Institution: University of Chester
Unit of Assessment: 22 Social Work and Social Policy

a. Context

For this unit of assessment the main non-academic user groups are those concerned with the social work and social care services, including social care delivery and management; the education system; youth services; health services; the criminal justice system and the use of archives. This includes links made with: legislators; policy-makers; managers; practitioners (such as the police, probation officers, youth workers, foster care workers and social workers); as well as the users of services and their carers'; and relevant archives. The type of impact relevant to this unit of assessment might include changes relating to: organizational structures and processes; legislation; policy; employment regimes; education; training; practices and engagement with and between service providers and users/carers.

Members of this research group are active in relation to three overlapping themes of interest. These are: 1) organizations, management and the provision of formal and informal care; 2) critical reflection upon knowledge, including its generation and contribution to the construction of professionalism, professional practice and the provision of services; 3) crime, justice and services of support. The types of impact relating to these three themes of interest are described below:

1. Organizations, management and the provision of formal and informal care: The external changes governing social work and social care organizations - such as social policy initiatives and legislative changes - constitutes the impact for much of the work generated in relation to this theme. Increased reflection and emotional intelligence in organisations as a potential means of facilitating communications, a deeper engagement with human need, problem solving and the sensitive provision of more relevant services underpin the contribution of on-going dialogue and research with employers, users, practitioners, and others. Positive impact would also include the design, manufacture and introduction of technological systems that allow vulnerable individuals to remain for longer in their own homes, as well as an update of the emergency services' communications methodologies. Responses to and the accommodation of new types of supply-led service delivery and organisation are also themes evaluated, whilst discussing and understanding user, carer and practitioner experiences of the impact of such extensive change.

2. Critical reflection upon knowledge, including its generation and contribution to the construction of professionalism, professional practice and the provision of services: Changes to ways in which providers of social work and social care engage with knowledge and its generation constitutes impact for this theme of activity. For example, Roscoe's use of narratives in practice as well as research into the effectiveness of the use of reflective letters in Intensive family support services provides evidence of an increase in practitioner-led research and a more sophisticated approach to the inclusion of service users as contributors to knowledge.

3. Crime, justice and services of support: Improvement in the accessibility and application of interdisciplinary approaches are relevant to the work that has been carried out within this theme. Impact would be discerned by an increased awareness of the needs of victims of crime as well as harm associated with the risky behaviour of adults, for example the behaviours associated with alcohol consumption and the risk this poses to safeguarding children. This, however, also has to be placed into context such as by recognising the impact of structural disadvantage or cultural micro-processes which echo the complex symbiotic rituals which link together structure and agency. Resultant improvements in the response of the helping agencies and carrying out evaluations in line with national policy initiatives would also constitute evidence of impact.

b. Approach to impact

Submissions should describe the unit's approach and its infrastructural mechanisms to support staff to achieve impact, during the period 2008-2013. This may include (but is not limited to):

- *how staff in the unit engaged with or developed relationships with key users in order to develop impact from the unit's research:* Members have participated in a range of networks that include users of social care services in research (see below). In order to discuss principles of knowledge generation and implementation, members of this research unit have instigated and participated in meetings with key managers of practice agencies. **Roscoe's** evaluation of a

new pilot scheme in safeguarding evidenced how service managers have responsibility for the implementation of policies and legislative frameworks filtering through to workforce and the provision of services on a local or national basis. Members of this research unit have also provided assistance to practice agencies in order that specific problems might be resolved. Partnerships created by academics and research users have given rise to shared research proposals and shared responsibility for the dissemination of findings. Representatives of practice agencies have been invited to participate in, as well as become members of teams that mount dissemination events (see below). Furthermore, **Carey** is an active member of the following advocacy groups: Forum for Carers and Users of Services; Citizens as Trainers; Front-line; Age UK; Women's Aid; 42nd Street; Medical Foundation for the Victims of Torture; South Manchester Law Centre; and Oxfam. A long term and strategic approach has been taken on the basis that strong academic – practice partnerships will give rise to new opportunities for research, dissemination and impact.

- *evidence of the nature of those relationships:* **Harlow** has been a long standing member of the policy advisory group of the national charity the Fostering Network. In conjunction with the Fostering Network she has initiated a symposium to which researchers and research users have been invited. From this symposium papers have been published in academic journals and an edited book. In partnership with this particular user group a research proposal was generated and submitted to the Esme Fairbairn Foundation. There is on-going multi-disciplinary dialogue with the regional agency Adoption North West, the local authority Cheshire West, Age UK Cheshire, MIND and the Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service. Negotiation with these latter two agencies has given rise to the submission of partnered research proposals, one of which has been funded by the European Union. Age UK Cheshire and the involvement of **Carey** and **Roscoe** show how relationships continue to develop in partnership with the University. These researchers are involved in the evaluation of service provision that is located in a community development centre in Northwich, Cheshire. This study involves older people throughout the research process and has evaluated their use of IT and the internet to form 'virtual communities'. Such projects continue to foster strong partnerships that centre their research on evidenced based interventions to help secure future funding for service providers that now have links to the University.

- *how the unit has specifically supported staff to enable impact to be achieved from their research:* In addition to supporting staff to feedback research findings to commissioners (such as the Children's Workforce Development Council), the unit has supported staff to achieve impact in two main ways: firstly by funding and enabling staff participation in user-inclusive dissemination activities mounted by others and secondly by mounting its own user-inclusive dissemination events. This includes working with partners and practitioners in the integrated family support services (Wrexham and Flintshire) where practitioners delivered their research with academics during internal conferences.

In terms of disseminating research at symposia or seminar events mounted by others: **Turner** has presented her work at the Research Network Scheme 'Our Criminal Past: Caring for our Future'. Funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, this Scheme involves those working in archives, museums, heritage and education (both within and outside of universities). She has also presented at the following: the British Crime Historians Symposium; the Translating Penal Cultures Symposium; the Women, Crime and Criminal Justice Historical Perspectives Symposium; London Metropolitan Archives; Heroes and Villains ESRC Midlands Crime and Policing History Seminar Series; Reading and Writing Lives ESRC Seminar Series; Jack Leighton Local History Seminar Series. **Pratesi** has presented his work at the group Ethics of Care – an international network of academics and professionals engaged in discussing the place of care in society. **Harlow** has presented her research at two seminar series, both of which included research users - the national Organizations Studies Network and the regional seminar series hosted by the Department of Social Work at the University of Nottingham. **Roscoe** has presented in the international sociology and social work conference disseminating her early fieldwork findings of her PhD studies.

Since 2008 members of this unit have presented their work at conferences which have included the users of research. Presentations have been made at the following: the European Network of Social Action Joint European Conference; Dilemmas in Human Services International Research

Conference; International Conference on LGBT Psychology; International Conference of the Society for Community Research and Action; British Sociological Association Annual Conference; World Conference of the International Society for Gerontology; Annual Conference of the British Society of Gerontology; Criminal Justice, History and Activism Conference; International Conference on Sociology and Social Work; World Congress of the International Society for Criminology; World Victimology Conference; International Conference for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect. Members of this submission have also have made a contribution to the organizational processes associated with two international conferences: 'Law, Crime and History' and 'Dilemmas in the Human Services'. The University of Chester is currently working with the Leeds Metropolitan University, the University of Huddersfield and Leeds City Council to mount in 2014 an international conference on the topic of Family Support Policy and Practice. In addition, initial planning is underway for the hosting of the international Social Work and Sociology conference at the University of Chester in 2015.

Relating to this REF submission, there are three ongoing series of seminars which include the users of research: the first, which is hosted by the Faculty of Education and Children's Services, focuses on multi-professional policy initiatives and their implications for practice, the second, hosted by the Department of Social Work, mounts presentations relating to the themes identified above, the third is hosted by the Social Work History Network. The Social Work History Network is facilitated by a partnership between the University of Chester and Kings College London. Recently Emeritus Professor Bob Holman presented his research on the impact of evacuations on children during the second World War, including its influence on the establishment of the Welfare State. There are further speakers and seminars planned which are well attended by users, carers and practitioners from health and social care and which are also open to the general public.

- *how the unit has made use of institutional support, expertise, or resources to provide support to its staff:* The University of Chester has facilitated staff in the achievement of impact by circulating information on forthcoming events, and by funding travel and participation in conferences and seminars. It has also provided accommodation and catering in order that events might be hosted. Administrative support has been provided in the marketing of conferences and seminars, e.g. the creation of websites, flyers and circulation of invitations.

c. Strategy and plans

By drawing on a range of organizational stakeholders (such as researchers, administrators and information management experts) the University is in the process of enhancing its impact strategy. This strategy will include the creation of a web-based impact repository, as well as policies and guidance on the way in which impact considerations are embedded in the initial planning and proposal writing for all research projects. For projects associated with this Unit of Assessment, principal investigators will be required to plan for impact. This will involve planning the route for the take-up of research. This route will specify the key stakeholders as well as when and how they will be involved. The plan will also show the steps for gathering the evidence that the research has had impact. This evidence will inform the construction of case studies that can be disseminated by means of the web-based repository. A series of training events will inform researchers of this new policy and requirements and the written guidance will be disseminated. Members of the Research and Knowledge Transfer Office will be available to assist researchers as they construct their impact plans.

d. Relationship to case studies

All five members submitted to this unit of assessment have been recruited since 2008. Whilst their research activity since joining the University of Chester has been energetic and productive, most of the underpinning research that has given rise to impact and potential case studies was conducted at other HEIs. Despite this, one case study is provided which meets the REF requirements. This case study has resulted from the evaluation of the Support to Front Line Managers project that took place between 2010 and 2011. It was commissioned by the Children's Workforce Development Council and conducted by **Harlow** in partnership with Prof. Nicky Stanley of the University of Central Lancashire. The evaluation was the underpinning empirical project, but it has been theoretical insights concerning reflective and relationship-based coaching, supervision and social work practice that has given rise to research outputs and the associated case study.