We are all risk takers and decision makers. By the time we get to work, we will have made a number of important, risk-informed decisions. Some affect our health: do we eat cereal or fried bacon for breakfast? Others affect our safety: do we run that amber light or wait for the green? Often our perception of risk is at variance with the available evidence. Our risk-informed decision making can be categorised in many ways, but the World Economic Forum (WEF) categories of economic, societal, environmental, technological and geopolitical shows the breadth of the concerns, all of which are addressed at the University of York.

Our research takes a holistic approach to modelling risk, to understand the cultural and social contexts in which risk is assessed, monitored and controlled and in which evidence is gathered and decisions are made.

Our research excellence

- York researchers have defined and refined methods of economic evaluation of health technologies, developing many of the methods that underpin the activity of the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) and similar organisations internationally.
- The Centre for Reviews and Dissemination specialises in evidence synthesis, assembling and analysing data from multiple research studies to generate policy-relevant research.
- York’s environmental research has provided evidence and models that underpin policy decisions of global consequence, on topics such as climate change, air pollution and species conservation.
- York leads research in the safety of complex computer-controlled systems. We have pioneered approaches to assessing safety of software and to providing safety assurance, with applications in aerospace, air traffic management, defence and space.
- The Science and Technology Studies Unit influences and informs decision-making on a range of complex technological and bioscience issues.
- York’s research on geopolitical risks investigates the dynamics of intra-state conflicts and strategies for conflict resolution. Our work also highlights political dissatisfaction and influences policy in the context of the UK in Europe.

Case study
Tackling TB and tobacco

TB and Tobacco is a four-year project, funded by the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme. Led by Dr Kamran Siddiqi, the project is coordinated by the Department of Health Sciences at the University of York and involves eight other partners. The aim of the project is to investigate ways in which interventions designed to encourage people to stop smoking can be integrated into tuberculosis (TB) control programmes. This builds on our previous work which showed that such interventions can be highly successful in helping people to quit smoking. Our ultimate goal is to improve the health and longevity of patients suffering from TB, and to reduce the number of people who suffer from tobacco-related diseases.

We are conducting our research in partnership with three TB high-burden countries in South Asia: Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan.

Siddiqi, K., et al. (2013). Action to Stop Smoking In Suspected Tuberculosis (ASSIST) in Pakistan: a randomized, controlled trial. Annals of Internal Medicine, 158(9), 667-675
Case study
‘Smart’ security

Security decisions are always uncertain. Should this passenger be allowed to board the plane? Is this person an innocent citizen or a terrorist?

Technological advances, such as the algorithmic analysis of big data, offer new ways of acting in the face of uncertainty.

Dr Alex Hall of the Department of Politics, University of York, has carried out research which focuses on the international securitisation of mobility and contemporary border politics in the West, drawing on interdisciplinary work from international relations, anthropology and critical security and border studies. She has conducted research into the everyday production and experience of security within immigration detention, and the rise of ‘smart’ e-border targeting systems in the UK and Europe.


Partnerships and impact

Our excellent research underpins international networks and partnerships, ensuring maximum impact for our risk assessment expertise.

- York academics have spun out a software solutions company, SimOmics, which provides transparent, evidence-based decision support tools for the pharmaceutical and environmental risk assessment sectors and companies such as AstraZeneca and Syngenta.

- The Centre for Applied Human Rights is studying the risks faced by human rights defenders in Colombia, Mexico, Kenya, Egypt and Indonesia.

- The University of York, in collaboration with NASA Ames researchers and automotive partners, is developing means for reasoning dynamically about safety risks under high degrees of uncertainty, with emphasis on unmanned aircraft systems and autonomous driving.

- The University of York was the lead partner for the Natural Environment section of the UK Climate Change Risk Assessment 2017 Evidence Report which recommends the priorities for government action on climate change risks over the next five years.

- York, in partnership with NHS Digital, is leading the development of a tool-supported assurance methodology for justifying the safety of digital health technologies deployed within the NHS, for example ePrescribing and self-management apps.

The Centre [Centre for Health Economics] has made extraordinary contributions both nationally and internationally to the development of health economics. It has done so from both a theoretical and practical standpoint. In particular, its contributions to the work of NICE have been so very important that I doubt if we would have achieved anything without the rigour and expertise provided by the Centre and many of its staff."

Professor Sir Michael Rawlins, Chair of the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) until 2012