

**Institution:** The Open University

**Unit of Assessment:** D30 History

**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 University uses its extensive broadcast and online resources to engage with the public on a scale unparalleled by any other higher education institution (HEI) in the UK. This provides several routes through which historians at the OU can generate impact. Our research shapes and informs television and radio programmes, co-produced and co-funded 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 involvement in the web-based learning platforms YouTube, iTunesU and the OU's free learning platform OpenLearn, which together generate tens of millions of visits annually. The OU is the only UK university to have a physical presence in all four nations of the United Kingdom and its historians make use of this footprint to transmit their research via a range of engagements with non-HEI partners. These routes to impact sit alongside those more usual for a university, such as engagements with local schools, community groups and cultural institutions.

Within this unique environment, the research activities of OU historians achieve extensive planned impact by stimulating and facilitating learning journeys on the part of those not directly engaged in higher education. The scale of broadcast and associated activities ensures that our research contributes materially to a more informed public understanding of the making of contemporary society, and to greater awareness of issues such as cultural diversity and contested pasts.

Through its partnerships the UoA enhances the capacity of a range of national and local heritage institutions to disseminate knowledge and encourage life-long learning. Moreover, historical research has also generated a range of policy impacts, especially associated with the work of the *International Centre for the History of Crime, Policing and Justice*, whose members influence key policy groups, leveraging change at a national and international level by contributing to reviews and working groups, and taking a role in drafting policy.

**b. Approach to impact**

Historians at the OU use their research to generate three types of impact: (1) enhanced public understanding of national and international history, achieved via educational broadcasts and associated study activities; (2) improvements to the provision of cultural heritage institutions in the UK and abroad, achieved via targeted collaborations; (3) more focused impacts, such as the generation of enhanced capacity within UK police forces concerned with overseas police deployments, achieved by consultancy and liaison activities.

**1. Public education through broadcast and online activities:** OU Historians are encouraged to generate impact through the institution's defining and unique partnership with the BBC. The Arts Faculty seconds a senior member of academic staff as Media Fellow (40% full time equivalent) to the Open Media Unit. The Media Fellow liaises between the Open Media Unit, which manages broadcast activities, and academics, enabling academics' research to influence both the choice and the quality of BBC programming as well as ensuring that this research is widely disseminated through OpenLearn and iTunes U. Members of the History Department regularly serve as 'nominated academics' for high-profile broadcast projects. During the REF period these included *The History of Scotland* (**Donnachie**, 2008), *Empire* (**Hack**, 2012), *The History of the World*, (**Chant, Mombauer, Williams**, 2012), *The Story of Wales* (**Herbert**, 2012) and *Wartime Farm* (**Williams**, 2012). Nominated academics are not simply consultants; they serve as production team members, commenting on scripts, rough cuts and final cuts to ensure that the programmes are informed by the most up-to-date historical research. In 2010, the OU and the BBC signed a sixth agreement ensuring that the link between these two national institutions will develop further during the next assessment period.

Public engagement and understanding is further enhanced by the strategic use of online follow-up activities to broadcasts. Typically, tens of thousands of viewers will follow the OU's 'call to action' prompt to request free educational materials, written by OU academics, based on their research. *Empire*, a five-part BBC series presented by Jeremy Paxman, attracted up to 2.96 million viewers,

resulting in 45,000 visitors to the OU's associated OpenLearn site and over 56,600 requests for supplementary educational print materials, produced by **Hack**. Materials like these are intended to reach a broad non-academic audience, and encourage individuals to embark on a 'learning journey' from informal to formal learning. *The History of the World*, presented by Andrew Marr in 2012, attracted 3 million viewers, 145,000 OpenLearn visitors and 95,000 requests for the print item; *Wartime Farm* had 2.82 million viewers and 84,150 OpenLearn visitors; *The History of Scotland*, Series 1 (Dec 2008 – Jan 2009) had 2.22 million viewers across five episodes, Series 2 (Dec 2009 – Jan 2010) had 1.75 million viewers across five episodes. 112,000 individuals visited the associated OpenLearn website, and 48,000 requested the print item. *The Story of Wales*, the first collaboration between the OU in Wales and the BBC Cymru Wales, received two BAFTA Cymru Awards and was particularly commended for contributing 'to the understanding and appreciation of the history of Wales'. First shown on BBC One Wales with average viewing figure of 0.32m, it generated 11,707 visitors to our OpenLearn website, then shown on BBC2 with 1.21m viewers, resulting in a further 16,358 visitors to our website, and requests for 16,000 print items. Looking ahead, the UoA is also exploring the opportunities being generated by the new OU-owned FutureLearn project for disseminating our research beyond the discipline. FutureLearn brings together a number of higher education institutions and the British Council, The British Library and The British Museum. This is creating opportunities to make free educational research-based materials available to new and diverse audiences.

Impact through online activities is not confined to research associated with broadcasts. For example, **Byford's** research on the Semlin concentration camp in Serbia, and the associated online materials, has led to extensive public debate in the Serbian press over the place of the Holocaust in Serbian national memory, and has been incorporated into educational materials delivered in Serbian schools. It has also informed meetings of the UN 'Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research'.

**2. Improvements to the provision of cultural heritage institutions:** A number of historians at the OU have cultivated links with museums and have used these contacts to improve the quality of provision at these heritage institutions. **Williams**, for example, was involved in establishing the Crime and Punishment Collections Network (CAP), which seeks to share expertise for the purpose of improving the standard of provision of such museums. **Hughes** has worked extensively with community peace museums (CPMs) in Kenya in the aftermath of the 2007/08 post-election crisis and has facilitated the exchange of information and expertise across eight ethnic communities by bringing together CPM curators and activists in a series of exchange visits in 2009/10. **Holmes** has collaborated with the Ulster Museum and the Down County Museum in Ireland to develop outreach activities related to family and community history. These academics have been supported in a variety of ways to achieve impact via collaborative working with museums. **Hughes**, for example, was internally-funded as a Research Fellow to bridge gaps in external RCUK funding, and has also been supported with travel and subsistence costs for several trips to Kenya. The History Department hosted the CAP AGM in 2011 without charge and covered the costs for **Williams** to attend meetings around the country. The Department also supports two jointly-supervised PhD students with the British Library and the National Library of Wales.

**3. Informing criminal justice practice:** Over the REF census period, the Department's *International Centre for the History of Policing, Crime and Justice* has developed lasting links with the Association of Chief Police Officers, the International Police Assistance Board and the Ministry of Defence Police. All of these organisations have sought advice and information from the Centre. **Sinclair** has worked with key individuals to shape both police coordination and provision for officers deploying overseas. Full details are given in the associated case study. **Sinclair** (working with **Emsley** and **Williams**) has been supported in this activity by the provision of bridging funding.

### c. Strategy and plans

The OU has a distinctive place in the UK's national cultural life, and commitment to public engagement has driven the University's mission since its inception in 1969. Over the last five years impact has increasingly shaped our research strategy, from Open Research Online (one of the UK's largest online open access research repositories) to investments in online open arts, citizen science, and community engagement projects. The overall aim of the D30 impact strategy from 2014 onwards is to ensure that our historical research is both relevant to, and influential in, contemporary society by making best use of our existing broadcast and online expertise, combined

with non-HEI collaboration. The research of historians at the OU will continue to be framed and enabled by this commitment to public engagement and collaborative working with non-HEIs.

The University has plans for developing this aspect of its research over the medium term in response to the developing HEFCE agenda. Over the next three years, an important focus will be our commitment as an RCUK Catalyst to deliver the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE) Manifesto for Public Engagement, using our digital infrastructure, and to engage with research users and the public as partners and collaborators in our research.

**Lawrence** and **Williams** are already fully involved in the development of an institutional strategy for this programme. We also recognise that the impact agenda should inform the training and support offered to all levels of researchers. The changing nature of the PhD, for example, means that expertise in planning for and achieving impact will be an important attribute for those seeking to enter academia. In 2014, historians at The Open University (led by **Lawrence**) will deliver the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funded skills development programme 'Becoming a Public Intellectual'. This programme will involve historians in training Arts Faculty PhD students in engagement beyond the academy, both directly and also via collaboration with media and cultural institutions. Strategic partners such as The British Library, the National Library of Wales and the BBC will all play a part in the delivery of this innovative programme.

Historians at the OU will continue to be closely involved with BBC history programming, and the Department will enable staff to engage accordingly. In 2013, the Department supported the production of the BBC's four-part series *How the First World War Made Britain*. The series, for broadcast in 2014, draws on research by **Mombauer**, and will be presented by Jeremy Paxman. The accompanying booklet ('The First World War Experienced') has an initial print-run of 50,000 and will be supplemented by OpenLearn materials written by **Mombauer**, based on her research.

The UoA will continue to make professional media training available to all academics and PhD students, to assist in preparing for press interviews and appearances on radio and television. One area flagged for further development is the enhancement of staff expertise in the use of social media and associated online tools such as podcast and vidcasts. Whilst training is already available in all these technologies (taking advantage of in-house expertise and our well-equipped recording studio), the Arts Faculty's Digital Humanities research group will be working directly with staff to ensure that all researchers develop their expertise.

The UoA will also seek to maximise its collaborations with non-HEIs. In particular, it will leverage links already forged with the three UK national libraries. History has current AHRC-funded studentships with these institutions and will involve both staff and students with the libraries' exhibition and collection activities as an additional route to achieving greater public engagement and impact. All the partner institutions have signalled that they welcome such collaboration, which will be supported by high-level strategic assistance from the Arts Faculty. For example, the Dean and Associate Deans hold three planning and strategy meetings a year with the British Library's senior Arts and Humanities team, which allow the two institutions to broker strategic research projects and other knowledge exchange activities. In addition, the UoA will continue to develop links with practice-based users, through support of the successful collaborative activities of the *International Centre for the History of Crime, Policing and Justice* with UK police organisations, and collaborations with museums and other cultural heritage institutions.

#### **d. Relationship to case studies**

Our case studies are exemplars of the breadth, reach and significance of the impact our research has generated. One case study illustrates our **public education impact** by demonstrating how our research helped shape the production of a prestigious BBC TV series (*Empire*), which attracted an audience of millions, and created the subsequent learning journey followed by tens of thousands of viewers. Our research had impact on the production process itself, as well as on those members of the public who followed up their viewing by actively seeking further information provided by us.

**Impact on policy-making** is demonstrated by our second case study, which shows how research into the history of colonial policing in conflict situations has informed approaches to the deployment of police overseas today. Our research has significant contemporary relevance and impact by influencing current overseas policing policy and practice.