

Impact template (REF3a)

Institution: University of Sunderland

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

a. Context

The mission of the University of Sunderland is to be a civic university, leading in the development of our city and the region, and to become a catalyst for change. Initiatives within the unit sit firmly within that context. The University has a long and strong tradition of applied research in tourism, sports and leisure. The impacts of our research are local as well as international. The impacts take various forms ranging from impacts on public policy and services to economic, commercial and organisational impacts. Research on mobilities has had a noticeable impact on the work of NGOs addressing the employment skills needs of European migrants and over 50s. Research on heritage and cultural industries has contributed to the improvement of the heritage offer in urban destinations. Research on the physiology of intermittent exercise has helped to improve the testing and conditioning of elite football players. More recent work on mass tourism has contributed to policy debates in the Balearic islands. Beneficiaries of our research include destination management organisations, elite football clubs and Welfare organisations in the North East of England addressing employment and skills challenges of over 50s and European migrants.

b. Approach to impacts

The main impacts of our research have been generated within the context of inter-institutional partnerships that included non Higher Education organisations from the third and public sectors. Two strong partnerships have been established that foster direct collaboration between researchers and practitioners. The University of Sunderland was a leading partner in an EU funded project on “Changing People: Rising to the challenge of demographic Change.” The partnership included North East charities addressing employment skills needs of migrants and over 50s, Local Authorities and the regional development agency. The University of Sunderland was also a partner in another EU funded project on Access to Heritage in Cultural Tourist Destinations (ISAAC project). The partnership included 14 European institutions including universities, ICT companies, Local Authorities and cultural organisations. The nature of the relationship is defined by our orientation towards delivering impact and transferring knowledge. These partnerships were set up to enhance social and economic well being across different sections of society.

Our approach to impact has the following critical elements:

- *Collaboration.* Our approach gives priority to the development of synergies and partnerships with partners across various levels, in relation to collaborative research, partnerships with industry and programmes such as Knowledge Transfer Partnerships
- *Embedding impact in research.* Our approach emphasise the need to embed impact in all stages of the research process and to establish a link between excellence and social impact. We aspire to produce world leading research that is of benefit to individuals and organisations.
- *Dissemination of research.* It is important to raise awareness within academia of the range of research activities undertaken. It is important to ensure the availability of our research to our non academic partners.
- *Built on existing strengths:* we focus on particular areas of strength and excellence, and prioritise activities according to capability and capacity.
- *Research active curriculum.* Our research is expected to enhance the curriculum of our taught programmes

Research active staff has enjoyed extensive support to enable impact to be achieved.

Research Centres and Beacons have been the main mechanisms that provides support to research active staff. The University provided support in three basic areas: first, financial support to attend conferences and workshops. Secondly, administrative support to manage the partnerships and thirdly specialist support in terms of expertise. The unit made extensive use of the expertise of an External Funding manager who worked closely with the team on two projects, the Changing People project and the MERGE project. We believe that all the above elements are key to the success of research and to develop impact.

c. Strategy and plans

The University recognises the importance of applied research, international collaboration and knowledge transfer. The aim is to embed this within the culture of the institution, by putting in place the strategic and operational frameworks and support systems to achieve: a) an increase in engagement in applied research activity by academic staff; b), the recognition and reward for applied research activity by academic staff and c) embedding of collaborative activity within the University's activities, as part of the Corporate and Academic Strategies

There are several key components to the integrated approach taken at the University of Sunderland:

- *The Corporate Strategy*, which articulates the vision of a civic University, making an outstanding contribution to our city and region
- *The Academic Strategy*, which takes this vision and clearly identifies research activity as an equal partner to teaching and learning, as part of an integrated and blended continuum of academic activity for all departments, academic areas, and academic staff
- *The University Research plan*, which articulates a vision of 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 Health Sciences and Well Being Beacon* which aims is to conduct world-leading research that leads to better physical and mental health and well-being for all, bridging the gap between the worlds of academia and real-world practice.
- *The Faculty of Business and Law Research Plan*, which sets out a vision for applied research and a research-informed university with clear objectives and targets.
- *The Framework for Personal Development and Career Progression for Academic Staff*, which provides a clear career progression pathway for academic staff engaged in applied research activity
- *The University Research and Innovation Committee*, which helps to determine strategy and tactics, sets and monitors targets, and identify and take advantage of opportunities, as well as helping to implement appropriate academic governance
- *Faculty-level responsibility*, Associate Deans, as part of Faculty Executive Boards, have responsibility for third stream activities at Faculty/Department and/or Academic Area level
- *The Research Support (RS) team in Academic Services*. The team provide regular reports for key committees and groups as well access to research related software. (Research Professional, for funding opportunities and intelligence; *pFACT* for costing and pricing of proposals; and *SURE* for full text of outputs in the institutional repository). , which provides integrated support for research and reach out.
- *Comprehensive Workload Models* which map the workload of individual academics, to balance them to provide the opportunity for the development of research impact

The combination of these key components provides a thread all the way through from the highest level in the University and our Corporate Strategy, to the practical development of academic staff and the support of central services.

The University research plan has set out a number of performance indicators through which

the University intends to measure the success of our research activity, and the success of the strategies and operational structures to support it. They include:

- Feedback from our external partners in both business and the community – in terms of impact and value to them of our partnerships
- The implementation of a Research Systems Development Plan that improves academic governance.

d. Relationship to case studies

Research within the unit has by its nature been applied and has thus tended to generate social impacts. Such impacts have been regional, national and international in nature. The submitted case studies detail the range of beneficiaries. They also emphasise the collaborative and sustained nature of our approach to impact

Migration and demographic change in the North East of England

Collaboration: the case study is based on a cross sector partnership led by the University of Sunderland. The consortium included the North East Polish community organisation, the North East Strategic migration partnership, the charities Age UK and Mental Health Matters, the regional development agency and Durham County Council.

Embedding impact in research: The project aimed to develop, test and deliver new ways of addressing a range of interlinked employment and skills dimensions posed by demographic challenges. The EmployMeE mobile phone application and the W project are two examples of impact being embedded into the research.

Dissemination: The project included initiatives that raise awareness of our work both in academia and beyond. Attendance at conferences, delivery of research papers and presentations to other regional partners all contributed to developing thinking on migration in the north east England.

Built on existing strengths: The case study develops Prof Hannam's work on mobility and social exclusion for the understanding of the impacts of demographic change on the local economy. Kevin Hannam is a leading figure in the development of the mobilities paradigm.

Research active curriculum: the project enhanced the academic experience across the portfolio of undergraduate and postgraduate taught programme. Staff involved in the project made use of their research experience in their classes and workshops.

Integrated e-services for Advanced Access to Heritage in Cultural Tourist Destinations

Collaboration: The case study is based on a European funded project involving a multi-stakeholder community of private and public stakeholders. The consortium included universities, Local Authorities, destination managing organisations and ICT specialists.

Embedding impact in research: The project looked at more efficient use of ICT services in urban destinations, thus embedding research on ICT and the visitor economy in the management of urban destinations.

Dissemination: The project included multiple initiatives that raise awareness of our work. Regular meetings and workshops with the partner cities, attendance at international conferences, and delivery of research papers as well as presentations to partners all contributed to the dissemination our work.

Built on existing strengths: The case study draws on an established tradition of research on heritage tourism at the University of Sunderland. This line of inquiry, which was initially developed by Prof Prentice and Prof Hannam, is now led by Mitsche, Obrador and Wilson.

Research active curriculum: The project enhanced the academic experience across the portfolio of undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes, which have various modules focusing on heritage and urban tourism. Staff involved in the project made use of their research experience in their classes and workshops.