

**Institution:** The Open University

**Unit of Assessment:** D31 Classics

**a. Context**

The OU aims for all its research to make a distinct and material contribution to the economy, society and cultural life because knowledge transfer is fundamental to our mission to be 'open to people, places, ideas and methods'. OU resources and infrastructure across the whole of the UK engage millions of people with university research on a scale unparalleled by any other higher education institution. This reach extends far beyond the OU's 250,000 students; each year the OU's TV and radio programmes, co-produced with the BBC and other media organisations, attract audiences of over 150 million. In this REF census period, there has been a shift from the 'knowledge transfer' approach to the development of an 'impact' strategy. This has led the Classical Studies department to extend our reach in broadcast media and online engagement through open-access resources, networks, partnerships, and innovative approaches to what has become known as the 'digital humanities'.

**b. Approach to impact**

Since the foundation of the OU, television was the first in a long line of new technologies used both to support students and to bring research-led education to the widest possible audience of non-formal learners. In Classical Studies (CS), broadcast media forms a central part of our commitment to engaging with a wide public. We have five research clusters in CS:

- Classical Receptions
- Digital Classics
- Material Culture
- Greek and Latin Texts
- The Ancient Body.

The OU has always worked proactively with broadcast media and, while mainstream media, looking for an expert, still approach individual members of staff, in this census period CS has moved further away from the traditional responsive mode to find ways to engage audiences with our research.

A senior member of the Arts and Humanities Faculty academic staff is seconded to the Open Media Unit (OMU), as a Media Fellow (0.4 FTE). The OMU commissions content and manages not only BBC/OU co-productions but also iTunes U, YouTube and OpenLearn materials. CS staff member Robson served in this role from 2009–11. The Media Fellow acts as a conduit to academic departments in generating programme ideas, handling requests for assistance with particular broadcasts and giving advice on the broadcast possibilities of particular aspects of our research. The OMU also works closely with BBC commissioning agents, and CS staff are actively encouraged to discuss ideas with them. A result of this process is Robson's *Birth of Comedy* series of 6 audios and 5 videos, developed in 2012–13, launched in August 2013, and repackaged as a free iTunes U course, with investment of c.£15k from the OU.

The BBC is linked with the OU in its Charter, the partnership providing a unique way to combine academic expertise based on excellent research with high-quality production values, stimulating people's curiosity and opening up access to new learning opportunities. When the BBC needs support in developing a broadcast, in CS our strategic approach is to deploy individuals to ensure that projects such as Andrew Marr's *The History of the World* (BBC1, 2012) reflect state-of-the-art research and findings in ancient world studies. In 2012–13 the department supported *Ancient Greece: The Greatest Show on Earth* (BBC4; broadcast Aug–Sept 2013).

In addition to our broadcasting work, we share our research findings through platforms such as YouTube and Facebook, as well as iTunes U (to date over 40 million downloads of OU content, much of it research-driven). Tasters of more than 20 Classical Studies modules that build on our

research are available on iTunes U including *Myth and Modern Culture*; *Culture, Identity, Power in the Roman Empire*; *Roman Funerary Monuments*; *Greek Heroes in Popular Culture Through Time*; *Greek Theatre* and *Myth at the Heart of the Roman Empire*. To take just one example of the production values of these pieces, 'Greek Heroes in Popular Culture' mixes archive film, TV clips and character animation for engaging videos, providing accompanying audio discussions on the underpinning research on the changing reception of the heroes studied. Since the launch of this material in September 2011 it has had enormous reach, with 112,995 iTunes U downloads and 53,164 YouTube views. Significance can be measured in the clickthroughs to OpenLearn, our online learning portal providing free course materials to the public, much of it linked to OU/BBC productions; *Greek Heroes* has had over 1200. James' OpenLearn piece on Greek and Roman strands in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and her iTunes U section on Buffy and Pygmalion both arise from her research, and have had over 90,000 downloads since August 2010.

A further proactive example in this census period is the initiative taken by CS in November 2011 to launch the vodcast series *Classics Confidential* (CC), with over 50,000 views to date. In addition to providing an infrastructure facilitating both the dissemination and the impact of the department's own research, CC showcases the work of other academics, new exhibitions and arts events and activities in schools. CC uses Twitter (@ClassicsConfide) and Facebook to promote new pieces, and links from the OU website or its Arts Matters blog further extend their reach. CC in turn generates opportunities for impact that were not initially anticipated, bringing awareness of our work to journalists, cultural organisations and exhibition organisers.

### c. Strategy and plans

In each of our five research clusters we seek to translate the classical world to the widest range of audiences through broadcast and online media. Staffing decisions over this census period have been made partly with a view to increasing impact potential; all new staff have research interests relating classics to the modern world, and so are inherently capable of delivering cultural impact. Recent appointments strengthening the Classical Receptions research strand (Hughes, from 2008; Bakogianni, 2009; King and Paul, 2011; Swift, 2012) further extend its remit into material culture, Greek film and music, historical and contemporary medical practice and film studies.

The CS department is now embedding impact even further at a range of levels. It is an integral part of the planning, resourcing and execution of research projects, reflected in the standing item on impact alongside media engagement on the agenda of the monthly departmental meeting. It is discussed with individuals at their annual staff development reviews and at the annual research monitoring meeting, and is built into the workload planning process.

Our support for impact includes allowing time in staff workload models not only for staff to identify and to work on specific projects to extend the impact of their own research but also for them to commit to longer-term impact activities such as the development of *Classics Confidential* (Barker, Hughes). Because the OU provides such extensive support for impact activities, with specialised training enabling staff to make the most of any opportunities, CS staff have access to a wide range of media training to enable communication of research knowledge through radio, television, podcasting and using social media to engage audiences, with short courses offered covering topics ranging from writing a script for different media, to working with props, drawing on the facilities of an extremely well-equipped in-house production suite.

In addition, the Department's Research Steering Group encourages staff and Postgraduate Research Students (PGRS) to take part in training activities with impact potential. While this can be about acquiring skills (e.g. undertaking media training) it is increasingly about developing partnerships. For example, the department supported Swift's successful application to the AHRC-funded 'Communicating Ancient Greece and Rome' programme (2013 onwards). Associate Lecturer and departmental Research Associate Emma Bridges (who, *inter alia*, set up the Facebook page *Classics International*) and PGR student Iarla Manny are also taking part in this programme, designed to help researchers build partnerships with national organisations in the media, arts/heritage and education sectors; here we aim to take full advantage of the OU's national structure.

Part of our strategy is to identify current events with relevance to the classical world. An example is the 2012 Ancient Olympics project, conceived as part of a research-led OU outreach and knowledge exchange programme and designed to provide informal learning opportunities that in turn could lead into engagement with more formal education. Working with museums and other cultural heritage institutions, we experientially engaged people with research-based classics, history and heritage by bringing the Ancient Olympics to life through the use of multimedia content (audio, animations, interactive maps and images). The free-to-use content was actively distributed through collaboration with various external providers including the Iris Project and remains available as a cohesive OpenLearn resource. Written by Alzola Romero in collaboration with a group of international scholars, the materials won an OpenCourseWare Consortium award for excellence in the use of multimedia, announced at the Open Educational Resources (OER) 2012 conference in Cambridge; a short video overview is available. By the census date the site had received 32,500 unique page views with an average dwell time of 5 minutes.

We intend to use our expertise in the digital humanities further to engage online audiences with CS. We will monitor the impact of *Classics Confidential* and use it to ensure that our research reaches a wider audience, responding to news stories and cultural events such as exhibitions and theatre productions, and doing more to identify opportunities in advance so that we are ready to engage with them.

We will continue to play a leading role in the development of the internet infrastructure relating to the ancient world and will exploit this in future pedagogy as we seek to embed the technology in educational programmes at primary, secondary and tertiary levels. We will explore ways to build on our strategic investment in Roman archaeology and in CS's new Ancient Body research cluster, for example placing articles on ancient medicine in journals read by medical professionals as well as those aimed at classicists. King, who already has close contacts with midwifery practitioners, has published an introduction for a *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry* special issue on narrative medicine and has had a piece accepted by *The Lancet*. In 2014 she will be speaking in a series on narrative medicine at St Bartholomew's Hospital. Each of our five research clusters has been asked to identify an area on which it can have impact in the next census period, and to identify a strategy for achieving that impact.

As part of our continuing commitment to a national role in PGRS training, particularly in reception studies, in July 2014 we will be including 'achieving impact' as a theme of one of the graduate workshops we run as part of our involvement in the Classical Reception Studies Network. We will also work with our partners in the Consortium for Humanities and the Arts, South-East England (CHASE) network to explore further opportunities in this area, building on the AHRC-funded workshops 'Becoming a public intellectual' (from October 2013), in which Swift is participating.

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

Case Study 1, on working with practitioners in a range of areas of Classical Reception, represents a way of approaching impact that is central to what we do at the OU; we share our findings with a wider audience, using the response of the audience to enhance our own research. Swift developed contacts with theatre professionals and has used competitive funding to extend these further to engage audiences with the concept of fragments of Greek drama. Robson's 'Birth of Comedy' emerged from his research on Aristophanes and on modern translations; he then pitched it successfully to the OU's Open Media Unit (OMU). Both of these models are being shared within the department. Case Study 2, on Digital Classics, emerges from the wider OU digital humanities theme. The interests of the chosen funding sources and the external collaborations enhance the impact produced upon the digital infrastructure of significant cultural organisations. The impact of this project will continue to develop as open-linked data becomes more and more fundamental to the functioning of the internet. A five-year project to extend the reach of Barker's existing work still further, 'Chorologia', is currently being considered by the European Research Council.