

Institution: University of Aberdeen
Unit of Assessment: UoA 29 - English Language and Literature
<p>a. Context</p> <p>The pursuit of research impact is encouraged both by the general ethos of the School and by specific institutional initiatives and structures. The three disciplines in English – Literature, Creative Writing, and Language and Linguistics – approach impact in different ways and often target different constituencies, but their efforts are mutually supportive and are reinforced by initiatives elsewhere in the School and University. Research centres play a vital part in this process: all have remits beyond the purely academic, and some have an outstanding record in attracting public interest in (and funding of) research, and in using academic research to inform and influence public debate. Individual scholars and writers have also been successful in winning audiences beyond the academic, and in creating cultural and economic impact with their work, through publication, broadcasting, consultation and other forms of dissemination. Colloquia, conferences, public readings and festivals hosted at Aberdeen routinely involve members of the public, and researchers in the unit maintain close links with local schools, colleges and other educational institutions, as well as with libraries, museums, heritage sites, book clubs, debating societies and other public forums across Scotland and beyond. As the case studies and other examples below illustrate, literary and linguistic research, and creative writing are actively used to advance public understanding of Scotland’s cultural and intellectual heritage, English language and literature generally, and cultural ties with other countries. Even seemingly specialised areas of research such as textual editing and dialectology are promoted as topics of public interest and concern.</p> <p>b. Approach to impact</p> <p>Questions of impact feature at all stages of the research process at Aberdeen, from postgraduate supervision to staff appraisal and strategic planning. Within English, a particularly important role is played by research centres, which coordinate the research of many members of staff and postgraduates, generate external funding bids and maintain extensive networks of contacts with other academic and cultural institutions, media organisations and private individuals. Another distinctive feature of the unit is the balance it maintains between local, national and international constituencies in its pursuit of impact. As well as being an institution with a global reach, the University has a substantial local student recruitment, creating a large pool of alumni with a continuing interest in the research of Aberdeen staff, as demonstrated by the popular <i>Café Scientifique</i>, <i>Café MED</i>, <i>Café Controversial</i> and <i>Café Connect</i> series (evening events run by academics in local cafés and bookshops, dovetailing with book launches and readings by creative writing staff) and by the huge success of Aberdeen’s annual WORD Festival.</p> <p>An example of the strategic approach to impact is the Walter Scott Research Centre, which helped to coordinate the acclaimed <i>Edinburgh Edition of the Waverley Novels</i> (completed in 2012) over a twenty year period, and has been instrumental in promoting the edition, the insights it produced, and Scott’s work generally, to the widest possible audience. The Edition has generated over 100,000 sales and transformed public understanding of Scott’s novels and how they shaped the literary tradition and cultural heritage of Scotland and Europe. Impact has been facilitated through extensive staff links with libraries, museums, discussion clubs and heritage sites, notably Scott’s home at Abbotsford, on whose Advisory Board Lumsden and Hewitt serve. Through talks at Abbotsford itself (2009) and venues such as the Edinburgh New Club (2010), as well as public exhibitions at the Edinburgh Writers’ Museum and National Library of Scotland (2009), the editors have also made textual editing itself a matter of lively public interest, tapping the bibliographic imagination of non-academic audiences and furthering public understanding of the importance of editorial decision-making within the writing and publishing process. The expertise of Aberdeen staff has proved instrumental in the development of several projects related to Abbotsford, including a successful Heritage Lottery Fund bid for a new Visitors’ Centre, thus enhancing Scotland’s heritage and tourism economies. This multi-faceted approach to impact is made possible by the collaborative nature of this editorial project, the embedding of research in institutional structures such as research centres, and the close ties maintained by Aberdeen staff with the broader community.</p>

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Other examples of the relationship between research centres and impact can be found in case studies 1 (*The Penguin Book of Irish Poetry*) and 3 (*Language and Linguistic Evidence in the 1641 Depositions*), both of which have been facilitated, in different ways, by the Research Institute of Irish and Scottish Studies (RIISS), headed by **Craig**. RIISS also hosted (2000-2010) an annual 'Language and Politics' conference, which brought together academics, language activists and policy makers to discuss the future of minority languages in Ireland and Scotland, helping to shape national policy in both countries (see Kirk, *Language and Politics of the Gaeltacht and Scotstacht, 2000–2010: Review and Impact*, 2011). Another of its events with discernible cultural impact is the Irish-Scottish Forums, which address general cultural issues, including literature and language, and involve a wide range of politicians, policy makers, civil servants and professionals from public institutions in both Ireland and Scotland.

The Centre for the Novel's many outreach activities have included research-led workshops with 30 local schoolteachers (2012 and 2013) and the highly successful Dickens Programme (2012), organised by **Hutchison** in conjunction with Library and Events staff. The latter combined talks by high-profile academics with public readings, a special screening of David Lean's *Great Expectations*, a keynote lecture by Aberdeen alumnus James Naughtie (attended by 275), an exhibition of Dickens material in Special Collections and Archives, and a dramatic performance by Miriam Margoyles (capacity audience of 700). This interweaving of academic and non-academic events extended public understanding of literary research and led directly to the creation of a new, Aberdeen branch of the Dickens Fellowship. Todd, the Centre's former director, has taken her research on Austen to a broader public through a series of publications and outreach activities including a Broadview paperback edition of the *Manuscript Works* (2012), a popular introduction to Austen for Carlton Books (2013), a Connell Guide to *Pride and Prejudice* (2010), the 2011 Annual Lecture of the Jane Austen Society, an article on law and inheritance in Austen for *Barclay's Bank* magazine, and her involvement in a BBC Jane Austen's Rogues and Romances Facebook Game.

Cultivating, and responding to, public interest in literature and criticism are also primary aims of the annual WORD Festival, founded and directed by **Spence**, which has provided a forum for both creative writing and literary research since 1999. The Festival, hosted at the University, brings together local, national and international writers; combines literature, music and other art forms; attracts around 10,000 visitors each year; and receives extensive media coverage. The Festival has been a vital platform for new creative work by Aberdeen staff, pump-priming the reception process while also drawing public attention to the symbiotic relationship between academic research and creative activity. This is illustrated by case study 2 (*NORTH/EAST: Cultural Links between Scotland and Japan, 19th Century to Present Day*) and by the career profiles of **Price** and **Lynch**, both of whose work was launched at WORD. Since 2009, the Festival has included a 'European Voices' strand, aimed in part at Aberdeen's large Polish community and supported by the Bednarowski Trust and Polish Consulate; this has led to new translations and creative collaborations. English staff also regularly present on literary and linguistic topics at WORD, notably through the annual Linklater lecture (on Scottish writing), winning new audiences for their academic research. The WORD programme is planned in conjunction with the Centre for the Novel and with Aberdeen's Belmont Cinema and The Lemon Tree, a leading arts venue. Writers, actors, film directors, journalists and scholars freely intermix during the Festival, breaking down barriers between different cultural domains and mediating academic and artistic research to a diverse audience, both locally and, through media coverage, nationally and internationally.

Individual researchers also engage with wider publics. **Janus**, for example, has presented her theoretical work on Jean-Luc Nancy and Beckett to non-academic audiences through an exhibition catalogue at Gallery West, The Hague, for video artists John Wood and Paul Harrison, and through the journal *The Vacuum*, sponsored by the Northern Irish Arts Council, in its special issue on the International Samuel Beckett Festival held in Enniskillen in 2012. **Millar's** AHRC-funded 'Fisher speak' project, studying lexical change in Scottish fishing communities, involved members of the public as both subjects and users, and has attracted international media coverage (e.g. press interviews on the death of the 'last speaker' of Cromarty dialect, 2012).

c. Strategy and plans

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Research centres will continue to play an important role in stimulating research projects and funding bids, and enabling research teams and individual scholars to maximise the impact of their work. The redesign of the School's administrative structures in 2012 has allowed greater collective input into decisions about the allocation of resources, including support for research centres, research travel, colloquia and outreach activities. This has fostered greater awareness of the strategic importance of impact and ways of achieving this.

The School's successful half-day Impact Forum, piloted in 2012, will be repeated on a regular basis, allowing staff to share experience and explore new initiatives and collaborations. So too will the University's impact workshops, designed to alert staff to institutional mechanisms for supporting impact and to report on the broader evolution of the impact agenda in higher education. The need to document and quantify the effects of impact as part of the process of research audit has led to new initiatives such as the appointment of a Public Engagement Officer (with dedicated secretarial support) within the School, and, at University level, the establishment of an Office of Public Affairs (part of the Communications Office) and a dedicated Public Engagement with Research Unit, supporting the embedding of public engagement in the research process.

It is envisaged that the School's Public Engagement Officer (Cameron) will play an increasing role in future, offering support to individual staff and research centres on the cultivation and monitoring of impact. The School will also continue to share its expertise in public engagement training both locally and nationally. **Fennell**, for example, is Chair of the national THiNK network, which promotes knowledge exchange between policy makers and practitioners in arts and humanities, and led two national events on Knowledge Exchange in the Era of Impact in 2013, in London and Aberdeen. She also received £3k internal funding in 2012 for a series of University-wide workshops in Digital Humanities and e-support, with impact as one of its objectives.

Questions of impact are addressed in the yearly meetings of research staff with the School's Director of Research, with a view to identifying at an early stage projects with impact potential, discussing ways of developing this, and alerting researchers to staff development training opportunities. The increasing importance of impact in external funding applications is stressed in these meetings as well as in the vetting of applications by the School Research Committee. Where appropriate, impact is also a criterion in the allocation of funds by the Research Travel Subcommittee and, at University level, by the Principal's Excellence Fund and Interdisciplinary Fund, and Knowledge Transfer schemes. The University continues to develop its impact infrastructure and is a signatory to the Public Engagement Manifesto 2012.

d. Relationship to case studies

The case studies have been chosen to exemplify the impact of research in the three areas of English, to illustrate a variety of forms of impact and types of end-user, and to highlight impact at local, national and international levels. The first charts the impact of an ambitious new anthology of Irish poetry edited by **Crotty** which has transformed public awareness of the range and quality of Irish verse in multiple languages across seventeen centuries, attracting new readers and making available many previously inaccessible or untranslated poems. Its production involved close collaboration with other poets, scholars and translators, and its dissemination beyond academia has been assisted by the international networks, high public profile, and media experience of RIISS. The second case study documents the impact of an historical novel by **Spence** which has enhanced cultural ties between Scotland and Japan, extended public understanding of the history of globalisation, and had wide artistic and educational influence. The project was fostered by the intersection of creative writing with other disciplines in the University, and by a research environment responsive to both local and international publics. The third case study demonstrates how a multidisciplinary linguistic research project, led by **Fennell**, on a digitized corpus of early modern witness statements has shed new light on the roots of the Protestant-Catholic divide in Ireland and the UK that has contributed to contemporary public debate and reconciliation events. It builds on a previous collaborative project generated by RIISS and researchers at Trinity College Dublin. A follow-on project will involve further cross-disciplinary collaboration within and beyond the University, with opportunities for impact on topical questions of law and legal testimony.