

Institution: Sheffield Hallam University
Unit of Assessment: 16 Architecture, Built Environment and Planning
<p>a. Context</p> <p>As researchers concerned with identifying problems and proposing solutions, the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research's (CRESR) mission is to achieve impact through active dialogue with policy-makers and practitioners charged with responding to these challenges. The key beneficiaries of our research are central government departments, devolved administrations, local authorities and various non-governmental organisations. They procure our research expertise and seek our specialist advice in the broad fields of housing, regeneration, welfare reform, cohesion and labour market analysis with the express intent of improving performance, enhancing policy and practice and promoting positive change for particular groups or locations. Our main impacts are on public policy, professional practice and, as recipients of policy and practice, wider society as a whole. Impact relates to our research through the 'virtuous circle' (see REF5) designed to ensure the effective linking of academic analysis, contract research and impact.</p>
<p>b. Approach to impact</p> <p>In order to achieve impact from research, staff interact with beneficiaries in four key ways. <u>First</u>, CRESR has a strong record of delivering high profile research and evaluation contracts as part of a range of public and voluntary/community sector commissions across the UK in fields such as urban policy, housing, welfare reform and labour markets (150+ projects procured since January 2008). One explicit aim of these contracts is to effect impact. The value and usefulness of insights to research users is evidenced by the number of repeat commissions from key users (see REF5) and also success in securing framework agreements with research users such as the Department of Work and Pensions; Department for Business Innovation and Skills; Scottish Skills Development Agency; Scottish Government; Manchester City Council; and Consultancy One. <u>Second</u>, CRESR has an impact on practitioners and professional services through the active dissemination of findings from research and evaluation projects. More than 100 reports and guidance documents authored since 2007 have been published and disseminated by commissioning bodies, or are available on the CRESR website. Staff have also spoken at a large number of launches and learning events hosted by research funders in order to disseminate findings, share lessons, and provide guidance to policy and practitioner audiences. For example, Lawless made some 15 public presentations on the results of the evaluation of the government's New Deal for Communities regeneration programme to policy and practitioner audiences (2008-2012). <u>Third</u>, the knowledge and expertise of staff, combined with their national/international profile, has led to numerous invited contributions to professional and practitioner seminars, conferences, and media outlets, as well as calls to give specialist advice and guidance to government Ministers, working parties, civil servants, Parliamentary Select Committees, central government departments, devolved governments, local authorities and local and national voluntary and community organisations. The following provide a flavour (see also REF3b): Cole was appointed by the Minister of Housing in 2008 as Independent Chair of the Ministerial Advisory Panel on cross-domain regulation in social housing; Fletcher served as a commissioner on the Sheffield Fairness Commission (2012) and as an expert advisor on offender employment to the Learning and Skills Council; Lawless made an invited presentation to the 2009 Houghton Report on worklessness and a presentation to the Marmot Review into health inequalities (2009); Cole, Hickman and Lawless were members of the DCLG expert panels on Housing and on Neighbourhood, Cities and Regions. <u>Fourth</u>, CRESR has actively pursued opportunities for closer collaboration and co-production with the users of research. For example, in 2012 a successful joint bid to the ESRC Knowledge Exchange Programme (ES/J020877/1) was developed with Sheffield City Council (SCC) in order to support the implementation of a city-wide model for whole household interventions with vulnerable families (Batty, Crisp and Robinson). CRESR worked in partnership with SCC and partners, by serving as a critical friend, profiling problems and challenges, building bridges between organisations and services, and facilitating problem resolution. Lessons were shared across the City. Other examples of successful initiatives with research users include two bids to the ESRC Third Sector Research Fellows Programme (Wells). One was a partnership with Involve Yorkshire, which developed a series of local area profiles of civic participation in Yorkshire and tested the assumptions of the Big Society agenda. Outputs included co-produced reports, a submission to the Permanent Secretary of DCLG and extensive local press/media coverage, including phone-in discussions on Radio Sheffield and Radio Leeds.</p>

Various approaches are employed to **identify impact**. All contract research projects are subject to a post-project review process. As well as an internal assessment of delivery and impact, this involves forwarding a Post Project Review form to research users, which explores the impact of research and evaluation activities. Impact on political and popular debate is continually assessed, for example, via periodic analysis of Hansard (see case studies) and on-going analysis of media coverage of our work. For example, in 2013 Beatty and Fothergill were funded to generate a comprehensive, quantifiable model of the impact of welfare reforms, in partnership with the Scottish Parliament and the Financial Times. Analyses revealed that findings were widely reported and debated in the press and media: 222 stories in UK-wide outlets, including The Guardian, Financial Times, Sunday Times; 29 in regional outlets; and 38 in broadcast outlets, including Sky, BBC and ITV news. Analytics tools are also employed to assess traffic on the Centre's web site. Findings informed a redesign of the site in 2012 to make it more user friendly and render the potential impact of our work more apparent to users.

Evidence of **an agile approach** to opportunities is illustrated by success in working within timeframes required by policy clients, responding to invitations to tender, and delivering high quality outputs to tight deadlines required by the review and scrutiny process in government. We also respond at short notice to opportunities for disseminating findings or to provide expert advice and guidance. This is made possible by our approach to work planning, time management and team working: all senior staff have allocated time within their work plan to engage in impact activities. Agility is also evidenced by engagement with new and traditional media. Staff are assisted in sharing expertise by the SHU Media Relations team, which helps maximise the reach and impact of research by promoting events and activities to relevant audiences, using traditional media, as well as Twitter and Facebook channels. The online Find an Expert database provides a portal through which experts can be sourced. Staff have provided expert comment to radio, TV and print media (Beatty; Casey; Cole; Lawless; Hickman; Powell; Reeve; Robinson and Wells).

Additional components of the **package of staff support to achieve impact** include a commitment to cover the time and expense associated with engagement in impact activities. For example, in 2013 Robinson was recruited as an expert advisor to the Homes and Communities Agency's Equality and Diversity Board Advisory Group, which advises the HCA's Executive Board and challenges the agency on its attention to equality and diversity issues. Expenses are paid by the HCA, but the time involved is covered by SHU. Lawless chaired Yorkshire Futures, the research intelligence arm of the then Regional Development Agency, on a similar basis (2009-11). The staff development strategy supports staff in developing skill-sets necessary to secure impact. A suite of training courses is available to enhance research and knowledge transfer skills in line with the Vitae Researcher Development Framework, including media training, and commercialisation and IP. The SHU Professional Development Policy and Framework articulates professional development throughout the academic career, key components of which include knowledge transfer and marketing. The institution also actively promotes impact activities by rewarding staff and teams for success in this field, as reflected for example in criteria governing regrading and Professorial applications.

The UoA has made use of **institutional facilities, expertise and resources to enhance impact**. HEIF funds have been invested to support the dissemination of findings and advice (£200,000+ to CRESR since 2008/09). For example, launch events were held for reports into Women on Incapacity Benefit (Beatty, 2010, London and Sheffield; 100+ delegates) and Tackling Worklessness in Britain's Weaker Economies (Beatty and Powell, 2010, House of Commons, 40 delegates, including the Shadow Chancellor), copies of both being sent to all local authorities in the UK. Beatty was supported to deliver two one day seminars in partnership with the Bill Sargent Trust exploring the consequences of welfare reform, attended by local authorities and voluntary organisations in Hampshire (2011, Farnborough/Winchester, 140 delegates). Various local and regional workshops have been delivered in partnership with the third sector. For example, Wells engaged in six partnership events with third sector organisations in 2012 as a plenary/contributing speaker. These activities informed and stimulated practitioner debate, challenging conventional wisdom and facilitating improvements in practice and performance.

CRESR has also benefited from a Faculty commitment to knowledge transfer, evidenced by the funding of a Knowledge Exchange Programme managed by the Faculty's Knowledge Transfer Champion (1 FTE). This Programme addresses the four priorities identified in the University's Impact Strategy for Research and Knowledge Exchange: making knowledge readily accessible

Impact template (REF3a)

and available; providing an environment that supports staff engagement in impact activities; developing successful partnerships essential to delivering impact; and actively engaging with research users. This Programme has supported staff to engage with research users in order to: raise the profile of our work; increase our understanding of the culture and needs of external organisations; promote collaboration; and secure impact by providing direct benefits to partner organisations. CRESR secured five Knowledge Exchange projects in 2011/12 (£50,000) and four in 2012/13 (£60,000), with match funding provided by partner agencies. For example, Robinson was funded to deliver a knowledge navigator project in partnership with SCC, which developed a concordat to support collaborative working and the co-production of knowledge.

c. Strategy and plans

The Unit's Impact Strategy is consistent with the University's commitment of ensuring areas of research strength contribute to the knowledge economy and promote solutions addressing concerns of public policy, whilst having a positive impact on quality of life. In line with these University-wide objectives, our principal aims have been to: produce relevant and accessible research and knowledge which is communicated widely to maximise impact on policy, strategy and professional practice; develop links with potential users of our research; nurture effective partnerships across public, private and third sectors to support co-production and knowledge exchange; and work with partners in the University to ensure that internal structures and processes support the delivery of impacts. Building on progress since 2008 against these key objectives, and reflecting on lessons learned (see section d), our priorities for maximising impact over the five year horizon **2014-2019** are to: **(i)** maintain the institutional infrastructure and staffing base required to procure and deliver high profile policy research and evaluation contracts for government and other local and national agencies (marker of success: contract research turnover ~£2m p.a.); **(ii)** actively disseminate findings and guidance through the full range of activities and media. Explicit plans include more pro-active use of social media; more involvement of the University's media team to disseminate findings beyond CRESR's traditional policy audience; the generation of (free) subscription service for research users providing regular updates on projects, outputs and other contributions; the annual publication of three issues of the open access journal *People, Place and Policy*; the provision and promotion of an annual public seminar programme of at least 10 sessions involving internal and external speakers; and funding of launch and dissemination events to maximise the impact of research outputs (at least three p.a.); **(iii)** increase the pool of staff engaged as expert advisors, through the provision of targeted support and assistance; work planning to support impact activities; and attention to impact activities as part of the annual appraisal process. Success will be measured by the number of staff members newly engaged in the provision of expert advice and guidance (target of at least three); **(iv)** forge new collaborations and strengthen existing relationships with research users in order to enhance knowledge exchange and to nurture co-production activities. Plans include the continued investment of funds to support knowledge exchange; assistance for staff to develop ESRC knowledge exchange bids (at least one bid p.a.); closer relations, collaboration and co-production with SCC and the Sheffield City Region (evidenced by joint bids and knowledge exchange events); and extension of collaborative relations with the VCS, building on the ESRC Third Sector Research Fellows Pilot; **(v)** annually monitor the effectiveness and impact of each of these activities.

d. Relationship to case studies

The three case studies epitomise the approach to impact outlined above and provide evidence of claims made about the virtuous circle between academic analysis, contract research and impact activities (see REF5). First, all three case studies are underpinned by high quality, academic research. Second, the insights secured were shared with research users through the generation of reports and guidance documents and presentations to commissioning agencies and user groups. Third, accumulated knowledge and expertise was shared with the wider community of policy interests and practitioners through active dissemination of outputs to inform and influence public policy (e.g. at practitioner events and via media appearances). Staff were also recruited to serve as members of (and expert witnesses to) local and national (UK and overseas) government committees and groups. These case studies also provide four learning points which have informed our impact strategy 2014-2019: securing impact is a long-term activity to be nurtured over time; impact is best secured through multiple modes of engagement with research users; impact can be achieved at the local, national and international, level; and a series of relatively modest collaborations can have a significant cumulative impact.