

**Institution:** The Open University

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

### a. Overview

The Geography Department at The Open University is a small, distinctive group with a strong research culture whose work has shaped key debates in the discipline of human geography through the problematisation and interrogation of notions of space and place. The Department has an international reputation for its work on **space and power** – rethinking the politics of place, scale and territory - and for its work on **culture and practice** – rethinking the ways in which relations between and among humans and technologies come together to make up places. These innovations have been built on a blend of conceptual endeavour and empirical rigour, and have fed into the development of an evolving area of work on **environment and politics**. In the period since 2008, this has been bolstered by significantly-enhanced external research income and an increase in postgraduate research student numbers. We have also played a leading role in raising the profile of Geography as a discipline with the wider public through our distinctive public education remit, a role pursued by working with and having an impact on partners such as the BBC and the Ashden Trust. These achievements have been enabled through the establishment of the interdisciplinary *OpenSpace* Research Centre, which sets the strategic priorities for Geography research at The Open University, both within and outside the Geography Department.

### b. Research strategy

Since 2008, and in line with the strategy set out in RAE 2008, the aim of Geography research at The Open University has been to produce high-quality outputs that drive forward intellectual agendas in our signature areas of research excellence: the spatial registers of power undertaken by the *Space and Power* cluster, and the post-representational cultural geographies of place carried out by the *Culture and Practice* cluster. We have also strengthened the evolving research cluster of *Environment and Politics*. These intellectual agendas have been furthered by: aligning financial and other research support to support the three clusters; fostering postgraduate research in our areas of excellence; increasing research grant income; and supporting longer-term collaborations with non-academic partners.

The Open University's Geography Department is known around the world for its research on **Space and Power**. Since 2008 this research has focussed on elaborating new spatial registers of power which move beyond those of scale and territory, not least by exploring the potential of topological accounts. Led by Allen's pioneering conceptualisations of geographies of power, and through empirically-grounded, externally-funded research projects, this work has highlighted the rearrangements of space that are inherent to different objects of geographical concern such as state organisation, urban and regional policy and governance, the spaces of migration and the biopolitics of disease. Cochrane and Allen have highlighted the significance of different powers of reach which enable state and non-state actors to govern in ways that loosen apparently taken for granted understandings of time and distance, working across and through space. Cochrane has reframed the ways in which local, urban and regional politics may be understood without starting from preconceived notions of political territory, locality or government hierarchy. His empirical work has led the way in theorising regions, sustainable housing (ESRC funded 'Tensions and Future Prospects for Sustainable Housing Growth') and the politics of the urban everyday (ESRC funded 'Living Multiculture'). Similarly, Bingham and Allen have demonstrated how diseases are multiple and heterogeneous, making securing life less a matter of keeping out and more one of being prepared. Their work takes us beyond the much vaunted language of biosecurity used in policy circles towards recognising the biopolitics of disease (ESRC funded 'Biosecurity Borderlands'). Raghuram presents a distinctive take on the spaces of migration as they articulate with development, the flow of knowledge, student mobility and practices of care. She shows how highly contentious issues such as the 'brain-drain' (ESRC funded 'Overseas Trained South Asian Doctors and the Development of Geriatric Medicine') may be better addressed by recognising the topologies of knowledge flows which reach out to, and draw in, migrants. Researchers in this cluster have not only focused on the ways in which the complex and overlapping entanglements between space, place and politics play out in practice, but have actively developed new thinking

(around topology, assemblage, the transnational, and biopolitics) to make it possible to understand those processes more fully.

Field-defining research by the **Culture and Practice** cluster has opened up innovative ways of thinking about culture that move beyond approaches framed through forms of textual analysis and notions of representation. Researchers have focused on the complexities of practice to challenge both the textualisation of various cultural forms – from art to music, and from photographs to buildings – as well as the binary terms through which much current cultural geography is parsed – representation/non-representation, affect/emotion, material/immaterial, human/nonhuman, powerful/weak. In this work, culture is understood as embedded in, and as inherent to, a multitude of practices enacted between and among humans and technologies, which create particular places. Rose is a world leader in visual culture and methodology. Her agenda-setting conceptualisation of images as objects whose effects are mediated by social practices informs both her framing of visual research methodologies and her analysis of the interface between visual cultures and contemporary urban design practices, in ESRC-funded projects on urban aesthetics and on architectural atmospheres. Hetherington has elaborated the spaces created by encounters between humans and object by exploring the complex geometries generated by practices of display and curation in museums. Through a spatial reassessment of early Freudian psychoanalysis, Pile has redefined the topographies and topologies of emotion and affect and has set out the fault lines of debates on their geographies, in, for example, *Transactions of Institute of British Geographers*. Butcher's research on affect and belonging in ordinary spaces in London (ESRC funded) and in cities in the global South, emphasises the importance of subjectivity to the affective, as well as taking 'urban theory beyond the West'. Routing his work through post-phenomenology Revill provides a critique of accounts of the senses as non-representational. Together this work disperses culture across a range of actors and media and, in an approach shared with the *Space and Power* group, understands power as tangled across and through topological geometries.

Research in **Environment and Politics** has focused on innovative conceptual understandings of natural resources and environmental governance. Dominant ways of addressing global environmental challenges have been limited by narrow understandings of processes of governance and environmental behaviour. In contrast, Humphreys has argued for the need to think of the dynamic and interacting forms of forest governance as an international forest regime. He focuses on the challenges of imagining new forms of governance that promote democratisation while addressing the ideological constraints to more effective environmental issue resolution. Humphreys' focus on the spatial challenges of forest policies is being taken up in the fields of conservation, management and environmental change in the work of Corry who investigates climate change governance and argues that the plurality of governance mechanisms must be recognised in order to address the problem of climate change, while an engagement with policy development in the area has been pursued in the work of Jones (Early Career Researcher). Bhagwat's research focuses on the interface of forest biodiversity conservation and poverty alleviation in the context of climate change (RCUK funded) and on vegetation history in agricultural landscapes (Leverhulme). Research in this cluster has had high impact on the ways in which environmental change is imagined and represented by policy-makers and the media (See Ref 3b) and is therefore strategically important to the Unit.

This research, the underpinning strategy and its implementation have been developed and supported by the *OpenSpace* research centre, established in 2009 as one of five research centres at The Open University set up to foster research excellence in defined areas of strength. This organisational shift from a departmental research centre to one that centres on Geography but reaches out to cognate members in other disciplines has allowed us to take forward and extend cross-cutting interests as set out in RAE 2008. The Centre is led by a Director who is a member of the University Research Committee ensuring that there is alignment between Centre and University strategic research strategies.

Key achievements of Geography at The Open University over the assessment period are:

- i. publications in high quality, international, peer-reviewed journals that have extended spatial thinking on topologies of power and on cultural geographies. An indication of the academic impact of this work is that in the period 2008-12, 20% of the publications included in this

submission and indexed in Web of Science are in the top 5%, and 60% in the top 25%, of highly cited articles in their subject category and year of publication. Publications in 2013 have not been included as they are seen as too recent to have accrued a citation index. Analysis completed 22<sup>nd</sup> Oct 2013.

- ii. external funding has more than trebled over the period and draws on a more diverse range of funding bodies, including third sector organisations, Humanities in the European Research Area (HERA), as well as RCUK;
- iii. PhD completions in this census period were significantly higher than between 2001-2008;
- iv. the development of focused partnerships with national institutions such as the BBC;
- v. the award of national and international honours in recognition of research excellence. Rose's leadership in setting international agendas for the analysis of visual cultures and development of geographical methodologies was recognised in 2012 by the receipt of the RGS's Murchison Award for contributions to visual culture and geographical methodology. Humphreys won the International Studies Association's Harold and Margaret Sprout Award for the best book on international environmental problems in 2008. Smith won the AICA (International Association of Environmental Communications) Beppe Career Prize in Environmental Communication in 2009. Massey's outstanding contribution to the discipline has been recognised in the publication of *Spatial Politics: Essays for Doreen Massey* (2013) in the RGS-IBG series.

The future strategy of the Geography Department at The Open University is to continue agenda-setting research in the *Space and Power* and *Culture and Practice* clusters and to extend research in *Environment and Politics*. The role of *OpenSpace* will be pivotal in enabling the Department to broaden its spatial agenda across disciplinary boundaries, to take the lead in interdisciplinary initiatives that have spatial, cultural and environmental dimensions and to develop our impact agenda beyond the academy (See REF 3a).

Research in the *Space and Power* cluster will further explore the significance of the topological shifts that have subtly altered many of the ways in which power is exercised today, enabling actors to register their presence through quieter modes of power. This work will enable us to understand the spatial articulations of power in pressing contemporary issues such as the securitisation of migration, border-crossing investments and disease and connected localisms. Current projects in this cluster include the Australian Research Council funded study on the financialization of infrastructure. Research in *Culture and Practice* will deepen existing strengths around the sensory, the psychoanalytical and the corporeal as modalities of cultural experience. New research in this cluster will focus on the constructions of belonging, feeling and difference in city spaces in the UK and in the global South, in part as they are mediated by diverse practices of digital visualisation. New funding has been obtained to take forward research in this cluster from HERA (with University of Heidelberg and University of Amsterdam). Research in the *Environment and Politics* cluster will build on existing work on governance and politics, focussing on the science-policy interface. Cross-cluster projects will be central to future strategy. For instance, the *Environment and Politics* cluster will work more closely with the *Culture and Practice* cluster to enhance cultural understandings of the environment (AHRC funded 'Earth in Vision'). Similarly, researchers in the *Culture and Practice* cluster are increasingly taking up the innovative work on topologies undertaken by the *Space and Power* cluster in their research by exploring the topologies of affect and emotion. These fertile boundary-crossing projects and outputs aim to set new agendas in human geography.

These aims will be supported by the funding streams noted above. *OpenSpace* will pump-prime further early-stage projects in order to further increase our externally funded research and widen our pool of funders. *OpenSpace* will continue to enable the continued support of new and ongoing collaboration with academic and non-academic partners, with the latter focussed upon a deeper public engagement initiative that includes a notable digital presence and a more directed impact strategy (see REF 3a). *OpenSpace* will act as an organisational umbrella for the management and administration of these initiatives.

### c. People, including:

#### i. Staffing strategy and staff development

Staffing strategy in Geography is rooted in the need to maintain a balanced demographic profile and succession planning focused on developing leadership capabilities, as well as promoting *OpenSpace's* research clusters. The strategy is to maintain excellence by recruiting staff able to invigorate and replenish the research clusters. Arising from this strategy, Geography has recruited four new members of staff (three in the *Environment and Politics* cluster [Bhagwat, Corry and Jones] and one in the *Culture and Practice* cluster [Butcher]). Although no longer a member of academic staff Doreen Massey has continued to contribute significantly to supporting Geography's research culture in her role as Emeritus Professor. Three members of staff have been promoted during this period.

Strict equalities procedures are applied in recruitment and selection with monitoring of equalities data within the recruitment process. The Dean of the Faculty is advised on staffing strategy through an Academic Staff Management Group on which Geography is represented.

Staff development in Geography is underpinned by the University's wider commitment to the process. The Open University is a signatory to the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers and it has received the European Commission HR Excellence in Research Award. The Open University's Research Careers Development Team and *OpenSpace* both provide dedicated research skills training for postgraduate researchers, early career and fixed term researchers and established staff in line with the Vitae Research Development Framework. Dedicated sessions on getting published, obtaining grants and networking are run regularly to ensure all new postgraduates and early career researchers have access to sessions. Targeted investment of QR monies has enabled financial pump-priming for research grants, establishment of research networks including with diverse publics, enhanced publications and has helped to secure and evidence impact (See REF 3a). Pump-priming has led to funding successes such as the Architectural Atmospheres project (ESRC) and the Global Financialization of Infrastructure initiative (Australian Research Council). Regular work-in-progress meetings provide individualised staff support for enhancing publications and grant applications. Staff development in research dissemination includes podcast training and workshops on using digital media. *OpenSpace* has also contributed to staff development within the University and in the Higher Education sector on public engagement through a series of interventions such as the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE) report on Segmenting Publics (2011).

All staff, regardless of age or length of career, have research mentors. More experienced researchers are encouraged to develop their leadership capabilities. Allen, Cochrane, Raghuram (*Space and Power*), Hetherington, Pile, Rose (*Culture and Practice*) and Humphreys (*Environment and Politics*) have mature research profiles and provide ongoing intellectual leadership to their respective research areas. In addition, several have been supported to develop research leadership capabilities, for example by attending Leadership in Higher Education Foundation courses. Staff have taken up research leadership roles across the university: Pile and Raghuram as *OpenSpace* director; Hetherington and Rose as Associate Dean (Research) in the Social Sciences Faculty; Allen is Deputy Chair of the University Research Committee and has been Chair of its Thematic Research Networks group; and Raghuram and Bhagwat as Postgraduate Directors in the Faculty. With this level of support in place, we are confident that our research excellence will be sustainable into the future.

In recognition of the distinctive academic calendar of The Open University (i.e. year-long) all academic staff of The Open University are entitled to 44 days of research leave per year. Target setting and monitoring of performance (in respect of outputs, bidding activity, research student supervision, public engagement and impact) is undertaken at the *OpenSpace*, Department and individual levels. All staff members take part in annual reviews where progress in relation to previous plans, and priorities for the coming year, are identified.

These more formal aspects of staff development are supported by a collaborative research culture that has its roots in the collective teaching arrangements that exist at The Open University, which embraces the Department and extends outwards to members of *OpenSpace* other than human geographers. A regular seminar programme which matches our strategic initiatives, involving internal and external speakers, including postgraduates, encourages communication and

debate. *OpenSpace* also collaborates with the University's *Centre for Citizenship, Identity and Governance* (CCIG) and the *Centre for Research in Social and Cultural Change* (CRESC, ESRC funded and jointly managed with Manchester University), to organise national and international workshops on topics such as Topologies of the Psychosocial, Local Action in an Era of Localism and Scales of Urban Citizenship, Politicizing the Post-political City and Politicisation and the European City. These activities and the Annual Doreen Massey Event, all work to stimulate an exchange of ideas across disciplinary horizons and foster a sense of interdisciplinary endeavour that reflects our teaching mission.

*OpenSpace* and The Open University maintains high standards of professional conduct in all research activities and 'The Code of Practice for Research at The Open University' sets the standards for the conduct of all research within the Centre. The 'Research Ethics' <http://www.open.ac.uk/research/ethics/> website enables researchers to readily find information on research ethics principles and procedures. All studies that involve human participants, including MRes and Doctoral Studies, are required to be pre-approved by the University's Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). All researchers are required to adhere to the recommendations made by this committee

## ii Research students

The Open University Geography Department's postgraduate research student (PGR) strategy has been to recruit high-calibre students whose research excellence plays a key role in renewing and sustaining research within our signature areas of excellence. Our students are integral to, and integrated within, the on-going work of the research centre and its clusters.

Student numbers have increased substantially in this census period. ESRC quota studentships, targeted University and Faculty funding and studentships co-funded by external partners (such as the Ashden Trust and the British Geological Society) and through grants (such as HERA) have enabled this growth.

The departmental director of PG research oversees the training needs of students. Training is provided through a comprehensive Research Career Development Programme, delivered by the University and the Faculty and by participation in *OpenSpace* events. Weekly training workshops encompass the whole research process from induction to viva and career building.

Infrastructure for PhD research meets or exceeds the requirements of all research councils and Quality Assurance Agency standards, and thus offers excellent supervision as well as training. Students are assigned two supervisors and a mentor whom they meet regularly. Progress and training is monitored through six-monthly progress reports. The initial MPhil registration is upgraded to PhD following satisfactory performance at a presentation and mini-viva which is assessed independently of the supervision team. Regular progress and probationary reports are monitored and approved by the Faculty's Director of Postgraduate Research Programmes. Full-time students are allocated workspace, a networked computer and £1000 annually as a research training support grant. Students regularly present their work at major conferences.

Researchers with PhDs in Geography at The Open University have an excellent track record in gaining academic posts elsewhere, an indicator of the excellence of our provision. Many of the PhD students we supervised in the REF period now contribute to geographical research in universities both nationally and internationally (Akinwumi, Simon Fraser; DeSilvey, Exeter; Erim, Yasar, Turkey; Griffin and Kesten, UCL Bartlett; Hutta, Beyreuth, Germany; Jupp, Open; Last, Glasgow; Vacchelli, Middlesex).

Future strategy for postgraduate research in Geography at The Open University has three elements. First, we will seek external co-funding for studentships; second, we will continue to deliver excellence in research supervision and support; and, third, we will contribute towards research training nationally as part of our DTC collaborations. Utilising The Open University's state-of-the-art Virtual Research Environment (VRE) access will be provided to a range of resources, such as skills and careers training, library, news, social media and administrative resources ensuring parity of experience for research students regardless of their physical location. Notable Geography contributions to advanced training are visual methodologies and growing expertise in quantitative methods.

#### d. Income, infrastructure and facilities

Since 2008, our grant income has more than trebled, allowing us to appoint postdoctoral and fixed term researchers to support our work. *OpenSpace* has played a key role in this by: horizon scanning for appropriate funding opportunities; identifying research grant ideas that are both fundable and will influence research agendas in our three core research areas; pump-priming selected applications to road-test methods and gain indicative data and by offering internal peer review of all applications prior to submission. Grant successes have underpinned a number of our high profile journal publications. An illustrative example is Rose's paper 'More on Big Things' in *TIBG* which arose from the ESRC funded project 'Urban Aesthetics', one of the most highly cited papers in that journal in the last few years.

Almost all of the funding obtained has been awarded on a competitive basis nationally (ESRC, AHRC/DCMS) and internationally (Australian Research Council, European Science Foundation (ESF), HERA), with small amounts from UK third sector organisations. These grants have been obtained by individuals working collaboratively with other HE institutions (including Bristol, Brunel, Exeter, Leicester, Northampton, Surrey, University of Heidelberg and University of Amsterdam) as well as with non-academic partners (youth theatre company *Immediate Theatre*, film production company *Mouth That Roars*; development company *Msheireb Properties and Milton Keynes Council*). External funding has been obtained for research projects, seminar series (ESRC – Visual Dialogues) and workshops (ESF), postdoctoral research (ESRC) and doctoral study (as above) and to support publications with a broad outreach (Soddy Trust).

The realignment of Geography research at The Open University through *OpenSpace* has been accompanied by an expansion of infrastructural research support. Dedicated research administrators and secretaries have been appointed, who are assisted at the Faculty Level by a Research Office which co-ordinates the governance and administration of the Research Centres and supports external income generation activity. This support has enabled the development of a vibrant research hub with a programme of seminars, workshops and conferences related to our core research areas.

Rooted in The Open University's core mission of openness to all the University has invested in a range of resources to improve access of research materials to staff, students and wider public. This includes an on-line library services which provides Geography researchers and research students with remote access to a world-class collection of digital resources. The university also hosts one of the UK's largest open access research repositories, Open Research Online (ORO), with over 23,000 publications from its staff and about 40,000 visitors a month from around 200 countries. All Geography research outputs are in ORO. *OpenSpace* has also developed a newsletter and a suite of podcasts on key topical and thematic issues which are available to download from its website and other social media outputs.

#### e. Collaboration or contribution to the discipline or research base

Geography at The Open University is embedded in a vibrant interdisciplinary culture. Our research has influenced: sociologists and anthropologists (Allen and Bingham's biosecurity work, Cochrane's work on the everyday politics of multiculturalism, Butcher, Hetherington and Rose's urban scholarship); psychoanalysts and artists (Pile); academics in the field of higher education policy (Cochrane); health and social care professionals (Raghuram); transport scholars and musicologists (Revill); and ecologists, environmental scientists and foresters (Bhagwat and Humphreys). Geographers at The Open University also serve the discipline by taking geography to interdisciplinary academic audiences. We publish in interdisciplinary journals and Rose's book *Visual Methodologies* is widely used across a range of disciplines in many countries.

Geography research at The Open University has been underpinned by active collaboration with a range of organisations both within the HE sector and outside. Staff members have collaborated with researchers at other universities on externally-funded research projects (see above) and have held international research fellowships in several countries: Butcher (University of Heidelberg, leading to successful HERA project); Pile (Ural State University); Raghuram (University of Hyderabad). In accordance with the strategy set out in 2008, the Geography Department has continued its international visitor programme with 8 international research fellows and postgraduate students during this period.

Geographical research at The Open University is also undertaken in collaboration with non-academic partners. For example, Humphreys is a member of the International Union of Forest Research Organization's Task Force on forest governance, Raghuram has been commissioned to write research reports for European think-tanks such as Heinrich Böll Stiftung, the Hamburg Institute of Economics and UNRISD and Cochrane has authored reports for Milton Keynes Council. Geographers have also contributed to non-academic work through their roles in public organisations such as the National Museums of Science and Industry (which includes the Science Museum, National Media Museum, National Railway Museum, Revill). The filmmaker Patrick Keiller is an affiliate member of *OpenSpace* and his film *Robinson in Ruins* (distributed through the BFI) (2011) was the product of work conducted with the help of an AHRC grant, on which Doreen Massey was co-investigator. Massey authored an essay *Landscape/space/politics* which is distributed with the DVD. Keiller, Massey and Bartolini also curated an exhibition *Misión Robinson* (January- March 2013, Milton Keynes).

The contribution of Geography at The Open University to the discipline is extensive. Allen has been a member of the Leverhulme Prize in Geography Panel since 2007, and is a member of the Academy of Social Sciences. Departmental members have been appointed to RCUK peer review colleges (Cochrane, Revill, Rose), Australian Research Council (Pryke), SSHRC Canada (Cochrane) and Revill was chair of the Landscape Research Group until February 2009. We have edited 9 special issues of significant journals: *Diversities* (2013) *Environment and Planning A* (2008, 2012), *Environmental Science and Policy* (2013), *Geoforum* (2008, 2009), *Journal of Intercultural Studies* (2009), *Journal of Integrative Environmental Sciences* (2009) and *Population, Space and Place* (2013).

*OpenSpace* funding has been central to these outputs. For example, Cochrane received funding to help convene three sessions on Urban Politics at the AAG (2009), a selection of papers from which is to be published as a special issue of the *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* in 2014. Other contributions to the discipline include the organisation of major international conferences such as the Visuality/Materiality conference (Rose, 2009) and the Second Visual Research Methods conference (Rose, 2011). Departmental members edit the journals *Journal of Cultural Economy* (Pryke) and *Journal of South Asian Diaspora* (Raghuram) and the CRESC *Culture, Economy and the Social* (Routledge, Hetherington) and *Mobility and Politics* (Palgrave, Raghuram) book series. We hold membership of 26 journal editorial boards.

Additional evidence of disciplinary leadership include requests to provide reviews of proposals for research councils in Australia, Austria, Canada, Finland, Hong Kong, Israel, the Netherlands, Switzerland, US and the European Research Foundation. Moreover, we have examined PhD theses in a number of European countries and beyond (Australia, Belgium, Denmark, France, Hungary, Netherlands, Norway, Singapore, Sweden) and led postgraduate masterclasses (Czech Republic, Italy, Norway, Russia, Singapore, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland) and thus contributed to shaping early career geographical research internationally. In addition, both Allen and Pile have written papers that have generated extensive debate in *Dialogues in Human Geography* and *TIBG* respectively, with Allen's previous work on power and spatiality celebrated as a Classic in Human Geography in *Progress in Human Geography* (PHG) in 2013. Finally, as a further mark of our contribution, Raghuram has been awarded a special professorship 'bijzonder hoogleraar' at the University of Utrecht, between 2009- 2014. Cochrane was Chair of the International Advisory Board of the ESRC's major (interdisciplinary) project on Cities in Conflict, based at University of Cambridge, and involving Exeter and Queens Belfast, and Rose will deliver the *PHG* lecture at the RGS/IBG conference in 2014.

In conclusion, the Geography Department at The Open University performs a distinctive role within the discipline of human geography, one focused upon conceptual leadership in two core areas of human geography – space and power, and culture and practice – while fully committed to developing a third, environment and politics. The quality of these contributions is acknowledged by both academic and non-academic audiences, as evidenced by the range of indicators presented here. Through robust management and focused investments, *OpenSpace* provides a dynamic intellectual framework and a clear organisational infrastructure for deepening and extending this contribution over the next REF period.