

**Institution: University of Bedfordshire**

**Unit of Assessment: 35 - Music, Drama, Dance and Performing Arts**

**a. Context**

In 2008 a strategic decision was taken by the recently formed University of Bedfordshire, namely to implement and enhance research in Music, Drama, Dance and Performing Arts (MDDPA) by building upon the strengths of the department of performing arts and that of media, art and design. Research in the field is coordinated by the Research Institute for Media, Art and Performance (RIMAP) which is part of the Faculty of Creative Arts, Technologies and Science (CATS). RIMAP, led by Professor Garry Whannel, promotes staff research and doctoral studentship through a number of schemes. The Institute has research specialisms in new media publishing, cross-media integration, political communication, journalism, sport and the media, community radio, performance and creative writing

Within RIMAP – and the core of this unit of assessment submission – sits the Centre for Applied Research in Dance (CARD), which supports and promotes excellence in research in e-dance and knowledge transfer between the academic and professional domains within the subject. CARD enhances learning and teaching in dance through the development of advanced scholarship in the subject by hosting externally funded research projects (see b).

Research is developed to respond to staff expertise in professional practice and to current developments in both the academic and professional – or industry facing – music, drama dance and performance contexts. Such a culture is informed by, and benefits from, a well-established interdisciplinary vision, promoted by and within RIMAP.

Key to research in MDDPA at the University of Bedfordshire are four distinctive, though interrelated approaches to performance studies: 1) practice as research; 2) technologies of performance; 3) performance science; 4) new histories and historiographies.

Each approach informs one or more of the research narratives of the current research culture in MDDPA, as well as the way research-active members of staff explore how diverse compositional, dramatic choreographic, performance-making and somatic practices can generate new insights into the notions of art and art-making. Such explorations, in turn, question and challenge existing discourses and long-held beliefs in the various fields. Thanks to the support mentioned further on, research active staff members are helped achieve both national and international reputation, through publications, participation in projects and performance making. It is such reputation that attracts, postgraduate research students, often interested in operating within the parameters of Practice as Research (PaR) – the main strand of the MDDPA's research culture.

**b. Approach to impact**

**Staff professional and creative practices**

In line with the strategic research plan developed in 2008, research active members of staff within MDDPA are invited to engage in research and enterprise that is applicable to and usable by the professional areas with which those researchers engage and/or by the community they aim to serve. Within MDDPA, therefore, the majority of staff members are actively involved in professional and creative practices at local, national or international levels. In terms of impact, therefore, their research is applicable to the professions they interact with and contributes to the work of colleagues in practice, while informing policies. Such interaction is paramount in keeping abreast of industry trends and to impact effectively on audiences and stakeholders. At the same time, the involvement with professional practices promotes the interdisciplinary work that is at the core of MDDPA, as each of the supporting bodies facilitates the creation of multi-disciplinary dialogues with the professional artistic world and related industries. Since 2008, the majority of these subject specific creative practices based project has been in the context of dance and theatre and has attracted considerable interest and funding as demonstrated by the grants have been received in

**Impact template (REF3a)**

the reporting period: £79,000 Arts Council England Grants for the Arts Award for the three-year project *dancedigital* (2011-14); a £28,000 Arts Council England Grants for the Arts Award for the 12-month theatre project *Ash* (2012) and a £15,500 Arts Council of England Grants for the Arts Award for a 9-month project *Composite Bodies: Networked Choreography* (2010).

**Directorships**

Staff members are also supported in operating as directors of arts organisations, through which research impact is also secured. For example, Dr Giannandrea Poesio is the Chairman of the European Association of Dance Historians and Dr Tamara Ashley is seconded for 0.2 FTE to *dancedigital* as Artistic Director of the organisation. The former is an active, research oriented and research promoting association that proposes a constant re-thinking of ways to make and consider dance history. The association, which numbers 110 members across Europe and the US, organises annual international conferences which explore the relationship between dance and other disciplines, in line with the demands of established scholars as well as of early career researchers – to whom the Association offers mentoring schemes and processes.

*dancedigital* is a dance technology agency with a national and international remit for fostering and promoting the relationship between dance and technology within the professional dance context. This dance organisation, which has been active on both the national and the international scene for the past fifteen years has led and still leads the development of innovations in choreography and new technologies. The organisation works nationally and internationally to advance digital dance, performance, choreography and community engagement. Based in Essex, Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire, the organisation works in partnership with numerous local, national and international partners to run artistic, research, creative learning and community engagement programmes. *dancedigital* is also one of the arts organisations resident within the Arts Hub, the arts incubation centre situated at the Polhill Campus and managed by Professor Helen Bailey

**Support**

Within RIMAP, staff members are supported in a variety of ways to undertake research activities, produce research outputs and disseminate research findings. RIMAP and CARD provide funding for a range of research activities, as well as support for the development and submission of research bids for externally funded research projects. Recent successful achievements in this area include: a £500,000 AHRC DEDEFI Large Research Grant for *MiPP: Movement in Place Platform* (2010-12) and a £400,000 AHRC-EPSRC-JISC e-Science Scheme Award Large Research Grant for the three-year *e-Dance Project – Relocating Choreographic Process: the Impact of Collaborative Memory and Grid Technologies on Practice-led Research in Dance* (2007-10).

The support received by RIMAP and CARD is complemented by interaction with both the Knowledge Hub and the Office for Research and Enterprise. While the former acts as a gateway for the University to reach out to organisations and for them to access expertise within the University, the latter spearheads the drive for research and enterprise at the University, and facilitates working with local, regional, national and international communities and businesses, as well as building new links and actively seeking new potential partnerships.

**c. Strategy and plans**

Considerable progress with research in MDDPA has been made at the University of Bedfordshire since 2008. Such success is the current driving force of our strategic five-year plans for further research developments. Key to such vision remains the involvement of staff members in professional and creative practices, whether they be early career researchers or more experienced ones. With the support highlighted in the previous sections, MDDPA will continue to focus on the winning of high profile research grants linked, though not limited to interaction with professional realities.

An example of such a strategic approach and plans is the *Mobilities* research scheme, focused on the development of new digital dance performance works. The scheme, spearheaded by Senior Lecturer and *dancedigital* Artistic Director Dr Tamara Ashley with Professor Helen Bailey and Dr Sue Hawksley investigates models of making and thinking in digital dance performance. This research builds upon the success of the 2011 national conference *Digital Futures in Dance*,

spearheaded by Dr Ashley, and aims to establish creative collaborations with eleven dance artists, who benefit from working with dance scholars while developing new digital based choreography. The research, the findings of which will be presented at the *Mobilities Festival* in April 2014, focuses on an investigation of processes and practices of contemporary digital dance performance through an analytical study of the eleven professional dance artists. The team of academics from the University engages thus in a macro-enquiry that seeks to uncover and understand patterns of practice across the artistic projects undertaken by the artists. As such, the project, funded by the Arts Council England through a grant to *dancedigital*, will provide a unique practical insight into the development of digital dance that bridges academic and artistic research, theory development and production. .

Central to our five-year plan are:

- 1) implementation, continuation and further consolidation of collaborative and interdisciplinary work through associations with scholarly institutions such as the US-based Society for Dance Research, Sadler's Wells Theatre, National Youth Theatre, and Milton Keynes Theatre;
- 2) strengthening and further explorations of new technologies in relation to MDPPA;
- 3) implementation of an internationally recognised Dance Science culture, in the light of the growing demand in the sector and the unique possibilities offered by the existing sport labs the University has already.
- 4) maximizing of research impact through publicizing the Division's activities nationally and internationally through multiple channels – web-based, print or film.
- 5) building staff and student capacity: creating new Professors and readers in the fields of both performing Arts and Dance; encouraging new researchers; participating in professional development opportunities regionally and nationally; and increasing the research student cohort.
- 6) dissemination of the results and the findings of the practice based and evidence led academic activity at conferences – MDDPA members benefit from the University being a corporate member of leading theatre, dance and music associations such as Society for Dance History Scholars (USA), Society for Theatre Research, Society for Dance Research - in publications and increasingly as key note speakers at prestigious events

**d. Relationship to case studies**

Each of the two case studies represent a factual application of the distinctive, though interrelated approaches to research within MDDPA, discussed in section a in line with the strategies and the plans outlined in b.

**Case Study 1**

Case Study 1 builds on the ongoing exploration of new technologies in relation to performance making, in line with a salient strand of MDDPA's approach to research (namely 2. 'performance technologies'. In addition, this particular Case Study draws upon one of the most successful collaborative and interdisciplinary activities undertaken by the staff member and *dancedigital*, in line with the strategy outlined above.

**Case Study 2:**

This case study draws upon and stems from the combination of two of the salient approaches to research listed in section a (1. 'practice as research' and 2. 'new histories and historiographies'), which are core to the university's research culture within the context of MDDPA. This case study outlines the significance of a collaboration between the academic and the professional worlds.