

Institution: University of Nottingham

Unit of Assessment: Sub-Panel 22: Social Work and Social Policy

a. Context

The School of Sociology and Social Policy, which includes the Centre for Social Work, conducts **theoretically-informed and applied research concerned with social justice and the experiences of marginalised, disadvantaged and excluded groups**. Our research and impact activities form eight themes - Children and families; Social work and social care for adults; Health and well-being; Policy analysis; Identities; Mobilities and migration; Work and inequalities; Science, knowledge and society.

Knowledge derived from our research directly impacts on:

- **policy makers** (including local, regional and national governments and NGOs) by enabling better-informed decision-making and the implementation of more effective policies and legislation to the benefit of **society in general**;
- **practitioners and service providers** (including those in health, social work and social care) in influencing their perspectives, decision-making and practices, including planning, delivery and evaluation of services to the benefit of **service users, their carers and families**;
- **wider publics** in challenging and confronting myths and prejudices about some of the most disadvantaged/excluded people in society, and providing alternative ways of understanding and responding to their realities, **to the benefit of these groups**.

b. Approach to impact

Relationships with key research ‘users’

Much of our research is conducted in collaboration or partnership with **policy makers; practitioners; service providers; service users and their carers and advocacy groups**.

These collaborations range from traditional membership on advisory groups, through to more active partnerships involving the entire research and dissemination cycle, and relationships have been developed over many years. For example, research in a number of the School's themes directly partners with NHS and social care providers and practitioners.

Additionally, our research with adults with learning disabilities is most often carried out in partnership with the Ann Craft Trust, a key national charity also housed in the School. Our research with young adult carers, and associated public engagement and impact activities, are always conducted in partnership with key service providers (e.g. Carers Trust) and directly involve the young people on steering groups. Work on trafficked persons involves close collaboration with national and international NGOs. In many cases, therefore, our research, public engagement and impact activities are ‘co-produced’ directly with policy makers, practitioners, services providers, service users and carers.

Evidence of these relationships can be seen through:

- collaborative outputs produced in partnership with stakeholder organisations (e.g. with Ann Craft Trust and Carers Trust);
- on-going and repeat invitations by governments and NGOs to provide keynote presentations, advice and guidance to inform their policy and practice (e.g. O’Connell Davidson on trafficking; Becker on young adult carers; Clawson on forced marriages);
- continued commissioning and funding of research by policy makers, NGOs, government and advocacy groups (e.g. by Equality and Human Rights Commission; Save the Children; Carers Trust).

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Additionally, **evidence of the *impact* of these relationships** can be seen through:

- identified changes in policy and service delivery (e.g. new and improved services for young adult carers across the UK);
- explicit use of research findings in policy documents (e.g. research on Learning Disability Partnership Boards used by the Department of Health; research on family involvement in case reviews used by the Department for Education in *Working Together to Safeguard Children*);
- uptake of research recommendations by policy makers (e.g. Scottish Government policy on young carers; Home Office multi-agency practice guidelines on forced marriage).

Support for staff to make an impact (School and institutional)

The School's Research Committee identifies research projects which have potential for significant impact and ensures that appropriate support is provided. This includes financial resources to help researchers to develop and attend public engagement initiatives, international events and other initiatives to extend the reach of their research. For example, the PI of our Case Study on child trafficking was supported financially and through adjusted teaching load to attend key events at critical times. Guidance on maximising the reach and utilisation of research is provided by a **School Impact Officer**.

The School works closely with the **Faculty Impact Manager** to maximise partnership-building with relevant stakeholders and beneficiaries, and with the University's **Centre for Advanced Studies** to develop research proposals that include such partnerships at an early stage of planning. This extends the significance and reach of our research.

During the REF period, the University initiated the **Nottingham Impact Campaign**, with five Themes from across the University, all designed to bring 'positive and lasting influence on society' through world-changing research. The School has been instrumental in developing this major initiative. Becker sits on the Campaign Strategy Group chaired by the VC and is the Theme Leader for all University projects in the Health and Well-being Theme.

The **theatrical production for our Case Study on dementia**, for example, was supported both financially and through expertise provided by the *Impact Campaign*. **The University Open Day for young adult carers** was funded and managed by the *Impact Campaign* in association with the University Widening Participation Team, with nine young carers heavily involved in planning and delivering the Day. *Impact* also paid for the video of this event and other events associated with the dissemination of our research.

The University's Communications Team works to raise wider awareness and reach for our research. Their support and marketing for the theatrical production on dementia, for example, extended the audience for this research-based production to over one thousand health and social care professionals and a similar number of the wider public.

School engagement with the ***critical analysis of the impact agenda, 'pathways to impact', and impact discourse***, also supports the School's researchers to better understand impact, its forms and its implications for HE and the wider society. So, at the same time as conducting research which creates impact, the School also has a critical strand investigating the very meanings and nature of impact.

c. Strategy and plans

Impact will continue to be prioritised in the research culture and activities of the School in a number of inter-related ways:

Impact template (REF3a)

- the requirement for the **highest standard of rigour and ethics** so that impact is meaningful and enduring. Research Committee, our mentoring and support systems, financial and quality arrangements are all part of our strategy to deliver the **highest quality research outputs** that will have enduring impact;
- the development of **mechanisms and systems** which work to maximise the impact of research studies. This will include wider dissemination outside the Academy through traditional methods, social media and new technologies;
- embedding impact more deeply in the **research culture** of the School, especially with early career academics and PGRs. This will include training programmes, guidance and advice on the importance of impact and ways to maximise it. This will also encompass a **critique** of the impact agenda itself;
- **monitoring and collation of evidence** on impact. We are establishing procedures and systems by which academics and PGRs systematically collect, collate and analyse evidence of the impact of their research;
- **increasing our public engagement, collaborations and partnerships** with wider stakeholder groups to increase the significance of our research and its reach.

These goals are achieved through allocating financial resources, reduced teaching and administrative workloads, appropriate training and other incentives that give support to our impact aims and ambitions. A new Faculty Director of Research (Becker) has been charged with developing the mechanisms and procedures to deliver these goals in partnership with the School's and the Faculty's Research Committees.

d. Relationship to case studies

Our four Case Studies illustrate the School's primary concern with issues of social justice and improving representation, support and outcomes for marginalised and excluded social groups (young adult carers; trafficked persons; adults with learning disabilities; vulnerable and people with dementia, their carers and support workers). They typify the work that is conducted under three of the School's research themes and demonstrate that academic notions of social justice are not purely theoretical and conceptual but can be applied and delivered in the real world.

All four Case Studies show the benefits of working collaboratively or in partnership with policy makers, practitioners, service providers and service users and carers. The impacts described were brought about by planned and intentional actions, networking, partnerships and collaborations with those individuals and organisations. The experience and knowledge gained from those interactions informs our conceptualisation of impact and our understanding of mechanisms and processes that can help to deliver change. This helps academics and PGRs gain understanding of how research is used, can be used, and the power and transformative value of research when applied purposefully, intentionally and ethically.

All of these impacts also grew out of, and are founded on, a long-term academic engagement with the key issues confronting certain groups, supported by a number of research projects and outputs, which build the evidence base for change.