

the note

Staff and Student magazine for the
School of Sociology and Social Policy

Featuring contributions from:

Jaya Gordon-Moore
Gabrielle Stapleton
Jack Aldridge Deacon
Libby Steel
Ruby Chau

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Cover: [The Millennium Garden, University Park](#). By Lisa Gilligan-Lee. Image supplied courtesy of The University of Nottingham ©.

A note from the Editor:

Welcome to the seventh issue of *The Note*. This semester posed all kinds of challenges as we shifted to new ways of learning and engaging with one another. The articles in this issue came from a time before COVID-19, but they speak to experiences as students and teachers that are timeless. Jaya Gordon-Moore tells us about her musical journey. Gabrielle Stapleton reflects on her time as an undergraduate. Jack Aldridge Deacon discusses the uncertainty of PhD research. Libby Steel takes us back to 1980s Nottingham, and her experience protesting. And Ruby Chau tells us about her work in the School. Thank you to all of this issue's contributors.

To our graduating students, congratulations. To everyone in our School community, please enjoy the issue. Stay safe, and have a good summer.

Scott Pacey
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JayaHadADream

Hi! I'm Jaya, a third-year study sociology student here at the University of Nottingham. Besides studying for my degree, I'm an independent rapper, singer and producer with a versatile range of music, mostly stemming from hip-hop. Music has always been a huge part of my life. In primary school, me and my friends created a band and I dabbled with drums. In secondary school, I performed a few times, singing, and by sixth form I was pulling all-nighters all the time, making music in my nan's garage. So much of my musical influence comes from my family. Even on my Dad's side (which I don't have much contact with), I have several cousins who rap or DJ.

I have been recording music for around four years, but have been publicising it since I got to university in 2017 as I knew I'd have more confidence in a new city with a fresh start. One thing I really love about making music is the subjectivity and freedom. I literally record everything in my bedroom. With the music software (Logic Pro X) that I use, I can mix my vocals however I want, and I can produce a piece of music using my midi keyboard however I choose. I feel like this has really refined my sound and allowed me

to experiment. Due to things like social media and advancements in music technology, I no longer have to rely on a record company, which is great. I do not have to manipulate my image or change my style to sell music. I have full control, and it's so empowering. Just over a year ago, I decided I needed to push myself and start doing events. Although I dreaded being the centre of attention, I must have done at least twenty shows since. I can't lie; I kind of like seeing their ears perk up when they hear me start to rap, and their conversations halt when they hear what I rap about.

*In the end I'm always fine, just gotta overcome the hump,
Mental health is like a cancer,
don't ignore the lump,
I swear down—am I gonna fall,
Remain calm when I'm breaking down, remain tall,
I promise you it's in my genes,
I been acting like I'm MJ since I heard Billie Jean,
I been acting bohemian since I listened to Queen,
Poster on my wall quoting Martin's speech,
After reading that sh*t I knew that
Jaya Had A Dream.*

– JayaHadADream, lyrics from her album *Hypersensitive* (2019)

Along with growing up in a single parent council house amidst the versatility and disguised inequalities of prestigious Cambridge, being a female Jamaican-Irish 'tomboy' has exposed me to core sociological issues, especially regarding identity. How could I not be critical? I believe music has always been sociological. Music is a cultural artefact. It can be seen as either the product of a given society, or a reaction/rebellion against it. I think my music is both. I aim to create thought-provoking, but relatable content that is raw and authentic. Additionally, a song can reflect a mood. Listening to music has always helped me to express, and make sense of, my sadness/happiness/feelings of injustice, so I aim to help others do the same.

Hypersensitive

In January, I brought a new laptop to help with my music. Being a typical critical thinker, I felt like one of capitalism's ignorant slaves. To reassure myself that it was worth it, I decided I was going to try and make an album involving many of the people who had helped me get to where I am.

In today's consumerist society, where mental health issues are so easily commodified and even glorified, I wanted to share an

honest account of the ups and downs of an angst-ridden, overthinking outcast. This album also had to be an ode to my mental health. That's why I decided to name it *Hypersensitive*. The goal was to encapsulate the ups and downs of someone who might have a tendency to think too deeply and feel hopeless. On the one hand, my hypersensitivity has enabled me to be the mindful sociologist that I am. On the other, it has really hurt me and jeopardised my social life. I only really focused on my mental health after a big breakdown in sixth form, following some painful family issues. Since then, my mental state had been very up and down. Despite my first year at university including some of the best times of my life, it was polluted by one of my biggest battles with mental health. I always hear about today's society being 'too sensitive' and 'too easily triggered'. I agree with this to an extent, but I also think this stigma is rooted in a specific ideology that wants to dismiss intersectional identities and problems. I want to celebrate hypersensitivity, with all its pros and cons! I hope this album helps people to be mindful of themselves and others.

I'm still at the beginning of my journey, but in the last year alone I have had some amazing achievements and opportunities,

which include getting BBC Radio Nottingham to play my music and performing for their music and mental health event. I've done several events that explore the relationship between music and social issues, such as for Black History month. Similarly, I recently did a performance for WGeneration's female empowerment book launch. If I could give any advice to upcoming creatives, I'd firstly say, GO FOR IT! It took me way too long to be overtly proud of my craft. Of course, this takes time, but trust your work! Believing in yourself goes a long way. I'd also say, take all the opportunities that come your way. Network with people online, and take time to appreciate other people's creative expression.



Thank you so much for reading this. I hope you might have a listen to *Hypersensitive*, which came out in November last year. You can find it on all platforms (Spotify, Apple Music, Google Play, etc.). To follow my journey, find me on social media platforms like Instagram and Twitter under @JayaHadADream. And if you have any enquiries, hit up my email: musicjaya8@gmail.com.

Jaya Gordon-Moore
3rd year student, Sociology, School of Sociology and Social Policy

Song, Science and Study: Finding Balance on My University Journey

As the end of my time as an undergraduate student draws near, I've been reflecting on everything that has shaped my university experience. From canoeing to singing with a choir, to attending approximately 260 lectures, university became so much more than just a place of study. Throughout the years, it has helped me to learn more about myself, my interests and my ideas—as well as my ability to arrive at a lecture on time (with seconds to spare) despite missing several alarms.

Back in September 2017, I followed a group of other newcomers to the freshers fair, mainly for the freebies. Not knowing what I wanted to do besides study, I signed up for nine different societies. However, within my first week of lectures, I realised that I needed to find a good balance between my studies and social life. So, I decided to split the societies into different categories: those I could attend on a weekly basis, those that had optional events, and societies that complemented my course or career. Choosing one society in each category, I managed to narrow the number down to just

four, making my priorities more manageable. However, over the past three years, although I have joined and changed societies, one has always remained.

After receiving free sweets at the freshers stall, I knew that the Revival Gospel Choir was worth checking out. The following Monday I navigated my way around the Portland Building, eager to find the studio for my first rehearsal. On arrival, I was greeted by other members and soon found myself comfortably situated in the Alto section, listening to 'oohs' and 'aahs'. By December, I had sung at numerous events and become more confident about singing and socialising. The friendly nature of the society—and its great song choices—convinced me that this was a society I could attend on a weekly basis.

I attended rehearsals week after week, preparing for our Christmas and Easter concerts alongside other performances with (for example) BBC Radio and 'Songs of Praise'. Being a member of the choir became more than just about singing and occasional dance moves; it was a place of acceptance and appreciation. During rehearsal breaks, socials

and trips, choir members would spend time learning about each other's courses, cultures and creativity. Comprised of students from different backgrounds, the choir consists of editors, songwriters, photographers and a whole range of other people. While our love for singing unites us, we all contribute our various qualities to the group, adding to who we are as individuals, but also creating something new that we can give to society as a whole.

Besides giving me the chance to sing, the choir created opportunities that have helped me on my academic and career paths. Following a social with choir members, I found out about a network called 'Black Women in Science' (BWIS). Initially, I thought this network would only include natural sciences such as biology, chemistry and physics. But the founder assured me that social sciences were not excluded. As a social science student, issues surrounding race and gender have always been of particular interest to me, and as a black woman in science, I was interested in joining the group.

Joining the Black Women in Science Network offered me support from black women at various stages in their careers. From graduates to scientists, the network has become

internationally recognised, allowing women from all walks of life to interact, inspire and identify. Through the online members forum and social media platforms, BWIS has amassed over 800 followers, creating a safe space to discuss a range of topics. With its weekly 'Monday Motivation' sessions and monthly blog posts, the network has provided encouragement and guidance to members, followers and readers. Popular posts such as 'Melanin Magic' encompass scientific theory and research, but also provide practical advice on how to take care of one's skin. With exposure to such creative and relatable content, my understanding and knowledge began to expand, enabling me to engage with scientific research and see its relevance to individual lives.

The ethos of BWIS, and my own personal passion for increasing equality and representation, led me to take on the role of Outreach and Engagement officer. With deadlines and concerts approaching, I was initially apprehensive because I simply did not want to fail. Nevertheless, alongside my study and choir commitments, I was determined to find a healthy and sustainable balance. To ensure that I got everything done, I dedicated particular days of the week to

specific tasks. For instance, Mondays were dedicated to seminar readings, choir rehearsals and the occasional Portland Coffee lunch with friends. I must admit that slight changes to the week would potentially put my weekly plans at risk, but that is where flexibility and alterations came in. Tasked with having to find a new approach to balancing my activities, I would adjust the structure of my days, for example changing lunch with friends to a Friday.

Through genuine enjoyment of all three of these areas, as well as having a good organiser and sleep, achieving balance has become second nature. With my studies at the forefront of my priorities, a vital element was selecting modules that both interested and challenged me. Witnessing the passion behind my lecturers' research and teaching contributed to my enjoyment and engagement with my studies, often reminding me of why I chose this particular course in the first place. Learning the intricacies of criminology and sociology within the School has helped shape my understanding of the wider world.

On reflection, my university journey was not limited to merely ticking off to-do lists or doing the bare minimum. Trying to constantly find balance in my life

allowed me to give the time and effort needed to enjoy moments and opportunities. Whether sitting in a lecture, or singing on a stage, I learned that being involved and interested in something does not have to end with the lecture or concert. Whilst it has not always been easy to find a balance, I can say that the journey has been worthwhile and certainly not wasted.

Gabrielle Stapleton
3rd year student, Criminology and Sociology, School of Sociology and Social Policy



Embracing the Uncertainty (or at Least Coming to Terms with It)

My first instinct when thinking about this article was to produce a reflection on my PhD research. As a postgraduate researcher (PGR), immersed in the fieldwork phase of my studies, I find myself at a juncture where I have some sense of where my research is going and what it contributes. Perhaps a reflexive piece about my findings and approach would have been interesting—at the very least, it would have saved me some legwork next time I present my research at a conference or seminar.

As useful as such an exercise *might* have been (for me perhaps more so than for you), the internet is full of such expositions, many of which are far more engaging than anything I could have produced. What really put me off writing a conventional research reflection, however, was the simple fact that I am frequently left with a pervasive sense of dissatisfaction after having read such pieces. In my experience, most authors invariably overstate the impact of careful planning in making their endeavours possible, while downplaying or even omitting the contingencies, uncertainties, fortuitous accidents and outright mistakes that invariably form a large part of life as a postgraduate

student. When an author focuses too myopically on what they did and how they did it, a false sense of seamlessness is projected onto the research process—one which leads you to believe that things could not have been otherwise.

Perhaps this is the product of an overarching system that gives precedence to ordered narratives, and which erroneously conflates neat, linear progression with rigour. Who knows? For my taste, however, reading about the slow but inexorable evolution of a PhD has the effect of making me feel thoroughly inadequate—that I could never do what others have somehow miraculously achieved. I am consistently forced to remind myself, however, that things could *always* have been otherwise. The certitude that many (although not all) reflections exude is a mirage; the corollary of the author being in a position to look back on events that, for them, have been comfortably subsumed into the sediment of the past.

At this point, I would like to highlight that I am in no way accusing *all* PhD/PGR research reflections of being fictions or falsehoods, devoid of merit (far from it). Nor do I think that to do a PhD is to spend three to four years

navigating a horizon-less swamp of chaos (although my opinion on this matter varies according to how well I feel my work is going, and whether the kettle is working in the PhD kitchen). There is, as with everything, a certain rhythm and structure inherent to the undertaking of a PhD, which varies according to discipline and subject, but broadly speaking follows certain well-trodden paths.

Yet, behind this general structure and rhythm there *is* a pervasive and perennial sense of uncertainty that warrants acknowledgement—whether or not it is the ‘done’ thing for it to be acknowledged. If a PhD is a journey along a well-trodden path, then uncertainty can be thought of as the shifting eyes watching you from among the foliage, the wolf that nips at your heels as you carve a track through the gloom.

But what form(s) does uncertainty take in relation to a PhD? Am I simply highlighting a generalised sense of anxiety, one which inheres in many occupations? Perhaps I am; I can only speak from experience and my experience is invariably somewhat limited. And yet, while I have no doubt that the uncertainties of PhD life share commonalities with those of other vocations, I feel that there are some issues that are

at least partially unique to the PGR experience. These include:

1. Questions of career progression, and uncertainty regarding the availability of early career research or teaching opportunities following completion;
2. Issues relating to the viability of a chosen methodological approach and the associated challenges of data collection/fieldwork;
3. Being fully appraised of and meeting the (potentially competing) expectations of supervisors, funders, and external assessors;
4. Ensuring that your work offers an ‘original’ contribution to knowledge, and has ‘impact’;
5. Questions of time, whether there is enough of it, and if you are on track to finish within three years;
6. Questions of ability, and whether you are good enough to be doing a PhD at all.

I have presented these here as discrete manifestations of uncertainty, but in reality, they are not so neatly delineated. They may blend and meld into one another, forming a more inchoate yet indelible sense of uncertainty that

persists over time. Maybe some of these uncertainties are more prevalent than others, or they are the catalysts for a range of other issues. It may also be that particular uncertainties are missing from this list altogether.

Subjectively speaking, however, these seem to me the most affecting challenges, and I am sure most students have experienced some of them at one point or another. Using myself as an example, uncertainty manifested itself most overtly, and most perniciously, in relation to my experiences of fieldwork. Despite planning my research for almost two years prior to seeking ethical approval, with contingency plans in place to cover a number of eventualities, from the point at which fieldwork started I felt that so much of the fate of my project was out of my hands. There was always the possibility that gatekeepers would deny me access to the research site, always the chance that participants would not be forthcoming. What would I do if I couldn't get any data? Would I be able to finish my PhD? The uncertainty surrounding this elicited further concern: were my difficulties an indication of a more serious and chronic lack of ability? Should I even be doing a PhD?

While perhaps a somewhat disproportionate reaction, the

oppressive sense of uncertainty that I felt regarding all of this began to have a tangible effect on my personal wellbeing and sense of self-worth. As I read relevant articles and chapters in search of consolation, I gradually began to feel that the social sciences were subject to a form of perverse Darwinism: that only the accounts of the successful made it into print. As success (qua collected data) was by no means assured for me, the lessons that might be derived from the experiences of others did not feel applicable. After all, I was not reading anything much about what categorically, and catastrophically, had not worked. Maybe I was doing something dreadfully wrong and simply did not know it yet.

This may all sound like melodramatic self-absorption (and indeed it may well be), but I feel that these concerns are demonstrative of the strange and unique nature of PhD uncertainty. Many people have done a PhD before, and many people have written about their experiences of completing it successfully, endeavouring to pass on their wisdom to new generations of PGRs. This, in conjunction with a diverse and active PGR community (as exists at Nottingham), who are engaged in empirical research and thus encounter similar challenges as yourself, should surely offer

reassurance at times of uncertainty.

And yet, it did not for me; at least, not completely. This is because, ultimately, the uncertainty that surrounds your project is yours alone. The PhD is unlike any educational undertaking you are likely to have engaged in before: for the most part, you are in the driver's seat, making the lion's share of the decisions and being correspondingly responsible for their consequences. No one is as invested in what you are doing as you ought to be. Moreover, as no two projects are exactly alike, any shared uncertainties that exist between yourself and your peers may never converge or be experienced commensurably. It thus is up to you (albeit not inevitably without practical or emotional support from others) to mentally find a way through the challenges that are specific to your circumstances. You might think of the PhD as a small business, in which you are the CEO, the regional manager, the travelling secretary and the front of house staff: your concerns will run the gamut from the mundane to the meta and you will be predominantly answerable to yourself. This can be unsettling.

How then do I think we PhD students should manage uncertainty? I am by no means the

best-placed to answer this question, primarily because I am still grappling with the uncertainties highlighted above. Yet, it would be churlish (or worse, self-indulgent) to waffle on about all of this without considering ways in which lessons might be learnt. Ultimately, I feel that the best approach boils down to allowing room for happenstance. Planning and forethought are fundamental aspects of doing a PhD; without them, no project would ever get off the ground. But we in the social sciences do not operate within a vacuum: our research takes place in the messy and complicated world of the human. The unexpected and the unanticipated will always be a part of what we do. Any plan, no matter how detailed and rigorous, can only ever be a tentative one until it has been implemented. Once implemented, the contours of the social world will impinge upon our good intentions: foreclosing certain possibilities, but also opening up new opportunities.

Uncertainty is thus a door that has the potential to move in both directions. At times it may cause agonising frustration; at others, it may send you in new and infinitely more exciting directions than you imagined. We therefore need to find a way to reconcile, on a collective and an individual level,

the fact that uncertainty will persist, but that it is not invariably negative. Perhaps the best way to deal with uncertainty is to conceptualise it not simply as an inconvenient truth, but as an intrinsic part of our craft.

*Jack Aldridge Deacon
PhD student, School of Sociology
and Social Policy*



Dionysius vs Apartheid: Memories of Protesting in Nottingham

The year was 1985—a time of social change and free markets initiated by the Tory government. Thatcher was diminishing the power of the unions, and the country was awakening to a more prosperous, post-recession economy. Capitalism was rife, and we witnessed the rise of the ‘yuppie’—especially in the city of London, where a slogan that was parodied by the comedian Harry Enfield was ‘loads of money!!!’ Dreams of better houses and cars seemed realisable, and were encouraged for those higher up the mobility scale.

I was 16, and my musical and fashion tastes very much epitomised the 1980s. I had an idealistic view of the world; the future looked bright, and anything seemed possible. In September I had gone off to Bilborough College in Nottinghamshire to study drama, art and art history. I was excited, scared and nervous of the new adventure that lay ahead. What if I couldn’t make friends? What would happen if I didn’t like my subjects? And the wrath of my mother, if I failed, was not appealing at all. She still scares me when she calls me Elizabeth, and I am now a woman of a certain age.

I remember standing on my own in the College’s reception area while students milled around, looking trendy and cool. I wondered if I could, or would, fit in to this new environment. But it didn’t take me long to make friends, especially on my drama course. There was a gang of us who were into music, partying and going down to Rock City and The Garage to attend gigs. Such memories!

In drama class, our teacher, Janice, got us to do weird and wonderful things. I learnt how to be a tree, and how to speak with noise. One day, Janice said she would be holding auditions for the Greek Trilogies. There were several gods, but the main one was Dionysus, the god of wine. After the auditions, everyone waited with anticipation to see which part they would get, or if they would be relegated to being an understudy or part of the backstage crew. The list was pinned up on a cork board in the common room; everyone was on tenterhooks, clamouring to see who had been awarded the main role! I nervously scrolled down the list and there was my name—I’d been assigned one of the lead parts: the god of wine, Dionysus. The plays were to take

place over three lunch sessions in the lobby/reception area of the College.

At the same time, my friends and I were not only interested in gigs, parties and drama. We were also interested in what was happening politically. This was a time when young people had a louder voice, in some respects, and there was much political unrest in the country, with students protesting and miners striking. Of particular concern was apartheid—a legal and political system of racial segregation in South Africa. Some of our attention was focused on the bank, Barclays, and its investments in the country. In fact, after protests, student demonstrations and boycotts, it pulled out of South Africa in [1986](#). Barclays had maintained that they were trying to be a positive influence of change during this period in South Africa.

Amidst all the excitement surrounding the play, everyone at college and in the student union were getting very vocal about Barclays. In fact, a demonstration had been scheduled for the same day as one of the performances! The objective was to stage a sit-in at Barclays in the centre of Nottingham, and I wanted to do both. I decided to go to the demonstration and be back at Bilborough College in time to play

Dionysius. After all, mine was an important role, and one section of the play revolved around my character.

I remember how students from across Nottinghamshire gathered in the centre of town, shouting slogans against apartheid. Banners and placards were held high in the air, and members of the student union were stirring up the crowd with a megaphone. We scuttled and flooded our way to the bank, where we sat on the floor and stopped people from entering. As time went on, I started to think I should leave. But looking towards the entrance, I saw there was a big commotion. The police had been called in, and I thought: I'm really in trouble now. There was no way out, because the police had barricaded us inside.

Eventually, they let us go after making a few arrests. But it was now 3 pm, and I was supposed to have started playing Dionysius at midday. I was very anxious going back to the college, because I knew there would be serious repercussions. I nervously entered the reception area and immediately bumped into the art teacher. They said Janice was absolutely livid with me. I tried to fight my corner, saying that I was absent for a good cause, but to no

avail. The next day, I was pulled into the principal's office—Janice was also present. I was suspended for several weeks, and barred from auditioning for any more lead roles.

The moral of this story is that you should be true to yourself and stand up for your convictions. Demonstrations against tuition fees may not have changed policy, but at least student voices were heard. Sometimes people may ask what the point to standing up and going against the grain actually is. My reply is that sometimes, change does happen. Dionysius was sacrificed, to be sure, but Barclays eventually took notice of public opinion, and pulled out of South Africa the following year.

Libby Steel
Teaching Associate, School of
Sociology and Social Policy



Spotlight on ... Ruby Chau

What is your role in the School?

I am an Assistant Professor (soon to be Associate Professor) in Public and Social Policy.

What do you teach?

Last year I taught Welfare Policy, and Research Methods and Research Management; this year, I have taught Policy Analysis and Ageing and Global Policy Responses. Before joining the School, I had taught East Asian Welfare Systems, Social Divisions in Contemporary Societies, Qualitative Research Methods and various social work modules.

Describe your research and how you go about it.

My research is built around three themes: social policy in Europe and East Asia; culturally sensitive health and social care for older migrants; and women and welfare. I was born in Hong Kong and brought up in a family where both my parents had fled from China as refugees during the Sino-Japanese War. I was educated under the former British colonial administration. Living between two different cultures has put me and many of my contemporaries in a unique position in which we

constantly negotiate between two sets of values and make judgements on what to follow and what to synchronise. This experience has helped me to see the similarities of some apparently different social systems and the diversity within seemingly homogeneous cultures. My comparative study on social policy in Europe and East Asia therefore aims to identify the common challenges faced by different welfare worlds and to promote mutual learning of good policy measures. My research on older migrants in the UK, on the other hand, challenges the 'one size fits all' approach in health and social care and argues for respect for potentially diverse preferences within ethnic minority communities. As a woman academic, I am not immune to cultural expectations of family caring roles and the so-called 'care penalty' that comes with care-related career breaks. In my study of women and welfare, I aim to enhance awareness of the gender bias in conventional welfare systems and to advocate for more support for women to enable them to organise their lives according to their preferences.

What led you to academia?

Becoming an academic was not my plan. When I was a schoolgirl, I wanted to follow in my eldest sister's footsteps and become a fashion designer. However, I didn't have a chance to explore my artistic potential, because art was not taught in my school. Since I was young, I have been very good at public speaking. The first time I addressed an audience was to give a thank you speech to the teachers at my kindergarten. Therefore, my number two dream job was something that would allow me to do a lot of talking. I once entered myself into a DJ competition hoping to get a job in a radio station. I seriously considered running in a local election to make people listen to me. Subsequently, I enrolled in a social work course, in which I learnt not only how to talk, but also how to listen. The course gave me a starting point to study social policy and to serve socially disadvantaged groups. Working with grassroots communities which have been badly failed by the unfair competition in capitalist markets, and by different welfare policies, my interest in the subject of social policy grew day by day. After winning a Commonwealth Scholarship, I studied for my PhD at the University of Sheffield and started my academic career there. I still remember how loudly my

friends and other PhD students cheered when I was offered a lectureship in the same department, just a month after my viva.

What interests you most about your work?

The opportunity to work in a multicultural and multidisciplinary environment. The department in Sheffield and the School here in Nottingham are both very diverse. My colleagues are from a range of academic backgrounds, from social work, social policy, public policy, criminology, sociology, and many other disciplines. There is a rich cultural mix in both the staff and the students. Collectively, they have expertise, life experience and country knowledge in abundance. Being used to such diverse environments has helped me to build up my confidence in conducting international research. Before joining the School, I was a Marie Curie Research fellow at the University of Sheffield conducting a comparative study in seven European and East Asian countries. I travelled to many countries to discuss policies with government ministers and advisers, senior executives of national and international organisations, top academics and researchers. I could never have imagined doing this when I first started as a PhD student in the UK,

when I struggled to speak and write in English.

What do you do in your spare time?

Coming from a Chinese working class family, spare time has always been a luxury. I believe that the more you receive from God, the more you have to share with other people. Apart from my job, I serve in my church and in the community in various voluntary capacities. I relax by going to the gym, taking long walks, submerging myself in a hot jacuzzi, playing with my cat and listening to music. I also enjoy movies, the theatre and travelling.

What achievement are you most proud of in your life?

The friendships I have developed with people in many different parts of the world. Thanks to modern technology and social media, I am able to keep our friendships fresh.

What advice do you have for students?

Reach out, and talk to people from different cultures and backgrounds. You would be amazed by how much there is to learn about the world, and from each other.

Ruby Chau
Assistant Professor, School of Sociology and Social Policy

