking part in the project were very much involved at every stage of the project from defining the research questions, to designing the installations, analysing the data, and producing the final outputs. All the women that took part in the project also own the data, which means they were able to use the data in their own communities and impact change at a local level through community activism.'*



# Closing Panel: Reflections on the Prospects for Interdisciplinary Research in the Social Sciences



Chair

**Professor Andy Miles,  
Professor of Sociology and Research  
Director for the School of Social Sciences**

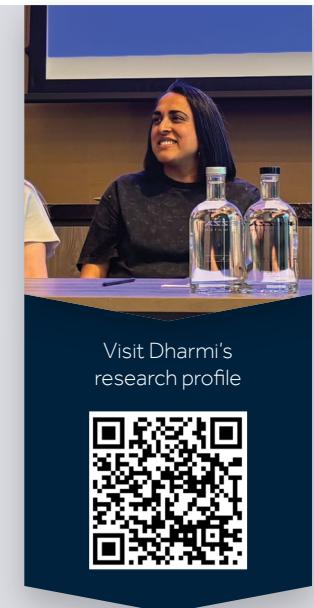
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**What are the main challenges of doing  
interdisciplinary research?**

**Dr Dharmi Kapadia, Senior Lecturer in  
Sociology, Centre on the Dynamics of  
Ethnicity (CoDE)**

*'For context, my background is in Psychology and Social Statistics, and I am interested in mental health and how race and racism impact how people get access to support. One of the benefits of interdisciplinary work is the plurality of skills that an interdisciplinary team can have. The issue is sometimes the disconnect between different agendas across a team, for example the social justice message. I am interested in sharing ideas that might not match what a doctor wants to push forward. For me it's not about the discipline: what matters is the agenda, we need to agree on why we are doing the project.'*



Visit Dharmi's  
research profile



**Prof Matthew Paterson, Professor of International Politics and Director of the Sustainable Consumption Institute (SCI)**

*'Coming from Social Sciences, interdisciplinary work with disciplines like Earth Sciences can be very advantageous as they receive a lot more funding than we do. The problem we face is one of mutual suspicion between disciplines but if we get approached by natural sciences it's worth sticking with them because they have genuine reasons for working with us. We also need to rethink the idea of authorship in the Social Sciences; the attachment to the notion of authorship as "the person holding the pen" needs to be rethought to make collaboration easier.'*



Visit Matthew's research profile

**Prof Saska Petrova, Professor in Human Geography and Research Director in Geography, School of Education Environment and Development**

*'I work on environment governance and environmental injustices, specifically energy injustices. Energy has been approached by many different disciplines. It's a complex topic, which makes interdisciplinary research very beneficial. One of the biggest challenges is the time needed to translate and discuss the multiple understandings and theorisations of key concepts and approaches used in different disciplines. Choosing an adequate journal to publish interdisciplinary work can also be a challenge as some top journals expect contributions aligned with a specific discipline and its associated scholarship.'*



Visit Saska's research profile





## What are the major areas of potential for developing interdisciplinary research in Social Sciences?

### Dr Chloe Jeffries, Research and Innovation Manager, Faculty of Humanities

*'I used to see a lot of proposals where there was a single individual saying that their work was interdisciplinary because it borrowed from lots of different disciplines. What funders are increasingly looking for instead are larger teams made of academics coming from different disciplines and framed around a problem or a challenge.'*

*'In terms of the mechanisms, a lot of the challenges are around time, language, trust, and alignment. It is difficult to build strong teams in the hurry and scurry of a funding application, so doing other kinds of groundwork is important before applying for external funding. We have increasingly good mechanisms at the University for this, like the Platforms, which help to lay the necessary groundwork for collaboration ahead of a funding call.'*

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### Dr Robert Meckin, Academic Presidential Fellow in Social Statistics, National Centre for Research Methods

*'Interdisciplinarity is a derivative concept: you need disciplines to have interdisciplinarity. It can take many forms - at an individual level, as part of a project, within a department. One of its dominant themes is a logic of innovation: collaborating to create something new. However, this is not the only logic to consider. We can think of broadening accountability or challenging ontologies as other examples. We also need to consider our different modes of engagement. Sometimes the focus is on integration or synthesis, but antagonistic interactions or providing services to other disciplines can also serve different purposes.'*

*'We are arguably in a time of proliferation, of new objects of study, as well as the idea of constant crises like with COVID 19 and AI. Interdisciplinarity offers various ways to address these issues, whether through methods or co-designing research questions and projects, or providing alternative and challenging ways of understanding issues. One idea we put forward is about locally producing a range of concepts for different disciplinary combinations to tackle as part of a wider project.'*

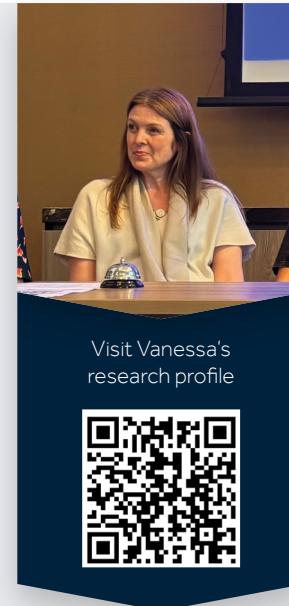
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**Dr Vanessa Higgins, Director of Training, UK Data Service, and Senior Research Fellow in Social Statistics/the Cathie Marsh Institute**

*'There are opportunities around learning interdisciplinary data skills and research methods, specifically upskilling social scientists in data skills from other disciplines (and vice versa). At the UK Data Service, we run a programme of training events and online learning to teach researchers how to use quantitative social science datasets such as large surveys or longitudinal studies – and our staff are social scientists who are highly skilled in handling these datasets.*

*When we introduced a training programme on computational social science, which involves the application of computational skills to social science problems, we hired staff from other disciplines (such as computing, data science and linguistics) to teach skills like Python, text mining, and web scraping. At first, it felt like the team members needed a glossary to understand each other but we found common ground by keeping an open mind and listening to other perspectives, not just sticking to our disciplinary viewpoints. I see many opportunities, especially funding opportunities, for cross-disciplinary data skills development.'*



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