

**Institution: University of Sussex**

**Unit of Assessment: UoA 17 Geography**

### 1. Context

The Department is situated within the School of Global Studies and much of its work is international in scope. Consistent with the Department's global transformations research strategy, outlined in REF5, we aim to carry out research that achieves a range of impacts, including those on creativity, culture and society, on economic, commercial and organisational processes, on the environment, on practitioners and professional services and on public policy. Aligned with the global research mission, many researchers work in developing countries or emerging economies and have impacts that reach into governments and/or civil-society organisations in those countries. The Department works directly with industry and commerce via its partnership with international engineering company Halcrow, with whom it has co-developed a specialist centre for consultancy and research activities in applied geomorphology and for training professionals in this field. Some researchers also work with NGOs and local government departments in Brighton or in other local contexts – at the national level at Whitehall (DFID, Home Office, FCO) and with think tanks (IPPR, ODI) and internationally – with INGOs (Red Cross, IRC), at the EU (DG DevCO, DG Home, DG RTD, DG MARE) and the UN. The intention to connect the Department's research constructively with its users is built into all appropriate areas of Geography's activity, including each research cluster's plan, and each of the cross-cluster themes.

### 2. Approach to impact

Geography embeds engagement with users within its research, right across the Department, in order to achieve effective impact with policy-makers, community groups and commercial organisations, both locally and internationally. The Department prioritises: getting the interest, support and contribution of important decision-makers at an early stage; formulating research questions in a manner relevant for research users; helping end-users of research to become aware of, access and apply research knowledge; using intermediaries, the media and the arts to connect research with end-users in policy and practice; and making efforts to communicate the results in a user-friendly way.

The methods used for ensuring impact through user engagement include developing bespoke training courses, seeking consultancy that complements other research for relevant clients, public engagement through debates and the production of art, drama and film, the use of advisory groups for research centres and large projects, and of participatory and action research methods, and the co-creation of research agendas.

There are numerous strands to the Geography Department's embedded approach to impact, four key elements of which are outlined:

#### Developing relationships

Much of the impact of research arises through developing relationships between researchers and research users, to build shared understanding, trust and awareness. The Department invests effort in building these relationships via several mechanisms, including visiting practitioners, advisory boards for research centres, consultations across the Department, the feeding back of lessons learned from specific projects via the Departmental Research Committee, and also through the areas described in detail below:

- **Training** focused on requirements of business or policy-makers. In Physical Geography, the MSc in Applied Geomorphology embeds a policy component taught by practitioners from industry; practitioners from industry undertake modules on the course as CPD. In Human Geography, innovative research on return migration, skilled migration, and migration and poverty linkages has been used to enhance the knowledge and policy approaches of staff in the FCO, the Home Office and DFID through a series of bespoke training courses designed to present research in ways that speak to timely policy concerns (2006–2012). The Department was also commissioned to run the Chevening course for the FCO (2008–2010), which provided three months of training in Migration Studies for mid-level civil servants from Commonwealth countries. During these courses, new

## Impact template (REF3a)

research findings were used to enable civil servants to carry out their roles with a more sophisticated understanding of migration issues.

- **Secondment.** Secondment out from the Department into DFID in order to expose research users to findings, and researchers to the research needs of users in meaningful ways.
- **Recruitment policy:** Attracting people with experience of working with research users. The Department has appointed the UK's first Chair in Applied Geomorphology, Professor Roger Moore, who concurrently has a long-standing role as Director (Geotechnics and Engineering Geomorphology) for international engineering company, the Halcrow Group. Dr Priya Deshingkar has extensive experience of providing advice to international organisations on migration and was appointed as Research Director of the DFID Migration research centre in 2010, from ODI.

### Embedding research in policy concerns

The Department has benefited from working closely with DFID since 2005. DFID policies required the unit to develop and maintain an awareness of up-to-date thinking on research into use, and to invest in professional support. This experience, as well as subsequent projects working with the EU and the Government Department for Science, has informed the way the Department embeds research activities into policy concerns and *vice versa*. This has led to a number of projects that integrate policy concerns including:

- *Migrating out of Poverty Consultation exercise.* In the first year of the Migrating out of Poverty project, five consultations were carried out on the work programme of the RPC in different countries, resulting in specific projects being developed in response to local concerns.
- *Foresight project.* The project was informed by a high-level stakeholder group consisting of 26 individuals in international organisations (e.g. Red Cross, WHO, UNDP, IPCC) and an advisory group of 48 civil servants from across Whitehall.
- *Humanitarianism.* A workshop on New Humanitarian Agendas was referred to in the HEFCE-funded report on 'Effective Academic-Humanitarian Collaboration: A Practical Resource to Support Academic and Humanitarian Organisations Working Together' as a successful model of knowledge exchange between academic researchers and humanitarian agencies. Research Hotels have been held to work out future research agendas in consultation with these and other humanitarian partners.
- *CKDN.* The Migration and Climate Change project in Bangladesh co-opted research-users into the design of the project.

### Participatory research and impact

Sussex geographers use participatory and immersive methods to connect research and action at a local level.

- In collaboration with arts-practitioner colleagues, Ben Rogaly uses oral history, ethnography, film, photography and theatre to highlight the role of migration and trans-spatial connections in the lives of people often portrayed as indigenous, and thereby to develop a greater mutual regard between residents of all backgrounds, from fairground and factory workers to priests, *imams* and local councillors in Peterborough.
- Dominic Kniveton works to improve the utilisation of climate information for real-world decision-making, including working with Kenyan farmers to develop a variety of participatory methods to combine scientific and local knowledge in order to increase community resilience to climate-related hazards, and in terms of the improved use of data in strategic disaster-risk management, in a process called 'Participatory downscaling'.

There are a range of structural and institutional resources which support the integration of research work with policy concerns, engagement with research-users and the development of on-going relationships and, hence, impact.

- *Research Communications Manager (RCM).* A communications professional has worked with the DFID-funded migration research centre from 2005 and the learning from this experience led to the School appointing an RCM in Jan 2012 who is responsible for engaging with non-academic research-users and supporting the achievement of impact through projects across the School.

## Impact template (REF3a)

- **Research themes**

The University supports – centrally, by a research theme coordinator, an administrator and central funds amounting to £250,000 – six research themes which encourage engagement with research-users. The Department of Geography is active in many of the themes but provides the academic leader for the theme ‘Global Transformations’, which itself emerged out of the Geography Department plan of 2009. This theme has supported a number of interdisciplinary activities designed to increase the impact of research, including public debates on climate change and the H5N1 virus, as well as organising an event bringing together humanitarian actors and researchers. There are centrally located university resources which the Department uses in order to ensure that impact activities are embedded in its research projects and that research findings can be made useful in the most appropriate ways. These include the Enterprise Development Fund, which supports proof of concept activities for potential commercial applications (Geography currently has a project under review), and the Press and Communications Division, which leads on media relations.

### 3. Strategy and plans

Geography at Sussex has developed a strong culture of research engagement, which embeds the needs of non-academic users within projects. This approach is consistent with the Department’s global transformations growth strategy. Going forward, our overarching goal is to help to address some of the most pressing environmental, economic and social concerns of our age. Impact is clearly vital to every aspect of this goal and to achieve it the School’s strategy is to increase the impact of its research work by supporting researchers, providing resources and engaging with research-users so that we can build in their contribution to research on an on-going basis, formulate research questions appropriately and support end-users to apply research knowledge.

As part of the School of Global Studies, Geography will take advantage of a series of external engagement strategies to connect to non-academic research-users, including visiting practitioner fellowships and an advisory board. At project level, the RCM is part of the peer-review process for proposals within the Department, to ensure that each new project proposal adequately takes into account strategies for engaging with research-users on a timely basis and provides the structures, resources and budget to achieve this. This post is supported by HEIF funds which are allocated to activities that engage with non-academic users, including events, communications activities and non-academic publications (for example the humanitarianism ‘Research Hotel’). We are also developing a ‘pathways to global impact’ scheme whereby the School will support faculty leave for researchers who sign up to an impact process in the year following the end of a grant. For projects which meet specified criteria, the scheme will provide co-funding to researchers to support the development of an impact agenda and impact activities, including professional communications support, support for events and publications and study leave for the PI. Academics in the Department routinely carry out consultancy contracts with UN-level organisations, national government departments and others (e.g. Commonwealth Secretariat) and our strategy is to increase this type of engagement as a way to move relevant research closer to the policy sphere.

### 4. The relationship between the unit’s approach to impact and the case studies

- **Low-carbon technology transfer.** This case study illustrates Geography’s commitment to policy-relevant research, integrating stakeholders into early phases of research and dedicating time and resources to engaging with stakeholders to ensure uptake. It also illustrates the benefit of the strategic use of consultancy projects to strengthen stakeholder engagement and how the development of bespoke training courses can engage policy-makers in productive ways with research.
- **From ‘climate refugees’ to climate adaptors.** This exemplifies the unit’s approach to embedding research in policy by getting the interest, support and contribution of important decision-makers at an early stage (through a stakeholder group) and formulating research questions in a manner relevant for research-users.
- **European and Chinese regional development and poverty alleviation.** This demonstrates the ways in which developing relationships, in this case with the Chinese state authorities via the EU, enable our research to influence central state planning at the highest level.