Impact template (REF3a)

Institution: University of Leicester
Unit of Assessment: UoA25 Education
a. Context

Since before the RAE period, we have promoted and undertaken research that critically informs and engages with educational policy and practice. The research strategy and activities summarised here have been developed to contribute to improvements in the conditions, processes and quality of learning opportunities in formal and informal settings throughout the life-course, consistent with the demands, challenges and opportunities of the knowledge economy. Through our research, we have taken seriously the generation of knowledge that is relevant to the development and improvement of educational policy and practice in a wide range of educational and institutional contexts. The main non-academic user groups of our research are local, national and international government and non-governmental policy makers, school and college leaders, teachers and students, national and international examination boards and assessment agencies, community organisations, textbook publishers, and professional associations.

Our strategy is aimed at achieving three main types of impact through our research:
(a) Changing, or encouraging a critical questioning of, policy and strategy in Government and non-Governmental organisations, assessment agencies and examination boards internationally, nationally and regionally.
(b) Changing, or encouraging a critical questioning of, policy and strategy in schools, colleges and HEIs internationally, nationally and locally.
(c) Influencing the conceptual frameworks and assumptions which shape development of educational policy and decisions by policy makers (local, national and international) and school and college leaders.
(d) Contributing to social justice on a regional, national and international scale.

More specifically the types of impact we aim to achieve through our research include:
(a) Changes in policy, practice and approaches to key areas of the activities of our user groups.
(b) Changes in conceptual frameworks and assumptions that shape policy and practice, especially as these relate to the conditions, values and practices that influence the development and improvement of learning (including organisational and professional learning and development, teaching, curriculum and assessment).
(c) The development of research projects which help targeted user groups to understand and critically engage with the learning and social needs of pupils, teachers, leaders, parents, and other relevant members of school and college communities and their networks.
(d) Encouraging critical, research-informed approaches to educational problems as a way of encouraging a questioning of underlying assumptions behind the development of policy and practice among our user groups.
(e) The promotion of sustainable development and use of research-engaged and informed strategies and approaches to optimising the quality of leadership, teaching and learning in schools, colleges and HEIs, and the quality of teacher learning, teacher development and teacher preparation.

Our research is a major input to our teaching, with a global reach through the thousands of graduates and current students on our M level courses. The majority of our students study via distance learning while in employment. Our DL programmes, learning materials and recommended readings influence the practice and thinking of distance learning students throughout the world. In addition, our M level students undertake research in their own organisations and professional contexts, supervised by School staff, and aimed at policy and/or practice development and implementation in their institutions. Also, current and former trainee teachers benefit from the materials our staff produce for PGCE and school-based initial teacher education programmes. Their developing practice and expertise and the practices of their colleagues are influenced by research they are supported in undertaking in their placement schools.

b. Approach to impact

Since 2008 our aim has been to encourage critical and interdisciplinary research. Our strategy

during the REF period has been aimed at explaining the distinctive contribution that the School of Education makes and can make to policy and practice change and improvement in educational settings. To this end we have: changed perceptions among current and new partners and audiences about the distinctive contributions that educational research makes and can make to policy and practice development; encouraged and supported our academics to work with our range of partner institutions and networks; and finally created, developed and extended our participation in new and current partnership arrangements. Engaging our partnerships and networks is not only aimed at applying our research but also at developing joint research and development with our partner institutions in order to contribute to improved policy and practice. A further benefit we derive and aim to cultivate through our partnership arrangements is widening scope for access to schools and local authorities for research purposes and engaging practitioner and policy-makers' inputs into the design, implementation and dissemination of research and development projects.

Our focus since 2008 has been on:
(a) Increasing awareness of educational research, its relevance to practice and policy development and critique, among our school partners and networks, and Government and non-government organisations and our other user groups.
(b) Intensifying opportunities for optimising the visibility of our research through: increasing our presence at practitioner or mixed academic-practitioner conferences, and via involvement in social media. The open access Leicester Research Archive with its link to the publication data base, e-thesis deposit mandate and digitization of theses supports our emphasis on ensuring our research is as visible as possible.
(c) Developing research partnerships with Local Authorities including Leicester City Council and with three regional Teaching School Alliances (100+ schools) – Leicester, Affinity (Leicestershire) and Brooke Weston (Northamptonshire) that are helping us further extend access to schools and develop high impact joint policy and practice-oriented research and development with policy-makers and practitioners. The promotion of research-informed approaches to policy and practice resulting from this partnership work has developed research-informed approaches and changed schools' resourcing and support for research-based initial and continuing professional development. As a result of such changes, partner schools have reported improved teacher and student learning outcomes.
(d) Extending our active involvement in professional organisations such as with BELMAS - British Educational Leadership Management and Administration Society (Taysum and Smith) and BERA - British Educational Research Association (Burgess), British Society for Research in the Learning of Mathematics (Ainley was Chair 2008-2010 and Forsythe is Treasurer), the National Network for Directors of EdD programmes (Burgess is the elected Chair), the University Council for Educational Administration in the USA (Shah), Association for Language Awareness (Svalberg), European Society for Research in Mathematics Education (Ainley), National Association for the Teaching of English (Dymoke).
(e) Encouraging knowledge transfer through joint funded research and development with school partners, consultancy, and putting research ideas and designs to practical test. For example our three Teaching School Alliance partners were supported by the School of Education in their successful applications to the National College for Teaching and Leadership for R+D funds into the practice, leadership and sustainable development of Lesson Study. This has led to increased involvement of users in funding applications, and in the design, implementation, application and dissemination of research.

To support these activities and goals we have introduced user engagement into our mentoring of staff and induction of new staff; considerably enhanced the help given to staff in developing and writing research proposals at School and College level, with particular attention to the forms and kinds of impact that can be promoted through different research plans and projects. We have also proactively sought to strengthen our relationships with local schools, networks and other bodies in the context of defined research and development collaborations and through more formal recognition and representation on management committees as Strategic Partners with Teaching School Alliances.

In addition to the research summarised in our three impact case studies, the research which we

have carried out as a result of our strategy is often directly on practices or has implications for the practices of educational institutions. Some research is directly concerned to enhance and improve practice such as the research work with primary and secondary schools and student teachers in university and school-based programmes of initial teacher education carried out by members of the Lesson Study Research Group (Cajkler, Fox, Norton, Pedder and Wood). Dymoke's research has supported improved poetry pedagogy among students, teachers, student teachers, initial teacher educators and policy makers. The work of Rogerson-Revell, Bird, Edirisingha and Conole has contributed to online learning innovation in HE settings. Other work is targeted at influencing and changing policy. For example Shah's research into diversity and leadership of multi-ethnic schools included work with Nottingham City Council Children's Services that influenced policy change towards girls-only schools in ethnically diverse contexts. Smith's research into women in academic STEM careers formed the basis of written evidence presented to the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee. Burgess was appointed consultant to the biggest review of Primary Education in the UK since the Plowden review (1967) and contributed a review on Primary Workforce Management and Reform. Other research involves direct collaboration with practitioners such as Pedder and Fox's work with three Teaching School Alliance partners on improving school leadership and CPD cultures and practice in schools in the region. Our research tools are shared and can be used to enhance research capacity-building and activity in the workplace.

We encourage staff to fully engage with the University Library's open access policies, and to take advantage of relevant courses provided by the University's Academic Practice Unit, such as the 'Enterprising Researcher' series.

c. Strategy and plans

Our strategy post-2013 will continue to be shaped by the core commitments of the School to promote, support and undertake research that critically informs and contributes to the improvement of policy and practice in diverse educational contexts. We plan to build on the developments which have been achieved since 2008 by realising a set of embedded practices that will enable us to constructively engage with the challenges of a fluid policy and practice environment in which impact is expected and routine. The importance of working in partnership with our user groups has been a long-standing value that continues to shape our impact plans and strategy. We welcome the opportunity to co-research with our partners on ways of developing innovative approaches to supporting improved student and teacher learning, testing and assessment, curriculum development and organisational improvement. Through our partnerships we are able to optimise scope for disseminating findings with as much reach and local relevance as possible.

The goals of our strategy will include:
(a) Maximising the impact from existing and future grant income and consultancy, with particular attention to the needs and challenges of regional, national and international partners in the primary, secondary, and tertiary sectors as they increasingly seek to develop research-engaged approaches to improving the quality of teaching and student and teacher learning.
(b) Continuing to support joint work and consultancy between the School and international testing and assessment agencies.
(c) Building on our capacity to undertake policy- and practice-oriented research that contributes to social justice on a regional, national and international scale.
(d) Working closely with the University's Enterprise and Business Development Office to disseminate our research and consultancy services in order to gain new collaborators and partners.
(e) Ensuring that all our research applications have user-engagement and involvement in their design.
(f) Encouraging staff to gain media coverage for our work in order to impact on public opinion, and hence shape a wider public debate about the means and ends of educational research.

d. Relationship to case studies
Each of the four case studies illustrates how our strategy continues to support research-based impact at regional, national and international levels by working with users to improve the quality and conditions of teaching, learning and assessment.