

**Institution:** University of Aberdeen

**Unit of Assessment:** UoA 21 (Sociology)

### 1. Unit context and structure, research and impact strategy

The University of Aberdeen has a long history with sociology in Britain. Robert Morrison MacIver began his career here between 1907 and 1915, before moving to Canada and then to the USA, where he established sociology at Columbia University and founded the New School of Social Research. In the 1930s, Dugald Baird, initially an obstetrician, pioneered the study of social influences on stillbirth and maternal health. The various research units he founded eventually became the Department of Sociology under Raymond Illsley in the 1960s. The Department - consistently placed in the top ten for sociology by Guardian University Rankings - continues to be an active centre of sociological teaching and training and to innovate (for example with peace and conflict studies) while consolidating its previous strengths.

The submitted unit is the Department of Sociology. Along with Politics and International Relations and Anthropology, the Department forms the School of Social Science, the main link between the University's central administration and the Unit's academic staff. While some functions have recently shifted to central administrative staff, many elements of the research environment (such as, identifying and developing potential funding opportunities, monitoring research income and spending, ensuring ethical compliance, providing facilities and training and reviewing research proposals prior to submission) are still carried out primarily by Unit staff and other School colleagues, under the supervision of the School's Director of Research.

During the review period, student numbers grew – a reflection of the discipline and Unit's popularity – while staff numbers fell from 14 to 9.3. Sadly, one colleague died in post (Debra Gimlin) and another retired; the other leavers were recruited to more senior positions elsewhere: a compliment to the Unit's ability to develop staff careers. The Unit's continuing vitality was recognised by the University's allocation of three new posts at the start of 2020. The pandemic delayed the filling of two of the vacancies, but Isabella Kasselstrand, joined as a Lecturer in December 2020.

The structure and tradition of the Department has promoted staff autonomy in research and publication and the Unit's research activity is driven largely by the interests of its individual members. However, because the Unit is small, because all staff collaborate in teaching its undergraduate (UG) and postgraduate (PG) degrees (and many courses are co-taught), and because such teaching reflects staff research interests, there is considerable informal encouragement and cross-fertilisation. The result is not only research-led teaching but also research inspired *by* teaching. This allows us to summarily describe our research under three broad headings:

- The sociology of religion;
- The sociology of peace and conflict;
- The sociology of social divisions.

As described in the following sections, these fields are not exclusive, and staff research interests often overlap between two or three of the areas, which creates opportunities for collaboration and peer-to-peer support and guidance.

#### 2.1: The Sociology of Religion

The Department has four staff who work in the sociology of religion. Steve **Bruce**'s standing as an expert on secularisation and on the "westernisation" of eastern religious themes in contemporary spirituality has been recognised by his election to the British Academy and to the Royal Society of Edinburgh; his outputs in the period include four monographs with Oxford University Press. He is currently working on a timely exploration of an important topic largely overlooked by sociologists of religion: the uses of religion in sexual abuse and sexual exploitation. Marta **Trzebiatowska** shares **Bruce**'s interest in secularisation and in the religious control of sexuality; she has also advanced our understanding of the links between atheism,

gender and identity through her studies of the nonreligious in Poland, women's narratives of "lived atheism" and the use of Catholic identity in Poland's current religio-ethnic mobilisation. Andrew **McKinnon** has written extensively on social theory and is the co-author of *The Anglican Communion at a Crossroads: The Crises of a Global Church*, a major study of the conflict over sexuality and theology in the worldwide Anglican communion. Bernadette **Hayes** has explored the impact of religion as well as its link to ethnonationalist identity in the context of the conflict within Northern Ireland. **Hayes** has also written extensively on the role of religious divisions in relation to attitudes towards victims and restorative justice mechanisms, as well as support for political systems in addressing the legacy of Northern Ireland's violent past. All four have worked together in various combinations: **Trzebiatowska** and **Bruce** on *Why Are Women More Religious Than Men?*; **Hayes** and **McKinnon** on "Belonging without believing: religion and attitudes towards gay marriage and abortion rights in Northern Ireland"; and **Trzebiatowska** and **McKinnon** on *Sociological Theory and the Question of Religion*. Finally, the recent appointment of Kasselstrand, a skilled quantitative sociologist, will add a new dimension to the team's work, which to date (and with the exception of that of Hayes) has been largely ethnographic and historical.

## 2.2 The Sociology of Peace and Conflict

The interests of the staff mentioned in the previous section often shade into the field of peace and conflict studies. The Department has long-standing interests in social tension and unrest within the UK – **Bruce** and **Hayes** have extensively researched the links between religion and conflict in Northern Ireland - but over the review period, it has extended that range to incorporate other parts of the world and topics beyond domestic conflict. **Hayes**, Gearoid **Millar** and Luisa **Gandolfo** and until 2019 John **Nagle** (now at Queen's University Belfast) were central to the establishment of the Institute for Conflict, Transition and Peace Research (ICTPR), which has, since 2015, provided a focus for staff throughout the School of Social Science and generated research on peace and conflict studies; transitional justice; gendered violence and women in peacebuilding; and the dynamics of memory, apology, forgiveness and reconciliation.

**Millar's** research on Sierra Leone shows how individuals and communities experience post-conflict peacebuilding and development projects and investigates how interaction between local and global actors generates new social realities. He has extended this work methodologically in his development of Ethnographic Peace Research (with funding from the Independent Social Research Foundation) and theoretically (with his most recent work supported by a Leverhulme Research Fellowship) by exploring the implications of complexity theory and encouraging the further conceptualisation of complex global peace systems.

**Millar** has also published on performative memory, a field shared by **Gandolfo**, whose research draws on ethnographic data from Palestine-Israel to show the role of culture and cultural organisations in local peacebuilding efforts. Encompassing theatre, song and art, she explores the alternative pathways to dialogue that continue despite the stalemate that marks Palestinian and Israeli relations at a state level. Recently, her research has extended to consider how tensions from conflict zones (such as Libya) are recreated by diaspora communities in other parts of the Mediterranean (such as Malta). Her forthcoming output, *Post-Conflict Memorialization: Missing Memorials, Absent Bodies* (2021), co-edited with colleagues at the University of Bristol and Royal Holloway, looks at the significance of absence and silence in the memorialisation processes of conflict and post-conflict societies.

**Hayes** has built up an impressive body of research with substantial funding from the Leverhulme Trust (2009-2015), as well as three Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)-sponsored Northern Ireland election surveys (2015, 2017, 2019). The Leverhulme project addressed three contemporary arenas of conflict (Northern Ireland, South Africa and Sri Lanka) and four historical cases (the USA after the civil war, West Germany after the fall of Nazism, Spain after the death of Franco and the Lebanon after its civil wars), as well as exploring the verbatim evidence of witnesses during truth recovery procedures. A particular focus of **Hayes'** research over time has been on attitudes towards the rights of victims and sexual minorities, as well as the differential

and negative impact of consociational power-sharing arrangements on women in societies emerging from deep-seated ethnic conflict. **Hayes** also collaborated with **Nagle** on two articles and a book chapter which drew on their combined expertise in consociational power-sharing arrangements, intergroup tolerance, sexual minority rights, Northern Ireland and Lebanon.

Before **Nagle** departed, he made a singular contribution to the study of how power-sharing governance structures impact minority groups in divided societies such as Northern Ireland and Lebanon. He also published in the field of memory studies and contributed to gender studies with two articles on LGBT rights in Lebanon and Northern Ireland co-authored with **Hayes**.

### *2.3 – The Sociology of Social Divisions*

The Department has a strong record of quantitative and qualitative research on social, cultural and economic inequalities in Britain, North America and Asia. With substantial funding from Research Councils UK (RCUK), the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council, the European Framework Programme and CC Network+, Claire **Wallace** has studied community-led digitisation and the link between social cohesion and quality of life and ICT in rural areas from the Western Isles to India. The dot.Rural project has yielded three further studies: Cultural Repositories Information Systems (CURIOS), which helped local history societies to develop cultural heritage initiatives; Agent and Semantic Support for Rural Economies (ASSURE), which developed intelligent networking for rural businesses; and Satellite Internet in Rural Areas (SIRA), which helped to bring fast broadband to rural areas. Combined, the projects exemplify the potential for research to change lives locally (and beyond). They also exemplify interdisciplinary engagement: each brought sociologists, computer scientists, engineers, geographers, historians and business studies experts alongside external agencies (such as rural businesses, local historical and cultural associations, social enterprises, Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise) to conduct timely and impactful research that would leave a legacy in the communities involved.

Just as **Wallace**'s broader work connects with global projects, so Christopher **Kollmeyer**'s research is international in scope. He studies large-scale changes in the social structures and political economies of modern societies and such consequences that concern sociologists as change in income inequality, trade union participation and democratic politics. Most of his research uses advanced quantitative research techniques and large multi-country datasets to understand the causes and effects of structural change in modern societies.

Sharing this interest in socio-economic issues, John **Bone** has conducted research in the areas of political economy, social and biosocial theory and social media research. His work applies an original biosocial model to analyse ways in which neoliberal economic policy affects identities, working lives, political engagement, social polarisation and social cohesion. With colleagues in Politics and Computing Sciences, he is now studying the link between socio-economic insecurity and rising populist politics in the UK.

Rhoda **Wilkie**'s work is emblematic of the Unit's intellectual curiosity. Her studies of species-based social divisions are pioneering. She has followed her study of mainstream livestock production (which was awarded the British Sociological Association's prize for best first book) with an interest in the use of insects in food production and consumption. She is currently investigating the backgrounds, interests and attitudes of the new "minilivestock" farmers regarding the food animals with which they work and exploring the institutional vertebratism that characterises our understanding of human-animal relations.

### **Research and Impact Strategy**

Staff in the Department disseminate their research by the conventional means of monographs and edited volumes with leading academic publishers and articles in prestigious international journals. But they also ensure open access to their research, supported by the Sir Duncan Rice Library's Scholarly Communications Service (**REF5a**), by making it available via the Aberdeen

University Research Archive (AURA). This commitment extends to datasets, for example, data from **Hayes'** work on the Northern Ireland election surveys are available via the UK data archive, while **Wallace's** ESRC funded project (2016-2018) made data available to a wider audience via the Grampian Data Safe Haven (DaSH). Staff have also used their research to contribute to debates via online outlets such as the American Sociological Association's *Work in Progress* blog and *The Conversation* (of which the University was a founding member and to which **Wallace, Millar, Gandolfo** and **Nagle** contributed during the current REF cycle). Staff have also popularised their work in the mass media: for example, **McKinnon** has been interviewed on Laurie Taylor's BBC *Thinking Aloud*; **Wallace** has written on rural internet access for *iScot* magazine; and **Millar** has commented on divisions created by the Scottish independence referendum on BBC Scotland's *Sunday Morning* and written on peace, conflict and development issues for *Geographical Magazine*, *Banker Africa* magazine and *Peeps Magazine* online.

More broadly, the Department is committed to increasing the impact of its work over the longer-term and has created the post of Impact Lead in this REF cycle to support colleagues in ensuring that research impact is embedded in all future projects. Part of this strategy is to make use of networks that the University of Aberdeen has established. The University was one of the founders of the Scottish Policy and Research Exchange (SPRE) network, which facilitates researcher contributions to the Scottish Parliament and to Scottish Government policy processes. An example of SPRE's work is the seminar for the Scottish Parliament on Quality of Life led by **Wallace**. The University has also promoted a similar UK-wide initiative through its participation in the Academy of Social Sciences Campaign for the Social Sciences and its promotion of the ESRC Festival of Social Sciences (in which Gimlin, **Millar, Nagle** and **Wallace** all participated during the current REF cycle).

The Unit's interest in impact has encouraged staff to build engagement with stakeholders into new research projects. For example, **Wilkie's** current study of edible insect farming is opening new lines of inquiry that should have direct implications for ongoing practice. Initially funded by a Leverhulme Research Fellowship, **Millar's** current research was designed to develop the potential for peace and conflict research to feed more directly into the practice of international peacebuilding organisations; it engages with six such organisations. **Bone's** study of the social and political effects of insecurity in labour and housing markets has included presentations to local and national politicians, and he is currently applying his biosocial theory to the analysis of social media data with an eye to helping policymakers and other stakeholders to better understand the underlying psycho-social effects of economic insecurity and inequality. **Bone** also provided the main input for a recent BSA contribution to a British Academy report requested by Sir Patrick Vallance, UK Government Chief Scientific Officer, for analysis regarding the medium to long term societal impact of COVID-19.

Finally, as documented in one of our impact case studies, **Wallace's** EPSRC-funded project on cultural heritage in rural communities involved Scottish local history societies. Her ongoing EU-funded Horizon 2020 Cultural Tourism project builds links with Visit Scotland, Historic Environment Scotland, the National Trust for Scotland and the Abbotsford Trust to build a stakeholder network (together with online media entrepreneurs). Its research findings are fed through a series of workshops that will help to develop better strategies for developing media tourism in Scotland. Stakeholders are also able to shape the research direction, for example, by linking it to the Sir Walter Scott Anniversary events in 2021 and 2022.

Involving stakeholders and building pathways to impact is aided by our openness to interdisciplinary research and collaboration. Sociologists are rarely precious about disciplinary boundaries. Though patently a sociologist, **Bruce** was awarded the Saltire Society's 2014 award for best Scottish history book, while **Millar** and **Gandolfo** (and until recently **Nagle**) research and publish in fields that are defined by topic rather than by discipline, and the article by **Hayes** (co-authored with **Nagle**) on abortion and LGBT rights in Northern Ireland was short-listed for the 2020 Meisel-Laponce Award for the best article in the *International Political Science Review* over the last four years. In addition, many staff have worked with colleagues in other University departments. **Millar** has researched land use and farming practices with staff in the School of



Biological Sciences, **Bone** has been engaging with colleagues in Psychology and Mathematics in order to develop new research on populism and the media, **McKinnon** has worked on the theme of Conflict in the Anglican Communion with colleagues in the school of Divinity, History and Philosophy, **Hayes** has published with colleagues in Politics and International Relations, while **Trzebiatowska** is a member of the Research Centre for Polish-Lithuanian Studies.

**Wallace's** collaboration with the Medical School, mentioned in Section 3, also fits this pattern, and she has worked with colleagues in the Schools of Engineering, Education, Language and Literature, Music and Visual Culture.

Staff also engage regularly with colleagues outside the University. **Wilkie** has worked with staff of the James Hutton Institute (formed in 2011 from the Macaulay Land Use Research Institute and the Scottish Crop Research Institute), and **Kollmeyer** has collaborated with a colleague at Laurentian University in Canada to co-author an article in the journal *Social Forces*. **Wallace** has co-authored with a number of James Hutton Institute staff, while **McKinnon** is involved in long-term collaboration with colleagues at the University of Toronto. **Millar** collaborated with colleagues at Radboud University Nijmegen, Lund University and Uppsala University to complete a 2016 edited volume *Peacebuilding and Friction: Global and Local Encounters in Post-Conflict Societies*. In the same year **Millar** organised an international authors workshop funded by the Independent Social Research Foundation that resulted in an edited volume titled *Ethnographic Peace Research: Approaches and Tensions* and a special issue of *International Peacekeeping* in 2018. Together these publications incorporated the work of 17 authors from eight different countries. **Gandolfo** similarly convened a symposium with the NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies, Amsterdam, in 2016 that resulted in a volume titled *Post-Conflict Memorialization: Missing Memorials, Absent Bodies*, co-edited with colleagues at Royal Holloway and the University of Bristol. **Wallace** has collaborated with colleagues in the United Arab Emirates and has been a visiting fellow at the University of Zhejiang (one of China's most prestigious Universities). She has twice been an ERASMUS exchange scholar at the Czech University of Brno and twice been a visiting professor at the University of Freiburg, Switzerland. Her research on digital communications has involved colleagues at Robert Gordon University, Manchester Metropolitan University, RMIT Australia and the University of Groningen, while the ESRC Digital Working Research Centre incorporates colleagues from the University of Sussex, University of Leeds and University of Cambridge. She is also involved with 16 universities and research institutes across the EU in the Horizon 2020 project titled *Social and Innovative Platform on Cultural Tourism and Its Potential Towards Deepening Europeanisation*.

Finally, the Unit's staff have long been active in disseminating their work beyond the academy. **Bruce** has written frequently for the *Herald* (formerly the *Glasgow Herald*) and he has also addressed clergy audiences, humanist societies, the Orange Order, staff of the Scottish Parliament and political organisations with an interest in religious identity and contemporary affairs. **Trzebiatowska** has addressed the Edinburgh Secular Society and the "Being Human Festival". **Millar** and Gimlin (in 2014) and **Wallace** (in 2017) took part in the ESRC-sponsored Festival of Social Sciences, and **Wallace** has contributed to the University's annual Mayfest, which presents research findings to the public.

All of these engaged, interdisciplinary and collaborative efforts evidence the supportive research environment within the Department and the School of Social Sciences more generally. Staff are encouraged to pursue a research agenda of their own making and to develop relationships and networks both within the school and University, and at other institutions, that can foster those ambitions. As part of that support, the Department and School share responsibility for the oversight of basic research development. This includes, for example, an internal grant application review that provides staff with constructive feedback. It also includes a research ethics review to assess the research integrity and data management and protection plans for any new research endeavours prior to review by the Committee for Research Ethics and Governance in Arts, Social Sciences and Business, the original policies of which were drawn up by a member of the Unit and on which the school has a representative in the shape of a School Ethics Officer. All staff and postgraduate research (PGR) students submit plans for new and ongoing projects to this committee and receive helpful ethical guidance. These activities

demonstrate the Unit's adherence to the University's research ethics and governance frameworks, as set out in the University's Research Governance Handbook, which is aligned with the UKRI, UUK and EU concordats and policies on research integrity (**REF5a**). University level support includes help from a dedicated Business Development Officer, who identifies grant opportunities for the Department broadly while developing relationships with specific staff members to target specific opportunities. It also includes a wider training provision in research practices and support for interdisciplinary initiatives provided through the University's Grants Academy (**REF5a**). Collectively these structures function to promote and support the independent research efforts of the Unit's staff.

## 2. People

### Staff Development

The University of Aberdeen maintains well defined procedures for supporting staff through their early careers, overseen by the University's Researcher Development Unit (**REF5a**). For example, the University supports the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers and incorporates policies in line with the concordat's seven principles. The University also supports the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers, which identifies key principles for good working conditions for researchers. The University's strength in this area is evidenced by the retention of the HR Excellence in Research Award (**REF5a**) since it was first awarded in 2010. In addition, probationary staff have protected research time; they are also formally mentored by a senior colleague. Three of the staff discussed here (**Millar, Gandolfo and Nagle**) benefited from these mechanisms in the earlier years of this review period. While there were no subsequent permanent hires until December 2020, various temporary teaching fellows and lecturers have greatly benefited from this system. Peter Gardner, for example, secured a permanent appointment at York after a year in Aberdeen.

In addition to probationary and mentoring systems, the University provides a wide range of research training; some developed and provided by University staff, and others provided by external consultants. Over the course of this REF cycle, for example, staff have taken courses or participated in workshops on developing bids for external research funding, on research ethics, on identifying and engaging with research partners, on enhancing research impact, on supervising PGR students and on managing research staff. The University has responded to the changing nature of the UK funding landscape by rethinking and refocusing its research themes through a series of working groups in which Unit staff participated. The result is the *Aberdeen 2040* strategic plan (**REF5a**). Staff knowledge of, and engagement with, national research developments – such as the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) – have been supported within the University by an ongoing series of "Conversations on" organised around themes of central importance to UKRI funders. These connect Unit staff with those in other Departments and Schools with similar thematic interests and so enhance the kind of engaged interdisciplinary and collaborative research the Unit staff have long pursued. Additionally, through ResearchBite sessions delivered by the Grants Academy (**REF5a**) – a team based in the University's central Research and Innovation Unit – and regular School forum meetings, staff engage with up-to-date policy and governance and procedures related to research matters. These cover topics such as data management, GDPR Compliance, research funding, inclusion and diversity and decolonising the curriculum.

However, for all these supportive University structures, the most effective stimulants of the Unit's research remain the collegiality and the informal interaction made possible by collaborating in teaching and sharing conjoint office space. Members of the Unit work closely together on Department and School committees and in tasks such as postgraduate supervision. This closeness augments the stimulation provided by visiting speakers, staff seminars and the like.

In addition, post probation, all staff are appraised annually by their academic line manager (either the head of Department or the head of the School of Social Science). They are encouraged to evaluate their previous year and to frame achievable research, publication and

impact goals for the forthcoming year. Research excellence is encouraged and rewarded through an annual promotions process; during the assessment period four staff were promoted from lecturer to senior lecturer (**Wilkie**, **Trzebiatowska** and **Millar**) or reader (**Nagle**) and **Gimlin** was promoted from senior lecturer to professor. Ironically, a good illustration of the Unit's success in developing staff careers is the departure of **Nagle** for a chair at Queen's University, Belfast.

With the exception of **Hayes** (now part-time) all staff are employed on conventional open-ended full-time teaching-and-research contracts. The University is committed to a 40/40/20 split of time between teaching, research and administration and, as the published outputs and the two impact case studies demonstrate, this has allowed staff sufficient time to pursue their own research. The Unit also schedules teaching commitments so that staff can concentrate teaching in one semester and so remain largely free of timetabled teaching commitments for the other. In addition, the acquisition of research grants that fund teaching cover is strongly encouraged, and during the census period three members of staff have had periods of research leave funded by such mechanisms; both **Millar** and **Nagle** acquired Leverhulme Research Fellowships and **Gandolfo** spent a year on research leave at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study.

As one would expect when its discipline focuses on social divisions, the Unit has always been mindful of equality and diversity issues and has led rather than followed the University's direction in such matters. Since 1991 every vacancy short list has included at least one female candidate and for the last two decades the Unit has had an even gender balance at every level of staffing. In the year prior to Gimlin's untimely death, there were three female professors and one male. There are currently five women in the staff of 9.3 (six if we include the December 2020 appointee) and, of its three professors, two are female. The staff is ethnically mixed: three are Scottish, two English, two Irish, and one each from Canada, Poland and the US. No members are registered disabled (although the Unit's building is well equipped for disabled access). The Unit staff also has a good mix of career stages, from Lecturer through to Professor.

A concern for equality and fairness has informed every stage of REF preparation. All staff have been involved in the drafting of this statement and in the selection of submitted outputs. All potential submissions were read and scored anonymously by both internal and external readers. There was bespoke Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) training for staff involved in REF decision-making, including selection of the output portfolio. In conformity with the institutional Code of Practice for REF2021 all staff were encouraged to declare individual circumstances which may have affected their ability to contribute to the Unit's research.

On top of the Unit's own tradition of diversity and inclusion, the University has introduced a range of equality and diversity initiatives (see the broader institutional submission for details) and it holds an institutional Athena SWAN Bronze award. The School of Social Science (co-led on this matter by **Gandolfo**) successfully applied for the Athena SWAN Bronze Award in 2017. As part of its report, the Athena SWAN self-assessment team planned new measures for awareness training and monitoring to be enacted before submission for the Silver Award in November 2021. The majority of actions have been taken, and the Unit and School are on schedule to submit for the Silver Award in April 2022.

#### Postgraduates

The Unit has been successful in PG recruitment. The Unit supports five one-year postgraduate Master's degrees which attract students and act as a feeder system for our PhD programme. The Master's in Research in Social Science, in particular, often serves this function as it provides a deeper knowledge of research methods and so is a strong preparation for PhD studies. Recently the PhD programme has also been opened up to distance-learning students. This makes the programme more accessible and encourages a more inclusive and diverse PGR community.

The Department has long enjoyed ESRC accreditation and (with Edinburgh, Stirling and Glasgow) is part of the Scottish Doctoral Training Partnership. This provides a funding stream for students, wider opportunities for training and discussion, additional funds for specialised language training and fieldwork and, notably, an annual PGR conference. The Unit currently has two students (Ruben Schneider and Krzys Adamczyk) funded through this scheme. The Unit is also a participant in the interdisciplinary “Political Concepts in the World” (POLITICO) programme, a Horizon 2020 Marie Skłodowska-Curie doctoral training programme situated in the University’s Centre for Citizenship, Civil Society and Rule of Law (CISRUL). Immediately before the pandemic two students were funded through this programme (although, as a response to the pandemic, one has now transferred to her home country).

As in any research active department, PhD students contribute significantly to the Department’s research culture and are included and supported in a number of ways. All PGRs are provided with office space, library access and a fully networked PC, and all participate in and attend Departmental and School seminars. Additionally, with support from the School, PhD students regularly participate in national and international conferences, raising the profile of the Department further. Over the course of this REF cycle, for example, in addition to many domestic conferences in Scotland or the UK, PhD students within the Department delivered papers at conferences in Japan (Nick Adams, 2016-2019), Mexico, the USA, Germany, Kuwait and Qatar (Emanuela Buscemi, 2013-2018).

In addition, some of our PhD students have engaged in substantial outreach and impact efforts. Nadia Ncube (2017-present), for example, is the founder and director of Save the Girl Child Movement (an NGO in Zimbabwe), and in March 2019, she was invited to New York to present at the UN’s 63<sup>rd</sup> Commission on the Status of Women. In March 2020, she was also among a select group of participants chosen to participate in the Commonwealth Futures “Reimagining Peace Workshop” in Durban, South Africa. At the domestic level, Tracey Forbes (2012-2020) was a member of the Cross-Party Working Group on Rural Affairs for the Scottish Government, and two current students (Adamczyk and Schneider) have recently worked with Government bodies through the Scottish Graduate School for Social Sciences Internship Programme (both in 2020). Adamczyk is also a recent recipient of a Wellcome Trust ISSF Public Engagement Fund to continue his impact work. Through these kinds of opportunities, PhD students within the Department gain valuable experiences and insights that contribute to our internal research environment, while also representing the Department to the wider world and contributing their expertise to policy and practice.

It is also important to recognise that these students have many opportunities to develop their teaching skills while here at Aberdeen. They often provide some of their first presentations and lectures in the Department’s seminar series, and after the first year of their studies they are normally offered the opportunity to tutor on Level 1 and 2 undergraduate courses. This provides an important way of integrating them into the intellectual life of the Unit as well as a source of valuable professional pedagogical training and experience.

The University has a centrally managed Postgraduate Research School (PGRS), which provides a variety of mandatory training courses for PGR students in the Unit (**REF5a**). They attend an induction course covering research methodology, literature reviews and academic writing, and this initial training is complemented by workshops and courses based on RCUK guidelines and the QAA Code of Practice. The PGRS supports corresponding training of new and experienced supervisors and requires that refresher training is undertaken every five years. Additionally, it hosts a range of *ad hoc* training sessions and events throughout the year for staff and students such as Supervisor Breakfasts and training in public engagement, entering the job market and other topics of relevance to emerging academics.

All PGR students attend annual monitoring meetings with a panel of senior academics, who report on their research progress to the School’s Postgraduate Committee and are encouraged to reflect on their progress by completing six monthly review forms for the PGRS office. A clearly laid out framework for monitoring and supporting PGR students explains what is expected at



each stage of the PhD, and a written Code of Practice details the reciprocal responsibilities of students and supervisors. The Unit's work in this area is undertaken with the support of the School Director of Postgraduate Research and the Dean for Postgraduate Research.

All of the above is input, however, and the quality of the Unit's research supervision is best demonstrated by the output, or the roles our graduates go on to play both within and outside academia. While some have taken up positions in and around Aberdeen, including Forbes, who is a lecturer at North East Scotland College, Adams, a Research Fellow at Robert Gordon's University and our most recent graduate, and Ruth Wilson (2017-2021), who is currently at the James Hutton Institute, most graduates have travelled further afield. This includes those who are pursuing post-doctoral studies, such as Sandra Rios (2010-2014) who is now at the Catholic University, Louvain, Belgium, Senna Middelveld (2012-2019) who is now at Wageningen University in the Netherlands and Danillo Giglito (2013-2017) who is at Sheffield Hallam University. It also includes those who have made the jump into policy and practice, such as Rachel Anderson (2010-2015), who is now Principal Social Researcher with the Scottish Government, David Magee (2009-2013) at the Joseph Roundtree Charitable Trust and Marek Szilvasi (2010-2015) at the Open Society Foundations in Budapest. Each of these placements, both within and outside academia, evidence the strong skills and valuable experience post-graduate students within the Department receive and the variety of opportunities that are available to them upon graduation.

Finally, while fewer in number, it is important to note the success also of post-doctoral researchers who have worked within the Department over this REF cycle. It is a mark of the Unit's success in nurturing full-time research staff that the three people employed as post-doctoral researchers during this REF period have all proceeded on to full time academic posts elsewhere. Leanne Townsend (2011-2018) is now a Senior Researcher at the James Hutton Institute, David Beel (2011-2015) is now a Senior Lecturer at Manchester Metropolitan University and Natascha Mueller-Hirth (2010-2014) is now a Senior Lecturer in Sociology at Robert Gordon University.

### 3. Income, infrastructure and facilities

Over the course of this REF cycle, the Unit has made pragmatic adjustments to protect staff research time. Teaching programmes have been revised and new forms of delivery have been adopted, freeing up staff time for research. All staff have pursued grant opportunities, large and small, appropriate to the requirements of their research topics, many of which do not require large research teams. This external funding has been used very efficiently. For example, Bruce's Leverhulme Research Fellowship (2007-2010) has now produced five monographs, four of them published by Oxford University Press, while **Wallace's** dot.Rural research resulted in three PhDs and 20 peer-reviewed articles in academic journals. In addition, **Hayes'** large Leverhulme Grant (GBP1.26 million, 2009-2015) has resulted in three monographs, an edited volume, a book chapter, four peer reviewed articles as well as four PhDs, three of which were awarded during the census period. **Millar's** Independent Social Research Foundation (ISRF) workshop has so far led to an edited volume, a special issue of a journal, and four peer reviewed articles, while his 2013 fieldwork in Sierra Leone, funded with just GBP2,420 from the Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland, contributed to a monograph and six peer reviewed articles.

These successes indicate the quality of work that researchers within the Unit are capable of and what we will be building upon as we move forward in the coming REF cycle. With our new hire having arrived in December 2020 and two further new hires expected in 2022, the plan is to build on the individual successes discussed previously and develop more collaborative funding proposals. We will continue to develop grant applications, which fund PhD students (for example, via the ESRC-DTP and the Carnegie Trust) in order to grow our discipline from the bottom up, and, in line with the interdisciplinary ambitions set out in *Aberdeen 2040*, we will apply to collaborative, interdisciplinary schemes as prioritised by the UK Government, such as via GCRF, with colleagues in the University of Aberdeen and beyond.

The university provides the Unit with excellent IT facilities, and its award-winning Sir Duncan Rice Library (**REF5a**) houses a first-rate regional archive and a local records collection built up over five centuries. The Unit has a library representative who liaises with the library staff to ensure that colleagues are furnished with the teaching and research resources they require and an annual fund for the purchase of books or other library resources necessary for research and teaching purposes. The Library manages open access to research through the AURA repository and supports Gold Route publishing through Open Access block grant funding.

Finally, the Unit benefits from the University's presence in a relatively enclosed and delineated geographical area with a relatively small number of administrative units and pertinent institutions. That position created research opportunities that still benefit the Unit. In the 1960s Ilsley established the Aberdeen Children of the Nineteen Fifties longitudinal survey; its steering group is currently chaired by **Wallace**. That cohort is linked to NHS administrative data as well as other major UK cohort surveys in a pioneering data-sharing enterprise, which has made this survey unique. It provided data for an ESRC-sponsored PhD project. Along with staff of the Medical School, **Wallace** has addressed a number of popular community engagement meetings around Aberdeenshire.

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

During the review period, the Unit's staff have made an exemplary contribution to enhancing the professional structure of research in the UK and the wider world. **Bone**, for example, has been Chair of the British Sociological Association (BSA) since 2018. The BSA Chair is the operational head of the association, providing leadership and direction to the Board of Trustees that is responsible for decision making and monitoring of the organisation's activities. The latter includes promoting the discipline nationally and internationally, fostering new developments, holding a programme of events and conferences, representing the interests of the discipline with government and associated policymaking bodies and setting ethical guidelines for UK sociologists. As part of this role **Bone** also chairs the association's Advisory Forum, comprised of its constituency representatives and journal editors, as well as BSA Publications Ltd, the association's trading subsidiary, and thus plays an important role in the oversight and running of its journals and book series. **Bone** is also a current member of the British Academy, Strategic Forum for the Social Sciences Committee. For his part, from 2016 through to early 2020, **Millar** served as a member of the Governing Council and Chair of the Peace Studies Section of the International Studies Association (the third largest section within that organisation, with a global membership of approximately 900). In this executive position he was responsible for the overall management of the section, for raising funds, for planning and organizing events at the annual ISA convention and for overall issues of recruitment and strategic development.

Other staff are active in supporting research worldwide as follows:

Editorial Boards: **Bruce** (*Journal of Contemporary Religion*); **Kollmeyer** (*International Journal of Comparative Sociology*); **McKinnon** (*Canadian Journal of Sociology, Sociology, Critical Research in Religion, Sociology of Religion*); **Millar** (*Civil Wars, Peacebuilding*); **Wilkie** (*Society and Animals*); **Trzebiatowska** (*Religion and Gender*); **Wallace** (*Social Forces, Czech Sociological Review, Slovak Sociological Review, Social Indicators Research, Journal of Community Wellbeing, International Journal of Social Quality*).

Guest editor of special editions: **Wilkie** (*Society and Animals*); **Millar** (*International Peacekeeping*).

Grant Refereeing and Evaluation: **Bruce** (British Academy and Leverhulme); **Hayes** (ESRC Peer Review College, Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences, Carnegie Trust, EUROLAB University of Cologne); **Kollmeyer** (European Research Council, Polish National Science Centre, Swiss National Science Foundation); **McKinnon** (Irish Research Council); **Millar** (Independent Social Research Foundation); **Wallace** (ESRC Research Committee 2010-2015, European Research Council, European Science Foundation, Belgian

Research Council, Dutch Research Council, Polish Research Council, Czech Research Council, German Research Council, Finnish Research Council, Kazakh Research Council, Volkswagen Stiftung, Panel for German Excellence Strategy).

Project Advisory Boards: **Bruce** (British Religion in Numbers website BRIN, Universities of Birmingham and Manchester), Catholics in Britain (Leicester); Religion and Politics in Finland (University of Helsinki); **Wallace** (panel for Czech Republic's version of REF and chair of the Social Science Panel for the Czech Science Council) and regularly chairs or contributes to European Science Foundation panels.

Journal and Book Refereeing: Between them, staff have refereed papers for all the major sociology journals in the period and most have reviewed proposals for publishing houses. For example, **Trzebiatowska** is on the board for a Bloomsbury series on religion, gender and sexuality, **Bruce** frequently reads proposals for Oxford University Press, **Millar** has reviewed proposals for Bristol University Press, Oxford University Press, Policy Press and Springer, **Kollmeyer** has reviewed proposals for Palgrave Macmillan, Polity Press, Routledge and Wiley-Blackwell and **McKinnon** has judged proposals for Brill, the University of Chicago Press and the University of California Press.

Miscellaneous: **Trzebiatowska** (faculty, Research PG summer school, Utrecht); **Wilkie** (mutual visiting agreement with French National Institute for Agricultural Research). **Gandolfo** (supported by Junior Fellowship from the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences in 2014) enjoyed a ten-month residency at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study over 2014-2015.