

Institution: York St John University

Unit of Assessment: 25 (Education)

a. Overview

Education research is important for an institution that has been engaged in the study of education since 1841, although only achieving university status as recently as 2005. The environment for research has been moulded and developed by a series of university research strategies, whereby all academic staff are expected to be engaged in research and scholarship, with research defined in accord with the REF guidance as 'a process of investigation leading to new insights effectively shared' that involves scholarly, peer-reviewed, research activities and their outcomes, other explicit research activities and outcomes, and research activities whose outcomes (such as textbooks) are indirectly derived from the research. All Education academic staff, including those in the Faculty of Education & Theology (in Initial Teacher Education [ITE] and in the Children, Young People, and Education [CYPE] subject groups, within that Faculty), and academic staff elsewhere in the University involved in education, are expected to be engaged in research (in its broad sense), and this is intended to inform all Education teaching. In this way the UoA has adopted a very inclusive approach to research.

In RAE 2008, four staff were submitted, and there were, at that time, three research students. The continuing development of Education has led to 11 staff being presented in the REF of 2014, with 10 Education research students: a near three-fold increase.

Responsibility for the development of Education research rests with the Dean of the Faculty of Education & Theology and the Professor of Education Policy. They are accountable to the Deputy Vice Chancellor, who is the university's director of research; this ensures that research is addressed at the highest level in the institution, consistent with the University's research strategy.

All staff in the submitting UoA are involved in research across a diverse range of Education topics. This is monitored and nurtured by a programme of annual Research Conversations where the Dean and the Professoriate meet with each member of staff to discuss his or her research activity, plot future plans, and identify suitable support. Research activity in the unit is grouped around two main research areas, led by the Professoriate: (i) education, spirituality, and religion; and, (ii) education, policy, and praxis. The first of these also allows a very fruitful cross-disciplinary relationship to develop with Faculty colleagues in Theology and Religious Studies, in areas such as collaborative research, joint publications, and conference organisation and hosting. The second area allows for the inclusion of a number of staff working centrally in the university's Learning and Teaching Development unit and in other disciplines, such as Psychology. This research area also embraces the research of a number of members of staff pursuing doctoral studies who have the common focus of theorising their own practice. Staff in both research areas have established forums to facilitate opportunities for further development of research and to enhance collaborative activities through publications, funding applications and conference organisation.

The UoA has a strong commitment to creating and encouraging active roles for its Visiting Professors and Fellows, so that they are fully involved in the UoA's research activity via participation in seminars, public lectures, collaborative projects, and joint publication. Currently there are six Visiting Professors and two Visiting Fellows in Education, the first three of whom also contribute to Theology and Religious Studies research: Professor Geoffrey Alderman (University of Buckingham), Professor Leslie Francis (University of Warwick), Professor Jeff Astley (University of Durham), Professor Mike Bottery (University of Hull), Professor Ivan Reid (University of Bradford), through whose auspices as editor the journal *Research in Education* is hosted by York St John, Professor Chris Sink (Seattle Pacific University), Dr Michael T Buchanan (Australian Catholic University), and Dr Helen E Lees (University of Stirling), through whose auspices as Editor, the journal *Other Education* is also hosted by York St John University.

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Their involvement includes working with academic staff to develop research projects and supporting new researchers to be published and to gain research funding. Their extensive experience contributes significantly to the research culture, has a positive impact on research skills, and produces collaborative research outcomes. For example, recently Dr Lees has collaborated with Professor Stern on joint research relating to 'silence' in schools, and Professor Francis has collaborated with Dr Adrian Brockett in relation to studies in Islamophobia.

b. Research strategy**Developments since RAE 2008**

The Faculty set out four strategies in response to the RAE of 2008 aimed at increasing research activity post 2008. The first strategy was to attain a target of 80% of staff being research active, which has been surpassed with all staff now actively engaged in research at some level. Many of these staff are early career researchers and so the expectation is that the quality and extent of their work will develop considerably in the coming years. A second strategy was to aim at generating a minimum of £200k in external research funding annually. This has proved more challenging in the current climate but has been achieved this year because of the significant success in Erasmus Mundus (see below). The expectation for all academic staff to have, or to be undertaking studies towards, doctoral degrees was a third key strategic goal and progress has been good, with nearly 60% of staff in that category. However a number of members of academic staff still need to prioritise work towards HEA Fellowship status or Masters level qualifications. The final strategy was to appoint a Professor and a Reader in research. The first was achieved with the arrival of Professor Jean McNiff who has commenced a considerable programme of support for staff researching into their own practice. This was followed by the arrival of Professor Donald Gillies – the decision having been taken to seek a second Professor rather than a Reader – which has added a stronger focus on research outputs, external research grant bids, and research publications. Professor Gillies has also been involved in some of the other staff-related developments itemised in the RAE documentation: surgeries for new researchers and staff development sessions related to writing for publication. Research student numbers have grown from 3 to 10 and university-wide investment has ensured suitable facilities and an environment to support their studies. Should the university's application for Research Degree Awarding Powers be successful, then research student numbers should grow further as a professional doctorate is developed.

To support further growth and enhancement of research across the Faculty a strategic decision was taken by the Faculty Management Group to allocate funds to employ a part-time research administrator in 2009. Because of the significant increase in research activity and growth in the recruitment of doctoral students, this post was increased in 2010 to a full-time position.

Strategic plan: research

UoA 25 research in the university contributes to, and is in turn supported by, the university's continuing strategic research aim of developing a 'strong, vibrant and sustainable research culture that informs our teaching, inspires our students and staff, enables research excellence, and enhances our academic reputation.' In the 2012-15 period, this aim has been developed in terms of six key objectives, to which Education research has made specific contributions. These objectives, with some explanations of Education contributions to them, are that the University should:

- a. *Promote research as a key form of learning:* Education researchers, such as Sadler and Asghar, develop and theorise this objective by working on the nature of learning in Higher Education (as well as other contexts);
- b. *Ensure that high quality research and scholarly activity contribute to exceptional learning and teaching in all subject areas:* UoA 25 researchers collaborate with researchers in other disciplines, such as Theology, and support various approaches to learning across the university. The key role of staff research in contributing to the quality of the student experience

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is underlined by the university through its financial support for research from funds not generated from research;

- c. *Create a critical mass of sustainable research and increase the percentage of staff with doctorates*: UoA 25 research has played a significant role in increasing the sustainability of research generally, by contributing to research (including doctoral study) in, and collaborating on research projects with, a number of Faculties;
- d. *Achieve Research Degree Awarding Powers, with increasing numbers of research students and high completion rates*: this objective has been supported through the increase in UoA 25 doctoral students and the preparations for the establishment of an EdD programme;
- e. *Engage with, and influence, users of research, locally, nationally, and internationally*: Education researchers have developed their local, national and international networks to support this impact objective and shared them with others (for example, physiotherapists, product design specialists, music academics, and others);
- f. *Increase research activity through effective research management, tied to work planning systems and student experience*: this objective is supported and informed by UoA 25 researchers being actively involved in University-level research management – with the Dean of Education & Theology chairing, until recently, the University Research Committee.

UoA 25 research is an integral part of the Performance Development Review (PDR) system, with the annual Research Conversations held with each member of academic staff further contributing to the PDR process.

Education research is managed at a local level, including monitoring progress towards these strategic objectives, through the Faculty Research Committee (FRC) which meets four times per year. It is Chaired by the Professor of Education Policy and its membership comprises the Dean, all Professors and Readers, all Heads of Department, and nominated and self-selected researchers. The FRC reports both to the Faculty Management Group, and the University Research Committee. A Faculty Research Ethics Committee sits alongside the FRC to support staff in maintaining high ethical standards in research. This model is mirrored at institutional level with a University Research Committee overseeing institutional research development and activity, and delegating responsibility to a University Research Ethics Committee to provide direction and guidance to Faculty Ethics Committees, and to deal with any referred applications.

New initiatives

The competitive success of Margaret Meredith's bid for Erasmus Mundus funding (see section d, p6 below) has meant that the unit now has the opportunity to build on this ground-breaking moment for the Faculty. One avenue being pursued is to increase the expertise at institutional level to support external grant applications and funding bids. Another is to use the experience to help develop further research into Social Economy issues and continue the international collaboration initiated here.

The proposed EdD programme is planned to centre on the two research groups' work so that the UoA can capitalise on its research expertise in the programmes it offers to postgraduate students, and thereby support the principle of research-led pedagogy. This will involve some reshaping and further refinement of each group's focus. The growing number of staff who will complete doctoral studies within the next few years will mean that there is a broad base of staff able to contribute to the programme and the future development of these research groups.

The development of Teaching Schools Alliances under the present government's Education policies has, because of the particular research remit of these Alliances, opened opportunities for joint academic-practitioner projects. Thus far, research links have been established with two such alliances under the supervision of Professor Donald Gillies. It is intended that these links will be developed into a supportive system of connected learning communities facilitated by Dr Tony Leach who has long-standing research in this area. A further expected benefit is that these links

should enable the UoA to build up a pool of potential participants in its own future research studies.

Priority developmental areas

The Strategic Plan (pages 2-3 above) identifies six areas that the UoA wishes to see develop over the coming years. These can be summarised as follows: continuing to support staff progress toward doctoral completion; encouraging and enabling staff to increase the quality of their research activity (and related publications); extending the increase in postgraduate student numbers; using the (future) granting of research degree awarding powers to boost postgraduate student numbers, partly through the development of an EdD programme; refining and developing the role of the research groups within the Faculty and in relation to the EdD programme; and systematically seeking out suitable external sources of research income and increasing expertise in competitive bidding. Internationalisation is a particular area of interest for the university and, in research terms, the unit aims to address this through work with relevant international visiting scholars (Professors Sink and Buchanan in Oregon, USA, and Australia, respectively), building on the experience of the Erasmus Mundus bid which is founded on international collaboration, and by staff being encouraged and supported to develop a stronger international profile for their research outputs, through involvement with the European Educational Research Association, for example, and other European and global Education networks. The unit also intends to continue to develop its role in hosting international research conferences, the university's historic setting and modern campus facilities combining to make it a very attractive and effective conference venue. These priority areas are in addition, or complementary, to the institutional strategic goals listed above.

c. People, including:

i. Staffing strategy and staff development

Staff are managed within Departments and Faculties and at university-level. Departments focus on individual support and development, Faculties on finance and structural support (e.g. conference funding), and the University on contractual, strategic and inter-Faculty support.

Not counting the Dean, Professor Julian Stern, there are 37 academic staff in the two Education departments (ITE and CYPE) that contribute to UoA 25, with a number of academic staff elsewhere in the University including Dr Ian Sadler in Sport, and Mandy Asghar as Head of Learning and Teaching Development, who are active at various levels of Education research.

The recruitment process requires all academic staff to demonstrate ability and willingness to undertake Educational research. In addition, all new academic staff are expected either to be HEA Fellows (or equivalent), or to be willing to take part in the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice (PCAP, which is managed by the Faculty of Education & Theology), which is built on a practitioner research model, and accordingly encourages a researcher attitude to teaching and learning as part of induction into the university's culture. All Education staff wishing to complete doctorates are encouraged and financially supported to do so.

The appointment of Professor Jean McNiff has meant a higher profile for action research in the UoA: this is evidenced in the number of staff using such an approach in their doctoral studies and in the development of the education and praxis research group. The appointment of Professor Donald Gillies has contributed to the sharpening of the policy focus, and also to the mentoring of colleagues towards improving research outcomes through the better designing and managing of projects to completion, and improved dissemination and quality of publication.

In the longer term, having the entire body of staff 'research active' should allow staff to move on in their research careers to undertake more and better research and to be supported to become capable of fulfilling roles as principal investigators in their own right. The annual Research Conversations allow for the needs and wishes of staff to be formalised and for support to be identified to address these, with support being offered on an individual basis to both early career researchers and those returning from career interruption. Equality and inclusiveness have been

significant factors in the REF submission with the only restriction placed on the inclusion of staff being that submissions must meet the minimum one star rating. This inclusive approach is designed to encourage the future research development of as many staff as possible and not restrict this to a select few.

Prior to RAE 2008, involvement in research conferences was undertaken by a very small number of those staff more active in research. By 2011-12 this had risen to more than 40 national and international conferences attended by a much wider range of staff, and this growth continues as staff become more active and confident in their research. Faculty funds are allocated to support attendance at conferences, with £29,000 being made available for this purpose in 2012-13.

The quality of research is assured by a number of different measures: the annual Research Conversations allow for activities to be monitored and evaluated; the Faculty Research Ethics Committee oversees the ethical dimension of planned research; and conference attendance is subject to Faculty approval, with reports required on return. The extensive programme of research seminars also serves as a forum where issues around research quality can be probed and discussed so that these sessions have an Educational value both for staff and doctoral students.

ii. Research students

Numbers have grown from only three in RAE 2008 to ten in 2013, with one recent PhD completion and one ready for final submission. The granting of Research Degree Awarding Powers will enable numbers to grow further, particularly when the proposed EdD programme is established. The increasing number of staff with doctorates means that there is a good base of potential doctoral supervisors, with a broad range of research interests and expertise. Current doctoral students have access to training and development opportunities both on campus and at the Universities of Leeds and York. In addition to their research supervision, doctoral students also have access to a system of pastoral support, so that research students have the opportunity to have their needs and progress considered and supported, on a regular basis, by staff not directly involved in their supervision. In addition, the university's annual Research Methodologies conference for PGR students allows doctoral students the opportunity to present their work and to discuss and defend it. Employability skills are promoted and are a potential subject of discussion at the pastoral meetings. Of the submitted staff, Professors Stern, McNiff, and Gillies and Drs Wood and Ring currently supervise PhD students within the Faculty.

c. Income, infrastructure and facilities

In 2012, Margaret Meredith and colleagues in Spain and Peru won a prestigious three-year research grant of €335,000 (£280,000) to develop curriculum materials related to the social economy. This was the result of a successful bid to the European Commission's Erasmus Mundus programme, one of only seven winning bids from a field of 63. This represents the biggest research grant in the history of the Faculty so far. This project is at an early stage and so no published output has yet emerged. £47,496 of this grant was received in the year 2012-13.

External income for Education research had, historically, been small, and is only now starting to grow. In the years 2011-13, for example, we had £5,769 for the Westhill Seminars project and £1,000 from Farmington Fellowships (both related to the research of Professor Julian Stern and colleagues), £4,644 for the Heart project (related to the research of Professor Jean McNiff and colleagues), and £4,650 for the Critical Review Feedback project (related to the research of Dr Ian Sadler). Both Professor Stern and Dr Sadler have published resultant work in peer-reviewed journals, and Professor Stern's output features in one of the unit's Impact case studies. £30,414 was received in the years 2011-13 to support a Leverhulme Visiting Fellowship.

Education research has been supported, in particular, through funding for the delivery of presentations at, and the organisation of, conferences. Recent years have seen an increase in the number of conferences organised by Education researchers, including the Westhill Seminar and the Virtue and Value in Practice-Based Research conference held in York St John University, and

the International Seminar on Religious Education and Values held in Finland in 2012 with Professor Julian Stern as the organising General Secretary.

Facilities supporting Education research include IT and Library support, with ring-fenced library budgets each year for research materials, and investment of money and staff time in web-based support for, and dissemination of, research. The importance of having a physical location to support Education (and Theology and Religious Studies) research was established in 2010, and we now provide hot-desks and IT equipment, and a seminar room with a video-conferencing suite, for Visiting Professors and Fellows, Research Assistants, and doctoral students (complementing the Graduate Centre facilities at University-level which were established in 2008).

d. Collaboration or contribution to the discipline or research base

Much of the UoA's research involves collaboration, including co-authorship within and beyond the university (e.g. Stern and Backhouse 2011; Buchanan and Stern 2012; Pirrie and Gillies, 2012); conferences (e.g. Virtue and Value in Practice-Based Research, with over 70 delegates coming from across the UK, Croatia, Iceland, Ireland, Norway, South Africa, and the USA); memberships of editorial boards (e.g. the *British Journal of Religious Education*, the *Religious Education Journal of Australia*, *Scottish Educational Review*); and visiting professorships and other honorary positions (at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, Ningxia Teachers' University, Beijing Normal University, Hong Kong Institute of Education Centre for Religious and Spirituality Education). These are complemented by a wide range of direct contributions to the discipline, in publications – articles, monographs, edited books – and in various conference and other presentations, most notable of which are a wide range of peer-reviewed keynotes at international conferences. These include Professor Julian Stern's keynote address 'From Negative Ethics to Positive Virtues in Research' delivered at the opening of the Virtue and Value conference in the summer of 2011 and Professor Donald Gillies's critique of 'the agile university' delivered in the public seminar series at the Oxford Learning Institute, 2012. However, a marked indication of the wider influence of the UoA's research can be gauged by the global scale of keynote addresses delivered by Professor Jean McNiff in just one calendar year (2012): in Beijing at the First English Language Teacher Education Summit; in Malaya at the first Leadership Research Conference, at the Institute for Educational Leadership; in San Diego at the 9th Annual Action Research Conference: 'Emergent Models in Action Research'; in Lusaka at the end-of-pilot Zambia-Ireland Teacher Education Partnership (ZITEP) conference; and, at the University of Tromsø at an open seminar for university Faculty.

Professor Stern is general secretary of ISREV (the International Seminar on Religious Education and Values) and occupies a significant international role in research around spirituality and Religious Education. Professor McNiff remains an authoritative figure in action research through her books and international contributions (for example, being featured as Routledge's Education Author of the Month for February 2013). Elsewhere in the unit, individual researchers make significant contributions to their chosen fields. Professor Gillies has developed a strong international profile in Foucauldian research in Education; Dr Adrian Brockett has pioneered some important research instruments for use in the field of Islamophobia, his fluency in Arabic and his Middle East networks affording him an unusually strong research base; Dr Margaret Wood has published widely on children's voice, although it was her 2012 article on student perceptions of teaching excellence which won a Highly Commended Award at the Emerald Literati Network Awards for Excellence 2013; Dr Tony Leach has done important work on professional learning communities; and other staff in the UoA are undertaking innovative research studies around the use of media and technology in teaching and in assessment.

The transformation in the UoA since 2008, however, has not been based solely on the successes of those highlighted above. It has been achieved through an energetic cross-Faculty professional engagement with research by all staff, dedicated research support, and a strong focus on research capacity-building, so that the current research environment for the unit suggests that the future is one of rich promise. With a significant number of staff undertaking doctoral studies, and recently qualified staff now embarking on their own research trajectories, the UoA is in a strong position to

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continue its growth in both the quality and quantity of its research. This will be supported by a nurturing institutional ethos, a robust financial base, and enabling management structures that will facilitate the development of further collaborative activity in its preferred research areas. A secure and sustainable base has been created for research in the UoA so that there can be considerable institutional optimism about the future vitality of Education research at York St John University.