Institution: The Open University

Unit of Assessment: C25 Education

a. Context

In research, as in all its activities, The Open University (OU) exists to be open to people, places, methods and ideas. Rooted in the OU's distinctive history of educational innovation, commitment to social justice and widening participation, the Centre for Research in Education and Educational Technology (CREET) pursues agenda-defining research to theorise and shape the future of education. We have built strong relationships with practitioners, organisations and policymakers, working collaboratively and across discipline boundaries to transform lives by creating new opportunities for education and learning.

CREET is an internationally renowned centre of excellence. Its work coheres around four clusters of signature research excellence: (1) Childhood Studies, (2) Education Futures, (3) Language and Literacies, and (4) Technology Enhanced Learning. Clusters collaborate with a range of partners including those directly involved in supporting learning and those that influence it through policy or legislation. Each cluster has a wide range of beneficiaries. They include: children and young people; parents and carers; social workers; health visitors and language therapists; teachers and school leaders; teacher trainers; adult learners; further and higher education professionals; public and commercial providers of education; editorial boards of scientific journals; professional associations; non-governmental organisations including Mencap and NSPCC; and local, national and international governmental organisations such as the UK's Department for Education (DfE), the Hungarian Government and the office of the United Nations Secretary General.

Our research impacts on learning practices and the policies that support learning, from the early years to adulthood. Impacts from across CREET include:

• frameworks for monitoring child development for use by parents and professionals
• changes to the practices of teaching, learning and support
• changes to the content and process of training courses for teachers and lecturers
• contributions to the development of Local Authority (LA) policy
• new opportunities for learning facilitated by innovative technologies
• a stronger voice for young people in shaping their services
• greater understanding of young people's rights, and frameworks to enshrine them at an international level
• pioneering online spaces for dialogue which develop and draw on user understanding of educational issues.

b. Approach to impact

Our work reshapes practices, policies and public debates in education. Our approach is underpinned by excellent research that is driven by theoretical concerns grounded in real world problems. Our research is generated and applied through partnership and collaboration with users, from discussing the research focus, to jointly producing resources and seeking to promote the agency of those we work with. We are committed to using and developing innovative, participatory methodologies that provide a voice for learners, with child-led research as a significant example.

We provide systematic and strategic support for impact, benchmarking our approach via a version of the Edge tool, developed by the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement. Our elaboration of the tool extends to work that creates change within partner organisations and wider beneficiaries. Operational support for impact is led by the Deputy Director of CREET, whose brief is to enhance impact and public engagement, with direction provided by our Executive Steering Group. Impact development is embedded within CREET strategy, operational plans and funding allocations. Strategic funding is provided for impact work within the budget allocations for each cluster and additional CREET funds are allocated for impact work which crosses clusters. The Deputy Director organises staff development workshops to support impact work and advises research teams on their pathways to impact. We have funded face-to-face and virtual opportunities

for engaging with user communities in order to assess and address their needs. The key elements of CREET's approach to impact are:

1. Developing long-term relationships with research users. We nurture partnerships between research teams and key groups by supporting initial meetings, funding events and joint initiatives. For example, CREET researchers were supported in working with five diverse local authorities to change practices in the teaching of reading, impacting on 800 schools and 36,000 pupils per year group. CREET part-funded a joint event with the UK Literacy Association (UKLA) to enable teachers and education professionals to engage with research on reading, literacy and argumentation. The UKLA has continued to support our research on reading, co-publishing a summary of research funded by the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) which was customised for teachers.

2. Securing external funding for impact work. Intensive support and feedback are provided to bidders by the Deputy Director, Director and senior CREET staff. Examples of successful pathways are shared, e.g. the successful ESRC Knowledge Exchange Project bid to develop work on conflict reconciliation (£72k). Staff development events focus on developing impact within each stage of research. Work that facilitates writing a robust bid is also funded, e.g. preparatory meetings with users/partners. We draw extensively on expertise from the OU's Research Office, in particular the Research Career Development Team who oversee implementation of the Concordat for Supporting the Career Development of Researchers, and whose work has been recognised by the European Commission HR Excellence in Research Award. Senior staff in CREET promote the work of the Research Office's Innovation and Enterprise Team, encouraging research teams to work with them on bids for Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTP) and Knowledge Exchange Vouchers. Collaboration with Booktrust resulted in a recent bid for a KTP.

3. Working with policymakers. Our researchers have built up strong relationships with those shaping and implementing policy in the UK and internationally. For example, Woodhead built on previous work as Adviser to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2005) to take the lead on drafting the UN Secretary General's report on Young Children's Rights (2010) which resulted in a UN Resolution with specific recommendations and strategies for Early Childhood. At the national level, Oates has worked with the Department for Education (DfE), and predecessors, to lead the development of a generic Developmental Journal for Children with Additional Needs (2008), which was incorporated into the Early Support programme and linked with Oates' authoring of the Unique Child charts in Development Matters in the Early Years Foundation Stage in England. This relationship with the DfE has continued, leading to the development of journals for older age groups and children with multiple needs.

4. Widening our networks of users. Using the UK-wide presence of the OU, CREET works with professional and non-professional user groups, harnessing their expertise, maximising the reach of our research to diverse communities and extending our understanding of their needs. We also work internationally. For example, Oates worked with the team that established the first 40 Biztos Kezdet (Sure Start) Children Centres in Hungary, and has negotiated the use of the Developmental Journal, in computerised form, within the Hungarian national programme.

5. Creating online communities of users. Pioneering the use of digital technologies we dialogue with national and international communities of users through virtual networks, where debate is informed by evidence and outputs from our research. The development of the 'Teachers as Readers' Evidence hub arose from a needs analysis by a partner local authority, which then part-funded development work alongside the DfE-funded Vital project in CREET (£8.1 million). The new hub builds on the model provided by the earlier Open Educational Resources Hub, also developed in CREET with funding from the Hewlett Foundation. The Vital project has itself created a resource for online networking amongst teachers in England (6000 users annually). This work builds on our research into teachers' situated professional development to develop peer-to-peer learning. In another example, our Language and Literacies Research Cluster worked collaboratively with the European Centre for Modern Languages to engage language teachers across Europe in online dialogue about the application of products from our research (training materials) in different national contexts.

6. Mobilising audiences via broadcast and social media. We change public attitudes and

understanding through contributing to major television programmes, creating new online outputs and targeting popular print media. We work with the OU's Open Media Unit to ensure broadcasts are linked to interactive OU web pages and accessible research-based booklets, which engage the audience more deeply with the issues, prompting them to question attitudes and actions. For example, three CREET researchers drew on their research to advise the BBC co-production 'Child of Our Time' which has sustained a significant audience, on average 4.1 million and with ratings of 'excellent'. Web pages for 'Child of Our Time' attracted 250,000 visits with 100,000 people completing research activities. CREET uses the OU's digital infrastructure, including the OU's main channels on iTunes U and YouTube (the OU was the first university to reach a million subscribers on iTunes U) and OpenLearn, our free online portal, where more extensive engagement is stimulated. Researchers in our Technology Enhanced Learning Cluster have developed an online presence via social media through which they engage in dialogue with users, and crucially gather research ideas. For example, Weller uses microblogging (6000 followers) to alert the public to his professional blog (over 300,000 views) and to research webinars. Altmetrics measure project outputs to inform evaluation, alongside other measures of engagement and community input.

c. Strategy and plans

CREET's research strategy highlights our role in shaping the future of education, and developing new approaches to teaching and learning through excellent research. Maintaining our relationships with users, deepening their engagement, and evidencing the impact of our work will continue to be a key task. To take forward this work we are implementing a detailed Public Engagement and Impact Strategy that draws on our existing practices, and internal and external guidance, including the Concordat for Engaging the Public with Research, established by UK funders. CREET's strategy supports the work of the University's RCUK-funded Catalyst project (£299k), contributing to the development of an Open Research University. A CREET researcher leads the project as the OU's Champion for Public Engagement and a further three CREET researchers are seconded part-time.

CREET's objectives
1. Maintain and develop relationships with policymakers and other users, to deepen the reach and significance of the impact of our research:
    *   work with research teams to identify key user groups and widen those involved in shaping research, including those who work with traditionally excluded groups
    *   draw on the professional and research networks of staff to shape and respond to new directions in policy
    *   support research teams in developing partnerships through which users can contribute to identifying and prioritising deeper impacts
    *   identify and secure the resources needed for working with user partners.
2. Develop and implement clear plans for public engagement and impact, and in securing ongoing funding for this work:
    *   facilitate the involvement of users in designing new projects
    *   retain a specific impact budget to support new initiatives, undertake horizon scanning for external funding, including non-traditional funders
    *   continue to provide individual feedback on pathways to impact, targeting increased user input into shaping research design and implementation, and more effective evidence gathering and evaluation of impact
    *   continue to share good practice featuring CREET, both internally and with external users.
3. Extend public engagement and impact work, and support research teams in developing robust social media strategies:
    *   continue work with the Open Media Unit to access training for CREET researchers in engaging with the media across all platforms: broadcast, print and social media
    *   contribute further to the OU's Research Communication Strategy
    *   convene forums to share existing good practice by CREET researchers in using social media and expand its strategic use by research teams
    *   explore the potential of learning analytics in evidencing change via social media
    *   maintain our research presence on OpenLearn, the OU's Open Educational Resource (OER), engaging users with new ideas and their applications

- involve our alumni professionals (teachers, lecturers, youth workers, educational psychologists and early years workers) in debating and changing practices.
4. Contribute to user-run networks, groups and online platforms to extend engagement with our research and develop further impact:
    - work with research teams and clusters to identify key user groups, ways we can actively contribute to their agendas, where appropriate, and shape future work by users
    - contribute to working groups, major conferences, training events, online debates/blogs and joint publications.
5. Extend the visibility of researchers who are undertaking public engagement and impact work, and recognise their achievements internally and externally:
    - review the effects of inclusion of the Impact and Public Engagement category within researchers' plans and staff appraisals
    - target key impact work for external recognition through national awards building on successful shortlisting in the Guardian University Awards 2013 for the Outstanding Research Impact category
    - continue to promote researchers' impact work on our external website and via the OU Research Communications Team.

d. Relationship to case studies

Our approach to developing long-term relationships with key users is exemplified by the case study 'Reading for pleasure in the 21st century: impact on education policy, practice and perceptions'. Across several phases of work the project team worked closely with five local authorities and partner schools to involve teachers, as researchers, in generating innovative classroom practices. CREET funded action research in a partnership school to explore the impact of the *Our Story* app; involving users (teachers and pupils) in improving its functionality and developing school-based uses of the app.

The case study 'Empowering children and young people' shows how CREET supports the development of networks between researchers and beneficiaries. The Children's Research Centre (CRC) has developed a 'learning community' of schools, youth organisations (e.g. the Girl Guides) and charities (e.g. Mencap) across the UK to enable child-led research with several hundred children. CREET is supporting CRC's website redevelopment. In this and the 'Reading' case study, we have begun to develop 'evidence hubs' for online dialogue with users; and this approach builds on the more mature Open Education Resources hub.

The reach and significance of our work with policymakers is illustrated by the case study, 'The impact of the National Student Survey: changing the behaviour of institutions, teachers and students'. The survey, which resulted from our early research, has been implemented widely across the UK and has changed behaviours within HE.

Three of our case studies, 'Shaping the new open education policy and practice agenda', 'The impact of mobile learning research on practice in a global context' and 'Enabling publics to participate in science learning through technology', demonstrate our strengths in using new technologies to impact on users. The case studies show how users' needs and constraints have guided implementation, for example, in using simple mobile technologies in Bangladesh (through 'English in Action' over 4000 teachers have engaged in learning using mobile devices) and low-tech-customised open learning in Sub-Saharan Africa (over 300,000 teachers used TESSA materials). Engaging with users via social media has grown the community using the products of our research, such as iSpot, nQuire and other resources. These are now also available online via the OpenScience Laboratory, a joint initiative of the Wolfson Foundation and the Open University.

All six case studies demonstrate success in securing diverse funding sources for impact, for example RCUK, DFID, DfE, the Esmée Fairburn Foundation, the Hewlett Foundation, and in-kind contributions from private companies including Microsoft. They all demonstrate that our approach to impact has generated significant change over the long term. We nurture strong local impacts, but have also demonstrated our capacity to impact nationally and internationally, creating new opportunities for learning.