

## Impact template (REF3a)

<b>Institution:</b> University of Worcester (UW)
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 25 - Education
<p><b>a. Context</b></p> <p>The central focus of the submitting unit is on producing impactful research; that is, influencing the experiences, relationships and perceptions of those working in schools and other educational settings, with an emphasis on the utility and application of research to improve understanding, policy and professional practice. Much of the research generated by the submitting unit is applied in nature and is designed to be of benefit to non-academic research users. Key beneficiaries include head teachers, teachers and teaching assistants, student teachers, school governors, carers/parents and the post-compulsory sector. Findings from the unit's research is used by policy-makers at local, regional and national level e.g. local authority advisors and the former General Teaching Council of England (GTCE), National College for School Leadership (NCSL), National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL), Centre for British Teachers (CfBT), Training and Development Agency (TDA) and Parliamentary Select Committees (Brown; Robertson). There is a wide-ranging body of work which has been a consequence of the strategic development of research culture, staffing and operational support. This has been co-ordinated through research groupings, both within Education and in collaboration with colleagues from other areas of the University of Worcester (UW). An example of the latter includes the relationships with the Institute of Sport and Exercise Science (reported in UoA 26) which have led to the development and completion of research into reflective practice, physical education and access for students with disabilities. Likewise, Education has associations with the Institute of Health and Society including collaboration to provide PhD study (Kington) and research into health education/literacy in primary schools and perspectives of children with profound and complex learning needs (Dominic Upton). The submitting unit is part of an Institute of Education which works on a day to day basis with over 750 schools and education settings and our research findings impact directly on the education of children and professionals within these partnerships.</p>
<p><b>b. Approach to impact</b></p> <p>The University's Strategic Plan (2007-12), under the broad heading <i>Generating Knowledge and Promoting Enterprise</i>, identified the following key objective: "to support the development and expand the reach of our areas of research excellence, in particular interdisciplinary and multi-professional research and consultancy, with social and/or community identified impacts". This objective is reflected strongly in the approach to impact adopted by the submitting unit over the REF period. The strategy for Education research has reflected the ambition of the University's plan, with a fundamental goal being to: "Ensure that our work is academically sound and has an applied impact on local, regional, national and international services". Our focus was, and is, on developing locally derived, inclusive projects able to produce outcomes of national and international significance and reach.</p> <p>Research through collaborative partnerships has been a key feature of our approach to having impact. Researchers in this unit have worked in collaboration with: education and child care providers (e.g. practitioner-based inquiry projects conducted with staff in schools which form part of our partnership); educational bodies and government agencies (e.g. an HEA-funded workshop focused on developing a research-led culture in post-92 education departments); and charities (e.g. a CfBT-funded collaborative project with the University of Oxford explored factors associated with being an inspirational and effective teacher). Foskett (2010) worked with partners in Universities across the South African Development Community on an EU funded project into capacity building in demography which had impact on the demographic policies in the region, and on the higher education curriculum in African countries. Such projects are producing research that has a significant impact on their respective stakeholders. We have also received support from partners to offer studentships to produce clear, impactful research. For example, the Lankelly Chase Foundation and Vestia Community Trust are supporting a PhD studentship to explore the impact of interdisciplinary payment services on families with severe and multiple deprivation. This work will be disseminated both nationally and internationally and will benefit target families,</p>

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commissioners of health, education and social care services, charitable organisations and, ultimately, their service users.

Findings and recommendations of exploratory, small-scale research projects have demonstrably contributed to the operation and development of local services (for example developing research informed school-to-school support, leadership development (Hughes, Whittingham), effective classroom practice (Kington), special educational needs (Woolley, Bracken) and the deployment of teaching assistants in Taunton (Carroll) and Dudley (Whittingham), and the robust methodology that has underpinned the research and implementation of the recommendations has provided for the simultaneous local and international dissemination of results (for example, with school leaders from Saudi Arabia, South Korea and Canada (Whittingham)).

Research from the submitting unit has had significant impact nationally and on local communities by researchers working closely with service users. For example, work with local schools on creative writing (MacLusky and Cox, 2011), a study of teaching assistants (Carroll, 2013), and a pilot with Nottingham City Council (Kington, 2013) impacted on the provision of funded nursery places for two-year olds from disadvantaged families. Members of staff have developed close links with colleagues from the user groups, inviting them to participate on research advisory groups, and actively encouraging the relevance and value of our research to be disseminated to the wider society. For example, practitioner research groups are well established in three secondary schools across the region, developing evidence-based knowledge and understanding to inform practice. Further, Education has developed a Research Digest (<http://www.worcester.ac.uk/discover/education-research.html>) through which research conducted by staff, practitioners and students is disseminated to all partnership schools and other stakeholders.

There is an active dissemination strategy that emphasises and values, not only the traditional peer-reviewed article, but also the professional journal article to increase the reach of research findings. Researchers use active networks – locally, nationally and internationally - to promote the value of research, disseminate findings and to engage with relevant communities to inform better solutions. Staff from the submitting unit have run several dissemination events (e.g. the Partnership Awards), presented at academic and practitioner conferences and have fully engaged with partners in running seminars and sessions where research findings can be promoted more fully and the impact of it more clearly articulated (e.g., <http://www.worcester.ac.uk/discover/research-focus-2013-people-policy-practice.html>). One example of evidence of an outcome with international significance is the receipt of the BERA Sage Practitioner Research Award 2013 by Rachel Barrell and Sarah Purcell (<http://www.worcester.ac.uk/discover/university-staff-pick-up-teacher-training-award.html>) for an action research study which involved the design, implementation and evaluation of a collaborative teaching programme to address a lack of information literacy (IL) teaching for undergraduates.

The unit's research strategy emphasises the requirement on all research active staff to attend appropriate conferences, disseminate research findings and collaborate with colleagues from user groups. Support comes from a number of institutional resources. The Communication and Partnership department routinely plays an important role in the dissemination of research activities to user groups and the wider public. In addition, support is provided for individuals wishing to present their research at conferences and seminars and ensure that research findings are disseminated via electronic and web resources (e.g. <http://www.worcester.ac.uk/discover/inspire-research-magazine.html> and <http://www.worcester.ac.uk/researchportal/672.htm>).

Another key part of the strategy is the approach to staffing. Emphasis is placed on the importance of employing staff with a significant track record of undertaking research with impact and also practitioners with developing research profiles. For example the recent appointments of Dr Colin Howard and Genea Alexander: Howard has explored the benefits of new school builds on teacher identity, motivation and job satisfaction; and Alexander's research focuses on the impact of pupil-selected singing choices as part of music education in primary schools.

### c. Strategy and plans

In the new Strategic Plan (2013-18), UW identifies as part of its mission statement its continued commitment to foster research with the potential to achieve major social impact. UW has a strong regional focus and it seeks to have a transformative effect on Worcestershire and more broadly the West Midlands, although this does not limit its drive to have impact nationally or internationally. The mission and the success of the approaches outlined above have informed the development of the strategy for achieving impact within the submitting unit. Thus, a key part of the Education strategy is to develop partnerships and collaborations that will nurture impactful research.

Throughout the period, it has been our policy that commissioned research will result in publication and dissemination to ensure it impacts on services, communities and people e.g. local dissemination to school teachers, local authority stakeholders, parents/carers and school governors. Much of the research in the unit has been driven by the needs of professionals, practitioners or service users. Future work will continue to be in partnership with education providers, charities, educational bodies and government agencies.

The current Education research strategy emphasises the importance of research having significant and enduring impact on education policy and practice. Newly appointed staff are expected to show how they will contribute to this aim. For example, two principal lecturers with an applied focus to their work have recently been appointed. As part of its longer term research development, the Institute of Education has recently appointed an Associate Head (Research) (Woolley) who, with other key members of research staff, will develop a strategy for educational research which has both reach and significance in the period.

Over the past two years in particular, strategy has included the development of school-based groups undertaking action research projects and other research in order to support school improvement and staff development (Hughes, Whittingham, Messenger). This activity is being developed to facilitate clusters of schools to share research findings and disseminate best practice in line with government policy. A further example is the development of an innovative research-informed approach to establishing effective behaviour management in secondary schools which is being disseminated through consultancy.

### d. Relationship to case studies

The two case studies are built upon two areas of longstanding research in the unit:

- Case study 1, **Enhancing Learner Development by Influencing PDP policy and Changing PDP Practice**, is focused on the student experience in the Higher Education (HE) sector, reflecting the on-going work of the Educational Development Unit;
- Case study 2, **Enhancing Practice and Influencing Policy in Vocational Education and Training**, is underpinned by research reflective practice, an area of research focus since the late 1990s and remains so.

Both case studies are good examples of how our research feeds into both policy and practice. Case study 1 has impacted on national guidance provided by the Quality Assurance Agency. Case study 2 has impacted on QA guidance relating to Vocational Education and Training (VET) at the European level. In both case studies, the research has fed into practice by changing and enhancing practitioner activity in (HE and VET respectively).