

Institution: University of Chester

Unit of Assessment: 29: English Language and Literature

a. Context

English at Chester is committed to delivering a range of public engagement activities, which to date have focused on the presentation of literary and cultural heritages and supporting creativity. Most activities and events for the public have emerged specifically from staff research and have been designed to stimulate a deeper understanding of literature and its relationship to culture and society. A key area of activity for English is working with literary societies, as committee members (**Chantler, Rees**) and as invited speakers at society events and conferences. Each keynote delivered to non-academic audiences at literary societies, as well as study days for members of the public, directly relates to staff research (e.g. **Fegan's** work on William Carleton; **Siddle's** research on Trollope; **Wynne's** publications on Victorian textiles, Austen, Gaskell and Arnold Bennett). The Creative Writing team's activities for non-academic audiences are designed to stimulate creativity, a rationale which underpins the development of free online resource materials, 'Creative Writing: News and Resources for Aspiring Writers', which is available via **Chantler's** blog.

English's creative writers have been supported in their efforts to link research and creativity to appeal to wider audiences. **Haig's** first novel, written at Chester and emerging from her research on contemporary literary representations of the Holocaust, will be published worldwide: *The Fire Sermon*, a post-apocalyptic novel with elements of fantasy and science fiction, is being published in the UK by HarperVoyager in 2015, with two sequels to follow. The film rights to the novel have been purchased by DreamWorks Studio, and Simon & Schuster will be publishing the series in the US and Canada. Translation rights to the series have already been sold in some twenty countries. Discussions have begun on ways of enabling future impact initiatives based on **Haig's** trilogy.

English engages annually with a wide range of readers at the Chester Literature Festival; it has long been involved with hosting and organising events and conducting interviews with major writers (e.g. Julian Barnes, Pat Barker, Carol Ann Duffy, David Lodge, Andrew Motion, Claire Tomalin, A. N. Wilson). English staff have also been the mainstay of the prestigious Cheshire Prize for Literature since its inception, co-ordinating the competition and chairing the judging panel (**Chantler, Rees, Walsh**). The Department's Creative Writing team has been particularly active at literary festivals beyond Chester, giving readings from their own published work (**Blair, Haig, Stephenson, Wall**) and receiving invitations to speak on research specialist areas at public events and workshops (**Blair, Wall**). **Davies's** corpus linguistics analysis of the lyrics of The Fall formed the basis of his keynote address at the Sheffield Lyric Festival (co-organised by Simon Armitage).

English also works to extend the reach of its research to benefit schools, where some members of staff have been invited to deliver talks (**Alsop, Wall, Wynne**). **Davies** delivered the keynote address at a professional development event, the national Stylistics for A level Teachers (SALT) conference in 2013. Stories from *Flash: The International Short-Short Story Magazine*, edited by **Blair** and **Chantler**, have been republished in *Spotlight on Literacy* (2013), designed for Key Stage 3. Other activities include the delivery of a series of broadcasts on BBC Radio 3 (**Alsop**) and the organisation of study days (**Wynne**). **Wall's** *Labyrinths and Clues*, essays based on his research into literature, myth and science, have appeared regularly in *The Fortnightly Review* in 2013, a free online journal aimed at the general reader. **Rees's** major interdisciplinary study, *The Vagina: A Literary and Cultural History*, has attracted widespread media attention, including an interview with **Rees** on a BBC Radio 4 edition of *Woman's Hour* (2013). Since the appointment of six new colleagues in English Language (from 2009), plans are in place to develop a new impact project based on **Herrmann's** research into the phonological awareness of deaf children.

b. Approach to impact

The University of Chester enjoys a reputation for engaging productively with the wider community and the institution rewards impact initiatives through the mechanisms of its Readerships and

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Professorial promotions processes. Professors and Readers in English are involved in current public engagement projects and activities. The development of impact in English from research undertaken is underpinned by an expectation that a minimum of 20% of the QR income from the RAE 2008 is deployed in impact-generating activities. This is an institutional policy that has been enthusiastically embraced by the English Department. Each member of staff, at the annual Performance Development Review (PDR), is encouraged to explore ways of furthering the Department's impact strategy, while existing public engagement activities and opportunities are reviewed and supported. The Faculty of Humanities also supports impact initiatives in English, monitoring the design and feasibility of impact proposals, which are scrutinised at Board of Studies Level. Faculty research funding is available for the most promising impact initiatives. Similarly, the University's Research and Knowledge Transfer Office monitors all funded projects closely, reporting on impact activities. The English Department enables impact by means of financial support; it identifies and encourages research which seeks to benefit the public. Support staff are employed to manage English's online social media sites and blogs through which members of the Department present their research to the public in freely accessible and innovative ways.

c. Strategy and plans

The Department's research strategy does not privilege any one type of research activity, and at departmental meetings and research days staff have explored a range of ways in which the boundaries of academic research may be extended. As a department which has long argued that there is – and should be – an interdependent and mutually enriching relationship between research and teaching, the main thrust of English's impact activities has been to reach out beyond the academy to distil and share the fruits of colleagues' scholarship and research with a much wider cultural community. The mission is simple enough: to make literature more readily accessible, and more widely and deeply known, enjoyed and studied in the outside world to the benefit not just of individual readers but of society as a whole. Both of the case studies have developed in the context of this mission.

The Department is wholly committed to finding ways of speaking to non-academics about its research, a commitment which has led to the support of activities developing from a series of BBC radio broadcasts, and the associated use of blogs, through an array of activities with special interest groups, such as literary societies, reading groups and creative writing groups, to diverse work at festivals and other public events. Some public engagement activities are planned specifically to showcase those aspects of the Department's research activities likely to be of interest to the general public, such as talks on literature and music for BBC Radio 3 audiences, poetry readings, talks given at literary festivals, and lectures delivered to literary societies.

Other developments designed to benefit the public emerge from specific research projects, where potential areas of interest have been identified, and specific needs which our research can go some way towards meeting. At times English's research projects have moved in new, occasionally unexpected, directions, as with **Wynne's** recognition that public responses to the costume drama have played a role in her research into screen adaptations for her book-length project (which has gained the support of an AHRC Fellowship for 2013-14). The Department thus recognises that a complex series of interactions with the public may need to take place in the development of a sustainable and popular impact project, and remains alert to opportunities when they arise.

English's impact strategy reinforces the commitment to continue supporting the two case studies projects outlined in REF3b. The Department is currently developing other impact projects which reflect a broader range of staff research specialisms. Three projects are targeted for support:

- *Flash Fiction*: **Blair** and **Chantler** (both creative writers and editors) are exploring the impact potential of *Flash*, the short-short story magazine they established in 2008. The magazine already has an extensive website, popular Facebook page, and over 1300 followers on Twitter. The editors founded the National Flash Fiction Youth Competition in 2013 and plan to extend the reach of *Flash* to encourage children's creativity since the magazine's involvement in *Spotlight on Literacy* (2013), designed for Key Stage 3.

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- *Creative Writing: Post-Apocalyptic Fiction*: **Haig** will be supported in her plans to exploit the relationship between her research (which has resulted in academic publications on post-1970 Holocaust literature) and her creative work, most notably her novel *The Fire Sermon*, its sequels and possible film adaptations by DreamWorks.
- *Phonological awareness in children with cochlea implants*: **Herrmann's** current collaborative research project (co-investigators: Dr B. Schaefer, University of Sheffield and Dr B. Schramm, Katholische Hochschule Mainz, Germany), begun in 2012, aims to design an iPad application to enable children with hearing difficulties to develop speech. The impact potential of the project has been identified and prioritised by the Faculty and **Herrmann** is currently being supported in his plans to apply for an external funding grant.

Blair, Chantler, Haig and **Herrmann** are targeted for financial support from future QR funding; they will also have opportunities to bid for Faculty funding and additional research leave to support their impact activities. Each will be allocated a mentor to guide them in applying for external funding when their projects have gained sufficient momentum. Other researchers will be encouraged, through discussions at staff research days, to develop projects based on their own specialisms; viable initiatives will gain the financial and IT support given to current projects.

d. Relationship to case studies

English at Chester actively promotes and supports interdisciplinary research which engages innovatively with a range of cultural formations (from the arts, popular science, and material culture) and its impact activities have so far aimed to raise public awareness of the relationships between literature and culture. Each of the case studies is based on research which demonstrates literature's interaction with wider cultural formations, a key feature of the Department's research objectives. As well as benefitting from QR money and Faculty funding, **Alsop** received payment from the BBC for all of his broadcasts, while **Wynne's** public engagement activities scheduled for 2013-14 have received external funding: £1870.50 of her AHRC Fellowship will support impact.

Handel's Literary Texts: This long-running project emerged in the 1990s from **Alsop's** interdisciplinary research into the relationship between literature and music. It focused initially upon eighteenth-century culture later developing into new areas with research into the links between music and modernist literature. This has resulted in thirty programmes which he scripted and presented as BBC Radio 3 broadcasts. The impact potential for **Alsop's** research has been promoted by English through internal funding, research leave, and IT and administration support for the blog he established to continue the wider dissemination of this work. He has also received Faculty funding for visits to relevant library archives. However, for his public radio broadcasts, **Alsop** received payment from the BBC, an acknowledgement of his standing and authority in his particular research field.

Textile Stories Project: This relates to **Wynne's** research specialisms in nineteenth-century literature and material culture, and her analysis of costumes in screen adaptations. **Wynne** identified a demand among audiences at her public talks for more information about representations of clothing in literature and the costuming in screen adaptations. This prompted further research which underpinned the development of the *Textile Stories Project* public engagement events (organised in collaboration with Dr Amber Regis, University of Sheffield). The project has engaged general readers and those whose interests are primarily in textiles and textile work to think about literature and textiles as capable of generating significant narratives and histories. Feedback indicates that many participants felt inspired to use what they had learned at the events in their own practices and were encouraged to read novels, or read them in new ways.

These projects have inspired other members of the department to explore the impact potential of their research. Meetings have been scheduled for 2014 to discuss impact in terms of sustainability, new public benefit initiatives, and extending the reach of current projects. **Alsop** and **Wynne** have agreed to act as mentors to the principal investigators of new and developing projects.