

<p><b>Institution:</b> University of Abertay Dundee</p>
<p><b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 23</p>
<p><b>a. Context</b></p> <p>In line with the University’s strategic goal to be ‘rooted in the community’, the priority for Sociology as a first-submission has been to enhance the quality of research outputs as a baseline for external impact and to realise wider influence through policy-relevant research. Since 2008, impact has become an increasingly explicit part of the unit’s discussion on and formulation of strategy, for instance in the mentoring of early career researchers. This has resulted in a relatively wide range of research impact and user engagement in public policy and the public sphere more generally. The Sociology unit’s main non-academic user groups reflect research interests within the unit:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Policy Sociology, especially health, education, youth and environment</b> – key impact on public policy, communities and professional practice</li> <li>• <b>Criminal Justice</b> – key impact on criminal justice stakeholders</li> <li>• <b>Media, arts and cultural industries</b> – key impact on digital design processes, media educationalists, artists and curator</li> </ul>
<p><b>b. Approach to impact</b></p> <p>Public policy and public debate are identified as key ways to root research impact in local and national communities. Sociology’s approach to impact relies on the wider recognition of individual staff building sustainable relationships through identifying and extending relevant user networks, such as NHS Tayside. Abertay operates a centralised communications function to manage and influence our reputation for applied research. This includes a programme of media releases designed to generate coverage in news media locally, nationally and internationally and in specialist media. Our commitment to this strategy is demonstrated by the media coverage which our research in this Unit received on, for example, Newsnight, Newsnight Scotland and Panorama.</p> <p><b>Policy Sociology</b></p> <p>Sociological expertise informs public policy processes and practices, with impacts on local and national policy and user practices in the fields of health, education and young people.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Health</b> policy research in 2012 on Support Needs of Young Adult Carers shaped the setting up of young adult carer services in Angus and Perth and Kinross. It engaged user groups from local government, the voluntary sector and NHS Tayside. This relationship was facilitated by the University after contact was made by the charity Angus Carers and is maintained by staff presence on the steering group. A study of Dundee School’s Anti-Smoking Initiative for NHS Tayside in 2008 main impact was to help secure additional resources for diversionary activities in schools to promote healthier lifestyles among pupils. It involved key users Dundee Council, schools in Dundee and their pupils. This relationship is maintained by steering meetings and presentations to Health Scotland, annual pupil conferences, and presentations to senior NHS Tayside executives. In such cases, the University allocates research time as part of workload planning to support research and engagement.</li> <li>• <b>Higher education</b> research impact influences national teaching and learning policy and pedagogy through staff appointment as lead research consultant for the ‘Graduates in the 21st Century’ Enhancement Theme, the ‘Developing and Supporting the Curriculum’ Theme and, more recently, on the preparation for and impact of ‘Curriculum for Excellence’ on Scottish HE. Through the main non-academic user QAA (Scotland) the research impacts on policy in terms of the sociological impacts of the changing higher education landscape: the widening of participation and issues of (in)equality, the focus on the personal, the engineering of graduate identities, formal and informal learning in the knowledge society, and impacts on staff and the management of change. This research is embedded in the University and feeds into strategic policy initiatives such as the development of Teaching and Learning (TL) planning in University committees and steering groups, and informs reporting practices on TL quality to external bodies. Relationships with users are maintained through the Enhancement Themes workshops and presentation series. Findings from higher education research are disseminated through the authoritative national Enhancement Themes website, which gives the findings international reach. For example, Scottish higher education has recently benefited from knowledge exchange with Australian HEI managers on policy and pedagogical developments in higher education.</li> <li>• <b>Youth</b> research impact included feedback meetings and invited submissions and presentations involving policy-makers, professionals, voluntary organisations – principally social work,</li> </ul>

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teaching and youth workers – to disseminate good practice in relation to young people and risk management. Other relevant activities include a joint conference with key stakeholders at Dundee University in March 2010 on Child Safety; a video conference presentation from Abertay to HM Inspectorate of Education; an invited presentation at a North Lanarkshire Council event on childhood hunger at Wishaw Library in November 2012; an invited talk at the youth worker conference Prestatyn in Wales in November 2012, and a number of meetings with community groups. Written and oral submissions were made to the Scottish Government's Education and Culture Committee in May and June 2013 on decision-making processes regarding taking children into care. A number of media outputs related to the youth and risk theme encompassed ten radio appearances, including BBC Radio Scotland; five newspaper articles in local and national press; and seven television appearances, including Newsnight Scotland.

- **Environmental** sociology contributes to and influences public disputes over land control and land management engaged with communities and regulatory bodies in rural Scotland such as the Isle of Rum Community Trust and the Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust, Scottish Natural Heritage, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the National Trust for Scotland. Initiated by staff, the University supported longitudinal study with the award of sabbaticals (2003 and 2011).

#### **Criminal justice users and stakeholders**

Sociological expertise shapes specific criminal justice policies, practices and public understanding, with impact at local, national and EU levels.

- **Extremism and Terror** research led to staff appointment as research consultant to the EU's Committee of the Regions, Area of Freedom Security and Justice in 2011; a presentation to Tayside Police CONTEST Board, 12 March 2013. Interviews about staff research into extremism and anti-Semitism appeared in *The Courier*, 21 March 2012 and about far-right violence on BBC Radio Scotland, 2 Aug. 2012, with a large social media following on academia.edu, including NGOs, government and media. Appointed as 'Expert Analyst' for The Extremis Project, 2012, a platform for extremism experts, advice is sought by government agencies, NGOs, law enforcement, and media.
- **Alternatives to Prison** research evaluated referral rates to East Port House Supported Accommodation Unit, part of Tayside Community Justice Authority. Its main impact is on how clients are 'processed' through the court referral system. Staff involved user groups such as Criminal Justice Social Workers at the earliest stage, prior to grant submission. Initial contact came through links established by the University's relationship with East Port House secure accommodation unit in Dundee, leading to one member of academic staff joining their Advisory Group. The University provided support and advice on the grant application process, enabling users to be involved at an early stage in the research design.
- **Tolerance and criminalisation** research led to a range of impacts. These include written and oral submissions in June and September 2011 to the Justice Committee on the Offensive Behaviour at Football Bill; a talk to school teachers at the Modern Studies Association Annual Conference; being an invited speaker at a football fans forum at Ibrox Stadium, Glasgow. Media dissemination included eight television appearances, fifteen newspaper articles or quotes, eighteen radio appearances including Radio 4, and online articles. An article on the riots in England of 2011 in the influential journal *Scottish Affairs* prompted a wide range of media interviews.

#### **Media, arts and cultural industry**

Sociological expertise shapes media education, cultural understanding and new media technologies at local and national levels.

- **Media sociology** research led to a productive relationship with the Association of Media Education Scotland (AMES), the body for media educationalists in schools and colleges in Scotland. Staff are invited by AMES to present current research in media sociology to their annual conference and to write articles for the trade journal, *Media Education Journal*, which forms the basis for classroom teaching activities.
- **Sociology of art** research led to invited presentations and panel discussions on cultural policy, cultural sociology and cultural criticism with artists, photographers, film-makers and curators at galleries, theatres, and cinemas. Public engagement was also generated through a series of articles in the cultural politics magazine, *Variant*.
- **Cultural industries** research involved collaboration with the user-centred design process at the

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Telecom Software and System Groups at the Waterford IT (Ireland, 2008-2010). Here the objective is to design reputation interfaces using sociological insights building in end-user needs from the earliest point in the design process (see <https://factchecking.civillinks.it/en/service/#reputation>). Relationships with the user were initiated through personal networks established through internet and social media. User-centred research lead to the design of novel interfaces with social media platforms.

**c. Strategy and plans**

In keeping with the University strategic plan to root scholarship in the concerns of local, national and international communities, our aim is to embed impact considerations in sociological research. Our strategy to achieve this is to:

- Develop a more defined translational approach to research
- Continue to foster equal and inclusive working relationships with our non-academic partners
- Continue to promote and disseminate research findings to wider publics
- Reward knowledge exchange alongside traditional research outputs using workload planning models and career advancement
- Continue to support individual researchers and groupings that show potential to produce excellent research with real world impact

In particular, we will continue to attract researchers with an emerging reputation for policy sociology. This will ensure that we maintain and strengthen our productive working relationships with local, national and international bodies, such as the new national organisation Police Scotland, the Scottish Government, the EU, NHS, and Dundee City Council. Such research will continue to broaden the multi-disciplinary approach of the unit by engaging user groups, working with other areas of the university, such as collaborating on creative industries with White Space (researchers from psychology, computer arts, computer science, sociology and environmental sciences) and criminology with the Investigation, Security, Police and Intelligence (I-SPI) grouping (psychology, sociology, forensic science, computer security and law), and beyond the university through existing and developing new relationships with user groups such as SIPR (Scottish Institute of Policing Research) and ACPOS (Association of Chief Police Officers Scotland).

Our future planning recognises that criminal justice, health and education policy research is currently affected by public and voluntary sector austerity, impacting funding and network opportunities. However, the unit is in a strong position to build on its existing networks of users. For instance, work on HE enhancement themes has been funded through a series of consultancy awards, generating expertise and reputation in this strand of policy-related research. This has fed into current research on national education policy, Curriculum for Excellence, which will lead to the widening of networks between school, FE and HE representatives. Other current initiatives include evaluation research for Dundee City Council and Education Department to examine educational policy in Physical Exercise (PE). This involved user groups from the beginning. From this research recommendations will be made about how physical activities might be developed and adapted across all Dundee schools, with plans to disseminate findings through the steering group, Education Department and NHS Tayside partners. In 2013 evaluation research was carried out for Tayside Directorate of Public Health and Dundee City Council on Health Literacy (Smoking) and Story Development in Dundee Primary schools, which will influence teaching and learning through children's own narratives in Dundee primary schools, with plans to introduce a digital animation element by working with White Space research group.

**d. Relationship to case studies**

The case studies represent particular examples of the approach taken to impact by the Sociology unit in the period since 2008. These have depended mainly on the efforts of individuals with time and material support from the University and practical support from colleagues. Both case studies illustrate the importance of being embedded in wider networks. In one case, the researcher of discourses in health and higher education was deeply involved in local and national higher education and health networks. This enabled him to disseminate research findings to key stakeholders, make key recommendations and influence HEI and NHS practices. The youth and risk case study shows the importance of a proactive dissemination strategy, developing networks and a public presence for sustaining the momentum of research in the public arena. Such dissemination helps shape professional practices, contributes to the scrutiny of public policy, and widens the terms of public understanding of crime, young people, and institutional language and practices.