



**ARE WE
RUNNING
OUT OF
SCIENTISTS?**



**BRITAIN'S
BOOMING
RURAL
ECONOMY**



**THE
CHANCELLOR'S
ECONOMIC
LEGACY**

Britain Today



The state of the nation in 2007



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SOCIAL SCIENCE... THE WIDER PICTURE



SOCIAL NEUROSCIENCE

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LAND USE AND CONSERVATION

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WELCOME TO THIS INAUGURAL issue of *Britain Today*, a new annual publication from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

The ESRC is the country's biggest funder of research on the major social and economic issues that the country faces today and is independent of government. We fund research by the very best social scientists in the country. They are all committed to ensuring that their research has the biggest possible impact on the economic development and quality of life of the people of Britain and beyond.

We want the excellent research we support to be used by everyone who can gain from it. For government, it provides the evidence for economic policies and for thinking about health, social security, climate change and the future of the UK workforce in a globalised world. It informs business about new management methods and new forms of organisation such as public-private partnerships. For the public services, we are providing research evidence on better ways of educating people throughout their lives, for their personal development and for the country's economic benefit.

ESRC supports top-quality researchers in a wide range of subjects. Some study novel issues such as the future of nanotechnology, or the impact of our growing knowledge of the brain on how we educate children. Others work in longer-established fields such as economic and social policy. But they share a commitment to producing research that influences and informs thinking, in the UK and around the world, both to improve prosperity and to enhance quality of life.

This magazine will give you a flavour of what research is revealing about the UK and its place in the world. Some may confirm things we already think we know: for example, that British children are becoming more obese. But how many people would have guessed that allowing girls to wear trainers to school is part of the solution? In the same way, we know that the UK has been altered by mass immigration in recent decades. But we show here that the picture is far more subtle than we have previously appreciated. Mass immigration from South Asia and the Caribbean has been supplanted by the growth of many small immigrant groups, from a wide range of rich and poor countries around the world. Each has a distinctive view of its role in the UK.

The ESRC-funded research we describe in these pages shows that the social sciences work best in combination with research from other areas of knowledge. World problems such as climate change and the ageing of the population are about human behaviour as much as they are about atmospheric science or medicine.

We cannot side-step these issues. A period of marked population ageing is inevitable if population growth is to be halted. Social policies, national and personal finances, and individual actions, all need to reflect this reality.

In the same way, 2006 and 2007 will go down in history as the years when we realised the full consequences for ourselves and the world around us of the mass use of fossil fuels. Better technology and improved knowledge of Earth systems will both be needed to help us make the big changes that are needed to leave the oil era. But political and business institutions will have to change too, as will personal attitudes and behaviours. The role of social science is to make sure we have the knowledge we need to make this change rapid and effective.

We hope you find what follows informative, enjoyable and entertaining. We intend this to be the first of many issues of *Britain Today*, and we would welcome your response via the editor at britaintoday@esrc.ac.uk ■

PROFESSOR IAN DIAMOND FBA AcSS, Chief Executive Economic and Social Research Council

INSIDE BRITAIN TODAY



(Top) Fewer people in Britain are identifying themselves as British. (Below) How best can policymakers tackle global poverty?

BRITAIN AT A GLANCE

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Cities

Competitiveness

Economy

Ethnic minorities

HIV and AIDS

Home learning

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