Institution: University of Sussex

Unit of Assessment: UoA 25 Education

1. Context

The Department of Education informs, influences and shapes educational policy, practice and change at international, national and local levels. Principal non-academic stakeholders and beneficiaries for Education's research include policy-makers, government agencies, non-governmental organisations, multi-national and bi-lateral agencies, charities, educational practitioners, and mass-media organisations. Our research is specifically aimed at changing policy and practice in a range of educational contexts and at these different levels across the following six strategic areas:

- access, equity, gender and inclusion in schooling and higher education;
- education and development in low-income countries;
- learning, teaching and assessment to improve educational quality, equity and outcomes;
- teacher and other professional education, development and learning;
- educational planning, governance and financing; and
- childhood, youth and family studies.

2. Approach to impact

Research in Education aims to create change at international, national and local levels by developing collaborative relationships with non-academic communities and engaging in dialogue with key stakeholders, user-groups and beneficiaries. This has been realised through the development and refocusing of research on key contemporary problematics within specific research fields. For example, since the RAE in 2008 and in response to, and collaboration with, non-academic groups (UNICEF and the Dutch government), research in the first two strategic areas has been shaped to include a focus on Education and Peace-Building in Conflict Affected States within one of our research centres – the Centre for International Education (CIE). In a similar way, the Centre for Innovation and Research in Childhood and Youth (CIRCY) has addressed current concerns about children's and young people's engagement with media by facilitating their interventions in public spaces through the project Space Invaders: Children, Youth and Public Spaces. These kinds of development typify the Department's proactive, progressive support and development for relevant, timely research on contemporary social and educational concerns.

We have identified, consolidated and strengthened our six strategic areas via the establishment of three Department-based research centres – the Centre for International Education (CIE) (http://www.sussex.ac.uk/cie/), the Centre for Higher Education and Equity Research (CHEER) (http://www.sussex.ac.uk/education/cheer/) and the Centre for Teaching and Learning Research (CTLR, previously CIRCLETS) (http://www.sussex.ac.uk/circlets/) – and one cross-School centre, the Centre for Innovation and Research in Childhood and Youth (CIRCY) (http://www.sussex.ac.uk/esw/circy/).

Our centres operate as hubs for research development by bringing together expertise in and across our strategic areas. They provide leadership within the strategic areas to develop approaches to impact that enable us to work both across the Department, School and University and with numerous non-academic bodies, organisations and agencies, thereby expanding our networks and strengthening our communications. The centres help us to extend the reach of our research and shape our research agendas in response to the key concerns raised through dialogue with user-groups and stakeholders and in relation to particular expertise across our six strategic areas. We focus on building strong dialogic and collaborative relationships with our user-groups and stakeholders in the following ways:

- **Collaboration** with alumni, other departments, universities and non-academic agencies and organisations characterises our approach to research. Collaborative approaches include working together with user-groups and key stakeholders through workshops, seminars, action and participatory research methods, consultation, intensive dialogue, professional training, education and development, policy-oriented dissemination events and establishing steering and advisory groups with non-academic representatives. Through such approaches, we reach and engage with particular user-groups who have interest and influence in specific fields (such as international education and development, higher education policy and practice, or school-based pedagogies).

- **Communicating key recommendations** for policy and practice is achieved through dialogue with key stakeholders, for example through steering and advisory groups, consultation with user-groups and non-governmental and government agencies (including e.g. UNESCO, UNICEF and the World Bank). Our success in delivering research with positive policy and practice impacts has attracted cohorts of EdD students and alumni who are in influential decision-making positions (some selected examples include the Chief Education Director in Ghana, the former Director-General of the Malaysian education system, and the Director of Educational Planning, Sri Lanka).

- **Encouraging critical reflection** through collaboration and dialogue is central to our approach. This is facilitated through dialogic-centred workshops, seminars, courses and conferences. Drawing on participatory and teacher-as-researcher approaches helps us to create spaces for reflexivity and change in educational and pedagogical practice (one example is the Teacher Preparation and Continuing Professional Development in Africa project, funded by the Hewlett Foundation).

- **Developing networks** beyond academic circles provides rich opportunities for dialogue, collaboration and research impact.

Taken together, these approaches have resulted in the consolidation of a set of practices and outcomes designed to increase research impact and maximise reach and influence. These include:

- continuing professional development;
- policy-orientated symposia;
- policy briefs outlining key recommendations for change emerging from research findings;
- the creation of opportunities for critical engagement with research (e.g. as part of professional development through high-quality programmes such as our International and Home EdD);
- funding impact through the grant process to enable the time and resources required to develop relationships with key stakeholders;
- building on successful research to secure Follow-On funding with a specific focus on generating impact; and
- the further development of research projects and institutional websites to reach a wider non-academic audience, targeting specific groups of beneficiaries.

3. Strategy and plans

The Department of Education's major aim is to achieve impact by effecting change in educational policy and practice, with a focus on our six strategic areas of key importance in contemporary societies. This entails theoretical engagement with the issues in focus and embedding the capacity for thinking through and generating change within research bids and projects, in order to generate impact at all stages of the research process. This strategy is underwritten by clear plans for supporting impact, through:

- **Leadership** provided through Departmental structures and within each of the Research Centres, with a particular focus on providing mentoring and guidance to early- and mid-career

researchers about how to (i) develop plans to target appropriate non-academic user-groups and beneficiaries at local, national or international levels and (ii) develop methods for creating collaboration and dialogue with those target groups. A cross-School Research Committee places impact as a key concern in the development of research strategy and operational plans, ensuring that the appropriate structures, mechanisms and resources are in place to optimise research communication and impact (for example, structures have been put in place to support mentoring and peer-reviewing, resources are provided to reach out to a wider community through organising events and developing web-based and online resources and so forth). Research Centre Directors will provide expertise, experience and strategic guidance in identifying the extensive networks of research partners – engaging with the diaspora of alumni, many in influential strategic and policy positions – and the positive reputation built on previous relevant quality research generates opportunities for events and activities that enhance impact.

- **Resources** will be made available to nurture, develop and secure funding for research that can lead to impact and educational change. These include ensuring that dedicated staff are given time to develop research designed to maximise impact, providing expertise and dedicated support to researchers through our Communications and Partnership Officer and our Senior Research Development Officer, producing essential materials such as policy-briefings, and supporting events designed to reach non-academic users. Dedicated support staff linked to each Centre provide the resources to support impact generation, for example, through helping to organise events intended to reach non-academic users, supporting the production of materials, including online and digital, designed to influence policy-makers, and keeping a record of successful approaches to impact to inform future planning.

- **Communication** and engagement strategies are driven by an awareness of external opportunities and windows for policy influence identified by Research Centre Directors with Centre members and key stakeholders. This is underpinned by a commitment to dialogue, so that our research agendas are formed in response to key concerns and issues raised beyond academic networks and communities.

4. Relationship to case studies

To illustrate the range of ways in which our research strategy works at varying levels of impact in relation to different substantive research concerns, we have selected the following three case studies:

- *International development organisations take up strategies for universalising access to education, from CREATE research.* Findings from the research have shaped bilateral (DFID, AusAID) and multilateral aid policy (UNICEF, UNESCO, World Bank) and national development strategies in Bangladesh, Ghana, India and South Africa. This case study exemplifies the collaborative approaches described above.

- *Education and peacebuilding in conflict-affected states.* This project was designed to strengthen evidence on the role of education in peace-building processes in conflict contexts. Findings have challenged the approach of UNICEF and have made the case for investment in education as a peace-building strategy. They have been directly employed to create a major programme by the Dutch government that operates in 13 countries (2012–16). This has been achieved through collaboration and communications with key stakeholders.

- *Transforming policy, teachers' practice and students' learning in reading and higher-cognitive talk.* Through working closely with teachers, student teachers and school pupils over an extended period, the research has created opportunities for change in practice at a national and a local level. Nationally, changes to assessment have changed the way in which children learn, and are assessed on, collaborative talk. Locally, results show gains in reading performance and have resulted in the 'Drop Everything and Read' approach. This case study exemplifies collaborative approaches through action and participatory research methods.