

Research on ageing, making an impact: working effectively with NGOs and Government

David Sinclair , International Longevity Centre -UK

The International Longevity Centre-UK is an independent, non-partisan think-tank dedicated to addressing issues of longevity, ageing and population change.



Summary

- About ILC-UK
- The role of science/research
- How does ILC-UK engage with academics?
- What does the Government/Voluntary Sector think about academics
- What does the Government/Voluntary Sector want from academics
- Making an impact
- My tips for engagement

About ILC-UK

The ILC-UK was established in 2000 to explore and address the new longevity revolution and its impact on the life-course and society.

It provides the visionary approach needed for individual and societal planning to ensure a progressive, economically viable and socially inclusive tomorrow for all.

Some of our publications

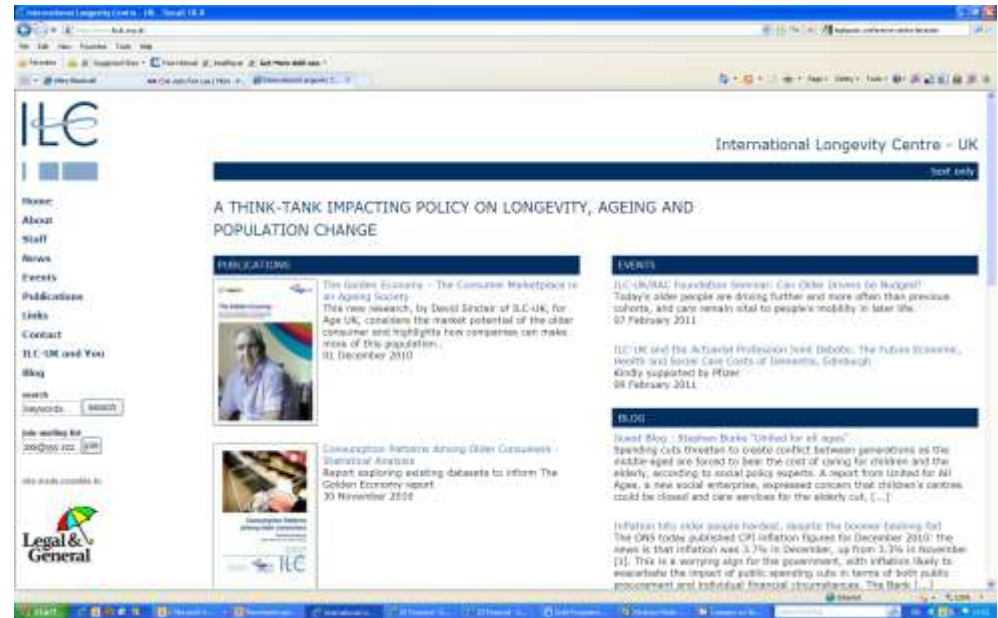


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Our research/policy team

- Baroness Greengross (Chief Executive)
- David Sinclair
- Researchers (Quantitative/demographer and housing; Public Health; Health and Care; nutrition; Ex Treasury Official)



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Who do we engage with?

- A recent ILC-UK event saw 10 people registered from the Department of Health alone and we typically are attracting about 20% of our audience from Government and Quangos.
- We attract about 35% from the voluntary sector and academia and about 35% from the private sector. About 10% of the participants are lay members of the public.

We organise events

- In 2010 we organised 17 events in and around Westminster.
- Ten Ministers/Shadow attended these events, which attracted almost 1000 people.
- In 2010, we held our first international event in Brussels attracting attendees from across Europe and from the European Parliament and Commission



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Events often influence

- We organised a dinner and debate on dementia in the House of Lords in June 2009 for Pfizer, the dinner was attended by 5 peers, a minister, several MPs and many leading academics.
- The event proved to be so informative that it was referenced by the minister, in a debate in the House of Lords a week later. As a result of this success, we were commissioned to produce the report of the National Dementia Research Summit for the Department of Health and the Medical Research Council.

We use new media

- We are prolific users of new media to promote our work. In 2010 we published 67 blog posts which drew further attention to our 24 publications during that year. We have over 1150 followers on twitter (and growing).



Photo by ivanpw
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/28288673@N07/4847679257/sizes/m/in/photostream/>

And we don't forget the traditional media

- We achieve high levels of media coverage. Recent coverage includes: [Ex-Countryfile presenter wins BBC ageism case](#) (Channel 4); [Let's take the housing fight to wealthy owners with empty spare rooms](#) (Guardian); [Christmas shopping experience 'puts off over-65s'](#); [Grey pound's £100bn Christmas warning to retailers](#) (Telegraph)
- Our research standing is supported by our research work being accepted and covered in prestigious academic journals including the journal 'Health Policy' (<http://www.journals.elsevierhealth.com/periodicals/heap/article/PIIS0168851008002534/abstract>).

The World is Ageing



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How much further will we age?

Aubrey de Grey believes that human life expectancy at birth in 2100 will be 5000 years

“I think the first person to live to 1,000 might be 60 already”



Or perhaps more realistically?

"In ancient times, half our children would have died by the age of 20. Now, in the western world, 98 per cent of them are surviving to the age of 21.

"Our life expectancy is now so good that eliminating all accidents and infectious diseases would only raise it by two years. Natural selection no longer has death as a handy tool."



Any ideas

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Blue Monday



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Where was academia?

- **Blue Monday** is a name given to a date stated, as part of a publicity campaign by Sky Travel, to be the most depressing day of the year.
- This date was published in a press release under the name of Cliff Arnall, at the time a tutor at the Centre for Lifelong Learning, a Further Education centre attached to Cardiff University.



Photo by: [Samael Kreutz](http://www.flickr.com/photos/mein_arkengel/5026764931/sizes/m/in/photostream/)

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But why are we relying on Ben Goldacre?

Guardian columnist Dr. Ben Goldacre reported that the press release was delivered substantially pre-written to a number of academics by public relations agency Porter Novelli, who offered them money to put their names to it.



Photo by psd/Paul Downey
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/psd/3696638199/sizes/o/in/photostream/>

So what is the role for academics

“Good policy needs academic expertise. Academics are no less responsible than politicians for bad policy; just because influencing policy is difficult doesn’t mean academics shouldn’t try.”

“Universities need to demonstrate their public value – natural science does this, but social science struggles. The withdrawal of public money from HE can be directly related to the irrelevance of many academics to public policy debates”.

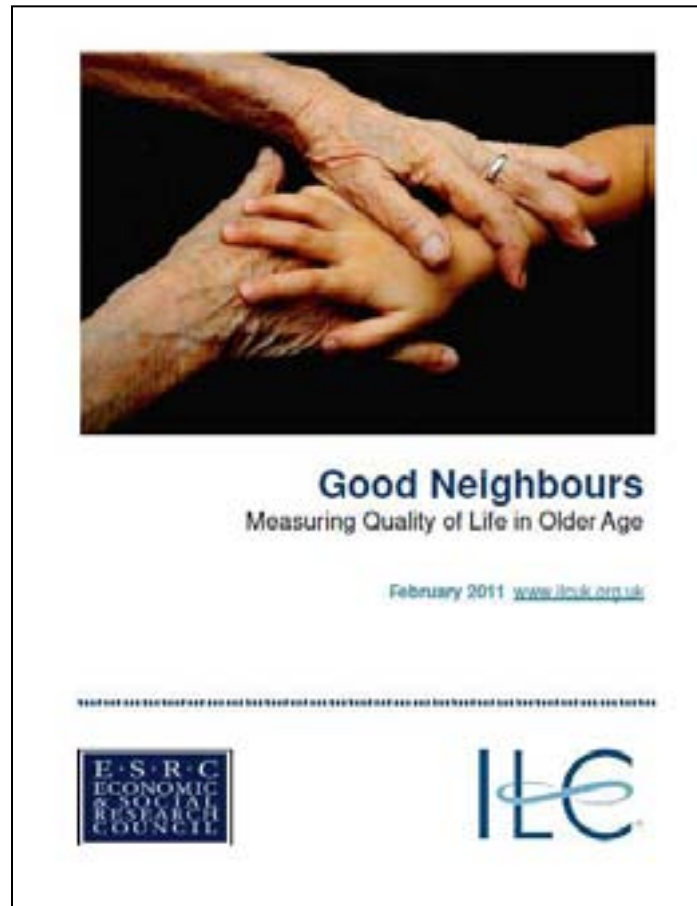


Photo by [ozvoldjj Jeff Ozvold](http://www.flickr.com/photos/jeffozvold/2253118421/)
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How do we engage with academics?

- Commissioning research/ the customer
- Speakers at events
- Research partner
- Translation of research into policy practice
- Partnership/ consultation

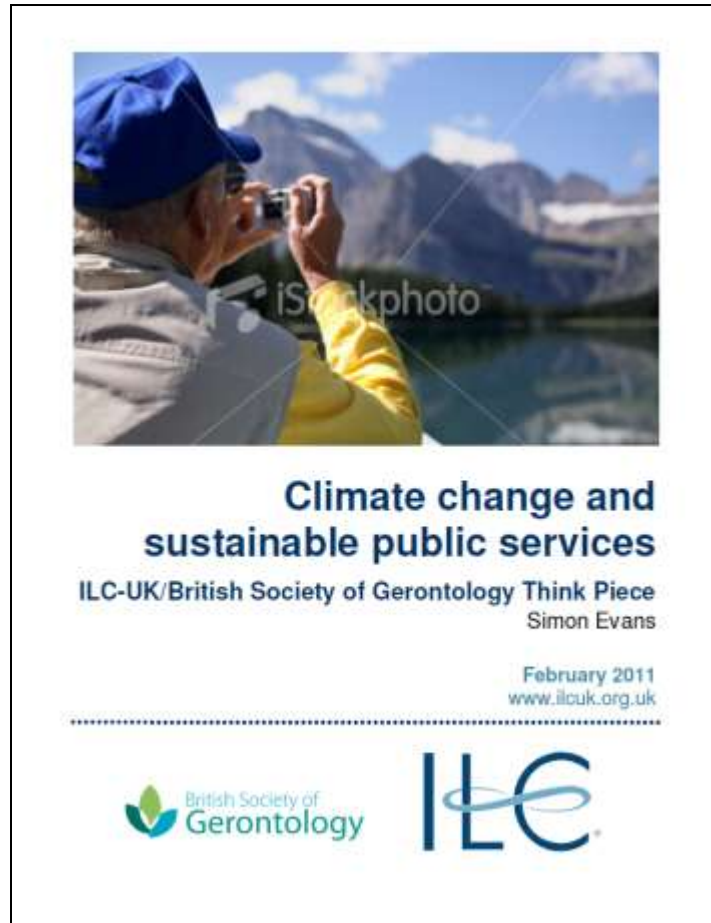
Some examples – ESRC Quality of Life



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Building a relationship with the British Society of Gerontology



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Academic advisory group/ILC-UK advisors

- Professor David Blane
- Professor Elizabeth Burton (MA Cantab DipArch DipUD PhD)
- Kate Davidson PhD, BSc(Hons), RHV, RGN
- Professor Emily Grundy
- Janet Lewis (AcSS, PhD, MA, Diploma in Social Administration)
- Graham Mulley (MB ChB FRCP DM)
- Professor Judith Phillips (MSc CQSW PhD)
- Professor Chris Phillipson (PhD)
- Ceridwen Roberts

Research partnerships



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Some Truths? Does Government care about academic research?

“Policy-makers don’t have the time or inclination to read academic journals. If you want to influence policy, there needs to be a middle-man who knows how to reach policy-makers, how to speak their language, and will be able to translate which bits of academic research will be relevant to actual policy development.”

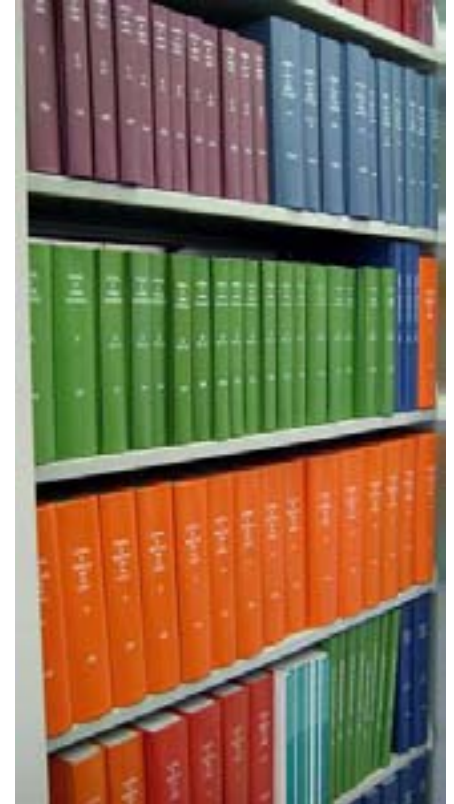


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Does the Government care?

“Civil servants don’t (often) even take notice of the research their departments commission – it’s a PR exercise.”

“The image of academia within government departments is very poor (academics are perfectionists, stuck in Ivory Tower, unwilling to get their hands dirty, always over deadline, too expensive, too arrogant).”



Photo by jaybergesen

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And what about the voluntary sector

- They try to be evidence based
- But advocacy organisations don't have to take consensus view or be balanced
- They need to move quickly – Wikipedia is easy to access!
- They don't know how to engage with academia
- They see a lot of research as irrelevant
- They don't have access to peer reviewed material
- They don't know how to analyse research



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But what do we/Government want?

The (right) answers!



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Your help to get things right

Academics should engage with think-tanks because think-tanks also get things wrong. We are in a position to influence policy-makers, and academics should support us in doing this.



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Work across disciplines - Teamwork

“Neither think-tanks nor government care about disciplinary boundaries. Academics must work across disciplines to be effective; too often research outputs are undermined by the function of academic silos.”



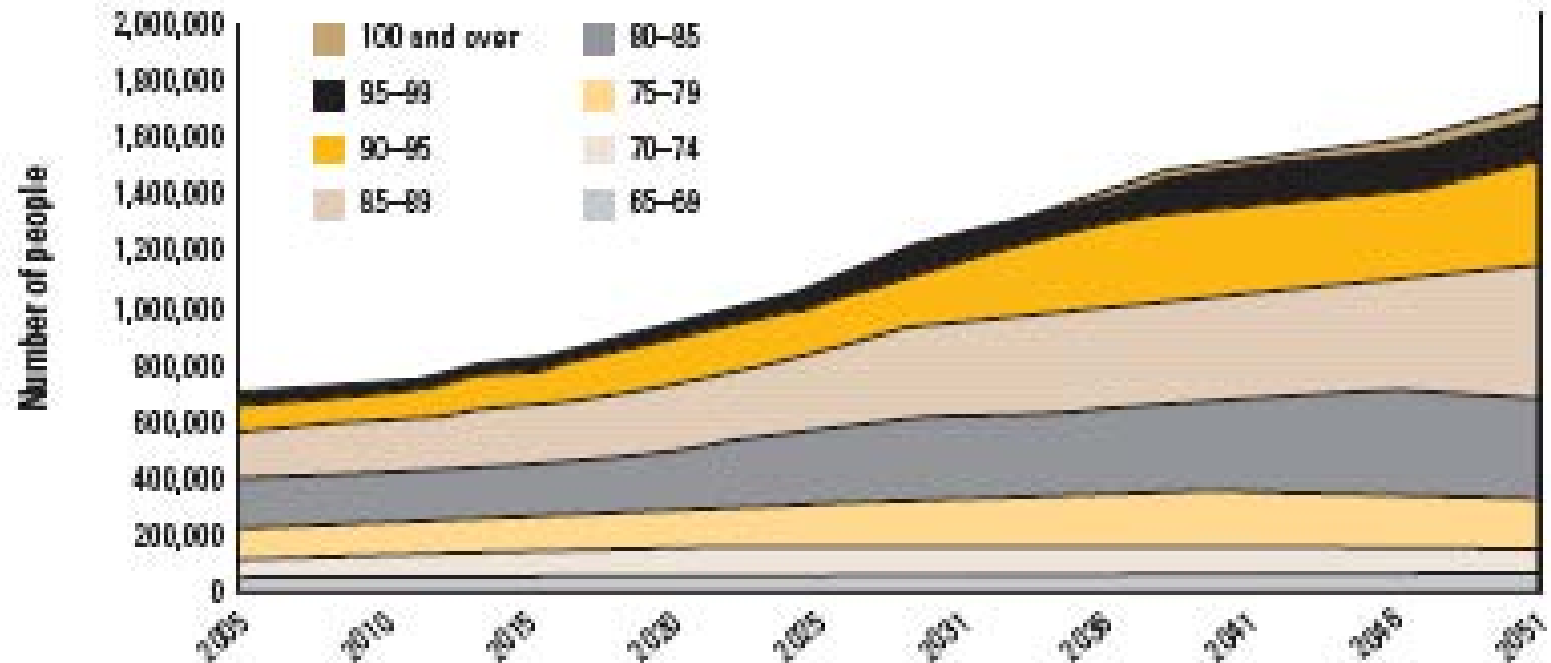
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We are often less specialist than you. We need the specialist input



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Explain the complex

THE TIMES Monday February 9 2009 News

All babies will have gene code mapped at birth 'within ten years'



Babies are already tested for inherited diseases using a heel-prick blood test. A similar test could be used to reveal a baby's genome

Mark Henderson Science Editor

Every baby born a decade from now will have its genetic code mapped at birth, the head of the world's leading genome sequencing company has predicted.

A complete DNA read-out for every newborn will be technically feasible and affordable in less than five years, promising a revolution in healthcare, says Jay Flatley, the chief executive of Illumina.

Only social and legal issues are

By the time the scientists James Watson and Craig Venter had their genomes mapped two years ago, the cost had fallen to about \$1m (£700,000).

Genotyping services, which examine about 2 million of the genome's 6 billion DNA letters for clues to disease, are already available to consumers for about \$1,000 (£700). Those with deeper pockets can have their whole genome mapped for about \$100,000 (£70,000).

Illumina is preparing to launch a

Cutting costs

2001 Human Genome Project produces map. Cost: \$4 bn

2007 James Watson and Craig Venter, below, have full genome maps, costing \$1 m each

to screen for inherited diseases such as cystic fibrosis.

By examining which genetic variants a person has inherited, it is possible to identify raised risks of developing an array of conditions, including cardiovascular disease and many cancers. Those at high risk can then be screened more regularly, or given drugs or dietary advice to lower their chances of becoming ill.

As DNA affects the way certain drugs are metabolised, personal



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Challenge lazy assumptions



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Present the views of older people. Also debate moral/ethical issues.

“But how much smaller do we want a phone?”.

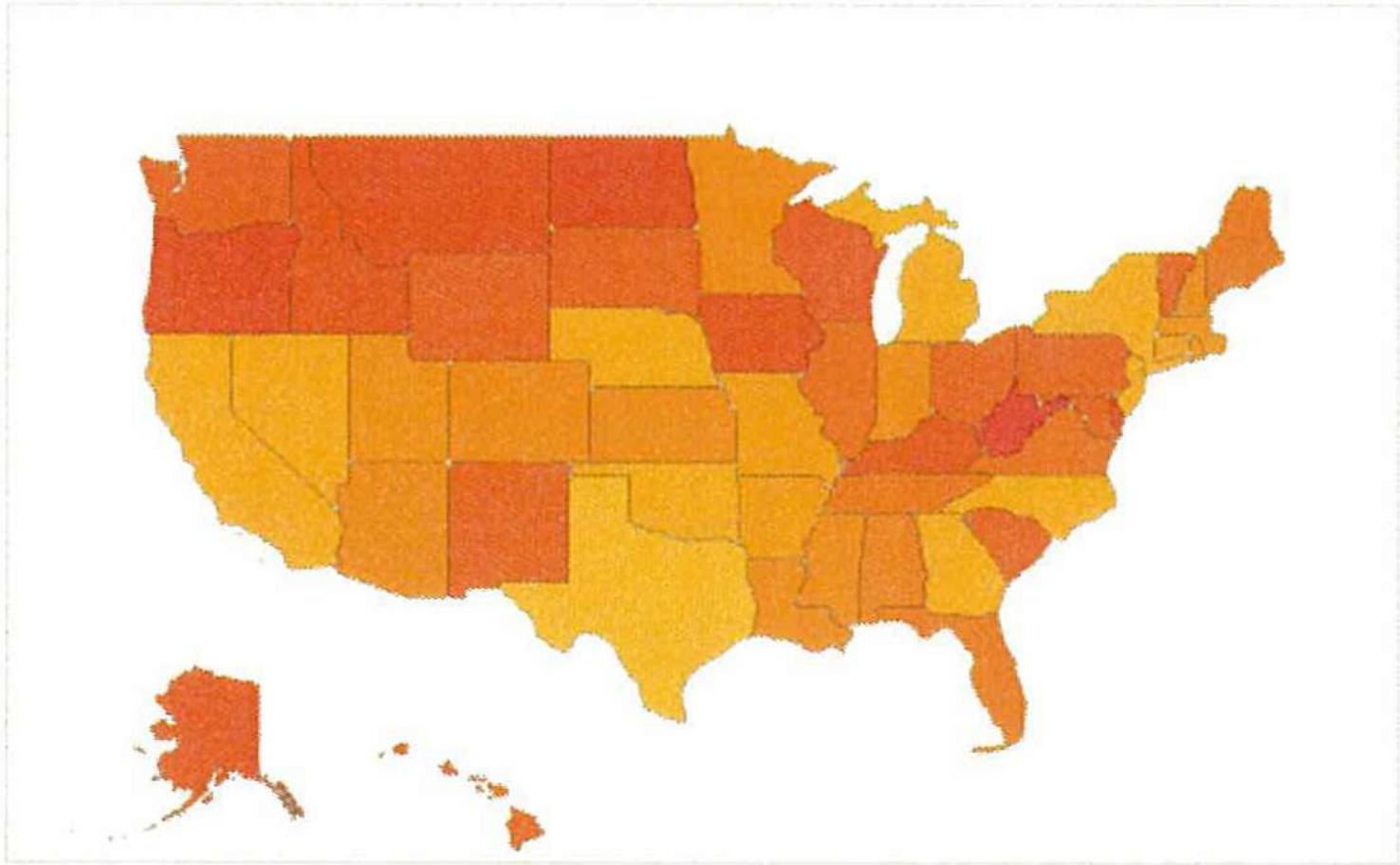
Some/many do but: “I don’t want to live in a smart-home – I’d rather be dead”

Moral and ethical debates – cant afford to ignore them

Must help older people choose technology when it is right for them (tagging/urine tests)



Be aware of the world outside the University: Google knows!



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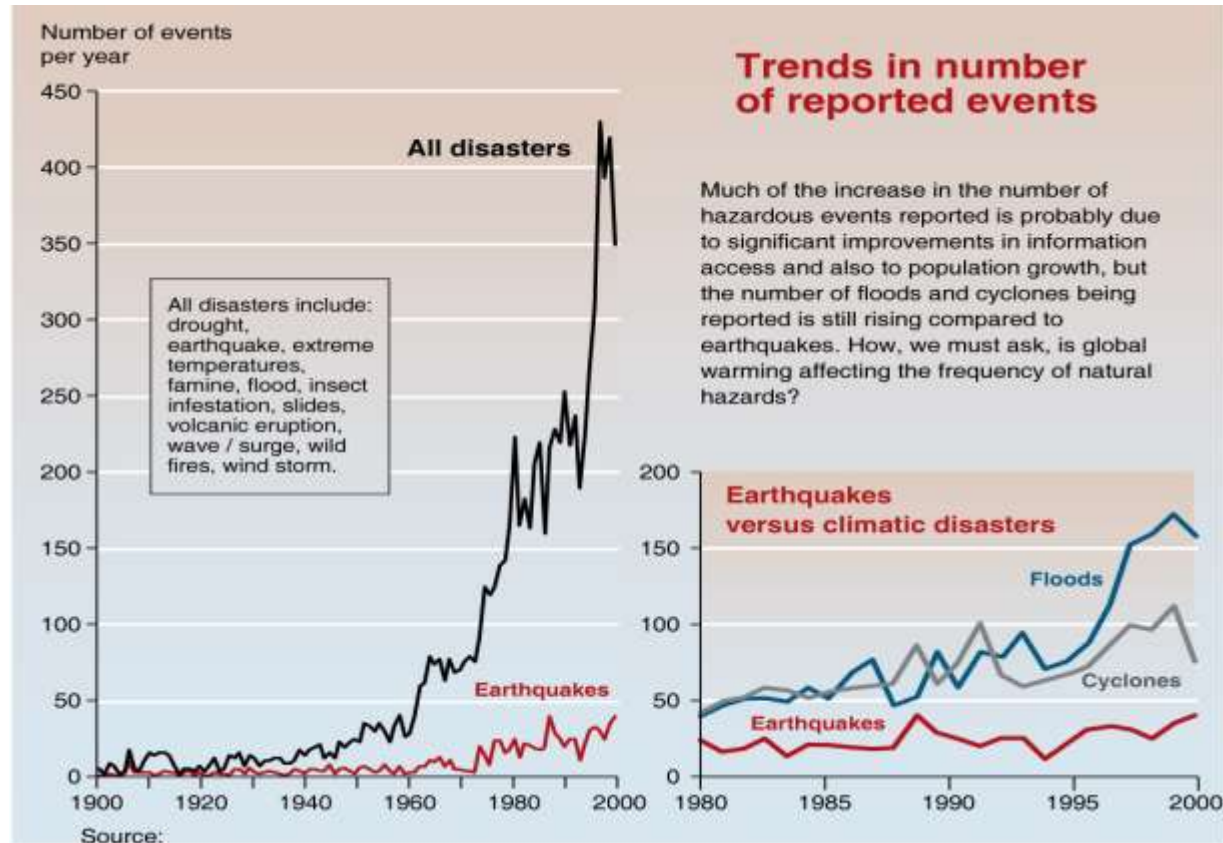
Deliver solutions



I think there'll be a cure for cancer one day. That we never thought we'd see...and Alzheimer's.

I would wish for a pill to cure everything...

Fill research gaps



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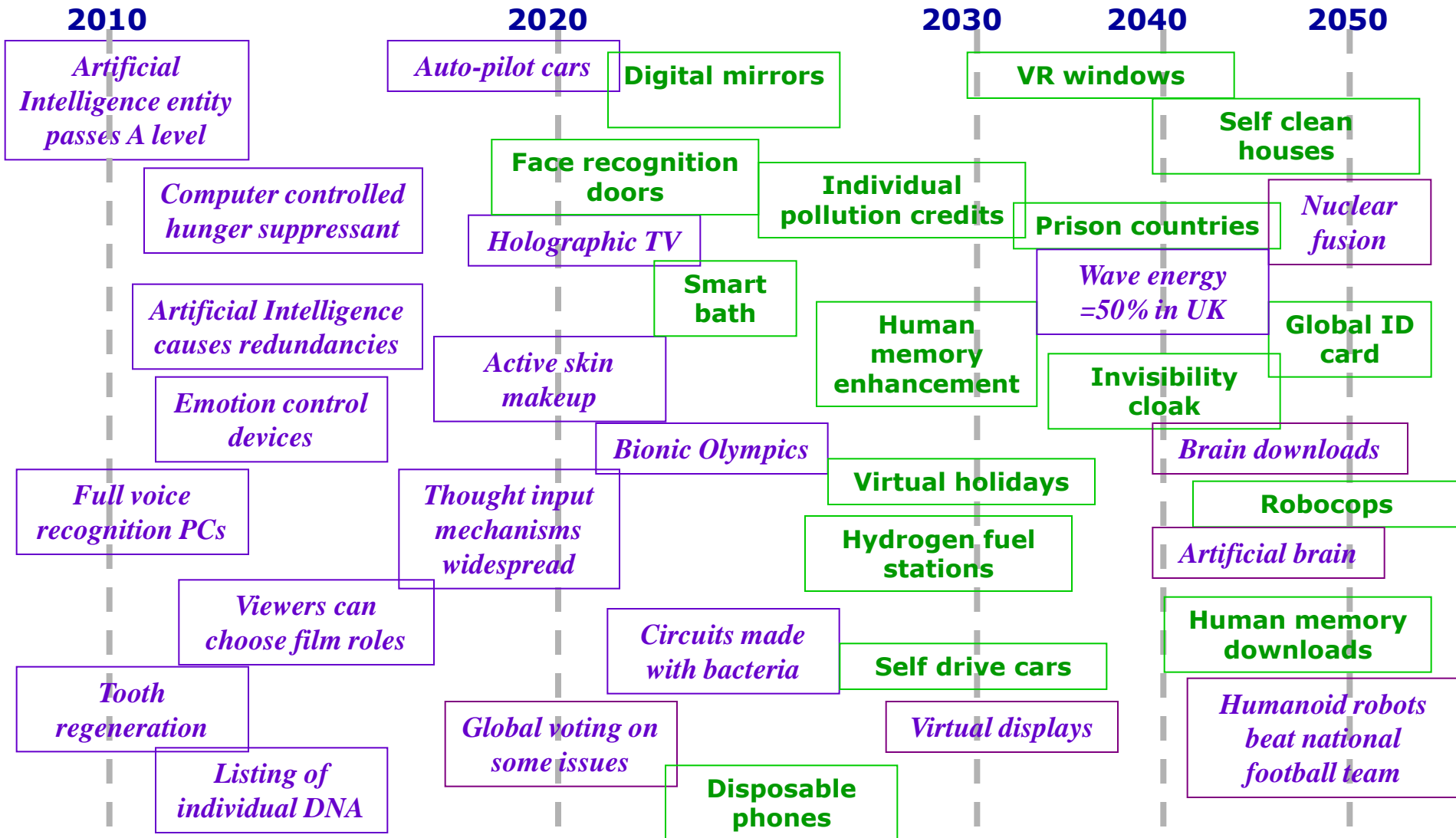
And thus help policymakers develop the right policy

Italy to keep elderly cool in supermarkets (Independent)

“GOVERNMENT PLANS to herd elderly Italians into supermarkets to protect them from the summer heat sparked controversy yesterday, with critics saying the creation of a public register of those at risk violated their right to privacy.

Girolamo Sirchia, the Health minister, has instructed local authorities to draw up a list of all Italians over the age of 65 whose health might be at risk in the event of a summer heatwave. It has been suggested that they could then easily be moved to supermarkets and other public places with air conditioning. More than 7,500 old people died as a result of the heat in Italy, while as many as 60,000 perished in France in the course of a sweltering July”.

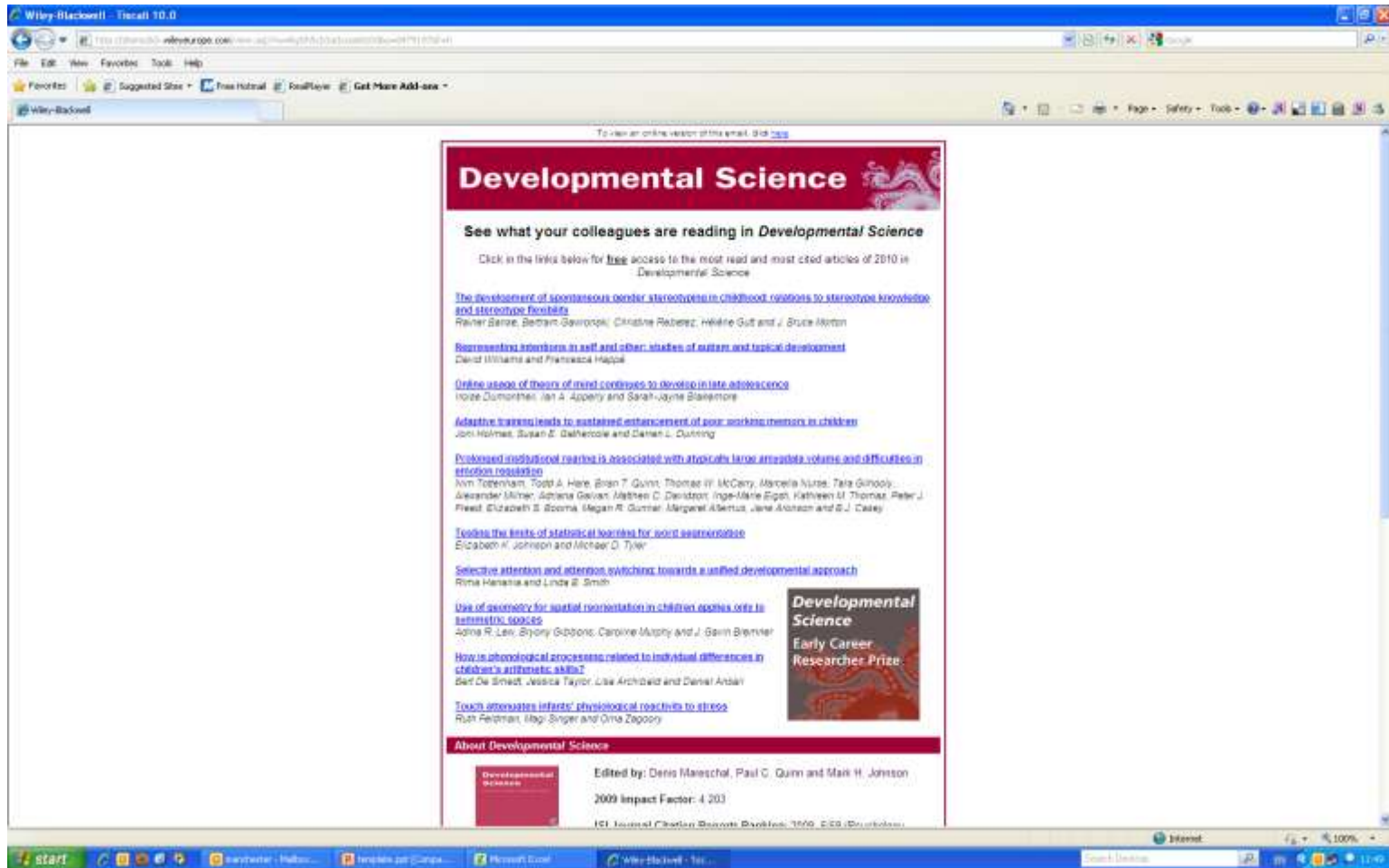
Be timely and Policy Relevant



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Accessible



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We can do much more to be accessible.

“Dr Neylon thinks it would be far better for all the artefacts of the research process, such as videos, samples, data and images, to be made freely available in an open-access format - hosted either by journal websites or alternatives such as university repositories, individual researchers' websites or large commercial providers such as Amazon - Research intelligence - Rip it up and start again”

16 December 2010

By Paul Jump (From TLS)

And do we need to rethink the status quo?

“The peer review
process is irredeemably
corrupted”

James Delingpole. Horizon. January 2010

Making an impact?

- How can you measure
 - Policy Influence (?Discuss?)
 - Media Coverage
 - Downloads
 - Mentions in Parliament
 - Approaches from Government

So why work with us?/Think Tanks

“Not many think tanks are independent”. You can work with political think tanks but take care

You aren't in London (nor are most Universities)

Universities can be bureaucratic in terms of when you want to engage in policy/media/events

It is easier for us to run an event for opinion formers in London than you. And we will get better people there!.

Great Expectations report

- Academy of Social Sciences: said universities should engage better with the public but not necessarily directly

Top tips!

- “Write clearly”
- “think about who would be interested in your work”
 - understand the potential audience
- Make the most of Web 2:0/Social Media
 - ? blogging/twitter/Youtube
 - Put your lectures online?
- Disseminate throughout not just at the end.

Tips

- Make sure your university press office supports you/is accessible/trains you
- If you aren't good at media work don't do it! You can say no
- But if you do want to engage with the media be accessible

- Accept that think tanks may be better at communicating your research to the right people than you - You are paid to be good academics not media pundits!
- Make the research process accessible (Wiki publication?)
- Open access to final product (even we find it difficult to access research)

- People at different stages in their careers may want different support – e.g. in identifying who are the relevant organisations who might be interested in your work.
- It isn't difficult to find out who you need to influence (all on the internet – select committees; who speaks at conferences etc)

Tips

- Yes: Involve us in advisory groups. But don't be surprised if the voluntary sector says no. You need to start costing participation into budgets including day rates.
- Better to involve us as project partners and engage us in doing/supporting dissemination

Tips

- Work with organisations like ILC-UK to disseminate your messages (ESRC project)
- Come to us with ideas
- Be as accessible as possible. ie respond to emails! (ILC-UK blog)

I have said yes to...

- I've just written my PHD in X. Its relevant to the news/policy agenda. I'm keen to get it into the hands of policy makers. Will you let me write it as a think piece for your website
- I've just finished a major piece of research. Can you give me a speaking slot at one of your events
- Can we write a joint project on X
- Can I write a guest blog for your website

Many thanks

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