

Institution: UNIVERSITY OF KENT
Unit of Assessment: UOA 19
A. Context

Creating social and economic impact has been at the heart of our research environment since 2004, when we launched the first of our applied research centres. The five centres conduct high quality academic research and generated the majority of our REF impact case studies:

[The Anglo-Chinese Business and Management Centre](#) (Management Science) develops research partnerships with Chinese organisations. It specialises in designing performance management solutions for complex operational environments characterised by rapid growth and increased competition. Partners and research users include the Chinese Academy of Sciences, Tonsan Adhesives and Xingxiang Insurance.

[The Centre for Employment, Competitiveness and Growth](#) (People, Management and Organisation) works with hundreds of owner managers of SMEs across Kent and the policy community that supports them, including the Department for Business Innovation and Skills, the Federation of Small Businesses and Kent County Council. It provides research-based executive education and policy direction.

[The Centre for Logistics & Heuristic Optimisation](#) (Management Science) uses heuristic search and practical optimisation to tackle real-life problems in both the public and private sectors. These applications include scheduling and routing, facility location and network security enhancement. Applications are under development with the US Fish and Wildlife Service, urban railway networks in Italy (Ansaldo STD, SEPSA), and the NHS Blood and Transplant authority.

[The Centre for Tourism in Islands and Coastal Areas](#) (Strategy and International Business) generates research that directly informs tourism policy for the World Bank, Commonwealth Secretariat, national governments of small island developing states and other NGOs. Research projects focus on the benefits of small scale tourism in promoting sustainable economic growth.

[The Centre for Value Chain Research](#) (Marketing) works nationally and internationally with high profile organisations such as Tesco, Unilever, Oxfam and the Institute for Economic Development, as well as hundreds of farmers and small food producers. The Centre's research helps small food producers make effective use of consumer insight data and promotes the development of sustainable supply chains for small farms in developing countries.

Within Kent Business School, sustained engagement with non-academic users is not restricted to applied research centres. Our wider community of researchers also address pressing management and policy issues. Recent examples include:

- Acquaye's role as research scientist on the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
- Ashley's investigations of diversity and inclusion policies within global professional service firms
- Wyatt's involvement in designing the candidate selection processes for major political parties at a national and local level
- Barnes' contribution to a systematic evaluation of the BT plc website during a major redesign effort, using the teams' WebQual/eQual evaluation instrument
- Wong's input into a Probation Service project on enhancing the delivery of unpaid work by offenders
- Lewis's British Academy funded project on the 'mumpreneur' phenomenon

B. Approach to impact

We approach the development of non-academic impact in two ways:

1. Specific investments in our applied research centres
2. The integration of impact and external engagement considerations into our research management processes.

1. Applied research centres

The role of the applied research centres is the defining feature of our approach to generating social and economic impact during the assessment period. Over half of the school's researchers and research students are members of these five centres.

Formal centre status at University level gives each centre a strong identity and 'shop window' for engaging potential partners. They achieve this through dedicated websites, social media and press activity or their own literature and reports. These communication tools are developed and maintained by the professional marketing and research support teams, in close collaboration with Centre directors.

During the assessment period, we have supported our applied research centres through multiple research assistantships (equivalent to 16 years in total), as well as five PhD bursaries. The research assistant positions all have external engagement as a key part of their remit and are expected to help centres become self-sustaining.

Some examples of the success of these appointments are:

- The Centre for Employment, Competitive and Growth won two ESRC grants with strong impact elements (e.g. ESRC seminar series '[Strategic thinking in second generation family firms](#)') and an increased range of partnerships with a range of policy and industry organisations
- The Centre for Tourism in Islands and Coastal Areas won grants from the World Bank and Commonwealth Secretariat to support tourism development research projects.
- The Centre for Value Chain Research won a total of £324,000 research funding from DEFRA and developed new partnerships with world-leading organisations such as Unilever and Oxfam

2. Research management processes

Our School-level research management processes and investments help all researchers realise the non-academic impact potential of their work. We recognise the importance and potential of this type of impact activity. This often emerges from 'traditional' scholarship rather than as intended outcome of an applied research project.

Consequently, support mechanisms for impact activity and business engagement are incorporated into wider research management processes:

- Our professional support team includes a Research and Impact Manager and a Director of External Services who both support academic colleagues in impact and external engagement initiatives (see REF5 D 2).

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- Our annual research report process specifically requests information on impact and public engagement activity. This information is used within our evaluation of research performance and as a guide for the allocation of research resources (see REF 5 C 1.2).
- Our small grant and other internal funding schemes support non-academic engagement, as well as high quality publications (see REF5 D 3).

Some examples of how our investments in individual researchers or small group have achieved significant social and economic impact during the assessment period include:

- Truss's contribution to an employee engagement white paper for the government-sponsored Engage for Success movement. We provided a one year research assistant position and £10,000 in funding from other school sources to support this activity. This project was also funded through an ESRC Seminar series grant (['Employee engagement, organisational performance and individual wellbeing: exploring the evidence, developing the theory'](#)).
- Support for a new Kent Business School research centre ([Centre for Quantitative Finance](#)), in recognition of the non-academic impact potential of our finance research team. For example, Tunaru and Stanescu delivered a webinar ('Managing commercial real estate risk after the subprime crisis') for the non-profit, Professional Risk Managers' International Association in February 2013.
- O'Hanley's collaboration with the US Fish and Wildlife Service and Scottish Environment Protection Agency on fish passage barrier mitigation planning was supported by both Faculty and Kent Business School small grants.
- Follow-on funding for Soltani's ESRC-funded research on performance management in financial institutions in the wake of the global financial crisis. This allowed him to collect further data from seven major banks and engage with the Financial Services Authority and Quality Scotland.
- Fearn's partnership with Unilever, Oxfam and the Institute of Economic Development. We provided match funding for a sustainable supply chain evaluation toolkit and handbook.

C. Strategy and plans

Our impact strategy and plans are driven by our mission as 'a research-intensive business school that produces rigorous and applicable knowledge', which 'informs the practice of management in public and private, local and global communities for a sustainable future'. This keeps impact activity at the heart of the School's research strategy and will be supported by two mechanisms.

1. Develop the structure and focus of our applied research centres

While our impact activity in the applied research centres is successful, we wish to bring our applied researchers together more consistently over the next five years. To this end, we will develop the five centres, using our priority themes of sustainability and enterprise (see REF5 B 2.2). These two umbrella themes will provide direction and focus, promote collaborative working across the five centres, and help prioritise investments.

We will achieve this through two working groups on the themes of enterprise and sustainability, involving researchers from the applied research centres and the wider school. These two groups will create joint research initiatives and seek ways of enhancing the work of the five centres.

2. Provide the skills, support and resources for effective impact activity

We will help all Kent Business School researchers achieve their full potential for non-academic impact by providing them with appropriate skills, support and resources to engage successfully

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with non-academic partners. To this end, we will provide the following support or resources at four key stages in the research life cycle:

- 2.1 Identify the impact potential of specific research areas by helping researchers understand how their projects could be relevant to, and used by, non-academic stakeholders. This will be achieved through discussions that arise during the annual research reporting process. Our expectation is that much business and management research combines management or policy relevance and scholarly importance. Additional school resources will only be allocated to projects that meet both requirements.
- 2.2 Develop research projects with strong non-academic impact by using the expertise of our professional research support team (see *REF5 D 1*), the University's central Research Services department, and specialist mentoring by a small group of business school academics with a strong track record of successful impact activity (e.g. Barnes, Fearne, Gilman, Hampton, Scaparra, Wong). This will ensure that impact considerations are incorporated and fully developed at the design stage of both externally and internally funded projects.
- 2.3 Create maximum impact for our research by ensuring that investigators have the resources and expertise needed to implement effective impact activities. This will include using the services of specialist teams, such as the Press Office, Research Services' public engagement experts and Kent Innovation and Enterprise. Our professional support team will provide help in costing and planning individual impact activities (e.g. workshops, training events, conferences and literature) and we will develop the new 'Knowledge' section of our website and publications to share relevant research with practice and policy communities.
- 2.4 We will maintain records of our impact activity to retain examples of best practice and create an institutional memory of our previous achievements. This will also allow academic staff to record impact alongside scholarly outputs. The professional support team will provide advice and guidance on maintaining records of this activity and we will use the University's planned impact database to achieve this.

D. Relationship to case studies

Four out of our five REF impact case studies relate to the work of our applied research centres, while the fifth is based on a long-standing collaboration within our Accounting and Finance Group.

The delivery of four REF impact case studies by our applied research centres is testament to the success of our approach to impact generation over the assessment period. The five selected case studies are also distributed across our five disciplinary groups and further demonstrate that our strategy for creating social and economic impact is embedded across the School. Four of the case studies can also be linked to major school investments with three case study projects supported by research assistant posts ('Farming and Food', 'Tourism' and 'SMEs'). A fourth project ('China') was supported by funding of approximately £16,000 per year for the Anglo-Chinese Business and Management Centre.

The research underpinning these case studies share some common themes. Three projects are concerned with smaller organisations (Fearne, Gilman, Hampton), two address sustainability issues (Gilman, Hampton), three deal with business growth (Fearne, Gilman and Liu/Mingers) and three involve close engagement with policy communities (Funnell/Jupe, Gilman and Hampton). This is further evidence of the vigour and cohesion of the overall Kent Business School research environment.

Our impact strategy for the next five years is built on these outstanding examples of successful impact activity.