

Institution: University of Sussex

Unit of Assessment: UoA 18 Economics and Econometrics

1. Context

Research in the Department of Economics at Sussex is aimed at improving people's lives – often the lives of the poorest. Over the REF period we have invested heavily in new faculty within our five main research clusters – development, international trade, labour and education, quantitative economic history, environment and energy – each of which has immediate policy relevance. A near-threefold increase in faculty numbers from 11 to 27 has been instrumental in driving forward a substantial reputational shift towards becoming an internationally recognised applied-economics department with a clear focus on research strengths and impact on policy and people. The main non-academic user-group for our research outputs are official policy-making bodies. Impact is primarily achieved through engaging in public debate and working with or influencing government bodies, national commissions, and international and non-governmental organisations. Our research has effected changes in legislation, directed the policy debate, and resulted in the training of policy-makers. Much of this impact has arisen because, as applied researchers, faculty choose to tackle problems that they know are challenging policy-makers. The ultimate beneficiaries of our work are individuals from across the world engaged in a variety of activities; they include migrants in the Pacific, the low-paid in Britain, rural workers in India and consumers in the US.

2. Approach to impact

The Department has a long tradition of applied policy research coupled with close involvement with potential users. Investment in the Department has provided an opportunity to expand on that tradition as we targeted recruitment on a careful mix of talented early-career economists and experienced senior academics with close policy links and significant capacity for non-academic impact. The Department's approach to supporting and enabling impact has three key elements: (i) to undertake direct engagement with key users, (ii) to recruit individuals who work on policy issues and who have strong links with the policy community and (iii) to encourage, support and monitor the dissemination of key research findings to users.

Undertaking direct engagement with key users

If research is to be effective in influencing policy there need to be strong professional relationships between those conducting the research and policy-makers so the Department encourages and supports direct engagement with key users through a number of mechanisms.

- ***Facilitating part-time or secondment arrangements***
 Winters took part-time leave to work as Chief Economist at DFID on an 80 per cent basis between 2008 and 2011. Litchfield was seconded on a 40 per cent basis to DFID between 2009 and 2013. These engagements have enriched the Department's collective understanding of the policy environment, thus enabling impact. For example, Winters' earlier secondment to the World Bank facilitated our case study on Temporary Workers in the Pacific.
- ***Supporting research projects that have direct policy relevance***
 Many faculty members undertake commissioned research for policy-making bodies which enhances the opportunity for direct influence on non-academic users. For instance, Rosa Dias is conducting work for the World Bank, in conjunction with the Nigerian Ministry of Health, to examine the role of monetary and non-monetary incentives in improving the retention and performance of midwives in rural areas. In recent years, faculty have conducted research for, among others, DEFRA, Home Office, HM Treasury, Cabinet Office, Department for Employment and Learning, Lord Chancellor's Department, Employment Service, World Bank, OECD, DWP and the Commonwealth Secretariat. Some of these projects involve working directly with policy advisors; e.g. Dickens carried out research with the LPC Chief Economist which has fed into the case study on the Minimum Wage.

Impact template (REF3a)

- *Supporting faculty to act in policy advisory roles*

Faculty from the Department are in frequent contact with senior individuals from a range of user communities. They provide formal policy advice and sit on advisory panels to key national and international bodies. For instance, Disney is a member of the Senior Salary Review Body (SSRB), Tol acts as an advisor for the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the US Environmental Protection Agency which directly resulted in our case study on the Social Cost of Carbon, Dolton sits on the Armed Forces Pay Review Body (AFPRB) through which his work on total employee reward has recently fed into the metrics utilised by a number of pay-review bodies.

Appointing individuals who work on policy issues and who have strong links to the policy community

Our recruitment strategy has focused on attracting research excellence in our five clusters of expertise. We have made a number of core appointments at the senior level with strong policy links; Disney, as well as being a member of the SSRB, has previously been a member of the NHS Pay Review Body and an advisor to Winsor's investigation into police remuneration; Dolton, in addition to being on the AFPRB, was a former member of the Doctors', Dentists' and School Teachers' Pay Review Bodies. Tol has been involved in Working Groups I, II and III of the IPCC. He advises governments and companies on energy and climate policy and is the scholar the most cited by the influential Stern Review of the Economics of Climate Change.

Our recruitment of early-career researchers has also targeted individuals working on policy-related issues. For example, Telhaj and Hussain have worked on the links between university quality and the earnings of its graduates. Pathania is working on the impact of food labelling on obesity. Harding works on the allocation of gain from natural resources. MacKerron has developed a smartphone-based app 'Mappiness' to collect real-time data on subjective wellbeing. The Indian Prime Minister cited Bhattacharyya's work to defend a public employment guarantee in rural India when it was under threat of abolition. The Department has also appointed those with previous experience in policy environments – Borchert from the World Bank, where he helped to construct the Services Trade Restrictions Database and Chari, from the Rand Organisation, who works on a range of policy-relevant issues, including the impact of healthcare reforms in the US on informal care-giving.

Encouraging, supporting and monitoring the dissemination of key research findings to users

The Department encourages the dissemination of key research findings to external organisations through direct support for activities that promote interaction with non-academic users. For instance, Dolton addressed an audience at the Institute of Directors of 270 MPs and policy-makers, including former US president Bill Clinton and Lord Adonis, to discuss his work on worldwide comparisons of teachers' status; Telhaj's and Hussain's work on university quality and funding was presented as evidence to two Parliamentary Select Committees – Education, and Innovation and Universities, Science and Skills. Dickens' work on earnings mobility and child poverty was presented to two different Secretaries of State for Work and Pensions, James Purnell and Yvette Cooper, and fed into a Cabinet Office report on social mobility. Gasiorek and Holmes have provided training for more than 400 participants from 70 countries using their software package, Tradesift, which they developed based on their research, to assist those involved with international trade negotiations.

As a result of these approaches, the quality of our non-academic impact in terms of reach and significance has been substantially enhanced. Our three case studies, all of which directly resulted in legislative change, provide clear evidence of the success of our approach to impact.

3. Strategy and plans

An emphasis on applied policy will remain the driving force underpinning our research strategy for the next 5 years as we aim to become one of the very top applied-economics departments in the UK, in terms both of research outputs and of non-academic impact. As current research begins to influence non-academic user-groups, we anticipate additional growth in the reach and significance of our impact over the next 5 years. Our goal is to further improve the quality of life through a stronger influence on policy-making across a wider range of non-academic users. The strategy for supporting impact will build on the approaches taken in the period 2008–13, with additional emphasis on the

further recruitment and development of existing faculty and the exploration of new avenues to enhance impact.

Further recruitment and the development of existing faculty

The Department will continue to stress policy relevance and the potential impact of research in appointments and in the monitoring and mentoring of faculty. The next phase of our strategic recruitment will enable us to hire researchers with long-standing and high-level policy connections. We will continue to facilitate non-academic contacts through mentoring, support for engagement activities and recognition for such activity. Faculty are required to develop impact plans for research applications and the mandatory Departmental review of proposals by senior faculty offers strong guidance and support on how to integrate engagement with users (early, frequent, two-way, etc.) into proposals. Researchers also commit to producing and delivering outputs aimed specifically at non-academic users in the form of policy briefings, reports and blogs. Goals for impact form an integral part of an annual research plan produced by all faculty and discussed with the School's Director of Research and Knowledge Exchange. The Department encourages the dissemination of research through our website and the University Press Office provides direct contact with print and social media. To harness the Department's existing connections and impacts in the policy world, the School is currently appointing an individual with explicit responsibility for communications, events and outreach who will work closely with the Department.

Exploring new avenues to enhance impact

New opportunities to enhance impact with non-academic users are also being explored. Our recent expansion in faculty has resulted in broader and deeper links with non-academic bodies. For instance, Dolton and Pathania are conducting research on an NHS-funded project to evaluate the impact of a reform to patient referrals on health outcomes and efficiency, Chari is working on two US National Institutes of Health-funded projects on the impact of institutional deliveries on child mortality in Rwanda and India. Tol is part of an initiative that seeks to change the way in which the US government discounts the welfare of future generations in designing climate policy and is examining innovative strategies to adapt coastal systems to rising sea levels for the EU.

4. Relationship to case studies

The three submitted cases studies reflect the reach and significance of the approach to impact described in Section 2. Details of how each case reflects our approach are as follows:

- ***Improving the labour market experiences of young people through Britain's National Minimum Wage***
 This case is a good example of faculty's direct engagement with policy-makers. Dickens has a long-standing relationship with the LPC and his work fed directly into the LPC's annual recommendation on the NMW. This relationship has been further cemented by Dickens' research collaboration with the LPC's Chief Economist.
- ***Estimating the 'social cost of carbon' to reduce US emissions and improve energy efficiency***
 This case demonstrates the success of our strategy to recruit faculty with strong links to the policy community. Tol has a long-standing engagement with policy-makers across the world with regard to environmental policy and has acted as advisor to the United States Environmental Protection Agency since 2007. Through this role, his research on modelling the costs of climate change at Sussex has rapidly fed into government regulations in the US.
- ***Boosting poor households' incomes through temporary-worker schemes in the Pacific***
 This case validates the Department's strategy of encouraging direct engagement with policy-makers through support for secondments. Winters' links, arising from a previous secondment to the World Bank in 2004–07, were instrumental in enabling him to assist in both the design and the implementation of the temporary-worker scheme in a way that permitted formal evaluation. It was this direct involvement with users that led World Bank staff to describe this as 'among the most effective development projects ever evaluated'.