Section A		
Institution: University of St Andrews		
Unit of Assessment: UoA 17: Business and Management Studies		
Title of case study: Enhancing research use, influence and impact in policy & practice		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2000 - 2019		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	**Role(s) (e.g. job title):**	**Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:**
Huw Davies	Professor	01 September 1996 – present
Sandra Nutley	Professor	01 October 1992 - 30 September 2006 and 01 April 2012 – 30 September 2018
Isabel Walter	Research Fellow	01 September 2001 - 25 January 2013
Alison Powell	Research Fellow	01 April 2008 - 30 June 2017
Vicky Ward	Reader	08 May 2018 - present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: January 2014 – 31 December 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
Section B		

1. Summary of the impact

The Research Unit for Research Utilisation (RURU; www.ruru.ac.uk) researches and promotes better ways of getting research-based knowledge used in public policy making and public service delivery. This case study focuses on RURU's influence on 5 agencies that help decision makers and practitioners find and make best use of research to address policy and practice problems. These agencies operate in different sectors (education, healthcare and social care) and are indicative of the breadth and depth of RURU's research influence. The significance of this influence is that it has helped to *transform thinking* about the process of research use and has also shaped *actions* (strategies, resource deployment and practices) to enhance research use across multiple agencies. For example, the Education Endowment Fund has drawn on RURU's research to develop a systems-based approach to mobilising evidence, including funding a national network of 37 schools that support the use of evidence to improve teaching practice within other schools. Within social care, Research in Practice (RiP) has drawn on RURU's work to position social work professionals as active agents in knowledge creation and use. This approach has assisted RiP to almost double the size of its member network since 2013, and it now reaches over 10,000 people (social work professionals) each year through its learning events and resources.

2. Underpinning research

The underpinning research has been conducted since 2000. It focuses on understanding how research is or is not used in public policy and practice and how such use can be enhanced. It has been carried out in the context of sustained international interest in evidence-based policy, evidenced-based practice, and the persistent challenge of ensuring that research is used in these settings.

The main insights from the underpinning research are summarised as follows:
- Articulation of research use is a complex, social, interactive, and context-dependent process, in which research is more likely to be adapted than simply adopted [R1; R2].
- Production and refinement of a taxonomy of strategies to improve the use of research that identifies 5 key underlying mechanisms: dissemination; interaction; social influence; facilitation; and incentives/reinforcement [R1; R2].
- Formulation of 3 models of evidence-based practice (the research-based practitioner model,

the embedded research model, and the organisation-excellence model) [R2; R3].

- Reviews of the evidence about the success or otherwise of different strategies and mechanisms for increasing research use and impact, leading to recognition that research use is enhanced by: sustained interactions between researchers and research users; the use of multiple mechanisms to encourage research use; and the development of a supportive context for research-based practice [R1; R2].
- Identification that for research to be useful and used, findings from individual studies need to be situated within a wider body of research and integrated with other sources of knowledge [R2; R4].
- Recognition that strategies that are system-based and target a broad range of actors (including those funding research, producing research and using research) are more likely to increase research use and impact [R3].
- Articulation of the detailed factors supporting the use of research in policy and practice: the need for a catalyst, organisational capacity to engage with research, and a series of research engagement actions [R5].
- Provision of evidence that increasing the knowledge and skills of researchers and policymakers to engage with one another and appraise research evidence is likely to lead to the appropriate application of research in policy [R5].
- Development of 8 key archetypes (sets of assumptions, actions, configurations and rationales) that capture the differing the strategies and approaches of knowledge mobilisation intermediaries [R6].
- Evidence that the research use strategies and approaches of research funders, producers and intermediaries are shaped by many factors, often developed in isolation and rarely evaluated, leading to a need to facilitate cross-sector and interagency learning and reflection [R6]

The above insights are drawn from peer-reviewed systematic review studies (e.g. R1), peer-reviewed mixed method empirical studies (e.g. R5; R6), and studies that have combined elements of both (e.g. R3). There have also been landmark synthesis publications that draw together the key findings from a range of studies (e.g. R2).

3. References to the research

The peer-reviewed journal articles below exceed the 2* quality threshold. The landmark synthesis book [R2] is built on a raft of published peer-reviewed work of similar quality.

- R1: Walter I, Nutley SM & Davies HTO (2005), 'What works to promote evidence-based practice? A cross-sector review', *Evidence & Policy*, 1(3): 335-364. DOI: 10.1332/1744264054851612.
- R2: Nutley SM, Walter I, Davies HTO (2007). USING EVIDENCE: *How research can inform public services*. The Policy Press, Bristol. DOI: 10.2307/j.ctt9qgwt1 (Landmark synthesis, cited by Campbell Collaboration when presenting the Robert Boruch Award to Nutley for research that informs public policy in 2011.)
- R3: Nutley SM, Walter I and Davies HTO (2009), 'Promoting evidence-based practice: models and mechanisms from cross-sector review', *Research on Social Work Practice*, 19: 552-9. DOI: 10.1177/1049731509335496.
- R4: Nutley SM, Powell A, Davies HTO (2013), 'What counts as good evidence?', Provocation paper for the Alliance for Useful Evidence, https://www.alliance4usefulevidence.org/assets/ What-Counts-as-Good-Evidence-WEB.pdf
- R5: Redman, S., Turner, T., Davies, H., Williamson, A., Haynes, A., Brennan, S., Milat, A., O'Connor, D., Blyth, F., Jorm, L. & Green, S. (2015). The SPIRIT Action Framework: A structured approach to selecting and testing strategies to increase the use of research in policy. *Social Science and Medicine* 136: 147-155 DOI: 10.1016/j.socscimed.2015.05.009.
- R6: Davies HTO, Powell AE, Nutley SM (2015), 'Mobilising knowledge to improve UK health care: learning from other countries and other sectors - a multimethod mapping study', *Health Services and Delivery Research*, 3:27. DOI: 10.3310/hsdr03270.

4. Details of the impact

RURU's research into better ways of getting research used in public policy and practice has influenced the thinking, strategies and practices of **research funders** and **research intermediaries** across different sectors (e.g. education, healthcare and social care) and in various jurisdictions (e.g. UK and Australia). An independent survey of an international community of scholars, practitioners and funders concerned with the use of research (*n* = 102) asked respondents to name researchers who had influenced their own work. RURU's research [R2] was *"the only one which was nominated by people from multiple fields and by far the most frequently"* [S1 – data and commentary from one of the survey researchers based at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine].

Details of RURU's specific influence are outlined below. In general, this influence has been facilitated by the way in which members of the unit have sought to engage with research funders and research intermediaries both during the research process and following the publication of findings. This has involved working with many bodies (see examples below) as they seek to understand the implications of RURU's research for their organisations. RURU's influence has also been achieved by 'secondary links' as existing users apply, cite and recommend RURU's work to others (see, for example, RiP and Iriss below).

Influence on the strategies and practices of research funding bodies

Since August 2013, RURU's influence is evident in the design of the strategies and practices of at least 4 research funding bodies (The Education Endowment Fund, the National Institute for Health Research, the Economic and Social Research Council, and the WT Grant Foundation). Details relating to the first two of these are provided below.

The Education Endowment Fund ([EEF](#)) is a major funder of education research in the UK, but it is not just a grant funder. It also supports teachers and senior leaders to raise the attainment of children facing disadvantage by helping them to make best use of available evidence. RURU's research [R2; R4] has informed the design of research projects (GBP3,200,000 funding allocated) to understand how schools and system leaders engage with, understand and use research, which in turn has influenced national and international policy on evidence use [S2].

Between 2013 and 2016, Nutley was an adviser to the EEF and, drawing on RURU's research; she helped to transform EEF's approach to improving research use. *"[The] EEF was mobilising its research predominately using traditional communication and dissemination methods… RURU research [R1; R2] highlights the limitations of that approach, emphasising the importance of interactions and relationships between research producers, users and intermediaries. With the help of Prof. Nutley, the EEF adopted a more systems-based approach to mobilising evidence, involving the strategic alignment of activities based on dissemination, interaction, social influence, facilitation and incentives [R1; R2]… e.g. [by] influencing national policy and creating local infrastructure for research-informed practice"* [S2 - testimony from the Professor Research Fellow in the EEF's Dissemination and Impact Team].

In creating an appropriate local infrastructure, the EEF drew on RURU's research about the social, interactive nature of research use [R2] to develop the Research Schools Network, a national network of 37 schools across England. Research Schools work with the other schools in their areas to help them use evidence more effectively to inform their teaching (GBP8,000,000 invested as of November 2020 - [S2]). An independent evaluation suggests that the Research School Network is playing a vital role in shifting cultures and attitudes towards evidence use [S2; S3, p.6].

The National Institute for Health Research ([NIHR](#)) funds health-related research in the UK. RURU's research on the importance of interactions between researchers and research users [R1; R2; R6] has influenced its strategies, priorities and practices. A key pathway to this influence has been Davies' ongoing interaction with NIHR. His advice (based on RURU's research described in Section 2) shaped the design of collaborative partnerships between universities and surrounding NHS organisations. Between 2013 and 2018, NIHR invested GBP124,000,000 in 13 Collaborations for Leadership in Applied Health Research and Care (CLAHRCs) [S4]. These local partnerships were selected for funding on the basis of their alignment with RURU-derived principles about the nature of research use and the importance of sustained interaction [S5, p. 204]. Davies was invited to chair the funding panel.

In 2013, RURU's insights about the lack of high-quality research on appropriate training and support for knowledge mobilisation [R2] led to the introduction of a research aspect to NIHR's Knowledge Mobilisation Training Fellowships. This had the specific aim of developing a critical mass of individuals who can lead and champion research-based knowledge mobilisation in applied health research. Again, Davies was invited to chair the funding panel for the first 3 years of this fellowship scheme. Evidence of the influence of RURU's research on this training scheme is provided by the Director of Programmes and Impact (NIHR Academy), who reported in 2020 that "*his [Davies'] expertise and research was invaluable in shaping the scheme… and in influencing some significant changes to the scheme in 2013... The influence of the research of RURU means knowledge mobilisation and the guidance given to applicants for NIHR Advanced Fellowships, remains an important theme for these career development awards*" [S6].

Influence on the thinking and actions of intermediaries supporting policy and practice development

RURU's influence has been particularly marked amongst those working in intermediary bodies tasked with improving the use of research in public services. Since 2013, RURU's influence is evident in the shifting approaches of a least six national intermediary bodies (including the Children and Young People's Centre for Justice, NHS Healthcare Improvement Scotland, and the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement). The three examples below are drawn from Australia and the UK. Amongst these intermediaries, there has been a largescale shift in language and thinking around research use away from passive dissemination towards more active 'knowledge mobilisation' and a more encompassing view of what counts as evidence and knowledge. Through the actions of these intermediaries, RURU's research has indirectly supported the development of improved public services through better application of evidence.

Research in Practice (RiP) works with a membership network of 127 local authorities and 12 national charities in England to support them to access and apply evidence in their work with children, families and adults. Since 2013, RiP has drawn on RURU's work [R2; R3] to position social work professionals as active agents in knowledge creation and use rather than passive recipients of research. RiP's approach has enabled it to grow in size and influence. Its network has almost doubled in size since September 2013, and RiP now reaches over 10,000 people (social work professionals) each year through its learning events and resources [S7].

In particular, "*RURU's work… has heavily influenced our operating model and the way we communicate with the social care and wider family support sector*" [S7 – testimony from the Director of RiP]. In 2014, RiP drew on the three models of evidence-based practice [R3] to inform their contact model with members. "*These models are still used with new members joining the network to help them articulate their ambitions for a more evidence-informed practice.*" [S7] In 2015, RURU's research on the conceptual use of research [R2; R3] was used to underpin a large programme of work focused on reflective supervision [S7]. More recently, in 2020, RURU's research on the five mechanisms for improving research use [R1; R2] was used to underpin the launch of RiP's Outcomes First Group, which supports evidence-informed child-centred practice and leadership [S8, slide 19].

Overall, "*by drawing on RURU's work, RiP has been able to articulate 'evidence-informed practice' as a means of reflecting and addressing… criticisms of the overly rigid nature of programmatic evidence implementation… this approach – inspired and informed by RURU's work – resonates strongly within the sector*" [S7]. The main pathways to RURU's influence on RiP have been through the targeted dissemination of RURU's research and via discussions with RiP staff at numerous seminars and workshops on ways of improving research use.

The Sax Institute is the national lead agency promoting the use of research evidence in Australian health policy. In response to RURU's work on research use and knowledge mobilisation, the Chief Executive of the Sax Institute asked Davies to help them redesign their process of evidence engagement. Between 2011 and 2019, Davies collaborated with the Institute's Centre for Informing Policy in Health with Evidence from Research (CIPHER). The first stage of the collaboration involved the development of the SPIRIT Action Framework [R5], which drew on key insights from RURU's research [R2; R6]. "*Drawing on RURU's research… Professor Davies contributed extensively to our CIPHER program, helping us structure our*

thinking and develop more effective methods for capturing and honing our intent." [S9 – testimony from the Chief Executive of the Sax Institute]

The collaborative team then sought to test the effectiveness of the Action Framework through a step-wedge trial [S10]. The CIPHER trial found that the intervention had strengthened the capacity of the six trial agencies to find and use research [R5; S9]. The trial led to the creation of new capacities within the Sax Institute, including a training program for early career researchers on working in partnership with policy agencies and training for policy makers on critical appraisal and evaluation [S9]. Since their launch, these programs have reached over 500 people (policymakers) from 60 government and non-government agencies across Australia [S11, p. 2].

The Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services ([Iriss](#)) is a charity that builds the capacity and capability of the Scottish social services workforce to access and make use of knowledge and evidence for service improvement. RURU's research has had a significant impact on the thinking and actions of Iriss: "*The overall basis of how Iriss functions as an organisation has continually been informed by and shaped by RURU research."* [S12 – testimony from the Head of Delivery, Iriss]. The pathway for this impact has been though the targeted dissemination of RURU's research and through Iriss staff regularly attending RURU's seminars and workshops since 2012. Several examples of this influence are listed below.

- Iriss has used RURU's research on the eight archetypes that capture the different aims and approaches of knowledge intermediaries [R6] to articulate its own approach as "*We inform; We translate; and We co-create. This has formed the backbone of how we project ourselves to the sector"* [S12].

- Iriss's focus on creating conditions for effective information sharing, supporting individuals and groups to make use of evidence and working with communities to develop and test ideas for change, has been heavily influenced by RURU's research [R2] on strategies to improve the use of research [S12].

- Iriss's Evidence Search and Summary Service (ESSS) is underpinned by RURU's insights [R2; R4] into the need to integrate research evidence with knowledge from other sources [S12]. The ESSS is designed to receive live enquires on topics from social services practitioners and incorporate evidence from research, practice and experience in order to support people working within social services [S12].

Iriss also has shared RURU's framing of evidence and evidence use with other agencies when collaborating on the development of sector-wide strategies. For example, Iriss worked with organisations across the social service sector in Scotland (including Scottish Social Services Council, Care Inspectorate, Scottish Care, Coalition of Care and Support Providers Scotland) to develop a joint evidence-use statement as part of the Social Services Strategy between 2015 and 2020. This statement drew on RURU research [R2] to help frame what effective use of evidence looks like and acknowledges the need for multifaceted ways to promote research use [S12].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

S1: Survey data table and covering email from an Associate Professor at the London School of Hygiene Tropical Medicine, who led the independent survey of scholars, practitioners and funders concerned with the use of research evidence.
S2: Testimony from the Professor Research Fellow in EEF's Dissemination and Impact Team.
S3: Evaluation report of EEF's Research Schools Network (see p. 6)
S4: Press release from the Department of Health announcing funding for CLAHRCs
S5: Report detailing the aims of the NIHR CLAHRCs (see Appendix 12, p. 204)
S6: Testimony from the Director of Programmes and Impact at the NIHR Academy.
S7: Testimony from the Director of Research in Practice (RiP).
S8: RiP's 2020 Outcomes First Group Launch slides, slide 19.
S9: Testimony from Chief Executive Officer of the Sax Institute.
S10: Sax Institute, Annual Report 2014-15, pp. 14-15.
S11: Figures provided in email from Head of Evidence for Action Division, Sax Institute.
S12: Testimony from the Head of Delivery, The Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services (Iriss).