

## Environment template (REF5)

**Institution: University of Sunderland**

**Unit of assessment: 26 Sport and Exercise, Science Leisure and Tourism**

### **a. Overview**

The University of Sunderland is a research active university, with a research active curriculum, enhancing the academic standing of the institution as a seat of higher learning and scholarship, undertaking research which both enhances the learning experience of our students, and delivers impact.

The University encourages research across the range of academic activity and across all Faculties and units. Four over-arching Research Beacons and three Research Centres have been established to support, encourage, nurture and facilitate research. These have been designed to be sufficiently broad to capture our research interest, but sufficiently focussed so as to highlight areas of research strength and to act as an enabling framework. The Beacons and Centres each have management groups comprised of senior members of academic staff. They provide the context, and agree and manage targets for research grant applications, the strategic appointment of new staff and the co-ordination and focus of research activity.

The submission to the Sport and Exercise Sciences, Leisure and Tourism panel includes work in two distinct areas: Tourism and Sport. Tourism at the University of Sunderland is a critical studies unit situated in the Faculty of Business and Law. As such it contributes to the **International Centre for Research into Innovation, Sustainability and Entrepreneurship (RISE)**. Research in sport and exercise science is part of the **Health Sciences and Well Being Beacon** in the Faculty of Applied Sciences. Both tourism and Sports work within an interdisciplinary environment that encourages the development of synergies with the various units integrated in the research beacons and centres

This unit of assessment has changed significantly since the last research assessment exercise in 2008. Firstly, tourism is no longer part of the school of Arts Design, Media and Culture. Following a major restructure in 2009, tourism is now part of the Faculty of Business and Law. Secondly, for the first time this submission includes work on Sport and Exercise Sciences.

### **b. Research strategy**

We are committed to undertaking high quality research that enhances the learning experience of our students and delivers impact to the wider community. Research in tourism has traditionally adopted a critical perspective that emphasises its significance for the Social Sciences whereas research in Sport has adopted a physiological, psychological and sociological approach that seeks to understand factors that influence the uptake of physical activity.

The **strategy outlined as part of the RAE 2008** has been satisfactorily met. We have made significant progress in all 6 objectives outlined in 2008. First, the unit has actively contributed to the development of the interdisciplinary concept of mobilities (Objective 1). The contribution was led by Prof Kevin Hannam, who left the university in 2012. The work of Dr. Pau Obrador has also actively contributed to the development of this interdisciplinary concept within tourism as well as doctoral research on train travel and caravanning. Second, there has been a significant increase in the completion rates of the unit's doctoral students (objective 2). A total of 18 students have completed their PhD during the period under review, increasing the size and the profile of the doctoral school. Third, a number of outputs have been delivered from applied research projects that were carried over from the previous census (Objective 3). Three publications from the ISAAC project co-authored by Nicole Mitsche have been included in this submission. Fourth, external research funding has increased significantly (objective 4). The University of Sunderland was a leading partner in two research projects that received funding from the European Social Fund. The first project "Changing People: Rising to the challenge of Demographic change in the North East of England and beyond" (2009-2011) with a total

budget of £1,120,000 with 50% match funding. The second project "Mobility and Employability Research for Generation Erasmus" (2011-13) had a total budget of 309,772 Euros. Fifthly, academics have been supported all along the period of assessment in their research careers (objective 5). Funding has been made available to academic staff to support research activities. Six, during this period outputs have been published in the highest quality outlets (objective 6). It is also worth noting that the unit has been actively engaged with the wider academic community through conferences and collaborative research leading to high quality journal publications.

The research objectives and activities for the five years following the RAE in 2008 have been driven by two key strategic changes in the university. The first is the establishment of Beacons and Centres. In 2009 four research beacons were created one of which included research in sport and exercise science - the **Health Sciences and Well Being Beacon**. In 2010 a new research centre was established in the Faculty of Business and Law, which included tourism as one of its five clusters. The centre was renamed the **International Centre for Research into Innovation, Sustainability and Entrepreneurship (RISE)** in 2012. The Centres and Beacons have provided an internal focus for research activities including research students. They have also helped to further develop the external profile of research.

The second key strategic change is the approval of the first **University Research Plan** in 2012. The plan reinforces the importance of research and sets out the context in which units plan their own activities. The fundamental context for research is to underpin the academic standing of the University as a seat of higher learning and scholarship. The aim of the university is to continue being research active, with a research active curriculum, undertaking research which both enhances the learning experience of our students and delivers impact. Following the publication of this plan, the Faculty of Business and Law has developed its own vision for research, which identifies 6 relevant objectives for tourism. 1) To improve levels of research income through QR and externally funded research; 2) To develop close links between research clusters and the faculty research centres; 3) To provide support for early career researchers and established researchers through clear allocation of research allowances linked to outputs; 4) To grow postgraduate research student numbers; 5) To develop our systems and processes for supporting research such as IT infrastructure and the physical environment for Postgraduate research students. 6) To develop the research capacity of the Faculty through the appointment of senior academics with established research track records into Key posts. In 2008, Sport identified the following objectives. 1) to enhance the quantity and quality of research outputs for the next REF; 2) to increase the critical mass of students undertaking and successfully completing research degrees; 3) To improve research funding from grants and applied monies; 4) to employ (additional staff) or promote staff to senior research roles (reader) to advance research output.

Substantial progress has been made towards achieving these objectives. First, with the establishment of the Research Centre (RISE) a cluster leader for tourism has been appointed with clear responsibilities and a significant allocation of time for these. His responsibilities include the strategic lead of the cluster, the coordination of a programme of activities and the management of doctoral students. The program of activities for the cluster includes regular meetings and a seminar series with speakers from the faculty and from other universities. Second, the support structures for research have been noticeably improved in the last five years. A scheme has been put in place where researchers can apply for additional time to support their research activities. There is also financial support available to attend conferences, seminars and other research activities. There has also been a noticeable improvement of the supporting infrastructure for PhD students following a university review in 2012. Customised facilities are now provided for research students where they have access to office space and meeting rooms. Third, progress has also been made in developing the research capacity of the unit. In 2010 two postgraduate academic assistants were recruited consolidating our doctoral school. A number of appointments have been made of academics with an established and/or developing research track record, including two readers.

The strategic changes in the faculty and university are fostering a number of initiatives of strategic importance which are expected to produce visible outcomes in the near future. The

most important of these is the development of research links within the centre as well as with other universities and regional institutions. Relationships are being developed with cultural institutions in the area involving Postgraduate Research students as collaborative partners.

Over the next five years the unit will continue the promotion and development of research, ensuring its long term sustainability. The objectives for the next five years are to:

- i. Position Sunderland as one of the leading centres for tourism in the country. The unit's success is to be measured by the proportion of 3 star and 4 star outputs produced in the next five years.
- ii. Consolidate performance in securing external research funding. The Unit is expected to generate over £100,000 pa of research income over 5 years.
- iii. Increase postgraduate research student numbers. It is expected that at least 20 students will complete their PhD by the time of the next assessment exercise
- iv. Attract external funding for our research degree programmes
- v. Develop knowledge exchange, user partnerships and collaborations in key areas including cultural industries and events, mobilities and sport science so that the impact of our research is maximised.
- vi. Nurture a vibrant research environment that supports new initiatives and fosters innovation.

### **c. People, including:**

#### **i. Staffing strategy and staff development**

A key objective in the university Research Plan is the continued promotion and development of research beyond 2015. Success of the Research Plan depends critically on the quality and engagement of staff. It is a priority of the University that recruitment activity reflects priorities in research and that a vibrant research culture that encourages academic inquiry and knowledge creation is strengthened. The Unit has had a successful policy of attracting and appointing research active staff as well as in encouraging research synergies.

There have been substantial changes in the tourism team since the RAE 2008. The main change is the departure of the team leader Kevin Hannam in 2012 and the subsequent appointment of new members of staff, Donna Chambers as Reader and Karl Russell and Sharon Wilson as Senior Lecturers. Pau Obrador has been promoted to Reader and is now the research cluster leader. The new appointments reflect priorities in research as well as teaching and external engagement. Tourism at Sunderland is a young team with an average age of 40 that combines established and early career researchers. It is comprised of 7 full time members of staff, 6 of whom are research active. Two are early career researchers and have not been included in the REF. Five members of staff have a PhD (Durham, Sunderland, Brunel and the Swiss Management Centre) while the other 2 are in their final stages. The team is gender balanced and has an international profile with members from 4 different countries.

The Sport team includes new members of staff since 2008, including Dr Edward Bradley as senior lecturer in Biomechanics and Dr Paul Davies a senior lecturer in the sociology of sport. The Sports Team have also promoted Dr Istvan Soos from senior lecturer to reader in sports psychology. The Sports Team includes 7 PhD students currently undertaking their studies and two recent PhD completions (Dr Paul Bradley, Dr Ian Whyte). These new additions and completions reflect the increasing research focus within the Sports Team on high quality research and progression to improved critical mass for the next REF submission. Dr Paul Bradley was able to generate £45,000 from Sunderland Football club for a full time studentship in Sports Science (Performance Analysis).

All members of staff have the opportunity to engage in research activity as part of their agreed workload. Academic staff are encouraged to engage with research in identified areas of strength and where there is a critical mass of experienced staff to offer support and leadership. Research development is discussed and supported through staff appraisal and team meetings. Less experienced researchers work alongside an established researcher for mentorship and personal development; as an appreciation for research management is developed, the

responsibility for research projects and supervision of research students can be spread. Good practice is shared across the University of Sunderland and with other regional Universities through research forums and at training events.

A range of research training programmes are available within the University. In collaboration with the Universities of Northumbria and Teesside, Sunderland developed and piloted a Leadership Foundation funded programme "Leading on Research Excellence", a tailor-made strategic leadership programme for Readers and Professors across the region. Pau Obrador is taking part in the program in 2013.

The University fully subscribes to the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, and is an HR Excellence in Research Award holder. We have reviewed our support for researchers, and have identified areas for further improvement which are being implemented in 2012/13 (including a new development programme specifically for contract researchers and a review of careers provision to ensure researcher needs are fully met).

The University values and promotes the equality and diversity of staff and students. In line with our strategic aims, we work to ensure that all members of our community treat each other with respect and dignity. The University is an Athena Swan Bronze award holder, holds Investor in People status is a Stonewall diversity champion and subscribes to the "Two Ticks" "Positive about Disability scheme".

## ii. **Research students**

The University ensures that our Postgraduate Research (PGR) students enjoy an excellent student experience, that their work is of the appropriate standard, and that they achieve their qualification within an appropriate time period. In 2012 the University undertook a review of the PGR provision at all levels which highlighted our strengths and identified areas for action. Central Graduate Research Support provides administrative and procedural support for PGR students and their supervisors. Central Academic Services provide a comprehensive offering of PGR student training programs which spans the VITAE research development framework. All PGR students are required to attend this program as well as an annual review of their progress. The PRES survey in 2011 showed good scores for student satisfaction with their skills development, ranging from 73% for transferable skill and 87% for independent learning. A recent university-wide PGR review identified this as a comprehensive skills training programme. Faculties provide subject-specific training including access to Master's modules where appropriate.

Over the past 5 years a strong and dynamic PGR culture has developed in both tourism and sport. PGR student numbers have increased significantly since the RAE 2008. A total of 16 students have completed their PhD in Tourism and 2 in Sport. There are currently 8 students' registered in PGR tourism programs and 7 in Sports Science. PGR students that completed their PhDs in the unit in the last five years are currently holding lecturing positions in the following universities, Leeds Metropolitan University, University of Sunderland, Flinders University in south Australia, Strathclyde University and Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University in Thailand. One student holds a research position in the Forum of Agriculture research in Ghana.

The Unit has been successful in securing external funding for PGR students. One student was awarded an Overseas Research Student Award Scheme (ORSAS) scholarship. One student had a scholarship from the Thai government, two from the Libyan government and one from Saudi Arabia. Sunderland AFC and Newcastle United FC are funding 2 PHD students in sports sciences. Internal funding has also been secured. Both Tourism and Sports have 2 Postgraduate Academic Assistants. This is a competitive scheme funded by the University that combines teaching duties with PhD studies. One Student was selected to participate in an international arts project funded by the Arts Council England and which resulted in a publication.

PGR students are integral to the research culture of the university. They are automatically enrolled as members of RISE in the case of tourism and the Health Sciences and Well Being Beacon in the case of sports, where they are regularly invited to present their work in seminars. PGR Students have the opportunity to gain teaching experience and participate in the

academic life of the unit.

#### **d. Income, infrastructure and facilities**

The research environment has benefited from collaboratively funded applied research work. The Unit received funding for four different projects. The largest project was “**Changing People: Rising to the challenge of Demographic Change in the North East of England and Beyond**” (<http://www.sunderland.ac.uk/faculties/bl/research/centres/cree/changingpeople/>). The project ran between 2009 and 2012 and was submitted under the priority 2 of the European Social Fund. The aim of the project was to develop innovative ways of influencing and addressing the employment and skills of the over 50s and European migrants in the North East. The university received £560,000 for this project of which £332,000 went to other partners. The money was used to fund 2 research assistants, 50% of an external funding manager and a series of meetings and workshops. High quality research outputs are in preparation.

The Changing People project led on to a further successful research application to the EU lifelong learning programme for which the University of Sunderland was the leading partner. The project “**Mobility and Employability Research for Generation Erasmus**” (**MERGE**) analysed the effects of Erasmus programme on the mobility and employability of former students and identified which elements of the Erasmus experience may have the greatest impact upon career choices and opportunities. Its total Budget was 309, 772 Euros. In 2012 the Project was transferred to another university following the departure of Kevin Hannam.

A third project was carried over from the previous period of assessment. The project, **Integrated e-services for advanced access to Heritage in Cultural Tourism Destinations (ISSAC)** (<http://www.isaac-project.eu>) enhanced the relationship between digital heritage and cultural tourism through the provision of a novel user-friendly IT based platform to support the accessibility of European cultural heritage and its interpretation. It ran between September 2006 to August 2009 and had a total budget of €86,280 of which the University received £20,690 in 2009 and 2010. A number of outputs from this project are included in the REF.

The final project to receive funding was a short 40 week **Knowledge Transfer Project (KTP)** with The Next Level Systems Ltd. The project had three aims: to provide the company with a strategic shift into international markets, to develop an international marketing strategy and plan and embed this within the company and to further the sustainability of the mobility of goods.

Support for research is provided by a Research Support team, within academic services. This team provides support for postgraduate research students, for research active staff, research project managers, and senior management through the provision of management information. Central support is also provided for the identification of funding opportunities and bid writing and submission. At a faculty level customised facilities are provided for research students where they have access to office space and meeting rooms. The facilities are close to the library which carries a good stock of relevant books and journals in electronic and paper formats. All doctoral students are offered a librarian ‘buddy’ who offers one-to-one help and support in information retrieval. A full-time administrative assistant supports these facilities and has responsibility for scheduling annual progress reviews and supporting the cluster leaders. In Sports both staff and research students have access to laboratories with up-to-date equipment for assessing the physiology of human performance.

#### **e. Collaboration and contribution to the discipline or research base**

This is a highly interdisciplinary unit that has established numerous research collaborations at local, national and international level. These research collaborations have generated important economic and societal benefits whilst enhancing the robustness of our curriculum programmes. Our contribution to the fields of tourism and sports science is particularly strong in two key areas: the testing and conditioning of elite football players; and, critical approaches to tourism, including those linked to cultural and heritage tourism, and the mobility and integration of individuals.

Our interdisciplinary research links across Social and Health Sciences. Paul Bradley's work combines sport psychology and performance analysis with papers published in both areas. The work of Pau Obrador and Donna Chambers is relevant to Human Geography, cultural studies and sociology. Obrador has published articles in *Geography* and *Cultural Studies* journals (*Social and Cultural Geography*, *Cultural Geographies* and *Senses and Society*) and Chambers in *Development studies* (*Third World Quarterly*). Karl Russell works at the intersection of management and hospitality, while Nicole Mitsche's work combines information technology and cultural heritage.

The unit has worked cooperatively with a range of partners in initiatives that foster direct collaboration between researchers and practitioners. In sport, Paul Bradley has a long established relationship with elite football clubs and applied sports scientists. He has published a number of research studies in the *Journal of Sports sciences* using ProZone multi-camera computerised tracking system, which allows elite football clubs to track the activity profile of the players. He has also developed his practical skills through his four years as a sport scientist at a Premier League football club, testing and conditioning elite players. He has collaborated with Newcastle United FC, Sunderland AFC, Middlesbrough AFC, West Bromwich Albion FC and Sunderland Women Team.

In tourism, the two European projects involved collaboration with non academic partners. The consortium for the Changing People project included North East charities addressing employment skills of migrants and over 50s, Local Authorities and the regional development agency. The Consortium for the ISAAC project included universities, ICT companies, Local Authorities and cultural organisations. Both partnerships provided opportunities for knowledge transfer. Other examples of collaboration include the work of Karl Russell with Delta Check, an industry database and research centre based in Germany, and Pau Obrador's collaborations with various local organisations in the Balearic Islands on tourism policy. In 2012 He wrote a report for a political party analysing a new tourism law that was used in a parliamentary debate at the Balearic Parliament. He has participated in public debates and regularly writes a column in a regional newspaper and a leading news-portal in the Catalan language.

There is much evidence of national and intentional academic collaborations in the unit. Pau Obrador and Donna Chambers have established research collaborations with academics from the universities of Durham, Exeter, Surrey and Napier in Edinburgh, which have led to the publication of high quality journal articles included in the REF submission. Donna Chambers regularly collaborates with academics at the University of the West Indies in the Caribbean to develop tourism conferences in the region. She co-chaired the 1st International Tourism Conference in 2009 and was a member of the organising and scientific committee for the 2nd International Tourism Conference in 2012. Two journal special issues have emerged from these conferences which were both co-edited by Donna Chambers. Paul Bradley's research has involved international collaborations with world leading research groups from the University of Copenhagen, Vigo, Cape Town and Exeter. This has resulted in numerous publications and invitations to present at conferences nationally and internationally. Paul Davis has been invited to contribute to 4 publications including a journal article for *the International Review for the Sociology of Sport*. He has also co-edited a book on Philosophical perspectives on gender in Sport with Canadian colleagues. Nicole Mitsche has worked closely in the context of the ISAAC project with academics from the University of Naples "Federico II", Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam, the Polytechnic of Turin, Forschungszentrum Karlsruhe and the Free University of Amsterdam. Karl Russell has established research collaborations with academics from the University of Dubai and Limerick Institute of Technology, which have led to publications included in the REF Submission.

The members of the unit have actively contributed to journal editorship and preparation. Donna Chambers co-edited a special issue for *Tourism Culture and Communication* in 2012 and another in 2010 for *Tourism and Hospitality Research*. Pau Obrador and Donna Chambers have reviewed papers for 10 tourism journals including 4\* journals namely *Annals of Tourism Research* and *Tourism Management*. Pau Obrador has also reviewed papers for leading Geography and Sociology journals including *co-Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, *Social and Cultural Geography* and

*Mobilities*. Paul Bradley has reviewed papers for *Journal of Sports Sciences*, *International Journal of Sports Physiology and Performance*, *Human Movement Sciences*, *Sports Medicine* and *Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research*. Paul Davis was invited to review a book for *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy*.

A total of 33 papers have been presented at national and international conferences over the period under review. Donna Chambers has organised sessions in three international conferences. Nicole Mitsche won the best paper award in the 2009 for a paper presented at the International Conference on Intangible Heritage held in the Azores. Pau Obrador has been invited as key note speaker on four occasions, including a workshop in the History Department of the University of Barcelona, the opening of the Academic Year of the *Spanish Distance Learning University* (UNED) in Menorca and in the Institute of Advanced Studies at the University of Lancaster. Donna Chambers' keynote speeches include a staff seminar at the University of Leeds, a radio interview on the potential development of gay tourism in Jamaica and an international conference hosted at the University of the Balearic Islands. Paul Bradley has presented at 5 international symposiums including the Bases conference, a symposium organised by the Danish FA on Physical Testing & Conditioning of Elite Soccer Players and The World Sciences and Soccer Conference in South Africa. Paul Davis was invited to speak at the ICSEMIS conference in July 2012.

Paul Davis became the Vice-Chair of the British Philosophy of Sport Association in 2013. Donna Chambers became a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society in 2009, a member of the Tourism Society (2004-2012) and an Executive Member of the Association for Event Management Education. Pau Obrador became a Fellow of the Minorcan Research Institute in 2006, of the Catalan Geography (2006-10), and of the Mediterranean Mobilities Network based at CEMORE in the University of Lancaster. Paul Bradley has professional accreditation as a Sport & Exercise scientist.

The members of the unit regularly participate in PGR training, including the supervision of doctoral students. All of us have received training on supervision and ethics. Paul Bradley has been involved in the PGR training in areas of blog sampling and statistical analysis. Pau Obrador was a panel member for review of PGR provision that took place 2012. Davis and Chambers have both been external examiners for PhDs. Chambers has been an external examiner at the Universities of Plymouth and Middlesex, and at Dublin Institute of Technology. She has participated in the validation of programmes at Anglia Ruskin and Coventry.