

**Institution:** University of Ulster

**Unit of Assessment:** 4

**a. Context**

The case studies reported in this submission relate directly to the research activities of our main research groupings. As outlined in our research strategy, all of the research activity carried out by our staff is applied and aims to make a genuine difference to those outside academic life. This approach is evident in all of our research groups and staff members have been actively encouraged to engage in applied research by publishing in high quality research outlets but also to report their findings in governmental and other forums to ensure that important research findings impact on policy makers. Group members in our Peace and Conflict group for example have sought to influence policy in terms of intergroup contacts in the area of integrated education (Stringer) improving intergroup communication in organisations (Hargie) and through surveys of community relations (Robinson). Robinson is Director of ARK which was established in 2000 as a centre specifically to maximise the impact of social and political research in and on Northern Ireland. ARK achieves this aim by making accessible an extensive range of research resources on its website and by running surveys to capture vital information which has influenced policy makers and Government. Our Psychological Epidemiology and Mental Health grouping have actively sought to report their research to both the Government and the Victims Commission for Northern Ireland to ensure that key research findings on the mental health of the Northern Irish population are both recognised and acted upon. Professor Liddell and her co-workers have made a substantial and sustained contribution to Fuel Poverty both within Northern Ireland and internationally. Working in partnership with government and key energy stakeholders, Liddell's work has both shaped policy in this key area and her work for many different agencies across Northern Ireland is having a significant impact on how local councils are implementing energy saving schemes. She has also worked internationally to provide a European voice on fuel poverty and is a core member of the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE).

In the area of Autism Keenan and his colleagues have through their applied work established a local charity PEAT which serves as a voice for parents of autistic children. Their funded work has enabled support packages for parents of autistic children to be translated and used across Europe. They have argued and helped to set up specialised ABA autistic schools in the Republic of Ireland and Professor Keenan has been recognised through numerous international awards for his work with autistic children.

**b. Approach to impact**

During the REF period the Institute has actively encouraged staff to engage with key stakeholders and policy makers in Northern Ireland. Robinson as Director of ARK has run workshops which have brought together policy makers and academics specifically to encourage better interaction between academics and government. These meetings have helped academics to approach Governmental contacts in order to get their findings heard. One of the most important lessons from these meetings was that academics needed to describe their findings in a non-academic terms that policy makers would take note of. These short briefing papers have proved very popular and present a succinct message and key findings that are easier for non-academics to follow. They provide policy makers and members of the public with an easily accessible version of more complex findings in journal articles.

<http://www.ark.ac.uk/publications/updates/>

Group members have also been encouraged to present their findings at Stormont sponsored by an MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly). These presentations allow key findings, on for example mental health findings, to be presented to an invited group of key stakeholders from the wider community and allow MLAs and policymakers to listen to and discuss these findings with academics. This approach has been highly successful and has led to further invites to academics to present their findings to governmental committees influencing policy in the areas of fuel policy, mental health, community relations and victim services.

## Impact template (REF3a)

Stringer as Chair of the Northern Ireland Branch of the BPS initiated this approach by organising events at Stormont to ensure that the work of local psychologists would be better understood by policy makers (Ageing Well: Psychological Perspectives: Long Gallery, Stormont 19<sup>th</sup> May 2009). This approach was highly successful and was further supported by the BPS allowing the Branch to employ a part-time parliamentary advisor to help psychologists maximise their impact on the local Assembly. The NI Branch strategy highlights this approach:

[http://ni.bps.org.uk/document-download-area/document-download\\$.cfm?file\\_uuid=D31434FA-1143-DFD0-7E4B-540C9725689B&ext=doc](http://ni.bps.org.uk/document-download-area/document-download$.cfm?file_uuid=D31434FA-1143-DFD0-7E4B-540C9725689B&ext=doc)

### c. Strategy and plans

The Institute and University actively encourage impact. The University's research strategy encourages the translation of research findings into products and services that have an impact on the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life beyond academia. Institute funding of £20k was given to help staff develop their impact case studies. The Community Relations case study was awarded a University Impact Award which provided additional financial support to develop their case study. Within the University a multidisciplinary working group was established to share best practice in this area and included colleagues from Computing, Environmental Science and Psychology. The University recognises and rewards individuals who decide to follow the Innovation route by providing explicit recognition and equality for it as one of three equally valued routes to promotion to Senior Lecturer and Professor. Professor Keenan was promoted to a chair under this route and Professor Liddell was recognised for her work by the university through the award of a Distinguished Community Fellowship. The University's Office of Innovation provides a focus for enterprise, innovation, networking, industry training and development projects, commercial collaborations, consultancy and funded programmes that promote impact.

Within the Institute we have encouraged younger researchers to work together with more experienced academics on case studies and this is supported by working in partnership with external stake holders to ensure that research programmes are meeting the needs of those who have most interest in utilising research findings. In addition, case studies have been funded to ensure that research findings are reported not only in academic journals but also through report launches. For many young academics this experience is a challenging and novel one which provides them with real life feedback about their research and ideas which they cannot get from academic publication. Three examples of such launches involving group members are given below:

- Volunteering and Health: <http://news.ulster.ac.uk/releases/2013/7174.html>
- Post-Traumatic Stress and Mental Health: <http://news.ulster.ac.uk/releases/2011/6113.html>
- Human impact of the Troubles: <http://news.ulster.ac.uk/releases/2013/6884.html>

One of the key challenges for academics, which is important when dealing with the dissemination of findings containing highly sophisticated statistical techniques, is to present information in ways that can be easily understood by the lay person. Report launches require very different presentational skills from those required in academic journals. The support of the University media services team has been particularly useful here in ensuring that press releases and media coverage are presented in clear and understandable ways.

### d. Relationship to case studies

The unit's research across all three RRGs is applied and fits well with the impact agenda of REF and the Institute's focus on applied research. In all three research groups numerous examples of good applied research can be highlighted with impact on society. The three case studies are simply exemplars of what could be achieved over time by other researchers in our Institute. As the impact agenda is relatively new within REF, we found that impact case studies were highly useful ways to encourage other researchers to develop the impact agenda. At our School away day the

presentation of case studies along with the challenges they threw up for researchers was a highly valuable way to encourage Institute staff to address the impact agenda. For many researchers separating research from impact is initially difficult, as they find it difficult to think of findings other than in the way they are traditionally delivered through academic talks or papers. Many young researchers found the prospect of being able to present findings directly to stakeholders both exciting and challenging and new areas of future impact emerged from these presentations.

In all three submitted case studies engagement with end users has been a crucial aspect of achieving impact. This approach is clear in the Fuel Poverty case study where Ministers with direct responsibility for energy efficiency, highlight the importance of research which helps identify those most in need, leading to changes in Northern Ireland's Fuel Poverty Strategy. A quote from the former Director General for Electricity and Gas for Northern Ireland captures the importance of this engagement at all levels in the Fuel Poverty area:

"Christine clearly believes sound policies are more likely to follow if the evidence produced by research is widely disseminated, thoroughly understood and properly debated at every level by all the stakeholders. She is ready to share her knowledge with any obscure community group that asks her as with her academic colleagues or ministers' advisers."

A similar engagement theme is evident in the Autism case study with the focus on research looking into family needs and the implementation of a package to help parents of families with autistic children being rolled out across Europe. The engagement of the team is evident in the setting up of a charity and special schools; the development of a professional multi-media package with a local business; the setting up of a specialist Masters Course in Applied Behavioural Analysis and the testimonies of groups in different countries about the impact this work is having on families. Large-scale European funding for this approach totalling €773k has enabled the team to achieve international impact for this work and their work was cited as a project of excellence by the European Commission.

The wide ranging user engagement achieved by the Northern Ireland Life and Times surveys as part of the £2.7 Million ESRC award to ARK is clearly evident in the extensive use and citations to this key research resource in Northern Ireland's post conflict environment. Monitoring changes in opinion on key social issues requires an independent and reliable research tool which is both representative and authoritative. The yearly surveys and their extensive usage by political parties and academics illustrate the importance of this type of research data. Funding from the Northern Irish Assembly (OFMDFM) during the period of £619k for individual modules also highlights the importance they attach to this open-access approach. As Northern Ireland moves cautiously into a post conflict period, political progress is dependent upon wide spread public support for Government policies. The Life and Time Surveys provide a yearly picture of how a representative sample of the Northern Ireland population feels key community relations performance measures are being achieved/or not achieved by Government policies.

As the Director of the United Community Division in OFMDFM states "the results of the (Life and Times Surveys) provide an evidence base to support the development of policy on good relations".

### **Reporting Diverse Impact Case Studies**

When dealing with complex social problems such as autism, fuel poverty and community relations in a post-conflict environment the authors of our case studies have tried to capture wide ranging impact. This necessitates covering a range of activities in which researchers have engaged extensively with end users to provide impact which is greatly valued but is difficult to convey easily in a brief case study format. In judging this type of impact we would ask reviewers to consider adopting a well known Gestalt Psychology principle "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts."