

Impact template (REF3a)

<p>Institution: University of Stirling</p>
<p>Unit of Assessment: C25 Education</p>
<p>a. Context</p> <p>Practitioners, policymakers, parents and learners are the principal non-academic beneficiaries of the research undertaken within our two research groups: <i>Curriculum & Pedagogy</i> and <i>Work, Learning & Society</i>. The School's research encompasses pre-school, school, vocational and professional and adult education contexts. It takes place within a wider range of activities including initial teacher education (for primary, secondary and tertiary sectors), continuing professional development, knowledge exchange, and taught postgraduate programmes (including TESOL).</p> <p>Our research impact is related to our areas of expertise. It aims at influencing curriculum innovation and professional education; developing a model for curriculum change (taking account of both curricular purposes and the complexities of the settings into which policies are enacted) that has informed Continuing Professional Development; providing policy and practice guidance and strategies for technology use in early years settings; promoting effective participation in workplace and lifelong learning; and influencing professional practice in relation to pedagogic actions and interactions (including assessment) which support learning both through technology and more broadly. These types of impact can challenge some traditional forms of understanding educational practices and provide structured and focused alternative approaches, therefore supporting changes in thinking and practice.</p> <p>The impact of this research has been local, national and international and has engaged practitioners, policymakers, parents and learners at each stage of education; and it shapes the environment in which we help educate and support the future and current education professions.</p>
<p>b. Approach to impact</p> <p>The research that is generating impact has two distinctive features. The first is a strong engagement with educational and social theory across the School, involving teaching fellows as well as researchers. This has led to the investigation of complex questions, the generation of new insights and the use of theoretical resources to generate alternative forms of understanding and practice. The second involves an innovative methodology, developed by Brown and McIntyre, for understanding how teachers make sense of their classroom practice. This methodology, as well as generating insights which have influenced policy and practice, has been adopted in successive research within the School of Education and is central to one of our case studies.</p> <p>The research groups are the main vehicle for co-ordinating the School's research effort and maximising impact. Each group aims to develop research capacity, among established as well as early career researchers, supporting a range of dissemination activities (including using new social media), and contributes to the School's seminar series by giving presentations and reporting on work in progress or by inviting external speakers. The groups are linked to two outward-facing initiatives, the Laboratory for Educational Theory (TheoryLab) and the research network for Professional Practice, Education and Learning (ProPEL), each of which was supported for its first three years by an internally funded post-doctoral Research Fellow; each draws its membership from across the research groups and involves a range of external research partners. This strong infrastructure is complemented by School-wide support from a dedicated Research Development Manager; a resources manager and administrative support.</p> <p>The approach to impact involves two key strands.</p> <p>(1) <i>Developing and sustaining relationships with professional and policymaking communities in education and in related fields.</i> Our aim has been to undertake innovative research that both informs and drives practice and is responsive to the needs of policymakers, practitioners and the public. Staff are actively encouraged, within each research group, to engage in a range of partnerships and are given resources to support meetings and activities. We provide capacity building, in the form of media training, social media skills development, and writing for different audiences, as well as involving early careers researchers and research postgraduates in engagement activities alongside more experienced colleagues.</p>

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A key feature of our relations with practitioners and policymakers has been their engagement throughout entire research projects, rather than simply disseminating findings on completion of research. Researchers leading each of the case studies engage with practitioners and policymakers in identifying central questions, debating the research design, discussing regular reports of findings and validating their analytical framework. This has been instrumental in assisting the researchers in maximising impact, and we have benefited enormously from these on-going relationships.

Strong associations within education communities have been built and sustained through a programme of events hosted by the School. Those who participated during the assessment period have included local authorities (e.g. Highland, West Lothian, East Lothian, Dumfries and Galloway, Stirling, and Perth & Kinross), schools and teachers. Research links with East Lothian and Highland Councils have led to the commissioning of school-based curriculum development and teacher development in 2012-13. Staff have developed relationships with policy makers such as the General Teaching Council for Scotland, Scottish Qualifications Agency, Skills Development Scotland, Scotland's Adult Learning Partnership and Education Scotland in such a way as to maximise their potential as intermediaries in the research-policy nexus while retaining the autonomy required for high quality research.

Researchers have also developed strong relationships with practitioners and policymakers in related professional fields. These include associations with Voluntary Sector organizations (such as the Workers Educational Association and National Institute for Adult Continuing Education), the then Northern Constabulary (since merged) and Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland, the Scottish Government, the General Teaching Council, the Association for Chartered Teachers and associations of practitioners in social work, medicine and nursing. Individual researchers publish frequently in practitioner forums, from *Adults Learning* to *TES Scotland*. We maintain a TheoryLab blog, and several individuals (staff and research students) also blog and tweet regularly. Individuals have authored invited contributions to blogs maintained by users including NIACE, the WEA and the MacArthur Foundation.

The School contributes significantly to policy development. Edwards was convener of the Scottish Teacher Education Committee (STEC) and co-chair of the National Partnership Group on Teacher Education, Redford was seconded to STEC to co-ordinate development of policy guidance on partnership working, Fenwick is Associate Director of the Scottish Institute for Police Research, and Priestley and Stephen are both involved in high profile seminars with Scottish Government and Education Scotland. Field was seconded to the UK Government Office for Science's Foresight Project on Mental Capital and Well-being as Science Co-ordinator for Education.

(2) Extending the reach of the School's research and its impact at National and International levels. Staff have been encouraged and supported in developing strong national and international networks (through attendance at academic and profession-focussed conferences) and the School has hosted a large number of international visitors. We have also sought to enhance the visibility and impact of our research through conferences and events associated with TheoryLab and ProPEL. These networks also bring international and national perspectives to bear upon and help focus our own research agenda.

As well as providing financial support to staff to build networks, less experienced staff are mentored and often collaborate with senior members of staff to undertake networking activities, especially at International levels. Our staff have benefited enormously from the expertise of Sally Brown and Walter Humes, who are active emeritus members of the School. Staff with varying levels of experience have built and extended networks through conference participation which have led to the development of new research funding bids, collaborative writing and other outputs. Extended networking has contributed to the take-up of the School's research internationally and led to direct impact.

c. Strategy and plans

Our impact strategy has three objectives: i) increasing our own awareness of the impact agenda, ii) supporting impact through partnerships and other mechanisms, and iii) managing and demonstrating impact. We pursue this by encouraging work with non-academic partners through travel funding, speakers from external organisations, and encouragement to include external organisations in grant proposals. We seek to have sustained impact on understanding, policy and practice, based upon our own engagements with research on innovations and implementation

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across the social sciences. Performance is monitored through the research groups, which regularly review impact activity and report to the School's Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee.

The School hosts two outward-facing research networks. ProPEL is concerned with researching professional education and learning, while TheoryLab is concerned with theory in educational research and practice. Both host regular conferences, workshops, doctoral summer schools and other events, involving practitioners and policymakers as well as researchers and doctoral students. ProPEL in particular sets out to build links with a range of professional communities, including (but not limited to) those responsible for education. We encourage use of jointly funded studentships (most recently with Skills Development Scotland).

We expect our researchers to engage with the wider public over educational research, and this is built into and monitored through our appraisal scheme; we provide training to staff and research students in media relations and the use of social media. The impact policies of ESRC and AHRC help shape our engagement with professionals and policymakers, and provide a foundation for evaluating success. In turn, Professor Fenwick is contributing to the wider debate around impact through her membership of ESRC Council.

Priority actions include the further development of partnerships with policy makers and practitioners at local and national levels; extending our own research expertise in innovation and implementation; developing the visibility and reach of our research through centres, seminars, publications, conferences and increasing the stream of international visitors, whom we seek to involve with professionals and policy makers in Scotland. Both case studies were carried out within the *Curriculum & Learning* research group, which is comparatively well established. The *Work, Learning & Society* research group is relatively new, and we expect its impact to develop significantly. Future plans include building our capacity for documenting evidence of impact and further developing ways in which the fields of practice in education and learning can help shape our research questions, topics and approaches.

d. Relationship to case studies

The two case studies indicate systematic and sustained impact over a long period and this has been supported through the School's strongly resourced and supported approach. The impact in each of the case studies is both immediate and cumulative and while drawing on earlier work, it is based largely on research conducted within the current REF period. Our first case study, *Curriculum Change and School-based Curriculum Development*, was influenced by the School's earlier work on teachers' understandings of their own classroom practice, a study led by Prof. Sally Brown. The methodology developed and the insights from the research reported in Brown's study, *Making Sense of Teaching*, also shaped the research on pre-school education and reported in the second case study, *Young Children Learning with Technology at Home and Preschool*.