

Institution: York St John University
Unit of Assessment: 25 (Education)
<p>a. Context</p> <p>The University context York St John University has a vibrant and developing research community across its various disciplines and is acutely conscious of the need for its research to have beneficial impacts on the external communities it serves. Its commitment to the promotion of research that impacts on the external users of that research is evident from the relevant Key Objective from the University's Research Strategy: 'To engage with and influence users of research, locally, nationally and internationally.' This makes explicit the university's commitment to the pursuit of research which has the broadest possible impact.</p> <p>The Faculty of Education and Theology within which the submitting UoA is located The Faculty of Education and Theology has an active research community with support for the engagement of all academic staff in creative and collaborative research projects that impact on the educational community beyond the walls of the academy. The extensive daily interactions members of academic staff have with the schools in which their students are placed, and the numerous conferences that they attend and deliver at in the company of educational practitioners, ensure that the researchers in the Education UoA are constantly interacting with the major users of their research.</p> <p>The level of research activity within the Faculty has grown significantly during the period 2008-2013 as evidenced by the large number of articles, monographs, edited books and research reports which have been produced in the Faculty over the last few years for a very wide readership. This has been alongside an increased involvement of academic staff in international conferences, high profile public lectures and membership of the editorial boards of international journals; an involvement designed to extend the reach, and thereby the impact of the Faculty's research. The importance of impact is recognised by all researchers in the Faculty and is firmly embedded within its research culture.</p> <p>The Education UoA Leadership of research activity in the Faculty is undertaken by the Professoriate. Research leadership in the submitting unit is provided through the research of Professor Julian Stern, Dean of the Faculty of Education and Theology, Professor Jean McNiff, Professor of Educational Research, and Professor Donald Gillies, Professor of Education Policy. The development of research activity with national and international reach and impact has been an important part of the context during this period too, linked to the University's Internationalisation Strategy, as is evidenced below.</p> <p>Professor Stern has a strong international profile, having been appointed as General Secretary of the International Seminar on Religious Education and Values (ISREV), an association of over 220 religious education scholars from around 36 countries. He is a leading researcher across a range of research areas, the impact of some of which is testified to in the accompanying case study on 'The Influence of Research-Oriented CPD on Religious Education Professionals.' The impact of Professor Stern's research derives from the fact that an intended audience of his eleven books and several dozen articles consists of trainee teachers, experienced teachers and teacher educators – the users of Education research.</p> <p>Professor McNiff came to York St John University in 2008 on a part-time basis. She works with practitioners at York St John and internationally in a range of educational settings, including higher education. Her work is informed by her research, which has extended over a period of thirty years, with the aim of supporting practice-based research that impacts on thinking, policy and practice. Professor McNiff's own accounts of her research, together with the accounts of those whose work her research has impacted on, constitute a global knowledge base, as evidenced in the accompanying impact case study on thinking and practice worldwide across diverse settings, including Norway, New Zealand, the Gulf states, China, South Africa, and the Middle East.</p> <p>Professor Gillies came to York St John University in 2012 with a research profile focused on critical policy studies both within the UK and internationally. The impact beyond academia of his research is impossible to gauge but his recent work on rural depopulation was used as part of a successful campaign to reverse Scottish Government policy on community ownership. His online dictionary of education was launched in 2010 and currently attracts some 15,000 hits annually worldwide</p>

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(www.dictionarofeducation.co.uk). The main target audience is the undergraduate population but the resource has attracted media interest also.

Planning for impact is becoming embedded in our research culture as researchers engage with and influence users beyond the university sector. The case studies demonstrate how our research has impacted on the development of dialogue between researchers, advisors and teachers in schools and enriched their practice. The research outputs across this UoA show many other examples of impact beyond the university sector. These include, for example, the research of Ring (2009) into developing the approaches used by teachers to drawing and meaning-making for young children; the research of Leach (2009) into the role of paraprofessionals in organisational learning; and the research of Brockett (2008) into media influences on attitudes towards different ethnic and religious groups in a multi-faith society.

b. Approach to impact

The approach to impact has been focused on influencing the development of pedagogy, principally in primary and secondary education settings, through practice-based research. Many of our programmes are applied to the workplace, for example our Foundation degrees and postgraduate programmes in Education. Research within this submitting unit is applied to the work of a wide range of professional and voluntary groups and organisational settings as evidenced in the submitted research (for example in the areas of professional learning communities, entrepreneurial learning in the workplace, knowledge creation and organisational learning). The approach has been underpinned by a commitment to research which is relevant to and impacts on practice settings. The range of conferences organised by the Faculty, as cited, for example, in the accompanying case studies, provides evidence of how we seek to reach practitioners with our research and so have a positive impact on their resulting practice.

c. Strategy and plans**Strategy**

Our strategy in UoA 25 is to plan for impact that is personally and professionally transformative for people and organisations. This strategy supports and enables staff researchers and student researchers to develop as reflective practitioners using research as a professional development tool in their own settings. Many of our students are teachers who are carrying out practice-based research on our Masters degree in Practitioner Research, or Teaching Assistants carrying out research in their schools for their BA Education Studies degrees. Our programme validation documents demonstrate, for example, how at postgraduate level the rationale of 'practitioners as researchers' is a common aim of our provision. Teachers and other professionals working in voluntary settings and education or training-related settings undertake research with us as part of their undergraduate and postgraduate studies and, in terms of demonstrating the reach and scope of the impact, our case studies provide evidence for a 'snowball' or 'ripple' effect. This effect can be evidenced through the impact we have on those with whom we work, whose research in turn impacts on their colleagues and students or clients in their settings, thus demonstrating the significant reach of the contribution made to the development of organisational learning and improved practice. Since 2008 we have had teachers and education professionals from several Local Authorities in diverse practice settings on our Postgraduate Certificate/ Postgraduate Diploma/ MA in Practitioner Research and MA in Educational Improvement Development and Change. All have been using practitioner research to impact on the development of practice in their settings and sometimes across a number of settings within cluster groups too, consequently having a wider reach far beyond their own immediate workplaces. One way in which impact evaluation can be built into research design can be seen in Professor Stern's accompanying case study.

Plans for supporting impact

Colleagues have been in receipt of institutional resources such as funding to support them to carry out 'impactful' research of this nature. This has allowed them to have time to visit a variety of settings in which to collect data and finance to cover research expenses. Staff are very generously supported, for example, when they request funding to attend international conferences to disseminate their research to wider audiences.

Research activity for new staff is supported through the opportunity to study the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice which develops their research skills through the pedagogic research undertaken as part of the programme. Participant feedback provides evidence that their knowledge and

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understanding of research grows as a result of this programme and impacts on their work with professionals in the field.

The Faculty has supported the international Value and Virtue conference held annually at York St John University since 2011, planned and organised by Professor McNiff and colleagues to showcase and disseminate postgraduate research studies in the Faculty. It offers great opportunities for networking and wider dissemination of research by staff and research students to an international audience. The Faculty further supported potential research impact by hosting the 6th International Conference on the Social and Moral Fabric of the School in 2010 with delegates from the UK, the USA and Hong Kong. Four York St John UoA 25 academics presented their research at this international conference.

An extensive programme of staff research seminars is organised in the Faculty each year to which Education staff and Visiting Professors have contributed. The research seminars allow for wider dissemination of research, and thus its impact on our peers, and are another means of support for the development of a research culture within the Faculty.

d. Relationship to case studies

Our approach to impact reflects our institutional values as a supportive, creative, critical and reflective community with a commitment to extending the external contribution and impact we make nationally and internationally through our research. The research submitted in the case studies is congruent with the University core value to be a transforming institution in terms of contributing to transformation of life-chances and experiences through our research. The case studies we have submitted demonstrate this through the relevance of the research to practice; to transforming thinking; and to achieving personal and professional betterment.

Professor McNiff's research reflects her desire to enable people to speak for themselves and realise their potentials as practitioner researchers able to develop explanations of their practice. As such her research is transformative both personally and professionally for the practitioner researchers with whom she works.

Professor Stern's research has drawn teachers and researchers together in seminar discussions and his work has influenced new and experienced teachers alike. The Westhill seminar series, running since 2004, has brought together researchers, advisors and teachers working on religious education in UK schools and internationally. These seminars have sought to develop the relationship between researchers and professionals. The longer-term impact of the seminars on participants' own practice (as teachers), on their pupils, on schools (curriculum and ethos) and on the nature or status of religious education is still being evaluated. The next stage of the research project is designed to interview previous teacher-participants in the seminars. The data generated will be used in order to develop a model that can have a wider impact by being used internationally.