

**Institution: Leeds Metropolitan University**

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

**a. Context**

The group of staff submitted as part of Unit of Assessment 22 coalesced over a number of years through an incremental process culminating in the formation in the spring of 2013 of the Centre for Applied Social Research (CeASR). This research centre is interdisciplinary and includes staff submitting to Units 4, 25, and 19 alongside those submitting to Unit 22. In 2005 the School of Social Sciences, whose members form the core of those submitting to Unit 22, was formed through the merger of the existing Applied Social Sciences group with sociology and politics provision from the School of Cultural Studies. This new group also brought together staff with similar research interests from the Faculty of Business and Law, Social Work, and Play Work with a view to creating a strong culture of research led teaching which had at its core a progressive commitment to themes of social justice and combating social exclusion.

Amongst the earliest fruits of this project was the development of a single honours undergraduate criminology programme realised through the recruitment of new staff at both senior and junior levels. The research interests of these new staff (including Webster, Kingston, and Crewe) extended, deepened and cut across the research focus of the existing group. Thus Webster's work on class and racial exclusion, Kingston's work on gender and crime, and Crewe's work on issues of power and responsibility in relation to crime all complemented Thomas's progressive research into the field of criminal records and the exclusion of offenders.

Related issues of exclusion were also explored by the social psychologists submitted as part of this UOA. For instance, Rickett and Milnes explore the psychological aspect of women's oppression in ways that complement similar themes in the work of Webster, Crewe and especially Kingston, while Sullivan explores defensible forms of social constructionism applied to real world issues such as health problems and affect or emotion at individual, group-based and collective levels. Beyond these links, Thomas's research, which is rooted in the field of social work, acts as a bridge to wider concerns of poverty and exclusion explored in the work both of Frost in social work and Brown in play work. The very recent appointment of Till further complements the work of feminist theorists in the group.

Similar convergences developed with the politics staff in the new group. Thus from the outset Blackledge and Wetherly played a core role adding a political dimension to the group's provision in particular through their research into areas of ethical theory, state theory, and multiculturalism. Together they organised an international conference at Leeds Met on Ralph Miliband's contribution to state theory in May 2009. A more recent conference led to the publication of a collection co-edited by Wetherly on multiculturalism, while Blackledge organised a conference and co-edited a series of collections on Alasdair MacIntyre's ethics. These works were key to the formation of the International Society for MacIntyrean Enquiry which in turn organised a series of annual international conferences.

These themes were strengthened further when staff from the School of Applied Global Ethics joined the Social Science group in 2010. This merger provided further scope for strengthening the research base of the group. Nunn's work on labour market transitions, institutions, class and inequality links directly to that of Webster. Similarly Langan's research on poverty, trade, aid and development relations between the EU and Africa is built on earlier seminal work by Nunn and Price (Nunn and Price, 2005) on the Lome and Cotonou trade/aid regimes.

These new members of staff joined a vibrant research community that has produced outputs with impacts beyond those mentioned in the two case studies. For instance, Webster's collaborative longitudinal study of transitions from teenage to young adulthood in respect of family, school-to-work, leisure, crime and drug-using, health and housing careers begun in 1998 and still ongoing, has revealed the nature of myriad aspects of poor transitions among an economically marginalised population living in Teesside. The series of cumulative studies, publications and impacts - funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the ESRC over several years - are known as 'The Teesside Studies'. Webster's co-authored book *Poverty and Insecurity: Life in Low-pay, No-Pay*

**Impact template (REF3a)**

Britain, Bristol: Policy Press (2012) was awarded the 2013 British Academy Peter Townsend Policy Press Prize.

Meanwhile Brown's research on (particularly Roma) abandoned and abused children in the Transylvania region of Romania informed the decision to invite him to join the Advisory Panel of the National Children's Bureau's Children's Play Information Service<sup>2</sup>. In the same year he established the charity, Aid for Romanian Children<sup>3</sup>, which to date has given hundreds of volunteers the opportunity to broaden their life experience and work with some of the most disadvantaged children in Europe. In 2009 this led to Professor Brown being invited to become a member of the International Advisory Board of the Romanian Association of Play Therapy and Drama Therapy.

Similarly Nunn has achieved significant research impact on policy and practice in the UK and beyond. His work on performance management and Public Employment Services (PES) Target has informed the development and implementation of several different systems in Jobcentre Plus. He has been invited by the European Commission to contribute to two PES Dialogue conferences and to inform and support a Peer Review exercise on Performance Management, which take place within the auspices of the Open Method of Coordinating employment policy across the EU. He has authored a report informing the Peer Review and also a Technical Expert paper for the EU on this subject and his work substantially informs a new Toolkit for PES practitioners across Europe. Nunn's work on inter-class mobility has also substantively informed policy in the UK and across Europe. Indeed, Nunn has been commissioned by the Council of Europe to inform an expert committee on social mobility and social cohesion. The book length report, approved by the transnational committee of experts and unanimously by the Committee of Ministers formed the basis for policy guidelines (drafted by Nunn) (see <https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=1836387>) for the 47 member states of the Council of Europe on social policies to promote both mobility and cohesion (Nunn 2013). Findings from this work have informed academic publications (Nunn 2012) and led to an invite to speak at the ESRC Festival of Social Science event for policy makers and academics on social mobility in 2012.

Conversely, other members of the team have seen their work impact in the world of social activism. For instance, Blackledge's theoretical explorations of the links between the work of Aristotle and Marx informed the publication of more popular pieces amongst which one on the politics of social class has been picked up by the Canadian activist journal *Climate and Capitalism* and reproduced as one of 10 important contemporary contributions to leftist strategic debate. Blackledge has also been an invited Plenary Speaker at a number of international conferences including *The Naturalisation of Marxism: Studies on the Experience of the UK and the PRC Conference*, Nanjing University, China, September 2010 (his contribution was published in Chinese and in English); the *Historical Materialism conference* City University New York January 2010 – "Ethics and Anti-Capitalism" (his contribution was published in the journal *Socialism and Democracy*). Additionally, his work on anarchism has been debated internationally, including by Prof Lucien van der Walt (Rhodes University, South Africa), while his more recent work on Left Reformism has been an important point of reference for contemporary debates on left realignment in Britain – he was asked to speak on this topic at the *Historical Materialism conference* in New York in April 2013.

**b. Approach to impact**

This is the first time that this group is to be submitted for research assessment. The impact strategy of the group is rooted in the research culture noted in the Environment Template. Amongst this group there has been a push for increasing day-to-day research contact with end users and increasing research informed publications in non-academic press. The new research centre aims to "foster interdisciplinary research with impact on policy and practice in the social science". This project is intended to build upon and extend existing strengths within the group. Research was initially supported in four Programmes (now expanded through securing additional funding to 5): Sex, Gender, Identity and Power; Crime, Justice and Society; Employment, Work and Welfare; Speech, Language and Communication; and Global Inequalities. Each Programme is led by a designated academic and is supporting a range of funded collaborative research projects which have to lead to both academic outputs in high quality peer-reviewed journals and external

stakeholder engagement through workshops, targeted advice, publications in the relevant trade press and through 'impact pathways' which include the widespread use of new social media (such as blogs and Twitter). Some of these are already underway and can be viewed at [www.leedsmet.ac.uk/CeASR](http://www.leedsmet.ac.uk/CeASR). All programmes are also being supported through the allocation of at least one PhD studentship in the academic year 2013-14 and further studentships in the future. Grant capture, joint publication and stakeholder engagement are already underway. The establishment of CeASR reflects the gradual coalescence of substantial research and engagement capacity built up by the mergers described above over the last five years. CeASR also contributes to the quality of the taught and research student community in the School. It also integrates with the UG and PG curriculum (in the School of Social, Psychological and Communication Sciences), infusing it with research informed content and will grow the taught and research PG community through acting as a Graduate hub within the school.

### **c. Strategy and plans**

The CeASR marks a substantial and renewed commitment to Social Science research at Leeds Metropolitan University and was created with the intension of extending and deepening existing interdisciplinary research aimed at making an impact on policy and practice in the social sciences. The Centre's explicit objectives include: increasing the number of stakeholders engaged with social science research at the University; increasing the impact of social science research at the University; increasing the volume, prominence and reputation of social science research at the University; promoting the esteem and reputation of Social Science research within the University; increasing the number and value of applications for external research funding; increasing the number and value of externally funded research projects; increasing the number and quality of external stakeholders staff within the School engage with; increasing the number of staff producing social science research outputs; increasing the quantity and quality of social science research outputs at our University; contributing toward the flexibility and relevance of the curriculum, through infusing teaching with relevant and cutting edge research findings; and attracting more PG students to the school. Each of these objectives will be measured against specific performance measures, reported through the Management Committee and the University Research Committee. Though the last five years has witnessed the coalescence of active researchers exploring similar themes, the establishment of the CeASR explicitly recognised that there are a wider range of colleagues in the School and undertaking social science research across the University who required additional support and time to fully exploit their research potential.

CeASR will coordinate future research strategy beyond the five Programme areas and includes (1) a strategic staff release scheme for individual members of staff working on areas outside of the programmes; (2) a mentoring structure for new and less experienced colleagues; (3) integration into the Human Resources' annual Performance and Development Review structure with line managers mandated to set research objectives for all academic staff and to identify the necessary support to enable this; (4) engagement with the timetabling process to enable colleagues to block time on teaching and research activity respectively (and a minimum of one day a week dedicated to research plus other release as per the Programme Action Plans and the Strategic Staff Release Scheme) and (5) the future REF strategy will be coordinated by the CeASR and its management team (made up of the Director, Programme Leaders and all Readers and Professors in the School/Centre). Over the summer 2013 6 fully funded and a further 3 part funded PhD scholarships were awarded in a further signal of intent and commitment to the success of research in the CeASR. Further part-funded scholarships are about to be advertised and 2 part funded MRes scholarships were supported in summer 2013.

### **d. Relationship to case studies**

The selected case studies reflect the successes of the existing research culture within the group, which the Centre for Applied Social Research aims to deepen and extend. Both Thomas's work on criminal records and sex offenders and Frost's work on multi-professional engagement with vulnerable children and young people have had an impact on public policy and practice including the Safeguarding Boards. Many additional case studies could have been provided (as the discussions above suggest) and the CeASR strategy will ensure that future selections will be even broader.