

Institution: Birmingham City University

Unit of Assessment: 29 – English Language and Literature

a. Context

The primary research focus of Birmingham City University (BCU) is on externally-facing applied research, with strong commercial links and over 25 Knowledge Transfer Partnerships completed since 2008. Within this wider context, the School of English is a department of the traditional humanities and, though the primary driver for many of researchers is intellectual curiosity, we have taken every opportunity to learn constructively from our environment, making internal collaboration the means to achieve high levels of external recognition. We have an eclectic understanding of our discipline, covering literary, linguistic, philosophical, creative and dramatic studies, and our work demonstrates the power of English to reinvent its historic boundaries and form new alliances. Members of every research group in the School have been involved in high-impact external engagement activities since 2008:

1. **Cultural:** Sustained collaboration with media and cultural institutions, including Writing West Midlands, the Royal Opera House and the BBC, has brought the work of our literary scholars and creative writers to general audiences at regional, national and international levels. Our Institute of Creative and Critical Writing is influencing creative practice and public debate about the value of the arts.
2. **Educational:** Our literary researchers have published scholarly work for a general readership, including students at universities worldwide. We have provided continuing professional development opportunities for A-Level English Language teachers and for writers working in schools. The innovative IT resources and language corpora built by our Research & Development Unit for English Studies have influenced the design and delivery of curricula across disciplines in schools and HEIs internationally.
3. **Commercial:** There have been unique partnerships drawing upon our research expertise in Linguistics and Philosophy to bring commercial benefits to UK construction companies and to an advertising agency working on behalf of international brands. Our work has also contributed to economic prosperity in the creative sector through the publication of poetry collections, creative non-fiction, and novels with mainstream publishers.

b. Approach to impact

Our strategic approach to interaction with non-academic audiences has been underpinned by a combination of externally-funded projects and our own internal initiatives. During the REF period, we have been awarded two separate AHRC Knowledge Transfer Fellowships totalling £110k: a major achievement for any English department but particularly for one of our modest size. We have also explored new sources of external funding, securing £60k from JISC to develop open-source e-learning software with significant usage beyond our own institution and discipline. Internally, we have developed interdisciplinary relationships with other departments and used these as a platform for increased external engagement, leading to the formation of the Institute of Creative and Critical Writing (ICCW). We describe our approach to impact in more detail below:

Cultural

Effective engagement with the Arts sector has been a long-term strategic aim of the School. We have been recruiting practising writers to our permanent staff since 2005, and drawing upon their experience and contacts to form new partnerships within and beyond HE. Creative writing provision has been extended since 2008 with the appointment of **Marchant**, author of *Something of the Night* (Simon & Schuster, 2012) and numerous other works of creative non-fiction, and novelist **Lawrence Pietroni** (*Ruby's Spoon*, Chatto & Windus, 2010).

Marchant's success as a writer has led to a series of commissions from BBC Radio. His programmes for Radio 4, as writer and presenter, have included *North & South: Across the Great Divide* (2 parts, February 2012), *The Completists* (5 parts, February 2011), and *The Ghost Trains of Old England* (October 2010). His Radio 3 show *Walking with Attitude* (December 2011) was chosen as a radio highlight by *The Guardian* and *Radio Times* ('arrestingly-well-written').

We have several members of staff whose work bridges the traditional gap between the scholarly and the creative and who have benefited from the cross-fertilisation of ideas in our multi-

disciplinary environment. This cross-fertilisation has, in turn, brought wider benefits to the general public, as we outline below. **Mellors** is a poet and critic whose creative works include *The Lewknor Turn* (Shearsman, 2013) and a collaboration with the painter David Rees on *The Gordon Brown Sonnets* (Verisimilitude, 2009). **Leadbetter**, author of a CCUE prize-winning study of Coleridge (Palgrave, 2011), is also an established poet who undertook a Hawthornden Fellowship in 2013. **Roberts**, a specialist in C17 and C18 drama and literature, regularly contributes 1500-word programme essays for the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, including an essay on treatments of Tamburlaine in the later C17 which supported the 2010 Graham Vick production of Handel's *Tamerlano*. In total, programmes containing **Roberts'** essays have sold over 16,000 copies, and some have been translated into Dutch and French for productions on the Continent. **Roberts** advised and appeared on *Leading Ladies*, a Radio 4 documentary about Restoration actresses (2010), and was an interval speaker for Radio 3's *Opera on 3* (2011).

Within the Faculty structure at BCU, English is grouped with schools of Media and Acting and an internationally recognised Conservatoire. This has allowed us to expand our interdisciplinary links through collaborative initiatives. For example, in 2011, staff and students from the School of English and Birmingham Conservatoire collaborated on the *Make an Aria* project with Music Theatre Wales and Welsh National Opera. Combined expertise in poetry and music composition led to the creation of new work to herald WNO's autumn season in Birmingham.

In 2012, we built upon earlier successes and formalised our commitment to the promotion of cultural excellence by establishing the ICCW, directed by **Leadbetter** and supported by a Fellowship: novelist and scriptwriter Helen Cross, dramaturge and playwright Caroline Jester, poet, novelist and academic Patrick McGuinness, poet and Professor of Writing at Warwick David Morley, and poet Sally Read. The ICCW hosts a series of public events each year, designed to extend the impact of our creative and scholarly work beyond traditional university boundaries. A good example is the inaugural John Donne Day (April 2013), presented at Polesworth Abbey, North Warwickshire, in partnership with Writing West Midlands (WWM), the literary development agency for the region. The ICCW provided the academic programme, with **Leadbetter** and **Mellors** joined by colleagues **Howe** and **Littlewood**. The Vicar of Polesworth wrote afterwards (this and WWM letter referenced below both available on request):

being the first of such ventures in this former-mining village, so far from the 'centre', the effect was quite profound.[...] The input from BCU lecturers greatly enriched the event and this is evident in feedback we received from those who came.[...] This event has inspired new forms of cultural expression, contributes to the 'sense of place' and builds up local identify and pride.

Our creative partnership with WWM is now well established. In addition to the Donne event, our academics have chaired sessions at successive Birmingham Book Festivals, and at The Writer's Toolkit, a conference for over 150 industry professionals. The Chief Executive of WWM wrote:

BCU's School of English has enriched the writing ecology of the region.[...] The quality of this engagement – and the quality of the staff involved – is high, emphasising BCU's contribution as the university in the West Midlands with the greatest impact on our policy and practice.

Educational

We have demonstrated a long-term commitment to supporting work that speaks to a wide audience of students and general readers by drawing on the most up-to-date scholarship. **Mellors'** OUP World's Classics edition of Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* is the standard edition in schools and universities worldwide. **Roberts'** World's Classics edition of Lord Chesterfield's Letters (over 9000 copies sold) is the only annotated edition of this landmark text, and his 2010 edition of Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year* (over 14,000 copies sold) formed the basis of a play performed in partnership with the English Speaking Union. Building upon the success of his CUP monograph, **Roberts** wrote a further play on the life of Thomas Betterton, which was toured to groups of A-Level Theatre Studies students by Royal National Theatre actor Robert Lister and is revived in London in 2014.

We have also provided opportunities for writers to become involved in educational initiatives. In February 2013 we hosted the Writers in Schools workshop, a joint event with the National Association of Writers in Education (NAWE), bringing together writers and teachers wishing to introduce creative writing into the classroom. Delegates commented to NAWE that the day was 'very well pitched for a large diverse group' and 'very thought provoking and empowering'.

Impact template (REF3a)

The WebCorp linguistic search tools developed by our Research and Development Unit for English Studies (RDUES: **Gee, Kehoe, Renouf**) are included on university syllabi from Oxford to Stanford, have been used by researchers worldwide studying topics from C19 Fiction to Climate Change, and have received over 15,000 searches per month throughout the REF period. A new WebCorp interface tailored for A-Level English Language students (KT Fellowship, 2009-11) introduced concepts not usually found at pre-university level, also bringing Continuing Professional Development benefits for teachers. RDUES' more recent eMargin annotation tool has already attracted over 800 registered users across disciplines from schools and universities worldwide and has been integrated with many of their institutional virtual learning environments (see REF3b).

Commercial

Research by **Addis** on the philosophy of expertise underpinned his KT Fellowship with three construction companies: Mouchel, Thomas Vale, and Rider Levett Bucknall (2008-9). By engaging in critical discourse about practice, **Addis** was able to enhance individual practitioner and company performance, and provide economic benefits. Building upon their work on WebCorp and the language of online discourse, **Kehoe** and **Gee** were engaged by communications agency Grey London as part of a major product launch by fashion brand Puma (see REF3b for both initiatives).

c. Strategy and plans

Our strategy for the next period is to build upon previous successes by widening the scope and reach of our external engagement activities further still. Researchers with experience of successful externally-facing work (**RDUES, Addis**) are already providing support and mentoring to colleagues across the School to ensure that impact is given appropriate consideration in the planning of all research projects, collaborations and events. At institutional level, BCU has demonstrated a clear commitment in its new Research Strategy to research responsive to the needs of external partners.

In the School of English, our core aim is to build upon existing partnerships and develop new cross-disciplinary research collaborations with potential for high impact. For example, a new ESRC-funded project will see **Addis** work with psychologists and IT specialists at Liverpool on the automatic generation of scientific theories from large data collections: work with the potential to transform research activity in a wide range of domains. We also plan to exploit the growing importance of corpus linguistics as a cross-disciplinary methodology. **Kehoe** and **Gee**, along with **Lutzky**, were invited expert speakers at an event at the new ESRC Centre for Corpus Approaches to Social Science, Lancaster (Sep 2013), and are working on a joint initiative with the University of Birmingham to develop corpus-derived learning materials on behalf of the British Council, for use by language learners worldwide. The linguistic expertise of the RDUES team is already being utilised by further advertising agencies in partnership with The Commercial Edge Initiative (<http://www.tcei.co.uk/>). The research underpinning eMargin is being exploited through an Arts Council bid in collaboration with the Birmingham Repertory Theatre (REP), designed to expand the REPwrite collaborative playwriting tool for new audiences. REPwrite brings together multiple 'characters' in different scenarios and, thus, is transferable to any domain where dialogue is central. Case studies are planned for 2014 in the museum sector, restorative justice (bringing together offenders and victims), and mental health counselling in the NHS.

We recognise that Impact can be more difficult to achieve in the traditional scholarly areas of our discipline, and this was a key driver in establishing the ICCW. Highlights of the public programme scheduled for 2013-14 include a seminar on *Europa*: a pan-European theatre project involving Fellow Caroline Jester, writers from Britain, Germany, Poland, and Croatia, and held in partnership with the REP; a collaboration with the Birmingham Conservatoire on Britten's settings of Donne's poems; and a workshop on writing outdoors for Wenlock Poetry Festival. Indicative of the strength of the planned programme is the fact that WWM has asked to be the ICCW's official partner for future events. Furthermore, ICCW Director **Leadbetter** has accepted an offer to join WWM's Board of Trustees and will be on a sub-committee directing artistic policy from Nov 2013.

d. Relationship to case studies

Our case studies reflect both the strengths of our approach throughout the period and our future ambitions. We have chosen studies based on the work of **RDUES** and **Addis** as they demonstrate reach into domains not typically considered by traditional English Studies and illustrate approaches to external engagement which will act as exemplars to our other researchers.