

Institution: Robert Gordon University
Unit of Assessment: 19 Business and Management Studies

a. Context

In line with the RGU research vision, *'to be internationally recognised for excellence in applied research in key thematic areas and to demonstrate tangible success in applying that research for the benefit of the wider community'*, the focus at RGU is on translational research and it has looked to build a research base of staff and students who undertake highly relevant leading-edge research that advances knowledge and provides tangible benefits to the wider economy and society.

RGU has always enjoyed close links with industry and, as a result, the boundaries between Aberdeen Business School (ABS) and industry are fluid. The fluid boundaries are maintained by a number of informal mechanisms, including the **movement of staff backwards and forwards between academic and practitioner contexts** in the public (in 2005/6 Professor David Gray was seconded to the Scottish Executive to assist Ministers in the preparation of the National Transport Strategy) and private (Dr Laura Muir is currently on a year's secondment to Amor Group) sectors. It is not unusual for senior players from both the public and private sectors to move between employment in these contexts and academic positions within ABS, sometimes more than once (see e.g. Dr John Park REF3b). The movement between contexts is sometimes more transient. For example several members of staff hold Board level positions in local (e.g. Dr Rob Smith is a Board member of Houseability, a social enterprise for the disabled), regional (e.g. Anne Stevenson was recently honoured with the CIPD Award of Distinction in recognition of her contribution to the Institute, including 3 years as Chair of North of Scotland and Islands Branch) and national (Professor Alex Russell is Chair of the Oil Industry Finance Association, the body which sets Standard Oil Accounting Procedures for the North Sea oil industry) organisations. Through this work they routinely influence organisational strategy and act as conduits between the research conducted within IMaGeS and specific practice contexts.

Within IMaGeS the focus on applied, translational research means that most of our research active staff and doctoral students are engaged in research which **privileges the addressing of issues relevant to real world contexts**, often in collaboration with practitioner communities. In the past, these collaborations have extended from relationships between individual academics and specific organisations (such as the recent Knowledge Transfer Partnership between Professor Bill Donaldson and Aberdeen and Grampian Chamber of Commerce) to long term collaborations (such as Professor Elizabeth Gammie's work with the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland see REF3b). The rewards for privileging real world problems are great: IMaGeS has had academic posts, and in one case a whole research centre, funded by public (Scottish Institute for Policing Research) and private (Charles Skene; Federation of Small Businesses) sector organisations who want to build long term partnerships with IMaGeS members and thereby support our translational research agendas.

Within this context of joint research endeavour between academics working inside and outside academia and practitioners working inside and outside their practice contexts, impact occurs naturally.

b. Approach to impact

In the past, the focus on applied research has meant that impact has been implicit in much of RGU's research activity. This can be demonstrated by the strong collaborative relationships with both individual organisations and industry bodies, and by the significant proportion (70%) of the UoA income which comes from public and private sector sources. IMaGeS' approach to impact can be seen in their research planning, dissemination, support and training.

1. Including practitioner groups in the development of research plans

At a University level, in September 2011 the university undertook a research foresighting exercise, to look beyond REF2014 and to identify areas where the university should seek to concentrate its research focus. To assist the university in this assessment an international panel from the US and

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Europe was convened over three days by the Vice-Principal for Research and Academic Support Services. This panel worked with the university research community and a range of key national and international stakeholders from government, industry and the third sector in considering the key challenges society will be facing in 20 years and what research will be required to address these challenges. The panel ultimately recommended that the areas for future focus should be around the areas of oil and gas, energy society and remote health. The selection of these areas took into account the extensive dialogue with key potential end users of the research, the capabilities of existing staff and the university's unique location in Aberdeen.

All members of IMaGeS staff undertake an annual review of their research with either their Theme Leader, or for more senior staff, the Research Institute Director. Built into this process is a review of knowledge exchange and impact activities. In IMaGeS more than 40% of our doctoral research is undertaken part time, and many of our students involve their organisations in the conceptualisation of their doctoral research questions.

2. Communicating research outside the academic community

At the University level, IMaGeS enjoys the support of a proactive Communications Office (CO) who captures research activity across the institution and in the form of news items shared through the RGU webpages, and disseminated through Twitter. The CO also offers an internal consultancy service on communications and media relations issues, such as on-screen appearances and press release production. The CO coordinates press and media enquiries from external sources (such as newspapers and radio and television broadcasters) including requests for subject experts to comment on current national and local news.

At the faculty level, ABS has employed a Web editor in order to ensure that information about research results and research interests are presented to the wider community in an accessible and effective way. The IMaGeS launch (which included a keynote presentation by political economist and writer Will Hutton) invited a wide ranging audience including figures from local government and industry. The launch also included a public exhibition of IMaGeS research. IMaGeS has produced a number of brochures outlining research projects and capabilities which have been made publically available online, and distributed at public events.

3. Increasing opportunities and Support for impact

The Research and Enterprise Services (RES) team supports and coordinates funding bids and has significant expertise in handling practitioner focused research. For example, using the Interface portal (designed to help organisations who are looking for academic support to solve business challenges) RES initiated contact between Professor Seonaidh McDonald, colleagues from the Scott Sutherland School of Architecture and Built Environment and a firm of Glasgow Architects and then supported all parties to write a successful joint bid for CICStart funding to investigate how Housing Associations make investment decisions about low-carbon technologies.

In 2011 the University invested in a research impact expert as part of the process of engaging researchers in ways of developing the impact of their work. Beyond REF, the University has retained the services of Professor Charles Oppenheim, an expert in intellectual property rights and bibliometrics, to develop and deliver a programme of training aimed at assisting individual researchers to record and maximise the impact of their work. IMaGeS has also invested in the part time services of a member of staff to track and record the impact of members' research.

4. Training to support the development of impact plans of staff and doctoral students

We have already incorporated a number of elements of impact development training into our programme of doctoral training. All doctoral students have an introduction to how to increase the impact of their research as part of PGCert Research Methods, which is compulsory for all research students. McDonald delivers a one week, 30 credit, doctoral level module on Creating Impact in Professional Practice. This module centres on considering different forms of research impact, understanding how to create impact through, for example, a consideration of organisational change literature, an examination of participative research methods and effective dissemination outside the academic community. IMaGeS colleagues also provide the impact training for doctoral students on

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the ESRC DTC Scottish Graduate School for the Social Science Information Science pathway. The first master class was held in May 2013 for ESRC doctoral students and research students from pathway partners across Scotland.

c. Strategy and plans

The first challenge for IMaGeS is not so much to increase the impact of research, as to make it a more explicit, strategic focus of our research plans and records. The second challenge is that in the past within IMaGeS the research with the most impact on practice and the research with the most academic excellence have tended to be unrelated areas of strength, carried out by different groups of colleagues (with some notable exceptions: Anderson, Gammie see REF3b). In order to significantly extend impact capability IMaGeS needs to find ways of bringing these two streams of expertise together in more effective ways so that the same research projects can deliver both high level research outcomes and embedded changes in practice. The strategic plans going forward are designed to address these two challenges.

Moving forward, more dialogue is needed within IMaGeS about what kinds of impact we can and should produce with our research, individually, and as an Institute.

Staff training seminars on impact are planned and will be made available to all staff across RGU, extending to staff the excellent provision already developed for doctoral students. We also plan to introduce staff development workshops to develop and share good practice in planning and monitoring research impact across the three Research Institutes.

Individual IMaGeS members will be expected to develop their own impact plans, tailored to their subjects and audiences.

Impact needs to be planned for, supported and facilitated, rather than occurring serendipitously.

IMaGeS theme leaders, departmental research coordinators, Communications Office, administrative staff, and the Faculty web editor, will form a research impact coordination group, chaired by the Research Institute Director, to develop a local impact strategy for promoting and communicating IMaGeS research.

RGU has employed Professor Charles Oppenheim to review and update our open access strategies.

Impact needs to become an integral part of the way in which we formally report and assess IMaGeS research.

Examples of impact have begun to be reported by Theme Leaders through the IMaGeS executive committee alongside achievements against other key indicators such as publications and research income. Good examples of impact activity will be included in IMaGeS reports to RKEC (see REF5 for RGU research governance structures).

As part of their annual research review objectives setting, research active staff will be expected to engage in the development of objectives related to research impact, extending the existing objective setting for dissemination to include plans for engagement with users.

Professor Oppenheim will provide guidance to the University on the adoption of suitable KPIs to reflect and track progress in research impact.

d. Relationship to case studies

The cases that follow illustrate IMaGeS' track record in making impact. The first case comes from the Professions theme identified in REF5. This case demonstrates the impact of IMaGeS research on national and international policies and practices for training accountants. The impacts here are sequential, each building on the last. The second case centres on colleagues within the Entrepreneurship theme (REF5). It uses a series of examples of impact to demonstrate how a stream of individual research projects carried out by members of a team with a common research agenda can underpin impact on a wide range of actors and have effects at all levels from individual Scottish firms to a whole undergraduate education system. Here the impact is cumulative.