

Institution: University of East London

Unit of Assessment: 19

a. Context

UEL's submission to Unit of Assessment 19 comes from its Royal Docks Business School (RDBS), the principal beneficiaries of whose work are the local and international business community that informs and engages our research and work. The Unit's six research clusters (Accounting; Finance, Economics and Risk; International Business Management; Marketing; Human Resource Management; and Tourism, Hospitality, and Entertainment Management) underpin a vibrant research environment designed to benefit not just our own academic communities, but much broader research user groups. The breadth and depth of our research interests have been accommodated by the establishment of a number of small research clusters that feed into centres associated with the School, including the Noon Centre for Equality and Diversity in Business, Centre for Innovation Management and Enterprise (CIME), and Centre for Islamic Finance and Banking. We provide a platform that serves students, staff and communities through our creation, dissemination and application of knowledge relating to business and its wider economic context, and are committed to exchanging knowledge with and delivering benefit to both local and global communities. The Unit is relatively new (the RDBS was established only in 2009) and relatively small, and we are very much at the start of our 'pathway' to impact. Nevertheless, this is a priority area for our strategic investment and growth in the coming years. That commitment is evident in our structural and research emphasis on engagement, especially in the contexts of social and female enterprise, ethical finance, sustainability and workplace diversity. Work in these and related fields has wide-ranging relevance and applicability and the Unit is keen to promote the international, as well as the local, dimensions of its work. To that end, it has **generated and contributed to both public and political debate and informed policy reflection** in areas of international interest such as global tourism (Bianchi), global economic shifts (Lutz, Karathanasopoulos, Fouskas), and gender and equality (**Chandler, Sheikh**) in work with and within communities across Europe and Asia. In several cases, this work has **generated policy recommendations and informed decisions** relating to social and economic policies across the world. As such, it reflects the Unit's commitment not only to **informing businesses themselves**, but also to **shaping the environments in which business activities take place**.

b. Approach to impact

The cornerstones of the Unit's approach to impact are its **transfer of expert knowledge and advice** beyond academia, most particularly through the **provision of training** based on our research expertise but tailored to meet the changing needs of a broad range of UK and international users. This overarching ambition is supported by the Unit's structural make-up and focus (at thematic research centre level) on external engagement. Much of this engagement is facilitated by the School's Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee (RKEC), which oversees the development of research activities in the UoA. Its Chair works closely with staff across our six research areas, as well as with representatives of the associated centres described above, to facilitate knowledge exchange opportunities. These centres provide an important focal point for various research and knowledge exchange activities; they are all externally focused and all have a mandate to engage, inform, and respond to the changing needs of various stakeholders. As such, they particularly support the following key strands of our approach to impact:

1. Engagement with local and global businesses and society. The Noon Centre, for example, engages widely with businesses, NGOs and policymakers who benefit not only from its research insights, but also from its provision of a forum for discussion, debate, training workshops and networking via speaker events and conferences on various aspects of equality, gender, race and diversity in business. Recent examples of events engaging non-academic audiences of up to 100 with research in these areas have included workshops on managing diversity (June 2013), which explored legislation relating to diversity and inclusion; the *Ethnic Relations Colloquium: Exploring the Lived Experiences of Ethnicities* (July, 2013); and *Feminist Research Conference* (July, 2013). Our *Women in the Boardroom* speaker series (March-April, 2013) created a forum for discussion of policy propositions on the setting of quotas related to women on company boards. The Centre also provides a forum for local community engagement with Unit research through its contribution to

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knowledge exchange initiatives such as the ERDF 'Make It Global' project (Bathgate and Mostert).

The Noon Centre engages and transfers its expertise to international non-academic audiences through its Global Scholars Programme, which sponsors academic-led student social enterprise projects involving global partner institutions from both the Higher Education and business sectors. Current partners include: Bahrain Polytechnic, Faculdades Metropolitanas Unidas (FMU), ESPM San Paulo, Shanghai International Business and Economics University (SIBEU), SANDA University Shanghai, and University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, as well as numerous businesses in countries across Europe and in Brazil, India, Malaysia, China, and Bahrain. This programme was launched in 2012 with two project groups. In 2013, there were 9 projects with over 90 participants, including academic staff and students.

2. Knowledge Transfer to SMEs. All of our centres have been and remain actively involved in our provision of **academic consultancy services** including, for example, as part of The Local Enterprise Grant Initiative (LEGI). Located in the Regeneration area of East London, the initiative provided SMEs with a small grant supporting 20 hours of relevant academic consultancy addressing issues such as how to restructure, innovate and refocus their businesses to improve sustainability and growth. It culminated in the production of individual reports for each client and provided tailored advice about growth strategies. The recommendations in these reports were used to develop nuanced strategic objectives within local SMEs including *Carona-Reuter*, a Dagenham-based company specialising in customized metal fastenings for Hi Tech industries such as aeronautics and energy, whose international strategy we helped to reformalise. Our provision of strategic advice was also used by *Trustway*, a local SME in the service sector, to restructure their business. These projects highlight our engagement with the efforts being made in East London to create regeneration through SMEs. Beneficiaries of schemes led by our academics have included *Apex Associates*, *Eight28*, *Award Business Solutions*, and *Colourite Metal Treatment Ltd*. The Black Business Observatory (see UEL19-01) has provided training and resources for use by local businesses; 17 workshops for black entrepreneurs hosted by the BBO have been instrumental in setting the groundwork for new companies and producing numerous new jobs within London.

3. Supporting dialogic relationships between the users and the producers of research-based knowledge. Involving end users in every stage of projects such as these allows current and potential research users to communicate their needs and priorities, ensuring that our research and associated activities remain as relevant and responsive as possible to those needs. Our approach to impact is therefore strongly informed by a focus research that addresses areas of recognised need among our user communities. As well as engaging in knowledge transfer partnerships and projects of the type outlined above, we accomplish this particularly by **hosting and contributing to conferences and other events** (often based on those knowledge exchange projects) for mixed academic, professional, industry and public audience. Recent examples include our contribution to conferences such as the Chartered Institute of Marketing Olympic conference, a practitioner event for members of the Charter Institute of Marketing (2011); Association for Tourism and Leisure Education (Atlas) conference, an international conference for academics and practitioners in the field of tourism (September 2012); and Innovation and Environment Regions of Europe, Zero-Impact Cultural Heritage Event Network (Interreg ZEN) conference, a joint practitioner and academic conference (September 2012).

4. Ensuring our relevance in a global business environment by working with international collaborators. The Unit's ever-broader understanding of the potential audiences for and beneficiaries of its research is concomitant with its commitment to international research collaboration. As well as hosting events, the Unit also engages with international collaborative partners by hosting visiting staff: thus, for example, we recently hosted a group of finance and accounting staff from one of our Chinese partners, SANDA University, Shanghai for a one week training programme on current finance and accounting practices.

c. Strategy and plans

The creation of a body of knowledge to be shared, not only within the academic community but also the broader business environment and society, is central to the Unit's strategy for ensuring and maximising the impacts of its work. Although the Unit is new, it is committed to establishing a reputation for generating innovative, internationally-recognised research that not only informs the

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academy, but catalyses and contributes to debate and discussion informing policy and behaviours in the business world, and especially within our local business community. Both the Noon Centre for Equality and Diversity in Business and the Centre for Innovation Management and Enterprise are donor-supported centres with a mandate to engage with businesses through training and awareness building. The development of an impactful research culture centred on productive knowledge transfer to non-academic partners and beneficiaries will be particularly supported by:

1. Working with academic staff on **developing research grant proposals** that are structured and developed with a methodology that **measures and contributes to impactful research**. As a unit, we will be targeting 3-6 successful projects per year and working with academics on bids for large grants from the HEA and ERSC.
2. From 2014, all academic staff will be asked to complete an **annual research activities report focussing especially on research and knowledge exchange**. Academic staff whose research is producing meaningful impacts will be supported through sabbaticals, time off from teaching and seed grants to develop their research further.
3. Maintaining – and where possible expanding – our research centres' involvement in the **coordination of conferences and other activities** that support our objective of achieving wider participation and engagement in the dissemination, creation and application of research findings. Currently, we plan for each of our centres to host at least one international conference per year, as well as having bi-yearly lecture series open to non-academic audiences.

We also plan to increase user involvement in our research processes and engagement with our research outputs. To that end we intend, more specifically, to:

4. Maximise the reach of our research impacts on SMEs, both locally and internationally, by identifying and **increasing the number of our publications in journals whose readership includes non-academic audiences**, such as the *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development* and *Journal of Small Business Management*. Researchers will be encouraged and given time released from teaching to support publishing in these journals. The Unit will also support its academic staff's **greater involvement in editorial activities**.
5. Disseminate research findings through **policy and working paper series** associated with the centres in the School. We hope to achieve a minimum of ten research outputs per year in these various forms to exchange knowledge with our business partners.
6. Establish **three Research Chairs** over the next five years to support and develop both the outputs and the impacts of its research. These will be in line with the Unit's key strategic areas in terms of research impact – Workplace Diversity, Social Entrepreneurship, and Sustainability – and funded by a combination of donations both from individuals and from Corporations. We envisage seeking up to five sponsors per Chair. These sponsors will be practitioners and consumers of the knowledge generated through these Chairs, and will help us evaluate the impact of work delivered through this scheme. Activities associated with the Chair will include **workshops and conferences** hosted by invitation, **training sessions and Webinars** that help increase the exposure of the various events sponsored by the Chair to non-academic audiences.

d. Relationship to case studies

UEL19-01 illustrates our commitment to **building local community networks** and demonstrates the centrality to our approach to impact of **transferring expert knowledge to practitioners and policy-makers**. It explores the intersections between lived experiences of black entrepreneurs, the institutional environment, networks and interfaces to track the spatial and temporal dimensions of entrepreneurship among the black population. This is closely linked to the various activities at the Noon centre and the SMEs in the community that benefit from skill enhancement workshops and seminars within the context of our approach to creating impact. UEL19-02 demonstrates the capacity for our research findings to inform policy and practice beyond the UK through its use to develop and deliver **training workshops for business professionals from around the world**. It has fed into our emphasis on Workplace Diversity as a theme for further research likely to deliver non-academic impact. Both case studies have highlighted the utility of our delivery of this sort of training (and associated learning and information resources) to build meaningful and sustainable relationships with non-academic audience regionally, nationally and internationally.