

<p>Institution: Queen's University, Belfast</p>
<p>Unit of Assessment: 16 Architecture, Built Environment and Planning</p>
<p>a. Context</p> <p>Traditional physical and land-use emphases in planning, construction and urban design have changed to a more comprehensive, inclusive, and integrated approach to creating sustainable place. Since this reflects our long-standing 'social' approach to planning and architecture, we keenly endorse this engaged approach. Thus, the <i>users/beneficiaries</i> for our research are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the full range of institutions of governance, from the global to local scale and embracing the social, economic, cultural, educational and environmental, not just those agencies with specific remits for planning, regeneration, architecture and design; • those institutions' senior staff, in terms of their personal expertise, experience, and practice; • community, and voluntary bodies concerned with place-making, mediating space and architectural practice, as well as the private development sector. <p>The main <i>types of impact</i> include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) influencing public discourse, particularly with regard to urban regeneration, rural and coastal development, heritage, sustainable energy and community development/relations; (2) shaping policy, plans, and design practice in these domains; (3) empowering local communities to develop regeneration strategies, engage in cross-communal collaboration, and participate in the planning and design process; (4) contextualising architectural heritage within a world system, to allow re-evaluation of the built environment, including not only protection of buildings, but also celebration of their aesthetic and value, and the crucial part they play in a sense of 'place'; and (5) in collaboration with design practitioners and manufacturers, developing new approaches to design improvement and building quality.
<p>b. Approach to impact</p> <p>Staff are encouraged and trained to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • build in these types of impact to our six research themes (see REF5); • adopt a participative action-research model as an important framework and methodology for involving research subjects at a formative stage, and for adopting a problem-solving approach that aims not only to understand but also to change; • this emphasis does not preclude other types of research, whose robust and critical empirical data produce evidence to influence public opinion and policy. Therefore not all staff will focus on research with a clear and immediate social impact; • operate their work at various scales from locality to international advisory groups; • appreciate that academy is an important, but not exclusive, site of knowledge production—thus we work with all appropriate sectors, to widen research dissemination and take-up; • form long-term strategic partnerships for collaborative research with government and community agencies, and other kinds of policy-makers and opinion-formers; • in all their major research projects to operate advisory committees, comprising representative agencies with authority to deliver change, informed by the research; • work with design practices and manufacturers to develop innovative problem solutions; • commission research to evaluate impact at a formative rather than summative stage; • use various media and formats not only to disseminate findings, but also to engage relevant audiences about the implications for their practice; • welcome opportunities to become government advisers and lobby experts as an instrument for strengthening leverage on evidence-based policy-making; • present their research at the Knowledge Exchange Seminar Series (KESS), a regular regional forum for politicians, government officials and academics, with the overall purpose of promoting evidence-based policy and law-making in Northern Ireland; • become active in appropriate networks and professional associations related to their research themes; and • conduct professional-practice modules that offer interdisciplinary teams of post-graduate students, who will become planning and design practitioners, <i>the chance to address through action research 'real world' challenges</i>, in partnership with localities.

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Our unit supports staff in this engagement by: (1) building it into the percentage of research time in workload allocation; (2) prioritising funding of conferences/workshops and travel to develop networks, which extend research findings to user groups and policy-makers; (3) funding subscriptions to associations offering global platforms to optimise policy influence; (4) encouraging use of university rooms/resources for events which facilitate civic 'in-reach' to the academy; (5) spreading best practice to staff from model 'engaged academies', such as the University of Illinois, Chicago; (6) mentoring early career staff in how to optimise impact; (7) including the post-graduate students in this process; and (8) engaging closely with industrial partners and professional bodies.

Further support for this effort also derives from enhanced capacity for social engagement at an institutional level, where emphasis on impact is endorsed by (a) building it into consideration for promotion; (b) seeing it as an important criterion for sabbatical leave; (c) establishing a Vice-Chancellor Prize for research projects evidencing best social impact; (d) publishing reports and holding public exhibitions to demonstrate the social relevance of the university's research; (e) employing staff to profile this engaged research and improve its visibility among potential users, and (f) attempting to create a university culture in favour of a long-term, strategic commitment to social relevance and public welcome. In such a culture, high impact and quality research are promoted as not only mutually compatible, but also mutually supportive.

c. Strategy and plans

For the goal of optimum social impact, we adopt a systematic, '6-D' approach, involving:

1. **Definition:** in problem selection and definition, understanding the policy context and the policy-making process, so that we can be *proactive* and *timely* in adapting our strategy;
2. **Design:** building anticipated impact into the research design, thereby ensuring that it is a *formative* rather than a *summative* consideration;
3. **Development:** developing *long-term partnerships with stakeholders*, so that they have a role in problem-definition and research design, and a consequent 'ownership' of research output;
4. **Delivery:** adopting *interdisciplinary* approaches and, while robustly critical in analysis, appreciating how *political/fiscal circumstances* can sway the relative appeal of policy options;
5. **Dissemination:** alongside customised communication for targeted audiences, using research mediators such as policy advisers and lobby groups, to maximise access to diverse audiences — appreciating the important *linkage role of 'meso' bodies*, like Belfast City Council and umbrella agencies, as 'research consumers' who can both 'drill' down to 'micro' localities and reach up to 'macro' decision-makers at regional/national and international level; and
6. **Decision:** without conceding the independent critical voice, convincing policy-makers by demonstrating how earlier positive impacts were informed by our *evidence-based studies*.

These systematic steps form part of a proactive strategy of engaged research that anticipates key policy agendas (see Research Environment, REF5). Given our high share of early career researchers, we undertake targeted workshops to highlight for them how they can build the 'impact' factor into their research framework and practice. To take this further, we are establishing a committee, comprising staff membership, to identify opportunities for improving this practice. In our continual 'impact monitoring', we identify not only outputs but outcomes, and disseminate these through the various channels mentioned above. The result of this comprehensive approach is clear in both the reach and the range of the Unit's impact: from positions on national advisory panels, through close-working with industry to important projects in local engagement, staff have made a marked impact across scales and stakeholders in the built environment:

Ellis is a director of Belfast Healthy Cities, and the national expert for the Republic of Ireland on the International Energy Agency's Working Group on the Social Acceptance of Wind Energy Projects (Task 28), co-authoring a major policy report on the Transformation of the Irish Energy System for the National Economic and Social Council. **Gaffikin** has been a senior adviser to government on urban programmes, vision planning and employability, as well as metropolitan and regional development. Together with **Sterrett**, he operates a research partnership, with the Department of Environment and a set of Belfast local communities, investigating how to customise spatial planning for a divided society. **Murray** has been a board member of the Irish Social Sciences Platform (since 2007) and is a member of the Rural Policy Evidence Advisory Group,

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Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, Northern Ireland. **Sterrett** is a founding member of the Forum for an Alternative Belfast, a radical think tank of architects, planners, designers and community activists offering creative challenges to orthodox urbanism. **Larmour** is an active member of the Ulster Architectural Heritage Society, a pressure group whose aim is to promote the appreciation, conservation and restoration of historic built fabric. **Keeffe** was commissioned by the Manchester International Festival 2013 to develop an aquaponic urban agriculture laboratory, which is a permanent public exhibition and research platform. He has worked also with Triangle Architects on TSB-funded projects Design for Future Climate (1 and 2 (2011 and 2012) and Building Design Partnership on the Green Genius Award (2013). **Morrow's** work with PS2 has engaged deprived communities in N. Ireland with place-based environmental arts. She has developed her work on fabric-faced concrete into a spin-out company *The Tactility Factory* (2009-), while **McAllister** has worked with N. Ireland's Education Department to develop school design strategies, customised for pupils with ASD. **Moore and Clancy** have worked with the Museum of Ireland to produce a long-term architectural development strategy. Importantly, our 'impact strategy' is informed by a set of considerations, including:

- emphasis on 'real world' problems does not preclude 'blue sky' research, and a range of research approaches — knowledge itself is a public good;
- co-production of knowledge entails equitable partnership between experts and activists/stakeholders, based on *knowledge-exchange*, not *knowledge-transfer*;
- operating through *international networks* of collaboration ties our research agenda to global 'big issues', upon which our overall research strategy is based (see REF5), and to extensive dissemination, both serving to optimise relevance, reach and consequence;
- in public policy, impact is *not always linear*;
- engaged research, designed for policy impact, cannot compromise *intellectual integrity* and academic independence to secure political favour and endorsement.

d. Relationship to case studies

Adopting the same 6D template, the following indicates how each stage informed the way 'impact' was embedded in the research process behind our selected case studies:

1. **Definition:** research theme selections are informed by their policy pertinence, as evident in the *Planning for Peace* and *Renewable Energy* case studies.
2. **Design:** research design in all case studies was shaped through preliminary 'scouting' with key players, such as government. Moreover, these relationships, particularly in the *Planning for Peace* and *Conserving Heritage* studies, have matured over decades, involving partners in co-design;
3. **Development:** the applied research nature was developed via durable partner relationships with relevant stakeholders, such as local communities, as illustrated in the *Planning for Peace* and *Renewable Energy Policy* studies, strengthening the prospect of delivery and actual outcomes;
4. **Delivery:** interdisciplinary approaches have been adopted. This has involved collaborative work with colleagues in health, sociology, psychology, etc., particularly evident in *Planning for Peace*, *Renewable Energy* and *Improving Regulation* case studies.
5. **Dissemination:** findings have been shared in multiple forms, such as workshops, reports and exhibitions, with a diverse set of *targeted audiences*. An example would be an exhibition on sustainable urbanism, Hack the City, Dublin (August 2012), converted to a website, Interstitial City.com, addressing the inventive use of redundant space in shrinking cities; and
6. **Decision:** in each case study, the goal of *impact* is embedded from the start; relations with policy-makers are mature; and subsequent 'impact trails' are monitored and interrogated, so that future impact can be deepened. In other words, our researchers follow through with relevant stakeholders to the point of delivery and beyond, illustrating the long-term commitment that this demands. Being in 'for the long haul' greatly enhances credibility, as corroborating letters testify.

In short, the case studies evidence strategic and systematic approaches to impact, built into the research framework, and the resulting evidence-based policy and changed practice have in turn enhanced the prospect of future research securing interest and 'buy-in' from key decision-makers.