

Institution: University of Reading
Unit of Assessment: 30 History
<p>a. Context:</p> <p>The Department of History in Reading is concentrated around three main research themes: political cultures; economic and social history; and religion, magic and the state. Within these, colleagues cover a broad range of topics and a time-period that spans from the Medieval to the late twentieth century. The very nature of historical research ensures that it feeds into and makes contact with a variety of non-academic individuals, communities, groups and organisations, particular with regard to the museums and archive sector and the creative industries. At Reading, this is realised in a variety of ways, from the general public gaining access to and utilising elements of historical research generated within the Department, to culture sector providers drawing on research to enhance their own public-facing activities. Such impact is generated through consultancy, institutional collaboration and virtual media, and lies predominantly in areas of civil society, cultural life, education and public discourse.</p>
<p>b. Approach to impact:</p> <p>History at Reading places interaction with key users, beneficiaries and audiences at the heart of its research strategy (see section c). All members of the Department are engaged in impact-generating activity of one sort or other. These are enabled by the following mechanisms:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <p>• Collaboration with culture industries: Historical research is closely linked to the museum, archive and heritage sectors, where colleagues develop relationships in a number of ways. For example, Dr Yates' groundbreaking Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP) with the Weald and Downland Open Air Museum in Sussex enabled the museum to present information about its houses and collections to the public in an innovative way, combining history with cybernetics to help raise the museum's profile to the extent that it won the Europa Nostra award in 2011. More generally, the Department maintains a fruitful link to the country's premier rural history museum, the Museum of English Rural Life (MERL), to which colleagues make regular contributions as curators, speakers and promoters. Professor Hoyle's research in the field of rural history has also led to collaboration with the Museum of North Craven Life in Settle, providing information for its visual displays that will also feed into the museum's new guidebook. Professor Stack has joined with the British Natural History Museum's 'Nature Live' team to promote public understanding around the Museum's <i>Darwin200</i> events, while Professor Grant, whose research expertise on medieval architecture and patrons led to her serving on the advisory board of the English Heritage Restoration Project at Dover Castle from 2007, has also subsequently contributed much to the castle's outreach and promotional activities. Grant's research on Norman architecture led to her involvement in a landmark exhibition on Gothic Normandy at Caen and Toulouse in 2008-09, including writing the introductory chapter to the catalogue. Locally, the research focus of the Graduate Centre for Medieval Studies, led by Grant, has helped forge strong links with Reading Abbey.</p> <p>Beyond the museum and archive sector, interaction with the creative arts has led the Department to impact on the cultural well-being and environment of the nation. For example, Professor Worley's research on British politics has led to and informed his work as consultant to the Turner-Prize winning artist Jeremy Deller, as with the 'All That is Solid Melts into Air' installation at the Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2008). He has also advised on and contributed to exhibitions by the artist Scott King and the archivist Toby Mott. In terms of the theatre, Worley has acted as historical advisor to Alan Pollock, whose play on Oswald Mosley was premiered on BBC Radio 4 in January 2013 and is currently being prepared for performance by the Birmingham Repertory Theatre.</p> <p>• Building knowledge through creating and enabling the use of databases and virtual media, which offer an accessible and interactive means of presenting research materials and information for use (and often addition to) by the wider public. Among the publicly</p>

available databases developed (or co-developed) within the Department, Dr Burchardt's unique allotments database was collated and distributed from 2010 in conjunction with the Family and Community Historical Research Society, while Professor Taylor's AHRC-funded Clergy of the Church of England database (first made public in 2005, with a second edition in 2009) has provided both academics and genealogists with unprecedented access to biographical information relating to clergymen of the 16-19th centuries. Professor Major is currently curating an on-line exhibition for the Google Cultural Institute, focusing on the history of the Berlin Wall. This is an expandable resource and engages the public through an interactive user interface which will allow people to deposit their own memories.

- **Dissemination of research and application of expert knowledge:** Such activity takes place in a variety of contexts. Close ties are maintained with the Historical Association, and these together with other means of involvement with the media allow colleagues to disseminate research-based knowledge and contribute to public debate. Some examples of this in the period 2008–13 include Dr Bell's appearances on BBC radio and television to comment on issues such as the 2008 US Presidential election and submission of the 2010 Health Bill; Dr Burchardt's work as a consultant for numerous BBC productions, including *Birds Britannia* (BBC4, 2010); Prof Grant's regular appearances on *Time Team* and service as consultant for various television productions relating to the medieval castle in Britain and France; Dr Mijers contribution to the Radio Scotland series on the 'The Scottish Intellect' (2011); Dr West's participation in BBC 2's 2009 'See Hear: Black History Month Special'; and Dr Rist's contributions to the BBC and Sky News on the papacy. In addition, most – if not all – colleagues have participated on local radio with regard to issues ranging from changing attitudes towards the countryside to the inner-city riots of 2011. This dissemination activity, discussed within the Research Committee, funded by the Department and organised in liaison with the University's Communications department, showcases History's research and enables it to enter and influence public consciousness.

Members of the Department are also ready to deploy their research expertise as professional advisors in other contexts. For example, Professor Healey served as an expert witness on six occasions between 2008 and 2013, giving detailed testimony about the prosecution of sexual minorities in republics of the former Soviet Union for those requesting asylum in the USA on the grounds of sexual orientation. This entailed providing expertise on the history of gender and sexuality in the former Soviet Union and Russia relevant to the legal and factual bases of certain asylum claims.

c. Strategy and plans:

Impact has become a key strategic consideration for the Department's research committee, which oversees and directs colleagues' research from its inception to dissemination. This oversight ensures that a sustained impact culture is fostered within the Department by incorporating it from the outset into all History research projects. There are various ways by which the Department approaches this task. Termly meetings are held between colleagues and the Department's Research Committee, with research impact successes and plans as an increasingly important and formalised part of discussions. The Department also makes sure that close links are maintained with institutional facilities that enable impact. As well as internal peer-review groups that consider and advise on the impact potential of emergent and on-going research, colleagues work closely with the University's Research & Enterprise Development team to integrate impact into their research and ensure support for existing and future research leaders. Regular contact with the Communications and Press offices enables both the Department and the University to promote and provide media coverage of events such as the University's participation in the European-wide Researchers' Night in 2011, which attracted c.500 people to its programme of events and included a talk by Prof Grant on Reading Abbey in the European context. Finally, the Department and the School of Humanities offer financial support to enable colleagues to undertake activities geared towards impact, most obviously in the form of travel costs to promote research.

To further develop the Department's range of impact into the future, a number of strategies have been set in place:

- Departmental and individual research plans will continue to be developed with impact as a

Impact template (REF3a)

core component. The Department's Research Committee has highlighted impact potential in emergent research projects, working to develop, catalogue and direct these towards targeted areas of impact such as heritage and cultural industry collaboration and interactive media. Thus, for example, Professor Major's work with the Google Cultural Institute is being monitored and its on-going impact catalogued and collated. Capturing and understanding this project will empower colleagues and inform their methods and processes for recording impact in other future projects.

- The recent success and experience of colleagues such as Bell, Grant, Hoyle, Stack, Worley and Yates in developing research impact is now highlighted as best practice in informing and shaping the impact potential of developing research projects within the Department. To this end, research bids are continually peer-reviewed as part of a detailed process leading to submission, with impact forming a key part of the referees' rubric. Likewise, postgraduate bursaries will be targeted towards impact-related research and early career researchers will be supported and championed within the Department, such that the research leaders of the future are developed within an impact-oriented culture.
- Close ties have already been developed with the University's Communications office in order to disseminate research and cultivate impact. Colleagues regularly update Communications as to their research activities and outputs to establish regular interaction with and links to external contacts in the media. The Department is now targeting its media work and monitoring current affairs to ensure that colleagues are able to provide expert opinion in a timely and responsive manner. Meanwhile, building on the success of the University's participation in Researchers' Night, future showcase events will be facilitated with a view to ensuring that media contacts are fully developed and exploited.

The overall objective is to make impact strategies an organic part of the Department's wider research development; a component as inherent to research planning as publication.

d. Relationship to case studies:

The three selected case studies for History at Reading relate closely to the Department's approach to achieving impact. The KTP with Weald and Downland Open Air Museum built on the Department's encouragement of cross-disciplinary collaboration and engagement with the museum sector. By so doing, it proved History to be proactive in directing research towards enriching the nation's cultural life by providing new resources to the Museum and informing the practices of its staff. As an institutional resource offered by Reading, Dr Yates' use of KTP was both exceptional and an example of the rich potential offered by such an approach.

Dr Parsons' work on the plight of child evacuees has been served well by its interaction with the University's Communications department and, subsequently, the media. This has allowed Dr Parsons to disseminate his work across an extra-European audience and enable him to gain Heritage Lottery Funding to further develop links to organisations beyond academia. In particular, Dr Parsons' work confirms the Department's encouragement of colleagues to consider and develop their research in ways that move beyond a mere understanding of history and towards its utilisation as a means of influencing behaviour and providing a decisive impact on both individuals and organisations related to their particular line of enquiry.

The impact story which developed from Dr Burchardt's research into the nineteenth-century allotment movement, demonstrates again researchers' responsiveness to expressions of interest in their work among the broader public beyond academia. Further to that, it reflects the Department's continuing ability to bring 'popular' topics into the academic spotlight and the deployment of research expertise and professional advice to the benefit of the non-academic community.