

Institution: University of Ulster
Unit of Assessment: 22 Social Work and Social Policy
<p>a. Context</p> <p>With the growth of diversity in social policy in the UK, associated with the devolution of powers to regions, we have readily acknowledged as a responsibility that one key part of our mission must be to undertake research with an island of Ireland, Northern Ireland or regional relevance. In fact, the past and present of social and political life, as experienced in NI, give it an acknowledged special importance in understanding societies and governance more generally. However, it is accepted as essential that all of our research, whatever its focus, must aim at the highest standards of excellence in originality, significance and rigour. In NI, the process of transition to a post-conflict society (associated with devolution from 1999, which took a unique form of mandatory power-sharing coalition) has ousted conflict as the chief concern of policy. Opportunities for research with regard to policy needs are now extensive. Impact is a dimension integral to this UOA's research, especially in three areas where it is designed to assist in the development of policy-making capacity and networks not only in NI but beyond: (1) the systems and processes of NI governance in comparative UK and Republic of Ireland contexts, (Acheson, Birrell, Gray, Knox, and Case Study 1, Knox and Carmichael); (2) particular issues associated with UK devolution in the fields of health and social care (Birrell, Gray, Heenan, Horgan, Taylor), (3); policing and justice (Monaghan, Topping and Case Study 2, Lundy) and women and young offenders, and custody (Case Study 3, Moore and Convery). The beneficiaries of impact from our research include policy-makers and practitioners (statutory and voluntary), communities and service users. The chief forms of impact are informing policy debate, modifying policy, influencing professional practice and management in social care, and advancing public understanding. Case studies reveal only part of our impact, so we give at this point an impression of the true breadth as revealed by other examples.</p> <p>Important impacts have ensued from collaboration between Taylor and McCormack (Professor of Nursing) as leaders/grant holders of a team commissioned in 2005 by the Department of health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) to develop the NI Single Assessment Tool (NISAT) for the health and social care of older people. There is a pressing demand for effective and efficient assessment, treatment and care, with assessment tools central to identifying needs, providing services, coordinating care and communication between professionals, and for data to monitor and improve services. NISAT's development involved stakeholders from a variety of professions, as well as older people and carers. It was launched by the Minister on 11 February 2009. NISAT is now a key part of guidance on adult social care management: http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/hsc-eccu-1-2010.pdf The carers' assessment developed within NISAT is adopted by professionals performing duties under carers legislation and is referred to in the strategy document <i>Transforming Your Care</i> (2011: 49, 65, 68). Taylor's work shows notable reach and significance in its impact on developing resources to enhance professional practice, and its influence on professional standards, guidelines, training, and practice, and the planning and management of services.</p> <p>Heenan secured an ESRC Placement Fellowship in 2008/09 in the Office of First and Deputy First Ministers (OFMDFM). Her research project (<i>Rural Ageing in Northern Ireland</i>, ESRC/OFMDFM, Belfast, 2010) aimed to ensure that research-based evidence about the coherence, effectiveness, accessibility, impact and cost-effectiveness of rural services shaped policy development. The research originated with a British Academy grant in 2006 and involved engagement with voluntary organizations. It informed the subsequent review and development of the earlier strategy document <i>Ageing in an Inclusive Society</i>. In November 2011, Dr Stephen Donnelly, Head of Statistics and Research in OFMDFM, sent the report to the new policy lead official for the older persons' strategy 'because ... it has a very important qualitative dimension ... reviews some of the key demographic trends and statistics and is a useful overview of the key issues'. To the Commissioner for Older People (Claire Keatinge) appointed in 2011, Donnelly also sent the report: it was 'an integral part of the policy base sent to her'. In 2011 Heenan joined the expert review team, including Prof Chris Ham of the King's Fund, to review health and social care priorities in NI. The report, <i>Transforming Your Care</i> (2011) provides evidence of the impact of Heenan's own research on care policy with a citation of it (p. 66) to underline the need for robust social care services to be available and</p>

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accessible to older people in rural communities.

Osmani's research on human rights and socio-economic policy led the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to ask him to assist in devising guidelines. In 2006 OHCHR issued *Principles and Guidelines for a Human Rights Approach to Poverty Reduction Strategies*. In an email of 21/01/2010, OHCHR underlined the reach and significance of the **impact on policy development** to which Osmani contributed: 'the guidelines have helped to understand poverty as a multidimensional phenomenon resulting from multiple deprivations of human rights; to highlight entrenched cases of discrimination, marginalization and exclusion otherwise invisible in national averages and reports'.

The UOA can thus demonstrate a wide-ranging commitment in its research to analysing the nature and extent of a range of national and international problems, *and* to producing impact of extensive reach and significance for public benefit on (a) the content of policy debates and (b) the nature and outcomes of measures adopted, in NI and more widely. The three Case Studies in REF 3b examine the forms, significance and reach of the impact of research by five staff members (three returned in this submission). The research concerned is representative of our wider work in that it deals with our principal research areas: public policy; policing studies; criminology. The topics involved are (1) research into the NI Review of Public Administration, (2) research into the legacy of conflict in NI which analyses the work of the Historical Enquiries Team, (3) research into policy and practice in respect of youth custody in NI.

b. Approach to impact

The UOA, in conjunction with support from the University's Institute for Research in Social Science (IRiSS), has established contact in depth with public sector bodies and the voluntary sector. One good example is that, in building on ESRC funding of the Access, Research Knowledge (ARK) project <http://www.ark.ac.uk/> (see also REF 5e), Gray and Horgan, of ARK's Policy Unit, collaborated with the NI Statistics and Research Agency to produce *Figuring it Out* (2009, <http://eprints.ulster.ac.uk/10235/>), a statistical commentary on key social policy issues. In fact, the **ARK Policy Unit is central to the UOA's developmental infrastructure in respect of impact**. It was established in 2008 to undertake **research and to promote research-based critical debates about social policy developments** in NI - a region where social policy-making remains relatively new and policy-making is challenging (because of the intricacies of the consociational arrangements). Impacts have included: the increasing use of academic evidence in policy making; the development of responses by practitioners and NGOs within the policy-making process, and more effective relationships between government, civil society and academia. Roundtable discussions on policy and legislation being considered by the Assembly have been held, itself a highly significant impact. Topical matters were identified, and for each roundtable papers were prepared (<http://www.ark.ac.uk/publications/briefings.html>) to ensure that the information could be widely used. Invited participants - senior civil servants, NGOs, academics and business representatives - participated under Chatham House Rules. The roundtable discussions continue, facilitating knowledge-based policy debate through the use of academic research by Gray and Horgan, colleagues within the UoA and broader academia. The impacts of Gray and Horgan's work include broadening public understanding of the parity principle and the scope for flexibility within it in the Welfare Reform Bill (NI) 2012 (BBC NI, *Spotlight Special*, Current Affairs Programme, 9 October 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01n91pz>). The Policy Unit is invaluable for, as well as hugely enhancing the impact of its own core research, chiefly by Gray and Horgan (see REF 2), it provides a mechanism for **bringing research right across the UOA** to the attention of policy makers, practitioners and the wider public. This success has led to a further grant, from OFMDFM (2012-2015, £298,758) for an associated project.

Additional UOA and IRiSS support for impact has included seminars to devolved governments in the UK. Many UOA members give presentations as lead participants in the *Knowledge Exchange Seminar Series* held most weeks in Parliament Building, Stormont. Sponsored by the University and the Assembly, seminar audiences include Members of the Assembly, public and private sector employees, academics, and representatives of voluntary and community groups. Papers are

available at <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/Assembly-Business/Research-and-Information-Service-RaISe/Knowledge-Exchange/Knowledge-Exchange-Seminars-Series-2/>

Support for impact promotion has also included sponsoring in 2012 a Public Lecture by Sue Duncan, former Chief Government Social Researcher, on social research in policy making. This event underlined to a large audience of government advisers, users of services, and researchers, the benefits of taking the impacts of research seriously. In addition, the UOA has pooled experience to optimise the recording of impact. This initiative helps disentangle specific impacts of research from any possible ‘personal’ impact and alerts us to unanticipated impacts.

Institutional strategies supporting impact in this UOA includes the internal Research Impacts Awards scheme, from which funding was won to give additional reach to its monitoring of collaboration and cooperation with policy stakeholders, including end-users as well as policy-makers. This strengthened our ability to ensure that the detail of externally funded investigations was more widely known to potential users, with the possibilities for impact being enlarged.

c. Strategy and plans

The REF focus on impact and the UOA’s participation in the Pilot stimulated the development of an explicit strategy to monitor and enhance impact. In conjunction with IRiSS, the Unit identified at their inception its research projects most likely to have impact, and then provides resource assistance to connect researchers with anticipated beneficiaries, especially by organising tailored conferences and facilitating meetings. While one focus of the UOA is on impact in NI, with reach across the NI Office, relevant devolved Ministries, NGOs and voluntary associations, this is coupled with disseminating the research to produce impacts on policy and practice outside of NI as cognate problems and issues arise, enhancing the reach and significance of impact. The Research Coordinator and IRiSS have instituted procedures to record and validate the phases of impact due to all our research, including instances where research has criticised proposed policies as well as assisted positively development and implementation. When research findings have conflicted with policy commitments it may be noted that some senior officials, who in private acknowledge impact, have on occasion held back from providing statements to this effect for REF purposes.

Across the UOA the **goal** is to maximise the impact of ongoing research and ensure it is a high priority in new research for which funding is sought. A key criterion in the appointment of seven new full-time staff as ECRs associated with this UOA in the current REF period (four returned in this submission) was the potential for significant impacts to ensue from their anticipated research excellence. This promises new strengths beyond REF 2014. We already **plan** to increase the impact of our research associated with risk and social care, on formulating social policy under devolved governance, our ARK Policy Unit research, and new research on young people and social exclusion, ‘state crime’ and migration will have impact as an integral component. We are well placed to continue to advance the significance and reach of the impact of our research, both in the NI policy environment and beyond. We also understand, however, that research informs opinion indirectly, complementing impact as exemplified in our Case Studies, and that research of the highest quality into the intellectual origins and characteristics of ideas and values germane to social policy, social work, and criminology, can, by aiding the growth of fresh and useful insights, in turn shape impact.

d. Relationship to case studies

The Unit’s impact strategy largely anticipated and facilitated actual impacts. The Unit’s success in the Research Impacts Awards scheme enhanced our ability to study and monitor the development of impact. The three Case Studies present research, conducted by five staff members, springing from aspects of our principal research areas, public policy, policing studies and criminology: Carmichael and Knox, on impacts of their research into the NI Review of Public Administration; Lundy, on her research into the legacy of conflict in NI which interrogates the work of the Historical Enquiries Team and which has had a high-profile impact on its re-evaluation; Convery and Moore, on research into policies and practices relating to youth custody and rights in NI.