

Institution: University of Warwick
Unit of Assessment: 18 – Economics and Econometrics
<p>a. Context</p> <p>The economic condition of individuals, localities, nations and the international community provides an urgent context for the impactful research being conducted by the University of Warwick Department of Economics. Research here addresses on-going and emerging questions about policy tools and their power to bring about social good: How can nations improve living standards, raise productivity and maintain the international competitiveness that is central to the economic well-being of their citizens?¹ What underlying forces must be reckoned with to help people escape the grip of poverty?² Should goals for economic progress in the 21st century be re-defined beyond the standard Gross Domestic Product to take into account well-being and sustainability?³ Warwick economics examines the underlying economic apparatus that leads to improved government, more effective businesses, enhanced societies and better lives throughout the world. Questions underlying events of recent years only amplify the need for such research: What lessons does the Great Depression offer that may hasten recovery from the recent financial crisis and prevent another one?⁴ What caused – and what may remedy - the recent collapse of global trade?⁵ Does the financial service sector pay its fair share of taxes?⁶ How do government policies influence charitable giving?⁷ How does immigration affect workers' employment and wages and a nation's overall economy?⁸ What measures may boost economic growth in the EU's poorest regions?⁹ How can education policies be designed to improve outcomes, not just on tests, but in life?¹⁰</p> <p>As these questions suggest and the case studies confirm, the primary direct beneficiaries of impactful Warwick economics research are policymakers tasked with implementing and evaluating cost-effective policies to enhance social welfare, particularly at national and international levels of government. A secondary direct beneficiary, and the primary indirect beneficiary, however, is the public at large: individual households, for-profit firms, and non-profit NGOs and charities. For some research strands, public engagement activities by individual authors - complemented by departmental and university initiatives to enhance impact - influences public understanding, attitudes, and/or debate about important issues of the day. The ultimate beneficiary of government policy is society at large, however, and this resonates in the vast majority of department impact.</p> <p>While policymakers and the public indeed dominate the beneficiaries of Warwick economics department impact, the idiosyncrasies of economic research reveal variety in the breadth of topics for which Warwick economics research has had, and will continue to have, impact. Examples include the threat of cybercrime, internet privacy, the spread of livestock disease,¹¹ and as befits the nature of "pure" (economics) research, the ultimate impacts can sometimes be far removed from the original focus of the research.</p> <p>b. Approach to impact</p> <p>This department is taking a proactive approach to achieve impact that can be distilled into two main initiatives: embedding impact in our academic culture, and expanding our efforts to engage</p>

¹ Research agenda of professors in the Centre for Competitive Advantage in the Global Economy.

² Research by Wiji Arulampalam, Anandi Mani, and Omer Moav.

³ Research by Andrew Oswald, Eugenio Proto and Daniel Sgroi.

⁴ Research by Nicholas Crafts and Kris Mitchener.

⁵ Research by Dennis Novy (used by World Bank and UNESCAP).

⁶ Research by Ben Lockwood on VAT for financial services used by CHECK European Commission.

⁷ Research by Kimberley Scharf (solicited by HMRC).

⁸ Research by Sharun Mukand, Jennifer Smith (solicited by the UK Home Office), and Fabian Waldinger.

⁹ Research by Sascha Becker.

¹⁰ Research by Victor Lavy.

¹¹ Research by Jonathan Cave for agencies in the US, UK, Europe and internationally.

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with potential user groups.

Creating an “Impact Culture”. Though the Department has long recognised that media, policymakers and non-academic practitioners tap faculty expertise for many purposes, in the current assessment cycle, the department initiated a pro-active approach, making substantial investments to inculcate a culture of impact:

Investing in impact through personnel and incentives. The department made high-visibility investments that demonstrate a commitment to impact: (i) The department established seven new positions aimed at impact - an academic position (Director of Research Impact) and administrative staff (Research Impact Manager) to oversee and enhance work toward this goal; and five positions for impact-oriented communications. (ii) Professors working on impact-oriented tasks and research with compelling potential impact-oriented themes are now offered the opportunity to put more time into this aspect of their work in exchange for reduced administrative and/or teaching commitments.

Founding of the Centre for Competitive Advantage in the Global Economy (CAGE), with impact a key pillar of its mission. Established in January 2010, CAGE is an ESRC research centre within the department and focuses on how countries enhance the economic well-being of their citizens by improving living standards, raising productivity, and maintaining international competitiveness. A major objective of the Centre is to ensure that this academic research also has practical impact in helping policymakers achieve these goals. Institutional features of CAGE’s organization help foster impact goals. For example, the Centre makes extensive use of its partnership with the Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House) to facilitate the production of policy briefing papers and the holding of seminars, workshops, and lunchtime meetings. Chatham House is renowned for its ability to disseminate research findings among the London policy community.

Leveraging interdisciplinary and inter-institutional avenues to impact. The department has embarked on joint professorship appointments with politics and medicine. These professorships expand the potential reach of the department’s work into these broader arenas, which can similarly broaden the pool of potential non-academic beneficiaries.

Expanding our efforts to engage with potential beneficiaries. The department’s long-standing emphasis on producing research of such high calibre to warrant attention within and beyond academia was amplified since 2008 with substantial investments enhancing our public engagement with potential beneficiaries. The aim is to provide greater opportunities for this research to be seen and appreciated outside of academic circles:

Enhancing outreach and communications with an impact focus. The department invested in multi-faceted measures to improve outreach to and communications with non-academic communities that are essential to achieving meaningful impact: (i) Five new staff positions were established to capitalise on expertise in communicating with policymakers and popular media and to upgrade and establish new communications vehicles (publications, video, websites, social media). Positions include specialists on media, internet technology, and policy-oriented communications in individual business sectors (e.g. financial services) and the government; (ii) The website was re-designed with the help of two new full-time employees and outside expert consultation; (ii) The Warwick Economics Bulletin, a publication showcasing department research, was created as a springboard for media coverage. Following a re-design, circulation expanded beyond largely academic and media constituents to include the roughly 1,500 members of the Government Economic Service and Social Research team; (iii) The Department and CAGE conducted two workshops to help professors better communicate the significance of their research to non-technical audiences and to work with the media in more effective, pro-active ways. The training led participants to undertake more public engagement activities.¹² (iv) A number of faculty began actively blogging and/or using social media to communicate research findings.¹³

Encouraging engagement in public service roles that provide avenues for research to inform public

¹² E.g., Marcus Miller in Financial Times (15 May 2012); Jennifer Smith Twitter feeds on UK labour reports.

¹³ E.g., Mark Harrison and Kim Scharf blogs; Sascha Becker Twitter feeds on CAGE/department research.

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policy. The Department encourages faculty to take on roles in public service arenas that bring them into contact with non-academic constituencies that may benefit from their specific research expertise: (i) The department's engagement plan emphasises taking advantage of formal and informal gatherings that bring researchers into contact with non-academics who have an interest in economics research fields. These gatherings reinforce the credibility and expertise of the department in non-academic circles and lead to the informal contacts that often prove so valuable in providing the insights that link potential research agendas with practical needs; (ii) Though the impact orientation is new, Warwick economics faculty have an ample record of this kind of engagement. Over the past five years, professors participated in outside activities that could be said to represent a "point of potential impact" aimed at fostering impact beyond academia nearly once every week – 228 activities over the course of the 260 weeks in the period; (iii) These "points of potential impact" are extraordinarily wide-ranging – taking place in 46 countries and involving more than 50 organisations, and including such "hands-on" situations as providing extensive advice to the Greek government in the midst of its economic crisis.¹⁴

Engaging with unconventional constituencies. To explore new outreach methods, the department worked with the Warwick Arts Centre to offer leading artists interaction with faculty¹⁵ and information on frontier economics research. Exchanges led theatre specialist Sue Buckmaster to create "Bank On It," an experiential drama for ages 8-12, inspired by the financial crisis. Underpinned by Warwick economics expertise and partially funded by the department, the show (produced in London by the Barbican, and in Coventry by the Warwick Arts Centre) reached roughly 2,150 children, received exuberant coverage,¹⁶ and is likely to be produced elsewhere.

c. Strategy and plans

The department plans to make further significant investments to help expand the impact of its research and to evaluate the progress of impact efforts in the next cycle. Plans include:

Establishing a Policy Laboratory. The department has recently established a Policy Laboratory modelled on successful laboratory-to-marketplace conduits used by medical science research labs. The policy lab represents a novel initiative to create a kind of incubator that allows economic researchers and policymakers to work together to come up with experimental designs that test potential policy options. A hallmark will be undertaking empirically rigorous evaluation of a given policy's potential via randomized, controlled experiments. This capitalises on strong departmental expertise in quasi-experimental methods of economic analysis.

Establishing a London presence. Because London is a natural meeting point for national and international collaborations and centre of government, business, and NGOs, our department is investigating ways to bring more of our work and our people there, where the two-way exchanges we seek to foster can take place. The department is establishing an annual event, the Warwick Economics London Lecture, to invited audiences to bring business and policy leaders together with department academics, with presentations and networking opportunities for both. At present, Chatham House events bring the department into London, and the department seeks to create other conduits for London-based constituents with formal events and informal lunches and dinners.

Expanding outreach to alumni. The department is seeking to tap an underutilized resource by expanding outreach to our alumni, who offer an as-yet untapped vehicle to reach many communities beyond the university. Ideas include holding alumni-oriented gatherings on campus and in London, using social media as a communications tool with that group, and establishing a departmental alumni publication. Our own graduates offer tremendous potential to provide channels for impact, through their own professional knowledge and contacts.

Hiring with impact in mind. The faculty is growing, and impact is a key consideration in hiring decisions. The department is seeking to expand its ranks with researchers who have the capacity to produce world-class work, and have demonstrated the talent, drive and desire needed to

¹⁴ Herakles Polemarchakis as director of the economic office of the Greek prime minister (2009-11).

¹⁵ E.g., Robert Akerlof, Anandi Mani, Michael McMahon, Abhinay Muthoo, Rocco Macchiavello.

¹⁶ E.g., BBC World Service, Financial Times, Guardian, Telegraph, Times of London, TimeOut London.

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transmit findings beyond academic journals.

Making impact-orientation the new norm. The department's emphasis on impact is relatively new. As the strategy matures, we anticipate that professors will become more accustomed to making impact an integral facet of their work. Our strategy will mature as we grow more comfortable with the outreach to and communication with non-academic constituencies. Training to facilitate maximal impact and communicating the importance of impact to academic staff begun in the current period will be on-going to help faculty make the transition to this new orientation.

d. Relationship to case studies

Analysis of how the impact in the case studies was achieved has played a crucial role in informing our existing and planned investments in impact:

High-quality research is essential. None of our impact would be achievable if it were not for the calibre of the work. World-class experts, many at the frontier of economic research methods, are essential and of greatest interest to non-academic beneficiaries. Their work *must* be based on sound, scientific methods that can withstand scrutiny and, thus, provide a reliable, trusted policy foundation. In *every* case study, research was of such quality that it had given the professors a reputation for expertise. As a result, the research was sought-after by policymakers, in some cases for sponsored research that specifically addressed a specific policy need or question. In addition, the research findings that led to long-lasting impact were sufficiently powerful and persuasive that they transcended politics and differences in political agendas in the face of changing governments.

Engagement early and often with non-academic networks can provide the springboard for impact. Discussions with the professors whose research is profiled in the case studies demonstrated that public engagement with potential constituencies was essential for creating a path to impact and underpins the second, public engagement, pillar of our impact strategy. In *each* case study, professors had initiated engagement with non-academic constituencies that represented natural links to their research agendas. These engagements were multi-faceted. Professors invested the time and effort into making presentations on findings in settings that were not exclusively academic, and they took the time to establish interpersonal connections with professionals in relevant non-academic communities, often acting on a common-sense intuition that such relationships were important to cultivate. At times, this kind of engagement led to sponsored research requests on topics that were relevant to well-established research agendas, but even if not, the channels of communication were established to allow non-academics to benefit from the academic's research expertise as well as academics to benefit from the non-academic's understanding of the policy concerns of the day. Often, connections made through multiple, unrelated channels worked together to signal to policymakers that a particular researcher was the best choice to advise on a particular policy issue. Network channels – working in both directions, to and from, policymakers and researchers – were important in leading to impact and motivated our strategy that further impact will stem from increased opportunities for the two groups to connect.

Communication and outreach through traditional and new media channels can aid impact. The case studies underscore the power of traditional and new media to serve as megaphones for research and a springboard for impact. In the case of Kimberley Scharf's work on charitable giving, new media in the form of blogs and Twitter commentary allowed her to bring her long-standing research expertise to the fore at a time when substantial and controversial policy changes were being proposed by the UK government. The vast and rapid distribution network of social media users in charitable organizations thrust her academic work into the mix during this intense period of debate between policymakers advocating change and charities decrying the proposals. More conventionally, Andrew Oswald's pioneering work on the economics of happiness and well-being has been amplified by media coverage (television, radio, printed and online publications, social media), and his engagement with public media has served as a springboard for his research to gain traction outside of academia – where it resonated with both policymakers and the public.