

Institution: University of Northampton
Unit of Assessment: Economics and Econometrics (UoA16)
<p>1. Unit context and structure, research and impact strategy</p> <p>1.1 Unit context & structure</p> <p>The Economics and Econometrics subject group at the University of Northampton is being submitted to REF2021 for the first time. The development in research has been led in part by structural changes at the University level, but more significantly by the appointment of a new Dean in the Faculty of Business and Law in 2014 who placed more emphasis on research, illustrated by the appointment of a Head of Research in 2015 and in forming a clear coherent strategy to grow and support research activity. This support is illustrated by the formation of two research centres which members of this unit contribute to and in the identification and creation of support activities for all research active staff. As a small UoA we regularly collaborate with Business who provide support to colleagues helping sustain a healthy research culture.</p> <p>Much of the research undertaken in the unit is linked to the University of Northampton Strategic Plan 2015-2020. This plan is heavily influenced by the fact that the University of Northampton is the first UK member of the Ashoka U network of socially impactful universities. We consequently have a number of institution-wide Changemaker Challenges that focus on social impact generally but also specifically on social impact in Northamptonshire. These challenges are themed around children and young people, health and wellbeing, culture and heritage and business. The University is also committed to aligning its impact work with the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and is making its first submission to the Times Higher Education Impact Rankings in 2021. We have aligned ourselves to the SDGs 'To build resilient Infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation', 'to promote sustained inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all' and 'Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns'.</p> <p>This area of sustainability is approached from various angles within this unit including how sustainability is measured globally, (Dsouli), at firm level (Egergeni), and also within the informal economy (Igudia). Deane looks specifically at the impact that HIV has had on the economy in Tanzania and Aftab and Samad examine social marketing in terms of controlling diabetics in United Arab Emirates. Much of the research in this unit is international and based in developing countries. This also includes the examination of the role of the state and banks in a developing economy (Arif, Aftab) and the impact of political risk (Mshelia, Ghalia). In addition to this work, the house-building industry and policies that govern it are explored by Field and Ghalia.</p> <p>This research activity is underpinned by the two research centres, which many of the researchers are members of. The Centre for Sustainable Business Practices (CSBP), brings together colleagues researching sustainability within profit-making businesses across numerous disciplines including Economics. The Centre for China and Emerging Economies (CCEE) has evolved from the China, Transitional and Developing Economies Research Centre (CTDERC) which was in our 2014 REF Business submission, and supports the research being undertaken in developing countries.</p> <p>1.2 Research objectives</p> <p>The overall research strategy of the faculty since REF 2014 has been to support our staff members to undertake research at every stage (PGR, ECR, mid-career and late career) of their research journey by creating a vibrant and supportive research environment. This has been implemented within the unit through the use of several initiatives such as the Research Development Awards, allocating research hours into their workload allocation, and Research Seminars, giving staff and PGRS opportunities to present their research in a supportive environment (see Section 2 for more details). As a new research area, it has been important to encourage these colleagues to publish</p>

and collaborate with more experienced staff members both internally and externally. The research centres have been key in enabling this collaboration to take place by providing training and development and opportunities to present between staff at all levels.

We have also focused on the internationalisation of our research, specifically with a focus on developing countries. **Deane, Aftab, Samad, Arif, Mshelia** and **Ghalia's** research have all look at the social impact of business within the developing world. Examples of these include **Ghalia's** work with the King Abdulaziz University in Saudi Arabia and **Mshelia's** collaborations with African institutes such as Lulutho Academy (South Africa) and Unibridge (Kenya).

Our research objectives, moving forward to the next REF cycle, are based on building on our progress so far in this Unit in terms of an increase in quality outputs, national and international collaboration and successful bidding activity. To support this our strategy is to appoint research active staff where possible and continue to invest in researcher development. This is in line with the University Research Plan (2020 – 2025), creating a clear researcher development path from ECR to professor, supported by a strong ECR development course, appointments to Associate Professor and opportunities to apply for professorship. The recent introduction of the Teaching and Research contracts is a positive step in recognising the support that is needed for our research active staff. The institution's move towards semesterisation in 2021/2022 is also seen as an encouraging development in terms of workload planning. There has also been recent investment in the Research and Innovation Funding Support (RIFS) team who work closely with the research centres to provide bespoke support in terms of the identification, submission and running of funded projects.

This is a unit very early on in the development of its research culture. Moving forwards as a unit it is important to develop knowledge and experience in terms of research impact. This will be addressed by appropriate workshops and support from both internal and external experts and the sharing of good practice from other parts of the Business faculty.

The University supports the Concordat to Support Research Integrity building this into a rigorous Research Ethics policy. This is implemented at a Faculty level by the Faculty of Business and Law Ethics Committee. **Aftab** is one of the representatives from the different Subject Groups on the committee. It assesses all ethics applications submitted by research-active staff and is also responsible for overseeing the ethics and integrity procedures undertaken within undergraduate and postgraduate taught modules.

1.3 Open research

Staff receive training and support in open access, copyright and data-management. In 2019 the University launched its CRIS (Current Research Information System) enabling greater visibility of not only research outputs, but also research activities and datasets. In 2020 the University purchased a platform for digital preservation, and staff are now moving towards a more open research environment, where open research has progressed from being encouraged, to becoming an integral part of the research life-cycle. Datasets are uploaded to the CRIS on submission, where they are checked for replicability and long-term digital preservation. A data management plan is required for all research projects as part of the ethical approval prior to any research being carried out. To facilitate this, staff are encouraged to use [DMPonline](#) and examples of well-written data management plans, and one-to-one training sessions are available to all staff. A strong emphasis is placed on ensuring that our data adheres to the FAIR (findable, accessible, interoperable and reasonable) principles of sharing of data, striving to be as open as possible, but understanding when necessary restrictions are required.

Staff have been provided with training in the selection of places for publication, use tools such as Sherpa/Romeo and the creative commons to check funder requirements, restrictions relating to copyright, and the selection of appropriate licencing of research outputs. An institutional fund is available to cover the cost of open access where a green (non-payment) route is either not an option, or where the embargo period is extensive. This fund covers the payments for articles,

chapters and monographs. Where possible scholarly chapters are made open access. Research activities, such as presentations at conferences, workshops and educational resources are made available under a creative commons licence.

1.4 Research integrity

Economics supports a culture of research integrity. It works within the University of Northampton's Research Integrity Policy, which seeks to: maintain the highest standards of rigour and integrity in all aspects of research; ensure that research is conducted according to appropriate ethical, legal and professional frameworks, obligations and standards; support a research environment that is underpinned by a culture of integrity and based on good governance, best practice and support for the development of researchers; use transparent, robust and fair processes to deal with allegations of research misconduct should they arise; and work together to strengthen the integrity of research and to reviewing progress regularly and openly.

2. People

2.1 Staffing strategy & development

Staff development is embedded in the structure of the Economics unit. A number of initiatives have been put in place over the last seven years to create a supportive environment for all staff, from early career to experienced researchers. To assist in this challenge the Faculty research lead and the head of Doctoral Programmes were supported to attend the Development Programme for Directors of Research run by the Chartered Institute of Business Schools and the British Academy of Management.

In order to ensure that research is considered during the recruitment process, the Research Lead contributes to the selection process, by discussing research plans and publication records with each candidate and feeding back to the interview panel. This involvement has led to the recognition that support is essential for our ECRs from the beginning of their employment and has led to the organising of specific sessions for ECRs to not only to provide training and impart knowledge but also to enable them to meet each other across subject groups and create their own support network.

The most significant initiative in terms of research support in this unit has been the Research Development Awards (RDAs). This is a faculty-led program where staff members at all levels have the opportunity to apply for research hours to be included in their workload allocation. These ringfenced research hours allow staff members to undertake further research alongside their teaching obligations. The provision of this time has played a fundamental role in enabling all the staff members in this unit to move forward with their research. These awards have now been superseded, to some extent, by the introduction of the Teaching and Research Contracts at a university level which provide research active staff with designated research hours on their workload.

In line with our commitment to developing our researchers, and this being a new unit of assessment, a mentoring scheme has been running for the last three years. The mentorship scheme provides support for producing research outputs, networking, skills development and evaluating impact. This collaboration between experienced academics and ECRs helps develop careers, broaden networks and increase collaborations. A Small Grants Award Scheme was also made available in 2018/2019 and 2019/2020 for staff members to apply for up to GBP2000. In this application it was necessary to demonstrate how the money would be used to move their research forward as well as how this opportunity would assist in applying for external funds in the future. During that time numerous projects have been supported, enabling colleagues to collect data, disseminate information and form important networks. An example of this is **Igudia** who was successful in winning this award in 2018/2019 which enabled him to travel to Nigeria to collect data for his study on street vendors.

Other Faculty programmes include supporting bid writing with the introduction of writing retreats supported through external facilitators. These writing retreats have led to the formation of several research bids such as **Mshelia** who recently submitted a bid to the Department of International Development to support the Skills for Propensity Programme in Kenya. Impact is a key area for development within the economics team and we have begun to develop our capacity in this area through Professor Johnston from SOAS, one of our Visiting Professors, providing one to one support and facilitating workshops on writing impact case studies.

A weekly Research Seminars Series is run during term time giving a platform for all doctoral students and research staff to present their research and receive feedback from colleagues. This originally was only available for doctoral students but has expanded over the last four years to enable staff at all levels as well as visiting professors/speakers to contribute. It provides an opportunity for staff to become aware of and get involved with research being undertaken in other subject areas and thereby lead to interdisciplinary research. Colleagues within this unit, including **Eigereni, Aftab and Ghalia** have all recently contributed to this activity.

A further development opportunity for staff and students to enhance their presentation skills and to network across the different faculties is the University Annual Research Conference. This conference was originally a faculty run research conference but was collaborated with other faculty led conferences in 2018 to create a University wide event which has grown from strength to strength and is now run over two days. This is now in its third year, and both **Ghalia** and **Mshelia** presented their research in 2020.

Central resources such as The Graduate School and Research and Innovation Funding Support (RIFS) assist with our strategy to develop researchers. The importance of providing support for ECRs is recognised across the institution with the Graduate School offering a comprehensive programme of over 40 workshops and seminars running throughout the year on such subjects as “Designing Research with Impact in Mind”, and “Making External Partnerships Work for You”.

The University of Northampton’s Equality and Inclusion Policy and Procedure establishes honesty, fairness and consistency in the recruitment and progression of research staff. All staff undertake an e-learning module on Equality and Diversity and unconscious bias as part of their induction programme. The individual needs and wellbeing of all UoA colleagues are supported through the PDR process, with sensitive, bespoke arrangements in place in the faculty to support, for example, flexible and remote working, career development for part-time and fixed-term researchers, conference attendance for colleagues and PGRs, and appropriate adjustments for colleagues with disabilities, long-term illnesses, caring responsibilities and returning from leave periods.

In addition, many UoA colleagues participate in a growing number of colleague-led institutional support and advocacy groups such as the BAME Staff Network, LGBTQ+ group and Staff Disability Network. Many UoA colleagues have also benefited from the University’s ‘Springboard+’ staff development programme for women, trans and non-binary colleagues in academic or professional services roles which provides an opportunity for staff to undertake personal and professional development and support for leadership, goal-setting and strategic visioning skills.

2.2 Postgraduate researchers

A head and deputy head (**Aftab**) of Doctoral Programmes were appointed in 2018. These new appointments are driving our programme of PGR development within the faculty putting sustainability and vitality at the heart of our PGR offerings. The more senior colleagues in this Unit, have made an important contribution to our supervisory capacity for level 8 students which includes both PhD and DBA students. For example, **Aftab** is presently supervising two PhD students and one DBA student. One of his PhD students is on our John Lowe Scholarship and is looking at the effectiveness of a company board of directors to enhance environmental, social and governance practices. This sustainability topic is linked to the overall research objectives of the unit.

The FBL Research Seminar Series (RSS), as mentioned earlier, is key in bringing together researchers at all levels, including our PGR students. It provides a regular forum for a constructive

and supportive discussion about research and introduces our PGR students to our wider research community. The programme schedule includes the discussion of research from staff within this unit as well as external speakers from other faculties and institutions. It also includes our doctoral students' transfer seminars (when they are required to present their progress after one year of study). Each PGR must present at least one research seminar per year as well as being encouraged to present his/her work at internal and external conferences.

In addition to these seminars, the need to provide discipline specific research methods and methodology workshops for our PGRs has led to the recent introduction of the Doctoral Development Programme which runs parallel to the university Graduate School workshops. It runs as a series of workshops covering topics such as Research Philosophy and Quantitative Analysis facilitated recently by **Aftab**. The programme consists of informal round table sessions that allows members of staff and supervisors to offer their shared experience back to the community.

It has been important to expand our pool of supervisors in this unit and to involve as many research active staff in supervision as possible. To this end, supervisor training is run regularly by the Graduate School and is mandatory for all new research active staff. These recently trained colleagues are then often matched with a more experienced supervisor (2 completions minimum) to share knowledge and provide supervisory opportunities. Eight colleagues in this unit have completed the first of two modules of this supervisory training course, which is the minimum required to be given supervisory responsibilities and two are currently attending. Two colleagues, **Aftab** and **Igudia** have also completed the second module and been awarded the Postgraduate Certificate in Research Degree Supervision.

As the number of supervisors has increased, the need for a monitoring system of supervisory support has been recognised. This approach was developed as a recommendation from the University Research Degrees Committee. The reviews ensure that Doctoral Researchers (PhD and DBA) receive regular supervision meetings with their supervisory team, and that the core discussion points arising from these meetings are appropriately recorded. The review includes the transfer process deadlines and requirements. The reviews take place twice a year in Autumn and Spring.

Both the Faculty and the Graduate School have worked hard to increase opportunities for PGR career development, for example by providing paid teaching roles, in the SuCCEED@8 programme which enables doctoral researchers to gain experience and teaching qualifications, and to include PGR representatives on all Faculty and University committees. Evidence that these initiatives are having a positive impact can be clearly seen with UoN performing exceptionally well in the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey, coming 4th overall in 2018 progressing to 1st in 2020. In this latest survey, PGRs have rated the support to research and development offered by the university in the top 8 in all categories including 1st for resources and responsibilities and 2nd for progression, research skills and professional development.

3. Income, infrastructure and facilities

3.1 Research funding and strategies for generating income

As a new unit of assessment one of the key areas we are looking to develop is research funding. Most members of the unit are presently gaining experience by applying for either internal or smaller funds. For example, as mentioned previously, **Igudia** was successful in winning a Small grant award of GBP2,000 in 2018/2019. We have identified key funders and funding areas to target, focusing on our research strengths of sustainability and developing economies. Examples of some of these new funders we are targeting are evident with **Deane's** application to Wellcome Trust, **Igudia** applying to the Private Enterprise Development in Low-Income Countries (PEDL) and **Mshelia** applying to the Department of International Development.

Where the university has identified new research disciplines, such as Economics, there is a commitment to providing bespoke support and dedicated resources to build up a mass of colleagues who are 'bid ready'. These support mechanisms include sourcing bids in suitable

areas, bid-writing support, building pathways to impact and how to deliver impact beyond the project lifecycle.

The central Research and Innovation Funding Support (RIFS) is crucial in supporting colleagues to identify and apply for external funding and they run numerous drop-in sessions and tailored workshops to provides that support. Moving forward, the University has recently extended its institutional support by investing into Funding Institutional alongside GRANTfinder to support the faculty in discovering new, relevant research opportunities for staff to apply for.

3.2 Infrastructure and facilities

The University has recently invested heavily in its facilities, having completed the move to the purpose-built Waterside Campus in 2018 at a total cost of GBP330,000,000. The campus has been heralded as the cutting edge of university infrastructure, winning the 2019 Royal Institute for Chartered Surveyors' coveted 'Design Through Innovation' award. While it is not possible to attribute a precise portion of this investment to Economics, the department has benefitted from the new working environment with state-of-the-art IT infrastructure, new office space and a new library. The new workspaces facilitate scholarly dialogue and the exchange of research knowledge between disciplines creating a more interdisciplinary environment.

The new campus has also transformed the experience and working environment of the UoA's PGR community. Whereas PGRs previously were separate and located across the campus, the new senate building provides an impressive, purpose-built, co-designed suite for the University's whole multidisciplinary PGR community. The success of this strategic investment in PGR workspace is seen in strong, improving PRES results for PGRs at the University of Northampton.

The Bloomberg suite is an area dedicated to Economics and Accounting and Finance staff and students, located on the ground floor of the Senate building. This new suite consists of nine Reuters terminals which provide research students and staff access to exclusive live financial trading data in a user-friendly manner in order to make economic forecasts and trading strategies. This is a great facility for researchers in this area moving forward.

4. Collaboration and contribution to the research base, economy and society

4.1 Collaborations

Because much of the work in this Unit is of an international nature, the staff members are often collaborating with colleagues based in other overseas universities or institutions. These include **Ghalia** who has written with staff members at King Abdulaziz University in Saudi Arabia and **Deane** who worked with the National Institute for Medical Research Tanzania in his research on HIV. **Mshelia** collaborates with a number of African colleagues and institutions including Lulutho Academy in South Africa and Unibridge in Kenya, who together put together a proposal for the Skills for Prosperity Programme. **Aftab** also publishes work with colleagues from South Africa at University of Witwatersrand. There is also collaboration and joint publications taking place with UK universities including Loughborough, Brunel, Reading and SOAS.

4.2 Contributions to the research environment

Several of our research active staff are key contributors to their research specialism by being on editorial panels and reviewers of prestigious academic journals. **Mshelia** is one of the track chairs for the AIB Africa chapter for Governments, NGOs, Global Institutions & State-Owned Enterprises and a member of British Academy of Management's Research Methodology Special Interest Group (SIG) Steering Committee. **Ghalia** is a reviewer for the Journal of Current Issues in Tourism and the Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research. **Aftab** is a reviewer for Structural Change and Economic Dynamics journal. He is a member of the Economic History society and presents papers at the Economic History Society conference.

