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| Institution: University of Aberdeen |
| Unit of Assessment: Education |
| a. Context |
| <p>The School of Education's research profile is diverse and multidisciplinary, focussing on a range of educational settings within Primary and Secondary School education, Community education and related professions. Our research seeks to evidence how children and adults learn best at different stages and ages, and to identify optimal conditions for maximising learning in a rapidly changing world. Our research impacts on local, national and international government policy decisions, development agencies such as Creative Scotland and NGOs such as the National Autistic Society.</p> <p>The output from our three overlapping research areas, <i>Pedagogy and Innovation</i>, <i>Professional Learning and Teacher Education</i>, and <i>Communities and Partnerships</i>, impacts on and benefits learners, adult and youth community groups, social services and related professions in the following ways: 1. Providing a model for initial teacher education which has informed policy recommendations for redesigning the curriculum for early career teachers at a national level e.g. Scottish Teachers for a New Era initiative (STNE) 2. Providing research-informed resources for teacher development adopted internationally e.g. Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) 3. Strengthening partnerships with Local Authorities and schools through collaborative practitioner-research e.g. Arts as a Tool for Learning across the Curriculum (ATLAC), Inclusive Practice Project (IPP) 4. Enabling new ways of learner-teacher collaboration by providing processes and digital tools for joint analysis of lessons e.g. Lesson Observation and Critical Incident Technique (LOCIT). 5. Empowering adult, youth and community groups and 'hard to reach' members of society to be more confident, inclusive, organised, co-operative and influential within those communities e.g. Community Aspirations Project, Pathways to a Healthy Living and the Centre for Research into Families and Relationships and MOOCS (Massive Open Online Courses). 6. Empowering stakeholders in Social Services and related professions to make informed decisions and work effectively e.g. caring for Autistic children in school and cross-services care for 'looked after' children.</p> |
| b. Approach to impact |
| <p>The unit has four main approaches to impact: (1) maximising benefits for a broad range of stakeholders; (2) building and maintaining close contact with policy makers thus maximising the relevance of our research for these groups; (3) establishing and engaging in research with non-academic and professionally mixed groups enabling creative synergies and establishing a greater range of sites for dissemination of findings to relevant individuals and organisations; (4) systematic support for staff to develop their research and dissemination skills through thematic groups and collaborative activity within the School and across the University.</p> <p>1. Maximising the benefits of our research to practitioners and professional bodies</p> <p>Our research has to be accessible and applicable to practice settings from classrooms and social spaces to policies and government agencies. The professional-public-academic interface therefore is fundamental to our core work. The School promotes the principle of collaborative research partnerships in which the relevance of the research is co-planned at the onset with active involvement of end-users and practitioner stakeholders. For example, the Community Learning and Development (CLD) Statistics and Stories Research (McArdle) involved practitioners through participatory and applied research design approaches. Further benefits ensue from collaborative work between teachers and teacher educators, between teachers, learners and researchers. For example, in the Interacting for Teaching and Learning in CLIL (ITALIC) study, 22 teachers and 650 learners were involved as co-researchers (Coyle) with the outputs of the research conceptualised on a needs-driven and issues-led basis.</p> <p>The majority of researchers in Education are qualified, experienced teachers in sectors other than the university and bring with them their field experiences and understanding of how their research is of relevance to the professional contexts. In Education, active researchers work alongside colleagues who are driven by professional interests, and wish to develop research in and on their professional practice. There is continual collaboration and interaction between professional and academic researchers, as evidenced by STNE's Action Research for Practitioners network supported by and conducted in collaboration with the local authorities.</p> |

There is increasing successful involvement in Knowledge Transfer Partnerships for example: with Aberdeen City for creating an interface for education-relevant data mining (**Coyle**); and with Aberdeenshire, Moray, Highland, Orkney, Shetland and the Western Isles using Participatory Action Research (PAR) to explore how MOOCs can meet the CPD needs of 'hard to reach' sessional and part time CLD workers in the public and voluntary sectors (**McArdle**). Innovative approaches to research mean that those who might otherwise be excluded from benefiting or participating are brought into the frame (e.g. **Coyle's** pupils as researchers initiative subsequently used by Florian, Spratt; and the RESPECT project where communities set the research agenda (**McArdle**).

Researchers actively participate in high-profile national professional events such as the Scottish Learning Festival to engage with local authority partners, Scottish Government, schools and colleges in order to identify future needs.

2. Maximising the relevance of our research to policy makers

Members of the unit work closely with a range of government agencies and policy makers to explore the effects of policy implementation. These include Scottish Government Food and Health Excellence Group; Scottish Qualifications Authority; Scotland's National Implementation Group for Outdoor Learning; Natural England; Education Scotland Working Group on a Professional Development Framework for Adult Literacies; Scottish CLD Standards Council; Creative Scotland. Research which provides practitioner perspectives also influences guidance for new policies underpinned by robust research (e.g. **Coyle**, Scottish Government Advisory panel on Language Education resulting in policy recommendations, 2012). Our research continues to inform national and international guidelines: Florian and Rouse informed guidelines produced by the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education; **Coyle** authored the National Guidelines for Content and Language Integrated Learning for England in 2010 for DES as well as key policy documents in Sri Lanka; **Gray** contributes to Natural England's Research Strategy for Learning in Natural Environments. The STNE initiative (**Gray, Colucci-Gray, Mtika, Shanks**) was specifically mentioned in a literature review commissioned by the Scottish Government and conducted by Glasgow University which subsequently informed the influential Donaldson Review of Teacher Education.

Staff are increasingly commissioned to undertake reviews (e.g. Spratt for NHS Scotland into sex and relationship education in primary schools, 2009; **Coyle** for World Bank for Sri Lankan Government into models for bilingual education, 2012). Representation on, for example, the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (Florian), led to a White Paper for the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education on improving outcomes for students with disabilities, launched at a series of briefings on Capitol Hill, the White House and in the US Department of Education in May 2011.

3. Establishing and engaging in research with non-academic and professionally mixed groups

We actively involve practitioners in the design, execution and interpretation of our research, for example, through membership of advisory or steering groups (ATLAC, STNE, IPP, Partnership Placement Project (PPP), Interacting for Teaching And Learning In CLIL (ITALIC)). This distinct approach ensures that our research is not only relevant to the practitioner field but is also owned by them. Such ownership can lead to incremental benefits e.g. the rapid uptake of **Coyle's** LOCIT digital analytic tool (Learning-Oriented Critical Incident Technique) by teachers and their pupils in a virtual space, allowing practice-based evidence to be shared across professional networks and for teachers and pupils to use their own data to improve classroom learning.

Close collaboration with local authorities has led to seconded researcher posts (e.g. STNE project) and teacher-researcher scholarships (e.g. school-based research into the effect of iPads on pupil learning).

A significant amount of our research portfolio involves practitioner-oriented research which facilitates user engagement through integrated participatory approaches. A useful illustration is **Mtika's** PPP study working with seven local authorities, schools, teachers, student teachers and university tutors to study the implementation of an enhanced partnership approach to support

professional learning and development in Teacher Education.

4. Systematic Support for Staff

A commitment to sharing research development manifests itself in discussion groups, training days, seminars, blogs and virtual networking. Staff within the School of Education are supported through a research mentoring scheme, regular seminars and research focused school fora, each of which addresses ways in which our research can inform professional learning and professional contexts. Research methods training includes support for members and partners in keeping abreast with new and evolving theories relevant to both applied and scientific approaches to research. Research skills training days are linked to engagement with users and maximising the impact of the research e.g. through teacher action research initiatives (e.g. STNE) and participatory processes.

The University has a strong Communications Team which helps with the dissemination of research findings. This work was expanded in 2012 through the only Research Council UK Public Engagement with Research Catalyst award in Scotland (£300k). Researchers actively seek new networks to disseminate their work with emphasis on follow-on studies to maximise impact. In addition, the university’s drive to encourage interdisciplinary collaboration has resulted in extending our potential beneficiaries through the University’s Pathways to Healthy Living Theme. For example, PhD studentships have been funded with the Rowett Institute of Nutrition and Health and the College of Life Science and Medicine. **(McArdle)**

c. Strategy and plans

Our strategy is to capitalise on impact by ensuring the principles of impact define how relevant and appropriate data are collected, ‘translated’ and disseminated. We ensure that specific links between research outputs and research impact are identifiable. We are committed to working with professional partners to create new opportunities for professional and academic researchers at all stages of their careers to engage actively with the impact agenda. Our goal, therefore, is to optimise the impact of our work by participating fully in inclusive partnerships and community engagement. In so doing we continue to engage all our students – both undergraduates and postgraduates - in practitioner or applied research during their lifelong professional learning, so that through a range of collaborative activities with both applied and theoretical researchers, we can find mutual benefits. We plan for students, staff and outside partners, to understand the importance of making research accessible in order to promote advancement in all kinds of learning. We will continue to maximise the publicity resulting from our work through professional, community and policy-maker engagement activities, social networking and web applications, to ensure that our work informs current thinking. Liaison with government bodies and NGOs will continue to develop so that our expertise continues to inform important decisions in both policy and practice. The unit will continue to develop its impact strategy by increasing cohesion between research themes and research projects, to enable individual researchers to contribute to, and expand on, the collective impact of research within the particular themes.

d. Relationship to case studies

The two selected case studies exemplify our approach to the impact of our research across a range of stakeholders involving both policies and practices in education. We have chosen the case studies as exemplars of our work which demonstrate how impact can benefit not only those initially targeted in the research but how building on stakeholder engagement and confidence can lead to new beneficiaries across diverse contexts. The case studies provide evidence of how when working towards a fundamental goal in education (i.e. to enhance and improve learning) research not only needs to take account of contexts and policies but must make accessible the implications of the research to those who are able to operationalise the changes. Hence both case studies demonstrate how ‘translating’ research into *accessible* and *professionally appropriate* forms involves reaching the gatekeepers of learning (i.e. teachers and future teachers). We believe that the case studies exemplify our commitment to participatory partnerships and community engagement.