

**Institution: Liverpool Hope University**

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

**a. Context**

Part of Liverpool Hope's mission is 'to contribute to the educational, religious, cultural, social and economic life of Liverpool, Merseyside, the North-West and beyond'. A general measure of Hope's impact in these spheres is noted in the ESRC/HEFCE report (2010) 'The Impact of Higher Education Institutions on Regional Economies' which states that 'what Hope has achieved was in its own way peerless'. This general university context drives the focus of the research described here.

UoA 22 represents a new departure at Liverpool Hope. Key appointments have been made since the 2008 RAE: Professor Lavalette arrived in January 2009 (initially as Associate Professor), Professor Brown in 2007/08 and Professor Mair in September 2012. In addition to these senior appointments which have begun to drive research locally and internationally, five junior staff have been recruited since September 2011. The UoA is, therefore, very much work in progress. Its focus coheres around issues of social and criminal justice: Professor Brown's work on academic peer review and its implications for quality and for students; Professor Lavalette's work on the need for a more actively engaged and committed social work practice; and Professor Mair's research on the use of community sentences and community justice courts. The kind of impact that relates most closely to this UoA is to do with holding policy initiatives to account and/or subjecting them to public scrutiny. Thus impact is about stimulating public or practitioner debate and policy/practice development. Opportunities for influencing government in its plans for social policy are rare and the UoA's work demonstrates the beginnings of a coherent and concerted effort to widen debate.

More specifically, the audiences for the research are government departments, practitioners/professionals (university staff, social workers, criminal justice professionals) and the general public. The wider implications are considerable: the effective regulation of academic quality; a social work that engages effectively with the poor and the vulnerable; a criminal justice system that is focused on the community.

**b. Approach to impact**

Inevitably, given the relative youth and small size of this UoA, the approach taken towards impact has been on the whole one whereby individuals have used their personal reputations and networks to take forward the potential effects of their work. The academic standing of Professors Brown, Lavalette and Mair is such that they are well-known amongst policy-makers and practitioners and their work is known to journalists.

Thus, Professor Brown's research has been used by a House of Commons Committee to inform their report into academic standards and quality; he was also a key witness to the Institute for Public Policy Research Commission on the Future of Higher Education where he argued for the need for a single independent higher education regulator, which formed one of the recommendations of the Commission's Report; and he has also been a regular contributor to the pages of Education Guardian (e.g. 'Tables can turn' 10/4/07; 'Regulate the regulators' 9/10/07; 'We cannot leave higher education to the markets' 21/10/08; 'Will for-profit providers do higher education any good?' 8/3/11; 'The case for increased university fees is losing its credibility' 11/1/11; 'Student choice is a myth – and it's immoral' 19/3/12).

Professor Lavalette speaks regularly to conferences of practitioners both in the UK and abroad about the need for a more radical approach to social work (e.g. The Palestine-UK Social Work Network in 2012; a keynote presentation to the Brazilian Social Work Association in June 2012; a keynote speech to the International Symposium of Poverty and Social Exclusion in Europe in 2010); in 2005 he co-founded SWAN (the Social Work Action Network) which brings together

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academics, social workers, service users and students and organises annual national conferences; and he has been featured in *the Guardian* ('Time is of the essence' 11/3/09; 'Care in the global community' 25/7/12).

Professor Mair's work has been used in two House of Commons Justice Committee reports (Towards Effective Sentencing – July 2008; and The Role of the Probation Service – July 2011); he has been interviewed regularly on radio (e.g. BBC Radio 4 'The Report' 22/7/10; BBC Radio Merseyside 23/2/11; BBC Radio Newcastle 17/8/11; BBC Radio Kent 28/11/12; BBC Radio Merseyside 29/8/13; BBC Radio 5 Live 18/10/13) and his work has featured in the press (e.g. The Guardian 2/3/09; The Times 28/8/09; guardian.co.uk 3/8/12); he has discussed with two major organisations their plans to bid for criminal justice contracts and contributed to the response of one of these two organisations to the ministry of Justice consultation document 'Transforming Rehabilitation'; and he delivered the keynote address to the first ASEAN+3 conference of probation managers in South-east Asia.

In these ways, research has been used to widen and inform debate and to influence policy and practice. The university has encouraged such activities by allowing time/absence from teaching as necessary, and has arranged public lectures by Professors Brown, Lavalette and Mair. Institutional support for such activities includes: staff development on the impact agenda; provision of facilities for hosting public events; funding staff travel and accommodation where necessary; support in developing external funding applications; subsidizing conference organisation; support from the Conference Office in organising events.

### c. Strategy and plans

The unit's strategy and plans for the future feed into and sit within a developing institutional strategy which will embed impact within academic life and culture. In terms of the unit's research environment:

1. Impact will form a part of annual performance review. This will include target-setting and identification of any staff development needs.
2. Impact achievement and potential will be one of the criteria to be considered in recruitment and promotion processes.
3. A portion of research funds, at unit level and institutionally, will be earmarked to support impact-related activity.
4. Regular review mechanisms for on-going projects will be established, to measure progress and effectiveness and assist with forward planning.
5. Staff development in impact for the unit will continue, to optimise the effectiveness of impact-related activity and support individuals/groups at all stages of the impact life-cycle.

The development of a specific strategy for staff within the UoA is being developed with an eye to the presence within the Unit of a high proportion of early career researchers, some of whom are still completing PhDs. In some ways, early career researchers are more open to impact, although the PhD is not perhaps the most appropriate way to take impact forward. Impact is now an integral aspect of any planned research within the Unit, insofar as it is expected to be considered at an early stage of the research.

Professor Lavalette's SWAN group is one very specific way for social work researchers to develop impact given its incorporation of professionals and users as well as academics, although other members of the Unit could also utilise SWAN's networks.

The university's encouragement of staff to contribute brief 'Expert Comment' items to its web pages leads researchers to write about their work with a wider audience than their academic peers in mind.

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Staff are encouraged to develop relationships with practitioners locally and nationally. There are currently strong links with PSS (a Merseyside social services agency) and these have already led to potential research/practice collaborations and will be developed further.

Professor Mair continues to discuss possible research/practice collaborations with organisations bidding to enter the criminal justice market. Overall, the strategy will:

- Encourage all research to consider impact wherever practicable
- Where feasible, publish short user-friendly accounts of academic research
- Encourage attendance/presentations at meetings/conferences of practitioners
- Utilise knowledge/skills/experience of more senior academics (e.g. ML, GM)
- Development of links with practitioners, service users, etc.
- Development of links with local/national media

More specifically: impact will form a part of annual performance review, which will include target-setting and identification of staff development needs; impact achievement and potential will be a criterion considered in recruitment and promotion; a proportion of research funds will be earmarked to support impact-related activity; ongoing research will be reviewed regularly in order to assess impact potential; staff will be encouraged to undertake training opportunities in how to maximise impact.

**d. Relationship to case studies**

Professor Brown's case study demonstrates how his work has been used by those involved in high-level policy debates which is where the focus of his work lies.

Professor Lavalette, on the other hand, aims to influence social work professionals and his case study exemplifies how he has targeted such groups locally, nationally and internationally.