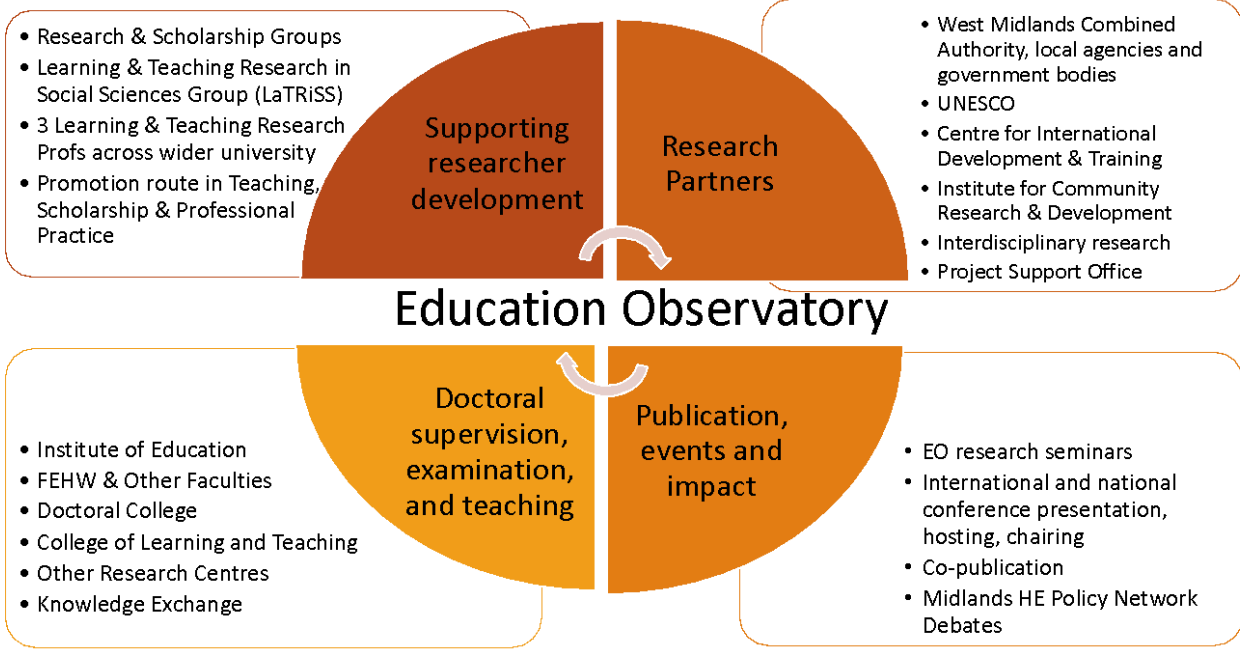


<b>Institution: University of Wolverhampton</b>
<b>Unit of Assessment: 23 Education</b>
<p><b>1. Unit context and structure, research and impact strategy</b></p> <p><u>a) How Research is structured across the Unit</u></p> <p>Research in UoA23 (the Unit) is led by the Education Observatory (EO), which was established in 2017 and oversees both research conducted in the Institute of Education (IoE) and research relating to learning and teaching undertaken across the university as a whole. The EO represents and indicates the value that the University of Wolverhampton (UoW) places on research in education. The EO received almost 20% of the £6m Research Investment Fund (RIF) allocated by UoW since 2014, which was used to consolidate, extend and expand the research on which the RAE2008 and REF2014 submissions in Education were founded. This has enabled the University to take a dynamic, responsive approach towards ensuring and supporting the vitality and sustainability of education research and its impact. Core to this has been the EO's success in increasing the quality, quantity and impact of education research across the University and via strong collaborations within the local region, nationally and internationally. Figure 1 illustrates some of our key partners in research and teaching; how we disseminate findings and maximise impact; our engagement with other parts of the University on teaching and doctoral supervision; and how we support the development of new and experienced researchers involved in education research in EO and across the UoW.</p>  <p>The diagram illustrates the Education Observatory (EO) research and partnerships ecosystem. It is centered around four quadrants, each with a list of associated partners or activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Supporting researcher development</b> (top-left quadrant):       <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Research &amp; Scholarship Groups</li> <li>Learning &amp; Teaching Research in Social Sciences Group (LaTRISS)</li> <li>3 Learning &amp; Teaching Research Profs across wider university</li> <li>Promotion route in Teaching, Scholarship &amp; Professional Practice</li> </ul> </li> <li><b>Research Partners</b> (top-right quadrant):       <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>West Midlands Combined Authority, local agencies and government bodies</li> <li>UNESCO</li> <li>Centre for International Development &amp; Training</li> <li>Institute for Community Research &amp; Development</li> <li>Interdisciplinary research</li> <li>Project Support Office</li> </ul> </li> <li><b>Doctoral supervision, examination, and teaching</b> (bottom-left quadrant):       <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Institute of Education</li> <li>FEHW &amp; Other Faculties</li> <li>Doctoral College</li> <li>College of Learning and Teaching</li> <li>Other Research Centres</li> <li>Knowledge Exchange</li> </ul> </li> <li><b>Publication, events and impact</b> (bottom-right quadrant):       <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>EO research seminars</li> <li>International and national conference presentation, hosting, chairing</li> <li>Co-publication</li> <li>Midlands HE Policy Network Debates</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>Curved arrows indicate interactions between the quadrants: from Supporting researcher development to Research Partners, from Research Partners to Publication, events and impact, from Publication, events and impact to Doctoral supervision, examination, and teaching, and from Doctoral supervision, examination, and teaching back to Supporting researcher development.</p>
<p><b>Figure 1. Education Observatory research and partnerships ecosystem</b></p> <p>The EO is located in the Faculty of Education, Health, and Wellbeing (FEHW), which is made up of four key Institutes: Education; Sport and Human Science; Health; and Community and Society. The co-location of these subject areas in FEHW provides opportunities for interdisciplinary collaborations in applying expertise to influence policy and practice in educational organisations, local communities, the local region, nationally and internationally. Moreover, as Figure 1 illustrates, there are numerous cross-University collaborations that enrich the educational research environment. These partnerships support an ongoing dialogue through which new and existing</p>

researchers receive support to strengthen their impact for future REF submission. This is outlined in more detail at section bi), below.

The number of core staff submitted to REF in the Unit has increased from 12 staff (9.2 FTE) in 2014 to 26 staff (24.6 FTE) in 2021. The 2021 submission is drawn from three groups:

- 1) Core EO staff, which comprises five Professors, two Readers, and two Senior Research Fellows;
- 2) Colleagues (eight senior lecturers and one head of department) located in the Institute of Education (IoE) who have significant responsibility for research and are also associate members of EO.
- 3) Researchers from across the University evidence the wide reach of research on education that is embedded in subject-based areas. The group consists of five senior lecturers, one head of department, FEHW's Head of Enterprise and Commercial Development, and the Professor of Learning and Teaching in the Faculty of Arts, Business and Social Sciences (FABSS). The latter is one of three Learning and Teaching research Professors recruited as part of the University's strategic investment in Higher Education (HE) who are located across the institution (two have been returned in different UoAs due to their specialisms). While not members of the EO *per se*, these three colleagues are instrumental in the internal outreach of the work of the EO across the University. In addition, since 2017, a new role profile and promotion route has been established within the UoW for Teaching, Scholarship and Professional Practice (TSPP) for colleagues who wish to develop a career related to their pedagogic practice. Mentoring for successful Advance HE and National Teaching Fellowships are closely linked with this route and EO members actively support this process across in collaboration with the University's College of Learning and Teaching (CoLT).

#### Research areas

The EO undertakes theoretical and applied research in all areas of education and allied areas of social policy to promote social justice and regional transformation in the West Midlands and beyond, focusing on disadvantage and disenfranchisement. Its six Research and Scholarship groups, typically with 10-20 members, engage staff from IoE and other parts of FEHW, the wider University, and postgraduate students. The EO's Research and Scholarship (R&S) groups are:

- Children, young people and families;
- Curriculum innovation;
- Education and mental health;
- Equality, diversity and inclusion;
- Higher education: research and policy; and
- Leadership and education reform.

These groups are co-ordinated by core EO members and provide a vital environment for engaging colleagues in research. They serve to build future research capacity by active mentorship and coaching of new researchers. The structuring of research around the R&S groups has expanded and clarified the foci of education research in the EO and beyond. Research on education is encompassing and influencing various subject areas, and our research ecosystem and culture allow expertise to be maintained, while also supporting flexibility to expand and develop new areas in collaboration with researchers across the University. For example, following from presentations from EO Professors at events organised by the Learning and Teaching Research in the Social Sciences (LaTriSS) group, new productive opportunities to develop collaborative research have been developed with the EO's R&S Higher education: research and policy group. In 2019, the EO and CoLT co-chaired the successful international Higher Education Institutional Research (HEIR2019) conference. Session chairs and presenters were drawn from across the UoW's R&S

groups, including new colleagues. Talks from LaTriSS on learning and teaching research were very well received by the international community.

#### b) Research Objectives: Past and Future and Performance

##### i) Evaluating Past Performance

Our research strategy and the creation of the EO in 2017 brought together and rationalised the work of the two previous research centres in education which co-ordinated the REF2014 submission. In that strategy we focused on four objectives, which are evaluated below:

- Increasing the quantity, quality, and impact of research undertaken

Both the quantity of research outputs and quality thresholds have been increased by targeting publication in journals that have significant reach and influence in academic and professional communities, and supporting researchers who have emerged since 2014, such as Williams-Brown and Smith. For example, several collective and individual articles written by early and mid-career researchers have been successfully published in the Springer Postdigital Science and Education journal, with the Editor-in-Chief now an EO visiting professor. Acknowledging the need to maintain student numbers and attract staff in a competitive employment market, our strategy has been to increase the number of high quality research outputs and improve the impact of research on relevant education policy, practice and theory.

Research undertaken within the unit has attracted over £1m in research funding during the REF period (see section 3a below) from a variety of funders, including RCUK/AHRC Connected Communities Programme, European Union (Erasmus+ and FP7), United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), the Department for International Development (DfID), the Engineering and Physical Sciences Council (EPSRC), the British Council, the Commonwealth of Learning, NHS (England and Scotland), Social Mobility Commission, local authorities and health trusts, and groups of schools.

High levels of research impact have also been maintained in key areas such as adult learning, school collaboration, and digital and mobile learning, while innovative research has been developed in new areas such as mental health in schools and human-data interaction. The EO's webpages on the University website feature reports and multimedia case studies from current and past projects and media engagement. These are key elements of our dissemination and impact plan, designed to complement traditional methods such as journal articles, conference presentations, debates and seminars. We are continuing this improvement with particular emphasis on supporting new and emerging researchers.

- Increasing the number and completion rates of PhD and EdD research students

Both PhD and EdD numbers have continued to increase and current numbers represent a 72% increase since 2014. Completion rates have increased significantly: 29 EdD and six PhD students have completed since 2014; the corresponding figures in 2014 were one EdD and five PhDs. The EdD awards did not meet the criteria for a research degree and are not included in the REF4a. However, we took the strategic decision to increase the research content of the EdD, and the award is undergoing revalidation. Post-2021, our plan is to continue to increase the rate of completions, particularly among part-time students.

- Strengthening partnerships with researchers involved in pedagogical and curriculum research across the University and beyond

EO's partnerships on pedagogical and curriculum research have been strengthened across FEHW and through work undertaken to support pedagogical and curriculum research in the other Faculties and via CoLT. For example, the Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education and

Professional Practice (PGCHE & PP), which is accredited at D2 of the UK Professional Standards Framework, is led by Dr Laurence Eagle (IoE) and co-taught with Professor Lawton, Professor of Learning and Teaching in Academic Practice in CoLT. The KUDOS Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Scheme, accredited at D1, D2 and D3, is also led by CoLT. Although these different lines of provision sit within two different departments, there is a synergy and an efficient joined-up approach between the two areas. Members of staff in CoLT teach on the PGCHE & PP and members of the IoE are KUDOS mentors/reviewers. The two areas work closely together on learning and teaching research, academic practice and staff development. A new PG Diploma in Professional Practice in Higher Education was introduced in September 2019, led by IoE and supported by EO. Staff participants engage in a work-based project within their own context after exploring research methodology and scholarship in learning and teaching. They assess and develop their capabilities against national expectations set out in the Academic Professional Apprenticeship Standard and engage with colleagues across the sector to inform their professional practice. These are all ways in which the links between teaching and research and learning and teaching are strengthened, and researchers across the University are supported to engage with the EO where their research interests and activities are relevant.

The impact of the new special interest and subject-specific groups, which have been developed involving colleagues outside the EO, is evident in the increased quantity and quality of the education research outputs. For instance, in FABSS, two new research groups have formed since 2014 that focus on learning and teaching: LaTRiSS (see above) and Arts Learning and Teaching Research. Both collaborate productively with colleagues in the EO, for example in presenting at, and producing research outputs from, the 2019 HEIR conference. A number of initiatives, such as the Wolverhampton Learning Region, ResearchSEND and the Midlands HE Policy Network (MHEPN), which were established during the period, have extended our reach and influence further, building on established links with schools, colleges, other universities and early years settings in the region. Evidence of impact and reach in the region and beyond from the MHEPN is demonstrated through a series of live debates with regional and national presenters. These were at first hosted at UoW in 2019 but spread to be hosted by other regional universities (e.g. Aston and Derby). Online debates during lockdown have been very productive and attracted over 30 stakeholders discussing issues such as diversity in HE and (post-) digitalisation. Post-2021, we will maintain and extend these partnerships in our areas of expertise.

- Interdisciplinary research

Interdisciplinary research, particularly in relation to social justice and inclusion in education, wellbeing and social welfare, was identified as an emerging developmental area in 2014. The EO maintains and continues to develop a thriving, vibrant, and sustainable education community involving postgraduate students, colleagues in UoW, and other universities, organisations and networks. Many regularly present or chair sessions at conferences, seminars and workshops, such as the HEIR conference in 2019 or EO's annual educational research conferences.

A range of interdisciplinary research projects have been undertaken with FEHW since 2014, such as research evaluating provision for vulnerable families in local authorities in Birmingham, Liverpool, and North Yorkshire, and research evaluating the Headstart programme in Wolverhampton, which is designed to improve resilience and mental health in schools. All these projects involved cross-Faculty collaboration led by researchers from the EO. One example is a programme of interdisciplinary research on adult community learning and mental health and wellbeing led by Lewis, working with colleagues at UoW and five other universities as well as the third sector, which is informing the development of the interdisciplinary research and scholarship group on education and mental health (See also section 1d, below).

## ii) Establishing the EO's reputation for research excellence

Our research strategy is driven by an ambition to extend our reputation on high quality and innovative research and to establish the EO as a centre of world-leading education research, which has impact and influence regionally, nationally and internationally. Our key strategic aims

post-REF2021 are maintaining and improving the quality of research outputs, increasing research income generation, supporting early career researchers to develop and maximising the impact of the research we undertake. In line with the University's research strategy, we will focus on projects that address societal challenges, for example through Lalli's work on food and education, or Traxler's work on digital and mobile learning in conflict zones. The strategic priority of developing research-inspired learning will be addressed via a hub-and-spoke model that links the EO with learning and teaching staff in all faculties and institutes.

### c) Impact from the research and the link to Impact Case Studies

#### i) Impact Areas

The EO's impact strategy centres on its work with a wide variety of stakeholders: schools, colleges, universities, and early years settings, as well as training providers and third sector organisations. Examples include influencing practice in schools through our research into the pupil premium in 2020; influencing regional debate through the MHEPN debates (see 1bi), above); co-hosting a conference on combatting gang crime in 2019; and changing practice in local government through seminars on evaluation and impact (also in 2019).

Four main areas of impact can be summarised with reference to the three impact case studies we are submitting:

- Public or political debate has been shaped and informed by research, including activity that has challenged established norms, modes of thought or practices

Our research has identified flaws in policy, practice and paradigms in areas such as mobile and digital learning, which have led to changes in how they are used in contexts of local and international disadvantage and have informed UNESCO's digital policy and guidelines. The implementation of information derived from research findings into school collaboration and support has led to changes in how all 12 local authorities and schools work together on school improvement in North-East England.

Findings from our research into school strategies for disadvantaged and pupil premium students in secondary schools and special educational needs and disability provision has strongly influenced debate, policy and practice in these areas.

- Enhanced cultural understanding of issues and phenomena; shaping and informing public attitudes and values

Debates and discussions based on our research have enhanced cultural understanding of issues and phenomena in areas such as digital/social mobilities, post-digital and futures research, widening participation in higher education through live debates in the English Midlands and interdisciplinary research in Germany; school leadership; and early childhood education, for example in Hartlepool and Liverpool.

- Educational or pedagogical practices and methods have changed in higher education

The primary area in which our research has had a positive impact on pedagogical practices and methods is in Higher Education, notably in a consortium of universities in Palestine. This has involved modernising teaching methods, building research capacity and integrating research into teaching.

- Research is used to change current processes or services and identify new services to be provided



Findings from our research have been used to improve local authorities' service provision in areas such as school improvement and support for vulnerable and disadvantaged families. For instance, in one socially and economically deprived area, we have created improved programme provision through collaborative working with 119 professionals. Furthermore, our work has positively impacted support for speech language and communication in the settings delivering early years education. To achieve this, we have shared our research findings with key stakeholders, such as universities in the UK and internationally; schools nationally and regionally; local authorities; voluntary organisations; practitioners in HE, schools, early years, and social services; and children and young people.

#### ii) Significance and Reach

In terms of significance and reach, we are pleased to see that a mutually iterative relationship has developed across our practical and academic work in both international and local areas. Ongoing collaboration with local authorities, schools, early years' providers and influential voluntary organisations regionally and nationally has also been significant in shaping services, debate and provision, while also extending our reach across education sectors and locations. For example, we have recently been commissioned to offer policy advice on reducing educational disadvantage to the Social Mobility Commission.

Impact arising from areas such as learning regions (Wolverhampton became a member of UNESCO Learning Cities in 2018), post-digital learning and overcoming disadvantage will continue into the future, for example through our policy advisory work with the Social Mobility Commission which began in November 2020. We approach our impact through planned engagement and the co-production of knowledge with key stakeholders including research users, for example Select Committees, and other beneficiaries, such as digital users. This allows us to support significance and reach because those who benefit most are already involved and can contribute directly to the evaluation of their impact.

#### d) Supporting Interdisciplinary Research

Further to the discussion of Interdisciplinary Research at Section 1b) above, the research and scholarship groups that meet regularly around all campuses or online are also a key part of our collaborative research approach. To ensure an open and inclusive environment that supports interdisciplinary research and builds a vibrant research community, work is underway to provide cross-linkages via webpages to all research and scholarship groups. All of these groups contain PGR students, members from other areas in FEHW and other parts of the University. We are also actively developing collaborations with other research centres beyond education, for example working in collaboration with the University's Institute for Community Research and Development on the evaluation of the West Midlands Violence Reduction Unit, or the Centre for International Development and Training on school survival research in Zimbabwe.

In relation to PGR, the development and high completion rates of the EdD since 2014 have strengthened the relationship between PGR and professional practice and increased research and supervisory capacity in IoE. Supervisory capacity is drawn from across IoE and FEHW and EO staff contribute to doctoral teaching and supervision in postgraduate degree projects in multi-disciplinary areas such as psychology and health.

#### e) Progress towards an Open Research Environment

Our approach to creating an open research environment in the EO is founded on the collaborative and participatory approach we take to research. We focus on mentoring inexperienced colleagues on research in real time and working with participants, rather than collecting data on them. Much of the data we collect is qualitative and relates to potentially vulnerable research participants (children, young people and disadvantaged groups), and due to its often personal nature, we

cannot share such data openly. Despite this, to ensure that our data and research informs positive change, we put considerable effort into sharing findings in ways that are aligned with, and go beyond, the scope of the UoW's open access policy as part of our commitment to vitality and sustainability. Thus, in addition to placing research outputs in the UoW's open access repository, 14 research reports are openly accessible on our website, alongside summaries, multimedia case studies and films from five research projects, and blogs available in a range of formats through our website. To ensure further that our research informs practice and appeals to practitioners as well as practitioner audiences, we will continue to ensure robust ways in which educational research outputs are available.

#### f) Supporting a Culture of Research Integrity

We support a culture of research integrity in line with the UoW's policies and strategies, in particular the research strategy, ethics policy and the code of practice. Our approach to developing and supporting a culture of research integrity in EO builds on the collaborative, ethical approach to research already outlined. Early career researchers (ECRs) work closely with more experienced researchers, who train them by involving them in externally funded research projects in areas such as data collection and analysis as well as in drafting new funding applications and promoting and supporting fellowships. This allows all researchers to work together to develop and maintain research skills and ensures that they understand and work responsibly within the UoW's protocols for research ethics and integrity. All educational research needs to obtain ethical approval and the EO works closely with the IoE, FEHW and UoW's Ethics Committee certifying that all our research is conducted to appropriate ethical, legal and professional frameworks. Funded research is also quality assured at monthly EO meetings to ensure that milestones are being met and that risks, including those relating to ethical issues, are addressed and managed. PGR students' research are subject to the same procedures and their progress is monitored at regular Faculty student boards and, where necessary, at EO meetings.

## **2. People**

### a) Staffing Strategy and Staff Development

#### i) Staff Development

Our objective has focused on maintaining a supportive environment for all our staff and students. Our inclusive and collaborative approach towards staff development is central to the EO's research strategy and environment. We encourage collaborations amongst researchers, practitioners, policy-makers and other local, regional and national stakeholders. Supported by our administrative staff, we organise sandpits and workshops regularly to develop research concepts and new collaborations, for example in relation to our work on data and disadvantage (see below). Our objective to maintain and further develop a strong and dynamic research community of staff and students both in the EO and across the University is also outward-facing. It extends into the wider regional and international communities we work with to provide our staff and students with exciting development opportunities. As such, it closely articulates with the UoW Research Strategy's focus on "Place", reflecting economic, social and technological development, as exemplified by the annual Black Country Educational Insight reports produced collaboratively by new and experienced researchers.

Progress against targets is actioned and monitored by the Researcher Development Concordat Working Group, a sub-committee of the University Research Committee, which is chaired by the Dean of Research and includes representatives from Faculties and UoW's Research Institutes (a balance of early-, mid-career and senior research staff), HR and careers services. In following the principles of the Researcher Development Concordat in the EO's research staffing strategy, the following have been achieved:

The EO was established in 2017 with RIF funding which allowed strategic research appointments to be made (Jopling as Founding Chair; Riordan as Senior Research Fellow alongside Johnson and Welham offering funding and administrative support) to consolidate and expand existing research expertise. This constituted Professors (Lavender, Traxler, Tuckett), Readers (Bartram, Williams-Brown, Tsouroufli until 2019), and a Research Fellow (Lewis), who as founding members have supported the development of the EO. For example, EO has revitalised the research and scholarship groups and engaged new (Kingdon, Lalli, Scott, Smith, Wright) and more experienced researchers (Bennett, Royle, Thompson) in research activity and dissemination. The recruitment of Hayes to EO as Professor of Higher Education Policy in 2019 was also crucial in expanding capacity in key areas such as policy analysis and post-digitalisation and coordinating the work of learning and teaching researchers across the University (Apperley, Collings, Halls, Housee, Prior, Pryke, West).

Further to this, the three research Professors for Learning and Teaching (Bond, Karodia, Prior) actively collaborate with the EO in order to support research into learning, teaching, pedagogy and curriculum. Members of EO are invited by the Doctoral College to give talks to research students and staff, e.g. symposia on issues such as “Conducting research to influence policy”, led by Tuckett and Hayes with colleagues on 29 April 2020, and “Literacy at the crossroads?”, led by Tuckett and Traxler on 09 December 2020, both hosted online due to the Covid-19 pandemic. EO members also give talks to other research groups (e.g. LaTRiSS) or run workshops on subjects such as academic writing and getting published, which include opportunities for mentoring and peer review.

Since 2006, UoW has run an Early Researcher Award Scheme (ERAS), which annually awards ten grants of up to £5,000 alongside a tailored mentoring and action learning programme to facilitate the research career development of ECRs. During this REF period, Williams-Brown was awarded funding from this scheme, following which she progressed from Lecturer to Reader in Education and senior member of EO. Dr Marion West, a senior lecturer in FABSS, who recently completed her EdD in FEHW has successfully been awarded ERAS funding in 2020, mentored by Hayes, as was Lalli, mentored by Bartram.

The UoW’s annual Experienced Researchers’ Development Programme offers researchers the opportunities to build on and enhance their research profile and develop their research leadership skills. The development programme has three areas of focus, namely to develop: researchers’ skills as research degree supervisors, examiners and chairs; research impact and outreach, influencing policy, working with the media and using social media; and applications for research leadership (Readership and Professorial appointments). EO members have been mentored and supported in all of these areas. In addition, the University has an online resource centre for researchers that provides information on developing research proposals, engaging stakeholders and managing research funding. Two EO members (Williams-Brown, Lewis) have benefitted from this initiative, mentored by more senior colleagues in EO.

Regional and international staff development opportunities are continually generated through diverse EO research projects and collaborations. For example, as new contracts are won, invitations to collaborate are extended to ECRs (Traxler’s DFID project enabled Scott and Smith to work with Traxler and Hayes). Commissioned research for the Social Mobility Commission (secured by Riordan, Johnson and Jopling) has enabled other researchers such as Thompson and Lalli to contribute. Traxler’s British Council Digital Education research in Africa and Hayes’ EPSRC Human Data Interaction (HDI) ‘Digital Skills, Data and Disadvantage’ project in the local region have enabled Johnson to develop his experience.

Dialogue and live critical debate are key values that EO has embraced as staff development opportunities. The collaborative MHEPN debates launched by Jopling and Hayes (UoW), Westwood (Manchester) and Hayes (Derby) in 2019 provide platforms for



newer researchers to be supported to speak to a live public audience (see section 1b) above).

## ii) Staffing and EO Support

The EO coordinates educational research for staff across different areas of the University, and its support and administration is managed by monthly operational meetings involving all core members and relevant members from IoE, FEHW and wider. Its working is further supplemented by sub-groups delivering on research projects, interventions, or funding. The EO supports emerging and experienced colleagues in IoE to attend research conferences and professional development events. Most colleagues who attend conferences present a paper, which they translate into a journal article or book chapter subsequently, but we have also supported colleagues to attend their first research conference to demystify the process and encourage them to participate in future events. Since 2014, EO staff have been funded to present at a range of national and international conferences, including but not limited to: British Educational Research Association (BERA), British Education Studies Association (BESA), European Educational Research Association (EERA), European Early Childhood Education Research Association (EECERA), International Health Humanities Network (IHHN), International Professional Development Association (IPDA), and American Educational Research Association (AERA).

The EO organises a range of internal research development events, such as monthly research seminars, an annual research conference, and termly research and scholarship group meetings. At all of these events, a multidisciplinary audience of colleagues from the EO, IoE, FEHW and other parts of UoW present work and new research ideas with academics, practitioners and other professionals. The first EO-led annual research conference was held on 21 June 2018, where 16 staff and students from IoE presented their work, alongside workshops on areas such as writing for publication and research funding. A larger number also presented in 2019 and in 2020, when the conference was held online. IoE staff present at the UoW annual research conferences. Invited speakers at the research conference and research seminars have included Professor Lorna Unwin (UCL Institute of Education), Professor Daniel Muijs (Head of Research, Ofsted), Professor Andy Westwood (University of Manchester), Professor Gary Beauchamp (Cardiff Metropolitan University), and Professor Pete Boyd (University of Cumbria). In addition, the EO organises writing mentors, scholarship writing days, is co-ordinating a research methods and ethics learning package for FEHW and leads on linking research with the undergraduate and postgraduate curricula. As already indicated, members of EO also give talks and provide training to research students and staff as part of the Doctoral College events for researcher development.

## b) Research Students

The EO currently has 28 PhD students and 42 Professional Doctorate (EdD) students at thesis stage and supports learning and teaching research students in all of the University's Faculties. All PGR students, along with staff from across the University, are invited to the EO's monthly research development seminars, based around the EdD programme. In 2020, the seminars focused on issues such as research ethics, writing at doctoral level, and presenting data. PGR students are also supported to present at the UoW's Annual Research Conference held in June each year; 30 PGR students and staff members presented in 2020. PGR students are actively encouraged to engage with the University's Doctoral College. This provides a comprehensive Postgraduate Researchers' Development Programme, working in collaboration with other University services, including Careers and Employability, Funding and Impact Units, Learning Information Services (both of which have dedicated PGR Advisors) and the Students Union to enhance the postgraduate experience and encourage a vibrant research student community at the University.

All PGRs are supervised by a team of researchers who are chosen for their supervisory expertise and research skills in order to optimise support for PGR. Mandatory training is required to act as a research supervisor, as is regular CPD via the Doctoral College's Research Supervisors' Development Programme. In addition, supervisory teams are supported by the Faculty's PGR

skills development tutor who develops an annual programme of subject-based research training together with research centre staff. During this REF period, the EO has had one AHRC-funded PhD studentship (completed in 2017), one internally-funded Athena SWAN PhD studentship (ongoing), alongside four RIF-funded PhD studentships (from 2018). The majority of our PGRs are part-time students on the EdD programme, and future plans include recruitment of full-time PhDs aligned to and funded from external projects, where applicable.

PGR progress is monitored via an annual progress review (APR), where all students present an aspect of their work to independent assessors, who also discuss the individual researcher development plan with the PGR. The monthly EO meetings provide a platform to share ongoing research. Regular monitoring and oversight of PGR matters are undertaken by FEHW's research student board. PGR students have also formed their own support groups, often as part of EdD cohorts, which have contributed to peer support and their success. Monthly workshops, linked to EdD teaching sessions, are open to all PGR students and cover issues such as using secondary data and engaging research participants. They are designed to complement the extensive training and support available from the Doctoral College. Overall feedback from students about the support offered to them throughout their studies is consistently very positive. In the PRES2019 survey, nationally EO was fourth out of 34 overall in Education, fourth out of 32 for research culture, and fifth out of 33 for research skills.

### c) Equality and Diversity

We are committed to the advancement of equality and the elimination of unlawful and unfair discrimination. We value the benefits of having a diverse student and staff population and regard them as integral to the vitality of the Unit. Specific examples of our commitment to equality and diversity are:

- We have undertaken five research projects relating to gender and inclusion during the REF period, involving eight members of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion research and scholarship group. Findings from this work are used to improve our practice and we have offered a range of open research conferences and seminars on equality and diversity issues in education. These include: Widening Participation: Reflections on Research and Practice seminar (2018); Gender and Intersectionality conference (2019); and Literacy at the Crossroads panel discussion (2020).
- The University's and the Faculty's Gender Action Plan (GEAP) is monitored at both EO and Faculty research management meetings to ensure we continue to maintain equitable working environments. IoE has been working and it is close to finalising a departmental Athena SWAN submission in 2021.
- Our mentoring programme for early and mid-career staff researchers is very established and also ensures their inclusion in gender balanced teams on funded research. We promote gender-balanced supervisory teams where specialisms permit and ensure that any recruitment follows Athena SWAN principles.
- All staff undergo mandatory equality and diversity and unconscious bias training, every two years. This is closely monitored and encouraged by HR and line managers.
- All IoE colleagues and all PGR students in IoE are encouraged to join at least one of the EO's research and scholarship groups, which are also open to colleagues in other parts of the University. PGR students are represented at FEHW research committees and meetings and organise their own support groups (face to face and via social media) and seminars. All raised issues relating to support and wellbeing are monitored with students supported to submit suggestions and invited to further discussions on finding and implementing the best solutions. This resulted in an inclusive research culture, as the results from PRES2019 demonstrate.

**3. Income, infrastructure and facilities****a) Research Funding and Strategies for Generating Research Income**

Effective use of income, infrastructure and facilities underpin everything we are doing by providing the means, space, and resources the EO requires to do its work. This contributes enormously to our vitality and the financial, research-related, and impact-related sustainability of all that we do. The EO's external research income has come from a range of sources and income during the REF assessment period and amounts to £1,001,701. This was also more than matched by funding for research evaluations and commercial research. Funding has been competitively won from research funders including European Union (Erasmus+ - three projects), DfID, EPSRC, Social Mobility Commission, AHRC, Newton Fund, NHS and local authorities in Wolverhampton, Birmingham, Liverpool, Derby and North Yorkshire. This external funding has supported the development of researchers and research networks, as well as the conducting of the projects and associated dissemination and impact generation activities.

We are also further developing a programme of research seminars and activities to bring researchers and practitioners together. ResearchSEND is an excellent example of this, as it has received funding from Department for Education in 2018 to hold a series of conferences aimed at promoting dialogue between researchers and SEND practitioners. We envisage potential funding streams emerging from such partnerships. Additionally, the EPSRC HDI researchers led two cross-sector regional events and participant feedback clearly suggests that these reach activities are strengthening dialogue at the important intersection of data privacy and digital inclusion.

**b) Organisational Infrastructure Supporting Research and Impact**

The EO is supported by a dedicated administrator and a bid writer. Alongside this, the EO draws on the University's research central support services. Members take advantage of research opportunities highlighted by the University's Project Support Office and its guidance on bids for externally funded research. Examples of success include the METHODS project in Palestinian universities and the EPSRC work on human data interaction. Members of the EO are supported by the University's Research Policy Unit with a dedicated Impact Officer, and support with research systems, governance and ethics.

The University's approach to impact is rooted in its central research strategy and associate policies. These enable the operationalisation of impact and give us the means by which to achieve it, supported by the University's research infrastructure. Impact plans are written into all our research projects and resources are allocated to ensuring that attendees at seminars and conferences, for example, are asked for feedback about the potential impact on them and their practice and followed up where possible.

As the EO brings together the academic community conducting research on education, we have also instigated a series of research events and seminars, both face-to-face and online, since 2020, designed to disseminate findings from research and prompt discussion to influence education practitioners and policymakers. We run monthly seminars aimed at doctoral students, but also open to students across the University, which promote interdisciplinary research skills and strategies. Further to this, infrastructure, facilities and expertise are utilised in relation to impact activities through our Open Research and Impact seminars. Since 2018, we have run a minimum of six of these each year, advertising widely, and being open to the public. They have addressed issues from adult literacy, violence reduction, and wellbeing in early childhood to overcoming disadvantage, e-research and impact evaluation itself.

c) Equality and Diversity

The Unit's policy and activities for acquiring research funding is aligned to our strong principles on gender policies and actions, attracting staff and students from historically excluded backgrounds and support for accessing scholarly or operational infrastructure. The latter are outlined in detail in section 2c). By working with the Project Support Office, we further ensure the peer-review of funding applications is constructive and inclusive.

**4. Collaboration and contribution to the research base, economy and society**a) Arrangements and Support for, and Effectiveness of, Research Collaborations, Networks and Partnerships

Education touches many areas and settings and EO members are involved in multiple external networks and collaborations involving schools, colleges, universities and other learning and voluntary sector organisations. Examples include multi-academy trusts, schools, the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) and local authorities in the region. This contribution to our research base, our economy and society is vital to the sustainability of our research and the impact that accrues to it. For instance, the highly regarded and successful Learning Region Initiative launched in November 2017 is led by EO in partnership with local organisations aimed at framing lifelong learning research activity in the City of Wolverhampton and the wider Black Country region.

In February 2018, a conference chaired by Tuckett and entitled 'Whatever happened to our vision of a learning society?' examined lifelong learning policy and featured contributions from Lord Blunkett and leading researchers and policy makers in the field. EO members also have a long-term working relationship with West Midlands CPD leaders and worked with the Centre for the Use of Research and Evidence in Education on the CPD Pathway linked to the national standards for CPD.

b) Relationships with Key Research Users, Beneficiaries or Audiences

Tuckett advised UNESCO on lifelong learning and was President of the International Council for Adult Education 2011-2015. He has also been an adviser to the World Economic Forum and El Centro de Cooperación Regional para la Educación de Adultos en América Latina y el Caribe (CREFAL) and a consultant for the Government Office for Science Foresight. He led the external review of the National University of Ireland, Maynooth's Department of Adult Education in 2017, and holds a Benjamin Meaker Visiting Professorship at University of Bristol. With Tuckett as Emeritus Professor of Education from 2021, we continue to draw on these links in EO in support of our research into post-compulsory education and adult learning.

Traxler is widely recognised as a pioneer in the use of social and mobile technologies to improve educational opportunities and experiences for disadvantaged communities and his five edited books aimed at improving professional practice have involved international collaborations and have been widely recognised. He was awarded a *UNESCO Chair* in Education & Technology for Social Change in 2019 and gives frequent invited workshops in overseas universities, most recently Hong Kong, Palestine, South Africa, Sweden and Saudi Arabia, as well as invited keynotes, opinion pieces and panels for international agencies such as UNESCO, UNICEF, and United States Agency for International Development (USAID). In the past four years, he has led or contributed to a range of international projects including several Newton Fund projects in Kenya, Brazil, Kazakhstan, Turkey, and EU projects, both Erasmus and FP7, as well as consultancy for UNRWA, British Council and NHS.

Hayes led a funded workshop to develop research capacity at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) in Kumasi, Ghana (2019). Participant submissions to high impact journals led to three members of the EO being invited to teach again in Accra, Ghana in



July 2020. A successful bid to the institutional QR GCRF fund has led to funding allocation for a networking event to support the career development of female academics in HE. Other members of the EO have led EU-funded projects on gender equality and transition into HE with universities from Italy, Hungary, Bulgaria, Portugal and Poland (Tsouroufli who was Reader in the EO until 2019) and an Erasmus+ funded project on leading learning Networks with universities in Belgium, Spain, Sweden, Slovenia and the Czech Republic (Devlin). Lewis was co-investigator on a RCUK/AHRC funded international consortium programme of research involving multiple academic and third sector partners over five years (2013-2018). In 2014, she was appointed WEA Ambassador and Honorary Fellow of the Institute of Mental Health, Nottingham.

EO staff have spoken at conferences and CPD events nationally and internationally and since 2014 have been involved with organisations including the International College of Advanced Education, the Association of Colleges Beacon Awards, the Equality Challenge Unit, the Cambridge Primary Review Trust, the Chartered College of Teaching, the Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe, International Health Humanities Network, British Sociological Association, British Educational Leadership, Management & Administration Society, and European Educational Research Association, as well as subject associations. In addition to those already referred to, researchers involved in Education have been involved in collaborations with universities in Southampton, Durham, Cardiff, Newcastle, Leicester and Berlin since 2014.

### c) Wider Contributions to Economy and Society

In addition to the impact discussed in our case studies, the EO has had considerable conceptual Impact. An overview of ResearchSEND edited by Haywood and Jopling gave opportunities to colleagues in EO and beyond to write about SEND and inclusion. Matheson (Reader in EO 2018-2020) was editor of a subsection of the *Springer Handbook on Promoting Social Justice* (2020) to which four further members of the EO contributed chapters. Hayes' monograph published by Brill in 2019, *The Labour of Words in Higher Education*, led to the collaborative Midlands Network events, mentioned earlier, plus an invitation to speak about the book at University of Edinburgh (May 2019), University of Derby (May 2019 and November 2019) and University of Leeds (January, 2020). An official launch of the book sponsored by Brill took place on 07 April 2019 at the American Educational Research Association (AERA) conference. Brill issued a contract to Hayes for a follow-up book: *Postdigital Positionality* (forthcoming, 2021). Further impact was realised through the actions of both Brill and Springer in providing sponsorship funds to support the HEIR Conference 2019.

EO staff brings together the research education ecosystem and work closely with staff engaged in conducting and supporting learning and teaching research across the University, notably the research L&T Professors appointed from 2017. One of these (Prior) has contributed an entry for publication in the Encyclopaedia of Educational Innovation section, which Hayes, with Professor Petar Jandric and Chris Wilson (Aston University) edited as a subsection of the *Springer Encyclopaedia of Teacher Education*, edited by Michael A. Peters. A book edited by Prior, *Using Art as Research in Learning and Teaching*, published by Intellect in 2018, featured a chapter by Hayes and Jandric, alongside others written by the University and international colleagues.

In relation to knowledge transfer, a recent successful bid for £10,000 submitted to the EPSRC HDI Network "Data and disadvantage: taking a regional approach towards Human Data Interaction (HDI) to inform local and national digital skills policies" has built on established connections with regional stakeholders and their existing knowledge exchange network surrounding the Black Country Digital Skills Plan. Hayes and Johnson held a regional, cross-sector event in September 2020 to surface and address the inclusion of measures to support agency, legibility and negotiability concerning people's data in the Black Country initiatives for digital upskilling of marginalised citizens. Findings from this cross-sector dialogue led to invitations from Black Country Consortium Economic Policy Unit to work collaboratively on knowledge transfer activities such as case studies, grant applications and requests from businesses and key stakeholders for timely information on digital deprivation and analysis. Wolverhampton City Council sought our



input and contributions to a new DigitalWolves website focused on digital skills and inclusion and regional communications. A colleague at the local co-operative academy has convened digital curriculum leads to work with EO as a result focussed on informing and providing key outputs for this very large regional initiative.

#### d) Engaging with Diverse Communities and Publics

Our research activity is informed and conducted with partners outside academia. Mechanisms and pathways for engaging research partners and users and achieving these impacts have included:

- Creating and promoting new networks for researchers, practitioners and other education stakeholders to come together. Examples include the Midlands Higher Education Policy Network, which brings together regional academics and research students in regular debates (five held since 2019) of key issues in higher education; and ResearchSEND, which was established at UoW in 2017 and hosted by EO. This promotes and supports the integration of practice relating to special educational needs and disability (SEND) in all areas of education through practitioners and researchers collaborating in research projects, conferences, events, and publications. This has led directly to EO undertaking funded research related to SEND and literacy, regionally and nationally.
- Regular face to face and (since 2020) online workshops, conferences and seminars on issues such as school leadership; reducing gang membership; and evaluating the impact of interventions on education topics.
- Collaborative and participatory research with practitioners, professionals, the general public, children and young people, such as examples in sections 4b) and c) including for lifelong learning with the WEA.

#### e) Contribution to the Sustainability of the Discipline

Our research collaborations place the discipline of Education in exciting global and local exchanges concerning social mobility, disadvantage, data, mobile learning, postdigital, biodigital and futures debates and the effects of Covid-19 on all levels of education and wellbeing. The longevity of the EOs work is therefore guaranteed through its interdisciplinarity and cross-sector dialogue with stakeholders, research users and support for ECRs. Our seminars, events, debates, news stories and blogs are captured on our website to demonstrate our broad and dynamic impact environment and inclusivity of researchers at all career stages. In terms of significance, vitality and reach, the diverse research in our Unit informs national and international policy agendas, for example in relation to lifelong learning and addressing educational disadvantage, and influences new practices, pedagogical approaches and design in areas such as mobile learning and (post-) digitalisation.

Staff contribute to teaching, supervision and examining for doctorates in health and sport, chair vivas across all disciplines and support teaching and seminars in the Doctoral College, the Research Policy Unit and the College of Learning and Teaching (CoLT). EO staff support learning and teaching research across the university and IoE is responsible for the PG Cert in Learning and Teaching, which is part of the induction of many new staff into the university. Further examples of our research projects and programmes that are interdisciplinary in nature include the evaluation of Headstart Wolverhampton and research into mental health, wellbeing and vulnerable groups, which involves colleagues from other areas of FEHW and external organisations.

A particular strength of the EO is a focus on collegiality and flexibility to provide rapid input to collaborative research projects, or responses to tenders and consultancy. Our local dedicated support staff work closely with central professional services to ensure support from concept creation to case studies development and further. Our interdisciplinary Education research

remains dynamic and relevant improving the lives of many we work with in diverse locations beyond the academy.

#### f) Indicators of Wider Influence

##### i) Journal editorship

Colleagues in the EO hold a range of editorial roles and responsibilities, including: Lavender (editorial board: *Australian Journal of Lifelong Learning*); Hayes (associate editor: *Postdigital Science and Education*); Jopling (editorial board: *Management in Education*; *Transdisciplinary perspectives in educational research*, EERA book series); Lalli (editorial board: *Cambridge Journal of Education*; *Health Education Journal*); Traxler (editorial board: *IT in International Development*); and Tuckett (editorial board: *Studies in Continuing Education* and *Journal of Transformative Education*).

##### ii) Fellowships

Fellowships awarded to members of the EO since 2014 are: Hayes (Principal Fellow HEA); Lavender (Senior Research Fellow, Learning and Work Institute); Lewis (WEA Ambassador, Fellow of the Institute of Mental Health); and Tuckett (RMIT Melbourne, University of Bristol, International Institute of Adult and Continuing Education New Delhi, UNESCO Institute of Lifelong Learning, Assessor's Guild).

##### iii) Prizes

Three members of the Unit have won prizes in the REF period. They are: Tuckett (knighted for services to education, 2018); Hayes (SEDA-JISC Institutional Change Leader Award, September 2015); and Lavender (International Hall of Fame for Lifelong Learning, 2015).

##### iv) Membership of Research Council or similar national and international committees

Jopling is the convenor of the children and youth at risk and urban education network at the European Educational Research Association (from 2017) and Williams-Brown is the Chair of the British Education Studies Association (2018-2021).

##### v) Invited keynotes, lectures and/or performances, or conference chair roles

We have here only included the most notable invited keynotes and lectures given during the period:

Tuckett delivered the Presidential address, 8th World Assembly, International Council for Adult Education, Montreal, Canada, June 2015; 'Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose' Keynote at the UNESCO International Literacy Day symposium, Paris Sep 2015; 'Learning through the life course: The role of universities in stimulating participation, Inaugural Lifelong Learning Conference, at the Singapore University of Social Science, Nov 2017; and the keynote for the Government of Scotland, ministerial conference, Newbattle Abbey, April 2018.

Traxler was invited keynote speaker at the International Symposium, Federal University of Pernambuco, Recife, Brazil, August 2015; invited keynote at the 4th Annual eLearning Innovations Conference, Nairobi, Kenya September 2016; the Festival of Mobile Learning, University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, June 2017; an invited speaker at the UNICEF: Designing an Effective Large-Scale Mobile Learning; Initiative For Public Schools, Pretoria, August, 2017; and invited panellist at the World Bank Internet Policy Workshop, Berlin, November, 2014.

Hayes was an AERA Panel member at the Learning in the Age of Digital Reason: Reinventing Dialogue, American Educational Research Association (AERA) Conference, New York, April

2018; and Co-chair of the 2019 Higher Education Institutional Research (HEIR) Conference, University of Wolverhampton, September 2019.

Jopling delivered the keynote presentation at ResearchSEND conference, Manchester Metropolitan University, November 2018; and delivered invited seminars on addressing disadvantage in the school system, Humbolt-Universität zu Berlin, February 2018 & January 2020.

Royle was the keynote speaker for Challenges of Digital Era for Higher Education, Serbian Ministry for Higher Education Presentation to Minister of Education and Representatives from all the Serbian and Other Western Balkan Universities; British Council Sarajevo, Bosnia, October 2018.

vi) Refereeing academic publications or research proposals

Since 2014 EO members have reviewed for a host of academic publications and publishers including: *Teaching and Teacher Education*; *Journal of Further and Higher Education*; *Studies in Higher Education*; *Educational Futures*; *Journal of Social Policy*; *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*; *Educational Research*; *School Leadership and Management*; *International Journal of Lifelong Education*; *Australian Journal for Lifelong Learning*; *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science*; *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*; Oxford University Press; Cochrane Library; Sage; and Policy Press.

vii) External examiners

Six staff members (Hayes, Jopling, Lavender Traxler, Tuckett, Williams-Brown) were external examiners for 18 PhD and five EdD viva voce examinations, six of which were overseas, and four Masters programmes in other UK universities.