

Institution: University of Sussex

Unit of Assessment: UoA 23 Sociology

1. Context

During the REF period, the University of Sussex has restructured and Sociology now sits within the School of Law, Politics and Sociology (LPS). We continue to produce research across our core thematic clusters: Health, Medicine and Science; Gender and Inequality; Social Theory and Political Sociology. In addition, we have recently begun developing a new cluster: Criminology and Transgressions. We have operated an overall strategy of producing research that combines robust empirical investigation with rigorous theoretical analysis, while ensuring that our research is beneficial to a range of external communities. A major driver of our research has been to address issues of social justice by improving awareness and understanding of how key social opportunities, experiences and outcomes are differentiated by background characteristics such as class, gender, occupation, nationality, health status and ethnicity. In the review period, research in Sociology has produced impacts on the following specific beneficiaries:

- Health-care policy-makers and providers, patient organisations, individual patients
- HE policy-makers and providers, student organisations and advisory bodies, individual students
- Museums, galleries, event and exhibit artists, curators, audiences and visitors
- Political organisations: political parties; think-tanks and political advisory groups; lobby groups, NGOs
- The general public.

Our unit's research has mainly produced impacts by:

- contributing to policy debate and formation, increasing awareness, knowledge and understanding, providing expert advice and consultancy; and
- collaborating and engaging with local user-groups and audiences.

2. Approach to impact

During the review period our impact strategy has been to realise:

- the University's commitment to translate research to the benefit of society; and
- our Departmental commitment to ensure that our research addresses issues of social justice by improving awareness and understanding of how key social opportunities, experiences and outcomes are differentiated by background characteristics such as class, gender, occupation, nationality, health status and ethnicity and, more particularly, to address areas where specific groups are disadvantaged.

We have sought to achieve this strategy by contributing to policy debate and formation at the local, national and international levels, and collaborating and engaging with user groups and audiences in the following four main ways:

- ***Appointments to key advisory boards and roles***

We have sought to ensure that our expertise feeds into policy debate and decision-making via appointments to national and international boards and via roles through which we can disseminate research knowledge and findings. These positions, in turn, ensure that our research agendas remain policy-relevant. In this context, Farsides' bioethics research expertise has secured appointments to the Emerging Science and Bioethics Advisory Committee, the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority's National Donation Strategy Group, the Nuffield Council of Bioethics Working Party on 'Human Bodies: Donation for Medicine and Research' and the UK Donation Ethics Committee. Her research has ensured that decision-making in these fora is informed by sociological and philosophical theory, and by empirically grounded frameworks for understanding the donation context and process; it has thus contributed to an increase of 50 per cent in organ donations (see case study). Research and expertise feed directly into the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence's (NICE) R&D work via Will's appointment as a NICE Scholar, and her aim to integrate 'ordinary people's preferences and values...into the work of NICE' (nice.org.uk). Bendelow is an International Advisor on the Advisory Board of *Chronic Pain Australia*, contributing directly to public information strategies and policy

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agendas in this area of health and well-being, and is Public Governor and Honorary Senior Research Fellow at the Sussex Partnership Foundation NHS Trust.

- ***Producing research, policy reports and non-academic outputs that contribute to policy-making***

We have further aimed to present research findings to audiences that include policy-makers, practitioners, activists, service-providers and service-users to ensure that they benefit from our research and that our research benefits from their knowledge and experience. Faulkner's work on the regulatory environment for regenerative medicine, for example, was presented at a multidisciplinary – including scientists, engineers, industry consultants – Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency meeting (2012), feeding into a report to the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee. Phipps' on-going research-based relationship with the National Union of Students, specifically in relation to working on their *Hidden Marks* (2010) and *That's What She Said* (2013) reports, has led to her writing sexual-violence policy documents for higher education (HE) organisations. Woodfield has co-authored reports for the Higher Education Academy (2011) and the Equality Challenge Unit (2012). Hinton-Smith's research on lone parents fed into her work as a parliamentary researcher for Kate Green MP in summer 2011. She represented Green on All-Party Parliamentary Groups on issues including women, children, poverty and social mobility, and her expertise and research findings were deployed in report- and brief-writing activities that contributed directly to high-level party and government policy formation. Martell's research on social democracy was published in a Policy Network collection *After the Third Way* and has been presented to international think-tanks – e.g. Wiardi Beckman Stichting – and the Foundation for European Progressive Studies. Delanty and his team on the EU-funded Festivals project produced documents summarising findings for policy-makers, e.g. *European Art Festivals: Strengthening Cultural Diversity* (2011). We are active disseminators of our research to non-university audiences through media contributions, e.g. Hinton-Smith's interviews for the New York *Metro* (daily readership 1 million, 2012); appearances by Scott, Fincham, Seal and Bendelow on BBC Radio 4's *Thinking Allowed*; Edmunds' *Guardian Online* article 'Look elsewhere for the enemy within' (3 December 2008) and database entry for Muslim Council of Britain (2010).

- ***Working with non-university partners throughout the research process***

We collaborate with a wide range of user- and practitioner-groups to ensure that our research has impact. Collaboration occurs at a range of points during the research process, and at varying levels of intensity, but includes engaging and developing solid, on-going relationships with non-university partners while formulating research questions, inviting research-users and beneficiaries onto steering groups to oversee research and advise on impact value, and developing full co-researching projects with non-university partners. In collaboration with local curator Helen Sloan, and ten local artists producing original pieces for the event, Scott, Hinton-Smith and a post-doctoral research fellow – Härmä – organised 'Like Shadows: A Celebration of Shyness', as part of the White Night Arts Festival (Phoenix Gallery, Brighton, 29 October 2011); this inclusive, community-focused event was attended by approximately 7,000 visitors. Between 2008 and 2012, Woodfield was a member of the Senior Researchers' Group Helpdesk for the Community University Partnership Programme. In this role, she dealt with referred research queries from not-for-profit agencies in the regional community, cascading knowledge, expertise and findings to groups, e.g. supporting the Seaford Seniors' Forum in their quest to identify members' priorities by teaching survey design and data entry and aiding with statistical and policy analysis – producing a database of membership concerns. In 2008, CUPP received the *Times Higher Education* Award for 'outstanding contribution to... local community'.

- ***Sustaining an extensive programme of research-based outreach and knowledge-exchange activities***

We have further sought to engage non-university audiences via a portfolio of community-engagement events for adults and children. For example, since 2010 Woodfield has instigated and organised the Sussex Salon Series in partnership with the Brighton Dome and Festival Offices. This prominent not-for-profit series of public debates focuses on issues emerging from faculty research agendas and community interests (we take community approaches for themes and poll attendees at the close of each season). In these events, two University faculty act as 'expert contributors', alongside two external contributors e.g. Polly Toynbee (*The Guardian*), Caroline Lucas MP, Stephen Booth (Research Director, Open Europe), and Peter Tatchell (human-rights campaigner and gay-rights activist). A rationale of the debates is the creation of a knowledge-exchange space between academics

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and the non-University local community. We regularly poll attendees on key questions using electronic devices during these events and results have been incorporated into faculty understanding and research; links between contributors and community members have been initiated or strengthened by these events. For instance, the Salon 'Is an Inclusive Education System Possible?' was well-attended by local teachers, head teachers, and Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators from mainstream and special schools, as well as parents of children with special needs, who provided insight into how mainstreaming policies worked in their institutions; on-going links between community members, activists and faculty members were forged at this event. Our faculty have been particularly active contributors: Bendelow ('Expert Patients'; 'Body Beautiful'), Farsides ('Assisted Dying'), Fincham ('Civil Partnerships'), Will ('Expert Patients'). In 2013 we rolled such events out to the Ropetackle Arts Centre in Shoreham, and instigated a series of whole-day Children's Debates on campus for local schools. We (Fincham, Hinton-Smith, Martell and Will) further engage in *ad hoc*, research-based outreach activities with the local community and these have led to benefits for non-University communities. For instance, Hinton-Smith's research on lone and teenage parents led to relationships with staff and users of Sussex community services in disadvantaged areas and facilitated the initiation of mentoring work, including workshop participation, between young, lone parents and University members.

3. Strategy and plans

As a Department with an existing strategic aim to ensure impacts from our research, and with successful mechanisms in place for supporting and delivering this, we will seek to augment our approach, and further develop our strategy in several ways. These include the identification of new research-management mechanisms to ensure that all faculty and doctoral researchers are maximising the impact potential of their research:

- Ensuring that impact continues to be integrated and embedded into our research from the planning and proposal stage through to outputs and dissemination – e.g. faculty are required to reflect on the impact potential of their research in annual and 5-year research plans and meetings; all funding proposals are peer-reviewed and impact assessments checked.
- Ensuring that all researchers have the full training on impact that is available to staff and PGR students via the University Research and Enterprise Services and Doctoral School.
- School-level management structures include the HoS, the Director of Research and Knowledge Exchange and the HoD, who are responsible for the delivery of the University's research and impact vision and strategy. This includes developing the research potential and impact of postgraduate research students, expanding research funding streams, translating research into practical applications, and understanding and influencing the external research and policy agenda. Within Sociology, we also operate a Research Committee composed of the HoD and research-group leaders who, from 2013, are responsible for implementing the Knowledge Exchange and Impact strategy tailored to address subject-specific needs.
- Continuing to use HEIF funds to support the Sussex Salon Series, Ropetackle events and Young Peoples' Debates to ensure the future of our extensive research-based outreach activities.

4. Relationship to case studies

The impact case studies are: Farsides – Negotiating human bodies and donation issues; Phipps – 'Lad culture' and violence in Higher Education; and Scott – 'Like Shadows: A Celebration of Shyness' – a contemporary interactive art exhibition on shyness, technology and social interaction.

The case studies exemplify our overarching strategic commitment to produce robust, empirically grounded and theoretically sophisticated research that is policy-relevant and engages with a range of external communities. They exemplify our research focus on improving awareness and understanding of how key social opportunities, experiences and outcomes are differentiated by background characteristics, including those which may lead to disadvantage. Farsides and Phipps provide good examples of how our research strategy has led to contributions to policy debate and formation at the local, national and international levels, via appointments to key advisory boards, presentations and panel memberships and the production of policy reports and research publications that feed into national-level policy discussions and decision-making processes. Phipps and Scott provide good examples of how our research strategy has led to collaborating and engaging with user-groups and audiences, which has, in turn, produced impacts.