Institution: University of Reading

Unit of Assessment: 34a Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory

a. Context

Our impact strategy is organised in relation to established research strengths in exhibition curation and participatory art practice - in RAE2008 there was specific mention of the excellence of our curatorial initiatives. This research, organised within the 'Exhibitions & Publics' research strand, develops new modes of engagement with audiences in the production, curation and display of art within public contexts. Impact is developed through widening access to public collections, providing educational opportunities and developing public understanding of contemporary art, as well as enabling direct participation with targeted user-groups in the design and construction of museum artefacts and displays, encouraging a shared ownership of public collections and their histories.

The 'Exhibition & Publics' research strand is one of three developed since the merger of Fine Art and History of Art in 2011 to organise research across Practice, Theory and History. The other two strands are 'Art, Power, Politics' and 'Performance, Publication, Text'. 'Exhibitions & Publics' draws on the world-leading research of Allen, Chaimowicz, Clausen, Gruetzner-Robins, O'Connell and Rowlands and is further enhanced by a strong postgraduate cohort, including Andy Hunt, Director at Focal Point Gallery, Southend (and Judge for the Turner Prize 2013) and Mark Beasley, curator of Performa, New York (the most prestigious performance event in the world).

The research addresses a range of user groups, beneficiaries and audiences, including, members of the public interested in contemporary art and History of Art; users of art galleries and museums, including exhibitions and associated events such as talks, performances and publications; audiences for public symposia and conferences on contemporary art and History of Art; users of/ participants in educational projects at galleries/museums/schools; and curatorial and education museum staff. As well as this, the research explores the potential of publically sited/performed artworks and the interaction with specific-interest groups (e.g. science, mathematics and military) and targeted participant-groups/researchers, including children and users with disabilities.

b. Approach to impact

Within 'Exhibitions & Publics', which spans art-historical, theoretical and practice-led research, two main areas of our activity are most directly related to impact outside of academia.

1. Large-scale institutional and gallery curatorial projects. This research is concerned with developing dynamic, accessible models for the display of art and artefacts, exploring the potential of educational, outreach and other associated projects as a way of enabling public understanding, appreciation and conceptual ownership of public collections. For instance, since the staging of his seminal exhibition *Celebration? Realife*, at Gallery House, London in 1972, **Chamowicz**'s research has experimented with the juxtaposition of different categories of creative production, contesting the conventional hierarchies of high and low culture as a way of democratising museum display. His 2012 solo show at Inverleith House, Edinburgh, curated contributions by contemporary artists such as Mona Hatoum, Wolfgang Tillmans, Glenn Ligon and The Otolith Group, as well as historical artworks by Alberto Giacometti, and an extensive collection of Black Panther Party newspapers and posters. Similarly **Rowlands'** co-curation of the exhibition *Dark Monarch* at Tate St Ives, 2009, drew connections between historical artworks in the Tate collections and examples from popular culture, literature, film, music and local folk ritual. These projects also involve extensive work planning engagement with publics, editing explanatory publications and working with education departments to organise projects with schools and other public events. **Rowlands** was also directly involved in devising and programming the connected series of events, including film screenings, performances, gallery tours, curator's talks, education projects (see case study).

The public visibility and accessibility of these outputs is clear. The underpinning research informs and shapes the impact strategy, developing and refining a methodology for enabling understanding of the complexities of contemporary art and art history. This research is directed at non-academic audiences, including visitors to the exhibitions and events and participants in education projects.

In a related vein, **Clausen's** 'Performing Normality in the Face of Crisis' (2009-11, funded by Arts

Council England and the Canada Council for the Arts) drew on the film archive at the University's Museum of English Rural Life (MERL), which houses the most comprehensive national collection in the UK of objects, books and archives relating to the history of food, farming and the countryside. Through the production and analysis of a filmed performance, 'Ballet' (2009), the project explored the linking of dance and the aesthetics of everyday movement to ideas about social order, drawing on a selection of rural propaganda films describing procedure and instruction in the case of nuclear emergency or other catastrophe. The research comprised visual analysis of the original archive material, as well as social interactions with groups of local artists and students as performers and with local farming communities in the production of 'Ballet'.

2. Public art and participatory projects. This research enables impact through direct participation by diverse and mixed sections of the broader public in both the production and reception of artworks, performances and museum artefacts. Reach is also generated through public siting of the projects and large visitor/participant numbers (Speke Hall, the site of one of **Allen's** projects, attracts over 100,000 visitors a year). Significance lies in the direct participation and empowerment/education of targeted user-groups in the production of artworks and artefacts and in creating the contexts in which they are shown and used. For instance, **Allen's** current AHRC-funded research project *Interactive multisensory objects* (2012-15, see case study) involves people with learning disabilities as co-researchers in workshops organised onsite at museum venues. In *Lumps of Rock Zooming Around* (2012), jointly conducted with the Zurich University of the Arts and the Kunstmuseum Thun, **Clausen** ran a publicly-conducted performance workshop over five days, drawing together a professional actor, a group of 30 local primary school children, a leading zoologist and a high-ranking military commander.

O'Connell's 2009 *Pearce St project*, sited in a Dublin drug rehabilitation centre, involved extended consultation with local community groups to develop an artwork for the four-storey atrium, informed by the Government's Health Strategy (*Quality & Fairness, A Health System for You*, 2001) and Primary Care Strategy (*Primary Care: A New Direction*, 2001). The work was required to contribute to the improvement of 'the personal experience of the residents of the Irishtown Area who avail or are entitled to avail of the health and personal social services' and physical space, so as to create a more positive environment for those using the healthcare services and those working there.

Such cross-institutional, collaborative, interactive and site-specific research projects require considerable engagement and activity with people and in locations away from the University; as such, they are actively supported by departmental mechanisms to enable impact-focused research (e.g prioritising scheduled research leave or teaching relief, as in **Allen's** current cover for one day per week for the duration of her *Interactive multisensory objects* project. Eight staff have thus far benefited from research leave under this initiative to support impactful research.

Our inherent research interests in interactions with communities beyond academia inform our teaching strategy, enabling further impact at one remove, including in the education, health and local community environments in which much of our participatory research is focused. Current undergraduate modules encourage interaction and engagement in non-academic environments: students studying 'Critical Collaborative Methods' organise exhibitions in external venues, and Art and Art & Psychology students take up placements in schools and medical institutions. Recent developments of this synergy between impact and teaching plans include projects organised between students and local primary schools (four in the last two years), for instance the *Ridgeway Primary School project* 2012 (in which 16 students developed site-specific artworks for the school grounds) and the recent *Long Close School project* (where a postgraduate researcher worked with 15-16 year-olds from a local school, and our BA and MA students, to explore alternative approaches to submissions in GCSE Art, utilising our gallery, studio space and digital resources). We also directly engage students in our impact-focused research: for example, in 2013 Allen secured University funding and an EPSRC bursary for students to support her *Interactive sensory objects* project and secured Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) funding for a separate innovative interactive electronics project for BA students run over the summer 2013.

c. Strategy and plans

The Department's Impact strategy builds on its experience to date to identify and support key enablers for designing and developing impactful research:

1. We will continue our successful strategy of prioritising impact through research leave (through the structure of the 1-in-9 research term schedule) and in-term teaching relief.

2. We will continue to foster and encourage cross-departmental and cross-institutional collaboration to maximise impact-based research. It is clear from the examples above that collaboration is crucial to the success of impact-focused research projects. For instance, Allen's *Interactive multisensory objects* project involves collaboration with the University's School of Systems Engineering and external partnerships with the Access to Heritage Forum and the Rix Centre, University of East London. In 2013, Garfield negotiated with the estate of ground-breaking film maker and cinematographer, writer and graphic designer Stephen Dwoskin to permanently house his archive in the University collections. This is a significant resource relevant to research both in the department and across the School and a focus for partnerships with non-academic institutions: a large AHRC bid is already in preparation with the BFI (British Film Institute) and LUX as confirmed partners. In all cases the diversity of research and professional expertise and participation is crucial to the project's success. To this end we have developed two key recent partnerships: with the ICA (Institute of Contemporary Arts) London to allow the scheduling of research events and development of joint research projects at this prestigious central London venue (negotiated in collaboration with the Department of Typography), and a Postgraduate Research Platform for Curatorial and Cross-disciplinary Cultural Studies, set up with Zurich University for the Arts. Building on these partnerships we staged the symposium *Who's afraid of the public?* at the ICA in May 2013, which included presentations by postgraduate students from both Reading and Zurich, addressing the issues of audiences and public-ness. In this way we are also supporting and influencing future research leaders and practitioners by ensuring that our postgraduate students are involved in thinking about impact.

3. We will further enable the consolidation and dissemination of our impact-orientated research and facilitate debate in our key areas of expertise and interest for the benefit of a broader community. We will continue our tradition of organising conferences and public-oriented events related to specific projects (as in Allen's current work) or areas of interest. Three symposia are planned at the ICA over the next three years addressing Impact orientated issues; for example, the March 2014 symposium will use the work of Stephen Dwoskin as a focus for discussion of cross-disciplinary practice. The University's press office is featuring our offsite projects in the next edition of *CommUnity* magazine, to promote further local collaboration and interaction.

4. We will build on our research interests in education, health and community, within our research activity. Our concern with potentials of art in/as education and community engagement is being developed in two AHRC bids**.** In the first Clausen is Co-I on a bid addressing the *Digital Transformations in Community Research* theme (submission 2014) with (PI) Dr Ellie Francis-Brophy, Institute of Education, Reading, and partners including Slough Borough Council, Slough Schools Music network, Slough Museum, NHS Berkshire and the South East Migrants Health Network. The project will explore the potential of time-based community sound media that can be readily used by diverse communities (education, migrant, public, health) and sustained through interactive engagement and open access. A second project exploring alternative approaches to Primary Art education is being developed as an AHRC Networks and Arts Council application (2014). In addition, Allen's JISC-funded project training students in the use of interactive electronics has secured funding for 2013–14.

d. Relationship to case studies

Rowlands' work around The Dark Monarch exhibition and associated events at Tate St Ives and the Towner Gallery, Eastbourne, is an example of widening access, providing educational opportunities and enabling public understanding and appreciation of contemporary art through large-scale institutional and gallery curatorial projects.

Allen's work on the *Access to Heritage* project (2008-9) and her *Interactive multisensory objects developed for and by people with learning disabilities* project (2012-15), exemplify the department's strong focus on enabling direct participation in both the production and reception of artworks, performances and museum artefacts.

Both case studies demonstrate our abiding interest in community involvement in our research and its outputs, and in cross-institutional collaborations to design impact in to our research activity.