

**Institution: University of Chester**

**Unit of Assessment: 17B Geography, Environmental Studies & Archaeology (Archaeology)**

**a. Context**

Archaeological research developed with vigour following the appointment of GONDEK in 2006, and WILLIAMS in 2008 and gathered pace with the appointments of GRAY JONES in 2011 and AINSWORTH, TAYLOR and MALDONADO in 2013.

During this time, archaeologists at Chester have developed an impressive range of outreach activities and impact initiatives within Chester and its regions. These include, school workshops, heritage tours and interpretation, participation with local and national heritage organisations and archaeological societies. For example, the Department also has a longstanding public lecture series held at the Grosvenor Museum, Chester, to which the archaeologists regularly contribute. Another example is that archaeologists at Chester deliver regular public talks to history and archaeology societies across North Wales, and the Midlands and North-West of England. Moreover, GONDEK has actively been involved in the fieldwork of Chester Archaeological Society.

We have disseminated our archaeological research worldwide via the departmental newsletters '*The Trowel*' posted online and via social media newsfeeds including Twitter. Our online presence extends to project websites and both project and personal research blogs. For example, Professor Williams' regular blog *archaeodeath*, initiated in July 2013, has posted over 70 times to the end of September and explores themes in the archaeology of death, burial and commemoration past and present. In combination, these outreach activities engage the public with Chester archaeologists' research locally, nationally and worldwide.

Building on these firm foundations, the archaeology impact strategy reflects a well-developed Departmental infrastructure which ensures its research activities are firmly embedded within the wider communities of Chester and its regions. This is supported through Professor Williams' role as research coordinator for archaeology yet closely tied to the distinctive and original research projects developed by archaeologists in the Department.

**b. Approach to impact**

While there are many dimensions to our public outreach (section A.), from 2008, impact has prioritised integrated collaborative research fieldwork. Coordination, collaboration and a clear rationale have underpinned our impact philosophy, enacted through a four to five year cycle, refreshed and revised through annual away day meetings and implemented anew at the start of each new academic year.

Our approach to impact foregrounded the impact gained through exposure and participation to the archaeological process, as well as archaeological results themselves. This philosophy and practice underpinned a clear vision that impact was not a separate aim for research that derived out of pre-existing academic interpretations. Instead, we regarded impact as stemming from integrity with, and development within, the key research aims and objectives of archaeological fieldwork and responsive to new discoveries and insights in the field. Hence, our philosophy was for archaeological research to inform public understanding, appreciation and engagement with the early Middle Ages through fresh research on internationally recognised ancient monuments *before*, *during* as well as *after* each field season. Also in this way, the impact philosophy was to balance a focus upon early medieval monuments at the time of their construction with a detailed investigation of their complex biographies of use and reuse, and the landscape contexts in which they enacted social lives, dovetailing neatly with current research agenda for the study of early medieval inscribed and sculpted monuments.

Strategies to achieve impact were therefore designed to attract the public to the archaeological

**Impact template (REF3a)**

fieldwork and simultaneously engage traditional and new media to disseminate to the public unable to access the site in person (such as those with disabilities, financial, personal and transportation restrictions). In this fashion, while part of the impact philosophy was to promote community engagement with early medieval monuments, we were keen to not prioritise geographical locality in the definition of 'communities', especially since even local people could not always readily access the archaeological sites on their doorstep for a range of mobility and social reasons. Instead the approach to impact engaged with local and regional identities by presenting and questioning myths and pre-existing understandings of early medieval monuments, counterbalanced by global coverage via media, especially the world wide web in which the early Middle Ages (or Dark Ages) has widespread fascination and appeal.

These ideals underpinned the evolution of the pair of collaborative archaeological fieldwork projects developed as impact case studies for the REF: the Rhynie Environs Archaeological Project, (hereafter REAP) and Project Eliseg. A further strength of this pairing of projects has been their shared focus upon early medieval stone monuments. Thus, while discrete, these projects have been enriched through cross-fertilisation of impact strategies.

**c. Strategy and plans**

This integrated fieldwork philosophy was disseminated through REAP and Project Eliseg via a network of impact strategies before, during and after each field season:

- site-based local volunteer and student participation;
- site-based open days and pre-arranged visits by schools, youth groups and societies;
- public lectures and seminars to archaeology and history groups;
- an innovative range of web-based blogs and social media as well as traditional media such as television, radio and newspapers;
- open-access dissemination of results via popular archaeology magazines and academic papers;
- Research that informs on-site heritage management, conservation and interpretation;
- Engagement with local museums in displaying finds and interpretations of the early medieval monuments investigated.

Together, this network of strategies bound together a range of different interested groups and reached out beyond traditional groups interested in early medieval archaeology and heritage.

**d. Relationship to case studies**

The Department's two impact case studies (REAP and Project Eliseg) complement each other in their themes, aims and objectives, yet each is distinctive in its results and the nature of its impact on academic and popular understandings of the early Middle Ages. While reflecting the theoretical and methodological expertise of the two distinct researchers involved, the complementarity of the two projects makes them a perfect pairing for showing the role of impact in two very different localities in the British Isles: Aberdeenshire and Denbighshire. The impact in question is therefore simultaneously regionally specific and of national and international reach.