Institution: Queen's University Belfast

Unit of Assessment: 22 – Social Work and Social Policy

a. Context: UoA22 includes social workers and researchers who opted to make a difference in the lives of people who use services by improving the evidence base for practice and effecting change in policy and practice. This is evidenced in the topics of their doctorates e.g. *Chronic Child Abuse: A study of children in the child protection system* (**Devaney**); *Family support services for learning disabled children and their families in Northern Ireland* (**Kelly**); *The treatment of minorities in the Irish Youth Justice System* (**Carr**), and in the profile of our research as evidenced in REF2 and 5. All staff belong to one of 5 research clusters designed to nurture the application of research. This includes members of the Institute of Child Care Research (**ICCR**), a research centre established in 1995 to provide evidence on which to base policy and practice in children's services. Its work is steered by policy makers, Chief Executives and managers from a range of agencies.

The main user groups for UoA22 research are policy makers, service providers and practitioners; people who use services, the media and general public. The following are key groups:

- The Department of Health, Social Services & Public Safety (DHSSPS) and the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM), are central to the development of children and families policy in Northern Ireland (NI). They use our work on parenting, domestic violence, substance misuse, and children in substitute care/adopted.
- The Public Health Agency (PHA) advises commissioners (Health and Social Care Board; Trusts) on evidence-based services, with a particular focus on early intervention. It commissions research in order to make decisions about future service provision.
- The health and social care regulator (RQIA) has close links with a number of UoA22 researchers, drawing on our work to inform their systems of inspection and regulation.
- The Department of Education has a particular set of responsibilities for looked-after children, and is interested more widely in our work on early years' interventions.
- The Department of Justice and the Youth Justice Agency have a longstanding interest in our work on youth development (BYD study), criminality, restorative practices, and the work we do that pertains to the over-representation of looked-after children amongst young offenders.
- The 5 Health and Social Care Trusts plus voluntary sector agencies (e.g. Barnardo's, BAAF) are amongst our funders and use our research to inform their service development.

b. Approach to impact

Supporting staff, building capacity: Staff benefit from School-wide structures established to develop their capacity to maximise the impact of research. **ICCR** and research clusters have been central to this, providing forums for sharing good practice, challenges and potential solutions. 'Planning for impact' is addressed in the quality assurance of research proposals, staff appraisal and in our mentoring of PhD students and junior staff. The University provides training and workshops, and other facilities, such as the Research Enterprise Directorate and Media Services. QPol (**Q**ueen's into **Pol**icy) is a University initiative, established in our Faculty to enhance the impact of Queen's research and to engage users in our dissemination strategies. UoA22 staff are active members of QPoL and the School has 2 members on the QPoL steering committee.

Strategies: We maximise the likelihood of significant reach and impact in 5 key ways:

i) Ensuring reach and significance: Research that speaks to the agendas of policy makers and practitioners is strongly positioned for influence. Much of our research is funded by service organisations (e.g. competitive tenders from Barnardo's; National Disability Association), or government (OFMDFM; PHA) e.g. **Carr's** research on Gay, Lesbian Bisexual and Transgender has been discussed in the Dáil (Irish Parliament), and has informed policy developments in the Republic of Ireland. Researcher-proposed studies are typically submitted to funding bodies with a mandate from service providers, practitioners and/or policy makers e.g. respectively: a study of the emotional wellbeing of disabled adolescents; a study of the physical and mental health of looked-after children, and the quality of social work assessments in court proceedings e.g. **Winter's** research on the Letterbox Club (an intervention designed to promote the educational achievement of children in foster care) influenced the decision to introduce Pupil Premium Plus funding in NI. The relevance of our research encourages stakeholder involvement in planning, execution and dissemination. Findings from **ICCR's** evaluation of the use of therapeutic approaches in residential

care informed NI's Ten Year Social Work Strategy (implications for workforce training), Children's Homes Minimum Standards (RQIA), and the DHSSPS review of the training needs of residential care staff. It also informed the development of high level commissioning strategy by the Health and Social Care Board. **Houston's** evaluation of a model of reflective practice in social work is being rolled out across NI by the social care regulator, NISCC.

ii) Interacting with End Users and Beneficiaries – Planning for impact: We think carefully about who to 'sign up' to a study to maximise its potential impact. We identify key stakeholders to act as advisors in the identification of studies, their design and implementation. This ensures relevance, keeps important agencies/people 'in the loop', opens doors and provides advice on how best to present findings – particularly useful when these are potentially unpalatable or controversial. **ICCR** has a *Professional Liaison Group* (*PLG*) that includes policy makers, judges, relevant chief executives (e.g. Youth Justice Agency, Trusts) and practitioners from a range of agencies. The *PLG* advises on research topics, issues of access, knowledge transfer and impact, and **ICCR**'s knowledge transfer work was commended as an exemplar of good practice (R&DO Today 2009). All UoA22 studies have *Advisory Groups* whose members represent key stakeholders, e.g. the PHA funded study of children returned home on care orders has an advisory group including senior staff from each of the five Trusts, the Director of VOYPIC, Parenting NI, and a solicitor. Where appropriate we have young people's advisory groups (e.g. 'Ready to Learn') or otherwise ensure input from service users. We are recognised for our work in this area. We prioritise health and social care topics for **Cochrane reviews**, 22 of which have been used in developing 16 Guidelines, 10 by the World Health Organisation and 5 by NICE.

An example of the effectiveness of this approach is the influence of findings from the Belfast Youth Development Study on a range of policies. The findings were used in preparing for a Ministerial summit on substance misuse in Dublin; discussed at a British Irish Council summit on substance misuse and contributed to the development of the *New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs Phase 2* (DHSSPS). The inclusion in the Steering Group of people from 3 service user/carer organisations was key to the impact of **Duffy J's** study *Looking Out From The Middle* (see Case Study). The Director of Mental Health and Disability at RQIA said this research 'has been a catalyst for us to ensure that we put service users and carers at the heart of what we do in all our regulation, inspection and review activities'. Another example is the changes made to placement policy by certain Trusts in NI, following evidence from the *Pathways Study* (**McSherry**) that pattern of placements for looked-after children differed with their postal address; the Chair of **ICCR**'s PLG and members of study advisory group were instrumental in driving forward these changes.

iii) Making research accessible: We attend carefully to the need for 'at a glance', accessible versions of reports. In a study of outcomes for children in different types of substitute care, we produced tailored reports for our three key audiences: looked-after children, foster carers, and social workers, in addition to an academic text (**McSherry**). A range of report types, including online and TV have been produced form other research e.g. outputs from SCIE reports (**Macdonald, Duffy J**). **ICCR** uses a range of media to enhance the accessibility and impact of its research, including podcasts, Twitter and YouTube/cartoons (e.g. http://tinyurl.com/nond3th). Staff regularly give interviews on radio and TV and make full use of newspapers and other media. UoA22 staff have collaborated with victims and survivors of NI's conflict to disseminate research findings in contexts ranging from innovative approaches to teaching, to international conference presentations delivered by **Pinkerton** (S. Africa) and **Duffy J** (New York and Croatia).

iv) Building relationships: We develop and maintain effective relationships with policy makers and practitioners. Staff meet regularly with key individuals e.g. the Chief Social Services Officer (**Devaney**, **Macdonald**), the CEO of the Health and Social Care Board (**Macdonald**, **Higgins**) and voluntary organisations such as MENCAP (**Kelly**, **Macdonald**). Others are members of influential advisory committees, on the basis of their research record. For example, **Duffy M**'s research on CBT resulted in an invitation to join a national advisory committee in Ireland to design a CBT training programme for mental health staff. This led to significant changes, including the closure of psychiatric hospitals, the expansion of community care, and the retraining of staff. Consequent on his research he advised the new NI Victim and Survivor Service on treatments for PTSD and Complicated Grief and was made Chair of the NI Psychological Therapies Strategy Implementation group on training, supervision, and outcomes. In 2009 **Devaney** and **Lazenbatt** established a Domestic Violence Research Special Interest Group; this now has 200+ members from practice,

policy and research communities. The work of the Group informed the *NI Domestic and Sexual Violence Strategy* and action plans, e.g. in exploring ways of working with male perpetrators of intimate partner violence. As a member of the Safeguarding Board for NI **Devaney** is embedding relevant QUB research into policy and practice, including his own work on Serious Case Reviews.

v) Long pathways: Some of our research is intended to make its impact via a 'long pathway', as one of our aims is to improve policy and practice by enhancing our understanding of the social problems with which social work and policy makers wrestle. Examples include the 10-year *Belfast Youth Development* and *Care Pathways* studies. As above, key stakeholders have been involved from the outset; to ensure that the studies meet their needs (whilst not being constrained by them), and to draw on their expertise to help us tease out the implications for practice, and how best to target those audiences with the power and/or ability to effect change.

c. Strategy and plans: Queen's expects the academy to contribute to the social, political and economic life of the country. As signatory to NCCPE's Manifesto for Public Engagement, Queen's works to 'connect the University with research users (Research Strategy, p14). This requires planning, effort and innovation. The University has organised showcasing events, video streaming and the 'DNA of Innovation' series (e.g. http://tinyurl.com/pcgl4g6), which publicises the work of academics whose research is making a real-world impact. In this REF period the School has developed strategies to further enhance the impact of research. In 2009, one research cluster – *Contemporary Social Issues and Policy* – took strategic responsibility for engagement with user groups and enhancing research impact. This led to a number of events open to members of UoA22 & 23. Working with the NI Assembly Research Services we developed a database of our expertise for their use. Seminars on writing to maximise impact with different audiences have been provided and, together with policy makers from the NI Assembly, we developed a template for user-friendly policy briefing papers. This culminated in a very successful Knowledge Exchange Seminar Series between the School and the Assembly Services, in which staff (e.g. **Winter** and a group from **ICCR**) and postgraduate students presented their research to audiences of elected representatives, Committee Clerks, Assembly Researchers, the community and voluntary sector and NGOs (http://tinyurl.com/lhbu7jv). The Seminar Series has been rolled out across Queen's and U. Ulster, demonstrating our leadership role in enhancing impact and knowledge exchange with local government. UoA22 staff have been interviewed about their work on radio and television, and study findings reported in a range of newspapers. **ICCR** uses web forums (e.g. Lifestart study), profiles in Facebook (e.g. the Youth Development Study), and Twitter to enhance its impact.

Moving forward: We will continue current good practice, taking steps more systematically to embed attention to impact. We plan to i) routinely develop impact plans for all our research at the outset of a study; ii) include an impact plan as a routine item on the agendas of study advisory groups, to hone and amend as appropriate; iii) incorporate SMART goals against which to monitor success or failure, and learn from this; iv) develop an impact seminar series where, one year after the end of a study, staff critically reflect on the impact of their research and the process by which it was achieved; v) embed a focus on impact within appraisals to provide mentoring and support form staff. At the School level we will develop mechanisms to monitor our success and systems to ensure better paper trails from which to demonstrate the impact of our research.

d. Relationship to case studies: Our case studies (CS) illustrate the approaches described in **b**. The research on Serious Case Reviews was critical not only of existing policy, but of those responsible for it – the commissioners of the study (**b.i**). Networks built and sustained by **Devaney** facilitated delivery of this research to a tight timetable, and enabled him to write the report in such a way that policy makers and legislators were persuaded of the validity and relevance of the recommendations. This resulted in considerable changes to the process of case management reviews in NI (**b.ii+iv**). The CS on User Involvement illustrates the impact of working collaboratively with service users. Their involvement in the study, from design to delivery, provided a very powerful set of messages. It set the scene for the work to have maximum impact, despite some very tough messages that commissioners had not bargained on (**b.ii**). The Looked-After Children CS illustrates a body of work with a 'long pathway' (**b.v**). It shows how involving a range of stakeholders over an extended period, including looked-after children, combined with effective (face-to-face) dissemination with policy makers, set the scene for its impact. The Young Witnesses CS is typical of how reach and significance is ensured by working with influential partners (here, NSPCC) and undertaking research for those positioned to implement our findings (**b.i**)