Institution: University of Chester

Unit of Assessment: 22 Social Work and Social Policy

a. Overview

The University of Chester has within the last decade made the transition from a College of Higher Education and in so doing has established a vision 'To foster excellence in research, scholarship and knowledge transfer/enterprise'.   Structurally, the research agenda is driven and supported by the Research and Knowledge Transfer Office as well as the Graduate School.   The services provided to academic staff by the Research and Knowledge Transfer Office include: assistance in the identification of funding sources; full economic costing of project proposals; and the robust financial and project management processes which offer rewards to departments and individuals who are successful in attracting funding.   These central administrative bodies relate to seven faculties. This submission reflects collaborative endeavours cross the three faculties of: Education and Children's Services; Social Science; and Health and Social Care.   Activity has given rise to outputs that can be clustered in accordance with the following three overlapping themes:

- organizations, management and the provision of formal and informal care;
- critical reflection upon knowledge, including its generation and contribution to the construction of professionalism, professional practice and the provision of services; and
- criminal justice and services of support.

The Faculty of Health and Social Care has its own research office which constitutes a facilitative hub that builds upon the supportive and enabling foundation of the University wide Research and Knowledge Transfer Office.   Within the faculty the building of inter-professional collaboration is identified as crucial in fortifying pedagogical, research, practice-based and associate activities such as the development of ethical processes and standards. For example Social Work staff were involved in the medical-legal mental health course which supports the vision of inter-disciplinary research and pedagogical provision. As part of the faculty's strategy, we have also continued to promote service user and carer involvement wherever possible, including involvement in empirical research. Representatives of the research office and the Department of Social Work participate in the faculty's Research Committee and Research Ethics Sub-committee where multi-disciplinary strategic and operational matters are considered.   All faculties are represented on the University wide Research and Knowledge Transfer Committee which has the responsibility for providing advice to Senate.   In short, the University structure allows for disciplinary difference whilst ensuring cross discipline contributions to common strategic aims and objectives.

b. Research strategy

The vision identified above has been translated into the University's Research and Knowledge Transfer Strategies.   The strategic objectives include: ensuring that all staff expect to undertake and disseminate excellent research; increasing participation in research across all faculties; maintaining and developing the quality of the University's research environment; improving the overall quality of the University's research performance; maximising the external income earned to support research; continuing to develop and enhance doctoral programmes; and strengthening the support offered by the Research and Knowledge Transfer Office and Graduate School.

Reflecting on the research specific objectives, it is possible to claim that positive progress has been made.   The structures and processes which encourage engagement with research have contributed to an ongoing shift in organizational cultures. This shift has also occurred by means of the staffing policy (see below). In addition, resources and support have been made available that provide opportunities for the fulfilment of initiatives (see below).   There has been a growth of high quality research outputs across the University. Professional doctoral programmes have been created, approved and continue to recruit whilst the number of registered postgraduate students has also risen. The involvement of external groups, such as members from Age UK, MIND, and some other smaller third sector providers, in activities such as training or the gathering, interpretation and dissemination of data and evidence, has also been promoted. We have also

made much stronger collaborate links to nearby Russell Groups Universities such as Liverpool and Manchester, and have generated strategic plans regards providing more regular and focused supervision and training, making consistent space for staff to undertake research, and so forth, and we continue to host national and international conferences.

Since 2008 the Faculty of Health and Social Care has published research strategy documents that shape the ways in which the overarching University strategy might be implemented at the local level: through the creation of the research office, for example. This office employs a researcher and research assistants who might be invited to contribute to the writing of research proposals and become members of project teams. Staff members are encouraged to create Special Interest Groups and engage with health and social work agencies through the creation of Professional Development and Research Partnerships.

As indicated above, an objective of the University was to increase the participation in research across all faculties. Over the past five years members of this submission have participated in: applying for research funding; managing projects and participating in empirical research; writing reports for external agencies, writing papers for international journals and book chapters, editing books, giving papers at seminars and international conferences, and co-ordinating conferences and seminars. What follows here is a description of the knowledge generated as it relates to the three overlapping themes identified above:

(1) Organizations, management and the provision of formal and informal care

Neoliberalism and managerialism have been explored for the explicit and more nuanced way in which they have shaped identities, social work and social care organizations, management and the wider reconstruction of 'social work' (**Carey**, **Harlow**). Whilst such discursive debates have now prospered for some time attempts have been made to enhance where possible and add finer details to supplement context. For example, **Carey** has examined the ethical implications of any over-reliance upon contingent 'agency' staff within adult social work; and the complex ramifications - including theoretical, organisational and identity related - of practitioner deviance and cynicism. **Harlow** has critically focused on recent developments in the supervision of social workers, including the introduction of coaching as a means of providing managers with support and developing supervisory and practice skill. Legislation and policy on foster care has been reconfigured over recent times and key research findings have been captured by **Harlow** in the form of an edited book. Questions over the organization and provision of foster care expose the complexities of corporate parenting. In keeping with this theme lies the work of **Pratesi** whose expertise lies in the theorization of caring and the emotions. He has examined the way in which caring regimes encourage human productivity, and within the contexts of both the USA and UK, he has focussed on the implications of social change, diverse family forms, gay parenting and inequalities.

Safeguarding is a dominant concern within social policy and social work and researchers at Chester are contributing to the body of knowledge and the debates. On behalf of a Community Safety Partnership, **Turner** has explored alcohol misuse and contributed to developments in harm reduction. **Pratesi** has conducted empirical research on technological innovation and the way in which monitoring systems might safeguard older people, helping them remain in their own home. A cross faculty team of academics at the University of Chester has, as part of an international team, secured European funding to examine community responses to emergencies, and the ways in which supporting agencies might best alert communities and vulnerable populations is currently underway (**Harlow**). **Roscoe's** interdisciplinary work in domestic violence and integrated family support services has also centred upon generating new models for practice in safeguarding and social work.

(2) Critical reflection upon knowledge, including its generation and contribution to the construction of professionalism, professional practice and the provision of services.

A quantitative analysis of the academic affiliations of those publishing papers in British journals

was the subject of one academic contribution (**Harlow**). The project replicated an earlier study and drew attention to the global patterning of disseminating knowledge on social work. **Carey**, **Harlow** and **Pratesi** have all published papers on the complexity of undertaking in-depth qualitative research, including reflecting upon the inclusion of service users in knowledge generation. For example, **Carey** has highlighted some of the ethical, practical and hegemonic limitations of participatory research and policy. He has also examined the changing identities of social work practitioners, for example in relation to accommodating ongoing market-led policy drivers. **Pratesi** has provided practical guidelines for involving older adults in the design, development and implementation of assistive technologies. **Roscoe** has also participated in discussions on knowledge generation and the importance of its proximity to service users and social work practitioners. She examines in detail the practice of an Integrated Family Support Service which relies on motivational interviewing techniques and in so doing attempts to generate evidence of what constitutes good practice. Similarly, her work on narrative approaches to practice emerges from a rejection of the gulf between 'theory' and 'doing' and a commitment to an authentic and ethical engagement with service users.

(3) Crime, justice and services of support

Empirical research has enabled **Turner** to publish journal papers on criminal justice. Taking a regional and historical case study approach, **Turner** has explored the topic of women and the penal system. **Roscoe's** contribution to knowledge on this theme relates to services provided to women who have experienced domestic violence. She has evaluated two different services: firstly, a group work programme for women who have experienced domestic violence and secondly, the service provided by independent advocates to women who have experienced domestic violence. Papers published on these projects provide the analysis of the service users' perspective and reflect a commitment to encouraging good practice through reflection and research.

This theme is evident in the scholarly activity of other social work colleagues, as well as colleagues working in a range of faculties at the University of Chester. In consequence, the topic is being pursued from a variety of disciplinary perspectives and the enhancement of this theme as a significant area of interdisciplinary activity would be an appropriate focus for future investment.

The University requires faculties and departments to produce annual reports of research activity which enables progress on the overarching strategy to be evaluated. In addition to this system there is ongoing update of activity at the Faculty Management Teams and Faculty Research Committees, both of which inform the central system outlined above. The impact of critical reflection and research on professional practice is an emerging theme of interest. The recent national concern with ensuring that social work practitioners are adequate to their task has inspired research related activity. For example, on successful application from the Department of Social Work, the Higher Education Academy awarded a grant of £1,000 which was used to host a national conference on the challenge of failing students. **Harlow** was a member of a team that secured a contract from the Children's Workforce Development Council to provide support to practitioner-led research programmes (£109,500). In conjunction with the educational partnerships currently being constructed nationally between HEIs and practice agencies, these successes may provide a foundation for the future development of joint academic and practitioner empirical projects that encourage the development of critical reflection and research informed practice.

The priority development for the unit will be to formalize the theme 'Organizations, management and the provision of formal and informal care' into a Professional Development and Research Partnership (PDRP). This will include the researchers identified above, active and beginning researchers from across the University, as well as representatives of practice agencies. This PDRP will facilitate local initiatives, but also joint applications for funding for national projects.

The educational partnerships described above will give rise to opportunities for the continuing professional development of social work practitioners and academics. In keeping with the emphasis on the generation of practice knowledge, the aim is to encourage a thriving social work

practitioner/ research community which develops innovative service in the light of in-depth reflection and research. Professional Doctorates have been established within the faculties of Education and Health and Social Care. Social workers in the region have already begun to participate in these programmes.

c. People, including:
i. Staffing strategy and staff development

The Department and the University are strongly committed to the development of all staff of the University. This was recognised externally by the recent award to the University of the HR Excellence in Research Award which demonstrates a commitment to implementation of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers.

The University has established (through the Research Committee) a forum for early-career staff to enable networking across subject and discipline boundaries and to help identify and address common problems and allow issues to be raised at policy-making level.

All new academic staff members of the University are supported through an accredited programme leading to a Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy. A particular feature of the Chester programme is that the compulsory core modules provide developmental support helping and encouraging newly appointed staff to understand the demands and opportunities of research supervision, and encouraging them to study a further optional module that develops skills in supervision to an even higher level.

The University of Chester supports activities promoting equality and diversity. There is a long-established annual University Diversity Festival to which all staff and students are invited. The University has a Disabled Staff Group that has been active since 2007 and provides a safe and supportive environment in which to discuss issues relating to disability. The Human Resources Department monitor regularly for equality issues as part of the recruitment process for staff and funded research students, and the University is currently working towards an Athena Swan award.

The University's Annual Staff Conference is an all-day event held each year. Research is featured within the conference through several parallel session which showcase successful projects, opportunities to develop impact, and a sharing of good practice in grant applications and management, collaborative initiatives, and understanding good research governance. Other similar events are specifically relevant to this research group: the Warrington Works Conference provides an opportunity for researchers from health, social work and criminal justice to explore shared interests, whilst the annual conference mounted by the Department of Social Studies and Counselling facilitates presentations from academics at Chester as well as external guest speakers. In addition, the faculty of Health and Social Care holds regular Staff Days at which research papers might be presented, or sessions held on research related resources and facilities.

The probationary and induction programmes are interlinked and ensure that all new members of staff are introduced to a wide range of facilities and policies. These include access to colleagues from the Research and Knowledge Transfer Office who can provide assistance in applying for grants and setting up R&D contracts, and colleagues in the Graduate School who can help to advertise research projects and to interview and admit potential research students.

Roscoe has recently joined the University and is being supported by the Department in the completion of a PhD. This support involves the provision of a sabbatical three months in duration. In addition however, **Roscoe** is the recipient of the £8,000 Jo Campling scholarship which was awarded in 2012 in support of the completion of this project.

In 2010 the post of Professor of Social Work was created and filled. This was the first Professorial post with the main responsibility for driving forward the research agenda in the Department of Social Work. However, all Professors offer support to members of their Departments in order that

they develop their research interests and potential. It is the role of the Professors to liaise with Heads of Department and assist in staff development were appropriate. Heads of Department are responsible for holding Performance and Development Reviews with each staff member and these meetings focus on performance and developmental needs that relate to research related objectives. The University is generous in funding staff attendance at conferences and other developmental opportunities.

ii.   Research students

Apart from **Roscoe's** studentship awarded by the Social Work Education Research Award (SWERSA), there are three PhD studentships that are relevant to this particular unit of assessment: the first student having been awarded a Gladstone Fellowship is researching the organizational development of the Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service and the second is researching sporting events and domestic violence. Both of these students are being supervised by an interdisciplinary team that spans the faculties of Education and Health and Social Care. The third student is researching punishment and the government's changing approach to sentencing.

Training and support for PGR students is a shared responsibility at Chester between the Graduate School, the faculty and the subject department which provides supervision and specialist training and support such as the use of SPSS and NVivo. PGR students are offered face-to-face training and are supported by the VLE Moodle, a site which provides on-line access to training and education materials provided and constructed by academic staff from a range of subjects and faculties. PGR students also attend seminars where peer dissemination and learning are fostered to engender critical dialogue of research as well as present their studies in an annual PGR day to celebrate the diversity of projects within the University. All students undertake the usual standardised University induction and undertake a skills audit to help them to identify their training needs. Students involved in teaching are expected to undertake training to prepare them for this activity, and may, if they wish, undertake modules leading to Associate Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy.

Every student is supported by a team of at least two approved supervisors, one of whom is designated Director of Studies and who has supervised at least one student to successful completion of the award. Supervision meetings take place frequently, with at least one meeting per month being recorded with outcomes and targets. Following a probationary period of 6-9 months, student progress is reviewed formally. If the student's registration is confirmed at the probationary review, a termly meeting of the full supervisory team reviews progress with the student subsequently and an Annual Progress Review (chaired by an independent academic staff member) reviews progress against objectives and expectations on an annual basis before the Annual Progress Board meeting. Students must submit a report, give a seminar and attend an interview before their upgrade from MPhil to PhD can be confirmed. There is a similar rigorous process to consider applications to transfer to 'writing up' status. Each Faculty has at least one Faculty PG tutor who is available to see PGR students by appointment and to resolve any issues or questions they may have. Faculty tutors represent their Faculty and its students at the regular Graduate School meetings and also represent the Graduate School as appropriate in their Faculty.

d. Income, infrastructure and facilities

Since 2008, academics contributing to this submission have, in partnership with others, generated approximately £642,278. This funding has been generated locally, nationally or internationally. Collaborations have involved colleagues from the Universities of: Central Lancashire; Greenwich; Glyndwr; Bristol; Salford; and Kings College London. Funders include: the European Union; the Children's Workforce Development Council; a Community Safeguarding Board; Wrexham Social Services; Barnsley Metropolitan Trust; the North Wales Criminal Justice Board; the University Hospital of South Manchester NHS Foundation Trust and the third sector organization Tai Hafan Cymru.   This funded research activity has given rise to publications in the following journals: *Criminology and Criminal Justice; Child and Family Social Work; Diversity in Health and Care;* and *Practice: Social Work in Action.*

Primarily, the aim is to apply for funding that will enable the members of this research group to build upon the knowledge that they have already generated. Established international and national collaborative networks (as discussed below) are particularly important to this strategy as well as innovative theory formation and production in the context of inter-disciplinarity and research. It is also the intention that social work agencies that have partnered with the University of Chester to provide education, will be engaged in future activity as users of and contributors to research activity. Members of this research group have already acted as reviewers of research proposals for funding bodies (such as the ESRC).   In order to build relational networks and become increasingly familiar with expectations and standards, this activity will be extended.   Structurally, members of the Research and Knowledge Transfer Office as well as the Research Office of the faculty of Health and Social Care circulate electronically alerts to funding opportunities. They also provide support in the completion of bids and the recruitment of research assistants.

Hosted by the faculty of Health and Social Care, the Special Interest Group on service user participation in research (a group which includes services users) may constitute a valuable resource for future research proposals and projects. Service users contribute to the wider health and social care faculty at the University and are involved in research dissemination, assessment, presentations, recruitment and interviews and information dissemination. Innovate partnerships are and have been at the forefront of service user participation and this has included working on service evaluations with MIND, Age UK and Social Service Departments.

All members of the academic staff have their own desk, PC and internet connection. The University Library subscribes to over 1,000 printed journals and more than 13,000 electronic journals which can be accessed online. The Library has approximately 260,000 printed volumes in its collections and books can be borrowed from any of the libraries at the University's different sites. The collections also include 15,000 e-books which are core academic texts plus access to many other online materials. At the main campus library there is 24/7 access to computers, printing and quiet study space throughout the year and extended access to all collections across all sites is provided during term-time and at peak periods.

e. Collaboration or contribution to the discipline or research base

The University supports collaboration by appointing disciplinary leaders to take up posts such as visiting professor. These appointments contribute to the cementing of relationships and access to networks. Mike Fisher, Professor of Evidence Based Social Work at the Tilde Goldberg Centre, University of Bedfordshire, has been appointed to support the research theme concerning knowledge generation.   The University also hosts, along with King's College London, the national Social Work History Network which mounts seminars biannually.

This submission includes three social workers and two social scientists, and the research undertaken is frequently multidisciplinary. For example, the work of **Carey** includes social policy, sociology and philosophy as well as social work, whilst the work of **Turner** involves history as well as criminology. **Roscoe's** work combines criminology and social policy in empirical studies surrounding domestic violence. By facilitating time and funding travel the University of Chester supports participation in a range of collaborative endeavours which are often multidisciplinary and inclusive of research users.   The researchers submitted here belong to a number of formal networks: **Pratesi** is a member of the following: Sociology of Emotions Research Network; the Ethics of Care – an international network of academics and professionals engaged in discussing care the place of in society; ReValuing Care Research Network; KT-EQUAL – a consortium of UK researchers dedicated to extending quality of life for older adults and disabled people in collaboration with Manchester Metropolitan University and the University of Sheffield; and MICRA the Manchester Interdisciplinary Collaboration for Research on Ageing. **Turner** is a member of the interdisciplinary national network 'British Crime Historians' as well as the research network 'Our Criminal Past: Caring for our Future'. This latter network is funded by a grant from the Arts and Humanities Research Council, mounts seminars and conferences. **Turner** has presented at these events. **Roscoe** is a member of the International Sociology and Social Work and has presented at

these events.

Researchers have been participating in meetings with the Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service and children's adoption agency Adoption North West. **Harlow** is a member of the policy advisory group of the national charity the Fostering Network. Collaboration with the national charity the Fostering Network gave rise to the production of the book on Foster Care. Work with the Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service led to the engagement with the national and international emergency services and the award of the grant by the European Union. **Harlow**'s participation in the interdisciplinary Organization Studies Network gave rise to the international comparative work undertaken which involved colleagues from the disciplines of sociology, politics and management from the Universities of East London and Lulea in Sweden.

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. A regional seminar series on social work is hosted by the University of Chester. Internationally prestigious guest speakers have made presentations that are in keeping with the research themes identified above. Participants have included academics and research users. Members of this submission participate in seminar series that have been hosted elsewhere: for example, members have contributed to the organization of two international conferences: 'Law, Crime and History' and 'Dilemmas in the Human Services'. **Harlow,** is an editorial board member of two journals: *Social Work and Social Science Review*; and *Practice: Social Work in Action*. Members of this submission review papers for a number of journals including: *British Journal of Social Work; Ethics and Social Welfare; Work Employment and Society*; *Health and Social Care in the Community*; *The Historical Journal; Organization; Qualitative Social Work; Journal of Social Work; Community, Work and Family; and The Journal of Gerontological Social Work.* Scoping exercises have been carried out and book proposals reviewed for the publishing house Sage*.* Research proposals have been reviewed for the ESRC and the Welsh National Institute for Social Care and Health. On invitation **Harlow** has acted as independent advisor on a national research project undertaken by the University of Salford and Manchester Metropolitan University.

Members of this submission are Fellows of the Higher Education Academy. **Pratesi** is a member of the following: American Sociological Association; European Sociological Association; and the British Sociological Association. **Harlow** represents the University of Chester at the Association of Professors of Social Work as well as the JUC/SWEC and its sub-committee on research. She is also a member of the British Association of Social Work. With this experience, members of this research group are well placed to form the next generation of disciplinary leaders.