

**Institution: Cardiff University**
**Unit of Assessment: UoA 25 Education**

**a. Context:** Educational research at Cardiff is central to the University's mission to contribute to the health of civil society in Wales and beyond. It is located in the multi-disciplinary School of Social Sciences and organised around four themes: Childhood, Culture and Identity; Education, Skills and Labour Markets; Critical Policy Analysis; and Advances in Research Methodology. The School has an established track record in communicating with a full spectrum of stakeholders, facilitated through investing in a network of research centres. This strategy has been further strengthened in the assessment period, giving an infrastructure that supports impact and engagement. Research centres clearly signal concentrations of specialist expertise whilst providing a focus for building and sustaining relationships with policy-makers and practitioners. The resulting engagement and innovation involves reaching out to different *polities*, *professions* and *publics*, and undertaking activities designed to provide research-informed advice, to support professional practice and to provoke debate.

**Polities** benefiting from our research range from supra-national organisations to national and local governments. Engagement here includes Power and Taylor's involvement with the European Commission through directing NESET (*Network of Experts on Social aspects of Education and Training*) and Felstead's research on the development of the OECD's *Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competences*, a survey which collected skills data from adults in 23 countries in 2012. At the level of individual countries, work includes the ESRC Centre on Skills, Knowledge and Organisational Performance's (SKOPE) input into the activities of the Australian Commonwealth Government and *Skills Australia*, and Brown's impact on the Singapore Government's higher education policy. In the UK, an evaluation of the Welsh Government's Free Breakfast Initiative is recognised as good practice in the most recent *Magenta Handbook*, the key guidance for those working in the UK Government on evaluation. WISERD (Wales Institute of Social & Economic Research, Data & Methods) has particularly close relationships with the Welsh Government and other organisations including the Office for National Statistics (ONS), jointly running an ESRC-funded seminar series with the Government and holding regular information exchange meetings with senior policy makers. Similarly, the Centre for the Development and Evaluation of Complex Interventions for Public Health Improvement (DECIPHer), through its work with the Public Health Improvement Research Network, has facilitated a number of rigorous national policy experiments around the role of education in public health, producing a step-change in policy planning process within the Welsh Government.

Education staff also achieve impact from their research by serving as expert advisors, board members and trustees for a wide range of Welsh, UK and international bodies in the public and third sector. Over 70% of staff hold such roles. SKOPE has influenced the Scottish Government through its advisory bodies such as the Skills Utilisation Leadership Group, the Scottish Funding Council, and Skills Development Scotland. SKOPE's director has served as advisor to the House of Commons Select Committee on Education and Skills' inquiry into Post-18 Skills, and as Advisor to the House of Commons Innovation, Universities Science and Skills Committee's inquiry into Implementing Skills and Training Policies. Felstead's research led to advisory work with several Sector Skills Councils and to commissioning by governments in Scotland, Ireland and Wales to provide expert reports. Rees was an advisor to the Webb Review of further education in Wales which has been influential in shaping government policy. Stroud serves on the Steel Sector Social Dialogue Committee – which brings together the European Metalworkers' Federation (now IndustriALL) and the European Confederation of Iron and Steel Industries – helping to steer a common agreement on training, as well as involvement on behalf of the UK trade unions in the founding stages of the Jobs and Skills Council for Steel.

**Professions**-focused engagement rests on the School's longstanding expertise in further and higher education, and emerging strength in medical, dental and social work education. One major focus here is on the maximisation of the effectiveness of professional practice. For example, the Cardiff Unit for Research and Evaluation in Medical and Dental Education's (CUREMeDE) work on designing essential continuing professional development (CPD) requirements for EU dentists has promoted equity of education provision and the safe management of patients, whilst also providing greater standardisation and harmonisation of CPD

delivery across the EU. Education researchers are working closely with the Welsh Government and HEFCW to look at the relative success of strategies to widen participation in higher education and to develop more effective evaluation practice in this area. Educational research underpins the recent award of a major commission in which Cardiff leads a Wales-wide initiative for the development and delivery of CPD programmes for qualified social workers across the country. Research on the Welsh Baccalaureate continues to be influential in shaping both professional practice and government policy, especially in relation to the recent revisions of the 14-19 qualifications system in Wales.

Education researchers also engage with different **publics** through an array of activities designed to foster dialogue and knowledge exchange between academic researchers, civil society organisations, professionals and citizens. This dialogue is not only about communicating evidence or providing advice, but also changing the terms of the debates themselves. Examples include work relating to: global concerns about the so-called 'war for talent' (Brown); the sexualised nature of school bullying (Renold); the efficacy of qualification reforms and curriculum experiments designed to raise standards (James); the veracity of claims about the relative underachievement of schools in Wales (Rees, Taylor). The latter work also exemplifies our use of the media to foster engagement with research and (in this case) challenge dominant political discourse. Research centres are active users of social media, especially Twitter and Facebook. New forms of media have been used to engage young people in research. For example, researchers in WISERD, collaborating with BBC Cymru Wales and Techniquet, facilitated young people and communities to develop their own narrative resources including 'audio walks'.

**b. Approach to impact:** Educational research has benefited from University investment in outreach activities. This provided the funding for the School's Innovation and Engagement Strategy, initiated in 2005 to take an integrated and proactive approach to impact. This has now been further strengthened and underpins five principal mechanisms for impact: 1) early planning; 2) developing networks; 3) putting on events; 4) investing in training; and, 5) incentivising staff.

1) *Early planning:* Wherever possible, educational research is conceived and planned around the needs of potential beneficiaries so as to maximise potential for impact. Peer-review processes are built in at proposal development stage to ensure that the 'pathways to impact' are clear and that communication strategies are tailored for target groups. The School has appointed an academic member of staff to serve as 'impact co-ordinator' whose brief is to raise the profile of impact amongst colleagues and to organise training in this area. In addition, its Research Committee oversees the allocation of an 'Impact Development Fund' to support user group engagement and maximise impact.

2) *Developing networks:* In addition to externally-funded networks (such as the EC-funded NESET), we have developed strong links with a range of stakeholders through advisory boards that bring the School and its research centres into close contact with research users, helping refine and develop research agendas, providing potential research partners and assisting in the dissemination of research findings. Contrasting examples are: (a) an advisory group of young people, supported by a full-time 'Involving Young People' Research Officer and a youth worker, for DECIPHer's ALPHA project (Advice Leading to Public Health Advancement); (b) WISERD's Advisory Board which includes the Chief Inspector of Education and Training for Wales and the Chief Executive of HEFCW. Such structures are mirrored at the School level by the School's Advisory Panel which includes representatives from the Welsh Government, an NHS Trust, the Chief Constable of South Wales, the former director of the Institute of Education, and the ONS.

3) *Putting on events:* A range of innovative public engagement events include participation in the ESRC Festival of Social Science, most recently collaborating with 12 Schools across South Wales to promote 'Statistics in Society'. In collaboration with the Wales Governance Centre, WISERD has organised a seminar series in the National Assembly for Wales focussing on *Unequal Wales*. Education researchers contribute to the School's *Policy Café*, attracting a range of stakeholders to discuss research findings on, for example, Wales' education qualifications system. There are also joint seminars on policy issues (with contributions from an experienced policy-maker, experienced researcher and a Doctoral student) in a three-way arrangement between the ESRC DTC, WISERD and the Welsh Government.

4) *Investing in training:* The School has taken the initiative in providing training around impact at all levels. Sessions are offered as part of the Social Science Research Methods Masters

Programme as well as dedicated advanced courses being provided by School staff through the ESRC Wales DTC and made available through the UK-wide NCRM portal. This emphasis on impact reflects our conviction that future generations of researchers need to be more attuned to the importance of working with non-academic organisations and have well-developed skills and strategies to ensure effective communication.

5) *Incentivising staff*: Along with the Impact Development Fund, impact activities are explicitly recognised in the School's workload model and in annual appraisal. This enables a transparent and accountable balancing against other aspects of role and means that impact is a facet of career advancement.

**c. Strategy and plans:** At the heart of our strategy is the belief that only robust academic research will have a lasting impact and that investment in centres of research excellence and pathways to impact are inextricably linked. A key element of strategy therefore is the continuing development of a network of research centres, based on the evidence that such investment provides a rich environment for interdisciplinary research and a good infrastructure for impact. For example, the success of WISERDEducation in developing and establishing effective engagement with policy-makers and practitioners was key to two recent strategic developments. The first is the recent launch of WISERDEducation, a £1m initiative sponsored by HEFCW. Alongside capacity-building, WISERDEducation's remit includes a portfolio of translational activities designed to increase the research literacy of teacher educators, teachers and other stakeholders. The second is the recent award to Cardiff of the contract for the Public Policy Institute for Wales (PPIfW) by the Welsh Government. Commencing in Autumn 2013, the PPIfW is a vehicle for the provision and marshalling of independent sources of expert advice designed to 'improve the robustness of policy in Wales and make the Welsh Government a more intelligent customer in terms of research and advice' (WG Statement, May 2013). Education policy and education issues will form a significant portion of the work of the PPIfW. A further means for increasing the impact of the School's educational research will be provided by the recently established Masters in Educational Practice (MEP) Programme. The School has the lead role in delivering this £10m pan-Wales initiative which offers newly qualified teachers the opportunity to develop and evaluate their own action-research projects. Both WISERDEducation and the MEP offer many new opportunities to establish direct relationships with those working in schools and colleges. The School is committed to building on these to maximise the reach and significance of its research.

The School is also working closely with the ESRC DTC to increase collaboration with non-academic partners in research projects and studentships. Around 50% of recent studentships in education are collaborative in this sense, reflecting a wish to change aspects of the research culture and maximise opportunities for learning about impact and other aspects of the research-practice interface. The School's new 'Policy speaks to Social Science' lecture series also is designed to bring researchers and policy-makers (e.g. Chief Social Research Officer for Wales) into a closer relationship and help set the agenda of future policy-relevant areas to research.

The planned appointment of a *Research Impact Officer* will enable the School to become more systematic in realising and recording its expanding impact and engagement work. The recent creation of a College of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences (bringing together 10 academic Schools in Cardiff), and the projected Cardiff University Social Science Park will each enable new developments and support a continuing focus on the impact of educational research.

**d. Relationship to case studies:** The case studies selected for return provide a cross-section that reflects our strategy and approach to impact. All three cases are strong examples of multi-disciplinary educational research, respectively bringing together geography and education, health and education, sociology and education. They also illustrate the importance, for research with high impact, of the breadth of methodological expertise across the group of educational researchers at Cardiff (encompassing for example GIS, RCTs, a range of qualitative approaches and the judicious use of mixed methods). Two of the case studies demonstrate the extra reach that can be achieved through consolidating expertise in multi-disciplinary research centres (namely DECIPHer and SKOPE), whilst the other demonstrates the importance of well-developed networks, in this instance with the voluntary sector. Finally, the chosen cases reflect the impact of Cardiff educational research across polities, professions and publics at different levels of scale, from Welsh policy, through UK-level practice and policy, to international debates.