



Sheffield Solutions



Department
for Work &
Pensions

GLOBAL CHALLENGES; SHEFFIELD SOLUTIONS | MARCH 2018



Connecting academic knowledge with pressing policy agendas

A practical guide to effective collaboration –
DWP & The University of Sheffield

Academics are under increasing pressure from funders, collaborators and policy makers to do cutting-edge research that has an impact on the broader social, economic and political environment. Influencing and engaging with policy-makers is seen as a pivotal area through which academics can demonstrate and enhance the impact of their research, whilst at the same time, the need for robust evidence to inform the policy making process is more critical than ever. ▶



The
University
Of
Sheffield.

Faculty of
Social Sciences.

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION

In order to help build a richer connection between the academic and policy worlds, the Faculty of Social Sciences (FoSS) at the University of Sheffield (UoS) and the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) have developed a more systemic partnership arrangement, building on our mutual strengths. This close relationship enables the academics to develop a clearer understanding of policy directions and processes, whilst also helping DWP to access fresh thinking on some of their more pressing policy needs in a timely and accessible manner.

We believe that both academic and policy work is greatly enriched by this collaboration. Outlined within are just some of the activities where we collaborate.

ACADEMIC SECONDMENTS:

Secondments are mutually beneficial for sharing best practice, transferring knowledge and insights and for building trust in partnerships. They can be flexible and vary in length/contact hours dependent on the specific project needs.

“I was seconded to work on some of DWP’s policy and analytical projects on employment support policy. It has brought real value to my academic thinking and career and was an excellent opportunity to have a significant impact on the area that I’m passionate about. I was able to build trust and networks so that I was no longer an outsider and could be included in internal policy discussions to inform various policy decisions directly. The insights fed back into my academic research - stimulating new ideas for projects and strengthening the quality of my research. The experience was mutually beneficial for DWP, not only in the direct projects that I was able to bring my expertise into but also in the wider academic ways of working and networks that I was able to bring to my time there.”

Dr Adam Whitworth
(Senior Lecturer, Department of Geography)

“The university encourages interdisciplinary working, and this works well at DWP. Economists, social researchers, statisticians as well as analysts all with different backgrounds work closely together, utilizing each other’s knowledge and expertise.”

Dr Bert Van Landeghem (Marie Skłodowska-Curie and Vice-Chancellor’s Fellow, Department of Economics)



RESEARCH COLLABORATIONS:

The University and DWP are proud of their rich history of collaborating on research projects, including some large-scale initiatives. Such collaborations enable our academics to gain access to highly relevant DWP data and also ensures our research is influenced by today’s most pressing policy priorities, whilst DWP’s involvement helps them to access the latest academic thinking and influence the shape of research.

“I have worked with DWP, and in particular the Work and Health Unit, developing a number of research proposals and this has always been a rewarding experience. For example, our current research project on the causal impact of health on work outcomes, funded by the Health Foundation, is a result of extensive discussions with DWP. Our questions are motivated by research knowledge gaps but discussions with DWP mean that they are also aligned with policy needs. This means that as well as advancing science our work is able to provide results that directly contribute to effective policy design. Government priorities in this area can change rapidly and DWP colleagues have helped us to negotiate this complex area, pointing us towards current priorities and known evidence gaps. My research would not have developed to the same extent or had the same degree of success without our links with DWP.”

Professor Jenny Roberts
(Professor of Economics, Department of Economics)

“As a policy-maker, the collaboration with UoS has been brilliant for unlocking access to experts with the ability to shed fresh light on the policy landscape. Hearing how academics conceptualise major social issues and think about available policy levers has helped us think more systematically about key problems, and is a great counter to organisational ‘group-think.’”

Sarah Bradley (Labour Market Strategy)
& **Julian Williamson (Business Strategy, DWP)**



PhD INTERNSHIPS:

Taking place over three to six months, internships are mutually beneficial. Our PhD Interns work on specific short-term projects, bringing their analytical research skills to address a DWP need, and in return, gain a valuable, practical experience which can be career shaping.

"The DWP internship was a great opportunity to gain experience of working in the civil service and to get an immersed experience of the types of influences, pressures and motivations which shape their working. I was responsible for conducting a qualitative project to inform future policy relating to joint working between the DWP and the NHS which gave me the opportunity develop my skills in research design and implementation, report writing, and presentation."

Amy Beckett
(PhD Intern, Department of Urban Studies and Planning)

"We have worked collaboratively for many years with UoS. One of our regular interactions is the annual WPEG (Work Pensions and Labour Economics Group) conference, which offers DWP staff a great opportunity to hear about relevant new research and interact directly with the academics involved, as well as presenting on DWP work and getting constructive comments back from the academic community. We've also benefited from University staff delivering seminars on topics of particular interest to DWP, and from a number of successful inward secondments – which we believe have benefited those involved, as well as us."

Mike Daly (Central Analysis Division, DWP)

COLLABORATIVE PhDs:

Co-designed to advance academic knowledge in a very applied approach, collaborative PhDs enable our top quality graduates to undertake substantial research over a longer period of time, working closely with DWP on a topic of mutual interest.

SHEFFIELD SOLUTIONS LUNCHTIME SEMINARS:

Our monthly lunchtime seminars, held at DWP, bring together academics, policy makers, practitioners and deliverers to develop networks and better understand policy issues. Seminars have covered topics ranging from Travel Behaviour and Labour Market Mobility to Big Data and Employee Wellbeing.

"I think these sessions are excellent because they bring in fresh thinking. The best bit is when you think you've had that light-bulb moment, it's always reassuring to find there is an academic who had it years before and has the research available that you can use to try and persuade Senior Leaders and Ministers that the policy idea warrants consideration."

Claudette Whittingham (Labour Market Strategy, DWP)

"It was great to get the chance to present our ideas and to have such as engaging discussion afterwards."

Professor Karina Nielsen
(Chair in Work Psychology, School of Management Studies)



SHEFFIELD SOLUTIONS IN-DEPTH WORKSHOPS:

These workshops bring together a range of perspectives from academic and policy worlds to sharing insights and expertise on a pressing policy agenda, identify knowledge gaps and potentially develop new areas for research collaboration. Workshops have focused on issues such as 'How to Make In-Work Progression Work', as well as exploring DWP's Areas of Research Interest (upcoming).

GATEWAYS TO ACCESS EXPERTISE:

The University understands that navigating our different structures and departments can be difficult. The SSPIKE team works closely with DWP to help them identify relevant expertise as they need it, whilst also offering tailored programmes of one-to-one meetings.

"It was fantastic to be able to step away for day-to-day pressures, and engage in more detailed and provocative discussions with academics in Sheffield on issues ranging from welfare conditionality to the application of neuroscience in education and child protection."

Andrea Lee
(Children, Families & Disadvantage Directorate, DWP)

WORK, PENSIONS AND LABOUR ECONOMICS STUDY GROUP (WPEG):

This collaborative partnership between DWP and the Department of Economics was founded in the 1960's. Its primary function is to foster dialogue between academics and civil servants and to promote and disseminate research in labour economics, pensions, and related research areas (including poverty, housing and savings). WPEG hosts an annual conference in Sheffield.

For more information, visit:

www.sheffield.ac.uk/economics/events/wpeg/index



Interested in learning more?

The University is open to assisting other government departments and strategic partners through these collaborative models.

For more information contact:

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Sheffield Solutions is an initiative of the Faculty of Social Sciences, at the University of Sheffield, which supports events, activities and outputs aimed at connecting social science perspectives to policy makers, practitioners and other external audiences in order to tackle pressing global issues.

www.sheffield.ac.uk/faculty/social-sciences/making-a-difference/sheffield-solutions