

Anything becomes possible at the LSE

by Lisa Muggeridge, MSc student in the Department of Sociology at the LSE



At long last inequality is the watchword on the lips of economists, academics, politicians, and media alike. The evolution of the financial crisis into social and political crisis, has left many wondering how they didn't notice inequality widening. Leaving them to wonder what equality meant in the first place and how inequality actually shapes the economy and society. The London School of Economics recently formed the International Inequalities Institute as a response to the growing anxieties relating to inequality. Ironically the LSE is of one of the universities in the golden triangle at the apex of the higher education and class reproduction hierarchy in the UK.

My research interests are how institutions map inequality, and how we read and understand what our social policy institutions tell us, and researching the relationship between instability and inequality. In the context of the UK, I am suggesting that using our social policy systems and the narratives that shape them, will help us to map out that relationship in the period since the financial instability of 2008.

And so here I am. One of the first graduate students at the new Inequalities Institute, hoping that next year I will have the skills and funding to start that research. My first term which I now know is Michaelmas term, has been educational to say the least.

I graduated in 2006 from the University of Bradford, a social worker preparing to work at the intersection of inequality, social policy, social life and our economic system. Inequality as I understand it is about power and abuse, and at the coal face where I worked I was trying to make those systems work in the lives of kids who were vulnerable to significant harm. Harm from their families, but also from a society where they are invisible, and social policy systems that harmed them under the guise of 'help'. Learning to navigate the cracks being widened by privatisation and financialisation and the deepening economic inequality has been difficult. Especially when I have a theory based around the ability to critically reflect on the power of social policy and how that shapes the lives of those that wider society does not want to see.

Those who graduated with me would go on to work different inequality fault lines, older people, younger children, people with mental illnesses and learning disabilities, vulnerable to violence, abuse, vulnerability that is a by-product of being dependent on other people or the state for care. The LSE is one of those universities that will churn out the policy makers who shape the working lives of those I graduated with, and the private lives of our very vulnerable service users. Being at the LSE is thrilling, having access to the documents that gave birth to the institutions that interest me in our well-resourced library, and equally having access to brilliant minds and academics whose work I have followed for years.

The MSc Inequalities and Social Sciences course provides a rotation of lectures from academics at the top of their fields, examining different aspects of inequality. Theorising inequality and egalitarianism, law, media, organisational sociology and the studies of gender, race, and class which should shape these fields. And if that isn't enough Thomas Piketty will be lecturing next term. We have access to courses across the institution and can create unique masters degrees reflecting the wide variety of interests in the new intake.

The recognition that studying inequality requires a journey across disciplines and institutions mirrors what I have learned in my working life and through my undergraduate degree, and yet I

have found this is a new understanding for the academic institutions who educated those who shaped my working landscape. That most of these disciplines exist in silos unable to communicate and learn from each other. I don't think I have ever felt so different. Not just because of the intangible barriers that class creates, not just because I commute here from West Yorkshire and balance my study with the care of my daughter and still live subject to the social policy systems I am studying. But because I sometimes feel like I have landed in a frosted glass bubble, with academics who know they should be able to see the world I know, but can't.

I reflect on the policies I have delivered on behalf of the civil service and local authorities, and can see how that disconnect manifested reality.

I am trying to get to grips with statistics and quantitative research methods, and as I struggle with the basic handling of data and SPSS, I realise that if it can't be measured, it doesn't count. There is a great deal that can't be measured. There have been huge problems in how we have interpreted what can be.

The distance between my life at LSE and my life outside is more than the commute, and that distance is having a more profound effect on my understanding of the world, than the essays I write and the homework I do to get to grips with statistical analysis.

We are living in a very exciting time, and the ideas formed now and at this institute, will shape generations. I believe just as the thoughts Keynes and Hayek had here in the 1940s, which shaped the world over the past 70 years. It is thrilling. We have their knowledge, we have the data and the evidence that the institutions born here provide, and we have the capability to use that data for the first time in history. But part of what the LSE must do is to develop the ability to reflect on their place in this system and the impact of those ideas, so the same mistakes are not made. When the London School of Economics and other elite institutions can do that, anything becomes possible.

November 24th, 2015 | [Inequalities](#), [Studying Sociology](#) | [1 Comment](#)

☺