

<p>Institution: University of Leicester</p>
<p>Unit of Assessment: 36: Communication, cultural and media studies, library and information management</p>
<p>a) Context</p> <p>The Department of Media and Communication at Leicester embraces a multi-disciplinary approach to research that includes critical and empirical analysis of media and communications, their structures, policy and legal frameworks, audiences and influences which necessarily reaches beyond academia. Research engagement in the Unit therefore impacts upon government, public administration, community groups, NGOs and the public. Since 2008 the University has invested heavily in the department increasing its numbers from 12 to 32 academic staff. While this enhances our future impact potential, most of these are new appointments which places limits around the number of staff whose research can have demonstrated impact at Leicester. Within this context, our strategy has been aimed at achieving four main types of impact:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Influencing and changing policy and strategy in government, the public sector and NGOs through an interactive research approach grounded in a developed relationship with user community members. 2. Providing evidence and analysis targeted at specific strategy or policy initiatives across a range of users. 3. Developing critical academic research with a social purpose that aims to influence broader public debates and to offer an analysis of the mediatization of a wide range of social and cultural processes. 4. Developing a local agenda for impact in our relations with local government, media and NGOs.
<p>b) Approaches to impact</p> <p>Our approach from within the College of Social Science is also informed by the ESRC's dimensions of impact. This involves encouraging researchers to achieve impact through a broad commitment to social change which is executed by providing evidence that can impact upon policy making. The Unit has used this guide in its research applications which has enabled it to make a number of important interventions:</p> <p><u>1) Influencing and changing policy and strategy</u></p> <p>An exemplar of research influencing and changing policy and strategy through a long-term interactive approach grounded in a developed relationship with user community members is the work of the Cybersociety Research Group directed by Whitty. Over a number of years (since 2010) and through externally-funded projects, Whitty has established and sustained developed relationships with a wide range of user community stakeholders: in law enforcement (e.g. The National Crime Agency and the Metropolitan Police), Government (e.g. The Home Office) and public administration (e.g. Trading Standards). The group has interacted with policy makers, think tanks and commercial sector projects and has established links with businesses including online dating companies and software companies, helping to develop a public communication strategy and instigating changes in entrepreneurial activities. Work in the Media and Democracy Research Group, led by Wright, advises a range of bodies from local councils to the US State Department one-democracy initiatives. Wright's research has influenced the development and use of online consultations, discussion and political blogs by groups such as the Hansard Society; the International Centre of Excellence in Local E-democracy; Public Works and Government Services Canada, and the German Bundestag. Simmons' research as Co-I on the ESRC seminar series 'Digital Policy: Connectivity, Creativity and Rights' involving Third Sector participants has contributed the 'Connected Digital Economy Catapult' launched by the Technology Strategy Board.</p> <p><u>2) Providing evidence to user communities</u></p> <p>There are a number of examples of research within the Unit that provides evidence to user communities. Work from within the Media and Social Policy research group most addresses this initiative. For example, Koteyko has secured an ESRC grant in partnership with a research charity,</p>

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Diabetes UK examining public discourses of diabetes. Hansen, Gunter and Touri conducted research for The Alcohol Education and Research Council and Alcohol Concern on the advertising of alcohol to young people which has influenced numerous national and international policy directions on alcohol abuse. Gunter, Dickinson and Matthew's work on the nature of infant/follow-on formula advertising informed on-going government reviews of regulations and codes of practice in this product category. Davidson's research on political and media responses to the ageing society has led to him to conduct research for *Age UK* on age compositions of voting turnouts in Westminster constituencies. He is also a member of the Future of Public Affairs Commission.

3) Developing critical academic research with a social purpose

This element of our approach spans most of our research groups and shapes much of our research identity in a social science context. Some examples are related to analyses of risk, for example Hansen's and Koteyko's research on the role of the media in constructing discourses of environment which leads into their work for the International Environment Communication Association. The Ideograms research group (with a broad interest in arts and culture) facilitates cross disciplinary research. Its latest initiative exploring representations of disability attracted funding from the ESRC. The 2012 Festival of Social Science One-Day Conference 'Mediating Disability' brought together speakers from local and shadow government, Paralympians and disability activists with academics. Reilly's work on the role of the internet in the transformation of conflict in Northern Ireland has been reported in the NI Community Relations Council Bulletin and involved testimony to a British Army exercise, Operation Agile Warrior. His work on on-line activities and social unrest has been directly addressed to the European Police College (2013) and to the military (Royal United Services Institute, 2011) and has involved a number of national and international media appearances (e.g. BBC Radio and Montreal Gazette)

4) Developing a local agenda for impact.

Our developing local impact agenda is exemplified by the work of the News and Journalism Research Group which conducted research for a local newspaper, the Leicester Mercury, on local news reporting (Dickinson). The Cultures of Production and Consumption Research Group has developed a partnership with Leicester City Council and local food producers in a study of local definitions of food and identity (Matthews, Maguire, Moylan). Members of the department (Moylan, Ong, Wood) are also part of the new Migration Research Group, a cross departmental group that links researchers to local agencies including Leicester City Council, studying social dimensions of migration. Newsinger's research into developing social media applications for the collating of information for arts and cultural participation involves collaboration with a number of local small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs), (including Soft Touch Arts, Leicester Museums, Bulb Studios) - working towards combining entrepreneurial activity with an interest in the increased participation in the arts by disadvantaged youth. This work has recently been awarded AHRC funding through the Collaborative Triple Helix Project.

This outward-facing approach to the real-world implications of our research has been achieved by providing dedicated administrative support for research and dissemination events to foster and enable links between specific projects or researchers and targeted stakeholders. We have implemented a number of initiatives within the Unit to embed impact potential early in the design and implementation of research. This involves:

- Encouraging the development of research, which now covers an increasing diversity of topics in the Unit, to address a range of user community needs.
- Increasing the visibility of our research through media coverage and the engagement of our researchers in publicising research and entering public debate.
- Supporting early career researchers through mentoring and pump-priming funding for research projects to develop impact potential.
- Making the impact agenda part of the strategy of development for research groups and part of the mentoring of early career academics. We have made a senior academic (Gunter) responsible for developing enterprise policy in the department, while he also acts as deputy director of the College Enterprise Committee, sits on the University Enterprise Committee and therefore enables departmental policy to align with the University's 2015 Enterprise Strategy.

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In addition, academics are able to gain support from the Research Support Office and the Enterprise and Business Development Office (EBDO) in the University. This includes a dedicated College Business Development Manager. Many of the projects outlined above have benefitted from direct funding from the College Research Development Fund where up to £2k of funding can be received in order to get projects started – the most recent examples include the Leicester Food Project and the Arts and Cultural Participation Project. Also the support of more junior researchers is enhancing the significance of the research of Newsinger, Reilly and Davidson. During the REF period we have therefore made considerable progress in raising the awareness of the impact agenda with all academics and researchers at all stages of the research process.

c) Strategy and plans

Our strategy post 2013 will continue to be driven by the need to consolidate the focus on impact by established researchers and to assist with the identification of impact potential in research. The strategy will also have to take into account the constituency of early career researchers in the department and use the systems of research mentoring and research career development support to integrate experience across the Unit. We intend to generate a more strategic focus on impact through the research leadership of our groups and by building upon the experience of our some of our established researchers. Our future strategy will focus on:

- a) Maximising the impact from grants and consultancy, with particular focus on target audiences: policymakers, civil society bodies, community organisations, local government, media and NGOs.
- b) Working closely with the EBDO to enhance the visibility of our research to broader user communities.
- c) Auditing our research across the unit to define the range of specialist knowledge and skills that can be developed into consultancy and contract research packages for public, private and third sector organisations.
- d) Ensuring that all our research applications have user involvement and wider dissemination activities in their design, using research group leadership more strategically.
- e) Encouraging staff to gain media coverage for our work in order to impact on public opinion, and hence promote wider public debate.
- f) Improving our public presence and visibility by developing our website and making use of the open access Leicester Research Archive with its link to the publication database, e-thesis deposit mandate and digitization of theses.
- g) Fostering an impact agenda which can grow in two directions: both to attend to the international 'reach' of our research, with the potential for more comparative analyses, but also to deepen the local significance of our work for the enrichment of the communities of Leicester.

d) Relationship to case studies

The three case studies exemplify the approaches to impact adopted in the unit and are supported by the research environment and administrative structures of the department. Whitty's research on online dating scams is an example of a developed engagement with a range of user communities which leads directly into policy. It highlights our focus on cross-disciplinary research and reflects the importance of our research groups, in this instance the Cyber-security Research Group, to the development of impact case studies. The case studies by Gunter, Hansen and Touri on alcohol advertising regulations and young people and by Gunter, Dickinson and Matthews on infant/follow-on formula advertising exemplify research projects focused on providing evidence for public policy bodies and NGOs which also have made an impact upon policy. They have been produced through the News and Journalism and Media and Social Policy Research groups and demonstrate the benefits of senior researchers working together with mid-and early career researchers towards an approach to impact.