

**Institution: The University of Edinburgh**

**Unit of Assessment: 23 Sociology**

**a. Context**

For us, 'impact' has never been an add-on, but always an integral part of how we practise sociology. In his 1965 Inaugural ([www.tomburns.org.uk](http://www.tomburns.org.uk)), the founder of the Edinburgh Sociology Department, Tom Burns, said: 'It is the business of sociologists to conduct a critical debate with the public about its equipment of social institutions.' Burns had in mind **broad publics**, the first of our three main groups of users, beneficiaries and audiences. A second group is **more specific publics and policy makers**, and a third is **hands-on practitioners**. We employ different mechanisms to reach these three groups: see b. below.

The impact of our research mainly concerns enhanced cultural understanding of issues and phenomena, and the shaping and informing of policy debate. Other aspects of our impact of growing importance include contributions to environmental sustainability and improved management of natural resources (see, for instance, the *Bioenergy Case Study*). Our work frequently challenges established norms, modes of thought or practices: see the case studies and also, for example, Stanley's and Orton-Johnson's critiques of the ESRC's 2010 Framework for Research Ethics in *Sociological Research Online* 15(4).

Some of our impact has been achieved by individual scholars or small groups of scholars: for examples, see the Case Studies on *Finance*, *Synthetic Biology*, *Policing*, *National Identity* and *South Asia*. In other cases, impact arises from the work of larger research centres, in particular:

- i. Two centres that represent very large ESRC investment in our work on bioscience innovation: the Genomics Forum (see below), the first centre funded by ESRC specifically to maximise the impact of research, in this case the research of the UK-wide ESRC Genomics Network; and our own centre in the network, Innogen (see the Case Study on *Life-Science Innovation*).
- ii. The Centre for Research on Families and Relationships. Co-founded and co-directed by Jamieson and with Brownlie as an Associate Director (but mainly reported to UoA 22), CRFR has since 2008 held 134 events—training, conferences, seminars etc—with 4816 participants, and has particularly close links to the Scottish Government.
- iii. The Centre of African Studies (see the Case Study on *Bioenergy*).

**b. Approach to impact**

Achieving impact requires us to engage in different ways with our three groups of users. First, **broad publics** are reached via:

- i. **'Public intellectual' mode, via eg the press or social media.** For multiple examples, see the Case Studies and eg Dritsas's role as advisor to the BBC and National Geographic/PBS (eg for the BBC's *The Last Explorers*), and to exhibitions on David Livingstone at the National Museum of Scotland and National Library of Scotland; and the extensive press and radio coverage of research by Jamieson on solo living and Bancroft on the sociology of intoxication (both appeared in Laurie Taylor's *Thinking Allowed* on Radio 4; other coverage included eg the *Times*, *Mail*, *Express*, and *Sun*). Overseas public engagement of this kind included Stanley's advisory role for a South African Broadcasting Commission TV programme on Olive Schreiner (broadcast in both Afrikaans and English) and public-intellectual work by Gorringer: eg three op-ed articles in *The Hindu* on caste politics and caste-based violence, and an article in the Indian academic-outreach journal, *Seminar*. He has sometimes chosen forums whose politics are quite different from his, as a means of undermining prejudices: for example blogging (by invitation) on Centre Right India.

The Genomics Forum has been particularly active in reaching broad publics via social media, making extensive use of its blog (which has generated nearly 77,000 views), Twitter (3700 followers, with some tweets re-tweeted to tens of thousands of people), and its own Flickr and YouTube channels. Its 16 photosets on Flickr generated nearly 1800 views and the 27 videos posted on YouTube resulted in over 7600 views.

- ii. The annual African Studies **film festival**, *Africa in Motion*. Founded by and, from 2006 to 2011, directed by former UoA member Bisschoff, this is a central means by which the Centre of African Studies reaches broad publics. It is the largest such event worldwide outside of Africa, has

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screened over 200 African films to total audiences since 2008 of over 15,000 people, and runs symposia and roundtables alongside the films. The festival is a major cultural presence in Scotland, amongst diaspora communities and more widely.

iii. Other **relationships with creative artists** also allow us to reach wider publics in innovative ways. Eg, as described in the Case Study on *Synthetic Biology*, Calvert and colleagues built close relationships with prominent artists and designers in their 'Synthetic Aesthetics' project. A popular book, including images of the most powerful resultant art works, will be published in March 2014 by MIT Press, with a launch event at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. The Genomics Forum has had 11 collaborations with artists and writers: for example, playwright Peter Arnott (who eg directed Caryl Churchill's play on cloning, *A Number*, at Edinburgh's Traverse Theatre) and filmmaker Cameron Duguid, whose documentary about DNA and genome sequencing, *Simply Complex*, premiered at New York's *Imagine Science* film festival on 13 October 2013.

Second, **more specific publics and policy makers** are reached via:

i. **Engagement work with specific publics.** Two examples are: Crow's work with the 'Connected Communities' consortium, engaging with community partners eliciting (for example, using participatory video) visions of the future and discussing with these partners ways to make them happen; and the work by Yearley and the Genomics Forum for the Human Genetics Commission's Citizens Inquiry into the forensic DNA database. This latter work involved engagement with groups for which the database has special significance (such as young men of colour, highly over-represented on the database in statistical terms). The Inquiry won the Commission the 2009 'most engaged policy maker' award from the Sciencewise Expert Resource Centre, which provides specialist advice and support to UK government departments and agencies on public dialogue.

ii. **Research-based responses to consultations:** eg both CRFR and the Genomics Forum have been particularly active in responding to consultations in their respective domains. The Forum, for instance, has produced detailed responses to ten consultations since 2008 on topics such as genomic medicine, direct-to-consumer genetic testing and research strategy on food security.

iii. **Direct involvement with policy-making and advisory bodies, etc.** The highest level of decision-maker reached directly since 2008 has been the then Prime Minister Brown, who was briefed by McCrone on social and geographical mobility in Scotland (see the Case Study on *National Identity*). There are multiple other examples of direct involvement by policy-makers in the Case Studies and elsewhere in our work, for example:

*Webb*, appointed a Non-Executive Director on the Board of NHS Health Scotland (2003-11), was co-responsible for assembling the evidence bases for Scotland's pioneering policies on smoking and alcohol pricing, which led the rest of the UK. She has now been appointed to Scotland's Expert Commission on District Heating, her new research is cited in the Scottish Government's *2020 Routemap for Renewable Energy*, and in 2013 she was asked by the UK Department of Energy and Climate Change to convene the feedback meeting on its draft Heat Policy.

*Lyall's* May 2012 briefing of the Chief Executives of ESRC, BBSRC and NERC on impact, interdisciplinarity and engagement.

*Haggett* was appointed UK National Expert on the social acceptance of wind energy for the International Energy Agency, and is advising the Crown Estate, the Government Office for Science, and Marine Scotland on the social acceptance of onshore and offshore wind.

*Bruce* has joined Defra's Science Advisory Council Exotic Disease subgroup as a co-opted expert.

*Molony* served as an international election observer, Kenya Presidential elections (March 2013).

Third, **hands-on practitioners** are reached via:

i. **Direct two-way relationships in the research process**, via which they inform our research findings (and sometimes also help shape research design and methodology), while we disseminate findings direct to them. The many examples include the financial practitioners and police officers of the Case Studies on those topics, and the local/central government pioneers of municipal energy and other experts in Webb's 'Heat and the City' project. Uses of social media to link to practitioners include, for example, Kingsley and Taylor's use of the Twitter account @INZI\_Edinburgh to discuss their work on the shaping of research on and control of Human African Trypanosomiasis ('sleeping sickness') with practitioners, and provide a clearinghouse for news about Trypanosomiasis.

ii. **Demonstrator projects** taking research and demonstrating concretely how it can be put into practice. Eg, Yearley took insights from his 'public understanding of science' research on lay involvement in air-pollution monitoring and, with colleagues, has demonstrated how they can be applied in a quite different area, deer management. This demonstrator project used stalkers and estate managers as lay 'peer reviewers' and informants for 'participatory' geographic information systems. The project showed how local knowledge could be integrated into mathematical models of red deer habitat use, and the approach has now been put into practice by the Cairngorm Speyside Deer Management Group. Two particularly successful Innogen demonstrator projects have been transformed into software implementations: ALSIS (see *Life-Science Case Study*) and REALISE, a database tool for innovators in regenerative medicine. The latter is now being commercialised by Realise Solutions Ltd, a firm set up by an Innogen industry collaborator.

iii. **Training.** Lyall, for example, has drawn on her research on interdisciplinarity (see REF2) in teaching around 20 training sessions or workshops on interdisciplinary capacity building. She has been described by the Director of the DEFRA/ESRC/BBSRC/NERC Rural Economy and Land Use Programme as 'the foremost trainer and evaluator on interdisciplinary methods in the UK'. Other examples include Gorrings' and Rosie's training of police officers, and P. Jeffery and R. Jeffery's training of NGO activists in India for qualitative research (see the Case Studies on *Policing* and on *South Asia*).

Our approach to impact is **reflexive**: 'impact' has been a topic of our research ever since the influential early work conducted here by Bechhofer, Williams et al. (*Scottish Affairs* no. 36; <http://www.scottishaffairs.org/backiss/2001.html#summer>), which demonstrated the fallacy of the standard linear model in which 'research is presumed to generate new knowledge that is diffused to potential users and will then give rise directly to changes in user behaviour' (p.136). This work has now been deepened eg by Lyall's research (REF2), which was the basis, for instance, of her briefing of the Research Council Chief Executives on impact (see above). Williams has also been taking it forward, eg in research on the changing informational practices of life scientists, which has shown the inappropriateness of 'one size fits all' approaches to e-science infrastructure provision and led to a high-profile dissemination event on IT infrastructure for research, held at the British Library and led off by Sir Kenneth Calman, Chair of the National Cancer Research Institute.

Originally, achieving impact was simply part of our craft skill as sociologists. As our UoA has grown, more **formal support mechanisms** have been put in place. Annual review meetings held with all staff in the UoA now always encompass impact, and are used to identify training and support needed to enhance individuals' impact work; two members of staff (Kemp and Parry) have taken on the role of impact officers, tasked with ensuring those needs are met. Where possible, we use externally provided training and resources, but have also begun to organise our own events, such as a 2012 workshop on 'Writing for Impact' with BSA Press Officer Tony Trueman. Members of the UoA particularly active in engaging users (including Lyall, McCrone, Jamieson, P. Jeffery, R. Jeffery and Williams) are members of Edinburgh University's Public Policy Network; the Network eg co-funded Gorrings and Rosie's first knowledge-exchange workshop (see Case Study on *Policing*). Lyall served as Director of Knowledge Exchange for our School from 2008-11.

Edinburgh's College of Humanities and Social Science is increasingly active in supporting the achievement of impact, and has been an important source of funding for Sociology, STIS (Science, Technology and Innovation Studies) and CRFR knowledge-exchange work, with 11 grants totalling £27,855 since 2008. The College has created a Knowledge Exchange Office (headed by one of our former doctoral researchers, Anne-Sofie Laegran) and has begun an 'Exchange Fellowship' scheme, in which NGOs, government bodies, etc, second members of staff to Edinburgh University for part-time or full-time research along with academic partners. Amongst Fellows so far, in this case working with CRFR, was Amy Roch of the support network and campaign group LGBT [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender] Youth Scotland.

Innogen and the Genomics Forum have employed five members of staff with dedicated impact, public dissemination and 'knowledge brokering' roles. The huge advantage resources on this scale have offered our impact work is the opportunity to experiment with different modes of engagement. Eg the Forum has pursued its impact workstreams (plant genomics, synthetic biology, biosecurity, intelligence assessments of biotech threats, intellectual property and stem cells) by:

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- the above uses of social media, collaborations with artists and consultation responses;
- stakeholder and public events (eg 15 events at the Edinburgh International Book Festival);
- a rotating cast of 95 visiting fellows from the worlds of social, natural and medical sciences, and policy (eg OECD, UK Cabinet Office and South African Shadow Cabinet);
- 'Chatham House rule' workshops involving policy officials and industry/NGO figures;
- networks, eg the UK Synthetic Biology Standards Network jointly coordinated by Frow.

For example, the Forum has engaged closely with the OECD (for instance, co-hosting a large international meeting in Paris on biotechnology), which has led the OECD to take far more seriously the social aspects of biotechnology (as evidenced in the subsequent commissioning activity by the OECD's Working Party on Biotechnology).

**c. Strategy and plans**

Our impact strategy is to spread best practice in respect to impact, and to intensify the move of knowledge exchange and engagement from the status of tacit craft skill to a formally recognised, fully embedded and properly supported aspect of our work. We are doing this in six ways:

- Employing a full-time knowledge exchange/impact officer and half-time events officer as part of our School's new Research Office (see REF5).
- Continuing to raise awareness of best practice in respect to impact (for example, producing a dossier of exemplars), providing internal training and promoting externally-provided training.
- Increasing the sophistication of our use of social media for knowledge exchange.
- Systematising our collection of data on impact.
- Expanding CPD and collaborating with other units within the University to develop a user-friendly 'register of experts'.
- Moving on from embedding impact and knowledge-exchange work in annual staff reviews to incorporating it fully in promotions.

In pursuing this strategy, we are placing particular weight on three aspects. First, we are encouraging staff and PhD researchers to seize the opportunity of constitutional turmoil in Scotland to make research-based contributions to debate (see, for example, the Case Study on National Identity). Innogen has just raised £252k from ESRC to develop the evidential basis for doing this in respect to the science and medicine research base in Scotland. Second, we are making our growing strength in quantitative methods available to NGOs and similar bodies: MacInnes, for instance, has been engaged as a statistical advisor to NGOs and the Malawi government on development projects and a survey of poor districts.

Third, and most important, we are embedding a focus on impact into postgraduate training, for example via: an accredited practice programme for doctoral researchers working on public engagement; PG-led workshops (eg, although attended by staff as well as PGs, the workshop with Trueman was PG-led); and active encouragement of PGs to take up opportunities for placements such as those with the Scottish Government (the latter is funding 35 three-month placements a year for ESRC-funded PGs). Examples of engagement work by doctoral researchers of the kind we are encouraging (eg by the workshop with Trueman) include: the extensive media coverage of Friedman's PhD work on comedy (reported in the *Telegraph*, *Guardian*, *Mail*, *Melbourne Age*, Radio 4 and Canadian Broadcasting Corporation); and Wilks's *Observer* article on forced marriage (11 August 2013), which won her the Amnesty International Student Media Award.

**d. Relationship to case studies**

The Case Study on *Financial Crises* is an example of impact via work as a public intellectual (although distinctive in the technical depth of the research being drawn upon). The Case Study on *Bioenergy* is one of the multiple examples of the impact of African Studies. The Case Studies on *Synthetic Biology* and on *Life-Science Innovation* are examples of the impact of the main recent specialism of our work in Science and Technology Studies. The Case Study on *Policing* is an example of a new departure in our research, and exemplifies how we reach specific user groups, while the Case Studies on *National Identity* and on *Health and Pharmaceuticals in South Asia* are examples of the impact of two of the long-standing research specialisms of Edinburgh Sociology.