

**Institution: University of Gloucestershire**

**Unit of Assessment: UoA26: Sport & Exercise Sciences, Leisure & Tourism**

**a. Context**

Central to the focus of the UoA has been the impact of its rigorous and policy-relevant research beyond academia. The UoA is an exemplar of impactful research, the foundation of which is its sustained success in delivering high quality commissioned research for its client community throughout the UK and (latterly) in Europe. In recent years the UoA has become successful in terms of research grant bidding and commercial income generation and now has a strong and established track record in collaborative, evaluative and multi-disciplinary research in sport, exercise, physical activity, health and wellbeing. The over-arching aim of the UoA has been to connect and engage with a wide range of non-HEI stakeholders, funders and end-users, and to build an income generating brand as a reputable provider of practical and applied research around a 'value for money' model. Principal user groups include UK government departments, the European Commission, and a variety of other non-governmental and charitable organisations. Other beneficiaries include: clinical professionals (such as General Practitioners and Public Health professionals in the UK and across Europe), health and physical activity related organisations, national governing bodies of sport, professional sports clubs and organisations, professional sports teams, and individual athletes. Our selection of impact case studies feature examples of this work.

Over the last 20 years much of the UoA's research has been commissioned to inform the development of policy and practice around the benefits of sport and physical activity, to assist national governing bodies of sport and physical activity practitioners in the functioning and delivery of policy and processes on the ground, and to provide robust evaluations of policies, programmes and initiatives with recommendations for their development and subsequent improvement. Such impactful research is exemplified through a number of projects which have sought to evaluate (regionally and nationally) both the physical and mental benefits associated with publicly funded exercise referral and rehabilitation schemes involving the development of an evidence base of applied practice within the context of health and wellbeing enhancing interventions. The impacts of some of this research have been wide and far reaching. This work began in 1999 with the evaluation of a countrywide exercise referral scheme. Since then staff have continued to undertake other large scale programmes of funded work in this area across a wide range of interventions, and often involving beneficiaries of the research in conceptualisation/design, programme delivery and evaluation. The research outcomes have also resulted in opportunities for further impact by extending the reach through funded EU knowledge translation and exchange programmes.

This pattern of impactful research activity is also exemplified by the work of UoA members at national and international policy level. For example, through a significant amount of on-going work originally commissioned by the Football Association (FA) in 2001, the UoA has been instrumental in the development of policy and practice in professional football, including an evaluation of *Respect*, the FA's behavioural change programme, which has since become internationally recognised and adopted. This led to consultancy work that contributed to the creation of the 'Respect Parent Module', an online educational resource now included in all FA Coach Education courses. As a direct consequence of this work, the FA has introduced new formats for youth football in England (e.g., small sided games for younger players, greater emphasis on forms of the sport that promote intrinsic motivations), new competitive structures (fewer leagues and tournaments) and a greater awareness of inequities created by the relative age effect. Through work with the FA, UEFA and FIFA, staff have also begun to contribute to developments in policy and practice around injury prevention, focusing specifically on the exploration of the role of neuromuscular functioning in the reduction of injury risk and prevention in young athletes. Such activities have latterly attracted a significant amount of interest from professional football clubs both in the UK and overseas.

The practical and applied nature of much of the research activity of the UoA ensures that it makes a distinct and valuable contribution to policy development and practice. Much of its research is informed and directly driven by stakeholder participation and members of the UoA work closely with a range of non-academic partners to ensure that research outcomes impact policy and practitioner communities. For example, in a recent programme of evaluative research, staff have collaborated with a range of not-for-profit and charitable organisations (including end-users) to devise ways in which sport and physical activity might best be used to engage marginalised young

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people who find themselves: (i) living in areas with a high incidence of crime; (ii) at risk of entering the criminal justice system; and/or (iii) in custody. Such work has served to assist organisations within the sector in understanding and evidencing the impact of their own activities.

**b. Approach to impact**

The UoA's approach to impact between 2008 and 2013 has been embedded within its core research strategy as detailed in REF5; this amidst a constantly shifting policy and funding environment. In light of outcomes following RAE2008, the UoA resolved in 2009 to adopt a more targeted and strategic approach to research and, in particular, to build upon and extend its work with practitioners and other end-users around specific sport/health-related interventions and initiatives. The UoA also recognised a growing need for its research to become increasingly targeted at the European and international level, whilst maintaining its reputation as a regional and local service provider. In light of this, staff have engaged more regularly with stakeholders, beneficiaries and end-users in order to identify new areas of research, to assess the potential impact of their research, and to ensure that client/user groups are better able to access the evidence required to achieve this impact. This has been undertaken at an individual and collective level across the UoA, through the establishment of formalised relationships with project commissioners and practitioner audiences to better mobilise this impact, and by making evidence-based research findings more accessible to end-user groups through the hosting of workshops and seminars and via a range of other media outlets for completed projects. The UoA has also sought to involve doctoral and masters research students in applied research projects to ensure excellent value for money for those funding, and exceptional experiences for the students concerned.

The UoA has substantially developed its overall public profile since 2008, re-aligning it towards a more sophisticated web-based presence and by engaging with various social-media platforms that enable end users and beneficiaries to become aware of research findings quickly and efficiently. In 2010 the UoA undertook to establish two research centres: the Exercise and Sport Research Centre (ESRC) and the Centre for Sport, Spirituality and Religion (CSSR) which have, in turn, assisted in the creation of a more coherent web presence from which evidence and findings from individual projects can be accessed. The ESRC collectively showcases the entirety of UoA research activity and in so doing acts as a central point of contact and communication for stakeholders, funders and end-users. As a result of these activities, staff members are frequently approached by the mainstream media and policymakers to make a distinct contribution to debates based on the UoA's broader research portfolio, for example through BBC (and other) local and national radio stations and national and international print media. Such interactions have led to subsequent commissioned research of a highly applied nature.

One of the principal ways in which the UoA has developed impactful research has been through a series of substantive and methodological developments in its fields of expertise. At the substantive level, staff have been at the centre of a number of innovations around physical activity and health, where novel, quantitative methods have been applied in new contexts and user involvement models have been evolving in qualitative approaches. Methodological developments have centred on the work of those staff specialising in sport, physical activity and marginalised youth around the creation and adoption of 'youth-based methodologies' within the context of evaluation research, this in response to wider calls from within the 'youth' (especially the criminal justice) sector for the greater involvement of young people in the research process (including the training of young people as co-researchers). Such innovations have not only benefitted many of the young people (respondents/participants and end-users) involved by way of subsequent increases in skill levels and self-advocacy, but have also assisted public and voluntary sector organisations in evidencing the impact of their own policies and programmes.

**c. Strategy and plans**

From 2014 the UoA will further develop its strategy in three main ways: (i) In 2012 'Sport, Exercise and Wellbeing' (SEW) was identified as one of six priority research areas within the University and the UoA is a significant driving partner in this institutional-wide initiative receiving targeted RAE2008 funding. SEW will provide a firm basis for the UoA to develop cross-disciplinary activities and related research innovation, supported and enhanced through two new Research Fellow appointments (in October 2013). Such activities have already been instigated via internal structural funding for the UoA's 'Interventions4Health' (i4H) initiative - a business enterprise project focused

## Impact template (REF3a)

on innovative design, development and delivery of health interventions and performance improvement programmes on behalf of clients and commissioners. The SEW thematic strategy will broaden the scope of opportunities for impact through its goal of developing closer links with public sector and industry bodies (particularly public services); enhancing the current promotion and dissemination of research findings through press releases and social media and expanding public engagement work into cross-disciplinary arenas where new forms of impact should be possible.

(ii) Given the large proportion of externally funded, policy/practice driven research in the UoA, greater focus will be placed on the identification of 'down-stream' end-user impacts. It is anticipated that those funding applied research may wish to sponsor studies to investigate 'down-stream' impact. The UoA will co-fund such studies given the need to develop better evidence of impact of research informed policy. Collation of evidence and methodological approaches lend themselves well to research student projects and can build on an established culture of student involvement in research in the UoA. (iii) From January 2014 the UoA will instigate a REF Working Group (RWG) to inform strategy and development for REF2020, with an initial remit of learning lessons from the current impact assessment exercise, and subsequently implementing processes to not only ensure that the UoA's research is guiding change in the most efficient way for end-users and beneficiaries, but that its impact is continually recorded, monitored and evaluated alongside other core research activities. The RWG will form part of existing Faculty Research Committee structures (see REF5).

#### d. Relationship to case studies

The selected case studies reflect the approach to impact detailed above. Investment in understanding and evidencing research impact is an established feature of the UoA's existing profile, and one which is evidenced through its track-record of delivering research excellence for a wide community of stakeholders and end-users. The three case studies reveal the reach and significance of the UoA's contribution to policy and practice as substantively and methodologically varied, cross-disciplinary, and cross-sectoral. They also demonstrate the need for on-going monitoring amidst a constantly changing policy context. Most significantly, the case studies reflect the reputation of research excellence that the UoA has built up over the past 15-20 years in academic, policy, practitioner and wider stakeholder communities throughout the UK and in Europe.

**Impact Case Study 1: *Primary Care Referral Interventions for Health Improvement (Crone and James)***. This work exemplifies the success of the UoA in undertaking highly applied research informed by project commissioners, practitioners and end-users. It strongly reflects the UoA's commitment to public and end-user engagement, innovative and mixed-methods approaches, and the substantial reputation that staff have beyond academia, especially with those commissioning applied research. A key focus has been on engaging more deeply with local and regional stakeholders in order to maximise the impact of research findings and to develop a range of conceptual, methodological and practical 'tools' as a result.

**Impact Case Study 2: *Safeguarding and 'Respect' in Children's Football (Pitchford)***. This case study centres primarily on socio-cultural/moral values and child protection strategies and bears testament to the long-term and on-going engagement of the UoA with the Football Association. It demonstrates the ability of UoA staff members to work with high profile clients to bring about change to (young) people's experiences of sport in new and innovative ways whilst simultaneously contributing to high level policy - as exemplified through FA policy documentation and testimonials. The case study also evidences impact via a range of broader channels including codes of conduct and professional standards, and the development of educational and training resources.

**Impact Case Study 3: *Protect their knees: Reducing injury risk in paediatric sporting populations (De Ste Croix)*** To maximise the impact of its work, the UoA has always sought to engage multiple end-users with research outputs whenever possible, in line with the client-focused approach to impact outlined above. As a rapidly emerging area of research within the UoA (since 2004) this case study exemplifies this approach. Contract research for UEFA, FIFA and the Football Association, together with peer-reviewed applied science publications, has led to intervention work with the English FA Centres of Excellence and various professional football clubs both in the UK and overseas around changes in policy and practice related to injury risk and injury prevention in paediatric populations and the effectiveness of pre-rehabilitation programmes for injury prevention.