

Institution: The Open University

Unit of Assessment: D32 Philosophy

a. Context

Impact beyond academia is integral to research at The Open University (OU). Extending its reach far beyond its c.250 000 registered students, the OU uses its broadcast and online resources and infrastructure to engage with the public on a scale unparalleled by any other higher education institution in the UK. Our research activities shape and inform TV and radio programmes, co-produced with the BBC, attracting millions of viewers and listeners. The global impact of our research has been transformed during the current REF period through our large-scale web presence on YouTube, iTunes U, and the OU's free learning platform, OpenLearn. These routes to impact sit alongside traditional methods of engagement, such as talks and lectures to local schools and community groups.

The research in the philosophy department is focused on two areas: the *Philosophy of Value* (which includes the Ethics Centre directed by **Chappell**) and *Meaning, Mind, and Rationality*. All members of department submitted for the REF have published in at least one of these areas, and seek to use this research so as to have an impact in three areas: public discourse (enhancing public understanding), education (enhancing the philosophy provision at Key Stage 5) and the delivery of public services (by influencing decision makers and public service providers).

b. Approach to impact

Given the distinct advantages of the OU, we are able to engage with the public on a scale unmatched by other institutions, both through opportunities for broadcast and online provision. The department has a unique opportunity to make an impact on a range of issues related to our research.

Enhancing public understanding of major issues and challenges

Matravers is seconded from the department to work as Media Fellow (40% FTE) to the Open Media Unit (OMU). The Media Fellow liaises between the Faculty and the OMU to advise on commissioning programmes and the provision of academic expertise. In this role, Matravers is able to ensure that the BBC's programming is informed by the most up-to-date philosophical research. For example, the *Philosophy of Value* research cluster was closely involved in the BBC Four 'Justice Season' (2011). The nominated academic (who comments on scripts, rough cuts and fine cuts) for the series was **Price**.

Chappell was the adviser on an online interactive game that aimed to enhance public understanding of the ethics of lying. This was part of the 'learning journey' from the series (the provision of the opportunity for viewers to further their interests) and attracted over 7300 individual participants. The season received extensive press coverage in all the major newspapers (it received 52 reviews and was frequently recommended watching). It was described by *Metro* as: 'An hour of stimulating if mind-bending television ... an excellent documentary'.

The department has led the sector in the extent to which it has made philosophy available via websites, iTunes U and YouTube. During the census period 47 podcasts have been put up; one album, 'Exploring Philosophy', reached number 4 in the worldwide iTunes U charts and another album, 'Thought and Experience', is invariably in the top five downloads from the OU (the latter had 55,439 downloads between February and July 2013). These albums include discussions that draw on departmental members' research – for example, **Barber** on hedonism and **Price** on the emotions. An educational 'game' that explores issues such as hedonism and the 'experience machine', designed by **Price**, has garnered more than 15,000 individual users.

The OU commissioned a series of podcasts, EthicsBites, which is a part of Nigel Warburton's highly successful PhilosophyBites podcasts (which combined have more than 155 15-minute interviews with philosophers and 15 million downloads). EthicsBites has been well received by key sites on the web and is used, for example, in Ethics courses at the Universities of Idaho and

Oregon.

Although the bulk of our impact is achieved through public engagement via broadcast and digital media, we are also active in soliciting invitations for face-to-face interaction. This includes talks by **Matravers** (inaugural address in 2009) and **Belshaw** (2011) to the Gibraltar Philosophy Society; the audiences included the Gibraltarian Chief Minister and several members of the Government.

Education

Members of the department actively seek to promote their research expertise to enhance the teaching of philosophy at Key Stage 5. In addition to talks at schools and colleges, we engage directly with teachers. For example, **Chappell** and **Price** have both participated in an initiative, organised from Oxford, in which teachers are invited to engage directly with University research and researchers, with a view to refreshing both their attitude to the subject and the content of their teaching. Once again, however, the OU's distinct advantages allow us to do this at scale. In 2008/09 the department successfully bid for money from the Higher Education Academy to fund the 'Bridging the Gap' project. This involved collecting information on all publically available OU teaching material that could be of relevance to A-level and IB teaching, and making that known to teachers. Around 15 teachers took part in the pilot project, visiting the OU and giving feedback on how the material was used. One teacher adapted **Frankish's** material on consciousness for use in her classroom which we were able to make available for general use via OpenLearn.

The OU is the dominant national provider of free online learning. OpenLearn has over 8000 hours of study material currently available and is visited by around 5.4 million unique visitors every 12 months (April 2013 figure). The site currently hosts over 120 hours of free online learning in philosophy, including material based on **Price's** work on the emotions and **Frankish's** work on consciousness.

Influencing the delivery of public service

As stated above, the impact of departmental research is not limited to broadcast and online projects; we recognise that some activities are best done face-to-face. The department supports the application of members' expertise to improving standards in all areas of public service. Members are enabled to take advisory roles and are funded to present research to a diverse range of audiences. **Belshaw** has presented his research on death and the value of meaning of life to, amongst others, the Wellcome Collection in London. **Chappell** has developed a working relationship with a consultant paediatrician based at Northampton General Hospital, which challenged staff to consider the respect in which they view patients as persons. **Matravers** has served as the Ethicist on the Clinical Ethics Forum at Addenbrookes' Hospital in Cambridge since 2007. This committee meets regularly to discuss hospital policy and advise clinicians; feedback from the committee indicates that **Matravers'** contribution is highly valued. In addition, since 2010 **Matravers** has chaired the statutory OU Animal Welfare and Ethical Review Body (AWERB).

c. Strategy and plans

The department, through its Research Steering Group, is implementing a detailed Public Engagement and Impact Strategy that draws on our existing practices, and internal and external guidance, including the Concordat for Engaging the Public with Research established by UK funding bodies. The department's strategy supports the work of the University's RCUK-funded public engagement Catalyst project (£299K), contributing to the development of an Open Research University.

Specifically:

We will find ways to systematise our contribution to the enhancement of public understanding of philosophical issues. New members of staff will receive training in relevant skills, including formal training by the Open Media Unit on engaging with the media across all platforms: broadcast, online, social media, and print. This will include training on working with broadcast production teams. Participation in such projects will be fully recognised in workload plans. We will expand our presence on OpenLearn, engaging users with new ideas and their applications.

Impact template (REF3a)

We will strengthen our links with philosophy provision at Key Stage 5. A clear mechanism has been set up to enable schools to identify and invite members of staff to share their research. There is now a standing agenda item that reviews our curriculum, all online content, and all research relevant to Key Stage 5 that could be made available online to teachers through social media and through the 'Bridging the Gap' project.

The departmental Research Steering Group will continue to provide individual feedback on pathways to impact, targeting increasing user input designing research bids, and implementing plans for more effective evidence gathering and evaluation of impact. Impact will play an increasing role in the annual 'career development and staff appraisal' meetings which individuals have with their line manager.

d. Relationship to case studies

The two case studies are exemplars of the department's approach to influencing the public understanding of philosophy and of influencing the delivery of public services. **Matravers'** research on the definition of art came to the public's attention through a podcast which he was invited to do in part because of his expertise in online and broadcast media. In contrast, **Chappell's** case study exemplifies how departmental research can have an impact targeting research on specific user groups who can make use of it, via face-to-face interaction.