

Impact template (REF3a)

Institution: University of Greenwich

Unit of Assessment: (UoA 19) - Business and Management Studies

a. Context

For academic research to have impact, the primary requirements are that it should be of sufficient quality and it should be relevant to decision-makers and policies of users. The researchers must have credibility, which is most likely to be achieved through a track record of producing high quality relevant research; and they must be able to communicate their research findings in ways comprehensible to a lay person. This philosophy is central to the approach to impact taken in this UoA, and is exemplified in the case studies presented.

There are three main contextual facts to be taken into account when reviewing the research carried out by the University of Greenwich (UoG) under this Unit of Assessment (UoA):

- There are five established research groups operating within this UoA, each with its own distinctive target non-academic user groups. The case studies presented cover two of those groups: (the Work and Employment Research Unit (WERU) and the Public Services International Research Unit (PSIRU)). The other three groups (Centre for Business Network Analysis (CBNA), Governance Risk and Accountability (GRA) and Supply Chain Management (SCM)) also generate research outputs with extra-academic impact, but the limits on the number of case studies preclude their inclusion within the REF submission. Some of these groups, eg CBNA, are more theoretical than others, eg PSIRU, but each has impact in its own way. In the case of the more theoretical groups, the impact can be less direct and take longer to crystallise.
- The approach to impact reflects, and exploits the opportunities presented by, the geographical location of UoG. The university is fortunate to be proximate to three different spheres of potential impact: the global financial services centre in Canary Wharf and the City of London, and the other large corporates and professional services firms associated with it; the governmental, political, parliamentary and legal worlds in central London; and the local economy in South East London and the Medway area with its large number of SMEs. The impact case studies presented show in particular how the approach to impact has benefitted from the first two of these three spheres. The third sphere is accessed via the growing enterprise activities associated with the research carried out in this UoA, as explained below.
- A significant part of the research carried out by two of the research groups – PSIRU and WERU – is critical in nature and runs counter to what have been received opinions and policies over the past twenty years. For example, PSIRU has taken a critical approach towards contracting-out and privatisation of public utilities and services, which has been, to a large extent, a bipartisan matter in the UK during that period. Critical and contrarian research is rarely welcomed by those who are subject to it, and, as such, it is harder to achieve impact through membership of, or advisory roles with, official bodies. The policy impact of such research must therefore often be achieved indirectly, with the first step being to contribute to the public and political debate on contentious policy issues with the long term objective of shifting the centre of gravity of that debate. It is for that reason that considerable efforts are made to generate profile in serious and influential media for the research outputs generated. For example, **Professor Stephen Thomas** has for a long time taken a sceptical position on the economics of nuclear power based on his research. As this has run counter to conventional wisdom, he has sought a platform for his research in serious media including the Economist, the Financial Times and the Independent; and by publishing in outlets which have a wide readership amongst policy makers and industry even though they do not have academic impact factors, for example, Parliamentary Brief, Nuclear Engineering International and the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientist. His impact is global and similar examples could be given for a number of countries. The research being carried out by **Professor Ozlem Onaran** on the prospects for a wage-led economic recovery is a further example of potential impact of this nature (though it is at an earlier stage); and we have been supporting her in finding opportunities for extra-academic dissemination of her work

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(eg, a seminar held jointly with the International Labour Organisation on 22 March 2013 in which a senior economist from the Department of Work and Pensions also participated as a discussant.

b. Approach to impact

Taking account of the contextual factors set out above, the approach taken to maximising the impact of the research carried out under this UoA during the assessment period reflects three main principles:

- First, it is recognised that achieving impact is a long game. It often takes five to 10 years for research groups to have impact, in part to establish the credibility and track record of the researchers; and it is often hard to predict at the outset which research outputs will have the most impact as there are many other independent influencing factors. So we choose research themes which will have an enduring relevance and which touch on areas of societal significance even if they are not immediately fashionable, rather than trying to get involved in areas that have only short-term relevance.
- Secondly, we encourage researchers to seek funding from business, practitioners, professional bodies and trades unions, as well as from conventional research funding sources. This is not merely to diversify funding sources - though that is, of course, an important objective – but to cement relationships with practitioners, which are key to selecting research questions with potential impact and to disseminating research findings outside academia. For example, in August 2012 one of the 'Big 4' accountancy firms chose us for funding to apply the social network analysis models developed by CBNA to the management of their client relationships. This arose as we specifically targeted this firm on the basis that they could provide a platform for testing and demonstrating the impact of these models. The PSIRU research group receives core-funding from an international federation of public service unions, Public Services International (PSI), and a regular stream of commissions from its European counterpart, European Federation of Public Service Unions (EPSU). This ensures that research carried out is relevant to current policy issues, provides valuable feedback on drafts and ensures the results are fed into the policy process. Working closely with users also helps us identify strategic new capabilities that will be required for future research.
- Thirdly, we encourage the testing, validation and refinement of research outputs through our enterprise activities. Such activities also generate more research questions, and build the relationships with business required to gain access to carry out research. For example, UoG has, through its participation in the FLASH programme (a European Regional Development Fund initiative to provide SMEs with access to recent and credible industry research and best practice) has reached over 324 local SMEs through their participation in workshops or through short consultancy assignments. This has in turn generated around 124 opportunities for Innovation Vouchers of 24 hours' worth of academic interventions and multiple case studies, and two Knowledge Transfer Partnership applications, with more in the pipeline (<http://enterprise.gre.ac.uk/employer-services/flash>).

The university supports dissemination of Business School research through Higher Education Innovation Funding grants, aimed at improving interactions between universities and the wider world. The Business School has received 10 grants worth a total of £128,985 between 2008-13.

c. Strategy and plans

The strategy and plans for maximising impact have three main strands:

- **A focus on maximising impact is built into our processes for selecting research-active staff, allocating research funding, and assessing the performance of research groups.** For example, in a recent exercise to recruit external research professors, their plans for generating long term impact from research - both their own and that of their colleagues - was a critical factor in the assessment. The criteria for allocating timetabled university-funded research time specifically focus on applicants' proposals for achieving extra-academic impact.

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- **We actively seek out enterprise activities** which provide opportunities to test research. This was a key part of the rationale for bidding for the FLASH programme mentioned above; and also for a similar follow-on programme called New Deal for Innovation (NDI; funded by EU Interreg programme) aimed at equipping SMEs with the latest knowledge for business development through a programme of further workshops and innovation vouchers. This is providing opportunities for a number of our research groups, including the Supply Chain Management (SCM) Group and the newly emergent Centre for Communication and Consumption Research (C³ORE) group to test their ideas on practitioners (<http://www.ndi-innovation.com/>).
- **We involve a wide range of academic staff in these enterprise activities** rather than restricting them to a core of specialists, in order to give as many staff as possible the opportunity to test the impact of their research and scholarship. Overall, we expect that around 50 academic staff will have been involved in FLASH and NDI over the entire project.

We encourage staff to become involved in public debates on subjects where they have a research-based contribution to make, consistent with our recognition that this is an essential precursor to impact in many areas. We have done this by providing practical support, for instance in the form of media training, from which 15 staff have now benefitted. As a result, researchers from this UoA in the university have over the past 12 months appeared in, or been quoted by, a wide range of serious media outlets including the broadsheet daily press, the Economist, Radio 4, Channel 4 News and BBC News, and serious trade press as well as a range of overseas media outlets (such as the Cumhuriyet (Turkey), Toronto Globe and Mail, Australian Broadcasting Corporation and the Financial Mail in South Africa) on over 30 occasions. This activity is intended to put solid, evidence-based research into the public domain as illustrated by the fact that staff on occasion deliberately publish the same material more than once, originally in an academic outlet and then in more public fora. For example, Professor Steve Thomas published an article entitled “The Pebble Bed Modular Reactor: an Obituary” in 2011 in Energy Policy, vol 39,5,2431-2440; and then disseminated the findings set out in this article at three public events in South Africa in September 2010 and in op-ed pieces in the Cape Times and the Business Report in the same month.

d. Relationship to case studies

The case studies chosen reflect the principles set out above:

- Long term: the ‘Public-Public partnerships in the water sector’ case study is based on research first published by PSIRU more than 10 years ago and the ‘Establishing social services work as a strategic priority’, also based in PSIRU, dates back to research commissioned in 2005.
- Focus on fundamentally important topics: the research carried out in WERU for the Low Pay Commission (‘Enforcing a national minimum wage’) related to a fundamentally important issue, namely the underpinning of the lower paid end of the labour market, which was an important policy objective of the incoming government in 1997. The pursuit of such an inherently important topic meant that it had the potential for significant impact from the outset.
- Links with practitioners and other research-users built in from start: the research carried out in WERU on the role of lay members as judges (‘Lay members as judges in employment rights cases’) necessarily involved lay members and judges as subjects of the questionnaires and interviews. In addition, judicial approval was sought in advance for the sending of questionnaires to the subjects. This practitioner involvement gave weight to the research findings when published.
- Funding from users as well as traditional sources: three out of four of the case studies were based on work commissioned by users. The two PSIRU case studies were based on work commissioned by EPSU while the Minimum Wage case study was based on research commissioned by the Low Pay Commission. The Lay Members case study was based on a research grant from the ESRC.