

Institution: The Open University

Unit of Assessment: C22 Social Work and Social Policy

a. Overview

This submission covers research conducted (primarily) within the Faculty of Health and Social Care (FHSC), together with important contributions from the Faculty of Social Sciences. This work is multi-disciplinary and structured around themes that relate to the life course, including reproduction, childhood, adolescence, parenting, (dis)ability, ageing and death. Three signature areas characterise the research and form the basis for development over the next five years.

These are:

1. innovative and participative research methodologies
2. ageing and later life
3. theorising and researching care relations transnationally and across gender and generations.

b. Research strategy

Since RAE2008 our aim has been to foster research excellence by building upon our focus on the life course and our three signature areas described above. Our strategy has been to promote and support inter-disciplinary work, methodological innovation, and social impact. A significant refreshment of staff has taken place since 2008 and a vibrant portfolio of new work has developed, taking our research in innovative directions. The FHSC research strategy encourages researchers to recognise and respond to the challenges that may be experienced across diverse life courses, and think differently about these challenges, opening up new insights and understandings. This stems from the OU's mission to be 'open to people, places, methods and ideas' and the University's founding principle of social justice. The Faculty's strategy sits within the University's research strategy, which aims to nurture research that is outward looking and socially engaged; internationally recognised for excellence and impact; and can make a fundamental difference to the health and well-being of individuals and communities. The aims are met through:

- (i) rigorous and focused staff recruitment, high quality professional development and excellent research support from early to late career (see c)
- (ii) a range of measures to foster a vibrant research culture and engagement with wider research and user communities institutionally, nationally and internationally (see c and d)
- (iii) clear policies and strategies that determine expectations for grant capture and publications, and provide the support to enable these to be achieved (see c).

In 2008, 15 members of staff in FHSC were submitted as part of RAE 2008; 14 were submitted under UoA40: Social Work, Social Policy and Administration, and one to UoA 45: Education. Ten per cent of our research in UoA 40 was ranked as four star and 50 per cent as three star, and our strategy has since been driven by the objective of increasing this. For our 2008 submission we placed particular emphasis on our expertise in research across the life course. The content of this 2013 submission is a result of the range of investments that have been made, in both staff and infrastructure, in order to build a portfolio that not only illustrates our areas of excellence but demonstrates our responsiveness to new opportunities and agendas.

The submission reflects the work of a group of staff of whom 25 per cent are professors, the majority are senior lecturers or lecturers and are mid-career. This offers a sustainable basis for long-term academic planning. The following sections outline the main objectives and activities associated with our three, inter-related, signature areas.

1. Innovative and participative research methodologies

The methodologies we have pioneered, and which were commended so highly in the 2008 RAE, have since been developed further and provide a focus for our future plans. These include:

- a) participatory visual methods with children, led by Lomax, attracting Economic and Social Research Council funding for the seminar series 'Visual Dialogues' and explored further in a

- highly regarded themed issue of *Critical Social Policy* (co-edited by Fink and Lomax)
- b) Peace's agenda-setting work on how we understand older people's use of space in both macro and micro environments, and (with Holland) the development of observational research on intergenerational use of space
 - c) Blackman's pioneering use of complexity theory (a long-established interest at the OU) and Qualitative Comparative Analysis to inform evidence-based policy and practice, engaging practitioners in co-producing explanations of different outcomes from local strategies to tackle health inequalities (featured in a major piece for a forthcoming special issue of the Academy of Social Sciences' *Contemporary Social Science*)
 - d) Earle S's innovatory use of online ethnography, informing important ethical, conceptual and methodological debates, especially on sexuality.

There is a tradition within the Faculty of developing innovative research methods, approaches and strategies that are participatory and serve our social justice agenda, particularly in the area of learning disabilities. New members of staff (e.g. Tilley) are taking this work forward, building on a track record of cutting-edge research with people with learning disabilities. This has continued to attract external funding with a recent major grant from the Arts and Humanities Research Council on 'Developing a co-produced digital archive of learning disability history' (Tilley with the University of Leeds and University of East London). Other studies have engaged older people with high support needs, such as those with dementia (Peace, Holland, Katz), contributing to wider debates on inclusion (such as our leading role in the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's 'Better Life' programme).

2. Ageing and later life

We continue to bring a range of disciplinary perspectives to understanding ageing, and have a leading presence in this field. Peace is President Elect of the British Society of Gerontology and a member of the ESRC-funded international network on globalisation and the ageing population, which is exploring policy and practice for the development of age-friendly cities, and part of a World Health Organisation initiative. Jones is also making leading contributions with her work on sexuality and ageing alongside work by Holland and Katz with Jewish elders. ESRC funded research on 'Transitions in kitchen living', an exploration of the interface between design and biography, has opened up further exciting opportunities for novel, inter-disciplinary research on ageing.

Other work on space and place has produced new insights on inter-generational relationships and exchanges (Peace), and has set out an agenda that re-frames advances in the field of assistive technologies. This includes exploring robotics technology as a basis for inclusive domestic appliances rather than devices for 'special needs' (Blackman). A final example of how we have prioritised both quality and engagement is Johnson *et al.*'s study, *The Last Refuge Revisited*, which traced the history of the 173 care homes studied by Peter Townsend in the 1950s, and which was a collaboration with researchers from The University of the Third Age (U3A). This won the British Academy's inaugural Peter Townsend Policy Press Prize in 2011.

3. Theorising and researching care relations transnationally and across gender and generations

Aldgate, Rose and Thomson established an international reputation for the OU's research on children, mothering and families and, over this REF period, this has been taken in significantly new directions. Featherstone was recruited in 2011 for her work exploring fathering, gender relations and child welfare, which has gained her an international standing. Since joining the OU she has explored the practices of non-resident fathers in relation to care, risk and intimacy (a project with Dermot at the University of Bristol and funded by the British Academy). With Tarrant and O'Dell, she has explored service users' perspectives of child protection services (funded by the Family Rights Group) and interrogated the policies and practices that enable families to care safely. Her work is characterised by a commitment to giving voice to marginalised (if not demonised) groups and making visible the existence of an ethic of care in adversity. With Robb at the OU, she received funding from the ESRC in 2013 to investigate what kinds of welfare relationships are valued by boys. This will make a significant contribution to very contentious policy and practice debates about the function of male role models and will complement the work of Earle R. on the

identities of young men in the criminal justice system.

We also have important theoretical and methodological engagements with social geography, through the exploration of care and space (Jupp and Holland), an area of work that is leading to further cross-faculty collaboration at the OU. For example, a cross-faculty ESRC seminar series, 'Home space? Public and private in new welfare settings', involves colleagues from the Faculties of Health and Social Care, Social Sciences, and Education and Language Studies, led by Jupp.

Yeates' research into transnational care relations is now a key reference point for work on the globalisation of care economies and migrants. She has worked with the UN Research Institute on Social Development, the UN International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women and UNESCO, designing, convening and contributing to a high-level symposium on the Social Dimensions of Regional Integration in collaboration with Deacon (Sheffield) and Van Langenhove (Bruges). The symposium brought key managers from 23 regions alongside academics and major international NGOs from Africa, the Caribbean, Asia and Europe. It led to an international policy research network whose outputs include *World-regional social policy and global governance* (Yeates co-editor and co-author).

The three signature areas, addressed in the above sections, reflect our strong commitment to building on established areas of excellence, to a strategic investment in new staff and the development of a strong and supportive infrastructure. A number of further developments are planned, based on our current work. For example, Jupp and Lomax are developing conceptual and methodological approaches to neighbourhood-based care practices and have already brought together academics, policy makers and practitioners to explore possibilities for a new research programme. Featherstone is linking into this work as part of her research on rethinking how child protection is conceptualised and practised. Featherstone, Tarrant and Terry are developing interdisciplinary research on fathering and grandfathering and exploring the theoretical, policy and practice implications of differing constructions of care and masculinities. This will form a key area of work in the next period. Further innovative work on life course challenges is also planned through grant applications on reproduction and sexual health (Earle, S.) and losing parents in late mid-life (Komaromy and Barbour).

c. People, including:

i. Staffing strategy and staff development

Our strategy gives staffing and staff development a high priority and has the following elements:

- Recruitment and selection has been used in focused and rigorous ways to help us maintain our level of research excellence in the field of life course and life challenges. Three new professors, Barbour, Blackman and Featherstone, were appointed during this REF period, strengthening further the areas of methodology, health related research and children and families (Barbour's work forms part of the OU's submission to the A3 panel in this REF). In addition, appointments at lecturer and senior lecturer level (Tilley, Earle, R., Lomax, O'Dell and Mackian) have brought fresh areas of expertise and complemented existing work in visual methods, learning disability, the experiences of children and young people and spirituality. In October, 2013 we have been joined by Hoggart who has an established research record in social policy and health, while three research associates (Jupp, Tarrant and Terry) have been appointed in the areas of parenting, care relations, masculinities and reproductive health.
- Fostering of collaboration between established and experienced staff and those who are less so. Thus, there are continuing collaborations with Emeritus Professors Bornat, Bytheway and Johnson, who are members of our Centre for Ageing and Biographical Studies, and part of our work on ageing and later life. They also support our on-going association with the ESRC 'Timescapes' Qualitative Longitudinal Initiative. Emeritus Professor Atkinson supports our learning disability research, while Emeritus Professor Aldgate continues to generate impact on policy and practice from her research on children and families, and with Rose is working with current staff on the implications of this impact (e.g. Featherstone).
- Staff development activities, which are deliberately multi-layered and tailored to the differing needs of staff, with a particular focus on appropriate training (see below) and mentoring for

early career researchers. The mentoring strategy is carefully planned and annually reviewed.

- Individual workload planning and the robust management of study leave (two months per year, which can be accumulated) and research days to ensure that research time is available and protected. Skills development, workload planning and study leave and research days are managed within the framework of Career Development and Staff Appraisal (CDSA), an annual developmental discussion including objective setting and identification of development needs, with more frequent reviews throughout the year. All OU staff take part in the CDSA process and participate in a workload planning process that aims to give equitable workloads and an ability to plan ahead. A research plan forms an integral part of the CDSA, enabling colleagues to discuss their research performance and forthcoming plans with their line manager within the context of the Faculty research strategy. The CDSA also provides an important opportunity to identify research support and development needs.

The OU has a well-resourced central Research Career Development Team that has grown its provision every year since 2008, providing a wide range of development opportunities and receiving excellent evaluation feedback from across the University. Provision is appropriately tailored to each member of staff's current and future needs, including contract researchers and academics at each stage of their careers, and research students. The central team works with us to plan and deliver this provision. All new staff and early-career researchers have mentors and take part in an extensive induction, as well as receiving priority in the allocation of ear-marked research funds. The OU is a signatory to the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers and actively works to implement its seven principles. In this context there is a clear commitment to equal opportunities and supporting early-career researchers. Our commitment to the Concordat has been recognised with the European Commission HR Excellence in Research Award. In addition, the Faculty of Health & Social Care's Research & Enterprise Team provides staff with opportunities for research skills development and provides local support and training for research students, complementing central provision. The Faculty's programme of staff development activities includes workshops on writing for publication and bidding for research funding. This provision is reviewed annually to ensure that the activities support and develop staff within FHSC, maintain a focus on research excellence and help build research capacity.

ii. Research students

Our postgraduate research community is a very important part of our research environment, currently comprising 24 doctoral students, 11 of whom are full time and 13 part-time. In the census period we have had 17 students complete PhDs (our metrics total is 16.17 because of co-supervision arrangements) and one MPhil. We have had particular success attracting co-funding and since 2006 the Faculty has had seven co-funded studentships supported by organisations including Unison, the Race Equality Foundation, Brook and UNICEF.

The Faculty is also part of the OU's well-established Affiliated Research Centres (ARC) programme, which accredits independent research organisations as doctoral training centres under OU quality assurance and regulations, including for example the UK Health Protection Agency, the Wellcome Trust Research Programme in Kenya (KEMRI) and the MRC Laboratories in The Gambia. Students' progress, probation and viva examination are reviewed and approved by the Faculty's Director of Postgraduate Studies. Supervision takes place within the ARC with support from the OU. In the census period the Faculty has had six ARC students. We are working with the OU's Development Office to identify the potential for further funding in this area and strengthening links with ARCs in order to build on our success.

A comprehensive Research Career Development Programme is provided for all research students, from induction to viva preparation, complementing the training on research methods provided by our postgraduate taught courses and weekly workshops. Excellent face-to-face and online careers services provide personalised advice and frequent dedicated sessions are offered by the library. A dedicated web portal into a virtual research environment is available to all our research students. This has been designed and built to the OU's world leading standards, providing access, regardless of students' physical location, to a range of skills training resources, news, careers services, supervision, library, social media and administrative services. Our infrastructure for PhD research meets or exceeds the requirements of all Research Council and Quality Assurance

Agency standards.

As well as being assigned at least two supervisors, with one as the main supervisor, students are also given a mentor who they meet regularly. Their progress and training are monitored through six-monthly progress reports, with initial MPhil registration upgraded to PhD following satisfactory performance via a presentation and mini-viva, which is assessed independently of the supervision team. Progress and probationary reports must be approved by the Associate Dean and are co-ordinated and supervised by the university's Research Degrees Office. Full time students are allocated workspace and a networked computer, and all students have full access to the library, VRE and a sector-leading ICT infrastructure. A hardship fund and other financial and pastoral support are available via the Research Degrees Office.

d. Income, infrastructure and facilities

Income

The Faculty receives an allocation of HEFCE-R funding via the University, a proportion of which goes towards offsetting the cost of our research support staff, with the rest being ring-fenced to pay for research development activity. There is an annual bidding process for small amounts of seed money. External research income is pursued where it can support our research strategy, or where calls suggest new lines of enquiry that fit our expertise and plans. Funding has been secured from a range of funders, including UK Research Councils, charities and the EU. We have a commitment to collaborative research, be it with international agencies or small charities, either as lead organisation or as partners, as this is important to meeting our strategic objectives. We are also concerned to develop innovative 'blue skies' research that is theoretically and methodologically challenging.

Recently, we have increased the priority given to capturing external income, so as to expand our targeted areas of research, and have put in place a range of bidding mechanisms to increase our success rates. Plans for grant applications are discussed as an integral part of CDSAs, so that targets are agreed and reviewed annually. All applications for research funding are subject to peer review arrangements within the Faculty and agreed with the University Research Committee. Peer review arrangements operate at an early stage in the proposal process. All proposals are signed off by the Associate Dean for Research. Measures to support and improve bidding processes, such as Faculty peer review and the University's investment in a new awards management system, are complemented by an expectation that experienced researchers will act as research leaders, discussing possible proposals with colleagues and reading and commenting on drafts. The formal bidding mechanisms are backed up by actively fostering a culture that encourages collegiality and support, particularly for those with less experience.

Examples of the range of income received, which we are currently expanding, include ESRC funding for methodologically innovative, inter-disciplinary projects such as 'Transitions in kitchen living' (2009–2011) (Peace with Loughborough University) and Bornat's oral histories with overseas trained geriatricians. Bornat and Thomson were part of the large multi-disciplinary and cross-university 'Timescapes' research programme, with Thomson exploring the 'Dynamics of motherhood' and Bornat 'The oldest generation'. Bornat was part of the Timescapes methodology strand on secondary analysis with Leeds, Cardiff and London South Bank University. While at the OU Blackman has received EPSRC Public Engagement Catalyst funding for 'An open research university: embedding public engagement within the culture of research at The Open University' (2012-15). He also led the University's successful application to the Higher Education Funding Council for an £8m grant towards the Milton Keynes 'smart city' big data project on inclusive economic growth (2014–16).

We place a high value on engagement with charities, NGOs and government (local and national). Not only is it part of our commitment to socially useful research and the promotion of social justice, but it has been a key means of developing research into the experiences of socially marginalised groups. Featherstone, O'Dell and Tarrant, for instance, received funding to evaluate the advice line and advocacy service run by the Family Rights Group; the Joseph Rowntree Foundation has funded research on understanding the aspirations of people with high support needs, carried out by Katz (2010–2012); and Katz also led the research project 'What happens to people with dementia after discharge from general hospital?' funded by the Alzheimers Society. Research in

the area of learning disability has been supported by funding from foundations, charities and local government. The project 'Developing a living archive of life stories' involved a feasibility study for the Learning Disability History Digital Archive and was funded in 2010 by the Rix-Thompson-Rothenberg Foundation. Atkinson received funding from the Wellcome Trust for seminars on 'Spending time in institutions' and from the Heritage Lottery and Croydon Borough Council to explore: 'Days gone by – A history of day centres in Croydon' and 'How my life has changed', a history of learning disability services. Funding has also been received by Tilley, from the Home Farm Trust, to explore the history of a learning disability charity 'Drawing the lessons of the last 50 years'.

Thomson and Earle S. have received funding from Brook for 'Positive outcomes in teenage pregnancy' and Komaromy from the British Academy for 'Investigating mortuary services in hospital settings'. European funding has supported the project 'Digital inclusion skills for carers bringing opportunities, value and excellence' (DISCOVER), carried out with Birmingham City Council, Aristotelio Panepistimio Thessalonikis (Greece), Fundación Privada Cetemmsa (Spain), Fundación Intras (Spain), Astra-Com VOF (Netherlands) and Dundalk Institute of Technology (Ireland).

Infrastructure and facilities

The University has an advanced e-infrastructure including a 200 node computer cluster and online library services providing staff and research students, wherever they are, with access to a world class collection of over 85,000 academic journals. Our multi-million pound investments in online services include one of the UK's largest open access research repositories, Open Research Online, with over 23,000 OU publications and about 40,000 visitors a month from around 200 countries. The University also includes substantial research content in our iTunes U site, one of the largest and most popular in the world, and pioneering public engagement sites such as OpenLearn.

The University's Catalyst for Public Engagement, 'An Open Research University', is one of just eight projects funded by RCUK under the public engagement theme (Blackman is PI). This recognises our existing commitment to public engagement and accelerates the work to embed it within our research at all levels and enables us to implement a rewards scheme that recognises researchers for excellence in this area. It issues calls to researchers for projects on public engagement with research, and provides structured opportunities for user communities and other stakeholders to engage with OU researchers and research. The OU is a signatory to the NCCPE Manifesto for Public Engagement.

The nature of our research does not require any significant facilities in addition to the IT that is already provided to all academic and research staff. Beyond this, the University operates a loan service for items that researchers may need for fieldwork, such as audio recorders and cameras. We also benefit from the University's Technology Research Laboratories, in particular the Gaming and Future Technologies Laboratory, which we have used to explore how older people make use of unfamiliar technologies. Full-time postgraduate students have dedicated facilities within the Faculty, including desk and office space, IT equipment and support. Part-time students also have access to office facilities as well as the OU's sector leading Virtual Research Environment.

Research support services are provided in the form of dedicated teams based in each of the University's nine faculties and institutes. These are supported by central teams providing specialist support for grants and contracts, innovation and enterprise, strategy and governance, career development, and postgraduate research students. A pan-university research and enterprise support network provides a forum for sharing best practice. Each faculty and institute has an Associate Dean for Research, who is responsible for research strategy within the wider University spectrum and who chairs the Faculty/Institute Research Committee. Research strategy in the Faculty of Health & Social Care is led by the Associate Dean (Research & Enterprise). She is a member of the Faculty Executive, where research is a standing item on the agenda at monthly meetings. She also represents the Faculty on the University's Research Committee. A Director of Postgraduate Studies (DPGS) is responsible for the recruitment and progress of research students and represents the Faculty on the University's Research Degrees Committee. The AD(RE) and DPGS are supported by a team of four research and enterprise managers and three deanery

assistants. The portfolio of the AD(RE) and team includes research, knowledge exchange, events and communications. A Research Sub-committee is responsible for all research matters, including representation from contract research staff and students. It meets three times a year, reports to the Faculty Committee and is chaired by the AD (RE).

e. Collaboration and contribution to the discipline or research base

Interdisciplinary research

As indicated throughout, our submission reflects a strong commitment to inter-disciplinary research, which is reflected in our range of research grants. A good example is Holland's 'Older people and technology', an EU lifelong learning partnership project in conjunction with the Faculty of Mathematics, Computing and Technology at the OU, Age UK and European partners. There is also a complementary ESRC seminar series. Section (d) noted a range of other research projects, such as the DISCOVER project. The 'Transitions in kitchen living' project involved social gerontologists working with ergonomists and designers.

Networks, clusters and collaborations with users of research

Blackman has been an advisor on health improvement to the Department for Communities and Local Government and undertook the first comparative policy analyses of the effectiveness of strategies for tackling health inequalities in England, Scotland and Wales, working with the governments of all three countries. Featherstone is expert adviser to Barnardos, Ireland, a member of the Law and Policy Reference Group for the Family Rights Group and a member of the Centre for Social Justice working group on family breakdown. She is patron of MOSAIC, a charity that supports families affected by sexual abuse. The Centre for Ageing and Biographical Studies runs bi-annual research methodology seminars involving users of research.

Evidence of national and international academic collaborations

Featherstone was a visiting Professor at the University of Vechta, Germany for a semester in 2011 and is a member of an international collaboration led by Professor Lars Plantin (Malmo University, Sweden) on fathers, care and work, and a network for the development of family based policies and practices (led by the Universities of Birmingham and Nottingham). Peace is part of an ESRC supported International Urbanisation and Ageing Population Network that brings together academics, architectural practitioners and local government officers concerned with age-friendly environments and comparative research. In 2010 she was also a member of the European-wide consortium funded by the EC's Seventh Framework Programme to create a European Roadmap for Ageing Research over the next 10–15 years. Yeates is Honorary Senior Research Fellow at Dublin City University.

Seminar series, contribution to journal editorships, conferences and research-based CPD

Three seminar series were funded by the ESRC in this period. Lomax' 'Visual dialogues' (2010–2011), Holland' 'IT and inclusion' (2010–2013) and Jupp's 'Home space' (2012–2014). In 2013, we hosted the 11th International Death, Dying and Disposal Conference, bringing together practitioners and academics from the humanities and social sciences. Featherstone was invited by Policy Press to develop the proposal for, and become joint managing editor of, the new inter-disciplinary, international journal *Families, Relationships and Societies*. Two members of the submission have been co-editors of leading social policy journals during the census period: *Journal of Social Policy* and *Global Social Policy* (Fergusson and Yeates). The following gives an overview of the extent of editorial contributions to journals that deal with the life course, social work, social policy and health: *Child and Family Social Work*, *Fathering*, *Irish Journal of Applied Social Studies* and *Comunitania* (Featherstone); *Youth Voice* (Earle, R.); *Human Fertility* and *Sociological Research Online* (Earle, S.); *Visual Methodologies* (Lomax); *British Journal of Learning Disability* (Tilley); *Medical Sociology online* (Holland, Katz); *Mortality* (Komaromy); *Feminism and Psychology* (Terry); *Psychology of Women, Children and Society* (O'Dell); *Ageing and Society* (Holland); *Local Economy* (Blackman), *Transformations: Irish Race, Migration and Social Transformation Review* (Yeates)

Contribution to professional associations

Blackman is an academician of the Academy of Social Sciences (ASS) and was appointed by HEFCE as an output assessor for UoA 22. Peace is also an academician and, as a member of the

Environment template (REF5)

ASS, was part of the Advisory Group to ESRC on the review of their Research Ethics Framework (now the Framework for Research Ethics). Yeates is Vice-Chair of the Social Policy Association Executive Committee.

Featherstone was appointed Chair of the Children and Families Faculty of the College of Social Work in 2013. Komaromy is Chair of the Association for the Study of Death and Society. Earle S. was Convenor of the British Sociological Association's Human Reproduction Study Group and was a member of the BSA Executive. Peace is President Elect of the British Society of Gerontology.