

<p>Institution: Birmingham City University</p>
<p>Unit of Assessment: UoA 25, Education</p>
<p>a. Overview Birmingham City University (BCU), formerly University of Central England in Birmingham, has a longstanding tradition of producing good quality, practice-facing research in education. In 2001 6.4 FTE staff were returned to RAE achieving a score of 3b. In 2008, against a backdrop of considerable expansion in research activity it was decided to return a more selective group, 3.55 FTE, with 65% of work submitted judged to be 2* or above, 25% 3* and above and 5% 4*. Since 2008 the University has invested substantial additional resource in the development of the research environment. This has helped to ensure that research in education has consolidated and extended existing strengths through a period of significant structural and personnel changes and continues to be responsive to the challenges and dilemmas faced by a diverse community of stakeholders in the context of a rapidly changing external environment.</p> <p>Preparing this return has provided a useful and timely opportunity to review the impact of both increased investment and a new strategic context for research in education at BCU and we are pleased to be able to demonstrate growth in relation to capability, capacity, quality and impact as well as a much more strategically driven, stimulating and challenging research environment.</p>
<p>b. Research strategy</p> <p>Research in education is resourced, supported and celebrated through a nominated University Centre of Excellence (CoE), the Centre for Research in Education (CRE). Whilst CRE is structurally located within the Faculty of Education, Law and Social Sciences (ELSS) it also works closely with the University's Centre of Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT) to extend its reach and broker engagement from across the wider University. CRE has four key delivery functions: firstly to shape and drive the strategic development of the education research portfolio; secondly to support and monitor the production of excellent research in education in Creativities in Education, Early Years Education, Literacies and Policy and Curriculum Studies; thirdly to support and grow research capacity and capability; and finally to collaborate with sister centres of excellence, both within the Faculty and across the University, to implement and operationalise University and Faculty policy.</p> <p>CRE was founded in 2009 as part of the University's £3 million strategy to expand its network of Centres of Excellence following success in RAE 2008. Centres were central to new overarching aims to achieve more effective research governance, build infrastructure and to focus resources in strategically important areas with proven track records of success and potential for growth. Combined with matched financial commitment from a newly constituted Faculty with a new management team this strategy bought just over £1million of new investment in social science research into a new ELSS Faculty.</p> <p>Research is a core feature of the Faculty's strategic and operational plans. Led by the Associate Dean for Research (Kendall) ELSS takes a co-ordinated and centralised approach to research governance and management that is then flexed and nuanced at the local, disciplinary level by three CoEs, of which CRE is one, in their capacity as specialist research hubs. As well as ensuring effective resource management this strategy has supported collaboration across the faculty's constituent disciplines. This approach has facilitated practice sharing, building of leadership capability, the development of career pathways and, crucially, a dynamic, interdisciplinary orientated and very visible social science research community. It has also brought together the Post Graduate Researcher (PGR) community within a unified Faculty Graduate School (FGS) that actively participates in research governance and assures an influential voice for PGR students.</p> <p>Since its inception CRE has pursued a long-term strategy of research capacity building around its core aim to be a centre of excellence for evidence-based practice and pedagogies. This strategy has been driven by a commitment to developing an engaged, inclusive research community of practice within which all participants, students, staff and a wider group of partners and stakeholders, are dynamically and agentively positioned as 'prosumers', both producers and consumers, of research. As such there is, very intentionally, a strong correlate between the demand-led work the School of Education undertakes with partners, its teaching portfolio, and the four research areas around which CRE has been building critical mass: Creativities in Education; Early Years Education; Literacies; and Policy and Curriculum Studies. Four participatory research clusters, each led by a member of CRE's new professorial team, bring together academic staff, students, practitioners and a wide network of visiting professors, fellows and practitioners in</p>

support of this aim. This strategy has enabled CRE to achieve new synergies between research and teaching and researchers and teachers and facilitated production, dissemination and use of a broad spectrum of research: from the evidence-based practice of the theorising teacher to the high-impact, world-leading. A number of outcomes have been achieved in line with our strategic objectives over the last four years:-

1. The quality and quantity of research outputs relevant to UoA25 has increased. After internal assessment and external moderation 104 outputs from 25 academic staff across the community CRE works with were judged to be of REF quality at least 1* or above in quality.
2. The research capacity and capability of an existing, stable staffing base has developed significantly which is well illustrated by the significant increase in the number of staff holding or studying towards doctoral qualifications. In 2012 9 staff held doctorates compared with 4 in 2008. A further 14 have been fully funded by CRE to undertake doctoral qualifications either at BCU or externally. This means that in 2012-13 49% of the academic staff in the School of Education held or were working towards a doctoral qualification marking a significant step change in terms of research capability within education.
3. Strategic dedicated appointments at both professorial and senior researcher level have been made in priority areas (Aubrey, Kendall, O'Connor, French) to support capacity building, growth and senior staff (Hatcher, Le Gallais) support succession planning.
4. The range, scope and scale of external bidding has significantly increased which has kept income generation stable and enabled CRE to sustain its capacity building and growth model despite the challenges of a contracting and increasingly competitive external funding market. This has been facilitated by a number of initiatives including a 'bright ideas' seed-funding scheme which has invested in pilot projects to enable production of results that can support bids to external funding schemes.
5. CRE's PGR community has both grown and become more diverse. The number of PGR students affiliated to CRE has increased from 8.2 FTE in 2008 to 22.5 FTE in 2012-13. A Professional Doctorate programme has been added to our portfolio to increase the attractiveness of doctoral study to a wider constituency of practitioners. Twelve part-time EdD students progressed from year 1 to year 2 in September 2013, 100% progression and a further part-time 10 have enrolled in 2013 taking the total to 27.5 FTEs in 2013-14. These figures include five full-time students on Faculty funded studentships. A newly developed and fully funded Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) role to support enhanced integration between research and teaching activity has recently been advertised and as part of its on-going strategy CRE will continue to recruit a new GTA each year for the next six years.
6. CRE has become a 'turn to' partner of choice for research and development work in its specialist areas. This is demonstrated through projects such as the Sound and Music project '*Listen, Imagine, Compose*' (Fautley) funded by the Arts Council and '*Developing Pedagogies for the Prison Virtual Campus*' (Kendall, £101,000) funded by the Skills Funding Council where CRE's participation in activity was actively sought out by funders.
7. An aspirational research culture has been engendered through new management architecture that has agreed new workload packages and researcher groupings. These have enabled mobility of talent through well articulated and supported career pathways so that academic staff, researchers and PhD students are well supported to work at a level at which they are comfortable, but also signposted and encouraged, through role modelling and mentoring to strike out in new and innovative areas. A competitive sabbatical programme launched in 2011 has enabled colleagues to dedicate fixed periods of time, from one month to a full semester, to research activity. To date 17 sabbaticals, each yielding tangible, published outputs, have been awarded and successfully completed.
8. Over-arching Faculty structures have facilitated inter-disciplinary recruitment and collaboration and enabled CRE to work closely with researchers in Criminology, Law and Psychology. The HEA '*Literacies for Employability*' project (Kendall, French), a collaboration between Education, Law and Sociology and the integration of Coyne and Kantartzis into CRE's Literacies and Early Years clusters respectively exemplify this in action.
9. Six newly created professional services posts provide support to all aspects of CRE's activity including bidding, financial planning and management and graduate school administration. This support architecture ensures that academic staff are not burdened by administration and can instead play to their strengths.

In reviewing our strategic plans we have identified current priority actions and longer-term actions and aspirations. The funding, infrastructure and operational organisation are now in place to ensure these actions are achieved. Over the next five years we will contribute to the Transforming Communities aspect of our Local Economic Partnership strategic plan through continued focus on evidence based practice that positively influences the work of teachers both in our region and beyond and as a consequence the lives of learners within the local, national and international education communities we serve. We will achieve this by:

- reviewing, expanding and developing our clusters so that our research continues to be needs-led by both internal and external users;
- continuing to maintain financial sustainability by seeking out strategic collaborative partnerships with other HEIs, education providers and leading voluntary and charitable organisations and by building on our successes, being ambitious in our bids and supporting more staff to win external funding for their research;
- promoting, disseminating and, where appropriate, commercialising the outcomes of our research activity through collaborations with education partners, policy makers and industry;
- continuing to develop the infrastructure and environment to support research activity by continued investment in staffing, equipment and resources and continuing to develop the interdisciplinary research base for our work;
- maximising the impact of our work and tracking, monitoring and assessing its influence on policy and practice;
- continuing to fund, nurture and expand our PGR and post-doctoral research community;
- using REF 2014 dynamically as a quality marker to help us to understand and reflect upon our progress and to inform future strategy.

c. People, including:

i. Staffing strategy and staff development

The Faculty's comprehensive staff development strategy provides the necessary financial support, mentoring and workload management to enable academic staff affiliated to CRE to develop successful research identities and outputs for the achievement of our strategic aims and objectives and a sustainable future. BCU is a practice facing university and consequently the University generally and the School of Education in particular recruits staff directly from professional practice. Whilst a postgraduate qualification is generally required doctoral level study or significant research experience is not. As such the academic community that CRE works with is a diverse one and a differentiated package of support ensures that the needs of all affiliated researchers are met, from the neophyte group through to the most experienced whose work is showcased in this return.

CRE has identified three categories of researcher, Early Career, Mid-Career and Senior Researcher, to describe staff at different stages of their research career and offers a tailored, differentiated package of support for each. The Director of CRE (Fautley) works with individuals to self-assess their category against set criteria. All members of the School of Education are required to agree research targets and target setting is supported by a three-way discussion with the cluster leader and the line manager as part of the appraisal process. This approach ensures that targets are realistic, appropriate and challenging and that sufficient support and resources are in place to enable colleagues to be successful. The Vitae researcher development framework was piloted in appraisal in 2012-13 and will be permanently adopted across from 2013-14.

In each category researchers are allocated a minimum research leave entitlement, 20%, 35%, 50% of workload respectively, ring-fenced through a newly introduced workload allocation model and booked formally through the same process as annual leave. Positioning within categories is reviewed annually through appraisal and this review is linked to the annual call for submissions to the University's conferment of titles panel to enable potential candidates to be identified and mentored toward application. Careful monitoring has enabled CRE to establish baseline data against which to track and set targets for mobility across categories. Additional time is allocated for externally funded research or knowledge exchange activity or for successful applications to the Faculty sabbatical or pilot project funds – see above. The participatory approach adopted by ELSS provides research opportunities for all staff, irrespective of their current position, length of service or any other factor, in accordance with the University's equality policy. Centre procedures undergo equality impact assessment to maximise equality and identify issues for further action. The aim is to ensure a clear, transparent research culture in which all staff can maximise their potential and advance

their careers whilst also contributing to the strategic development of CRE. The inclusive approach outlined here contributed to the Faculty being awarded the Investors in People Silver Award in 2012.

Colleagues are well supported to attend conferences and seminars both internally and externally to showcase their work and maintain connections to their local, national and international specialist communities. CRE hosts an annual conference for both staff and the wider community of partners affiliated to the Centre as well as a diverse and stimulating annual programme of workshops and seminars led by internal and external speakers. Recent speakers have included Pat Thomson, Stephen Gorard, Melissa Benn and Geoff Hill, Visiting Professor from the University of Queensland. A Research Café on the last Monday of each month provides a forum for staff and students from the wider social science research community to share work in progress or lead discussion around research dilemmas and methodological issues. Staff in all research categories are able to access funding to support attendance at external seminars and conferences both in the UK and internationally via either CRE or the School of Education staff development budget. The former provides privileges support for staff giving papers whilst the latter is used primarily to support colleagues in the early stages of their research career. In both cases a formalised process with set, published and publicised criteria ensures funds are allocated fairly and transparently and processes are monitored on an annual basis by FRC and the Staff Development Funding Panel respectively.

As well as providing opportunities to showcase and disseminate work the CRE research leadership team recognises that in a busy modern university time and space for writing needs to be proactively ring-fenced to enable colleagues to write successfully for publication. As a response CRE hosts and funds four structured writing retreats each year in October, December May and July. The retreats are held off-site over one or two days and are led by a facilitator (Le Gallais) with the support of the professorial team. The retreat model that has been developed provides personalised, peer and community support to those new to writing for publication, time and space for more experienced writers, and regular, planned opportunities for colleagues to come together to write collaboratively. The retreats have a high profile across the School and line managers proactively support attendance. On-going evaluation of the retreats indicates a positive relationship between participation and completion of conference papers and published outputs.

All academic staff are entitled to bid in to the Faculty's annual sabbatical and pilot project schemes. Sabbaticals secure a release from all duties of between one month and one term to enable completion of a specified research task. Thirteen sabbaticals were awarded in 2011-12 and 4 in 2012-13. Funding of up to £5000 is available for projects which contribute to the strategic priorities of the CoEs and their constituent clusters in 2012-13 five projects were awarded.

A monthly research e-bulletin circulated across the University and to the research hub partners ensures that research news and opportunities are disseminated across the wider community and that success is shared.

i. Research students

Recruitment

CRE has worked closely with its sister CoEs to develop a strong postgraduate research student culture in order to meet its strategic aims and objectives and achieve its priorities over the coming years. As such both CRE and its host Faculty has invested heavily in the development of a FGS. Formed in 2010 the FGS provides a highly visible focal point for postgraduate research in the social sciences. A full-time Graduate School Administrator works alongside academic staff to support the day to day running of the FGS. Governance of the FGS is driven by its members who work closely with GSA and the ADR. This dynamic relationship was recognised by the University in 2011/12 with the award of a Student Academic Partnership grant that enabled student representatives to be funded to develop a 3 year action plan for the FGS. The FGS links to the wider graduate community via the University's PGRNet.

CRE students are recruited strategically by subject to MPhil, PhD, or EdD programmes affiliated to one of the 4 specialist clusters. This ensures that students are closely supervised and well supported by senior members of the research team and join small, but coherent groups of active researchers. The EdD offer was added to the portfolio in September 2012 to extend the reach of the FGS into the local professional community and increase the diversity of the FGS. All full-time students are funded by the University bursary scheme and a significant proportion of part-time students are funded by the Faculty fee waiver scheme (see staff development section below). In September 2013 the Faculty will pilot the University's new GTA scheme. The scheme combines

PhD study with a teaching role offering a new hybrid route into fully funded, full-time PGR study that we hope will be attractive to students coming from a practice focused background whilst supporting our mission to embed our research and our researchers within the everyday practices of teaching and learning. CRE recognises that investment in post-doctoral opportunities for PGR students completing their studies is crucial to securing an effective research pipeline. As such CRE has secured funding to employ Blackburn, Kinsella and Jones as post-doctoral researchers on completion of their studies in 2013-2014. This will ensure that CRE benefits from a longer term return on investment in studentships and will further strengthen the work of the specialist clusters.

Skills development and monitoring

Skills development and monitoring of progress is managed pro-actively and systematically through the monthly Faculty Research Degrees Committee (FRDC) and ensures that students make good and timely progress. Students enter a formal monitoring process introduced in 2011 on enrolment to their programme. As outlined above the Faculty has adopted the Vitae researcher development framework to support the maturation of its research community and this was embedded in the Annual Review of Progress (APR) for PGRs in 2012-13. The APR takes place in June and is a three stage process requiring an in-depth self-assessment by the student supported by the supervisory team, this is then reviewed by a third party 'critical friend' who offers support and guidance to the student and their supervision team and makes a progression recommendation to FRDC. It is at this stage that students whose progress is considered to be 'at risk' are identified and additional support packages and mechanisms agreed for the short and medium term. An additional mid-term risk assessment is made at the February meeting of FRDC to ensure that issues and concerns are identified before they become critical and that the wider research team can respond to the needs of students and their supervision teams in a timely manner. The number of students judged be at risk has decreased by 50% in the second year of implementation of this scheme.

The APR process provides the focal point for management of individual skills development planning. As a practice-facing Centre public engagement and impact are core concerns of supervisors and PGRs at the research design stage. PGRs are set realistic but challenging targets through the APR process for the dissemination of their work and are provided with the necessary resources to achieve these. PGRs are encouraged to attend the four research retreats and agree funding support to attend conferences with the Director of CRE in September of each year.

As well as undertaking research skills training through Postgraduate Certificate in Research Practice in the first year of the their programme PGRs in the early stages of their programme are supported to present work in progress at a Faculty Research Café (see above) and the internal PGR-run CRE conference. In subsequent years as their work develops they are encouraged to return to the Research Café's as well as present to their specialist communities through conference submissions. CRE fully funds attendance at at least one national or international conference per year. The relatively small size of the PGR community enables PGRs to work very closely with their supervisors and research cluster leads as well as other members of the community. Students are encouraged and supported to co-write, co-bid and co-present with senior colleagues e.g. Jones attended a conference in San Francisco with Aubrey; Taylor and French are co-investigators on an HEA project with Kendall; Taylor, Kinsella, Matchett and Blackburn attended an event in Bulgaria with Kendall and Fautley; and Kendall and McGrath co-authored a peer-reviewed publication. The Faculty takes a proactive and reflective approach to the ethical issues related to co-writing with students and attribution is carefully considered to ensure that it correlates meaningfully with effort and input. In addition to developing research-related skills all PGR students are encouraged to undertake an appropriate level of teaching related activity within the School of Education and to make a contribution to undergraduate teaching. PGR students also participate in a range of specialist workshops such as Nvivo and SPSS training that are funded and run by the faculty and wider university as their personal development plan require. PGR students are strongly encouraged to develop their bid writing skills and are funded to attend all staff development opportunities run by CRE, the wider Faculty or University relating to this.

d. Income, infrastructure and facilities

Income

CRE has made good use of University and Faculty investment to develop an effective and architecture to support income generation and the long-term aim of sustainability. This has enabled the Centre to generate over £750,000 of research income over the period. This represents an

Environment template (REF5)

increase of 220% on the RAE 2008 figure of £236, 213, particularly pleasing in the context of an increasingly competitive market. It should be noted that as a practice-facing centre CRE undertakes substantial development work that although not captured in the REF income classifications in fact delivers a research output. As such this figure represents only a proportion of the actual research that CRE engages in. CRE takes a systematic approach to income generation and has introduced formal mechanisms to ensure that externally funded activity has a good fit with strategic priorities. CRE performance is driven by challenging metrics that are negotiated and regularly reviewed with the ADR.

Regular evaluation is undertaken to inform planning and a three year review (2009-2012) indicated that a substantial proportion of CRE income has historically been derived from projects undertaken with pre-existing partners, for example recent work with the Birmingham Music Service (Fautley) or the Skills Funding Agency (Kendall), who come directly to CRE to work with particular CRE 'experts'. There has been less of a tradition of bidding for external income so substantial staff development has been undertaken to support growth in this area. A monthly workshop series, led by the senior research team, has been running since September 2011. Participation in the series has enabled colleagues to learn about the principles and cycle of project development from the initial idea stage through to project approval, tender analysis, bid writing, costing and pricing, EU opportunities and on to post-award issues such as contract and project management. To complement the programme external specialists have provided one-day courses on bid writing and project management and the Faculty is hosting a two-day 'live bid writing' event in December facilitated by an external agency to support three teams of researchers to prepare 'live' bids for submission. A system of buddying ensures that inexperienced colleagues have opportunities to practice newly acquired skills and experienced colleagues are encouraged to pro-actively engage fellow cluster members and PhD students with their project work.

Provision of intensive training is beginning to show impact and bidding activity and success rates have been pleasing as performance over the last three years indicates: in 2011 18 were submitted and 15 successful; in 2012 63 were submitted and 33 successful; and in 2013 17 were submitted of which 7 have been successful. ELSS has developed a robust methodology for tracking and monitoring financial performance and CRE makes good use of this data to self-manage its strategic direction. To support further development an external review by The Projects Company of all systems and procedures was undertaken in 2012-13 and an action plan to support progression and development agreed.

Infrastructure and Facilities

A triad of meetings contribute to effective research governance in ELSS. The Faculty Research Committee (FRC) and FRDC are each sub-committees of University committees of the same name. The Faculty Research Management Group oversees day-to-day implementation of the faculty research action plan and reports to FRC.

However the Faculty recognises that whilst infrastructure and governance provide a necessary context for a stimulating and enabling research environment it is nurturing of ground-up activity that brings vibrancy and vitality to a research community. As a specialist hub CRE facilitates a subject specific space for research in Education within the contextual architecture of Faculty support and ensures that clusters makes good and effective use of management-led affordances.

The FGS has a prominent location at the heart of the School of Education ensuring a recognisable, physical presence for research at the heart of the community. The FGS has dedicated, fit for purpose facilities co-located with the Research Admin Office. All students have that access to a designated desk, IT, printing and kitchen facilities. All members of the School of Education have an Ipad and access to a laptop in addition to their desktop facilities so as to enable them to work flexibly and remotely in support of their research activity. Specialist software such as Nvivo and SPSS is available to all staff across the University.

e. Collaboration and contribution to the discipline or research base

The specialist cluster leads in CRE are actively involved in leading and shaping knowledge and practice in their respective specialist fields through their work on editorial boards, advisory panels and as invited keynote speakers and consultants.

Editorial Leadership

The CRE leadership team contribute to the work of a diverse range of journals that help to keep the specialist clusters connected to issues and debates in the wider academic community. Fautley co-edits the British Journal of Music Education, Aubrey was a founding editor of the Journal of

Environment template (REF5)

Early Childhood Research, French co-edits the Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education. The team are currently represented on a wide range of editorial boards including The Journal of Mathematical Behaviour (Aubrey), the Media Education Research y Journal (Kendall), Red Feather (O'Connor), Quality in Higher Education (Williams) and review for Research in Practice in Adult Education (Kendall), Literacy (Kendall), Journal of Vocational Education and Training (Kendall), the Howard League Journal (Kendall), Journal of Educational Administration and History (Hatcher), The Journal of Education Policy (Hatcher), The British Education Research Journal (Hatcher), Children and Society (O'Connor), Journal of Children and Media (O'Connor) Studies in Higher Education (Williams)

Advisory Work and Panel Membership

The specialist advice of CRE members is often sought for National and International panels and think tanks. Aubrey was a member of ESRC College (2004-2008) and Ofqual Early Years Advisory Group (2009-2010). She is currently working with the European Community on a study of the effective use of early childhood education and care in preventing early school leaving and recently evaluated a family education programme in Uzbekistan (with Chris Gittins) for UNICEF. She is a member of KLC International Advisory Panel to provide evidence on services to KLC School of Education Ptd Ltd, Crestar Group, covering Singapore, China and other regions and was a member of Scientific Programme Committee, Conference on Educational Assessment, University of Szeged, April 2013. She is also an Advisory Board member for Children and Families Research Centre, Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia. Fautley has been consulted by the DfE, QCA, the Chilean Government, a number of LAs, and the *Specialist Schools and Academies Trust* on assessment in music education. He was an adviser for previous iterations of the National Curriculum and was a co-opted member of the *Music Education Council* committee. Hatcher has been invited to join the expert seminar group informing the recently convened House of Commons Education Committee enquiry on academies and free schools. Kendall is an elected member of the International Committee of the International Professional Development Association and chairs the publications and research sub-group. She served on the national committee of the Research and Practice in Adult Literacy Network from (2000-2006) and has consulted for the National Research and Development Centre for Adult, Literacy, Numeracy and the Skills Funding Agency.

Keynotes by invitation

CRE cluster leads are regularly invited to give keynote lectures to academic and policy forums both in the UK and further afield recent highlights include: Membership of an expert panel to debate the Changing Face of Early Childhood in England over the last 20 years (Aubrey); Keynotes to the National Creativity Conference London, 2008 (Fautley), Scottish Teachers Ayr, 2011 (Fautley), 'Creative Sensations' Barton-upon-Humber, 2009 (Fautley), ESRC seminar Literacies and Online Gaming, Lancaster, 2010 (Kendall), Improving Digital Skills for a Networked Nation Conference, London 2012 (Kendall), the *Westminster Education Forum* London, 8 December 2011 (Hatcher), the *Education and Employers Taskforce* London, 24 January 2012 (Hatcher), the *Unió Sindical de Treballadors de l'Ensenyament de Catalunya*, Barcelona 5 April 2008 (Hatcher)

Collaboration

CRE nurtures collaborative relationships with a range of external individuals, institutions and agencies to enhance its skills base, extend its influence and ensure meaningful dialogue with the wider constituency of communities it serves. A vibrant community of visiting scholars, practitioners and professors complement the expertise of full-time centre staff. Visiting fellows contribute actively to a range of activities: Dr Cathy Burnett has led seminars for the literacy cluster; Julie Hughes collaborated with Kendall on the *Developing Pedagogies* project. Visiting Professors Christine Pascal and Tony Bertram from the renowned Centre for Research in Early Childhood bring additional supervisory expertise to PGRs in the Early Years cluster as well as facilitating wider collaboration between the two institutions. CRE regularly hosts visiting scholars from overseas on a short-term basis who bring an international dimension to the research community, between 2011 and 2013 scholars visited from India, Sri Lanka and Australia. Dr Geof Hill from the University of Queensland spent time as a visiting scholar and has subsequently been appointed as a visiting Professor. CRE established and convenes the West Midlands post '92 universities Education Research Forum. The forum brings together researcher staff and students from across the region to build critical mass and share expertise. The forum has collaborated on three bids to external agencies since its inception in January 2012, two of which have been successful.