

**Overview:** After the RAE2008, the University took a strategic decision to focus its research activities into four over-arching Research Beacons and three Research Centres tasked with nurturing and facilitating research. Beacons and Centres were chosen to be sufficiently broad to capture our research interests, but sufficiently focussed so as to highlight areas of research strength and to act as an enabling framework. A significant proportion of the University's QR funding has been allocated to the Beacons. Beacons and Centres agree and manage targets for research grant applications and co-ordinate research activity. In addition, the University has established a central Research Development Fund which has been used to support individual staff who demonstrate research excellence, early career researchers and to fund a small number of research studentships. At the same time the university undertook restructuring which resulted in unit members being reconfigured into our current location in the Faculty of Education and Society (FES) in the Department of Social Sciences.

When, the University invited applications for research Beacons and Centres, two applications were submitted from within the Dept of Social Sciences, from the Centre for Equalities and Social Justice and the Centre for Children, Young People and Families. The latter secured University recognition however, since 2010, discussion between the two centres resulted, first, in an amalgamation of the two Centres under the CCYPF name; and second, during 2012-13, a review of CCYPF and the decision to re-name the Centre as the Centre of Applied Sciences (CASS). CASS was launched in July 2013. All members of the unit are members of CASS. Whilst membership of CASS is open across the University community its aims and objectives more fully reflects the interests of the Dept. There are 42 members of the Dept in three teams, Applied Social Studies, Childhood Studies and Social Studies, providing undergraduate programmes in Health and Social Care, Criminology, Social Work, Sociology, Community and Youth Work, Childhood Studies, and Early Years Professional Training. Although some individuals were submitted in RAE2008 (Donovan and Malin), there was no UoA22 submission, notwithstanding the diverse range of research activities taking place within the Dept. Subsequently, there has been a strong commitment from the University, the Faculty, and CASS to ensure a unit submission this time.

**Research Strategy:** The University Research Plan reinforces the importance of research, and sets out the context in which units plan their own activities. The fundamental context for research is to underpin the academic standing of the University as a seat of higher learning and scholarship. The University is committed to being research active, with a research active curriculum, undertaking research which both enhances the learning experience of our students, and delivers impact. CASS's research strategy reflects the University's mission as a civic university with aims to improve living conditions, address inequalities and social exclusion and promote social justice across the region, nationally and internationally. Three objectives achieve the aims: the production of excellent research; the production of excellent knowledge exchange particularly with practitioners and policy makers; and to develop a research active curriculum. Three core activities, the production of excellent research, influencing the development of policy and professional practice and knowledge dissemination underpin our goal of having real world impact.

To support the core activities our research strategy has been developmental with aspirational goals: in the short-term to promote and support research activity in order to be submittable to the REF2014; and in the longer term, i.e. by REF2020, to embed research activity, with an impact agenda, as a core activity of CASS members; to increase external funding by 25%; to raise the profile of the work of CASS, evidenced, for example by having 350 twitter followers; to establish a taught Masters in the Dept of Social Sciences (this will be achieved by September, 2014); and to evidence our progress with a REF2020 submission increased by 50%. Several activities have enabled the short-term strategy to be achieved: the creation of a research culture through regular research meetings at which research ideas and current projects are shared and potential collaborations identified; research seminars to showcase the work of research active colleagues; workshops with external speakers to

promote research and publication; research away days; since 2010/11 QR funding to support research activities (£15,000 in 2010/11, £20,000 in 2011/12 and 25K per annum until 2015); the recruitment of research active colleagues; the development of collaborations between members to encourage research activity, impact and outputs.

Currently the research of CASS coalesces around five themes: *children, young people and families; communities, health and social exclusion; disability and diversity; 'Race' and racism; and crime, victims and social justice*. Research themes are identified to reflect research strengths and expertise but are 'live' insofar as they are regularly reviewed to ensure that they reflect the strengths of CASS members. The work of submitted members of the unit reflects at least one of these: Donovan with Ballantyne, Cosgrove and Tudor in *crime, victims and social justice* and, with Brennan, in *communities, health and social exclusion*; Kearney and Malin in *children, young people and families*; Macdonald and Malin in *disability and diversity*. This crossover of CASS/unit membership between themes is reflected in the work of submitted unit members and the unit's impact case studies (for example the work of Clayton and Donovan in the impact of the Coalition Government's spending review on the Dept of Social Sciences' regional partners; and the work of Clayton on both digital exclusion (with Macdonald) and youth work with Black young people). Opportunities for collaboration are also regularly explored (e.g. Donovan, Clayton and Merchant; and Macdonald with Charnock and Scutt); and it is intended that this will have benefits beyond REF 2014 (see below). A further example of collaboration is in the work that nine members of CASS (including Kearney, Donovan [co-editors], Macdonald, Clayton, Rushton, Ballantyne, Quaid, Bowler and Merchant) did to produce an edited collection titled *Constructing Risky Identities in Policy and Practice* (2013).

CASS meets regularly to keep members informed of the centre's activities, research opportunities and to create spaces for developing collaborations. The monthly research seminar provides opportunities for CASS members to showcase their work as well as for external visitors to present on issues pertaining to the interests of CASS. Alongside this writing for publication workshops provide different levels of support for those wishing to write (there is a workshop for those who have never published and peer support writing groups for early career researchers (ECR) wanting to exploit their theses). Workshops have also been held to encourage non-research active colleagues to explore research ideas and develop research proposals, and for everybody to identify and apply for external funding. We have also run writing for publication workshops with an external consultant providing one to one and group sessions on academic writing. The former supported colleagues who had not published before as sole authors (e.g. Ballantyne, Merchant, Quaid) to do so in the CASS edited collection *Constructing Risky Identities in Policy and Practice* (Kearney and Donovan, 2013). Postgraduate students are encouraged to attend all of the workshops. The three professors in the Dept. also provide informal mentoring for colleagues with less or no research experience.

A funding strategy to guide decision-making about access to QR funding gave priority in the first instance to supporting potentially submittable staff to the REF. However, given our starting point our funding decisions have also always been influenced by our aspirations to increase research activity in the long term. To this end we have provided funds for conference attendance at peer reviewed conferences (since 2010 eleven members of CASS have been funded to attend fifteen conferences); and funds for study leave to provide writing opportunities (since 2010 seven members of CASS have been given a total of approximately £15,000 for teaching relief in order to write either for publication or a research proposal). Two colleagues were enabled to submit because of this investment (Kearney and Ballantyne). Postgraduate students are also encouraged to apply to the CASS research budget for research expenses and conference attendance and three postgraduate students have successfully made applications for fieldwork expenses (Husband and Robertson) and conference attendance (Wilcock).

In addition, funding (approximately £8,000) has been made available to fund 7 empirical studies that reflect the aims of CASS and either promote the development of first time researchers (Merchant) and/or the development of collaborative work (for e.g. across disciplines in the Dept (Merchant, Donovan and Clayton; Buchroth; Parsons and Wright-Stephenson) or externally with partner HE and other institutions (e.g. Bowler). We expect that these investments will bear fruit for the REF2020.

Another aspect of the research strategy recently in development is raising the profile of CASS which has been achieved with the production of research newsletters (there have been three to date and one to be published in December 2013); and in the development of the CASS website. The latter provides an outline of our work in each theme; research profiles of all submitted colleagues; information about our knowledge dissemination events and pdf attachments of presentations given at them. At the launch of CASS in June 2013 we invited partners (individuals or organisations) to become Associate Members of CASS: this enables them to be invited to all of our events and to our annual review of CASS so that they can participate in shaping our future plans. We see this development as a way of consolidating existing relationships and/or creating new ones with partner agencies across the region. Since the launch of CASS we also have a twitter account which has 54 followers – 34 of which are partner agencies or other research centres) and this is used to advertise our achievements, seminars or other events.

The newsletter has two main functions: to raise the profile of CASS research related activities within the Dept, the Faculty and University but also externally across the region; and it provides a record of achievements that can be measured against the research strategy embedded in CASS. Thus we can show that during the REF2014 period CASS members were responsible for 13 research reports, 14 book chapters, 2 edited collections, 12 peer reviewed articles, 1 book, 2 articles in practitioner journals and 15 conference papers at peer reviewed conferences. In addition QR funding has supported 7 research studies.

A final aspect of the research strategy is the development of a taught postgraduate programme which will be launched in Sept 2014. This programme will reflect the research interests of unit and CASS members and keep a focus on the application of social studies knowledge and methods.

In keeping with the University's research strategy it is also intended that CASS will increase its external funding of research over the next 10 years by 25%; to broaden the range of external funders sought and to increase the numbers of staff who are successful in applications. To support this workshops are held regularly on writing research proposals and funding applications; and we retain membership of the Institute for Local Governance (ILG) which is a consortium of universities in the North East through which regional research projects are funded by local authorities for the benefit of the region. Having had some success with funding through this source (e.g. Malin and Morris; Malin and Tunmore) it is intended to build on this in the future. In addition, the university's Research Support organise research funder events aimed specifically at the social sciences, for example, with the Nuffield Foundation and the British Academy.

It is intended that the research strategy will remain the same going forward but with annual reviews to ensure that it is still fit for purpose. Looking forward to the next REF it is intended that the numbers of CASS members submitted into the unit will increase by at least a third; and that external research funding will have increased by 25%.

**People Staffing strategy and staff development:** Since 2008, there has been considerable change in staff in the Dept of Social Sciences and therefore the unit. Donovan and Malin (both submitted into REF 2008) and Kearney have been at the university for 17, 13 and 20 years respectively. Macdonald and Ballantyne have been at the university for 6-7 years and

Tudor and Cosgrove and Brennan are ECRs. The university research strategy which is promoted within FES makes it desirable for new appointments to have a PhD or to be near submission. Thus we have been enabled to recruit several ECRs on permanent contracts (Cosgrove, Tudor, Powton) but with some on temporary contracts (Brennan). Applications for promotion to readerships and professorships are invited annually, and two professors from within CASS have been appointed during the current period. Both are submittable: Donovan in this unit and Rushton in UoA 30. In collaboration with the Universities of Northumbria and Teesside, Sunderland developed and piloted a Leadership Foundation funded programme 'Leading on Research Excellence', a tailor-made strategic leadership programme for Readers and Professors across the region. The University Research Strategy (2013-2018) fully subscribes to the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, and the university holds an HR Excellence in Research Award. In 2013/14 a new development programme will run specifically for contract researchers and a review of careers provision to ensure researcher needs are fully met. In addition, new roles such as Research Student Manager (RSM) (Rushton) have been created to support postgraduate research undertaken by staff and students in each department.

Since 2008 five colleagues have taken maternity or paternity leave. This has impacted on the submissions of three members of the unit (Ballantyne, Cosgrove and Tudor). Another member (Kearney) has gradually reduced his working hours during this period and is currently (0.5 FTE) which impacts on the number of outputs he is required to submit. Underpinning the recruitment and staffing issues is the university's equal opportunities policies which promote fairness in recruitment, equality and diversity for staff and students and works to ensure that all members of the university community treat one another with respect and dignity. The University is an Athena Swan Bronze award holder, holds Investor in People status, is a Stonewall Diversity Champion, and subscribes to the "two ticks" "Positive about Disability" scheme. In consequence, CASS has an interesting mixture of well established, established and early career researchers as well as colleagues who have not yet become research active. As a result of the range of research experience, mentoring, capability and potential, the research strategy outlined above is intended to provide both a research culture and opportunities to support research past the REF 2014 and into the future. As a result of these activities we expect that in the next REF the proportion of those submitted will improve by 50%.

**Research students:** The University aims to continue to ensure that our Postgraduate Research (PGR) students enjoy an excellent student experience, that their work is of the appropriate standard, and that they achieve their qualification within an appropriate time period. Central Graduate Research Support provides administrative support for PGR students, their supervisors and procedural aspects. Central Academic Services provide a comprehensive offering of PGR student training programmes which spans the VITAE researcher development framework. All PGR students are required to attend this programme, and annual reviews of their progress. Recent PRES surveys have shown good scores for student satisfaction with their skills development, including 73% for transferable and research skills, 85% for analytical and project management skills and 87% for independent learning. The recent university-wide PGR review identified this as "a comprehensive skills training programme." Faculties provide subject-specific training, including access to Masters' modules where appropriate.

Four PhDs have been completed in the REF2014 period, i.e. 2008-2011, and there are currently 10 postgraduates in the Unit. One of those who completed is a member of staff (Quaid), as is one of the current students (Bowler), reflecting the university's commitment to staff development. One of the current students is a PhD by publication. The Departmental RSM has overall responsibility for both pastoral and administrative care of the students. Generic training provided centrally is continually supplemented at the Department level as

student projects develop. In addition Sunderland is part of a regional consortium of five universities offering training to each other's postgraduates: in this way our students may tap into the specialist training provided by ESRC-approved Doctoral Training Centres in the region, supported by funding from CASS where required.

Full and part time research students have their own room and facilities including their own computer and printing equipment. They are integrated into CASS through the Centre's allocation of financial aid to their research and conference attendance through the seminar series and the open invitation to research workshops. This has enabled them to both participate in and contribute to a strong research culture. Postgraduate students can teach as Academic Tutors, and are encouraged to take the training for HE tutoring available in the University as part of their professional development towards employability.

**Income, infrastructure and facilities:** Evidence of the university's investment in CASS and the unit:

i. All targets for research income have been achieved by the Centre since its recognition by the University in 2009. Historically, members of Unit 22 have been disproportionately successful given the relative QR investment from a range of funders, both nationally and regionally, from research councils and charities (applied to competitively and otherwise), including the ESRC (£295,000), Northern Rock Foundation (approx £500,000, £17,000), Sunderland City Council (£310,000), Department of Health (180K), Sunderland PCT (£80,000), and the NE ILG (£215,000). Given the relative academic age of CASS's membership, these successes bode well for a future beyond REF 2014 and the research strategy of CASS reflects this. In the REF period unit members have secured grants with a total value of circa £0.7 million including further funding from the ESRC (£266,000), ILG (3 grants to the total of £177,000 – one of which is a collaborative project with the Faculty of Business and Law); Department of Communities and Local Government (£110,000), Sunderland PCT/Tyne and Wear Partnership Board (£70,000), Department of Health (£5000) and Northern Rock Foundation (£30,000). These grants represent a range of collaborative approaches to applied social science research: across HE institutions (Donovan with Barnes at the University of Leicester); across disciplines (social policy, community and youth work with business and law); between experienced and new researchers (e.g Malin and Tunmore); and with partner agencies (Macdonald with Taylor-Gooby). CASS has a strong record in securing external funding to support its research activities. Academics have a strong commitment to engaging in policy relevant research with real world impact. The focus of our future external funding strategy involves targeting funders who share this goal, the Nuffield Foundation, British Academy and ILG.

ii. Research Support (RS) is a central university service that supports research activities across the university by providing regular updates and events about and with funders and tenders, support with creating research budgets and financial systems to monitor and report on research budgets. They contribute to CASS workshops on research income generation.

iii. CASS is led by senior staff in the Dept. Since the launch of CASS in June 2013 Prof Donovan has become its head.

iv. The university research strategy identifies the centrality of a research active curriculum and locates research as a core activity of the university. This embeds research in the appraisal system which in turn facilitates the identification of staff's research needs which are reflected in the staff development strategy at faculty and university level; and can be reflected in work-loading processes.

v. The Dept has a RSM who is a Professor (Rushton, Historical Sociology); and two other Professors (Donovan, Social Relations and Malin, Social Policy and Social Work) all of whom contribute to creating a research culture through CASS.

vi. Since 2009/10 the university has made QR funding available either through Beacons and Centres or through university-wide competitive calls for applications for studentships, early career development, research fellow activities, and research dissemination. Unit members have had a measure of success in the university-wide calls, which have been competitive, securing funding for a day seminar on 'Race' and racism in the North East (Donovan et al) which then led to further funding from NE Unison Black Members' Group for two further events under this title; and one colleague (now left) achieving a mini-fellowship to finish writing a peer reviewed article; and a part-time studentship (Hetherington) building on the research of Donovan, Clayton, Merchant and Ballantyne which explored the impact of the Coalition Government's spending review on the Dept's partners across the region and focussing on volunteering. As explained above, since 2010/11 Centres have been given QR research budgets to support research activities such as conference attendance, fieldwork expenses, dissemination events and pilot studies for new research.

vii. Research Activities: Professors provide mentoring for individual colleagues and identify and lead where appropriate on potential research collaborations and bids. A rolling programme of research related workshops on funding for research, research grant writing, writing for publication, beginning to write for publication, and starting to become research active are provided. Currently, 11 CASS members are involved with 8 research projects.

**Facilities:** University Library Services (ULS) has three libraries offering approximately 1400 study spaces, including areas for silent, quiet and group study and 300+ PCs and Mac work desks. It supports research through the provision of a high quality library environment and facilities, appropriate print and electronic information resources and support from professional staff. The ULS book fund for 2013-14 is £205,000 with £77,900 allocated to FES and £24,700 allocated to Social Sciences. The library purchases both print and ebook textbooks when available. ULS subscribes to over 20,000 print and electronic journal titles the usage of which is monitored continuously reviewed. In the REF period there have been substantial improvements to the support on offer for research from ULS. Search and retrieval tools include a federated search engine and a range of online databases including: SocINDEX with full text, Swetswise, Social Theory, Sociological Research online, and extended JSTOR access. In addition, researchers can also make up to 65 Interlibrary loan requests each academic year for items not in library stock. ULS subscribe to Journal Citation Reports for journal ranking and ISI Highly cited and Web of Science citation analysis tools. Researchers may join the Sconul Access Scheme, enabling access and borrowing from other Higher Education (HE) libraries, including 170 UK HE libraries and Durham and Newcastle Universities. SURE, the Sunderland Institutional Repository is the digital collection of the research output of the university including journal articles, book chapters, conference papers, and PhD theses. ULS also subscribes to the British Library's EthOS service where an increasing number of UK HE theses are available in full text.

**Support:** As well as a library website for researchers, ULS professional librarians provide support to researchers via the 'library buddy' service; contribute to the university's training programme for new researchers and deliver sessions on accessing, searching and retrieving information from online databases and using the Internet to communicate ideas and research outputs via social media tools. Research activities are also supported with latest editions of SPSS and NVivo and experienced computer support. University investment in upgrading the computer facilities at the University has resulted in increasingly user-friendly data analysis programmes and user support. In addition the university has invested in a central working and social space in which postgraduate training and workshops can take place. This section gives information about research income, infrastructure and facilities.

**Collaboration and contribution to the discipline:**

- Membership of CASS is multi-disciplinary which has resulted in multi-disciplinary collaborative working and provides opportunities for colleagues who are not research

active to become so. For example, Macdonald, a criminologist, has recently developed a collaborative piece of work funded through CASS working with colleagues from Social Work and Health and Social Care to explore the experiences of older people with learning disabilities in institutions. Other collaborative working has taken place through grants from the ILG (Malin and Morris; Malin and Tunmore); and CASS QR funding (Donovan, Clayton and Merchant).

- Members of CASS develop research links with colleagues both in other HE institutions and practice/policy settings. Macdonald has worked with a lay member of the Durham and Dales public and patient involvement subgroup of the commissioning group; and Donovan was successful with a collaborative bid to the ESRC with a colleague at Leicester University. Donovan has since developed a collaborative bid to the ESRC with a colleague at Sheffield Hallam. Clayton had developed a collaborative bid with a colleague at Northumbria University before he left.
- Malin has been appointed Co-Editor of the journal *Social Work and Social Sciences Review-An International Journal of Applied Research* with lead responsibility for mentoring new authors, developing the international arm of the journal and links between social work practice and the social science disciplines that inform it. He has engaged with CASS to nurture writing (including of research reports) for publication. Kearney, Macdonald and Hayman (a post grad student) have had pieces published in this journal.
- Research Fellowships have been obtained at St Anne's College Oxford (Visiting Plumer Research Fellow June -November 2011, Malin) and at the University of Winnipeg, Canada (Margaret Laurence Visiting Scholar, Donovan).
- Macdonald was on the organising committee of the First Annual European Congress on Learning Disabilities in Switzerland (2011).
- Several members have been asked to give key note and/or plenary presentations regionally (Donovan), nationally (Macdonald, Donovan, Malin) and internationally (Donovan, Malin) in their fields of expertise.
- Members of CASS are members of professional associations; of journal editorial boards (Malin, Macdonald) and have provided peer reviews for over thirty journals.
- Historically CASS has run two seminar series: an 'occasional' one which typically showcases an expert representing a nationally/ internationally important agency/role related to children, young people and families. The other is monthly and is a mixture of showcasing work of members of CASS (for example, the edited book from members of CASS was developed through a themed seminar series during 2010-2011); and invited speakers reporting on their work/research.
- In addition CASS have fundraised and hosted other themed seminar series: an international six seminar series on Domestic Violence in the 21st Century (2007-2009); an international 8-seminar series on the Coalition Government's Violence Against Women and Girls Action Plan (2012-2014) [both co-funded with Northern Rock Foundation](circa 90 attendees per seminar); a day conference on Mothering (2011)(circa 60 attendees); a three event series on 'Race' and Racism in the North East (circa 200 attendees over the series): from theory to practice with national and regional and Centre members speaking; and a dissemination event on The Impact of the Cuts (2012) (circa 40 attendees). In organising these events our approach is always to bring together researchers, policy makers, practitioners and funders to provide opportunities for discussing the impact of research findings on the development of best policy/practice.
- Members are external examiners at a range of other HE institutions for a range of activities: undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, postgraduate validations, PhD examinations; are ESRC grant and seminar series assessors and one has been a national external assessor for the Big Lottery Research Grants.