The University of Edinburgh

Edinburgh Impact 2015

Edinburgh Impact
The University of Edinburgh has an outstanding history of discovery, invention and innovation, improving the lives of ordinary people. Our 450-year history of influencing the world is well known.

Research conducted at Edinburgh laid the foundations of the Enlightenment, the study of English literature, our understanding of geology, modern economics and sociology, quantum mechanics, electromagnetism, thermodynamics, antiseptic surgery, nephrology and the theory of evolution.

Our researchers discovered carbon dioxide, latent and specific heat, chloroform anaesthesia, SARS, the Higgs boson particle, and developed the Hepatitis B vaccine, the hypodermic syringe, the kaleidoscope, the vacuum flask, the ATM, the diving chamber and in-vitro fertilisation.

In the most recent independent assessment of our research endeavours, the 2014 Research Excellence Framework, 83 per cent of the University’s research activity was classified as world leading or internationally excellent, and we were one of a small group of universities to achieve outstanding results when demonstrating the ongoing impact our research has on communities – locally, EU-wide and internationally.

Our researchers are committed to ensuring that decisions made by governments are based on secure evidence, brought about by their own – often collaborative – research activities.

As an institution the University is committed to its mission “to make a significant, sustainable and socially responsible contribution to Scotland, the UK and the world, promoting health, economic growth and cultural wellbeing”.

The dedicated efforts of our researchers are improving the effectiveness and sustainability of public, private and third sector organisations, improving social welfare and cohesion, increasing economic prosperity and regeneration, and enhancing cultural enrichment and quality of life – for all walks of life.

Here in Edinburgh Impact we present and share with you a selection of the work of our research colleagues, across the breadth of what are global priorities. Themed around Culture, Economy, Environment, Health and Wellbeing, International Development, Justice, Policy, Science and Technology, and Society, in the following pages you’ll find a wide variety of highlights of, and insights to, the sort of achievements and impacts we are making across these essential areas.

Without the support of funding bodies and the commitment of our staff, students and friends this work would not be possible. It is to this end we invite you to read these demonstrative stories about the power of such investments.

Professor Charlie Jeffery
Senior Vice-Principal
Research at the University is constantly expanding the depth of human knowledge and making an impact on the wider world.

Whether it is changing the nature of documentary film-making; uncovering ways to reduce the need for blood transfusions; preventing future deforestation; improving survival rates from stroke; giving infants in Zimbabwe life-saving treatments; preventing young people from entering the criminal justice system in the UK; sharing expertise around events such as the Scottish and European referendums; developing gene technology and improving patient care, or offering free online education, the University never stands still.

Our researchers enable us to forge links with charities, businesses, policy makers and other universities, so that together we can tackle long-standing challenges at home and overseas.

*Edinburgh Impact* highlights just some of the University’s most recent projects, driven by dedicated teams, international partnerships and individuals. Its aim is to provide a flavour of the University community’s ongoing efforts to change the inequalities of the world.

To download this publication as a PDF, and to find out more about these projects and other research underway at Edinburgh, please visit: [www.ed.ac.uk/research/impact](http://www.ed.ac.uk/research/impact).
In 2008, motor neuron disease (MND) sufferer Neil Platt, and his wife Louise Oswald, approached their friend and fellow alumna of Edinburgh College of Art, filmmaker Morag McKinnon, and her colleague Emma Davey, to help them document the last months of Neil’s life. The result is the Scottish BAFTA award-winning I Am Breathing, a film that has raised awareness, across the globe, of the devastation this illness brings to people’s lives.

I Am Breathing was chosen as the campaign centrepiece for the MND Global Awareness Day in 2013, screening in more than 240 venues across 46 countries that day, it still continues to travel.

Within filmmaking, I Am Breathing has suggested new ways of enabling the subjects of films to engage with audiences. Emma Davey and Morag McKinnon wanted to find an original, ‘filmic’ form that could empower Neil Platt to communicate the incredibly hard experience of living with MND and allow audiences to feel this on a visceral level.

“Ranks among the year’s most moving films... so firmly have Neil’s particular wishes been expressed that I Am Breathing never feels in any way intrusive or exploitative.” From a review by Neil Young in The Hollywood Reporter, December 2012.

Emma Davey explains the experimentation behind the film’s production: “A driving question for me is how can a narrative form in documentary be developed and interrogated so it reflects the production: “A driving question for me is how can a narrative form in documentary be developed and interrogated so it reflects the experience of the subject you are filming, without cajoling them into a documentary be developed and interrogated so it reflects the experience of the subject you are filming, without cajoling them into a...
Economy

Saving the NHS £100 million a year

Blood is a scarce, expensive and vital medical resource. In the UK, more than 500,000 people a year receive a red blood cell (RBC) transfusion. However, immediate blood supply for transfusions is limited and there are increasing pressures on future supply.

Edinburgh’s Professor Tim Walsh undertook a programme of clinical and implementation research, and analysed transfusion data from more than 1,000 patients. Founded on this research, Professor Walsh chaired the committee drawing up the UK’s first evidence-based guidelines for RBC transfusion practice in critical care.

New guidance promotes the use of ‘restrictive transfusion’, administered when a patient’s haemoglobin level drops below seven grams per decilitre (7g/dl) compared to the standard ‘liberal transfusion’ level of 10g/dl. This reduced intensive care blood transfusions from 40 per cent in 2001 to 33 per cent in 2006. This meant 7,000 fewer patients received transfusions in 2006 than 2001, and saved more than 400,000 RBC units a year.

Recognising RBC transfusions should be avoided where possible, Professor Walsh also supported the widespread introduction of cell salvage – recovering blood lost during surgery and re-infusing it into the patient. He initiated a Scotland-wide programme that saw red blood cell salvage increase from 90 cases per million population in 2005 to 650 cases per million population in 2010. The technology is now used nationwide. The overall economic impact of Professor Walsh’s research has been significant.

Between 2001 and 2012 there was a 22 per cent reduction in annual RBC transfusions, equivalent to an annual saving of around £100 million.

Increasing understanding of student finance

A practical guide designed to improve young people’s knowledge of student finance in higher education has been published by the University’s Moray House School of Education. Sarah Minty, a Research Fellow in the Centre for Research in Education, Inclusion & Diversity (CREID), worked with 350/6 pupils and current undergraduates to write Student Finance – a Guide to Higher Education in Scotland.

Launched in September 2015, the guide is written for 16-19 year olds considering studying at HNC/D or degree level. It will assist them and their parents in making post-school decisions and DEBUNKS STUDENT FINANCE MYTHS. Research previously conducted by CREID showed many students, particularly from less affluent backgrounds, were confused by higher education funding and needed clearer information.

Financed by an ESRC grant, a knowledge exchange project brought together NUS Scotland, the Student Awards Association Scotland, Lothians Equal Access Programme for Schools and Gateway Shared Services to produce the guide.

Improving patient experience and saving £21 million a year

A study conducted with more than 5,000 volunteer stroke patients HAS CHANGED HEALTHCARE GUIDELINES WORLDWIDE. Graduated compression stockings were historically the treatment of choice for immobile post-stroke patients at risk of deep vein thrombosis (DVT) and pulmonary emboli. Although the stockings were believed to increase blood flow in the veins of the legs, reducing the risk of DVT and subsequent embolism, there was no reliable trial evidence supporting this.

A team of researchers led by Edinburgh’s Professor Martin Dennis conducted a series of studies that has since disproven the effectiveness of this often uncomfortable treatment. This Edinburgh based study has changed health guidelines in the UK, Singapore, Canada, the US, Italy and South Africa, as they no longer recommend the use of stockings for stroke patients. However, not only has this policy change eased unnecessary patient discomfort, the changes have saved an estimated £21 million to the NHS, in associated healthcare costs.

Influencing a radical monetary policy

Research conducted by Professor John Hardman Moore, from the School of Economics, WAS INSTRUMENTAL IN MAKING SENSE OF THE 2009 FINANCIAL CRISIS. It also informed the unconventional monetary policy – quantitative easing – undertaken by central banks including the Federal Reserve and the Bank of England in 2009. Professor Moore’s research demonstrated that an injection of liquidity into the economy could help mitigate the adverse effects of a financial crisis. His unconventional policy advice – to conduct open market operations that exchanged illiquid assets for liquid ones – resembles important aspects of the quantitative easing policy conducted by the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago.

His innovative research has been IMPLEMENTED ACROSS THE GLOBE. Professor Moore has presented a series of invited lectures for the Bank of England, Bank for International Settlements, Banque de France, Bundesbank, Sveriges Riksbank and the Banco Central de Uruguay.

Adding £80 million to the Scottish economy

Since its inception in 2010, ECCI has become Scotland’s national hub for low carbon innovation and activities with a public policy, economic or social impact. It has actively ENGAGED MORE THAN 1,000 ENTERPRISES and organisations so far. Of these, it has worked intensively with more than 200, to help develop new products and services that have already contributed an estimated £60 million to the Scottish economy.

The Edinburgh Centre for Carbon Innovation (ECCI) is well on its way to its expected economic impact of £80 million in its first 10 years. ECCI Executive Director Andy Ken believes the ambitious target is achievable: “The sheer vibrancy of the engagement with big social challenges by different enterprises – public, private, academic and community – and by people across Scotland, suggests a bright future.

Making public promises is easy. Delivering on such promises, on contested topics, is very difficult. But when engaged politicians, vibrant social and business enterprise, a supportive public sector and a strong University base are able to work together, delivery starts to look a lot easier.”

ECCI has been at the heart of major public policy impacts in climate change, land use and energy and has helped develop 12 large-scale carbon efficient, low carbon locations in Scotland. Its work has attracted increasing interest from China, Ecuador and Chile, in research, training and innovation partnerships to deliver practical, low carbon outcomes.

In July 2015 ECCI opened A NEW BASE IN HONG KONG becoming the first education institution in the world to establish a low carbon research and innovation centre in another country. This will help deliver closer partnerships to address key challenges of climate change, lower carbon economies, and will provide Scottish companies with a gateway to China. ECCI continues to grow its global networks and is also building towards future low carbon basins in Asia and South and Central America.

www.edinburghcentre.org

The ECCI was the first refurbished historic building in the UK to achieve a BREEAM Outstanding award for building sustainability.
Making waves in power generation

Edinburgh’s FloWave Ocean Energy Research Facility is THE WORLD’S FIRST COMPLEX, WIDE-AREA, MULTIDIRECTIONAL WAVE AND CURRENT TANK. It provides a unique environment for energy and climate change research, simulating ocean conditions for the testing of tidal and wave energy devices.

Central to the facility is a 25-metre diameter, circular tank containing 2.4 million litres of water. This is circumferentially irriged by 168 absorbing wave-making machines, while 28 submerged, flow-drive units can drive currents across the tank in any relative direction. This permits controlled environment testing in realistic and repeatable ocean conditions at a meaningful scale, which corresponds to up to 28 metre waves, 12 knot currents and a sea-area of approximately two square kilometres.

Spin-out company Edinburgh Designs is now the world-leading supplier of scientific and recreational wave-making technology, with DESIGNS IN 19 COUNTRIES.

www.flowavett.co.uk

Shaping earthquake risk estimation and forecasting policy

Research conducted at the University of Edinburgh on earthquake predictability has directly influenced the policies of the International Seismological Centre (ISC) in the UK. Professor Ian Main, from the School of Geosciences, combines both statistical and rock physics data in his research. This has shown that, while increases in the probability of an earthquake can be identified, deterministic predictive models for individual events are unreliable. He has also shown that models for seismic hazard can be easily skewed by individual, extreme events such as the 2004 earthquake off the coast of Sumatra that led to the devastating Boxing Day tsunami.

Reliable, short-term prediction of individual earthquakes remains elusive but Professor Main’s long-term probabilistic forecasting provides a useful baseline for DEVELOPING BUILDING DESIGN CODES IN EARTHQUAKE REGIONS and in the shorter term, clustering properties provides an opportunity to calculate and communicate periods of heightened risk.

Italy’s Director of Civil Protection appointed Professor Main the UK’s sole representative to the ICEF in 2009, following a 6.3 magnitude earthquake near L’Aquila that resulted in 309 fatalities. Six members of the Italian Grand Risks Commission were convicted of manslaughter as a result of their perceived poor communication of the earthquake risk, although they were later acquitted on appeal.

Professor Main’s research directly impacted the ICEF final report, which stated: “Any information about the future occurrence of earthquakes contains large uncertainties and, therefore, can only be evaluated and provided in terms of probabilities”. It emphasised the lack of clear and reliable precursors needed for deterministic prediction, and recommended investment in ‘operational’ forecasting with clear communication of probability and uncertainty.

The report STIMULATED POLICY INNOVATION AROUND THE WORLD. The Italian Department of Civil Protection committed €1 billion to a 10-year research project on operational earthquake forecasting and implemented a public education programme to communicate probability and risk. Authorities in the US and New Zealand began similar programmes and the report also influenced policy development in Greece, Japan and Russia.

Improved bioenergy use in East Africa

The University’s work promoting sustainable bioenergy practices in Kenya and Tanzania is helping East Africa achieve a United Nations target of sustainable energy for all by 2030.

Dr Thomas Molony researched the countries’ use of biofuels for the PISCES – Policy Innovation Systems for Clean Energy Security – project on east Africa and south Asia. By 2030 more than three billion people may rely almost entirely on biofuel for their energy needs. The project explored how to make biofuel production more efficient, ensure people have better access to energy and eliminate wastage.

Dr Molony’s work has contributed to Kenya’s National Biofuel Policy and to a gender working group in Tanzania promoting equality in bioenergy policy. It has also helped IMPROVE THE LIVES AND ENERGY SECURITY OF MORE THAN 300,000 PEOPLE in East Africa, identifying local agricultural waste products - rice husks and jatropha cakes - as valuable fuel sources for a more efficient, cleaner-burning, biofuel stove.

Back ing a US-China carbon capture deal

Academic expertise provided by the University of Edinburgh Business School is at the heart of a partnership between the US and China. The deal will support the development of new carbon capture, utilisation and storage (CCUS) technologies.

The University is one of the key partners behind China’s Guangdong CCUS Centre, founded in 2013 as a joint project between UK and Chinese engineers and scientists. Now the University of Texas at Austin, American not-for-profit The Clean Air Task Force and the energy generator Southern Company Services, have agreed to collaborate with the Guangdong CCUS Centre.

Their partnership will assess CCU capture technologies and evaluate the viability of novel, safe carbon storage options such as offshore geological formations.
Health and wellbeing

Improving treatment for stroke patients

Researchers at the University of Edinburgh are helping to change treatment guidelines to HELP THE 15 MILLION PEOPLE WHO SUFFER A STROKE WORLDWIDE EACH YEAR. The International Stroke Trial, led by the University’s Professor of Medical Neurology Peter Sandercock, recruited 19,453 patients and showed that for every 1,000 patients treated immediately with aspirin, ten patients avoid early recurrent stroke or death, and at six months after stroke onset, thirteen more were alive and independent. As a result, the use of aspirin was introduced into stroke treatment guidelines worldwide, reaching up to 50 million patients annually.

Professor Sandercock and his team of researchers went on to conduct the Third International Stroke Trial, which demonstrated that immediate intravenous thrombolysis with the clot-busting drug r-PA, alteplase is a long-term effective treatment for acute ischaemic stroke in a wide range of patients. Today, in the UK, the administration of thrombolysis within three hours is a quality standard against which services are judged nationwide. The study, supported by the MRC, among others, is testament to the University’s ability to attract funding services are judged nationwide. The study, supported by the MRC, among others, is testament to the University’s ability to attract funding.

The team has also been looking at the effects of progesterone on the preterm birth of twins. The team conducted a double-blind, placebo-controlled trial involving 500 women pregnant with twins. The study revealed that progesterone was ineffective in women with twin pregnancy, and has led to clear guidelines published in Europe, North America and Australia that progesterone should not be used for this purpose. The excess cost of treating women with twin pregnancy with progesterone was £2,334 per patient.

Connecting mobility, mood and place

A three-year research project (2013-2016) called Mobility, Mood and Place explores how places can be designed collaboratively to MAKE PEDESTRIAN MOBILITY EASY, enjoyable and more accessible for older people. Funded by the ESRC, EPSRC and AHRC, the project brings together experts from the Universities of Edinburgh, Heriot-Watt, York and King’s College London. The researchers are using innovative co-design and mobile neural imaging methods to explore emotional responses to places. Working with the Lutish Birth Cohort of people in their 70s, the project is also the first to consider the influence of local environments in which people have lived from childhood.

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Improving treatment for heart attack patients

Reducing child pneumonia mortality

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) tested all the published risk scores for ACS using an unselected population of 70,000 patients in the UK. The GRACE risk score came out top and NICE, the European Society of Cardiology (ESC), American Heart Association and American College of Cardiology all recommend its usage.

Modelling by the researchers suggests that using the GRACE risk score SAVES 30–80 LIVES FOR EVERY 10,000 PATIENTS. The GRACE risk score is freely available as an app, which has been DOWNLOADED MORE THAN 10,000 TIMES, and is also incorporated into a ‘pocket guidelines’ app developed by the European Society of Cardiology for distribution to clinicians in 55 countries.

GRACE is now the international reference standard for defining ACS and its outcomes and the basis for designing major randomised trials and quality improvement programmes. What’s more, the app has helped to reverse the treatment-risk paradox so that high-risk patients can get the best evidence-based treatment,” explains Professor Fox.

Edinburgh’s Professor Jane Norman and her team of researchers are making discoveries that are SAVING THE LIVES OF BABIES WORLDWIDE.

“Pregnancy is a happy time and safe for most women, but for too many women something goes wrong in pregnancy causing the baby harm,” explains Professor Norman. “Around 4,000 babies are stillborn in each year in the UK, and a further 60,000 babies are born too early. Our group aims to try and understand what goes wrong in these pregnancies, and to develop and test treatments to improve outcomes.”

With backing from the MRC, the charity Tommy’s and Scotland’s Chief Medical Officer, the team has been producing clear results. In a study of more than 1.2 million pregnant women at term, conducted between 2008 and 2011, researchers found that elective induction of labour at time points from 37-weeks’ gestation progressively reduces perinatal mortality, particularly in mothers over 40 years of age. As a result the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists has recommended that induction of labour at 39 weeks should be routinely offered to older women. This is estimated to PREVENT 17 STILLBIRTHS PER YEAR IN THE UK ALONE.

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A GLOBAL ACTION PLAN ON PNEUMONIA. This resulted in major reductions in child deaths from pneumonia and helped to reduce overall child deaths globally from 9.9 million per year in 2000 to 6.3 million per year in 2013.

Boosting baby survival rates

Assessing heart attack risk with GRACE

A 10-year research programme resulted in the Global Registry of Acute Coronary Events (GRACE) risk score, which has SAVED LIVES BY HELPING DOCTORS BETTER MANAGE THE TREATMENT OF CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE. A critical form of cardiovascular disease is Acute Coronary Syndrome (ACS), which includes heart attack and unstable angina. There are more than 100,000 heart attacks in the UK each year.

Keith Fox, Professor of Cardiology at the University of Edinburgh and colleagues at the University of Massachusetts established the largest multinational study of ACS, involving more than 100,000 patients in 30 countries. The GRACE programme characterised ACS and identified a worldwide ‘treatment-risk paradox’ that lower risk rather than higher risk patients received more intensive medical treatment.

The team developed the GRACE risk score, made up of factors predicting risk of heart attack and/or death: age; heart rate; systolic blood pressure; renal function; congestive heart failure; ST-segment deviation; cardiac arrest; and elevated biomarkers.
International development

Protecting against parasitic disease

Through a combination of world-class expertise and resources the University of Edinburgh is helping to PROTECT FUTURE GENERATIONS OF AFRICAN CHILDREN AGAINST SCHISTOSOMIASIS, the second most deadly parasitic infection across the continent after malaria.

Schistosomiasis affects more than 100 million people in sub-Saharan Africa and is caused by contact with fresh water infested with the larval forms of parasitic worms, known as schistosomes. The adult worms live in the veins draining the urinary tract and intestines, and can cause severe and chronic physical and immune-mediated damage.

Until recently children under the age of five were thought to be low risk and excluded from mass drug administration (MDA) programmes of the only available control measure – Praziquantel (PZQ). However, a team of researchers at the University, led by Dr Francisca Mutapi, have collaborated with colleagues at the University of Zimbabwe and elsewhere in Malawi and Sudan to demonstrate that schistosome infection rates in under-fives are actually higher than in adults already enrolled in MDA programmes. Dr Mutapi explains: “Our laboratory work in Edinburgh proved that PZQ is both safe and efficacious in this age group.”

The results were presented at a World Health Organization (WHO) workshop in 2010 and in 2013 a new MDA programme was launched in Zimbabwe, which has already treated almost 350,000 PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN for the first time. The Chair of the workshop said: “This ongoing programme and evaluation study in Zimbabwe showed that young children need treatment.”

Eradicating sleeping sickness

The University’s Global Health Academy brings staff together to collaborate on global health challenges, including neglected tropical diseases such as rabies, malaria and sleeping sickness. Professor Sue Welburn, Vice-Principal Global Access and the Founding Director of the academy leads its Stamp Out Sleeping Sickness (SOS) campaign.

Sleeping sickness is caused by two forms of a parasite found across sub-Saharan Africa. In Uganda, the cattle population acts as a reservoir of parasite infection, which is then passed from the cows to humans by the bite of the tsetse fly. The disease is a cause of great concern in the country where for every person receiving treatment for acute human sleeping sickness, 12 people die undiagnosed. By controlling the disease in cattle it is possible to greatly reduce transmission to humans while also protecting the animals.

At the moment we’re working with various donors so that WE HAVE THE TOOLS, THE WHERewithAL AND THE COMMITMENT TO ERADICATE ACUTE HUMAN SLEEPING SICKNESS from Uganda,” says Professor Welburn.

The growing list of public and private sector partners supporting the research includes Makerere University in Uganda, the UK Department for International Development, IKARE – a venture philanthropy charity, supported by K Investment Partners, Ceva Santé Animal – a global veterinary health company and the WHO.

Taking a multidisciplinary approach, the SOS campaign draws on the skills of disease control professionals, researchers and students from Uganda and the UK, along with local livestock owners and has, to date, provided EMERGENCY TREATMENT FOR AROUND 500,000 CATTLE IN NORTHERN UGANDA. The campaign’s success was acknowledged by the Ugandan government in 2013 with a Collaboration and Networking Across Government Award, and in 2015 Professor Welburn became a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh in recognition of her outstanding contribution to the field.

Preventing pesticide self-poisoning

Researchers at Edinburgh are helping to reduce deaths from pesticide and plant self-poisoning in rural Asia, a cause of more than 350,000 deaths each year and the number one global means of suicide.

In the early 1990s Sri Lanka had one of the world’s highest suicide rates at around 52 per 100,000, which was linked to the introduction of pesticides into poor rural homes from the late 1980s, making self-poisoning possible. A team, led by Professor of Clinical Toxicology Michael Edelston, produced the first description of the clinical presentation and outcome of poisoning with a wide range of pesticides. The results led to banning of several toxic pesticides and a decision to not list the poorly effective antidote pralidoxime in the WHO’s Essential Drug List.

Those findings and ongoing clinical trials are estimated to be SAVING AROUND 10,000 LIVES PER YEAR IN ASIA.

Putting solar energy under the spotlight

Jamie Cross is a Senior Lecturer in Social Anthropology and Development at Edinburgh whose ESRC, EPSRC and Leverhulme Trust-funded research focuses on off-the-grid communities in South Asia.

Dr Cross, who is also a Director of the Global Development Academy, which harnesses the University’s international teaching, research and partnerships to ensure it plays a central role in transforming the world, explains: “Since 2011 I have been following the work of solar engineers and non-governmental organisations involved in DESIGNING AND DISTRIBUTING SOLAR PHOTOVOLTAIC LIGHTING SYSTEMS TO PEOPLE WHO LIVE WITHOUT RELIABLE ACCESS TO MAINS ELECTRICITY.”

As governments, international development donors and businesses commit themselves to realising targets for universal energy access, this research examines the relationships involved in creating markets for renewable energy technologies in contexts of global poverty and the values, practices and meanings that mediate the consumption of energy, particularly lighting.

By creating case studies of designers, manufacturers and users of solar technology, the research has helped to develop a social history of the solar lantern in South Asia and increased the understanding of how gender, kinship and caste affect the perception of solar technology. Dr Cross continues: “Any practical solution to the challenges of energy access must understand that energy poverty is a social relationship. In rural India, the engagement of poor people with renewable energy technology is shaped by histories of social exclusion and experiences of inequality.”

In May 2014 in partnership with Scope, a renewable energy specialist, Dr Cross was awarded a grant from the Scottish Government that builds upon his insights into the effective take up of solar energy in rural India by focusing on what happens when broken solar technology breaks down. The funding is being used to launch ‘Urja Samadhan’ – a non-profit social enterprise that connects people with broken solar equipment to local repair and maintenance services. In the Indian state of Odisha the platform aims to PROLONG THE LIFETIME OF MORE THAN 40,000 RURAL SOLAR INSTALLATIONS.

Saving savannas by satellite

Building on existing research that revealed the global significance of savannas for biodiversity, the University’s Dr Neil Stuart has shown that savanna habitats can be mapped in detail using satellite data. Dr Stuart led the first comprehensive mapping and botanical assessment of savannas in Belize, and the results, published in 2011 revealed that 10 per cent of the country’s savanna had been lost in the previous 20 years. The study guided a nationwide programme of plant collecting that led to 54 SPECIES BEING FOUND FOR THE FIRST TIME in Belize. The data was combined with historical collections to produce the first comprehensive botanical checklist of Belize’s savanna flora.

Dr Stuart’s project also supported the creation of the Environmental Research Institute at the University of Belize, where local professionals, trained by UK scientists, are now able to fulfil Belize’s monitoring requirements, for example to the United Nations Convention on Biodiversity.

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Reforming youth justice

The Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime (ESYTC) has increased understanding of youth offending and the impact of interventions. It has led to reform of youth justice policy and practice in Scotland, and has had international influence.

The ESYTC, led by Professor Lesley McAra and Professor Susan McIvor, is a prospective longitudinal study of robusts into and out of offending among a cohort of around 4,300 young people in the city of Edinburgh, established in 1997. It is one of the largest studies of its kind in the world, and one of a small number of studies in this field that have been influential worldwide. It is innovative in its breadth – using a census approach to maximise inclusion – and complexity of data management. Data collection included six annual sweeps of self-report surveys, spanning the ages of 12 to 17, records from police, social work, children’s hearings and schools, surveys of parents and teachers and compilation of a demographic information system.

The findings of the study formed the evidence base for the Scottish Government’s Early and Effective Intervention Programme for under 16s and the Whole System Approach for under 18s. The Whole System Approach is a major shift away from punitive measures towards maximum use of diversion as a means to KEEP YOUNG PEOPLE OUT OF THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM. It is underpinned by the ESYTC evidence that contact with the criminal justice system can be detrimental to behaviour and longer-term life chances. The ESYTC also led to amendment of the Children’s Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011, changing the status of childhood offences at Children’s Hearings.

The changes to national policy have resulted in reductions in youth offending. The Policing Performance Framework has collected data on youth crime since 2008-9, and recorded CRIMES AND OFFENCES COMMITTEE BY CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE (AGED EIGHT TO 17) FELL BY 32 PER CENT BETWEEN 2008–2009 AND 2011–2012.

Professor Lesley McAra, Chair of Policing at the University of Edinburgh, says: “If we truly wish to build an inclusive and respectful society, one in which all people and all communities live in safety and security, then we must adopt a compassionate approach to the problems caused by serious and persistent offenders.”

www.esytc.ed.ac.uk

Justice

Protecting children online

Dr Ethel Quayle has for the first time identified the demographics of child victims of online sexual crimes. A subsequent G8 meeting to discuss Dr Quayle’s findings, which were based on police data, led to the publication of a book that has been USED BY SPECIALIST POLICE FORCES, THE JUDICIARY, CHILD PROTECTION WORKERS AND NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS.

Also as a result of the G8 meeting, the US Department of Justice and the European Commission co-hosted the Global Alliance Against Child Sexual Abuse Online, which formally agreed to enhance efforts to identify and support victims, prosecute offenders and raise public awareness, and to REDUCE THE AVAILABILITY OF CHILD PORNOGRAPHY ONLINE.

As part of her membership of the UN’s Child Online Protection Initiative, Dr Quayle co-authored Guidelines for Parents, Guardians and Educators, which is available in English, French, Spanish, Arabic, Chinese and Russian. Dr Quayle has also advised the US Sentencing Commission.

Accelerating expertise in crime scene decision making

Researchers are applying the latest knowledge of decision-making processes to crime scene examination, and have developed a training tool to help ensure best practice throughout Scottish Police Authority Forensic Services.

The research, led by Dr Amanda Mordini, has “made thinking visible” through capturing the thought processes of experienced Scene Examiners. Applied cognitive task analysis was used to understand the cognitive demands facing Scene Examiners and to identify the tasks needed to perform proficiently.

The findings have offered a unique window on thought processes, producing detailed, observable information about situation assessment, the use of critical cues, and action taken. Supported by the Forensic Services’ Multimedia Unit, the research has led to the development of a scenario-based training tool for complex and major incidents. The product has highlighted regional differences in the approach to the examination of a crime scene. Ongoing work with the Scottish Police Authority aims to increase the expertise across Scottish Police Authority Forensic Services.

Influencing licencing policy

Research, led by Dr Nilam Shori, mapping alcohol and tobacco outlets in Scotland against social deprivation and health indicators has INFORMED CAMPAIGN GROUPS AND INFLUENCED LICENCING POLICY.

Researchers produced infographics highlighting the key findings and a website that maps the density of alcohol and tobacco outlets in neighbourhoods alongside illness and death rates linked to alcohol and lung disease. The ESRC-funded website has been widely used by Police Scotland, local authorities, licensing boards and community groups. Dr Shori addressed the Scottish Parliament’s Cross Party Group on Tobacco and Health, receiving support from MSPs.

http://cresh.org.uk/webmap

Informing forensic evidence protocols

New statistical methods have transformed the way forensic evidence is gathered and assessed, and have LED TO NEW PROTOCOLS BEING RECOMMENDED NATIONALLY AND INTERNATIONALLY.

Forensic scientific evidence needs to be evaluated objectively and interpreted clearly for the courts, since failure to do so can lead to appeals or miscarriages of justice.

For example, fragments of glass at a crime scene are believed to come from a broken bottle found in the possession of a suspect, how much weight should be given to similarities in the chemical composition of the samples?

The University’s Professor Colin Aitken and his collaborators have developed Bayesian statistical methods to aid the evaluation and interpretation of such evidence. The researchers pioneered the use of the likelihood ratio (LR) for evidence evaluation. LR takes into account, for example, variations within glass bottles and between bottles, first assuming the fragments come from the suspect’s bottle and second assuming they do not.

MANY FORENSIC SCIENTISTS HAVE Since ADOPTED THE USE OF LR, INCLUDING IN SWEDEN, SWITZERLAND, THE NETHERLANDS, NEW ZEALAND AND PARTS OF THE US.

Professor Aitken also developed procedures for determining the optimal size of samples that should be examined when assessing large amounts of potential evidence, for example when large consignments of potentially incriminating material is seized. The new methods mean investigators can sample fewer items and still provide evidence that is fit for use in a criminal trial.

Sampling software based on Professor Aitken’s statistical methods is available through the European Network of Forensic Science Institutes. This software allows forensic scientists without a strong background in statistics to benefit from cutting-edge Bayesian statistical methods.

Professor Aitken’s sampling protocols have been widely adopted. They have been recommended to forensic laboratories by the Crown Office in Scotland and in guidelines by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.
Improving air-quality public policy

Research led by Dr Matthew Heal into air pollution from particulate matter (PM$_{2.5}$), ozone (O$_3$) and nitrogen dioxide (NO$_2$) HAS INFORMED GOVERNMENT POLICY, RAISED AWARENESS AND HELPED PROTECT PUBLIC HEALTH. Researchers from the Heal group have improved methods for measuring these pollutants, modelling their movement and predicting the impacts of air pollution emissions.

Dr Heal’s more accurate methods for measuring NO$_2$ by passive sampler have been incorporated into NO$_2$ measurements across the UK, of which more than 139,000 are made annually. The Heal research group also discovered that less of the carbon in PM$_{2.5}$ samples than previously thought comes from fossil fuels, helping INFORM GOVERNMENT POLICY ON MEASURES TO REDUCE PM$_{2.5}$. Dr Heal’s work has raised awareness of the health risks of O$_3$, contributing to the strengthening of ozone air pollution alerts.

Uncovering extra costs in public health care

An analysis by Edinburgh researchers of private finance initiative (PFI) contracts in the National Health Service has influenced an overhaul of UK policy, including the SCRAPPING OF THE ORIGINAL PFI MODEL.

Dr Mark Hellowell and Professor Alyson Pollock uncovered extra costs associated with PFI contracts and a detrimental impact of those costs on the NHS’s ability to meet public health needs. The researchers gave evidence to the House of Commons Public Accounts and Treasury Committees, the House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee and the Scottish Parliament’s Finance Committee. Dr Hellowell was a Special Adviser to the Treasury Select Committee’s inquiry into the successor to PFI, Private Finance 2. Many of its features are designed to address shortcomings identified by the Edinburgh researchers.

The research has also been INCORPORATED INTO WORLD BANK CAPACITY-BUILDING PROGRAMMES for developing country governments.

Creating a forum for EU future debate

A new multi-author blog, European Futures, brings together commentary and analysis on European affairs by academics and practitioners from around the world. The blog provokes debate on the issues facing Europe and explores its potential futures. Its focus extends to the politics, economics and law of European integration, both within the EU and in other organisations.

Building on the way many of the University’s staff engaged with the Scottish independence referendum in 2014, the blog will contribute evidence and informed commentary in the public debate leading up to the referendum on UK membership of the EU.

European Futures was launched with 20 authors. The academic editors are Professor Laura Chan and the three Co-Directors of the Europa Institute. European Futures is funded by an ESRC Impact Acceleration Account.

www.europeanfutures.ed.ac.uk

Leading the field of Big Data

The University’s researchers are at the forefront of the rapidly developing field of data science, which presents major opportunities in many areas of public policy.

In 2015 the University formed Edinburgh Data Science (EDS), a unique initiative to bring data science expertise together, with an emphasis on communication, sharing of best practice and future development. Professor Andrew Morris, the Scottish Government’s Chief Scientist for Health and the UK’s leading research authority in medical informatics, leads EDS as the University’s new Vice-Principal of Data Science.

Edinburgh’s standing is reflected in its selection for several high-profile initiatives on the use of data science in public policy.

The University is one of the UK’s four Administrative Data Research Centres, part of a £164-million investment by the ESRC. The centres will make use of the vast amounts of data routinely collected by government departments and public services, to help policy makers decide how to tackle complex social, economic, environmental and health issues.

Edinburgh co-hosts the Farr Institute Scotland, led by Professor Morris, which is part of a collaboration of 19 universities across the UK to develop the safe use of patient data for medical research. The Farr Institute in Edinburgh’s Bioquarter hosts access to Scotland’s National Safe Haven.

The University also hosts two of the eight Innovation Centres established in 2015 to the tune of £10 million of ESRC investment. The Farr Institute Scotland, led by Professor Morris, is an example of a unique initiative to bring data science expertise together, with an emphasis on communication, sharing of best practice and future development.

The University’s ARCHER (Academic Research Computing High End Resource) system provides high-performance computing support for research and industry projects in the UK.

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Science and technology

Developing gene technology for clinical trials

Rett syndrome, a neurological disorder affecting girls, was previously thought to be untreatable, but research led by Edinburgh’s Professor Sir Adrian Bird has brought hope that a cure could one day be possible.

Rett syndrome is a severe autistic spectrum disorder with delayed onset that affects one in 10,000 girls. It is regressive, causing loss of speech and hand movement, an underdeveloped brain and growth retardation. Affected girls develop normally for around 18 months then regress, losing abilities they once had and requiring increasing levels of care as they age. The condition was believed to be developmental or neurodegenerative because of its early appearance and the gradual deterioration of those affected. A cure or therapy was thought to be most unlikely.

In 2001, researchers led by Sir Adrian developed a mouse model for Rett syndrome, by introducing a mutation into the mouse MeCP2 gene. Female mice carrying this mutation had symptoms similar to those of girls with Rett syndrome. This mouse model is now used in hundreds of labs across the world.

In 2007, Dr. Jacky Guy and other scientists in Sir Adrian’s group introduced a modified MeCP2 gene into Rett model mice that allowed controlled expression of normal MeCP2 protein. When that normal expression was activated in the mice, they rapidly regained normal behaviour.

This striking result indicated that the degenerative changes in Rett patients are reversible. ‘OVERTURNING PREVIOUS UNDERSTANDING OF THE DISEASE.

“That’s one of those exciting moments in research, a sort of eureka moment,” says Professor Sir Adrian Bird.

As a direct result of the 2007 findings, a small group of US parents of children with Rett syndrome formed the Rett Syndrome Research Trust (RSRT), a charity devoted to finding a cure for the condition. The RSRT has so far RAISED MORE THAN $25 MILLION IN DONATIONS, and 96 per cent of funding raised is committed to research seeking to cure Rett syndrome.

The UK charity Reverse Rett was formed in July 2010 by families across the UK who wanted to contribute to RSRT’s efforts to accelerate treatments for Rett syndrome. The UK charity has raised £2 million since 2010.

In response to the Edinburgh findings, MULTIPLE CLINICAL TRIALS ARE UNDERWAY IN BOTH EUROPE AND THE US to test a variety of drugs in the hope of achieving symptom improvement.

Modernising fire safety

The University’s BPE Centre for Fire Safety Engineering is transforming industry thinking, practice and regulation worldwide on structural design for fire safety in new buildings. A world leader in the performance-based structural design of buildings for fire resistance, the Centre has made research into fires in buildings its unique strength for more than 40 years.

Since 2008 a key advance has been the creation of an integrated approach to addressing fire safety problems in modern buildings, including detection and suppression at incipient and early fire development phases, organising fire service intervention, and forensic assessment of damage after the fire.

Internationally, structural and fire safety bodies and engineers are using the Centre’s expertise to design safer, more economical and more sustainable buildings. Engineering consultancy giant Arup says “the Centre’s ‘design tools and methodologies are now BEING USED IN SOME OF THE WORLD’S MOST ICONIC NEW STRUCTURES including Heron Tower, the Shard, and others”.

Identifying genome markers

Researchers have developed methods of identifying salmon that are resistant to infection, helping fish breeders select disease-resistant breeding stock.

Working alongside salmon breeding company Landcatch Natural Selection and other collaborators, studies led by the University’s Roslin Institute demonstrated that resistance to the infectious pancreatic necrosis (IPN) virus is heritable trait. Dr Ross Houston at the Roslin Institute then used high-throughput sequencing to identify single nucleotide polymorphism (SNP) markers associated with resistance to the IPN virus. These projects led to THE FIRST COMMERCIALY SUCCESSFUL MARKER-ASSISTED SELECTION FOR DISEASE RESISTANCE in aquaculture.

Creating software to protect public health

Researchers at Edinburgh developed critical software that has been used to understand the spread of, and inform the response to, global pandemics such as H1N1 swine flu.

Edinburgh’s Professor Andrew Rambaut, together with Dr Alexi Drummond of the University of Auckland, co-led the phylogenetic research and developed Bayesian Evolutionary Analysis Sampling Trees (BEAST) – a numerical estimation framework for evolutionary analysis, with a particular emphasis on infectious disease.

Professor Rambaut explains: “This open-source free software has been developed with a powerful but easy-to-use interface to make it accessible to those working in public health. It also provides a set of post-analysis visualisation tools to allow both statistical and visual representation of the results.”

BEAST has been used to INFORM PUBLIC HEALTH DECISION MAKING AT EARLY STAGES OF AN EPIDEMIC or outbreak when little other information is available, most notably in public health assessments and approaches taken by the World Health Organization during and after the 2009 human influenza (H1N1 swine flu) pandemic.

Professor Rambaut also maintained a public website during the swine flu pandemic on which he published all available current analyses, including analyses using BEAST. The site was used by journalists and Professor Rambaut was interviewed for more than 20 general interest, news and popular science publications, including Wired magazine, The China Post and Unipol Press International.

As well as having an impact on public health and society, the software has also been used in international court cases. For example, the export report for a large criminal case in Valencia, Spain, where an anaesthetist was convicted of infecting hundreds of patients with hepatitis C virus, used BEAST in determining the likely nature and timing of the infection, which was important evidence in determining responsibility.
Improving behaviour in schools
With behaviour in schools under the spotlight, the University’s Dr Gillian McCluskey’s work on alternatives to exclusion has helped lower levels of indiscipline and improved teacher confidence. Dr McCluskey’s research into restorative practices focused on the need to restore good relationships when there has been conflict and to develop a school ethos that reduces the possibilities of such conflict arising. Her research led to a Scottish Government backed two-year pilot by four local authorities adopting restorative practices, and in turn, advising the Government on a new national policy for use in all schools: Better Relationships, Better Learning, Better Behaviour.

Dr McCluskey’s research has POSITIONED SCOTLAND AS A LEADER on behaviour and relationships in schools. At the invitation of respected education bodies and institutions, Dr McCluskey has provided insights into the use of restorative approaches in the US, Canada, Spain and Korea.

Increasing our understanding of ageing
In 1921 and 1936, two groups of school pupils took a test of mental ability. Many years later, the people involved were contacted by the University’s Professor Ian Deary and his team, and invited to undertake a similar series of tests. The aim of the research was to delve into the causes of cognitive change during ageing. Professor Deary’s study found that reduced mental ageing is related to factors such as not smoking, being physically active and speaking more than one language. His research also revealed that children with higher mental capabilities are less likely to develop certain illnesses that affect thinking skills, and some factors previously thought to influence the ageing brain were shown to be unrelated.

The results have featured in numerous science festivals; have been the focus of a series of artworks created for The Art of Ageing exhibition, and been the inspiration for a book of short stories. Professor Deary also provided valuable information for government and NHS groups.

Enhancing inter-religious dialogue
The Edinburgh Akedah Centre aims to encourage A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF ISLAM AND ISLAMIC CULTURE through groundbreaking research and outreach projects. Its researchers created a residential conference, Breaking Barriers, which brought together young Christians and Muslims from across Scotland for scriptural reasoning sessions comparing Qur’anic and Biblical verses, and introduced them to the history of Christian-Muslim relations. The impact of the conference continues: delegates took the lead in organising four further day-long conferences to continue what the Centre had started.

The Centre recently rolled out a series of CPD seminars for Scottish police officers. Seminars led by University staff provided officers with essential information about Islam in both a national and international context. The success of the training led to further engagement between the University and Police Scotland with researchers invited to sit on the Association of Chief Police Officers Religion and Belief Reference Group.

Inventing broadband solutions to support communities
What began in 2007 as a research project, called Tegola, for the University’s Professor Peter Buneman, Dr Giacomo Biermardi and Dr Mahesh Marina evolved over several years into a community endeavour that resulted in bringing superfast broadband to an otherwise unconnected part of the Scottish Highlands.

The advent of superfast broadband has had a significant impact on businesses, organisations, education and home consumers alike, with an ever-growing range of commerce and communication dependent on high-speed internet access. Much of rural Scotland is without high-quality web access. University researchers realised the Tegola network demonstrated the suitability of long-distance Wi-Fi technology even for areas like rural Scotland. To increase the stability and sustainability of the network, the up-to-the-minute resources of the School were used to develop certain engineering measures, and use of solar and wind power for self-powered masts that would strengthen and protect the network.

The project corresponded with the ambitions of the Scottish Government:
“Broadband should not be considered a luxury in places like the Highlands and Islands. It is essential to enhance the quality of life of communities and to STIMULATE THE GROWTH OF THE LOCAL ECONOMY.” Nicola Sturgeon

The head of BT Scotland had expressed the opinion that mesh networks like Tegola were not robust however, experience has shown otherwise. In 2011 Tegola was successfully used for emergency medical services when a lightning strike knocked out the telephones to a wider area. As a direct result of the Edinburgh team’s research, some of Scotland’s most remote communities are now enjoying superfast broadband for the first time.

Tegola has become a replicable model for community-driven local access network deployments in Scotland. It has also inspired research into tools, systems and techniques to aid communities in deploying and maintaining similar rural networks in other parts of the globe.
Acknowledgements

Published by:
Communications and Marketing
The University of Edinburgh
www.ed.ac.uk

This publication can be viewed online and downloaded as a PDF.
Please visit www.ed.ac.uk/research/impact.
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The University of Edinburgh is a charitable body, registered in Scotland, with registration number SC005336.

This publication is available in alternative formats on request.
Please contact communications.office@ed.ac.uk.

With thanks to:

Photography:
Angus Blackburn
Peter Buneman, Giacomo Bernadi and Mahesh Marina
Graham Clark
Monica Coenraads
Emma Davie and Morag McKinnon
Paul Dodds
Pamela Moore
Dave Morris
Anna Okello
Louise Oswald
Douglas Robertson
Peter Saaremets
Sam Silva
Skimstone Arts
Stamp Out Sleeping Sickness Campaign
Vince Thompson
Catherine Ward Thompson
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