

Social science-led projects awarded £170,000 to combat infectious disease through a cross-disciplinary approach

The Bloomsbury SET – a £5-million translational research programme led by The Royal Veterinary College (RVC) and funded by Research England – has awarded a total of £170,000 to six social science-led projects. These projects will explore a range of approaches to understand the role of people, business and culture, in combatting infectious disease and antimicrobial resistance (AMR).

Partners in the programme comprise the RVC, the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM), London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), SOAS University of London and the London International Development Centre (LIDC).

The consortium's aim is to accelerate the delivery of innovative scientific and technical solutions to help safeguard global health. The most recent funding call uses a cross-disciplinary approach, focusing on the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, to bring new perspectives on global human and animal health challenges. This approach will help provide solutions to disease prevention or control, by helping understand how to deploy new diagnostic tools and vaccines in a way that is acceptable to local actors.

The reality that infectious diseases circumvent geographical borders has been brought sharply into focus in recent months. The Bloomsbury SET recognises that in order to tackle these complex challenges, we must take a holistic approach. This includes examination of historical, cultural and socioeconomic contexts in which microbes, people, animals and ecosystems interact, in order to better understand human behaviour, and inform structural and policy reforms of local health systems.



Bedouin men and their camels in Wadi Rum, Aqaba, southern Jordan (Photo: Peter Holloway)

The six collaborative projects are described below:

- **Knowledge Exchange through a Bedouin lens: a photovoice exploration of camel owner perceptions of zoonotic disease risk** – led by Dr Jackie Cardwell (RVC) in collaboration with LSHTM, the project will explore Jordanian Bedouin camel-owner views and practices relevant to zoonotic disease control, using a participatory photography approach to initiate new dialogue between community and researchers in this context.
- **Enhancing Political Economy Research Skills to Tackle Infectious Disease and AMR Challenges** – led by Dr Mehroosh Tak (RVC) in collaboration with LSHTM, this study will train researchers to investigate infectious disease and AMR, equipping them with tools, theory and methods from political economy and heterodox economics, to critically examine social, economic, cultural and political relations that govern human behaviours and policy-making in Low- and Middle-Income Countries.
- **Assessing Social Acceptability and Economic Impact of Centralized Antibiotic Usage Data Collection for GB Cattle Farms** – Dr Mehroosh Tak (RVC) in collaboration with SOAS, will lead a study exploring the social acceptability and economic impact of a centralised antibiotic usage (ABU) data-capture tool for cattle farms in different contexts in the UK.
- **Tackling Antimicrobial Resistance in Rivers: A design-based policy approach** – the study, led by Dr Naomi Bull (LSHTM) in collaboration with RVC and SOAS, will encourage the local co-design of public policies to combat the challenges of AMR pollution in rivers in Nairobi.
- **Contextualizing Antimicrobial Resistance Perspectives in Sri Lanka and European Union** – this study, led by Dr Risa Morimoto (SOAS) in collaboration with the RVC and LSE, builds on an existing RVC-led Bloomsbury SET project and will explore local contexts and cultural perceptions, investigating the understanding of AMR within local fishing communities.
- **Visual Arts and Localised Evidence and Decision-making** – led by Dr Polly Savage (SOAS) in collaboration with LSE and LSHTM, the project will look at how to enhance knowledge exchange and impact through visual materials which communicate the outputs of the LSE-led Localised Evidence and Decision-making (LEAD) project.

Dr Ray Kent, Director of Research Administration at the RVC, said: “The six funded projects represent an exciting opportunity to investigate social and cultural aspects of infectious disease and AMR, which can so easily be overlooked in our rush to identify and implement technology-based solutions. We trust that in combination, these studies will lead to genuine insights into how co-designing solutions with local people can reduce costs and encourage shared ownership of challenges in low-resource settings, leading to better outcomes for disease prevention and control.”

Dr Aygen Kurt-Dickson, LSE Research and Innovation Strategy Manager and Chair of the Evaluation Panel, said: “I am delighted to see such interesting collaborative projects come out of our interdisciplinary and cross-institutional activity. The role of social sciences in combatting infectious diseases and AMR is yet to be realised further, and I believe KE platforms like The Bloomsbury SET will continue to offer strong scientific and policy

evidence that is co-created by different disciplines and perspectives. This is truly an exciting moment for us to be able to contribute to this agenda and help tackle the challenges posed by infectious disease outbreaks with our understanding of socio-economic, political, and cultural contexts”.

To date, The Bloomsbury SET programme has distributed over £3.9 million in funding for Knowledge Exchange to combat infectious diseases and AMR, allowing the connecting of capability across different areas of expertise under the One Health approach.

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Notes to Editors

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About The Bloomsbury SET

Starting in April 2018, this £5-million translational research programme led by The Royal Veterinary College (RVC) and funded by Research England’s Connecting Capability Fund, has focused on the development of new vaccines and diagnostic tools, and addressing innovative approaches for data analysis and public health.

These projects complement the existing Bloomsbury SET projects portfolio, which comprises eight Project Grants, three Innovation Fellowships, five studies using Artificial Intelligence / Big Data and five Commercialization projects. The programme adopts the One Health Approach, creating opportunities for innovation and integration across different disciplines.

The six new projects will build on this by exploring new perspectives on global human and animal health with an emphasis on mobilising the knowledge and expertise of Arts, Humanities and Social Science researchers. For more information, please see: [The Bloomsbury Set](#)

About the RVC

- The Royal Veterinary College (RVC) is the UK’s largest and longest established independent veterinary school and is a Member Institution of the University of London. It was the first in the world to hold full accreditation from AVMA, EAEVE, RCVS and AVBC.
- The RVC is the top veterinary school in the UK and Europe, and ranked as the world’s second highest veterinary school in the QS World University Rankings by subject, 2020.
- The RVC offers undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in veterinary medicine, veterinary nursing and biological sciences.
- In 2017, the RVC received a Gold award from the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) – the highest rating a university can receive.
- A research led institution with 79% of its research rated as internationally excellent or world class in the Research Excellence Framework 2014.
- The RVC provides animal owners and the veterinary profession with access to expert veterinary care and advice through its teaching hospitals and first opinion practices in London and Hertfordshire.