

Institution: University of Sunderland
Unit of Assessment: 23
<p>1. Unit context and structure, research and impact strategy</p> <p>Following the appointment of a new Dean with an unstinting commitment to research (McKenna), a significant period of restructure and physical relocation to a dedicated building, the reorganisation of the Faculty of Education and Society (FES) was completed in 2019. The School of Education, located in FES, hosts a small, but distinct and vibrant Unit with a research portfolio which brings together researchers in professional learning and practice, spanning lifelong education in formal and informal settings. The Unit is committed to the conduct of research of high-quality and practical value and has seen a significant growth in the number of our high-quality research outputs during the assessment period. The Faculty Research and Innovation Committee (FRIC), led by (McKenna), exercises strategic leadership and coordination of research through several Thematic Research Groups (TRGs) which support the work of the Centre for Research in Education (CRE) and the Centre for Applied Social Sciences (CASS). The University of Sunderland's Centre for Excellence in Teacher Training (SUNCETT) is in CRE. All Professors and Associate Professors belong to FRIC as do all Heads of School in the Faculty. Research Centre Leaders report regularly to FRIC against strategic research objectives. Each researcher in FES (whether academic staff or research student) is engaged in a cognate TRG in at least one of the above Centres.</p> <p>Gregson leads research in CRE where activity is organised around three TRGs, full details of which are given later in this document. Each is led by a Professor or an Associate Professor with a strong track-record of research and peer-reviewed published work in that field of study. The work of TRG leaders is supported by the School of Education Research Manager (Taras) as well as by a Team Research Lead; Post Compulsory Education and Training (Nixon); International and Distance Learning (Hidson); Professional Development (Gilligan); and Initial Teacher Training (Duffy). As a research-led School, TRGs provide both focal points and infrastructure for mentoring and delivering collaborative research. Early Career Researchers (ECRs) across the School are supported at Professorial level by a dedicated School of Education Research Mentor (Elliott). Research activity in CRE encompasses a Working Papers Group; a Critical Reading Group; a Research Writing Group; Peer-Review Workshops and a significantly revitalised Research Seminar Series. Our research support activities are actively supplemented by the University's Individual Research Plan (IRPs) process and our Interdisciplinary Research Networks (IRNs). Led by a combination of experienced researchers and ECRs engaged in TGRs across the University, IRNs create new networks around which established and nascent areas of research can coalesce.</p> <p>Our research infrastructure provides strategic support to staff and students at all levels, encouraging an increasing number of researchers across the Unit to produce high-quality, peer-reviewed research outcomes. As a leading and large-scale provider of professional teacher education, ranked 2nd in the UK and 1st in England according to The Guardian University league tables 2020, our aim is to understand the changing contexts, conditions, and outcomes of policies, programmes and practices that frame the theory and practice of Education across the lifespan. We pursue excellence by fostering original, rigorous and influential research which translates into professional practice in ways that advance the discipline of Education while also attending to social, economic and cultural issues. Our work acknowledges the crucial contributions that research from the field of Pedagogy makes to improving educational practice in schools, colleges, universities and in wider vocations and professions. We disseminate and foster public engagement in our research through peer-reviewed journals and books; newspapers; webpages and social media; briefing papers; think pieces, professional periodicals as well as at national and international research conferences. Our long-standing partnership with the Education and Training Foundation (ETF) has led to the co-design, development, implementation and external evaluation of the externally funded national Practitioner Research Programme (PRP) a unique model of Post Graduate Research (PGR) internship, enabling teachers and education leaders in the Further Adult and Vocational Education (FAVE) sector to conduct systematic practice-focused research leading to impactful and high-quality research outcomes and in many cases, prestigious peer-reviewed publications (Case Study 1). The PRP</p>

is the first in the world to provide a substantial body of mid-career teachers and education leaders in the FAVE sector with the same high levels of intensive research training, collaboration, cooperation, mentorship and sustained critical friendship, normally reserved for ECRs with access to funding, exclusive research networks and academic patronage afforded in highly rated, research-intensive universities.

Our sustained outreach and our intensive public engagement with policy professionals, practitioners and other stakeholders are evident in our public lectures, in our requests to act as advisers to Government Commissions (**Gregson; Nixon; Martin-Denham**). **McKenna** is an invited member of two All-Party Parliamentary Groups, (Teaching Profession; Digital Skills and Education). Members of our academic staff have also been appointed as members of National Expert Advisory Panels (**Gregson**). They are also regularly invited to make TV appearances and radio broadcasts (**McKenna; Edgar**). To advance the above agenda, we capitalise on research-led teaching so that our programmes of professional teacher education actively integrate the work of tutors and students in the research process. For example, all teacher educators in the Unit engage in research related to their own teaching and they encourage their student-teachers to do the same. Our collaborative and cooperative research culture is further supported and nurtured by our intensive mentoring of ECRs, the purposeful inclusion of postgraduate and postdoctoral researchers in staff research activity and in the structures and strategies that we have put in place to encourage joint publications between University staff and their postgraduate and postdoctoral students. Our work embodies a clear and consistent commitment to real-world, practice-focused and impactful research. Research in the Unit includes contributions from staff from the Schools of, Education, Pharmacy, Health and Well-Being, Social Sciences and Medicine. Our key research collaborations draw in researchers from other disciplines including the Arts and Creative Industries, Sociology, English and Psychology. Our already strong and strengthening national and international reputation for collaborative, practice-focused research has enabled us to attract significantly greater numbers of excellent postgraduate and postdoctoral researchers from outside the institution and increase our number of grant awards. Our publicly applauded outstanding work on social mobility is augmented by, and evidenced in, a thriving research culture in which staff and students collaborate in undertaking distinctive research in themes united by an interest in the improvement of educational practice and wider inclusion and equity in education, while providing important insights into new possibilities regarding national, policy-research-practice relations (**Case Study 2**).

Research and Impact Strategy 2015-2021: Responding positively to feedback from the REF 2014 sub-panel was an important step in revitalising our research strategy. **McKenna's** Leadership was pivotal in 2015 when, during the process of restructuring our research activity, we identified and consolidated existing strengths, aspects of research activity that could be improved and circumstances in which research interests had shifted due to retirements and policy changes. We expanded our previous focus on Pedagogy to include wider aspects of, and issues in, the discipline of Education. The period from 2014-2020 has been one of extensive transformation and energetic expansion at the University of Sunderland. During this period strong leadership at School, Faculty and University level was vital in a major restructuring and the rebalancing of our research priorities. We directed our efforts to consolidate and expand the strengths we outlined as our strategy for the future in REF2014. At the same time, we remain open to the emergence of ECRs in nascent areas of research and to new demands for PGR study.

A sustainable research environment is one that strategically and consistently invests in increasing research capacity; consolidates and builds upon existing strengths while nurturing the development of new areas of research across and beyond existing activities; is proactive in environment scanning and responsive to change. The sustainability of the Unit is evidenced in our steadfast commitment to investment to strengthen research infrastructure, enhance our research culture, build research capacity and in the ways in which we continue to advance our research strengths through IRP support, while enabling new areas of research to come into view. We uphold the commitment and enthusiasm of researchers across the Unit by ensuring that staff and students are included, encouraged and supported in realising their intellectual ambitions and in rising to the highest standards of scholarship and educational research.

A vital research environment is alive and exciting to members of the communities which already exist within it, providing both the spirit and spark to draw in, welcome and inspire others. The vitality of the Unit's research environment is substantiated in our embodiment of inclusive and

collaborative research values, our expertise in the development of professional learning and our commitment to the improvement of educational practice. These aspects of our research are already recognised by national funding bodies and are publicly acknowledged as distinctive aspects of our research activity. We harness our expertise in supporting the professional learning of our own staff and in our internal approaches to the improvement of educational practice across the University. The quality of our research activity is evidenced by the increased volume of peer-reviewed published research outputs. Since the previous REF, submitted staff have produced, 14 books; 50 book chapters; 86 articles in peer-reviewed journals; 18 monographs 15 keynote lectures 55 conference papers and presentations, with colleagues doctoral and postdoctoral students, standing in additional testament to the reach of our work. Further evidence of the quality of our support for research is provided by the numbers of our staff and students who begin their studies at Master of Arts and MPhil level who subsequently go on to successfully complete their PhDs at the University of Sunderland.

In keeping with Sunderland's status as a socially responsible and civic university, we positioned our research strategy in the light of REF 2014 outcomes and in the context of broader developments in research including enduring and emerging educational issues in society and the economy. The University 2016-2021 Strategic Plan was developed through an extensive internal and external consultation process across the University Community and the results informed our strategic priorities. This enabled us to refine and articulate our vision to be innovative and inspirational by providing education, research and creative practices, which offer enhancing and empowering experiences to students, staff, communities and employers in the UK and across the world. Building upon this in 2017, we drew upon the University's Research and Innovation Strategy to set out our agenda for Education including our commitment to practice-focused and applied research which values and sustains all research active staff and students, recognises research excellence and contributes to teaching. The University is taking its life-changing ambitions forward into the Strategic Plan 2020-2025 where our focus is to offer transformative educational experiences to students from all backgrounds, provide opportunities for career-focused professional learning and to make a positive difference to industry and society through our research, innovation and practice. In tandem with the University, research in the Unit pursues these aspirations by harnessing our reputation for high levels of rigorous, original, significant collaborative and impactful research and in the ways in which we continue to take a leading role in research activities that respond to and anticipate pressing challenges in Education in the 21st Century across the lifespan. As a relatively small Unit, our strategy is to heighten our contribution to knowledge by focusing upon distinctive areas of research, securing funding in researching substantive areas of educational practice and by actively addressing issues of inclusion and equity in education while securing high standards of research and scholarship more generally. We particularly value contributions of user groups, especially practitioners in our collaborative research partnerships. We continue to build upon our restructure in order enhance our research culture, consolidate, celebrate and expand previous areas of strength identified in our 2014 submission while at the same time merging some of our previous strategic research objectives and identifying new ones.

While the research groupings identified in the Unit's REF 2014 submission continue to inform our research portfolio, following REF 2014 we reframed our research strategy significantly to bring these research groupings together across the Unit into the three coherent TRGs which currently frame our research portfolio. These provide the inclusive research base and collegial research communities for staff and doctoral students. Led by Professors, Associate Professors and senior researchers, our TRGs provide a strong foundation for the further development and continuing revitalisation of our research strategy. They also strengthen intellectual coherence across the School and the Unit. TRGs encourage sustained collaborations and mutual and critical engagement with the wider field of Social Sciences, Health, Medicine, the Arts and Creative Industries, while foregrounding the role and importance of the discipline of Education in advancing professional learning and practice across subjects and disciplines. Our TRGs engage in the critical consideration of conceptual and theoretical frameworks and the sharing of methodological perspectives, enabling staff and students to identify, clarify and explore how distinctive theoretical, methodological standpoints and other contributions from different disciplines can be drawn upon to address contemporary educational challenges.

TRG 1: Professional Learning, Teacher Education and Practice-Focused Research.

Led by **Gregson and Spedding**, this TRG includes research in the Initial and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) of Teachers; Work-Based Learning and Informal Learning as well as research which focuses upon the nature of practice and the processes through which practice improves. It draws eclectically from the disciplines of Philosophy, Education, Sociology, Anthropology as well upon contributions from Socio-cultural and Cognitive Psychology. The ETF funded PRP has enabled us to make major advances in developing an integrated understanding of the relationships between practice, theory and research across the FAVE sector and beyond. The role and potential of practice-focused research in educational improvement and its contribution to theory development has been picked up nationally by policy professionals, education leaders and practitioners across the UK, in the Republic of Ireland, Australia and Finland. **Gregson and Todd** provide a critical analysis of how standards in vocational education are or are not realised in informal and formal settings in the workplace. **Spedding** draws upon story and narrative inquiry to challenge the hegemony of popular models of teachers' CPD and professional learning. **Sawdon** illustrates important links between professionalism, professional learning and conscientiousness. **Unsworth** provides striking examples of simulation as a vehicle for professional learning in healthcare. **Foster** offers a framework to capture and analyse in-depth and incremental experiences of international students within and beyond Higher Education (HE).

TRG 2: Inclusive Education, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. Led by **Cooper, Duffy and Martin-Denham**, this TRG includes investigations in Affective and Moral Issues in Education. It draws upon insights from Neuroscience, Cognitive Psychology and Philosophy to examine how affective and moral dimensions of education influence, student involvement; inclusion and equity; learner empowerment; democratic education; citizenship and voice in different sectors of education. **Martin-Denham's** extensive, mixed-method, empirical research provides fascinating insights into, and is highly critical of, the implementation of local and national policy in relation to excluded children caught up in "managed moves" and "off-rolling", bringing to light the way in which these policies and practices are leading to school exclusions grounded in factors of social class and the dilemmas and complexities of teachers' attempts to rise to challenges of inclusion and equity education in a period of financial austerity and league tables. Her research has important implications for future changes and challenges in policy and practice. **Martin-Denham's** research has been taken up by Dame Carol Black (Chair of the Independent Review of Drug Use - Department of Health and Social Care) and Anne Longfield, (Children's Commissioner for England and DfE Central Research Division). **Benstead's** systematic literature review, supplemented by empirical research, deepens understanding of the concept of social inclusion and the experiences of pupils identified with SEND including those who have encountered adverse childhood experiences.

TRG 3: Curriculum, Pedagogy and Assessment. Led by **Atkinson, Foster and Taras**, this TRG includes research in Design Technology; ICT and Digital Technology in Education; Teaching and Learning in HE and FAVE contexts. It also investigates curriculum theory, curriculum design and development as well as assessment theory and practice. **Atkinson's** research is distinctive in providing important contributions to understanding curriculum theory, inclusion and development in Design Technology. **Taras and Davies** raise world-leading challenges to dominant discourses in the theory and practice of Formative Assessment by critically examining and evaluating how formative assessment practices relate to the realities of student involvement, empowerment and voice.

Achievement of Strategic Aims for Research and Impact: Since 2015, achievement of our priority research themes has been supported by three strategic aims.

Strategic Aim 1: Increase Research Capacity and Grant awards and Raise the Volume of Research Outcomes considered to be Meeting Higher Standards of Research. We have achieved this strategic aim through sustained investment in our people and infrastructure. We have appointed two new Professors, five Visiting Professors and three Associate Professors. This has enabled more senior staff to develop and sustain the research environment and to strengthen our new research infrastructures, training and capacity building. We have maintained substantial investment in supporting Individual Research Plans (IRPs) to further develop research capacity. Our introduction in 2018 of a new model of PGR support, funded by ETF in the form of the MPhil Pathway of the PRP has already enabled 12 MPhil PRP students to

progress to PhD. All of these students are on schedule for completion in 2022-24. The University provides IRP funding annually to enable staff to pursue PhDs and to disseminate the findings and impact of their research at national and international conferences. Over the past three years the University has invested £42,380 in IRP funding to the School of Education. This is increasing cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary collaborations across the Unit and the University through the provision of targeted internal funding and the allocation of additional allocations of research time. Our expanded programme of public lectures by distinguished scholars from the arts, literature, journalism and politics including, Lord David Puttnam, Anne Cleaves and Chris Mullin, alongside invited lectures from leading researchers in the discipline of Education such as Professor Frank Coffield (UCL) and Professor Terry Hyland (Free University of Ireland, Dublin) encourage staff and students to contribute to and share in the life of the Research Community across the School of Education, the University and beyond. We have increased research capacity by creating opportunities for researchers to work together within the discipline of Education and across disciplines and subjects through the above networks and sustained internal investment and external funding support. We continue to encourage ECRs to collaborate with experienced researchers in other disciplines including the Arts and the Creative Industries, Sociology, Social Work, Criminology and the Humanities. At the same time, we actively support emerging areas of research in coming to the fore by encouraging ECRs to conduct research in new fields of study. This currently includes promising research in the educational experiences of Travelling People, Romany and Gypsy families; researching the development of Critical and Creative Thinking in Teacher Education; ways of representing the professional learning of student teachers in the FAVE sector; and explorations of the potential role of the Arts and Creative Industries in mediating the development of academic literacy and scholarship. We ensure that our Research Centres, Networks and mentoring arrangements continue to contribute to a vital thriving and inclusive research culture by fostering greater engagement in collaborative research activity, creating new synergies and supporting more flexible research configurations. In pursuing the development of our research capacity, a dedicated School of Education Research Mentor (**Elliott**) provides regular, individual and group support, guidance and mentoring for a caseload of at least 10 of our ECRs each year. We also make sure that the work of colleagues who are currently unable to contribute to REF 2021 are publicly valued and held in high regard as an integral part of the intellectual community of the Unit of Education by actively and openly recognising them as potential contributors to future REF exercises.

We encourage all staff to concentrate on producing high-quality outputs rather than focusing on volume. Research outputs across the Unit are formatively assessed and developed at various stages in the writing process. This includes providing collaboration and support in the initial drafting, peer-review pre-submission and supported post-submission revision in response to comments offered by external reviewers. Internal and external formative and summative processes for evaluating and benchmarking the quality of research outputs are important in realising our commitment to improving the quality of research across the Unit in inclusive and collegial ways. Our transparent and rigorous process for raising awareness of the standards of research outcomes employed in the grading of outputs for institutional submissions to REF 2021 and for other research purposes are highly valued by staff. Our research development activities ensure that all staff are increasingly aware of and understand threshold standards of research, including the specifics of how individual members of staff might raise the quality of their research outcomes. Our intention is to reduce the number of outputs falling below the standard of nationally recognised work or failing to meet the widely accepted definitions of research. In this way, we have strengthened our research infrastructure and increased our research capacity. Evidence of our progress in this respect is found in our establishment of a CRE Working Papers Group; Research Round Tables; Critical Reading Groups; Research Writing Group; Peer-Review Workshops and a new face-to-face and online Research Seminar Series. These fora invite, enable and support staff and students to present and discuss their research in constructive and critical scholarly communities which embrace, sustain and support the work of experienced and less experienced researchers. The work of our IRNs and dedicated Research Mentor for ECRs, together with no less than 15 staff in School of Education currently receiving IRP funding for PhDs and Professional Doctorates, lend further energy to the consistently upward trajectory of the vitality and sustainability of our research environment. The above initiatives are enabling and will continue to enable a significant number of researchers across the

Unit to raise the standards of research above nationally recognised standards including progressing towards standards of international and worldwide research excellence.

Our success is evidenced in our maintenance of high levels research income in relation to the size of the Unit and in our targeted capacity-building activities in key areas of research. As a relatively small Unit with a clear commitment to real-world, practice-focused, applied and impactful research, our post 2014 strategy has enhanced and will continue to enhance our contribution to knowledge by securing funding in particular areas of policy priorities in Education and subjects of substantive societal interest. This signals a renewal and revitalisation of our research energies and expansion of our expertise. We continue to take a lead in developing our innovative collaborative model of PGR internship and supervision pioneered in ETF-SUNCETT PRP (**Gregson, Spedding and Nixon**) across the UK and beyond. We work closely with policy professionals, education leaders, teachers and learners in the wider research community to nurture intellectual capacity and provide insights which enable research in Education to adapt and thrive in a time of great regional, national and global political upheaval and economic change. Of significance here are, the educational challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic; the impact of BREXIT; increasing unemployment; widening of social, economic and educational inequalities; supporting online and workplace learning in T Levels and New Apprenticeships; addressing issues of environmental risk and uncertainty; and increased migration. We are exploring new opportunities for collaboration with rising economies such as China, India, Brazil and the Middle East. Developing an educational response to these and other concerns requires cross-disciplinary and cross-sector research, intensive cooperation and collaborative working. The role of research in the discipline of Education in all of this is pivotal. The research of **Gregson, Spedding and Nixon** actively supports staff and students internationally through the publication by Bloomsbury in 2020 of a research-informed scholarly textbook and a companion book of readings. Taken together, these publications provide a peer-reviewed, evidenced-informed, impactful and accessible resource which is helping staff and student teachers across the world to improve their practice in reflective, systematic and research-informed ways. Our International Practice-Focused Research in Education Conference (IPFREC), hosted by the University of Sunderland in July 2021 stands in further evidence of our growing worldwide standing in educational research.

Strategic Aim 2: Attract more Postgraduate and Postdoctoral Students: We pursued this objective by recruiting academic staff in key research areas and through our innovative model of PGR student support in the form of the MPhil pathway of the PRP, raising our recruitment of research students from 23 in 2014-15 to 73 in 2019- 2020, an increase of over 200%. Our research training for students and staff draws upon the expertise in our Graduate Research Support (GRS) team and the Centre for Excellence Learning and Teaching (CELT) including the hosting of University-wide seminars and conferences. Our continued recruitment of high-quality research students and academics clearly aligns with our priority research areas. As the Unit grows in research capacity, our team approach ensures that different strands of research remain coherent and connected, purposively involving new researchers many of whom are already experienced professionals.

Strategic Aim 3: Encourage More Interdisciplinary Research: Our IRNs stimulate and support research across subjects and disciplines. We have consolidated, extended and strengthened our TRGs through our highly successful, targeted, capacity-building in new areas of research activity. These include practice-focused research, SEND and research in equity in education. Our commitment to the strategic improvement of our research is underscored and strengthened by the University's provision of funding and support for the introduction of two new IRNs in the Faculty both closely connected to the Unit. For example, the University's investment in **Martin-Denham's** research in *Adverse Childhood Experience* (£12,000) and our IRN for research in *Race Class and Ethnicity* (RaCE) (**Smith** £12,000). Interdisciplinary research is also supported through a significant number of collaborations in the joint supervision of postgraduate students across FES and the Faculty of Arts and Creative Industries (FACI) (**Collier and Gregson**). Our focus on professional learning and practice creates opportunities which actively encourage and enable interdisciplinary research. For example, research groups across the Unit meet regularly to engage in collaborative writing, peer-review of outputs, critical reading and discussion of research papers, shared literature review and bid writing. The FES and the University Annual Research Conferences enable ECRs to share their experiences and the outcomes of their research with more experienced and senior research staff. Extending our national networks has already enabled us to collaborate with colleagues at the University of

Stirling, and the University of South Wales, University College London, Kingston University, Leeds Arts University, Waterford Institute of Technology and the free University of Ireland in the Republic of Ireland, ArTEZ University in the Netherlands, the British University in Dubai, the University of the Western Cape, South Africa and Victoria University (Melbourne),

Future Research Strategy Aims and Activities for the Next Five Years: Our aspiration to be world-leading research excellence is anchored in our strategy to build upon our already high-standing in distinctive areas of educational research. We continue to contribute to the development of professional learning, teacher education and practice-focused research; the creation of inclusive and equitable education systems; as well as research and advancing research in curriculum pedagogy and assessment. Our confidence is based upon the strong foundation we have achieved in these areas of research to date and in the increasing numbers of high-quality research students we attract. For example, we currently have 73 self/employer/sponsor funded students registered for MPhil/PhDs/D Prof, 42% are male and 58% are female, 78% are external candidates from schools, colleges and training organisations across the UK and overseas, 22% are staff from the Unit. Of this cohort, 11% identify as being from BaME groups. We will continue to invest strategically in new posts and secondments and succession planning in CRE. We are committed to supporting the development of a new generation of researchers through the University's recruitment of our own high-achieving doctoral students as well as bringing in new researchers from outside. This needs to be a careful balance to ensure that research in Education continues to thrive. We will continue to create conditions conducive to the encouragement of ambition in experienced researchers as well as supporting early and mid-career researchers through our IRP process and other strategic funding investments in research. We will also support the following cross-cutting priorities: methodological innovation and interdisciplinary activity; public engagement; impact and technology enhanced learning. We remain mindful of the importance of ensuring that financial and other structures for support and guidance in research are accessible not only to more experienced researchers but also to new colleagues as well as to early and mid-career researchers. The University's extensive investment in the IRP process and in the establishment of IRNs stand in further evidence of our continued commitment to the vitality and sustainability of the Unit's research activity. In publishing innovative and distinctive research of the highest quality, we continue to ensure that a significant proportion of the research outputs across the Unit are supported sufficiently to the extent that they might be regarded as meeting standards of research excellence. In this respect, our strategic objectives aim to further support the work of the Unit in increasing the proportion of research outcomes considered to be meeting standards of excellence worldwide.

In developing research partnerships within and beyond Education, we are expanding our international and interdisciplinary research presence and profile by encouraging increased collaboration not only between our Research Centres but also more widely across the University. This acts as a strong foundation upon which we can build our aspirations. We will also continue to expand our links with other HEIs described above. We will provide more opportunities for international and interdisciplinary research as well as increasing opportunities for new grant capture, particularly in the fields of Educational Evaluation and Improvement, SEND, Inclusion and Technology Education. We intend to galvanise new international and interdisciplinary dimensions of our research activity as part of our first IPFREC research conference in 2021. In sustaining the increase in our external income, we will maintain the growth in ETF income and other research projects which focus on SEND and inclusion as well as targeted bids for wider international funding in order to maintain a vibrant portfolio across a range of sources. We will maintain sustainable vital research environment that supports established leading researchers while encouraging new generations of scholars and research leaders to participate in the Unit and the University's research communities. We will also continue to encourage collaborative funding bids, host joint seminars conferences and international conferences, coordinate and share MPhil/ PhD/DProf supervision expertise. Work in these areas has already begun with financial support from the University through the IRPs and IRNs and through the University Central Research Support Fund as well as the Dean's discretionary research support budget, and it is anticipated that this University investment will be the key to leveraging more external funding and support in the future. The continued recruitment of committed and talented research students and academics with research expertise aligns with our priority research areas and remains central to the ongoing development of our research capacity across the Unit.

We will continue to increase our numbers of PGR students by actively recruiting more our undergraduate PGCE and Masters degree students. We will also increase our potential pool of supervisors and provide feedback and support earlier in the bid application process in order to strengthen the links between PGRs and our TRGs. In addition, we will continue to embed impact in all aspects of our research culture through our innovative developmental research workshops and seminars as an integral component of our impact strategy.

2. People

Staffing Strategy and Staff Development. Our staff are vital in ensuring that we maintain a vibrant and sustainable research environment, capable of supporting the achievement of research excellence and extending our research capacity. The primary aim of our research strategy is to ensure that all colleagues can, in time, develop leadership in research. All potential candidates for academic posts are required to demonstrate previous research success and future research potential. All Appointment Panel Members receive training in fair selection and recruitment. Our workload model is both strategic and research enabling as it guarantees protected research time with additional time for funded research and for PGR supervision. Our staffing strategy is distinctive in supporting the research careers of staff, at all levels and at every stage in their development, including staff working in administrative posts, research assistants, lecturers, senior lecturers, principal lecturers, associate professors and professors. For example, **Bell, Duffy, Dagg** and **Smith** have all achieved PhDs within the past two years and are producing related publications with the support of School of Education, Faculty and University funding.

Since 2014, two senior professors have retired, two new professors (**McKenna and Gregson**), three associate professors (**Taras, Mandala and Spedding**) and five Visiting Professors (**Gibson, Husband, Moffat, Sambell and Walton**) have been appointed. Departing staff have been replaced by those whose work reflects our commitment to succession planning in the fields of practice-focused research, educational evaluation and improvement assessment theory and practice, SEND, educational inclusion and technical education, while also opening up possibilities for new and emerging areas of research described above. Success in attracting external grant income has enabled the appointment of two Research Assistants over the period each making an important contribution to further energising our research culture. Post-2014, **Nixon, Ross and Morgan** have been promoted to principal lecturer posts, while **Buglass, Benson and Hidson** have been appointed to posts at senior lecturer level with **Brown and Scott** appointed at Lecturer level. Our career development strategy aims to develop a critical mass of teacher educators, by ensuring a pipeline of young educators who are equipped to follow a research pathway in education while working as teacher educators. Staff with significant responsibilities for research are supported by the annual IRP process providing allocations of additional research time and funding for attendance and presentation and research conferences, research dissemination and network building evidenced in over 55 papers presented at national and international research conferences and events since 2014. IRP funding is particularly helpful for ECRs who may not have access to larger grants. Staff primarily involved in initial teacher education and CPD have an allowance for scholarship included in their workload planning to enable them to engage in professional/research activity in order to enable their own development and ensure research-informed curriculum and pedagogy. Insights into our infrastructures and mentor support are provided above. The appointment of our dedicated Impact Officer (**Ramsey**) enables staff to gain recognition and reward for their research achievements by supporting them in the identification of potential 'hard' and 'soft' indicators of impact of their research by helping them to track evidence of impact in the conduct of the research from the outset.

Research Students. Promoting excellent postgraduate research is fundamental to the Unit's research strategy. We use a collaborative, team-based approach to doctoral supervision in order to maintain regular and consistent supervisions with our PGRs, to mentor new supervisors and to expand our supervision capacity as rapidly and effectively as possible. Doctoral students are recruited from across the UK home nations and internationally. Our suite of PGR programmes frequently produces leaders in their fields in universities, colleges, schools and other organisations. For example, a former PGR student (**Ross**) is now leading a large international distance learning teacher education programme in 60 countries worldwide; a current PhD student (**Watson**) is Principal of a large FE College in central London and former Masters student (**Webber-Jones**) is Vice Principal of a large FE College in Sheffield.

Our Education provision is now located on a single campus in a purpose-designed building which was completely refurbished in 2020, including substantial investment in our technological facilities. Our PGRs benefit from dedicated workspaces, computer clusters and common rooms. We host our monthly seminar series, research group meetings, IRNs, postgraduate events. Much of our PG teaching is located in our new dedicated School of Education building. This enhances our sense of belonging to an easily identifiable, genuine, and valued academic community. The School provides specialist software and technical support for staff and PGR students undertaking quantitative methods research. Joint writing and publication between PGRs and experienced staff are encouraged in order to develop student research careers. Eight such joint international quality papers/book chapters have been published since 2014 by **Gregson, Broadhead, Todd, Norton, Baines, Webber-Jones, Smith and Spedding**. We have consistently outperformed the overall sector in the Post Graduate Research Experience Survey (PGRES) increased our scores on all individual items. Our intention is to maintain and extend this lead. Our PGR student population is made up of full-time professionals working in a variety of workplace settings including, primary, secondary, workplace, further, adult and community education and HE. All are studying for MPhil/PhD or a Professional Doctorate. Our PGR students provide an important interface between our research community, our regional and national partners and wider professional, practitioner communities. In this way, we make vital contribution to research capacity-building across a range of educational sectors. The University provides a comprehensive programme of skills development for its PGR students based upon a Training Needs Analysis completed at induction in discussion with supervisors. This is reviewed regularly at monthly tutorials and at Annual Monitoring Review. This programme of professional development including structured and progressive research training with full and free access to public lectures and seminars, provided by the leading researchers from the School, visiting professors and national and international guest speakers operates at the forefront of research and practice in Education and education related disciplines. The University's Code of Practice for Research is complemented by School-specific guidelines to assure the quality of PGR provision. Regular supervisory training sessions are offered by the University PGR support team. The University also offers a PG Cert in HE for new supervisors which includes training in research supervision. Each PGR student is allocated a Director of Studies with a minimum supervision track record of two successful doctoral completions and at least one additional supervisor. The progress of each student is monitored at research proposal stage and through annual progress reviews. These are recorded in electronic supervision logs and personal development plans carefully monitored by the supervisory team and staff from PGR support services team. Mock viva examinations are held for all PGRs submitting their thesis in preparation for final viva voce examination. PGRs present papers and posters at the School Research conferences and seminars, at the University's Annual Research Conference and at the ETF Annual Research Conference in London. Our IPFREC 2021 conference offers PGR students opportunities to submit posters and papers for peer-review and presentation to an international audience and then forward to potential publication enabling them to contribute to and learn from the broad and inclusive research culture supported by the Unit and by the University. A rigorous two-stage ethical procedure is in place for all research. This is monitored and managed by a School of Education Research Coordinator who is a member of the Faculty Ethics Committee. In selecting research outputs for submission in our REF 2021 portfolio, we have taken careful steps to ensure that the distribution of outputs reflect the Unit's approach to equality and diversity, including research outputs from staff on part-time contracts, staff in phased retirement and staff with protected characteristics.

Table 1: PhD and Professional Doctorates Awarded

UoA 23	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	Total
PhD	2	2	3	2	1	5	15
D Prof	1	1	0	1	1	2	6
Total	3	3	3	3	2	7	21

Most of our PhD students are mid-career teachers working full-time in schools and FE colleges. Increased workloads occasioned by the move to online teaching, coupled with the added pressures of home schooling and caring responsibilities brought about by COVID-19 have adversely impacted the ability of significant numbers of students to progress/complete their research. Five of our PhD students scheduled to complete in 2019-2020 were particularly affected. Two sadly suffered parental bereavements due to COVID-19, while a further three students requested reviewable 6-month extensions to their thesis submission dates due to a mixture of significantly increased workloads and domestic caring pressures. Our total PhD/DProf awards are 11% higher than in the previous REF period. Had these five students been able to complete on time, this would have represented a 37% increase in Awards.

Equality and Diversity. The School is committed to ensuring equality and diversity for all academic staff. Of our research outputs submitted to REF 2020 /2021, 19% are male and 81% female, this includes 2 part-time members of staff. We continue to ensure our commitment to gender equality and support flexible and remote working, career breaks for staff with caring responsibilities, phased retirement opportunities while enabling staff with caring responsibilities to schedule lectures that avoid problematic timings. In accordance with our commitments in the Code of Practice, we support the career development of all our researchers. Contract research staff are encouraged to participate in all research related activities including access to conference funding and periods of study leave to enable them to develop their research and employability skills. Research support is also available for bid writing and funding submissions as well as in the preparation of research abstracts for submission to conferences and book proposals to publishers.

3. Income, infrastructure and facilities

Income. As part of our strategy for incremental and sustainable expansion, we have increased our research income to over **£2million** from 2013-2023. Our income generating strategy consists of three strands. Firstly, we are working closely with user groups and with internal services to identify funding sources and to match these to individuals and groups. Secondly, we review research proposals in the early stages of their development in order to provide mentoring and dedicated assistance for bid writing. Finally, the allocation of additional time, funding and resources further supports the preparation of research bids and proposals.

Our success in enhancing our research culture is evidenced in our increased levels of research income in comparison to the size of the Unit. For example, **£1.7 million** ETF 2013-2023 (**Gregson**); **£47,309**, Sunderland City Council 2016 (**McKenna**); **£167,993** Sunderland City Council, 2016-2020 (**Martin-Denham**); **£54,958** Erasmus, 2016-2019 (**Hughes**); **£197,627**, Together for Children, 2018-2020, (**Martin-Denham**) (**Total: £2.1 million**). Our consistently high achievement and completion rates for our much greater number of PGR students also stands as testament to our enhanced research support activity and culture. We expect our recent success to be sustained and reflected in higher income grants in coming years. The School of Education also supports the provision of external consultancy services. For example, **Gregson and Spedding** were awarded a consultancy of **£20,000** by the Royal Commission for the Exhibition of 1851 in order to mentor National Technical Teaching Fellows (2018-2020).

Infrastructure

Facilities: There is a large specialist Education library situated on our riverside St Peter's campus. Co-located with our purpose-designed building for Education our work is supported by a specialist education librarian with over £31,000 being spent on books alone in 2020. A further £31,000 was spent on over 25,000 print electronic journal titles and databases. Our Education librarian works alongside Education specialists at induction and attends Boards of Studies and Staff-Student Liaison Committees, including those for PGRs in order to optimise research support. The University also manages Sunderland Research Online and E-theses repositories. We have provided over 40 days of research training to research staff and students across the institution each year since 2014. Our managed desktop service to students and staff provide general software and applications as well as specific research spaces and tools including 1,232

study spaces for silent, quiet and group study, 304 PCs and 35 Mac work desks. The benefits of increased research income have enabled us to enhance and support for research and allowed additional internal promotions and external appointments to the School of Education.

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

Research Collaborations, Networks and Partnerships: Our collaborations nationally and internationally within the discipline of Education and across disciplines are central to the Unit's research strategy and impact. We collaborate with colleagues throughout the UK and globally. Across the UK and in the Republic of Ireland, we work closely with colleagues at the University of Stirling; University College London; Leeds Arts University; University of South Wales, Waterford Institute of Technology and the Free University of Ireland in Dublin. Our aim to produce innovative and distinctive research of the highest quality is supported and sustained through our longstanding partnerships (**Case Study 1**) as well as in our collaborations with universities in all four UK home nations. Our international networks and activities enable us to collaborate with colleagues from ArTEZ University in the Netherlands; the British University in Dubai; Victoria University in Melbourne; and the University of the Western Cape in South Africa (**Gregson**). Our research in teaching, learning and assessment enables us to work with colleagues in business and executive education in Poland, Germany, Russia, Holland, Hong Kong, China, Malaysia, Myanmar and Singapore (**McKenna** and **Foster**).

Relations with Key Research Users, Beneficiaries and Audiences: Researchers in the Unit hold influential scholarly roles within the research base. **Gregson** sits as an advisor on five National Expert Advisory Panels; the Excellence in Maths; the Advisory Group for T Levels; the Advisory Group for Construction; the Advisory Group for Engineering and the National Panel for Professional Teacher Education. **McKenna** advises the *Million Plus Coalition* of modern Universities contributing to political debate about the role of these HEIs and their contribution to the economy and society. **Gregson and Nixon** presented invited evidence to the Commission for Adult and Vocational Teaching and Learning (CAVTL); **Gregson, Spedding and Nixon** were national advisors to the Ofsted Curriculum Research Group; **Martin-Denham** is an advisor to Sunderland City Council and *Together for Children*; **Gregson and Husband** (Stirling) are currently working with the Scottish Government to explore to the extension of the PRP to practitioner-researchers working in the FAVE sector across Scotland. We have also made a major contribution to the discipline through editorial work. Journal editorships include *Journal of Higher Education Policy Leadership* (**McKenna**); *Education Sciences*; *Journal of Teaching in Lifelong Learning* (**Gregson**); *International Research Journal of Design Technology*; *Technology of Education*; *Australasian Journal of Technology Education*; *Cambridge Journal of Education*; *Curriculum Journal* (**Atkinson**). **Gregson and Spedding** are joint editors of the Palgrave Macmillan commissioned *Practice Focused Research in Further Adult and Vocational Education*. **Gregson** is a joint editor of the Bloomsbury commissioned *Reflective Teaching in FAVE* series. Most staff review for international peer-reviewed journals including, *Journal of Vocational Education and Training* (**Gregson**); *British Educational Research Journal*; *London Review of Education* (**Taras**); Open University, Palgrave Macmillan; the *Journal of Education Sciences* (**Spedding**); and *International Journal of Literacy Linguistics* (**Mandala**).

Wider Activities and Contributions to the Research Base and Society: Our contributions to the research base, economy and society are substantiated by strong national and international collaborations and the range of publications we have co-authored with our students and researchers from other institutions. Since 2014, **Gregson, Spedding and Nixon's** partnership with the ETF has increased research capacity by directly engaging with almost 300 practitioner-researchers from across England and over 1,500 of their colleagues and learners in the improvement of Education through practice-focused research across the FAVE sector (**Case Study 1**.) The same research has developed a unique model of research internship and CPD which encourages the identification of 'hard' and 'soft' indicators of improvement and impact offering an alternative model to 'top-down' and 'outside-in' approaches to educational evaluation. This model is attracting national attention and the interest of policy professionals in England and Scotland, the Republic of Ireland, the USA, Italy, South Africa, Australia and Finland. **Gregson** was invited to present a Keynote Lecture and contribute to an Expert Panel at the Society for Education and Training (SET) Annual Conference (2018). **McKenna** and **Gregson** have presented several invited keynotes to the Westminster Education Forum. **Martin-Denham's**

project SEND research on inclusion/exclusion in education in the Sunderland area is helping to identify unintended consequences of policy in practice on a national scale.