

The Higher Education Research Group

Strategy document

This document is intended to outline the scope and aims of the School's Higher Education Research Group (HERG) for the immediate and long-term.

HERG Mission

The Higher Education Research Group brings together innovative, leading-edge and internationally focused research in a wide range of contemporary, policy-related areas of higher education. The group acts as a vehicle for the production of new research across wide areas of higher education, as well as a forum for discussion and debate of research ideas through its regular series of seminars. Its remit and span of interests are broad and inter-disciplinary, encompassing a diverse field of interests, theoretical orientations and specialisms within Southampton Education School (SEdS), as well as within the Faculty of Human and Social Sciences and the wider University.

The group's goal is to become an internationally-recognised research centre that raises the profile of higher education research at Southampton. Whilst the group is located in the Centre for Lifelong and Work-related Learning (LaWRL) in SEdS, it is open to academics from the academic unit's other research centres, as well as those with substantive HE research interests across the faculty and university. It builds upon the existing research of the group and includes current activity relating to HE policy, management and leadership.

Key priorities:

- To exploit the existing capacity for multi- and inter-disciplinary HE-related research within SEdS, including consolidating and building on existing research activities.
- To increase the capacity for developing external grant applications to a variety of potential funding sources and external bodies (including consultancy on HE-related matters).
- To continue to develop links between other academic units within the faculty, university and beyond through the promotion of HERG and the continued dissemination of HE research through its successful seminar programme.
- To attract national and international PGR students through the marketing and presentation of HERG as a leading HE research centre that offers multiple research opportunities within broad areas of HE research.

Research capacity building

The Higher Education Research Group draws and builds upon the existing higher education research specialisms in SEdS. These can be grouped into five key themes, which are all addressed through national and international lenses and from a range of disciplinary perspectives:

- **Higher Education, Lifelong Learning and Graduate Employment**
Research in this area includes: Graduate employability and HE-Work Transitions; Student/Graduate/post-Graduate Decision-making, Labour Market Outcomes and Intersectionality; Early Career Learning, Skills and Career Progression; Theoretical Developments on the HE/Labour market Interplay.
- **Access, Participation and Transitions to Higher Education**
Research in this area includes: Post-16 Choices and Decision-Making; Patterns and Determinants of Progress to and forms of participation in diverse kinds of HE institutions and provision; Social and Life-course Influences on HE Transitions; Learner Attitudes and Responses to HE Policy.
- **Higher Education Policy, Management & Leadership**
Research in this area includes: Leadership and Policy Mediation in HE; Performance Management, Quality and Effectiveness within HE; Leadership Development & Learning; Policy and the Changing Public Role of Universities.
- **Higher Education Learning, Pedagogy and the Student Experience**
Research in this area includes: Student Approaches to Learning; Innovations in Student Learning & E-learning; Curricula Development in HE; Student Demands & Expectations; Development of Student Criticality.
- **Globalisation and Internationalisation of Higher Education**
Research in this area includes: Comparative Analysis of Governance of HE; European Governance of HE; International Student Mobility & Experience; Theoretical Analysis of Globalisation of HE.

Each of these research areas incorporates activities currently pursued by HERG members, most of which has been externally-funded, and has generated a strong body of research of both a substantive and applied nature. Such research activity has attracted a wide range of interest from government research institutions, policy-makers, cross-institutional academic collaborators and other audiences. The group is in a strong position to build on this research infra-structure and to pursue a broad range of research in related and new areas of HE research centred on two core activities:

- Mode 1: Academic, conceptually-driven and policy-orientated research aimed towards enhancing the field of HE (and related social science) knowledge through multi- and inter-disciplinary approaches, and developing outcomes that are channelled through traditional academic media.
- Mode 2: Evaluative, policy-focused research oriented towards aiding the future development of policy and practice within higher education generally, as well as producing evidence and insights likely to be of value to the development of institutional, pedagogic and academic practice at the University of Southampton.

Grant development

The research capacity of the group is built around the co-ordinated planning of a range of large- and small-scale research on higher education projects. The main thrust of this is research targeted at major government research council research bodies such as the ESRC, EU, British Academy, Leverhulme Trust and Nuffield Foundation (Modes 1 and 2). However, HERG also seeks to attract funding from a range of higher education government bodies interested in applied and evaluative research; for example, the Higher Education Academy, the Higher Education Funding Council(s), the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, and the Higher Education Careers Services Unit (Mode 2). The group actively pursues dialogue and communication with these various bodies, and group members are encouraged to gain cross-group support and feedback, formally through research workshops and informally through group discussions, in developing research bids. In addition, active strategic seminars are geared towards the production of new research ideas and their development into potential competitive research bids

Seminars and communication

The group currently engages in the dissemination of higher education research through its regular seminars with external and internal speakers, and working with other academics across the faculty, university and University Strategic Research Groups such as the Work Futures Research Centre (WFRC). These have been very successful in raising both the HE research presence in SEdS and bringing together researchers and practitioners from a range of backgrounds. HERG's seminar programme reflects the breadth of the group's interdisciplinary and internationally focused research interests and continues to have a research and policy orientation. It has also facilitated collaboration between the group and other HE institutions and external bodies attracted to the group's research programme.

Post-graduate research

The group invites prospective research students who are interested in undertaking a broad range of higher education research, including those with an interest in HE management and policy. Prospective PGR students are encouraged to work within one of the substantive research areas of the group and apply for competitive funding. The group liaises with existing structures within the faculty and university to increase recruitment and works with the International Office. Potential PGR students are offered a range of potential supervision and mentorship arrangements within SEdS.