



Queen's University  
Belfast

SCHOOL OF  
History, Anthropology,  
Philosophy and Politics

## Centre for the Study of Risk and Inequality

Applications sought for three fully funded PhD studentships to start in **September 2017**

Applications need to be submitted via the QUB on-line applications portal ([https://dap.qub.ac.uk/portal/user/u\\_login.php](https://dap.qub.ac.uk/portal/user/u_login.php)). The deadline for applications is **17.00 on Friday 17<sup>th</sup> February 2017**. You must quote the reference **RI17** in your application to ensure that it is considered under this call.

### ABOUT THE CENTRE

The Centre brings together researchers from across the University to investigate the relationship between two of the most significant challenges facing the world today: tackling increasing inequality and managing systemic risks. In addressing these challenges our primary focus is on questions concerning finance, the environment, and health.

We have a strong interdisciplinary orientation with members drawn from a wide range of disciplines, including politics, philosophy, law, sociology, nursing and midwifery, public health, engineering, planning, biological sciences, and management. This breadth of expertise, interdisciplinary focus, and a strong commitment to using research to have a sustained impact on society, all make the Centre an excellent place to study for a PhD.

### THE STUDENTSHIPS

These studentships are full-time and run for three years, beginning in September 2017. All fees are paid and there is also an annual maintenance grant. Successful candidates may also have opportunities to undertake some paid teaching.

Applicants should have a good first degree and master's qualifications in a relevant subject. They must also meet the DfE eligibility requirements (see: <https://www.qub.ac.uk/sites/graduateschool/PostgraduateFunding/UKFUProspectiveResearchStudents/>)

### THE PROJECTS

Applicants are invited to apply for one of the research projects listed below. Alternatively, if applicants are welcome to propose their own project as long as it fits within the remit of the Centre. Those wishing to take up this opportunity are strongly encouraged to discuss their plans with the Centre Director, Dr Tom Walker ([tom.walker@qub.ac.uk](mailto:tom.walker@qub.ac.uk)) before applying.

#### 1) The Political Economy of Energy Transitions in the Global South

This project will investigate how select countries in the Global South that are significant producers of fossil fuels (coal, crude oil, natural gas) adapt to global changes in energy markets, including the aim established in the Paris Agreement to move away from fossil fuels towards renewable sources of energy. It will examine how key stakeholders such as governments, state-owned energy companies and the international energy companies

with which they collaborate, and civil society organisations understand this unfolding energy transition and how they adapt to it by means of policy-making, corporate strategies and societal activism. It seeks to explain the impact of energy transitions in the Global South and whether or not conditions exist that make a successful transition to a low-carbon economy a likely outcome. Whether a comparative or single case study, the project will take an interdisciplinary approach by engaging with the literatures on international relations, the political economy of natural resources, climate change and the politics of transition. Three sets of interrelated research questions capture the nature of this project as follows: 1) What would the primary costs and benefits for energy producing and exporting countries in the Global South be if a transition to a low carbon economy is successful? Would the cost of fossil fuels becoming 'stranded assets' be outweighed by environmental gains and potential gains in renewable technology adaptation? 2) What political and economic factors drive the entrenchment of and, conversely, resistance to the domination of fossil fuels in these countries? Do primarily global or local factors determine the strategies and actions of key stakeholders? 3) Can renewable sources of energy close the gap between rapidly growing demand for energy and the insufficient ability to supply it? If they cannot, then how can the case for a transition towards a low-carbon economy be plausibly made? (Lead supervisor: Dr Stefan Andreasson [s.andreasson@qub.ac.uk](mailto:s.andreasson@qub.ac.uk), School of History, Anthropology, Philosophy and Politics)

## **2) Impact of smart grid energy technology on personal health and wealth**

Smart grid technology will change the face of energy access and pricing over the next ten years in the same way that the telecommunications and ICT revolution have changed the ways in which all tiers in society interact and respond to the world, their needs, their entitlements and what they judge to be fair. In contrast to telecommunications and ICT, however, the impact of smart grid technology on different tiers and groups in society has not, to date, been examined. For example, questions remain about how it will be shared, and about how the young, the old, the disadvantaged and the non-tech savvy will cope with it. This project will bring together perspectives (technical, financial, policy, social and ethical) from both technology and social science to address these questions. The project will undertake two concurrent studies to examine the impact of smart grid energy technology on personal health and wealth, as well as the ethical issues connected to these impacts. The first will seek to gather data on how citizens and elites visualise and understand smart grid energy technology to establish and quantify the inequalities between different groups. Data will be gathered through a mixture of qualitative (interviews, focus groups and Q methodology surveys) and quantitative (large scale surveys) methods. These inequalities will then be used to assess and quantify the risks both to society as a whole and to different tiers within society. Finally, both citizens and elites will then be resurveyed using the results of this analysis to establish the most probable set of impacts. (Lead supervisor: Dr Aoife Foley [a.foley@qub.ac.uk](mailto:a.foley@qub.ac.uk), School of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering)

## **3) Risk, Inequality, Human Flourishing and Orthodox Economic growth: Growth as Elite Ideology and popular support for post-growth alternatives**

The aim of this project is twofold. The first is to examine the proposition that orthodox, undifferentiated economic growth in western so-called developed countries is:

- a) a cause of systemic societal-level risks and a risk multiplier (in terms of increasing, though high carbon and accelerated production and consumption patterns leading to various ecological risks such as climate change, water stress, biodiversity loss);
- b) increases and manages rather than reduces socio-economic inequalities;

- c) has passed the point where it delivers greater levels of human flourishing and well-being and overall can be seen as 'uneconomic growth'.

This project seeks to empirically test the above three propositions through qualitative methods (interviews, focus groups and Q methodology surveys ) and large scale quantitative surveys with two sets of participants – ordinary citizens and political and economic elites – to find out whether they confirm, reject or modify these propositions about economic growth. This part of the project will seek to gather data on how elites and citizens conceptualise 'economic growth', and analyse the competing discourses of growth within the two groups. The second aim of the project is to empirically find out if there is support for the hypothesis that political and economic elites are less risk and inequality averse than ordinary citizens, in that elites support orthodox, undifferentiated economic growth much more than ordinary citizens. Part of this second element of the project will seek to discover, in particular, if there is more support for 'post-growth' economic objectives such as 'economic security' among ordinary citizens. Related to this the project will seek to provide empirical evidence for an argument often made in the 'heterodox' political economy literature that 'economic growth' is in effect a risk and inequality producing elite ideology. (Lead supervisor: Professor John Barry [j.barry@qub.ac.uk](mailto:j.barry@qub.ac.uk), School of History, Anthropology, Philosophy and Politics)

#### **4) The role of risk and inequality for the just transition to a low carbon economy**

How should concerns over risk and inequality feature in our transition to a low carbon economy? This question sits at the core of the proposed project, which aims to analyse how risk in its different forms and guises as well as inequality, in its multi-faceted ways, are and should be taken into consideration when designing policies to enable the transition to a low carbon economy. In addition, the project is intended to highlight the ways in which risk and inequality often intersect and mutually reinforce each other, especially if both 'risk' and 'inequality' are treated too simplistically and mono-dimensionally. For example, in debates around climate transition risk is often portrayed as coming only in two forms: climate risks and risks to the economic well-being of society. Similarly, inequality is often seen as referring either to income differences or differences in shouldering the burdens of transition. These uses of both 'risk' and 'inequality' ignore many of the intricate issues that exist at the overlap between risk and inequality. In order to normatively analyse the importance and role of forms of risk and inequality for achieving a just transition to a low carbon economy, we need to engage in wider debates on (un)sustainability, economic precariousness and security, feasibility, vulnerability and resilience. Only by doing this will the inter-linkages of risk and inequality become fully apparent, as well as the crucial socio-economic dimension of many risk-management strategies become apparent. In light of these insights, the project will develop policy proposals for a just transition to a low carbon economy. (Lead supervisor: Dr Fabian Schuppert [f.schuppert@qub.ac.uk](mailto:f.schuppert@qub.ac.uk), School of History, Anthropology, Philosophy and Politics)

#### **5) Discourses of civil contestation over hydraulic fracturing (fracking) in Ireland and the UK**

This project will examine the social contestation that arises over plans for fracking to enable gas extraction in various locations in Ireland and the UK. In particular, it will focus on the ways that risk factors are rationalised, justified and contested by different political and social actors. It will also seek to broaden our understanding of conflict that results from the perceived injustice in the distribution of risks (the socio-economic status of affected communities), the use of scientific reasoning in assessing the risks of fracking and the politicisation of that knowledge and the impact of the global economic downturn and resultant austerity towards the threshold of risk acceptability by disadvantaged

communities. The project will utilise qualitative approaches – interviews and Q Methodology to analyse the following discourses:

1. Perceptions of the risks associated with fracking;
2. Perceptions of the uneven distribution of those risks;
3. The knowledge claims/bases of perceptions of the risks of fracking.

It will seek to reveal and analyse these different 'fracking risk' discourses amongst different key actors – local and national policy-makers, politicians, energy industry actors, environmental groups and local citizens – in two case studies – Fermanagh in Northern Ireland and Lancashire in England. The project will also seek to analyse possible procedural/decision-making mechanisms for resolving such a contested policy problem, by applying both 'agonistic democratic' theory and 'conflict transformation' practices to study whether such inclusive, open, democratic fora can provide possible ways to resolve disputes and result in localised agreement around fracking. (Lead supervisor: Dr John Karamichas [j.karamichas@qub.ac.uk](mailto:j.karamichas@qub.ac.uk), School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work)

#### **6) Risk and mistrust to expert authorities in Ireland: The case of the anti-vaccination movement**

This project will identify and examine the patterns of networking and interaction among different actors involved in mobilizations that challenge expert authorities (institutional bodies, scientific authorities etc.) in Ireland (North and South). The focus will be on the anti-vaccination movement where it will investigate in detail the demographic characteristics of movement participants, their considerations and fears. It will identify any noticeable differences in the attitudes towards vaccination between the publics of the Republic and Northern Ireland that may exist and that way offer a detailed account that can inform the policy making process. (Lead supervisor: Dr John Karamichas, [j.karamichas@qub.ac.uk](mailto:j.karamichas@qub.ac.uk) School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work)

#### **7) Acceptability thresholds for risk imposition**

This project will analyze the ways in which the distribution of material wealth and other risk factors ought to affect the setting of acceptability thresholds for risk imposition. Focusing on one area in which risks are influenced by the activities of political or social actors it will examine how characteristics of the populations on which risks will fall (particularly their socio-economic status, and existing vulnerabilities) should impact what will count as an acceptable risk. We are particularly interested in investigating how existing inequalities should influence the setting of acceptability thresholds in cases of systemic risks, that is, risks that are caused by more than one actor through a series of seemingly permissible acts. (Lead supervisor: Dr Tom Walker [tom.walker@qub.ac.uk](mailto:tom.walker@qub.ac.uk), School of History, Anthropology, Philosophy and Politics)

#### **8) Decision making under uncertainty**

This project will focus on the ethics of decision making under uncertainty. Focusing on one of the central areas of interest for the Centre (finance, environment, or health) it will investigate in detail the considerations, and constraints, that policy makers or other actors should take into account when making decisions that impose risks on some sections of the population, with a particular focus on the ways in which considerations of inequality should be incorporated into the decision making process. (Lead supervisor: Dr Tom Walker [tom.walker@qub.ac.uk](mailto:tom.walker@qub.ac.uk), School of History, Anthropology, Philosophy and Politics)

### **HOW TO APPLY**

In the first instance please contact either the relevant lead supervisor or the Centre Director, Dr Tom Walker ([tom.walker@qub.ac.uk](mailto:tom.walker@qub.ac.uk)), for further details and information about the application process.

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All applicants applying for a studentship award need to include within the relevant section of the online application form a summary of the research project they plan to conduct. **The proposal should not exceed 750 words in length** and must set out the following:

- The research questions or problems that the research will address
- The research context, i.e. the past and current research and scholarship in the field
- Bearing in mind the research context, the contribution to knowledge and understanding the project will make to the field, and a clear statement of the intellectual significance of the proposed research
- The approach / methodology that will be employed, and an explanation of why it is the most appropriate approach for addressing the research questions/problems
- The resources and facilities that will be used during the research project, where are they located, and how will they be accessed