

Institution: University of Exeter

Unit of Assessment: Area Studies

a. Context

The **Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies (IAIS)** is one of the principal UK academic contributors to the formation of foreign and economic policy and to public engagement with Islam, the Middle East and the Muslim world. IAIS researchers act as consultants, nationally and internationally, to numerous government departments, think-tanks and NGOs. They train public servants in awareness of Islam and the Muslim world through dedicated, bespoke courses, and they inform the programmes of cultural bodies both in the UK and abroad through advice and collaborative projects with museums and cultural heritage organisations. The regular appearances of IAIS researchers in the national and international media enrich public debate around issues connected with the British Muslim community, and the Muslim world more generally. The aim of these activities is to create a more nuanced discussion and public understanding of issues related to Islam, and, in time, better informed public policy decisions. Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies at Exeter has, since the formation of Arabic and Middle East specialisms and the Centre for Arab Gulf Studies in the 1970s, played a major role in policy formation and public understanding of the Muslim world. The current public engagement activities of IAIS staff have maintained and extended this work by facilitating networks of government, business and third sector players, making Exeter a key contributor to the public understanding of the Muslim world. The principal impact activities of IAIS can be categorised:

1. **Advice to government departments, and collaborative work with institutes and NGOs**, concerning foreign policy with regard to the Middle East and domestic policy regarding Muslim and Middle Eastern diaspora communities within the UK.
2. **Public engagement and media work** raising the level of public awareness and informing debate about Middle East and Muslim world issues.
3. **Providing training for public sector workers** (including various Police forces, the Armed Forces and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office) in awareness of the Middle East and Muslim world issues.
4. **Working with cultural heritage organisations** within the region, and with museums and public educational forums within the UK to promote the understanding and preservation of Middle East cultural heritage.
5. **Working with police forces, the CPS and other legal agencies as consultants** on specific cases both within the UK and across Europe, providing expert witness, in court or otherwise.

Research in IAIS is structured around three disciplinary clusters: **Islamic Studies, Humanities** and **Social Sciences**. Each cluster engages in one or more of the above impact activity types. The Social Sciences cluster has been advising foreign governments and business interests, briefing diplomats before posting to the region, and contributing to in-house civil servant training (**Valeri, Githens-Mazer, Stansfield, Storm**). Both the Social Sciences and Islamic Studies clusters have been advising and working collaboratively with the Department of Local Government and Communities on projects ranging from Contextualising Islam (**Rizvi**), Non-violent extremism amongst British Muslims (**Gleave**) and Islamophobia and UK community cohesion (**Githens-Mazer**). Members of the Humanities cluster have promoted the preservation of cultural heritage of the Gulf States, through the MARES project (**Cooper** and **Agius**) and projects with the Qatar Museums Authority (**Onley, Cooper**). Supplementing the disciplinary clusters, interdisciplinary regional centres provide the breadth and depth traditionally associated with an Area Studies approach, and this has led to enhanced impact activity. Engagement with third sector organisations, for example, has been developed particularly by the European Centre for Palestine Studies, as ECPS staff have worked with charities and human rights organisations working in the Occupied Territories (**Pappe, Richter-Devroe**). IAIS staff from all clusters have acted as expert advisers to the Police, the CPS and defence teams in immigration, criminal and terrorism cases. This has included acting as advisers to police investigations, making court appearances and submitting written evidence.

b. Approach to impact

Since 2008, IAIS's Research Strategy has included the objective of maximising the utility of IAIS research to as wide a range of research users as is possible. To achieve this strategic objective, IAIS has established a series of mechanisms:

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- constructing impressive networks of contacts with non-academic users, created in part through RCUK funded research projects, making IAIS the first academic contact when they require research in a particular area
- developing bespoke training courses for research users, which have built on these networks so as to make IAIS research central to policy decisions and user practice in areas relevant to IAIS expertise
- developing collaborative research projects with military, third sector and cultural heritage organisations, such that user needs and advice inform the formulation of the projects' research questions
- informing public debate and policy opinion through appearances in the media and participation in the public policy forums of think-tanks, NGOs and advisory organisations

Establishing these mechanisms has been facilitated by University-wide services for encouraging impact. Impact and public engagement has formed an element of research training, incorporated into training visits to IAIS from the College's Associate Dean for Research, and impact sessions led by the Director of Research, informed by the College Impact Officer. IAIS has been a regular recipient of the University Impact grants (the Link Fund), which aim to facilitate Impact activities from existing research results. **Agius, Cooper, Gallois, Gleave, Githens-Mazer** and **Onley** have all received support for public engagement and impact activities from this fund for their various projects. **Onley**, for example, used this funding to develop high-quality information resources for users of the Trucial Oman Scouts Project. At a University level, the Personal Development Plan for early career staff includes impact/public engagement as an essential element for progression, and impact activities are built into progression criteria between grades. The University's Research and Knowledge Transfer (RKT) unit oversees the development and promotion of impact activities, and RKT members visit IAIS regularly to address staff on the latest mechanisms for enhancing research impact. RKT gives individual and group staff assistance for the construction of effective pathways for impact and research dissemination in applications for research funding, which has resulted in a number of successful, high-impact research projects. An example of the success of this mechanism can be seen in **Valeri's** ESRC project "Re-negotiating the Social Contract in the GCC, State-Business Relations & Reforms in the Oil-Rentier Gulf Monarchies", where seminars with Gulf business leaders and stakeholders frame research questions, providing advice and contacts to policy makers in the UK.

IAIS user group networks, in addition to those outlined in the impact case studies, include the network of police, security service and DLGC officers involved in jihad/Muslim violence through **Gleave's** Global Uncertainties projects; **Rizvi's** networks in Gulf and Iraqi policy formation resulted in a 5-week secondment to the FCO for a project on the Iraqi Shi'a; **Githens-Mazer's** funded projects from the Home Office and Al Jazeera on radicalisation and Islamophobia has resulted in work with various security services in the UK, Canada, USA and Scandinavia; **Richter-Devroe's** work on gender studies and Palestinian Women's groups has led to work with Palestinian NGOs; **Netton's** research in Christian-Muslim relations and his church networks led to his appointment to the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious dialogue.

The training resources developed by IAIS for research users have had a major impact working with NGOs, the public sector, the military and security services. The provision of two major 5-day residential training courses on Islam and Muslim community awareness, for example, has enabled members of Devon and Cornwall Constabulary to approach relations with the Muslim community with greater sensitivity. Four individual study days for senior members of the armed forces on regional political understanding and cultural awareness has informed operational decisions in Iraq and Afghanistan. Furthermore, IAIS is the major contributor to the development of the Strategy and Security Institute (**SSI**), a high-impact University initiative which builds on this training provision, with a focus on security-related training. The SSI staff based in IAIS include Gen (rtd) Professor Sir Paul **Newton** (Director), **Stansfield** (Director of Research), **Githens-Mazer** (Deputy DoR) and **Catignani** (Senior Lecturer). The **SSI**, formed in 2012, hosts regular public engagement events and private policy briefings, with a research strategy informed by engagement with research users.

IAIS specialisms in the areas of Islam and Muslim community studies have resulted in it being a major national resource for understanding radicalisation, jihadi groups, Islamophobia and UK Muslim integration. This has included court appearances, submissions to CPS and defence teams and advice to investigating officers in Police Forces across the country. **Ashour's** extensive work in this area is outlined in a Case Study. This is supplemented by other high-impact engagements.

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Githens-Mazer's ESRC funded research on radicalisation of North African diasporas led to advice to parliamentary groups and ministers, including the All-Party Parliamentary Groups on Islamophobia and Global Uncertainties. **Rizvi's** expertise led to work with the EU commission on radicalisation, and a major role in the DCLG-funded "Contextualising Islam" project with its reports jointly published by Cambridge, Westminster and Exeter universities.

The construction of collaborative IAIS-stakeholder research projects has enabled IAIS expertise to inform policy and user practice. The MARES project (2009-2012), for example, recorded the maritime culture of the Gulf and Red Sea region. **Agius** and **Cooper** have, with tourism and heritage ministries in the region, developed collaborative research projects. The Qatar 3D Boat Recording and Digital Imaging Project, for example, led by **Cooper**, has resulted in the allocation of a dedicated area of the forthcoming Qatar National Museum to the Dhow and its role in Qatari heritage; **Onley** similarly has been a contributory partner in the QATAR Unified Imaging Project, cataloguing Qatari history through an open source online repository; **Gleave's** AHRC project on Shah Abbas was jointly designed with curators at the British Museum, resulting in a major BM exhibition in 2009.

The IAIS contribution to public debate through media engagements and policy forums has become increasingly important since 2011 as the so-called Arab Spring has unfolded. **Ashour, Axworthy, Githens-Mazer, Pappé, and Stansfield** are amongst the more extensive contributors to BBC, Sky news and Aljazeera news and current affairs schedules. The expertise of **Gleave** and **Rizvi** has been recognised by regular appearances on BBC religion programming (both radio and television). **Ashour, Axworthy, Rizvi, Stansfield** and **Valeri** are regular, high-profile contributors to Chatham House and other think-tank events on the Arab Spring, Egypt, Iran and the Gulf region.

c. Strategy and plans

IAIS strategy for maximising the impact of its research over the coming years involves creating opportunities for individual researchers, particularly ECRs, to engage and collaborate with stakeholders as a central element in individual research plans. This will be put into practice through three strategic mechanisms. First, recognising the success of past policies for increased impact (secondment possibilities, project development with research users, and public engagement), IAIS will include impact-related activities in individual staff workload models and proposed impact activity will become an element of all study leave applications. This aims to ensure that the impact potential for all IAIS research is maximised over the coming 5 year period.

Second, the IAIS network will ensure that internal and external collaborations produce high-profile impact activities. A central element of this will be the developing collaboration with the Strategy and Security Institute. As the major contributor to the SSI, IAIS's impact strategy over the next 5 years will include an enhanced research collaboration with the military and security services, including training on Muslim world issues and security, Middle East political developments and the dynamics around Islamist and Jihadi movements. This programme will stretch across both humanities and social sciences, as IAIS will aim to provide training in religious and cultural awareness and understanding as a major element in security policy and decision-making.

Third, IAIS will further enhance its cultural engagement activities, nationally and internationally, through enhanced use of its infrastructure resources. Building on the established success of its dedicated gallery space ("The Street"), IAIS will be linking IAIS research funding acquisition, particularly in the Arts and Humanities, to public impact events, using The Street as a key venue. Work in this area is already underway and recent successful exhibitions, underpinned by IAIS research projects, include "Transgressing the Gulf", the "FutureCube" and El Seed's calligraphiti. These have proven a key mechanism for research linkages with non-academic users, using the cultural engagement to inform public awareness and policy formation.

d. Relationship to case studies

The two case studies (**Stansfield** and **Ashour**) are products of the incorporation of "public engagement" (later "impact activity") into the IAIS Research Strategy. **Stansfield's** research outputs, for example, were distributed through IAIS networks with HMG, stake holders and the business sectors, leading to his further engagement and collaboration; **Ashour's** research was promoted within the IAIS profile to media, police and the FCO, resulting in exposure and consultancy with stake holders. Other examples of the research Strategy's success include **Rizvi's** expertise on modern Shii thought leading to FCO policy papers and placements; and **Onley's** research on the Gulf monarchies (leading directly to QNM consultancy). Enhancing the direct research-impact connection within IAIS forms a major element of IAIS's future research strategy.