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Institution: Aston University

Unit of Assessment: 28 Modern Languages and Linguistics

a. Context

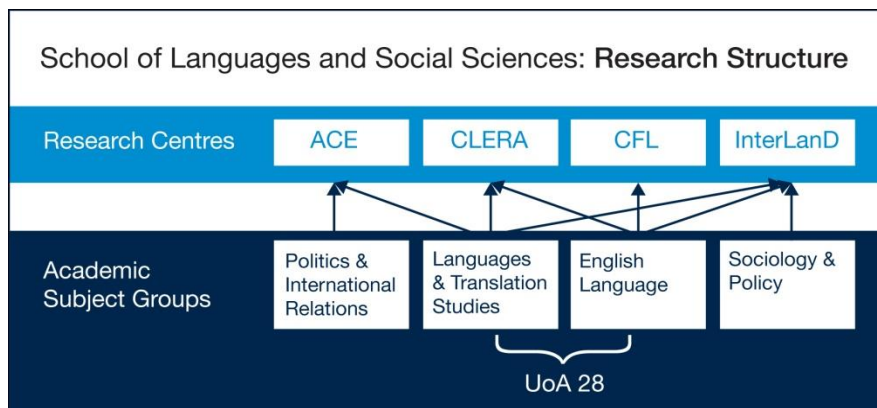
Working with key stakeholders, Aston academics draw on evidence-based research in Modern Languages and Linguistics to:

- 1) improve practitioner performance;
- 2) change professional practice and policy; and
- 3) inform public opinion.

This is achieved through research-based training which raises critical awareness and changes practice; provision of expert advice which informs policy development; and dissemination to partners in business, NGOs, civil society organisations and the general public to inform opinion more widely.

The main non-academic users and beneficiaries of our expertise include police services, business leaders, particularly women in leadership; cultural organisations such as local history, theatre, and minority languages groups; social movement and political pressure groups; and government departments and multilingual organisations such as the EU and international courts. Our impact case studies focus on groups such as translation professionals, public service interpreters who work with police interviewers, and police interviewers themselves. Our research benefits police investigators (including undercover police officers), lawyers, solicitors and the victims of crime. In the area of language education, it benefits English and Modern Foreign Language (MFL) teachers at all levels from primary to tertiary; teacher educators and policy makers, including those involved in the professional development of language teachers and the training of translators.

The UoA's researchers and their beneficiaries collaborate and interact primarily through the School's Research Centres, which have clear aims and objectives related to impact.



ACE (Aston Centre for Europe)
CLERA (Centre for Language Education Research at Aston),
CFL (Centre for Forensic Linguistics)
InterLanD (Aston Centre for Interdisciplinary Research into Language and Diversity)

b. Approach to impact

Institutional support: Building on a distinctive reputation for applied research in Modern Languages and TESOL which dates back to the 1970s, the UoA has enhanced research synergy and focus by drawing together research strands into Research Centres supported by University investment. The Centres provide the venue for discussion and cooperation between researchers and user groups. In combination with the School's programme of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) events, they foster a culture of creating and disseminating impact. New members of academic staff and research students are introduced to this ethos as part of their professional training. Research Centre administrators and the CPD officer are tasked specifically to engage with policy and practitioner groups and coordinate an annual CPD programme (e.g. www.aston.ac.uk/lss/research/research-centres/language-education-research/cpd/).

Communication with user groups: Staff are encouraged to communicate with practitioners through events and projects organized by the Research Centres. The Centre administrators maintain and develop user group databases, and enhance communication with practitioners. In addition to proactive engagement with users, we have a strong web and media presence. CLERA and ACE have blogs (<http://clerablog.wordpress.com/> and <http://Europe.blogs.aston.ac.uk/>); CLERA also communicates via Twitter (<https://twitter.com/CLERAatAston>) with academic and non-academic audiences. The CFL website (forensiclinguistics.net) is set up to work as a blog and to involve readers interactively.

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The University Communications team supports academics to achieve strong media visibility in order to draw further practitioner attention to our research and promote new opportunities for dialogue. CFL research featured recently in a successful *Crimewatch* appeal; InterLanD research on gendered language in the board room featured in BBC 2 series *Women at the Top*, BBC Radio 4's *Woman's Hour*, and international newspaper coverage. A single scholar working on right-wing extremism in France made 60 media appearances (press, radio and television, e.g. BBC Radio 4's *Today Programme*, ITV *Central News*, *Financial Times*, *Guardian*, to name but a few) in 2012-13, reaching an estimated global audience of over 50 million.

Research projects within InterLanD have engaged users and beneficiaries from the very outset of the research process as part of research design; funded projects have included members of performance groups, media celebrities, city council and trade union representatives who are crucial intermediaries participating in the research and disseminating its results.

Examples of follow-through to the delivery of impact:

Improvements in practitioner performance can be demonstrated by the application of research findings in Forensic Linguistics which have led, for example, to the West Midlands Police, incorporating linguistic analysis into undercover officers' training. CFL were approached by UK police officers who run the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) accredited training programme for online undercover officers, to determine whether incorporation of linguistics into training can improve operational capability. This led to a government-funded research project on modelling online identities, with a more extensive research application currently under consideration by the ESRC. The resulting linguistic training package has been delivered by CFL three to four times per year over the past three years. Other similar developments have included police training in interpreter-mediated interviewing, forensic textual analysis, and forensic linguistic techniques for the investigation of sex crimes.

Research Centres discuss the outcomes of research which are fed into a programme of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) designed to focus on issues with particular relevance for practitioners. MFL teachers, for example, have for some years been exploring the implications of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) not only for language classes but also subjects such as History or Geography delivered through the target language. A member of CLERA delivered a one-day workshop for language practitioners to disseminate her research findings based on a study of CLIL in German Studies at Aston. Discussion explored solutions for specific pedagogical issues arising in the MFL classroom; and concrete advice and materials for piloting in participants' respective classrooms were shared. Other examples include workshops for professional translators; training for primary school teachers on Key Stage 2 teaching of English grammar informed by theoretical advances in language-based pedagogy; and national conferences bringing together academic researchers and school teachers to explore research agendas and the application of research findings.

c. Strategy and plans

The UoA works within the framework of overarching strategies articulated at University and School level, notably in "[Towards 2020: Research in the School of Languages and Social Sciences at Aston University](#)". Aston has a strong culture of embedding research impact and knowledge transfer. This is evidenced within the UoA by on-target delivery of the impact plans associated with ESRC projects funded during this census period on women and leadership; discourse and socio-cultural identity in the West Midlands; and a Quantitative Methods curriculum Initiative.

The UoA has made considerable progress in its aim to "pursue research with impact for local, national and international communities", for example via its CPD programme. Building on this, a new School role of Associate Dean for Partnerships and Community Engagement has now been established to provide a dedicated focus on engagement with potential beneficiaries of research. In order to translate the impact-related objectives of "Towards 2020" into action, future plans aim to:

- Formalise current relationships with external parties through establishment of **advisory boards** for all Research Centres to maximise the benefit of strategic input from non-academic practitioners, facilitating mutual understanding and a broader exchange of perspectives. By informing and influencing decisions on the focus and approach to research, non-academic advisers assist Centres in developing outcome-oriented research which meets their needs and is capable of changing practices and behaviours in the

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professional world.

- Increase the number of **private sector and charity-funded research** projects, building on successes such as: the CLERA/InterLanD partnership with the educational charity Bell Foundation; CFL work with Qinetiq; and a local text analytics SME; and **public sector partnerships** such as that with West Midlands Police and the Birmingham City Council Chamber of Commerce for Women in Business.
- Secure further **international support** as through current links with non-academic partners such as Amnesty International within the framework of the European initial training network (ITN) TIME, delivering industry-relevant doctoral training including secondment of TIME fellows to associated partners (<http://eu-researchprojects.eu/time>).
- Increase **knowledge-transfer partnerships** through initiatives such as the Knowledge Exchange and Enterprise Network (KEEN), which supports West Midlands-based SMEs to increase growth through collaboration with regional universities, building on the current project: *Language Based Pedagogy: Developing Continuing Professional Development Materials*.
- Expand the **CPD programme** in order to improve practice of professionals such as the police, teachers, professional translators and interpreters.
- Extend use of **interactive blogs** to all Research Centres, facilitating increased interaction with practitioners and the interested public to deepen understanding and collaboration.
- Increase **online and media presence to raise the public profile** of Research Centres, drawing increased attention from interested practitioners.

d. Relationship to case studies

The following case studies illustrate the wide-ranging portfolio of impact-generating activities within the UoA. Each case study focuses on improving practitioners' performance and development of policy. These examples are based on a sustained record of engagement. All three case studies listed below are the result of collaborative engagement of scholars in the School's Research Centres which aim to foster an environment where researchers engage with potential users and beneficiaries of their work.

The case study '**Impacting English language teaching practices in the global primary sector**' is chosen to demonstrate impact in the area of teaching English to primary school children worldwide. CLERA researchers Garton, Copland and Burns – funded by the British Council – surveyed teachers on current approaches to English teaching in the primary school sector worldwide. The research resulted in a report informing teachers and policy-makers about different approaches, challenges and opportunities. Drawing on this research, Copland and Garton published a book directly addressing professional development for primary English-teachers. It presents 50 classroom activities designed by teachers from 28 different countries. As the case study shows, the materials have been accessed by 1,711 teachers for use in local contexts worldwide

The second case, also emerging from CLERA, is entitled '**Transforming EU policy and practice in translator training by defining translation competence**', and shows how research undertaken by Schäffner has helped generate a translator competence profile which has been adopted by the European Commission's Directorate General for Translation as a benchmark for admitting postgraduate translation programmes to the European Master's in Translation network. It has thus informed policy making and practice at European level. The first two case studies show how research undertaken in CLERA has benefitted practitioners (teachers, teacher educators, policy makers and trainers of professional translators).

The third case, '**Using linguistics to improve the delivery of justice through forensic casework and enhanced police-public communication**', illustrates how linguistics has benefitted the victims of crime, police and the Courts, through the admission of language evidence - an advance which stems directly from the research and expertise of CFL. These research findings are used to create new practice and policy, thus changing training for police in areas such as interpreter-mediated interviewing.