

**Institution:** The Open University

**Unit of Assessment:** C17 Geography, Environmental Studies and Archaeology

**a. Context**

Impact is one of the four key strategic priorities of *OpenSpace*, the research centre that acts as a hub for Geography research in the University. The conceptual research undertaken by Geography is based on active engagement with a variety of non-academic audiences and partners during the research process and has benefited partners at the local, national and global scale. The main beneficiaries of our research have been policy makers, cultural workers and organisations, and the general public:

- Benefits to **policy makers** and to non-governmental organisations have been central to research undertaken by both the *Space and Power* and the *Environment and Politics* research clusters. Cochrane has worked for policy and community organisations in Milton Keynes and has chaired the Milton Keynes Housing Forum. Work with think-tanks and civil society forums at the national and international levels include: reports that have benefited policy makers in housing policy (Cochrane, 2012), higher education policy in the regions (Cochrane, 2010; Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)-funded project Higher Education and Regional Transformation) and migration (Kofman and Raghuram, 2009, prepared for the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development). Corry is a policy adviser for the Danish Social Democracy. Smith is an adviser to the International Broadcasting Trust and to the Sainsbury's Family Charitable Trust on issues relating to environment and communication.
- Benefits to **cultural workers and organisations** have arisen from research undertaken by the *Culture and Practice* cluster. Geographers at The Open University have been invited to write interpretative frameworks for a number of visual arts projects. For example, based on her research on visual methodologies, Rose contributed to the Photographer's Gallery catalogue, 'Seeing Things', writing a 10-page section on questions to think about when looking at photographs in galleries, which can be used by teachers who take Key Stage 4 pupils to photography galleries. Rose also produced a document for ixia (the public art umbrella organisation) titled 'Learning about how people experience built environments', which has had 2000 visits since April 2009. Pile's research on psychoanalytical geographies directly led artist Sharon Kivland to create an artwork based on a series of postcards of Rome. The piece was exhibited in the Domobaal Gallery in January 2013. Pile authored an essay for the exhibition, printed as a self-contained piece in the style of Kivland's own art books – *Postcards from the Unconscious: The Shifting Spaces of Kivland's Rome*.
- Benefits to the **general public** arise from The Open University's mission of openness to students, researchers and publics beyond academia. Both by directly shaping BBC programming (Case Study: *Changing the way that environment and development issues are represented in the media*, henceforth *Environment in the media*) and by taking up the role of academic consultant for individual programmes (thus influencing their content), geographers have shaped cultural understandings of issues and phenomena among those who are not directly involved in higher education. For instance, Revill's research on railways led to his becoming a consultant to the three-part series *The History of Railways* (2012) by Dan Snow on BBC Two, a programme with average audience figures of 750,000. Smith and Revill have both worked as consultants to the *Coast* programme, whose popularity led to the eighth series being broadcast in 2013 with a ninth already being planned. Audience figures for the programme range from 1.8 million to more than 5 million. Geographers at the University have drawn on their research to contribute to the free educational materials that accompanied these series. The booklets for *Coast* Series 4 and 5 (2009 and 2010) were requested by 75,000 people each, up from 30,000 in Series 1 (2005).

**b. Approach to impact**

The key elements of the *OpenSpace* centre's impact strategy are:

**1. Supporting impact through targeted funding:** In order to enhance the impact of research, *OpenSpace* provides funding for impact activities at different stages of a research project, from

conceptualisation to dissemination. Two examples provide insight into our approach to funding impact activities. Funding was provided to help Butcher embed impact at an early stage in her project 'Creating Hackney as Home' (ESRC). Resources were also made available to Rose to extend, track and evaluate the impact of 'Architectural Atmospheres' on architects, planners and data visualisers during the final dissemination exhibition, *Visualising Atmospheres: Digital Place-making in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (The Building Centre, London, August 2013).

**2. Training** provision on how to increase impact is another important element of our approach to supporting impact. *OpenSpace* has collaborated with the Centre for Citizenship, Identity and Governance (another research centre in the Faculty of Social Sciences) to host a range of activities to develop understanding of impact among researchers. In bespoke sessions, researchers are trained to engage users while developing a research proposal, to involve them in advisory boards, and to adopt an impact strategy that involves deepening and extending impact as well as evidencing and evaluating it. The Faculty of Social Sciences has also established a Public Engagement with Research Group (PERG) to advise on public engagement strategy and activity, to recommend to researchers how to maximise the impact of their research and to share best practice and expertise across the University. *OpenSpace* members are active contributors to PERG, contributing, for instance, to workshops on social media. Most members of the Geography department have also undertaken training on social media and on developing podcasts.

**3. Influencing audiences via broadcast and social media:** This element is underpinned by the availability of support across the University in using a range of resources and outlets such as iTunes U and YouTube. The Open University, through its Open Media Unit (OMU), has a well-developed approach to working with media and particularly with the BBC. Each faculty has an Open Media Fellow, whose role is to liaise between academics and the BBC's television, radio and online output. Geographers at The Open University have used these resources to contribute to a range of BBC outputs, as discussed above. Geography research has also had a more direct impact on BBC policy, as evidenced in the Case Study *Environment in the media*.

**4. Developing sustained relationships with non-academic partners:** Staff are encouraged to develop sustained partnerships and to secure external funding from external partners for their impact work. One example is the collaboration developed with the Ashden Trust, who have worked with geographers at The Open University to create new cultural engagements with global environmental change. In 2008, following a successful workshop convened by the Ashden Trust and The Open University, the two agreed to co-fund a PhD studentship on the topic. In the following year the University paid about £4000 and the Trust £10,000 to fund a series of events, podcasts and the first in a series of publications (*Culture and Climate Change*, 2011).

The purpose of the *Culture and Climate Change* work is to invite cultural producers (such as artists, writers and arts institutions) to engage with climate change, and, for those already engaging, a critical framework within which to situate their work. This led to the demand for a portal where the public could not only browse but also input their experiences of the changing climate. As a result, the Creative Climate website was launched in 2010 on OpenLearn, the OU's open platform, which is public facing, free and globally available. The 226 diary entries (December 2009–November 2012) have been viewed 8996 times (July 2010–November 2012). These diaries offer qualitative research data for other researchers and for environmental policy communities.

Our sustained relationship with the Ashden Trust has thus allowed the underpinning research to translate to new cultural productions (films, diaries, exhibitions) of climate change, and to have secondary reach in the form of data availability of these shifting forms of cultural productions around global environmental change to new groups of academics and policy makers. The collaboration with the Ashden Trust and thus with cultural workers and the media is being further cemented through co-funding from *OpenSpace* (£3500) and the Ashden Trust (£10,000) for a new bundle of activity (event, publication and podcasts) in the *Culture and Climate Change* series.

### c. Strategy and plans

Geography at The Open University is committed to sustaining its impact on non-academic beneficiaries, such as policy makers, cultural workers and the media. Future work will focus on supporting impact, influencing audiences using The Open University's broad media experiences

and continuing our long-term relationships with non-academic users. To take forward this work we are implementing a detailed Public Engagement and Impact Strategy that draws on existing practices and internal and external guidance, including the 'Concordat for Engaging the Public with Research' established by UK funders.

The main elements of the strategy are to:

1. **Maintain and develop relationships with non-academic users** in order to deepen the reach and significance of the impact of research; help researchers to identify key user groups and involve them at an early stage while designing new projects; facilitation of engagement with these groups through specific impact budget; training and support for impact during the life of the project; appropriate impact benchmarking and sharing good practice across *OpenSpace*. Intended beneficiaries will include local authorities, international fora, arts organisations and broadcast media organisations, particularly the BBC with whom we enjoy strong working relations.
2. **Encourage researchers to seek external support for securing impact:** undertake horizon scanning for external funding, including non-traditional funders; co-fund impact activities where appropriate.
3. **Develop a robust media strategy to extend impact:** ensure all geographers are trained in the use of social media; maintain research presence in broadcast media by further developing our relationship with the BBC; grow our research presence on OpenLearn; use our expertise to train university staff on how to engage the media.
4. **Extend the visibility of impact work:** recognise the achievements of researchers engaged in impact; target key impact work for external recognition; promote researchers' impact work on our external website and via the Open University Research Communications Team.

This strategy will be supported at University level by the work of the OU's Research Council UK (RCUK)-funded Public Engagement Champion, who has been tasked with embedding public engagement more extensively into the institutional research culture and who will bring expertise from elsewhere in the University and share this with Geography. The ongoing work of the Faculty PERG will continue to provide a forum for sharing best practice.

This strategy will also be embedded in *OpenSpace* activity by the work of the Impact Champion for *OpenSpace*. The Champion will organise training for all *OpenSpace* members in the nature of impact and ways to evidence and evaluate its achievement, offer advice to *OpenSpace* members, advise the *OpenSpace* Director on the resourcing needs for this work, and also manage ongoing relations with external partners.

#### d. Relationship to case studies

Our two case studies exemplify aspects of The Open University's approach to impact. Both case studies have benefited from support from *OpenSpace*, including funding, and the training and dissemination infrastructures offered by The Open University. Humphreys (Case Study: *The impact of global environmental governance research on international forest policy discourse*) has received funding for attending forest-related meetings that are not directly funded by the International Union of Forest Research Organisations or other user organisations.

The Geography department allocated Humphreys and Smith (Case Study: *Environment in the media*) with time in their workload to support their impact work. Additionally, Smith was given a 50% buy-out for 3 years by the University (divided across the Research and Teaching budgets) to develop the Creative Climate website as part of the University's research, teaching and outreach.

Case Study *Environment in the media* also exemplifies our approach to broadcast media, and towards influencing and shaping wider knowledge and learning. The case studies illustrate our strong support for developing long-term relationships with non-academic partners, and both case studies evidence engagement since 1999 until the present. Case Study *Environment in the media* has led Smith to become involved in training other researchers in the University, the Faculty and within *OpenSpace* on how to undertake impactful research.