

**Institution: University of Oxford, Department of Social Policy and Intervention**

**Unit of Assessment 22: Social work and Social Policy**

**a. Context**

The Department of Social Policy and Intervention is committed to conducting research to inform policymaking and practice in the realm of social welfare. Our commitment to impact is evidenced throughout our hundred-year history: the Department was founded in 1914 as Barnett House, to address 'modern social, economic and political questions' and to connect research, policy and practice. In other words, impact is not a new component of our activities, but has been part of our collective identity throughout the past century.

Following on from the breadth of the Department's research, which is both multi-disciplinary in approach and often international in reach the main non-academic users and beneficiaries of our research are also diverse, including government officials, supranational and international organisations, politicians, representatives and lobbyists associated with business and trade unions, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and practitioners.

Our research has impact on policy debate, formulation and implementation around the globe. Beyond this primary impact on public policy, our work has secondary impact on people's wellbeing.

**b. Approach to impact**

The Department's commitment to impact is enshrined in its culture and approach to research. For example, the Department places strong emphasis on providing academic freedom and time to engage and network with stakeholders, as well as providing practical support for engagement, such as meeting space and financial resources for the organisation of seminars and conferences to enable staff and stakeholders to work together in the co-production and dissemination of findings. In line with our overall strategy to support ECRs (early career researchers), our approach to impact also aims to include and encourage them to participate in these activities whenever appropriate.

We consider public engagement and stakeholder involvement as a two-way pathway: not only do staff provide advice to policymakers but they engage stakeholders in various activities throughout the research cycle. Involving policymakers in research at an early stage fosters relationships through which they contribute to the development of the research and deepens the foundations for successful future impact. For example, Cluver has engaged South African policymakers in discussions about the design of interventions before carrying out research into their effectiveness, encouraging policymakers to be more receptive to adopting findings into policy and practice. The importance of this engagement is also demonstrated in Noble's work. Engaging with stakeholders, Noble developed the indices of multiple deprivation, which have subsequently been used by governments to underpin and legitimise decisions on major allocations of public spending targeted to improving living conditions in deprived areas, including in the UK and South Africa.

The Department's approach is systematically joined-up and integrated with the University's approach to knowledge exchange (KE). Centrally, the Knowledge Exchange and Impact Sub-Committee supports departments and researchers to develop strategies to facilitate KE. Through this committee, all researchers have access to the Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF). To further support KE within the social sciences at Oxford, the Social Sciences Division has recently recruited three dedicated KE staff. The overarching aim of this team is to support KE as an integral part of the research process, ensuring that researchers receive expert advice, share best practice, and are able to access initiatives designed to improve dialogue with external partners.

There are three key elements underpinning the Department's approach to impact:

**1. Targeted funding**

Targeted funding for knowledge exchange activities is core to our approach, since it enables teams to disseminate their research findings to broader audiences. For example Walker and Chase were awarded an ESRC Knowledge Exchange grant to develop a toolkit, part of which uses popular media, such as the soap opera *Makutano Junction* (regular weekly audience of 6.5 million viewers in Kenya and several million viewers in Uganda and Tanzania), supplemented by an interactive mobile SMS/Text interface and website allowing viewers to access additional information and engage in discussion. Another element of activity is the production of short films with the Media Trust which are broadcast as 25 minute programmes on the Community Channel, reaching between 800,000 and one million viewers in the UK.

**Impact template (REF3a)**

In 2013 two projects were strategically prioritised by the University to receive HEIF monies. Basten (with Billari from the Department of Sociology) has developed a population blog (openpop.org) to maximise the social and economic impact of demographic research. Montgomery's collaboration with Oxfordshire County Council provides training and web-resources for policymakers, and advertises the availability and benefits of evidence-based research to county councils across the UK.

In addition, the University makes available seedcorn funding and support for small projects through its John Fell OUP Research Fund, which colleagues in the Department have used in addition to HEIF monies to support knowledge exchange activities. For example, Walker and Chase received funding to organise a workshop to discuss findings emerging from their ESRC-funded project on poverty and shame. The workshop deliberations generated an initiative to promote the principle that governments should have respect for the rights and dignity of people covered by social security and social assistance provisions. Subsequently, the principle was successfully incorporated into Recommendation 202 of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) concerning national floors of social protection.

**2. Communication**

Impact is a driving factor in the Department's communication strategy. Research features prominently on the recently redesigned website, and in the annual newsletter, *Barnett House News*, which has a circulation of around 1500.

The Department's working paper series, *Barnett Papers in Social Research*, has also proved to be an effective tool to disseminate findings to stakeholders and to influence policy debate. This was recently demonstrated by the wide reference to Goldthorpe's paper, *Understanding – and misunderstanding – Social Mobility in Britain*, for example in the Financial Times, The Guardian, The Independent, and The Sunday Times.

In addition, the University has arrangements in place to support colleagues in disseminating their research, such as the training and expertise provided by the Press Office which also assists in the preparation of news releases subsequently featured on the University's Press Office website. An example of successful dissemination through the press is Montgomery and Richardson's work on the effects of omega-3 dietary supplements on children with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), which has been widely referenced, in The Guardian, the Daily Telegraph, Daily Mirror and Time Magazine and others, stimulating public and policy debate. More than 30 per cent of the research active staff of the UoA are also listed on the University webpage 'Find an Expert', thereby enhancing their public profile and making it easier for stakeholders and the media to contact them.

**3. Consultancy and Membership of Advisory Committees**

Providing faculty members with time to engage in advisory capacities is a further core element of the Department's approach to impact. For example, Kemp's research on housing has had a direct impact on the formulation of UK housing policy through his role as special advisor to the *House of Commons Select Committee's Inquiry into the Local Housing Allowance*. He also provided advice to officials in the Department for Communities and Local Government on the impact of the Business Expansion Scheme as an incentive to invest in new private rental housing and the attitudes of financial institutions to investment in private rental housing. His advice had direct impact on measures included by the Chancellor in the Budget 2011. All 'established' postholders are allowed 30 days per annum for 'external' consultancies, which further facilitates impact.

Research on social protection and inclusion as well as gender equality conducted by Bennett, Daly, Naczyk and Seeleib-Kaiser has led the Commission of the European Union to engage these colleagues as independent experts in the Open Method of Coordination on Social Inclusion and Social Protection, providing the EU Commission with research reports that feed directly into the process of determining country recommendations by the EU Commission as well as Peer Reviews.

**c. Strategy and plans**

Building on our current approach, but also recognising the importance of further improving our impact portfolio, the Department's mid-term strategy and plans include the following elements:

1. Establishing an Advisory Committee consisting of world-leading academics and stakeholders. Building on existing informal networks, some of which are mentioned in our impact case studies, members of the Advisory Committee might include representatives from the European Commission, the European Trade Union Confederation, the ILO, the

## Impact template (REF3a)

National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Oxfam, Save the Children, the South African government, Toynbee Hall, UNICEF, USAID, and the World Health Organization. This committee will be a key instrument in further improving our two-way pathways to impact, providing the opportunity for stakeholders to offer valuable input to research projects, and facilitating dissemination of findings among policymakers, practitioners and professionals.

2. Improving our outreach to international and supranational organisations, such as the European Union, offering support in benchmarking exercises based on our expertise in comparative social policy research. In 2013, the University has strategically prioritised additional HEIF resources to develop the participation in international benchmarking further.
3. Organising regular outreach events to showcase and disseminate research findings more directly to policymakers and practitioners, building on the success of the workshop organised by Walker and Chase that led to a change in the ILO's legal framework. The Department will make funding available for these events.
4. Embedding our expertise and evidence-based findings in local policymaking. We intend to build on Montgomery's experience of organising seminars for Local Authority policymakers. In addition to our engagement with international and national policymakers, we are dedicated to impact at the local level in line with the University's new Strategic Plan.
5. Strengthening our approach to communicate research findings by improving our web presence and using social media and blogs to disseminate information and as platforms to connect with key stakeholders. As first steps of this strategy element we recently redesigned our website, started a demography blog and employed a dedicated Communications Officer.
6. Encouraging targeted funding applications for various knowledge exchange programmes, building on our recent successes. The newly recruited dedicated KE staff in the Social Sciences Division will provide important infrastructural support.

#### d. Relationship to case studies

Our featured case studies closely reflect the elements of our approach to impact; each has employed multiple elements, highlighting the need for multidimensionality in achieving impact.

The Department's commitment to two-way pathway engagement with stakeholders is a core element of two of our case studies. Noble's (case study 22-01) and Cluver's (22-02) collaborative work with Statistics South Africa, Human and Sciences Research Council, the South African government and NGOs such as UNICEF and Save the Children, demonstrates the importance of two-way pathways. Engagement with government stakeholders has also been critical to the impact of Gardner's (22-04) work. Although Gardner's research was initially focused on the UK and USA, the impact has not been limited to these countries. Her approach to disseminating research findings through visits and discussions with stakeholders in various countries, including Estonia, Malta, New Zealand and South Africa, has been critical to generating impact from her research.

**Targeted Funding:** the support provided by University seedcorn funding enabled the establishment of the Centre for AIDS Interdisciplinary Research at Oxford (CAIRO) which, given its innovative and interdisciplinary approach, would have been initially unlikely to receive funding from external organisations. Cluver's (22-02) work is a major part of CAIRO, which is particularly focused on collaborating with policymakers, practitioners and academics to improve the integration of evidence into the global fight against HIV and AIDS.

**Communication:** support for the communication of research has contributed to the success of all four case studies. For example, Ruhs' (22-03) work included a policy primer published on the website of Oxford University's Migration Observatory which was cited in the Financial Times and discussed on the BBC News at Six. Noble's Indices attract significant media attention and Cluver's research has also been featured in various media (e.g. The Guardian, The Mail, and the BBC World Service). All media activities were supported by the professional services of the University's Press Office.

**Consultancy and Membership in Advisory Committees:** the UoA's policy of encouraging public policy involvement facilitated Ruhs' membership of the Migration Advisory Committee (22-03), giving him the opportunity to directly feed his research findings into the policymaking process.