

<b>Institution:</b> Birkbeck
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> Sociology
<p><b>a. Context</b></p> <p>Social research at Birkbeck is characterized by a deep commitment to addressing contemporary social, political and cultural concerns. Across our five research themes (see REF5), we engage with issues of: social and political participation; equality, social justice and social policy; personal life, relationships and the life-course; mental health and psychosocial well-being; higher education and professional development; media policy and practice; environmental policy and sustainability.</p> <p>The main non-academic user groups, beneficiaries and audiences for our research during this assessment period have been: civil society organisations, in the UK and internationally; government bodies, parliamentarians and policy-makers, in the UK and internationally; professionals, professional bodies and practitioners in mental health, medicine, social care and education; practitioners and organisations/ businesses in the creative, media and high-technology sectors, particularly artists, writers, and curators, journalists and designers; and the general public.</p> <p>Our research has contributed to: the development and debate of environmental and public policy; health, welfare and well-being; the work of practitioners and professionals; and the collective goods of creativity, culture and enhanced public understanding of important social and political issues.</p>
<p><b>b. Approach to impact</b></p> <p><b>Mission and Ethos:</b> Birkbeck is committed to the transformative role of research and teaching at both a societal and individual level, and to the development of vibrant public intellectual cultures. This mission permeates the College's ethos, and genuinely motivates researchers within the unit. Our unique, largely part-time student body, many of whom are employed in organisations directly implicated in our research, and our central London location, contribute to the embeddedness of practices of knowledge exchange, user-involvement and public engagement in our research.</p> <p><b>Mobilizing institutional support:</b> There has long been strong institutional support for enhancing the impact of research and engaging with a wide range of publics. We have made good use of the College's External Relations Unit, particularly its media training, and its expertise in publicizing research findings through <i>Birkbeck Briefings</i>, press releases, <i>Birkbeck Voices</i> podcasts and social media, including the <i>Birkbeck Research Blog</i> and the <i>Birkbeck Comments Blog</i>. Until 2012, the Business Relations Unit provided advice and assistance with knowledge transfer and user-engagement but more recently a dedicated Impact and Knowledge Exchange Manager was appointed by the two Schools involved in this unit to work with researchers in developing public and user-engagement. Each School also has a Digital, Online and Social Media Co-ordinator, who assists us in publicizing our research and connecting with a range of publics. Further, the Birkbeck Institute for Social Research (BISR) has catalysed lively discussions amongst members of this unit about the politics and practice of "impact" and knowledge transfer, and has organised a number of skill-sharing workshops and seminars about "making a difference" and "creating impact", blogging and social media, and working with non-academic partners.</p> <p><b>Developing relationships with civil society organisations:</b> We have developed mutually beneficial relationships with over 35 global, national and local civil society organisations. For instance, Seu's Leverhulme-funded project hinges on close collaboration with <i>Amnesty International</i> and <i>The Red Cross</i>, and engagement with <i>Oxfam</i>, <i>Save the Children</i>, <i>Disasters Emergency Committee</i> and <i>Action Aid</i>, and she has provided consultancy to <i>Child Workers in Nepal</i> and <i>Responding to Conflict</i> on their rehabilitation work with child soldiers. Watt's research on urban housing policy has engaged activist groups such as the <i>London Tenants Federation</i>, <i>Many Cultures</i>, <i>One Community</i>, and <i>Defend Council Housing</i>. With the pressure group <i>Games Monitor</i>, he organised the <i>Olympic City Critiques</i> reading group at Birkbeck, involving activists, students and academics. Roseneil's ESRC <i>Living Apart Together</i> project worked with the NGO <i>OnePlusOne</i> to produce online text and video resources for people in non-cohabiting relationships, counsellors and social workers. Cox's ESRC project involves key people from <i>Kalayaan</i> and the <i>Migrant Rights Centre, Ireland</i> on its Advisory Group, who are also writing chapters for her edited book on au pairs. Posocco collaborates with the <i>Safra Project</i>, <i>Women Living Under Muslim Laws</i>, and the <i>UK Lesbian and Gay Immigration Group</i> in the AHRC Decolonising Sexualities Research Network. Sullivan has worked with <i>The Green House Think Tank</i> and <i>Third World Network</i> to develop policy</p>

briefings and campaigning materials based on her research (see REF3b).

**Engaging with government bodies, parliamentarians and policy-makers:** Callender's research on higher education funding has directly engaged with Ministers, civil servants and think-tanks, whilst Vera-Sanso has advised the State of Tamil Nadu on pensions, and Sullivan has spoken with policy-makers in the UK and at the UN about environmental policy (see REF3b). Schlosberg has advised the Shadow Culture Secretary and a House of Lords inquiry on media plurality, and his research has been taken up by the *EU High Level Working Group on Media Plurality*. Roseneil's EU-funded FEMCIT research was presented to EU policy-makers, politicians and women's civil society groups at a policy conference at the European Commission (2010), and in a private meeting with the Shadow Spokesperson for Women and Equalities. The findings of her ESRC Living Apart Together project were discussed at a *Breakfast Briefing* with representatives from the *Department of Work and Pensions*, *Gingerbread*, *Child Poverty Action Group*, *Families Need Fathers*, and *DEMOS* and *IPPR*. More locally, Watt has engaged in dialogue with the *London Legacy Development Corporation* about the Olympics and urban policy in East London.

**Working with practitioners and professional bodies:** We have productive relationships with practitioners and professional bodies in the mental health, medical, social care and education sectors. Our psychosocial research, particularly the theoretical contributions of Frosh, has become important in the training and professional development of psychotherapists through long-standing relationships with the *Institute of Group Analysis*, the *Institute of Family Therapy*, and the *British Association of Psychotherapists*. Since 2009 the BISR has collaborated with the *British Psychoanalytic Society* to fund four year-long Birkbeck-BPS Professorial Fellowships, in which senior psychoanalysts interact with academic staff and students at Birkbeck, giving lectures and seminars on issues of clinical practice. Baraitser's work on motherhood has elicited interest from *The Maya Centre* and the *British Psychoanalytic Council*. At a series of BISR/ BSA Psychoanalysis and the Psychosocial Study Group seminars, in collaboration with the *Tavistock Institute for Human Relations* and members of the *Institute of Group Analysis*, Roseneil has brought together sociologists, clinicians and organisational consultants to discuss psychosocial concepts, and in 2013 she was invited to speak about her theoretical work on relationality to the *Group Analytic Symposium International* in Vienna and to the *Massachusetts Institute of Psychoanalysis*. Zukas's research on professional education and learning has involved seminars with practitioners and regulatory bodies, giving evidence to the *General Medical Council*, and working with organisations such as the *Police Training Federation*.

**Collaborating with the creative, media and hi-tech sectors:** Many of us have collaborated with artists, curators, journalists and designers. Baraitser has worked on maternal experience with artist groups, *Enemies of Good Art* and the *birthrites collection*. Cox hosted talks at the *Wellcome Collection's* season on *Dirt: The Filthy Reality of Everyday Life*, and wrote for the exhibition book. Roseneil worked with artist Lucy Orta and trainee architects on the material legacies of Greenham Common, and Vera-Sanso and Roseneil have been involved in the curation of exhibitions related to their research (see REF3b). Markham has disseminated his research on journalism to the *BBC Policy Unit* and *ITN*, and Rodgers similarly to senior editors at the *Toronto Star*, where he carried out an ethnographic study. Schlosberg is engaged in ongoing discussions about media accountability with senior figures from the worlds of journalism and human rights. In the hi-tech sector, he has acted as a consultant to the *Open Society Foundation's Mapping Digital Media* project, and Roseneil continues her discussions with designers and ethnographers at *Intel*, in the wake of their sponsorship of her research on communication practices in living apart together relationships and in the context of their wider interest in her work on non-conventional intimacies.

**Speaking to and with wider publics:** The greatest reach of our research has been through mass and social media. Callender, Cox, Frosh, Roseneil, Segal, Sullivan, Tomlinson and Žižek have been interviewed about their research on numerous radio and television programmes, including *BBC* and *Sky News*, *Today*, *Newsnight*, *Costing the Earth*, *Thinking Allowed*, *Woman's Hour*, and *Dispatches*. Leading British newspapers from across the political spectrum, local and international newspapers and magazines have covered our research, and some have published articles that we have written (e.g. Callender; Segal). Žižek's work has featured in several films (*Examined Life*, 2008; *Marx Reloaded*, 2011; *A Pervert's Guide to the Cinema*, 2013) and recently *The Royal Opera House* has commissioned four operas based on his work. Over the past three years, we

## Impact template (REF3a)

have begun to use social media, particularly Twitter, Facebook, and blogs. Most of our funded research projects, and many individual researchers, have their own websites. Many of us contribute posts to online journals, such as *The Huffington Post*, *Open Democracy*, and *Red Pepper*, and participate in online debates. Since 2009, the BISR and the Departments have partnered with *Backdoor Broadcasting Company* to make available over 70 free online podcasts of seminars and conferences, which have received over 5 million hits and 25,000 downloads. But, it is our PhD students who are leading the way in their use of social media, most notably Nelly Ali who has over 20,600 Twitter followers, 22,000 blog subscribers and 65,000 blog readers in 153 countries interested in her research on street children in Egypt. This prominence has led to several invitations to speak to international NGOs (e.g. *Arab Council for Childhood and Development*), and to write a paper on children's rights for the committee drafting Egypt's new constitution.

We also engage intensively with a range of London publics. The BISR, BIH, and Departments offer extensive and well attended programmes of public lectures, culminating in the annual summer research showcase, *Birkbeck Social Science Week*. The BISR marks the publication of significant new books by Birkbeck social researchers with book launch panel discussions. Milbourne's *The Voluntary Sector in Transition* brought together over 60 voluntary sector leaders. Schlosberg's *Power beyond Scrutiny* mobilized a similar number of journalists, and Segal's *Beyond the Fragments Revisited* engendered lively debate amongst 350 activists, commentators and writers.

### c. Strategy and plans

Our evolving impact strategy for social research is to:

- ensure that the social research carried out at Birkbeck makes a difference to the world, by feeding into policy processes, public debate and understanding, professional practice, service delivery and creative, cultural production, as appropriate;
- foster a research culture in which engagement with non-academic users and a wide range of publics is considered vital, and is valued and rewarded;
- ensure that researchers are skilled and empowered to realise the impacts of their research;
- engage in "audience development" and the creation of networks of research-users.

In order to do this, we plan to:

- invest in activities that support the development of impact and knowledge exchange;
- extend training and support for researchers and PhD students in: using social media; engaging with journalists and being interviewed; talking to policy-makers; collaborating with non-academic partners; seeking funding for impact-related activities;
- roll-out, through BISR a programme of *Breakfast Briefings* to launch the findings of major research projects to invited audiences of policy-makers, practitioners and journalists;
- establish, through BISR, a series of researcher/ policy-maker/ practitioner forums;
- increase the podcasting of research-led seminars and lectures, and their public visibility;
- extend the involvement of our Impact and Knowledge Exchange Manager in staff training and the development of partnerships with non-academic users.

### d. Relationship to case studies

The case studies exemplify our commitment to developing and realising collaborations with non-academic partners and research users, and to conducting social research that makes a difference in the world. **Callender's** case is an example of highly topical, policy-relevant research in which engagement in the making of policy and in public debate was central to the research process. The External Relations Unit was fully engaged in promoting Callender's research findings, producing a *Birkbeck Briefing*, and a *Birkbeck Voices* podcast about them, and ensuring that they were widely disseminated by the mass and social media. **Roseneil's** case illustrates the longer-term evolution of impact through a series of engagements with cultural producers, voluntary organisations and interested publics, underpinned by the researcher's desire to contribute to public understanding of the importance and impact of social movements. Both **Sullivan's** and **Vera-Sanso's** case studies highlight the powerful interventions in public and policy debate that can be made when researchers develop relationships with civil society organisations that are able to mobilize their research findings, and attest to the importance of using both new and older (print and photographic) media in reaching key international audiences.