

Institution: Newman University
Unit of assessment: 27 English language and literature
Section 1. Unit context and structure, research and impact strategy
<p>Newman is a diverse University primarily serving its local and regional community in south-west Birmingham. It is a member of the GuildHE/Consortium of Research Excellence, Support, and Training (CREST) with approximately 3,000 students studying a range of subjects at undergraduate and postgraduate level. Originally a Catholic teacher training college, Newman attained University status in 2013 and maintains a strong reputation for student support and teaching-led research. The University's Catholic ethos underpins the strategic plan which seeks the advancement of research for the benefit of the public and is 'dedicated to the construction of the common good, the transformation of its members' lives and of the world they serve and engage with'. The University's research degrees are validated by Liverpool Hope University and Newman is currently close to securing Research Degree Awarding Powers (RDAP), which is a key part of our strategic aim to become 'recognised nationally and internationally for the integrity and quality of our research and scholarship'.</p> <p>The UoA sits in the Faculty of Arts, Society and Professional Studies. The staff team includes members of the English and Drama Subject Areas and consists of Dr Helen Davies, Professor Peter Childs, Dr Helen Cousins, Dr Stephen Pihlaja, Dr Kate Katafiasz, Dr Louise McDonald, and Dr Kerry Myler. The team specializes in a range of areas within English literature, English language, Creative Writing, and Drama. During the assessment period, the UoA has increased from five members of staff to eight, and continued to develop its strength in English Literature, led by Dr Helen Davies who became head of the English Subject Area from 2015-2020, and is a nationally recognized scholar of Victorian Literature. While most colleagues specialize in modern English literature, where they have developed strong national or international reputations, the UoA expanded to include the development of Creative Writing, led from 2016-2020 by Dr Elizabeth-Jane Burnett, a nationally celebrated and critically acclaimed poet. The unit has also developed a research profile in English Language, led by Dr Stephen Pihlaja, an internationally recognized authority on Language and Religion who has published widely during the assessment period.</p> <p>The UoA's research focuses on identity and gender politics, particularly for traditionally marginalised groups, including the literature of Black British and Women writers, as well as the language and identity of religious minorities. The subject area's REF2014 was one of the strongest regionally in terms of outputs, and the aims during the assessment period have been to continue support for the excellent ongoing publications of team members and evolve the impact return for REF2021. The team works collaboratively to allocate REF funds for staff teaching buy-out, conference attendance, and network development, under the guidance of the REF lead, with increased allocation of support for impact case studies throughout the assessment period. The subject area is given autonomy to spend money based on specific priorities and funding has also been available centrally to support consultants for bid writing, staff travel, writing retreats, and equipment, leading to the submission of five monographs in this submission. To further develop links between research, teaching, and community impact, discussion and planning of Impact has been central to research planning and all team meetings during the assessment period, supporting ongoing relationships with community organizations like Writing West Midlands and Citizens UK. Support for this work has also been provided from REF funds and centrally for major bids for funding.</p> <p>The UoA's plan for development follows the University's four strategic aims for research: increased postgraduate research, securing a critical mass of academic staff who are engaged in research, securing a research culture that can support an application for RDAP, and expanding income streams and continue to demonstrate the impact of our research and practice on the wider community.</p>

First, during the assessment period, the UoA has seen a substantial increase postgraduate research, with developments in the PhD supervision and the first completion of a PhD in the UoA, and the establishing of Masters of Research and Victorian Studies programmes. Going forward, the UoA will further develop the recruitment of PhD and postgraduate researchers through the a) contributions to the existing MA programmes and participation in the development of new programmes, b) increased visibility as nationally and internationally recognized researchers to attract fee-paying PhD students, and c) bids for grant funding that support postgraduate research.

Second, all members of the UoA have a significant responsibility for research and are nationally or internationally research active, making important contributions to this REF return, marking a major milestone in the development of the UoA. The English REF2014 was one of the strongest in the University in terms of outputs, and we have further increased the quality and scope of research in this return. Members of the UoA have also been crucial for the development of the faculty-wide Humanities Research Centre, and have provided strategic leadership in increasing the visibility of research across the university. The UoA will seek to further strengthen our submission through a) an increased number of staff submitting monographs in the next return, b) further collaboration among staff in the UoA (and across the faculty and university) in research projects, c) leading on research within the university through leadership in the Humanities Research Centre, and d) further leadership in external academic and professional organizations, nationally and internationally.

Third, given the UoA's interest in marginalized communities, a development of real-world connections, identity, society and environment is a key goal for the UoA. This includes a commitment by all staff to develop impact activities as a part of their academic research, with further development to community relationships and bids for funding to support this collaboration. We aim to strengthen our work support structures and space for developing impact projects, working across the faculty within the Humanities Research Centre and across the University through an Impact Working Group, led by Dr Pihlaja.

The University's Strategic Plan following REF2014 included a commitment to direct investment towards growing and securing a 'critical mass of academic staff who are engaged in research, practice, or other forms of advanced scholarship and demonstrate achievements that are recognised by the wider academic community to be of national or international standing'. The English UOA is a clear example of the fulfilment of the University's goals in growing a mature and sustainable research culture.

All of the UOA's activities between 2014-2020 have been built on a number of principles developed at Faculty and Subject level since 2014:

- (i) To increase and sustain both the volume and quality of printed outputs
- (ii) To increase the number of applications made to external funding bodies
- (iii) To increase the number of academic and public-facing events and collaborations
- (iv) To develop a larger PGR cohort in Humanities

Building on these targets and responding to feedback from REF2014, the UOA has succeeded in driving growth and achievement in almost all of these areas. All staff in the UOA are strongly research active. This has resulted in a significant increase in the Unit's research power from REF2014, growing the number of printed outputs and monographs across the census period.

The UOA appreciates that the landscape of UK HE post-2020 will be challenging. However, we also envisage the next research assessment cycle as another opportunity for the UOA to mature its research culture from its embryonic submission to RAE2008. While it is not envisaged that the UOA will grow significantly in size in the next census period, our strategic goals revolve around the development of structures of research management and increasing the size of the UOA's external research footprint (in terms of impact, grant capture and outputs).

The University's institutional research strategy for the coming five-year period 2021-2025 will build on the current research plan while focusing on specific areas of implementation: an attainment of Research degree awarding powers, research integrity, Open Research compliance, and the equal promotion of disciplinary, cross-disciplinary, and interdisciplinary research.

Our goals for the period after 2021 are:

1. To build internal and external collaborations through clusters of expertise, especially through cultivating interdisciplinary relationships through the Humanities Research Centre
2. To implement the recommendations of the Researcher Development Concordat
3. To continue to develop public-facing partnerships that help shape projects and their outputs
4. To manage pathways to impact more effectively, particularly through the use of institutional methods of gathering data and sharing best practice

Section 2. People

From 2014, the Subject area has recruited a lecturer in English Language (Dr Stephen Pihlaja, now Reader in Stylistics), one Senior Lecturer in Creative Writing (Dr Elizabeth-Jane Burnett) and one Senior Lecturer in English Literature (Dr Kerry Myler, previously a temporary lecturer and early career researcher in the department), and a new Head of Department (Dr Helen Davies). Dr Louise McDonald, a member of staff who was not included in the REF2014, also grew substantially as a researcher in the field of women's middlebrow studies and looking at neglected and out-of-print inter-war fictional materials, is now included in the return. Drs Helen Cousins in English Literature have continued from the previous assessment period, as has Prof Peter Childs. Dr. Kate Katafiasz, Senior Lecturer in Drama also submitted to UoA 29 in 2014.

All staff recruitment is led by Newman's People Policy, which is inspired by the University's Catholic ethos and aims 'to foster good relations between people from different groups which embraces and celebrates diversity in line with our values and principles'. This includes support for periods of illness and care responsibilities. Motivated by a research theme looking at the experience of marginalised groups and people, the team has specifically undertaken research and run events around issues of diversity, equality, and well-being. In 2017, Drs Myler and Pihlaja ran a public event on sexism in HE, attended by over 30 staff and students from local universities. In 2018, Dr Pihlaja won a HEFCE Social Innovation Sandpit competition to look at support and policy around sexual violence in three UK universities, including Newman. Staff hired have also undertaken university induction, and additional training in disability and diversity has been attended by members of staff. Drs Burnett, Cousins, and Pihlaja also undertook training for SFHEA applications and were subsequently successful in attaining SFHEA status.

Newman University's mission focuses on outreach to underrepresented student groups and one fifth of the student body is drawn from so-called low participation groups. The English team's research interests in turn focuses on underrepresented work in English literature, including Black and women's writing, and scholarship from the global south. Dr Burnett has also served on the University's Equality and Diversity panel.

Staff participate in an annual appraisal process with the Head of Department where research, writing and grant applications are discussed. The UOA Research Coordinator meets separately with colleagues to discuss pathways towards achieving significant milestones in colleagues' research careers.

Research time is protected under the University's Work Allocation Model (WAM). The WAM also provides colleagues with blocks of clear time in which to complete grant applications. New members of early career staff are appointed a research mentor with whom they meet once each semester to discuss their wider plans. All colleagues have input into the UoA's spending priorities and direction through Subject meetings each semester.

Colleagues are encouraged to apply for a semester of research leave (plus the vacation period that falls either side) every three years. This scheme is administered centrally by the University in accordance with its Strategic Plan. Colleagues in the UOA agree in advance with the UOA Research Coordinator when their period of leave would be most useful and are then encouraged to submit an application to the University's Research Committee. During the period under review, half of English UoA colleagues have been granted research leave. Due to the size of the UoA, colleagues' teaching loads can be intelligently managed so certain modules can be shifted around with the agreement of the rest of the team to suit pressing research needs and open up space to complete projects.

In tandem with the University's Directorate of Learning, Teaching and Scholarship, members of the UOA can participate in on- and -off-site writing retreats during semester to give them another environment in which to write -- away from the bustle of teaching commitments. Several colleagues in the UOA have benefitted from writing retreats on campus and at the nearby Woodbrooke Centre, Birmingham. An annual celebration of research run by the Humanities Research Centre gives colleagues a chance to discuss successes in research projects and grant capture, as well as exploring opportunities for collaboration across disciplines.

Researchers in the UOA benefit from the culture of seminars and conferences in which all levels of staff and PGRs can participate. The Humanities Research Centre Seminar Series, co-convened by Dr Katafiasz, has heard sixty-seven speakers since the start of 2014, including scholars from Durham, Hull, Leeds, Łódz, Nottingham, South Wales Toronto and Warwick. These events were shifted online from March 2020, initially focusing on offering space to colleagues to discuss internal research projects and broadening to include several external scholars from the first months of 2021.

Research Students

There has been a significant focus on the development of postgraduate students in the subject area and all members of the team now contribute to postgraduate teaching. Through the partnership with Liverpool Hope University, staff have access to training for postgraduate supervision as well, and all members of staff in English were successful in applications to be approved as PhD supervisors. Dr Cousins led a successful validation for a Master of Research degree in 2017 and serves as programme leader for the degree, establishing a pipeline for students within the institution to continue on in higher education, a particularly important priority for Newman for whom one in five students are from low-participation areas in Birmingham. This includes one student from English who has completed their BA, MRes, and been admitted as a PhD student. The MRes programme across the Humanities, which includes students in History, English, Theology, and Drama, is taught by staff from across the subject areas.

PGR supervision teams have increased in sophistication, now including a Director of Studies, a Primary Supervisor and a Second Supervisor, allowing students access to subject specialists as well as senior colleagues in the Faculty. The Graduate School's Postgraduate Research Student Coordinator provides an additional layer of pastoral support for PGR candidates.

In 2015, the University offered tuition waivers and stipendiary for incoming 12 PhDs, of which two were successfully recruited in English with both completing their degrees. Two more PhD students were subsequently recruited, and Dr Davies serves as PhD supervisor to two external PhDs. With the completion of Dr Pihlaja's student in 2018, he applied for and was granted Director of Studies status, allowing him to oversee PhD teams in the department and he has subsequently taken on an additional EdD supervision with colleagues in other departments.

Professor Childs has been Director of Studies for 6 students over the REF period including, 4 in English studies.

Since the last census period, we have encouraged the growth of our PGR community. The University Graduate School runs a regular programme of training and skills workshops, equipping PGRs with skills needed for their doctoral work and after they graduate. Since their introduction in March 2015, the Graduate School has run 74 doctoral workshop sessions. Members of the UOA often lead these workshops, including sessions on 'Presenting a Conference Paper' and writing for publication. The University's annual Celebration of Doctoral Research has hosted a number of humanities PGRs, including several from English.

Since 2019, £150 from the English UOA is allocated to each PGR as a way to contribute towards speaking at conferences or to support visits to archives or other repositories. The Humanities Research Centre introduced an annual call for postgraduate funding in 2020 that encourages PGRs to develop collaborative, external-facing events, with PGRs at other institutions. This scheme offers up to £200 per year to a collaborative venture of this kind.

To support PGR development, the NewmArts postgraduate network was established in 2017 and is led by PGRs from Humanities subjects. The network brings together PGT and PGR students in Humanities subjects to organise academic and social gatherings. Newmarts also edit and administer the postgraduate journal Critical Commentary, which accepts submissions from PGR students. A member of NewmArts is appointed as PGR representative on the Humanities Research Centre steering group, allowing social events at the start and end of each semester.

Equality and Diversity

Efforts to enhance staff understanding of issues of equality and diversity have been interwoven through the University's structure: from the top level, through Faculty and Department and into the individual UOA. The Humanities Research Centre has led several events to address issues of inclusivity and exclusion in within the academy since 2014. In response to the RHS's 2019 update to its 'Roadmap for Change', the UOA and Humanities Research Centre organised a roundtable event for staff, PGR and PGT students to discuss action points. All members of academic staff across the University are required to complete mandatory Equality and Diversity training every four years.

Section 3. Income, infrastructure and facilities

Following REF2014, a more concerted effort has been made to increase bids for funding from the subject area, with most of the staff involved in applications for research funding for a variety of different research projects, both nationally and internationally. This work has been supported institutionally through the employment of staff to identify potential grants and funds, run workshops, and support staff in the writing of research bids, including external consultation for bid support. The subject area has also provided support from devolved QR funds to provide staff with time and space to research and write. The University-wide Impact working group, led by Dr Pihlaja, has also met regularly to discuss developing projects.

The University has also worked to support staff to develop their own research through a University-wide sabbatical scheme, which four English staff have applied for and won. This has also included central support for bid-writing consultants, writing retreats, and travel related to bid development. Working with the Humanities Research Centre, Readers Pihlaja and Cousins have also developed links across the humanities through events focused on supporting researchers in the humanities at Newman to develop their own research projects and collaborate with colleagues across subject areas.

The result has been 25 bids being submitted during the assessment period to a variety of different funding agencies including the ESRC, AHRC, Leverhulme, British Academy, Nuffield

Foundation, and Sir Halley Stewart Fund. Staff have been successful in securing money from Leverhulme, HEFCE, the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, the Lottery Heritage Roots, and the Sattley Trust for a total of over £145,000, rising to £300,000 (FEC) when including an AHRC ECR fellowship won by Dr Pihlaja in Spring 2021 for his work on language and religion in superdiverse city contexts.

External Grant Capture

The Unit has widened its portfolio of external funding since REF2014 by encouraging colleagues to apply to a greater range of grant schemes and supporting them with a more developed approach to submission. A research bid writer was appointed by the University in 2015 who liaised closely with the University Finance team to cost bids more effectively. A new workflow for grant bid submissions was developed across the census period and introduced in 2019. The Humanities Research Centre collates relevant funding calls and distributes them periodically to colleagues as well as holding events with bid writers and funders from across the country to encourage colleagues to develop grant-worthy projects. The Humanities Research Centre has also developed a grant bid database with examples of successful applications to a range of UK-based funders.

Internal Funding and Support

Structures to distribute internal funding have also advanced significantly since the last REF census. All members of the UoA have access to internal research funding to facilitate the creation, progression or completion of projects (individual or collaborative). Each year, this budget is set to around £5,000 which is distributed proportionally to each member of the Unit with a small pot of £1,000 side aside to allow colleagues to develop public-facing components of their research projects. The use of these funds must be explicitly tied to an activity or output that will contribute to the UOA's REF2021 submission and has facilitated the purchase of print resources, attendance and organisation of conferences, the costs of reproducing copyrighted materials for publication and the organisation of impact events.

The wider institutional structure to support research has matured significantly since the last census. Seedcorn funding, distributed by competitive process, by the Faculty of Arts, Social Sciences and Professional Studies (FASSPS) and its predecessor (the School of Arts and Humanities), has allowed for the purchase of equipment and research assistance (including the development of undergraduate and postgraduate student involvement in staff research projects). The Humanities Research Centre, established in 2013, also provides small funding particularly aimed at facilitating collaborations between graduate students.

In addition to this, the University Research Committee offers a competitive scheme to support internal and external collaborations, particularly through the organisation of conferences. To help these funds go further, the University Facilities Team allows events taking place on Campus to waive any booking fees for rooms or equipment.

Impact

The University implemented an Impact Working Group in 2019, where UOA coordinators and any colleagues working on an Impact Case Study were invited to share ideas and best practices.

The Humanities Research Centre's annual lecture was established in 2017 as a way to bring a prominent speaker to campus, starting with Edward Bond, to speak to a wide audience on the benefits of humanities research and attract new faces to the University. These speakers were chosen as a way to speak provocatively about often challenging topics.

Facilities

The UOA, along with all other Humanities subjects, is based in Oxford Hall at the northern edge of the Newman University campus. Senior colleagues are allocated individual offices, while junior colleagues share one large office per two scholars. Individual work spaces and meeting rooms are located around Oxford Hall if colleagues desire a more private setting. Colleagues each have a networked PC and access to multifunction printing devices that are dotted around campus. Colleagues who prefer to use their own devices for research purposes benefit from improved WiFi installed in the building between 2015 and 2016.

Postgraduate research students are given access to a 24/7 research room that is equidistant from their home UOAs and the University Library. The PGR Research Room contains hotdesks with networked PCs, dedicated printing facilities and a small kitchenette to facilitate interaction.

Section 4. Collaboration and contribution to the research base, economy and society

Originally a Catholic teacher training college, Newman attained University status in 2013 and maintains a strong reputation for student support and socially-oriented research. The University's Catholic ethos underpins the strategic plan which seeks the advancement of research for the benefit of the public and is 'dedicated to the construction of the common good, the transformation of its members' lives and of the world they serve and engage with'. These ideas sit at the heart of much of the UOA's research activity.

The English team has prioritised strategic partnerships with artists and communities marginalised from minority and marginalised groups. This has included both working with community groups, schools, and academic associations to promote collaboration between researchers and research users and communities. Dr Myler's work with the Contemporary Women's Writing Association works to enable links between academics, writers, and publishers. Finally, the subject area has developed and led on outreach and impact. Dr Burnett's work has been featured in numerous national venues, including the *Guardian* and BBC Radio 3. She has worked with arts organisations including the Centre for Contemporary Art & the Natural World to draw explicit links between ecological concerns and art. Dr Davies as well has been interviewed on BBC3 and gave a public lecture on October 27, 2020: The Freak Show and Victorian Medicine (The Strange Case of Millie and Chris) at the George Marshall Medical Museum. Dr Pihlaja's work in Church of England primary schools has focused on bringing the findings of research to teachers and school staff, including publication of a booklet for schools published with Grove Books. One of the UOA's aims at the last research census in 2014 was to grow the dissemination of its work. Members of the UOA are now accepted as leaders in their fields and frequently contribute to the larger cultural knowledge economy. Colleagues' expertise is evidenced by the increase in the number of keynote lectures given by members of the UOA. Professor Childs has for example delivered many recent international keynotes such as 'Empowering Fiction', Invited Plenary, University of Trier, June 2017; 'Human Fiction', Invited Plenary, Transcending the Postmodern Conference, University of Genoa, September 2018; 'Food Separation and Canonical Modernism', Invited Plenary, Craving Food Conference, Sibiu University, November 2019. Since its inception in 2004 Childs has been on the International Advisory Board of the *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* (Routledge) and served as an assessor for the Postcolonial Studies Association Funding Schemes. Childs has also remained an editor of the Bloomsbury Contemporary Critical Perspectives series (<https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/series/contemporary-critical-perspectives/>).

English staff have also increased involvement and leadership in external academic bodies, including the Contemporary Women's Writing Association, the Poetics and Linguistics Association, and the University Council of General and Applied Linguistics. Each of these academic associations has worked to develop links with schools and the public to promote the study of language and literature with the public, and further develop links between artists and academics.

Building on these successes, the subject area is planning to develop further work with community organisations, particularly Citizens UK, whom Dr Pihlaja has partnered with in his AHRC ECR fellowship, to develop more public outreach with community organisations to promote practical inter-religious dialogue for community organising. Interest in ecology and marginalised communities within the subject area have also developed into interest into non-human animal rights and Drs Cousins and Myler have also begun collaboration on work surrounding representations of animals in literature with a focus on further developing links to pedagogy and activism. Building on the high-quality research that has developed during this REF cycle, the subject area plans to work with colleagues through the Humanities Research Centre to match research interests and develop impact-led research bids as the core of the subject area's research agenda for the next REF cycle.