**Improving public services**

ESRC supports the creation of new insights from research and datasets around the development and delivery of equitable and efficient public services including in healthcare, welfare, housing, education, waste and policing.

We fund research and data collections to give insights and evidence that inform and shape the development and delivery of equitable and efficient public services, including new innovations and approaches across the UK.

Below are a few examples of our work.

### Informing public services policy

Public services and the policies that support them underpin modern society, from healthcare, welfare and housing to education, policing and much more. These are big, complex services involving millions of employees and significant infrastructure.

Planning effective public services starts with understanding the needs of the population and how they are changing over time. Researchers at the [ESRC Research Centre on Micro-Social Change](https://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/misoc) at the University of Essex are carrying out cutting-edge social science research across vital areas such as education and skills, families, ethnicity and migration and labour. Their work is generating robust data-driven evidence to support the development of policies and programmes that equalise opportunities and create greater fairness in our society.

We also need to understand how public service needs and provisions differ across the devolved nations of the UK. For example, ESRC funds the [Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research and Data](https://wiserd.ac.uk/), which brings together researchers from economics, sociology, geography and political science to generate high-quality research to influence policies and public services in education, health, work, adult social care and more.

The [Wales Centre for Public Policy](https://www.wcpp.org.uk/), also funded by ESRC, has generated more than 120 studies for the Welsh Government over the past five years, influencing policies on childcare provision, health service delivery and waste recycling. And our investment in [Administrative Data Research UK (ADR UK)](https://www.adruk.org/) brings together public sector data across the UK to ensure the best evidence is available to make informed decisions.

### Building back from COVID-19

Coronavirus (COVID-19) has had a significant impact on public services across the whole of society. Recovering from the pandemic will require rapid, accessible evidence to support policymaking that addresses the social, economic and public health impacts and helps communities get back on their feet.

To support this effort, we are investing in the International Public Policy Observatory to gather and assess evidence from around the world to inform UK policymakers about how best to move forward.

These insights will enable better decision-making and avoid unnecessary mistakes while achieving better outcomes for the public, especially for at-risk groups including those in care, homeless people and Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities.

### Health and social care

The health and social care needs of the UK population are changing as we live longer, and there are regional differences that impact on relevant local services.

We’re funding a number of research projects and programmes that are generating evidence to underpin extensive transformations across the complex and fragmented health and social care system. This is not only from the perspective of delivering suitable services but from each person’s needs in terms of care, support and quality of life.

One example is our new [IMPACT Centre (Improving Adult Care Together)](https://www.ukri.org/news/esrc-and-health-foundation-supports-new-adult-social-care-centre/), jointly funded with the Health Foundation. Over the coming years, IMPACT will lead the way in helping people working in adult social care, carers and the people they support make better use of high-quality, practice-based evidence to support innovation, build capacity and skills, identify and overcome barriers, and develop productive working relationships across the sector.

We also support a wide range of work on dementia that draws on experiences of carers and those with dementia to understand how to deliver effective care.

### Education and children’s services

Improving educational outcomes is one of ESRC’s key priorities. We are investing in research into education and skills, covering formal learning at school through into later life, and finding out how the provision of education and training impacts outcomes and opportunities. We are also supporting a significant number of projects looking at the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education across the UK.

We have invested in a five-year programme of academic thought leadership, investigating how teacher training, supply and retention, as well as the use of technology in the classroom, can improve outcomes for all children in schools across all four nations of the UK.

The [Centre for Global Higher Education](https://www.researchcghe.org/) led by the University of Oxford is carrying out research on all aspects of higher education in order to:

* enhance student learning and the contributions of higher education institutions to their communities
* develop the economic, social and global engagement of and impacts of UK higher education
* provide data resources and advice for government and stakeholder organisations across the UK and worldwide.

Our newly funded [Centre for Early Mathematics Learning (CEML)](https://www.lboro.ac.uk/media-centre/press-releases/2021/november/centre-for-early-mathematics-learning/) at Loughborough University will transform our understanding of children’s mathematics learning during the early years, and equip educators with the knowledge, tools and confidence to help children succeed.

Around 13% of 18 to 24-year-olds are not in any form of education, employment or training, and only around half of young people go on to university. [Young Lives, Young Futures](https://www.ylyf.co.uk/) is a longitudinal study of around 17,000 young people led by researchers at King’s College London and funded by ESRC. They are investigating how England’s vocational education and training system can better support the school-to-work transitions for people who do not go to university and help to reduce inequalities and instability for this group.

Since 2008 we’ve funded the [Centre for Learning and Life Chances](https://www.llakes.ac.uk/) at UCL to understand more about the connections between learning and life outcomes by studying:

* education and training
* career pathways
* intergenerational mobility
* civic values
* inequality
* social cohesion.

The [ESRC International Centre for Language and Communicative Development](http://www.lucid.ac.uk/) is researching how children learn to communicate through language, with the aim of designing effective interventions in education and healthcare.

We also fund research to improve children’s services more broadly. For example, an initiative focused on innovation in social care explores how to improve outcomes for families affected by domestic abuse, children at risk of abuse or neglect, and care leavers. Our mental health portfolio helps to develop policy and practice in a way that sustains mental health for children and young people, such as the work done by the [Centre for Society and Mental Health](https://www.kcl.ac.uk/csmh/about/about-us).

As well as investing in work to improve learning outcomes across the UK, ESRC supports researchers to address key questions affecting education systems in developing countries.

This is achieved through the co-funded [ESRC-Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office Raising Learning Outcomes (RLO) in education systems](https://www.ukri.org/what-we-offer/browse-our-areas-of-investment-and-support/esrc-fcdo-raising-learning-outcomes-in-education-systems/) research programme.

The RLO programme supports international cooperation and research to:

* build evidence in critical policy areas constraining education systems
* invest in research which can be used to effect positive change within developing countries
* contribute to a stronger, more secure shared global future.

### Housing

The supply, accessibility and affordability of housing has a major impact on the wellbeing of the population as well as the wider economy and financial system.

A home is much more than just a place to live, and the quality, availability, price and location of housing has knock-on effects on many aspects of life, such as wealth, health and education.

In partnership with the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the Arts and Humanities Research Council, we’re investing in the £6.1 million [Collaborative Centre on Housing Evidence (CaCHE)](https://housingevidence.ac.uk/) to generate and share robust, practical evidence on housing in the UK. CaCHE researchers are producing evidence and new research that will contribute to tackling the UK’s housing problems at a national, regional, and local level, sharing their findings widely through traditional policy publications and [new channels such as on YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC1AS-P90owSISBKlpuCtE4A/videos).

### Security, policing and justice

We’re supporting research aimed at understanding the interconnected aspects of crime, national security, policing and justice, informing the development of strategies and policies that work fairly for all and keep people safe.

We have made significant investments in research into national and global security challenges. Through the [Partnership for Conflict, Crime and Security Research](https://www.paccsresearch.org.uk/), our researchers have enhanced understanding of cybercrime and transnational organised crime. Researchers at the [ESRC Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats](https://crestresearch.ac.uk/) are looking at issues such as violent extremism, radicalisation, cyber risk and resilience. We are also supporting research looking at the use of digital forensics by the police.

The new [ESRC Vulnerability and Policing Futures Research Centre](https://www.york.ac.uk/news-and-events/news/2021/research/vulnerability-and-policing-futures-research-centre/) at York and Leeds Universities will look at how vulnerabilities, including exploitation by County Lines drug networks, online child sexual exploitation, domestic abuse, modern slavery, mental illness and homelessness shape demand for policing. The centre is exploring how the police, public service providers (such as health, social care and housing) and other partner organisations can collaborate to prevent and respond to these vulnerabilities and reduce inequalities.

### Big ideas for big challenges

Complex issues such as public services need big ideas to solve them. We have introduced our Big Ideas Pipeline to collect ambitious and forward-thinking suggestions for transformative research that will deliver real change and build capacity at scale. Anyone is welcome to submit an idea and the best will be taken forward as opportunities arise.

Delivering effective public services with constrained budgets and resources is a significant challenge. Economic and social science research plays an essential role in gathering the evidence to inform the development and delivery of equitable and efficient services to the people who need them.

The UK Government spends around £1,000 billion a year on the public sector, and it is vital that this money is spent effectively and fairly in order to deliver value for taxpayers and support for the people who need it most.

We are funding wide-ranging economic and social research aimed at generating high-quality, robust evidence to underpin the development of strategies and policies for public services that will meet the needs of the population within the budgets and resources available.