

<p>Institution: University of Chester</p> <hr/> <p>Unit of Assessment: 27: Area Studies</p> <hr/> <p>a. Overview</p> <p>Research field Postcolonial perspectives on identity formation and centre-periphery relations in language-based Area Studies.</p> <p>Structure of the unit The unit comprises researchers from language sections in the Department of Modern Languages and one researcher working on European cultural identity in the Department of Media Studies. The unit is coordinated by the Director of Research and Head of Modern Languages, Dr (Prof) Claire Griffiths (Francophone postcolonial studies). Other members of the research team include: Dr Haili Ma (Chinese cultural studies), Dr Vera Slavtcheva-Petkova (European cultural identities), Brenda Garvey (Francophone cultural studies), Dr Timo Obergöcker (Transnational Francophone cultural studies), Dr Jean-Frédéric Hennuy (Francophone cultural studies), Dr (Prof) David Corkill (Iberian and migration studies), Dr Christopher Hull (Hispano-American history and cultural studies) and Dr James C Kent (Hispano-American visual cultures).</p> <p>Context and background of the submitting unit The unit has been set up within the lifetime of the current 2008-2014 REF period. Prior to the arrival of the unit's coordinator, appointed as the new Head of Modern Languages in September 2009, the Department of Languages, as it was previously known, was not considered research active for the purposes of the REF.</p> <p>Griffiths was appointed from a senior research fellowship in Francophone Studies at the WISE Institute, University of Hull, a post combined with teaching and research roles in the Department of Modern Languages (French section) and director of the University's postgraduate programmes in Modern Languages. In the first year of appointment (2009/10) at Chester, the incoming Head of Department prioritised the development of a research strategy for Modern Languages with the aim of being in a position to propose the inclusion of Modern Languages in the Faculty of Humanities' return to REF2014. The environment for developing such a strategy is particularly propitious in the Faculty of Humanities at Chester where the other three departments (English, History & Archaeology and Theology & Religious Studies) were included in RAE2008 and constitute together a highly research-orientated faculty. The strategy to bring Modern Languages and Area Studies into line with these departments and the Faculty was actioned from 2010/11 through a two-stage process. Details of the research strategy and its impact on the research environment are given in the next sections.</p> <hr/> <p>b. Research strategy</p> <p>Targets 2010-2013</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enable collaborative and innovative research leading to transformations in learning and teaching across the curriculum. • Establish a coherent narrative framework for the launch of collaborative research in postcolonial Area Studies. • Seek institutional support for new research-active Modern Languages appointments in the field of postcolonial Area Studies. • Support and mentor early career research in emerging fields of postcolonial Area Studies. • Coordinate research activities to generate collaborative publication. • Start to lay the foundations of a centre of excellence in language-based Area Studies.

Summary

The new departmental research strategy implemented from September 2010 has sought to transform Modern Languages at the University of Chester into a research-led learning and teaching unit.

Between January 2010 and December 2013 the Department has moved from having one member of staff participating in REF2014 orientated research activity (incoming Head) to the majority of full-time staff participating in the return to Area Studies sub-panel 27.

Modern Languages and Area Studies at Chester now has eight international level researchers working within a collaborative field of transnational area studies.

The departmental research strategy has comprised two research activation stages supported by a departmental knowledge transfer and income generation project, alongside a strategy supported by the new Dean, to align the Department with other sections of the Faculty of Humanities, which already benefitted from a positive and supportive research-active culture.

The departmental and Faculty strategy has been located within a wider objective to gain the confidence of the institution, and particularly its most senior layer, in the Department of Modern Languages as a potentially highly research-active discipline cluster with a growing international reputation for excellence in research.

Stage 1: Strategic actions

As agreed with the Vice-Chancellor on the appointment of the new Head of Modern Languages in 2009/10, and supported by the new Dean of Humanities from September 2010, the first stage focused on developing a positive research culture and research activity within the existing Department of Modern Languages. The strategy developed in year 1 involved:

- facilitating the undertaking of new research projects among existing staff members classified as 'research inactive' in REF terms prior to 2010/11;
- as a consequence of the above, developing more opportunities for the integration of research into the teaching of Modern Languages and Area Studies at Chester;
- cultivating a positive research environment and support for the planned appointment of new highly research-active colleagues.

The impact on existing staff members of the first stage of the research activation strategy is summarised under c. People below.

Stage 2: New appointments

At the same time as facilitating the undertaking of new research projects among existing staff members, the second stage involved preparing for the establishment of a centre of research excellence in the Department of Modern Languages. Key targets involved the appointment of new members of academic staff already producing excellent research, as evidenced by annual international quality output/s, combined with a record of excellence in research-led teaching. These new staff would be appointed to enhance the Department generally, participate in a REF2014 submission and support the new Head of Department with the aim of creating an international centre for transnational language-based area studies in Modern Languages at Chester.

As the appointment of new staff requires considerable investment on the part of the HEI, an admissions strategy was required to gain the support of senior management in the institution for new research-active posts at a time when the uptake of undergraduate places on Modern Languages programmes have been in decline nationally for over two decades.

This involved a new and pro-active recruitment campaign devised and implemented by the Head and Deputy Head of Modern Languages. Together they have taken charge of the Department's contribution to the bi-annual institutional Open Days, and written and presented applicant day talks

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on six Saturdays and six Wednesdays in each academic session for the last three years. The Deputy Head has supported this on-campus campaign by starting an off-campus schools' liaison programme for the region. Applications to programmes have either grown or remained stable throughout this period, and admissions to programmes globally have grown year on year.

Being perceived as reversing a national decline in admissions to Modern Languages' programmes has contributed to gaining the confidence of senior management in the Department's ability to sustain and grow its position in the undergraduate market. As a result of this, the Department has since expanded with the introduction of new programmes, including a triple language programme and a Chinese Studies programme, both of which launch in September 2013.

As regards research, new publications from the Department contributed to consolidating a confidence in the subject area. For example, Griffiths' monograph, *Globalizing the Postcolony*, was described in reviews as ground-breaking in the field. The project had attracted a number of research awards during the period of desk and field research in Africa, including AHRC research leave, and Nuffield Foundation small grants to the social sciences (two awards), along with a number of smaller awards from Reckitt and Coleman Educational Trust.

While institutional support for new appointments was necessary to meet the overall strategic objectives, the absence, in the past, of dedicated research funding was a potential obstacle to the Department developing its research potential and raising its profile in the short and medium terms.

The research strategy therefore required an independent funding strategy. The detail of this area is given under d. Income, infrastructure and facilities below.

Developing the Research Environment 2014-2020

Strategic targets 2014-2020

- Reinforce public engagement as a platform for research outputs.
- Increase internal and external research revenue.
- Consolidate the research group as a centre of excellence in language-based Area Studies.
- Enable trans-disciplinary research collaboration within and beyond the group.
- Continue mentoring and supporting early career researchers.
- Expand the research cluster across a global network of partner institutions in China (Shanghai Jiao Tong), Cuba (Havana) and Canada.
- Develop a thriving postgraduate community in the field of transcultural identity formation.

The overall objective for the UOA is to establish, by the end of 2020, a global profile in language-based Area Studies on a platform of innovative trans-disciplinary research with a particular focus on transcultural identity formation in the postcolonial world.

c. People, including:

i. Staffing strategy and staff development

Stage 1 of the research strategy for Modern Languages and Area Studies at Chester has involved facilitating the undertaking of new research projects among existing staff members hitherto not classified as 'research active' in REF terms. This involved mentoring senior academics who in this context were early career, and supporting the work they undertook to secure what for some were their first peer-reviewed publications.

1. The *Developing Student Autonomy in Language Learning and in Transition into Higher Education* project

This area of pedagogic research was identified through collaborative discussions in the

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Department as a promising site for research and research-led teaching for existing members of staff not previously engaged in research. Griffiths worked collaboratively with Carmen Usategui (senior lecturer in Hispanic Studies) and Sue Beigel (senior lecturer in French, retired August 2013) to develop the *Student Autonomy and Transition into Higher Education* project. Staff development involved mentoring and collaboration between the incoming Head of Department and existing staff members in the following activities:

- First collaborative international conference paper written by Griffiths and Usategui and delivered in January 2011.
- Successful application submitted by Griffiths, supported by Usategui and Beigel, for a Learning and Teaching grant resulting in an award of £10,000 to support research and publications in the period 2010/11-2012/13.
- Subsequent conference papers presented by Usategui and Beigel in 2012/13 and 2013/14.
- First publication by Usategui and Beigel submitted to peer-review June 2013

Note: outcomes from the above are listed under e. Collaboration or contribution to the discipline or research base below.

2. Trans-disciplinary research group *Postcolonial perspectives on identity formation and centre-periphery relations in language-based Area Studies*

This research group or 'laboratory' (following the French approach to thematically-coherent multidisciplinary research clusters known as "*laboratoires de recherches*") provides a supportive and collaborative research environment for all active researchers in the field within the Department and beyond. It incorporates researchers at a relatively earlier stage of their careers, including Dr James Clifford Kent, recruited as a specialist in Hispano-American/Cuban postcolonial visual cultures from Royal Holloway (University of London), Dr Vera Slavtcheva-Petkova, recently appointed to the Department of Media, with publications in the field of identity formation in Europe, and Dr Jean-Frédéric Hennuy, an experienced university teacher recently first appointed to research and teaching posts. They are working alongside more established researchers, five appointed between 2009/10 and 2012/13, including in addition to Dr / Prof Claire Griffiths recruited from Hull, Dr Haili Ma from the University of Leeds, a specialist in Chinese performance and visual cultures, Dr Christopher Hull previously at the universities of Nottingham and Nottingham Trent specialising in Hispano-Caribbean/Cuban history and cultures, Dr Timo Obergoeker appointed from Mainz University specialising in visual and musical culture as expression of identity in the francophone world, and Prof David Corkill working on European identities and displacement. Staff development involved mentoring of Modern Languages ECRs through the Faculty ECR network and departmental support to secure peer-reviewed publication from doctoral research (see, for example, REF2 – JC Kent).

Other outcomes of the new research culture included a long-standing member of staff (Dr Mark Gant) publishing a book version of his PhD, awarded in 1996, on *The Spanish Writer Carlos Frontaura: A study of his social influence and ideology* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2012).

ii. Research students

The Department of Modern Languages has been allocated a three-year GTA/PhD studentship in the area of global Francophone studies. It is expecting to fill this position within the next twelve months in one of the specialist fields of supervision offered by the existing and/or newly-appointed French staff. The Department will expect to generate its first PhD in the specialist field of language-based Area Studies during for the period 2014-2020.

With a vastly expanded and highly focused research base in the Department it is expected that the number of postgraduate students will develop accordingly in the next REF period. As that postgraduate community develops in number, individual students will benefit from specialist research guidance from a team of at least two qualified and specially trained supervisors (all PhD supervisors at Chester complete supervision training) and be integrated into the thriving postgraduate research environment of the Faculty of Humanities (which already has the highest number of PhD students of any faculty in the University).

d. Income, infrastructure and facilities

Department

In the absence of external funding for research in Modern Languages (outside small Faculty Staff Development awards) the Department needed to develop a funding strategy to support research in the short and medium terms.

The funding strategy has been developed through the establishment of three income generation projects. The residual income from these projects is allocated to the Department, part or all to be used at the discretion of the Head of Modern Languages, with the support of the Dean of Humanities, to support research and knowledge transfer in Modern Languages and Area Studies. The income generated will support the introduction of sabbatical leave of increasing length up to one term (10 weeks) for all staff expected to be returned to REF2020.

1. Language Services

Designed in 2011/12 and launched in September in 2012, the Language Services unit is delivering language courses on weekday evenings in six modern foreign languages at various levels outside the degree programmes. In Spring 2013 the Language Services unit diversified into business solutions and now provides tailor-made German language courses for a major car manufacturer in the region. The programme is run as a knowledge transfer project by the Deputy Head of Department. By generating income to support research, the Deputy Head makes a valuable material contribution to the development of the research environment in the Department while not being classified as 'research-active' in the traditional sense.

Income generation in the Department has been contributing towards the development of research profiles, resources and careers, for example by subsidising the cost of production of outputs (such as Kent's photographic exhibitions of Cuban identities – see REF3b Impact case study 2) as well as supporting impact projects more generally (see REF3a).

2. University of Cambridge ESOL teaching and testing centre

Approved by the University of Cambridge in November 2012 and launched at the University of Chester in the Department of Modern Languages in January 2013, the Cambridge ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) centre provides general and specialist courses in English for speakers of other languages. Classes are delivered by CELTA-qualified teachers under the management of the Head of Modern Languages Department and the Department's first lecturer in English for Academic Purposes appointed to a part-time position in July 2012 and to a full time position in July 2013.

3. ESOL Language and Culture summer and pre-session courses

The Department of Modern Languages launched the University's first pre-session English language programme for international students entering postgraduate and undergraduate programmes at Chester in September 2013.

Residual income from the undergraduate and one postgraduate pre-session courses and the Cambridge ESOL courses will go towards funding sabbatical leave for researchers in the Department.

Faculty

The Faculty of Humanities has consistently provided income support through research awards up to £500 from the Faculty Staff Development Fund. In 2012/13 it held an early career researcher event attended by two ECRs in Modern Languages. Faculty involvement in the development of the *Language Services* income generation unit is outlined below.

University

The University has supported the development of research and scholarship in the Department of Modern Languages through financial and structural support. The Research and Knowledge Transfer Office (RKTO) has provided one-to-one and departmental training sessions in identifying

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external funding opportunities. This has resulted in three Santander Universities-funded International Research Excellence Awards amounting to approximately £3000 to the Department since January 2010. The RKTO has also awarded the Department of Modern Languages three competitive development grants in the same period:

Francophone Africa VRE

A competitive award of £5000 was won by Modern Languages for a project leading to the creation of an online virtual research environment on francophone Africa. To date the environment is being used by academic and non-academic users in Senegal, the Canaries and the UK to explore issues of migration and identity formation, and to accommodate a 1000-page French African archive on education and gender policy in interwar French West Africa, among other projects.

Market Research for Language Services (2 grant-assisted projects)

The RKTO awarded an initial grant of £5000 to the Faculty of Humanities to conduct market research for language services in the Cheshire and Liverpool region. Acting upon the findings of this research the Department bid for an additional tranche of funding of £7000 to launch the Language Services unit. The RKTO has awarded a further grant to *Language Services* to explore opportunities for diversification in 2013/14.

e. Collaboration or contribution to the discipline or research base

Due to extreme youth of the UOA, the opportunities for collaboration and contribution are still in the developmental stage. Nevertheless there have been a number of positive results to date, including:

- the research-active cluster in Modern Languages has grown from 0 members at the beginning of the REF cycle in 2008/09, to eight members in 2013/14 (plus one from outside Modern Languages);
- during the period 1 January 2010 to 31 December 2013, three monographs and one edited book have been published by members of the research unit whilst in post at the University of Chester;
- Griffiths serves on the international jury organised by the Canadian Journal of African Studies to select the best book on the field of African studies published in Canada or by a Canadian national anywhere in the world;
- members of the research cluster serve as reviewers for several international research journals (Griffiths: *Work and Organisation*, *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, *Francophone Postcolonial Studies*, etc.) and advisory boards (Usategui and Griffiths: advisory board members to the international edu-communications journal *Communicar*);
- Griffiths is assistant general editor at Lexington Books, USA, for *France After the Empire* series);
- Modern Languages at Chester has set up research collaborations in the period 2010-2013 with UCAD, Senegal (Francophone Africa VRE project), *Ecole Normale de Dakar*, Senegal (Francophone Africa VRE project), Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria (Griffiths and Kent: visual cultures research projects), and Universidad de Huelva, Spain (Usategui: Student Autonomy project).