

Institution: University of Sussex

Unit of Assessment: UoA 22 Social Work and Social Policy

1. Context

Sussex Social Work research has been organised as a cross-cutting activity with the interdisciplinary Centre for Innovation and Research in Childhood and Youth (CIRCY) (2012) and the new Centre for Innovation and Research in Adult Wellbeing (CIRA) (2013). It aims to influence those who shape and deliver social work and related services locally, nationally and internationally and ultimately to benefit vulnerable, marginalised or disadvantaged service-users and carers, families or communities. It has direct impact on government framing of law and policy in social work and related fields, on educators and regulators in shaping social work education, on practitioners by informing the development of their practice, and on service-users by bringing their experience and voices to the fore on practice and policy agendas. Thus, the key beneficiaries are: i) policy-makers, e.g. Department for Education (DfE) and Department of Health (DH); ii) law reform bodies, e.g. Law Commission; iii) professional associations, e.g. College of Social Work, and regulators, e.g. Health and Care Professions Council; iv) organisations with international reach who commission, collect and synthesise knowledge about what works in social care, e.g. Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE); v) people who design and deliver social care and social work services, including the research workforce; and vi) educators and students on qualifying and continuing-professional-development courses in UK HEIs.

2. Approach to impact

We are committed to ensuring the quality of our research both as experienced by the beneficiaries and as assessed against research-quality indicators. Our approach is designed to inform both *conceptual* change, shaping understandings and attitudes, and *instrumental* change, improving performance and capacity among our research-users. Our understanding of impact is informed by our collaboration with Sebba, an Education colleague, and her work on translating findings and using networks to influence policy and practice [*Evidence and Policy*, 9(3,) 2013]. Our responsibilities include intervening at 3 levels of impact to enhance the use of our research: to use a range of strategies to disseminate our findings, to develop interventions designed to ensure a process of exchange with end-users, and to facilitate research utilisation beyond the end of the project. To ensure we move to the next 2 levels, our approach to impact prioritises four areas of activity: co-producing knowledge application; engaging beneficiaries in cycles of consultation and feedback throughout the research process; developing research products in partnership with end-users; and developing innovative knowledge translation strategies. We address each area of activity below and provide exemplars from our work.

Co-producing knowledge application: To ensure relevance to research-users, we typically plan co-production by working with a standing group of service-users to promote research engagement and impact. The group builds on the foundational network established in 2003 to support the design, delivery and review of our social work education programmes. Participation is firmly embedded in the ethos and practices of the Department. Members are appointed using University HR procedures and reimbursed on the appropriate grade. Funding for participation in project steering groups, acting as co-researchers and sharing dissemination activities is built in to project budgets. This requires proactive engagement and sustained vigilance to ensure diversity in recruitment, on-going induction, training and support to participants, and the monitoring of outcomes. Responsibility for measures to ensure co-production is held by both the Department and by principal investigators in specific projects.

The project *Carers as Partners in Social Work Education* (SCIE, 2008–09) <http://www.scie.org.uk/publications/reports/report28.pdf> illustrates co-production with a range of stakeholders and the significance and reach of impact we have achieved. The Steering Group included carers, social work educators, members from 3 national and local carers' organisations, and local-authority strategic commissioners for carers. The Chief Executive of Carers UK and a senior officer from Princess Royal Trust for Carers (PRTC), national organisations in the field, both wrote in the Report Foreword about the value of co-production: 'I appreciated the way [Sussex] enabled meaningful involvement by all Steering Group members, which...benefited from the equal weight and respect accorded to a variety of viewpoints and expertise. [Our] learning will be applied and shared to inform the work of the Trust'. An outcome of the project was formation of the Social Work Education Project (SWEP), a core group of 20 service users and carers from groups linked to 6 universities, including Sussex. Initial development funding was provided by the DH and, when this ended, SWEP

Impact template (REF3a)

reconfigured as an independent charity. It has produced a web presence with resources to support user and carer involvement in education (<http://www.socialworkeducation.org.uk/>), including an array of video resources. The impact of such co-production on end-users was graphically described by young fathers in the Talking Dads Project (2009–10), in which they co-conceptualised the project and were trained as peer interviewers: 'We've felt as though it's been a job for us rather than a lesson...it's been more like we've worked all together, not us having to work for you or you working for us. We work together, as a team'; 'If I can do that, in another couple of times I can get qualifications and a job out of it'.

Engaging beneficiaries in cycles of consultation and feedback throughout the research process. Much of our research activity is cyclical, where initial research activity generates interventions designed to engage potential research-users in a process of exchange, often involving an initial co-conceptualisation of the issues. This approach presents a distinctive model of research design and of embedding changes resulting from the outcomes, using an iterative cycle of consultation with, and feedback from, intended beneficiaries, akin to the Delphi Method. Sharlands' UK-wide research-based consultation, *Developing Research Capacity in Social Work and Social Care* (ESRC 2007–08 and 2008–09) used an iterative process to develop a strategy for conceptualising and addressing capacity deficits in the social work and social care research workforce. Research-providers and users across a wide range of disciplines were engaged in considering the challenges of increasing cross-disciplinary recruitment to the field, building research-mindedness and enhancing capability and critical mass among academic and practitioner communities. The recommendations have had a powerful impact on strategy among research providers and sponsors: 'This was a seminal contribution not just for ESRC and social work academics, but ultimately for the quality of social work services which will be delivered' (Provider): http://www.esrc.ac.uk/_images/Main_report_SW_and_SC_tcm8-4647.pdf.

Developing research 'products' in partnership. In 2010, we entered a 3-year partnership with the Newhaven Community Development Association (NCDA), a third-sector agency working with communities in Newhaven and the surrounding region to tackle deprivation. We successfully co-applied to the Technology Strategy Board Knowledge Transfer Partnership. The aim was to embed NCDA research and evaluation capacity, to ensure service delivery was evaluated and adapted to provide maximum social benefit, and to ensure NCDA sustainability by enabling external grant funding and service contracts. The KTP focused on building third-sector capacity by engaging users and providers of services in co-producing ways to evaluate the NCDA impact. As an example, a sub-project brought together 27 young people aged 11–18, and two youth workers, to develop an alternative method for evaluating services. Co-led by the Project Associate (employed by the University and based at NCDA) and a graffiti artist, a series of graffiti canvases were developed by the young people to portray their views, actions and outcomes. This project has won an East Sussex SPARK award (2013). The young people subsequently worked with students from the Sussex School of Media, Film and Music to produce two short films about NCDA and the young people's project, presented by the young people to the end-of-project conference at Sussex in July 2013. The Head of Policy and Learning for the Big Lottery Fund attended the conference and subsequently sought a meeting to learn about the KTP experience of developing evaluation and impact methodologies. This partnership has extended its reach to the Bromley-by-Bow Centre in London and, together with NCDA, we were invited to bid to the Arts and Humanities Research Council Connected Communities Scheme.

Developing innovative knowledge translation activities. Effective knowledge translation increasingly requires innovative and creative approaches to engage 'hard-to-reach' groups. This may include the use of internet technologies, film and other forms of media to disseminate research, bring groups together to share knowledge, and enable the research to be informed by the priorities of the researched. In addition to the KTP examples referred to above, another particularly innovative example was supported by Higher Education Innovation Funding (2013–14). The '*New Publics: Innovating Children and Young People's Communities*', developed in close collaboration with the NCDA, established a diverse network (researchers, practitioners, children, young people and families) to generate innovative strategies for new research and practice development. The funding supported face-to-face and mediated communication between workers, children and young people in Newhaven, a community that had become accessible as a result of the KTP. In 2013 the project targeted participants in the Brighton Fringe Festival to facilitate children's interactions with the social and public worlds they inhabit and educate adults about children's social worlds, including a popular competition for children to make short films about their use of social media and a public debate at the Festival: www.sussex.ac.uk/esw/circy/communicate; www.sussex.ac.uk/esw/circy/communicate/projects/spaceinvaders

3. Strategy and plans

Our post-REF strategic objectives (REF5) set out our aim to conduct research that facilitates social *change* at local, national and international levels. Key impact objectives are to further develop participatory approaches to the engagement of users through the research process and to create approaches that build knowledge exchange across practice, professional and organisational contexts. Mechanisms to deliver these objectives will be informed by what we have found to be successful in our research projects, and by developing new mechanisms and opportunities to mobilise knowledge in response to rapid shifts in social networking practices, expectations and the communication culture. To support this strategy we will prioritise these mechanisms:

Create an infrastructure to support research impact. Sustained support for impact generation activities is to be further embedded within departmental mechanisms, including research mentoring, team-based research projects, peer-support circles, and investment in dedicated support – e.g. staff with web-design expertise. We will learn more by systematically sharing the learning from engagement in innovative impact activities across the Department, School and University, within and across disciplines. We anticipate that the 2012 appointment of Nolas (on maternity leave until January 2014) as a National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement ‘Ambassador’ will provide a ‘framework’ to learn new strategies to target influencing others.

Continue and consolidate close collaboration with our wide constituency of research users. The KTP provides a tested model for capacity building and learning that can be applied across a wide range of organisations. It has attracted considerable national interest from pioneering community organisations such as the Bromley-by-Bow Centre, London, which is working with NCDCA and ourselves to develop a joint project to support further work on developing strategies with and for third-sector organisations. This could be funded by The Big Lottery and/or AHRC, both funders new to us.

Extend impact to international constituencies. We have initiated international research collaborations and knowledge exchange activities during the REF period, and have positioned ourselves to build international collaborations via the appointment of additional staff with a range of international experience. An example is the 5-year ERC *Connectors* Project led by Nolas, which starts in 2014 and will research children’s participation in public life in London, Athens and Mumbai, involving schools and community organisations in each setting.

Mainstream outreach and facilitate utilisation beyond the end of the study. Our aim is to embed impact in our research, including offering workshops, web-streamed seminars, training and consultancy, and the enhanced use of social-networking technologies. It is essential to embed and cost impact activities in research bids and take creative approaches to identifying and securing new funds to support outreach and research uptake, including ‘in kind’ contributions, i.e. building reciprocal relationships with research users who can contribute to our broader activities such as social work education.

4. Relationship to case studies

The first case study shows influence on law, policy and practice; the second shows influence on regulators and educators who themselves influence social work education and learning by students and practitioners, and through them benefit service users and carers. Both case studies apply each of the four areas of activity presented in Section 2.

Case Study 1: ‘Improving governance, policy and practice in adult safeguarding and self-neglect’: research-user engagement, extensive inter-professional and inter-agency networks resulted in 39 invited presentations and practice-development workshops, yielding substantial evidence of impact on thinking and changes to practice; produced a governance benchmarking tool used at national events by 30 Safeguarding Adults Boards, leading to significant changes to strengthen accountability; reports have been widely accessed by users, and have informed diverse activities to facilitate change, including practice development workshops, webinars, consultation on agency policy development, and further extension of the evidence base.

Case Study 2: ‘Changing social work education’: user engagement unusually included children and young people of all ages and abilities; researchers engaged proactively with the policy communities, then with the regulators and the professional association to establish admissions guidelines; they shaped HE practice through national workshops with university admissions tutors; diverse research products included reports, a Law Resource Guide, e-learning resources and a participatory action research project to build workforce capacity.