

**Institution: University of Reading**

**Unit of Assessment: 29 English Language and Literature**

**a. Context**

In its approach to impact, English at Reading has built on two of its principal strengths: (1) a long-established tradition of working with archives, and (2) growing experience of working with non-academic bodies in local communities. At the same time, the Department has sought to realize the cultural benefit inherent in all its research through a wide range of public engagement.

**(1) Archival development and digitization** The Department has a long tradition of working with archivists on material both in Reading's Special Collections and elsewhere. Researchers

- enhance public engagement with the archival material through critical interpretation (Nash and Wilson - publishers' archives; Pilling and Nixon - Samuel Beckett Archive; Sutton - literary manuscripts and authors' papers);
- increase national and international public access by creating digitized archives and databases (Ioppolo - Henslowe-Alleyn Digitization Project; Nixon - Beckett Digital Manuscript Project; Donnell and Sutton - Leverhulme Diasporic Archives; O'Callaghan - Verse Miscellanies Online).

**(2) Local connections** In recent years, the Department has developed a strong emphasis on fostering local connections to achieve impact from its research, generating impact through:

- the Poetry and Poetics research group, which focuses on practice-based research and has extensive long-term involvement and impact in the local community in Reading;
- independent projects in which researchers have built on connections between their research and local interest constituencies (national and international) to enhance public engagement and impact (Morrissey - sermons at St Paul's; Holmes - Pre-Raphaelites and museums; Stoneley - Irish detainees in Reading Prison; Hardman - insular uses of the Matter of France; Donnell - Caribbean literature and sexuality).

**The main types of impact generated by our research are in the area of cultural benefit,** where we have sought to enhance public intellectual capital, interpreting literary texts and traditions and developing new cultural insights to produce:

- personal intellectual enhancement or improved quality of life from greater understanding and enjoyment of literature or culture as a result of engaging with our research;
- improved access to and engagement with archival resources supported by our research;
- educational enrichment at school level through research-led initiatives.

The beneficiaries of our research are professionals in the worlds of the theatre, museums, and the book; local school teachers and pupils; Arts councils and other public bodies; and members of the general public.

**b. Approach to impact**

Researchers in English foster impact in four key ways: (1) engaging directly with user groups; (2) developing relationships with broadcasting media; (3) collaborating with museum curators and public bodies; and (4) using social media to enhance public feedback.

**(1) Researchers in English engage directly with user groups** (local, national and overseas) at public readings, discussions and lectures; conferences including non-academic participants; meetings of societies with niche interests and special-interest groups; workshops; exhibitions; literary festivals; publishers' events; school visits; dramatic performances. For example, Poetry and Poetics researchers regularly engage members of the public through impact-producing poetry events as detailed in Robinson's case study. Book professionals - publishers, librarians, archivists, conservators and book dealers - participated in Bullard's 'Gathered Text' project (2010), which focused on the construction of Early Modern books. Cocks drew on his research on children and

## Impact template (REF3a)

literature in a series of Skyped workshops (2011) with local school teachers and pupils, who testified to their enhanced understanding ('It made me look at Dickens in a different way') and improved creative and critical thinking skills; while Holmes's and Lesnik-Oberstein's innovative workshop to demonstrate the value of the literary and historical study of biology to biologists (2012) enabled researchers to interact with science professionals and school teachers, who recorded the impact of the project on their perceptions in response to a detailed questionnaire (<http://www.reading.ac.uk/cultivating-common-ground/>). Researchers also engage actively with user contacts in response to research publications. For example, in consequence of his published research on publishers' archives, Nash was invited (2010) to a meeting with Random House UK to provide an academic perspective on the complicated practical, legal and commercial issues involved in developing better ways of facilitating access to the company's archive, held on deposit at Reading. Morrissey's published work on Paul's Cross sermons led to an invitation to take part in a public event co-sponsored by St Paul's and the charity Our Democratic Heritage (2012), to explore the role of the Cathedral area in the legacy of democracy and free speech in the UK (<http://www.stpaulsinstitute.org.uk/Events/St-Pauls-Cross-Preachers-People-and-Power>).

**(2) Researchers develop relationships with broadcasting media**, working with UoR Press and Communications Officers to generate publicity (podcasts; local radio broadcasting). For instance, Hardman's podcast about her joint research project on medieval romances (2011) led to an invitation to participate in a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a community-based street theatre project in Walsall (2012-13) with impact for local community members in their enhanced experience of local identity, as recorded on the project website ([www.bayardscolts.org.uk](http://www.bayardscolts.org.uk)). Further afield, Lesnik-Oberstein's published research in *The Last Taboo* (2006; 2011) has led to numerous engagements with broadcast and print media in UK, Europe and North America, producing in turn widespread responses from members of the public witnessing the personal impact of the research on their cultural perceptions (<http://www.thelasttriangle.com/?s=lesnik-oberstein>). Donnell's public workshop in Barbados on literature and Caribbean sexualities was filmed by the Caribbean Broadcasting Company (2011), and her lecture on Caribbean Queer for a follow-up workshop organized by local scholars was archived on the website of International Resource Network (2011), where it is used by a global community of researchers, activists, and artists sharing knowledge about diverse sexualities (<http://www.youtube.com/user/caribbeanIRN>).

**(3) Researchers collaborate with museum curators and public bodies to grow impact.** For instance, collaboration was built in to Holmes's AHRC fellowship on the Pre-Raphaelites and science, in which public engagement with his research on the design and decoration of the Oxford University Museum and the Natural History Museum was promoted by public lectures and an exhibition (2012-13) and an educational website. Collaboration is key to Stoneley's AHRC research project 'Enemies of the State', in partnership with Berkshire Record Office, which launched with a public event and exhibition (2013); the project aims to engage new, non-academic audiences with archives on the internment of Irish patriots in Reading Prison after the 1916 Easter Uprising (<http://blogs.reading.ac.uk/enemies-of-the-state>). Researchers make active use of University Special Collections, especially of their staff's expertise and support in planning and publicizing public-facing events: for example, in Wilson's 2012 workshop and exhibition on 'Selling and Distributing Literary Cultures, 1880-1940'; the exhibition on Ladybird books (2012-13) at the University's Museum of English Rural Life (MERL) developed by Cocks (whose research on children's literature underpins it) with museum staff, in which local public engagement and impact was primed by a call to lend personal copies of Ladybird books.

**(4) Researchers use social media and other resources to enhance public feedback.** The Department actively supports staff in developing and gathering evidence of impact by granting some alleviation from teaching or examining (funded in part by University central provision for impact). Researchers invite reflection and feedback from user groups via social media (Twitter, Facebook), email discussion, blogs, and targeted impact questionnaires; extensive responses via social media and through audience responses at public events have been captured (for instance, in the activities of Donnell, Holmes, Lesnik-Oberstein, Ioppolo, Nixon, Robinson).

In addition to, and in support of, these specific mechanisms, **the Department actively fosters an impact culture among staff** through new departmental initiatives: ● Impact Workshop (2011) - open discussion on the importance of impact; ● Impact Awayday (2012) - inputs and discussion on

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developing impact for REF 2014 and beyond; • appointing a Director of Enterprise to support researchers in working with non-academic collaborators.

The Department encourages the development of impact through projects and events that bring the public into contact with our research: • redesign of Department website to highlight new research projects and achievements visible to outside web-users; • participating in UoR Researchers' Night (2011) - researchers showcased and shared current projects with the local public; • organizing annual public lecture series at MERL (2011-13) - researchers provided new cultural insights to members of the general public through wide-ranging literary interpretations.

**c. Strategy and plans**

The Department's excellent recent performance in securing significant grants brings with it explicit opportunities for impact and demonstrates the strong base on which this work will build. English at Reading plans to exploit its existing research strength in **archival development and digitization**, and its success in achieving impact through fostering **local connections**. Indicative examples of these two strategic aims are: Sutton's Leverhulme International Network on Diasporic Archives (2012-14), which has potential for substantial international impact; and Donnell's ongoing work engaging NGOs and activist groups in the Anglophone Caribbean as part of her AHRC leadership fellowship, which has potential for significant future impact regarding health and well-being as well as public policy. The Department will continue to work closely with MERL as an important local partner in creating impact deriving from our research, and at the same time will develop links with other local impact partners such as Berkshire Record Office.

However, the Department's strategy for the future is based on the conviction that the cultural benefit inherent in the kind of research we typically do needs to be made explicit in all our projects and its impact on individuals and user groups recognized. Every research project developed in the Department must have a robust and achievable pathway to impact built in to the planning of the project, involving relationships with potential users. For instance, Holmes's new bid for AHRC follow-on funding (2014) hinges upon collaboration with museums in Oxford, London and Manchester to produce exhibitions, public events, and an app.

Building on the current impact strategy, and in light of discussions at the Impact Awayday 2012, researchers will be supported in developing the impact of their research through review structures. The Department has instituted a new system of research and impact mentoring between colleagues to provide guidance and support from 2014, while existing annual staff development reviews and individual research meetings will give increased opportunities to discuss questions relating to impact.

The Department will also continue to develop and maximize the efficacy of the website as a tool for generating impact and encouraging user interaction. All researchers will be encouraged to seek to optimize the availability of their research outputs to potential users employing internet searches, and to create research blogs and online discussions wherever possible, as well as capturing user feedback in response to research activities. Analysis of the responses will contribute to ongoing improvement in the mechanisms for generating and enhancing impact.

**d. Relationship to case studies**

The 'Availability of Poetry' case study exemplifies the intellectual position underpinning the Department's approach to impact: that our research has the capacity to create impact and cultural benefit through enhancing public understanding and enjoyment of literature and culture. The 'Charlemagne' case study demonstrates the Department's active pursuit of impact by disseminating research and following through the impact opportunity generated by the users' response. Both draw strength from the Department's impact emphasis on **local connections**. The 'Beckett' case study as a whole illustrates the breadth of the Department's impact activities, while the Beckett Digital Manuscript Project and the 'Henslowe-Alleyn Digitization Project' are forerunners in the area of **archival development and digitization** that the Department has identified as of particular importance in relation to our research strength in Digital Humanities and the resources of the archive holdings at Reading.