

## **Impact template (REF3a) University of Sunderland UOA: 22 Social Policy and Social Work**

### **1. Context.**

Shaping policy and practice is central to the ethos of the Centre for Applied Social Sciences (CASS). This commitment to ensuring that research is both academically rigorous but also relevant and accessible to agencies that can apply the findings, is evidenced in the variety of organisations nationally, regionally and locally that cite and use our research. Among the beneficiaries of the work of CASS have been the Home Office, the Department of Health, the Department of Community & Local Government, Broken Rainbow and Co-ordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse (CAADA); and at the regional level, the North East Domestic Abuse Project (NEDAP), hosted by Victim Support, and Voluntary Organisations Network North East. The significance and reach of the work of members has been substantial, particularly in the case of domestic violence. This research has provided the first comprehensive and credible evidence of the problem being experienced in same sex relationships, thus it has been used to argue for central and local funding. Our research has directly contributed to national public policy discussions about widening participation in higher education and on other aspects of social exclusion. The research undertaken by CASS builds in pathways to impact, for example, by developing relationships with key stakeholders at an early stage to inform dissemination and recommendations for policy and practice. There is also some evidence of conceptual impact for example, the social model of disability is adopted to better understand the needs of those with dyslexia, and digital exclusion is better understood as social class related rather than individual choice.

### **2. The Unit's approach to impact during the period 2008-2013:**

As a result of the last RAE the university developed a new approach to promoting and supporting research in Centres and Beacons. Up to June 2013 CASS was the Centre for Children, Young People and Families (CCYPF). CCYPF was strongly influenced by the previous New Labour Government's Every Child Matters Agenda and had a strong focus on applying research to workforce development and professional practice. Over the years as the staff base has changed, along with the external political and economic context, the Centre has evolved to reflect the interests of its members but kept a commitment to research informed impact activities. Between 2008 and 2013 a strategy for promoting applied research has developed with core activities including:

- Identifying key stakeholders to be included in steering groups for research projects to enrich research design and inform dissemination and impact;
- Being involved with local, regional and national agencies as board/committee members to build partnerships and promote evidence-based best practice and policy. For example, between 2012-13 Donovan worked with Northumbria Probation Trust to develop an intervention for abusive partners in same sex relationships.
- Dissemination events that always involve a mixture of practitioners, policy makers, funders, politicians and academics and with a minority of academics; and involve workshops for practitioners and policy makers to reflect on findings that have been reported during the event;
- More recently during the second Northern Rock Foundation International Seminar Series on Interpersonal Violence we have also introduced the use of action plans for practitioners and policy makers to complete as a prompt to what they will take with them from the event. Attendance at these seminars (6 in the first series and 8 in the second) is regularly between 90-100 from across the region and from a broad range of agencies: the police, the crown prosecution service, probation, health visitors, social work, voluntary agencies such as Tyneside Rape Crisis Centre, 608030 (a domestic violence service in Northumberland), counsellors, councillors, Victim Support, Housing Associations such as Stonham, etc.;
- Dissemination also involves making ppts of speakers at events available through our website wherever possible;

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- Raising the profile of our work has more recently been part of our strategy, for example, since May 2013 CASS has a twitter account which we use to advertise events and achievement. Currently we have 54 followers. Our newsletter, the fourth one of which will be published in December 2013 will also now be put on the CASS website and circulated beyond the university;
- As a result of investing in a consultancy on impact, during 2012-13 we have also developed a shared database for CASS members to record the impact and dissemination of their work. This tool will be used for internal reviews, as an archive of evidence of our achievements in relation to impact, its reach and significance; and in preparation for the next REF or equivalent;
- The resources of CASS are distributed based on agreed criteria to encourage external engagement, such as dissemination events, helping with visiting speakers, publication of reports and so on. The resources are also used to help maximise the impact of existing research or to kick-start new veins of research with funding for pilot studies, transcription costs, travel costs and so on. Within the Department of Social Sciences where CASS sits, work-loading arrangements include commitment to support research and impact activities, and applications for funding from CASS specifically require evidence of work-loading negotiation and agreement;
- Regular CASS meetings, together with the CASS seminar series, has proved fruitful in identifying areas of specialist interest that can be the catalyst for building new partner relationships. For example, a sub-group of colleagues interested in 'Race and Racism' organised and secured competitive, internal, QR, funding for an event focusing on policy and practice in the North East. Its success was evidenced when the regional Unison Black Members Group provided funding for two further events in what became a seminar series, again bringing together practitioners, policy makers and funders. In 2013 the Unison Black Members Group has approached CASS again with some further funding because *'that series has been the most significant we've seen in relation to 'race' and racism in the North East'*.
- CASS's activities also include workshops for new and existing members, to explore what impact means and how it can be embedded into research ideas from the start (supported by materials produced by the consultants on impact); writing research proposals; writing for non-academic audiences; using traditional and new media;
- The CASS seminar series showcases members' research and its relevance for policy and practice as well as inviting external speakers. Seminars are open beyond the university community, including the CASS Associate Membership. The latter, launched at the CASS launch in June 2013, is open to any individual or organisation interested in our research activities and ensures invitations to CASS events and annual CASS review meetings to help to shape our research agenda for the future;
- Nurturing relationships with partner agencies who provide placement opportunities for our undergraduate programmes is also important and provided the impetus for a piece of research exploring the impact of the cuts on our partners in statutory, third sector and private sector agencies. The research has enabled umbrella organisations for the voluntary sector to build the case for fighting the cuts and identifying and validating the negative impacts on services, service users and practitioners and especially small, voluntary groups; and was the impetus for a successful application to an internal QR competitive call for studentships for a part-time postgraduate studentship exploring volunteering.

### 3. Strategy and Plans for supporting impact:

The research active membership of CASS is relatively young academically. Currently, early and mid-career researchers make up the majority of those who are research active. With such potential it is envisaged that the impact strategy developed towards the end of the

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period 2008-2013 will provide an exciting environment in the coming period. It is intended that ongoing regular Centre meetings will continue to facilitate opportunities to explore the impact potential of members' work and the identification of opportunities to collaborate around specific issues. The focus on research impact will be kept alive through the criteria used to judge applications to the resources of CASS; through a series of training workshops that build skills such as writing for non-academic audiences or methods to more readily influence policy and practice or public discourse; and embedding impact in the structure of research proposals. We will continue the practice of creating steering groups for research projects that include key policy and practice stakeholders so that partners inform the research from the start and provide accelerated 'pathways' to impact. The University's press office will also provide advice on traditional and new media to help CASS members in their use of a range of techniques to disseminate their research.

As well as evaluating dissemination events in the usual way, in 2011, a pilot measure of impact was built into the second NRF International Seminar Series. Volunteers are followed up with telephone interviews three months after the seminar to find out whether the event had any short / medium term impacts in their workplace / their own working practices. The findings of this (due in February 2014) will be used to inform the development of dissemination events in the future. At the first year of this pilot there was a lot of support for the events and some tangible evidence of impact beyond the events themselves, for example, one supported housing agency had decided to include a rainbow flag on their literature to encourage use of their service by lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or trans victim/survivors of domestic violence and abuse. Another local councillor said that attending the seminars had improved his ability to respond about DVA to the people in his wards who had voted for him and to better contribute to council discussions about resources. In the general feedback on the day, many conveyed the message that they intended to cascade learning from the day within their agency, for example, one person said 'Very informative which I can take back to my organisation'. Others identify the seminars as continuing professional development: one social work student explained that she saw attendance at the seminars as 'essential' for her learning about interpersonal violence

### **4. The relationship between the unit's approach to impact and the submitted case studies**

(a) The case study on violence and abuse reflects the broader unit approach to impact. Steering groups representing user stakeholders were involved in the original research; the PI has been a board member of the only national organisation for domestic violence in same sex and trans relationships (2008-2010, currently) and is on the steering group of the first regional development worker for this work (2007-current). Thus there are on-going mutually beneficial relationships between research, policy and practice. The dissemination model outlined above was developed in the first international 6 day-seminar series focussing on domestic violence. In addition the research has also been used by national and local organisations to secure funding for new services in response to LGBT DVA.

(b) All of the research projects underpinning the case study on social exclusion/inclusion involve practitioners and policy makers as key stakeholders, which has enhanced the reach of the research. Educational policy debates have been informed by this work at a national level and internationally the work has fed into the development of new ways of understanding digital inclusion. The research on the impact of the cuts has resulted in several regional events at which practitioners and regional representatives of interested parties (e.g. VONNE, Unison, and the Regional Youth Work Unit) have engaged with the research and articulated intentions to use it in their work. Funding has been secured as a result of the evaluative work. In addition the research has been disseminated through various media at national and local levels.