



A word from the Director...

This is a time of major change for CRSP as we seek to develop and expand on our success in assisting the University to win the Queen's Anniversary Prize for Higher and Further Education 2005.



This was the first time that the Prize, which recognises 'outstanding education achievement in areas of service and benefit to the nation', has been awarded for social policy research and is, therefore, an accolade for the whole community - not just for Loughborough. The citation states,

The University's contribution to social policy through high-quality research, with a record of relevance, practical orientation and innovation, is an outstanding example of how excellence in research can be applied with wide impact and benefit. It has influenced policy makers and legislators in the UK resulting in better targeted policy, in particular as it affects neglected and disadvantaged groups'.

As some of you know, I returned to CRSP in January after a lengthy illness and, as my first external commitment, I was immensely proud to represent my colleagues in CRSP at the ceremonies that were held in London for the award.

The past months have seen major changes in staffing at CRSP. Bruce Stafford, my Co-Director, left CRSP at the end of January to take up his appointment as Professor of Public Policy Research at Nottingham University. I am delighted that Dr Alan France, currently Director of the Centre for the Study of Childhood and Youth, University of Sheffield, has been appointed as Director and Professor of Social Policy Research and will take up his appointment in late September. Alan's research and international reputation in the field of youth studies will compliment and expand CRSP's current interests. I will remain in CRSP with the title of Research Director and look forward to working with Alan.

We are extremely grateful to Dr Simon Roberts, who has been Acting Director in the interim, for his support and hard work. CRSP has also been privileged to host Professor Phil Robins, University of Miami, as a Visiting Professor for the last six months. In addition to continuing his own work, Phil also contributed to the cost benefit analysis of the national evaluation of the New Deal for Disabled People. As well as benefiting CRSP by assisting us to expand our methodological skills and experience, Phil has been a delightful colleague and has made many friends here - we hope to continue to work with him and that he will visit us again very soon.

We have also been pleased to welcome:

- Dr Janet Harvey, formerly Deputy Director of Nuffield Community Care Studies Unit, University of Leicester, as Assistant Director;
- Dr Adriana Sandu from Syracuse University, New York as a Research Associate; and,
- Rebecca Hand as Project Administrator.

Congratulations to Amanda Crompton and Justin Waring who were married in March 2006.

For more information about CRSP the latest Annual Report is available on our website at: http://www.crsp.ac.uk/downloads/Annual_Reports/Annual_report_2005.pdf or by contacting CRSP on +44 (0)1509 223372 or crsp@lboro.ac.uk

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A Minimum Income Standard for Britain



CRSP has recently begun a new research project, with colleagues from the University of York, to develop a Minimum Income Standard for Britain. Current debates about reducing or ending poverty in Britain suffer because we do not have a socially agreed, empirically based, minimum income standard. The conventional measure of poverty – 60 per cent of current median household income – is an arbitrary measure and not very accessible to public understanding.

Our research, funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, brings together the expertise of the Family Budget Unit (FBU) and the Centre for Research in Social Policy (CRSP) in order to answer the question 'What level of income is needed to allow an acceptable standard of living in Britain?' The Minimum Income Standard will be rooted in social consensus about the goods and services that everyone in modern Britain should be able to afford, while at the same time drawing on expert knowledge about basic living requirements and actual expenditure patterns.

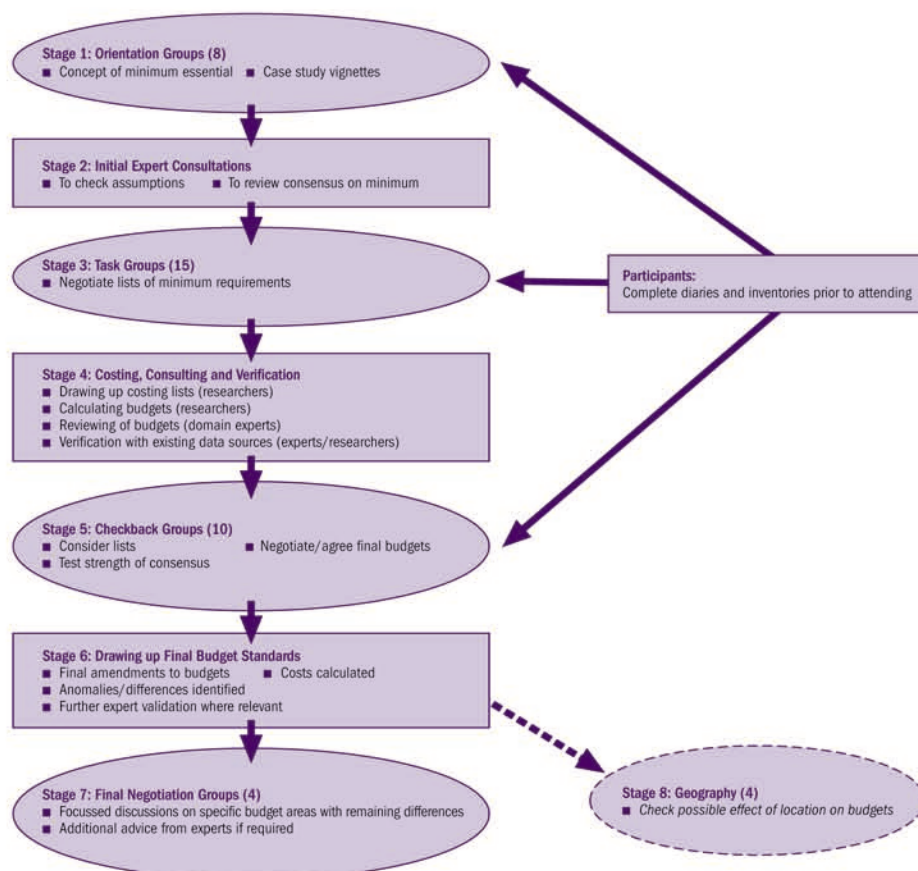
The project was launched at a conference in London in May, attended by representatives from the media, the voluntary sector, the government and trade and industry.

Research design, methods and analysis

The research will combine the consensual budget standards method pioneered at CRSP with the FBU expert or 'normative' approach, to ensure the Standard is rooted in the views of ordinary people but tested by expert opinion.

The research design encompasses seven stages of discussion, consultation, calculation, verification and testing to derive the budget standards (see Figure 1 for further details). Focus groups will draw up and reach a consensus about the content of the budgets. Their deliberations will be monitored, informed and

Figure 1: A Minimum Income Standard for Britain – Research Stages



www.minimumincomestandard.org

advised by the technical and scientific knowledge of expert professionals, in an iterative process. The resulting budget standards can then be used to calculate the minimum income that households of different sizes and compositions would need to experience an acceptable standard of living in Britain today.

The project also includes an extensive analysis of behavioural data using the Expenditure and Food Survey which will help to set the budgets derived in the context of how families prioritise resources in real life. The project will also draw on previous work to derive a model to establish what income is required to enable expenditure at the level of the budgets to be achieved. Further, it will produce a basis for uprating and rebasing the budgets over time.

What the minimum income standard will look like

The final budget standards for different family types will be in a format that makes it easy to calculate the budget of each family unit according to composition, as well as the initial income needed under the current tax and benefit system for a household to achieve the minimum. The aim is to place the budgets on a website (www.minimumincomestandard.org), with a 'ready-reckoner'. The website will also give access to working papers and other details of the research as it develops. A final report for the project, in late 2007, will present budget standards for the current year, and discuss an approach to uprating and rebasing them in the future. The project will also open up possibilities for future work that builds on a baseline of minimum income standards to specify budgets for groups with particular additional needs.

Who will use the minimum income standard

The Standard will be able to be used as a benchmark for benefits, tax credits, foster care allowances, affordability of housing, minimum/"living" wages, income-based charges and penalties, and many other purposes. It will also be possible to test the validity of existing equivalence scales – implied in benefits and used in research on income poverty.

The findings will have direct policy relevance by contributing to debates and discussions about poverty in Britain and, hence, informing the development of policies designed to combat it.

The research team

At CRSP the team will be Sue Middleton, Noel Smith, Abigail Davis, Nicola Selby and Sharon Walker. They will be assisted by Karen Kellard (now at BMG Research Ltd.) who, with Sue and Noel, have developed and refined the Consensual Budget Standards methodology in CRSP over the last ten years. At the University of York, the team will be led by Jonathan Bradshaw, who re-pioneered the use of budget standards in the UK and is currently Director of the Family Budget Unit. Nina Oldfield, who has been centrally involved with the work of the Family Budget Unit over many years, will work with the CRSP team.

A Fairer Society? A Review of Policies for Vulnerable Groups

Wednesday 20th September 2006

Holywell Park Conference Centre, Sir Denis Rooke Building, Loughborough University

The Centre for Research in Social Policy (CRSP) is pleased to announce the 2006 CRSP Conference: 'A Fairer Society? A Review of Policies for Vulnerable Groups' to be held on Wednesday 20th September.

Following the success of CRSP's 21st anniversary conference the 2006 conference will provide an opportunity to explore policies intended to promote a fairer society for all, with particular emphasis on people in vulnerable groups.

Keynote speakers:

- **Professor Robert Walker**, Department of Social Policy and Social Work, University of Oxford, Research Fellow, Institute for Fiscal Studies; and
- **Professor Jonathan Bradshaw**, Department of Social Policy and Social Work, University of York.

In addition, papers will be presented by policy makers, academics, and researchers under the following themes:

Young People and Future Prospects

Child poverty and policies to overcome disadvantage in early years through services directed at health, education and family support.

People of Working Age – Opportunities and Limitations

Employment, welfare to work, social inclusion, benefits and child care.

Older People - Needs and Resources

Pensions and financial security, services and support, care, independence, and other issues that may influence older people's quality of life and well being.

Transitions Through the Life-Course

Transitions into and out of work, study, childrearing, sickness, disability, retirement, old age and other changes in family or personal circumstances.

Further information and registration details can be found on www.crsp.ac.uk tel **01509 223372** email CRSPConference@lboro.ac.uk. The CRSP 2006 Conference is supported by BMG Research.



Visiting Professor

CRSP recently hosted a visit from Philip K Robins, Professor of Economics at the University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida, who spent six months at the Centre while on sabbatical.

Professor Robins is an internationally renowned labour economist specialising in the design and evaluation of public policies toward low-income families. He has also been involved in designing and evaluating many social experiments, including the Self-Sufficiency Project in Canada, and has published extensively in these subjects.

Professor Robins gave presentations about his research to staff at CRSP, the Institute for Social and Economic Research at the University of Essex and the Policy Studies Institute in London. He was also a guest lecturer at the Department for Work and Pensions annual Summer School at Cambridge University. While in the UK, Professor Robins continued his own research, collaborated with colleagues at CRSP and delivered internal training workshops.

Reflecting on the six months he spent at CRSP Professor Robins said ***'It's been a very productive time that was facilitated by the wonderful resources, co-operation and support of the staff at all levels. My impression of CRSP is of a first class and highly professional organisation with a very interesting research programme.'***

We wish Professor Robins well on his return to the University of Miami.

The Social Fund: Current role and future direction

CRSP has completed research exploring the current role and future direction of the Social Fund, which was funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. The research report was launched in June at an event attended by welfare rights organisations, government agencies and academics.

The discretionary Social Fund, which comprises Community Care Grants, Budgeting Loans and Crisis Loans, is intended to help people on a low income meet one-off expenses for necessities and cope with emergencies. However, the research found that, in its current form, the Social Fund is making only a limited contribution to meeting the Government's objectives of combating poverty and social exclusion. The researchers propose that the existing scheme be abolished and replaced with a scheme comprising: Regular Winter Grants, Regular Start of School Grants, Essential Items Grants, Interest Free Loans, and Crisis Loans.

The full report, **The Social Fund: Current role and future direction** by Kate Legge, Yvette Hartfree, Bruce Stafford, Monica Magadi, Jacqueline Beckhelling, Line Nyhagen Predelli and Sue Middleton, is published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (ISBN 978 1 85935 472 8, price £17.95). The report can also be downloaded free from www.jrf.org.uk

Children's Perspectives of Social Difference

In the UK today, children can lead very different lives from each other. Even children living in the same location can have very different views of the world and their place in it.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation commissioned CRSP, with support from Save the Children UK (SCF), to conduct this exciting research into different children's perspectives of their own lives. The research compares and contrasts children's views and experiences and seeks to illuminate aspects of social difference, inequality, social exclusion and inclusion.

The children are from contrasting backgrounds: twenty live in disadvantaged areas, and participate in services provided by Save the Children; twenty children attend fee-paying independent schools. They are all between eight and thirteen years of age. Separate groups of girls and boys participated in eight small groups, which met several times throughout the year.

The research is participatory and, as such, the children themselves help in the design, conduct and evaluation of the research process. This enables the children to have a real say into what to research and how to research it, as well as giving their views on the whole experience.

Each child took part in a preparatory workshop to help decide what issues to focus on in the main fieldwork. The main aim of this session was to find out what is most important in the children's lives. The children were supplied with suggestions about research methods and

asked to choose the methods they would like to use during the main fieldwork, and to propose their own methods.

The methods are participatory, and activities included:

- 'Mapping'
- Draw and write techniques
- Playing games
- Conducting role plays
- Photography: including planning and keeping photo diaries
- Devising questions and questionnaires and conducting recorded interviews
- Taking part in 'walkabouts' of the area they live in

A final workshop will allow the children to evaluate the research and their participation in it, to discuss preliminary findings, and to propose dissemination materials.

Sponsor

Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Project team

Liz Sutton, Dr Noel Smith, Chris Dearden, Sue Middleton, Sharon Walker and Thahmina Mannan.