

Institution: University College London

Unit of Assessment: 33 - Theology and Religious Studies

a. Context

The impact of research carried out by UCL's Department of Hebrew and Jewish Studies is driven by a commitment to sharing our research findings with the public, and a keen awareness of the significance of our work to the identities, cultures, and social life of Jews and non-Jews in the UK and abroad. The diversity of expertise in the Department ensures our relevance to a wide cross-section of the public, who have in common an interest in Jewish history and literature, Israel studies, Jewish languages, and Judaism. Our research users and audiences include local and international communities, cultural heritage bodies, the mass media, non-HE educational institutions, and the general public in London, the UK, and internationally. Our research contributes to the intellectual, cultural, and spiritual wellbeing of these audiences, supports their engagement with important socio-cultural debates, broadens their understanding and appreciation of Jewish cultural heritage, and more widely promotes the quality of cultural life and multi-ethnic relations in contemporary society. Thus, for example, Berkowitz's research on British Jews' involvement in sport, which has been widely reported in the popular media, has kindled public interest both in the Unit's research itself and in important social issues relating to local history and genealogy (see case study UCL33-IDE). Other areas of research have had beneficial impacts on local and international communities through their use as the basis for community-based teaching, outreach lectures, public performances, and popular publications.

b. Approach to impact

Public engagement activities are central to our approach to achieving research impact. We run and contribute to regular activities and events for non-academic audiences, including public workshops and conferences held at UCL. For example, key aspects of Guesnet's research on Eastern European Jewry, which highlights the complexity of the coexistence of Jews and non-Jews, have been communicated to public audiences via four international conferences at UCL (2010 – 2011), attracting a total c.500 participants from both academic and non-academic backgrounds. These conferences addressed contentious and divisive issues in contemporary Eastern European politics and society and generated lively debates between academics, politicians, diplomats, and members of the public. In particular, members of both Jewish and non-Jewish communities of Eastern European origin were challenged to question and reassess their understanding of their own cultural heritage.

Our main, institutional organ for public engagement is the **Institute of Jewish Studies (IJS)**, which has provided an important platform for our achievement of research impact. The IJS has enhanced our capacity to share research insights with public audiences through annual conferences and public lecture series freely open to all. In 2011/12, 20 lectures were delivered to a total audience of 800. IJS conferences, which are convened by staff members on themes related to their research, attract primarily non-academic audiences of 80-200 people. The 3-day summer conference of 2012, for instance, attracted 75 delegates per day.

To extend the reach of their impact to established networks beyond the Unit itself, we frequently run our public conferences in partnership with **external organizations** such as the Polish Cultural Institute, the Polish and Lithuanian Embassies, and the Moroccan British Society. We also actively contribute to the public events and conferences of external organizations, including:

- The Jewish Book Week. This major annual literary festival is held in London and provides a platform for cultural, political and social debate, showcasing the work of writers, publishers and translators from the UK and abroad. Ratner has been on the council and programme committee since 2007; she and other of our staff are also regular contributors to the festival, which last year attracted more than 1,500 participants.
- The annual Limmud conference. A major forum of Jewish education, the Limmud conference is described on its website as 'the world's most influential Jewish event'. Bringing together more than 2500 people of all ages from across the globe, it provides an important platform for engagement with a large non-academic audience; our staff have made eight contributions since 2008.

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- Summer courses. Beer has been Director of the annual Yiddish summer course at SOAS since 2002 (c. 60 attendees), and is a regular participant at similar, triennial courses in Brussels and Paris, each of which attracts about 70 attendees.

Our research has also been used in the **museums sector** in the UK and elsewhere to inform the development of exhibitions. These provide benefit to large sections of the visiting public by promoting understanding of their historical roots and sense of belonging, and of the relevance of the historical past to present-day society. Exhibitions to which we have contributed include:

- 'Lisbon': (October-November 2012) a major exhibition in Lisbon (see UCL33-LOC).
- 'Ghetto Warriors': an exhibition at the Jewish Museum, London (see UCL33-IDE).
- 'The Jewish calendar': since 2011 Stern has provided consultancy to the Yeshiva University Museum, New York, to support its development of an important new exhibition for 2015, which will be based largely on Stern's research on calendars.

Engagement through the **media and performing arts** has, similarly, allowed us to extend both the reach and the range of benefits arising from our research, including through the following:

- Radio: Berkowitz discussed his research on Jewish sportsmanship on the BBC Radio 4 series 'Sport and the British' (8 & 14 July 2010, 15 February 2012); Lochery's research featured on ABC Australian, KVON, and Dutch National News (2011); Kahn's work on Hebrew language featured in the BBC World Service's series 'Heart and Soul' (March 2011); Ratner's work on Israeli fiction informed the BBC programme 'The Verb' (May 2008).
- Television: Stern appeared on Ethiopian TV to discuss world calendars (June 2008), and Lochery made numerous appearances between 2008 and 2011 on BBC News, Press TV (Iran), and other channels to discuss his research on Middle Eastern affairs. In August 2011 Berkowitz was invited on the basis of his expertise in Jews and criminality to contribute to the BBC's hugely popular series 'Who Do You Think You Are' (audience of 5.82 million; repeated May 2012).
- Film: Drawing on his research on Jewish economic history in Eastern Europe, Guesnet appeared as an expert interviewee in the British film-director Dan Edelstyn's 2012 film, 'How to Re-establish a Vodka Empire'.
- Performing arts: in 2009 Beer co-founded the UCL East European Choir, which performs widely in the UK and includes a Yiddish repertoire informed by Beer's research. In 2012, seven performances were given in London and Brighton to audiences of 150-600.

Our **community-based teaching activities**, usually in the form of single talks or short courses, constitute a further, vital facet of our approach to engaging broad public audiences. They are generally undertaken in partnership with synagogues, Jewish societies and cultural centres, schools, and 6th-form centres both within London, across the UK, and internationally. An indicative example of this very extensive activity is Stern's use of his research on early rabbinic attitudes to paganism as the basis for his classes on Talmud *Avodah Zarah* at Hampstead Garden Suburb Synagogue, to an average of 12 participants per week. Geller lectured at the South Hampstead Synagogue on his research on ancient Near Eastern science; Ratner ran an Israeli Film Club in 2007-10, fortnightly at UCL and open to the public; Lochery delivered lectures in two schools in Portugal about his research on Lisbon in WW2; Berkowitz lectured on 'Jews and boxing in Britain' to Immanuel College (London) A-level history students (28/03/12). Kahn and Ratner's research on Hebrew language and literature has been used to develop teaching resources, training, and curriculum for secondary schools in the UK.

Another important pathway to research-led impact is our production of **popular publications** such as Kahn's *Colloquial Yiddish* (2011), a language textbook for classroom and independent learning based on her linguistic research. It has been extremely well-received by teachers as far afield as the USA and Australia (1137 copies sold to date), and has promoted the popular revival of Yiddish worldwide. Lochery's *Lisbon*, a popular history of Lisbon's involvement in WW2, has been very well received, appearing in several sold-out editions and translated into Portuguese, Brazilian Portuguese and Spanish (UCL33-LOC). Our staff also contribute regularly to popular publications in the UK and abroad, from journals such as *Jewish Renaissance* (Beer, Ratner; circulation: 2000) to daily newspapers and their supplements, such as *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (Nothhaft; circ. 380,000), *Polish Observer* (Guesnet; circ. 30,000), *Haaretz* (Ratner, circ. 72,000).

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Further impacts have been achieved through **consultancy** to a variety of educational, policy-making, cultural and community-focused bodies in the UK and overseas. Guesnet, for example, has advised community project 'Bürgerstiftung Neukölln' (Berlin) on a mentoring programme; Ratner has acted as Subject Chair for AQA's GCSE Boards (since 2009); Berkowitz advises the Jewish Historical Society (as their journal editor since 2012). All our staff give regular, expert advice to journalists, amateur historians, clergy, genealogists, and so on.

Although individual members of staff are often solely responsible for instituting and maintaining working relationships with external partners, our collegiate approach to impact has facilitated the productive sharing of these contacts. For example, Stern's invitation to speak at the Shomrei Hadas Synagogue, Hampstead (2011), led to Guesnet being invited for a lecture series in the same venue (2011-13). Contacts were similarly shared by Beer and Rapoport in their consultancies for BBC producer Mark Savage's Radio 3 programme on 'Yiddish' (30/11/2008).

c. Strategy and plans

The Department is united in its commitment to maximising the impact of its excellent research, particularly by fulfilling our duty to share our research findings with a broad non-academic public. To that end, we will encourage staff to maintain and expand the successful and effective public engagement activities described above. We intend to:

- **Build on the success of the Institute of Jewish Studies** as a platform for public engagement. Collaboration with external partners will be expanded, for example with foreign embassies and new partners such as the Israel Medical Association and colleagues from UCL Medical Sciences for the IJS Conference 2014.
- **Develop our links with partners in the museums sector:** Lochery will negotiate the transfer of his 'Lisbon' exhibition to a permanent venue in Lisbon. Berkowitz is planning to move his 'Ghetto Warriors' exhibition to UCL Art Museum. Stern will continue to provide expert consultancy to the Yeshiva University Museum in developing its exhibition on the Jewish calendar.
- **Develop a Moodle site in 2014/15 to record and share impact-related activities** within the Department. This will help us recognise and share best practice examples of impact-generating projects, catalyse collaborative activities within the Unit, and highlight opportunities for individual staff to broaden their networks of external partners. Research students will be encouraged to contribute to the Moodle site and to treat impact activities as an important aspect of their professional development.
- **Take impact into account in making strategic research decisions.** For example, Smelik will prioritise research projects and funding applications in the area of Late Aramaic syntax, partly because of its greater potential for non-academic impacts: Late Aramaic is an important language in Jewish liturgy and Torah study, and Jewish communities world-wide will benefit from a better understanding of it. We plan to develop an open access online resource for the study of Late Aramaic to help maximise the impacts of this work.
- **Undertake collaborative and cross-disciplinary research**, where appropriate, to extend the audiences for our work and share findings through other established user networks.
- **Use resources** available from UCL's Public Engagement Unit and encourage staff members to apply for external funding, for example the Rothschild Foundation Europe.

d. Relationship to case studies

Our two cases studies demonstrate both the wide range of our approaches to, and the international reach of, our impact. UCL33-LOC exemplifies the importance of **working with the museum sector** (particularly on the development of **public exhibitions**) and production of **popular publications and information and learning resources** as a means of sharing insights with public audiences. UCL33-IDE demonstrates the central importance to our approach to impact of **public engagement**, often in collaboration with **external partners**. It also highlights our contributions to **media discourse** and use of the popular media to reach the widest possible non-academic audiences. It further exemplifies the potential for **collaborative research** drawing on the diverse specialisms and skills of our own staff to deliver impact, an avenue that we will explore further in future. Both studies describe activities extending well beyond the UK to Europe and the USA.