

<p><b>Institution: Staffordshire University</b></p>
<p><b>Unit of Assessment: 25 - Education</b></p>
<p><b>a. Context</b> While the Institute for Education Policy Research (IEPR) at Staffordshire University is located within the Faculty of Business, Education and Law, its research is multi-disciplinary, and its membership spans disciplines such as Economics, Business, Psychology, Sociology, Science and Health. Educational research conducted by members of the IEPR has always been closely linked to government policy and the work done in schools, further education (FE) colleges, higher education institutions (HEIs) and the community. Since 2008, we have worked closely with partners in educational establishments and the community, and researchers at other HEIs and other organisations, and have conducted research which has resulted in extended research programmes. For example, our 2007-2008 project carried out for the Sutton Trust (Davies, P.; Slack, K.; Hughes, A.; Mangan, J.; and Vigurs, K. '<i>Knowing where to study? Fees, bursaries and fair access</i>'), which investigated the impact of financial considerations on 16-20 year-old students' decisions about participation in higher education, led to a continuing research programme with three academic papers published relating to student decision-making and fair access. This included a collaborative project with Sheffield Hallam University in 2008, funded by DIUS/SPA (McCaig, C.; Bowers-Brown, T.; Slack, K.; Barley, R.; Adnett, N.; Cripps, C.; Wolstenholme, C.; and Willis, B. '<i>Fair Admissions to Higher Education: A Review of the Implementation of the Schwartz Report Principles Three Years on</i>'), which reviewed the implementation of the Schwartz Report, to assess the changes in admissions processes in higher education to support the Report's five principles, and resulted in a series of good practice guides. A third project in this programme was funded by HEFCE and conducted in collaboration with Oakleigh Consultancy in 2010 (Renfrew, K.; Baird, H.; Green, H.; Davies, P.; Hughes, A.; and Slack, K.; '<i>Understanding the information needs of users of public information about higher education</i>').</p> <p>Not only have we carried out research recognised for Research Councils' funding, but we have undertaken a great deal of external work identified as consultancy or teaching which is grounded in research. We have also drawn on University funding to work with local schools or other Faculties within the University. For example, we have recently used the HEFCE Transition Fund to work on two projects with colleagues in the Faculty of Computing, Engineering and Science to ascertain how work-based learning initiated with a private and a public organisation could be extended to other similar establishments. These two projects were the result of a collaboration developed with these colleagues during an earlier EU-funded project. Also, we have used the University's Innovation and Collaboration Vouchers scheme to examine best practice in a local school that introduced an integrated curriculum some years ago. The final report of this project has now been sent to our local MP, Joan Walley, who motivated us to undertake this project; and to Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Local Authorities, to be sent to all local schools to highlight best practice in one school and to encourage other schools to emulate it. Other examples include three projects undertaken with the University's Widening Participation fund to consider information, advice and guidance for higher education students, and a new project funded by the VC's Teaching-led Research fund to investigate the teaching and learning experiences of PhD students.</p>
<p><b>b. Approach to impact</b></p> <p><b>i) Impact on policy and public debate and awareness</b></p> <p>Much of the impact of research in Education is social, rather than economic. Most research studies that we undertake have a strong social justice focus and aim to improve the life chances of its participants, and to have a positive impact on others in similar groups. Our approach to impact, therefore, is long-term and is focused on lifelong impact on students, teachers, parents, communities and other stakeholders. For this reason, the impact is subtle and intangible. Nevertheless, we constantly seek ways to improve the impact of our work and publicise it as much as possible. The impact of our research is on education policy, practice, and public awareness and debate. As noted in our case studies, the impact of our work is evident in the citation of our research in the media and by quangos, and the use of our research to justify and develop government policy. For example, in our research on Social Inclusion in Education, our final report on the project funded by the Sutton Trust (Davies, P., Slack, K., Hughes, A., Mangan, J. and Vigurs, K. (2008) <i>Knowing where to Study? Fees, Bursaries and Fair Access</i>) has been cited by the Guardian front page headline, OFFA, and the Higher Education Academy. It has also been referred to in Alan Milburn's report, '<i>Unleashing Aspiration: the final report of the panel on fair access to the professions</i>', and cited in the BIS research paper, '<i>The role of finance in the decision-</i></p>

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*making of higher education applicants and students*'. Another example is the final report of our project funded by HEFCE (Davies, P.; Hughes, A.; Slack, K. and Oakleigh Consulting Limited (2010) *Understanding the Information Needs of Users of Public Information about Higher Education*) which was one of the two studies commissioned by HEFCE on which most of the proposals in its November 2010 document, '*Public information about Higher Education*' are based. This report was also cited by the Government White Paper, '*Putting Students at the Heart of Higher Education*' (BIS, 2011). Further, the findings of the report were mentioned in the media (e.g. Times Higher Education, 2012). This is a high impact study on which the Key Information Sets (KIS), provided through the UCAS site and elsewhere to encourage informed choice of higher education courses, are based.

We have also raised the impact of our research on School Performance. The final report on our project funded by the ESRC (Davies, P.; Adnett, N.; Telhaj, S.; Coe, R.; and Hutton, D., *Within school competition and pupil achievement*) was widely discussed in national debates on resourcing and governance of UK schools, such as in national newspapers (e.g. Guardian), BBC (Radio 4), and Times Higher Education. It also generated interest in Europe as our methodology was used by the Belgian Healthcare Knowledge Centre that advises and educates on healthcare policies; and international interest from Australia, which has led to further research linked to education policy. The fact that the report was used by a healthcare knowledge centre illustrates the importance of our work in multidisciplinary contexts. Moreover, the final report of our project funded by the DCSF (Pugh, G.; Mangan, J.; and Gray, J.; *Resources and attainment at Key Stage 4: Estimates from a dynamic methodology*) was referred to in *Parliamentary Questions* in the Summer of 2009. It was considered widely in the media: Radio 4 Today programme, five national newspapers and the Times Educational Supplement. The findings were also presented in a keynote symposium at the British Educational Research Association conference, where the discussant was a senior representative from the Government Economic Service.

**ii) Impact through teaching**

Another way in which we enhance the impact of our research is through teaching. Most of our master's and doctoral students are practising teachers, lecturers or managers in schools, FE colleges or HEIs. We subscribe to evidence-based teaching, and one of the important ways in which we demonstrate the impact of our research is by using examples of our research in our teaching. In this way students learn about staff research and use its findings in their work contexts on the one hand, and acquire skills to conduct similar research on the other. Thus, our research has an impact on the day-to-day and long term practice of education professionals.

**iii) Impact through research**

We constantly seek the support of the University-wide Enterprise and Commercial Development team to target funding organisations in the public and charitable sectors to conduct research that can have a high impact. Since 2008, we have carried out research funded by government departments, charitable organisations, and internal University funding - which draws on funding provided by HEFCE, for example through HEIF - which is distributed on a competitive basis after submission of proposals to the University. The findings of this research are disseminated through talks and seminars to practitioners, either at their place of work, or seminars at the University to which practitioners and policy makers are invited. Further, we draw on the Faculty's staff development budget to raise awareness about our work at national seminars and international conferences, which are attended by practitioners and policy makers as well as academics. This can sometimes result in interdisciplinary research collaborations or further funding.

**iv) Impact through publication**

Within the Faculty, staff are encouraged through mentoring, writing teams, IEPR symposia and Faculty seminars to publish, disseminate, and improve the impact of, their research. Our research has resulted in highly-cited publications, for example, Nick Adnett's principal-authored paper in *Higher Education Quarterly* (2011) in Routledge's Highly-Cited Research Collection; invited seminars and workshops, for example, Tehmina Basit's seminar at the University of Southampton (2011), and workshop at the University of the West of England (2012) both attended by practitioners as well as academics; and invitations for research collaboration, for example, Jean Mangan's collaborative work in Australia (2013). We also demonstrate the impact of our research through writing and editing volumes that include research-based chapters; for example Tehmina Basit's co-edited book, Basit, T.N. and Tomlinson, S. (eds.) (2012) *Social Inclusion and Higher Education* comprises chapters by researchers in the UK, US and Australia. The book not only has

an international focus, but is also interdisciplinary, as it includes the work of sociologists and anthropologists as well as educationalists.

**c. Strategy and plans**

**i) University Plan**

To a large extent, our future research strategy is dictated by our University plan. *Securing Successful Futures: Staffordshire University Plan 2012-2017* highlights the importance of excellent research. It points to the need for ‘a deep and real commitment to knowledge generation and exchange through scholarship and research’ (p.4), thus making ‘a difference to the curriculum we offer and to the businesses that engage with us’ (p.9). It focuses on ‘ensuring that our applied research and knowledge transfer activities are business and commercial focused and delivering impact and revenue for the University’ (p.18). Accordingly, one of the Staff Key Targets is ‘Improved performance against national measures of research excellence (including the REF, outputs produced, conference papers delivered, impact upon professions, practice and academia) through increased investment and support for key thematic areas of research excellence’ (p.22). We aim to implement the strategy and fulfil the targets stated in our University plan to improve our future research, and to prepare for the REF 2020.

**ii) Evidence-based teaching**

We will maintain our research-informed-teaching stance and use the methodologies and findings of our research in our teaching so that our students, most of whom are education practitioners, can replicate the research in their work contexts. Further, we will be more proactive in using our research to improve the curriculum and pedagogy for the benefit of our students, and our partners in schools, FE colleges and other organisations.

**iii) Impact evaluation**

We submit research proposals for open calls and also in response to invitations to tender. Our future research plans include the submission of research proposals to the ESRC, the EU, and major charitable organisations. Research funded by these funding bodies now has to demonstrate the impact of the research on user groups as an essential aspect of the project. This will enable us to be heedful of building mechanisms within research proposals so that showing the impact of the research takes as much priority as the research itself. As noted above, though the impact of Educational research is likely to be apparent in the longer term, one of the things that we have initiated is to approach groups on whom our research is likely to have an impact and to undertake an ‘impact evaluation’ of our research in the short term and thereafter. We already offer to present our work, for example, at the school or college where the research has been undertaken, though this offer has not always been accepted, but we now make it a necessary aspect of our research and present the findings at the participating institutions at the end of every research project as a matter of course.

**iv) Dissemination**

Our Faculty newsletter, *Enterprising Times*, which includes details of our recent research activities, is published six times a year, and is distributed extensively within the University, to partner organisations, and to local MPs amongst others. We publicise our research reports widely, and will carry on doing so. We will continue to enhance the impact of our research through research seminars, conference presentations, and publications, and by publicising our work to user groups. We will also be more proactive about submitting press releases on our research and in using the Marketing and Public Relations department in the University to disseminate our research regularly

**d. Relationship to case studies** Our two case studies on ‘Social Inclusion in Education’ and ‘School Performance’ exemplify our research focus and incorporate the research of IEPR researchers at Staffordshire University. Our case studies offer examples of our approach to generating impact through the use of qualitative and quantitative methodologies and mixed-methods research. These two case studies illustrate what we have noted above with regard to our approach to impact and our strategy and plans for supporting impact. The case studies show the ways in which we have been able to have an impact on government policy and on public debate on educational issues, thus affecting a wide audience. For example, the outcomes of the recent Select Committee Report on IAG, ‘*Careers guidance for young people: The impact of the new duty on schools*’ emphasise the poor, patchy nature of IAG following the policy changes. This makes our work with the IAG networks particularly valuable given this policy context and the levels of deprivation in some of our schools and colleges.