

Institution: Plymouth University

Unit of Assessment: UoA 22 Social Work and Social Policy

a. Context:

The broad range of research activity undertaken by members of the UoA ensures that impact is achieved at local, regional, national and international levels across a spectrum of issues. A strategy of nurturing collaboration and partnerships through the Institute of Health and Community (IHC) and its embedded Research Centres (RCs), in close partnership with the Socio Economic Research and Intelligence Observatory (SERIO), enables the UoA to create a platform for research that embeds engagement and impact within research design and throughout the research process. Our research work has had a demonstrable impact on practices, values and policies across a diverse range of settings outside the university with a broad range of stakeholders benefitting from our work: it engages with health and welfare services, public policy, law, and justice services; practitioner and professional services, and creativity, culture, and society.

We encourage innovative, multidisciplinary research activity that is community inclusive, impact focused, and reflects the diversity of the broader population. At a local level this includes work with Plymouth Public Health, victims of hate crime, pregnant women and new mothers, and offenders with complex needs and/or mental health problems. On a national level we have contributed to the work of The National Audit Office, the NHS, The British Association of Family Therapy, Barnados and internationally to drug-use policy and strategies to reduce imprisonment of Aboriginal Australians. Overall, our research has contributed to improvements in the quality of life, particularly for vulnerable populations and in terms of the creation and application of government policy.

We seek to influence the planning of services, inform and stimulate practitioner debate, and use our research to enhance professional practice. One key way is through membership of policy and practice groups such as Plymouth Drug and Alcohol Action Team and Exeter Refugee support. We seek to maximise the impact of our research by emphasising close contact with a diversity of local, national and international agencies and organisations. National/international conferences organised and held at PU attract external audiences and encourage the provision of information and critical debate in key areas and also encourage CPD. Since 2008 we have held 22 conferences with over 3000 attendees (over half coming from practice/policy agencies). These include events on Safeguarding Children, Ageing and Dementia, Big Society, Community Engagement, and a series on Methodological Innovations.

b. Approach to impact

Our approach to encouraging impact is inclusive and forward looking. The investment in IHC and its RCs reflects a commitment to building sustainable, long-term platforms for impact focused research that harnesses the skills and energies of researchers. In this way we are establishing a stable and sustainable financial base for enhanced research activity and strategically developing KPIs of research performance aligned with external criteria used by HESA (which include impact, income, outputs and research student success). We are also extending and developing enterprise networks and promoting knowledge exchange.

These aims are aligned with PUs enterprise agenda—aimed at maximising impact, sustainability, and robust viability—and its concern for regional engagement. An annual Community Research Award scheme develops ideas proposed by local charities and community organisations in close partnership with the expertise in our RCs. Members of the UoA sit on the Award committee to support this initiative and several UoA staff have been successful recipients of awards since its foundation in 2008. Such studies include the legal advice needs of the gypsy and traveller community, training for GPs in early dementia awareness, the development of a volunteer strategy for Macmillian Cancer Support, and a court duty service for people threatened with eviction. From 2014 the IHC will involve community groups by hosting an annual conference, on behalf of the university, showcasing this initiative and its academic and practical outcomes.

Since 2008 we have initiated and developed mechanisms for identifying and monitoring the impact of our research. Existing partnerships and impact have been mapped to allow us to further develop ongoing relationships with stakeholders, policymakers, and agencies, at local, regional, national and international levels. Major stakeholders have become members of the IHC Steering Group as a way of maximising potential pathways to impact. A key development here has been

Impact template (REF3a)

the establishment of a Memorandum of Agreement with Public Health Plymouth, which has led to jointly agreed research and training priorities, joint research, and work towards a Masters in Public Health.

Support and training towards impact involves a Mentoring/Buddying system for all research active staff, flourishing ECR and doctoral forums for the dissemination of best practice. New research training modules (undergraduate and postgraduate) with an emphasis on impact have been developed to enhance researcher capacity, in line with ESRC recommendations, and ensure greater continuity from student researcher to professional researcher. To spread research skills among practitioners we are developing a new Professional Doctorate in Social and Human Sciences. Impact and engagement are essential criteria in the seed corn research funding provided by the Institute for ECRs, and all research applications are required to report on plans for impact. Seminars and conferences enhance impact and community engagement through their involvement of community groups. A key venture has been the development of research on ageing in conjunction with members of the University of the Third Age.

Impact on professional practice and training and on service user experience is secured through close work with practitioners throughout the research process. Through working closely with practitioners at Derriford (Plymouth) and Treliske (Cornwall) hospitals we have identified new research programmes that relate directly to service user needs and that have resulted in changed environments and practices for professionals, in training for professionals, and in additional support materials for service users.

SERIO, as a commissioned-research organisation with a practical remit, will continue to provide a unique 'value added' service for the UoA, working closely with our projects. It has helped to embed an understanding of how to fully maximise the impact of research using a variety of methods to connect and keep in touch with research users, including quarterly newsletters, providing a helpline for organisations looking for data and running workshops for the voluntary sector. SERIO works through an allocated team member responsible for maximising and recording impact, planning impact in at the beginning of projects; reviewing impact and evidence throughout and gathering feedback from organisations. This is being rolled out across the unit.

c. Strategy and plans

Our overall strategic aim is to nurture, recognise, and reward research talent that includes engagement and impact at its core and ensures a dynamic and supportive environment for staff, for students, and for research partners such as clinical researchers and service user researchers. The UoA's strategy is informed by and builds on existing strengths exemplified in the three case studies; this includes building collaborative partnerships internally across disciplines and externally with agencies and communities of interest and other HE institutions, developing innovative methodological practices, and ensuring effective approaches to public engagement.

IHC and its RCs actively promote collaboration. A number of new funding bids by UoA staff build on collaboration with other HE sector partners and with government and other agencies such as the Metropolitan Police and Public Health. These have been developed on the back of long-term networking and partnership building and reflect the UoA's reputation as a leader in social science research. A further goal is to continue to develop our positive connections with outside bodies, which is important as some of the organisations we work with are re-organised. We aim to ensure relations are nurtured through improved use of new platforms such as social media, web-based communication, and e-literature, by disseminating research findings, by developing new methodologies, and by creating new research opportunities. The UoA is reviewing the quality of existing platforms to ensure they reflect the skills and energies of the UoA (e.g. to ensure our continued ability to contribute to training of practitioners and the production of useful material for service users). A priority is to fully understand how we can best manage the research relationship with organisations so we can deliver work that impacts on their work. We will share experiences and review any conflicts, providing support for less experienced researchers in issues that may arise.

Our strategy to improve the public understanding of social issues has been to host events for practitioner and lay audiences, to present our work at practitioner conferences, to produce non-academic outputs alongside academic publications, and by active involvement in local, national and international groups. This will be enhanced by running workshops on engagement and dissemination and sharing good practice in the production of non-academic outputs. We aim to ensure that our research students are fully confident and skilled in producing and delivering

research findings for a variety of audiences. A future priority is to help the public sector understand the impact of delivering services through social enterprise models. As a unit we are supporting organisations such as Public Health to set up evaluations to understand the change in service delivery and impact on the public. We are also undertaking research with the Real Ideas Organisation on the use of volunteering models in delivering services.

d. Relationship to case studies:

The three Case Studies reflect the strengths and diversity of various strands in the UoA's research. They demonstrate both Reach and Significance in a number of key areas of contemporary public concern, i.e. the risks associated with injecting illicit drugs, the allocation of resources in the public sector and the care and support of pregnant women/new mothers. Each has unique features (reflecting the specific nature of their research issues), but they share key commonalities including a positive impact on the management and organization of complex social issues. They have all led to a greater understanding of the underlying issues and have taken a reflexive approach to research, to training, and to practice. The case studies demonstrate that our research has led, not least to, cost effective improvements in services (e.g. with reference to public injecting) and have influenced practitioner attitudes and training (e.g. nurses, care workers, addiction workers) as well as challenging the way resources are allocated at the national level.

Other research in the UoA has also impacted upon practice in similar ways. Annison and Hocking's research into the management of prolific offenders is one of the first studies into the effectiveness of the approach undertaken by probation, police and voluntary sector partners. Sheppard's work on reflexivity in social work has impacted on practice through its incorporation into training materials. Jordan's work has led to increased support for immigrant workers in London, Bellinger's to refugees newly dispersed to Plymouth, Morgan's to additional support for children with a parent in prison, and Gilbert's to safeguarding adults.

The three case studies demonstrate that impact can be achieved with both large, well-funded research studies and smaller, focused studies. The research by Asthana and colleagues attracted large budgets and it was clear that the findings would impact on national policy and regional thinking, while the work on providing support and information during pregnancy has been a series of small studies that have responded to the real life issues raised with our researchers by practitioners. Reflecting on this success, we are ensuring that impact is planned into our research studies, irrespective of their size, and we will continue to engage fully with practitioners so we can respond to emerging concerns. We will do this through our networks, newsletters, seminars and other events.

The case study detailing the research by Asthana *et al* demonstrates the impact a programme of research can have when tackling political areas of concern such as the goal of equity in the NHS and wider public services. Through building a body of research, the team have challenged the status quo and some deep rooted assumptions and were commissioned by the Department of Health to develop a new model to allocate mental health funding. This case study is an example of the strength of multidisciplinary research and the importance of using both technical and philosophical arguments within social policy research. The case studies also demonstrate how one research study that delivers applied findings targeted at the needs of practitioners can often lead to additional work for the same organisation. The research on the injecting of illicit drugs in public places was in response to issues being raised by the Plymouth Drug and Alcohol Team (DAAT) and led to a close relationship with Public Health and subsequent Memorandum of Understanding. This research has led to other research for Plymouth DAAT and for DAATs elsewhere. Similarly the work on screening for the UK National Screening Committee (part of the NHS) was developed alongside policy makers and has led to subsequent research contracts with the UK National Screening Committee to review screening evidence for psychiatric illness in pregnancy, childhood obesity, anal cancer and physical activity. These all inform NHS policy and ultimately improve patient care. In line with our future goals, we will look to ensure that our applied research is delivered to the highest quality, in partnership and in a timely manner and so increase the opportunity to work with organisations again in the future and continue to build a body of expertise.