

Institution: University of Chester

Unit of Assessment: 27: Area Studies

a. Context

Research activity in the Area Studies UOA at the University of Chester enhances public awareness and understanding of the impact of language culture in postcolonial societies. By locating European language cultures in their global and transnational context, the unit enhances public understanding of the legacy of colonial occupation on postcolonial culture and society.

The research unit was founded with the appointment of the new research-active Head of Department in 2009/10 which marked the beginning of nationally and internationally significant research activity in Modern Languages/Area Studies. Since that time the unit has grown to nine participants working in related research areas across language cultures.

The main forms of impact include:

- *Impact on Civil Society:* the research in the unit informs and influences the form and content of associations between people to illuminate and challenge cultural values and social assumptions about postcolonial language cultures. Research projects are bringing researchers into direct contact and exchange with political leaders and cultural figures in the areas being studied.
- *Impact on Cultural Life:* research underpinning the case studies interprets cultural production in the fields of visual arts (painting and photography in and of postcolonial developing societies) and informs and influences both the practice of contemporary art and the presentation of this art to the general public.
- *Impact on Policy Making:* case study 1 informs policy by creating connections between the formal and informal polity around discussions of what constitutes development in Francophone Africa.
- *Impact on Public Discourse:* case study 1 extends the range and improves the quality of evidence, argument and expression around issues of poverty, deprivation and migration in sub-Saharan French-speaking Africa to enhance public understanding of the major issues and challenges faced by individuals living in and moving from these countries. Case study 2 challenges public perceptions of postcolonial Cuban society through debate and events at photographic exhibitions of contemporary Cuban identities. Other impact activities not included as discrete case studies are having an impact on the way experiences of migration between Africa and Europe are being articulated and shared by those preparing to migrate and those who have arrived at destination.

The main beneficiaries of the impact of research in Francophone African studies and Hispano-American Studies are cultural organisations, galleries, associations, and educational institutions. Case study 1 follows from extensive fieldwork in Francophone Africa between 2000 and 2010, applied since 2010 to the visual arts. The research is focused on expanding evidence and understanding of development debates beyond the formal political arena, such as in civil society, cultural and creative industries. Case study 2 follows on from research undertaken in Hispano-America on visual cultures. All these activities communicate new understandings of cultural identity in postcolonial developing societies in cultural locations outside the academy.

b. Approach to impact

The Department's approach to supporting impact in the period 2010–2013 (since the inception of the research unit) has been financial, structural and professional.

Impact template (REF3a)Financing Impact

In the absence of QR funding, the Department devised an internal research funding strategy to support impact in the current REF2014 period (plans for REF2020 are outlined under strategy below). The strategy is based on income generation by the Department from language classes and support services to the local and regional community. With the active support of the Faculty of Humanities, it successfully applied for funding from the University of Chester's Research and Knowledge Transfer Office (RKTO) to research the market for language services locally and launch a trial range of classes and services in September 2012. By Easter 2013 the trial services had produced sufficient residual income to finance the two main research impact events planned for Case Study 2 described in REF3b.

Enhancing the structural environment for Impact

The Department was also awarded a tranche of funding from HEIF5 income by RKTO (£5,000) to support the development of a global research and knowledge exchange platform for the dissemination of research and accelerate its impact globally. The Department made use of the University's Informatics Centre, to support the design and delivery of this research and knowledge exchange platform for global activities around issues of identity, migration and development in Francophone Africa. The platform was launched at the African Studies Association of the UK (ASA-uk) biennial conference in Leeds in September 2012 at the Francophone African panel presentations as francophoneafrica.org.

Enhancing the professional environment for Impact

To enhance and professionalise research practice in the unit, the Department founded a new institution-wide research cluster, *Francophone Africa Research Group*, in September 2010 and held a launch symposium marking the 50th anniversary of political independence in Francophone Africa. The initiative provided a platform to develop research capacity and impact in the areas of conference organisation, grant application and peer-reviewed publishing. With the help of a conference grant from ASA-uk it was able to open the symposium to the general public, thereby affording access to the symposium to participants from beyond the academy. In addition, the Department and Faculty have used the annual Performance and Development Review process to identify opportunities for additional support in the upcoming academic session for research activities prioritising impact.

c. Strategy and plans

All new appointments in the unit are made with a view to maximising impact from research on public awareness and understanding of language cultures. Dr Christopher Hull, newly appointed senior lecturer in Hispano-American Studies for the academic session 2013/14 has on-going involvement in outreach and public talks that present new understandings of the changing role of Cuba in global politics and diplomacy. Dr Haili Ma, newly appointed in July 2013 as senior lecturer in Chinese, brings an annual schedule of public engagement in the organisation of Chinese cultural festivals and informed by her long-standing research expertise and professional experience in Chinese opera. Dr Timo Obergöker appointed senior lecturer in French in July 2013, and Dr Jean-Frédéric Hennuy, newly appointed lecturer in French Studies, both have experience in organising film festivals and art exhibitions. These skills will provide opportunities to develop impact from the unit during the next REF period supported by the income generation activities of the Department in this area of public cultural life.

To date, due to the lack of staff and time, the potential for building a virtual research environment within the online francophoneafrica.org platform has not been fully developed. The departmental income generation for research and impact (IGRI) strategy will fund research assistance to work alongside the Francophone African specialists to activate the potential in the platform for transcontinental research, educational and outreach activities between partners outside the academy creating a shared online environment with partners in Francophone Africa, Europe and North America. To date primary and secondary schools in Dakar are using the platform to explore Garvey's research on storytelling and language use in Francophone Africa (see REF2 outputs – B Garvey). Through fieldwork in Senegal since 2008, Garvey has established relationships with

Impact template (REF3a)

teacher trainers at the national teacher training college in Dakar who now participate in the story-telling project housed on the online platform. She originally established the project with the charity Caritas in Palma working with migrants around stories of identity and displacement and is building a transcontinental network of participants. Most recently she has extended the project to Chester, where a non-academic member of the research cluster, Germain Nkuka, Cameroonian film-maker based in Chester, is working in collaboration with Garvey with local migrants to produce podcasts and other visual outputs recording stories of migration from Africa to Europe on film. These podcasts of migrant stories are being imported into the platform and have the potential to generate significant impact.

On the basis of individual research plans for the next REF cycle, the unit is drawing up an impact event calendar for the period 2014 to 2020. This calendar will map the development of underpinning research to events and evidence of impact. Focusing on the final element, the unit will concentrate efforts on participant *feedback*, developing tools to capture users/beneficiaries and audience perception of and response to the unit's research as delivered through impact events and activities. Continuing to benefit from the Department's IGRI strategy from 2014–2020 the unit will build capacity to attract more substantial external funding for the consolidation of the unit's ambition to establish a centre of excellence in research in transnational language cultures by 2020, and will continue to draw on the expertise of the Research and Knowledge Transfer Office to seek external funding sources to support the growing role of impact from our research activity.

d. Relationship to case studies

All research projects in the unit have a focus on impact; all projects are presented in an annual research seminar series and as such all have an impact upon the development of impact within projects in the research cluster. *Visualising Development in Francophone Africa*, Garvey's online project, *Travelling Stories of Identity*, Corkhill's work on migration, and Kent's work on Hispano-American identities and displacement, and, looking forward, Ma's work on identity formation in Chinese cultural communities through public performance and folk opera, Obergöker's work on popular cultural forms (Chanson and popular musicals), Hennuy's work on cinema and Hull's work on transcultural influences in Cuban identity formation, are explored in seminar-workshops in terms of knowledge production within distinct disciplines, transdisciplinary findings and in terms of public engagement and impact.

Methodologies for supporting and accelerating impact from research are therefore shared and mutually informing, an example being Kent's research in photography as a medium for identity formation in diasporic communities that informs the visual story-telling element of Garvey's *Travelling Stories* project developing on the virtual research and knowledge exchange platform.

Close collaboration with artists and curators in Griffiths' *Visualising Development in Francophone Africa* is informed by underpinning research and fieldwork in Francophone Africa (Gabon, Niger and Senegal) demonstrating both the means and forms through which sustainable and mutually rewarding relationships can be established at the interface between academic research and social and creative practice. *Visualising Development* has recently provided the opportunity for extending the experience of impact beyond the REF2014 research cluster. One teaching staff member in Spanish provided the exhibition guide Griffiths has collaborated on producing for an exhibition currently showing in Munich and the new Chinese senior lecturer subsequently provided the same guide in Chinese. The context in which impact from research conducted in the Area Studies UOA at Chester is nurtured is, in summary, through sharing methodology and practice across disciplinary divides.