

<b>Institution: University of York</b>
<b>Unit of Assessment: 22 (Social Policy and Social Work)</b>
<p><b>a. Context</b></p> <p>The Social Policy and Social Work Department (SPSW) is known internationally for its social policy research and particularly its emphasis on policy and practice. The Department embraces a mix of academic staff (teaching and research) and staff on research-only contracts, who are mainly attached to two well established applied research units – the Centre for Housing Policy (CHP) and the Social Policy Research Unit (SPRU). The latter’s impact on social policy and practice was recognised in 2009 by the award of the Queen’s Anniversary Prize.</p> <p>The Department’s core impact objective is the creation of the best evidence-based policy and practice for users in core areas of UK social policy such as health, housing, welfare and social services, and internationally, for example in relation to child well-being and poverty measurement. Research relationships with users and beneficiaries over the 2008-13 period have included: policy makers who construct the strategic vision and implement change at the middle and highest levels (MPs, MEPs and Lords); government departments (Health, Work &amp; Pensions, Education, Justice); local authorities (practitioners and managers in social services and housing); the private sector (homecare agencies, fostering companies); international bodies which influence social policy (EU, UNICEF, OECD); voluntary organisations, charities, NGOs (NSPCC, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Big Lottery Fund, Cancer Research UK, Shelter, Crisis); and organisations that support individuals and families (e.g. Parkinson’s Disease Society, Action for Sick Children, Dementia UK).</p>
<p><b>b. Approach to impact</b></p> <p>The Director of Research and the Departmental Research Committee (DRC), in conjunction with the Head of Department, oversee the development of the Department’s impact strategy. The departmental research emphasis on policy and practice means that impact has always played a significant role in our overall research strategy. Following the enhancement of the impact agenda in recent years, the DRC has developed seven key principles that have informed the Department’s approach to impact over the 2008-13 period:</p> <p><b>P1. Supporting Researchers: Building Expertise and Reputation</b></p> <p>By providing time for reflection and writing for all our researchers, including those on research-only contracts, the Department enables researchers to build their expertise, profiles and reputations for research capacity and excellence over time. The strong research profile of our staff has led, for example, to the award of a place on the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Research Frameworks 2009 and 2013 and being selected as intra-mural members of the National Institute of Health Research (NIHR) School for Social Care Research (2009).</p> <p><b>P2. Conducting User-relevant Research</b></p> <p>The Department’s commitment to enhancing the evidence base for policy and decision-making informs our research priorities. We focus on addressing questions that policy makers, practitioners and service users need answered and aim to provide evidence sufficient to inform practice and policy. To this end, a large part of our research portfolio is dedicated to projects sponsored by organisations such as the Department of Health (DH), NIHR; DWP, Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and commissioned research from the Third Sector such as Shelter and the Children’s Society.</p> <p><b>P3. Proactively Creating Impact</b></p> <p>In addition to <i>responding</i> to research calls from key users, we also proactively influence research agendas – see, for example, Sainsbury’s case study on the Single Working Age Benefit. A further example relates to the Health, Work and Wellbeing project’s (DWP, 2010-12) identification of the need for more support for working age bereaved people, which led to many of the project’s recommendations being included in the Command Paper on the Bereavement Support Payment in 2012.</p> <p><b>P4. Stakeholder-Driven Research</b></p> <p>It is usual practice on large projects to have advisory boards of people with relevant expertise. Examples are: professionals from government and social services and housing departments, users of services, charities and pressure groups who provide an excellent source of advice and knowledge on current issues and access to professional networks to which we can target dissemination efforts to maximum effect. Grass roots users are also involved in, and benefit from</p>

the impact of, our research. SPRU has three permanent and long-standing advisory groups made up of members of the public who have long-term conditions (children and adults), or who care for those who are ill (carers and parents). These groups help inform research priorities and advise on knowledge transfer. Examples include work on visual rehabilitation services identified through SPRU's service users consultation group that involved SPRU researchers developing a successful funding proposal for the Pocklington Trust, the results of which have led to service improvements. Another example is Beresford's evaluation of outreach services for deaf children's access to mental health services, funded by the DH, originating from the deaf community and conducted with deaf researchers as part of the research team.

#### **P5. Actively Disseminating Research to Non-academic Audiences**

Since 2001, the Department has been a regional centre in the national collaborative research transfer initiative, Making Research Count (MRC). We are one of the 11 centres in universities around the country with high profiles in the fields of social work and social care research who have come together to work in regional partnerships with local authorities (and health and voluntary sector agencies in some regions), to develop an evidence-based and knowledge-informed approach to service delivery, and to development in social work and social care. MRC's impact derives from enabling practitioners to make sense of research and helping them to develop the skills to evaluate their own practices and policies. Since 2008 staff have given 45 presentations at MRC workshops. In addition to MRC, knowledge exchange is actively promoted by the Department with staff speaking at practitioner and policy maker events, large and small, around the country. Examples range from the national 'Community Care Live' conference for social care professionals to the 'Northern Regional Meeting of the Association of Bereavement Services Coordinators'. Between 2008 and 2013 staff gave over 300 presentations to conferences, workshops and meetings that were practitioner-focused and over 400 presentations to policy makers.

#### **P6. Participating in Bodies/Events to Influence Policy and Practice**

We enhance impact through participation in policy advisory boards and working groups (e.g. Parker's work with the Dementias and Neurodegenerative Diseases Research Network). In 2012, for example, members of staff took part in 120 separate external advisory positions that can last up to five years. Over the period 2008-2013, staff were solicited to be expert witnesses/advisors for Parliamentary committees on sixteen occasions.

#### **P7. Supporting Impact and Dissemination**

Departmental research funds have been ring-fenced to facilitate impact and for networking with non-academic beneficiaries such as policy makers in government departments, practitioners and those who work in the charitable sector (e.g. JRF). Since 2009 SPRU has led the Department in the systematic collection of impact evidence. Staff across the Department are now required to archive activities and email correspondence that shows the use of research in non-academic spheres in Pure, the University's research information system. Impact activities are also included in the annual performance review process. Training sessions on impact have been provided for the department by the University's Researcher Development Team as well as bespoke training in social media tools to encourage their use in engaging non-academic research beneficiaries. The 2012 staff seminar series brought experts from around the country to speak on 'Social Policy: Making an Impact', while the 'Making Research Count' programme is designed to facilitate engagement between Departmental researchers and a range of local authorities and other research users. Impact and dissemination activities are well supported administratively: SPRU has a dedicated Information Officer and Assistant who facilitate access to research via hardcopy, email, website, twitter, blog, press releases, conference presentations and assistance with impact activities; CHP has an Information and Dissemination Manager and the department is in the process of appointing a dedicated Research Support Manager who is due to be in post by mid-2014.

#### **c. Strategy and plans**

The Department's research and impact strategy builds on a long tradition of carrying out research that makes a difference and, further, of actively promoting the use and impact of our research, as outlined above. To build strategically on the existing impact infrastructure, the DRC, led by the Director of Research, will be given a formal duty to oversee and monitor the Department's impact activities. Key research leaders on DRC, together with Impact Officer (to be appointed), will have responsibility with the Director of Research for driving impact strategy. The main parameters of the plan will include the following elements to enable the Department to maintain and expand its

programmes of policy and practice-relevant research:

- The development and implementation of a research impact framework to help researchers systematically identify specific and verifiable impacts related to their work – the framework to include an archive of examples of best practice, checklists for research project dissemination strategies, and an impact log of key achievements;
- The development of mechanisms to foster early and mid-career researcher involvement in policy research – for example, by including them as Co-Is on key projects and encouraging early progression to PI status;
- The further development of involvement with research users and practitioners, first by strengthening relationships with key user groups in order to gain better insights into the ‘user perspective’ (e.g. through invitations to users to speak to DRC and the Department more widely; user-focused conferences; user-researcher ‘round table’ events) and, second, by publicising MRC activities and events more widely to attract a greater range of practitioners;
- The extension of existing good administrative practice in SPRU and CHP to ensure the Department as a whole has a clear research support infrastructure capable of identifying research opportunities, supporting researchers on the practicalities of funding applications and supporting project dissemination plans;
- More effective use of the Department’s existing infrastructure for translating research results into accessible/interesting messages for non-academic audiences, with particular emphasis on utilising social media to disseminate research findings.

**d. Relationship to case studies**

The Department’s four impact case studies (ICS) should be understood in the context of the seven impact principles (section b) that have been developed to underpin current impact strategy, each ICS’s approach to impact drawing on one or more of the principles. While core elements of the principles (e.g. supporting researchers in the development of expertise and reputation, conducting user-relevant research) predate the emergence of the formal REF impact agenda, they have also been sharpened by it. Continuing developments in research practice in the Department, the University and by research funders themselves inform our principles, these being flexible and open to modification as the impact agenda develops. Clearly certain principles are broad and pertain to all of the case studies – **P1** and **P6** are examples. Each of our case studies is provided by researchers who have benefited from the Department’s commitment to ensuring that staff have the time and space to build (inter)national research profiles – Glendinning, Bradshaw, Skinner and Sainsbury are well recognised for their research expertise in UK policy making circles (DH, DWP) as well as internationally (UNICEF, OECD); again, the profiles of the ICS researchers (and others) have been enhanced by their membership of committees, boards and working groups, leading to enhanced awareness of their research expertise and the impact of their work.

The case studies reflect key aspects of our approach to impact in particular ways. For example, the Department’s commitment to user-relevant research (**P2**) is evidenced in Glendinning’s regular meetings with users from the DH and other government departments during the IBSEN project – as a result the DH actively used the research in the implementation of personal budgets. Bradshaw’s work on child poverty measures is a further example of this user-relevant approach: here the DWP was encouraged to adopt a particular measure of child poverty that was included in the 2010 Child Poverty Act. The Department’s capacity proactively to create impact (**P3**) can be seen in Sainsbury’s work on a ‘single working age benefit’ – this ICS demonstrates how an idea that emerges from a range of research projects over many years can, at a particular point, be ‘targeted’ at policy makers in a way that moves (social security) policy in a specific direction. Dissemination to non-academic audiences (**P5, P7**) lies at the heart of the case studies – and the Department’s approach to impact more generally – it can be seen clearly, for example, in Bradshaw and Skinner’s research contribution to high level policy seminars run for ministers and policy makers by the Nuffield Foundation and One Parent Families. Presentations by Glendinning’s team to politicians and a wide range of public and third sector organisations provide a further instance of this commitment.