

Institution: University of Westminster

Unit of Assessment: UoA 28; Modern Languages and Linguistics

a. Context

Westminster's Department of Modern and Applied Languages (DMAL) has a well-established reputation for research-informed professional practice based on applied language work. This is complemented by its central London location, enabling it to build long-standing partnerships with various government and cultural institutions. As a result, research taking place here drives a broad range of impacts on cultural life, civil society and public discourse. In addition to research and knowledge transfer activities (such as significant commercial contracts with bodies outside the academic world as below), teaching within the department is also oriented towards professional practice. This includes pioneering professionally-focused elements at undergraduate level, and internationally recognised postgraduate-level translation and interpreting qualifications and training.

Three examples illustrate how the DMAL extends its engagement with a wide range of non-academic users and beneficiaries (other than those described in the Case Studies). First, DMAL has worked with the Ministry of Defence (MoD) for the past 18 years to provide bilingual military language examinations for all UK forces personnel who undergo defence language training (current contract £1.5 million over 3 years). DMAL designed and delivers multilevel tests in all skills in accordance with a setting, delivery and moderation process that maximises validity and reliability across 49 languages. Second, DMAL has designed and delivered English tests in listening and reading for NATO's Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) where they are used to test the English proficiency of both military and civilian personnel from NATO member countries against post requirements. Tests escalate in level and items are benchmarked against the NATO STANAG. The total value of the 3 contracts to-date is £209k. Both these sets of tests (for the MoD and SHAPE) are used to ensure effective communication between military and civilian personnel in a number of settings, using either English or the host nation's native language. Third, is an EU-funded (£300k) two-year project (2011-13) 'Promoting Intercultural Competence in Translators' (PICT) to improve the professional expertise of translation teachers and translators with intercultural training. DMAL coordinates PICT and leads the international consortium managing it. The consortium shares its findings with the wider academic/policy communities via a website (<http://www.pictllp.eu/>) and knowledge sharing events in (to date) London, Pilsen (Czech Republic), Joensuu (Finland), Sofia, Krakow, Norwich (UK) and Paris. The impact for the professional practice of translators across the EU is considerable and still being assessed as part of this on-going project. Although distinct from the Case Studies, it is to be noted that this expertise in intercultural competence training in professional contexts was considerably developed during work related to Case Study 2, 'Museums and Galleries and the International Visitor Experience (MGIVE)'.

Much of this professionally-focused work and both Case Studies exploit opportunities provided by DMAL's central London location. Beneficiaries in civil society, public discourse and cultural life include, for example, French residents in London, notably through the research into the experiences of a much wider and more diverse range of French migrants in the British capital than has previously been undertaken (Case Study 1, 'The London French: Liberty, Equality, Opportunity'). Those working closely with these French residents have used the research, such as the French Embassy/Consulate and also, to date, media professionals and political party support workers. Beneficiaries in the field of cultural life further include London museum and gallery marketing professionals, who have improved their engagement strategies with international audiences and the visiting experience of international visitors themselves (Case Study 2, 'Museums and Galleries and the International Visitor Experience (MGIVE)').

b. Approach to impact

A clearly defined impact strategy has been essential for this relatively small Unit of Assessment in the period 2008-13. The strategy has several distinct strands. First, the Department used financial support from RAE 2008 to give staff time to develop new projects, to publish and to

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mentor new and early career researchers, and to develop public engagement. It has used two funded workshop series (AHRC and British Academy) to maximise the dissemination of its research projects beyond academia. It has also drawn on its wider experience (as above) to enable research-active staff to develop impact strategies, and to focus attention on those areas of research that are most likely to lead to direct engagement with wider communities of users. DMAL has also increased its knowledge transfer projects – where non-academic users and stakeholders are the beneficiaries – using internal mechanisms and resources to support impact. For example, the Department has a successful record of attracting Higher Education Innovation Funding (HEIF) for its projects (£0.5m from HEIF 4 and 5; 10% of the total HEIF budget for the University) used to develop language testing and CPD pilot projects. These mechanisms have also been used to support targeted funding applications for the development of our knowledge transfer strategy. A further example is the (£40k) HEFCE-funded 2008 Research Report, ‘Languages and International Events’, examining the contribution of higher education language departments to high profile international events such as London 2012 and the potential role of languages as a motor of economic and civic regeneration. The project team was drawn from those who had worked on Case Study 2. The research led to consultancy work with the London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games and the report is currently being studied by 2016 Organising Committee for the Rio de Janeiro Games.

Finally, two University appointments have a strategic role to play. In 2010, the University appointed 2 School-based Research Development Officers (RDOs) to support funding applications and knowledge transfer activities and, in 2012, a School-based Director of Business Strategy and Development. The latter has a broader remit of developing third-leg income and wider user engagement.

This impact strategy is executed in two distinct programmes of activity: 1) developing the impact potential of established research interests (including where impacts may not have been anticipated when the research was first undertaken); 2) encouraging the impact potential of newer research and research interests in a planned and direct way. The latter, in particular, is a way of developing the dissemination of the expertise and knowledge of staff who are established researchers but whose work may previously have focused on research quality within a more purely academic base (for example, in Case Study 1, ‘The London French: Liberty, Equality, Opportunity’), or of staff in the Department who have not previously been included in research submissions (for example, in Case Study 2, ‘Museums and Galleries and the International Visitor Experience (MGIVE)’).

c. Strategy and plans

Future research plans will build on acquired expertise to maximize impact potential, to embed and to develop the strategies described above. DMAL will continue to build on the successes of its knowledge transfer strategy and its expertise in engagement with non-academic users. It will support the development of collaborations with other sectors, and will help researchers to extend the very strong partnerships DMAL has already built outside the academic world (as shown above). Synergies across the University will be further developed, for example with the Contemporary China Centre (also part of DMAL and submitting to Area Studies), with the Institute for Modern and Contemporary Culture (Depts. of English, Linguistics and Cultural Studies, Media, Art and Design and Architecture and the Built Environment) which has established interests in museum studies and urban studies. An important opportunity is presented by University restructuring (from 2013/14) which brings Law into a new Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities. Colleagues in Law share strong research interests into migrant and refugee communities and have a well-established approach of focusing research interest on areas of research that are most likely to lead to direct and measurable impact on the wider community with their expertise in socio-legal and applied research. Future research into the ‘London French’ will develop comparative studies into the experiences and contributions of other migrant communities in London (notably Chinese and Latin American with work already in progress on both of these communities in DMAL). Comparative research into the British in Paris has begun with the University of London in Paris and will be launched at a public event and conference (London, March 2014).

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A key aim will be to move beyond impact in cultural life, civil society and public discourse to policy-making and public services. There is already interest in the work of Case Study 1, 'The London French: Liberty, Equality, Opportunity' from business, professional and political associations, and cultural institutions. There is also clear scope for its use by government departments dealing with urban migration and social inclusion; public engagement with the City; and debates on immigration. Case Study 2, 'Museums and Galleries and the International Visitor Experience (MGIVE)' shows scope for development of the research for economic prosperity by improving the visitor experience more generally (the UK visitor rating on 'Welcome' is low), and an aim not fully realized by the project was to investigate increased 'dwell time' and the 'return visit' by international visitors, both prized by museums and galleries.

d. Relationship to case studies

The Case Studies selected exemplify the Department's approach to impact. Activities carried out as part of these have played an important role in raising awareness and use of our research by a range of professionals and the general public. Case Study 1, 'The London French: Liberty, Equality, Opportunity' has included interviews with media organisations in France and the UK. A series of six short programmes on the contemporary French in London were made in 2011 by the commercial radio station French Radio London and its main output used as a competition prize in 2013. Project partners include the British Library (supporting the creation of the 'London French' Special Collection for the UK Web Archive), the Museum of London and the V&A which house a large number of French-related artefacts, and Boughton House (Northants; the 'English Versailles'). Two public events attracted a public audience of 70 to the project launch at the French Institute, London in 2010, and 120 to Westminster for its book launch in 2013. It also had an important presence at the popular Bankside Bastille Day Festival in 2012 and 2013. Such profile-raising events impact society and culture by improving public understanding. The case study as a whole is a prime study in how an academically conceived book can reach well beyond the interest of other academics.

For Case Study 2, 'Museums and Galleries and the International Visitor Experience (MGIVE)' targeted workshops (as for Case Study 1, 'The London French: Liberty, Equality, Opportunity') for specific stakeholders were a key part of the project. The National Gallery, the British Museum, the V&A, the National Portrait Gallery, Tate Britain and the Museum of London were engaged in developing and testing material. Direct dissemination also took place to marketing and communications directors from The Royal Academy, National Maritime Museum, Historic Royal Palaces, Roman Baths (Bath), British Library, National History Museum, Fitzwilliam Museum (Cambridge), and the National Museums of Scotland, reaching beyond a London focus.