



Poverty and Social Exclusion in the UK

UK's largest ever research project into poverty and social exclusion is launched. **May 2010**

New research into poverty

The UK's largest ever research project on **Poverty and Social Exclusion in the United Kingdom** is launched today with the ultimate ambition of helping to find solutions to tackle the problems of poverty and deprivation.

Funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), the investigation will be led by a team of top flight researchers, who will examine trends from the past ten years.

The findings will identify the causes and outcomes of poverty and social exclusion and could have a significant impact on policies to improve the standard of living across the social divide.

The initiative, which will span three and a half years, is a major collaboration between the University of Bristol, Heriot-Watt University, the National Centre for Social Research, Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, The Open University, Queen's University Belfast, University of Glasgow and the University of York.

Professor David Gordon, Director of the Townsend Centre for International Poverty Research at the University of Bristol, said: "Billions of pounds are spent each year in the UK on trying to reduce poverty and yet poverty rates remain stubbornly and persistently higher than during the 1960s and 1970s.

"Wages and benefits are too low and too much money and talent is wasted on 'socially useless activities' in the financial sector. A radical re-think is needed on how to end poverty and exclusion once and for all.

This study will provide the kind of deep analysis that can inform the work of the new Government - and Frank Field MP, who has been invited to lead a review on levels of poverty and how it should be measured"

The research project will:

- 1 Improve the measurement of poverty, deprivation, social exclusion and standard of living.
- 2 Measure the change in the nature and extent of poverty and social exclusion over the past ten years.
- 3 Produce policy-relevant results about the causes and outcomes of poverty and social exclusion and how best to address these problems.

Professor Ruth Levitas, from Bristol's Sociology department, said: "The UK now stands at a crossroads in terms of adopting effective measures to stop and reverse the damaging structural trends that have resulted in high levels of poverty and social exclusion for over 30 years.

"High rates of social deprivation have the effects of worsening health, education, and job skills, as well as relationships within families, between ethnic groups and across society as a whole.

"If the UK is to become an inclusive society in which everybody has a stake and is able to participate then the most important task facing government is the ending of poverty and social exclusion."

Professor Jonathan Bradshaw, Director of the Institute for Research in the Social Sciences at the University of York, and the UK's leading expert on child poverty said: "The UK has committed itself to ending child poverty, forever, by 2020. All political parties have agreed to this by supporting the Child Poverty Act. The academic community must rise to this challenge and provide the high quality research and policy advice that the government will need. There is too little practical scientific research into ending child poverty and more must be done as a matter of urgency."

Note to Editors

- 1 The project builds on earlier work, including the 1999 Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey, and on established expertise in defining and measuring social exclusion at Bristol University's Faculty of Social Sciences and Law.
- 2 Every decade since the late 1960s, UK social scientists have attempted to carry out an independent poverty survey to test out new ideas and incorporate current state of the art methods into UK poverty research. The 1968-69 *Poverty in the UK* survey (Peter Townsend and colleagues), the 1983 *Poor Britain* and 1990 *Breadline Britain* surveys (Joanna Mack, Stewart Lansley and colleagues) and the 1999 *Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey* (Jonathan Bradshaw and colleagues) and its 2002 counterpart in Northern Ireland (Paddy Hillyard and colleagues), introduced new methods, ideas and techniques about poverty measurement and helped to keep UK academic research at the forefront of academic research.
- 3 Further details can be found at www.poverty.ac.uk
- 4 For further information & interviews, contact: David Gordon (Principal Investigator), 0117-9546761 (office), 01803-865736 (home); Jonathan Bradshaw (University of York), 01904-433480 (office), 01904-728329 (home); Ruth Levitas (University of Bristol) (office) 0117-9287506.
- 5 Issued by the University of Bristol, Public Relations Office, tel 0117 928 7777.
- 6 Contact: Aliya Mughal, tel 0117 331 7033 / 07879 430 139