University of Cambridge: ESRC Doctoral Training Partnership

Subjects covered by the ESRC DTP

Sustainability, prosperity and well-being

This thematic cluster addresses global, national and local challenges in relation to climate change and environmental concerns, as well as the impact of city life and well-being. It also addresses the dangers of short-termism that comes with a narrow focus on economic growth and its potential trade off with other socially desirable metrics of well-being (including health dimensions of well-being). Sustainability of the environment, energy and well-being are inextricably linked with prosperity, but there are key questions as to how to make these links.

Inequality, equity, justice and economic growth

The global community and British society are beset with concerns about social and economic inequality, fairness and access to education and justice; economic growth is a necessary but not sufficient condition to address these concerns while ensuring the UK's place in the global economy. Thus one purpose of the DTP is to promote research into social inequality (including health and education dimensions of inequality), social justice (and links with citizenship), criminal justice (and links with social justice) and international development, as well as the study of determinants for economic growth in the UK and for economic development more globally. This includes efforts in entrepreneurship. Cambridge's position as a science hub with a cluster of tech-based start-up companies (as well as a developing landscape of social enterprises) places us in a good position to focus on the key dangers of a narrow focus on economic growth.

Conflict, culture, mobility and development

This thematic cluster addresses concerns that economic growth is likely to be accompanied by inequality of wealth distribution and opportunity within and between national economies, which can lead to conflict. This includes, for example, the need for cultural awareness to mitigate the dangers of globalization. Particular challenges lie in the causes, patterns and resolutions in relation to conflict within and between countries, nationalism, identity, culture, and post-war conflict, the material agency of cultural heritage as well as divisions between psychological constructions of heritage, nature and conservation, migration and movement, disruptions of identity, and group and individual patterns of violence, historical legacies of violence as conflict and conflict resolution. Notions of development are critical to all of this, whether in relation to global post-conflict country reconstructions or social, political and technological changes which impact on social behaviour.

Emerging technologies, human behaviour and productivity

This thematic cluster incorporates multidisciplinary themes revolving around the relationship between emerging technologies and economic and social behaviours. In the training pathway this cluster will include the study of the role of these emerging technologies in securing improved productivity and sustainable economic growth. Yet new technologies, including communication technologies can also carry perceived threats to both society and individuals. Emergent technologies are indeed changing the nature of society, as well as the nature of economic and social interactions. Research themes in this cluster and supervision of doctoral students will therefore also focus on the challenges posed by new technologies and their likely huge impacts.

Cognition, behaviour, language and learning

This thematic cluster, drawing on our wide language provision and specialisms in early years education, brings together research which addresses challenges relating to understanding human cognition (broadly learning, reasoning, affective processes, and decision making) and behaviour across the life course from birth to old age. This includes understanding the antecedents of cognition/behaviour (biological substrates, early developmental experiences, socio-cultural influences broadly construed, from family to society), their consequences (including social and societal impact in terms of social disadvantage), how they change in salient contexts (for example, behavior in conditions of risk and uncertainty) and the causal mechanisms enabling intervention (including learning environments, education and healthy aging).