

<p>Institution: University of the Highlands and Islands</p> <p>Unit of Assessment: UoA 27 Area Studies</p> <p>a. Context</p> <p>A key purpose of the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) is: “to have a transformational impact on the development and prospects of the region, its people and its communities” (UHI Research Strategy 2012-17). Achieving relevant and sustainable impact, which is derived from the University’s research, is a key proponent of this, as noted in the UHI Strategic Plan 2012-17, Strategic aim: 4a “Sustain and develop high impact research and knowledge exchange activities”. The ethos and approach encapsulated in the UHI mission and vision is reflected in the <i>raison d’être</i> of the Centre for Nordic Studies (CNS) which is to valorise, promote, and make sustainable the heritage of the north Atlantic rim to the benefit of the area’s communities through interdisciplinary research. Our research is enhancing the actual development and interpretation of that heritage by creating products and policy to engender economic prosperity and the enrichment of cultural life. The reach and significance of this is not limited to localised contexts. Instead, it extends across national and international boundaries.</p> <p>CNS was founded in 2006 by Dr (now Professor) Donna Heddle and has grown steadily since then to become a research and teaching unit which has a core staff of 4 full time and 4 part time colleagues, 10 research students, a full portfolio of successful taught PG provision (54 students in 2012-13), and an internationally renowned profile for interdisciplinary research as has been noted by the Scottish Parliament in two congratulatory motions, and by international academics such as Professor Margaret Greco of Cornell University, who noted that “The Centre for Nordic Studies is an extraordinary and timely initiative of international significance”. If “Nordic Studies” or “Viking Studies” is Googled, CNS comes out either as the first listing or as filling most of the entries on the first page. Our research publications have led to a number of public speaking engagements, television and radio appearances, and to meetings with politicians and industry stakeholders, including Ministers and members of the Scottish, Westminster, and European parliaments (Heddle as Cultural Adviser to the Scottish Government and as Cultural Policy Adviser to Highlands and Islands Enterprise and linguistic expert for signage at Highland Council); and to appearances before and involvement in Scottish parliament committees concerned with cultural policy, Scottish tourism, and language e.g the Scots Language Audit (McClure and Heddle). Heddle (cultural history and literature), Sanmark (historical archaeology), Ljosland (language policy and minority languages), McClure (Scots literature and dialects) and Jennings (history and placenames) have all contributed to international television and radio programmes both in their disciplines and on the work of the Centre (examples: NRK (Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation) programme filmed on 5/6/13 and the BBC Scotland <i>Scots: the Mither tongue</i> series with Billy Kay). McClure was awarded an MBE for services to Scottish culture in 2002.</p> <p>Our impact on the research base has been high, academically, socially and economically. For example, Sanmark’s Norse Assembly Sites body of research has been described by Prof. Neil Price of Aberdeen University in the international review of her work leading to the award of Docent/Honorary Reader at Uppsala as “outstanding analyses of the relationship between popular assembly, the communal judiciary and the process of state formation...her scope includes overseas colonies too, amongst others with an excellent paper on Greenlandic assembly sites in the <i>Journal of the North Atlantic</i>. Book chapters include contributions to key texts of recent years” and Ljosland’s groundbreaking new theoretical framework for the study of domain in sociolinguistics has been widely discussed and applied in several international studies, including Jónsson, Lauren, Myking, and Picht, 2013. The recent Economic Impact Analysis commissioned by Highlands and Islands Enterprise puts the economic impact of CNS conferences to March 2013 as £220,000 and also notes the social impact of the 469 delegates from USA, Canada, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Spain, New Zealand, Australia and South Africa who attended them. Our main non-academic user groups are lifelong learners seeking to develop job opportunities; small to medium local enterprises seeking to develop cultural products; and international companies with a local element seeking our expertise for the creation of products and strategies. Our main impacts are in the creation of business opportunities and community empowerment through our area specific interdisciplinary research which looks at how humans interact with their environment (physical, social, economic); the products of this interaction; and how these products can be used to sustain the communities that created them.</p> <p>b. Approach to impact</p>
--

Impact template (REF3a)

The Centre brought new research, cultural policy, community engagement, and research based teaching initiatives to the islands. This was noted in the Scottish Parliamentary motion of 2009 and in the Economic Impact Assessment commissioned by Highlands and Islands Enterprise and completed in May 2013. It has sought to make research such as Sanmark's research into Norse Assembly environments and structures of real benefit to the communities themselves by giving it a practical application. This created viable cultural products and new regional policies, for example in relation to Orkney and Shetland dialect and Nordic minority languages through the concomitant research by Ljosland, as noted by the Norwegian government, who have two of her publications on their key texts list. CNS realised the importance of the end users of our research early on in the Centre's existence and actively sought during the period 2008-2013 to engage with likely stakeholders through the following means:

Policymakers: Staff are regularly invited to join national and international strategic bodies and to contribute to government commissioned reports, such as the Scots Language Audit. CNS team members serve or have served on a wide range of relevant external bodies such as the International Advisory Board of the Centre for Advanced Migration Studies (AMIS), Copenhagen University; the Advisory Board for the Paderborn Museum, Germany; the council of the Association for Scottish Literary Studies, and its International Committee; the Modern Languages Association International Scottish Studies group as secretary and Chair; and the Universities Committee for Modern Languages (Scotland) and the Board of Museums Galleries Scotland. This latter membership led to the creation of a new research opportunity with the Pier Arts Centre in Orkney (ARLO) and to the contract for the development of MGS's CPD modules. Team members hold the following memberships and fellowships: Higher Education Academy Fellows; Fellow of The Society of Antiquaries of London; Fellows of the Royal Historical Society, Fellows of The Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, members of The Viking Society for Northern Research; member of The Society for Medieval Archaeology; member of The Royal Archaeological Institute; members of the Scottish Society for Northern Studies; member of the International Society for Cultural History;

Business Engagement: In the REF census period, CNS undertook two successful bids for Scottish Funding Council Innovation Vouchers which allowed research centres to work with businesses to create useful products. The first (2009) was a collaboration with local SME Orkney Ferries to develop a DVD of the heritage of Orkney for transmission in the waiting rooms at ferry ports so that visitors have a better tourism experience. This was based on cultural history and tourism research by Heddle and was seen by 1,423 tourists during its evaluation period in July and August 2009. It is a pilot for a larger project called "Sailing through Orkney's history" which will commence in March 2014 and will place DVDs on ferries. The second (2012) was a collaboration with the Unst Boat Haven to create multimedia material for their visitor centre. This resulted in a commercial publication – *The Small Boats of Shetland*.

Our most recent articulation has been with Serco Northlink Ferries. As a result of CNS research on the Norse expansion in the north Atlantic, we were first approached by Northlink in 2006 to create multimedia presentations for their ferry service. A pilot was created and ran in 2006. Becoming aware of our successful business consultancy with Edrington Group the new owners of Northlink ferries, Serco, seeking a complete rebranding, called CNS in as Nordic experts in 2013 to work on the new children's areas (phase 1) and general merchandising (phase 2). The consultancy fee for phase 1 has been £6,000 and we have just been commissioned to work on phase 2.

Strategic Knowledge Exchange activities: CNS ran a very successful seminar series (2009-13) which brought 30 international experts such as preeminent runes expert Professor Michael Barnes of UCL to Orkney and Shetland to give free public lectures. This led directly to the creation of the Hjaltland Research Network and the successful bid to the Royal Society of Edinburgh for its funding in 2011.

We also maintain a popular column in the local newspaper (average weekly readership 9,033) – details can be found on our website. The readership of this is extensive as the paper is widely circulated and posted abroad to Australia, Canada, New Zealand and there have been 3,193 views of the pages between January and October 2013. The value of the column has been documented in the AHRC Connected Communities Orkney and Shetland Dialect Corpus Scoping Study report, October 2012.

In order to develop our profile, since 2009 we have given 24 talks and 7 free public lectures, including at the Celtic Connections music festival where Heddle gave the UHI Inaugural Lecture (February 2012).

Impact template (REF3a)

CNS specifically supported and enabled staff to achieve impact from their research. For example, time was allocated to Ragnhild Ljosland to write her book *Chrissie's Bodle*, which has appealed to academics and the general public alike. This text has been extremely positively reviewed by writer Pamela Beasant, expert in Orkney's literature and has linked into a University of Edinburgh Research Project, 'Writing the North'. This strategy has led to a wide programme of community engagement and to the establishment of a successful business consultancy strand as well as the projects detailed above.

c. Strategy and plans

CNS will continue to be a UHI Strategic Priority which supports our development into an Institute with two new proposed campuses in Caithness and the Western Isles. Research impact is a key priority for CNS. Our strategy for achieving impact involves a) engagement with potential users of research and b) involving and informing potential users of research through knowledge exchange using diverse media, and public engagement. Our plan for the future is to create a network of tourism and heritage business professionals and local stakeholders across the North Atlantic Rim which will inform the direction of our research to maximise the impact – and to provide the stakeholders with the research that is needed to continue with our policy of helping local communities to make a sustainable use of their heritage. CNS is also conscious of the need to provide training for staff and students in research impact and commercialisation. It has developed training materials on these and has also submitted a bid to AHRC Skills Development Fund in partnership with Business Gateway Scotland for the development of a training package which will be available online to all interested Arts and Humanities research staff and students.

Our impact strategy will also encompass the following:

1. Offering staff contracts that require engagement with potential users of research outputs, including through membership of key organisations and advisory groups;
2. Providing increased time and travel budgets for staff to attend key meetings to develop key relationships and thereby achieve impact
3. Developing further training materials in in the use of media, knowledge exchange and public engagement methodologies
4. Alerting staff to funding possibilities for research, particularly those specifically aimed at enhancing Higher Education engagement with SMEs and decision-makers
5. Inviting users (and potential users) of our expertise to CPD courses and visits in order to familiarise themselves with our research and to suggest new avenues for research to meet their needs.

d. Relationship to case studies

The case studies form part of an integrated programme of research led community engagement activities undertaken during the REF period which have been an academic, social, and economic success, details of which can be seen above. They encapsulate the CNS ethos of interdisciplinary and cohesive research excellence allied to community engagement and economic benefit.

Case study 1: Raising Norse Spirits for Highland Park Distillery

CNS developed a very successful cultural research and consultancy practice with the Edrington Group's Highland Park Distillery. The case study exemplifies the research aims of making people aware of the value both social and commercial of their heritage; of creating new business opportunities from it; and of making research viable as a sustainability tool for employment in the communities. We were engaged to undertake this work because of our expertise in Viking studies, our tourism research, and our success in using our research in the creation of multimedia cultural products like the Norseworld website. The impact can be seen in the sales figures (44,000 bottles with a sales value of £2,640,000 have been sold so far).

Case study 2: Keeping Orkney's Cruise Industry Afloat

CNS created the Scottish Tour Guides Association Orkney Green Badge Tourist Guide course which ran again in 2012 after the success of its inaugural run in 2010 and will continue to run every two years to meet demand. This was in response to centre research identifying a need for more guides to service the cruise industry. Students graduated in six languages (English, French, Spanish, German, Polish, and Swedish), and this led to the creation of local jobs and opportunities in culture and heritage and a service to other tourism areas as well as affording opportunities to disseminate the heritage of the islands to a wider audience, both local and global. There was a direct new employment impact as the programme created 28 new jobs (24 FTEs).