

Institution: University of Oxford
Unit of Assessment: Sociology (23)
<p>a. Context</p> <p>This template primarily covers the impact of research conducted by the Department of Sociology. It also covers the impact of sociological research conducted by the Oxford Internet Institute (OII), which is an autonomous interdisciplinary unit within the University's Social Sciences Division.</p> <p>Sociology at Oxford is renowned for its empirical research and especially for quantitative analysis. Our research has significant and broad impact on many different users: politicians making policy; civil servants implementing policy; and organizations and publics debating policy. This range of users spans geographically from the United Kingdom to the European Union, extending to Latin America.</p> <p>Within the UK government, our research has been central to policy-making. The Cabinet Office used research on social mobility by Goldthorpe and Mills, which underpinned the White Paper <i>New Opportunities</i> (2009). This research was also used by the Panel on Fair Access to the Professions (2009), and the National Equality Panel (2010). Mills was one of three sociologists appointed to the latter panel. The Department for Communities and Local Government commissioned Heath (and his doctoral student, James Laurence) to analyze the sources of community cohesion (described in case 23-04). Other governmental users include the Home Office, the Office of National Statistics, the Government Office for Science, and the Department for Work and Pensions.</p> <p>Our research informs debates over public policy. The <i>Guardian</i> (2013) featured Stuckler's book on the consequences of austerity for public health. His research has been used by many organizations shaping policy debates, such as the Trades Union Congress (<i>The Cost of Unemployment</i>, 2010) and the King's Fund (response to Health White Paper, 2011), and has been cited in Parliamentary debates (2010). (Stuckler's independent research began while a postdoctoral fellow at Oxford from 2008 to 2010; he rejoined the Department in 2013.)</p> <p>Our research is used by various organizations in the public and private sector. Users include the Electoral Commission, Ofcom, the Sutton Trust, the Women's Budget Group, and the Equality and Human Rights Commission. In the private sector, Trajectory Partnerships, working for firms like Nokia and Kellogg's, partnered with Oxford's Centre for Time Use to collect data on time use in metropolitan areas using GPS devices. Other consultants using our research include Ipsos MORI's Social Research Institute and SQW. The BBC and other media organizations rely on methods developed at Oxford for election prediction (described in case 23-02).</p> <p>Beyond the UK, our research impacts on European users. Europol, Eurojust and the Italian Anti-Mafia Commission draw heavily on Varese's research (described in case 23-01). As another example, France's Ministry of Work used Gallie's research on the quality of employment to design a new survey to monitor stress at work. Intergovernmental users include the United Nations Development Program, the World Health Organization, and the OECD's Statistics Directorate. In Latin America, Payne's research on transitional justice is used by activists for human rights and by lawyers and prosecutors (described in case 23-03).</p> <p>b. Approach to impact</p> <p>Sociology has two aims for impact. One is to make policy more effective, to enhance the welfare of society. The other is to inform public debate, by increasing understanding of social trends and patterns. To achieve these aims, Oxford Sociology exploits its distinctive position within the discipline, emphasizing empirical research and quantitative analysis. This leads to two pathways to impact.</p> <p>The first derives from a focus on topics which matter to policy-makers and the public, such as organized crime, social mobility, social cohesion, internet use, and public health. Research on such</p>

topics is often initially driven by sociological curiosity. The research findings, based on rigorous empirical investigation, are then disseminated and communicated. Users subsequently take up the findings for their own purposes. This usually begins an ongoing relationship between the researcher and the user. One example is the way that Oxford's long-running research programme on social mobility has been used by policy-makers and has shaped public debate.

Another example is the Oxford Internet Survey, conducted biennially since 2003, and run by Dutton and Blank at the OII. This survey has shed new light on the digital divide, by emphasizing the attitudes of non-users rather than lack of physical access. These findings have reshaped internet policies through briefings to the Prime Minister's Digital Communications team, the Number 10 Policy and Analytics Unit, and heads of digital engagement throughout Whitehall (in 2011). Survey data have been shared with the Scottish Government's Culture Analytical Team and the Welsh Assembly's Digital Inclusion Unit, informing digital strategy in both nations.

The second pathway to impact derives from our research on methods for analysing data. Users frequently commission Oxford sociologists to undertake research to achieve an immediate impact. There are many cases involving survey data. For example, the Arts Council commissioned Chan to analyze their own survey of cultural consumption. His finding, that people who had participated as children were far more likely to participate as adults, led to the Council's new emphasis on engaging children in the arts. Oxford's research is developing beyond survey analysis to cutting-edge methods, such as collecting time-use data from mobile devices, and reconstructing criminal networks from wiretaps.

The second pathway, in particular, underscores the reciprocal relationship between research and impact. Collaborative relationships with research users do not simply promote the impact of our research; they also enable new research. A good illustration is Chan's relationship with the Arts Council. By consulting on how to increase participation in the arts, Chan was able to use data collected by the Council for his own research, culminating in a major book (*Social Status and Cultural Consumption*, Cambridge University Press, 2010).

Oxford Sociology's approach has been to foster impact that grows organically from sociological research agendas and from established relationships with users. Impact is facilitated by several institutional mechanisms. The Department and OII encourage staff to act as advisers and consultants to research users. As a result, staff may be paid as consultants for up to thirty days each year (without loss of salary). This policy enables staff to develop long-term relationships with users. An example is Fisher's ongoing work for the BBC: it has employed him for a total of seventy days in the period 2008-13.

For larger projects, academic staff take advantage of Oxford University Consulting (OUC), a component of the University supported by HEFCE's HEIF funding. Thus Heath joined an interdisciplinary team of social scientists to tender through OUC for a contract from the National Auditing Office (NAO). Heath evaluates the NAO's own reports and advises the organisation on the use of statistical evidence to measure value for money. OUC's contracts with the NAO have totalled £8m since 2008.

Relationships with users are developed in many venues. Oxford sociologists are frequently invited to engage directly with users. For example, Heath spoke about his research on integration to a symposium at the House of Commons, co-organized with the All-Party Parliamentary Group Against Antisemitism (2013). Conversely, leading public figures come to Oxford through Nuffield College's Visiting Fellowship. Visitors include Brendan Barber, General Secretary of the Trades Union Congress, who has a long-term relationship with Gallie's research on the quality of employment. Thus, the British Academy's report on stress in the workplace was launched by Barber (2010).

Aside from research by members of staff, impact is achieved by training the next generation of

research users. The Department's doctoral professional seminar (for second-year doctoral students) promotes careers in research beyond the university, and has featured speakers from the Metropolitan Police (Betsy Stanko), the Home Office (Amanda White), the Government Office for Science (Lucy Mason), NatCen (Alison Park), KPMG (Adrienne Rivlin), and Towers Watson (Ying Zhou). The last three users undertook their graduate training at Oxford. The Department also encourages doctoral students to use the new ESRC internship scheme. Juta Kawalerowicz spent six months with the Home Office, conducting applied research on how to attract highly qualified third-country citizens (2013).

c. Strategy and plans

The Department in 2013 made the strategic decision to invest in two new strands of research, both with a direct policy impact. The Oxford Population Centre, led by Billari, will develop relationships with users of demographic analysis and predictions, and also promote public understanding of global population issues (blog at www.openpop.org). The second strand of research is the sociology of health and well-being. A team of researchers (three in post, with an additional two positions for which funding has been secured), led by Stuckler, will investigate the consequences of economic policies for health outcomes, focusing especially on the imposition of austerity. This research is already contributing to fundamental debates over public spending (e.g. op-ed in *The Guardian*, 30 July 2013).

OII will increase its investment in computational social science or 'big data', which has direct relevance for a range of private and public users, from companies analyzing consumer demand to human-rights organizations monitoring internet censorship in authoritarian regimes.

Alongside the organic development of impact emerging from particular research projects, the Department and OII will institutionalize formal mechanisms to maximize impact. This will exploit Oxford's new initiative on knowledge exchange, underpinned by the ESRC's Impact Acceleration Account awarded to the Division of Social Sciences for 2013/14 (£0.4m, with Billari as Principal Investigator). We have four priorities. Firstly, to incorporate impact across the life-cycle of research projects, ensuring that it is embedded from the outset. Secondly, to promote impact among Early Career Researchers, by enabling access to relationships with users that have been built up by senior academics. Thirdly, to deepen the extent of knowledge exchange with businesses, beyond the relationships already established by the Centre for Time Use and the OII. Finally, to develop formal tools to measure impact, and thus permit assessment and improvement of impact strategies.

d. Relationship to case studies

One pathway to impact comes from users embracing the findings of the Department's research. This is illustrated by two cases:

1. *Enhancing policies to combat organized crime (23-01)*: findings on the migration of organized crime reshape security policy in the United Kingdom, Italy, and within the European Union.
2. *Helping democracies to deal with past atrocities (23-03)*: findings on transitional justice are taken up by NGOs, victims, and the justice system in Latin America and elsewhere. This case also illustrates the global reach of Oxford Sociology.

The other pathway to impact comes from users exploiting the Department's methodological research to generate new empirical findings. This is illustrated by two cases:

3. *Predicting UK election results for the media and the public to improve televised programming and inform the voting public (23-02)*: advanced statistical techniques for analyzing polling data are highly valued by the BBC and other media organizations.
4. *Strengthening government policy on community cohesion in England and Wales (23-04)*: analysis of a survey carried out for the Department for Communities and Local Government leads to far-reaching changes in policy. This case also demonstrates the reciprocal relationship between impact and research: this analysis of the Department's survey challenges conclusions derived from American research, and thus has become widely cited by social scientists.