

# Sociological Studies

## *a history to be proud of*

The Department of Sociological Studies at the University of Sheffield has its origins in the establishment of the School of Social Studies in 1949, making us one of the oldest social science departments in the United Kingdom. The School offered two programmes: a two-year Certificate in Social Studies, preparing non-graduates for a career in basic social work or further specialised social work training, and a two-year Postgraduate Diploma in Social Studies, offering graduates the same. In the early 1950s the first Lecturer in Sociology was appointed, and a course on Research Appreciation and Basic Statistics was added to the syllabus.

The Department's second phase began in 1956, when Keith Kelsall, a founder member of the British Sociological Association who was interested in industrial relations, public administration, social stratification and demography, was appointed as the School's Director. In 1960 the School became the Department of Sociological Studies, part of the newly established Faculty of Social Sciences, and Kelsall was appointed to the new Chair in Sociology. A single honours degree in Sociology was introduced, and the Department rapidly expanded on the Sociology side, placing Sheffield at the forefront of the emergence of Sociology as a university discipline in Britain.

During the second half of the 1960s the focus of Social Work training at Sheffield increasingly became the postgraduate course, reflecting changes in the professional status of social work encouraged by the 1968 Seebohm Report. Relationships with the South Yorkshire local authorities and social services became increasingly important, and discussions with the Home Office led to the establishment of an external one-year probation training course. These developments led to further recruitment in 'Social Studies', as it continued to be known, but also increasingly drew Sociology staff into Social Work teaching.

The early 'sixties and the turn of the 'seventies, were very different eras, reflecting the national expansion of higher education since the 1963 Robbins Report, changes in the way teaching was delivered, the new organisational status of the Department, and the radical social movements of the late 1960s. Where teaching was the main focus for the few staff in the early 'sixties, and workloads challenging, by the early 'seventies the Department was better resourced and intellectual debate and research pursuits that were expected – by staff and students alike – rather than hard-won luxuries.

The Department's 'phase three' began in the mid-seventies, when staffing stood at about 23 full-time equivalents, about a dozen of whom were devoted to Sociology teaching. The present tri-partite Departmental structure – Sociology, Social Policy and Social Work – emerged at this time. In 1975 Kelsall retired and was replaced in the Chair of Sociology by John Westergaard, coming from LSE. Two years later, Eric Sainsbury was promoted internally to the new Chair in Social Administration (effectively Social Work). Together, Westergaard and Salisbury developed Social Policy as an intellectual bridge between Sociology and Social Work. This consistent and successful approach, maintained ever since, explains why today Social Policy is so central to the Department's mission and also explains the decision to develop a single honours Social Policy degree.

The second important consequence of the appointment of the new Chairs was a push to strengthen the Department's empirical research activity, in all of the Department's disciplines. The results of this strategy can be seen in the pioneering development of client-studies, which gave a voice to service-users, and in a number of large funded research projects (not least the large Social Science Research Council-funded study of redundancy in the steel industry, directed by John Westergaard and Alan Walker in the early 1980s).

However, all was not well in the University or with higher education nationally, both situations that deteriorated sharply after 1979. Funding was squeezed to the bone during the 1980s. These were hard times, and they produced hard and difficult responses. Without the established and well-founded income stream provided by Social Work training, Sociology and Social Policy might not have survived at all. That they did survive was a tribute to co-operation between the disciplines within the Department and the strong and shared desire within the Department to preserve all of the Department's activities. From the late 1980s the Department sought its salvation, largely under the leadership of Professor Alan Walker, in Social Policy, as a source of undergraduates – the single honours degree in Sociology was in abeyance for a while due to a drastic decline in student numbers – and as a newly developing field for the large-scale funded research which was vital if the Department was to survive. The vacant Sociology chair was protected after John Westergaard's early retirement, and in Walker's words, 'the strategy was to sustain three disciplines...[with] Social Policy as a component of Sociology.'

This shift of emphasis still informs the tenor of the Department today. The emphasis is firmly on policy-related 'real world' empirical research. Everything we do is informed by social theory and we are home to several distinguished theorists, but we are a department, first and foremost, of practising researchers, and the Department's research is assessed in the national Research Excellence Framework by the 'Social Work and Social Policy' panel. The trauma of the collapse of sociology in the mid- to late-1980s has not been forgotten, and

the principled and pragmatic remedies that came to the Department's aid then are still influential.

Despite the brief suspension of the single honours sociology degree, most main sociology courses continued to be taught and by the early 1990s single honours Sociology was back in business again. This marks the beginning of 'phase four'. The vacant Sociology chair was re-filled in 1995 - a good example of the success of the 'social policy strategy' – by Richard Jenkins and since then there have been a series of further appointments in all three disciplines. There have also been new approaches to our core business of teaching, in response to national policy shifts and student demand. Systematic postgraduate research training has achieved a new importance. We have developed successful Masters programmes in Social Research, Global and International Social Policy, and Professional Practice with Children and their Families. Undergraduate education has been reorganised around systematic research methods training, allied to a wide range of specialist modules that offer students enhanced choice.

Perhaps the other major change has been the rise of interdisciplinary research cooperation, between the Department's three disciplines and across the University and beyond. Over the last fifteen years Sociological Studies at Sheffield has become internationally prominent in three interdisciplinary fields in particular. Under the leadership of Professor Alan Walker, the study of growing older in the modern world, when the demography of societies everywhere is 'greying', has achieved international recognition. The Department has hosted a series of large national and international research collaborations, including the Growing Older Programme (funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, 1999–2004), the National Collaboration on Ageing Research (funded by four research councils, 2001–2005), and several major, and related, European programmes between 2002 and 2012. New European programmes are in the pipeline. Professor Walker's New Dynamics of Ageing Programme (NDA) is an eight-year multidisciplinary research initiative, 2006–13, with the ultimate aim of improving quality of life of people as they age. This unique collaboration between five UK Research Councils is the largest and most ambitious research programme on ageing ever mounted in the United Kingdom.

The study of childhood came to prominence in the Department with the arrival in 2003 of Professor Allison James, one of the founders of the new sociology and anthropology of childhood in the 1990s. Building on an existing foundation of Social Policy and Social Work research in Sheffield, the Sheffield Centre for the Study of Childhood and Youth, founded in 2002, now includes researchers from the humanities, social sciences and medicine in an ongoing programme of workshops, conferences and postgraduate training opportunities that attracts participants from around the world. The Centre's 2012 conference brought together 189 delegates from 29 countries. The Centre also boasts an open access, fully refereed, Internet-based journal for postgraduates,

Childhoods Today, which is edited within the Department by Dr Afua Twum-Danso Imoh. This offers postgraduates, world-wide, a first publication outlet through its supportive refereeing process and is an initiative that has been commended highly by Child Watch International.

Finally, and perhaps most innovatively, the Department can claim to be the United Kingdom's leading centre of excellence in International and Global Social Policy, and a globally recognised centre of scholarship. Under the leadership of Bob Deacon, now an Emeritus Professor, we have established a programme of research and teaching that attracts postgraduate students from all over the world, and research funding and collaboration with organisations such as UNESCO, the International Labour Organisation and the World Health Organisation. The programme covers a wide range of topics, including the role of global business in national and international governance, the emergence of global health policy, and the impact of migration on national and supra-national policy making.

Looking to the future of our research, perhaps the most obvious developing theme is the social study of science and technology, including health care. The appointment of Professor Paul Martin in 2011 added to our existing research capacity and marked a significant step change in the Department's profile in this field. Genetic and reproductive technology, pharmaceuticals and neuroscience – among other things – are now all firmly on our sociological agenda, and offer a further opportunity for co-operation between Sociology and Social Policy.

At the time of writing, 2013, the Department is arguably – along with the rest of the United Kingdom higher education sector – entering a new phase, and it likely to be nothing less than historical. Changes in home student demand due to raised student fees, reduced and increasingly concentrated research funding, and a steadily more difficult international student market, mean that we face a challenging future. The Department will respond to these challenges as it has before: with principled and pragmatic innovation, collegial co-operation and the interests of students always to the fore.