

# How can blogging help research make an impact beyond academia? Illustrative examples from the LSE blogs



*Previous posts in our series on the Impact of LSE Blogs project examined the effects of blogging on the academic sphere, looking more closely at citations to the original research outputs and also to the blog posts themselves. But what about the effects of blogging beyond academia, on the public sphere? In the final post of the series, **Kieran Booluck** recounts some examples of how LSE blogs have helped primary academic research to be discovered and used, and also revisits those posts that have demonstrated the blogs' huge potential to extend the reach of research.*

Earlier this summer, Carlos Arrebola and Amy Mollett introduced the [Impact of LSE Blogs project](#), which sought to investigate the role of [LSE's public-facing academic blogs](#) as channels of academic communication. Looking more specifically at the blogs' impact on the academic sphere, subsequent posts examined the [effects of blogging on the success of published articles](#) and the increasing frequency with which the [posts themselves are being cited](#) in scholarly publications. But with [citations being far from the only item](#) in the impact basket, we resolved to take a broader look at the reach and influence of the blogs.

After all, one of the initial ambitions of the blogs was that they would serve as a knowledge exchange initiative, "[communicating social science research and commentary in ways that enhance public debate and understanding](#)". The interactions that posts facilitate between their authors and the wider community, as well as improved coverage and prominence of primary academic research, were always hoped-for outcomes of the process.



With this in mind, we sought out examples of LSE blog posts being directly responsible for research that might otherwise have been overlooked being picked up and used. Sean Creaney's research is one such example. Last August Sean wrote for the LSE British Politics and Policy blog about how, across the youth justice system, [young offenders' views were not being listened to](#). His post warned that if this reluctance to allow youth offenders to have a say in the care they receive is not addressed, there will be a negative impact both on their personalities and on the risk of reoffending. This post was later picked up by the government's Youth Justice Board and included as further reading in its newsletter, YJB Bulletin. It was subsequently read by Lord McNally, Chair of the YJB, who personally contacted Sean to arrange a meeting, commending his good work on a subject that had proved challenging for the YJB and inviting his further input.

Shortly afterwards, Sean met with Dusty Kennedy, Head of the YJB in Wales, who requested his input on the national participation strategy. Sean shared findings of his PhD research and provided detailed feedback to the Board; he was subsequently cited in the final published strategy, invited to speak at the annual convention last November (and again at the forthcoming 2017 event), and participated in wider YJB training programmes. For Sean, the opportunity to write for the blog was key to bringing about this work: “crucially, the LSE provided me with a platform to share my critical views on the topic and increase public understanding, [enabling] the building of a network of contacts and the influencing of policy, specifically through acting as a critical friend to the YJB for England and Wales.”

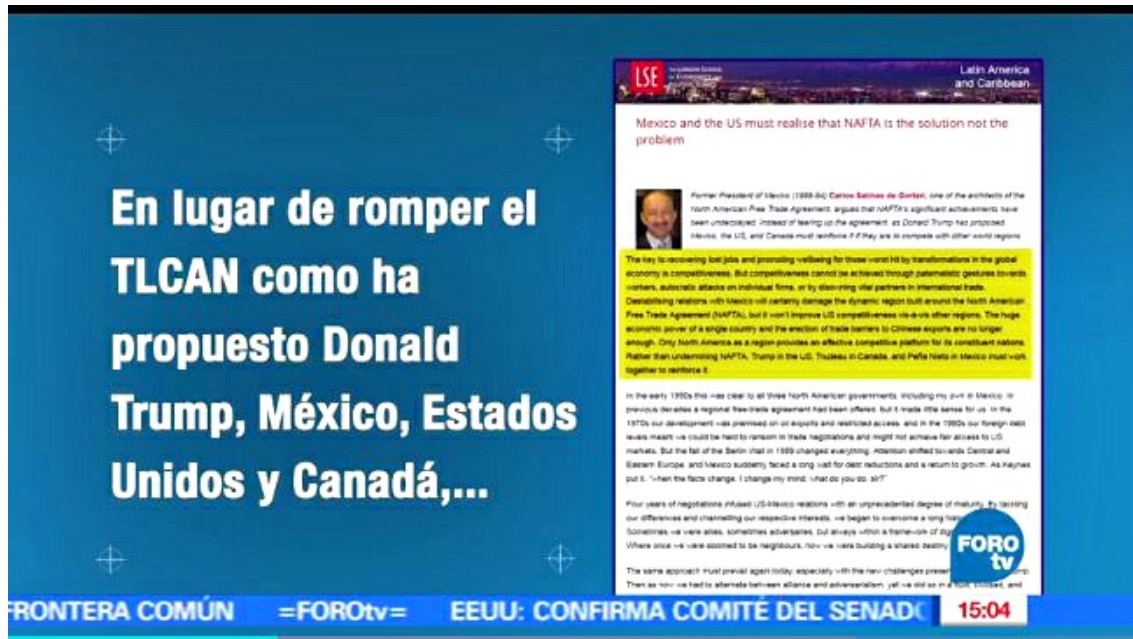
In another example, on 6 January of this year, again on the British Politics and Policy blog, Gina Netto wrote to highlight the shortage of supply and the unaffordability of homes as key elements of Britain’s housing crisis. Drawing on her [research](#) for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Gina outlined [six potential solutions to increase the supply of affordable housing](#). At a similar time, the Welsh Government asked the Public Policy Institute for Wales to convene a panel of academic housing experts to advise on housing plans for the current Assembly term, to include an expert round table arranged for 10 January. Dr Andrew Connell, a research associate at the Public Policy Institute for Wales, had read Gina’s blog post and subsequently contacted her with an invitation to attend the round table event: “we hadn’t been aware of Gina’s work previously, but when we saw the blog post we realised how important her contribution would be, so we had to get in touch with her straight away.”

Although it was not actually possible for Gina to attend the round table, she was invited to submit her comments in writing at a later stage. The report is currently being finalised and Dr Connell added: “Gina’s input has been very helpful in expanding on the discussion at a number of points. There may be further opportunities to inform housing policy development in Wales and we hope very much that she would be willing to contribute further.”

Key to these examples is the accessible nature of blog posts. Quite apart from being free from any paywall – unlike [the majority of academic research](#) and a number of established news outlets – the shorter, distilled format holds obvious appeal to many people at a time when [information overload](#) is an increasing concern. This is true of other researchers and interested members of the public, but perhaps especially so of those in positions of public influence, required to make important decisions and expected to be fully briefed and informed when doing so. Grace Rowley is Head of Research Communications at the House of Commons Library, an independent, impartial research service that publishes briefings on legislation and policy and provides a bespoke enquiry service to MPs and their staff (check out the team’s excellent blog, [Second Reading](#)). Rowley comments: “we look for authoritative, detailed and accessible sources of information to use in our impartial briefings, and the LSE blogs we’ve cited fit this brief. We work quickly, so academic research presented as a blog is useful as it helps us to easily get to the key information.” Indeed, following the triggering of Article 50 earlier this year, a number of LSE blog posts – including [Kenneth Armstrong’s](#) on LSE Brexit and [Jo Murkens’s](#) on LSE EUROPP – were cited in the Commons Library’s “[Legislating for Brexit: the Great Repeal Bill](#)” and “[Brexit reading list: legal and constitutional issues](#)” briefings.

The notion that researchers have come to view blogging as an important step towards achieving impact is not quite as fanciful as it might first have seemed. Analysis of the [Research Excellence Framework 2014 Impact Case Studies](#) – submitted in late 2013 when the blogs were still in their infancy – reveals those LSE blog posts that were cited as sources of corroborating impact, including in submissions by the [University of Manchester](#), [University of Nottingham](#) and [Coventry University](#). These particular cases touch on issues as diverse as equal representation in Parliament, organisational wellbeing, and commemorations of the 1994 Rwanda genocide, and while it would obviously be erroneous to suggest that the blog posts represent impacts in themselves, each would seem to have served as a staging post in communicating the wider significance of the underpinning research to a larger audience.

While real-terms impacts are sometimes difficult to demonstrate, what is easier to track is some of the mainstream media coverage afforded to academic research as a consequence of the LSE blogs. A particularly colourful example came earlier this year, when the LSE Latin America and Caribbean blog’s [inaugural post](#), written by former President Dr Carlos Salinas de Gortari, was reported on by a range of international media, including [Forbes Mexico](#), [El Universal](#), [Newsweek](#) and the [Huffington Post](#). This post also featured on Mexican television, with coverage on broadcast news channel Televisa’s [FOROtv](#) programme:



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Elsewhere, LSE blogs' coverage of the Brexit referendum and a series of European elections was frequently referenced across a range of national and international media; for example, in *Guardian* comment pieces on [the rise of populism in the Netherlands](#) and [Emmanuel Macron's liberal centricism](#), reaction to [Italy's constitutional referendum](#) in the *New Statesman*, and CNN's discussion of the [viability of a second Brexit vote](#). The *Guardian's* Matthew D'Ancona used his column to praise the British Politics and Policy blog for its "[comprehensive demolition of \[immigration\] myths](#)". Also, Ulrik Pram Gad's LSE EUROPP post mooted the possibility of a "[reverse Greenland](#)" option – whereby Scotland, Northern Ireland and Gibraltar could retain membership of the EU while England and Wales pursue their own arrangements – and its subsequent retweeting by Scotland's First Minister Nicola Sturgeon, became the subject of somewhat hysterical coverage by [the Express](#).

Perhaps the most novel example of impact, one that cuts right to the core of Middle England, is the case of Eric Kaufmann's British Politics and Policy blog post, "[It's NOT the economy, stupid: Brexit as a story of personal values](#)". In it, Kaufmann argues that it was mainly personal values that motivated voters, not economic inequality. This post was read by *The Archers* scriptwriter Tim Stimpson, inspiring him to consider how the [jury room in the murder trial of Helen Titchener](#) might be a forum in which some of the issues arising from Brexit could be raised. Writing for the BBC, Stimpson explained: "I'd also just read about a study that found that attitudes to capital punishment are a much better indicator as to how a person voted in the referendum than socio-economic factors. How much would the jurors' individual worldviews affect how they saw Helen's case?"

For all the various impacts, what is perhaps most striking about the LSE blogs is their extraordinary reach. Since the launch of the first blog in advance of the 2010 UK General Election, [LSE's public-facing blogs](#) have published 17,000 posts, have been read 24 million times across 190+ countries, amassed 200,000 Twitter followers, and been the subject of 750+ citations in the scholarly literature. The single most-read post, Nicholas Barr's explanation of [why he intended to vote Remain](#) in last summer's EU referendum, has been read by nearly 500,000 people. Meanwhile, research conducted by Qing Ke, Yong-Yeol Ahn and Cassidy R. Sugimoto – [summarised on the Impact Blog](#) – noted how analysis of scientists' tweets reveals [blogs.lse.ac.uk to be among the 20 most-shared domains](#) on Twitter, and is actually the single most-shared among only political scientists.

So, writing for the LSE blogs may not only contribute to an increased academic impact, but might also bring your research to the attention of a wider audience (potentially including people of influence), garner international media coverage, and possibly even inform the final determinations of a public jury in a Radio 4 drama murder trial.

## Previous posts in this series

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Permalink: <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2017/09/27/how-can-blogging-help-research-make-an-impact-beyond-academia/>

Blog homepage: <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/>

## Introducing the Impact of LSE Blogs project!



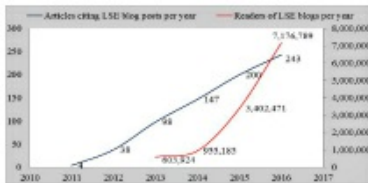
Since launching in 2010, more than 2000 contributors have written for LSE's public-facing academic blogs, reaching an ever-expanding, international audience. But how do we measure the impact of this particular form of research communication? Carlos Arrebola and Amy Mollett introduce the Impact of LSE Blogs project.

## How do LSE Blogs impact the academic sphere? Exploring the effects of blogging on published research



Carlos Arrebola and Amy Mollett share findings of a study examining effects of blogging on the success of published articles. While more exploratory than explanatory, with the positive effects on citations particularly difficult to demonstrate conclusively, data shows that blogging enhances overall attention paid to published research.

## How do LSE blogs impact the academic sphere? Blogs as citable items in scholarly publications



Carlos Arrebola looks at how LSE blog posts are cited in scholarly publications. Unsurprisingly, most citations are from English-speaking countries, in social sciences subjects. Meanwhile, some posts are even cited where a corresponding journal article is available; either because new detail is provided, or because of wider access issues.

Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of the LSE Impact Blog, nor of the London School of Economics. Please review our [comments policy](#) if you have any concerns on posting a comment below.

## About the author

**Kieran Booluck** is editor of the LSE Impact Blog. He has a background in higher education and academic publishing, having worked in a variety of editorial roles. His interests are in notions of impact, the REF, public engagement initiatives, and scholarly communications. He tweets much too infrequently [@kieranbooluck](#).