Impact template (REF3a)

Institution:
St Mary's University College Belfast

Unit of Assessment:
Politics and International Studies

a. Context
The research produced by the unit impacts upon a diverse range of non-academic audiences, specifically, policy-makers in government departments, teachers and pupils in schools and development advisers in non-governmental organisations.

The main types of impact relevant to the unit's research focus specifically on contributing to a discourse and offering advice on international development and political cooperation and creating educational resources and training guides on European culture and citizenship, which impact on practitioners and learners. The research activity within the unit specialises in the study of international, intercultural and political aspects of life. Therefore, the impact of the unit's research activity directly relates to these specialisms through collaborative work with and contributions made to non-academic beneficiaries which have an effect on change within the types of organisations referred to above.

The types of influences and changes effected as a result of the unit's research activity include the use of new teaching materials and methods in schools, raising awareness among policy-makers of the needs of development agencies and enriching the policies and thinking of government departments.

b. Approach to impact
The unit's approach to impact focuses on the potential of attracting end users to incorporate the outcomes of research activity into their general thinking and practice. From the outset, members of the unit consider the end users of their research activities so that possible impact is built into their research strategy, planning and output. Relationships with end users are developed by members from engagement throughout their teaching, outreach activities and research liaisons. The unit has established a network of political decision-makers, academics, development agency staff, teachers and other educators, which has grown into a bank of potential end users to benefit from the impact of the members' research. Meetings and discussion with end users, using various types of communication, are established as part of the unit's activities to generate dialogue and inform planning of research activities.

The nature of the relationships with end users is evident through joint scholarly work on research projects with academics from other universities, training of teachers from various countries on educational resources produced as a result of research and dissemination to policy-makers and non-governmental workers. The relationships were developed over time by travelling to various research project meetings, maintaining correspondence through on-line communication, visiting schools and receiving end users to the unit's institution for discussion.

The unit supports its members achieving impact from their research by communicating information about training opportunities and resources on how to plan for, measure and succeed in achieving impact. The unit negotiates with senior academic staff and management to accommodate its members with relevant time away from normal teaching duties to focus on gathering evidence and

measuring achieved impact. The unit also facilitates its members to achieve impact by investigating how to further extend contact with end users who may be considered as potential stakeholders benefiting from the outcomes of the research.

Institutional support, expertise and resources are continuously used by the members of the unit in order to assist them in fulfilling their aspirations of achieving impact. In addition to professional development, members also avail of financial assistance from the institution's Finance Department and resources from the IT Department such as recording equipment and e-communications to create learning materials and to liaise with partners. Members also seek the advice and expertise from the Research Office on issues such as research ethics, gathering evidence and conference organisation and from the Estates and Catering Departments in relation to organising and facilitating dissemination and training events.

c. Strategy and plans

The strategy for maximising potential impacts of the unit's research output and scholarly activity promotes a culture within the unit that emphasises the value of research that impacts on society outside of academia. The unit guides members to build an impact strategy into their research projects and grant proposals, target relevant groups as potential beneficiaries, contact end users at the initial research planning stage to secure their commitment to becoming involved in demonstrating impact and gather appropriate evidence to measure impact.

The unit, in creating a culture of impact, draws upon the experience of academic staff outside the unit to gain their opinions on their plans for impact. The unit also avails of the services of administrative staff by working with them on gathering and documenting evidence of impact.

The unit also operates a strategy to secure time from normal teaching duties for members to focus on identifying the impact of their research and documenting evidence to this effect.

d. Relationship to case studies

The approach to impact within the unit ultimately influences and reflects both case studies, presented for the REF, and demonstrates a relationship. Case Study 1 (From the Local to the Global) impacts upon globalisation and international development policy. The nature of the impact focuses on collaboration among development practitioners in non-governmental organisations, political decision-makers involved in North-South cooperation strategies and academics with expertise in North-South political, economic and social interaction. The impact refers to influencing international development policy. Case Study 2 (PAM-INA) impacts upon European identity and citizenship in education. The nature of the impact focuses on the development of common links between, and perceptions of, European identities. The impact refers to encouraging young generations to reflect upon similarities and differences across Europe. The methodology includes the design of two key resources to be implemented in post-primary schools across Europe: impact is evident in the production and use of study materials on European identities.

The two case studies presented demonstrate the specific context in which the unit's impact strategy operates. Those who have benefitted from the impact of the research are from outside the realms of academia, and impact has been achieved through discourse, expert advice and the production and use of resources and training materials relevant to political, international and intercultural issues.

The two case studies also reflect the strategic approach to achieving impact. They have succeeded as a result of careful consideration of the potential benefits of the research for end users during the planning stages of the research projects. This successful outcome has developed during the course of the projects by the researchers maintaining communication and relationships with end users. The researchers have also made use of the support from the unit as well as the institution, in terms of time out from teaching and financial, administrative and IT support.

The research projects have benefitted in terms of achieving impact as a result of the unit's approach and strategy, which set out ways of ensuring successful impact from research.

The end users referred to in the case studies are one or more of the following:
- pupils and teachers in schools and other educational or administrative bodies (e.g. see list of schools, education and library board, British council, etc. in case study 2 – PAM-INA);
- development workers for non-governmental organisations (e.g. Centre for Global Education Northern Ireland in case study 1 – From the Local to the Global);
- political advisers in government (e.g. members of Polish parliament in case study 1 – From the Local to the Global);
- academics or students in other higher education institutions outside the particular unit's institution (e.g. see list of universities in case study 1 – From the Local to the Global and in case study 2 – PAM-INA).

The impacts described in the case studies are demonstrated through
- discourse on political, educational and development issues;
- the production of resources for use in schools and university departments internationally;
- collaboration with academics and non-academics where advice is given by the researchers.

The underpinning research referred to in the case studies has been conducted with the end users in mind. These end users have become involved in determining impact as a result of the unit members' list of contacts developed as part of their outreach and academic teaching activities. Facilitation of meetings with end users and partners has been supported from research project funds or from the institution's research budget, as well as with time away from normal teaching duties.

The case studies have been produced as a result of the unit members involving themselves in research projects and initiatives that have the goal of creating output that has the potential to impact upon certain groups within society.