

Environment template (REF5)

Institution: Robert Gordon University

Unit of assessment: Politics and International Studies (21)

a. Overview

All of the staff returned in REF1 have built established research careers at the Robert Gordon University (RGU). The quality of the research conducted in RGU has contributed significantly to its continued rise in the major league table rankings. In RAE2008 we were the top performing post-1992 university in the 'Politics and International Studies' Unit of Assessment and placed ahead of a number of pre-1992 universities. We were one of only two universities in Scotland to achieve a 100% international excellence rating in the 'Esteem' category, reflecting our established strengths in applied research and engagement with policy practice., and apparent from the content of the two impact case studies presented in REF 3b. During the current assessment period we have also published in top journals (e.g. *British Journal of Political Science*, *British Journal of Sociology*, *Governance*, *Journal of European Public Policy*, *Journal of Social Policy*, *Public Administration*) as well as research published with mainstream publishers, attract research funding from mainstream sources (e.g. ESRC, British Academy, Leverhulme) and a steadily increasing stream of research student relative to RAE 2008.

b. Research strategy

The step change improvement from RGU's performance in RAE 2001 enabled the university to strategically invest the increased Research Excellence Grant to focus on its research strengths. To facilitate this RGU developed a new research strategy 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'*. This ambitious vision and strategy was implemented by the creation of three faculty based Research Institutes in 2009, led by a Director, to focus and manage research. These institutes developed their own thematic multidisciplinary areas set to focus on research activity at internationally excellent levels. Analysis of the thematic areas covered within the various RAE submissions resulted in the final selection of the main focus of the faculty Research Institutes, including *The Institute of Management, Governance and Society (IMaGeS)*. The Research Institutes ensure that research of international excellence is accomplished by using the designation of a tiered status (early; developing; senior), renewable annually, involving allocation of research time (20%/40%/60% of all duties) in return for accountability to annually agreed objectives. Our subject field lies with the 'Governance and Society' strand of IMaGeS, with a mixture of researchers identified in REF 1 from mid-research career to senior status.

In order to assess our performance and benchmark ourselves against REF standards, the group orientated towards this submission undertook 'mock' REF assessments in 2011, 2012, and 2013, on each occasion using different external assessors with experience of research assessment panels in Politics, and sharing the results at Institute and University level. As well as informing selection, the reviews conducted helped to guide the development of subsequent publication plans by individuals whose work appears in REF 2.

Each Institute has a Graduate School providing all postgraduate research students with a supportive environment, which has been instrumental in improving (externally validated) PhD completion rates from 54.5% (2000/01) to 83.3% (2008/09). A steady stream of research students have been recruited from both home-nurtured and external sources, often resulting in lasting collaboration between supervisor and student in publications and funding applications. IMaGeS provides financial support for all research students presenting papers at conferences during each of their second, and third, years (and the equivalent for part-time students) as well as support for fieldwork where other sources of funding are unavailable.

The infrastructure provided by research institutes will allow us to sustain and develop our activities within an interdisciplinary setting, in which each of the staff returned in REF 2014 will be supported with resources aimed at the return of their work by the University in 2020.

c. People, including:

i. Staffing strategy and staff development

Half of the staff in REF1 was submitted by us to the three most recent research assessment exercises, and the other half to two. We can fairly claim positions of research leadership in our niche fields within public and social policy (Spicker), political sociology (Greenwood, Halpin and McLaverty – political participation and interest groups; Vertigans – Islam), with Marron's high quality work on risk and consumption helping to bridge these twin themes as well as chime with the political economy heritage of interest group studies. Halpin's collaboration with Greenwood and McLaverty dates from 2004 and is reflected in institutionalised contractual arrangements (full-time, pro-rata, Visiting status, etc.) which are set to continue well beyond REF2014. He last visited Aberdeen during August and September 2013, and plans are currently being made for the next visit in the spring of 2014.

Politics related researchers are drawn from the Aberdeen Business School as well as the School of Applied Social Studies. This forms the basis for our multi-disciplinary strengths in political sociology and in social policy, and provides for a sustainable future in which all returned staff will be supported with resources aimed at their return in the next research assessment exercise. Vertigans became Head of the School of Applied Social Studies in 2011 and therefore works in tandem with staff in IMaGeS for research and staff development. Staff performance is evaluated annually by the Institute Director/Head of School in terms of specific metrics such as publications and related citations, external income generation and research student supervision. This is achieved through the Employee Performance Review (EPR) process undertaken by all RGU staff, assessing performance against annually agreed objectives as well as setting objectives for the year ahead, and with a mid-year review.

Research Assistants and Fellows are generally employed on a fixed term contract if their funding is grant related. However some may also be on a permanent contract if the funding duration and project is for a lengthy period of time, or they have service of 2 years (i.e. in excess of the legally applicable standard).

Research staff development has, since 2006, been one of the University's strategic staff development priorities. RGU is actively committed to the *Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers*. In engaging with this important measure the University has initiated and promoted a number of activities for training research staff across all different levels from research students through to professorial-level staff. The University has also developed specific bespoke events to support research staff in a number of areas including *An Angel's Nest to Dragon's Den* workshop – an iterative three day workshop on research applications, and a Research Project management workshop. In addition, a mentoring scheme is being developed which allows early career researchers to be mentored by more experienced members of staff. IMaGeS has hosted a number of research development events for researchers. Recent examples include 'Using Documentary Research in the Social Sciences' (27.2.2012) and 'Publishing in Academic Journals' (12.12.2012). Distinguished speakers in the Institute's regular research seminar series include Will Hutton, with a talk on 'Knowledge Matters' followed by a Q&A session with researchers (3.5.2011).

Since 2004, a Supervisor Training Programme for all research degree supervisors, regardless of experience, has been operated by the University. There is initial training which has witnessed an uptake of over 90% of the University's supervisory base. In addition are

CPD/refresher sessions, introduced in January 2010. Regular evaluations of these events provide the University with positive feedback as well as useful suggestions for future course content. In the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) 2011, under the 'Supervision' category, the University outperformed its national benchmarks in terms of the supervisory skills offered to students including subject expertise, mentoring and availability.

ii. Research students

We have enjoyed a steady throughput of PhD students during the assessment period, exceeding that achieved in RAE 2008. Two have published collaboratively with their supervisors (Bouza Garcia with Greenwood – see also REF3b; MacLeod with Halpin and McLaverty ((see REF 2 McLaverty, outputs 3 and 4))). Halpin's ESRC grant provided an initial empirical focus on administrative consultations between organized interests and the state, using Scotland as a context. This then evolved into work with MacLeod, who had researched evidence giving by organized interests to Scottish parliamentary committees. They collaborated on a book chapter (in Halpin & Jordan eds., 2012) and also together in McLaverty output 4. This assisted MacLeod to develop research collaborations in Quebec which explores whether devolution in formerly unitary systems fosters the development of sub-national group populations. MacLeod takes up a Lectureship with the University in December 2013.

Recruitment of full-time students have been facilitated by financial support from the University's Research Development Initiative (Aubry, Bouza Garcia and MacLeod). Two of our research students (Bouza Garcia, de Castro Asarta) were recruited as a result of Greenwood's role as Visiting Professor at the College of Europe, and a third (Barlow) from his research and practice networks in Brussels. McLaverty's expertise in participation and Scottish politics attracted Furrie (who submitted in October 2013), MacLeod and Tait; he is also second supervisor for PhD students in the Department of Law (2) and the Department of Information Management (1). Halpin has been included on the supervisory teams of most of our completing students. Our strength in translational research evident in REF3b makes us well placed to recruit a steady stream of part-time PhD students for the future. We have retained the expertise of experienced supervisors (Coram, whose outputs were part of our submission in RAE2008 in Politics and International Studies) in continuing research degree supervision and development by means of an on-going Visiting Professorship arrangement. Coram supervised Turganbayev (REF 4a) to completion in 2012/13, continues on the supervisory team of another student, and has delivered IMaGeS research seminars in 2012 and 2013.

Research Student Development.

All doctoral students undertake the Postgraduate Certificate (PgCert) Research Methods course which was first validated in 2002. It presently operates as two modules, each of 30 Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF level 11) credits, delivered intensively in one week blocks regardless of study mode. The modules integrate the content with the process of registration for and production of a PhD by including as assessment elements critical stages during the research process, such that progression requires the submission of a detailed statement (2000-5000 words) of research progress followed by a viva with a three-member team which includes an independent assessor; their written report with recommendations is then sent to the Graduate Board. In the event of a fail there is provision for one re-assessment opportunity. Induction elements previously offered in the first module are now offered as part of a Graduate School Induction Programme, which was implemented in October 2011. A number of seminars and training sessions are also arranged for doctoral students on specific issues including workshops on: developing research proposals for funding applications; preparation for the viva; and teaching and demonstrating for ad hoc tutors.

The University is a partner in the Scottish Graduate School of Social Science, the largest of the ESRC's UK-wide Doctoral Training Centres formed in 2011. SGSSS is a unique collaboration

between universities in Scotland and makes available outstanding research training to doctoral students in the social sciences. The IMaGeS Graduate School is the largest in the university with 129 research students, representing over 40% of the RGU research student community. The School has held Master Classes on specific research methods and on issues such as publishing and academic writing. Full time students have dedicated desks within our two newly refurbished research student rooms within the ABS building and are clustered in cognate areas. Part time students are able to use one of 10 hot desks within these rooms. Those based remotely tend to use them during their visits to the university whilst many part time students based in Aberdeen make use of them on particular days or evenings, adding to the variety and vibrancy of the research student community. More than 80% of the research student engaged with the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) 2011, with the results highlighting many areas of good practice. However research students noted the lack of a doctoral seminar programme and so the Graduate School introduced a regular series of student-led seminars where they can present their own work and receive feedback from their peers and IMaGeS members in a supportive environment. In 2012 RGU pioneered an enhancement-led internal review of research degrees, in which IMaGeS Graduate School had their processes and practices scrutinised by an external panel, which made three minor recommendations for further improvement and awarded seven commendations for excellent current practices.

d. Income, infrastructure and facilities

Research Management and Governance

The University's Strategic Planning and Resources Group (SPARG) advises, assists and supports the Principal in the development and implementation of strategic and operational plans, financial planning and monitoring, and monitoring of agreed Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) which includes research and knowledge exchange activity.

Each Research Institute has an Executive Committee which meets three times a year and which is responsible for the respective Institute's research governance. The Executive Committees subsequently report to the University's Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee (RKEC) which is chaired by the Vice-Principal and Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research and Academic Support Services). RKEC subsequently reports to the University's Academic Council and Board of Governors.

Each Graduate School has a Graduate School Board, chaired by the Graduate School Leader, responsible for research degree governance. The Graduate School Boards meet four times a year and report to the University's Research Degrees Committee (RDC) which is chaired by the Vice-Principal and Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research and Academic Support Services). RDC subsequently reports to Academic Council for final ratification of research degree governance decisions and confirmation of awards of research degrees.

Administrative support for the Research Degrees Committee is provided by the Research Degrees office located within the centralised Academic Affairs Department. The Research Degrees office maintains the University's quality assurance procedures and systems in support of research students and their supervisors for all aspects of the research student journey, from application to examination.

Research and Enterprise Services department (RES) supports the Research Institutes and Academic Schools for research and knowledge exchange services including:

- Support to Research Institutes in developing proposals for external funding
- Promotion of opportunities for collaboration supported by Business Development Services
- Facilitation of knowledge exchange and technology transfer including licensing and development of new companies
- Management and external reporting on activities.

OpenAIR@RGU is RGU's Open Access Institutional Repository which was established in 2006, providing a source of open access to the results of research activity undertaken at RGU. This contains the full text of research publications produced by staff and research students at RGU where copyright conditions permit, including journal articles, books and book chapters, conference papers, reports and doctoral theses.

The use of tiered researcher status within the research institutes allows for the provision of up to three days each week during term time which are free of teaching activities. The Institute infrastructure enables resources designated for research to be protected by the use of independent budget lines. Staff and research students who are presenting a paper at a research conference are supported to the level of at least one event per year, and resources are usually found to support those with more conference paper commitments. The Research Institutes also provide financial support for visiting researchers to spend periods of time at the University which includes a research seminar presentation.

The annual Employee Performance Review (EPR) includes objective setting for research outputs, research student supervision, and research grant applications. Grant applications are processed by a dedicated unit at central university level for research costing, ethical review, and final submission, in collaboration with Research Institute Directors. Successful applications during the period of assessment include those to the ESRC, British Academy, and Leverhulme, and informing REF 2 outputs of Greenwood and Halpin. Collaboration between Halpin and McLaverty continues in the form of funding applications.

e. Collaboration and contribution to the discipline or research base

Collaboration is a fundamental part of the research ethos at Robert Gordon University, evident from some of the key partnerships in the interdisciplinary fields spanned by our submission as listed below (throughout period unless indicated):

Justin Greenwood:

- Editorial Boards: *Business and Politics* (until 2009); *Interest Groups & Advocacy* (from 2011); *Journal of Public Affairs*; *Cosmopolis*.
- Visiting Professor: College of Europe (Bruges & Natolin); Moscow State University (MGIMO) (from 2010); University of Maastricht; European Online Academy: European University College (Brussels) (2008-2011);
- Chair, ESRC Advanced Quantitative Methods Stipend Panel (2009-10). Consulting assessor of scheme for ESRC Training Board, 2008;
- Guest research seminar presentations as sole speaker: University of Lund (2012); University of Maastricht (2011). Guest talk for mixed university/public audience at University of Roskilde (8.5.2013).
- Plenary speaker at conferences: Zeppelin University (31.5.2013); and at workshops - University of Maastricht (2011), Trento (2009), Mannheim (2008);
- Conference Panel or Workshop organiser: symposium (Council for European Studies 20th International Conference of Europeanists, Amsterdam June 2013 – two panels on *NGOs & Social Movements*); independent panel on the *European Citizens' Initiative* (Brussels, 2012 – co-organiser with Luis Bouza Garcia);
- His web site '*Reviewmyreview.eu*' lists acceptance rates and turnaround time for almost 100 political science related titles in the political science and related fields, becoming an established source of new data for the profession and publishers;
- External Examinerships, PhD: University of Antwerp University College Dublin (appointment within assessment period, events dates following shortly thereafter).

Darren Halpin:

- Founding Editor of book series *Interest Groups, Advocacy & Democracy* (Palgrave Macmillan);

- Review Editor, *Interest Groups & Advocacy* (Palgrave Macmillan);
- Visiting Scholar, Scandinavian Center for Organizational Research (SCANCOR) Stanford University (USA) (June-July, 2011) (now SCANCOR Alumnus);
- Harold Beech Award for International Scholars, Southern Political Science Association, USA, 2013;
- Invited Speaker, Department of Political Science Symposium Series, University of Sydney, 2012; Scandinavian Centre for Organizational Research (Scancor) Friday Seminar Series, Stanford University, July 2011;
- Scandinavian Centre for Organizational Research (Scancor) Alumni International Network Grant, Stanford University (2013) Project Leader Darren Halpin, Project team, Anthony Nownes (Uni Tennessee) and Kurt Sandholtz (Stanford University and Brigham Young University) (\$3400);
- Australian Political Science Association, Workshop Grant 'Political Organizations in Transition', held at the Australian National University, July 2013. Convened by Darren Halpin (ANU) and Ariadne Vromen and Anika Gauja (Uni Sydney) (\$7000).

Peter McLaverty

- Founder of PSA specialist group on *Participatory and Deliberative Democracy* (convenor until 2009), which has since developed its own conferences. Together with his successor as convenor, Stephen Elstub, McLaverty is joint editor of *Deliberative Democracy: Issues and Cases* due for publication by Edinburgh University Press in 2014. This builds on previous work with Halpin and MacLeod and contains chapters by leading deliberative democracy scholars Shawn Rosenberg (University of California), Jurg Steiner (UNC Chapel Hill), and André Bächtiger (University of Lucerne);
- Halpin and McLaverty's article 'Deliberative Drift' (REF2) was used/cited by André Bächtiger, one of the leading scholars of deliberative democracy today, in a keynote article in the *Journal of Political Philosophy* (2010, 18, 1, 32-63). They have since worked collaboratively on research proposals to empirically investigate the concept of deliberate drift, forming a clear focus for their future collaboration;
- authored 'Participation' section for Sage *Handbook on Governance* (2011)
<http://www.uk.sagepub.com/books/Book233053#tabview=toc>

Donncha Marron

- In 2011, his monograph on consumer credit was reviewed positively by eminent American sociologist George Ritzer for the American Sociological Association's review journal *Contemporary Sociology* (40,4, 417-420). Marron's research draws together a number of intellectual strands within politics and sociology including political economy, risk, governmentality and the political and social constitution of consumer culture. Here, his work has focused on such themes as identity theft, the governance of consumer credit and the ways in which state and financial authorities have problematized issues concerning personal finance consumption;
- As a plenary speaker he presented a paper on the theme of financial exclusion in the UK at an ESRC-funded conference at Copenhagen Business School in 2011 on *Encountering Markets: Consumers, Credit and Devices*;
- As a member of *Charisma* – the international consumer market studies network (<http://www.charisma-network.net/>) he has been called upon to contribute to two academic journal special editions on the themes of 'financial subjects' and 'consuming credit'. Marron has also addressed specialist credit industry audiences through contributions to trade journals *Credit Today* and *Credit Collections and Risk* published in 2012.

Paul Spicker:

- His REF2 output ““Leadership”: a perniciously vague concept”, *International Journal of Public Sector Management* (2012, 25, 1) was chosen as an *Outstanding Paper Award Winner* <http://www.emeraldinsight.com/products/journals/journals.htm?id=ijpsm> at the Literati Network Awards for Excellence 2013 (www.emeraldinsight.com/literati);
- His educational website <http://www2.rgu.ac.uk/publicpolicy/introduction/socsec.htm> *An Introduction to Social Policy* is among the first selections for Google searches for 'welfare state' (4th), 'social policy' (2nd and 3rd) and 'social administration' (1st). In the four year period Aug 1st 2009 to July 31st 2013, the site's pages were visited 2,579,219 times; each page deals with a distinct substantive area in Social Policy. There were 943,146 unique visitors. The site's reach is international. Most identified users come from the UK or US; of the remainder, the principal users are in Canada, Australia, the European Union, South Africa, India and China. In 2012, people apparently visited the site from 204 countries around the world; there were at least 365 sessions (or one a day on average) from 55 countries;
- Editorial board, *International Journal of Social Welfare* and *International Journal of Public Administration*;
- The second edition of his book *Social Policy: themes and approaches* was published in 2008; an extensively revised third edition, retitled as *Social Policy: theory and practice*, is in press and will be published in 2014. The book is used internationally; it has been translated into Japanese and Ukrainian. A contract has been signed for its translation into Serbo-Croat and that work is in progress;
- He was the keynote plenary speaker at the foundation conference of the Turkish Social Policy Association (*1 Uluslararası Sosyal Politikalar Sempozyumu*) in Istanbul in 2012;

Stephen Vertigans:

- Editorial Boards: *Compass* (Religion); *Figurations*; *International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology*;
- ESRC Language Based Area Studies Initiative – Expert Panel for the ‘Arab World’ (2006) and Mid Term Reviewer (2009);
- Assessor for Italian research assessment exercise, eValuation of Quality of Research (VQR) of the National Agency for the Evaluation of Universities and Research Institutes (ANVUR) via membership of Group of Experts (GEV);
- Research Committee Convenor, 39th World Congress of the International Institute of Sociology, Yerevan (2009);
- Contributor for National Improvement Strategy for Policing Consultation Group (2009)
- Member of International Benchmarking Review of UK Sociology (2009);
- Comparative Sociology Research Committee Convenor, XVII International Sociological Association World Congress of Sociology, Gothenburg (2010);
- Research Committee Convenor, 40th World Congress of the International Institute of Sociology, Delhi (2012);
- Research Committee Convenor, Second International Sociological Association Forum of Sociology, Buenos Aires (2012);
- Comparative Sociology Research Committee Convenor, XVIII International Sociological Association, Yokohama (forthcoming 2014).

In conjunction with the evidence presented in REF 3b, it is clear that we have strong recognition within international research networks around our subject specialisms, from which we have been able to make wider contributions to the discipline.