

Institution: Aberystwyth University

Unit of Assessment: 35

a. Context

The Department's evolving strategy for impact focuses on informing and influencing creative practice and policy through the development of positive relationships with communities and users external to the University, relationships which grow out of the research conducted by staff. It engages with a wide range of groups. These include in the area of creative practice, the creative and cultural industries and agencies (e.g. *Boomerang*); and in the area of policy, professional partners and policy makers (e.g. an invitation to address S4C executives on social media, media and language and an invitation to address the Welsh Government Communication Forum in 2013), public institutions (e.g. National Library of Wales), and communities and audiences, regionally, nationally and internationally, in both Welsh and English.

The Department organises research across three basic units and encourages cross unit collaboration. In the ***Theatre and Performance Research Group*** researchers are directly involved in professional theatre-making practices in Wales and beyond, in long-term and wide-ranging activities closely linked with their own academic research, 'generating new ways of thinking that influence creative practice beyond the academy.' This work impacts on the perceptions of audiences towards theatre, as a result of the innovatory creative work of staff in the department. It also impacts on the work of external professionals and theatre companies as users – assisted, enabled and inspired through direct collaboration with staff and through the provision of good models for practice in staff-created work. In the ***Film Television and Media Research Group*** researchers are involved in critically assessing and constructively supporting the media industries in Wales and beyond. Individual and group research activities impact upon professional practice and policy; they also contribute to the enhancement of creative expression beyond the academy, and to informing public perceptions both in and of Wales, within broadcast and other media. Members of the ***Welsh Theatre and Media Research Group*** are involved in researching theatre, performance, film, television and other media as well as addressing broader issues concerning the sustenance and promotion of minority languages in Wales and beyond. This work impacts on media professionals working in Europe's indigenous languages as well as governments (in particular through the work of the Mercator Institute for Media, Languages and Culture). It also impacts on theatre practitioners, at both a professional and community level in Wales (through work with, for example, National Theatre Wales and Theatr Genedlaethol Cymru).

b. Approach to impact

The Department aims to build long term relationships with key users by fostering strong links and systematically supporting this through planning and the allocation of resources. This involves cultivating relationships with theatre practitioners and with the media industries in Wales and internationally on issues of creative practice and policy.

Theatre and Performance Research Group

In the area of theatre and performance, the department has supported colleagues in developing a strong engagement with professional practice. Thus the work of our professional Creative Fellows, Eddie Ladd and Mike Brookes, along with that of Simon Banham, founder and director of the Manchester-based *Quarantine*, Professor David Rabey's *Lurking Truth Theatre Company* and Professor Mike Pearson's creative collaborations with Mike Brookes cultivate on-going interaction with the world of theatre and performance practice. The work of Lucy Gough who both teaches and researches in the department and writes for both theatre and broadcasting is a widely acclaimed and provides links for the department between the two areas. The Department's engagement in this area has supported the success of colleagues in that Mike Brookes, Eddie Ladd and Lucy Gough have all been Arts Council of Wales (ACW) Creative Wales award holders.

Film Television and Media Research Group

The Department has also encouraged and sustained a wide range of interactions with users in the area of film and television research over the years prior to and since 2008. The work of Professor Martin Barker on audience and reception studies involved commissioned research into audience responses to screened sexual violence for the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) within this REF round. This was done within the context of our strong links with the media industry which have been deliberately fostered over the years: Professor Elan Closs Stephens was Chair of S4C (1998-2002); a Governor of the British Film Institute until 2007 and since October 2010 the member for Wales on the BBC Trust. In 2008 the Department hosted the annual *Cyfrwng* conference that brings together scholars and representatives of the broadcasting industry and the Department building houses a BBC Wales radio studio. Interaction has been further developed through KESS scholarships in partnership with local media businesses including national independent television production companies *Cwmni Da* and *Boomerang* (www.boomerang.co.uk). Investment in new studio facilities enabled *Boomerang* to make its first programme in the department in 2011. Professor Tom O'Malley, Dr Jamie Medhurst and Dr Kate Woodward are regular commentators on media issues for BBC Cymru Wales radio and television.

Welsh Theatre and Media Research Group

The Department has similarly promoted vigorously high levels of interaction with the creative industries in Wales and Europe through the work of colleagues conducting research in the medium of Welsh. The *Mercator* Institute for Media, Languages and Culture organises projects and conferences with media professionals working in the indigenous languages of Europe. The department has KESS PhD scholarships with user organisations including the Welsh weekly magazine *Golwg*, the theatre development agency Creu Cymru. Fforest/Teifi Trails Theatre research is critically located by Dr Anwen Jones's work on national theatres in Wales including a public symposium with Theatr Genedlaethol Cymru (ThGC) and the Welsh Arts Council: '*Welsh medium national theatre: the way forward*', September 2010. Dr Kate Woodward is Vice-Chair of the Arts Council of Wales. The Department has KESS PhD scholarships on new media technologies with ThGC and on the ecology of youth theatre in digital culture with Aberystwyth-based theatre *Arad Goch*. Dr Roger Owen directs local community theatre company *Cwmni Troed-y-Rhiw*. Ames organises and directs and *Cyrff Ystwyth*, a company including Welsh-speaking adults with severe learning difficulties. Both generate new ways of conceiving of the form and function of theatre in Wales and strategies for sustaining rural communities

The Department has been conscious for a considerable period of the need to actively supported staff in their engagement with users. Thus it has mechanisms for sustaining close links with external bodies. Crucially, the Departmental Advisory Board includes in its membership: the Director of National Theatre Wales; the Director of Music Theatre Wales; a director of *Theatr Clwyd*; the Director, Corporate Affairs, S4C; and the Commissioning Editor, Arts, BBC Wales. The quality of the expertise on the Board provides a vital source of advice and support for colleagues. Linked to this is the fact that Knowledge Exchange and impact are kept to the fore of Departmental thinking by the presence of a Knowledge Exchange Manager who works closely with the Head of Department, The KE Manager provides essential information and support for staff, by assisting in the development of applications for industry related research in the form of Knowledge Exchange Studentships, Access to Master's programmes and Collaborative Doctoral Awards. The Head of Department and the Director of Research support this process by giving regular advice to staff making applications and engaging in contacts linked to our outward facing agenda. Impact is also discussed with staff at our regular Research Group meetings across the year. In addition the Department encourages staff to make use of the expertise available in the University's Research and Finance Offices when working on applications that have an outward facing dimension. Backing all this up the Department has extensive technical facilities and equipment and the support of expert technical staff. Eddie Ladd created *Ras Goffa Bobby Sands* in the department in 2009; *Cyrff Yswyth* holds its regular sessions and presents its performances in The Foundry Studio. The full range of facilities is available for public conferences and events such as the symposium on Welsh playwright Gwenlyn Parry in November 2011. Staff are kept fully informed of events and

opportunities through regular emails and advice on technical and administrative issues from our research and knowledge transfer administrators.

c. Strategy and plans

In addition to building and sustaining long term relationships with key users the rapidly changing economic and cultural environment in which the Department works demands flexible and forward-looking engagement. The Department will press forward an agenda on creative practice and policy engagement with an eye on key agendas around media policy, the environment and location, and the role of archives and their riches in the lives of people in Wales and beyond. To do this it will firstly respond to and seek to respond to the priorities of the Welsh Assembly Government by furthering research on digital economies and intervening in areas of policy development in relation to the creative industries in Wales, in particular in relation to the governance and future of public service broadcasting in Wales and Welsh-language broadcasting. Secondly it is developing collaborative projects examining the potentials of the humanities to enhance public appreciation and understanding of environmental change and its likely impacts on communities in rural Wales. Thirdly it plans to support the active targeting of staff work and provide context through public screenings and symposia of work designed to enhance public understanding and practitioner understanding of places and their representation. Fourthly, in collaboration with the National Library of Wales (NLW), Aberystwyth it will undertake a range of activities, including research, symposia, and exhibitions aimed at maximising public access to, and understanding of, its archival collections which cover a wide range of performance and media themes, in particular its newly acquired ITV Wales audio-visual archive.

d. Relationship to case studies

A total of seven case studies were considered during the assessment period. The four case studies being submitted best reflect the long-standing outward-facing work of the department in the areas of national theatre, performance, innovative community engagement and work with the creative industries. ***The Persians/ Coriolanus*** case study based on the work of Simon Banham, Mike Brookes and Professor Mike Pearson exemplifies ways in which practice-led academic research can impact upon both audiences and national institutions. Professor Heike Roms' case study ***What's Welsh for Performance? Beth yw 'Performance' yn Gymraeg: Locating the History of Performance Art in Wales*** – is chosen because of its range of public activities and engagements which inform public perception and institutional policy on matters of performance, whilst also revealing and promoting the practices of contemporary artists, particularly in Wales. The case study ***Capel: The Lights are On*** based on Margaret Ames's work with *Cyrff Ystwyth*, a company including Welsh-speaking adults with severe learning difficulties is chosen as an example of the significance of Welsh-medium research can have for enhancing the life experiences of a potentially disadvantaged community in a marginal location, work which has much wider implications. Merris Griffith's project ***Tween Audiences and Welsh-language Television Production – Knowledge Transfer and Commercial Benefit*** exemplifies the ways in which departmental research expertise is applied to the concerns of the cultural industries in a focused and critically engaged way, and has led to concrete benefits for the user.