

Institution: ASTON UNIVERSITY
Unit of Assessment: 19 BUSINESS AND MANAGEMENT STUDIES
<p>a. Context</p> <p>Researchers at Aston Business School (ABS), working with key stakeholders, undertake rigorous, evidence-based and interdisciplinary research in business and management to improve the performance of organisations and individuals, inform the opinion of key decision makers, and influence and change policy and practice. This is achieved through research based training and capacity building (e.g., by responding to government initiatives like the progressive innovation agenda - through the 'Innovation Voucher Scheme' - IVS [formerly INDEX] – Edwards and Scully and Engaging Research for BUSiness Transformation [EREBUS] - Clegg); the timely input to a range of organisations, authorities, charities and regional bodies (see below) which raises critical awareness and changes practice; and providing access to expert input that impacts policy development and sharing of best practice (e.g., entrepreneurship and innovation via the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor [GEM] Programme and the ESRC Enterprise Research Centre [ERC] - Hart and Mickiewicz).</p> <p>The main non-academic users and beneficiaries of our research include: government representatives and their programmes (e.g., ABS is actively contributing to Lord Heseltine's 2013 initiative on 'The Greater Birmingham Project: The Path to Local Growth' - Driffield), small and medium size enterprises, SMEs, (via the Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses Programme which ABS has delivered since 2011, now in its 5th cohort - Hart), large firms (via input on governance – Woods, M. and critical risk management - Albores), regional bodies (such as Local Enterprise Partnerships, LEPs, UK Trade & Investment, UKTI, by advising on impact of inward investments - Driffield and Love), health authorities (via guidance on quality care, staff satisfaction, effectiveness in the health sector and change - Leask, Carter and Butler), utility regulators (e.g., OFWAT – Saal and Thanassoulis), charities (e.g., National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts, NESTA – Edwards and Scully), local authorities (like Birmingham City Council, BCC - Scully) and industry amongst others. Our research impact agenda has contributed to the development of close links with local councils (e.g., BCC), LEPs, UKTI, UK Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), UK Technology Strategy Board (TSB), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), UK Department of Health (DoH), British Safety Council, charities and industry.</p>
<p>b. Approach to impact</p> <p>Impact is core to ABS's current research strategy, which has been in place since 2008 and aligned with Aston University's (AU) research strategy 2020 (www1.aston.ac.uk/research/strategy/). To achieve our strategy, we have placed strong emphasis on attracting research grants from a variety of funders and strategically pursued active engagement with different non-academic users of our research (through a combination of being part of key initiatives [e.g., projects being pursued by Lords Heseltine and Young, see Section a & c], leading on key programmes [e.g., GEM & Goldman Sachs] and as a member of key organisations, e.g., OFWAT – Thanassoulis and Saal), which allows us to deliver a strong impact both on practice and policy. Examples include Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTPs) such as the award winning project with Kimal plc (Leask), Goldman Sachs Programme (Hart), the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) awards on Servitization and recently started 'Transformation for Growth' (Baines and Butler respectively), European Union (EU) funding for 'disaster management' (Albores and Brewster), Science Bridges award on 'renewable energy' (Dey and Budhwar), funding from charities like NESTA (Edwards, Scully and Hart) and industry funding such as from the British Safety Council and Saudi Aramco to develop selection assessment interventions (Woods, S.), among others. A further important element of our research impact strategy is proactively responding to the agendas of bodies like BIS and RCUK by recruiting international scholars (e.g., Baines, Mickiewicz, Woods, M. and Bailey) to establish leading research centres at ABS (e.g., the ESRC ERC with Warwick – Hart, Mickiewicz and Love); and the Government, e.g., on entrepreneurship (GEM and Goldman Sachs Programmes – Hart) and engagement in local and regional growth agenda (Driffield). ABS has effective and efficient support systems (further explained below) to facilitate and encourage the delivery of research impact to influence both practice and policy. Proactive institutional support is available from the Business Partnership Unit (BPU) and the Associate Dean for Business Partnerships (a position we created in 2009), the Research Support Office (RSO), the Aston Academy for Research into Management (AARM, headed by the Associate Dean Research,</p>

is responsible for the coordination and support for research related activities at ABS and implementation of its research strategy), and others (e.g., research centres, EU grants consultant) to pursue research initiatives, collaborations and development activities to deliver research impact.

1) BPU: The BPU's role is to support ABS to attract industry-linked funding and initiate and sustain active engagement with non-academic users of our research to enhance its research impact. It acts as an intermediary and a centre of expertise to support the development (in number and depth) of links between ABS's research activity and the public, commercial and third sectors. Since 2008, the BPU has helped ABS to generate £3.2M of research income. The core thrust of the BPU has been on KTPs, Collaborative Awards in Science and Engineering (CASE) Studentships and ERDF funding (involving industry partners). In particular, since the last RAE, the BPU has helped ABS to secure the following, which has resulted in important impacts:

- 12 KTPs worth £1.1M involving the public sector (e.g., Warwickshire Police - **Scully**); commercial sector (e.g., Kimal plc - **Leask**), and third sector (e.g., BASW - **Rudd**). Research on these projects has influenced policy, practice and behaviour of the partners.
- 10 CASE Studentship Awards worth £700,000 involving the public (e.g., BCC - **Scully** and **Budhwar**) and commercial sectors (e.g., British Sugar - **Butler**). These awards have enabled the industry partners to pursue research on their critical areas of concern and secure robust and specific input to improve their work systems, behaviour and practice.
- Other funding, e.g., ERDF (**Baines**), £357K on servitization in the West Midlands. This project is creating awareness about the usefulness of servitization to enhance organisational growth.

In all the above projects, the BPU has been instrumental in finding and initiating the contact between researchers and industry partners, building the needed relationship and mechanisms for collaborations between them, helping with the development of research proposals, brokering deals and also in the dissemination and communication of the resulting impacts (e.g., along with the RSO, the BPU organises regular poster events for the non-academic users of our research).

2) RSO: The University's Research Support Office organises annual university level research days and KTP events to showcase research at AU thereby creating an active interface between researchers and non-academic users of our research and, along with AARM, supports EU networking events for grant applications. ABS's Research Development Manager (RDM) from the RSO plays a pivotal role in facilitating the development and submission of research grant applications (ensuring the pathways for impact are robust which subsequently result in a variety of forms of research impact) and also acting as an interface between researchers and finance and ethics/legal teams to facilitate effective governance of funding proposals. The RDM regularly circulates relevant call for funding applications and along with AARM organises grant writing workshops and seminars dedicated to specific funding streams. RSO also manages all RCUK, European and other funding applications. Examples of RCUK and third stream successes and the impact such projects have made, include:

- **Saal** received £62,000 from Severn Trent Water. This research has impacted the regulator's (OFWAT) awareness about the panel cost and productivity assessment methods in the industry.
- **Butler** received £124,000 from the ESRC for the 'TRANSFORMATION Project'. This research has helped to create practical and innovative management tools for performance improvement.
- **Woods** received a contract from the British Safety Council and Saudi Aramco for £133,000. The outcomes of this project are helping the industry partners to design a psychometric assessment tool to measure propensity for unsafe/risky behaviour at work.

3) Others: Many research projects (e.g., GEM, EREBUS, INDEX, Goldman Sachs Programme) have enabled ABS to work closely with bodies such as the BIS, UKTI, LEPs, DoH and AWM (Advantage West Midlands) resulting in an active interface with key non-academic stakeholders of our research. A combination of support (e.g., with the grant applications, finding industry partners, negotiating access and dealing with the funders) from AARM, BPU and RSO made it possible for these projects to establish themselves and deliver on their impact agenda by contributing towards capacity building, and influencing policy and practice in a large number of public, private and not-for-profit sector organisations. For example, the IVS helped to forge links between the academic community of the West Midlands ensuring that the knowledge needs of new and innovative SMEs are met, and this in turn informed the more recent national IVS. Similarly, EREBUS resulted in the development of a partnership in consultation with business stakeholders in the West Midlands, which encouraged the enhancement of research competencies in order to drive business

Impact template (REF3a)

innovation. BIS sees the GEM UK project as the only source of up-to-date data and analysis of entrepreneurship in the UK, a view recently confirmed by the National Audit Office. The GEM UK project findings are helping to identify policies for entrepreneurial growth. Also, the Goldman Sachs Programme is significantly enabling local SMEs to grow as evidenced by the performance of its past 4 cohorts.

In addition to the above, in ABS our Centre for Executive Development and Marketing department regularly organise practitioner oriented workshops and events, which help to create a useful interface between researchers and local businesses. Further, the university provides strategic funds for the creation of shared resources such as infrastructure and research training in grant writing, research supervision, networking, for visiting scholars and ethical evaluation. Such support facilitates active user engagement and a continued and an increasing rate of funding success to conduct research with industry partners resulting in further non-academic impacts.

c. Strategy and plans

ABS is a leading research-based institution with a strategic aim to improve further its research standing and enhance the impact of its research. In order to fulfil this ambition, our strategy is focussed on achieving a consistent increase in our research income by targeting a mixed range of funders that enable us to conduct research resulting in non-academic impact. We will continue to concentrate on increasing our research impact by: supporting existing staff and also by attracting leading researchers (e.g., **Bailey, Baines, Bhaumik, Evanschitzky, Kotlarsky, Leeflang, Marshall, Mickiewicz, and van Knippenberg, Woods, M**), developing leading research centres where impact is a central component of their strategy (such as the ESRC funded ERC - with Warwick), and lead on and deliver key programmes (like the GEM and Goldman Sachs) at Aston. Research within the Unit will influence policy and practice nationally and globally and will strive to alter economic, professional and commercial activities and benefits by conducting and disseminating rigorous investigations and analysis that address major questions facing business leaders, organisations, the people who work within them and those they serve. In doing so, it aims to further enhance its capacity of knowledge transfer and research impact.

To ensure effective implementation of our impact strategy, systems are in place (see Section b) to enable sustainability and strengthening of our impact profile, research base capability and specific measures to ensure that impact is generated from these. We are also continuously pursuing new and high potential initiatives which will secure future robust impacts such as working on regional economic development (**Driffield and Hart** with Lord Heseltine on his 'The Greater Birmingham Project: The Path to Local Growth', **Hart** assisting Lord Young in developing the Small Business Charter and with Derby City Council on their "Innovation Campus Programme"), leading on promising areas of knowledge transfer such as 'servitization' (**Baines**), developing new interventions/ frameworks via programmes like Goldman Sachs (**Hart**), tools and measures (e.g., **Woods, S.** – British Safety Council and Saudi Aramco), two ERDF funded Knowledge Exchange Enterprise Network (KEEN) projects (£88,000) are already in operation - **Pillai, Sood, Dey, Clegg, Baines, Scully, Budhwar and Lyubovnikova** and a few more are in the pipeline) to help West Midlands SMEs increase their profitability and growth. A further two projects funded recently by ERDF in 2013 related to 'Transformation for Growth' - £239,638 (**Butler with Birmingham City Council**) and 'Innovation Vouchers 2012' - £225,052 (**Theodorakopoulos, Parkes, Tapinos and Budhwar**) seek to contribute to regional economic development. Such initiatives are integral to our impact strategy and help us to impact the performance and effectiveness of organisations, markets and economies; they also help us to integrate research findings into our teaching.

To ensure active communication about our research impact, we will continue to achieve regular coverage of our research income successes involving industry partners in Times Higher Education, and are developing close linkages with users (e.g., LEPs, local businesses and bodies like the City Councils), to create an environment of research uptake (by which users can access our research such as via participative projects pursued under KTPs, CASE awards and other industry supported research projects mentioned above) and monitor the impact of our research (e.g., local entrepreneurs are clearly able to evidence significant growth after participating in the Goldman Sachs Programme). Apart from the research support and initiatives (see Sections a & b), ABS also has several leading research centres, which we will continue to develop. These centres have been instrumental in the delivery of our impact strategy (e.g., ESRC Enterprise Research Centre). They bring together a critical mass of researchers from different areas of subject expertise to create synergies, help them to succeed in getting research grants and create an active interface with the

end users of our research by organising regular workshops, seminars and conferences.

d. Relationship to case studies

We have selected 6 impact case studies for assessment and below summarise their impact and how our approach to impact has contributed in their development.

Case Study 1 – Driving High Growth Entrepreneurship and Small Business Growth

Hart, along with **Mickiewicz**, has been instrumental in getting the ESRC ERC to Aston. He also leads the UK GEM project and runs the Goldman Sachs programme for the Midlands. The RSO, BPU and AARM have provided considerable support to the successful creation and running of these ventures. **Hart** has been working with researchers at Aston such as **Mickiewicz, Bhaumik, Gong, Temouri** and **Bonner** on a range of funded projects, which form the basis of this case study. Findings of their research have already influenced and shaped business support policy in the UK and changed the strategic direction of small businesses in the Midlands region, leading to increased growth and profitability.

Case Study 2 – Inward Investment in the UK and Europe: Influencing Policy and Improving Policy Analysis

Driffield (with **Love, Du** and **Temouri**) as part of the AU funded Aston Centre for Research in International Business (which has enabled a critical mass of researchers to come together and collaborate) has led a number of projects funded by the ESRC, BIS/ DTI and UKTI to examine the links between internationally mobile capital, firm performance at home and internationally, and in particular the effects on the economic development in the host country. This has influenced economic policy for Manchester City Region and the new Manchester LEP, and changed awareness within BIS and UKTI of the effects of inward investment and also understanding about whether certain types of inward investment are likely to bring benefits to the UK economy.

Case Study 3 – Global Reinsurance Study

This research is supported by an insurance industry consortium – the Insurance Intellectual Capital Initiative – and funding from the ESRC and a number of industry partners (like Amlin, Aon Benfield, Hiscox, etc.). Coordinated by **Burke**, the research has provided a series of evidenced-based frameworks and models to the industry to support their decision-making during a period of significant change. This project has been closely supported by the RSO and BPU from negotiating access to research firms, proposal development and dissemination of its findings (e.g., organisation of seminars and workshops for non-academic users of this research).

Case Study 4 – Using Systems Thinking to Improve Operations Management Practice in Organisations

Supported by a regular stream of funding from bodies including the ESRC, TSB, ERDF, MAS, DfSTL and AWM (coordinated by the RSO and BPU), **Clegg, Edwards** and **Dey**, researching systems thinking (specifically soft systems thinking) have developed a new approach, ‘Process Orientated Holonic (PrOH) Modelling Methodology’, which has been successfully applied to a number of service and manufacturing organisations to model, debate and implement changes to strategy and operational processes.

Case Study 5 – Using Operational Research Techniques for Helping Preparedness for Emergency Response

The RSO facilitated the submission of the Evacuation Responsiveness by Government Organisations (ERGO), EC funding (with 10 European partners) and the Office of Deputy Prime Minister and the Fire Rescue Service grant applications. These projects formed the basis for the creation of the Aston Centre for Research Into Safety and Security. Research within these projects (coordinated by **Albores**) has influenced and changed the way government agencies deal with mass evacuation or decontamination following a chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear incident.

Case Study 6 – The Impact of Cost and Productivity Research on Water Industry Policy Reforms and the 2013 Water Bill

Building on **Saal’s** on-going research, the RSO provided the support to this ESRC funded research which has examined how the efficiency and productivity modelling has influenced OFWAT. The work has had a significant impact on the regulated water industry in the UK.