

**Institution: Leeds Metropolitan University**

**Unit of Assessment: 36: Culture, Communications and Media; Library and Information**

**a. Context**

Unit 36 at Leeds Metropolitan University represents a very wide range of engagement with non-academic users, from national and international business organizations (Public Relations in the work of Gregory), to large non-governmental organizations such as the UN (Halpin's work in Human Rights and information management, Mosley's work for UNESCO on environmental history); and more locally, from a variety of local government policy interventions (Blanchini's work with local authorities in the UK and the EU) to local engagement activities for the Leeds Region (public talks, study days, literature readings and open seminars across a range of subject areas including Media, History and English Literature – of particular note is Watkins's work for the Contemporary Women's Writing Association, Mosley's work on environmental history, Oram's interventions in public history debates for a range of stately homes and the various national heritage organisations, and Shore's work on the histories of crime). The variety of work presented here has a wide range of benefits – economic, political and cultural. The work of the unit has specific benefits for the operation of civil society, for the enrichment of cultural life, for economic prosperity and policy making and it makes a significant contribution to public discourse on a spectrum of issues and subjects. The case studies collected here are a representative sample of the research undertaken by the unit and have been selected to showcase the range of activity that the unit undertakes.

**b. Approach to impact**

The work of this unit at Leeds Metropolitan University is located in two of the institution's four faculties and in 3 separate Schools. Our university has a clear mission to be a catalyst for social and economic progress in and for our region, nationally and internationally, through research and enterprise (Theme 3, Strategic plan – see [http://www.leedsmet.ac.uk/strategicplan/Leeds-Metropolitan\\_Strategic-Plan\\_2010-2015.pdf](http://www.leedsmet.ac.uk/strategicplan/Leeds-Metropolitan_Strategic-Plan_2010-2015.pdf)) and that mission is central to our work in Unit 36. But while the mission is clear, because of the spread of staff and activity, it is very differently inflected depending on where the work takes place and depending on the nature of that work. We see these differences are appropriate and necessary. In some cases there are direct approaches from user groups (often in terms of commissions for consultancy, which are based on the reputation and previous research of individual colleagues -- particularly the case for Professors Gregory, Halpin and Bianchini). In other cases, engagement with a wider community is sought by the producers of the research – usually in the form of local events, study days, author readings and workshops, guest lectures and open access seminars.

In addition, our University also has a repository of published work (<http://repository.leedsmet.ac.uk/main/index.php>) which makes available, copyright laws permitting, published work on a free-access basis. This is still a work in progress, but it is our intention to make all published outputs available outside any pay-wall limitations with the intention of reaching at least Green Standard for all our research as the next REF period unfolds. Research loses much of its value if it is not widely disseminated. Most of that dissemination takes place via academic publishing, but as time goes on, it is envisaged that a far wider audience can be found through the 'creative commons' approach of the repository.

The work of PR and library and information colleagues has a clear path to policy impact which is evident and measurable. These are areas in which research has immediate and visible effects on the wider world, as one of the impact case studies appended below shows. They affect policy and change the ways in which businesses and government organizations operate. For PR in particular the case study demonstrates clear reach and significance.

Less immediately tangible are the impacts of other work in the unit, particularly that which focuses on cultural studies. Nonetheless, since the impact agenda was established as a major plank of publicly funded research, impact has been a greater focus of our work and has been actively managed as part of our discussions about individual colleagues' research activities. Our University actively manages the dissemination of research via the repository, but also seeks a wider audience through news management. Frequent press releases to various media outlets generate local and

**Impact template (REF3a)**

national media interest in particular aspects of our work. Recent examples include Robbins' local radio interview on Oscar Wilde (for LGBT History month, Feb 2012), Laughey's interview on local radio on the Leveson Enquiry (September 2012), Shore's consultancy work on a film celebrating the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Dickens' birth in January 2012, and Mills' TV and newspaper appearances on the work of Van Morrison. We also publicise our work via the 'research showcase' page of our institutional website as well as by mini-videos on our YouTube channel. The research interests and expertise of individuals and groups drives initial research which in turn stimulates the interest of the world beyond the academy. This breadth of research cannot be managed in absolute terms because it is partly context dependent. Although the unit is large, the staff base has to cover a very wide range of activity in undergraduate and postgraduate curricula, which means that there cannot be a large group of colleagues focused on a particular area. But we make every effort to welcome the public into our buildings for our events, and to participate in the life of the wider community via our research findings.

Simple examples include:

- We have made facilities available for some local history groups (for example the Co-op local history group), who came to us precisely because of their engagement with Leeds in Context days and Studying Local History Days (local impact activities that go back around 15-20 years). This relationship has been operational for about 3 years.
- We also support by the loan of space and the participation of our staff as speakers and facilitators the activities of the Leeds Soundings group – a left-leaning discussion umbrella group whose work is largely focused on cultural politics.
- We have also opened up our facilities for public events relating to the British Muslim projects undertaken by our former colleague Dr Claire Chambers and have evidence from feedback questionnaires that the audiences for these events were extremely diverse, and that they identified quality-of-life benefits from them. Her related work with Leeds school children is part of a continuum of activity in related topic areas. It is too soon to identify the longer term elements here, but we anticipate some changes to the ways in which minority ethnic children are encouraged to read and engage with literary culture as a result of these interventions.
- Our recent conference, Austere Cultures (September 2011), combined academic research with presentations and round tables from local activist groups. Their participation brought a slightly different audience to our university than that which might usually be expected from an academic conference, and the 'impact' flowed in both directions. This is a model we hope to use again in a forthcoming conference on Media Spaces and Places in 2014.
- The Gothic Research Seminar (4 times per term each academic year) has run for about over a year and is open to all. Similarly, History research seminars, co-hosted with the History Department at the University of Leeds until very recently, also attract a small but significant non-academic audience.

**c. Strategy and plans**

It is likely that, for the foreseeable future, the key method of dissemination of research will remain the academic publishing process. The maximization of quality outputs in this arena is largely managed via the annual personal development review (PDR) round, undertaken by all academic and academic-related staff. It has been a policy of the management of this unit for many years that all PDRs make reference to published outputs as one of the key performance indicators of our academic community. The drive towards impact narrowly defined has some risks which we are anxious to avoid. While it is clearly the case that Universities must be accountable for the public money they spend, simply 'popularising' research is not the answer to the impact agenda. In developing our plans and strategy, we are mindful of the need to strive for excellence (which may mean striving for the complex and the unpopular, and may mean finding out uncomfortable facts or making difficult interventions in public life) alongside the need to strive for a wider engagement with

our work and a wider engagement of our researchers with the public beyond higher education.

It is the view of our University that there are multiple drivers for research. It is important that public policy is driven by research, that business decisions are based on research findings and that cultural life be enriched by research. Policy and business are, however, often short-term in their focus so that although there is an imperative to respond to issues as they arise, this is not the only purpose of research. More pure forms of inquiry and critique often have impacts beyond the short term. It is essential therefore that our strategy enables reactive research (to particular agendas and needs) but does not stifle other kinds of inquiry.

In managing our research strategy, therefore, we are mindful of these multiple issues. Depending on the nature of the individual researcher's interests and skills, we focus on the following issues:

- Research outputs in the traditional sense (journal articles, scholarly works and books, the scholarly infrastructure) continue to be the key measurement of research success.
- In apportioning funding, supporting research bidding, and building our research capacity, we increasingly make use of impact measures (reach in terms of audience, both in raw numbers and in types of audience; significance in terms of changing paradigms for critique and understanding, and altering behaviours of individuals and organizations). We ask colleagues to discuss and plan for impact as part of their research outputs in the annual Personal Development Review rounds.
- We will continue to hold public events of a variety of kinds and on a number of different scales (from international conferences largely made up of academics, to smaller more local events) to increase the reach of our work and to support our University's mission to have an impact both locally and more widely.
- We will continue actively to manage the dissemination of our research via a variety of media outlets.
- We will continue to publicise our work on our own web pages.
- We will develop our repository so that it is an increasingly complete record of our work and increasingly an obvious locus for the external world to access publicly funded work.

We will measure our impact via a variety of data, including our website 'hit' data, our news footprint, and softer measures such as the questionnaires which define the local impacts of our public events.

**d. Relationship to case studies**

In selecting our case studies, we have tried to ensure that the range of work contained in this unit is reflected. In RAE 2008, one of the forerunners to this unit was described as an eclectic submission – that eclecticism remains to this day, and we are proud of it, since it is central to our interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary ethos. The breadth of our research effort is a part of our university's mission which demands that we 'engage, value and develop our diverse community of colleagues'. One of the ways in which we do this is to value very different kinds of research activity, from policy and business development focused research in PR and cultural policy, to Human Rights Research in Library and Information Management; and from postcolonial cultures to histories of crime and contemporary women's writing, all of which have value as cultural enrichment activities. Our strategic approach, which remains focused on individual researchers in most cases, was developed because no 'one-size-fits-all' plan could appropriately encompass the spectrum of work contained in this unit. We encourage experiment as well as 'needs-based' research, and the chosen cases studies are meant to reflect this context and breadth of activity