

**Institution:** The Open University

**Unit of Assessment:** D29 English Language and Literature

### a. Context

The Open University's (OU) position as a national institution with a global reach provides OU researchers in English with unique opportunities to maximise the impact of their work. Beyond the OU's 250,000 students, OU television and radio programmes co-produced with the BBC attract audiences of more than 150 million annually, and there have been more than 40 million downloads to date of OU content (much of it research-based) through online platforms such as YouTube, Facebook and iTunes. OU researchers thus have access both directly and via collaborations with media organisations to vast audiences, and their research therefore has the capacity to reach and enrich the cultural lives of millions.

OU research in English seeks both to enhance cultural lives, imaginations and sensibilities, and to contribute to events, activities and cultural products that provide economic benefits. Further types of research impact include: an impact on civil society by informing and influencing people's understandings of cultural values and social assumptions; an impact on the form and content of education, both for sixth-form students in Britain and for students of English in Bulgaria, Romania and India; and an impact on public discourse both in Britain and internationally by enhancing public understanding of major social and political issues.

### b. Approach to impact

Researchers in English have exploited the OU's unique position in order to reach the largest possible audiences and to enrich their cultural lives. The strategy has three strands: (1) to transmit OU research in English via online and broadcast media; (2) to continue supporting face-to-face events; and (3) to utilise print publications aimed at audiences beyond universities. The first strategy operates through open-access online educational resources (iTunesU and YouTube) and the broadcast media (BBC and Channel 4 television programmes and radio programmes); the second operates through public events and lectures (often co-organised with other institutions); and the third through the print media, including magazines aimed at the general public and at school teachers and pupils. An increasingly important means of enhancing the impact of our research has been to include non-higher education user-groups in the production of research data, most notably in the Reading Experience Database (RED) project, which relied on the active participation of many volunteers in the expansion of the database (see RED impact case study).

The most innovative route to enhancing impact in the REF period has been the increased use of the OU's distinctive online teaching infrastructure in order to communicate our research to much bigger audiences. A number of researchers have used the internet to achieve notable successes: **Neale's** YouTube 2010 interview with the novelist Iain Banks has had more than 35,000 viewers (figures: 21 Mar 2013); **Prescott's** five programmes on 'Charles Dickens: Celebrity Author' for iTunesU in 2012 have had 40,977 downloads (figures: 15 April 2013); and **Sergeant's** five programmes on the English Language have been particularly widely received: 'The History of English in Ten Minutes' (2,248,934 video views on YouTube); 'English: Language of Controversy' (95,501 downloads from iTunesU); 'Worlds of English' (39,647 downloads from iTunesU); 'English: Personal Experiences' (115,555 downloads from iTunesU); and 'English: Postcolonial English' (73,720 downloads from iTunesU) – all figures: 31 May 2013.

The OU's close relationship with the BBC has led to researchers in English working as academic consultants on television and radio programmes. In several instances, OU researchers went well beyond appearing as 'talking heads', as they contributed from the outset to the conceptualisation and planning of programmes. One such case was **Da Sousa Correa's** role on the three-programme television series 'In Their Own Words: British Novelists', which assembled rare footage of interviews with *inter alia* G. K. Chesterton, H. G. Wells and E. M. Forster, Virginia Woolf, William Golding, Salman Rushdie and Angela Carter. The series was broadcast on BBC 4 during August

2010 (there were 6,000 requests for the booklet accompanying the series, and 11,000 visitors to the series website). Another such case was **Haslam's** contribution to two BBC 2 television programmes on Ford Madox Ford (see more details in the impact case study on Ford). In addition to these BBC collaborations, **Watson** was a consultant and also appeared as an interviewee on a Channel 4 *Time Team* special programme on Poet's Corner in Westminster Abbey in 2010.

A number of other researchers reached wide audiences by discussing their research on radio programmes: **Allington**, 'The History of Swear Words', Three Counties Radio (2011), and 'Paperbacks v ebooks', Radio Solent (2013); **Da Sousa Correa**, BBC Radio 3 programme 'Claiming Schubert' (2012); Fraser, BBC Radio 3's 'Nightwaves' (2012) and BBC Radio 4's 'Rhymes of Passion' (2013); **Johnson**, the South Africa FM 'Literature Show' (2012); **Nasta**, BBC Radio 4's 'Women's Hour' (2009), and BBC Breakfast Radio (2011); and **Watson**, BBC Radio 4 programme on Westminster Abbey (2011). Our PhD students have also transmitted their research via radio to wider audiences, with Bullock having a story broadcast on BBC Radio 4 in March 2013.

Our second priority of communicating research in English via public events continues to be a major commitment. In the REF period, researchers in English have organised 41 public events and delivered 27 public lectures (including those described in the case studies). The 21 seminar series run at the Institute of English Studies (University of London) in the REF period by the Book History, Cultures of Contemporary Writing, Postcolonial Literature, and Romantic Period research groups have all been open to the public, and regularly attract non-HEI attendees. This has been especially the case with the Contemporary Cultures of Writing seminars, which averaged audiences well above 40 people.

The two journals based in English at the OU have been highly effective in organising public events to disseminate research in English to audiences beyond universities. *Wasafiri* (edited by **Nasta**) is both a literary magazine and a publicly funded arts organisation. During the REF period, *Wasafiri* organised twelve successful public events, both in Britain and abroad. Highlight events in Britain include: an evening of Indian poetry at the Nehru Centre in London (co-organised with the British Council, August 2009, attendance: 100); a public event at the South Bank Centre in London to celebrate 25 years of *Wasafiri* with readings and interviews with internationally acclaimed writers (October 2009, attendance: 250); a poetry reading in Cambridge with five international poets on the Poetry Parnassus UK Tour (co-organised with the OU's Contemporary Cultures of Writing research group, July 2012, attendance: 45); and poetry readings 'To Exist is to Resist . . . Young Poets' Words for These Times' at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London (January 2013, attendance: 80). International events organised by *Wasafiri* include: 'The Books That Made Me', Jaipur Literature Festival, India (January 2011, attendance: 350); and 'The Books That Made Me', Bocas Literary Festival, Trinidad (April 2013, attendance: 110). The second journal hosted at the OU, the *Katherine Mansfield Studies* journal edited by **Da Sousa Correa**, has organised several Mansfield Birthday Lectures, all of which had well over 100 attendees.

Many individual researchers have lectured on their work to public audiences, both in Britain and abroad: **Da Sousa Correa** in Oxford and London; **Fraser** in St Andrews, Swansea, Brighton, Edinburgh and London; **Greenwell** in Sunderland; **Gupta** in Swansea, New Delhi, Brussels, Sao Paulo, and Kolkata; **Johnson** in Cape Town; **Nasta** in New Delhi and in Göttingen; **Neale** in Norwich; **Towheed** in Dalhousie, Canada; and **Watson** in London, Edinburgh, Linköping, Stratford, and Verona.

The third strategy – to utilise print media aimed at audiences beyond universities in order to publish research in English in accessible form, thus enriching the cultural lives of a broader readership – has been successful on several fronts. *The English Review* edited by **Brown** has published a number of articles by individual OU researchers (**Brown**, **Greenwell**, **Haslam** and **Prescott**). *The English Review* reaches a wide readership: it is taken by at least 1134 schools, and has more than 300 individual subscribers and more than 200 digital subscribers. *Wasafiri* has a substantial readership beyond the higher education sector. With 4 issues year, the number of website hits has increased annually (up from 18,371 in 2011 to 24,551 in 2012), the number of articles downloaded is up from 3,772 in 2008 to 13,413 in 2012, and the sales agreements with libraries globally is up

from 761 in 2008 to 1,723 in 2012. **Greenwell** enjoys a high profile as a poet, parodist and reviewer in the broadsheet and cultural-political magazine press, with 15 articles and reviews in the *Independent*, and 93 poems and parodies in the *Spectator* and *New Statesman*. **Gupta** has discussed his research in articles in Bulgaria (*The Sofia Echo*, March 2009) and interviews in Turkey (*Kultur*, Jan-Mar 2011). OU PhD students have also published their research in the mainstream media, with Sweeney having an article in the *Sunday Times* in May 2012.

### c. Strategy and plans

The OU is founded upon a commitment to social inclusion and widening access to knowledge, and the REF emphasis upon maximising the social impact of research accords with such commitments. The impact strategy for English at the OU is therefore an intensification of existing educational priorities and principles. Broadly three priorities have been identified: first, to increase the scale and volume of OU research in English transmitted via online and broadcast media; secondly, to extend the many successful public events show-casing research in English; and thirdly, to publish more research in print publications aimed at audiences beyond universities. Breaking these priorities down, our plans are:

- *To exploit the OU's position as a world leader in the digital humanities.* The OU has unparalleled expertise in online teaching, and this expertise will continue to be used to facilitate the transmission of research knowledge. The databases of RED and South Asians in Britain, as well as the programmes on YouTube and iTunesU, have all been successful in making OU research accessible. These successes have inspired proposals from five researchers for similar initiatives in the medium term.
- *To expand collaborations with the broadcast media.* The OU's long-established partnership with the BBC enabled the successful television programmes by **Haslam** and **Da Sousa Correa**, and the aim is to increase from two to four the number of BBC consultancies undertaken by researchers in English in the next seven years.
- *To extend collaborations with partner-institutions.* Researchers in English have established collaborations with the British Council, the British Library, and the British Museum, all of which have a national reach and share the OU's concern for public engagement. The aim is to consolidate these partnerships and to forge new ones.
- *To explore further ways in which non-university users can contribute to the production of research data,* using RED as a model. Rather than seeing non-university users exclusively as passive consumers of research, the aspiration is to engage them in two-way relationships in which they help generate research data.
- *To make our research more accessible by publishing in print publications for non-university audiences.* This will include encouraging more OU researchers in English to publish in *The English Review* and *Wasafiri*, as well in other popular print venues.

In order to encourage and monitor such initiatives, public engagement is a regular agenda item for Department meetings, and researchers are obliged to include public engagement as an element of their research in their annual workload planning.

### d. Relationship to case studies

The three case studies exemplify the different routes English at the OU has pursued in order to enhance research impact. RED has reached large audiences by using online contributions from volunteers and by extending its online database and modes of communication. The South Asians in Britain project has reached large audiences through its online database, and also through its numerous well-attended public events in order to communicate its research beyond university audiences. The Ford case study has made effective use of the broadcast media, principally BBC television programmes, in order to enhance research impact.