Institution: University of Reading

Unit of Assessment: 20 Law

a. Context

The School of Law is typical of Law departments within the UK in that its scholars research a wide range of subject areas and use diverse methodological approaches, reflecting the holistic nature of legal education. That said, the unit is distinctive in that its work coheres around a series of specialist substantive research themes (*International and EU law*, including International Law, Human Rights Law, and International Commercial Law; *Rights*, including Gender, Race, Sexuality, Religion and Law; *Public Policy*, including Criminal Justice, Environmental Law, and Health Care; and *Legal History*) as well as a number of key disciplinary approaches (empirical legal studies; socio-legal studies; doctrinal/black-letter analysis). It is through these themes that engagement with non-academic user groups has been facilitated, and examples of successful engagement have been shared as a means of facilitating future impact.

The main user groups to benefit from the unit's research have tended to fall into three categories: i) governmental policymakers; ii) judicial decision-makers; and iii) non-government advocacy groups. The impacts that result tend to involve informing the work of professional practice (particularly organisations that define their practices via the law), and informing changes in public policy, law and services (by using research to assist in the process of reform). This impact has occurred in relation to the actions and outcomes achieved by government departments and lawmakers, legal actors and service users, policy and advisory bodies, and advocacy groups. Different research themes have tended to focus on producing particular types of impact, so, for instance, the gender, race and law scholars tend to work (often collaboratively) with non-government advocacy and advisory groups to inform changes in law and public policy reform on behalf of service users.

b. Approach to impact

As set out, the research undertaken within the unit covers a wide range of substantive, disciplinary, and methodological fields, and so the approach to impact within the unit has had to recognise this diversity; there is no *'one-size-fits-all'* model and so our approach has developed over time as a result of the 'good practice' of individual members of staff, which provide a successful template for others to follow.

We have adopted a *'communities of practice'* model for the sharing of practice via informal, but structured, networks within the School of Law. Key researchers have taken a lead in mentoring colleagues within their disciplinary sub-fields, establishing templates for impact-building activity that less experienced colleagues can use to ensure the potential impact of their own research is realised. These communities of practice utilise a range of different methods, including structures of mentoring and engagement, the sharing of information via communal resources such as model submissions and impact plans, and regular review of impact activity via face-to-face meetings. Key documents relating to impact are shared within the unit (via staff intranet and research web pages), and impact-generating activity is encouraged via research showcases, regular updates, and a proactive research management committee.

A good example of an iterative community of practice is provided by the unit's European law scholars, whose work has impacted on dispute-resolution processes and the decision-making of judicial bodies like the European Court of Justice (ECJ) (e.g. Tryfonidou on reverse discrimination, Thies on EU external relations, and Newdick on EU healthcare provision). Within this research theme, senior colleagues have been proactive in supporting less experienced researchers in line

with community of practice principles and in a manner typical of other themes within the unit, facilitating impact such as Thies's outreach events engaging with ECJ Advocates-General. Similarly, the work of international and human rights scholars has produced direct impacts on the practices of bodies like the United Nations Human Rights Committee (such as Ghandhi's work on the UK's 5th Periodic Report to the Committee Against Torture). By taking a lead in engagement with advisory and investigative bodies, senior colleagues have generated expertise that has assisted other cluster members in undertaking subsequent impact activities, such as Green's work for the International Law Association.

Several modes of impact-producing activity are undertaken within the unit. Firstly, much of the impact achieved within the unit has come about as a result of **relationships cultivated over time with user groups** for reasons often distinct from the generation of research questions. Some have built relationships of mutuality with professional bodies, and thus been in a position to use their research to directly impact on the enhancement of best practice and the formulation of policy; Newdick advised NHS Primary Care Trusts and other NHS governance bodies on the establishment of principles of ethical resource allocation. Others within the unit have engaged with advocacy groups in different public policy contexts to inform their lobbying of government, processes that tend to reflect long-standing collaborative relationships (such as Hilson and Wilde with the World Wildlife Fund, and Greenpeace, and Smith with the Office of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council). These relationship-building impact pathways are facilitated within the unit by the organisation of networking events and public lectures (in conjunction with the wider University) so that relationships with users can be forged; and via the recognition of outreach through promotion and reward mechanisms.

The second model of impact-production within the unit is for researchers to be **responsive to the particular stated needs of user groups**. It is common for organisations within the fields of law and public policy to solicit evidence, information, and input when they are making decisions, and this process requires that researchers be prepared to produce focused, detailed, research-led submissions to fulfil these needs when they arise. Within the unit, the work of 'law and public policy' scholars has had impact by influencing policy made by government and quasi-government bodies via responsive processes of consultation (such as McNamara advising the Cabinet Office and House of Lords on security-sensitive evidence hearings), and influencing legislative change and the development of legal principle by responding to legislative consultation processes (such as Callus and Cooke advising the Law Commission on marital property rights). Responsive pathways to impact are facilitated via the use of archived case-studies and templates on the unit's research support web pages, and the regular communication of calls for evidence and opportunities for engagement among the communities of practice within the unit. They are also tied to the pursuit of external funding from Research Councils, charities, and others, which is central to the unit's research strategy.

Finally, some scholars have taken a **proactive approach to impact-facilitation, applying to conduct research projects explicitly designed to produce evidence that will meet the stated needs of specific user groups**. As this is often responsive to a call from users, requiring targeted brief-fulfilment and competitive tendering, this model requires a high degree of institutional support. Researchers within the unit have fulfilled research briefs of this sort, and impacted on policy formation, across a range of legal contexts (such as Bano informing the Ministry of Justice on Sharia law practices, and Callus/Cooke conducting research for the Nuffield Foundation on matrimonial property rights), and the unit has facilitated this through the provision of resources and the use of study leave to support impact activity. Wider institutional resources (support from central Research and Enterprise Development, and pump-priming monies from central and faculty funds) have also been used to support reactive research activity.

c. Strategy and plans

Over the next five years, we will work to better maximise the impact potential of the unit's research and develop our knowledge, experience, and capacity with regards to impact. A major supporter for this development will continue to be the mechanisms available within the wider institution, assisting in the procurement of media/outreach training (via the Communications Office), the creation of impact pathways as part of funding applications (via the Research and Enterprise Development team), and the use of internal pump-priming funding (such as the Research Endowment Trust Fund) to support the development of impact-producing research. Our first priority over the next five years will be to sustain this momentum and internalise some of this institutional expertise, building upon the unit's emphasis away from process management and towards a pervasive 'impact culture', with a commitment to ensuring all colleagues and research students are trained, encouraged, and supported in adopting impact 'good practices', internalised at the highest level of unit management. This will mean revitalising existing mechanisms of managing and incentivising staff in order to give better weighting to activities that generate research impact, so that workload models, promotions criteria, and staff development reviews all reflect and reward the work that underpins the production of impact. We will also ensure that our research activities are as well-publicised as possible, via public lectures, online podcasts, open-access sources for outputs, and an increased use of social media to promote our research to a wider audience.

In important ways the trajectory of development for impact is sustained, with well-established mechanisms having emerged over a longer period of time to create significant impact capacity. The existing communities of practice within the unit have worked well over a number of years as a way of underpinning the development of the unit's capacity to both undertake impact-producing research and to maximise the impact potential when it does arise. We will look to strengthen these existing structures, and promote clearer expectations and frameworks for impact through, for example, agendas for staff training and mentoring programmes, so as to give more explicit support to research activities with the potential to generate really significant impact, particularly around our core research themes. These themes will also be strategically grown and developed via continued recruitment and resourcing in areas (such as legal history, and corporate and commercial law) where there is the direct potential to reshape the practices of public bodies (government bodies increasingly look to legal historians to interpret/evaluate established institutional processes) or inform the work of professional practice users (the commercial lawyers' research will assist business actors in finding solutions to their problems). The institution has already provided significant resources to underwrite this strategic expansion within these two areas, and research impact has been a key factor considered when making recent appointments; new Chairs have been appointed with track records of stakeholder and media engagement in the fields of legal history (MacMillan) and international law (Breau).

d. Relationship to case studies

Our case studies provide evidence of the processes for the facilitation of research impact adopted within the unit. For example, **relationship-building** via localised and iterative engagement with research users is evidenced in the Newdick case-study, where impact was produced via an existing relationship with users. The use of **responsive** methods of impact is evidenced in the Almond case-study, where he responded to emergent opportunities to engage with stakeholders. And the use of institutional support mechanisms to facilitate **proactive** impact is demonstrated in the Callus/Cooke and Bano case-studies, where research was undertaken in order to meet a user's stated need, with those needs understood and prior research disseminated through the researcher's immersion in the user community.