



# Nuffield Foundation Strategy

2017–2022



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We aim to improve evidence, policy, and practice in education and skills, from early childhood onwards.

# 01

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**The Nuffield Foundation was established at a moment when Britain was on the cusp of momentous change. Today we are arguably in the midst of social and technological changes as significant and as far-reaching.**

In 1943, a few months after the Beveridge Report laid the foundations of the welfare state, Lord Nuffield, one of the greatest British philanthropists of the 20th Century, created an independent Foundation to support “the advancement of social well-being...the care and comfort of the aged poor, the advancement of education” and the “relief” of the disabled. His commitment to embed science and technology in British education has shaped much of the Foundation’s work over its history.

In 2017, the Nuffield Foundation is revisiting its original objects to consider how they can best be interpreted to meet the changing needs of our society. Our aim is to engage with, and to understand the significance of, new trends and disruptive forces – social, demographic, technological and economic - that are changing the structures and context of people’s lives. This document sets out how we will achieve that over the next five years.

We have consulted many of our closest partners, grant-holders, and other stakeholders, who have been

forthright and generous in their insights. We have taken their advice to emphasise our intellectual and financial independence and our appetite for original, independent-minded research.

However, our independence as a Foundation brings with it an additional responsibility, set out in our original Trust Deed. The Nuffield Foundation is not simply an academic funding body, though the research it funds must stand up to rigorous academic scrutiny. All of the Foundation’s activities, including our student programmes, seek to improve education and skills, and to advance social well-being, particularly for those whose opportunities are constrained by disadvantage at different points in their lives.

In a Britain that Lord Nuffield would scarcely recognise, our original values and purposes still apply as strongly to contemporary society as they did seventy-four years ago.



We aim to improve people's lives through understanding of the social and economic factors affecting their well-being over the course of their lifetime.

## Our Purpose

# 02

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Our student programmes provide opportunities for individual students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, to develop their skills and confidence in quantitative and scientific methods and in data analysis.

**The Nuffield Foundation funds research, analysis, and student programmes that advance educational opportunity and social well-being across the United Kingdom.**

We expect the research we fund to influence workable proposals for policy and practice over the medium term. Our primary objective is to improve people's lives through better understanding of the issues affecting their life chances. Our research is also concerned with securing social inclusion in an increasingly diverse society and a data-enabled digital culture, and with safeguarding, through the justice system, the rights of the individual in relation to the State.

As an independent Foundation, we can offer our grant-holders the freedom to frame questions and enable new thinking that might not otherwise be supported. Our research is founded on the rigorous analysis of evidence; it examines the various interrelated social and economic changes that face people of different generations, cultural, linguistic, and social backgrounds. It also explores how the various causes of socio-economic inequality can change over the course of a lifetime.

We are forward-looking. We examine the emerging trends shaping a society where the value we attach to diversity may sit alongside the risk of greater social fragmentation. Social well-being depends on people feeling engaged with and supported by wider society. We expect the research we fund to improve the design and operation of social policy, especially in those areas which we have always identified as underpinning a well-functioning society – **Education, Welfare, and Justice**. We will contribute to building the capability of social policy institutions to use research, so that people might have greater trust and confidence that these institutions are acting to support them and their best interests.

A successful society is one that connects the perspectives of informed and independent-minded citizens. Our student programmes provide opportunities for individual students, particularly those from

disadvantaged backgrounds, to develop their skills and confidence in quantitative and scientific methods and in data analysis, as they move from the years of study to the world of work. These skills are essential for young people to participate fully in a knowledge economy, and need to be embedded across our education system as well as in the UK research culture.



## What our stakeholders say

*The Nuffield Foundation is best when it reduces policy complexity to a number of practical, tractable questions, such as ‘what makes the system work better for those it is meant to be working for?’*

*In a world of unlimited data, there is value to academics, students, Government, Parliament, and the wider public policy sphere in producing clear accounts of work across a discipline, or cross-cutting between more than one.*

*How do you get Whitehall decision-making to be better at improving the public services that touch people’s lives? The Nuffield Foundation should be thinking about the routes between those two worlds and how they interact. How can lessons learned from the front line be translated and amplified through the central policy machinery?*

*One has to think in terms of how digital technologies, social media, and data-driven approaches might be part of interventions and institutional redesign.*

*Evidence-based links between education policy and what happens in the classroom is something that is really lacking in the UK. There is quite a strong evidence base into what works, but in terms of the impact of that on teacher training and what is happening in classrooms, that link between research and practice is very impoverished.*

*I think that one of the things that is a profound challenge to all of us, and that goes well beyond what individual social scientists can do, is people’s abandonment of evidence in parts of the political debate. It’s a very difficult world now, which requires a lot of thought about how to establish authoritative evidence.*





Nuffield Research Placement students at the 2017 Big Bang UK Young Scientists & Engineers Fair in Birmingham.

# 03

## Our Focus

**Our focus will remain in the core areas which have defined our past reputation:**

- **Education and skills:** the challenges faced by the education system, from the earliest years through to further and higher education, including the teaching and learning of maths, science, and quantitative skills.
- **Children and families:** child development and welfare, learning difficulties, parenting, and the causes and effects of children growing up in adverse circumstances.
- **Economic advantage and disadvantage:** the factors that affect economic well-being, and how these factors change in the course of a lifetime.
- **Law in society:** the role of a modern justice system in providing the framework that underpins social well-being; interventions that build trust and improve outcomes amongst vulnerable people and families in their interaction with the justice system and other public institutions; the effects of differences in access to justice and judicial outcomes.

**However, in order to signal our core interests and to identify the links between them, we will organise our research portfolio into three broad domains:**



**Education**



**Welfare**



**Justice**



We are interested in funding research that takes account of the trends that are changing and shaping today's increasingly complex society.

## Cross-cutting themes

Some issues that will determine social well-being will cut across our three domains of Education, Welfare, and Justice, and may extend beyond them. In particular, we are interested in funding research that takes account of the trends that are changing and shaping today's increasingly complex society. This might include:

- How do **digital technologies and digital communications** alleviate, exacerbate and shift vulnerability, and affect concepts of trust, evidence, and authority?
- In what ways do factors such as **socio-economic status, gender, ethnicity, community, and geography** affect the vulnerability of people to different types of risk, and how can this be mitigated?
- What interventions might promote opportunity and reduce adversity through different life stages, and **promote social inclusion between and across generations**?
- What are the social and economic implications of **physical and mental disability and chronic illness**?
- How can social policy institutions make **better use of research, evidence, and data** in order to understand better the needs of those they serve, and improve services and outcomes?

Our work will focus on the United Kingdom but will include an international, comparative dimension.

Though we have discontinued our Open Door programme, we remain committed, across all of our work, to encouraging original and thought-provoking approaches to research that identify new questions and change the terms of debate.

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Further details about funding criteria and how to apply for a grant can be found on our website:

[www.nuffieldfoundation.org/apply-for-funding](http://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/apply-for-funding)



Q-Step students graduating from Manchester Metropolitan University.

## Our Principles

# 04

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**Our commitment to furthering the capacity of research to advance educational opportunity and social well-being is what makes the Nuffield Foundation distinct from most other funders. Underpinning all of our work is a common set of principles.**

- **Freedom and independence.** Our endowment guarantees our intellectual independence. We therefore have the freedom to challenge settled policy assumptions and to frame distinctive and larger questions over the longer term.
- **Commitment to quality.** 'Nuffield-funded' should continue to be a badge that denotes rigorous research. Our research is founded on quantitative evidence, but we believe that the insights from combining this approach with well-designed qualitative research can explain the problems facing our society and support the development of solutions.
- **Connecting perspectives.** Our research output is most effective when it allows academic disciplines to engage with each other and with those working in policy and in professional practice. Each can learn from the other's experience. We will put a new emphasis on synthesis, bringing together individual research projects to offer broader insights and conclusions.
- **Building trust in evidence.** Policies and practices that ameliorate disadvantage depend on a clear and impartial analysis of the evidence. However, at a time when public trust in the authority of evidence is frequently called into question, the wider credibility of our research will depend not only on its rigour and independence, but on demonstrating its connection with, and relevance to, people's daily experiences.
- **Enabling individual opportunity and growing confidence.** Our student programmes further our commitment to fostering opportunity and to the analytical thinking that underpins our research agenda.



We aim to improve outcomes for people who are seeking to resolve legal problems and disputes by facilitating evidence-based change within the justice system.

## Strategic Goals 2017–2022

# 05

Over the next five years, we will spend up to £70 million – at least £10 million each year for our core programmes, with an additional £20 million Strategic Fund for major, longer-term projects. During this period, our work will be led by four strategic goals.

### One

We will fund research that advances educational opportunity and social well-being across the United Kingdom. We will shape our research portfolio by bringing together researchers and users of research to identify the larger questions in our core areas of Education, Welfare, and Justice.

We will remain primarily a responsive funder, open to original ideas and new ways of approaching them. We will, however, be more proactive in shaping our research portfolio by working with partners to identify larger questions that will inform policy debates, and by funding work to address them. In this respect, we will become a more strategic funder.

The additional £20 million over five years will enable us to fund work on a larger scale. We also recognise that high impact projects can come from smaller grants, and we will fund the development of interesting ideas at proof-of-concept stage with grants that are easy to access and swift to process.

We will further this ambition by strengthening our role as **convenor**. We can provide a network that connects universities, think tanks and professional bodies. We can assist them in engaging with legislators at all levels of government, with regulatory and other agencies, and with public institutions, especially those delivering the Education, Welfare, and Justice systems.

We will make other strategic interventions in policy deliberation by using as a model the experience of the **Nuffield Council on**



We will grow our connections with partners in business and industry who respect our independence and are committed to our values.

**Bioethics**, which we co-fund with the Wellcome Trust and the Medical Research Council. The Nuffield Council on Bioethics, in its examination of ethical issues arising from developments in biological and medical science, has pioneered thinking and shaped policy. It is an independent authority, with a public status and international reputation. We believe there are other areas of our work where, working with partners, similar initiatives might be equally effective.

We will develop the international, comparative perspective of our research and increase its ambition and scale through co-funding, with both UK and international partners. We will grow our connections with partners in business and industry who respect our independence and are committed to our values.

We will continue to fund organisations outside the higher education sector who work to provide the evidence base and analysis that furthers public engagement and understanding. This is an increasingly important priority given current concern about low levels of public trust in evidence and expertise.

## Two

**We will work to improve the accessibility, use, and collection of the evidence and data necessary to understand the issues affecting people's life chances. We will consider the broader implications of a digital society.**



We will invest in increasing the number of people with the skills to understand data and evidence.

We want the policies and institutions that affect people's well-being to be influenced by robust evidence. We will work with the research community to foster an environment where this is possible. We will work with researchers, research institutions and users of research to improve the use of data and evidence so that policies are based on salient information about people's lives.

We will invest in increasing the number of people with the skills to understand data and evidence. We will bring together those collecting the data and those who need to use it, in order to help researchers from different disciplines understand each other and to apply their different skills and perspectives.





We will convene conferences, seminars, and workshops that bring together different combinations of expertise and experience that otherwise might not connect in the same way.

We aim to build public trust in quantitative and qualitative evidence by working to increase the transparency of how it is produced and applied. We aim to enable the providers of evidence to understand better the terms on which the public is prepared to accept its authority.

We will also consider issues of data ethics and governance in a world where an individual's data will increasingly be a significant factor in determining their relationship to society.

We are committed to supporting the enhancement of data literacy through our student programmes and we recognise its importance in lifelong learning.

### Three

#### **We will increase the profile and influence of our research portfolio and of the Nuffield Foundation as an organisation.**

We will develop our own communications platforms, and contribute to those of others, so that we can make our research more accessible to a wider audience.

We will enhance our reputation as an intellectually engaged and collaborative funder, supporting grant-holders from submission of a proposal to dissemination of its findings. We will provide more advice and resources to grant-holders so that they can maximise the impact of their work, helping them to shape it for different audiences and to respond quickly and flexibly to emerging policy and research agendas.

We will place a new emphasis on **synthesis**, publishing regular summaries of our work that bring together findings from individual projects and which add value by identifying the links between them and articulating their implications. These will be accessible to the wider policy community and enable us to take a higher profile in stimulating debate on emerging policy issues.

Through our events programme, we will convene conferences, seminars, and workshops that bring together different combinations of expertise and experience that otherwise might not connect in the same way. We will create a number of



We will offer Nuffield Fellowships to those in positions of public responsibility or with an informed interest in our agenda who wish to step back and consider significant social issues in depth.

different formats to allow for both long-term thinking and for timely response, and will actively promote the proceedings to a wider public.

We will convene a major conference once every five years to take a longer-term view with our grant-holders and partner institutions of the social policy agenda for the United Kingdom. We will publish the conference output.

We will hold an annual symposium to share the conclusions of our research output with graduate students and those in the early stages of their careers as researchers, policy makers and in professional practice.

We will offer Nuffield Fellowships to those in positions of public responsibility or with an informed interest in our agenda who wish to step back and consider significant social issues in depth. We will assist them in accessing the evidence base of our research portfolio, connect them with our network of Nuffield-funded researchers, and provide them with research support in scoping and publishing their conclusions. We will announce the Fellowship application process in 2018.

We will develop and publish a new framework and indicators that will help us to evaluate the impact of our work, both the individual projects that we fund, and our overall impact as a funder. We will share what we learn about impact with the wider research and voluntary sectors.

## Four

**We will increase opportunities for young people – particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds – to be active participants in a knowledge economy.**

Our **student programmes** are direct interventions to create opportunities for young people to develop the quantitative literacy and critical thinking necessary to be an engaged citizen in modern Britain.

Young people need skills and confidence in quantitative and scientific methods and in data analysis if they are to participate



We will explore new models for developing scientific thinking, quantitative skills, and data literacy amongst students.

fully in a digital knowledge economy. We will increase the opportunities we offer for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and from schools in disadvantaged areas to gain these skills through access to science and social science **Nuffield Research Placements.**

We will continue to develop our **Q-Step** programme to promote a step-change in building quantitative social science in higher education. We will explore new models for developing scientific thinking, quantitative skills, and data literacy amongst students and seek to apply them to other disciplines (including the humanities), and to younger age groups.

We will build an alumni network of former students who have taken part in Nuffield Research Placements and Q-Step in order to encourage access, grow aspiration and provide opportunities for successor generations.



We will make it a priority to help sustain the range of ideas and the career trajectories of talented researchers across the UK.

## Supporting the UK Research Community

# 06

**We will concentrate for the most part on grants of up to £500,000, but will also use our new Strategic Fund to allow for larger funding for major, long-term projects that will give definition to our new strategic goals.**

We will publish early in 2018 the guidelines and process for application to the Strategic Fund, along with a call for applications. We will also provide seed corn funding to support the early development of ideas that we judge have the capacity to grow into strategic projects.

We believe we add value through supporting individual academic careers. In an environment where the national Research Councils are increasingly focusing on very large grants which tend to favour established principal investigators, and where there is some targeted funding set aside for first grants for early years researchers, we will make it a priority to help sustain the range of ideas and the career trajectories of talented researchers across the UK.

We will support the careers of those, both inside and beyond academic institutions, who might not otherwise gain support for good ideas. We will build relationships with researchers of proven experience at the same time as encouraging new applicants. We will help sustain the independence and capacity of the UK academic community by continuing to work closely with the Research Councils, other charitable Trusts and Foundations and the Learned Societies. We will incentivise greater contact between social scientists, data scientists, and those from other disciplines, as well as between the different research communities.

We will develop an online application system and clearer routes to grant information via our website. We will ensure an easy-to-understand decision process for applications, and wish to be known as a funder that is flexible and fleet of foot in responding to ideas and opportunities.

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We will incentivise greater contact between social scientists, data scientists, and those from other disciplines, as well as between the different research communities.

## Conclusion

# 07

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This strategy document sets out, as the Nuffield Foundation has not done before, how we will build on our core interests and past reputation over the next five years. We will bring them together in new ways to give our research and interventions greater traction in the policy debates shaping the future of the United Kingdom. This will in turn entail framing new questions and identifying approaches that reflect the interconnected nature of contemporary society. We will strengthen the relationship with our grant-holders, enhancing their research through our capacity to bring it into wider discussion. By locating the individual projects we fund within a broader agenda, we will enhance their collective impact.

Our strategy is designed to evolve, and is not a closed statement of our interests. We will judge its success in part by the ways in which the projects it enables in turn require us to re-evaluate how we can best achieve our purposes in a rapidly changing world. It should lead us, and those who work with us, to think afresh about where new research is needed, and where there may be potential for new “observatories” for deliberation. It will encourage the bringing together of research outputs, opportunities for new partnerships and the support of new talent. It should lead us to re-energise our student programmes in order to enable greater opportunity and skills.

A Foundation, with the privilege to fund new knowledge, should beware of thinking of itself as being the sole arbiter of its own agenda. That will emerge from the relationships we can build with our partners – grant applicants, research institutions, fellow funders – and all those whose aim is to shape the future of a well-governed civic society.

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