Impact Statement (REF3a)

Institution: Lancaster University
Unit of assessment: 34 (Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory, Main Panel D, Sub-panel 34)

a. Context

The main driver behind our research into contemporary arts and design is to make a positive contribution to culture and society. We use innovative and interdisciplinary creative approaches to ensure that engaging with a broad range of user communities is core to our research and practice. We see this as a two-way process, contributors to our research practice may also be its beneficiaries, and vice versa. Thus the dissemination of our work (through performance, exhibitions, workshops, conferences, media, social and digital media amongst other channels) is central to our impact strategies.

Research impact is developed by LICA in the following ways:

1. We have an open, accessible, collaborative and outward-facing ethos as a core value in our research work, priorities and plans;
2. We have developed new, participatory practices exploring how citizens, communities and organisations can adapt to and influence change;
3. We proactively engage the participation of beneficiaries in our research practice;
4. We incorporate a collaborative approach with audiences/participants in our arts practice;
5. Our researchers are actively engaged in a number of public roles and commissions, contributing directly to policy development, business strategy and cultural practice.

Research at the Lancaster Institute for the Contemporary Arts (LICA) is characterised by the development of ideas in conjunction with different users, makers and participants. Through this we have established what we describe as a 'community of practice', with which we want to empower non-academics and non-specialists to participate in academic research and its outcomes.

We have found that this conscious engagement of communities beyond academia has been beneficial to everyone involved in our research programme. Working collaboratively has raised new questions and challenges, and also created new opportunities for dissemination. Iteration, empowerment, interactive dialogues, respect and reciprocity characterise what we are trying to achieve.

Our research centres (Contemporary Arts Thinking, Imagination, and Performance and Practice) provide a supportive structure for researchers to engage with our beneficiaries. These range from planners, developers, businesses and a broad range of policy makers, artists and 'end users', audiences; with the explicit acknowledgement that within all of those categories our communities might wear a number of identities. Some recent examples of this kind of collaboration are outlined in our case studies, which demonstrate how this can be achieved.

Our impact is developed within Lancaster University's wider strategy to proactively engage with diverse communities, and take our research beyond the academy. Our public arts organisation 'Live at LICA', funded by Arts Council England and the University, enables us to further disseminate our impact by tapping into a broad range of well-established networks. The outcome of this, described in our case studies, has included:

* Commissioning up to 12 new performances a year from internationally recognised artists, leading to national and international tours;
* Working with around 1,500 local residents of all ages to develop site-specific performance pieces;
* Developing projects with a range of partner organisations, including local authorities, businesses, regional arts groups, and third sector bodies such as National Trust and RSPB

Our research-led impact is exemplified by:

* *Contemporary Arts Thinking:* Increasing public engagement with the potential for digital art and culture; contributing to social and digital innovation;
* *Imagination:* Assisting organisations and citizens to imagine futures and adapt to change; helping to democratise policy decision-making on the built environment and design;

- *Performance and Practice:* Engaging audiences with the environment through site-based art and performance; creative and collaborative theatre practice; exploring the potential and impact of digital technologies on theatre and performance

The tangible aspects of these impacts are described in the LICA case studies submitted as part of the REF.

b. Approach to impact

LICA's work – with its impacts on design, performance, the built environment, policy evolution and dialogue with a wide range of user groups, is intrinsically outward-facing and collaborative. We define this approach in the following ways:

- All of our applications for external research funding must focus on impacts, particularly for non-academic audiences. An example of this is 'Beyond the Castle', or Developing Collaborative Design, funded as part of PROUD (People Researchers and Organisations Using Design for Co-Creation and Innovation), a €4.8 million, 3 year project funded by the EU INTERREG programme. This project will create an accessible public space around Lancaster's historic castle and priory by engaging the creativity of local people. This project exemplifies our approach to impact: non-hierarchal, highly collaborative, citizen-led and outward facing.

- Development of creative knowledge exchange: our approach places beneficiaries as co-producers of our research practice. For example, The Creative Exchange (a £4M AHRC funded Hub for Knowledge Exchange) responds to changes in the creative and media-based industries which have been stimulated by the opening of digital public space. It involves designers, artists, curators, producers, broadcasters, engineers, managers, technologists and writers. The Creative Exchange embraces new modes of thinking driven by non-academics, adapts to change in user behaviour, and promotes co-creation as core practice.

- Evolution of our arts-based practice in collaboration with audiences, and the environment or context in which they happen. An example is Dr Andrew Quick's work with Imitating the Dog, which has responded to the emerging demand from students, teachers and young film and theatre makers for workshops that introduce participants to collective theatre making using digital media.

LICA tracks the ongoing impact of our research and practice on user groups. An example of this is our Urban Futures Project (Boyko & Cooper, EPSRC, £4m), which used future scenarios to measure the resilience of urban regeneration projects. The research findings from this have created a training package, which has been used by built environment organisations, such as BRE and CH2MHill.

We also disseminate our research through media, social media, public lectures, conferences and other events.

We also define our impact through using our LICA building as shared space for public engagement activities. The building is variously used for conferences, events, workshops by a wide range of communities and publics.

c. Strategy and Plans

LICA's impact goals and implementation plans post-2014 will continue to build on our existing strengths and activities around collaboration, creativity and community engagement, as well as external research agendas. Our priorities include:

- To further explore ways that we can integrate beneficiaries as key stakeholders in the production, as well as end use of our research
- Developing and applying innovative mechanisms (like our strategic collaboration with LIVE at LICA) to provide a space for non-academics to shape our research activities
- Horizon-scanning changing socio-cultural-technological agendas to ensure that our research both evolves and remains relevant and timely
- Reconceptualising the notion of 'the venue' and 'the audience' as a means of increasing the reach of our research and its audiences
- Working innovatively with policy makers (such as the Government's Foresight Programme, and Future Cities), businesses and other interest groups to shape research agendas in a changing

political, economic and environmental context

- Multifaceted engagement with end-users to co-create visions of the future that can be made tangible through the engagement of contemporary art and design practices

In the context of these priorities, we recognise the need to continually evolve our understanding of research impact and how this might change over time and through innovations in practice. These priorities must have the development of our community of researchers at their core. We will:

- Support ECRs with a research mentor, to help focus and develop their understanding of the context for their work; to include integrating impact into their research plans;
- Encourage mid-career researchers to lead activities that inform and respond to LICA's agenda of non-academic research partners;
- Utilise senior staff as mentors; to provide research exemplars; build and lead a diverse and resilient research base

Our three research centres are central to supporting, developing and integrating our research impact strategy and importantly engage all staff within LICA in developing and evaluating this agenda post-2014. The centres act as catalysts for research discourse providing a space for discussion and debate. Engagement with beneficiaries has become embedded in their remit and as such assists staff in the conception of research impacts from the outset of research activities. The centres are led by internationally recognised researchers (Cooper, Gere, Etchells) and are responsible for the delivery and monitoring of our research strategy – including research impact. These concerns will continue to be at the forefront of our work.

d. Relationship to case studies

Our case studies have been chosen to exemplify our approach to research and its impact. One of our core drivers is to integrate our work with external, non-HEI organisations and produce outcomes which resonate beyond academia. Our case studies of course cannot reflect the entirety of our output, but demonstrate some of the range that our community of researchers is working on.

- Case study 1: (Cooper) shows the effective engagement of non-academics as research contributors and the development of new thinking in design decision making in the built environment;
- Case study 2: (Cruikshank) shows a highly successful example of local collaboration with residents and the local authority working to decide the future of a green space;
- Case study 3: (Quick) explores approaches to engaging audiences in collaborative dialogues;
- Case study 4: (Stewart) challenges traditional notions of venue, audience and participation through the use of environment-specific performance.