

Institution: The University of Edinburgh

Unit of Assessment: 21 Politics and International Relations

a. Context

The Politics and International Relations department (PIR) has a strong tradition of informing policy-making and public debate at Scottish, UK, European and international levels. In the 1980s, Prof John Erickson led the 'Edinburgh conversations' between Warsaw Pact and NATO generals, which were credited with contributing to the thaw in East-West relations. Prof Alice Brown was one of the key architects of the Scottish Parliament through her role in the Scottish Constitutional Convention and Consultative Steering Group, and later became first Public Services Ombudsman for Scotland. Building on this legacy, our impact-related activities take three forms, corresponding to 3 types of audience or user-group: informing policy-making; helping practitioners to critically reflect on current institutions and practices; and providing knowledge to nurture critical citizenship.

First, our research has **informed policy-makers** in governments, parliaments, political parties and international organisations. Our location in Scotland's capital allows us to exploit opportunities to shape the policy-making process in Scotland, as well as UK-wide debates on constitutional change and the UK's role in Europe. We have helped policy-makers in the Scottish Parliament and Government explore and debate issues such as fiscal devolution, welfare, mental health, information privacy, energy and climate change, and Scotland's foreign and defence policy. This advisory role is becoming crucial in the run-up to the referendum on independence. Our central role in the ESRC Future of the UK/Scotland initiative (involving £1.2m funding for PIR) creates exciting new opportunities for influencing policy: our Academy of Government hosts the £2.5m ESRC Scottish Centre for Constitutional Change; Jeffery is coordinating the £6.7m UK-wide programme; and McEwen and Mitchell have been awarded ESRC Senior Scotland Fellowships.

Staff have also influenced UK and international policymakers in areas such as privacy, immigration, foreign policy and global farming. For example, March and Stein both advised the Foreign Office on dealing with religious radicalisation in Russia and the Middle East, while Peterson's advice on the benefits of EU membership was quoted 3 times in the FCO's 2013 Balance of Competences Review on Foreign Policy; Boswell and Kaarbo both gave evidence to UK Parliamentary committees on (respectively) immigration and foreign policy; Hayward advised the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills on the ethics of global farming; and Raab has had influential roles in the Lords and for the UK Information Commissioner in the area of privacy and surveillance (see case study 'Regulation of Privacy'). We have advised policy-makers in other states, for example Hepburn's and Swenden's advice to (respectively) the Sardinian and Catalan governments on federal arrangements; and Henderson's analysis of the motivations behind civic engagement, which underpinned a change in Canadian policy on compulsory community service.

Second, our research helps **practitioners, professional and lobby groups** to reflect on and reform organisational practices. This activity is often underpinned by theoretical work on public policy, engaging with officials and practitioners to explore how they make use of research (Boswell's ESRC seminar series on knowledge use in migration policy-making); encouraging practitioners in the health sector and public administration to rethink attitudes to mental health (Freeman's 'Mental Health Conversations'); or developing deliberative approaches to public participation (Henderson's work with the Electoral Reform Society). Our political theorists have helped the British Army to reflect on the ethics of war, as part of the Soldier Meets Citizen initiative launched by Neal in 2008; and have supported NGO efforts to mobilise action to tackle climate change, through a series of research/practitioner seminars organised by Cripps. McEwen briefed NGOs and businesses on the role of community groups in renewable energy in Scotland. PIR has a long record of promoting women's access to political office and women friendly public policy in Scottish/UK political institutions; Mackay's embedded research on UN Women now extends this work to the UN's new institution for promoting gender equality.

A third type of impact activity involves **public engagement** to help nurture more informed and critical debate through a range of events, media and outreach activities. Our position at the heart of Scottish government and UK debates on constitutional change make us well placed to inform public debate through media analysis and participation in public events on government performance, political parties and elections – for example, McEwen's and Mitchell's frequent

Impact template (REF3a)

commentary on Scottish politics to a range of national and international media, and Peterson's regular commentary on transatlantic relations and US politics. From 2013 Mitchell has been academic adviser to the BBC's 'Generation 2014', tracking young voters over the course of the referendum, which will be broadcast through multiple BBC radio and TV programmes. Staff also reach a wider public through blogs and twitter accounts: we regularly update 9 blogs and 11 twitter accounts on issues such as gender and political representation, radical left parties and securitisation. In April 2012, Mackay's GenderPol blog made front page news in the *Herald* and featured in the *Guardian* and BBC Online when its analysis found that Scottish local government election candidates were 'male, pale and stale'. In 2013 we launched a new Scottish Referendum Blog, coordinated by McEwen, providing a platform for disseminating research and commentary to inform the referendum debate. Its blogs have already impacted public debate, including a post by Neal on GCHQ and Scottish independence, which made front page news in *Scotland on Sunday*.

b. Approach to impact

The UoA has adopted an enabling approach to impact, supporting staff in achieving the type of impact most appropriate to their research. We believe that impact is rarely achieved through one-off events or disseminating findings at the final stage of a project; rather, it should be a two-way process involving sustained dialogue, at multiple sites, at every stage of the research process. Our approach seeks to nurture the relationships key to such exchange through 3 elements: institutional support to foster relationships between researchers and users; advice and training to support academics in acquiring the required skills; and financial support for impact activities.

Institutional support. We have built capacity in a number of research institutes and networks to provide hubs for knowledge exchange activities and expand opportunities for impact. Most of our impact activities are run through our 3 **institutes**: the Academy of Government, the Europa Institute and the Just World Institute, which promote research impact through seminars, workshops, conferences, policy briefings and CPD. For example, the Academy of Government (AoG) has a Director of Public Policy (McEwen) with responsibility for raising the profile of academic research and fostering impact and knowledge exchange on governance issues. These institutes are well placed to develop an accessible and professionalised interface with knowledge users, through the use of registers of experts, branding and design of pamphlets and briefing papers, hosting various types of events, and maximising dissemination through web-based media and extensive user databases. For example, the Just World Institute's effective branding and compelling mission statement lent it credibility in engaging senior members of the British Army in dialogue on the ethics of war (participants included General Sir Michael Jackson and Major General Gordon Messenger); while the Europa Institute's extensive contact database enabled our EU Studies researchers to reach key MEPs and diplomats in their seminar series on energy policy.

Complementing the work of our institutes, PIR leads the university's **Public Policy Network** (founded by Freeman), which acts as a hub for knowledge exchange, fostering communication and collaboration among researchers, policy makers and practitioners. Over the past five years, the PPN has organised or facilitated more than 50 events involving over 130 organisations with more than 1,500 participants. Over 800 members subscribe to its monthly newsletter and e-mail updates, and it has around 570 Twitter followers. One example of its activities is the *Citizen Participation Network*, formed by 400 researchers, citizens, policy makers and practitioners working in a range of policy fields in Scotland. The *Network* has become a point of reference in public and policy debates about democratic innovation and citizen participation spanning areas such as national and local government, the third sector and the NHS.

Institutional support for impact-related activities is fully extended to **PGRs and early career researchers**. In 2009 PIR jointly established the Policy Impact Knowledge Exchange Network (PIKEN), which brought together PGRs and early career practitioners working in government and the voluntary sector to facilitate knowledge exchange. PIKEN was held up as an example of best practice in knowledge exchange by *Evidence and Policy* (2010, 6/4: 543-56).

We have also hosted practitioners within the Unit: the Exchange Fellowships scheme, established by Freeman in 2011, brings external practitioners to the university to work with an academic partner to develop grant applications, share policy developments and develop research skills. The School has hosted 5 of the 22 fellows across the university, including in the area of knowledge

Impact template (REF3a)

exchange in international development policy.

Advice and Training: We provide advice, mentoring and training to help staff and PGRs to maximise the impact of their research. Impact and KE are part of staff Annual Reviews, and since 2012 have been the subject of annual one-to-one discussions with the PIR Research Convenor, to identify training needs and advise staff on resources and strategies. Around 20% of the sessions of our weekly staff and PGR seminar are devoted to discussing aspects of impact (for example using new media). PIR has also benefited from the School's web team to develop blogs and twitter accounts, and to enhance the impact potential of our traditional webpages.

PIR has made extensive use of the University's Press and Communications team, which provides training sessions and individual advice on writing op-eds and tailoring briefings for a **media** audience, and has helped instigate collaborations with journalists for a number of our projects. In addition, colleagues with extensive media experience mentor other staff, for example through staging mock-interviews and sharing journalistic contacts. One example of effective media use is Stein's conference on Jihad in 2009. BBC Arabic television screened a panel discussion and the event was reviewed by Islam online, the world's most read Islamic website. Stein also wrote an article on the conference for the *Guardian*. The conference's website attracted 4,517 hits over the 3-day conference from the UK, Europe, Americas, Middle East and Australia.

Financial support. We encourage staff to tap into the extensive funding available for impact within the university. This strategy has been productive, with PIR staff winning 12 College Knowledge Exchange Grants since 2008 (worth over £25k). Our PGRs have proved successful at securing School-level grants, organising 7 knowledge exchange-oriented workshops since 2007. PIR has also won 3 of the competitive Principal's Career Development Scholarships (c. 50 awards annually across the university), which we use to fund PGRs whose research has the potential to influence public policy. One of these scholars currently combines PhD research on participatory policy making with a role as Project Officer for the Public Policy Network; while another who works on the emotional dimension of public policy serves as Associate Fellow for the Third Sector Research Centre. Finally, we have been successful in securing ESRC KE grants, including the AoG's series of academic-practitioner seminars on independence, in collaboration with the David Hume Institute.

c. Strategy and plans

These 3 tools for enabling impact have been highly effective in broadening and intensifying our interactions with non-academic users and audiences over the REF period. Our future strategy builds on this approach, indeed many elements of PIR's approach are now being rolled out across the School of Social and Political Science and the University through PIR appointments to senior knowledge exchange posts: 3 of the 4 Knowledge Exchange Directors for the School have been PIR staff (Freeman, Henderson and McEwen), while Jeffery became the university's first Vice Principal for Public Policy and Impact in 2012. Our new School impact strategy, developed by McEwen and adopted by the School in 2012, commits us to extending user engagement through:

- enhanced training opportunities, including media training for print, broadcast and social media;
- expanded CPD, through a new register of experts and a range of new CPD programmes. Together with the Graduate School, we will also develop a coordinated system for marketing, delivering and accrediting CPD programmes;
- reinforcing the role of the AoG as a hub for knowledge exchange, providing support for impact-oriented activities across a wide range of policy areas;
- bespoke advice and administrative support to strengthen impact plans within research funding applications, and to ensure effective dissemination of research findings of funded projects, in order to maximise impact.

d. Relationship to case studies

Case Studies 1 and 2 on 'Political Representation and the English Question' and 'The Welfare State and the Scottish Constitutional Debate', were supported by the AoG, including assistance with events and dissemination. Case Study 3, 'The Regulation of Privacy in Scotland and the UK', drew on an extensive network of contacts built up by Raab over 3 decades. Raab in turn advises other colleagues through his work with the PPN. Case Study 4 on 'Understanding the European Commission' was supported by the Europa Institute and the College KE office, which helped to identify EU contacts and to secure an ESRC Grant for a British Academy dissemination event.