

CASE STUDY 2: The UK Local Integrity System

UoA 20

1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)

This case study centres on research, which had an impact on a major piece of local government legislation. The research was a comparative study of the Local Integrity Systems (LIS) of England, Scotland and Wales. The research was commissioned by Standards for England as part of its 2010 strategic review, which was used by the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) in the creation of the *Localism Act 2011*. This Act fundamentally altered the English local integrity framework. The research has subsequently been used by major national research projects in corruption in local government.

2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)

The Local Integrity Systems study was commissioned by Standards for England as part of their strategic review for the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG). The work was commissioned in October 2009 through a competitive tender process and the research contract was worth £40,000. The election of the Coalition Government brought an electoral commitment from DCLG to fundamentally alter the structure and powers of local government in order to better reflect the concept of 'localism'. These myriad changes were manifested in the *Localism Act 2011*. One of the major changes that was considered was to England's local integrity framework, and to that end Standards for England commissioned a comparative research project to form a submission to DCLG. Professor Macaulay then of Teesside University, and a Visiting Professor at the University of Sunderland was the Principal Investigator and project manager; Dr Newman of Sunderland University was constitutional law specialist, researcher and also workshop co-ordinator for the duration of the project; two research assistants (Dr Rosemary Lucas and Dr Susan Poole) were also part of the research team.

The team was awarded the project due to the researchers' track record in local government integrity. Michael Macaulay has spent the last decade researching local integrity in the UK, and his RAE 2008 submission was predicated on research in this field that has been published in *Public Administration Review*, *Local Government Studies* and other internationally recognised journals. That body of knowledge was significantly enhanced by Dr Newman's legal expertise.

The research was conducted between October 2009 and January 2010 and was designed to evaluate the effectiveness of the local integrity frameworks in England, Scotland and Wales. The study utilised a mixed methodology and engaged with practitioners at all levels of local government: from members of local standards committees, to national policy makers from around the UK (e.g. Adjudication Panel, Local Government Ombudsman; Public Service Ombudsman for Wales; Welsh Standards Commissioner; etc.). In total there were approximately 20 practitioners and policy makers involved and they were consulted with via one-on-one semi-structured interviews (for those directly involved in local government) or by participation in a development centre (held in Middlesbrough in December 2010) for those at a national level. The Development Centre allowed high level policy makers to reflect on initial comparative findings and established a direct route to the local government community.

The significance of LIS studies has been recently recognised in two separate symposium issues of leading journals both of which are to be published later in 2013 (*International Review of Administrative Sciences* and *International Journal of Public Administration*), which Macaulay and Newman have contributed towards both as authors and guest editors. Their research has led to a number of journal articles, book chapters and conference papers in internationally recognised publications (please see section 3).

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

Key Publications

1. Macaulay, M, Newman, C and Hickey (2014) "Towards a model of the Local Integrity System", *International Journal of Public Administration* 34, 2 (expected Feb 2014)
2. Macaulay, M and Lawton, A (2014) "Localism in practice: investigating citizen participation and good governance in local government standards of conduct" *Public Administration Review* (expected Jan 2014)
3. Kolthoff, E., Macaulay M. and Anechiarico, F (2013). 'Introduction to special issue on ethics: Integrity systems for safeguarding ethics and integrity of governance', *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 79, 4.
4. Macaulay, M. Hickey and Begum, N (2014) "The Ethical Fault lines of English Local Government" in *Critical perspectives on Public Management* (eds. Liddle, J and Diamond, J)
5. Macaulay, M and Lawton, A (2012) Localism as a contested value: the tension between integrity and democracy in English local government, IRSPM XVI, Rome
6. Newman, C and Macaulay, M (2010) 'Comparing standards frameworks in England, Scotland and Wales' Manchester: Standards for England

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The LIS work has resulted in a number of impacts in terms of national policy and also further research. Our work found that there were a number of key differences between the approaches in England, Scotland and Wales in terms of the relationship between central and local authorities; the nature and definition of local values espoused; the organising process for investigations and complaints; and, the number of allegations and investigations received in each jurisdiction. In particular the report found that in comparison to the number of local councils (including Parish and Town Councils) that were covered by the integrity framework, the ratio of allegations to councillors was low, and the ratio of breaches of the code of conduct were lower still. Crucially our work suggested, however, that for those involved in local government the framework was highly valued despite these low rates, and indeed it was suggested that it might have been a sign that the system worked.

These considerations became crucial in the decision over the fate of the local integrity

framework, which was perceived by the Conservative Party whilst in opposition, as an unnecessary cost.

Standards for England used our comparative research as one of the foundations for the report *Local Standards 2.0 – the proportionality upgrade?* which was distributed to every local authority in England and Wales. (1) and was also presented to the Department of Communities and Local Government. Subsequently the entire local government integrity framework for England in the *Localism Act 2011* was overhauled. Individuals have replaced local standards committees; Standards for England has been abolished; and a new code of conduct for local government has been instituted (2). Through the SfE's work the Sunderland research, therefore, had a direct impact on major changes to UK local government policy and regulation.

The LIS work also led to a number of broader impacts, however which are still being felt today. On the strength of its local government research, for example, members of the Sunderland university team were asked to make submissions to the Committee for Standards in Public Life report *Standards Matter* (3). In addition members of the team were invited to make submissions to the Triennial review of CSPL for the Cabinet Office in 2012 (4). The research was also the basis for further research by Michael Macaulay on the initial impact of the *Localism Act 2011*, on the local framework, which was published by Teesside University in 2012 and was featured as a lead story in the local government magazine *The Municipal Journal* (5)

The LIS has also resulted in a number of international impacts including (a) advising Transparency International New Zealand's work on national and local integrity (6), and (b) being employed as an international expert for the Council of Europe in Ankara, Turkey, to develop integrity audit tools (7).

Perhaps most tellingly the Sunderland research has been cited extensively in Transparency International UK's most recent (October 2013) research on local government corruption risks (8). The TI report was mentioned 13 times in the second reading debate on *Local Audit & Accountability Bill*. John McDonnell MP drew heavily from the report and Brandon Lewis, Under Secretary of State for DCLG, acknowledged the report in the House of Commons. The TI report has also featured extensively in national and international media (9).

In short, the Sunderland LIS research has been led to publications in international academic journals and it has had a direct impact on major legislative changes in UK local government policy. It continues to have a lasting impact in the UK policy arena through providing a foundation for other major research projects such as the TI work, and also in the continuing international reach of the research team. The whole nature of the integrity framework in English local government has now fundamentally altered, and the Sunderland research has played a significant role in these developments.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

1. Standards for England (2010) *Local Standards 2.0 – the proportionality upgrade?* A review of the local standards framework (Manchester: SfE)
2. <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2011/20/contents/enacted>
3. The CSPL's latest report can be found at <http://www.official-documents.gov.uk/document/cm85/8519/8519.pdf>

4. The report of the triennial review can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/committee-on-standards-in-public-life-triennial-review>
5. The Municipal Journal 'Standards Framework Given Thumbs Down' 2 August, 2012
6. Chair (Independent Research Advisory Group (Identifier 1)
7. Council of Europe Integrity and Ethics Adviser (Identifier 2)
8. TIUK (2013) '*Corruption in Local Government: the Mounting Risks*'
<http://www.transparency.org.uk/news-room/press-releases/13-press-release/754-corruption-risk-on-the-rise-in-local-government>
9. Please see <https://webmail.vuw.ac.nz/owa/redirect.aspx?C=rwYdNHQoskW3NM5GxrGlvVq-KJ6KqdAIZP3O8UTU19vMqsiJkMABf09mfqQV-HRYolwYN2LbnCo.&URL=http%3a%2f%2fwww.theguardian.com%2flocal-government-network%2f2013%2foct%2f09%2fcorruption-local-government-robert-barrington> for examples.