**Institution: Robert Gordon University**

**Unit of Assessment: 21, Politics and International Studies**

**a. Context**

The strong emphasis placed upon translational research by the University (REF 5) provides a supportive context for impact. This is reflected on the opening page of the University's website, that *'An integral part of our purpose is to build a research base of staff and students who undertake highly relevant leading-edge research that advances knowledge and provides tangible benefits to the wider economy and society.'* The goal fits into a similar applied knowledge concept for the University as a whole; we consistently top UK university league table rankings for graduate employment. Embedded placement components within courses provided for good practitioner links which are also used for research purposes. Employers sit on 'user advisory boards' throughout the University. Within the subject field we also have an established contract to operate and supply data from a Citizens' Panel for local public service providers. The research topics in which we specialise lend themselves to engagement with policy practice, and our REF2 portfolio includes articles written at timed to contribute to specific policy debates (d, below). This approach is reflected in our 100% 'international excellence' rating in the 'esteem' section in RAE 2008/Politics and International Studies, and in ESRC CASE recognition for research student training from 2003 until the closure of the scheme in 2010. 40% of the Graduate School in which our subject is embedded (see REF5) are part-time students, often working in careers related to their studies, providing for a lively inter-relationship between basic and applied research.

The University's strengths in *Library and Information Management* (second equal in the UK from the results of that Unit of Assessment in RAE2008) have assisted with the development of strategies aimed at recording and developing impact. Politics related staff sit together with these colleagues within the Research **I**nstitute for **Ma**nagement, **G**overnment and **S**ociety (IMaGeS). The Professional Doctorate in Information Science (DInfSci), the Doctorate in Professional Practice, and the (mandatory, University wide) PG Certificate in Research Methods for doctoral students includes impact and media training as part of its curriculum. This forms a valuable set of resources from which to broaden into staff development sessions. Colleagues within IMaGeS also provide the impact training for doctoral students on the ESRC DTC Scottish Graduate School for the Social Science Information Science pathway. The first master class was held in May 2013 for ESRC doctoral students and research students from pathway partners across Scotland.

**b. Approach to impact**

Professor Spicker, whose work is presented in the Impact case study on Social Security, describes this process in his REF2 output 'Ethical Covert Research' (*Sociology,* 2011 45,1):

> *"In the course of the last year, I have visited or discussed issues with government officials, benefit administrators, voluntary sector workers, employment advisers, welfare rights workers, community workers, campaigners, politicians, disability activists, journalists and of course academics. None of those discussions has been part of a formally constituted research project. … The idea of 'research' ... includes much more than project-based investigation. It takes in scholarship, exploration, discovery, and practice. Research is often done informally, and informal research is rarely overt"* (pp130-131).

In such an outlook the researcher embedded within an iterative process involving scholarship, exploration, discovery, and practice. This requires oversight of the boundary point between observation of practice and our ability to offer independent assessments, much in the way required by participant observation methods; a working example involving the need to decline an invitation in order to maintain this boundary is provided in d. below. Our strong segment of part-time PhD students and history of ESRC CASE recognition in part-time as well as full-time mode has assisted

in the development of articulated governance arrangements for issues such as ownership of intellectual property require in order to assert the role of independent scholarship.

As well staff highlighted in d) below, the work of staff throughout REF1 demonstrate an appetite for public engagement.  Halpin's work on the participation of organized interests in Scottish Government consultations was featured in an article in the 'Government' section of the Scottish daily newspaper *The Herald* (REF3b). McLaverty's expertise in forms of participatory democracy were utilised in Scotland during the development of channels for public participation following the establishment of a Scottish Parliament, and thus fell into the RAE 2008 census period.  Highlights include a grant (hosted within the Centre for Public Policy and Management led by Professor Spicker) by the Scottish Parliament for the development of public engagement with the work of the Scottish Parliament committees, as well as a grant from Aberdeenshire Council for an investigation into public consultation, communication and engagement.  Whilst McLaverty has now completed this work, his research is moving into new areas, evidenced by his recent invite to China as a keynote speaker on deliberative democracy in November 2013. For other researchers in REF1 there is much by way of potential for impact, evidenced by a preceding stage of media interest in their work.  Thus, Vertigan's expertise on Islam has recently resulted in media interviews with 'Voice of America' (broadcast on 14.10.2013, on Mecca, Syria, and the Arab Spring),  Radio 4's programme 'Talking Allowed' (23.10.2013), (audio files of both are available on request) and *The Herald* (14.9.2013, p.5 – on the potential for a terrorist attack on football stadia in Glasgow).   Similarly, Marron's recent contributions to trade magazines such as *Credit Today* and *Credit Collections and Risk,* and to *The Conversation* ('academic rigour, journalistic flair' on the web) on payday lending regulation provide grounds for further impact to emerge.

A PhD student of McLaverty and Halpin, Iain MacLeod (REF4a), progressed to a research assistant position within the same department (and from December 2013, a Lectureship), and has developed his own PhD research on *Youth Participation and the Scottish Parliament* downstream in the form of the Aberdeen *City Voice* Citizens' Panel, comprising 1000 residents from across the city.  Panellists are asked to complete 3-4 surveys each year on a number of current policy topics in order to inform the policy direction of a number of strategic partners in the Aberdeen Community Planning Partnership (inc. Fire and Police services, the local NHS board, Aberdeen Council for Voluntary Organisations, and Scottish Enterprise Grampian, as well as Aberdeen City Council). There is extensive feedback from these partners (available on request) to provide evidence that the Citizens' Panel is a valuable tool in informing their policy intentions and service delivery.

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### c. Strategy and plans

In 2011 the University invested in a 'research impact tsar' as part of the process of engaging researchers in ways of developing the impact of their work.  Staff from the University library are also involved at both strategic and operational levels in REF preparations and beyond in bibliometric related issues.  The Research Institute to which we belong (IMAGES - see REF5) has also invested in the part time services of a member of staff to record impact for the four units of assessment submissions associated with the Institute, using Google Scholar analytics and alerts as well as other tools.  We are in the process of appointment for the Executive Council of IMaGeS. Research Institutes routinely prepare written reports ahead of each meeting of the University wide Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee, and which includes sections on impact and esteem.

To support the publishing and dissemination aspects of our impact strategy going forward the University has employed Professor Charles Oppenheim, a renowned expert in bibliometrics and copyright, to review and advise on publishing strategies across a range of subjects, to work with the University's three Research Institutes and the university library in reviewing and updating our open access strategies, and to provide guidance to the University on the adoption of suitable Key Performance Indicators to reflect and track research progress.  These will in turn influence staff development programmes focusing on individual publishing and impact strategies.   IMaGeS workshops on publishing have been run over the last two academic years for staff and doctoral students and two further are planned for spring 13-14.  These will continue the process of

engaging staff in the development of individual publishing strategies for both academic and user impact, including the effective use of our *Open Access* institutional repository, OpenAir@RGU.

The integration of impact strategies into the work of researchers is continuing as part of the Employee Performance Review (EPR) programme described in REF5. A training programme for reviewers in Research Institutes is in development which will assist in this process. Reviewers meet with researchers twice each year to review performance and set future objectives for the period ahead, which will require the identification of research impact plans in each case. Whilst the use of EPR mechanisms is commonplace, we lay fair claim to leadership through our Investor in People (IiP) status. The Robert Gordon University has been accredited to the IiP standard since 1995, and was the second higher education institution in the UK to gain recognition. The standard is a nationally recognised mark of attainment against 10 key indicators, with organisations assessed by a comprehensive audit every 3 years. We are one of a small number of universities to have accreditation across the entire institution, including all areas where research is conducted. We were the first university in Scotland to be accredited against the revised and strengthened IiP standards currently in force. This commitment to developing the work of its research community, together with the University's leading reputation in translational research (REF5) as well as the recognition which Politics research at the Robert Gordon University carries forward from RAE 2008 in esteem, place us well to emerge as one of the frontrunners in impact deliverables in both the current census period (as summarised below) and in the period ahead.

### d. Relationship to case studies

The generation of two substantial impact case studies from a relatively small group of researchers provides evidence of the depth of our commitment to impact. The strategic orientation of our work towards informing public policy is evident in each of the case studies:

The case study on **participatory governance** (REF3b) includes details of Greenwood's contributions to the debate on the EU Transparency Register. In 2009 he had declined an invitation to serve on a self-regulatory body for public affairs practitioners in order to preserve the ability to offer independent assessments of the dialogue between EU institutions and stakeholders, in that modes of regulation are the subject of intense political contestation. The longer-term benefit of this approach enabled the REF2 article on the (European) Transparency Register published in *Interest Groups and Advocacy* to be written in the knowledge of a forthcoming policy review of the Register. A special open access arrangement was negotiated with the journal publisher, Palgrave Macmillan, at no charge in recognition of the impact potential of the article, which was picked up by the European Commissioner (and Commission Vice-President) responsible for the Register, Maroš Šefčovič. The Commissioner wrote a substantial blog based on the article in May 2013, and which generated a public debate in which the *Transparency International* Europe office responded with a substantial retort also quoting extensively from the article. Greenwood since participated as an academic panellist for an expert discussion meeting (6 November 2013) convened by the European Parliament-European Commission Working Group on the Review of the Transparency Register. The Visiting Professor appointment of Greenwood at the College of Europe throughout the period of assessment allows him to maintain and develop a position as an observer within Brussels based networks, and is supported by the University through concentrating his teaching commitments into one semester. In turn, this position has assisted with the recruitment of PhD students who register on a part-time basis whilst working in Brussels, further strengthening access to research information and making research accessible to practice.

The case study on **Social Security** identifies how Professor Spicker's research has developed through from engagement and interaction which has in turn prompted his research. His submissions on welfare reform led to a section 30(2) amendment to the Scotland Act 1998 being introduced in the UK Parliament on 7th November 2012. The report from his current appointment as Budget Adviser for the Welfare Reform Committee's scrutiny of the Draft Scottish Budget 2014-15 is due out in mid-November 2013.