

Impact template (REF3a)

Institution: University of Leicester**Unit of Assessment:** UoA 23 Sociology**a. Context**

The research conducted by the Department of Sociology is deliberately varied in its approach and context, ranging from the theoretical and highly abstract to the more applied and policy-oriented. This mix provides complementary strengths and makes for a vibrant and challenging research environment.

There are two main policy-oriented research clusters within the Unit. The first includes sociologists interested in questions of citizenship, social inclusion and exclusion, civil society and political activism. The Unit has a long history of engagement with policy debates on community relations, football fandom, violence and crowd management. More recently this has expanded to include engagement with political and social issues around immigration, migrant communities and citizenship activism within the modern context of global population movement. The main non-academic users and beneficiaries for this group's research are third sector organisations, including voluntary groups and community activists, pressure groups, campaign groups, journalists and the media.

A second research cluster involves sociologists interested in issues of health, lifestyle, happiness and well-being. In this group, members have carried out research of relevance to sex education policy in schools, the techniques and practices used in counselling and in family therapy, the evaluation of happiness among immigrant families and migrant workers, and the communication of health issues in relation to consumption of tobacco and electronic cigarettes. The main non-academic users and beneficiaries for this group's work are public sector organisations, including government departments and the NHS, policy advisory bodies, professional associations, regulatory bodies and scientific advisory boards.

In the assessment period the Unit has produced impacts that include the following:

- Informing policy-making in the areas of community cohesion, ethnic relations and citizenship processes.
- Improving strategy and decision-making among special interest groups through increased understanding of the dimensions of social processes.
- Improving community relations in areas such as youth, race and ethnicity, and gender through developing and improving approaches towards inclusion and cross-community communication.

b. Approach to impact

The Unit's approach is guided by the University's commitment to maximising the economic and societal impact of its research. A key aspect of the University's strategy is the development and sustainability of an internal culture that encourages, supports and builds further the capacity for impact.

At the institutional level, the University has a framework of professional services which support the enabling of impact, built on significant investment in PR and communications, IT-based services, an academic practice unit to build researchers' skills and knowledge, Enterprise and Business Development Office and Research Support services.

The Unit sits within the College of Social Science, which encourages and enables impact from research through the dissemination of best practice across disciplines. The College has a dedicated Business Development Manager, who works closely with academics to support the development of contract research, consultancy, knowledge transfer partnerships and CPD/short courses. The Business Development Manager also coordinates a College Enterprise Committee, committed to identifying opportunities for impact and exploiting commercial opportunities.

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The College administers a Research Development Fund which includes the enabling of research dissemination to, or collaboration with, audiences outside academia with a view to generating measurable impact. The College has actively encouraged applications to the University's Prospects Fund – resulting in 12 applications to support impact-generating activity from Social Science researchers within the first six months of the fund's existence. The College also has a dedicated web and communications officer whose role includes the dissemination of research findings across departments and to stakeholders externally.

Using these institutional resources, the main route to impact developed within the Unit has been to develop a rich network of relationships with the users of research. Many academics have links or are developing links with prominent public policy groups, political activist organisations, and other external bodies. This networking activity is recognised to be a valuable asset for achieving impact which the Unit is committed to supporting and developing.

Specific examples include:

- The role of civil society organisations in furthering access to healthcare for men and women. This has involved collaboration with local policy-makers in Leicester City Council.
- Kurdish and Turkish associations active in diasporic contexts. This has involved the development of significant contacts with, and between, community groups, activists and policy-makers including the Turkish Prime Minister and the British Deputy Prime Minister.
- The political activities of anti-discrimination groups at the EU level and in Civil Society groups associated with political parties. This has involved interactions with non-governmental organisations and lobbyists within different national contexts of European politics (primarily Italy, France and Great Britain).
- The role of associations in the field of sports, particularly anti-racist associations and associations working on disability, sports and youth organisations such as Sporting Equals, Foxes Against Racism (Leicester City football club), and the Kick It Out campaign within professional football. A second aspect of this has involved collaborations with the organisers, policy-makers and special interest groups involved with the Special Olympics event that was held in Leicester in 2009.

During the assessment period the UoA has hosted or co-organised dissemination and public engagement events which have primarily involved audiences of non-academics. These include:

- A full day public symposium, 'English "Riots": Civic Responses and Sociological Perspectives' in October 2011 which brought together approximately 130 participants including representatives of civil society organisations, students, local citizens, community activists and academics. This event challenged conventional ideas about the underlying causes of, and subsequent media reporting of the riots in English cities. The new ideas presented fed into major reviews of journalism practice, including the Leveson Inquiry.
- An ESRC Festival of Social Science event, 'Our Leicester' which brought together 100 Leicester-based sixth formers from colleges that are part of the University's widening participation programme along with media representatives (BBC radio) and politicians (Deputy Mayor of Leicester). This event developed new ideas about local community cohesion in sport and other spheres of agency and developed further collaboration and contact between the Unit and its local constituency.
- A full-day workshop (May 2011) and a symposium (December 2011) which brought together 24 local civil society organizations (charities, social enterprises, voluntary groups) representing a diverse mix of communities including antiracist organisations, organisations of mental patients and religious organisations. This event developed new ideas and challenged conventional wisdom on civil society responses to policy directions in the National Health Service.

We also regard the general public and the media as important audiences for our research. Members of the department often accept invitations to participate in current affairs and news programmes where this has educational or other social value. Examples include **Pilcher** speaking

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on Radio 4's 'You and Yours' programme about the management of decisions over children's names between unmarried or divorced parents, **Hutchby** speaking on Radio 4's 'Thinking Allowed' about modern trends in aggressive political journalism, **Bartram** speaking on 'Thinking Allowed' about the relationship between migration and happiness, and **Bassel's** ideas about journalism's response to the 2001 riots in English cities being reported in the national press and subsequently mentioned within the Leveson Inquiry into journalistic standards.

c. Strategy and plans

The Unit plans to build on these growing networks with non-academic partners and increase related activities in communicating with the public about our research and challenging accepted ideas by a range of means.

One strategy is to continue to focus on producing research that has clear implications for, and where possible involves collaborations with, non-academic users and beneficiaries. Three current projects are worth mentioning in this regard.

Bassel, Monforte, Bartram and **Misztal** are embarking on a three-year investigation of immigrants' experiences of the UK Citizenship Test, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. This project promises to produce outcomes that will be of clear relevance for policy-makers, government agencies, anti-discrimination groups and other partners in the arena of immigration policy. The project also demonstrates the Unit's on-going commitment to incorporating the work of more applied sociologists (e.g. **Bassel, Monforte**) with that of sociologists at the more abstract theoretical end of the spectrum (**Misztal**).

Hutchby and **O'Reilly** are working on a project in partnership with clinical child psychiatrists and family therapists, funded by the National Health Service, investigating communication and decision-making in child psychiatric consultations. This project promises to produce outcomes that will be of relevance for practitioners, professional associations, training programme developers and regulatory bodies in the broad area of child and family therapy. It is already beginning to produce outputs intended for publication in outlets targeted at practising clinicians.

Demir is working on a collaborative project with others in science, medicine and ethics, funded by the European Union, that investigates the sociological, ethical and scientific dimensions of the collection, storage and distribution of genetic and other biological information about individuals. This project promises to produce outcomes that are of relevance for scientific regulatory bodies, politicians, medical services, as well as the media and the public at large.

The Unit is actively developing a new research centre that will address policy-relevant issues and incorporates user partnerships within its management structure. This is the *Centre for Diversity, Migration and Citizenship*, a primary impetus for which came from links between researchers in the Unit and a leading businessman from the local Asian community, and which plans to be a large, interdisciplinary University centre spanning a number of areas including education and family policy; disability and health studies; crime and public order; communications; religion; social integration; sport and leisure; housing and employment.

d. Relationship to case studies

Enabling Britain's Marginalised Communities illustrates the Unit's continuing commitment to producing impact in the broad area of migration, social identity and community development, as well as demonstrating the impact of close collaborative relationships with community groups, activists and political decision-makers (section b). In contrast, Guiding Work to Combat Racism in Sport exemplifies the Unit's long tradition in producing impacts in the areas of sport, violence and fan behaviour, bolstered in the modern period by a further set of linkages with ethnic and community relations and the dynamics of social inclusion and exclusion, again with a commitment to communicating these dynamics to those in the policy-making and decision-making arenas.