

Institution: Glasgow Caledonian University

Unit of Assessment: 25

a. Context

UoA25 comprises two research groups: the Caledonian Academy (CA) and the Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning (CRL) with 6.4FTE researchers. Our long-term strategic goal is to develop a trajectory of research impact in the broad domain of professional and lifelong learning.

Learning policies and practices are acknowledged to be complex, diverse and evolving fields. The aim is to achieve impact developing new theoretical and empirical insights with beneficiaries through implementation of research in public and private sector settings. Each centre has implemented a strategic approach to impact, focused on key areas of research strengths, encompassing a range of activities. These activities include participation in bi-lateral participatory research with end users; co-design of research with beneficiaries; opportunity framing through bespoke knowledge exchange activities; and activities around the application and dissemination of research such as participation in expert panels, contributions to the media and public forums.

The UoA has ongoing relationships with diverse stakeholder groups, who may also commission the research and have interest in using the outcomes. These groups include *government organisations* including JISC, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) and the Health & Safety Executive (HSE); *international and UK-based professional organisations* such as the Energy Institute, the Chartered Institute of Securities & Investments, the Higher Education Academy; *multinational organisations*, principally Shell International in the Netherlands and Canada, BP (UK), ConocoPhillips and Phillips66 (UK) and Centrica (UK); as well as a range of international research centres in Europe, America and Australasia.

Impact of research includes the implementation of new approaches to professional and organisational learning in UK public and private sectors, development of policy informed by research and references to specific research findings in policy and practitioner publications, the formulation and application of new approaches to organisational policy and practice problems.

b. Approach to impact since RAE2008

Following RAE2008, we reviewed how we might extend the reach and significance of the impact of our research, aligning with the University's strategic goals to apply research innovation with industry and public sector partners (GCU Strategy to 2015). We focused on improving engagement with research beneficiaries, research communities and the wider public.

One mechanism to improve engagement was to deepen the involvement of beneficiaries in bi-lateral (or multi-lateral) *participatory research*. A specific example is our work with the Jisc and the Higher Education Academy, who commissioned the CA to analyse the motivations, process and services around open learning practices. Our group worked directly with hundreds of research beneficiaries in universities and colleges, co-designing and implementing a framework for analysis of professional practice. This output provided a platform for the implementation of new institutional policies and practices, impacting on professional services in over 90 HEIs across England.

The Scottish Forums in Lifelong Learning also illustrate *participatory* activity. These Forums have sought to extend research and policy links which lead to change in policy through local and international exchanges. A prime example, in 2009, was the CRL Forum on Skills Utilisation. This forum brought research findings from Australian and UK experts to the attention of an invited audience of academics and Scottish Government policy makers providing opportunities for knowledge exchange. In 2011 the Centre hosted an International Symposium focused on the development and impact of research into the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). This event, organised collaboratively with the Prior Learning Research Centre (PLIRC) of Thompson Rivers University, Canada, enabled RPL scholars, researchers and policy makers to discuss how RPL at a national and international level can influence the development of flexible learning approaches and address widening participation and economic and skills agendas. Research in RPL has helped position Scotland at the leading edge of RPL development in Europe. Research findings support

Impact template (REF3a)

post-16 reform in Scotland; the Developing & Supporting the Curriculum Quality Enhancement Theme and the work of the SCQF Partnership in increasing the use of RPL across all sectors.

Principal beneficiaries may be encouraged to *co-design* research, particularly where they commission the work. These beneficiaries have interest in using outcomes to improve policy and practices around learning. Therefore co-design may improve alignment of stakeholder needs with research interests, which is particularly important for interdisciplinary and intersectoral impact. A specific example is a two-year research partnership agreement between the CA and Shell Learning, commissioned by Shell International in the Netherlands. CA researchers formulated and negotiated research objectives and outputs in partnership with industry executives. Impact was achieved through developing and prototyping novel technology-enhanced learning approaches aimed at supporting employees in self-regulating their learning within Shell.

We use specific targeting and tailored activities designed to allow for *opportunity framing* to identify and consider the needs of beneficiaries and end-users. These bespoke events, aligning the perspectives of researchers, policy makers and practitioners, often leading to impact. A prime example is a stakeholder event hosted by the Energy Institute in June 2013, bringing together researchers, senior executives and beneficiaries of research from energy sector companies across Europe and North America. At this event, outputs from studies on organisational learning from incidents (LFI, 2009-2012; LFI-Engage, 2012-13) were discussed with 16 end-users from 12 organisations from 6 different countries of the world. These outputs are now part of an industry training pack used by Energy Institute Technical Partner organisations worldwide. Another example of opportunity framing activity is project clustering. Drawing on our diverse funding stream, we purposefully theme and cluster research focused on theory and methodology with applied studies to strengthen our impact. For example we have aligned industry-sponsored research on Learning From Incidents with a seminar series on Interdisciplinary Perspectives on LFI funded by the ESRC (2013-15). Alignment of research council and industry-funded work improves knowledge exchange across theory-practice-policy boundaries.

Another mechanism to extend impact is by providing spaces for *application and dissemination* of research. CRL and the CA engage in multiple activities to engage a range of communities in dialogue around research outputs. Activities include participating within international expert panels, appearances on and contributions to the media and public forums and the development of a programme of bespoke knowledge exchange activities such as special interest groups, targeted seminars, policy forums and joint international conferences designed to provide opportunities for collaboration of researchers, policy makers and practitioners, leading to impact. From its inception in 1999, CRL has been committed to working with its key partners in Stirling University, and external researchers such as the Leadership Foundation and Thompson Reuters, to facilitate this dialogue. By RAE2008 the Centre had established a tradition of engaging with research users in lifelong learning through its series of Scottish Forums for Lifelong Learning. The Centre also established its biennial series of international conferences, commencing in 2001 as well as a programme of seminars. A wide range of targeted external stakeholder groups attend these events, each designed to provide opportunities not just to address audiences around key research findings but to engage in small workshop discussions. Another forum for dissemination is the CA's Special Interest Group in Technology-enhanced Professional Learning (<http://uk-sself.ning.com>). Established in 2003 through sponsorship from the Higher Education Academy, the SIG has a membership of around 200 researchers, practitioners and research end-users, who discuss and debate the relationship of research to practice, identifying opportunities for application and investigation.

c. Strategy and plans

We have already begun to refine our strategic plans to extend impact through applied research in professional and lifelong learning. Many of our strategic objectives are long-established but we aim to increase annual targets, for example increasing our income from commissioned funding sources in the public and private sectors; consolidating and refining interactions between researchers, practitioners, users and beneficiaries of research; aligning research activity, as appropriate, with the needs of key organisational partners.

We have developed specific objectives in key areas of impact using an established model. Our planned objectives have, therefore, been integrated within the research impact vision model developed by Mitchell & Walcott (<http://tinyurl.com/o6z5zwt>). The model has five key elements:

- 1 Extending impact leadership and strategy by:
 - Focusing research in thematic areas aligned with learning, specifically technology-enhanced professional learning and lifelong learning.
 - Clustering projects within these thematic areas to align conceptual and methodological research with applied research that produces direct impact.
 - Deepening relationships with funders and beneficiaries of research, including the research councils, government agencies, professional bodies and industry, through direct, collaborative working with partners or via knowledge exchange activities. An explicit focus in funding annual planning is building bridges to key external groups.
- 2 Improving impact literacy by:
 - Continuing to improve alignment of stakeholder needs with research interests.
 - Co-designing research with beneficiaries, where appropriate.
- 3 Offering reward and recognition for impact activity by:
 - Identifying previously unrecognised activities that contribute to impact.
 - Providing resources to improve impact.
- 4 Extending impact training for researchers through:
 - Continuing peer review of funding applications designed to help principal investigators develop comprehensive plans to support the pathway to impact strategy upon grant application.
 - Offering research impact training for contract researchers, principal investigators and research leaders via the GCU Graduate School and extending training for early career researchers on 'engagement, influence and impact' (Vitae, Researcher Development Framework).
 - Extending research impact skills training through peer review and academic exchange.
- 5 Tracking and capturing evidence of impact by:
 - Continuing to capture and store evidence of impact within the PURE enterprise system.
 - Embedding impact tracking as part of the repertoire of research practices.
 - Engaging research impact leads who review impact at regular intervals.

d. Relationship to case studies

The two impact case studies draw on a sustained period of research since the formation of CRL and the CA in 1999 and 2006. The first case study illustrates the impact of one thematic area of the research programme, focusing on policy, practice and services around open learning. The case study illustrates the CA's deliberate policy of working closely with beneficiaries and end-users to achieve cross-sector impact on professional and organisational learning. Dissemination and application of outcomes which led to impact on professional learning is evidenced in the UK, Australia and the Netherlands and internationally in the corporate sector. CRL has established a reputation for sustained investigation of the system and infrastructure of lifelong learning, particularly in, but not confined to, the Scottish context as shown in the second case study. Research since 1999, funded by a combination of the Scottish Executive and Government, the Scottish Funding Council, the QAA, SCQF and the ESRC TLRP, has focused on inter-connected areas of policy and practice relating to widening access, social inclusion and inequality, the recognition of prior learning, links between colleges and universities, and perceptions and uses of Higher National and other forms of short-cycle provision in both Scotland and England. This programme of work has provided a comprehensive evidence trail charting the nature of learner transitions between different learning contexts and sectors. The specific case study founded on this research relates to the impact on policy and provision of how links between short cycle higher education and bachelor degree programmes are interpreted and enacted.