Studying social policy has never been more important or timely. Who is living in poverty and why? What should governments do to address homelessness? Should the state intervene in personal lives? How can we make cities more child-friendly? Can social policy reduce obesity levels? How should we think about migration? Should drug taking be criminalised?

These are just some of the questions addressed in our social policy degree; providing an exciting opportunity to critically analyse contemporary social issues related to human wellbeing, inequality, disadvantage and crime.

Studying social policy here in Bristol means being part of a department which is one of the very best in the country. The people teaching you these subjects are leading experts in these topics – 80% of our research is categorised as ‘world-leading’ and Social Policy is rated highly in the Guardian University league tables.

Bristol is an excellent location to explore these issues; it is a city with a high proportion of young people, engaged with issues of environment and sustainability, wrestling with inequalities, and enriched by cultural diversity. It is a great place to study and relax and is regularly voted as one of the best places in the UK to live.

We look forward to seeing you next year!

Esther Dermott

Professor Esther Dermott explains more about Social Policy at the University of Bristol
Social Policy is a broad based social science subject which analyses a variety of issues facing society in order to advise governments, international organisations and policy-makers on how to address real world problems, locally, nationally, and internationally. Such engagement can also inform teaching, keeping it up to date with the latest issues, and relevant to the needs of society.

I am a Senior Research Fellow in the School for Policy Studies at the University of Bristol. For many years I have worked on issues related to migration in a research, teaching, and advisory capacity. I have advised the European Commission, the European Parliament, the Council of Ministers and EU Presidencies, and collaborated with many NGOs and international organisations including the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE).

Such work informs my teaching at a variety of levels, and my unit ‘migration policy in the UK and European Union’ is an optional second and third year unit for the BSc Social Policy and BSc International Social and Public Policy degrees. Most recently, I co-edited the journal Fatal Journeys Volume 3, which explores the challenges of collecting data on migrant deaths and disappearances. Better data on migration would help inform policy by helping to understand migration trends, enabling, for example, the construction of safe migration pathways and assist in better preparedness for migration ‘crises’. The report, published by the International Organisation for Migration, makes it evident that the number of migrants who die across the world are vastly under-reported. In many remote regions of the world, bodies may never be found, and many migrants may never be identified. Accurate data on the number of missing migrants is vital to building a true picture of the problem, to create strong, evidence-based policies to save lives and to improve identification of missing migrants.

The report focuses on the problems of collecting accurate data in six regions around the world: Middle East and North Africa; sub-Saharan Africa; Asia-Pacific; Central America; South America; Europe and the Mediterranean. Each of these regions presents specific problems related to the availability and collection of data on migration.

In Central and South America, for example, there is little data on migrant deaths and disappearances, and crimes against migrants tend to go unreported and therefore are not investigated. While there is greater awareness of migration from North Africa and Turkey across the Mediterranean, much less is known about the journeys that migrants make before they reach the Mediterranean coast. Those travelling through the Middle East and Africa may have travelled through or may be fleeing from conflict zones, making data collection difficult. In the Asia Pacific region, migration across the Andaman Sea illustrates that while occasionally women and child migrant deaths can be ‘hyper visible’, they are much more likely to be invisible, with women less likely to be reported missing, their bodies less likely to be recovered, and when they are, less likely to be reported than men.

With these issues in mind, the report makes a number of recommendations including:

- Make better use of administrative data and publish it whenever possible
- Promote survey-based data collection where standardised processes do not exist
- Improve data sharing across regions to inform the ‘bigger picture’
- Explore the use of new technologies including big data
- Work with civil society groups and involve the families of missing migrants as further sources of information.

The full report is available for download free at: publications.iom.int/books/fatal-journeys-volume-3-part-2-improving-data-missing-migrants

Ann Singleton describes how her research informs both international policy and teaching

Ann Singleton is a Senior Research Fellow at the School for Policy Studies. She teaches on the optional unit “Migration policy in the UK and European Union”. She is also Senior Adviser to the Institute of Migration (IOM) Global Migration Data Analysis Centre (GMDAC).
Breaking the law to save the world

Civil disobedience has been used widely in climate change protests recently. This has divided opinions but also been successful in bringing climate change higher up the policy agenda. But why do protesters break the law?

**Legitimacy**

Civil disobedience has a long history in liberal democratic societies. It is a particularly good way for people to protest specific unjust laws in a society that is otherwise legitimate. The classic example is the US Civil Rights movement that protested race segregation laws. The ‘civil’ comes from it being non-violent and also by appealing to people’s sense of civility and justice. The ‘disobedience’ comes from these forms of protest breaking laws, rules or instructions from authorities. A disobedient protest often receives more media attention than a normal protest march. Civil disobedience has a long history in liberal democratic societies. It is a particularly good way for people to protest specific unjust laws in a society that is otherwise legitimate.

- **One theory is that many adult women who have experienced FGM as children in their country of origin often have insecure immigration status, and their previous experiences with the police, and marginality as first-generation immigrant women, means that FGM is seen as a private or familial matter with tacit approval from the wider community. Survivors of FGM also report distrust of the police and wider criminal justice system, because they feel that their communities are being targeted by the police and wider society. This is based on experiences where they – or someone close to them – have felt unfairly treated and reflects a wider marginalisation of immigrant women in the UK.**

The lack of fit between the community perceptions of FGM – as a cultural practice, and a rite of passage for females from a specific community, and the official stance of many governments, fuelled by social media bubbles. We can also see it in hardened differences in social attitudes, particularly illegitimate. Therefore, even though the disruption of fossil fuels and the power of fossil fuel companies are seen as particularly illegitimate. Therefore, even though the disruption of fossil fuels and the power of fossil fuel companies are seen as particularly illegitimate. Therefore, even though the disruption of fossil fuels and the power of fossil fuel companies are seen as particularly illegitimate.

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Civil disobedience has been particularly common in climate change activism recently. Highlighting the illegitimacy of government inaction on climate change has been central. Protestors draw their own legitimacy from referring to the science. Indeed, many scientists have participated in climate change protests. This makes it hard to disagree with the message of activists without becoming anti-scientific or anti-knowledge, which is seldom a good look. Although activists have often lacked clear policy demands, they have highlighted the illegitimacy of government inaction on climate change.

- **Dr Oscar Berglund, lecturer in International Public and Social Policy, explores the unusual methods by which the climate change movement seeks to effect policy change.**

It is harder than ever to build majorities in parliaments. When there is so much separating you from your opponents, it is difficult to compromise, and politicians know that many of their voters won’t like it. The result is weak governments and/ or governments that many voters perceive as illegitimate. Because civil disobedience is fundamentally about legitimacy, this is an age ripe for disobedience.

**Climate Change Activism**

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We tend to call these ‘drugs’ for shorthand, but in almost all societies, throughout history, there has been something that was an ‘acceptable’ drug, while other drugs have been seen as unacceptable, and controlled in some way. That acceptable drug may not be something used routinely, but may instead have a role in ritual and ceremony.

‘Acceptable’ drugs
Where a particular drug falls in terms of that ‘acceptable’ and ‘unacceptable’ divide has, historically, had less to do with the particular properties of the drug itself, and everything to do with things like familiarity and who is thought to be the user of it in any given society. Social customs, norms and ‘etiquette’ grow up around ‘acceptable’ drugs, while laws and prohibitions grow up around ‘unacceptable’ drugs. This is what we mean by drug policies: the set of responses a society has to drug use – laws, arrangements for control, treatment of users – and the thinking behind those responses. Since the middle of the twentieth century, different countries’ drug policies have increasingly been framed within a global structure created by the United Nations Conventions on drugs and the systems for administering and enforcing those conventions. The UN conventions aim to eradicate the production and use of the drugs they control: all those that our own 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act classifies and bans.

Prohibition
This global framework of prohibition has many critics: countries whose own traditional ‘acceptable’ drugs are now criminalised like Bolivia, which has tried to legalise the use of coca, for example. Or international NGOs that argue against the way UN policies like crop eradication hurt less developed countries. Here in the UK, there are fierce debates about the production and use of the drugs they control: all those that our own 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act classifies and bans.

A great topic
So why is this such a great topic to study? It covers everything from questions about why individuals get into difficulties with drugs, and the ways we as a society treat them and provide help (or not), through to global issues – why does the UN take the line it does, and what does drug policy fit into international relations? If we are looking at British policy, we can see whether national politics affect how we think about drugs – have Labour, Conservative or Coalition governments had very different approaches to drugs, for example? From a sociological point of view, drug use is a fascinating topic: many of the classics of early sociology looked at drug use as a form of deviance and have insights to help us understand policy. It raises key philosophical issues: Can we see drug use as a self-regarding action, and one that individuals should have choice over, or do we believe there are harms involved that the law must protect people from, even against their will?

In the optional unit ‘Drugs and Society’ I address these sorts of questions, and look at the way British society has developed its drug policy over the last century, putting that into the global context and comparing it to other countries’ approaches.

Human beings seem to have a built in liking for psychoactive substances – things that change the way we think, feel and perceive the world.

Dr Rachel Lart has worked on research projects looking at a range of policy initiatives in the area of health and social care. Rachel convenes the first year unit Social Policy and the Welfare State: Historical Perspectives, and teaches two optional second/third year units: Healthcare Policies and Drugs and Society.
Social care in crisis

There is almost unanimous agreement that the adult social care sector in England is in crisis.

Social care refers to the ‘range of services designed to support people to maintain their independence, enable them to play a fuller part in society, protect them in vulnerable situations and manage complex relationships’ (DH 2006).

Services include support to people living in their own homes, residential care, as well as access to specialist services, such as drug and alcohol services. Most services are provided by private and voluntary sector organisations. However, unlike health care, publicly funded social care is only available to those who are eligible, for example people with physical disabilities and frail older people who have specific needs and, are unable to pay for services themselves.

So, why is social care in crisis and what can be done to resolve it? Many people argue that the crisis is a consequence of the growing numbers of older people requiring care, but this is a simplistic interpretation of the problem. Yes, the numbers of older people are rising but only a small proportion are eligible for funded care and many provide care themselves, locking after partners or grandparents. The problems faced by the sector are more fundamental.

Despite increased investment in social care during the late 1990s and early 2000s, funding in the sector has reduced since 2009, largely as a result of austerity measures (Botttery et al 2018). But arguments about the impact of austerity detract from the bigger question of whether publicly funded social care should be free to all in need or available only to those who can’t afford to pay? Then there are questions about how social care should be funded: Through taxation; insurance or a mixed system? The failure of successive governments to address these questions lies at the heart of the crisis, but the problems don’t end there.

Whilst the funding available to social care has reduced, the numbers of people requiring support have risen and so too has the cost of providing care. For example, the decision of some national providers to pay care workers a ‘living wage’ has forced smaller agencies to close. In addition, difficulties recruiting and retaining graduate social workers puts further pressure on the sector. And what impact have the funding cuts to the NHS had on the social care sector?

The complexity of the crisis facing social care demands broad agreement about whether or not social care should be universally available and, how it should be funded. Without tackling these questions, the crisis will continue and will only get worse.

References:
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Ailsa Cameron is a senior lecturer in the School for Policy Studies, at undergraduate level, her teaching focuses on inter-professional practice and personal welfare services and she currently convenes the ‘Social Care in Crisis’ unit.

“…I really dislike numbers but policy makers want numerical evidence so I need to learn how to provide evidence” …

… said a first year student when I enquired about why she was studying my unit. And I couldn’t agree more. Numbers can help quantify the social world by identifying the extent to which there is advantage or disadvantage in society so that we can address areas of need.

Numbers confirm

Without numbers we wouldn’t be able to say that in 2011, 22.7% of the UK population was at risk of poverty or social exclusion (Source: Office for National Statistics). This is equivalent to 14 million people not earning enough income to sustain decent standards of living. Similarly, numbers allow us to confirm that inequality in Britain has risen dramatically in the last 10 years. In fact, Britain’s richest 1% have accumulated as much wealth as the poorest 55% (Source: Office for National Statistics). It is now well known that high levels of inequality negatively affect individuals’ socio-economic position in society and restrict their life chances. The extent to which this happens can only be answered with numbers. In a globalised and data-driven world, it becomes therefore even more important to develop skills that can help analyse and interpret these data, so that we can inform policy making as well as improve career options. Increasingly, numerical (or quantitative) skills are in high demand from employers in all sectors and would definitely enhance students’ chances of getting a job.

Lack of confidence with numbers

Although the latest research indicates that 15-year-old pupils in the UK are motivated by numbers and can see their utility, the UK still lags behind when compared to other countries in the world (Source: OECD PISA report). So much so that in 2014 the education minister was rushed to Shanghai to discover the secret behind their pupils’ top scores in maths. Why? Numeracy not only increases individuals’ ability to succeed in life and in the workplace but at a national level it increases the country’s competitiveness and growth. In the social sciences, students understate the value of numbers and often think that to interpret or use numbers they need to have a mathematical mind. This, unfortunately, discourages students from taking any further maths. But this is a complete misconception! In the social sciences, particularly, numbers are used as a tool, which only works if students have a social sciences mind.

Sponsored tuition to help

Any social science student can learn to use and interpret numbers if they are motivated, engaged with the topic and, most importantly, if they receive learning support.

With this purpose, in 2013 the University of Bristol has become part of a £19.5 million national programme sponsored by the Nuffield Foundation designed to support students in the acquisition of quantitative training, by setting up the Bristol QStep centre, one of only 15 centres in the UK. Three highly skilled lecturers, including myself, were hired as part of the initiative to deliver new units that would not only appeal by their content to childhood studies students but would also equip them with the latest analytical tools to understand society.

For instance, I deliver a unit called “Segregation and Inequality in Britain”, The aim of the unit is to consider the extent to which the UK is a segregated or unequal society giving particular consideration to what is meant by segregation and inequality and how these concepts may be formalised and measured. With interactive lectures and computer labs we use data to better understand the UK socio-economic landscape. A data analysis project gives students the opportunity to explore the topic they most enjoy studying whilst learning data analysis skills. This subject can be chosen as an open unit or as part of the new BSc Social Policy with Quantitative Research Methods, and is taught by leading UK experts in quantitative methods. As proof that anyone can do it, no prior maths skills are required.

Undoubtedly, the strengths of the social policy programme at Bristol have already been recognised by numerous institutions, placing us first in several University league tables. But now, students at Bristol will have the unique opportunity to engage with the more quantitative side of social policy. Social Policy at Bristol gives students the option to strengthen their degree and widen future career opportunities, with the help and support of lecturers who are truly passionate about teaching the use and interpretation of numbers.

Alissa Cameron is a senior lecturer and qualitative researcher in the areas of health and social care. In this article, she examines the complexity of the social care crisis.

Dr Julia Gumy is a Lecturer in Policy Studies with Quantitative Research Methods. Her research interests lie in the study of the life course, subjective and economic well-being, gender, comparative welfare policies and the use of quantitative research methods.
The study abroad year is simultaneously one of the most exciting and daunting experiences of your university career. In the months leading up, you kind of lose track of how long you have left at home as you get completely caught up in deadlines, exams and cherishing your last moments with friends and family for a while. At least this is how it felt to me. I will definitely say I had doubts and thought about calling it all off, but I think this is only natural as you really are being pushed out of your comfort zone. It is not easy leaving your friends and family behind, and there will be tears at the airport, but everyone is just a phone call, Face Time or text away and it is a lot easier than you think to regularly speak to those close to you, even with the time difference. I am now about a third of the way through, but it feels like I only left home a week ago!

During the first week it felt like I was on holiday, if not slightly hectic. Whilst you’re trying to settle yourself in and complete necessary errands, like buying a phone sim and opening a bank account, you are also trying to meet people and explore your new home before university commences. I personally didn’t struggle to meet people as I am living in a shared house with a large group of students from the Universities of Leeds, Exeter and Manchester. However, if this is not your situation or if you choose to live in the equivalent to halls, you will likely be living in a flat with 7-8 other people so meeting people in that sense should also be relatively easy. If you do feel lonely or like you are struggling to meet people, the university hosts welcome/mingling events during orientation week which a lot of students attend so this could also be a good way to find your people.

The workload is similar to what I have been used to at Bristol, but with more frequent assessments throughout the semester. I decided to take two open units and two units compatible with my course, this has been really rewarding as it has allowed me to explore new subjects/interests outside of my degree subject.

In terms of socialising and travelling, there is so much to do in and around Brisbane and the city is always putting on events and entertainment. The university also has societies for international students which you can join to meet people or just enjoy the events they host; QUEST is particularly good for this. Lastly, with regard to travelling, you will almost definitely do some travelling in your year abroad and I would 100% recommend this but definitely start saving as soon as you can to ensure you can fully experience each destination you choose without feeling too much of a financial strain.

“I think a great way to approach the year is to be open and friendly to everyone. You will meet so many people throughout the year so keeping an open mind to experiences and people will be hugely beneficial to you."

Widen your horizons with Study Abroad

Hannah is a 3rd year undergraduate currently studying at the Queensland University of Technology in Brisbane, Australia. Here she talks about her experiences in the lead up to leaving the UK and in the first couple of months of her year abroad.

Studying or working abroad is an outstanding opportunity to internationalise your degree, boost your personal development and gain a new perspective on your studies.
I chose to study the ‘Work and Work Placements’ unit in my second year as although I had been employed in a variety of roles before applying to university, they were either in hospitality or retail. The Professional Liaison Network at Bristol provided me with the opportunity to gain experience of working in a different sector that would complement my future career choices. I also saw the unit as a chance to build my confidence, make connections and gain important employment-related skills such as how to write a CV and present myself at interview.

On selecting my work placement, I knew that I wanted to work in the third sector, as I thought it would give me a sense of ‘giving back’. St Pauls Advice Centre in Bristol gives free advice to lower income, marginalised groups in the local community and so it suited what I was looking for perfectly. I was specifically attracted to their community orientated ethos.

The team was very small, with just 12 people in total and I got to know everyone well. My role involved writing fundraising proposals, which requires researching a wide variety of social issues and using this information to convey a compelling argument to potential funding bodies. ‘The Centre is not for profit, so donations are essential for its day-to-day running.

My positive experience at St Pauls Advice Centre has now made me think about pursuing a career in this field. And although I already knew the importance of Social Policy as a degree, working at the advice centre has really consolidated this in my mind. The knowledge I have gained to date really helped in my placement and it reaffirmed the reasons I initially chose to study the subject - to help others and contribute to something positive.

Overall, I feel that the placement had a positive impact on my self-esteem and confidence. I struggle with generalised social anxiety and had always worried how much of a barrier it could be to me entering the ‘professional’ working world. Being in the workplace gave me the confidence I needed to see past that and overcome my fears.

The placement had a positive impact on my self-esteem and confidence.”

Anna

The BSc Social Policy courses are a great way to start your career. The skills and knowledge you will gain are highly sought after by employers, and our graduates have an excellent track record of employment. Here’s a selection of what some of our students have gone on to achieve:

- **Holly (2016)**
  - Worked in children’s social care, before moving to the transport sector where she contributed to the West of England’s policies on digital information, and designed the on-street timetables for the MetroBus rapid transit system.

- **Zeynep (2015)**
  - Employed by Zacchaeus 2000 in London – an organisation which addresses poverty issues that arise as a result of unfairness in the legal and benefits system.

- **Molly (2015)**
  - On graduating, secured a place at Hft, a national learning disability charity, as part of the 12 month Charity/Works trainee programme. Now works as a Community Builder for the Barnwood Trust, a charitable foundation dedicated to making Gloucestershire an inclusive community for people with a disability or mental health problem. Molly also works alongside the national ABCD forum to raise awareness of Asset-Based Community Development.

- **Jake (2017)**
  - Since graduating, Jake works as a Food Partner Support Officer with FairShare, a charity dedicated to fighting hunger and tackling food waste.