



Connected Communities: Revised Draft Outline for Consultation (July 2010)

RCUK Partners: AHRC (lead), EPSRC, ESRC, MRC, NERC.

Connected Communities is a new cross-Council Programme currently being developed; AHRC is leading development in partnership with four other Councils – the EPSRC, the ESRC, the MRC and the NERC. The following draft outline of the Programme has been informed by a range of consultation activities involving researchers from across a range of disciplines and a wide range of stakeholders but is continuing to be shaped by on-going development and consultation activities. This draft will be further updated later in 2010 following further analysis of the outcomes of the Connected Communities Summit in June 2010 and subsequent consultations.

Vision

To mobilise the potential for increasingly inter-connected communities to enhance self-reliance, regeneration, sustainability, health & well-being by better connecting research, stakeholders and communities.

Context

Communities are complex cultural phenomena essential to our quality of life and have a pivotal role in many of the societal challenges faced by modern societies. Made up of a diverse set of connections between individuals and groups they are essential to sustaining the human, social and cultural capital required to address the economic, social, health and environmental challenges of the 21st century and to fostering the creativity and innovation which will underpin future economic growth, sustainable development and improvements in quality of life. Increasingly policy-makers are looking to explore the potential to enhance community self-reliance, particularly as pressures on public funding increase, and to community-based initiatives to play a leading role in addressing a wide range of societal challenges such as economic regeneration, climate change, crime and security, an ageing population, social exclusion and mobility, and mental health. There is also increasing recognition of the broader role that local environments and ecosystem services, physical connections, a sense of belonging and a vibrant cultural and creative sector, play in supporting well-being and quality of life in modern societies.

New forms of connectivity within and between rural and urban communities are emerging as a result social, cultural, demographic and technological change and are prompting a re-evaluation of the nature of modern community life and the new opportunities and challenges this may face in the future. For example, despite the emergence of new forms of inter-connectedness, significant disconnections remain between some individuals and groups in our increasingly diverse societies and pose threats to social cohesion and well-being. Connectedness itself can sometimes lead to difficulties for example through gang culture, criminal networks or the exclusion of groups from communities. Substantial differences in life expectancy, health and mental well-being exist within and between different communities. Threats to quality of life, health, and productivity from alcohol and drugs are increasing as new classes of functional or recreational drugs emerge. Pockets of deprivation, low employment, low educational achievement and skills, poor life-chances, high crime, poor quality local environments, reoffending and anti-social behaviour and low levels of mental well-being persist.

As pressures on public funding increase and with declining levels of public trust and participation in some institutions and political processes, a fresh look is needed at the roles and relationships between public institutions and communities and to re-evaluate the roles of public engagement, participation and civic values in diverse modern societies.

Whilst there is significant research on communities or with a community dimension, this research is fragmented and much of it is small scale or focused on particular issues or communities. New research approaches are needed to integrate and better harvest insights from existing knowledge, data and approaches and to engage communities and other stakeholders in partnerships to address these key challenges.

Challenges

It is uncontroversial to argue that communities should be healthy, prosperous and sustainable and should support the quality of life of their members. The challenge is to make this concept operational by seeking to understand what constitutes a healthy, prosperous and sustainable community and to articulate what can be done to move communities to a more healthy, prosperous and sustainable state or to enable communities themselves to sustain such a state.

We need to understand how broader challenges such as climate change, pressure on natural resources and economic globalisation, along with demographic, technological, social and cultural changes, are impacting on communities and how they are changing **different forms of 'connectedness' in communities**. In the context of such change key issues include:

- How can we create attractive, safe and sustainable environments in which community life can flourish, including improving rural and urban planning, local environments, design, resource efficiency and infrastructure?
- How can we tackle pressures driving social disintegration, multiple deprivation, addiction and crime in communities?
- How can we better target and deliver services to meet diverse and changing needs within and between communities and support greater community resilience and self-reliance?
- How can we enhance and exploit human, social and cultural capital, harness the potential of the cultural and creative industries and exploit the potential for innovation and learning within the community and third sectors to develop and implement more effective strategies for regenerating deprived communities?
- How can community-focused approaches support the development of more sustainable communities with strong social support networks, a rich cultural life and strong sense of connection with their physical and natural environment and foster civic values, active and empowered citizens, healthy living and physical and mental well-being?

The Programme will seek to add value to the extensive current portfolio of Research Council-funded and other research by bringing together expertise and evidence from social, economic, cultural, environmental, health and technological backgrounds to address the threats and opportunities in a more integrated way.

Building upon existing programmes and partnerships, such as the Local Authority Research Council Initiative Concordat and OSCHR public health initiatives in addiction and mental health, a multi-disciplinary research community better connected with business, public sector, policy, voluntary and community groups, is needed to address these inter-connected challenges. The development of innovative approaches to engaging with communities throughout the research and the integration of knowledge from across research fields to produce better understanding of complex inter-relationships between issues will be distinctive features of the Programme. Close partnerships will also be developed with other RCUK Programmes to explore the central role played by communities in addressing key challenges of sustainable energy and environmental change, enhancing security and resilience, exploiting opportunities in the digital economy and enhancing well-being in later life.

Why there is a need for this Programme now?

- *The legacy of the global economic crisis will increase reliance on strong, cohesive, resilient communities and may exacerbate tensions, stresses, disaffection, crime and other problems in communities. We should anticipate, in order to prevent, these problems.*
- *Communities are vital role to play in providing the capacity (e.g. human, social & cultural capital, sources of creativity & innovation, attractive business environment) to enable the UK to sustain long-term economic growth.*
- *High levels of debt post-recession have led to fundamental debates on what the state should do for communities and communities do for themselves and may generate a need for enhanced community resilience and self-reliance as public funding comes under increasing pressure.*
- *Radical new policies on the 'Big Society' & localism at the heart of the new Coalition Government's strategy in England represent a major 'social experiment' and research opportunity, have created urgent new needs for research to inform policy and require a step change in research engagement with local communities and groups, the third sector and local government.*
- *Low levels of public trust in, and engagement with, some institutions is presenting new challenges for community governance*
- *Research emerging from areas such as energy, the environment, security and lifelong health is highlighting the increasing significance of understanding communities*
- *Rapid technological, cultural, social and economic changes and the need to address major environmental challenges are profoundly re-shaping some aspects of community life, for example in terms of social networks, community diversity, inter-personal communication and patterns of mobility and participation, with potentially significant implications that we do yet fully understand.*

Aims

At the core of the Programme will be research to understand the changing nature of communities, in their historical and cultural contexts, and the value of communities in sustaining and enhancing our future quality of life. This enhanced understanding will also inform the development of more effective community based interventions to address key economic and societal challenges. Engagement with communities and other stakeholders at all stages of the research will be a key feature. The programme will seek to connect research expertise and data relevant to communities from across the research base in order to develop a more holistic understanding of communities rather than tackling issues in isolation. It will seek to inform more effective interventions to prevent and tackle some of the 'wicked problems' faced by modern societies.

The Programme will support world-leading research in partnership with stakeholders and communities that will aim to:

- Enhance quality of life through the development of vibrant & diverse cultural environments, & supportive inclusive social, family & community networks;
- Create attractive, resilient, safe and sustainable environments in which communities can thrive and adapt successfully to the environmental, economic and social challenges that they will face in the 21st century;
- Promote healthy living and physical and mental well-being within communities
- Foster creativity, innovation & enterprise in communities & attractive environments for business to underpin international competitiveness and urban & neighbourhood economic renewal;
- Support the delivery of public services and institutional reform to better meet the diverse & evolving needs of individuals and communities;

- Encourage the development of modern forms of social belonging, active citizenship, civic values, connectivity with physical and natural environments, public participation and democratic processes;
- Counteract pressures toward social disintegration and the problems it causes.

A Community-focused Approach

Complementing the significant research being undertaken at individual and household level and at the larger scale (trans)national scale, Connected Communities will take a distinctive approach focused on communities as the key level of analysis. Whilst there is a strong foundation of research at a community level on which to build, this research base has tended to be rather disconnected, often characterised by smaller scale or community-specific research where the potential for learning from across disciplines and projects and for transferability to other contexts has often been under-exploited.

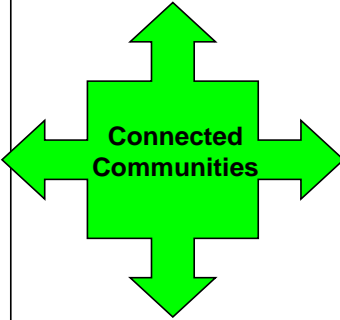
Recognition of the importance of community-based policy approaches has been growing with a range of community-based national policies in areas such as promoting environmental sustainable low-carbon development, improved public health, enhanced social cohesion, civic engagement, and improvements in public services and tackling issues such as crime and anti-social behaviour. At the same time there is increasing recognition of the importance of local or community-led initiatives as sources of innovation and of the importance of partnerships between local, regional/city-region and national/transnational government and organisations, the community and third sectors and other stakeholders including business. This provides a rich research environment for the Programme.

There are many notions of community but for the purposes of this Programme, and **subject to further consultation, we are currently thinking of 'communities' as:**

"cooperative or interactive groups sharing a virtual or physical environment and aspects of identity (such as location, race, ethnicity, age, history, occupation), culture, belief or other common bonds and/or a shared interest in particular issues or outcomes".

We recognise that such communities are not self-contained but are nested and overlap. The Programme is interested both in the relationships within these communities and the interactions between communities and their outcomes for broader society and economy. We also recognise that there are a variety of approaches to research on communities (see below which summarises some of these) and that the programme can add value by pursuing appropriate combinations of approaches.

Possible Approaches to Exploring Communities

Types of Community		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Lifecycle (e.g. children, adolescence, older people etc) •Social, cultural economic group, ethnic origin, class, religion etc •Spatial / temporal location, neighbourhood, rural/urban etc •Method of connection e.g.Virtual Community 		
<p>Cross-cutting Themes e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Participation & self reliance •Regeneration •Health & well-being •Cohesion & diversity •Community spaces & sustainable community environments 	 <p>Connected Communities</p>	<p>Method / Approach to study</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Theoretical / conceptual / historical / comparative •Systems, models, complexity •Case studies (initiatives, neighbourhoods, cities etc) •Intervention / experimental / action •Sustainability assessment •Evaluation •Participatory & ethnographic research •Synthesis & Data Integration
<p>Underpinning factors e.g. infrastructure, ecosystems services</p> <p>Drivers of Change e.g. Economic (e.g public spending squeeze), Environmental, Population, Technological, Cultural Change, Globalisation, Political, etc</p>		



Exploring the connections

Understanding connectivity is a vital to understanding communities; this includes the changing connections which link members within communities, the connections between different communities and the connections between individuals in communities and employment and services (e.g. education, health, housing, transport etc). Communities also provide a key context for exploring the connectivity between major policy issues, which have sometimes tended to be explored in isolation rather than in terms of their inter-linkages. Understanding this network of connectedness - between individuals, communities, services and policy issues – and when and how to enhance connectedness to help communities to move towards more healthy, prosperous and sustainable states, is a key rationale for a *connected* communities research programme.

Connecting Issues



RESEARCH
COUNCILS UK

Connectivity is also important for research on communities and achieving added value through joining up research across disciplinary & subject boundaries and linking research with policy, practice & communities is a key aim of the Programme. Therefore, the Programme will create a connected research community linking researchers from across the research base with business, policy, voluntary & community groups to co-produce and better integrate evidence to underpin future economic, welfare, health, planning, technological & environmental interventions to address the above research challenges.

Connected Communities: a Distinctive Approach

Connecting with Communities: the Programme will support research with communities rather than research on communities; community perspectives will inform the developing research agenda and effective plans for public engagement with the outcomes of the research will be expected.

Connecting with Partners: partnerships with relevant stakeholders at all stages of the research process in the co-production of knowledge and translation of research outcomes into effective policy and practice will be a requirement of funding.

Connecting researchers: the Programme will support world-leading research which draws together expertise, knowledge and data from across disciplines to deliver more integrated understanding of changing communities, including support for relevant international research collaborations.

Connecting issues: The Programme will promote research which seeks to explore connections between research issues which have often been considered in isolation in the past to deliver more integrated understanding of complex 'wicked issues' and challenges facing communities.

Tackling Societal Challenges

The Programme will seek to explore the positive contribution that communities can make to improving our quality of life, learning from positive examples of how social, cultural and community capital can be built and make a difference. It will seek to look at, and learn from, different kinds of community, not just those that have particular problems or have been the focus of past research. However, the programme will also seek to tackle persistent challenges that have affected communities and have proved hard to address effectively through past policy interventions. For example, whilst there have been some notable successes in encouraging behaviour change in some areas, behaviours in some areas have proved very difficult to change. Similarly, some deprived communities in the UK, often but not always in inner city areas, face a range of persistent problems such as:

- large scale unemployment and under-employment and hence low incomes;
- dependence on benefits
- poor health
- an education system that fails to transform and provide opportunity
- high levels of crime

Many of these issues are interdependent and Connected Communities will seek to provide a more holistic understanding of these issues in community contexts. It will seek to develop more innovative approaches to address such problems.

Addressing Major Policy Challenges

Since planning for this Programme began community-related issues have climbed significantly up the policy agenda. For example the new Coalition Government, through its 'localism' and 'Big Society' agenda has announced ambitious plans in England to:

- *"completely recast the relationship between people and the state: citizens empowered; individual opportunity extended; communities coming together to make lives better".*
- *"end the era of top-down government by giving new powers to local councils, communities, neighbourhoods and individuals"*

In Scotland the Scottish Government has identified as one of its National Outcome Indicators: "We have strong, resilient and supportive communities where people take responsibility for their own actions and how they affect others"

The Welsh Assembly Government has stated that "Our vision for Wales calls for strong, safe communities that people will want to live in now and in the future. Wales has a strong tradition of community identity and self-help. We want to enhance this identity by giving people the confidence to develop local solutions to community problems and by providing them with the funding and support to do so."

In Northern Ireland "People and Place – A strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal" aims to "to develop confident communities that are able and committed to improving the quality of life in the most deprived neighbourhoods"

*However, whilst the Programme will make a significant research-informed input into these contemporary debates, it will retain a strong focus on the role of communities in addressing longer term policy challenges such as those identified in the Cabinet Office's **Realising Britain's Potential: Future Strategic Challenges for Britain (2008)**, which highlighted that despite the rise of virtual communities and other changes in society, local communities will continue to be important in supporting family life and Government and local leaders will face increasing demands to ensure positive and vibrant places for people and families to live. It will also address the central to the aims outlined in the **UK Sustainable Development Strategy: "Building Sustainable Communities: creating places where people want to live and work, now and in the future"**.*

Examples of possible priority areas for research under the Programme include:

- Development of new approaches to sustaining economic growth and supporting regeneration of deprived areas through a better understanding of community based initiatives and the roles of 'hidden innovation', clusters, networks, human, social & cultural capital and the role of the creative and cultural industries and high value services.
- Addressing new challenges to mental well-being, particularly in social sub-groups with lower connectivity and/or social support
- Improving planning, design and infrastructure within complex, interactive, evolving urban and rural systems and development of innovative approaches to enhancing the places, spaces, institutions and environments which sustain community life
- Exploring new approaches to tackling addiction, including the increased use of narcotics and other drugs, addressing the inter-play between biological factors, individual decisions & social & cultural contexts
- Exploiting the potential for building community participation, self-reliance and resilience and for innovative, accountable, individualised and/or networked public services and partnerships to better meet the needs of diverse connected communities
- Understanding the experiences and needs of different urban and rural communities, social & cultural groups, (e.g. children, older people, ethnic groups, disabled & the poor).
- Developing new approaches to reduce urban crime and anti-social behaviour, and for promoting community safety and civic responsibility
- Understanding the changing role of trust, a sense of belonging, identities, cultural & heritage activities, values and representation in maintaining and developing social support networks, active citizenship & participatory democracy.
- Investigate ways to accelerate progress towards more environmentally sustainable and resource efficient communities (working with the LWEC Programme)

Costs of not addressing the issues

Connected Communities will address key issues which have significant economic and societal costs, for example:

- *Total current burden cost of crime against individuals and households in 2003/04 was around £36.2bn (Home Office 2005)*
- *The total annual cost of alcohol misuse to the UK economy has been calculated by the Cabinet Office at up to £25.1 billion. There were 8,758 deaths from alcohol-related causes in the UK in 2006, twice as many as there were 15 years before. In England, it is estimated that 18 per cent of the adult population (7.6 million) are drinking at 'hazardous' levels; another seven per cent (2.9 million) are showing evidence of harm to their own physical and mental health, including approximately 1.1 million people who have a level of alcohol addiction (dependency).*

Emerging Initial Priorities

Following initial consultations three cross-cutting themes have emerged along with five key areas for research.

An underpinning cross-cutting theme is:

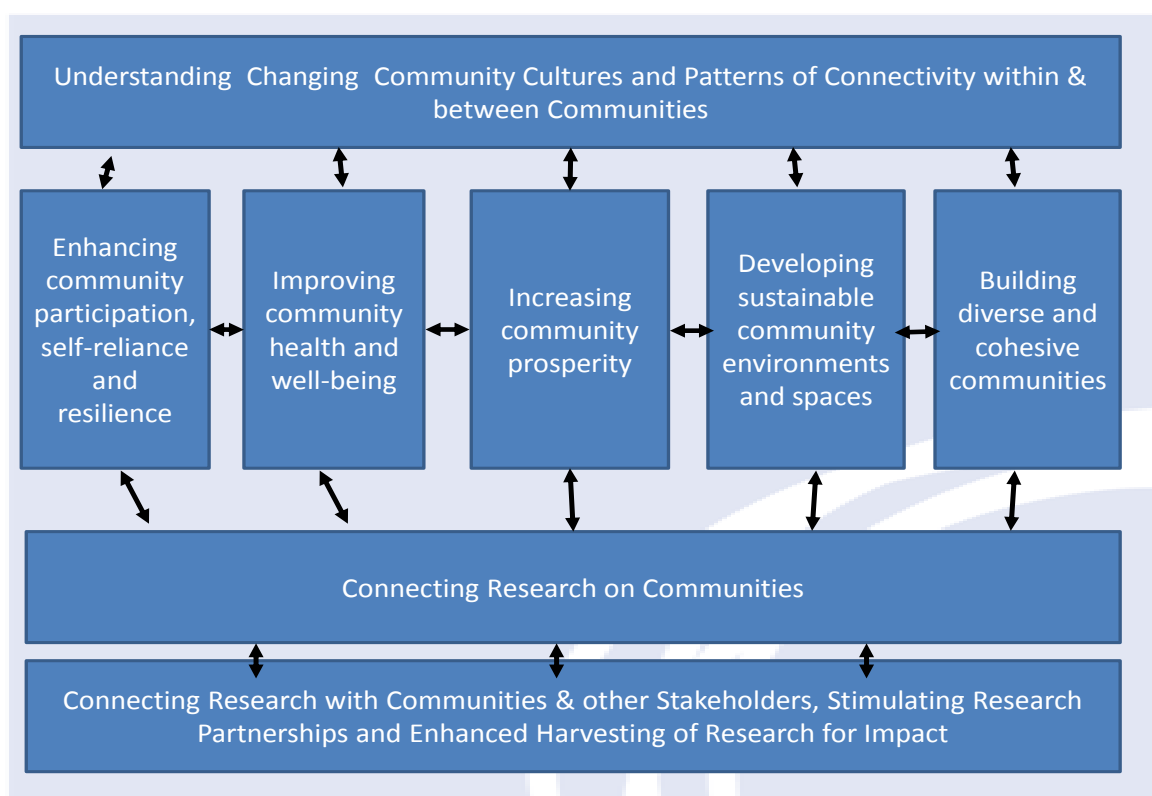
- **Understanding Changing Community Cultures and Patterns of Connectivity within and between Communities.** This theme will provide the cross-cutting understanding, in an appropriate historic and cross-cultural comparative context, of the ways in which communities, and the complex webs of relationships, ties and bonds which help to sustain them, are changing as cultural phenomena. It examines the wide range of factors shaping change in communities and the interfaces between these technological, environmental, social, cultural & economic factors. It addresses fundamental questions such as: What are communities for in modern societies? How do they contribute to quality of life? What do flourishing communities look like? How are community values and identities changing?

The two other cross-cutting themes highlight the Programme's distinctive to adding value to the field:

- **Connecting Research on Communities** focuses on the Programme's aim to add value to the significant, but fragmented and often disconnected current base and exploit the potential for major additional impact building on this existing base. Key areas include connecting researchers across disciplines and subject domains; supporting conceptual and methodological development to underpin research e.g. modelling, systems, complexity, networks, data, ethnography etc; improving the design and capacity to learning from community initiatives, case studies and interventions, including evaluation methods; learning from the past and across cultures, including international collaborative research; and, improved co-ordination and alignment of research;
- **Connecting Research with Communities and other Stakeholders, Stimulating Research Partnerships & Enhanced Harvesting of Research for the Benefit of Communities** focuses on the programme's aim to involve communities and other stakeholders at all stages of the Programme and its research from its early stages in the co-creation and co-production of research, through to achieving real benefits for communities. It also focuses on the Programme's emphasis on partnership working to exploit opportunities for strategic additional investment to address key needs and research gaps and to facilitate added value to existing activities. Key activities will include: support for knowledge exchange with communities, community organisations and the voluntary sector, with policy-makers and other key stakeholders; stimulating innovative ways of engaging communities in and with research; and, better 'harvesting' of existing research: synthesis, review, translation...

The five areas which have emerged as key areas where the Programme could add value to research are:

- Enhancing community participation, self-reliance and resilience
- Improving community health and well-being
- Increasing community prosperity
- Developing sustainable community environments, places, spaces and institutions
- Building diverse and cohesive communities



Further details of plans under each of these themes will be undertaken over the coming months. In some cases significant work in these areas is already well underway whilst under others new activities may be planned. For example, AHRC is considering leading an event to develop research under the community prosperity theme on the role **of the cultural and creative economy in developing and sustaining vibrant and prosperous communities in the UK.**

The Programme advisory group will be considering further potential topics for early development activities at its first meeting and the potential to complement other work such as that being planned by LARCI and by individual Councils, and the potential to build upon previous activities, **such as the recent review on 'civility'.**

Adding Value

The Programme will work closely with other RCUK Programmes many of which have identified the role of communities as an important dimension to addressing issues such as addressing conflict and promoting security, exploiting new digital technologies, supporting healthy ageing, enabling a transformation to a low carbon economy and building resilience

and adapting to environmental change. For example the Energy Programme has recently supported a call on 'Energy and Communities' and the Digital Economy Programme has **recently identified 'Communities and Culture' as one of its four priority areas for its next** phase of development. The Connected Communities Programme will seek to add value through developing a cross-cutting and more integrated focus on communities, networking of activities and undertaking new joint initiatives with RCUK Programmes where appropriate.

Examples of How the Programme Can Add Value

- Facilitate cross-Council multi- & inter- disciplinary collaborations on key societal issues not addressed under current RCUK Programmes.
- Promote more integrated approaches e.g. by drawing together current research and data; through developing systems, integrated assessment & participatory approaches; and community case studies etc
- Provide a new focus on the community level of analysis & on changing patterns of connectivity.
- Promote co-production of knowledge and partnerships.
- Act as a focus for KT, public engagement & international collaboration.

Consultation / Development Undertaken in 2009

- Establishment of a cross-Council working group with representatives from the AHRC, EPSRC, ESRC, MRC and NERC.
- Consultation event with local Government on 1 June 2009 through LARCI.
- Cross-Council consultation expert workshop on 2 June, chaired by Sir Alan Wilson, with 30 leading researchers suggested by 5 Research Councils.
- Consultation with a number of key stakeholder groups, including the Department for Communities and Local Government, Scottish Government, Home Office, DCMS, DCSF, Dept of Health, Business in the Community, the RSA, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Core Cities, Office for the Third Sector and the Equalities & Human Rights Commission.
- Consultation activities undertaken to inform a new phase of work under the Sustainable Urban Environments Programme led by EPSRC, on Energy and Communities led by ESRC as a part of the Research Councils Energy Programme and on addiction research led by MRC
- **Scoping study on 'civility' conducted in partnership between the Young Foundation and the AHRC.**

Development Activities Undertaken / Planned in 2010

- Connected Communities Summit on 28/29 June 2010 in Birmingham bringing together about 60 researchers from research projects and activities funded by the Research Councils relevant to the Programme.
- Convene first meeting of advisory group
- CLG Policy seminars (ESRC/AHRC)
- Civility project (AHRC, ESRC, Young Foundation)
- Collaboration with RSA Citizen Power in Peterborough Programme
- **Collaboration with CABE on 'Beauty' (AHRC)**
- Commission initial scoping studies
- Highlighted cross-disciplinary networking call and Fellowship scheme highlight in 2010 (AHRC)
- BIS SIN US network event on 'communitarianism'
- Enhance interim webpages
- **Workshop on 'crime & communities', 27 July 2010 led by ESRC**
- Plan for a research development workshop on the role of the cultural and creative economy in developing and sustaining vibrant and prosperous communities in the UK