

Institution: University of Essex

Unit of Assessment: 19 - Business and Management Studies

a. Context

Essex Business School (EBS) specialises in ethically sound, socially responsible, and environmentally sustainable business impact, working with private and third sector organisations from inception to the completion of our research projects. Industry representatives inform our research from the outset, ensuring that we respond to the needs of local and regional SMEs, international corporations, charities, NGOs, and trade unions. Through close working relationships **we benefit: business colleagues** through increasing the health of their organisations; **third sector campaigners** whose lobbying for corporate responsibility is better informed through our research; and **societies** through the increased environmental, legal, and ethical responsibility of our industry partners.

Each of our research clusters is concerned with responsible business practice. Our **accounting group** tackles issues in public and third sector institutions, including performance measurement and management in the public sector, regulation of accountancy practice, and corporate social responsibility. Our research in this field informs, *inter alia*: **public and parliamentary debate** about the efficient provision of public services; **not-for-profit campaigners** for improved financial regulation; and **UK MPs concerned with corporate tax avoidance**, including the current UK **Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills**.

Our **finance** group works on commodity price fluctuations and time-series models, which inform the business of our **external partners** by forecasting the effect of commodity price changes. Our work on the effect of postage stamp price changes has informed the business strategy of a major UK public service – **the Royal Mail** – and our work on the effect of commodity prices on developing economies feeds into **international policy debate** through citations in World Bank and UN papers. Our finance group also establish close working relationships with major financial players, such as our connection to **HSBC**, with whom we collaborate on behavioural finance research into credit risk.

Our **management** expertise allows us to enhance the business of **local organisations**. We raise local SME performance through our Business and Management Training Centre and improve the management of third sector institutions through our Essex Community Advice centre. The management group includes the Essex Sustainability Institute, which works on environmentally sustainable business practice and green industry. Our research on sustainable business informs public debate (cited in e.g. the UN's Human Development Research paper series), and improves **work undertaken by NGOs and charities (such as Friends of the Earth International and the World Rainforest Movement)** to campaign against the use of carbon markets to reduce global carbon emissions. Finally, our management researchers also impact **regional and local entrepreneurship and economic development**, contributing to OECD analysis and informing nationwide entrepreneurship policies implemented by the **Nigerian Government's National Universities Commission**.

b. Approach to impact

Our impact is primarily achieved through **selecting partners who wish to learn from critical business and management studies**. Essex Business School facilitates this through institutional infrastructure, such as a dedicated budget, workload allowance and promotion incentives for staff undertaking impact activities, with five staff promoted on the basis of their knowledge exchange since 2008. EBS infrastructure is complemented by University infrastructure, including Research and Business Partnership Managers and a Knowledge Transfer Partnerships Manager who help us identify partners, secure funding, and record our impact. Direction from the School Research Committee and the University's Research Committee, with guidance from the School's Marketing team and the Faculty Impact Officer, supports the following:

- (1) **Training and advisory services:** EBS runs **Essex Community Advice** (ECA), a pro bono mechanism for providing business support to regional not-for-profit organisations, which targets small, non-governmental and not-for-profit organisations that cannot pay high fees for

commercial consultancy advice. Kelum Jayasinghe, for example, led a project to help **Colchester Credit Union** fully exploit their financial accounting software, aiding both their operational needs and their longer-term strategic direction. Other ECA projects have included business strategy and marketing consultancy to **Cuckoo Farm Studios**, a local artists' collective. ECA is entirely resourced through the EBS operating budget, demonstrating our commitment to ensuring affordable access to research expertise for our local communities.

ECA is complemented by the **Essex Business and Management Training Centre** (BMTc) which runs a full suite of business and management courses: 160 courses, attended by 1,013 delegates from 395 local organisations, since 2008. As well as the rolling course programme, bespoke events address specific business needs, drawing on expertise from senior EBS academics. In 2010, for example, Samantha Warren delivered a workshop to a local media publishing firm on effective Performance Management. BMTc is currently funded through delegate fees, and supported by a dedicated management team and marketing support provided by EBS. It was funded through the HEFCE Higher Education Innovation Fund until 2011-2012.

- (2) Partnerships and commissioned research:** Through on-going client relationships, we undertake both collaborative partnerships and research commissioned by external users ranging from local SMEs and the not-for-profit sector, to international institutions in developing and developed countries. These partnerships have included knowledge exchange projects supported by the University's Research and Enterprise Office. Since 2008 EBS researchers have completed: two **Low Carbon Keep** projects – with a local solicitor firm and a software company – to reduce business carbon emissions; a **Knowledge Transfer Partnership to assist Flex UK** to develop, implement and increase sales of a carbon efficient, web-based HR system; and a **Building Partnerships programme** with UK Trade and Investment to develop links between UKTI and INVEST Essex, the Essex County Council enterprise team that encourages investment in the area.

Community representatives are often included in our research design to ensure our projects will benefit their organisations. The **Essex Sustainability Institute** (ESI) has developed successful external funding applications (British Academy and Leverhulme) in response to the needs of **local food co-operatives**. Other local and national partners include: **Quality Solicitors FJG**, the biggest provider of legal aid in the East of England; **Southend Airport**; **Age UK**; **Accenture UK**; **Westminster Council**; and **Santander UK**. Our international partners include: the **National Universities Commission of Nigeria**; **Weigao, a Chinese medical supplies manufacturer**; and the **Education, Audio-visual and Culture Executive Agency** of the European Commission.

Our research partnerships would not be possible were we not well-informed about the needs of industry. Since its inception in 2008, EBS has been guided by an Advisory Board that comprises seven members drawn from industries as diverse as manufacturing (Rolls Royce), telecommunications (Talk Talk), energy (BP), and banking (HSBC). We maintain an on-going relationship with Essex Chamber of Commerce (ECC) through which EBS research is made available to their members. We also **appoint industry figures as Executive Fellows**, who give guest lectures in EBS and inform our researchers of impact opportunities, presenting opportunities to contribute to these industries. Our partnership with HSBC, for instance, has resulted in 4 collaborative PhD studentships on real-time organisation issues, including a **graphical user interface which will be globally adopted by HSBC**. **HSBC executives also contribute to a lively programme of networking events** hosted by the School, such as the Business Breakfast seminar series for local organisations. This relationship has been developed by Dr. Nick Constantinou, appointed in 2010 from a previous role as Head of Market and Credit Risk in the banking industry.

- (3) Activism and Lobbying:** Our critical approach to business and management studies presents frequent **opportunities for political engagement**. We influence public and parliamentary discussion on the social responsibility of businesses through direct involvement of our researchers in political lobbying, and also through using our research to inform political campaigners and activists. **Our direct lobbying uses research to contribute to policy discussion** on issues including corporate tax avoidance, financial auditing transparency, and

Impact template (REF3a)

the private provision of public services. Prem Sikka, for instance, directly informs public debate about **tax avoidance** through regular contributions to news media (including *The Guardian* and BBC Radio), giving public lectures (including a lecture on the steps of St Paul's to the Occupy camp), and through **meetings and communication with the UK's Secretary of State for Business Innovations and Skills, who has requested Sikka specifically for consultation**. Similarly, John Stittle has contributed analysis of the problems of private handling of the UK rail network to **Trade Union campaign documents**, being cited by UK MPs in House of Commons discussions. We also contribute to political debate by making our research freely available to campaigners and activists, and promoting research through organising and attending events with non-academic research users. Steffen Boehm, for instance, publishes pertinent work under a creative commons licence. Promoting this research online and at conferences has led to over 40,000 downloads and citations of his work by the **UN's Human Development Research papers, Friends of the Earth, and the World Rainforest Movement**. Similarly, Stephen Shukaitis has established Minor Compositions, an open access publisher of academic and non-academic work in radical politics and the arts which distributes materials in coordination with galleries and institutions in London, New York, Glasgow, Berlin, Singapore, Amsterdam. Minor Compositions' research output has been downloaded 82,871 times since 2009.

- (4) Media and public engagement:** Our reputation for socially responsible business consultancy is supported by extensive media dissemination. EBS has a dedicated five-member Marketing and Communications Team (MCT) whose remit is to raise the profile of the School as a growing centre for business engagement. Their role is to both support academic staff in impact-generating activities (such as copy-writing and advice on publication outlets) and to pro-actively source opportunities for engagement. MCT produce a regular publication, 'Working with Business', which is sent to all business contacts and available for download from the EBS website with the aim of keeping businesses updated on how they can engage with the School. Press releases are issued on average once a month, attracting the attention of national media. For example, as a result of her press release Kathleen Riach was featured on Radio 4's 'Thinking Allowed' to discuss her study of emotional attachment in 'haunted workspaces'. Individual members of staff are also encouraged to circulate their own materials via blogs and through writing editorial copy for broadsheets. Prem Sikka, for example, is a regular *Guardian* columnist and contributor to *The Independent*, and Steffen Boehm has published in both the *Guardian* and in *National Geographic*.

c. Strategy and plans

Our strategy for improving our impact is to build on the strengths of our approaches to impact – particularly our close partnerships with industry – and add a new approach, namely embedding impact into our Unit infrastructure. All of these developments will use the new £21 million carbon-neutral building that will house EBS from 2014, which **includes dedicated conferencing and flexible space for industry partners**.

- (1) Collaborative research and partnerships:** We will increase our regional and international business engagement by involving research users from the inception of our research projects. Learning from the Essex Sustainability Institution model outlined in b.2 above, we will **consult users in our funding applications to ensure EBS research addresses 'live' issues in an applied context**. At least two further **Knowledge Transfer Partnerships** will be established in the areas of sustainability and brand management. We will also increase the number of **industry-collaborative PhDs**, helped by increased funding through the Essex ESRC Doctoral Training Centre. Our collaborative PhD scheme will be expanded to take on at least four additional students in the areas of self-management in the creative industries, post-financial crisis banking, sustainable management practices and corporate governance in developing countries.
- (2) Training and Advisory Services:** EBS' programme of **executive education will be expanded**, building on our strengths as a renowned centre for socially responsible, sustainable business education. The first of our new on-site, residential events, 'Reinventing the Organisation', was held in Summer 2013, and attracted an international delegation. We will

continue this programme with events that will respond to the needs of our business partners as they arise. We will also work with the Faculty Impact Officer to ensure future relationships are established with delegates (using social media and customer relationship management) in order to maximise impact opportunities and potential for further knowledge exchange.

- (3) Media and public engagement:** We will further increase the visibility of EBS' research through marketing and communications activities, including editorials, blog posts, and features for practitioner websites and publications, to be disseminated by the EBS Marketing team and the University Communications Office. This will also involve raising our **social media profile**, particularly in relation to blogging and vodcasts. The University YouTube channel already hosts 17 research videos by EBS staff, to which we will continue to add. We will strengthen links with professional bodies including Chartered Institute of Marketing; Chartered Management Institute; Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development; Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales; Chartered Institute of Management Accountants; and Institute and Faculty of Actuaries. We will also host new high-profile public events such as the event organised in October 2013 on 'Changing Behaviour for Sustainability – the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly'. The industry keynote speaker was Catherine Cameron, Policy Analyst at Agulhas.
- (4) Embedding Impact into School Infrastructure:** Our academic staff are being encouraged to think creatively about user engagement through a **University-wide initiative to embed impact into all systems and processes**. EBS will be implementing this strategy by incorporating impact training into a new induction programme for early-career EBS academics, and through a new category of EBS Research Committee grants to fund impact activities. In order to develop impact skills in future academics, our PhD student training provision will include input on the relevance of thesis findings to practice, a recommendation of research carried out by EBS academics Kat Riach and Marjana Johannson to understand doctoral students' perceptions of knowledge exchange.

d. Relationship to case studies

Our commitment to socially responsible business impact is exemplified in the details of our case studies. The work of Prem Sikka, for instance, which constitutes two of our case studies, exemplifies how **EBS members put their research into political practice**. In particular **Sikka's activism on tax avoidance** shows how such activities, supported by **extensive work with national print and radio media can influence public and parliamentary debate and inform the UK Government**. Sikka's research on the social need for transparency in auditing practices has also informed his freedom of information campaign, demonstrating how our members act both as researchers and as activists themselves. Impact with an emphasis on social responsibility is further exemplified by our collaboration with the Money Advice Service, which resulted in recommendations from the MAS, the FSA and the Department of Health to provide financial capability services for individuals in difficult life circumstances.

John **Stittle's** impact also exemplifies the political influence of our research through collaboration, specifically his **partnership with Trade Unions to produce a campaign document on the private handling of UK railways**. Our collaborations also influence the performance public-service providers, as exemplified by John **Nankervis' partnership with Royal Mail**. Nankervis' impact was the result of collaborative research with Royal Mail economists, providing mutual benefit and ultimately impacting on Royal Mail's business through the increase of stamp prices, as well as providing part of the **evidence base for the 2011 Postal Services Act**, which at the time set out the future of UK postal services provision.

Often our **collaborative research builds the needs of our research users into the research design from the beginning**, as exemplified in Jay **Mitra's** 'Education Partnership in Africa' project. Working with the National Universities Commission in Nigeria, and funded by the UK Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, Mitra's project worked with a variety of stakeholders to develop an entrepreneurship education curriculum. The research partnership not only provided research outputs for Mitra and the EBS team but also **an education program that has been implemented nationwide in Nigeria and adopted elsewhere in Africa**, introducing to these countries a model of University entrepreneurship education designed to aid their economic developments.