

Institution: University of East Anglia

Unit of Assessment: 22 Social Work and Social Policy

a. Context

Since the 1980s, the University of East Anglia (UEA) has shaped key areas of UK social policy and social work practice through research in relation to children, families, older and disabled people, in particular the most vulnerable and socially disadvantaged. Our aim is to use our research to improve wellbeing by communicating evidence that informs policy and models for practice to a range of non-academic user groups and direct beneficiaries across the statutory, voluntary and independent sectors regionally, nationally and internationally. In relation to child welfare, the Centre for Research on Children and Families has provided an important focus for our role in influencing services, ranging from investigations into child death to internationally valued models of caregiving in foster care. Our research on older people has helped shape recently announced reforms to long-term care funding and influenced policy on disability benefits for older people. The types of impact reflect these different areas of social need. We promote this impact by supporting research staff to be highly responsive to public and government concerns about the quality of children's and adults' lives in their family, community and public care contexts. The main non-academic user groups and beneficiaries linked to our research groups include:

- **Child protection and family support:** Department for Education; Welsh Assembly; Department of Health; Parliamentary Select Committees; Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass); NSPCC; Office of the Children's Commissioner; Kids Company; National Children's Bureau; Australia & New Zealand Ministries; Equality & Human Rights Commission; Working Families; Fawcett Society; Fatherhood Institute; Gingerbread; Relate; Family Matters Institute; EU- DG Employment: Directorate for Equality between Men and Women; UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs.
- **Child placement:** Department for Education; Ministry of Justice; Youth Justice Board; Parliamentary select committees; members of the House of Commons and House of Lords; Family Justice Council; British Association for Adoption & Fostering (BAAF); National Association of Independent Reviewing Officers, The Adolescent and Children's Trust (TACT); The Fostering Network; Break; After Adoption; agencies abroad e.g. in Norway, China, Italy.
- **Older and disabled people** HM Treasury; Department of Health; Department for Work and Pensions; Department for International Development; Age UK; Carers UK; Equal Lives; Parliamentary Select Committees and individual Members of Parliament; specialist commissions, such as the Commission for Care and Support.

b. Approach to impact

An underpinning principle is that maximum impact will only be achieved if the research is both persuasively rigorous and genuinely meets the needs of all the stakeholders who will use it. To achieve this reach, social work and social policy at UEA adopts a multi-level approach to impact including: making strategic choices of research bids and tenders that will have maximum impact; ensuring research activity links to relevant current regional, national and international policy priority areas; supporting staff to develop early dialogue and engagement with potential non-academic users and beneficiaries when research bids are being developed; involving stakeholders and service users in research design, conduct and dissemination; investing in close informal and formal strategic relationships with key policy-makers and intermediaries (e.g. civil servants, lobbyists, voluntary sector leaders, politicians). These approaches are all sustainable and built into our plans for 2014 onwards. Specific to our approach are the following pathways:

1. Centre for Research on Children and Families (CRCF) A strong research infrastructure is provided by the CRCF, now in its seventeenth year, which has an established identity, supporting staff individually and in research groups to build relationships with key research users. In July 2013, a House of Lords reception was held to celebrate the work of the CRCF. The CRCF brand and reputation for quality also supports uptake of our research findings. Beneficiaries are able to access the CRCF website as a platform through which research activities are communicated. Policy makers from the Departments of Health, Education and Justice and from regional and local authorities, together with practitioners, attend CRCF seminars, international conferences and local public events. An annual report is circulated to non-academic research users. Annual Centre conferences and seminars showcasing CRCF research to national audiences have been held

since 1996, with a focus on specialist areas within child protection, support for families, fostering, adoption and youth justice in the period 2008-13, reflecting our major research projects. A Centre administrator works with academics to facilitate impact, but also liaises with research user groups.

2. Influencing Policy Distinctive to our work has been our influential role with policy makers at regional, national and international levels. Shakespeare was an editor and author of the WHO/World Bank *World Report on Disability* (2011), and continues to consult with WHO, for example as editor/author of the joint UN statement on coerced and involuntary sterilization. We have provided evidence to Parliamentary Select Committee inquiries (e.g. Hancock and Morciano, Health Select Committee, 2010; Brandon, Safeguarding, 2011; Thoburn and Neil, Adoption, 2012). This has led to our research being referenced in Government consultation documents and inquiry reports to Parliament that have supported changes in legislation e.g. the Children and Families Bill (2013). Schofield was consulted by No 10 policy advisers and DfE policy makers on her research on offending by children in care. She is also a member of a DfE Expert Group on long-term foster care and her research has been used to support specific recommendations for change in government guidance. Impact is also supported by keynote addresses to multi-agency audiences (e.g. Dickens, Family Justice Council) who then consult us, e.g. DfE group on family interventions.

Staff have been involved in a wide range of national and international advisory, consultation and briefing roles including: Brandon, reviewing Child Protection and Serious Case Review guidance 2011 for the DfE; Thoburn advising Netherlands 'Sampson inquiry' on Child Abuse; Hancock, member of academic advisory panel for the Commission on Funding Care and Support, 2011 and specialist adviser to the Work and Pensions Select Committee, 2009; Shakespeare advising Department for International Development and contributing to the UN High Level Meeting on Disability, 2013. The Low Pay Commission refers to Connolly's research on women in part-time employment when it debates likely impacts of an increase in the National Minimum Wage and flexible working, which has benefited part-time workers.

3. Key Partnerships and Collaborations Ongoing and new partnerships with national leading charities and voluntary sector organisations have been critical to informing, energising and sustaining our impact activities. Many of these collaborations also serve as platforms for research grant applications as well as providing a two-way flow of knowledge and influence that has brought about changes in policy and practice, e.g. Schofield with TACT (*Looked after Children and Offending*); Brandon with NSPCC (*Neglect and Serious Case Reviews*); Connolly with the Fatherhood Institute (ESRC, *Fathers, work and families in twenty-first century Britain: Beyond the Breadwinner Model?*); Hancock and Morciano commissioned to undertake analysis for the CFCS, contribution acknowledged in their report. Hancock co-organised and chaired a Royal Statistics Society conference on Statistics for Adult Social Care Policy Making, keynote speaker Andrew Dilnot (2013). Hancock was consulted by No 10 Policy Unit (2012) regarding her research on better integration of benefits and social care, also quoted in the House of Lords (2013).

4. The translation of research findings to practitioner audiences Staff undertake a wide range of activities with multi-professional practitioner audiences (including the judiciary, social work, education, health and economics) to translate complex research findings into practice. Activities include conference presentations (regional, national and international), organised by key user groups such as statutory and independent sector adult and child welfare providers, training practitioners, including in the application of theory/research to practice models, case discussion workshops, text books, DVDs. Schofield's Secure Base model is used for training new foster carers in the UK and Norway and has been translated into French and Italian.

5. Making Research Count (MRC) MRC is an important mechanism for linking with research users and provides a collaborative research dissemination network of social work departments at 10 UK universities. UEA was one of the founding partners under Thoburn and has strong links with local agency partners. Each university in the scheme provides tailored research-based events for subscribing social care agencies in their region. MRC produces 'Research News' which includes reports of research in the MRC group, with electronic links to further information and reports.

6. Support for media impact from the University UEA has a highly experienced communications team supporting impact activities, submitting press releases, and the use of digital media. The ESRC *Fathers, work and families* project was reported on BBC online news (listed in top 10 most read stories on the website on the day and most popular on the family section). Their website (<http://www.modernfatherhood.org/>) received 1,673 visits, 1,227 unique visitors and 5,707 page views in 6 weeks after the launch on Father's Day16th June 2013.

Impact template (REF3a)

c. Strategy and plans

Our strategy for the future is built on the approaches to impact listed above, particularly through the CRCF and our established reputation and networks with policy makers and agencies in social work, family policy, family justice, health and social care. New developments in social work and social policy research at UEA since 2008 underpin our plans from 2014. Our strategy will be to:

- Embed the impact of both the social work and the social policy dimensions of our research through greater interdisciplinarity, in particular drawing on new links with health, economics, law and psychology to bring about change in policy and practice with new areas of emphasis e.g. service cost and value; disability across the life-span; foster care and adoption support.
- Develop creative approaches within our partnerships with non-academic users to ensure continuing impact in our areas of influence, both in policy and professional practice. We have excellent links with government 'arms-length' bodies and other organisations central to the adult and child welfare agenda e.g. Cafcass, the College of Social Work, SCIE, the Courts Service. We will also use our links to key voluntary organisations e.g. Shakespeare is a Trustee of Equal Lives, a leading disabled people's organisation; Cocker is a Trustee of BAAF; Thoburn is a Trustee of the Grandparents Federation, Break and others.
- Further develop our distinctive approach to service user involvement in research. As with our work with birth parents of children in adoption and with young researchers in our projects for the Office of the Children's Commissioner, this strategy not only enriches the quality of the research it increases the likely success of impact on policy and practice and therefore the benefit to the wider community of service users.
- Ensure next generation researchers are strongly networked through engagement in policy relevant activities with our key contacts in Government and non-governmental organisations, in relation to vulnerable children and families, disabled children and adults, and older people.
- Deliver further modernisation of research communications including: widening the base of alerts and subscribers to CRCF web platform; developing blogs drawing on the research; strategic tweeting to individuals who may benefit from the findings.
- Harness our interdisciplinary international research networks and membership of expert groups. Intellectual capital for impact is nurtured by our wide-ranging external networks of influence, including: membership of the global network of ChildWatch International Research Institutions; our role as founding members of International Association for Outcome Based Child and Family Services (IAOBER) global network; Work and Family Researchers Network (<https://workfamily.sas.upenn.edu/>). International Parental Leave Network annual seminar includes Employment/Gender Minister and representative from ILO, EU or OECD (www.leavenetwork.org); membership of the International Fostering Research Network; leading role in International Conferences for Adoption Research (ICAR). These networks include non-academic agencies and beneficiaries and promote the wider use of research in practice.

d. Relationship to case studies

In our case studies, our strategies for achieving impact through policy and practice change illustrate the benefits of our approach to impact, i.e. the persuasive rigor and significance of the underpinning research combined with our strong links to policy makers enables us to develop the reach of this research. The translation of complex findings into clear messages for policy and/or practice change has been designed to benefit vulnerable individuals, families and communities.

- *Preventing child death from maltreatment* - Influencing changes in policy and guidance for practice at Government level was an essential part of the impact of this series of linked research studies. This included helping to shape the new professional standards with respect to child protection. Working within the policy and practice networks of the CRCF and drawing on its range of practice as well as research expertise was key to the impact demonstrated in this Case Study.
- *Influencing reform of disability benefits for older people* - The focus was on ensuring accurate and robust statistical analysis is used in evaluating reform of disability benefits for older people. Key to this Case Study was submitting written evidence to the Health Committee's Social Care inquiry and working with Age UK who gave oral evidence. Findings from this research have therefore continued to have an impact.