

Institution: Aberystwyth University

Unit of Assessment: 34

a. Context

The School of Art (SoA) seeks to enhance our **the cultural life** and contribute to **public education** within local, national and international contexts. Beneficiaries include visitors to galleries and museum, professional artists and crafts-persons, recreational artists, tourists, curators, dealers, conservators, collectors, school teachers and educationalists as well as arts and bookstore managers and publishers. Impact is delivered through a variety of activities (outlined below) that demonstrate the responsibility of the SoA, as custodian of an art collection and recipient of public funding, to visibly and measurably communicate its research to an ever wider audience.

Impact is conceived in terms of cause and effect: the SoA's movement towards the public, and their reaction to that movement. The substance of our impact-orientated research is currently undertaken through the history of art and visual culture, exhibition curation, and visual and sound practice in the following areas: **a)** art history in Britain and Australia since 1800, with a particular interest in drawing, painting, printmaking, photography, the visual culture of the Judaeo-Christian religion, and art in Wales; and **b)** art practice through drawing, painting, performance, photograph, printmaking, and sound.

Since RAE2008, the objectives and focus of our research impact have been to:

1. retrieve, restore, preserve, reassess, revise and re-present artists, careers, practices, and artefacts that have been either lost, marginalized or overlooked. This has been achieved through researched and curated exhibitions (at provincial and national art institutions in the UK and abroad), the interpretation of fine art works, publications, public lectures and performances, and by setting up public-access databases and digital archives (SoA Collections and Ceramic Archive);
2. contribute to the culture and heritage of Wales, in particular, and of the UK, by enhancing national awareness of indigenous and broader art practices and histories. This has been done in collaboration with publically-funded institutions (such as the National Library of Wales, National Museum Wales, Royal Commission of Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales, CyMAI, Royal Academy of Arts, and Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery);
3. generate public enthusiasm for, exposure to, and participation within, public discussion and interaction through the provision exhibitions and private views (at the SoA Galleries and elsewhere), and a programme of public lunchtime lectures, print workshops and engagement with local art societies; and
4. broaden the reach of the SoA research culture and activities through the origination of, and participation in, conferences and colloquia aimed not only at academics but also secondary school teachers and pupils, and public-art organisations (through workshops, gallery tours, &c.).

The anticipated public responses to, and benefits arising from, these initiatives included: **a)** public engagement with, and a cultivated appreciation of, art works and artists that might not otherwise be seen; **b)** an understanding that art and its history are constructions, and that art history consists not only of the received canon but also of artworks and practices which presently lie outside it; **c)** an awareness that art works are neither self-sustaining nor self-interpreting but require practical and scholarly management and custodianship; **d)** cognizance of the wealth of visual, textual, and other material (related to Wales and elsewhere) that is not currently on the walls of museums or in art history books but either forgotten or concealed in archives, collections, stores, and documentation.

b. Approach to impact

The SoA has, historically, encouraged impact through a supportive environment where such activities are considered a natural result of research. However, during the period of assessment the SoA has taken the opportunity to move to a more formal and strategic approach to impact. The SoA had determined that outputs currently in process or in conception would (where appropriate) include a bespoke impact strategy. This involved:

1. maintaining records for each project/output (e.g. attendance figures for exhibitions, gallery comment books, blog posts, e-messages, and Tweets, reviews and press cuttings, media interviews, web-site usage statistics, and citations in non-academic publications);
2. identifying target and potential audiences and how they can be developed (e.g. school students and teachers, curriculum developers, museum curators, art dealers, arts administrators, art clubs and societies, and the general public);
3. identifying ways in which to improve public participation in a project (through the provisions of exhibitions, workshops, conferences and colloquia, talks and tours);
4. improving public access to, and the visibility of, research (using the SoA Collections and Ceramic Archive databases, websites dedicated to specific projects, and AU's CADAIR repository); and
5. developing impact awareness and expertise by encouraging research staff through the provision of departmental and university training events, sharing best practice, and making Impact an item for discussion at staff appraisals and meetings of the SoA Research Committee.

Outputs, such as exhibitions, that had an obvious public interface and a culture of metrics were chosen as the ground for, and an exemplification of, the development of an approach to research impact. The exhibitions have been supported both either by public and research-council funding or by the SoA's own museum and gallery trust funds for preservation and dissemination of artworks. Our originated exhibitions, whether local to the SoA's galleries, or designed to tour also, have always acknowledged public support and through accompanying catalogues and gallery literature has sought to be explanatory and inclusive of broad knowledge base. (The two case studies were chosen on this basis, and also because the outputs would be published sufficiently prior to the REF deadline for a degree of impact to be achieved and evaluated.)

c. Strategy and plans

In essence, the SoA's present impact strategy is to direct its researchers' efforts towards civic service in the implementation of an academic mission that seeks to enlarge the scope and number of the beneficiaries of research in responsive collaboration with public institutions.

During the period of assessment the SoA's Research Committee undertook a strategic review of impact, culminating in the production of an Impact Strategy in 2012 (which would underpin activities over the next three years). This builds on our present perceptions and practice, and will ensure that an impact sensibility is built into the conception of new research projects. The impact strategy has two elements: first, to ensure that an impact awareness and objectives are incorporated into the design of all new research projects; and, secondly, that impact sensibility and practice is supported, developed, and sustained by departmental and university training and monitoring procedures.

Establish Objectives to: **a)** determine the target beneficiaries, contact them, and develop and manage contacts; **b)** to be responsive to public institutions and bodies who are seeking academic partners; **c)** anticipate the public outcomes of research; **d)** determine the 'research effect' (that is, the degree of change or difference the research has made); **e)** develop audience awareness of projects from inception to publication and beyond; **f)** explore the possibility of present research development and outputs in non-traditional venues, familiar to a general public (such as art centres, public libraries, and chapels and churches); **g)** explore ways in which more esoteric

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research can be made accessible for non-academic audiences; **h**) develop mechanisms for networking and communicating with the audience (using social media); **i**) encourage participation in, and discussion about, the project by potential beneficiaries and public bodies (at symposia and workshops); **j**) cultivate personal contacts with local and national media and journalists; **k**) take a proactive role in AU's *Directory of Expertise*; and **i**) develop feedback mechanisms to receive and evaluate responses to the project at inception, during its course, on completion, and afterwards.

Develop Promotion through: **a**) media channels (articles in local and national newspapers, TV and radio, internet fora, social networking sites, and mail shots); **b**) reports and briefings (to participating bodies etc.) on the project in process and on conclusion; **c**) websites dedicated to the projects that include descriptors, progress reports, responses; **d**) events to mark inauguration and conclusion of projects; conferences and workshops to explore and disseminate aspects of the project (presenting 'teaser/trailer' summaries of the research); **e**) the publication of mailshots, e-flyers, and reports outlining the nature, progress, and outcome and findings of project and, additionally of research in non-academic magazines and journals; **f**) the development of 'spin-off' outcomes derived from examples of pure research; **g**) the dissemination of hard copies of exhibition catalogues to public libraries; and **h**) image projection and packaging through the development of a 'brand' or product identity, graphics, and associable visual style.

d. Relationship to case studies

The two case studies (Cruise and Meyrick) were chosen on the basis that their exhibition and publication outputs provided, already, more obvious, evidential, and trackable set of impact metrics, considerable potential for public interest in the outputs, and a broad reach. Furthermore, they addressed many of the definitive and prominent features of the SoA research culture. Both case studies manifest originated exhibitions, demonstrated an interpretative role in relation to their subjects, collaboration with national public institutions in Wales and further afield, and a generated a range of associated events directed at a public audience. In these respects, the studies exemplified ambitions and aspirations that typified the SoA's present and future approach to Impact. In particular, Impact is engaged as follows:

- In both cases, the projects' exhibition dimension has demonstrated a curatorial engagement with public collections in the UK and USA, and an exposure of their research at major public museums and galleries in the UK and abroad.
- Projects such as Meyrick's work on Williams and Lee have brought together works from private and public collections that might not otherwise have received exposure.
- Public commentary derived from visitor books and journalists demonstrate considerable populist interest and enthusiasm. Media coverage by the BBC and national newspapers was a significant means of enhancing the projects' dissemination and influence.
- Much of their work provides authoritative and unique presentations of, and insights into, their subjects, articulated in such a way as to be accessible to public and scholars alike.
- Attendance figures at host museums testify to considerable public interest in this research that was in excess of normal expectation.
- Both cases the textual and presentational elements of the projects serve a broad clientele including gallery and museum curators, educators, and curriculum advisors.
- The projects have spawned invitations to public lectures to art societies and regional groups, as well as television and radio appearances.
- Meyrick's work has contributed to enhancing an understanding and awareness of art, culture and heritage in Wales, while Cruise has drawn due attention to a neglected field of drawing in the UK.
- The exhibitions were accompanied by major publications that will help ensure impact in the mid and long term.