

**Institution: University of South Wales**

**Unit of Assessment: D29**

**a. Context**

The English Unit at the University of South Wales (USW) has been able to build on a long tradition of interacting with audiences outside the academy through readings, workshops, school visits, public lectures, festival appearances, and cross-arts collaborations. The Creative Writers in the Unit - Desmond **Barry**, Professor Philip **Gross** and Professor Christopher **Meredith** - are also set authors on literature courses. Meredith's post-industrial novel, *Shifts* (1988), for instance, is currently a set text on English modules in the universities of Bangor, Cardiff and Swansea as well as East Tennessee State University. Equally, Literature staff - Professor Jane **Aaron**, Dr Alice **Entwistle**, Dr Nicholas **Dunlop**, Dr Kevin **Mills** (also a poet) and Professor Diana **Wallace** - engage in a range of activities, including print and broadcast media, and editing popular editions, which disseminate the research of the Unit and interpret cultural artefacts to the wider public. Creative writers and critics also collaborate, notably through the *BorderLines* and 'In-and-Between' initiatives (see REF 5).

The main non-academic user groups and beneficiaries of research from the Unit include general readers, publishers (eg Honno), newspapers (eg *Guardian*, *Western Mail*), and broadcast media (eg Radio 4, BBC Wales), teachers of creative writing at all levels, creative writers outside the academy (eg Ty Newydd National Writing Centre of Wales), schools, artists, literary societies, literary festival goers (eg Hay Literary Festival), bookshops (eg Waterstones), and exhibition and museum audiences. In addition, they include a more diverse range including health care professionals, therapists, peace groups, U3A students, environmental workers, walkers, community groups, farmers, and charities.

The primary impacts of the Unit's research fall into the categories of cultural life and enrichment, heritage, education and civil society, with auxiliary impact on policy making and public discourse. Much of this research has international reach (eg Barry's collaborations in Uruguay, Gross's profile in Estonia, or Meredith's work on literary translation in Cairo and writer-in-residency visits in Finland and Slovenia). However, it is crucial to acknowledge the unique reach and significance of Wales-based research in the context of Wales as a recently devolved 'small nation' with a history of bilingualism, and a landscape which encompasses both the rural and the post-industrial. As writers in and beyond Wales, Meredith, Gross, Barry and Mills all create cultural capital, and their creative writing is complemented by the interpretive work done by Aaron, Dunlop, Entwistle, Mills, and Wallace, much of which focuses on the relationship between writing and place/space. Aaron's work (Impact Case Study 2) has had a major impact on the public and educational understanding of past and present Welsh literature, notably that written by women, both in and outside Wales. Thus, the creative and interpretive work of the Unit illuminates and challenges cultural values and social assumptions about, for instance, Wales, small and post-industrial nations, and women.

Our research also contributes to the enhanced appreciation of creative processes, through understanding the practice of teaching creative writing at all levels and through the active creation of new forms of cross-arts and multi-media collaborations. Barry, Gross and Meredith all work with visual artists and/or musicians, taking their work to multiple audiences through exhibitions, performances and websites. Both Barry's ongoing multiplatform work on *Diario de un retrato* (see REF 2), and Gross's work on transculturalism (Impact Case Study 1) contribute to public discourse about migration, while the cross-arts work of Gross and Meredith has also enhanced public understanding of environmental issues.

**b. Approach to impact**

Building on our long tradition of interacting with non-academic users, the Unit has tended to be organic rather than prescriptive in its approach to Impact. (Indeed, the role of chance in creativity and collaboration is explored in Barry's essay on the making of the *Far South* project (2013, see REF 2). The Unit has been able to capitalise on the work produced by established research clusters in Creative Writing, Welsh Writing in English and Women's Writing which lends itself to

## Impact template (REF3a)

engagement with audiences outside the academy. A proactive approach has enabled both building on long-term projects, such as Aaron's involvement with Honno, and the exploitation of new opportunities, such as the publicity resulting from the awarding of the T.S. Eliot prize to Gross's *The Water Table*. While Unit members have been encouraged to consider impact in creative ways during the period under review, most of them were already engaged in such activities.

The Unit's impact agenda has been supported at University level. Internal institutional support (Research Investment Scheme [RIS] income) has been obtained to support potentially high-impact projects (eg *BorderLines*, 'In-and-Between'). Funds have also been directed externally, for instance, to sponsor the XX Women's Writing Festival, Chapter Arts Centre, Cardiff (27 Oct 2012) where Aaron and Wallace took part in a panel to celebrate publisher Honno's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Several staff members have developed links with the Hay Literature Festival, delivering public lectures (Entwistle, 2009; Meredith, 2010, 2012, 2013), participating in panel discussion (Aaron, 2013), and giving readings (Gross, 2012, 2013). Unit members have been encouraged to raise the profile of the Unit's research outside the academy through print, broadcast and digital media. They have worked closely with the USW Press Officer and web team who have acted as intermediaries with media outlets (eg placing articles in the *Western Mail*, and facilitating appearances on BBC Radio Wales). Members have produced podcasts, videos, wiki-sites (for *BorderLines*, and 'In-and-Between') and blogs. Meredith's series of online essays as part of the HALMA scholarship for Wales Literature Exchange, for instance, has been widely republished online by *New Welsh Review*, the Institute of Welsh Affairs and the US online magazine, *WebdelSol*. (See <http://.org/en/translators-house-wales/blog/christopher-meredith-wales/>). A short video by Mills, 'Why Study Literary Theory?', has proved a particular success with over 3,700 hits (<http://english.research.southwales.ac.uk/videos/>), while Entwistle contributed a commissioned podcast to *UCD Scholarcast* which averages 2529 file downloads per lecture (<http://www.ucd.ie/scholarcast/scholarcast18.html>).

While some impact has been planned (eg Aaron's work with Honno), other examples have evolved from specific publications (eg Gross's work on the environment following the publication of *The Water Table* in 2009). High quality research has tended to lead to impact opportunities which have been further developed. Meredith's on-going work on **The Bog~Mawnog Project**, for instance, has its roots in a career-long interest in art, history and the rural and post-industrial landscapes of Wales. A collaboration with environmental workers and five visual artists, this conservation/art installation project led to exhibitions in Brecknock Gallery (Summer 2011, attracting 5,000 visitors) and Crickhowell Gallery (2013). Raising awareness of environmental damage in the Black Mountains, it entailed pegging lines of sheep's wool across damaged areas of mountain peatland and engaged the involvement of community groups including schools, farmers, and volunteers, as well as the army, wool producers, National Park workers, museums and bookshops. Meredith produced a series of poems which were published in *Black Mountains: Poems and Images from the Bog~Mawnog Project* (Mulfran, 2011) and *Air Histories* (Seren, 2013; see REF 2). The project led to a series of lectures and readings (public, U3A, and schools), radio broadcasts (Radio Wales, October 2011), and literary walks for Crickhowell Walking Festival and Brecon Beacon's National Park/Literature Wales.

### c. Strategy and plans

The Unit's research and impact strategies are co-ordinated by the English Research Committee (chaired by the UoA leader, **Wallace**) which will continue to encourage colleagues to generate and exploit opportunities for impact development. Where appropriate future impact plans will be supported through the structures provided by established centres/groupings, including the newly established USW Humanities and Social Sciences Research Institute, and the Centre for Gender Studies in Wales, and Centre for the Study of Media and Culture in Small Nations, in each of which English plays a major role. The Centre for Gender Studies (co-directed by Wallace), for instance, acts as a means to publicise research on gender outside the academy, particularly through the annual Ursula Masson Memorial lecture which attracts a wide non-academic audience.

While consolidating its achievement in longstanding areas of expertise, the Unit is aiming to develop the impact potential of new areas which have emerged through recent research, such as Critical-creative Writing, the environment, health and migration. The merger between Glamorgan and Newport, which brought Dunlop to the team, offers exciting potential through the emergence of

## Impact template (REF3a)

the Textuality and Cultural Spaces research cluster (Aaron, Dunlop, Entwistle, Meredith, Mills). With its close links to the *Border/Lines* and 'In-and-Between' projects as well as to the Centre for the Study of Media and Culture in Small Nations (now co-directed by Entwistle), this cluster offers the possibility of connecting work relating to Wales with an international dimension. Ongoing projects with impact potential include Entwistle and Mill's critical-creative work on Ciaran Carson in a Northern Irish context and Dunlop's work on Australia and postcolonialism (eg his work as a consultant on aboriginal culture for Belfast Festival).

While the Unit's commitment to the local/national through impact-related projects relating to Wales will remain a central priority, another strategic goal will be further developing an international dimension through building on links already established. Areas identified for development include Gross's connections with Estonia, and the reciprocal arrangements between Slovenian and Welsh literary organisations which have been an outcome of Meredith's work on place and multilingualism. The latter led to Meredith's HALMA-sponsored residencies in Finland and Slovenia (2012-13) which included numerous public literary events. Meredith was the subject of three radio programmes, including a full-programme interview for 'Views and Considerations' for Radio Slovenija's 3<sup>rd</sup> Programme, and some of his writing was translated into Finnish and Slovene. This in turn has fed back into our research environment with an Erasmus exchange agreement now established at postgraduate level between English at USW and the University of Jyväskylä in Finland. Increasing external income linked to impact will be another key goal. Meredith and Barry have both been successful in generating funding for impact-linked projects from a range of sources – Wales Arts International, HALMA, the Welsh Government, and Literature Across Frontiers (see REF 5). These offer a model for how international impact from high-quality research can be achieved in the future on relatively modest amounts of funding.

The Unit will also build on its successes in generating media interest in its work. Aaron, Gross and Meredith already have high media profiles. More recently, Wallace was one of 24 successful applicants selected to attend the BBC's Expert Women's Day Wales (October 2013) which offered media skills training. She has already appeared on *The Louise Elliot Show* and been invited to review the papers on *Good Morning Wales* (both BBC Radio Wales).

#### d. Relationship to case studies

The case studies exemplify the Unit's approach to achieving impact through developing distinctive areas of high-quality research at USW: Creative Writing, Welsh Writing in English and Women's Writing. They show the Unit's commitment to taking such research outside the academy with a variety of projects. The case studies also offer examples of the way in which the impact of the Unit's research is both national and international, strongly rooted in its locality and reaching out to a global audience. Gross's widely-disseminated work on the promotion of the study and articulation of creative process (Case Study 1), for instance, is closely connected to the collaborative *BorderLines* and 'In-and-Between' projects. His public profile following the T.S. Eliot Prize has enabled the development of international links with Norway and Estonia. Aaron's work with Honno (Case Study 2) has impacted on the teaching of Welsh writing in English throughout Wales and beyond but has a particular resonance within the South Wales valleys context of USW. In making new editions of neglected Anglophone writers, such as Menna Gallie, available to students and a wider popular readership, this project actively contributes to the enrichment of the cultural heritage of an area which is currently economically impoverished. It also adds to our knowledge of Wales' wider heritage and contributes to public discourse on a range of gender-related issues. Aaron's work has inspired further work on Welsh women writers in the Unit: Wallace has recently edited Hilda Vaughan's *Here are Lovers* (1926) for Honno, while Entwistle's interviews with contemporary Anglophone Welsh women poets will be published by Seren.

Other examples of projects with future potential impact not featured in the Case Studies but connected to the Unit's distinctive research include Wallace's work on women's historical fiction which has attracted much popular attention on general reader blogs, and research on health, ageing and writing as therapy. The latter is evidenced by, for instance, the public 'Poets Encounter Medicine' event (USW, 6 June 2011), to which Gross and Entwistle contributed alongside former National Poet of Wales Gwyneth Lewis. This was part of the collaborative 'Off Sick: Narratives of Illness Past and Present Project', based in USW.