

**Impact template (REF3a)**

<p><b>Institution:</b> University of Ulster</p>
<p><b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 25 Education</p>
<p><b>a. Context</b></p> <p>The UoA25 Education Impact Strategy has evolved since 2008 in line with the University's aim to make a major contribution to the economic, social and cultural development of Northern Ireland (NI). The University values the contribution it makes to the development of professionals in a variety of fields, including the social professions. Within UoA 25 the focus of research has a strong applied dimension with a stress, for example, on influencing positively those responsible for curriculum and practice in schools. Emphasis is on making a significant contribution to societal change by influencing policy and practice, particularly in the context of a society emerging from conflict. Much of this work emanates directly from research in the broad field of education for peace-building. However, the unit of assessment's activity also contributes to social and economic advancement in NI through its research into educational innovation in the area of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), its work to improve teacher education and disseminate this to teacher education generally, and its emphasis on research into inclusive approaches for those with special needs and the socially disadvantaged. At an international level, it is recognised that during the last forty years the School has acquired valuable research-based insight into education's contribution to better community relations, developing greater social cohesion and facilitating social and economic progress. Through its international research and practitioner networks the UOA shares this learning with academics, policy-makers and practitioners in other conflict affected contexts in order to help them bring positive change in their own countries.</p>
<p><b>b. Approach to impact</b></p> <p>A key strategy of the UoA is to build its research activity around externally funded development projects. Research is carried on both within the UNESCO Centre, a dedicated research group in the School of Education, and through other projects and research grants operated by faculty staff. Activity in the UNESCO Centre falls into two categories; that related to education and conflict (featured in one of the case-studies) and that associated with the Children and Youth Programme (CYP). The latter is an independent monitoring programme (IFI £1.4m.) focusing on the well-being of children and young people in Ireland, north and south, using a rights-based approach. Established between the two UNESCO Chairs in Ireland, Professor Alan Smith at Ulster, and Professor Pat Dolan at the National University of Ireland, Galway its research draws upon the shared knowledge and expertise of stakeholders from across a wide range of academic, statutory and voluntary organisations to identify issues that impact on the lives of children and youth across the island.</p> <p>Dissolving Boundaries, linking schools across political and cultural divides through the use of Information Communication Technology (ICT) (also one of the case-studies), and Creative Change are examples of projects, conducted by faculty staff, which have an integral research dimension. The latter engages with pupils, teachers, classroom assistants and parents in 12 local primary schools to build community capacity by raising educational aspirations across cultural divisions in a socially disadvantaged area.</p> <p>The UoA has an established track record in influencing policy related to educational responses to conflict and post-conflict situations. In NI the UNESCO Centre has used its expertise in conjunction with statutory authorities to bring about change in areas such as curriculum policy, for example, with the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) for the development of Local and Global Citizenship in the NI Curriculum. Several of the UoA's other research and development grants investigate aspects of curriculum development or innovative pedagogy, including the use of GIS hand-held equipment in geography classrooms (Roulston and Hansson). In supporting research and development work.</p>

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During the period of the current REF the UoA has implemented a new strategic approach to impact. The period of the REF 2008-13 largely coincides with the life of the CYP. The appointments of both a Communications Officer and a Policy Strategist have been instrumental in disseminating the work of CYP to policy makers in both jurisdictions on the island. The Communications Officer has also played a central role in helping the UoA more generally to ensure impact from its research. The following approaches have been adopted:

1. The Communications Officer has established a database of political representatives throughout Ireland detailing their main policy related interests and this is used by members of the UoA to focus their approaches to appropriate politicians.
2. Opportunities are sought to brief statutory committees on the outcomes of research and recently published reports. For example, CYP released a commentary on the Proposed Constitutional Referendum on Children's Rights in Ireland entitled "Children's Rights and the Family" in October, 2012, and CYP staff presented the main findings from the Education Report to the All Party Working Group for Children and Young People at Stormont on 9 October 2012. The School of Education has established direct input to the Education Committee of the NI Assembly. The committee met on campus on 25 September 2013 and was previously briefed on the UoA's research work and its impact.
3. Rather than placing an emphasis on regular small, internal research seminars the UoA now targets larger events held on or beyond the University to which external policy-makers and practitioners, including interested non-government organisations (NGOs) are invited. For example, the Creative Change project presented its initial research findings to politicians, policy makers and educationalists at Stormont, 11 September 2013.
4. Research outcomes from projects associated with the UoA are presented directly to the ETI Inspectors appointed to liaise with the School of Education. Thus, the ETI have become advocates for the work of Dissolving Boundaries, Creative Change and teaching controversial history, carrying research findings directly to policy makers in the education system. For instance, outcomes from Dissolving Boundaries have led to the inclusion of 'exchange' in the NI Assessment Framework for ICT competency (CCEA, 2012). A report summarising research in history education was endorsed by ETI Inspectors, circulated to all post-primary school history departments and used by the education and library boards (NI equivalents to LEAs) to shape in-service history provision in support of the revised NI Curriculum, 2008-9.
5. Lead researchers put themselves forward for positions of influence in national and international statutory and voluntary agencies in order that the UoA's research outcomes might inform policy. As examples, Smith acts as Technical Advisor for UNICEF to ensure that his findings on education programming and policy support sustainable peace-building processes as defined by the United Nations, thus promoting transformative education in conflict affected contexts including Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Cote D'Ivoire, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Uganda. Locally, McCully uses his research knowledge to advise the Community Relations Council NI Roundtable on formal education responses to the Decade of Anniversaries 1912-22 resulting in funded research and development leading to the production of tailored history curriculum materials for schools. In regard to teacher education, Clarke was the Chair of UCET in NI (2010-11) and is co-chair of SCoTENS in Ireland, thus directly contributing to the influence of research on teacher education practice. She is part of a four person UK-wide team commissioned to write an initial background paper for 'Research and Teacher Education - the BERA-RSA Inquiry'.

### c. Strategy and plans

Additional to the dissemination mechanisms above, researchers in the School of Education avail of a range of University and IRiSS support mechanisms to promote the impact of their work. The Press Office uses press releases to lobby policy makers, non-government agencies and other media outlets on their behalf. In April 2013 a report commissioned by the Integrated Education Fund (authored by Hansson and Smith) on the current position of integrated education in NI was

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published. The findings provided evidence for a critique of the emerging NI government strategy of “shared education”. The Press Office ensured that the story was picked up by media and within 24 hours Smith was interviewed by BBC radio and asked to write an opinion piece for the *Belfast Telegraph*. Subsequently, the publicity associated with the report has generated debate which has evolved into a substantial public and political issue, leading to reference to its findings in a major government report, *Advancing Shared Education*. The IRiSS website is consistently updated to provide research briefings to interested parties. CYP targets key legislators, policy makers and opinion formers in both ROI and NI, through printed programme materials and face-to-face meetings, plus a range of innovative tools including a dedicated website and use of social media. The Programme works closely with government departments to help develop strategies and policies which will enable legislators to fulfil international and national policy requirements. On behalf of the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister (OFMdfM) CYP has developed child’s rights indicators (O’Connor and Monteith) that have been acknowledged by First Minister, Peter Robinson, as the basis for reporting to the United Nations and monitoring future children’s policy in NI.

**d. Relationship to case studies**

There is symmetry between the two impact case-studies identified in that both are strongly representative, albeit on a larger scale than other projects, of the research and development work of the School of Education and its capacity to influence, policy, curriculum and practice. Both represent the positive role of education in responding to societal division.

Both case-studies are long-standing initiatives. The first details the impact of Professor Austin and his team’s research (Smyth and Mallon) on Dissolving Boundaries since 1997. The second traces the research of Professor Smith and his team (Smith Ellison, O’Connor, Hansson, McCully) into educational interventions in community relations and citizenship provision, from the early 1990s, and the resulting benefits, locally and globally. The programmes have a common thread in that they envisage schools having a key role in building better societal relationships. Both have significantly influenced curriculum policy and practice and this change can be evidenced over time, including the period since 2008, as detailed in the case-studies. As both initiatives have gained momentum and authority so each initiative has gained international recognition.

Both Principal Investigators have worked closely with DENI over many years and the work of each has been supported by successive grants from the Department. This has ensured that the innovative ideas generated, in the case of Austin the application of ICT to link schools of different backgrounds, and in Smith’s case the development of Citizenship Education, have worked in tandem with official policy-making. Both programmes have contributed directly to the professional development of teachers through in-service training workshops and their pedagogic innovations have been inserted into curriculum policy and guidance issued by CCEA.