



**scottish universities
insight institute**

mobilising knowledge for a better Scotland



Insight Institute

Review

January 2009 - September 2010

January 2011

Scottish Universities Insight Institute

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A REVIEW OF THE FIRST TWENTY MONTHS

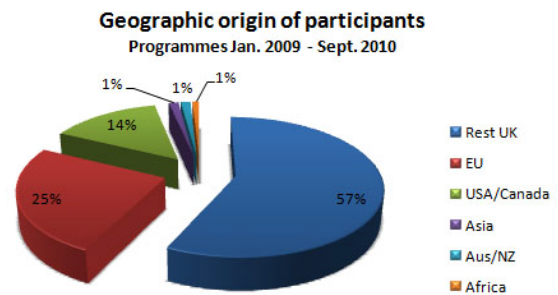
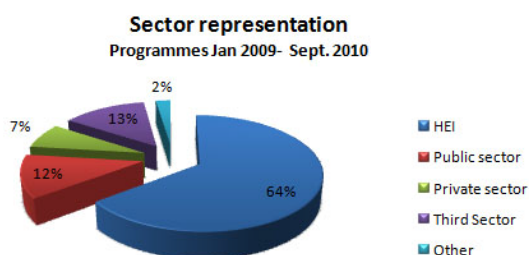
Introduction

The Scottish Universities Insight Institute commenced operation in September 2010 as a partnership of the universities of Dundee, Edinburgh, Stirling, St Andrews and Strathclyde.

The Insight Institute is a development from the Institute for Advanced Studies (IAS) funded by the University of Strathclyde. IAS began operating, after a period of consultation and planning, in January 2009. This report provides a brief overview of programme activity and impact from the IAS period. It identifies themes that emerged from, and transfers of knowledge between, programmes.

Purpose and programmes of enquiry

Our focus was refined during the period of operation as IAS, reflecting dialogue with stakeholders and experience of programme operation. Our objective now is to mobilise knowledge in sustained and collaborative focus on a shared issue or problem. The programmes of enquiry which we support draw in multi-disciplinary and multi-sector perspectives. We do not fund primary research but rather aim, through deploying existing knowledge in fresh ways, to get added value and impact from the research in which society has already invested. International participation in our programmes informs thinking, helps benchmark the Scottish research, policy and business environment, and builds Scotland's reputation for innovative approaches to addressing societal issues. The following charts show the breadth of participation by sector and involvement of international participants from January 2009 to September 2010.



Programmes were selected for support as a result of three separate calls. The first call in 2008 issued only to academics at the University of Strathclyde but programme organising teams and participation extended more widely. Resulting programmes ran between January 2009 and summer 2009. The second call was circulated across Scottish universities and resulted in programmes running (with one exception) from autumn 2009 to spring 2010. The third call reinforced our focus on collaboration by requiring organising teams to involve members of more than one Scottish university. It resulted in programmes which ran over the period from spring 2010 to September 2010. The table below shows the success rate for each Call.

Call/Prog period	Nb of EoI	Full proposals	Funded prog.	Success rate*
Call 1: Jan-June 2009	7	7	5	71%
Call 2: July-Dec 2009	21	16	6	38%
Call 3: April-Sept 2010	18	11	4	36%

*success rate is calculated on the basis of the number of full applications submitted

Our calls have not set themes under which programme proposals are sought (although we are considering this option for the selection of a proportion of future programmes). Rather, calls have allowed a bottom-up identification of issues meriting attention. Proposals received in the second and third rounds were assessed by reviewers from a number of universities. (For our most recent calls, where proposals will operate under the banner of the Insight Institute, we have added reviewers working outside universities). Our current requirements and processes, as the Scottish Universities Insight Institute, are set out in our *Guidelines for Applicants*.

Impact

All our programme organisers are asked to produce a short report which is placed on our website. Reports from individual programmes are available on our website:

www.scottishinsight.ac.uk/Programmes.

One of our continuing objectives is to ensure that programme reports are accessible to non-academic audiences and provide clear summaries of issues addressed and thinking developed – as well as an indicating the further outputs and impacts that have been achieved or are anticipated. The latter include:

- dissemination seminars, podcasts and films;
- new networks and new research collaborations;
- journal articles and books.

The Institute has been pleased to reach agreement with both the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament (the latter through Scotland's Futures Forum) for delivery of seminars which distil programme thinking.

The purpose and operating model of the Institute fits well with the concern for research impact from Research Councils and in the Research Excellence Framework (REF). We anticipate that this will further encourage the submission to us of high quality programme proposals which aim to inform and influence wider communities.

Programme coverage

While programmes may, at first sight, appear to have covered disparate and divergent territory, a number of clear themes have emerged and linkages have been beneficially made and exploited.

The imperative of achieving a low carbon society provided the context for a number of programmes. In January 2009, the starting point of "Attitudes to Energy" was that we already have in our hands technological and policy options that could substantially reduce emissions but attitudes and behaviours inhibit their effective deployment. The programme therefore looked at current attitudes

and behaviours and considered what actions might facilitate change. "Governing Decarbonisation" examined how governments can act to foster innovation including uptake of new technologies. It explicitly raised the issue of whether a move is required away from reliance on market related policy mechanisms; examined practice in the Netherlands; and discussed the impact of multi-level government on action in Scotland. The continuing thread between these two programmes was the exploration of the role of community action and involvement, not just in achieving change locally but in providing a supportive environment for more wide scale change.

A forthcoming programme of the Insight Institute, "Designing the transition to sustainability: resourcing community resilience" sets the low carbon objective within a broader definition of sustainability. The programme proposal recognises that community led projects will find it harder in future to access public sector funding and the workshops envisaged will draw on a broad range of expertise and experience to examine how resilience can be achieved and sustained in these circumstances. Amongst other things, the programme aims to develop a toolkit for communities.

While the role of active communities is being increasingly discussed, Governments and private sector businesses will undoubtedly remain as key decision makers. But the impact of decisions taken now will be shaped by a future that we do not know. The programme "Investing in an Uncertain Future" discussed the use of decision making tools in the context of uncertainty. It took investment in energy networks as one of its case studies.



This programme also examined decision making in financial markets, aligning with a first round programme on “Rationality in Financial Markets”. The latter programme, proposed for funding in 2008, provided a rigorous and multi-disciplinary examination of causes of the financial crisis. It focused on explanations of behaviour outside the realms of economic theory. In particular, the role of memory was discussed. Notwithstanding the importance of this wider disciplinary knowledge, cautionary words were also voiced about failures in the contribution of economics. While economics offers a number of explanatory models and approaches it was suggested by some that one approach had come to dominate discourse and practice.

The danger of a lack of openness to different perspectives and the importance of understanding the impact of different value systems fed into the programme “Pluralism in Crisis”. The starting point of this programme was the proposition that perceived threats to a society, or to dominant groups within it, may reduce the value that is attributed to diversity and plurality. There may consequently be less support for political and societal frameworks which seek to protect and mediate between different interests and perspectives, in other words for pluralist frameworks. This appears to be a particular challenge of the early 21st century. Those engaged predominantly in study of human thought and action engaged with ecologists for their understanding of diversity and with anthropologists who study societies which see themselves as an integral part of, and not separate to, the wider non-human world. This latter perspective returns us to the concept of sustainability. Arguably, it is the lack of a broad and shared understanding of interdependencies that has produced serious challenges to the viability of the Earth as a context for human life.

Dominant ways of seeing and alternatives to them were explored in “Designing Environments for Life”. The programme considered opportunities for design to be a continuing and participative process such that more of us see ourselves, and are able to

act, as makers rather than recipients of the environment in which we co-exist with others. The programme sought to bring together, amongst others, architects and anthropologists.



Lack of tolerance for difference, together with opportunities to cross national borders, has produced patterns of human movement that bring a range of challenges. One of the Institute’s first programmes examined knowledge and practice in respect of the “Integration of Refugees”. Another quite different early programme “Complex Networks” also fed into our programme on “Pluralism in crisis”. The “Complex Networks” programme explored how developing research in the sphere of mathematics can inform our understanding of behaviour patterns.

So, through these programmes, we see linking themes of: **achieving sustainability; valuing plurality and pluralist systems; and understanding complexity.**

Another early programme “Surveillance and Society” examined the uses of surveillance methods and technologies by public authorities and others, and looked at the concerns to which these may give rise alongside perceived beneficial impacts. While this was a programme of enquiry as opposed to the advancement of a specific argument, the organisers took the opportunity to be informed by and participate in the “Convention on Modern Liberty” which took place in April 2009. IAS was a satellite venue with around 80 attendees listening to web streamed content from London and taking part in workshop discussion in Glasgow. The programme also considered how science fiction literature has envisioned surveillance and how this can stimulate

our thinking about real world opportunities and challenges.

How far privacy should be protected was also an element in the recent programme, “Brain Imaging and its Impact on Society”. New technologies from neuroscience are getting closer and closer to “seeing” what we think. These have many possible applications, many of them not for the medical or scientific research uses for which they were originally intended. Wider uses may be claiming a legitimacy that is not well founded. Commercial uses are developing in, for example, lie detection and the establishment of consumer preferences while research use also raises questions of whether subjects should be informed of findings on susceptibility to future illness. Neuroscientists, lawyers and specialists in ethics met to discuss the potential of this technology, controls on use that might be desirable and information and advice that might be put to policy-makers.

The theme of **human rights** contained in the Surveillance and Brain Imaging programmes also underlay programmes on “Miscarriages of Justice” and “Women, Punishment and Community Sanctions”. The programme on “Miscarriages of Justice” examined the adequacy of avenues of appeal, the impact of claims of innocence on eligibility for parole and how legal education might better take account of possible errors in justice systems. In the light of discussion, the programme was adapted to include a workshop considering the role of juries in miscarriages of justice.

The programme on “Women, Punishment and Community Sanctions” took as its starting point the increasing use of imprisonment as a sanction with women offenders. Its objective was to ask how the number of women imprisoned can be reduced though use of non-custodial alternatives that are compatible with both the protection of women’s human rights and the promotion of social justice.

The fifth theme linking a number of our programmes is the **potential and impact of digital technologies**. Digital technologies are transforming the creation, transmission and receipt of information. A short programme examined “The

Future of News” and a future programme will examine opportunities and challenges for “Independent publishing” in a world of digital technology and global companies. The role that digital technology plays and could play in the lives of school age children has received a reasonable degree of attention both in research and wider discussion. A programme about to start in the Insight Institute will focus on a less examined age group, that of pre-school children. Another recent programme looked at the occurrence of cybercrime and how it is most effectively combated. Its focus was not just on technological developments in crime and its prevention but on the role of **human behaviour** in providing opportunities for and prevention of cybercrime. This takes us full circle back to the focus of attention in our first energy related programme, “Attitudes to Energy”.

The existence of these linking threads and underlying themes has resulted in a number of participants contributing to more than one programme and thus to the sharing and transfer of knowledge between programmes.

Moving forward

In supporting our forthcoming programmes, our desired impact continues to be for policy-makers and practitioners to be better informed on substantial issues facing Scotland and the wider world. We also seek recognition of the value of collaboration through the Institute in achieving such impact.

Jane Morgan
Director
Scottish Universities Insight Institute
January 2011