

<p>Institution: University of Essex</p>
<p>Unit of Assessment: 23 - Sociology</p>
<p>a. Context</p> <p>As sociologists 'making a difference' – ensuring their research has an impact, both academic and non-academic – is fundamental to the identity of those contributing to the UoA. From its early days impact of both types has been integral to sociological research at Essex (Peter Townsend, Sociology's founding professor, provides a notable example). Essex sociologists are located not only in the Sociology Department, but also the Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISER), the Centre for Psychoanalytic Studies (CPS), and the School of Health and Human Science (HHS), all interdisciplinary in character. Interdisciplinarity helps to ensure that UoA research is innovative, creative, and stretches disciplinary boundaries. It also encourages intellectual openness and a willingness to engage with others. Collaboration of all types to achieve academic and non-academic impact is central to our research enterprise.</p> <p>The UoA is committed to achieving two main types of impact beyond the confines of academia:</p> <p>Informing social and economic analysis and policy debate (Informing Debate) by generating key data about social and economic trends and changes, new and distinctive analyses of data, new concepts and ways of framing issues, and distinctive arguments.</p> <p>Influencing changes in public policy and practice (Influencing Policy), including the framing of legal, fiscal and other forms of regulation.</p> <p>The UoA is committed to working with a wide range of non-academic bodies who are users and beneficiaries of the research along with the wider public. The bodies include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Government departments and local/regional authorities in the UK and elsewhere ▪ Other publicly-funded bodies in the UK and elsewhere, such as NHS trusts ▪ National and international NGOs ▪ Other third sector organisations such as charities ▪ The media <p>The 2008-13 REF impacts derive from all five UoA research clusters.</p> <p>1. Social divisions and economic life (Social Divisions)</p> <p>This cluster's impact occurs primarily by Informing Debate. A notable example of data generation is Understanding Society, which incorporated the BHPS. The widely-used NS-SEC classification is an example of Informing Debate by developing a new framework for analysing data. The cluster also Influences Policy, as with Elson's research on gender-sensitive budgets, which encouraged the inclusion of gender impact assessments of budgeting in several countries.</p> <p>2. Public policy, welfare and regulation (Public Policy)</p> <p>This cluster's research directly Influences Policy. Sutherland's EUROMOD has underpinned the EC's social and employment policies, and has been used to simulate the effects of tax and benefit changes. Berthoud's research, commissioned by the DWP, contributed to the Government's Equalities Review and influenced the thinking about inequality and the relationship between different types of disadvantage, whilst Green's with Tendring District Council on houses in multiple occupation influenced the Council's policy on HMOs. Thiel's work on policing terrorism for the Police Federation was widely distributed at various police meetings.</p> <p>3. Identity, subjectivity and culture (Identity)</p> <p>Much of the impact of this cluster's research is via Informing Debate, as in Samson's work on the Innu in Canada, which was widely disseminated there and contributed to thinking about indigenous groups. An example of Influencing Policy is Canessa's research on gender, race and ethnicity in Bolivia which helped to shape the Bolivian Government's policies concerning racism in education.</p> <p>4. Transnationalism, nation and rights (Transnationalism)</p> <p>This cluster mostly has its impact via Influencing Policy, as with Papadopoulos' work on vulnerable asylum seekers which has changed the practice of organisations working with asylum seekers. The cluster also has an impact via Informing Debate, as with Morris' research on asylum and rights presented to an AGM of the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants.</p> <p>5. Sociological foundations: theory and methods (Theory and Methods)</p> <p>This cluster contributes to impact by strengthening sociological theory and methods, and often</p>

Impact template (REF3a)

Informs Debate indirectly. For instance, methodological research helps to ensure that the data generated by Understanding Society and other surveys are more accurate and provides a stronger basis for generalisation. An example is the research on reducing non-respondent rates. The conceptual and theoretical work of other researchers also Informs Debate, as with Voas's concept of 'fuzzy fidelity' to describe the relation to religion of many individuals, which he discussed on the radio and at meetings with various religious groups.

b. Approach to impact

The UoA has three distinct approaches to impact.

1. Research centres that share expertise and contacts with users

The research clusters each have associated centres that act as an important mechanism facilitating impact by bringing together academics with shared and complementary interests, knowledge and skills, and also by providing a means for establishing an identity and reputation that facilitates research that has an impact. Equally importantly centres directly assist the development of links with users by sharing and developing contacts and connections with major users. For example, the ESRC Research Centre on Micro-Social Change and the ESRC UK Centre for Longitudinal Studies have developed very strong links and relations of trust with government departments over time, that benefit all centre members and support the activities and impact of research of the Social Divisions, Public Policy and Theory and Methods clusters. Similarly, the Centre for Research in Economic Sociology and Innovation has developed both important international academic collaborations and strong links with users.

2. Developing collaborative research links with non-academic bodies

This is vital and occurs in a range of ways. The key requirement is to develop a strong, supportive relationship with the non-academic body. Sometimes we build on links established for teaching purposes, as with HHS's strong links with the NHS and other health organisations in relation to training health practitioners, and CPS and HHS's links with the Tavistock Clinic. Such links provide important opportunities for impact-oriented research (e.g. McPherson's work with the Tavistock and UCL on a randomised controlled trial of psychotherapy for treatment resistant depression).

Examples of different types of collaborative relationships and their follow through include:

- Green's research with Tendring District Council resulted from an initial approach from the Council keen for further information on the social conditions of vulnerable people living in houses in multiple occupation. The research led to a report to the Council, to enhanced knowledge of HMOs, and to a greater understanding of research-based policy and practice. It also generated further collaborative research plans.
- The Government Equalities Review approached Berthoud and colleagues in the run up to the 2010 Equality Act to make explicit comparisons between disadvantages over time. The research involved extensive co-operation with national bodies such as the Equality Panel, the Equalities and Human Rights Commission and the Equalities Office.
- Known for his expertise in terrorism, Fussey became part of a successful group bid to the ESRC/EPSRC for research on Resilient Futures, involving collaboration with the Cabinet Office, the Environment Agency, the Department for Energy and Climate Change, and industry.

3. Dissemination to non-academic bodies

The dissemination of research to non-academic audiences is strongly supported. Assisted by the Faculty Communications Officer and the two UoA Communications Managers, UoA academics use TV, radio and print media to discuss their research and its implications. Cox's series *Servants* (BBC 2012), informed by extensive Essex research, had an audience of 6 million. Following its success, she has recently secured ESRC Impact Uplift funding for research on shop workers with a new BBC series commissioned. Samson helped to disseminate his research by advising on a film about the memories of the Innu in Canada of the 1948 Nutak relocation (European premiere, Berlin, 2011). Busfield's research on the overuse of medicines was the lead story in the *Daily Mail*, was reported in many other newspapers, and led to interviews on radio and TV. Understanding Society findings are actively disseminated with a regular bulletin distributed widely outside academia, regular press releases, articles for papers and magazines, and media interviews. Contacts with the BBC's *Thinking Allowed* are good and academics have been regularly interviewed for the programme (Hobbs four times in the REF period). The web is also increasingly used to disseminate and exchange ideas, as with the Faculty's new Society Central website that publicises social policy research, specialising in finding research evidence to fuel informed debate

on current issues.

Support from the University in achieving impact

- The University’s Research and Enterprise Office (REO) has overall responsibility for research and knowledge exchange and provides advice and support. An example is the REO support to Thiel and Speed in a successful £92k bid to the Technology Strategy Board for a Knowledge Transfer Partnership with Colne Housing Society, which will explore the impact of benefit changes on the payment of rents and develop a digital map of services and service use.
- Along with the UoA, the REO scrutinises and advises on bids for research funding to ensure that they are of excellent quality and explicitly and adequately incorporate impact. For example, the REO advised Canessa on his bid for research on Gibraltarian identity that involves the Gibraltar Government – a key user and co-funder – and links with the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office. ECRs are strongly supported and encouraged through the mentoring process to develop funding bids and to ensure they incorporate impact into their research plan. All academics are regularly appraised for the same purpose (amongst others).
- The University’s Knowledge Transfer Innovation Fund has supported eight projects from within the UoA, including training to extend the research skills of user organisations, filming interviews with prisoners at HMP Bullwood Hall, and a further project to share findings with prison officers.

Support from the UoA in achieving impact

- Financial support is available for work relating to impact, such as travel costs for meetings with users and funders, and attending conferences. Seed-corn funding is available (e.g. for new research with Suffolk Youth Justice Council on courts’ removal of babies from their mothers), and financial incentives are provided for both making and being successful in funding bids.
- Generous research leave (one term in seven), along with skilful planning of teaching requirements, gives researchers time to carry out research and to ensure it has an impact. Bids for leave are now scrutinised by the UoA to ensure issues of impact are included, with the Faculty Impact Officer providing advice and support.
- A proactive approach is taken to research dissemination with the aid of two UoA Communications Managers, one of whom specifically promotes research that uses Understanding Society data. A Faculty Communications Officer also provides help in writing press releases and media articles, making contacts with TV and radio channels, and preparing for interviews and discussions (for examples see Dissemination above). The University is firmly committed to training researchers on how to make their research outputs accessible to policy makers and commentators and to maximise their impact, running workshops on presentation skills and giving media interviews.

c. Strategy and plans

The UoA’s goal is to produce robust research-based evidence to underpin decisions taken by policy makers in addressing key policy concerns. This requires productive engagement with research users. The UoA’s strategy, supported by the Faculty and University, involves:

Developing and enhancing existing contacts and communication with users – government departments, other publicly funded bodies, NGOs, third sector organisations and the media, to ensure visibility within on-going policy debates. An example is Canessa’s new research on Gibraltarian identity, partly funded by the Gibraltar Government, with the FCO now requesting regular briefings. UoA researchers have developed strong links with bodies such as the Met’s Special Operations; the Olympic Security Directorate; the World Bank; and the Equality and Human Rights Commission; they have regular meetings with UK Government researchers (DWP, BIS, Treasury, DfE, DoH, Cabinet Office); and have been members of influential policy-relevant committees and boards, such as the EU Task Force on the revision of SILC (Stats on Income and Living Conditions). The goal is to raise awareness of the UoA’s policy-relevant research and to ensure it feeds into policy debate and the policymaking process. UoA academics make a considerable contribution to non-academic bodies by these means and the Faculty Impact Officer supports staff in forging long-term relationships with likely non-academic users.

Continuing to produce clear communication and impact plans for each externally-funded research project. These identify target audiences and outline channels and activities to engage effectively with those audiences. For example, Harvey’s new ESRC Professorial Fellowship on the Food, Energy, Climate Trilemma involves major stakeholders, public and private, with whom he

Impact template (REF3a)

has connections, including Defra, DfID, BIS, British Sugar, BP, and the Biosciences KT Network, and clear plans for impact, including regular workshops in the UK and Brazil.

Embedding specific users into projects from their inception, so that the research design takes into account their specific needs – e.g. Hobbs’s research on policing and police-community relations before during and after the Olympics has involved contact with the Metropolitan and local police and the local council, Newham, from the outset. The ESRC has now selected the project as one of its Impact case studies.

Increasing the co-funding sought from research users for collaborative research studentships, in order to provide a generation of new researchers who understand the importance of collaboration with users. The UoA has secured co-funding for such studentships from IPSOS-MORI, YouGov, the ONS, the Wellcome Trust, and Essex County Council. One example is a studentship with UNUM Insurance, investigating health-related exits from employment, with the student spending three months a year at UNUM’s offices.

Learning from previous experience how to best exploit current contacts and mechanisms to generate impact for different types of users and different types of research. Through experience the UoA has identified a range of users that do not have the resources to participate in research design and direction from project inception but instead prefer to participate in dissemination events such as workshops and policy briefings. Others, such as industry and employers, prefer to be involved in research projects from inception, and to discuss decisions taken at each stage of the research process. One of the challenges for the future is to identify which approach is most appropriate for specific projects and users.

Further strengthening the scrutiny of activities in relation to impact in the appraisals required for all academic and research staff (now annual but twice yearly from 2014), in requests for research leave and in mentoring of early career researchers, as well as emphasising impact in decisions about promotions and new appointments.

d. Relationship to case studies

The six impact case studies submitted by the Sociology UoA together manifest all the aspects of the approach to, and support for, impact outlined above.

- The development of the NS-SEC at Essex has involved a long-standing collaboration with the Office for National Statistics, which commissioned the original research. This relationship has helped to enable the classification to be used by a number of government departments (BIS, DWP), the 2011 Census, and various statistics-producing bodies (HEFCE, HESA).
- Data from Essex’s British Household Panel Survey (now part of Understanding Society) has become routinely used by numerous government departments (including DoH, DfE, BIS, and DWP). Dissemination activities have been supported by a dedicated communications team and, in 2012, an Impact Fellow with the specific aim of enhancing policy development and partnership engagement, especially with the private and third sectors.
- The case study on pension provision relied on a successful dissemination strategy. Robin Blackburn made his findings available in non- and quasi-academic publications, making his research visible to a wider audience. This was instrumental in alerting the UN’s Department of Economic & Social Affairs to his work, and a piece from the *New Left Review* was published in Spanish by the Ecuadorian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Trade & Integration.
- Mark Harvey’s research on false self-employment was originally commissioned by the Union of Construction and Allied Trades and Technicians (UCATT). Harvey’s relationship with UCATT and his dissemination activities were vital in bringing this work to the attention of the Labour Party’s front bench and informing the second ‘Warwick Agreement’.
- The key objective of Renos Papadopoulos’ research on assessing the vulnerability of asylum seekers and refugees was to provide practical assistance to practitioners. The research, funded by the International Organisation of Migration, was linked to the Centre for Trauma, Asylum and Refugees, which was set up with the explicit aim of working with organisations throughout the world that support refugees and asylum seekers.
- Richard Berthoud’s research on Incapacity Benefit was conducted with the intention of informing public policy. In part the impact stemmed from a long-standing collaborative relationship with the DWP, to which Berthoud had earlier been seconded. An invitation to present his research to Upper Tribunal judges came about through the successful dissemination of a working paper.