What Made the Difference?
Ambitious questions, pioneering collaborations, unconventional outputs, sustainable outcomes

The Scottish Universities Insight Institute (SUII) is a unique, membership-based partnership between seven Scottish universities[1]. Its primary objective is to promote and support collaboration between researchers and wider society; allowing pioneering and timely work to reach beyond the walls of the academy. In short, SUII facilitates innovative multi-partner collaboration, addressing pressing issues in order to make a substantial and beneficial difference. This 'difference' was the starting point of this report, which explores the outcomes and impact of previous SUII programmes and is based around two guiding questions:

How did the programme make a difference?
What helped to make that difference?

In this enquiry, this report follows on from "Making a Difference" (SUII, 2016) which sought to assess the efficacy and potential impact of SUII programmes, analysing potential lessons to be learned for the future. In particular, the report highlighted the increasing importance of "impact", especially with regards to the Research Excellence Framework (REF). At the time of publication, the report pointed to the Stern Review of REF and its identification of impact as one of the successes of REF 2014. In recently published "Initial Decisions on the REF 2021" (2017), this emphasis been confirmed alongside further guidance which encourages "collaboration with organisations beyond higher education."[2]

The continued focus on impact, and increasing attention to Knowledge Exchange, reaffirms the importance of the support which SUII provides. This report is the result of further enquiry into the developments, ongoing activities, and overall insights of the following SUII programmes:

- **Memory-friendly Neighbourhoods** (2013, Open Call)
- **Good Lives and Decent Societies: Promoting Wellbeing in Scotland and Beyond** (2013, Wellbeing)
- **Big Data and the Third Sector** (2014, Open Call)
- **The Pinkie Resilience Project: Enhancing Equality, Boosting Wellbeing, and Realising Potential in Scottish Schools** (2014, Equality)
- **Planning for the National BSL Plan: Building a Sustainable Framework for British Sign Language in Schools** (2015, Open Call)

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[1] Dundee, Edinburgh, Heriot Watt, Glasgow School of Art, Stirling, Strathclyde, St Andrews
[2] http://www.ref.ac.uk/media/ref,2021/downloads/REF2017_01.pdf

- **Adoption of Stroke Technologies by the User Community** (2015, Innovation)
- **Rewriting the Rulebook: Analysing and Assessing the Economics of Community Landownership** (2015, Innovation)
- **The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in Scotland** (2016, Open Call)

These programmes were selected to cover the fullest range of SUII Calls for Proposals across the last four years. Interviews allowed for detailed insights into the continuing value of these programmes. This report is not intended to exhaustively document these programmes, but rather to highlight particular aspects of the difference they made to policy and practice and how they made that difference[3].

How Did It Make a Difference: Asking Ambitious Questions

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the starting point for all of the programmes interviewed was in the posing of ambitious and, at times, difficult questions. The Community Landownership programme asked, "How do we judge success in an innovative new field?" Memory Friendly Neighbourhoods examined, "What makes a dementia-friendly neighbourhood?" The UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) programme acknowledged that, "A lot has been done for Children's rights in Scotland, but there was still a lot to do," asking, "How can academia and civil society work together to create a new model for the implementation of the UNCRC?"

For some programmes, the solution was clear. The Stroke Rehabilitation Technologies programme commented on the inadequacy of rehabilitation for survivors of stroke that, "The solution has always been that we need to use technology to allow people to do more of their own rehabilitation," yet this led to the question "Why don't rehabilitation services use technology?" Likewise, the British Sign Language (BSL) in Schools programme asserted, "If you really want to go for it with BSL, make it part of the [Scottish Government's] 1+2 Languages Programme,"[4] whilst acknowledging that the question came back, "How do we do that then?"

While these questions may appear straight-forward, the wide-ranging nature of the issues they seek to interrogate presents challenges which demand equally wide-ranging collaborations, including academics, practitioners, policy makers, organisations, businesses, service users, and other target groups. As the BSL in Schools Programme noted, "It's a broad range, and I was going to say that's why it was complicated. But that's the nature of these projects, right?"

These ambitious, challenging questions led to motivated and complex projects. Extensive collaboration—while challenging—often pushed the programmes towards innovative and creative methods, allowing them to make considerable differences to a range of policy and practice areas.

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[3] Outputs from all our previous programmes can be found here:
https://www.scottishinsight.ac.uk/Programmes.aspx
[4] https://education.gov.scot/improvement/Documents/modlang12-1plus2approachMar17.pdf

How Did It Make a Difference? Pioneering Collaborations/Foundational Networks

All programmes pushed beyond disciplinary silos and the confines of academia, with many designed to engage with marginalised or ignored groups. As the UNCRC programme commented,

> what happens is we often work within our own bubbles, and the SUII seminar series allowed us to talk to people and collaborate with people that we wouldn't usually. And that's what's been, for us, the legacy of it.

The UNCRC actively included the children and young people whose rights it sought to advocate for; including Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament and Glasgow Youth Council who "really ran with the project."

Likewise, the Stroke Rehabilitation Technologies programme took the view that their network should be one third patients, one third rehabilitation professionals, and one third academics and technology developers. Even bringing together these groups, though, demanded new connections and collaborations, in that the patients were recruited through Chest, Heart, and Stroke Scotland as "there's been no real attempt to have a big engagement with those people." Accordingly, "The patients were very opinionated… And most of the progress, and really the findings, came from them." The involvement of groups who are the focus of the research questions is fairly unusual yet, as these programmes demonstrate, highly valuable.

At times the most notable difference resulted from the face-to-face meeting of disparate stakeholders, as with the BSL in Schools programme.   One of the crucial barriers was identified as a lack of understanding of different perspectives, "People like senior policy and practice people, these folks had not spent much time with sign language users ever in their lives before." The programme "gave an opportunity for them to understand, directly, from deaf people."

The provision of a space in which marginalised voices and perspectives can be valued emerges as one of the crucial elements of the success of these programmes, and often led to unexpected outputs.

How Did It Make a Difference? Unconventional Outputs/Unexpected Resources

The outputs generated by these programmes are many and varied, including book chapters, podcasts (Pinkie Resilience Project), academic articles (Stroke Rehabilitation Technologies), visual resources, journal special issues (UNCRC), websites, future projects (Memory Friendly Neighbourhoods), policy and practice recommendations (BSL in schools), evaluation tools (Community Land Ownership), online course material (GLADS) and further successful funding bids (Big Data).

The Memory Friendly Neighbourhoods programme, although focused on dementia-friendly landscapes—revealed a lack of guidance on dementia-friendly online spaces. The programme sought to ensure "that people could have access to information that was produced," by making its website "as dementia-friendly as possible" but were confronted with an absence of guidance on how to do this. [Phase two of the programme](#)—enabled by SUII Follow-on Funding—took up this challenge, and while this has moved away from physical spaces, "it's really nice to… have helped develop something that's now taken on a life of its own."[5]

Another output which is "growing its own arms and legs" is the mural produced as a result of the UNCRC programme. The programme commissioned two artists to work with primary school children to produce a mural which captured children's views of the event's discussions, "now a project in its own right." The mural has been requested by the Scottish Parliament for an event on children's rights, and there are plans for a roadshow exhibit early next year.[6] It has been, "from our point of view, the thing that we're proud of the most to come from the seminar series, and it's just been fantastic."

As is often the case with Knowledge Exchange and Impact activities, many of the programmes have outputs and outcomes which are ongoing or forthcoming. The Stroke Rehabilitation Technologies programme has an ongoing annual exhibition of stroke technologies, as part of Engage at Strathclyde,[7] addressing the fact that "one of the big issues was access to these technologies [for user groups]."

Working with a number of partners who took part in the project, the GLADS (Good Lives and Decent Societies) programme went on to develop a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC)[8] on societal wellbeing . The course was primarily designed for policy makers and practitioners from both the public and private sectors, whose professional work requires them to think and talk about wellbeing. However, it is open to anybody who wants to improve their lives by looking through a wellbeing lens. Over 2000 people have participated in the course to date.

In providing room for flexibility and creativity in Knowledge Exchange, rather than demanding conventional academic outputs, these programmes have been afforded the scope to produce significant, far-reaching resources which promise increased engagement and long-lasting benefits.

What Made the Difference? Sustainable Activities/Ongoing Developments

The programmes supported by SUII usually run for approximately six months. In terms of support for Knowledge Exchange, this is relatively unusual. As the BSL in Schools programme commented, bringing together a range of collaborators is "relatively easy to do it on a one-off basis" but "it is of immeasurable value to have that opportunity to create face-to-face dialogue over a sustained period."

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[5] https://memoryfriendly.org.uk/
[6] https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/uncrc-in-scotland-mural-reception-tickets-38114049147
[7] https://www.engage.strath.ac.uk/
[8] https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/social-wellbeing

This structure promotes development and the programmes often form the basis for a range of sustainable activities, ongoing developments, and future projects. The Scottish Government's BSL National Plan (2017-2023),[9] crucially informed by the BSL in Schools Programme, serves as evidence of the lasting impact these programmes can have:

> From our point of view, the space the project created, and the way it enabled us to join dots, essentially, it not only has been transformative already—and you can see it in the national plan—but there's every potential that it will be seriously transformative in the long term.

The sustainable networks and ongoing developments which SUII support encourages are essential in the creation of transformative and lasting change.

The ongoing impact and activities of programmes are also evident in practice, both in and beyond academia. In addition to the ongoing activities facilitated by the SUII Follow-on Funding, the Memory Friendly Neighbourhoods programme resulted in a close relationship between Edinburgh College of Art and the University of Stirling. This led to innovative teaching opportunities for postgraduate students in Dementia Studies (Stirling) and Architecture (ECA), "training the future generation of designers and people who work with dementia, as opposed to just keeping knowledge locked within academia." In this way, the programme enabled something that "isn't just a research seminar," but rather "training for the future."

The enabling of more traditional academic projects also drives towards change, particularly evident with the Big Data programme where, "The programme with SUII helped us to make the connections ahead of the ESRC call" for a "Big Data Network." This resulted in the Scottish Network for Third Sector Data, and associated website.[10] The programme team "were ultimately successful in securing £250,000 for an 18-month project on the back of it."[11] Now that their ESRC project has concluded, they're "looking to what's next and one of the things we've considered is the SUII follow-on funding." Follow-Up Support allows for the extension of collaboration and dialogue, and the potential for continued development and wider and/or deeper impact.

What Made the Difference? Flexible Support for Novel Approaches

Indeed, the Follow-Up Fund is just one of the ways in which the support offered by SUII affords novel approaches through flexible and adaptable support. As the Pinkie Resilience Project commented, "There was some really great flexibility in terms of what we could use the money for." A number of the programmes commented on the uniqueness of this and how it contributed to the success of their aims.

The flexibility of SUII funding encouraged many of the programmes to adopt different approaches in terms of the structure of their workshops. The Big Data programme made use of "café conversation sessions, where we had people moving around" to foster active

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[9] http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2017/10/3540
[10] http://www.thinkdata.org.uk/
[11] http://gtr.rcuk.ac.uk/projects?ref=ES%2FM010465%2F1

communication. They also organised "speed networking" sessions, which "was something small, but helped people mix together which was one of the main aims." The development of a network was a crucial aim of the project, and the network's ongoing success has its roots in some of those conversations.

The Pinkie Resilience Project looked to implement ongoing practice-based methods in the school to increase resilience among students but also to "ensure that the school was relating more to the outside community, so it wasn't just a bubble." In order to overcome barriers to this the team worked on bringing community groups into schools to make "the school is part of the community." Student-led podcasts, set up by the programme, were "basically a vehicle that the school's message can get out to the community, but the community can enter the school via these podcasts." This innovative approach has proven successful, and three years later these podcasts are ongoing.[12] The flexibility in funding also meant that the team "were able to use some of the money to train the teachers in the use of puppets, at nursery and early P1/P2 level, to engage in discussions with children which might not otherwise have happened" which was "a really important part of the project."

Detailed tailoring of the approach to the programme aims was similarly evident in the Community Landownership programme. Given "the nature of where community landownership is focused at the moment," there was "a huge amount of travel involved." In this instance, the usual invitation-based format would have been inappropriate: "You can't just invite people to come to Glasgow or anything like that." Instead the programme team went to "conducted eight interviews with individuals and we hosted three regional roundtables, so we went to Lewis, Oban and Inverness and invited community landowners in those regions." Without flexible support in these activities, engagement with the target group would have been severely limited.

The success of the Memory Friendly Neighbourhoods programme also depended on flexibility and creative approaches. While the team were aware of challenges in getting people living with dementia involved in events "we still got a bit of a shock when it came to trying to get a critical mass of people in the room at the same time." They then:

> had to change tack completely, move away from that model of a particular event, at a particular time, in a particular place with 30-40 people, to going out to where people congregate in smaller groups, sometimes even just talking to individuals.

The team also entered into Twitter discussions, making use of the established hashtag "DementiaChat". While less traditional, this approach allowed the fullest engagement with the people who made the difference by "doing it on their timescale, which isn't necessarily a timescale which lends itself to, you know, the 9-5 of the office."

These wide-ranging and pioneering approaches allowed for programmes to "get more than the usual suspects involved" (UNCRC), a fundamental aspect of successful Knowledge Exchange programmes. The flexible nature of the support provided by SUII undoubtedly assisted in facilitating these, an aspect which was consistently highlighted as unique. When the BSL in

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[12] https://www.edubuzz.org/pinkie/type/audio/

Schools programme was asked if there were any other similar KE support funding, they responded "I know of absolutely nothing that would have allowed us to do what we did there."

Summary

The discussions which informed this report emphatically stressed not only the innovation and ambition behind the programmes, but also the interconnectivity of the elements which made them successful. The use of two guiding questions has allowed for a detailed interrogation of the programmes in terms of what difference they made and how this difference was achieved. Yet it was often apparent that the two were inextricably linked, that the 'what' and the 'how' could not be easily teased apart. Ambitious questions resulted in novel approaches, while the pursuit of sustainable outcomes led to unconventional outputs. In most cases, what was most apparent was the reciprocal relationships between the various elements of the programme.

This underlines the multifaceted nature of Knowledge Exchange activities, and the success of these programmes can be seen as evidence that SUII's support model is effective in affording the provision of insight and the driving of change. The programmes valued the administrative support provided, where "everything that could have been done, was done" (Community Landownership), allowing the teams to dedicate all efforts towards the programme aims.

That these programmes demand considerable effort comes as no surprise, and the level of effort is arguably "the difference between the projects that just tick over and the ones that actually achieve something" (Memory Friendly Neighbourhoods). Ambitious questions, pioneering collaborations, unconventional outputs, sustainable activities, and novel approaches all contribute to a successful programme, but it is readily apparent that they depend on both SUII and the programme teams, on support and effort, to make a difference.

Acknowledgements

Appendix 1 – Featured programmes

Memory Friendly Neighbourhoods *addressed the urgent need for insights to guide the development of environments for ageing-in-place and lifelong social inclusion for those affected by dementia. It included a 'live site' visit, where participants travelled to a nearby town, met with local residents living with dementia and collaborated in a participatory mapping activity. The team were awarded Follow Up funding to develop a dementia-friendly website[13], addressing an important issue identified in the original programme.*

GLADS (Good Lives and Decent Societies) *took a comprehensive approach to measuring, understanding and promoting wellbeing by addressing the social, economic and environmental dimensions of individual happiness and a good society. Findings helped contribute to further development of the Scottish Government's National Performance Framework, Scotland Performs[14]. The team collaborated with the Scottish Parliament's Scotland's Futures Forum to develop a MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) on the subject of societal wellbeing.*

Big Data and the Third Sector *explored how third sector organisations can make better use of data strategically and operationally, to see what data can reveal about the third sector, and to develop the capacity and capability of third sector organisations to work with data. Following on from the programme funding of £250,000 was secured under the Economic and Social Research Council's Civil Society Data Partnership programme to enable the capacity and capability-building to be scaled-up and further developed in Scotland's Third Sector[15]*

The Pinkie Project *carried out a pilot aimed at enhancing wellbeing, fostering resilience and increasing opportunities in young children, testing selected interventions at Pinkie St Peter's Primary School in Musselburgh, East Lothian. School staff were trained by Puppet Animation Scotland[16] to use puppets to facilitate communication and attachment with children. Radio Pinkie[17] was also set up to encourage connections to the local community with students receiving training in developing content and producing podcasts.*

BSL in Schools *sought to support the Scottish Government's national plan to develop an action framework for BSL, bringing together Deaf sector organisations, BSL users, educators and early years workers, policy makers, and experts in BSL, sign language studies and language learning. The seminars identified opportunities for increasing teaching of BSL within the Scottish Education system and work is ongoing with key agencies (GTCS, Education Scotland and SQA) to begin implementing programme recommendations.*

Stroke Rehabilitation Technologies *aimed to address the disconnect between technology development for stroke rehabilitation and implementation into practice. They identified a number of user (patients, carers and healthcare professionals) priorities around designing a framework to evaluate and guide technology development, in a way that places the user at the centre. A broad network of developers, users and policy makers continue to work together to progress the rehabilitation agenda and influence practice.*

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[13] https://memoryfriendly.org.uk/

[14] http://www.gov.scot/About/Performance/scotPerforms/NPFChanges

[15] http://www.thinkdata.org.uk/

[16] http://www.puppetanimation.org

[17] https://www.edubuzz.org/pinkie/type/audio/

[Community Land Ownership](#) *examined the issue of community land ownership, enshrined in Scottish law since 2003, to help communities, government and wider society develop an understanding of how this model works and how to measure its performance. Participants developed a rigorous set of criteria for the appraisal of the performance of community-owned land, comprising economic, environmental, social/cultural and governance factors. The framework is currently being piloted Community Land Scotland[18] with existing community landowners.*

[The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in Scotland](#) *sought to improve and address gaps in the implementation and monitoring of the UNCRC in Scotland through an examination of the UNCRC in law, practice and policy. A key output from the programme was the development of a mural[19] by P6C pupils at Sciennes Primary School, working closely with commissioned artists to present the findings in a creative and engaging way. The mural went on tour to the Scottish Government and was displayed at the Scottish Parliament at an event sponsored by the Minister for Childcare and Early Years.*

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[18] http://www.communitylandscotland.org.uk/
[19] https://sciennesnewsflash.blogspot.co.uk/2017/06/uncrc-art-project-with-together.html