Institution: University of Westminster

Unit of Assessment: UoA 16; Architecture, Built Environment and Planning

a. Context

Main non-academic user groups, beneficiaries or audiences for the UoA research
The consumers of this UoA's research cover a wide spectrum of agencies, interests and practitioners in London, the UK, Europe and overseas. The nature of the disciplines represented in UoA 16 means that there is a strong emphasis on applied research and in particular sustaining a leading role at the cutting edge of practice in niche markets. The main user groups and beneficiaries of our work can be divided into five categories: (i) Central and local government, government agencies and partnership organisations; (ii) Non-governmental organisations particularly in developing countries; (iii) Professional institutions and think-tanks; (iv) Private sector industry, professional practices and consultancies; and (v) third sector charities, voluntary and community organisations. Impact is secured through ongoing work with clients, members of practice communities and professional committees, publication through a variety of media and engagement with other stakeholders in Architecture and the Built Environment.

Main types of impact specifically relevant to the UoA's research
The main types of impact are: extending technical practice to ensure efficient and effective delivery of services (for example in measuring the cost of delay for airlines, improving the management of freight to reduce cost and energy consumption); policy analysis to evaluate current policy and suggest improvements (for example in urban governance, managing the night-time economy in city centres, transport and the development of eco-cities); advancing the technical and design aspects of architectural practice (through publishing, best practice in conservation and cultural aspects of aesthetics and practice); reflections and international comparisons of history, policy, governance and the nature of urban society at all levels.

How these relate to the range of research activity or groups in the unit
The UoA is divided into five subject centres and two inter-disciplinary research clusters within the Faculty and two with other faculties in the University (as described in REF 5). The subject centres are primarily focussed on developing research within their own discipline while the cluster groups promote inter-disciplinary perspectives across the range of built environment disciplines. Architecture is mainly engaged in advancing the technical and design aspects of architectural practice while Transport, Tourism, Property and Construction and Urban Development are mainly involved in policy analysis to evaluate current policy and suggest improvements. The London, Global Itineraries and International Eco-Cities clusters are developing dialogues, reviewing policy and devising innovative approaches to generic policy issues at the leading edge of practice.

b. Approach to impact
  The University provides institutional support in promoting this research strategy and ensuring maximum impact through co-ordination, marketing, communications training, the management of research bids and finance and international promotions. At the Faculty level, research-active staff are well attuned to the needs of the different professions in the built environment and are fully aware of how best to promote their research to different academic, professional and voluntary sector audiences. Regular seminars and major conferences are used to highlight research activity and to build bridges with different professional interests in the public, private and third sectors. The research infrastructure and research resources at Unit level are based on a clear set of organisational priorities, systems to allocate time to key staff in workload planning, with key support staff who assist in the preparation and costing of research bids. A Research Development Officer is based in the UoA who identifies, facilitates and assists in the preparation of research bids and events. The research finance officer is responsible for managing post-award budgets. A locally based marketing officer assists with events, publicity and dissemination and the HR department run a researcher network to provide training in writing; proposals and communication skills. Staff are funded by the Faculty to attend research-related conferences and industry events on condition that achieving impact is a key objective of attendance.

The amount of research income, as well as the range of funding bodies, demonstrates the vitality and sustainability of the research culture and the quality of support from University and faculty-based staff. The UoA has been particularly successful in attracting additional funding for specialist conference programmes, such as three ESRC-funded conference series to extend the reach and impact to different audiences. Impact is also promoted through establishing closer links with industry through Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTP). Successful dissemination and steps taken to maximise impact bring additional benefits of a raised research profile and a stronger reputation thus improving chances of securing additional funding in future.

c. Strategy and plans

This UoA has a clearly defined strategy in order to maximise the impact of its research work. This falls into six phases. (i) The first involves collaborative arrangements to secure funded research contracts on the basis of previous track record and current expertise. (ii) Dissemination of findings to a variety of stakeholders and use of appropriate media is written into the research proposal. (iii) Active steps are taken to engage practitioners, industry and research users in advising and assisting in the delivery of projects. (iv) Outputs are developed to meet different interests and users: academic journal articles, international conference papers, practice reports, websites and social media to disseminate key findings and to meet the needs of relevant wider practice communities. (v) Securing follow-on funding to run seminars, conferences and training events for a variety of audiences including industry and practitioners. (vi) establishing, and where possible leading, international networks, such as ProBE, the London Cluster and the Volvo Centre of Excellence in Sustainable Urban Freight, with other world-leading bodies.

This strategy has proved flexible and sustainable over time and examples can be cited in terms of (i) research income secured; (ii) increased output of published work including dedicated reports, articles and websites for particular professional audiences; (iii) appointment of Visiting Professors and Visiting Research Fellows to advise on research and to identify opportunities; (iv) securing follow-on funding to target invited audiences and to sustain and advance the research topic; and training staff in communication skills and methods of dissemination. Four examples of how funding is secured in order to maximise research impact and to engage with the world of practice on a continuous basis are:

Network for Social Tourism and Regeneration (NET-StaR) was a seminar series supported by the ESRC. It created a network between 2011-12 to explore the potential of social tourism as a regeneration strategy in the UK, drawing on scholarship from tourism, family and social policy, regeneration and spatial planning. It brought together academics, policymakers and industry figures to examine existing academic work and to debate policy experiences.

The Governance of Eco-City Innovation was a seminar series funded by ESRC which ran from May 2011 to November 2012. It conceived eco-cities as a multi-faceted innovation process, rather than a set of forms and outputs. It emphasised the dynamic and co-evolutionary nature of knowledge creation, design, technological development and systems management and explored how these processes are steered, co-ordinated, institutionalised and legitimised. Although led by this UoA, the project team included academics and practitioners from Cardiff, Imperial College, Arup, and the United Nations Habitat program.

Modelling on the Move? Towards Transport System Transitions. This is an ESRC-funded seminar programme exploring is a series of events bringing together researchers and practitioners to discuss innovative ways of responding to pressing policy problems in transport running for a year from December 2012 to November 2013. Co-investigators include the universities of Oxford, Aukland, New Zealand and practitioners.

KTP Project (KTP No. 7236) with The Means LLP. The project led to the development of a portfolio of products and services to help businesses implement 'smarter travel' services with a view to improving employee wellbeing. The University selected it to enter the national competition for an outstanding KTP Project (commended with positive feedback). The project provided in-depth insight into existing travel advice tools, enabled staff to engage with a fast-developing sector that brings together travel planning, smarter travel and urban regeneration.

On the basis of these initiatives, new opportunities to extend and embed impact have been achieved through further research bids, consultancy opportunities and joint publication thus further contributing to vitality and sustainability.

d. Relationship to case studies

The Unit has selected four case studies, out of at least five available, which clearly demonstrate how impact has been maximised by following the six-fold strategy set out in section C above. As a result, this UoA has become a vital and sustainable centre of excellence in its field through the ability to attract funding, manage complex research projects over an extended period, produce reports, evaluations and policy recommendations, all of which have a demonstrable impact on key sectors including government and industry.

The six point strategy set out in (c) above has over time enabled the unit to progress a number of relatively discreet research areas and to achieve more research impact than would otherwise be possible. In particular, the depth, reach and significance of these research areas has been achieved by the Faculty and University channelling resources to key staff members, by providing a supportive and stimulating research culture, and by ensuring continuity of employment to research staff. Examples of direct support to staff include: work planning to increase research time, appointment of research development officers, and training and support in organising events for disseminating research findings. The following section provides examples of how each case study exemplifies this approach:

Integrated Rehabilitation Project Plan/Survey of the Architectural and Archaeological Heritage (IRPP/SAAH). This series of linked projects (known as the Ljubljana Process) is part of the Council of Europe's Regional Programme in S.E. Europe. John Bold as principal investigator was given additional time for research in our work planning model and was supported in the early stages with funding for travel and related expenses. He was also encouraged to attend international conferences in order to extend reach and significance.

Delay Cost Management in European Aviation has produced a quantitative framework for calculating airline delay costs. A report produced in 2011 is the industry benchmark reference document for strategic and tactical delay costs in aviation and Andrew Cook and colleagues have drawn on faculty and university facilities to become the market leader in this field.

Green Freight Transport and Logistics includes a series of linked, funded research projects on urban freight, freight modal shift and energy consumption and carbon emissions in the supply chain. Having started with a series of contracts for Transport for London, the group has attracted funding from the EU FP7 and more recently the Volvo Research and Education Foundation and has an international network of contacts and collaboration.

The Night-Time Economy was launched with funding for a researcher from a University trust fund before securing external funding and then engaging with industry and practice.