

Institution: The Open University

Unit of Assessment: C23 Sociology

a. Overview

Sociology research at The Open University (OU) has a long established reputation, nationally and internationally, for distinctive and innovative interdisciplinarity, and for ground-breaking research on socio-cultural change and citizenship and governance, which blends intellectual originality with empirical rigour. This research is based within the Faculty of Social Sciences in two research centres: the Centre for Citizenship, Identities and Governance (CCIG), one of five University-designated centres of research excellence, and the ESRC funded Centre for Research into Socio-Cultural Change (CRESC), run in collaboration with the University of Manchester. These two centres receive strategic University funds to pursue distinctive and interdisciplinary intellectual agendas in sociological research; to build strong national and international research networks; and to support new research ventures and collaborations, grant applications and studentships. The centres have been highly successful in winning grants, including ESRC funding of CRESC for a second term (2009–14). The high profile of Sociology at the OU is reflected in editorships of four influential journals, extensive public engagement such as the *Creating Publics* project and the Research Councils UK (RCUK) Catalyst for Public Engagement, its many international networks and partnerships, and in numerous keynotes at national and international conferences.

b. Research strategy

Since RAE 2008 our strategic aims have been to foster field-leading research within distinctive, sustainable signature areas of international research excellence; a vibrant research community; strategically aligned external research grant bidding; user/public engagement and activities designed to secure the impact of our work outside the academy; and excellence in postgraduate research. OU Sociology has played a leading role in the discipline nationally and internationally and is well known for its long scholarly tradition of distinctive interdisciplinary sociological research.

The organisation of both research and teaching in our home Faculty of Social Sciences has enabled a broad range of perspectives to come together through our two interdisciplinary Research Centres – CCIG and CRESC – combining intellectual openness with a commitment to the investigation and analysis of social, cultural, political, economic and psycho-social worlds and the causes and governance of social and cultural change. As a University-designated centre of research excellence, which includes 75 researchers, CCIG (director Jef Huysmans) has received annual funding centrally of £383,308 from 2008/9 to 2012/13. The OU also supports CRESC (co-directors: John Law, Marie Gillespie and Sophie Watson) which includes 15 researchers in the Faculty, with an annual grant of £55k to support centre activities including international networking. The joint Manchester–OU CRESC has six research areas, three of which were initiated and are convened at the OU: Law convenes the *Social Life of Methods* (SLOM), which explores what social research methods actually do and how they are shaped by the social world; Gillespie convenes *Reframing the Nation*, which studies the social practices and critical events that frame and underpin national and transnational dynamics in relation to media, cultural industries and diasporas and Watson convenes *Urban Experiments*, which explores the social, cultural and material practices and institutions that constitute the contemporary city.

The two centres sustain programmes of research, support grant bidding and management, provide forums for intellectual debate, and make public our individual and collective work. We have worked carefully to develop collaborative networks to further strengthen our distinct interdisciplinary sociology signature. For example, several researchers have been involved in more than one centre or research theme enhancing synergies between them. The Centres also prioritise socialising early career scholars into our interdisciplinary research through integrating them in the Centres' various research programmes and activities. For example, CCIG runs a series of forums with a distinct interdisciplinary mission every year. Together with a lively post-graduate research group, with dedicated funding from the Centres, these have contributed significantly to developing existing research strengths into new areas of interest. Our commitment to interdisciplinarity, a concern with methods, and an international intellectual agenda were the basis for our successful proposal to undertake the editorship of the journal *Sociology* from 2012.

Since 2008, our strategic aims have been to build on the focal areas of RAE 2008, in particular *Culture, Media and the Social, Citizenship and Governance, and Identities*. Through our Centres we invested significant resource in retaining a critical mass of researchers and a research infrastructure to support translating these research strengths into new interventions that speak to contemporary challenges, in both the social and academic field. These investments made it possible to position ourselves strategically to make distinct and forceful contributions that shape research agendas in three themes: i) the intersections of culture, the social and the economy; ii) citizenship and governance; iii) the psycho-social. Our researchers play a distinctive role in redefining their respective fields of study in these areas, for example, Law's development of the 'Social Life of Methods', Isin's notion of 'Citizenship as Enacted', Clarke and Newman's 'Creating Publics', and Watson's *New Blackwell Companion to the City*. These new interests have further strengthened the distinctly interdisciplinary sociology signature of the OU.

The main changes in intellectual direction since RAE 2008 have been in developing an explicit concern with investigating and theorising the relations, intersections and interstices between sociological objects, issues and matters of concern. While we consider these questions in a variety of ways, our approach is characterised by an open and exploratory sensibility, which derives, in part, from the prominence of interdisciplinary theory and methods at the OU. Our current shift in emphasis arose partly in response to the way recent epistemological and substantive changes have called into question the usefulness of treating the central organising concepts of the social sciences as stable categories. Instead we have become interested in how relations between, for instance, culture, economy *and* social worlds, research methods *and* social life, citizenship *and* governance, inner *and* outer worlds, might be rethought in the light of changes in intellectual climate as well as in the broader political, economic and technological environment over the past decade.

Thematically, our research practice and debate has absorbed, but not entirely followed, the broader turn from culture to the material, natural, technological and economic worlds. Rather we have combined questions of representation, signification and meaning with a renewed interest around materials and techniques. Further, the turn from the social and state to sociologies of fractured practices, in particular of governance and citizenship has engendered a new approach. Questions of state power and social integration and fragmentation have been supplemented with understanding the social and political significance of 'small' practices, often considered insignificant, in renewing and challenging key institutions of integration, like public sphere, public interest and citizenship.

Since 2008, our psycho-social research approaches have moved from a focus on identity and subjectivity to theorisation of routine embodied practices that incorporate the materiality of embodiment and the capacities of flesh into critiques of the interrelationship between personal and social worlds. Developments in the psycho-social have become increasingly attentive to affect and the dynamics of differential power relations in the intersection of political and social forces and emotion, feeling and affect.

The success of our intellectual and organisational strategies is reflected in our **headline achievements** as follows:

- Publication of journal articles and research monographs with a recognisable OU signature, many of which are primary and major reference points in the fields of culture, the social and the economy, citizenship and governance, and the psycho-social. For example: Law (2008) 'On Sociology and STS' in *Sociological Review* Vol. 56. 4; Isin (2009) 'Citizenship in Flux: The Figure of the Activist Citizen' in *Subjectivity* 29 pp. 367–388; and Stenner (2008) 'Psychosocial Welfare: Reflections on an Emerging Field' in *Critical Social Policy* Vol. 15.8.
- Success with grant applications from a diversity of funders rising year on year from £0.92m in 2008/9 to £1.34m in 2012/13.
- The development of a coherent knowledge exchange and public engagement strategy – for example, CCIG's *Creating Publics* programme; Gillespie's work in the BBC World Service.
- The selection of Murji, Watson and Woodward in 2012 as editors of *Sociology*, as well as editorship of a further three influential journals.
- A significant contribution to national and international research infrastructures through CRESC,

Environment template (REF5)

CCIG, the ISA programme, ESRC and Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) seminar series and networking programmes, and European funding programmes.

- Between 2008–13 CCIG hosted over 130 research events, including 'Citizenship after Orientalism' (06 February 2012 to 11 February 2012), attended by 200 delegates from 23 countries, and CRESC themes based at the OU organised 108 events including the CRESC Annual Conferences (250+ participants) – Social Life of Methods 2010, Framing the City 2011, In/vulnerabilities and Social Change 2013, the majority of which were targeted at a broad range of audiences, policy makers and publics.
- The establishment of the OU as a major centre for sociological research with a 'cultural', Actor Network Theory and psycho-social signature, involving leading international researchers in our activities.

Research Themes:**i) Intersections of culture, economy and the social**

Research in this theme takes forward into new territory our long-standing engagement with the character of, and relations between, these three organising concepts of the social sciences. The direction taken has been informed by the need to develop strategies and methods for responding to the profound changes, both substantive and epistemological, impacting on culture, economy and the social as core objects of sociological analysis. Since 2008 the context of sociological research has altered dramatically: financial and sovereign debt crises; the appearance of new, as well as the deepening of existing, inequalities; the extension and expansion of markets and marketisation; the transformations surrounding 'big data' and Web 2.0 based digital architectures; and growing migrant and diasporic populations are just some of the changes that are directly addressed within this research cluster. Against this background, research in this theme has continued its interrogation of how culture, economy and the social intersect by engaging directly with debates around performativity, devices and methods. There are three concerns:

a) Socio-cultural intersections

A concern with the ways in which diverse cultural practices make up social worlds has been particularly central to the research in CRESC, and builds on a long tradition of sociological research at the OU. Our work has traced the empirical and theoretical complexities of social and cultural change in family life, the economy, multicultures and diasporas. A long-term OU interest in Bourdieu's legacy, which has been theoretically innovative in reviewing cultural capital and its relations to field theory and the role of cultural capital in the organisation of contemporary forms of social division, has been taken forward by Silva in her research on the cultural capital of couples and the role of technology and culture on family life. Another strand embraces the 'material turn'. Woodward's feminist materialist analysis reveals sport as an assemblage of social and cultural forces in which flesh and temporality are central, which affects, and is affected by, the terrain of the social and which can be generative of social and cultural transformations as well as the enduring inequalities. Our work on urban experience has explored the cultural practices associated with attachments to religious buildings (special issue *Material Religion*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2013). Watson's reframing of the city in her *Companion to the City* (with Bridge) analyses the urban across the socio-cultural, material and affective realms through six reflective essays seen as reshaping the field (reviewed *Observer* 19 June 2011; *Art Review* 01 June 2011).

These intellectual agendas have been taken forward in numerous national and international events including the CRESC annual conference 2011 *Framing the City*, CRESC workshops on *Religion, Culture and Materiality* (2011), *City Objects* (2012), *Digital Cultures* (2013), and many keynotes (e.g. Silva 'The Material of Everyday Life' Brazil; Watson 'Emotional Geographies' Adelaide, 2010; AESOP Urban Spaces and Everyday Cultures, Istanbul, 2013; Woodward, *Boxing Cultures*). Our research has collaborators from NYU, Ecole des Mines, Paris and UVA in *Mundane Objects in Public Space* (large bid to the Open Research Area with Watson as PI under review), and from Kings College (Being in the Zone with Woodward as Co I).

Since 2008 we have extended Stuart Hall's early theorisation of racialised differences in multicultural polities in new directions, rethinking multicultural theory through Watson's exploration of everyday shifts in multicultural practices. Murji's research on race politics further develops Hall's

early work with his analysis of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry as does Garner's work on the intersections of race, class and ethnicities, and Ware's groundbreaking study of whiteness in the context of the British military migrants, which has been disseminated in several workshops and was reviewed in *The Observer* (25 November 12) as the definitive work on its subject. Gillespie has taken this legacy into the study of diasporas and the media, particularly the BBC World Service, in her AHRC-funded *Tuning In* project (£335,509), which included a transatlantic workshop on media spaces, religious networks and social change with the University of Chicago and led to several keynotes (e.g. Gillespie's Ethnicity, Race and Nationalism in European Media and Film, 2013 Manchester) and special issues including: Gillespie, M., Webb, A., and Mackay, H. (eds) *Participations: International Journal of Audience Research*, vol. 8, no. 1 and *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication* vol. 3, no. 2, (eds) Sreberny, A., Gillespie, M. and Baumann, G. Woodward's work on the BBC World Service led to a special edition of *Economy and Society* 2011, vol. 40, no. 2, with Brandstater and Wade, based on the Diversity and Diaspora conference (June 2009) and several keynotes including the 'Moving Manchester: mediating marginalities project conference' (Lancaster University, 2009). Woodward's work on postcolonial accommodations in the multiethnic space of the boxing gym and the routine strategies deployed to combat everyday racism was widely disseminated including: BSA, Cardiff 2009; BBC Radio 4 *The Sports Programme*, 2009; a film '*Bloody Canvas*' RTE 2010, and the *Art and Sport* project for the 2012 Olympics.

b) Culture and the economy

Research on culture and the economy has retained its long-standing preoccupation at the OU with the processes and devices that provoke and enact defined economic spaces. This has evolved into an established field of innovative, interdisciplinary approaches to the boundaries and organisation of social, cultural and economic life with heterodox, alternative approaches to questions of economic, market and institutional design. Also significant is a broader concern with exploring the way sentiment, art, creativity and sociality organise, and are organised through, economic activities. The *Journal of Cultural Economy* (co-edited by McFall) has become a major international outlet for research in the field and features major contributions from members including the special issues '*Performativity, Politics and Economics*' (2011) and '*The Social Life of Methods: Devices*' (2013 guest edited by Law and Ruppert). Publications such as 'Digital Devices: Reassembling Social Science Methods', for *Theory, Culture & Society* (2013) – guest edited by Law with Ruppert and Savage, McFall's 2011 *Sociological Review* prize-winning article 'A Good Average Man'; and Banks' 'After the Creative Industries' special issue of the *International Journal of Cultural Policy* (2009) have helped cement the reputation of this research group. Published work draws on events and funded projects including special sessions at the European Group of Organisational Studies (2012, 2013) and the International Sociological Association (2010, 2012) and the British Academy funded conference *Market Encounters: consumers, credit and devices* (2011, led by McFall). This conference led directly to the establishment of [Charisma: Consumer Market Studies](#) an online interdisciplinary research network that has organised further international workshops including the European Science Foundation funded 'Agencing Markets' (2013).

Watson's agenda setting work on street markets in the UK, Budapest and Vienna interrogated their role as spaces of sociality and commerce, leading to invitations to address two annual conferences of the National Association of British Market Authorities (2007 and 2013), and to a special adviser role with the House of Commons DCLG Select Committee on Traditional Retail Markets 2009–10. This research featured on *Thinking Allowed*, Radio 4 (25 October 2013). A related stream of work explores the role of arts and creative labour in markets and urban space. The nature of intersections has been further tested through Banks' investigations of the status of art money, Carter's dissection of markets for health and tourism, and Wheeler's research on fair trade markets. Silva's Arts Council funded work on the role of art in cosmopolitan spaces also addresses these concerns.

Law's pioneering project on the *Social Life of Methods* (SLOM) has established a new and significant intellectual agenda rethinking the relationship between research processes and knowledge outcomes by pointing to the consequences, effects or 'liveliness' of methods. This has promoted the development of experimental and interdisciplinary methodologies sensitive to the changing intersections of culture, economy and the social. Here the challenge and infrastructures

of the digital, the role of technical and arts devices in both constructing and eliciting the social, and finally questions surrounding non-coherence and performativity have been central. The research has been widely reflected in two large international CRESC annual conferences *The Social Life of Methods* (2010) and *In/Vulnerabilities and Social Change: Precarious Lives and Experimental Knowledge* (2013), as well as numerous cutting edge publications (e.g. with Lien, 2013 'Slippery: Field notes on Empirical Ontology', *Social Studies of Science*) and keynotes (e.g. Law, UCL Conference: Denaturalising nature, just sustainabilities and an 'Environment Domain' 2013, and Mc Fall, The Practical Heart of Markets at Contesting Markets, University of Sydney, 2010).

Early career research plays a prominent role in the theme. Silva was PI on Rubio's European Research Council Marie Curie Fellowship exploring the sociological identification of the actors, practices, discourses and technologies involved in the conservation of media-art works. Walford was a strategic appointment in 2013 (to replace Ruppert) in extending SLOM approaches into work which address time, method and the nature of knowledge. PhD researchers have been working on branding (Kobayashi), arts funding (Wilson) and alternate currencies (Novosath).

c) Intersections of the economic and the social

This concern explores how hard economic processes and markets have strong social effects and implications. Himmelweit's important contribution, with her colleagues De Henau and Santos (one of our impact studies), has established an extensive reputation for research on the rationales and consequences of the marketisation of care in different political regimes, the impacts of care policy and tax policies on gender inequality in the UK, and intra-household inequalities and the impact of unequal gender roles on family income and men's and women's perceived entitlements. This research has been influential in policy arenas (for example, the Labour Party now sees childcare as central to its social policies, and the coalition government now accepts that its welfare reforms would be improved by the introduction of a second earner disregard) as evidenced in the impact case study, and has been disseminated through keynotes (e.g Himmelweit, Gender Equality in Paid and Unpaid Work) and open broadcast (*Woman's Hour*, BBC News 24). Himmelweit was awarded £258,551 (from the ESRC) for her *Gender and Intra household Entitlements* project and was elected President of the International Association of Feminist Economists.

ii) Citizenship and governance

Since the RAE 2008, sociological research at the OU has continued to strengthen its distinctive and internationally recognised research at the interstices of citizenship and governance. Contemporary in focus and methodologically distinctive, this work has been significant for the analysis of contestations and reinventions of citizenship and governance in an increasingly complex world. Since 2008 significant resources have been invested to further internationalise and scale up our distinct research signature in this area. CCIG enabled concentrating energy and resources in support of collaborative and internationalising research activities. It led to several externally funded projects that have contributed to a sustained growth of research in this area. Isin secured a European Commission funded FP7 project *Enacting European Citizenship* (ENACT 2008–10) which included Huysmans as leader of a key work package. Subsequently Isin won a European Research Council Advanced Grant *Oecumene. Citizenship after Orientalism* (2010–14). Both grants brought CCIG significant resources (ENACT £332,927, from the European Commission, and Oecumene £1,538,462 from ERC FP7), and played a major role in putting our approach firmly on the European and international map.

Our research brings together the study of citizenship and governance, taking citizenship as simultaneously a technology of governance and a practice of becoming political. The OU has been particularly influential in developing a distinct approach to neglected dynamics of citizenship; one that focuses on how people enact themselves in novel ways as political subjects by creatively appropriating and adapting social, cultural and political repertoires of action. Isin's work on acts of citizenship in and beyond Europe has been, and will remain, a major driver of new research in citizenship studies as evidenced among others by the success of the symposium *Citizenship after Orientalism* (6–11 February 2012) organised by the Oecumene project, which attracted over 200 delegates from 23 countries, and included 80 paper presentations and 4 keynote lectures. This research has deepened our understanding of how citizenship is socially and historically negotiated

through unfamiliar and disrupting acts, and in unexpected sites, and how such developments challenge and are bound up with contemporary forms of governance. In particular, research in CCIG introduced, developed and critiqued instances of the social, cultural and political re-invention of citizenship in relation to various governance practices. More specifically, Erel's, Huysman's and Czajka's studies of the governance of migration; Isin's work on citizenship in flux; Conway's research on militarism and white citizens resisting military service during Apartheid in South Africa; Huysman's research on mobilising global democracy; and Prokhovnik's work on sovereignty, citizenship and bodies explore conceptions of activist citizenship and the governance of democratic participation. By researching the multiple practices through which people claim the right to hold rights rather than how people act out a given status, this work is also at the forefront of those approaches seeking to displace methodological nationalism with a more transversal and fractured study of citizenship. CCIG hosts the journal *Citizenship Studies*, edited by Isin, which is an internationally recognised intellectual vehicle for these approaches. Its success is evidenced by *Citizenship Studies* increasing from 4 to 6 issues in 2008, and from 6 to 8 issues in 2011.

While the above works research citizenship–governance interstices through citizenship practices, we also successfully invested in developing a distinct approach to the study of governance. Our research seeks to redefine governance by shifting attention from institutionalised methods of governing to citizen-led enactment of new forms of governance. The intersections of everyday citizenship practice, and modes of governing the social, form a distinctive focus of the work of Clarke and Newman. They have developed a conceptualisation of publicness that is shaping the fast expanding interest in approaches that move from governance of a public to conceptualising publics as something that is being summoned in multiple and fractured ways by citizens and institutions alike. Their ESRC network grant resulted in two symposia that looked at the creation of publics. This reflects an approach to modes of 'governing the social' that connects particular spheres of policy and governance and engages questions of their (changing) relationships to citizens. Other aspects of this work include: regulatory policy and practices (Tombs); economic policy (Prabhakar and Himmelweit); policing (Westmarland.); local governance of education (Clarke); and the governance of aspects of security (Huysmans). These investigations of governance from below share a methodological focus with our work on citizenship. They have developed concepts and tools for a fractured and transversal study of the social, cultural and political reinvention of governance that challenges both methodological nationalism and the search for coherent regimes of governance. Looking towards further developing this area post-REF, Huysmans has recently created a new collaboration led by CCIG with the University of Manchester, King's College London and the University of Edinburgh to scale up this methodological work. To the same purpose, in 2013 CCIG also launched a new lecture series 'Being on the line: citizenship, identities and governance in times of crisis' to explore new ways of making this work speak to the future research landscape.

Further evidence of the international impact of this work includes CCIG now hosting the journal *International Political Sociology* in editorial partnership with Pontificas Catholic University of Rio (Huysmans is Co-Editor in Chief), and various keynote lectures (Clarke: Crossroads in Cultural Studies; Westmarland Keynote at IPCC 8th Annual Conference of the European Partners against Corruption Network and Prabhakar's invited lecture at New Zealand Treasury on UK experience with asset based welfare; Erel's keynote lecture at the Swiss Gender Studies Network conference; and Isin's keynotes at the Royal Geographical Society Annual Conference 2008 and at the Centre for Humanities at Utrecht University. Visiting positions include: Clarke (CEU); Huysmans (Francqui Chair 2011–12 at University of Namur) and Mooney (University of Wisconsin). We have also had successful applications for competitive workshops, such as Huysmans winning the directorship of a European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR) Joint Session workshop on *Practices of Citizenship and the Politics of (In)security*.

The development of early career researchers and developing networks of doctoral students and early career researchers has been a particular focus of our future oriented work in this area. For example, Oecumene created eight post docs and four PhD studentships; while Clarke and Neveu's BA/CNRS grant provided exchanges for early career scholars in France and the UK (resulting in an international summer school on citizenship in France in 2013). Clarke and Mahony's ESRC grant (*Making Publics*) links with other 'public engagement innovations' in CCIG to develop an international network of early career researchers around these issues. Following chairing COST

Action A28 *The Evolving Social Construction of Threats*, Huysmans led an *International Collaboratory on Critical Methods in Security Studies* funded by an ESRC International Training and Networking Opportunities grant (2009–11) that brought doctoral students and early career researchers from ten countries together to develop critical security methods.

iii) The psycho-social

We have built upon the identities theme in the RAE 2008 submission to develop an innovative and interdisciplinary new research programme within CCIG – the Psycho-Social, combining theoretical and empirical work that demonstrates the inseparability of social and psychological forces. This programme was created with the explicit purpose of interfering distinctly in a growing international interest in theoretical and methodological innovation from a constructivist and materialist base that rejects individual–social dualism, leading to the development of a distinctive psycho-social approach. This theorises the processes through which transformations are made possible and endurances can be better understood by exploring how inner and social world processes are entangled in the making of social, cultural and political life. This theme makes two distinct contributions: the first is on making methodological contributions to shaping psycho-social research and the second on psycho-social research in a specific area: family, sex, gender and sexuality.

Langdridge, Stenner, Taylor, Dixon and Woodward’s research on the psycho-social, conducted within CCIG and CRESC, has generated innovative methodologies through which to explore the intersections of power and social and political inequalities – in particular those of race, ethnicity, class and gender. Focusing upon the domains of affect, bodies, sex, gender, sexuality, family and intimacy, our psycho-social research explores the ways in which social, political, cultural, historical, and material factors constitute, and are constituted by, subjective and psychological phenomena. This approach has distinct political implications for practice and for policy in the public arena. Theoretical and empirical work at the OU stresses relationalities and our approach to the psycho-social emphasises temporality (Fink, Woodward), spatiality (Dixon, Watson), and the centrality of processes (Stenner).

Interdisciplinary and diverse methodological approaches seek to engage with the complex interrelationships between psychological and social forces. These include Stenner’s innovative developments of interpretive pattern analysis and Langdridge’s phenomenological, Taylor’s narrative and Woodward’s critical feminist approaches. An AHRC Research Network Grant, (PI Woodward) explores social and psychic processes through the phenomenon of ‘being in the zone’ as experienced in music, sport and cultural work, highlighting the social and cultural dimensions of what has been construed as a psychological, individualised phenomenon.

Another distinctive OU psycho-social cluster focuses on family, sex, gender and sexuality, opening up new interdisciplinary perspectives on the multiple and diverse processes through which familial relationships are constituted, experienced and changing over time, which has led to Gabb and Fink’s ESRC award (£409,704) for their *Enduring Love* project; Langdridge’s cutting edge research on gay men and fatherhood, and sexual identities; and Woodward’s AHRC-funded research on sexual politics in sport. Holloway, now retired, was also awarded £281,892 (ESRC) for her *Maternal Identities* project.

This work has been internationalised through OU psycho-social researchers’ involvement with a number of leading journals: *Psychology & Sexuality* (Langdridge) and the *British Journal of Social Psychology* (Dixon), and a range of national and international research networks, including the Psychosocial Studies Network (Stenner) and the International Human Sciences Research Network (Langdridge). In a collaborative partnership with Monica Greco from Goldsmiths College London, Stenner won a European Science Foundation grant for an exploratory workshop on ‘Affectivity and Liminality: Conceptualizing the dynamics of suspended transition’, November 2013.

Seeking wider public engagement through the research work has been key to this theme. Public engagement highlights include: the OU London BiUK launch (15 February 2012) of *The Bisexuality Report* (the first of its kind), which included over 50 academic and non-academic attendees. Since then there have been 58,000 downloads of the report, and distribution of 400 print copies.

The *Enduring Love* project has also run a series of public engagement events including “Living

'Apart Together' (26 April 2013) for practitioners and researchers interested in family and personal life, households, couple relationships and biography.

c. People, including:

i. Staffing strategy and staff development

Staff are appointed strategically into our research centres and research themes. With the departure or retirement of several professors since 2008, we have made the following targeted appointments to extend and develop our research directions: Four Chairs (Law, Dixon, Stenner, Tombs); three lecturers (Wheeler, Garner, Conway) and two early career appointments (Walford and Czajika). A cornerstone of our staffing strategy has been to ensure the sustainability of our research by maintaining a balance of senior, mid-career and career-early researchers, and by providing support and career development opportunities for junior staff. Succession planning is achieved by involving staff in research planning and management; for instance through membership on the Research Centre boards and by playing coordinating roles in *CRESC* and *CCIG*.

The development of career-early researchers is assisted by formal and informal mentoring and support. All staff are provided with research mentors, but particular emphasis is given to supporting career-early researchers. The Faculty and University run dedicated training programmes focused on areas of particular relevance to career-early researchers (e.g. getting published, applying for external grants), while our Research Centres regularly organise development workshops. With a view to their long-term career interests, research fellows working within *CRESC* and *CCIG* are contractually obliged to plan, conduct and publish independent research.

Our staffing strategy ensures research activities are given suitable support and emphasis. Staff are given two months research leave annually and a weekly workload allocation with dedicated research time. Research leave arrangements are planned over several years, and allow for accrual to assist staff who take on substantial teaching or administrative duties to remain research active. Additional workload allowances are made to enhance work on externally funded research projects, research student supervision and for roles supporting research (such as Centre Directors).

ii. Research students

Recruitment and support of research students (currently 62 registered students) has aimed to build critical mass in focused areas of excellence through our Research Centres and within the three research themes. Students are required and enabled to be active participants in our research programme and have played a role in research management on our Research Centre boards.

A supervisory team approach has been adopted (involving at least two members of staff), which enables career-early academics to gain supervision experience and allows supervisors from different disciplines to come together to share expertise. Support for research students includes an integrated Faculty and University programme providing discipline-specific advanced methods training as well as the seven areas identified in the RCUK Joint Statement on Skills Training. In addition each full-time student has on average £1k/year to support, among other things, fieldwork, conference attendance and specialised skills training. They have the possibility to apply for further funding if so required by the research. The initial MPhil registration is upgraded to PhD following satisfactory performance at a presentation and mini-viva, which is assessed independently of the supervision team. As part of their training, students routinely attend and present at national and international conferences; it is a requirement of our probationary review that they present their work at an appropriate forum. Regular progress and probationary reviews are monitored through annual progress reports. Full-time students are allocated workspace and a networked computer.

The OU has made a major investment in a Virtual Research Environment (VRE) for its research students. The VRE will provide access in one place to a range of training, news, careers information, supervision, library, social media and administrative resources and, in particular, ensure there is appropriate access for all OU research students regardless of their physical location.

d. Income, infrastructure and facilities

Environment template (REF5)

Research is a strategic priority for the OU, supported by over £30m a year of internal revenue investment as well as around £20m of external research funding won competitively. Research strategy is an integral part of the University Strategic Plan, which sets out high level targets for research quality, research income and research impact, and identifies sociology as an 'institutionally strategic' research area. Research support services are provided by a dedicated Faculty-based team supported by central teams for grants and contracts, innovation and enterprise, strategy and governance, career development and postgraduate research students. A pan-university research and enterprise support network provides a forum for sharing best practice. The Faculty has an Associate Dean for Research responsible for research strategy within the wider strategic directions of the University.

A core element of the OU's research infrastructure is its investment in the creation of a technologically rich and sophisticated virtual research infrastructure. Through on-going investment in online library services, the library provides Sociology researchers and research students, wherever they are with access to a world-class collection of digital resources and 85,000 academic journals, half a million books and a vast selection of newspapers, images, video and sound, with 24-hour helpdesk support and a range of face-to-face and online training sessions available. Its multi-million pound investment in such services includes one of the UK's largest open access research repositories, Open Research Online (ORO) with over 23,000 OU peer-reviewed research outputs visited monthly by 40,000 individuals from around 200 countries, and substantial research content in our iTunes U site, one of the largest and most popular in the world. The central Information Technology (IT) unit develops and delivers the IT systems that underpin our research ambitions and provides effective services and support for our researchers. A new research grant-handling tool enhances support given to academics during the development of funding applications and increases the quality of post-award support offered to investigators.

Our Faculty strategy for generating research income has been to aggregate bidding activity around core thematic clusters of excellence in ways that effectively align our multidisciplinary expertise with the priorities of national and international funding agencies. We have developed a diverse portfolio of research grant income and been awarded funding from a range of sources. This has meant we have developed strong relationships with the European and national funding councils. Such external funding has created extensive opportunities for fixed-term contract researchers and doctoral researchers to work within Sociology. Bidding activity is supported at University, centre and cluster level with the Associate Dean for Research, centre directors, and other professorial colleagues taking responsibility for horizon scanning, mentoring, steering priorities and reviewing and supporting bid development. This ensures that we develop high-quality applications for funding for programmes of work that enrich our core areas of excellence. Our Faculty Research Office supports the development of applications for funding and Sociology has pump-primed research grant applications that will influence key research agendas in the three key research clusters.

Every researcher can apply for conference funding through the Research Centres, and has an annual Personal Research Allowance.

We have had a year-on-year increase in our grant income since 2008. There was a percentage increase of 47% from £916,227 in 2008-9 to £1,342,599 in 2012-2013.

Key grants include:

- Oecumene (Isin) £1,538,462
- CRESC 2 £1,646,280
- Intra-household Entitlements (Himmelweit) £245,986
- Enduring Love? (Gabb) £409,704

e. Collaboration or contribution to the discipline or research base

Drawing researchers together from across the Faculty, through our interdisciplinary Research Centres CCIG and CRESC, which act as foci of excellence, Sociology has developed a distinctive intellectual signature for its explicit concern with investigating and theorising the relations, intersections and interstices between sociological objects, issues and matters of concern and an interest in the relations between culture, economy and social worlds, research methods and social

life, citizenship and governance, inner and outer worlds. We have successfully taken these agendas out into the discipline and shaped new debates. We have built numerous **national and international research networks**, for example through CRESC (in collaboration with Manchester) and through CCIG, with New York University, University of Western Sydney, University of Melbourne, UC Santa Cruz, University of Amsterdam, Goldsmiths College, Sciences Po and Ecole des Mines, Paris, and many others, leading to international research collaborations. Examples include ENACT, which brought together researchers from three long-standing member states of the European Union (the UK, Belgium and the Netherlands), two new member states (Hungary and Latvia), and a candidate state (Turkey), and applications to the Open Research Area with NYU, UVA and Ecole des Mines, large conferences such as the annual CRESC conference, and numerous smaller targeted national and international workshops and seminars with invited participants (between 2008 –13 a total of 130 research events were hosted in CCIG, and 108 events were organised by CRESC/OU including the CRESC Annual conferences ‘Social Life of Methods’, ‘In/vulnerabilitis’ and ‘Social Change and Framing the City’, each with 250+ participants). Workshops and seminars were targeted at a broad range of audiences, policy makers and publics. These collaborations have resulted in our editorship of many special issues (e.g. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, *Material Religion*, *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, *Journal of Cultural Economy*) and numerous seminars, workshops, and edited collections (e.g. *The New Blackwell Companion to the City*).

Our success in furthering our agenda for a distinctive interdisciplinary sociology is also pursued through **our roles as editors of key journals** in the field: *Sociology*, *International Political Sociology*, *Psychoanalysis*, *Culture and Society*, *Journal of Cultural Economy*. Our extensive public engagement activities take this research into the wider political and policy arenas, also through our involvement as special advisers to government (e.g. Collins (now retired) House of Lords Select Committee on Communications 2008–9, Watson Special Adviser to the House of Commons Select Committee on Retail Markets).

Our collaboration with the third sector is firmly established through both CRESC and CCIG – for example Enact’s innovative methodology involving activists and civil society, and the Psychosocial Sexualities group’s involvement with national LGBT organisations including Stonewall and Pink Therapy. Similarly our research practice of involving **users of research**, exemplified for example by Gillespie’s research on BBC Arabic audiences’ use of social media, which directly influenced BBC Arabic’s strategic ‘*Change Project*’, has been a core objective of our research strategy.

Our future research strategy will build on these achievements to further develop and extend interdisciplinary sociological research through our Research Centres, publication in high impact journals, a vigorous pursuance of grants, strategic appointments in our key research areas and developing the research careers of our junior appointments. Our long-standing commitment to public engagement activities and national and international collaborations and networks will form the basis of further grant applications, seminars, journal issues and public events. Websites, such as Charisma and CRESC (with Manchester), to which the OU has committed future funding for three years post 2014, will provide a further vehicle for OU Sociology to take a leading role in shaping the subject.

In light of a fast-changing research landscape, both intellectually and financially, the Faculty will review its current research organisation in 2014. The aim is to shift, if necessary, existing research infrastructure and support so that the key sociological research themes in which we have a distinct international reputation and our interdisciplinary approach can be properly supported to impact on future research developments in sociology in the next five years.

To conclude, Sociology at the OU is an international centre of excellence for research. Committed to interdisciplinary forms of inquiry we work collaboratively to produce impactful, world-renowned research of the highest calibre.