Institution: University of Reading

Unit of Assessment: 32 Philosophy

a. Context

Philosophy is the broadest in scope of the humane disciplines, examining the 'big questions' that underlie all other fields of study. It is also, however, technical in its methods of analysis, with a specialized terminology and repertoire of concepts and forms of argument. Analytical philosophers, at least, while keeping broader issues in mind, tend to approach them in 'bite-sized' chunks, applying their technical resources with precision and often asking sub-questions that in themselves are unlikely to be of interest to a non-philosopher. In order to have impact outside the profession, then, researchers need to ensure that the relevance of their work to the big questions of fundamental concern to society are made clear. **The Department's strategy for impact is to enable colleagues to communicate this relevance in clear and comprehensible terms to the widest possible audience.**

For our department, then, impact focuses on dissemination of research on issues of core concern to people, and as such it leads, we hope, to cultural enrichment and increased understanding of the ideas and debates that have and continue to shape society. The main beneficiaries can be divided into two broad groups: (1) non-academic laypeople with an interest in the issues addressed by philosophy; (2) non-academic members of professions within which philosophical issues are of significant concern. Within (1) there are diverse groups, ranging from people who may have studied philosophy in the past, or read very widely in the subject, to those with a slight interest but who are potentially stimulated by interesting debates. Within (2), it is probably the professions of law, health care, and politics (or public service more generally) in respect of whom philosophical research has most impact. Our aim as a department is to make our work easily accessible to both groups of potential beneficiaries.

The impact of the work undertaken in the Department divides between those working on the more practical side of the profession and those at the more theoretical end. In our experience, as for most philosophers, it is the practical side, viz. moral and political philosophy, that tends to have the most impact, given its focus on values and action – good and bad, right and wrong, how to live, and so on. Even when relatively technical, much moral philosophy, for instance, is accessible to non-professionals, most of whom have an opinion on perennial moral questions. The new Centre for Ethics and Political Philosophy provides an important pathway to impact for much research at the applied/practical end of philosophy. At the theoretical end, the University's Centre for Cognition Research brings together philosophers and psychologists working on language and mind, and will act as an important conduit for research in this area, ensuring research results are widely communicated to potential beneficiaries.

b. Approach to impact

All colleagues continuously bear in mind the likely impact (or possible avenues of impact) of their research. We ask ourselves: (i) who, outside academia, might be interested in this piece of work? (ii) how might we make it known to them? We have no single method of achieving impact: much depends on the research being done, the nature of the researcher undertaking that work, and the opportunities that arise or can be created. Colleagues informally share ideas and practice, learning from each other ways in which impact might be achieved, and impact opportunities are more formally discussed as a standing item at our Departmental Board of Studies and the School Research Committee. Consideration of pathways to impact is also now a core element in our mentoring of new staff. There is no departmental policy of tailoring our research to possible impact opportunities; instead we are confident about the cultural and social value of the work colleagues undertake and thus seek all possible avenues to disseminate research outside the academy. Indeed, we see ourselves as responding to a rich vein of popular interest in philosophy and the kinds of topics and approaches with which it deals. (Witness the growth in non-academic philosophy clubs and meetings, such as the all-night events at the Institut Français, to which Strawson and Owens have contributed, publication in popular magazines, and the popularity of podcast series such as *Philosophy Bites* and *Elucidations*, to which several members of staff have contributed.) While it is perhaps easiest to demonstrate the cultural impact of work on the more applied side of the discipline, the Department also promotes the impact of work on the more

theoretical side (where we see the Centre for Cognition Research as a focus for future impact-related research).

The main way in which impact occurs and is manifested is through public discussion and debate of ideas/theories issuing from research in the Department. We see our work as contributing primarily to cultural enrichment, that is, the nourishing and shaping of informed, intellectual exchanges on fundamental questions about the world and our place in it. There can be no question that a good society is one in which its members are aware of and reflect on philosophical ideas and perspectives (even if those ideas are not recognised as part of the academic discipline of philosophy). Of course, decision-makers and practitioners need to be informed of current thinking so as to ensure thorough consideration of the issues with which they deal, but society also benefits from a general populace who concern themselves with questions about the nature of citizenship, fairness, rights, human understanding and our place in the world. The Department sees itself as contributing to this general cultural advancement by disseminating world-class research in an accessible and approachable way.

The following examples highlight the work of colleagues in seeking out avenues for impact or responding to opportunities to disseminate their research to a non-academic audience.

- Strawson's work on free will and moral responsibility has naturally led to invitations to speak on radio and at festivals, make popular presentations in newspapers, and so on. Some of his work has generated massive impact. (See case study.)

- Dancy used a very unusual opportunity to present his theory of moral particularism to millions of people via prime-time American television. *Very* few philosophers working in such an abstract area (albeit at the practical end of the spectrum) have such an opportunity, and of those much fewer would think of taking it up. Dancy did so with aplomb and generated a huge amount of public interest and discussion. (See case study.)

- The Centre for Cognition Research (Borg, Hansen, Stazicker, Segal) is the focus for interdisciplinary work with Psychology leading, we confidently expect, to research that will reach a wide non-academic audience with interests in consciousness and language.

- The Centre for Ethics and Political Philosophy is the focus for interdisciplinary work with Politics. Hooker's work on fairness, Owens' work on promising, duress, and consent, and Oderberg's work on bioethics all deal with issues that are fundamental for society, with the most direct beneficiaries being people working in law, politics, and public policy. We are excited about the avenues for impact (e.g. public lectures and conferences) that the Centre will present.

- John Preston's Wittgenstein Chronology, a website and Facebook page devoted to the intellectual, biographical and historical context of Wittgenstein's work. This project has been running since 2011, and within a year the Facebook page, for example, has generated over 400 followers, of whom the vast majority are interested non-academics. In addition, the posts reach over 1,000 people worldwide, with the page having over 2,400 'likes'.

- Preston's work on the philosophy of artificial intelligence, which he presented to a lay audience in the *Philosopher's Magazine* (2012), has attracted much non-academic interest.

- The Department has a close connection with Oxford University's Department for Continuing Education, which holds regular and very popular philosophy weekends attended by 40+ people, nearly all non-academics interested in philosophy. Recent presentations (2010-2013) include: (i) Preston on Wittgenstein and philosophy of science; (ii) Oderberg on Aquinas; (iii) de Gaynesford on Putnam; (iv) Borg on using language.

- In 2008 Borg was on the panel of 'askaphilosopher.com', an online resource allowing members of the public to raise philosophical concerns with professionals (named by *The Sunday Times* as one of 'the 101 most useful websites', 2008). She answered questions in her area of expertise (mind and language), making her ideas accessible and relevant to the general public.

There is, then, clear evidence of past work to promote cultural impact together with a clear Departmental strategy to promote impact in the future (see next section).

c. Strategy and plans

Our impact strategy is to enable colleagues to communicate the relevance of their research in clear and comprehensible terms to the widest possible audience, thus ensuring the pathway to impact. To implement this strategy we have made a number of changes to practice during the REF period (e.g. introducing a standing item on impact at our Board of Studies meetings, embedding

the impact agenda as part of our mentoring of new staff, strengthening links between the Department and the University Communications Office, and instigating School-level peer review of the impact agenda of grant proposals).

We have a number of plans for maximizing impact in the future, some of which are at a more advanced stage than others, but all of which will be in place over the next few years. Our aim is to set goals that are realistic and in harmony with the nature of the subject, giving us what we think is a coherent but achievable plan for disseminating our research and encouraging its discussion outside the academy.

We are already working on using the Departmental and related websites (e.g. Centre for Cognition Research blog) to give our research a more visible presence, thus enabling website visitors to engage with and be influenced by all the research taking place in the Department. Our site has already been revamped to increase visual appeal and content likely to generate non-academic interest. Connected to this are individual websites that staff are enhancing in line with our objective of making colleagues' research more accessible to those outside academia.

We will increase our use of social media to disseminate research; we have already made greater use of the Departmental Facebook page and launched a Youtube channel. We now intend to upload samples of departmental work such as lectures and research seminars, and are confident that this will generate much future impact. (Witness the success of philosophy podcasts on iTunes U, *Philosophy Bites*, et al. Clearly, online media is a significant avenue by which philosophers can generate public reaction to their work.) We are also looking for further ways of engaging with the traditional media. Some colleagues already discuss their work via print and digital venues, e.g. Profs Strawson and Borg. All colleagues, however, will identify opportunities for dissemination, liaising with the University's Communications Office where appropriate.

Engaging with policy-makers is another area where we aim to maximize impact. The Department will use Prof. Hooker's work on fairness and Prof. Owens's research on promising and on property rights to engage politicians and policy-makers. We plan, via the Centre for Ethics and Political Philosophy, to build on our experience and learning to date and to host a significant workshop in the next REF period, aimed at engaging these key potential beneficiaries.

In addition, we will use the Centre for Cognition Research as a vehicle for dissemination of research via public lectures and seminars, focusing on the exciting interface between psychology and philosophy in areas such as consciousness and language-learning that are of particular interest to the wider public.

More generally, we aim to increase the sharing of best practice with respect to impact in the Department, and to increase the use of University facilities to increase impact. We will build on existing experience, including that in departments across the University. We are giving all researchers the opportunity to see what works well elsewhere in the Department and colleagues are encouraged to attend University workshops on impact, which offer invaluable time for sharing of experiences, tips, and so on.

d. Relationship to case studies

1) The Dancy case study shows impact on non-academics in the field of public policy, in particular judicial policy and legal decision-making. Such impact is very difficult to demonstrate conclusively when the philosophical ideas involved are highly abstract, as in moral particularism, especially the interplay of reasons – their taxonomy, weighting, conflicts, role in action, and so on – and where the timescale for assessing impact from academic work on the broader population is relatively short. We are able, however, to trace a suggestive albeit indirect route from Dancy's seminal work to the way in which lawyers and judges understand the judicial process. This case study points the way for future – and more direct – engagement with public policy by researchers in the Department (e.g. Hooker, Owens).

2) The Strawson case study is a more typical example of the way in which controversial and challenging ideas concerning our central beliefs about ourselves have a direct impact on a non-academic audience. That highly theoretical work should have such an impact is nevertheless remarkable, and indicates the lively and highly accessible way in which Strawson presents his research to the public. We see this case study as a model for how colleagues can exploit ways of disseminating their research to non-academics, thereby stimulating public awareness of their ideas and, we expect, provoking discussion and debate.