

<p><b>Institution:</b> Edge Hill University</p>
<p><b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 26 – Sport and Exercise Sciences, Leisure and Tourism</p>
<p><b>a. Context</b></p> <p>During the review period, the Unit focused upon the production of user-led, and theoretically-informed, empirical research intended to make positive change in policy and practice in sport performance, welfare, health and well-being. The Sports Performance research cluster addresses these themes as they relate to the maximization of human performance by practitioners in the sport and exercise sciences. Through its user-led research activity with partners including the Rugby Football League (RFL), Everton in the Community (EitC) and Sports Coach UK, the Social Science of Sport cluster focuses its work on youth welfare and development, and the implications of sport and leisure lifestyles for policy and practice amongst research users. These research priorities have led to the identification of the following core research users: (1) young people; (2) sports coaches and governing bodies; (3) sports clubs; (4) performance athletes; (5) clinical practitioners; (6) applied sports scientists; and (7) policy-makers.</p> <p>Our applied sports science research is intended to enhance the physical performance of individual performance athletes, inform the practice of coaches, and change practice among clinical practitioners (e.g. medical personnel in sports and health settings) and other applied sports scientists working in human performance. Research which led to change practice in safeguarding policy has helped protect the welfare of young people vulnerable to abuse (particularly sexual abuse), informed new child protection policy and thinking among governing bodies and sports clubs. The findings of work in injury management, young people’s sporting and leisure lifestyles, and youth welfare has led to changes in thinking and practice among policy-makers in these fields.</p>
<p><b>b. Approach to impact</b></p> <p>Staff who are either former practitioners or participants in their respective fields before joining higher education, or whose applied research work has developed following direct entry to the academic sector, regularly engage these research users through their membership of one of two research clusters. During 2008-2013, staff have been supported and encouraged to achieve impact of reach and significance in three ways: <b>(1) Involving its main research users and beneficiaries in the design, implementation and evaluation of research activity.</b> This has involved the expectation from the Department’s Senior Management Team (DSMT) that all researchers develop collaborative research-led relationships with a range of users, including governing bodies (e.g. English Football Association, RFL), charities and community organisations (e.g. EitC, Sports Coach UK), clinical practitioners (e.g. in sports medicine and public and private health care), and individual performance athletes. Through the management of staff workloads and development of collaborative research teams within the two research clusters, staff are supported by the DSMT to engage with practitioners in practical settings to ensure all research is aligned with users’ expectations, priorities and needs. For example, following his appointment to the Unit from the English FA (where he worked as an applied sport and exercise scientist), <b>Greig</b> developed a collaborative programme of research which subsequently explored the influence of fatigue on injury and its biomechanical implications to ensure the problems being investigated were novel, relevant to the needs of the organization, and of significance for clinical practice in sports medicine, the NHS, and private physiotherapy practices. The decade-long work conducted with the RFL by <b>Hartill</b> also developed through regular consultation with key personnel (e.g. Operations Director, Lead Safeguarding Manager), to ensure the research helped embed principles of safeguarding and welfare into the organisation’s policies and procedures so that these better protected the needs of young players nationally.</p> <p>In addition, developing research capacity and impact has involved the use of local funds and budgetary controls to enable all researchers to work directly, flexibly and responsively with research users to co-produce impact, and also to develop new relationships through which future collaborative research can be planned. This has included work undertaken locally with schools and universities (<b>Haycock, Lindsey, Smith</b>), charities such as EitC (<b>Haycock, Smith</b>) and Sports Coach UK (<b>Hartill, Haycock, Lang, Potrac, Smith</b>) sports clubs and athletes (<b>Hartill, Marchant, Marrin, Midgley, McNaughton, Sparks</b>), nationally with the FA (<b>Greig, Potrac</b>), Welsh Rugby Football Union (WRFU) (<b>Potrac</b>), Welsh Hockey (<b>Marrin</b>), the RFL and Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU) (<b>Hartill, Haycock, Lang, Smith</b>), Amateur Swimming Association (ASA) (<b>Lang</b>), and internationally with partners including German Sport Youth, ENGSO Youth and Sport Austria (<b>Hartill, Lang</b>), and the World Anti-Doping Agency (<b>Levy</b>). As noted in REF5, substantial Unit and</p>

institutional investment has been made in campus-based sports facilities to attract members of local communities on-site (133,000 individual user visits plus 60 teams and clubs in 2011/12), providing opportunities to engage with users in order to shape our research questions, methods and non-academic dissemination. At a strategic level, the DSMT has maximised engagement with the local and regional community to generate sustainable impact locally, and then into national and international contexts, through a number of mechanisms. These include: developing student research-based internships and placements delivered in conjunction with strategically important partners (e.g. EitC, FA, RFL, Sports Coach UK); hosting practitioner conferences, workshops and laboratory training with athletes; and integrating members of the public into clinical population studies (e.g. **Marchant's** GP referral scheme work).

**(2) Disseminating research findings to practitioners, policy makers and members of the local communities.** With guidance from DSMT and other senior researchers in the Department, all staff are encouraged to take advantage of a number of infrastructural mechanisms to tailor their approach to dissemination to the needs of each research user group which are determined in the planning stages. Research findings are frequently disseminated verbally, including through practitioner presentations and forums (e.g. CPSU, FA, RFL, WRFU) and at professional conferences attended by research users and members of the organisations with whom staff work collaboratively (e.g. EitC, ESDN, FA, RFL, Sports Coach UK, UK Sport), when reporting interim and final research findings. Staff also present their findings as part of professional development programmes for research users, including governing bodies, sports coaches and Performance Directors (CPSU, RFL, Sports Coach UK, WRFU), youth leaders and welfare professionals (CPSU, ENGSO Youth, German Sport Youth, RFL), and through other professional outlets such as invited seminar talks, keynote lectures, consultancy activity, and staff training. Written research summaries are also provided (via professional magazines, online sources, industry publications) with policy and practice recommendations.

The efficacy of this approach to dissemination resulted in the development of other collaborative relationships that led to the appointment of post-graduate students now working on related investigations that explore new areas of concern for research users. This has included developing new work on novel problems in sports performance and fatigue (with clinical practices and professional sports clubs), youth sport and welfare (with CPSU, EitC, ENGSO Youth, RFL, Sports Coach UK), and sports coaching (FA, Sports Coach UK, New Zealand Rugby Football Union). These positions have been supported by strategic investments made by the DSMT and Faculty in: supporting staff applications to an internal Research Investment Fund (see REF5); the appointment of post-graduate research studentships to extend specified projects shown to demonstrate positive impact; and managing staff workload by limiting teaching contact time and creating 'mini sabbaticals' in-year by clustering teaching responsibilities.

**(3) Broadening impacts to other investigations and target groups.** In light of the success of its partnering approach to impact and research user engagement, the DSMT sought to develop more formal and strategic linkages, marked by shared priorities and shared effort, in the *co-production* of impact. This has enabled the Unit to focus on the needs of its key research users and beneficiaries whilst simultaneously expanding the range, diversity and reach of its research portfolio. For example, to build upon the effectiveness of user engagement processes from the earlier research of **Greig, Hartill, Lang**, since January 2013 **Smith** has developed a number of strategic plans with EitC which focuses upon enhancing practice and understanding of the health (particularly mental health) of young people and adults (especially young men), via community-based programmes delivered in some of the UK's most deprived communities. All planned work with EitC was developed, first by **Smith**, and then **Haycock**, in consultation with the Business and Development Manager, Health and Well-being Manager, and Football Mental Health Co-ordinator (the 'Working Group'), at monthly meetings held at the Head Office of EitC or on campus. To ensure all planned research was relevant to the Charity's work and responsive to the needs of their beneficiaries (e.g. young people in schools, those with mental illness, disabled people), the key research aims, objectives and target groups were identified collaboratively before suitable research methods were deployed to generate research findings on the everyday needs of the public. This collaboration has also been developed with a view to increasing the possibility that the Unit will be in a better position to attract external income, including from the health sector, to extend its core research priorities and impact work to improve the lives of local residents.

## Impact template (REF3a)

Building upon the approach adopted in previous work undertaken by **Greig** with the FA, the Unit's approach to the co-production of impact was broadened further by embedding changes in the practice of injury and fatigue management into sports under the auspices of the English Institute of Sport, and into rugby league. This not only ensured that previous impact achieved in one sport (football) extends positively, and more significantly, into other sports, but it also enabled **Greig** to mentor staff and post-graduate researchers working in clinical contexts to become research active, by for example publishing their collaborative research. In rugby league, for example, this was achieved by incorporating work on the role of fatigue in musculoskeletal profiling, and as an aetiological risk factor for injury, into the clinical practice of junior researchers in sports therapy charged with maximizing sports performance of players.

**c. Strategy and plans**

In its relatively short research history, the DSMT developed a research strategy that: expanded the number of staff returnable to the REF exercise through research-related appointments and mentoring junior staff; broadened its initial focus on research in sports performance to incorporate research in the social sciences (especially sociology and policy); used internal funds to recruit post-graduate research students and purchase research-related equipment; and implement a DRMG charged with developing the Unit's research portfolio. Led by the DSMT, the Unit intends to build upon its commitment to resolving complex problems identified by research users by: supporting staff through a new Unit-based research training programme dedicated to leveraging impact from their work and supporting staff applications to the Research Investment Fund and external funders and providing support to help them engage with non-academic collaborators; increasing capacity through the regular appointment of research students each year (facilitated, first, by institutional pump-priming); and appointing a strategic lead for community engagement in research to exploit disciplinary, and inter-disciplinary, impact-led research opportunities in the Department, and with the Faculty of Education, Faculty of Health and Social Care and the Post Graduate Medical Institute (PGMI) which will create new channels for research to generate impact in schools, the NHS, and private healthcare providers.

In the future, welfare-related work in sports performance will be extended further into rugby league with a particular emphasis on the development of athlete-centred models of welfare that help reduce the impact of fatigue on physical injury and athletes' psycho-social well-being. These projects will expand the Unit's research portfolio and output in sports therapy and psychology, and develop inter-disciplinary work on welfare in youth and professional sport. Maximizing the future impact of welfare-related research will be also be achieved via the launch of the *Centre for Youth Sport and Leisure Research* directed by **Smith** and **Potrac** (to complement a second planned research centre in sport and exercise sciences). A five-year collaborative Memorandum of Understanding has recently been agreed exclusively with the RFL, EitC and Sports Coach UK to enable joint funding applications, and the co-appointment of research students to projects investigating new problems in physical and mental health promotion, prevention of abuse, and safeguarding participant welfare, the results of which will be disseminated widely through joint delivery of research-led CPD workshops with national and international partners.

**d. Relationship to case studies**

The Unit's purposive investment since 2008 in sports performance and welfare-related work is evident in its two case studies that employed the impact approaches outlined above. Case Study 1 is oriented around a body of work related to fatigue and led by **Greig** which, whilst originating from the sports medicine domain, has not only been shown to change practice and thinking in the specialised field of sports medicine, but has also been accepted as a legitimate basis on which to change accepted practice within the more established medical profession. **Hartill's** work in Case Study 2 has similarly extended beyond raising awareness of sexual abuse in sport nationally into the broader field of sexualized violence internationally, which has resulted in changed practice and policy among leading sports and non-sports organizations. The strategic approach to research user engagement in both cases provide a guiding thread for future submissions in which emphasis will be placed on the consolidation and expansion of work in the two research clusters so that more studies can be considered in the next REF exercise.