

Institution: University of Birmingham
Unit of Assessment: UoA 18 – Economics and Econometrics
<p>a. Context</p> <p>The Department of Economics organises research around three clusters (Econometrics, Macroeconomics and Finance; Economic Policy using Theory and Experiments; and Environment, Trade and Energy) and each places a significant emphasis on engagement with non-academic research users. Across the three clusters, academic staff provide expertise in applied micro-econometrics, microeconomic theory, behavioural economics, macroeconomics, environmental and resource economics and public policy. Within these fields economists at Birmingham have made an impact on policy and public debates relating to the determinants of crime, the environmental activities of firms, appropriate levels of electricity pricing, the effectiveness of educational policy, the European Central Bank's modelling of bank lending rates, patterns of exporting amongst firms and many other topical and policy-relevant issues.</p> <p>The Department has a long and distinguished history of linking excellence in academic research with an active engagement with a variety of non-academic stakeholders. These include international institutions (World Trade Organization, United Nations), central government departments (the UK's Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Department for Energy and Climate Change, HM Treasury, the Argentine Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Argentine Department of Agriculture), central banks (Bank of England, Banque de France, Reserve Bank of South Africa, the central bank of Sri Lanka, the Bank of Thailand), local government (Birmingham City Council), regulatory agencies (Office of Gas and Electricity Markets, Ofgem), think tanks (Civitas, Centre for Crime and Justice Studies) and the general public (through print, radio, TV and public meetings).</p> <p>b. Approach to impact</p> <p>Our research is rooted in understanding the changes happening in the world around us, and how they affect our stakeholders' needs for deeper understanding of the drivers and the consequences of such changes. The Department takes a proactive stance in bringing the results of our research activity to the forefront of public debates, as well as orientating our research towards the requirements of our stakeholders. Over the past five years, we have developed processes and procedures to enable all members of staff to engage with external stakeholders. For example, we:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide administrative support, funding and, as necessary, ad hoc leave of absence to academics who are working to enhance the impact of their research (for example David Maddison recently received a term's leave specifically to work with stakeholders, including DEFRA and Birmingham City Council, in relation to his research on the impact of municipal waste sites on property prices); • encourage researchers to include provision for outreach and impact enhancement activities as part of any large grant bid (for example Bandyopadhyay's recently submitted ESRC bid entitled 'Democratic Control, Accountability and Public Governance' contains provision for 2 open conferences and 6 regional workshops. Additionally, there is an explicit collaboration with the think tanks the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies and CIVITAS for dissemination activities); • encourage staff members' participation in public debates and media interviews by providing appropriate media training and support their media engagement by facilitating links with the University Communication Office (for example during the REF period Matthew Cole, Robert Elliott and Indra Ray have each received media training at Media Centre, the University's professional television and radio studio and media training facility); • support staff members' proactive engagement with stakeholders and the general public using new media such as blogs (for example, Robert Elliott's 'Globalisation and the Environment' blog http://globalisation-and-the-environment.blogspot.co.uk/), online debates (for example Siddhartha Bandyopadhyay's contribution on Police and Crime Commissioners on the National Community Activitists website http://nationalcan.ning.com/forum/topics/elected-police-commissioners), and publishing articles and opinions on relevant websites (for example John Fender's 2011 article in VOX EU examining how the latest technology is helping to accelerate 'information cascades' which play a key role in riots and regime change); • regularly hold public lectures on topical and accessible themes which are attended by academics from around the campus as well as many individuals from local businesses, local school children and members of the public. (Recent speakers include Robert Chote from the Office of Budget Responsibility and Nobel prize winner Al Roth); • facilitate colleagues taking up cross-campus leadership roles to support the University's

relationship with external stakeholders (for example Richard Green's Directorship of the University's Institute of Energy Research and Policy);

- encourage colleagues to take up **College-wide roles** that support the dissemination of the benefits of our research globally (e.g. David Dickinson being College International Lead);
- directly **engage with businesses**, as an integral part of Birmingham Business School (for example Richard Green's work on electricity markets with E.ON UK (formerly Powergen)).

In 2008 we set **three explicit goals** to optimize the impact potential of our research.

1. To inform policy debates and decision-making via the production of relevant applied research in accessible formats and in the construction of lasting relationships with stakeholders. In this respect, we identified as our key stakeholders national and local governments, as well as other policy makers (for example central banks) and international organizations (for example the World Trade Organization). Since 2008, the results of our research have been widely cited in reports and policy documents by the UN (for example the United Nations Environment Programme report published in 2009 entitled 'Trade and Climate Change' cites two papers by Matthew Cole and Robert Elliott) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) (for example the WTO's 'World Trade Report 2013' cites 4 papers written by Matthew Cole, Robert Elliott, Facundo Alborno and Marco Ecolani), as well as in Ministerial documents, both domestic and foreign (for example Facundo Alborno's work on exporting is cited in Argentina's Federal and Participative Agri-food and Agribusiness Strategic Plan, 2010/2016 which is being currently implemented by the Argentine government).

The department has also encouraged members of staff to engage directly with policy makers and to build durable and close relationships. Several members of staff including Peter Sinclair, Anindya Banerjee and Nick Horsewood have also been invited for research visits or to give seminars at central banks including the Bank of England and the Banque de France and HM Treasury. Thanks to the two-year leave of absence granted by the Department, Anindya Banerjee was appointed to the position of Scientific Counsellor to the Forecasting Division of the Banque de France, in recognition of his reputation in the field of financial time series econometrics.

2. To develop relationships with interest groups and think tanks that allow us to inform their policy shaping activities by providing solid scientific foundations to their work. Siddhartha Bandyopadhyay's work with Civitas is exemplary in this respect. He first became involved with Civitas when working on the effects of detection and socio-economic factors on crime and subsequently Civitas provided him with research assistance to analyse the impact of sentencing on crime. This resulted in a report which received widespread attention in media and policy circles (see Case Study: *Challenging perspectives on crime and crime policy* for further details). Civitas has promised support in disseminating Bandyopadhyay's on-going research on the role of elected Policing and Crime Commissioners in England and Wales. The Department and the College assisted these activities by providing funding for the organization of workshops with practitioners to exchange ideas and to develop mutually interesting opportunities for research.

3. To enhance the involvement of our academics in outreach activities via their media presence as experts and commentators, using traditional and innovative media. Members of staff have appeared in a number of TV and Radio programmes (BBC2, BBC News, BBC Midlands, BBC Radio 2, 4 and 5, ITV, Sky News), and have contributed articles to national and international newspapers such as the Guardian, the New York Times, the Financial Times and the International Herald Tribune. Staff members also actively engage with electronic media as contributors to policy oriented websites such as VOX EU and theconversation.com.

The Department supports and encourages engagement with practitioners and the public via outreach activities that showcase the relevance of our research, and raise our overall public profile. One recent example of such activities was an event within the ESRC Festival of Social Science on 'Emotions and Charitable Giving'. The workshop consisted of talks by academics and local practitioners, such as the Head of Fundraising from the Birmingham Children's Hospital. As a result, further collaboration with the Children's Hospital is under discussion with a view to examining issues such as whether individuals' emotional state affects their charitable donations.

Finally, to engage with and inform the policy community, members of the Department participate and contribute to the Birmingham Business School (BBS) Breakfast Briefings. These consist of topic-specific events that provide a forum for academics, students, business leaders and policy makers to share knowledge and experiences. Participants from the Department are therefore able

Impact template (REF3a)

to provide insights from their research in discussion with government ministers, MPs, journalists, Birmingham Chamber of Commerce, and representatives from business.

c. Strategy and plans

Our strategy for the next 5 years is designed to consolidate and build on the achievements made during the REF period. Specifically, we have **four key objectives**: (a) to develop robust and sustainable organizational frameworks that support impact in research; (b) to provide incentives for staff, including early career academics, to exploit the impact potential of their work; (c) to further cultivate and extend user networks and (d) to ensure that the underlying research continues to be of the highest quality. These will be achieved in the following ways:

1. **By strengthening the management of impact within the Department and School.** The role of Department Director of Knowledge Transfer will be created, to complement the role of the Department's Director of Research. Working in close collaboration with the Head of Department and the Department's Director of Research, the Director of Knowledge Transfer will (a) take overall responsibility for the further development and implementation of the Department's strategy on knowledge transfer to complement its research strategy; (b) promote a culture where the benefits of knowledge transfer are understood by all new members of staff; (c) identify external developments and opportunities to support the Department's strategy; (d) monitor and record KT activities and assess the Department's performance against relevant targets and benchmarks.

The Department Director of Knowledge Transfer will work closely with her BBS counterpart to ensure that the Department's impact plans and activities are consistent with, and supported by, those of the School. The Department Director of Knowledge Transfer will also engage with the BBS external relations manager whose duties include managing collaborations between the Business School and organisations in all sectors, organising dissemination events including the Business Breakfasts, publicising BBS research, and liaising with the Communications Office. The Department Director of Knowledge Transfer will sit on the School Research Committee.

The Department will benefit from the planned BBS Impact Committee which will consist of the School Director of Knowledge Transfer, the School Director of Research, the new external relations manager and Directors of Research/Knowledge Transfer from each BBS department.

2. **By placing a greater emphasis on impact potential when recruiting academic staff.** While individuals who conduct highly theoretical economics will continue to be valued, our recruitment strategy will ensure that the mix of staff within the department is able to cover both our need for theoretical research and our need and desire to engage with policymakers. We acknowledge that some areas of economics lend themselves more to impact than others, which is one reason why we have placed an emphasis on behavioural/experimental economics and environmental economics within our research strategy. The university investment in School clusters, including behavioural/experimental economics and research on the Chinese economy, will also help to facilitate non-academic impact in these areas (See REF5).

3. **By placing greater emphasis on best-practice among early career researchers.** The exacting probation and mentoring processes of the University will also be utilized to give greater prominence to knowledge transfer and impact generation. The School and the College also provide research incentive schemes (prizes and awards) which will be adapted in a similar manner.

4. **By developing a lessons-learnt process whereby staff who are intrinsic to impact case studies share their experience with colleagues.** We will also ensure that impact activities that overlap the REF reporting period are sustained.

d. Relationship to case studies

Our case studies have been chosen on the basis of their ability to marry focussed and significant impact with excellence in underpinning research. The case studies are representative of the scope and significance of the research carried out within the department, and give an insight into how the department is working to enhance its impact. Each of the Department's three research clusters is represented in this selection, a further proof that a culture that recognizes the benefits of knowledge transfer and impact is diffusing across the Department.

The case studies are the result of a co-ordinated approach to impact within the University. They have benefitted from support at Department, School and College level through seedcorn funding for workshops and other activities, the granting of a secondment to the Banque de France in the case of Anindya Banerjee and through advice on the planning and implementation of activities from the College Research Support Office and Marketing and Communications Team.