

Institution: Leeds Metropolitan University

Unit of Assessment: 25 (Education)

a. Context

The context for understanding the impact of the Unit is given by its historic Centre structure which was based in four previous centres: the Centre for Research into Childhood, the Centre for Pedagogy and Professional Learning, the Centre for Academic Practice and Research in Internationalisation, and the Centre for Research into Higher Education, which were brought together in 2011 to form the Centre for Social and Education Research across the Life Course (SERL) <http://www.leedsmet.ac.uk/research/centre-for-social-and-educational-research-across-the-life-course-serl.htm>. SERL is a university-wide centre which draws together researchers and research students working in Childhood and Early years, teacher education and schooling, and higher education research amongst other areas, and who have common social justice concerns and an interest in developing participatory methodologies.

The underlying approach to impact across the Unit is: to develop close and long-lasting relationships with non-academic service users, for example in local authority departments and voluntary and community sector organisations; to collaborate with these external partners to implement findings from research and disseminate good practice; to develop capacity for these external partners to undertake and implement their own research; to inform changes to policy and practice; and to disseminate via multiple media to ensure that research findings are accessible to a wide audience especially non-academic partners. However, it is also useful to delineate the major non-academic users in three areas: Childhood and Early Years, schooling and higher education.

In Childhood and Early Years, academics undertake and disseminate research that demonstrates a commitment to children's rights, child-centered approaches and social justice for children. This involves encouraging research that benefits children and young people. They also promote children's participation in research as researchers. The major non-academic user groups are the varied professionals working in early education and in childhood including both statutory and non-statutory sectors involving children and young people, including education, social care, youth justice, community work, housing, immigration, health and day care. Work exploring models of professionalism and professional knowledge for early childhood educators, in collaboration with other higher education institutions and with local authorities departments, has been disseminated through journal articles, research monographs and academic text books. Other users include advocates for children currently caught up in border controls and those supporting children and young people in care of the local authority.

In teacher education and schooling the major non-academic user groups are local teacher practitioners in schools and local authority officials in Leeds City Council's Children's Services Division. The 'Leading Learning' project, for example, is designed to deliver focussed qualitative and quantitative studies of the effects of disadvantage and deprivation on pupil progress. The researchers work directly with teacher partners to develop teacher-led research and teachers are encouraged to present their findings, conclusions and recommendations to colleagues and school leadership teams, and to feed into contextualised school improvement plans. This work is complemented by further work with teachers related to social inclusion, special educational needs and citizenship education.

Non-academic users in the areas of higher education research include the Higher Education Academy and its previous Subject Centres. The HEA is committed to improving the experiences of the beneficiaries of higher education namely students and should, therefore, be understood as non-academic users in relationship to the research undertaken. Other non-academic user groups include those organisations that support disadvantaged groups who need support in order to enter higher education for example EQUAL 1 (European Social Fund), the Refugee Council, and the former Aimhigher, as well as the individuals themselves, including refugees.

This strand also incorporates work on internationalisation of the curriculum led by Caruana. In the context of research into higher education other university teachers, both nationally and internationally, are clearly users of our research in their work in supporting students. While they are academics, their status as 'users' is different in the case of higher education research as their

engagement parallels teachers as users of research in the school sector in terms of benefitting students.

b. Approach to impact

The Unit's approach to impact is based on the social justice concerns that motivates and inspires its research. It is, therefore, integral to how Unit members think about their research rather than an add-on. This affects the way research is designed and conducted, and the utilisation of participatory methodologies as well as the dissemination strategies employed.

For example, the priority for all concerned with the 'Leading Learning' work in schools is to find the common ground around 'improving performance' and 'closing the attainment gap', and to bring together academic partners with practitioner researchers and local authority officials. This requires 'on the go' joint critical reflections on the experience of collaboratively negotiating, organizing and instituting a professional learning community to improve the quality of teaching and learning for inner-city pupils who experience poverty and deprivation, and the building of an evidence bank to inform professional conversations and decision-making by power-brokers locally and nationally. The approach involves seeking out school-university partnership opportunities, voluntary work on schools' Boards of Governors and sub-committees, and community engagement in campaigns against school closures, and in creating the circumstances that allows partners to cross the boundaries of professional activity, forge relationships, and engage in joint work. Negotiations with School Heads secured agreement for pilot studies and the development of teachers' action inquiries on self-identified concerns peculiar to the School but in line with its needs and priorities. In turn, academic partners co-construct activities for practitioner research with teacher partners, and joint data collection and analyses, reviews of relevant research and readings, findings, conclusions and recommendations are fed into school, university and local authority deliberations on teaching and teacher education policy and practice.

The work on childhood has consistently been focused on bringing forward children's voices in ways that can then impact on policies that relate to their wellbeing and development. Brock, for example, is a member of the TACTYC (Association for the Professional Development of Early Years Educators) executive and is actively engaged in the evaluation of early year's policy. She was commissioned with a colleague to evaluate the social impact of the National Year of Reading in two local authorities in Yorkshire and Lincolnshire. Her research outputs are intended to engage with a wider readership and to reach the wide range of professionals who make a difference in children's lives. Potter and Moss have also researched and disseminated extensively in ways that bring forth children's voices especially those who are marginalised or 'silenced' such as children with autism and child immigrants and refugees.

Higher education work also includes participatory methodologies. In developing the book of resilience for example, Stevenson actively engaged students in co-authoring the materials based on an extended series of seminars with some of the participants. The seminars were not just used to disseminate research findings, therefore, but were actively used in the creation of the sorts of materials that would have authenticity and impact for their intended users (2010 http://www.leedsmet.ac.uk/091124-36595_Book_of_Resilience_LoRes.pdf). In developing guidance on accessing higher education for refugees and asylum seekers Stevenson and Willott involved young unaccompanied asylum seekers in the creation of the resource sent to over 1000 refugees and asylum seekers across Yorkshire and Humberside. Staff researching in this field are also encouraged to contribute to regional and local policy making fora (as evidenced in the case study 'Enhancing positive educational and employment outcomes for ethnic minority students and refugees'). In order to enhance impact resources are made freely and publicly available through the Leeds Met website as well as the Higher Education Academy website. See, for example:

- Sealey, P., Stevenson, J. and Clegg, S (2012), Extra-Curricular Activities: Creating Graduates with Impact in Education, ESCalate/Leeds Met. http://www.leedsmet.ac.uk/staff/files/120214_8449_ExtraCurricularActivitiesBooklet2_WEB.pdf.
- Stevenson, J., Anderson, L. and Clegg, S. (2010) The Leeds Met Book of Student Futures, Leeds: C-SAP and Leeds Met. <http://www.leedsmet.ac.uk/staff/files/101109->

[7567 Student futures booklet LoRes.pdf.](#)

- Stevenson, J. and Lang, M. (2010) Research synthesis: Social Class and Higher Education, Higher Education Academy. Available on-line at http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/EvidenceNet/Syntheses/social_class_and_higher_education_synthesis.pdf.

These examples substantiate our claim that impact is part and parcel of the research approach and not an add-on.

c. Strategy and plans

The institution’s Research and Enterprise Strategy begins with the aspiration:

- To be a catalyst for social and economic progress in and for our region, nationally and internationally, through research and enterprise

This forms the framework for the way the Unit thinks about impact. Social progress in terms of services, workforce development, and the policies that provide the frameworks for practice are values which drive and inform the intellectual focus of the Unit’s work. We do not think about theory and application, or research and impact, in a mechanical way and therefore many of our dissemination events have multiple audiences. For example we have held two series of seminars on widening participation in higher education (in 2010-11 and 2011-12) which explicitly sought to include practitioners doing outreach and aspiration raising work in schools as well as researchers and those who are working at the cutting edge of theorising historic disadvantage and critiquing the promises of social mobility. We do not see the two as incompatible as good theory should have genuinely explanatory power and an ability to make sense of practice. We also believe that impact is about the micro-politics of power and influence and operates at the local level, so we are happy to support the local and work closely with practitioners as well as seeking to have impact at the national policy level. One of the major factors in realigning four Centres into one was the realisation that although we are researching different points across the life course the underlying impetus for our engagement is common social justice concerns. Our strategic approach across the Unit, therefore, is to undertake research which seeks to explore, identify and address the origins, structures, and consequences of inequalities and enhance opportunities for social justice, equity and equality. The research takes place primarily within educational contexts but also within familial and other social contexts such as public care settings and young offender’s institutes, as well as within employment.

d. Relationship to case studies

The two case studies are designed to validate the claims we have made about our approach to impact in this statement and, in particular, demonstrate how we express our concerns for social justice in relation to research methodologies, pedagogy, citizenship, community, social engagement, power and privilege, and issues of in/equality and inclusion/exclusion amongst others, as well as service and policy improvements. Both the ‘Enhancing positive educational and employment outcomes for ethnic minority students and refugees’ and ‘Supporting Children: Childhood, Communication, Professionalism and Pedagogy’ case studies illustrate and illuminate the argument that, through empirical research and a critical engagement with policies and practices, members of the Unit are not only exploring issues of equity, entitlement, access and participation, but are also making a difference in policy and practice terms.