

**Institution: University of Central Lancashire**

**Unit of Assessment: 019 Business and Management Studies**

**a. Context**

Within this UoA the approach to impact is based on **proactive engagement** with external stakeholders and key policy makers, and **sharing research results in a format** both usable and relevant to the target audience. Impact arising from research within the UoA can be grouped into three main themes: performance improvement, poverty alleviation and employee relations. The beneficiaries of UoA research impact are wide ranging and include organisations (from the private, public and third sector), employees and their associations, policy makers at different levels, and the wider community. For example, research pertaining to employment relations has assisted at a national policy level in improving workplace conflict resolution and grievance procedures, to the potential benefit of both employees and employers. Similarly, organisational performance at a region level has benefitted from research findings related to leadership and/or entrepreneurial skills development, the identification of key elements contributing towards flexible and high performance workplaces, and the identification of SME growth opportunities. Poverty alleviation policy initiatives at an international level have been advanced through the insights provided by research relating to economic development and micro-finance initiatives and ultimately assisted to bring about change to disadvantaged groups and individuals.

**b. Approach to impact**

Engagement with external stakeholders is central to the UoA's approach to impact. Indeed, UCLan is one of only three UK universities awarded five stars for engagement in the QS 2013/14 world university rankings. This is achieved by: (i) **engaging potential beneficiaries of research** to inform research design by incorporating different perspectives with a view to improving research outputs; (ii) **facilitating the exchange of research findings through a variety of channels** (i.e. open meetings, research seminars, business training and knowledge transfer (KT) initiatives), in addition to academic publications; and (iii) **practical dissemination of research findings in an accessible form** to reach diverse audiences via a targeted publications strategies (i.e. trade and professional publications, open-access web resources, blogs, newsletters, press releases and university publications such as 'Breakthrough' ([http://www.uclan.ac.uk/research/environment/assets/breakthrough\\_spring2013.pdf](http://www.uclan.ac.uk/research/environment/assets/breakthrough_spring2013.pdf))). This approach encourages an on-going dialogue about the key issues arising from the studies. Our research is open to collaboration at all stages of the research life cycle, with researchers incorporating stakeholder perspectives into their research design.

**Networking with key stakeholders.** Stakeholder engagement is encouraged and facilitated through their inclusion in both the advisory boards of individual research institutes and the Lancashire Business School as a whole. In turn, UoA staff are members of business clubs such as 'Shout Preston', 'Downtown Preston', SELNET (Social Enterprise network) and the School is a member of the North West Chamber of Commerce.

The importance of developing stakeholder links and collaborative partnerships is reflected in the following three main research themes for the UoA.

**Performance Improvement.** Mostly through the efforts of the Institute for Innovation, Enterprise and Entrepreneurship (I<sub>2</sub>E<sub>2</sub>) and the Lancashire Institute for Economic and Business Research (LIEBR), research at the UoA seeks to enhance the efficiency of organisations, improve performance and/or the working environment and satisfaction of employees. This has taken the form of a range of business engagement and nurturing programmes including: the Call North West project (e-business, telecommunications and call centres in the region), business training programmes such as the *INTO Enterprise* and the EU ERDF programmes, the North West Development Agency leadership development in SMEs project that provides research support to business networks, the *Burnley Economic Development Programme* and, most recently, the *Knowledge Exchange for Business* programme, intended to disseminate research findings and spread best practice across the regional business community. Such collaborations are further enhanced by the university's long-standing work in employability, entrepreneurship and business incubation initiatives (via the *Northern Lights* business support/incubation programme) which provides research opportunities for staff in this UoA.

## Impact template (REF3a)

Building trust and translating research outcomes requires an understanding of the multiple beneficiaries' needs and views on impact, both the criteria and their relative importance. The UoA carried out an ESRC project encouraging small businesses to develop and articulate their research impact criteria through a series of workshops. The findings were disseminated via an ESRC/ISBE sponsored seminar within the annual ISBE conference. Furthermore, the report was sent by UCLan to every Business School in the UK to share and underline some of the evidence viewed as appropriate practices by the ESRC in approaching impact. This illustrates the interaction of engagement frameworks, the translation of research outcomes to wider audiences as well as targeting key policy makers in the process.

**Poverty Alleviation.** The same approach to impact is applied internationally by the Institute of Global Finance and Development (IGFD) that has a research programme examining financial exclusion in developing countries. Here, engagement is typically focused upon policy makers such as governments, international development banks and micro finance institutions. Communication - i.e. the translation of research results into clear and succinct understandable messages - is crucial for achieving impact. An example of such social and economic impacts is the role of the IGFD research in the adoption of new microfinance instruments in Ghana (discussed in more detail in the second Impact Case Study). Another example of such dialogue is a FP7 SET-DEV project on socialisation of scientific and technological research in India and Kenya that produced guidelines, standards and codes on research ethics, sensitive to and compatible with the local values and needs (<http://www.set-dev.eu>). Both the EU Commission and policymakers, in Kenya and India, were included in the design of the guidelines produced that defined clear nontechnical research ethics messages specific to each of these countries.

**Employee Relations.** This theme includes issues such as mediation, union learning, downsizing envoys, evaluation of trade union organisation and recruitment and internal communications. Much of the above research focuses on conflict resolution and prevention. These issues have been central to public policy concerns within a broader scope of government's 'Employment Law Review' and 'Red Tape Challenge'. The nature of this research implies dialogue and reconciliation of opposing viewpoints. Such research can neither be conducted, nor succeed, without active involvement of the relevant stakeholders. A key feature of the Institute for Research into Organisations, Work and Employment (iROWE) activities has been the development of a network of more than 200 associate members, comprised of senior human resource practitioners and policymakers. iROWE further benefits from business engagement via an advisory panel that comprises HR specialists from leading employers, including BAE Systems and NHS trusts, together with representatives from the TUC, UNISON, ACAS and the Federation of Small Business (FSB). Such combination reflects dialogue, both internally and externally, and leads to the translation of research outcomes into a format accessible to the engaged parties, making the iROWE practitioner networks a significant resource facilitating the development of effective workplace practice and employment policy.

**c. Strategy and plans**

The UoA research strategy seeks to achieve impact through the **continued development of relationships with external stakeholders**, creating a set of regional, national and international research collaborations. Our intention is to facilitate closer and stronger stakeholder engagement, which increases the probability of research findings being used to create economic or social benefit. Stakeholder involvement, in both research design and strategic research planning, is an increasing feature of this UOA's practice. In order to advance this approach, the UoA will internally evaluate the best existing practices, undertaken to achieve impact, and build upon the most successful whilst recognising that engagement approaches will vary depending on the research area and the potential beneficiaries.

As part of this process, research pertaining to 'performance improvement' **will be more strategically aligned to identified policy** - e.g. the Lancashire Region Priority Growth Plans to stimulate innovation and enterprise in high growth target sectors/markets such as advanced manufacturing, energy and aerospace supply chain and reducing the productivity gap with the rest of the UK (in particular in the SME sector). In order to better draw upon the appropriate expertise within the university and to facilitate this research engagement within the region, I<sub>2</sub>E<sub>2</sub> will be expanded into a wider pan-University centre for regional research, intent upon drawing a wider group of university researchers into this area of work, through fostering a variety of interdisciplinary

## Impact template (REF3a)

approaches. The UoA will be provided with university pump-prime funding to encourage such collaborations to generate innovative, multi-disciplinary approaches to research outputs and impact. In addition, the recent (2012/13) establishment of an overseas campus in Cyprus offers opportunities to broaden research impact, through the introduction of the successful business engagement practices in Cyprus, whilst collaboration opportunities provide an international dimension to the research.

A further strategy is to **actively encourage a multi-disciplinary approach** to research and impact within the UoA. Beyond the opportunities pursued through I<sub>2</sub>E<sub>2</sub>, there are further opportunities to foster links between; employee mediation and law, IT security and computing, energy and economic impact, leadership and policing, supply chain management and engineering, together with access to finance and domestic (as well as international) social inclusion. Moreover, there are opportunities to nurture greater connections between research and knowledge transfer activity. Researchers in the UoA are already fostering such links but this will be further developed as part of the future strategy on impact. These internal multi-disciplinary research networks will be encouraged to utilise the lessons from stakeholder engagement groups to be outward facing, liaising closely with regional and national organisations to promote collaborative research for real-world benefit.

**d. Relationship to case studies**

The two selected impact case studies provide good illustrations of the intended consequence of the approach undertaken by the UoA. They involve interactive relationships with a variety of stakeholder groups. The cases demonstrate how engagement is utilised to shape research that has direct relevance to emerging policy and practice agendas and consequently maximise impact.

The case study *Working with ACAS - informing advice, policy and guidance* provides strong evidence of the impact arising from collaboration between UCLan researchers and policy-makers at ACAS. This interaction helps to shape the research agenda, whilst also delivering practical impact and ensure relevance to contemporary policy concerns. For example, research into redundancy envoys led to ACAS offering workshops on the topic for companies.

This collaboration epitomises the UoA's approach to disseminating research through wide reaching channels. Researchers have ensured that stakeholder engagement is treated as a core element of the ESRC seminar series, awarded to disseminate and further explore conflict management in the workplace. The series involved 350 participants from a wide range of practitioner and policy making organisations such as CBI, TUC and Federation of Small Business. The case study also illustrates a range of mechanisms employed to present research findings in accessible forms, including presenting at practitioners' forums and producing a video discussing research on downsizing, which is embedded on ACAS webpages to maximise reach. The case study *Global Microfinance: Fighting against poverty in developing countries* demonstrates international impact. It highlights how researchers used the funding to establish international research collaborations with key stakeholders, including potential beneficiaries of research. Networks were created in India, South Africa, Ghana and Sri Lanka, to use research findings to inform international development and public policy debate. Invitations to the All-Party Parliamentary Group, and to contribute to the European Development Report (EDR) on "Microfinance and Social Protection", mark recognition of the researchers' efforts to contribute to the cutting edge policy debates on the issue. Similarly, contributing to Oxfam's blog 'From Poverty to Power' is an example of how researchers present research findings in an accessible way. Direct impact upon practitioners and services is further evidenced, in the case study, through benefits accruing to Yaalex Microfinance Limited. The relationship with this company was forged through a DelPHE project financed by the British Council. This exemplifies a deliberate strategy to have impact and to work with an end beneficiary to test research concepts and then subsequently share this with other interested parties through the scope of the research project. The two cases demonstrate how impact is achieved through a variety of means. In the workplace conflict resolution case, the dialogue with stakeholders takes a leading role in achieving impact. In the microfinance case it is the targeting of policy makers that underlines impact. Both approaches have proven to be successful and informed the approaches adopted by this UoA and demonstrate the drivers for impact described above are now embedded into the culture of the UoA as a whole and will inform future strategy and plans.