Institution: University of Lincoln

Unit of Assessment: UOA25 Education

a. Context

The Centre for Educational Research and Development's (CERD) aims to: conduct research in order to inform higher education policy, practice and pedagogy; and to contribute to the development of a research-informed approach to innovative teaching and learning, for the wider (inter)national higher education (HE) community, often using the University itself as a site for experiment. CERD has a national and international reputation for its work on innovative approaches to higher education pedagogies and policy. Its work focuses on 'research with application', and has a direct and practical impact on the problems and issues facing universities in an increasingly global HE sector. Additionally, CERD's research and impact is concentrated in particular areas of expertise, principally the nature and creation of knowledge via research informed learning, which impacts on public understanding of the university's role in the emerging global knowledge economy; the need for academic freedom for teaching and research; and student diversity and experience.

Research beneficiaries: the range and reach of CERD's research affects user groups at a number of different levels, and across various nations. For example, work on academic freedom has been has used by: universities to create academic freedom statements (e.g. Trinity College Dublin, www.tcd.ie/about/policies/academic-freedom.php#AcademicFreedom); university staff associations to criticise government policy (e.g. the Danish Dansk Magisterforening, www.information.dk/151351); and international NGOs defending global human rights (e.g. New York University's Scholars at Risk Network – scholarsatrisk.nyu.edu/10years.php).

Types of impact and relationship to the research activity: CERD's research impacts on various domains, as the case studies and other work set out below demonstrate.

1) In the area of public policy and law, **Karran's** work on academic freedom in Europe had a direct impact on the law on academic freedom in Denmark. The beneficiaries were the Dansk Magisterforening (university lecturers) professional association (with 27,384 members in Denmark's 44 HE institutions), who used the research for an appeal to UNESCO; opposition politicians in the Danish Parliament, who pressed the government for an independent review of the law on academic freedom; and the wider Danish general public, which gained increased knowledge of the importance of academic freedom, via national media coverage.

2) **Stuart's** work on widening participation has informed policy at HEFCE and the development of the new strategy for access and student success. Her research on social mobility and HE (2011) shaped the recommendations in the Higher Education and Social Mobility report by the independent reviewer on social mobility and child poverty, Alan Milburn (www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/80188/Higher-Education.pdf, chapter 7, p. 67). Similarly, **Abbas'** (and colleagues) ESRC project ('Pedagogic Quality and Inequality') has been acknowledged by Milburn in relation to his work on social mobility and higher education. The HEA commissioned a report on part-time social science students, drawing on the project's data and methodology, which was used to guide decision making within the HEA. **Stuart's** work on social mobility and HE (2012) is now being used by Universities UK to develop their strategy on social mobility and HE. In addition, her work on qualitative factors that influence degree attainment of minority ethnic HE students (2009) influenced the development of the Equality Challenge Unit's tool kit for supporting minority ethnic students (www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/files/improving-degree-attainment-bme.doc/view).

3) In HE pedagogical practice, **Neary's** 'Student as Producer' project (and related aspects of CERD's work on critical pedagogy) has acted as a best practice exemplar, and affected how HE teachers engage in practice across the sector, in the UK and beyond. Focusing on research engaged teaching, as a joint activity for staff and students, this work has, for example, enriched the learning experiences of students, enhanced the pedagogic skills of academic staff.

Commitment to impact: CERD's impact strategy is integrated in research projects at all stages of their lifecycle. Staff at varying stages of career development are given peer to peer support to help them identify and better articulate impact during the development of new research projects and bids. Thus, project plans are as specific as possible in: identifying the research users and beneficiaries; describing the methods and activities for engagement and collaboration with users

and beneficiaries; including a timescale for impact activities; assigning team responsibilities for impact; costing impact activities; measuring and evaluating the planned impact activities.

b. Approach to impact

All CERD's researchers work closely with a range of organisations and actively seek their involvement in maximising impact at all stages of the lifecycle of research projects. This includes HEIs, student bodies, and national and international HE policy groups. CERD members participate regularly in discussions with policy makers on debates on HE practice. CERD's approach to impact has evolved three principal mechanisms of engagement: research and development; networks and coalitions; and innovative approaches to dissemination. These inter-related approaches are central to CERD's research impact plan, through which our research and impact will be developed and further extended internationally, via, for example, greater access to research funds outside the UK, increased recruitment of international research scholars, and enhanced global networking.

A focus on research and development is a defining feature of CERD's research. CERD has been successful in attracting funding from bodies such as the HEA and JISC, for projects that necessarily contain a significant element of 'development' and 'impact', as well as research. **Winn**, for example, used JISC funds to develop Digress.it, as an application offering paragraph-level commenting in texts. A Digress.it online community with thousands of registered users developed, and one of the projects developed from Digress.it was chosen by the US Department of Transportation as its open-government flagship initiative and received a Leading Practices Award from the White House. Additionally, CERD has two Marie Curie Fellows (Intra-European and International Incoming) researching academic freedom. MC funding is conditional on demonstrating the impact of outreach activities and how the knowledge gained will be used for further development. Hence, for example, one project encompasses a framework for communication and partnership to enable a sharing of the knowledge gathered on the Fellow's return to Ghana at the end of the two-year project, amongst a diverse set of stakeholders in Africa and in Europe, including universities, governments, student bodies, Education Ministries, donor agencies, NGOs, professional associations, professional HE networks, and academics.

Developing networks and coalitions via collaborative working is a central aspect of CERD's strategy for research dissemination and impact creation. These collaborations are integral to the conceptualisation, design and management of research projects. Hence, **Neary's** 'Student as Producer' project contains strong representation from other universities (Warwick, Sheffield, UCLAN, and Macquarie in Australia), and works with radical networks (the Education Activist Network, the Edu Factory Collective, and the Free Universities Network), while **Karran's** work on academic freedom has been enhanced through engagement with groups such as the international Scholars at Risk NGO, the Council for Assisting Refugee Academics, the Dansk Magisterforening, and UNESCO's Committee of Experts on the Application of the Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers. **Stuart's** work on Social Mobility includes engagement with organisations such as Universities UK, HEFCE Action on Access, and the Universities Association of Lifelong Learning, as well as the International Academic Forum in Japan.

Innovative approaches to dissemination are used by CERD to ensure that research is disseminated to the academic community of the HE sector and beyond. CERD has pioneered the use of social media, especially via Web 2.0 technologies, to disseminate research outputs to a broad range of audiences. Many CERD projects have bespoke websites and staff use blogging tools, along with twitter, to support dissemination, which has had a positive impact, including on wider engagement with users and other institutions. For example, the toolkit produced by the Linking You project (//lncn.eu/toolkit) was further developed by the University of Southampton (openorg.ecs.soton.ac.uk/linkingyou), and is also used as a component of the national data.ac.uk project. In 2008, CERD established (and continues to run) an institution-wide social network and publishing platform (blogs.lincoln.ac.uk), where students and staff reflect on and disseminate their work to the public, which is seen as exemplary within the sector.

Staff present their work at seminars and conferences, nationally and internationally. 'Student as Producer', for example, has been presented by **Neary** at international conferences (Oxford, Tunis, Toronto, Paris and Barcelona) including those of academic activists, academics and students hosted by Edu-Factory Collective and the Free Universities Network. **Karran's** work on academic freedom has been presented at universities including Oxford, Cambridge, and York in the UK, New York in the USA, Copenhagen in Denmark, Maynooth in Ireland, and the Negev in Israel.

Given the variety of modes of dissemination, it is perhaps unsurprising that work by CERD's staff is

made more widely available through regularly citation in *The Guardian*, *The Times Higher Education* and *The Times Educational Supplement*.

Supporting impact: the College of Social Science has a team of key research support staff tasked with maximising impact by providing appropriate support, such as for partnership developments, dedicated marketing and press coverage (via links to the institutional Press Office), and administrative support for bid writing, to ensure impact creation is embedded within the planning, genesis, running and cessation of all projects. The College also provides a research fund which supports impact generation, augmenting a central competitive fund, which is also designed to raise the impact of research.

c. Strategy and plans

CERD has developed a five year research impact plan underpinned by: its broad commitment to academic activism; and the need to connect research with policy and practice. This approach is pursued as part of the University's strategic plan, which commits the institution to 'serve and develop our local, national and international communities by creating purposeful knowledge and research' via 'meaningful research to support transformational change in society, nationally and internationally, through discoveries and insights which not only have practical application, but can change the way that people see the world'. This will create a framework for impact maximisation, increasing CERD's partnership base, instilling a culture of research innovation, and developing staff to become proactive in engaging with new communities of research users and knowledge networks. In addition to continuing to link *research and development*, this will include:

Work with partners: as shown in (b) above, CERD has a good record of partnerships with external organisations, and developing these is a key strategic aim of the Centre. In particular, the intention is to engage with users pro-actively to ensure that the identification of research problems and the creation of research projects are actively informed by user input.

Innovative approaches to dissemination and open access to research as central to CERD's work. CERD will use a range of dissemination and impact activities, both formal via existing conventional channels, and informal, via social media and national and international networking. The University's institutional repository was initiated by **Beckton's** JISC funded LIROLEM project, and this research was progressed by **Winn** via ten further JISC funded projects designed to increase 'openness' in university work. For example, the Orbital project established and tested through a Research Information Service in the Library. Winn's work was then chosen as one of four exemplar best practice 'open education' case studies commissioned by JISC, and the research has fed into debates about the future management of research data in UK universities.

Staff development is seen as essential for accelerating CERD's research momentum, especially for early career researchers. Working with other parts of the College and the University, including with the Research and Enterprise office, this support and training also includes inputs relating to impact. The aim is to better support staff to work with end-users and stakeholders by helping them build user engagement into all aspects of research.

d. Relationship to case studies

The case studies presented here derive from work by the research groups on higher education policy, students, and critical pedagogy. In both, the research addressed a particular set of issues that directly involved practitioners, service users and the general public, resulting in outputs that impacted significantly on public policy, law and services, and on HE policy and practice.

Academic freedom in Europe (Karran, 2007-9). This study quantified the degree of compliance by the 27 EU states with the 1997 UNESCO *Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel*, which provides guidance for protecting academic freedom in universities. The study found that only about one third of states were fully compliant with all elements of the UNESCO Recommendation. The research was reported in the Danish press, leading to criticism of government legislation on academic freedom, at which stage Karran became involved in the debate within Denmark, ultimately culminating in an evaluation recommending a change to the law to increase protection for academic freedom.

Student as Producer (Neary 2007-12). This research and development project responded to developments in higher education policy and practice in recent years, including by developing new concepts. As a result it has had a direct impact on teaching and learning across the HE sector, in the UK and beyond, including, for example, work done by the Higher Education Academy. This links very directly with other areas of impact relating to students and pedagogy listed above.