

Institution: York St John University
Unit of Assessment: Sociology (UoA 21)
<p>1. Unit context and structure, research and impact strategy</p> <p>Entering REF for the first time, this unit comprises the most ambitious social science research at York St John University (YSJU), engaging with a variety of contemporary sociological research areas through a sustained focus on questions of social justice, one of the pillars of the university's 2026 Strategy. Staff in the unit are young researchers with developing national and international profiles and extensive collaborative networks that connect the university's research to some of the most vibrant research clusters and institutions across the UK and beyond.</p> <p>Context and structure</p> <p>Sociology was established as a discipline at York St John University (YSJU) in 2016 with the clear vision to contribute to the university's social justice agenda through impactful research. As such, the Sociology UoA continues YSJU's foundational mission to improve the education and wellbeing of disadvantaged, vulnerable and underrepresented communities. While YSJU has traditionally pursued these aims over its 180-year history by providing accessible teacher training and community engagement through the Church, the Sociology unit takes this mission forward by contributing with sociological knowledge, research and public engagement activities that are essential to understanding sociocultural diversity and social inequalities in the twenty-first century.</p> <p>In Sociology, we are submitting 14 staff (14.0 FTE) whose published research falls within four interlocking themes: (1) health, illness and mortality (Denham, Spokes, Smith, Ralston, Sointu), (2) media cultures and discourse (Denham, Hirschler, Mitman, Parker, Spokes, Hill, Moreh, Greenwood), (3) youth, education and employment (Formby, Ralston, Sointu) and (4) citizenship and belonging (Hill, Sotirakopoulos, Jarvis, Kirkland, Moreh, Hirschler, Parker).</p> <p>The majority (11.0 FTE) of the submitted colleagues are employed in the Social Sciences subject division (comprising Sociology and Criminology) which sits within York Business School, while three staff (3.0 FTE) (Jarvis, Kirkland and Greenwood) are employed in other schools and subject divisions (Politics and International Relations, and Media) and conduct sociologically relevant research which complements the research conducted within Social Sciences.</p> <p>The Social Sciences subject area is strategically led by a school academic leadership team (SALT), consisting of a dean of school, an associate dean for the subject area, a learning and teaching lead and a school research and knowledge transfer lead (SRKTL). At school level, research is managed through the School Research Committee and a School Research Ethics Committee, which monitor the implementation of our research strategy and guarantee the rigour and integrity of all research activities within the school. The SRKTL is responsible for strategic development of research within the school and by virtue of this position is a member of the University Research Committee (URC) that provides oversight of the university's strategic plans for research, as well as issues pertaining to research integrity and research ethics. The chair of the School Research Ethics Committee is responsible for implementing the YSJU Research Ethics Policy at school level and is also a member of the University Research Ethics and Integrity Sub-committee. All research activities at York St John University are overseen by a pro-vice chancellor for research and knowledge transfer.</p> <p>Achievement of strategic aims for research and impact since 2015</p> <p>The unit's five-year (2015–20) strategic aims since its creation were: 1) to establish itself in a variety of contemporary sociological research areas, 2) while promoting collaborations across themes and 3) enabling projects with a strong potential to achieve long-term social impact and advance social justice in various areas of life.</p>

The unit set itself five strategic priorities for achieving its aims, which have been surpassed in the four years since the unit's establishment:

1) Strategic and sustainable growth

The unit started in 2015 with 2.0 FTE staff based in the Faculty of Education and Theology. Both staff had a background in education and sociology. In the proceeding four years, 15 new colleagues were recruited to the Social Sciences subject division as lecturers/senior lecturers in Sociology and Criminology, 11 of whom are still currently working at the university and have been returned in this REF submission. This initial expansion has enabled us to establish our core research areas in a sustainable way, through attracting outstanding early career researchers (ECRs) with active external collaborations and research in complementary yet interrelated areas.

Since 2018 we have also put in place a strategy for attracting PhD students through graduate teaching assistantships (GTAs). This scheme provides a full fee bursary, as well as a three-year 0.5 FTE employment contract for teaching related activities up to a maximum of ten hours per week: the result is that we were able to attract the strongest candidates to our institution by offering them an income stream in line with the level provided by Research Council scholarships, while at the same time guaranteeing them valuable teaching experience. Between 2018 and 2020 we recruited six GTAs and aim to continue increasing our postgraduate research community through this highly successful initiative.

2) Prioritising ECRs

Our recruitment and growth strategy have been purposefully designed to prioritise those in early stages of their academic careers. We have a strong belief that building a new research unit mainly through the work of outstanding and highly motivated early career academics is the best path to achieving an exponential growth in exciting, timely and socially impactful research in a long-term and sustainable way. Of the 15 colleagues recruited to the Social Sciences team between 2015 and 2020, 12 (73%) had either gained their PhDs within the previous five years or were still completing their PhDs (eight colleagues were within five years of their PhDs and four colleagues were still completing their PhDs at the time of their recruitment). The three colleagues employed in other schools and divisions who contribute to research in the unit had also completed their PhDs less than five years before starting their employment at York St John (Kirkland in 2015; Jarvis in 2018; Greenwood in 2019).

3) Prioritising collaborations

Through prioritising ECRs we were also able to capitalise on their ongoing external collaborations with academics from other universities such as York (Spokes, Denham, Smith, Hirschler), Liverpool (Hill), Manchester (Jarvis), Leeds (Formby, Jarvis) and Southampton (Moreh), which have led to collaborative publications, grant proposals and conferences. Alongside external collaborations, we have focused on promoting collaborative work within the unit with the aim of strengthening key areas of research. These endeavours have resulted in a co-authored book (Spokes, Denham and Lehmann [2018] *Death, Memorialization and Deviant Spaces*. Bingley: Emerald) and six journal articles: Denham, Hirschler and Spokes (2019); Denham and Spokes (2018, 2019, 2020); Ralston and Formby (2020); Sointu and Hill (2020).

4) Establishing areas of long-term social impact through research

Our guiding aim during the first five years of the existence of our unit was to identify and support the development of research areas that have the strongest potential to achieve long-term social impact and contribute to the university's mission of promoting social justice through research. Research taking place in our youth, education, and employment thematic cluster tackles some of the most concerning causes of social inequalities and disadvantage. Formby's work on realist evaluation of widening participation strategies in higher education and Ralston's work on developing pedagogical approaches that acknowledge and reduce statistical anxiety among learners have been highly successful in engaging practitioners and making an impact on their work and, thus, on the life outcomes of young people who are about to enter higher education and/or the workforce. These two projects have also been selected as our impact case studies.

To promote the achievement of impact, impact case studies developed by staff in the unit were financially supported through school-level quality-related (QR) monies (grants of £1,000 per year were made available to impact case study leads) as well as through training sessions focusing on research impact (e.g. the externally commissioned “Fast Track Impact” training).

5) Enhancing our recognition and gaining representation in national and international research

Sociologists in our unit have taken leadership roles in regional collaborative research networks (e.g., Denham is co-director of the Death and Culture Network, University of York), sit on the editorial boards or associate boards of prestigious disciplinary journals (e.g., *Sociology* [Moreh] and *Sociological Research Online* [Hill]), specialist international journals (*Central and Eastern European Migration Review* [Moreh]) and book series (*Emerald Studies in Death and Culture* [Denham]).

Colleagues have been invited to give talks and keynotes at various events; for example, the 2018 Love Island and Sociology workshop at the University of Manchester (Hill), the Technology and New Media Research Seminar at the University of Cambridge (Hill, 2018), the Theory of Change workshop at the University of Sheffield (Formby, 2019), the British Sociological Association (BSA) Youth Study Group Workshop on Youth Labour Markets (Formby, 2020), the White Rose Workshop on Advanced Methods (Formby, 2020) and the workshop on migration in the Balkan region organised by The Kosovo Institute for Economic Development (Moreh, 2019).

We have also aimed to reach beyond the confines of academia: almost half of the colleagues in the unit have engaged with *The Conversation* (Kirkland, Mitman, Moreh, Hirschler, Spokes, Denham) since the university became a partner with the public dissemination outlet in 2018; Sotirakopoulos is a recurring speaker in the annual Battle of Ideas Festival and a regular contributor to national television programmes such as Sky News’ *Press Review*; and Denham was interviewed by BBC Radio about video game violence in January 2019. Through such activities, York St John sociologists are increasingly gaining national and international recognition despite their early career stage.

We have also taken significant steps to make our research accessible to the wider public and research funders. All new publications are immediately included on the university’s institutional repository (RaY), and all staff in the unit are registered on the researcher and contributor ID system ORCID, with ORCID IDs linked to their RaY profile. These measures have helped us progress towards an open research environment and compliance with the Concordat on Open Research Data.

Strategic aims for the next five years (2021–26)

The university strategy has three priorities: inspiring learning, impactful research, and enabling our students to be clear about careers. The research strategy emphasises interdisciplinary working, demonstrating greater research excellence through external recognition, and wider dissemination of research as key goals. Our four thematic clusters are the foundation for the unit’s future research and impact strategy (2021–26), which is aligned with the university’s Strategy 2026. The next five years will see the maturation of our unit, and this phase of our development will be guided by five main strategic aims:

1) Consolidating our thematic research clusters

In the first five years of the unit’s existence our aim was to build several interlocking research themes through attracting strong ECRs. During the next REF assessment cycle, we will focus our efforts on consolidating these themes into financially self-sufficient research clusters with a clear support structure. We aim to achieve this through a targeted recruitment strategy and support for competitive collaborative grant bids. This process is ongoing. We are currently working on establishing two research groups in Interactive Games and Realist Evaluation and Social Policy. These build on two existing research areas which have produced outputs in the highest-ranking academic journals (such as *New Media & Society*), attracted both internal and external funding and shown great potential for impact generation and collaboration with non-

academic stakeholders, such as ongoing evaluation projects for Uni Connect (formerly known as the National Collaborative Outreach Programme [NCOP]) and planned collaborative projects with North Yorkshire Police and North Yorkshire County Council.

2) Prioritising income generation through competitive external grants

One major ambition for the next REF cycle is for all four research clusters to secure external funding, with at least two grants of over £10,000 and one above £50,000. These targets build on our previous successes with internal catalyst grants (six projects totalling £9,826) and external funding (Go Higher West Yorkshire, Uni Connect grant of £39,916; Durham Police grant of £14,700; Northumbria Police grant of £7,995), as well as positive feedback received on applications submitted in the past two years to funders such as the British Academy, Leverhulme Trust and the Foundation for the Sociology of Health and Illness. External grant applications are also supported at York St John via our Research Office (RO) and a streamlined allocation of QR funding through four funding schemes, one of which specifically supports “Grant Preparation Funding”. Furthermore, our new research continuing professional development (CPD) training programme includes training on grant writing and impact generation, with a focus on developing skills among early career researchers. Over the next five years, all colleagues in the unit will be supported in engaging with these training opportunities, and all staff will be required to either hold or be preparing a research grant. Thematic clusters will be required to submit at least one grant application each year. At unit level, work on grant preparation will be further supported through the Social Sciences “Work in Progress” seminar series and peer review network, and principal investigators (PIs) who have secured internal grant preparation funding will be able to take academic leave to prepare submissions.

3) Generating traceable social impact in all four of our thematic areas

We will pursue our commitment to impactful research by supporting all colleagues in the unit to participate in opportunities for external professional development related to research impact. All internal grant applications for QR funds require applicants to outline their pathways to impact, and those working on funding applications have access to research impact training sessions provided by Professor Mark Reed (Fast Track Impact). Our target is to develop traceable impact in all our thematic areas. Recently initiated collaborations with North Yorkshire Police, North Yorkshire County Council and City of York Council will be the starting points for this work. The recent establishment of the first university research institute, the Institute for Social Justice (ISJ), provides a supportive framework for impactful research in our unit, and we are already actively contributing to its work, with a member of our unit (Mitman) is representing York Business School on the ISJ’s steering group.

4) Increasing the number of postgraduate research (PGR) students

Currently, the unit contains 7 PGRs (four on the census date, with three starting in October 2020) that have been recruited since YSJU was given research degree awarding powers (RDAP) in 2015. As part of our plans to consolidate our research clusters, we aim to further increase the number of research students in our unit so that each thematic cluster has at least one affiliated PGR student and all research-active colleagues are involved in supervision either as main or co-supervisors. For this purpose, we will continue investing in the GTA scheme and advertise GTA opportunities in selected thematic areas. In September 2020 we also started our first postgraduate degree (MRes in Social Sciences) with a strong focus on advanced social research methods. This further enhances the sustainability of our growth agenda by providing a bridge between undergraduate studies and PhD-level research.

5) Professorship in Social Science

Our fifth main strategic aim is to recruit the first full professor in Social Science at York St John University. This role will provide strong research leadership within the unit, especially given our ongoing focus on ECR appointments, and ensure the achievement of our strategic aims.

2. People

Staffing strategy

All 14 staff submitted for this REF cycle have been recruited to YSJU over the past five years. The sociology unit of assessment includes all the academics in Sociology and Criminology, as well as three staff who sit in other departments. All staff are employed on full-time permanent contracts that require research, scholarship, and teaching.

Strategic decisions regarding recruitment are taken at school level, with a focus on future strategic ambitions in each subject area. The strategic ambition of our unit in its first five years of existence was to establish sociology as a unit from bottom up, building on the most vibrant new research and providing fast-track career progression opportunities. To achieve this, we relied on the academic leadership of senior colleagues in related and more established units, such as Education and Psychology, while focusing our recruitment of the core Social Sciences team members on young researchers either with recent PhDs or who were close to completing a PhD, with cross-cutting areas of research expertise.

Spokes and Denham were the first to be appointed as lecturers in Sociology and Criminology in 2015 and 2016 respectively and their research expertise has provided a firm grounding for the emerging unit in cultural sociology. Mitman, Ralston and Smith joined in 2017, bringing new expertise in urban sociology, quantitative methods, youth studies, the sociology of work, cultural criminology and media studies. With the appointment of Moreh, Parker and Sotirakopoulos in 2018, the unit has expanded to the areas of migration studies, gender and sexuality, and political sociology. Joining in 2018 and 2019, Formby, Hill, Hirschler and Sointu have strengthened research in youth studies, social theory, migration and media studies, and brought in a new research stream in the sociology of health and illness. Apart from three colleagues who were recruited as senior lecturers to provide organisational leadership in general strategic areas such as postgraduate curriculum development (Poyser), qualitative methods (Sointu) and social theory (Hill), all those recruited had PhDs awarded in the previous five years (Spokes, Mitman, Moreh, Parker, Formby, Hirschler, Stockdale, Ralston) or close to completion (Denham, Smith, Parker, Lehmann).

Newly recruited staff were assigned mentors from related units. The success of this strategy and the support networks put in place is demonstrated by the fact that six out of the eleven colleagues appointed as lecturers have already been promoted to senior lectureships in recognition of their active contribution to research and academic management. Consequently, our unit now includes eight senior lecturers.

Our 2016–20 recruitment strategy has established the core areas of research within Sociology at YSJU, and as part of our future strategy we aim to strengthen these thematic areas and ensure their sustainability. Our latest recruitment round in May 2020 resulted in employing two further ECR colleagues (Biglin, Waistnage) who joined Social Sciences in September 2020 and will make a significant contribution to the area of migration, asylum and citizenship.

Staff development

Staff development is facilitated primarily by the following mechanisms: (1) career planning and workload management and (2) clear career pathways. Our approach to staff development is directly informed by the Vitae Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, of which York St John University is a signatory. Our staff development strategy is particularly focused on the needs of ECRs by identifying individual training needs and aspirations through annual performance development reviews (PDRs), setting achievable but increasingly ambitious targets, emphasising collaborations in order to achieve research aims and making the unit's research trajectory focused and sustainable over time. Our staff development strategy is progressing from an emphasis on developing the skills required to 1) produce influential publications, 2) generate social impact from research and 3) develop new collaborative projects, towards an emphasis on securing more external grants.

Our career planning and workload management model guarantees that the maximum number of scheduled teaching hours for everyone in the unit is reviewed in line with the university's upper limit of 450 hours per year and ensures a minimum amount of time dedicated to research. Acknowledging that conducting research often requires longer periods of sustained effort, colleagues are usually assigned one "light" semester each year, in which they can concentrate on their research outputs. Our PDR process empowers staff to apply for sabbaticals when working towards confirmed publications (book contracts) or on initial data collection rounds for large scale projects (providing that external funding has been sought in the first instance).

As part of our career planning provision we host a staff research CPD programme aligned with the Vitae Researcher Development Framework. The programme provides 40+ training sessions delivered by senior academics across the university as well as training sessions provided by external providers. For example, the CPD training includes externally commissioned sessions on research impact (Fast Track Impact), public engagement (National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement [NCCPE]) and grant writing (Scriptoria). At school level, research skills development is also facilitated by schemes such as the research skills development fund, which supports participation in external training.

As part of our commitment to provide clear career pathways to our early career academics, we introduced an accelerated promotions route in 2016–17. This route allows staff to apply for senior lectureship up to three years prior to reaching the top grade of the lecturer scale. Promotion is awarded based upon exceptional performance in research (alongside other criteria including teaching and administration), and it has proved a particularly successful reward mechanism for motivating ECRs. Accelerated promotion is actively encouraged through the PDR process, during which colleagues are supported in developing realistic but ambitious targets for meeting the scheme's requirements. Colleagues achieving the senior lecturer level are further supported through the PDR process to progress towards an associate professorship, which is achieved based on further demonstration of excellence in research.

PGR students

The first intake of two PhD students within Social Sciences was in 2018 (RDAP was first granted in 2015, see section 1), followed by a further two in 2019. In October 2020, a further three PhD students and one MA by Research student joined us. This development is in line with the university's growth strategy (the YSJU PGR community has doubled over the REF period) and has two main local aims for our unit: to strengthen the research activity in our emerging thematic areas and to provide staff with opportunities for research supervision and collaboration. We expect to award the first PhDs in Social Science in 2021–22.

Despite only starting postgraduate research provision recently, our PhD students are already contributing to the national recognition of our unit; for example, one PhD student has gained an internship opportunity at the House of Commons through a joint Political Studies Association (PSA) and UK Parliament scheme aiming to provide social science PhD students with real-life policy-making experience.

YSJU has well-established processes for induction, training, and monitoring of PGR students. Formal reviews of PGR student progress are conducted every six months by academics external to the supervisory team. Progress is monitored centrally four times a year (by Research Degree Committee). All supervisory meetings are logged. Supervisory teams are made up of multiple academic staff from the PGR student supervisory register. To be added to the register, staff are required to meet stringent criteria for PGR supervision eligibility pertaining to engagement in research, continual professional development and formal YJSU training. Endorsement from Heads of School or School Research Leads is also required. Applications are assessed by a central committee of senior research staff (again, by Research Degree Committee). It is mandatory that all supervisory teams have at least one member of staff with experienced supervisory status (have previously supervised a PhD student to successful completion). In addition, all PGR students have a PGR tutor who is available to provide support outside of the supervisory team.

All students undertake needs analysis periodically and an individually tailored training programme is created. The needs analysis is based on competencies in the Vitae Researcher Development Framework. Support is provided by supervisory teams and via a centralised PGR training programme that includes core and supplementary workshops at each year of study. Like our staff training programme, our PGT training programme aligns with the Vitae Researcher Development Framework. Core parts of the programme include Research Ethics and Integrity, General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) for Research, Data Management, and Copyright and Intellectual Property rights. These sessions are compulsory for all PGR students. A range of other central and local support is available to PGR students that include (1) access to centralised services (e.g. Student Services, Chaplaincy, Library and Learning Services, Careers); (2) access to a stipend of up to £900 (£450 part-time) to support travel and consumables associated with their research and professional development; (3) access to the YSJU Graduate Centre providing study space and remote access to a range of specialist software; (4) opportunity to complete a postgraduate certificate in academic practice to achieve associate fellowship of the Higher Education Academy (HEA); (5) administrative support provided by the School and Research Office and (6) various PGR events held throughout the year (e.g., Three Minute Thesis (3MT), Bake Your Thesis, and the annual PGR conference).

Six of our current PhD students were recruited as part of our GTA scheme. The scheme provides a full fee bursary and a three-year 0.5 FTE employment contract for teaching-related activities up to a maximum of ten hours per week. The value of financial investment in this development in the unit currently amounts to £79,200 in fee waivers and £87,000 in salary costs.

As with all new staff, GTAs are also required to obtain professional recognition and are supported in this through our Postgraduate Certificate of Academic Practice (PCAP) scheme and our new CPD Framework, which brings together all our academic staff development into a single scheme that is mapped to the various descriptors of the sector-recognised UK Professional Standards Framework. This means that we can assess staff in-house, process their application free of charge and award fellowship recognition at three of the descriptor levels: associate fellow (D1), fellow (D2) and senior fellow (D3). All GTAs are expected to obtain recognition as associate fellows.

The GTA scheme is part of a broader PGR pathway that aims to increase the number of PGR students at YSJU. Another element of the pathway are the alumni fee remissions that provide a 10% discount on all PGR degrees undertaken by YSJU alumni, and as of 2020–21, MSc/MRes students can also receive a scholarship that reduces course fees based on undergraduate performance at YSJU (50% reduction first class honours, 35% reduction upper second-class honours). We have started the first MRes in Social Science postgraduate course in September 2020, with nine exceptional recent Sociology and Criminology graduates benefiting from alumni fee remissions to continue their studies with us. The course is aimed at developing advanced skills in quantitative and qualitative research methods, while pursuing a piece of research of individual interest that falls in the area of expertise of our staff. We expect the course to become a vital component in our PGR pathway in two ways: first, by providing the necessary skills and experience required to progress into a funded PhD role at York St John or another institution; secondly, by opening up the advanced methods modules to existing PhD students as part of their professional development programme.

Equality and diversity

UoA 21 sits within a broader context of support for equality and diversity at YSJU which has implemented several initiatives which ensure policies and practices relevant to researchers are inclusive, equitable and transparent. This is formalised in the YSJU Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Policy and the targets within the YSJU 2026 strategy (e.g., 10% BAME student and staff population; all staff are engaged in equality and diversity training and development appropriate to their role; median gender pay gap below 10%; 95% of staff think the university is a good place to work). Equality impact assessments are a routine part of annual monitoring and progress towards YSJU targets are reported to executive board and the governing body on a yearly basis. Of additional note, YSJU is a member of the Athena SWAN Charter (and is

currently applying for a Bronze Award), a Stonewall Diversity Champion (ranked 49th place on the 2020 Top 100 Employers list) and Top 20 Trans employer, a Disability Confident employer, and a Mindful Employer. There are also several active staff networks available for staff to join that align with these awards and this agenda including the LGBT+, BAME and Disability staff networks.

In the first four years of its existence the unit has been particularly driven by the aim to provide career development opportunities and a thriving work environment for young researchers. All staff in the unit are employed on permanent academic contracts that include research, scholarship and teaching, and staff are provided with opportunities for flexible working as suited to individual circumstances and family commitments.

In the next phase of our development as a unit, we aim to advance the diversity of our staff more broadly. At the time of the REF 2021 census the unit was disproportionately represented by male researchers (10 FTE vs 4 FTE females). The first steps towards rectifying this gender imbalance have already been made in the latest recruitment round in which we filled two September 2020 start vacancies with two early-career female academics with impressive research portfolios. The unit is now in a good position to target future recruitment at exceptional female academics and other currently under-represented groups.

UoA 21 complied fully with the YSJU institutional code of practice in selecting research outputs. The UoA lead also undertook Advance HE training on equality and mitigating bias as part of the role. Due to the small size of our submission, it is not possible to report a profile at UoA level here while also complying with HESA guidelines on anonymous reporting when presenting Equality and Diversity data (e.g., all our percentages would be based on less than 22.5 FTE). However, equality and diversity data for the UoA was reviewed internally following the completion of output selections and reported to both the SALT and Athena SWAN development groups as part of promoting greater diversity and inclusion at UoA, school, and institutional levels. Our data was also included as part of an equality and diversity impact assessment at institutional level.

Apart from our commitment to ensuring and improving equality and diversity in respect to the staff constitution of the unit, our research is also at the forefront of advancing the better understanding of the lives of underrepresented and vulnerable social groups and advancing their rights and opportunities. Our research on widening participation in higher education for pupils of disadvantaged backgrounds, on the lives and rights of migrants, asylum seekers and sexual minorities, on ways for improving life outcomes for young offenders, is actively contributing to enabling a more equal, diverse, and fair society.

3. Income, infrastructure and facilities

External grants

Colleagues are strongly encouraged to prepare and submit bids for external research funding as PIs and co-investigators (CIs) as part of their professional development reviews, and are supported in this task by a dedicated team of grant advisors located in the central RO established in 2018. Between 2017 and 2020, staff in Social Sciences have applied for external funding as PIs or CIs to funders such as the British Academy, Leverhulme Trust, UKRI and the Polish National Agency for Academic Exchange. External funding was secured from Durham Police and Northumbria Police, totalling £22,695 (not reported as HESA research income), and through existing collaborations, such as work on realist evaluation with Go Higher West Yorkshire, Uni Connect (£10,000 for the period Sept 2018 to Aug 2019, and £39,917 for the period 2020–21; PI: Formby [£19,958 reported on HESA research return for 2019-20]).

Internal research funding

Staff in Social Sciences were also supported in developing new research projects and collaborative activities through the university's catalyst funding scheme and school-level pump priming funds, through which staff in our unit have benefitted from £9,826 in funding since 2017

for projects such as “Aesthetics, Art, Agency and Aggression: Players' Experiences in Violent Video Gaming” (£1,800, Denham and Spokes) or “Beer and Authenticity” (£1,543, Mitman, Denham, Spokes).

Staff are also supported to attend academic conferences to disseminate their work and create new collaborative opportunities. Since 2017, staff in Social Sciences have been successful in securing a total of £18,591 towards conference attendance costs. Colleagues working on developing impact activities and tracing tools for their research projects have also received a total of £8,000 to support their work.

One innovative university-level funding initiative is the Students as Researchers (SaR) scheme, which has a long history at York St John, having been first introduced in 2006 to provide opportunities for staff and student collaboration. An example of sociology staff successfully engaging with the initiative is the SaR project on “Migrant experiences of Brexit Britain: Analysing qualitative textual data” (2018–19, £943.35, PI Moreh). This engaged a third-year undergraduate student and has led to a co-authored policy briefing paper published in the ESRC Centre for Population Change Policy Briefs Series.

Infrastructure and facilities

The Sociology unit is integrated within a wider university-level research support structure. We have benefited from a new central RO, which includes a head (1.0 FTE) and 5.15 FTE staff. The RO is responsible for overseeing research governance and compliance, supports grant applications, manages PGR student experience, coordinates staff research training and monitors research performance. This has relieved academics in the UoA of substantive administrative duties associated with research supervision, allowing us to maintain a high-quality experience as we expand our PGR cohort numbers. The RO directly improved the quality of support for research grant applications, as evidenced in the increased number, range and type of the UoA's grant applications.

The new Business Development and Knowledge Exchange Office (BDKEO), which includes a director (1.0 FTE) and 13.5 FTE staff, supports schools in increasing the range and scope of applied research, business development and knowledge exchange and is our main conduit for impact and public engagement. It helped gain accreditation for Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTPs) and registered YJSU with Innovate UK, as an approved KTP knowledge base deliverer. It was integral to YJSU achieving Silver Watermark accreditation from the National Co-ordinating Centre of Public Engagement (NCCPE). Going forward, the BDKEO will be central to our unit's increased engagement with stakeholders beyond academia. An example of the synergy between our unit and the BDKEO is the latter's successful application to the NCCPE which has led to the university being awarded a silver charter mark; work on widening participation engagement with schools carried out by Uni Connect in collaboration with Formby was mentioned in the successful application.

Material infrastructure

Social Sciences have their offices on the main campus on Lord Mayor's Walk in central York. Our offices are shared by two staff rather than being large open-plan spaces, and all are situated on a quiet corridor, which provides a conducive working environment. All staff have access to high-speed internet connection and specialist research software (such as SPSS, Stata or NVivo) in their offices. Software is also available for off-campus use through a cloudpaging service, making remote research work possible. A 50-user network license for the latest version of Stata/MP 16 (two cores) has been purchased by the university to support our unit. The unit also has a dedicated research space available for multi-purpose data collection. To date this has been used as an interview room for two pump-primed projects, which led to three journal article outputs being submitted to this REF return.

Library resources

The library provides university wide support for scholarly communication through their academic liaison librarians, repository librarian and copyright and licensing officer. This includes input to

the induction programme for PhD students. All PhD students are eligible for one-to-one bespoke advice and support from their named academic liaison librarian. Completed PhD theses are uploaded to the institutional repository, in open access format, embedding the principles of open research early. The university has made a commitment to support open access research, which can be demonstrated by our open access policy and data management policy. The library underpins this commitment with the provision of the university's open access repository Research at York St John (RaY) and open data repository Research at York St John Data Repository (RayDaR). Outputs on RaY are harvested by CORE and Google, further widening access to the university's research outputs. These measures go beyond current open access requirements for REF2021.

Within the REF period, Library and Learning Services has increased investment in information resources by 44%, ensuring facilities and resources are appropriate to enable research at all levels. This has resulted in a 93% increase in journal titles. The level of investment in databases and journal packages relevant to Sociology (excluding some direct journal subscriptions) has gone from £12,140.43 in 2016–17 to £58,790.52 in 2020–21. Subject specific subscriptions include SocINDEX with Full Text, ProQuest Sociology Collection (includes ASSIA, Sociological Abstracts, Sociology Full Text, Social Services Abstracts, IBSS) and Criminal Justice Abstracts. There are also packages of databases, journals and tools that support research activity such as Web of Science, Sage Premier, Elsevier Freedom Collection, Taylor and Francis OA Offset, Qualtrics, Altmetric and several others.

Research events

New external research collaborations have been promoted not only through staff participation in external conferences but also by hosting visiting speakers as part of the School Seminar Series. Among the guest speakers whose research aligns with those of staff in our unit we could count Professor Philip Whitehead (University of Teesside), who presented on “The triangular trade of neoliberal polity, social insecurity and penal expulsion” (2017); Dr Sarah-Jane Walker (University of Bristol), who presented on “What does justice mean for victims and survivors of domestic and sexual violence” (2018); Professor Anne White (University College London), who presented on “Invisible Poles: Second-generation migrants in the EU 'mobility laboratory'” (2019); Dr. Rachel O'Neill (University of Warwick), who presented on “Men on #MeToo” (2019) or Dr. Cristian Tileaga (Loughborough University), who presented on “Misogyny and antisemitism online” (2019). For a new unit at a new university, such opportunities to invite established academics from leading research institutions provide invaluable advantages; for instance, Professor Anne White provided useful comments and served as referee on Moreh's 2019 Leverhulme Research Fellowship grant application.

4. Collaboration and contribution to the research base, economy and society

Participation in collaborative networks, honorary positions and contributions to society

Increasing internal and external collaborative research is a priority for the Sociology unit and has been promoted by research support structures at both unit and school level. For example, the competitive Interdisciplinary Small Grants Initiative invites collaborative bids from research teams that include members from at least two different broad subject groups within the school, and the Social Sciences Work-in-Progress seminar series, encourages colleagues to present and receive feedback on a planned publication. As a sign of successful collaborative activities, since 2018 staff in the unit have published ten REF-able outputs co-authored with another colleague from York St John and have submitted four external grant applications in collaboration with other York St John staff.

Our staff also actively participate in national and international collaborative networks and are making valuable contributions to the profession. Examples include: Hill's recognition as honorary research supervisor by the University of Liverpool in 2018; Moreh's continued collaboration with colleagues at the University of Southampton as a visiting research fellow at the ESRC Centre for Population Change and CI on the ESRC-funded project “Transnational healthcare and well-

being among Polish migrants in the UK" (2019–22); Moreh is also an affiliated researcher at the Făgăraş Research Institute, Romania.

The research expertise of colleagues in the unit is increasingly sought out by external collaborators. For example, Moreh contributed to the Făgăraş Research Institute's 2019 report on the potential of diaspora implication in communities in the Făgăraş region of Romania; he was also an invited academic expert in the Brexit and Extremism Risks strategic foresight workshop run by the Extremism Analysis Unit (Home Office) on 10 May 2019 at King's Manor, University of York; Formby has served as research consultant for TASO (Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education), has produced three reports for Go Higher West Yorkshire as part of his realist evaluation work of widening participation initiatives, and his earlier co-authored "Cost Analysis of the Legal Declaratory Relief Requirement for Withdrawing Clinically Assisted Nutrition and Hydration (CANH) from Patients in the Permanent Vegetative State (PVS) in England and Wales" has been noted by House of Commons Science and Technology Select Committee report series.

Our increasing engagement with stakeholders beyond academia is also the basis on which we have developed sustainable pathways to wider social impact. Our two impact case studies offer excellent examples. The first case study (led by Formby) aims at improving the outcomes of higher education Widening Participation initiatives by designing and implementing realist evaluation strategies in partnership with stakeholders such as Go Higher West Yorkshire (Uni Connect). The second case study (led by Ralston) focuses on developing a "layered pedagogical model" for reducing statistics anxiety among school pupils and university students preparing to embark on further studies and careers in the social sciences. Through engaging with stakeholders and end users such as the National Centre for Research Methods (NCRM), Uni Connect and schools (e.g. John Leggott College), the project contributes to strengthening the skill base of UK social science professionals.

Wider activities and contributions to the research base

Publications

Although we are a small unit of young researchers, during the REF assessment period we have collectively published over 70 REF-able outputs, including ten authored books and articles in leading journals such as *New Media and Society*; *Media, Culture & Society*; *Theory, Culture & Society*; *The British Journal of Sociology*; *The British Journal of Criminology*; *The Sociological Review*; *European Journal of Social Theory*; *Sociology of Health and Illness*; *The Lancet Public Health*; *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*; *International Migration Review* and *International Affairs*. Formby has edited a special issue on youth transitions in *People, Place and Policy* (2020) and Denham co-edits the *Emerald Studies in Death and Culture* series.

Invited talks and conference attendance

Since joining York St John University, staff in the unit have given invited talks at nine events, including at the University of Manchester, University of Cambridge, University of Sheffield, University of Copenhagen (Denmark), Pacific University (USA), the British Sociological Association's Youth Study Group conference, the Palace of Westminster and The Kosovo Institute for Training and Economic Development. They have attended a further 26 academic conferences both in the UK and abroad (including in Amsterdam, Zagreb, Madrid, Kyoto and San Francisco).

Organising and awarding committees

Denham and Smith have played a key role in organising three editions of the Death and Culture conference, which takes place every two years and alternates between the University of York and York St John University as a key event of the Death and Culture Network co-directed by Denham. Moreh was a member of the judging panel for the 2020 SAGE Prize for Innovation and Excellence for the BSA journal *Sociology*.

Media/public engagement

Staff in the unit have also actively engaged in reaching a wider audience for their research. Examples of public engagement include: 14 articles in *The Conversation* attracting 184,657 readers from around the world (at the time of writing) and features in news outlets such as *The Independent*; public contributions and appearances in events such as the Battle of Ideas Festival and media outlets such as Sky News (*Press Review*) and BBC Radio.

Journal peer-reviewing activity

Since 2014, staff in the unit have completed 73 peer reviews for journals. “such as *Sociology*; *The British Journal of Sociology*; *The Sociological Review*; *European Journal of Cultural Studies*; *Body & Society*; *Sociology of Health and Illness*; *Acta Sociologica*; *Current Sociology*; *Information, Communication and Society*; or *Crime, Media Culture*.”