Welcome from Director, Professor Mark Shucksmith

Newcastle University is known around the world for its vision ‘to be a world-class civic university’. Our guiding principle is ‘Excellence with a Purpose’ – understanding not just what we are good at, but what we are good for. With this in mind we seek to help address the major societal challenges of our time – ageing, sustainability and social renewal – through engaged research and teaching.

The Newcastle University Institute for Social Renewal (NISR), established in 2012, is helping to realise this vision. NISR engages in the process of renewal in three main ways: first, as a thought leader; second, through the production and dissemination of high quality research and scholarship that informs policy and practice; and third, by working on selected projects on a co-production basis with partners. Our intention is to explore new ways in which a research intensive university – its staff and students – can connect with society in order to make a difference.

We see the challenge of Social Renewal as addressing the question: how can people, communities and societies thrive when faced with rapid, transformational change? In Britain and worldwide, the impacts of globalisation, technological change, demography, and the uneven and perturbing effects of capitalism are creating challenges of great magnitude to which there are no simple or obvious responses. A crucial element of any response is to gather research-based evidence; but equally important is to deliberate and debate what we understand to be a ‘good life’ and a ‘good society’. Universities play a crucial role in both these respects.

I am often asked for examples of what we have achieved. This Annual Review reports some of the ways in which Newcastle University is pioneering a new approach, enlisting expertise across the University to help address these challenges. Three projects are highlighted in depth – the health impacts of the ‘bedroom tax’; Newcastle City Futures; and Digital Civics. But there are also many smaller stories – most activity in Newcastle University can be seen as related to Social Renewal – from civil rights to rethinking the school curriculum; from literacy to social justice; from regional innovation to food banks, wellbeing and resilience; from the local to the global.

And of course these help to connect the University’s wider strategies for research, for teaching and learning, and for engagement; and to connect the University with its partners in the city, region, nationally and internationally.

We have made good progress in 2014, but there is much more to do, especially in these challenging times. I hope that this Review will convey to you some of the innovative ways in which Newcastle University is making its contribution.

Professor Mark Shucksmith OBE, Director of NISR
Societal Challenge Themes

We are committed to ensuring our research helps to address some of the key global issues affecting society today, by focusing on three societal challenge themes, as part of our overall focus on excellence with impact.

Newcastle University Institute for Social Renewal was established to address the challenge of Social Renewal, while our counterparts the Newcastle University Institute for Sustainability and the Newcastle University Institute for Ageing are the University’s responses to the two other societal challenges.

Newcastle University Institute for Ageing

The Newcastle University Institute for Ageing is our response to the societal challenge of Ageing. We are seeking new ways to make the most of the extensive opportunities associated with increasing human longevity, while at the same time solving some of the problems. Our mission is to be a global leader in ageing research and innovation, and to translate internationally renowned research into the biological, medical and psychosocial determinants of healthy ageing across the life course into interventions that extend healthy lifespan and support active ageing.

Newcastle University Institute for Sustainability

The Institute for Sustainability provides leadership and innovation in sustainability research and demonstration with a focus on research excellence, interdisciplinarity and practical, engaged solutions to real-world sustainability issues. Sustainability can be summarised as ‘enough for all, forever’.

Research focuses on these five key areas of sustainability:
- Energy
- Food
- Transport
- Water
- Earth Systems Engineering

The focus for our research and innovation activity is on how we can “live better for longer” and addresses the big question facing society of: “How can we live better for longer in our communities and maintain our quality of life?”

More information can be found at www.ncl.ac.uk/ageing

More information can be found at www.ncl.ac.uk/sustainability

Societal Renewal as a Societal Challenge

NISR is a means of enlisting all the expertise across Newcastle University in helping to address the challenges facing society today. As one of Newcastle University’s three Societal Challenge Themes it brings to life the University vision of a civic university with a global reputation for academic excellence. The primary feature of a civic university is its sense of purpose – an understanding of not just what it is good at, but what it is good for. This means delivering benefits to individuals, organisations and to society as a whole. We work across the University, including with our Theme Champions and our NISR Ambassador, putting academic knowledge, creativity and expertise to work, to come up with innovations and solutions that make an impact.

The 10 Social Renewal Themes

- Arts and Culture in Social Renewal
- Citizenship
- Digital Innovation
- Enterprise in Society
- Health and Inequality
- Learning for Change
- The Past in the Present
- People, Place and Community
- Social Justice and Injustice
- Wellbeing and Resilience

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3 Highlights of 2014

The Newcastle University Institute for Social Renewal has had a busy 2014, with colleagues across the University engaging in an array of exciting and pioneering projects.

We worked with Newcastle City Council and Your Homes Newcastle studying the impact of welfare reforms on one of Newcastle’s poorest communities; Walker. We supported the Newcastle City Futures exhibition in June of this year, and the continued work colleagues are undertaking to help Newcastle thrive as a city region.

We also supported Newcastle University in a successful bid for a prestigious EPSRC Digital Civics Doctoral Training Centre which will explore how to support digitally connected citizens and communities and train 55 doctoral students.

You can read more about these highlights, and others, over the following pages.

The Impact of Welfare Reform

The UK Government implementation of the ‘Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy’ in April 2013, commonly known as the ‘bedroom tax’, affects an estimated 660,000 working age social housing tenants in the UK. Where tenants are deemed to under-occupy their social housing, their housing benefit is cut by 14% for the first ‘spare room’ and 24% if there are two. Around 60% of those affected have disabilities. When introduced, the Government’s official impact assessment predicted that this change would have no social impact, nor any impacts on health.

Dr Suzanne Moffatt, from the Institute of Health and Society, Newcastle University, has worked with a team to examine the impact of lowered income as a result of this tax, in a North East England community in which 68.5 per cent of residents live in social housing.

The North East, where the research was carried out, is disproportionately affected by the ‘under-occupancy tax’, with some 50,000 households estimated to be ‘under-occupying’.

The study was commissioned by Newcastle City Council and is an example of the civic university in practice, with relevance to all of our Societal Challenge Themes. It was jointly supported by Your Homes Newcastle and Newcastle University. Research team: Suzanne Moffatt, Rebecca Patterson, Sarah Lawson, Eleanor Holding, James Brown, Alice Dennison and Sarah Sowden.

Not just bricks and mortar

The research findings are very powerful; income reduction affected purchasing power for essentials, particularly food and utilities. Participants recounted negative impacts on mental health, family relationships and community networks. The hardship and debt that people experienced adversely affected their social relationships and ability to carry out normal social roles. Residents and service providers highlighted negative impacts on the neighbourhood, as well as added pressure on already strained local services.

Residents were finding it increasingly difficult to buy simple, basic foodstuffs and in some extreme cases, cutting down to just one meal a day, or going to bed early to evade hunger and keep warm – a pattern more prevalent among parents to ensure their children were properly fed.

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“Few pounds literally made the difference between falling into debt or not,” says Dr Moffatt. “Budgeting advice was offered by service providers but this could not address the underlying problem that many residents simply had insufficient money to meet basic needs.”

Monumental effort was put in by people to simply ‘survive’. Their accounts powerfully demonstrate how loss of income as a result of the bedroom tax has a detrimental effect on mental health, with many saying it had left them feeling ‘hopeless’.

Conclusion

“The bedroom tax reduces a home to simply bricks and mortar,” explains Dr Moffatt. “However, these are homes that people invest in over time, places of safety within communities that offer friendship and support. As a consequence, many of those we interviewed elected to pay the tax in order to stay in their homes, resulting in cutting back on essentials such as food and heat to do so.

“Rather than improve housing stock efficiency and save tax payers money, the effect of the bedroom tax in the North East is likely to make the distribution of social housing less efficient, encouraging a short-term approach that is unsustainable and disrupts communities.”

The Trussell Trust – volunteers sort and pack loose food into emergency food boxes

Aerial view of Newcastle and Gateshead

Welfare Reform praised

A flawed framework

As part of their research, Dr Moffatt’s team also took each of the Government’s suggestions for mitigating the effects of the bedroom tax: downsizing, taking in a lodger, getting a job or increasing working hours – and found them all nearly impossible to achieve.

Most people taking part in the study did not consider their home as ‘too large for their needs’ as many needed the flexibility to accommodate family, e.g. accommodating children in part-time custodial arrangements, siblings of different ages and needs, or having room for carers or couples who sleep apart due to health problems.

There is a shortfall of one-bedroomed properties in the North East, which seriously limits options to downsize, with estimates of four households competing for each property. “The reality is that residents did not have the money to pay the bedroom tax but could not easily re-locate to avoid paying it,” explains Dr Moffatt.

The Government’s other suggestion of taking in a lodger raises issues about legal contracts and also a loss of privacy, along with safeguarding issues, particularly in homes with children and vulnerable adults.

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The Trussell Trust – volunteers sort and pack loose food into emergency food boxes

Aerial view of Newcastle and Gateshead

Welfare Reform praised
The Future of Cities: a Newcastle perspective

One of the highlights of 2014 was the Newcastle City Futures exhibition and the Newcastle Urban Foresight study which ran alongside it. These pioneered a new method to think about the future of cities and have led to enhanced collaborative working between Newcastle University, Newcastle City Council, and a range of other organisations both across Tyneside and in government. The concentration of expertise at Newcastle University in urban and regional change, planning, public participation and social science analysis is being put to use to shape the future prosperity of Newcastle.

Using the past to imagine the future

The Newcastle City Futures exhibition and events programme took place in the Grade I Listed Guildhall, next to the iconic Tyne Bridge, in May and June 2014 and was led by Professor Mark Tewdwr-Jones of Newcastle University’s School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape.

Over the 19 days of the exhibition, there were:
- 2,400 visitors
- 24 free events at the Guildhall
- 22 different partners involved, including Tyne and Wear Museums, Nexus Metro, Amber Film & Photography Collective and the Royal Townsend Planning Institute (RTP)

The multi-media exhibition explored examples of development from Newcastle’s recent past, including the famous 1960s architecture envisioned by then City Council leader T. Dan Smith, and surprising proposals from recent years which were never built like the ‘Tyne Dock’ construction over the river Tyne.

The fascinating examples, artefacts, drawings, photographs, films and models of Newcastle past, present and future, served as a prompt to dialogue and discussion allowing people to think about what Newcastle could and should be like in the next 50 years. A ‘partners’ space’ and debating forum within the exhibition area helped generate involvement in allowing public dialogue to occur between citizens and some of the key agencies and service providers in the city.

Having these discussions in one neutral setting provided a platform for true civic engagement, where residents, businesses, tourists, professionals could all reflect and look forward to ways in which the city, its infrastructure and built environment might develop. Visitors were asked “what would you protect?”, and a family area, events and activities encouraged all generations to participate in visions of the city.

The challenge of the city

Urban areas can be exciting and dynamic, but they also possess deeper societal changes or tensions; for example, the need for better public services, the impact of business closures amid global economic challenges, changes in the housing market, the needs of minority groups, and the implications of an ageing population. The democracy of cities where new services, agencies, businesses and communities can emerge (or be subsumed) is their strength and their potential weakness. Finding a way to help the many aspects of cities thrive, and allow citizens a voice in the change, is a challenge that all three Theme Institutes are tackling.

Responding to the challenge: The need to look ahead

The Government’s Chief Scientist, Sir Mark Walport, commissioned Professor Mark Tewdwr-Jones and Professor John Goddard of Newcastle University to lead research to focus on medium and long term trends facing the Greater Newcastle city region, as part of a national project entitled the “Foresight Future of Cities”. Newcastle University has played a pivotal role in bringing stakeholders together, facilitating the exchange of data and of expertise.

This networked, multi-disciplinary approach to research has addressed a key challenge for cities. It has unlocked the information held within different discrete parts of the city, and enabled scenario planning to look ahead, employing a range of innovative methods, to deliver a more joined up, multi-faceted approach to Newcastle’s future.

Following the early success of the project, Newcastle University has also been invited to lead and coordinate the ‘Foresight Future of Cities Research Network’ involving Manchester University, Liverpool University, Cardiff University, Bristol University and University College London. This will compare innovative approaches to city futures to roll out new forms of civic engagement, and consider new relationships between universities and the cities in which they are located.

Working in partnership

Building from the Newcastle City Futures Exhibition and the “Foresight Future of Cities” research, Newcastle University and Newcastle City Council have established three key research impact and dissemination policy mechanisms:
- The Newcastle 2020 Initiative
- The City Futures Development Group (chaired by Mark Tewdwr-Jones)
- Newcastle Policy Cabinets

These fora link research findings to policy choices, continue dialogue on challenges and opportunities facing the city region, create a strong pathway between academic research and evidence based decision making, and foster collaborative arrangements for future research projects. This links back to influential work by Prof John Goddard (Centre for Urban and Regional Development Studies) on the role of higher education bodies as anchor institutions in their cities and regions, which can add value through skills, investment, brokering, advice and civic leadership.

Through the work of our colleagues, the expertise within Newcastle University is being applied to have an impact in the city and region.

Research excellence being applied in practice

Newcastle University’s urban research is led by the School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape and the School of Geography, Politics and Sociology. Newcastle University’s School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape is graded 4th in the UK for research intensity and research power. The results of the Research Excellence Framework (REF2014) graded 85% of its work as world-leading (4*) or internationally excellent (3*), and the School of Geography is graded as 82% of its work as world-leading or internationally excellent.
Digital Civics

Whether it is through the redesign of local services with communities, or rethinking how citizens can and do interact with local government, technology innovation and design has a critical role to play in enabling digitally connected citizens and communities.

Led by Centre co-directors Prof Patrick Olivier and Prof Pete Wright, of the School of Computing Science’s Digital Interaction Group, the EPSRC Centre for Doctoral Training (CDT) in Digital Civics at Newcastle University is training doctoral students in the design, deployment and evaluation of community-driven digital technologies and services.

Integrated approach

The EPSRC CDT in Digital Civics is a unique partnership between Newcastle University, Newcastle City Council, Gateshead Council and Northumberland County Council, and a range of local, national and global industry and third sector partners. The CDT delivers a programme of intensive training, internships at some of the world’s leading universities and companies, and projects that involve local citizens, communities and local governments working together to deliver innovative digital civics research.

Citizens not consumers

Traditional thinking in public service provision casts citizens as service consumers, local government as information providers, and digital technology as a broadcast information medium. The digital civics vision is that by working with local councils and local citizens on locally embedded and responsive demonstrator projects, we can create a participatory imaginary in which both citizens and local government can explore the value of an alternative model of service provision. By placing local citizens at the centre of the research, the EPSRC CDT in Digital Civics creates possibilities for new relationships between citizens, local councils, and NGOs and new relational models of local service provision that are supported by digital technologies. By harnessing the potential of social media, participatory film making, and digitally enabled interactions such as crowd sourcing and online deliberation, the EPSRC CDT in Digital Civics enables an innovative and dynamic approach to engaging individuals, communities and publics in civic life.

Cross-disciplinary research is very much at the core of what we’re doing – we all bring different perspectives, and, all have different interests. Researching how town planning and technology can move forward is a challenge, but an exciting one.

This programme seemed to be ideal as it allowed me to combine several of my interests: digital technologies, community engagement, and learning. On the one hand, the taught modules allowed me to develop a narrower research interest, while on the other I was given independence in choosing the research topic and methodology.

Angelika Strohmayer, Digital Civics Doctoral Student

Some current Digital Civics research topics:

- Sharing and exploring experiences of service provision for people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
- Young people, sexual health and social media
- Technology platforms to support Open Finance
- Designing support networks for wellbeing with young people who are experiencing homelessness
- The Politics of DIY and MakerSpaces
- Technologies for Rare Disease Advocacy
- Social media to support cervical screening
- Digital media to support community learning in cross-cultural settings
- Embedded technologies to measure gaze and attention
- Interactive public displays and participatory budgeting
- Digital technologies for participatory town planning

Key Facts

- EPSRC £4.7 million award.
- Cross-disciplinary, including human-computer interaction (Digital Interaction Group), planning (Global Urban Research Unit), public health (Institute for Health and Society), education (Centre for Learning and Teaching) and security (Centre for Cybercrime and Computer Security) amongst others.
- Minimum of 55 doctoral students will be trained over 8 years.
- 4 application domains: public health, social care, community learning; and local democracy;
- 4 cross-cutting digital capabilities human-computer interaction; ubiquitous and social computing; participatory design; and security, privacy and trust.

Conclusion

The great value of the CDT in Digital Civics is its 8-year timescale. It is only through long-term relationships that the potential of new technologies offering new relational models of citizen participation in local government can be realised.

I always wanted to do something that made me feel challenged. I wanted to feel like I could do something that could help others, or make a difference to people’s lives.

Ian Johnson, Digital Civics Doctoral Student

FeedFinder: An early example of Digital Civics approach

The promotion of breast feeding is a major issue for UK public health practitioners, and of particular concern in the North East of England. Madeline Balaam from the Digital Interaction Group undertook to research this issue and explore ways in which Digital Civics could respond. Through a series of workshops, in which young mothers shared their experiences of breast feeding, the team was able to identify a range of issues the young mothers’ concerns about where they can breastfeed comfortably and safely when away from their homes. In response, the team developed FeedFinder, a location based review app for breast feeding mothers. FeedFinder enables mothers to: rate and review public places (e.g. cafes, parks, restaurants) where they have breastfed, share this information with other app-using mothers, and make it public on the web. The FeedFinder app now has 5000 users, 1900 rated places and 1810 reviews, showing the huge potential for citizens to create their own trusted information service. https://feed-finder.co.uk

Artwork from Newcastle University researcher Luis Hernan’s Digital Ethereal project
Further Highlights of 2014

Issues at the heart of social renewal are increasingly prevalent and, through projects such as those highlighted below, Newcastle University continues to collaborate and innovate to ensure that its research makes contributions to local, national and global communities.

- The presentation of Queen’s Anniversary Prize for our work on rural economies and societies
- Newcastle University’s entrance into the Guinness Book of World Records by turning a maths lesson into the world’s largest treasure hunt
- Professor Sugata Mitra’s launch of the SOLE centre
- Building partnerships with other ‘civic universities’ notably Cornell University and Gromingen University, and through the Civic University Study Programme

John Brewer delivers the 2014 Lord Patten Annual Lecture on Social Renewal

Professor John D Brewer (Professor of Post-Conflict Studies at Queen’s University, Belfast) delivered the 2014 Lord Patten Lecture on Social Renewal, ‘Society as a Vocation: Renewing Social Science for Social Renewal’. Championing the ethos embodied by the Civic University, Professor Brewer believes that a strong focus on moral purpose, cross-collaboration and civic engagement is something that should be embraced within any university and is essential for tangible progress that will benefit the society in which we live. As a prominent sociologist, author and principal investigator in a major cross-national project to help the victims of conflict, his argument for increasing the relevance and regeneration of social science through post-disciplinarity is compelling. He contends that, to face twenty-first century problems, society rather than science must be the focus of social-scientific practice.

A full transcript of Professor Brewer’s lecture can be read on the NISR website www.ncl.ac.uk/socialrenewal

Championing Research with Impact

The Universities of Newcastle and Durham have both been awarded Impact Acceleration Accounts worth £1.3m by the Economic & Social Research Council (ESRC). The prestigious grants are given to top UK research-intensive universities in the UK to enable academics to maximise the impact from their research. By encouraging innovative schemes like the ESRC IAA Social Renewal Open Chair scheme which will involve stakeholders in the coproduction of research around key societal challenges, the IAA is part of our ongoing commitment to continuing to engage with communities, business and policy-makers to disseminate our work and put it into practice.

Social Inclusivity in the Third Age: Enhancing Life for Seniors

In an era in which society is responsive to the wellbeing of an ageing population, the intention of this collaborative study between Newcastle University and Hartlepool’s ‘University of the Third Age’ was to investigate how older people from disadvantaged backgrounds can engage with lifelong learning, with the aim of informing practice, removing barriers and improving access and opportunities in Hartlepool and across England. Co-researchers from the University of the Third Age found the findings very interesting and useful. A large and lively audience took part in a dissemination event in June, and following this the University of the Third Age has announced that it will convene a national sub-committee to further cement improvements. The results were given a wider audience when presented to the British Society of Gerontology Conference in September.

What Price? Public Health and Welfare Reform in the North East

Since the introduction of the Bedroom Tax, nationwide debate has raged. In June, the ‘What Price?’ conference, supported by NISR, brought together academics, charity workers and members of North East councils to lead discussion to address some key issues relating to welfare reform. Dr Suzanne Moffatt and Dr Jim Brown led the way here with their presentation on the impact of welfare reform in Walker (summarised in pages 4-5). Other speakers placed this in the context of broader reforms, the restructuring of public health responsibilities and the challenges facing both the public sector and the voluntary sector under policies of austerity.

Little Heresies Lecture Series

These lectures in Newcastle University Business School are designed to engage, provoke and introduce practical solutions to a number of popular heresies. Introduced to challenge the widespread use of performance measures in business, this series of lectures is fast becoming established as a key platform in which to contest conventional views of public sector management more broadly.

To date, the Little Heresies lecture series has covered a wide range of issues such as the inadequacies of the current trend towards outcome-based performance management; the shortcomings of using statistics to measure wellbeing; the negative financial implications of procurement practices; the unacknowledged benefits of ensuring the health and wellbeing of offenders; and the skewed priorities which can arise when branding public sector organisations. Through the unique style of each individual speaker, the lectures have opened up important debates into how far common public sector practices are inadvertently damaging the vulnerable in society.

With more interesting topics in the pipeline, a new series of lectures will run throughout the coming year.

[Professor Mark Shucksmith and Mr. Jeremy Phillipson, Newcastle University]
[Newcastle University Guinness World Record for largest treasure hunt – maths walk on Newcastle quayside]
[Social Inclusivity in the Third Age event]
Ten Years After the North East Assembly Referendum 2004: Where Next?

In light of the Scottish Independence Referendum and the controversial introduction of ‘Metro Mayors’ into key English heartlands, systems of governance throughout the UK have never been more in the spotlight. Ten years on from the referendum which rejected a Regional Assembly in the North East, the panel debate ‘10 Years After the North East Assembly Referendum 2004: Where Next?’ was held in November to explore the ways in which devolution might still play a vital part in the future of the North East and, taking into consideration the ever-changing systems of governance, what form potential changes should take. Academics, business leaders, politicians and journalists came together to share their progressive ideas and debate the practical limitations which may stand in the way of future imaginations of governance.

The Martin Luther King Peace Committee: WW1 Christmas Truces

To mark the centenary of WW1, the MLKPC has engaged the community on a large scale, by leading key discussions such as ‘How should churches mark the First World War?’ and by publishing a wide range of resources for both teachers and church groups which challenge learners to interact with the subject matter in a variety of interesting ways. These materials are available for free download. Co-convenor of the MLK Peace Committee Dr Nick Megoran argues that, rather than glamourising war, the WW1 truces show a commonality of spirit which was hailed by critics as ‘an intelligent assessment of the impact that the substantive work of the Centre for Rural Economy has gained international acclaim over the years by tackling difficult topics including the issue of land-use in rural areas, the changing relationships between urban and rural society, the impact of foot and mouth disease and the need to address social exclusion within rural communities. The University will continue to work to ensure that this type of innovative and effective knowledge exchange brings direct results for society at a local, national and international level.

10 Downing Street Visit and Party Conferences

Following its success with the Queen’s Anniversary Prize, the Centre for Rural Economy was invited to 10 Downing Street to discuss its new report, ‘Reimagining the rural: What’s Missing in UK Rural Policy?’, with the Prime Minister’s staff. Having already been launched at the Conservative Party Conference earlier in October by Professor Mark Shucksmith, it was well-received. The report outlines problems and potential solutions relating to a broad range of rural issues, such as a lack of access to affordable housing, higher levels of fuel poverty, and the detrimental effects of insufficient mobile and broadband coverage. It is positive to see key issues relating to rural development and a plethora of possible solutions being delivered directly into the hands of policymakers; an indication of the impact that the substantive work of the Centre for Rural Economy will continue to have.

Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE)

In April, Professor Mark Shucksmith was appointed to the Board of Trustees for ACRE, the national body that works with rural community councils and others at a local level to support rural communities across England and to influence policymakers on rural matters. Professor Shucksmith was also the keynote speaker at the ACRE conference in November, addressing the question of ‘Why Rural Matters - The Case For Investment’.

Queen’s Anniversary Prize

In February, Newcastle University’s longstanding commitment to rural research was recognised when its work on ‘Places of Possibility: Towards Sustainable Rural Economies and Societies’, led by the Centre for Rural Economy, was awarded the Queen’s Anniversary Prize. Presented to the Vice Chancellor and Prof Philip Love by Her Majesty The Queen at Buckingham Palace, with Mark Shucksmith, Guy Garrod and other staff and students in attendance, this award was the culmination of over 21 years of cross-cutting research and was a great honour to all involved.

Our Centre for Rural Economy has gained international acclaim over the years by tackling difficult topics including the issue of land-use in rural areas, the changing relationships between urban and rural society, the impact of foot and mouth disease and the need to address social exclusion within rural communities. The University will continue to work to ensure that this type of innovative and effective knowledge exchange brings direct results for society at a local, national and international level.

Maths for Children: a Guinness World Record!

Newcastle University soared into the record books in July when it held the world’s largest treasure hunt. This ‘maths walk’ was designed to let participants uncover the hidden secrets of the Newcastle-Gateshead Quayside, with specific focus given to elements of maths in the surrounding scenery. Covering iconic locations such as Baltic Square and the Millennium Bridge, participants had to answer questions to progress through the challenge. This enhanced their engagement with, and understanding of, their local landscape while allowing students, parents and teachers to experience mathematics in a new way. The event was organised by Steve Humble (‘Dr Maths’) from Newcastle University in association with The Baltic and The Centre for Life and attracted over 1000 children, more than doubling the previous treasure-hunt record. In his new book, ‘How to be Inventive When Teaching Primary Mathematics’, Steve Humble challenges teachers to think about how they can support children’s mathematical memories and his record-breaking treasure hunt exemplifies the possibilities of embedding learning in meaningful ways.

Public Lecture: Sir Peter Hall

Good Cities and Better Lives: How Europe Discovered the Lost Art of Urbanism

In one of his last lectures, Sir Peter Hall, Bartlett Professor of Planning and Regeneration at University College London, honoured Newcastle University by giving a lecture on ‘Good Cities, Better Lives’ in May. A distinguished academic who was revered throughout his lifetime for his work in town planning, he argued that regional redevelopment in its current state is completely ineffective and results in widespread inequality within society. Always forward-thinking, he highlighted the success of innovative structures across Europe, notably those of Scandinavia, Germany and the Netherlands, and outlined the ways in which their examples of best practice can be used as a model by others. Sadly, Sir Peter Hall died later in the year, but he is remembered at Newcastle University for his ability to engage any audience in his complex ideas through his approachable and practical style, and for his lifelong contributions to society and to planning.

An audio recording of this lecture can be found at www.ncl.ac.uk
From the local... Working with Communities

The Newcastle University Institute for Social Renewal’s engagement with local communities and issues pertinent to the North East reflects our commitment to address these issues in our academic work, drawing on knowledge outside academia. We are pleased to have worked during 2014 with a wide variety of organisations, community and voluntary groups, businesses and policy makers on local projects.

Beyond Frontiers

The North East has a long history of mobility and exchange, but local communities often lack the opportunity to talk about their differences and celebrate the knowledge, ideas and beliefs that newcomers bring to the region. In 2014, a sandpit event was held in the Great North Museum to explore the ways in which Newcastle University academics could help to enable local schools and other partner institutions to promote mutual respect and understanding through workshops and classroom-based activities. Beyond Frontiers was led by Dr Joseph Skinner (School of History, Classics and Archaeology), and the goal was to devise a suite of cross-curricula activities that might allow schoolchildren to explore questions of cultural difference in the comparatively “neutral” environment of Graeco-Roman antiquity. The discussions allowed University academics to collaborate with school teachers, the Great North Museum and local service-providers catering for refugees, in order to change attitudes and promote respect. A pilot project with West Jesmond Primary School is taking this work forward in 2015.

Lyrical Labours: Mining Poetry in the North East

The culture of the North East of England is deeply embedded in its industrial heritage, with a rich tradition of folk songs, broadsides, and ballads relating to everyday life both in the mining communities and more generally. However, for too long this has been associated negatively with economic decline and folk nostalgia. Much of this has been preserved in ballad collections of antiquarians such as John Bell’s Rhymes of Northern Bards (1812) and the Newcastle songbooks of the Gateshead printer John Marshall. In order that the North East can have a satisfactory repository of this literature and culture, the Lyrical Labours project was launched to survey and understand the interesting, little-known, and perhaps, then and now little-perceived textual culture of the region, and to document its evidence in ballad collections. An exhibition was also created and on show at various venues in the region.

Oral Histories of Readers in North-East England

The North East has historically been one of the most literate places in the world. It is more important than ever to remember this, when librarians in the region are facing cuts and low literacy rates at the national level are hitting the headlines. This project, led by Professor Jennifer Richards (School of English Literature, Language and Linguistics), is adding to this story the reading experiences of people who live here today. Over a period of six months, a collection of short audio interviews were made with members of the public, who were invited to contribute their experiences and thoughts about reading at a series of drop-in recording days held at Newcastle Gateshead libraries. This was the first time that readers in Newcastle and Gateshead had been invited to record their personal experiences of reading in this way. Part of the Cities of Reading consortium, this project is creating an understanding of reading habits today and will provide a platform for further work within the region.


The recent exponential increase in number of and reliance on food banks has put food poverty at the centre of political debates and media commentary on social justice and citizenship in the UK. Even so, these debates are often focused on families with young children and take less account of the impact of food poverty on older people. The Foodscapes, Identities and Ageing project, led by Professor Elaine Campbell and Dr Kirsten Gibson (School of Geography, Politics and Sociology), engaged six older residents (aged 45 to 63 years: 3 men, 3 women) and captured their experiences of food banks using interview, visual, biographical and observational data. This pilot research generated a rich portfolio of photographic imagery – a total of 145 images – which powerfully documents the day-to-day realities of living on the breadline. More recently, this project has culminated in a workshop in association with Food Newcastle called Tackling Food Poverty Together, which brought together stakeholders and aimed to turn the research into future policy and practice.

North East Together networking events

There are many people in the North East working to create social change – people who have recognised social injustice and are seeking to address it within their communities, organisations or the social systems in which we live and work. Professor Rob Wilson and Dr Toby Lowe, from the Centre for Knowledge, Innovation, Technology and Enterprise (KITE) in Newcastle University Business School, have developed a network for collective exploration of the important social issues facing the North East, called Network for Leaders of Social Change. The focus of this NSRF-funded project is to provide a forum for such leaders to learn from one another. The launch event, held in November 2014, enabled participants to form working groups on the topics identified as requiring collective action. The Network is expanding its workshops in 2015, encouraging ongoing dialogue and knowledge exchange.

NISR funding enabled OLaT to work with staff and students to explore how space is currently used and the possibilities for change. As a result, school users were able to understand how the school is experienced, and some consistent problems were revealed. As well as clarifying what is needed, this contributed to increasing evidence that limited physical space may have a negative impact on children’s learning. Because teacher decisions about appropriate learning activities are constrained by the space available.

Mapping Print Culture in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1571 – 1790: Musical Print Culture in Early Modern Newcastle

By 1800, Newcastle was a major national printing centre; but the rich history of its bookselling culture has not been fully told. Dr Kirsten Gibson began to explore the printed music of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as an attempt to recover the musical narrative and create an important new record of Newcastle’s publishing past. The project achieved this by documenting evidence of musical activity, music publishing and the sale and circulation of printed music, and is contributing to the preparation of a large, cross-disciplinary project on Newcastle’s early print history (‘Mapping Musical Print Culture’). Already, the research has been presented at the ‘Musical Life Outside London, 1500–1800: Networks, Circulation, Sources’ Study Day (co-convened by Dr Kirsten Gibson, Dr Staph Carter and Dr Roz Southey). A dynamic, open access web map will make the research widely accessible by documenting the libraries, bookshops, bookkeepers, printers, publishers, subscribers and readers of early modern Newcastle.
...To the global
International Learning

A critical part of the impact of the Newcastle University Institute for Social Renewal is our global consciousness. We aim to take our local knowledge and apply it for truly international significance. From the local to the global, Social Renewal is leading the way in international learning and engagement.

Cornell Partnership
In August 2014 Newcastle University signed a strategic partnership agreement with Cornell University aimed at mutual learning to support our shared commitment to excellence with a purpose. Our role as a world-class civic university resonates with Cornell’s unique status as both an ‘Ivy League’ and land-grant university with a public service ethos. At this stage specific collaborations will include: sustainability, rural studies; and translational research. Professor Mark Shucksmith, has worked with colleagues in Cornell for many years and in November he joined our Vice-Chancellor and Pro-Vice-Chancellor in discussions at Cornell.

Groningen University
Newcastle University works closely in several areas with the University of Groningen, who collaborate with us in the civic university study project (see page 18). Since 2011 their Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities has promoted interdisciplinary work on the challenge of ‘Sustainable Society’, in terms of inclusion, cooperation and resilience. We have begun discussions during 2014 with the Director of this Sustainable Society Institute, Sharon Smit, and we hope to build further cooperation with colleagues in Groningen in the future.

Territorial Indicators of Poverty and Social Exclusion
A research project on Territorial Indicators of Poverty and Social Exclusion in Europe (TIPS2) was the first comprehensive and systematic attempt to identify and map regional patterns of poverty and social exclusion across Europe. The team devised four domains to establish a clearer picture of social exclusion: earning a living, access to services, social environment, and political participation. Mark Shucksmith, Ali Madanipour and Hilary Talbot drew out several implications for EU policy: for example, reliance on GDP and average income as indicators gives an incomplete picture and leads to partially informed policy that is ‘territorially blind’. Professor Shucksmith presented the findings to an audience of EU policymakers in Rome in December.

Honorary Degrees
Since Martin Luther King was awarded an Honorary Degree in 1967, Newcastle University has a long history of awarding honorary degrees to those seeking social justice. In December the University honoured British philanthropist Paul Marshall, co-founder of the international children’s charity Absolute Return for Kids (ARfK).

Democratising Water Governance and Management
It is widely recognised that we face a global water crisis, particularly affecting our poorest countries. However, this crisis is not the result of water scarcity or a lack of technology and expertise in the efficient management of water. Professor José Esteban Castro (School of Geography, Politics and Sociology) and Dr Jaime Amezaga (School of Civil Engineering and Geosciences) formed the WATERLAT research network and more recently the EU-funded DESAFIO project in order to bring together global partners who could work to remove structural inequalities in access to water.

This research has influenced and shaped public policy at the federal, national and municipal levels in Brazil and elsewhere in Latin America, translating into a wide variety of campaigns, policy frameworks and activities by governmental and non-governmental organisations alike. It contributed to the first legal framework for sanitation in Brazil (the Brazilian federal Basic Sanitation Act) and first National Plan for Basic Sanitation. In August 2014, the International Seminar on Socio-environmental Conflicts related to Essential Water and Sanitation Services was held in Colombia, featuring roundtable led by Professor Castro and Dr Amezaga.

Self-Organised Learning Environments
Following the success of his innovative ‘hole-in-the-wall’ experiment and the subsequent award of the $1 million TED Prize, Professor Sugata Mitra (School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences) has spread his idea for Self-Organised Learning Environments (SOLEs) across the globe. The first learning lab, where schoolchildren could experiment and solve problems with minimal teacher intervention, was set up in Newcastle, but several more Schools in the Cloud have been established in India through 2014. Now, the flagship centre in West Bengal has been launched, called Area Zero, and its aim is to push the boundaries of learning in the 21st century using technology and prompting children to teach themselves.

SOLEs have been set up in schools across five continents, and the SOLE toolkit has been downloaded 67,000 times, revolutionising the learning experience for children all over the world. When he asked a group of Indian children what they would use Skype for if they had it, they asked for a granny in England to read them stories. As a result, Professor Mitra has taken his project forward in “the Granny Cloud”, engaging 75 retired teachers in assisting children’s learning across the internet.

1. Cornell University, stock image
2. Academiestuifmeule Riethoven, available under a Creative Commons Attribution Licence, Flickr
3. Democratising water governance in Brazil project
4. Schoolchildren in India take part in Self-Organised Learning Environment (SOLE)
Social Renewal in Action

The Civic University Study Programme

Eight civic universities from across Europe have come together to establish the Civic University Project. This collaborative programme allows principal academics to reflect on, and improve, their experiences in order to shape the future direction of the civic university. At a symposium hosted by the Vice Chancellor at Newcastle University, successes and challenges were discussed, as were opportunities for societal engagement which may yet be capitalised on. Each university is now developing its own paper on the issues yielded by this programme, which will then be collated into a new book, The Civic University: the Policy and Leadership Challenges. List of participating universities: Newcastle, UCL, Amsterdam and Groningen in the Netherlands, Aalto and Tampere in Finland and Trinity College Dublin and Dublin Institute of Technology in Ireland.

Gypsy, Roma and European Traveller Learning: A Reciprocal Experience

In England, student attainment in schools is lower for children from Roma and traveller backgrounds than for others, and the EU Council recently implemented a framework for National Roma Integration Strategies in the midst of growing concerns about inequality amongst migrant Roma populations across Europe. It is therefore clear that specific strategies are needed in order to support the education of traveller communities. To address this issue, Dr Heather Smith has designed a study into Gypsy, Roma and European Traveller Learning. This focuses predominantly, but not exclusively, on Roma families in the region. It aims at engaging both students and their parents in the English education system through an exciting variety of digital linguistic exercises; which will not only build their accessibility to education, but confidence in the system itself. However, the outcome of the workshop and presentation ended on a more positive note for the future: by examining the era when the idea of Europe was underpinned by colonialism and violence, there is the opportunity for society to create a new European memory that moves past a fixation with the Nation State and, instead, is based on the ethics of responsibility on a worldwide scale.

Teaching Education for Social Justice

In recognition of the inequalities that exist between children from different social backgrounds and the worsening of these differences by the current education system, a key part of PGCE teacher training is a student-led reflective essay. This encourages students to evaluate how transformative practices can be used to overcome the barriers to social justice which they encounter daily in their classrooms. Now, for the first time, through the work of Dr Hanneke Jones, Dr Gail Edwards and Dr Heather Smith, the astute reflections of over 90 PGCE students have been collated, key themes and running concerns within them have been disseminated, and compelling ideas have been recorded in order to inform and improve future teacher training. The findings were presented and discussed at the British Education Research Conference in London, 2014, and at the Centre for Learning and Teaching (CfLaT) showcase in February 2015, held by the School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences (ECLS). These events were attended by teachers, academics and policymakers; those professionals best placed to make a real impact on teacher education, thereby ensuring the biggest possible effect on the learning experiences of future generations of disadvantaged children.

Italy, Germany and the New Adriatic World

During the major European conflicts of the 20th century, aggressive societal and institutional attitudes towards land borders and national identity were seen to play a significant and devastating part. Then, as the continent reconstructed itself and moved forward towards a new millennium, popular belief assumed that we had learned our lessons and moved on. Not so. On the 70th Anniversary of the Second World War, Professor Tim Kirk (Newcastle University) and Professor Paolo Ferrari ( Udine University) hosted a workshop and exhibition which proposed that the territorial legacy of the war years is still alive and well throughout Europe. Animated discussions during the workshop highlighted the fact that national borders and identity - the ideals which were once used to justify violence and occupation - still have prevalence in any conversation relating to an integrated modern-day Europe. However, the outcome of the workshop and presentation ended on a more positive note for the future: by examining the era when the idea of Europe was underpinned by colonialism and violence, there is the opportunity for society to create a new European memory that moves past a fixation with the Nation State and, instead, is based on the ethics of responsibility on a worldwide scale.

Literacy in Prisons

Due to the segregated position of prisons in our society, public attitudes towards inmates come largely from the media. As a consequence, important and complex issues can be simplified and manipulated according to the varying agendas of the day. Richard Armstrong, an employee within the education department of one of the UK’s largest prisons and a Newcastle University student seeks to paint a fuller picture through his research paper, ‘A case study of prisoners’ communication and literacy skills’.

His study into literacy within prisons is innovative in several ways: as a prison worker he has time and access to far more data than other researchers, resulting in more substantive analysis; his position, helping offenders into educational and vocational work, gives him well-rounded first-hand knowledge of the barriers that are in place, an example of which are the lack of placements available to inmates despite their willingness and ability to participate; and, unusually, he analyses literacy among adult offenders rather than adolescent offenders. His work will help to ensure that the education and employment provisions that directly influence rehabilitation stem from reality rather than misconception.

‘Wellbeing’ as part of the Little Heresies Seminar Series

In a society increasingly governed by measurements and statistics, Dr Karen Scott, Theme Champion of Social Renewal’s Wellbeing and Resilience, gave her audience food for thought when she presented ‘The truth about wellbeing and the trouble with measurement’ as part of the Little Heresies lecture series in July. She noted a global preoccupation with measuring wellbeing, yet broke down the meaning of wellbeing in our individual lives to show that it is an intangible and multifaceted state. Most importantly, she discussed how governmental reliance on measurement can be used to justify the status quo while ignoring the many nuances that add to wellbeing in its true, subjective sense. In this way, ‘measuring’ wellbeing can excuse inaction and damage progress.

In 2014, her work in this field led to Dr Scott being invited to advise the Government of Northern Ireland on their Wellbeing policies.

Political Participation

One of the key ways of expressing citizenship is through political participation, particularly in helping elect representatives and leaders at all levels from national to local and European. Dr Alastair Clark (School of Geography, Politics and Sociology) has undertaken extensive research on elections and political engagement throughout the UK. He has given evidence to the Scottish Parliament on boosting election turnout at local elections, and is cited in a number of recommendations resulting from that enquiry. Most recently, his work has examined the integrity of the electoral process across Britain. He has presented this research to major international research projects, and also to the UK Electoral Commission. In 2014 he acted as an election observer in the European elections and the Scottish Independence referendum. The Referendum had unprecedented levels of participation and innovated in a number of ways but particularly by extending the vote to 16-17 year olds.

Literacy in Prisons project
Professor Jim Edwards, Social Inclusivity in the Third Age event
Newcastle University campus
Polling Station – London mayoral elections 2012 by secretlondon123, available under a Creative Commons Attribution Licence, Flickr
Newcastle University’s students not only contribute to the pursuit of knowledge within the institution, but also give up their time to volunteering opportunities and extracurricular activities within the city and the region. Enriching both themselves and the communities they invest in, 2014 has been a great year for Newcastle students taking the initiative to make a difference.

Knowledge Café: A heritage of Human Rights and marginalised voices today

Tyne-side has a rich heritage of giving a voice to marginalised groups and protecting human rights. In 2014, young people from Roma, migrant, refugee and asylum-seeker communities were given the opportunity to explore new ways to tell their stories as part of a NSF funded project led by David Barnes (School of Art and Cultures). The participants were able to explore the essentials of media literacy, and reflect on how they might further develop skills and knowledge in this field to reduce their isolation, enrich their community and pass on their acquired skills to others. The pilot project with A Living Tradition and the North Benwell Detached Youth Project (NBDYP) identified opportunities to develop a funded media project over several years in which Newcastle University journalism students will be able to disseminate their skills and knowledge to the benefit of deprived and divided communities.

McKenzie Friend Project

Victims of domestic violence are often left with nowhere to turn in emergencies, and advice can be hard to find following cuts to legal aid. It was to answer this need that the McKenzie Friend Project was launched by Jenny Johnstone (Newcastle Law School) in conjunction with the National Centre for Domestic Violence (NCDV) in 2014. The NCDV provides a free, fast emergency injunction service to survivors of domestic violence regardless of their financial circumstances, race, gender or sexual orientation. Students are trained to take statements over the phone from victims seeking an injunction, and Newcastle University (School of Modern Languages) collaborated with four pupils from Walker Technology College (WTC), and together, they produced a bi-lingual glossary and phrase booklet for Textiles studies, which became the basis of the SuccessAll Year Six Summer School in the College. It was a great opportunity for Newcastle students to pass on their skills, and participants from both institutions welcomed the collaborative and enriching experience that it offered.

Mother Tongue, Other Tongue Poetry Competition

In 2014, Student Ambassadors from Newcastle University came together with thirteen schoolchildren for a half-day workshop titled ‘Mother Tongue, Other Tongue’. The purpose for the pupils, whose first languages included Polish, Urdu and Mandarin Chinese, was the submission of a poem or piece of creative writing in a language other than English. As well as enhancing the creative writing skills of every participant, it offered a rare opportunity to introduce their respective mother tongues directly into their classroom, sharing their linguistic and cultural experiences with others along the way. The recruitment and training of Student Ambassadors bridged two schools in the University (Modern Languages and English literature, and the School of Modern Languages) and brought together undergraduate and postgraduate students as well as UK and international students, thus providing a unique collaborative experience. The winners in the ‘Mother Tongue’ and ‘Other Tongue’ categories performed their poems to an audience of 100 people as part of a national celebration in Manchester.

Bridging the Gap

Small businesses can greatly benefit by employing recent graduates, but Dr Tracy Scuny (Newcastle University Business School) and Leigh Sear (SFEDI) discovered that there are a number of barriers and challenges to small businesses and graduates working together. A key barrier was the extent of understanding amongst graduates of the world of small business and the understanding of small business owners of the ‘commercial’ value of graduates. The ‘Bridging the Gap’ project aimed to bring together small businesses and students to growth-oriented small businesses in the North East in two workshops to help overcome the barriers on both sides.

Eight businesses from different sectors, and at different stages of development, participated in each workshop, and students were able to see a wide range of business approaches as well as gaining advice for developing their own career. Participants from both groups found the experience positive, students reported that the session had challenged some of the views that they held about the opportunities in small businesses and the employers admitted that they were surprised by the energy and enthusiasm of the students. Future events are being planned.

Public Lecture: Arezu Bari, Victoria Pagan, Anthony Schrag

New Voices on Social Renewal

In May, we welcomed a new generation to Social Renewal when three PhD students from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences presented their doctoral research to a large audience in the Curtis Auditorium, as part of the University’s regular Insights series of public lectures. From an analysis of the use of international forums to tackle global inequality, to issues arising from increased informality within urban structures, to using participatory art to emancipate communities, they took us on a journey into the future. We look forward to the impact these bright minds will have in informing a broad range of future research.

SCAN

SCAN (Student Community Action Newcastle) is a vibrant and dynamic student-led charity and has grown to be an essential link between the general population of Newcastle and the students that come here every year. Based within Newcastle University Students Union (NUSU), SCAN provides a wide variety of volunteering opportunities for students, both through running its own community projects and acting as a referral service for over 70 community groups and charities across the North East.

SCAN has a high profile and influence within the local voluntary sector and offers a reliable and consistent point of reference for many partner organisations, seeking to tap into the wealth of experience, talent and skills which resides within the student population. 973 students have registered as volunteers with SCAN since October 2014, many taking part in more than one project that SCAN offers including micro-volunteering, English Conversation Groups, an Intergenerational IT project and group community gardening activities. SCAN staff have made over 1000 individual volunteer referrals to external organisations. NUSU itself also works with local schools, groups and charities, via the volunteers within Societies, through its ‘Raising and Giving’ activities and through the ‘NUSU into Schools’ project which sees sports clubs and societies delivering workshops to school children with the aim of raising aspirations.

The Spanish Textiles Project

The aim of the Spanish Textiles Project was to give University students the opportunity to engage with young people and children in Newcastle, and to promote language learning in vocational studies, something which most pupils of vocational studies are excluded from. Five second-year language students from the School of Modern Languages collaborated with four pupils from Walker Technology College (WTC), and together, they produced a bi-lingual glossary and phrase booklet for Textiles studies, which became the basis of the SuccessAll Year Six Summer School in the College. It was a great opportunity for Newcastle students to pass on their skills, and participants from both institutions welcomed the collaborative and enriching experience that it offered.
Looking Ahead

The Newcastle University Institute for Social Renewal is building on these achievements as we progress through 2015. Our Theme Champions and Ambassador are playing vital roles in animating and leading work on our priority themes, working with partners, adding insight and embedding the work of NISR within Schools and Research Centres across the University.

Carnegie Fellowship

The Carnegie UK Trust is a charity founded by Andrew Carnegie in 1913. In early 2015, Professor Mark Shucksmith was made a Fellow of the Trust, in order to lead its project Interaction: How the third sector and academics can work together to influence policy and practice. This work seeks to address one of the key findings from the research in the Evidence Exchange report, published by the Trust in 2013. As part of his study, Professor Shucksmith is attending a number of roundtable events across the UK during the spring to explore the issues before reporting on his findings later in the year. Professor Shucksmith said:

The evidence produced by universities is highly trusted but rarely reaches policy and practice: working with the third sector could help increase the impact of universities’ work as well as helping community and voluntary organisations achieve their charitable objectives.

Ideas for an Incoming Government blog

In anticipation of the May 2015 General Election, the Social Renewal blog is hosting a series of manifesto-style ideas for an Incoming Government, written by academics across Newcastle University. Drawing from the research strengths of the Institution, the blog series draws expertise and knowledge into specific recommendations for policy. From education to healthcare, the ideas for an Incoming Government blog is bringing to light important evidence-based solutions for the big problems facing our society. Through this, Social Renewal hopes to inform both the election debates and the political parties’ thinking.

Children and Young People Research Hub

The Children and Young People Research Hub was established in November 2014 following a networking event hosted by Social Renewal Theme Champions Professor Kathryn Hollinsworth and Professor Liz Todd. Since then, the Research Hub continues to bring together colleagues from across Newcastle University to discuss common interests, methodologies and theoretical approaches within the broad research area of children and young people.

A permanent online space has been established, in which like-minded researchers can collaborate, and a number of themed seminars are being run under this theme. Professor Peter Hopkins’ talk, ‘Reflecting on researching young people’s everyday geopolitics: faith, ethnicity and place’ ensured an enthusiastic launch to the series and the success of the following three seminars has established the Children and Young People Research Hub as an important academic and outward-focused platform.

Inspirational Women of the Law Exhibition

Inspired by the success and growth of the Inspirational Women of the North East Exhibitions, Professor Kathryn Hollinsworth and Dr Niko Godden (Newcastle Law School) launch a portrait exhibition that celebrates the achievements of women of the law. From Lady Hale, the only female judge in the Supreme Court, to Vera Baird, Newcastle’s Police and Crime Commissioner; the Inspirational Women of the Law Exhibition aims to encourage women to contribute to societal change, whether in the legal profession or in their own contexts.

A collaboration between Newcastle Law School and Fine Arts students, this exhibition points to the untold stories of women who have strived to make a difference, and demonstrates how much more needs to be done to secure equality. Professor Hollinsworth and Dr Godden look forward to seeing how the exhibition captures the imagination of the next generation of female world-changers, and inspires more people to progress in the legal profession. The exhibition launches on 5th March 2015, and will be in the Hatton Gallery before it makes its permanent home in the Law School.

Medics for the Community Fund

On 16th March 2015, the Medics for the Community Fund was launched: the result of a collaboration between Newcastle University Institute for Social Renewal and the Community Foundation. In this exciting project, doctors from Newcastle are being given the opportunity to support local charities that are supplementing the efforts of our healthcare system. These small, grassroots charities deal with broader healthcare issues sometimes overlooked, from drug use to counselling needs. They will be given the opportunity to meet with local medics and demonstrate the impact they have on lives in our region. At the fund launch, held in the Great North Museum, there was a panel for discussion as well as an exhibition of the local charities represented, from Them Wikes, which aims to increase access to creative arts for women in the North East, to the popular HenPower, a group that helps older people to keep their own chickens. As the fund becomes established, it is hoped that many people will be encouraged to invest in initiatives such as these, and that an increasing link can be forged between healthcare and philanthropy.

Joining the Dots: making healthcare work better for the local economy

Joining the dots is a collection of papers edited by Professors Rose Gilroy and Mark Tewdwr-Jones (School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape), and presented in 2015 in Westminster. It is premised on the need to reduce health inequalities in our country, and is an important collection of research. It aims to move the debate beyond the economics of healthcare and whether the UK can afford the health system that is demanded, and instead focus on the economic benefits that improved healthcare would bring.

There is not only a significant social justice argument to be made for reducing inequality in this area, but, argue Professors Gilroy and Tewdwr-Jones, an economic one. The 2010 Marmot Review suggested this, and these papers address the questions policy makers are now asking about the relationship between health and the economy. They consider several questions concerning public health, governance of our healthcare systems, and what good health contributes to our economy. This is unpacked in local contexts, generating creative ideas for employers and exploring what the next steps are for public health delivery.

UN Sustainable Development Goals Workshops

The three Societal Challenge Theme Institutes (Sustainability, Social Renewal and Ageing) announce their first cross-Institute initiative in early 2015 by hosting workshops which provide Newcastle University academics and researchers with an opportunity to explore ways to contribute to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Newcastle University is well positioned to contribute to this United Nations initiative, addressing the social, economic and environmental aspects of sustainable development in a coherent and comprehensive manner. The first workshop was in February 2015, and all of the participants look forward to developing Newcastle University’s contribution to this important modern debate.

Rural Housing Policy Review

For the last year, Professor Mark Shucksmith has worked with other experts as part of the Rural Housing Policy Review group, chaired by Lord Best, to propose solutions to the challenges of rural housing that acknowledge the current constraints on public spending. There are severe housing difficulties throughout the UK, but rural areas face special difficulties. In early 2015, the group presented their recommendations at a launch in the House of Lords, which, it is hoped, will inform public policy, and help the future of rural communities sustain.

The shortage of affordable rural housing is an issue not just for young people and others earning middle to low incomes; it has a wider significance as our countryside becomes ever more socially exclusive, a place where only rich people will be able to afford to live and in which most members of society can never be resident.

The challenges facing the world appear ever more daunting, as inequalities widen, growth slows in many countries, and political instability and conflict affect many areas. In the UK a General Election approaches. In these circumstances, the work of universities must continue to be relevant to the societal challenges we face. NISR will continue in 2015 to support colleagues across Newcastle University in rising to the societal challenge of social renewal, helping people to thrive in the face of change. Our progress during 2014 encourages us to believe we can do even more.
The Newcastle University project leads mentioned in this Annual Review can be contacted at the following email addresses.

Please get in touch for more information.
Find out more about the work of the Institute

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