REF2021

Institution: University of Leicester

Unit of Assessment: 34a

1. Unit context and structure, research and impact strategy

The University of Leicester (UoL) has been a leading international centre for media and communication research for over 50 years, making significant contributions to the critical analysis of media markets and industries, political and public communication, including journalism, and audience research. In this REF cycle we complemented this tradition by focusing on the role of media in significant social and cultural spheres including environmental communication, health communication, global media, gender and media, social justice in media industries and digital security.

Our research is oriented to real world relevance and impact. Nearly 20 academics have acted as consultants and advisers to national and international NGOs, public and private sector agencies, government departments, grassroots and community media organisations. We develop our research in partnership with a wide range of interest groups and communities in the UK and beyond. Our research promotes changes in national and international professional practice and policy in the media, museum, creative and food industries, education and health sectors. We are committed to expanding public understanding of critical issues such as sexual violence, cybersecurity and media policy.

The Department of Media and Communication was the locus of media research until 2016 when it merged with Sociology to form the School of Media, Communication and Sociology. The same year, the Research Institute for Cultural and Media Economies (CAMEo) was founded led by media academics. CAMEo and the merger with Sociology have provided a unified context, integrated governance and shared infrastructure for strengthening our research focus on the sociology of communication and culture. The merger and the establishment of CAMEo also enabled media researchers to develop interdisciplinary research, enhance our PGR community, and increase support for research development.

Research and impact strategy
During the current REF cycle, our research strategy was shaped by the aims articulated in REF2014, complemented by emergent initiatives and themes.

2014 Research Aims	Achievements
To create a more supportive infrastructure and environment for research with an emphasis on ECRs.	We have enhanced mentoring, internal peer review of research grant applications and introduced innovative research cluster activities.
To develop and sustain coherent research clusters in media and foster greater international collaboration and networks.	We have created five research clusters which have been instrumental in encouraging research collaboration, establishing research teams among faculty and connecting to other disciplines within the University and beyond.
To increase research grant funding and diversify sources of funding.	We have increased our research income compared to the REF2014 period by 54%

	from £668k to £1.381m and diversified our funding streams.
To maintain our research strengths and encourage new initiatives.	We have sustained and developed our research tradition in media, sociology, and journalism through our Public Communication research cluster. New research areas have been developed in research clusters focused on Media Cultures, Digital Networks and Society, Health, Communication & Well-Being, and Media and Gender.
To strengthen PGR research by improving completion rates and integrating students to the research environment.	We have enhanced support for PGRs and integrated them into our research environment leading to a near tripling of completions compared to REF2014 (from 15 to 43).
To enhance the relevance and impact of our research beyond academia.	We have embedded impact planning in mentoring and support for grant writing. Through mentoring, we help colleagues to identify potential pathways to impact in their research.

A key strategic aim was to consolidate our research interests and expertise into research clusters. Clusters provide a context and support for research development and collaboration and enable cluster leads and members to influence and implement research strategy. For example, support for grant application development involves both research committee members who organise mentoring and reviews and cluster leads who support group members in framing and developing their research. The clusters developed in response to this strategy were: Media Cultures; Digital Networks and Society; Public Communication; Health, Communication & Well-Being; and Media and Gender.

Media Cultures explores the trajectories, tensions, and dynamics of mediated cultural worlds, developing new insights into the media's role in shared and contested cultural lives. Taking an interdisciplinary perspective, the group questions access, opportunity and participation in cultural production and consumption. Cluster research has generated new insights on community art, austerity and neoliberalism (Newsinger, **Morgner**, **Serafini**). The cluster builds on an established reputation for media audience research (Das, **Lunt**, Wood) and cultural theory and media (**Lunt**, **Morgner**). Our work on tribal radio (**Moylan**), funded by a Marie Curie Fellowship exemplifies the development internationally oriented networks and creative, impact-oriented research.

Digital Networks and Society brings together colleagues interested in the implications of critical reflections on the 'digital' for understanding social, political and psychological lives. Research also explores the implications of the digital for research methods, epistemology and ethics (**Cossu**, Harvey, **Mendes**, **Tsatsou**, **Whiteman**) and aims to develop new insights into the role of digital media in shared and contested cultural lives (**Bain**, Chen, **Karatzogianni**, **Lunt**, **Whiteman**). Members of the Digital Networks and Society cluster have successfully gained grant funding, notably **Karatzogianni's** H2020 grant, examining how children and young people are affected by the technological transformations in their everyday lives.

Public Communication integrates the established UoL tradition of interdisciplinary scholarship in political communication, journalism, environmental and health communication (**Hansen**, **Forchtner**, **Campbell**, **Lunt**, **Matthews**, **Serafini**) with emerging work on PR and advertising (**Davidson**, **Puppin**, **Somerville**). Appointments in media, diaspora communities, immigrants and extremists (**Forchtner**, **Osman**, **Smith**) have resulted in new insights into the diversity of mediated public life and political participation in a variety of global contexts. For example, **Forchtner's** work develops an analysis and critique of far-right political discourse; **Hansen's** work has done much to consolidate and synthesise research on environmental communication. Cluster members have won prestigious fellowships (Leverhulme, British Academy) to explore mediation of the law (**Gies**), and to conduct impact-led research with organic farmers in India (**Touri** ICS3).

The Health, Communication & Well-Being research cluster conducts interdisciplinary research with colleagues in sociology, psychology, economics, medical and life sciences, to interrogate the impact of media on public understandings of health (Koteyko, Vicari, **Zhu**). In partnership with industry stakeholders, the group's research has established how digital media can enhance health service delivery, for example, in **Gong's** work with Chinese migrant mothers. Members of the cluster have attracted eleven funded projects through the Wellcome Trust Institutional Strategic Support Fund at UoL (Institutional Environment Statement (IES) Section 2.2), including **Zhu's** work on social media's impact on postpartum depression and **Whiteman's** work with Sociology colleagues on social media use and adolescent mental health. In 2020, Cluster members submitted a report to the House of Common's Health Committee inquiry into the role of education in promoting emotional wellbeing in children and young people.

Media and Gender is a cohort of feminist media scholars consolidated by several new appointments who together built a dynamic research grouping. Research in the cluster investigates the intersections between media processes, cultures, texts and gender. It explores digital feminism (**Bain**, **Mendes**), digital intimacies (**Hart**, **Neville**), representation of girls (**Kennedy**), women's voice (**Kay**), and how these intersect with identity characteristics such as class, ethnicity and sexuality (Wood). Cluster members have produced nine monographs in the census period, including **Mendes'** award-winning *Slutwalk: Feminism, Activism and Media*, and secured funding from sources such as the British Academy (**Bain**, Wood), AHRC (**Mendes**, Miazhevich, Wood), and overseas funders (Harvey).

CAMEo was established as a University Research Institute in 2016 to complement our research clusters and support our strategy to attract large scale funding, enhance interdisciplinary research and develop research impact. CAMEo has provided a vehicle for research collaboration between Media, Communication, Sociology, Museum Studies and the School of Business. CAMEo established itself as a leading centre for the critical study of cultural industries and held a series of research meetings attended by academics from across the world. Examples of research conducted within CAMEo include Parry's 'One by One' project centred on building digital confidence in the museum sector which fed directly into a UK government toolkit which supports arts, culture and heritage organisations to integrate digital technology into their work (ICS2). Media and communication researchers have played a prominent role in CAMEo, including as Directors (Banks, **Karatzogianni**), as leaders of Institute research strands (Wood, Harvey), as Research Associates (**Serafini**, Marsden) and as organisers of salons, seminars, conferences and events (**Bain**, **Kay**, **Kennedy**, **Morgner**, **Moylan**, **Mendes**, **Whiteman**). To date, CAMEo members (Banks, **Karatzogianni**) have attracted over £500k external research grant and consultancy income.

Our strategy of enabling researcher development in Media focuses on supporting ECRs and mid-career academics, to achieve external funding success. For example, 23 of the 40 awards secured in the REF period were to Assistant Professors. Highlights include **Moylan's** EU Marie Curie Global Fellowship (2019-2021, £200k), exploring Tribal Representation across American Indian-produced radio, **Touri's** British Academy grant on communication and development in alternative food networks (2017-2018, £8k), Veltri's H2020 grant which assesses the role of digital transformations in young people's online political behaviour (2016-2018, £114k) and Das' AHRC networking grant exploring new directions in audience research (2015-2018, £37k). These projects created impactful outcomes, such as developing effective social, educational, health and online safety policies, practices and market regulation to tackle harms from using ICT. For example, **Mendes** has co-produced a comprehensive school policy, co-badged by Britain's largest headteachers union, to tackle online sexual harassment, a practice that impacts up to 75% of school age girls (ICS1).

We have developed mechanisms to increase research grant income from a variety of funding sources. We encouraged and enabled research grant initiatives via proactive support for research development, including support for pilot and scoping projects from School funds and by encouraging and applications for University pump-prime funds. We provide mentoring for each applicant and systematically review all grant applications. These structures and processes have enabled increased applications to a broad range of funding bodies including the British Academy, AHRC, ESRC, Wellcome Trust and EU bodies, smaller charities and international funding sources.

We achieved our strategic aim of further developing our PGR community, integrating them into our research environment by re-structuring our research activities around clusters and through more focused recruitment of PGRs whose interests map onto staff expertise. Drawing from School funds, we have provided a fully funded annual PhD writing workshop for three students in Prato, Italy (in collaboration with our partners from Monash, Oxford, Kent, Newcastle, Kings College London and Giessen). Additionally, we have received funding for PGR studentships via consortium bids via the ESRC Midland Graduate School Doctoral Partnership and the AHRC Midland 3 and 4 Cities schemes (IES, 3.3) and by competing for six fully funded University Graduate Research Associate positions. Consequently, we have nearly tripled our PhD completion rate (from 15 to 43), bringing us on par with the sector average (the REF2014 Russell Group average is 25.6).

1Impact Strategy
Embedding impact is aligned to our strategy to produce research that has relevance beyond academia. Our impact case studies (ICS) demonstrate how we have impacted government policy on the museum industry (Parry ICS2), communication strategies of organic farmers in India (**Touri** ICS3), and professional practice and strategic planning of organisations to tackle sexual violence (**Mendes** ICS1). To support our impact strategy, we appointed two Impact Coordinators who worked with staff to identify and develop impact potential throughout a project's lifetime and sought funds to enhance impactful research.

We applied for internal and external funds to support impact development securing £35k internal investment (e.g. ESRC Impact Accelerator Awards) (IES, 2.3), and external awards worth £98k (AHRC Follow on Funding for Impact and Engagement). These initiatives have enabled staff to develop relationships with key stakeholders, supported physical and virtual exhibitions, and workshops and training to a range of (inter)national stakeholders including museums, farmers, school leaders, and young people. Cluster leads, the Director of Research, Impact Coordinators

and members of the University's Research Enterprise Division work closely with staff to apply for funding which prioritise impact and the inclusion of clear and meaningful pathways for impact in funding applications (IES, 4.1).

Achievements

We are proud of our many achievements in media research in this census period, enabled through our research and impact strategies. We have more than doubled our external income, from £668k to £1.381m, through British, European and international funding sources. Application success rates now stand at 28%.
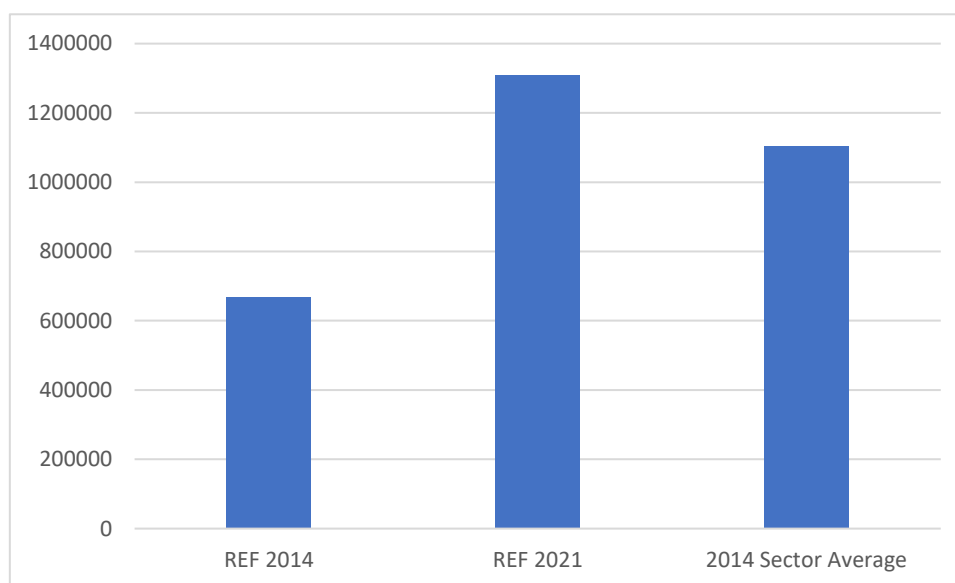

Figure 1 – Income (£) by REF cycle

An important mechanism enabling increased research grant income has been the diversification of funding sources beyond the AHRC and ESRC to include EU bodies, charities (e.g. Fire Service Research & Training), institutes (e.g. British Film Institute), consultancies, and overseas funders (e.g. Canada's Social Science, Arts and Humanities Research Council; Institute of Latin American Studies; International Development Fund). We have furthermore supported the development of international collaborations and networks achieving success in H2020 (**Karatzogianni**, Veltri), Marie Curie Fellowships (**Moylan**) and five grants on development themes funded by the Global Challenges Research Fund (**Karatzogianni**, **Lunt**, Ong, **Somerville**, Veltri).

Open Access

We have contributed to open access debates, processes and structures, fully embracing the University's Open Access (OA) policy. All staff within the unit deposit research outputs within three months of acceptance. Significant support for this process has come from the University's research repository hosted by the library through Figshare, facilitating public access to research data and outputs. Staff have sought institutional investment to support 11 Gold OA articles, built in OA publication costs in grant proposals and targeted OA journals such as *Social Media + Society* or the *International Journal of Communication*. The School emphasizes OA publication in all research mentoring meetings, and our PGRs have produced the OA peer-reviewed journal *for(e)dialogue*. Media researchers created and contributed to the CAMEo Cuts and DigiGen open access occasional paper series (Banks, **Karatzogianni**), sit on editorial boards of OA journals (**Lunt**, **Karatzogianni**, **Mendes**) in the field such as the *International Journal of*

Communication, and research open access and policy sharing practices amongst academics (**Zhu**). These efforts have progressively increased the visibility and discoverability of the Media research findings, with over 38k views and 27k downloads from 90 countries via Figshare since 2019.

Research Integrity
The School has implemented a robust procedure to ensure the highest ethical standards in all research conduct. Colleagues and students must submit research programmes for approval by a School Ethics Officer and a University Research Ethics Committee. Our procedures support and enable research on sensitive research topics exemplified by **Karatzogianni's** research with Syrian refugees about their experience in Greek refugee camps and **Mendes'** research with sexual violence survivors using hashtags such as #MeToo.

Future Strategic Aims:
We are proud of the research environment we have built, and as we look beyond REF 2021, the future strategic aims in the Unit are to:

- consolidate existing areas of expertise around public communication, digital technologies, media cultures and media and gender, while driving the discipline forward through expanding knowledge around media, health and well-being, and digital futures.

- enhance our supportive infrastructure enabling our early and mid-career researchers to reach their potential through mentoring and career development, including support for female and BAME staff through the promotion process.

- promote 'deeper' forms of interdisciplinarity, working with a broader range of disciplines beyond the social sciences (e.g. medical and life sciences, economics, informatics) supported through our work with institutional research networks, the Leicester Institute of Advanced Studies (LIAS), and the Wellcome Trust Institutional Strategic Support Fund.

- support all eligible research staff to gain grant funding and increase our research income.

- develop new initiatives, collaborations and impact activities informed by research excellence in our key research areas with external HEI and non-HEI partnerships.

- develop the role of Research Impact Coordinator by coordinating impact across the Unit, developing impact strategy, attending university-wide strategy meetings, flagging internal support, and driving diverse forms of societal change.

- support the development of international research projects and collaborations, enhancing our research impact and quality.

2. People

Overview
Media and Communication comprises an internationally diverse workforce of 29 Category A staff representing 13 different nationalities. Our present staff profile comprises three professors, 11 readers/associate professors/senior lecturers, 14 lecturers, and one Research Associate.

Staffing Strategy

Our long-term commitment to delivering social change through research has driven our strategy to recruit outstanding staff at all career stages committed to research excellence and impact. The strategic plan over this cycle has been to develop and enhance existing research specialisms (especially public communication, political communication and audience research), to invest in growth areas such as public relations (**Davidson**, **Puppin**, **Somerville**), environmental communication (**Forchtner**), global media (**Osman**), digital media (Allington, Chen, **Cossu**) and media and gender (Harvey, **Hart**, **Kay**, **Kennedy**, **Mendes**, **Neville**, **Whitehouse-Hart**).

New appointments in our REF cycle, predominantly ECRs, have made impressive and significant contributions to our research culture. To retain outstanding staff and enable an environment in which world-class research can unfold, we provide career development opportunities and reward success through promotions and merit awards. We uphold an equal, diverse and inclusive working environment through staffing policies, equality events and a transparent workload model.

Our partnerships with CAMEo and the Leicester Institute of Advanced Study have enhanced our recruitment to research-active postdoctoral and PGR positions including two new FT Postdoctoral Research Associates, three fully funded GRA PhD studentships as well as external funding for two AHRC Creative Economy Engagement Fellowships, one Rutherford Fellowship, one GCRF Fellowship, and one ESRC research fellowship. These research focused posts contribute significantly to the research culture, extending interdisciplinarity and industry links. For example, funded through an AHRC Creative Economy Fellowships, Banks and Frost (a research fellow) helped the Phoenix cinema and digital art gallery develop a strategy to establish UoL as a destination for digital excellence in the arts, resulting in 'Phoenix at Home', which includes films, digital art, educational resources and creative activities.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Our strategy is informed by the principles of transparency, consistency, accountability and inclusivity, reflecting the University's strategy, 'A Culture of Equality: Equality, Diversity and Inclusion' (IES, 3.1). We have created opportunities for early and mid-career scholars, including women, BAME, LGBTQI+ candidates, in our appointments. Since 2014 we have appointed 22 staff (13 women: 9 men). 14% of current staff self-declare as BAME (just over the national average of 12%), 10% from LGBTQI+ communities (higher than the national average of 3.4%), and 4% with disabilities (on par with the national average).

Category A Staff Returned in the Census						
	Prof.	Assoc. Prof or Reader	Assistant Prof	Post-Doc	ECR	BAME
Male	1	5	6	0	5	0
Female	2	6	8	1	8	3

Figure 2 - Category A Staff Returned in the Census

We aim to build on these achievements to diversify our staff profile and have appointed an Athena SWAN coordinator, and pioneered the appointment of a Director of Equalities (DoE). The

DoE sits on the staffing and Research committees and participants in all recruitment and interview process. In addition to advertising jobs via traditional routes (e.g. jobs.ac.uk), we routinely advertise them via listservs to target underrepresented groups (e.g. MeCCSA's Race Network and Women's Network). These actions have increased diversity compared to REF 2014 and we support women and BAME staff to take on senior positions through mentorship and staff development.

Mentoring and Staff Development

We aim to equip staff with the skills to achieve excellence in research following the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers (IES 3.2). We promote and embed institutional practices that foster an inclusive and supportive environment, enabling staff to reach their full potential, and rewarding their accomplishments. Mechanisms for enabling this include our focus on mentoring, support for study leave, and research training opportunities on grant writing, promotion applications, and impact development.

To support our early and mid-career scholars, we provide support during probation. New appointments receive an Early Career reduction in teaching hours; 30% for their first year, 20% in their second year, and 10% in their third year. They work with a senior academic mentor to monitor and encourage their professional development and growth. These mechanisms provide colleagues with the confidence and capability to take advantage of opportunities to develop their research and their academic profile, make a full contribution to the unit's activities and meet current and future challenges. All staff receive feedback during annual personal development discussions and bi-annual research discussions.

Robust and timely feedback on developing publications and research grant applications is provided through an Output Mentoring Scheme. Academic mentoring has led to academic collaborations between more senior and junior staff, including papers (**Kay** and **Mendes**; O'Reilly and **Whiteman**; **Somerville** and **Davidson**), edited collections (**Bain**, **Kennedy** and Wood), funding applications and events (**Kay**, **Kennedy** and Wood; Noske-Turner and Tufte; **Bain** and **Whiteman**). The Aurora program for women involved participation from five colleagues as mentees and two as mentors, providing support and development to women across the University.

We implement a study leave policy in which all staff are eligible for research leave of one semester in seven irrespective of leave funded from other sources, secondment opportunities, or by periods of ill-health or maternity leave. Study leave is subject to the submission of an agreed research and publication plan. In this census period, 39 staff have been granted study leave, and have used it to secure external funding (**Moylan**, **Puppin**, Miazhevich), take up visiting roles at international institutions (Harvey, **Forchtner**, **Lunt**, **Mendes**, Miazhevich, **Moylan**), and develop impact and engagement activities (Banks, **Gong**, **Mendes** ICS1, **Moylan**, **Touri** ICS3). Study leave has also enabled delivery of 40 REF outputs including 5 monographs and 3 edited books.

Media academics have benefitted from Research Training opportunities provided by the University's Research and Enterprise Division (RED). Some sessions are tailored for early career researchers, or staff with little experience applying for external funding. Sessions primarily focus on grant capture and impact development. Supported by RED, our School provides in-house research training, drawing on staff expertise in grant capture, impact, engagement, peer review and REF preparation. Successful AHRC grant holders, for example, have hosted training sessions for early career staff on preparing their first applications and we

regularly run sessions for those wishing to apply for British Academy small-grant funding (with seven grants awarded in the census period). These are examples of our success in developing a supportive infrastructure for our ECRs which provides mentorship and support.

Our staff benefit from the University's e-learning academy, developing skills in project management, coaching and mentoring, leadership development, planning, self-development and transformational change. Staff participate in research Leadership Development Programmes at Leicester (e.g. Future Leaders Programme; Vital Leadership Programme; Coaching and Mentoring Academy; Women Leading with Purpose; Aurora). For example, **Mendes** benefitted from both the Future Leaders and Aurora Programme and works across the institution to implement EDI strategies and best practice, including sitting on the REF Code of Practice working group. These programmes enabled her to organize university-wide sessions on university policies, decolonizing the curriculum, and diversifying forms of assessment.

Our focus on training and mentoring staff, particularly female staff, has led to tangible changes in the gender balance in leadership positions. For example, women have held key roles relating to research, teaching and administration during the REF cycle including one Head of School, two Deputy-Heads of School; Director of Research, Director of Teaching; Director of Post-Graduate Research; and REF UoA lead. These efforts have also had a direct impact on staff success with progression.

Progression
In REF 2014, three staff members were promoted (two men, one woman, all to Associate Professor). To create mechanisms enabling more staff to progress, we created a Staffing Committee (2016) with a remit that includes proactive discussions around applications for promotion and mentorship. We aim to build on our success in attracting outstanding early career female colleagues and mentoring and supporting them by developing career profiles to ensure promotion. Addressing the ethnic diversity in our staffing presents more of a challenge. We recognise that the problem starts much earlier in the academic career cycle, failing to attract home BAME students to postgraduate research. In 2020, staff in our School led a university-wide initiative and developed a toolkit to de-colonise the University curriculum. At the College level, supported by colleagues in our School, a Task and Finish group has been established to address the BAME awarding gap, launching five BAME PGR 3+1 scholarships as a first step this year (two of which came to our School). Increasing BAME staff and students is an institutional priority. In our unit, nearly 10% of Associate Professors are BAME (14% are BAME across our profile) and we aim to increase this percentage over the next REF cycle.

These mechanisms have delivered a significant increase in promotions: 7 staff members promoted to Associate Professor (6 women, 2 men: **Bain, Forchtner, Gong**, **Mendes**, **Moylan**, Veltri, **Whiteman**), two women were promoted to Professor (**Karatzogianni**, **Mendes**), and 31 merit awards were awarded to academic staff.

PGRs
Our PGRs research in diverse fields including digital inclusion, feminist activism, selfies as a form of cultural production, environmental communication, public relations, cyberconflict, and counterterrorism. Issues of equality and diversity drive acceptance of PGR students, and we consequently have an internationally diverse group of students from 20 countries, with excellent representation from the Global South (15 different nations), BAME (30 students) and female students (27).

Overall numbers at this census point are 45 FTE students (40 FT and 15 PT) of which 67% are female and 33% are male (compared to the Russell Group average of 59% female and 41% male). 58% of the current cohort identify as BAME (compared to a sector average of 17%), and 9% have registered disabilities (above the Russell Group average of 2.2%).

Table 2 – Student Identity Characteristics

Student Identity Characteristics	Leicester (2021 cycle)	Russell Group Average (2014 cycle)
Female	67%	59%
Male	33%	41%
BAME	58%	8.3%
Registered Disability	9%	2.2%

Since 2014, 55 PhD registrations (average of 9 per year) and 43 home/EU completions (an average of 6 per year) represent a near tripling of completions. In addition, three International Distance Learning completions are not included in the HESA data. These figures reflect the unit's sustained success in recruiting and supporting a larger cohort of high-calibre PGRs, most of whom complete with minor corrections.

Induction provides a crucial opportunity to inform PGRs about the support available to them from the University's Doctoral College, in terms of academic resources and in mental health and well-being (IES, 3.3). As with all other core activities, we support remote participation to ensure students based outside UoL or with caring responsibilities are included. Our PGR induction provides support in areas such understanding the PhD journey, literature reviews, research methods and writing. We ensure that all students are aware of expectations, procedures and training opportunities, and embed themselves within the School research culture. Our PRES data indicates that an average of 84% of PGRs in the census period took advantage of professional development opportunities.

Financial Investment and Support
Nearly half of our PGRs receive funding, including international Government scholarships (20) from nations such as Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Oman and employee sponsorships (3). Fourteen of our students are funded through the college as Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) or Graduate Research Assistants (GRAs) and two through CAMEo. In this REF cycle, the University has invested £255,676 in GTA and GRA studentships and a further £182,425 in fee waivers or other scholarships in Media PhDs.

The development and integration of PGRs has enhanced the activities within our research clusters leading to collaborative outputs with staff, through conference papers (Dikwal-Bot & **Mendes**), book chapters (Dikwal-Bot & **Mendes**; **Karatzogianni** & Ferra), journal articles (Ditchfield & **Lunt**; **Karatzogianni** & Ferra; **Matthews** & Cameron; **Matthews** & Onyemaobi; Zsubori & Das), books (Chen & **Lunt**) and edited books (**Karatzogianni** & Ferra). PGRs with support from academics organised over 15 events since 2014, most notably the 2016 MeCCSA Post-Graduate Network conference, and the annual NDiMS (New Directions in Media and Sociology) Conference for PGRs and early career researchers. We have also developed a PGR open access journal, *for(e)dialogue.* Our PGRs play an active role in the university by forming support groups for those working on sensitive research areas such as sexual violence,

migration, and trafficking for students and staff from criminology, geography, and sociology. Our PGRs have secured jobs at UK Russell Group Universities (Leeds, Nottingham), prestigious international universities, and UNESCO and Human Rights Watch organisations.

3. Income, infrastructure and facilities

Research Income
Our strategy in this census period has been to diversify funding sources and significantly increase research grant income, positioning ourselves as a strongly performing School that creates opportunities for ECRs, and funding time for staff to deliver world-leading research with impact. Across the 2021 REF cycle, we have secured £1.381m (£749k more than in REF 2014, and above the sector average of £1.1m). Our grant income increase includes 51 new grants awarded since 2014, up from 12 grants in the previous cycle (a 425% increase). These figures evidence how our research environment supports a thriving grant ecology.

While a few senior staff generated most of the grant income for REF2014, we now have a wider range of staff gaining grant funding, including ECRs building track records of grant capture success. Indeed, 23 of the 40 awards secured in this period were from Assistant Professors. Research income has increased over the census period because of improved support structures, infrastructure, mentoring and a more transparent and ambitious grant capture strategy. Consequently, we have one application per FTE compared with 0.3 in the last REF period and have achieved a 30% increase in the proportion of staff securing single or multiple awards (from 28% to 40% of staff) and a 35% increase in the average size of grants awarded (from £34k to £51k). We have achieved this by supporting staff through the cycle of developing funding bids, from identification and discussion of early ideas at research mentoring meetings, diversifying our portfolio, providing mentoring through the research clusters and a supportive review of grant applications.
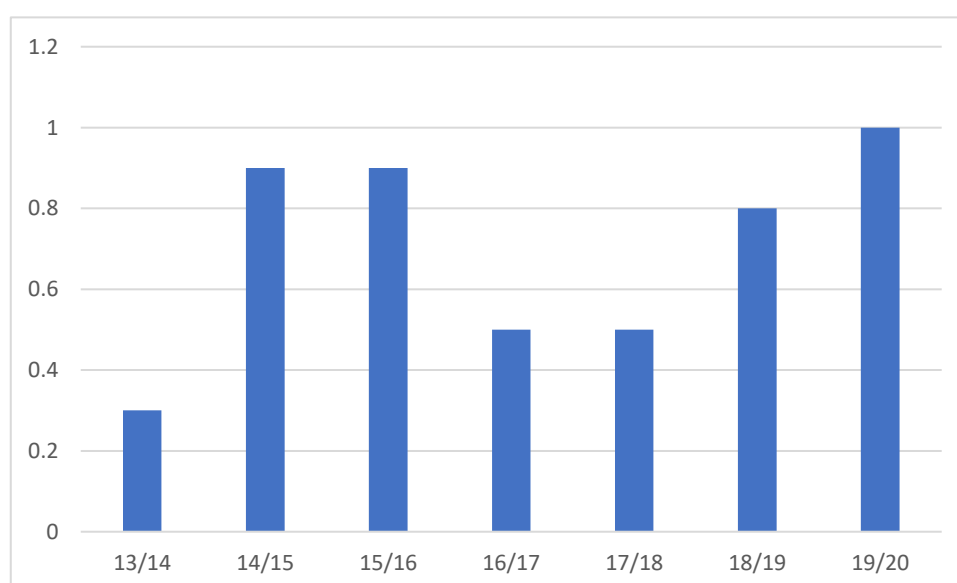

Figure 3 – Number of funding Applications per FTE

Our success in diversifying funders, includes awards from organizations and charities such as the Creative Diversity Network (2), the Fire Service Research & Training (1), Stillbirth and Neonatal Death charity (1), Innovate UK (1), and International Media Support (1). A number of

these projects are on-going and will continue to underpin our research income and impact in the next period (Kviat, **Moylan**, **Karatzogianni**, **Mendes**). As we look ahead, we anticipate continued trajectory upward, experiencing a 50% growth in external income since 2016/2017, with many more and higher-value applications in progress.
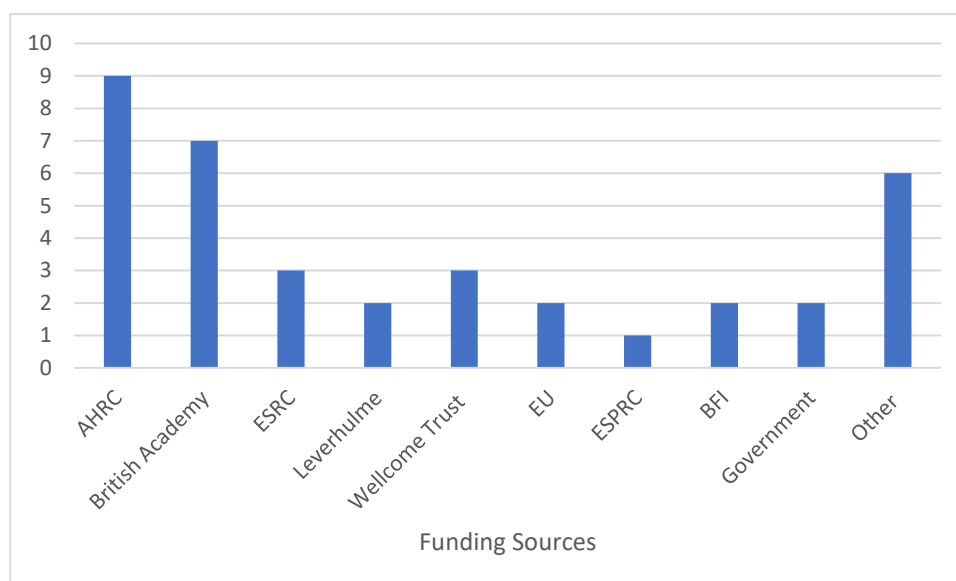

Figure 4 – Number of Grant Holders this REF Cycle by Funder

Infrastructure

Our unit's successes are supported by the coordination and integration of internal unit-based and institution-wide infrastructure and facilities. In total, the unit has spent £290k of income allocated by the School, including from grant overheads, on research-related activities since 2014, a doubling since REF 2014.

We have communicated an integrated research strategy across the whole School adopting clear lines of governance and responsibility linking the School Research Committee to the School Management Board and research cluster leads to media researchers. The Research Committee is responsible for allocating pump-priming funds to academics and organising mentoring and review processes for research development and grant applications.

We incentivise success in grant capture by allocating a share of grant overheads to develop research and impact activity and grant income generation. In the REF cycle, the percentage has changed. We reduced the allocation of overheads to PIs from 50% to 10% making the rest available through the School Research Development Fund (RDF) to increase research support across the School, particularly amongst our ECR staff. The School allocates approximately £20k/year to support research initiatives in the School. In addition, all staff have access to an annual staff development budget to attend international conferences or support research collaboration (approximately £70k per year for the unit). Examples include grant writing support, grant/publication planning, fieldwork, conference expenses, publication/OA costs, specialist equipment/software, meetings to develop impact/KE and evidence capture for impact/KE.

We give preference to early career staff and those making their first application, or for grants over £100k and applications intended to leverage funding elsewhere. In the census period, our unit allocated £48k to support Media research. This has resulted in the development of new research, grants and collaborations such as **Touri's** travel expenses to develop research on

organic food networks in India, resulting in several outputs and impact work (ICS3), and **Gong's** research with expecting Chinese mothers in the UK, resulting in two grant applications (one successful), two journal articles, and fostering an open and inclusive research environment by involving a PGR in active research.

In addition, funds are available through the University and College to cover travel expenses, conference presentations, grant development, research fellows, impact and engagement activities, and other "pump-priming" activities (IES 2.3). In the census period, staff have been awarded £172k from these funds, supporting activities such as start-up funds for a project on news reporting and changing political construction of energy issues (**Hansen** & **Matthews**), use of technologies during humanitarian crises (Ong), and representations of minorities in community radio (**Moylan**).

At University level, cross-disciplinary, collaborative research is supported through LIAS and CAMEo, which award seed funding to bring international collaborators to UoL, create cross-disciplinary networks ('Tiger Teams') and networks. These have resulted in interdisciplinary collaborations, including with non-academic partners (e.g. IBM), leading to multiple outputs and events which prioritize public engagement beyond the academy.

Academics have also made four successful applications worth a total of £37k to the University's Impact Development Fund (IDF), and three to the College Research Impact Development Fund (£3k). These funds have supported impact around digital literacy lessons for feminist activists (**Mendes** ICS1), digital literacies in the museum sector (Parry ICS2), promoting sustainable development, communication and Alternative Food Networks in India (**Touri** ICS3), a video game education summit connecting with key stakeholders including developers, human resources staff, recruitment companies, and policy-makers at (Harvey) and enhancing maternal health information for Chinese migrants in the UK (**Gong**).

Members of the Unit (**Gong**, **Lunt**, **Mendes**, Parry, **Touri**) have secured £20k from the 2019 ESRC Impact Accelerator Award (£1m) to support impact development from research applications (IES, 2.3). Our staff (Marsden, **Mendes**) have furthermore secured this funding to host events at the ESRC Festival of Social Science on topics such as on ableist privilege in cultural work, and developing digital feminist activists.

A supportive infrastructure has been aided by £2.2 million institutional investment to the unit from the College and University to support excellence in research and scholarship (see IES). Funding has been spent on new posts, travel, equipment, resources and research support (e.g. RAs). Staff have strategically targeted these centralized funding opportunities for research pump priming, leading and developing interdisciplinary research institutes and networks. Most notably, supported by £1.4m, we have seen the establishment of interdisciplinary cross-institutional research institutes (CAMEo, led by Banks, and **Karatzogianni**) and research networks. Supported by senior colleagues in our unit, Chen led a university-wide Leicester Artificial Intelligence Network of colleagues from 10 different departments and all three colleges, funded by £30k institutional investment. The Network, has hosted six events since its launch in 2018, and members of the network were commissioned in 2019 by the European Union Agency for Safety and Health at Work to write a report on AI and the future of work.

Facilities
Our unit has directly benefitted from £800k investment from the University, College and School. In 2016, following the merger of Media and Communication with Sociology, the new School

received over £300k institutional investment to refurbish a new building. Staff are co-located with all research staff having their own offices, PGRs with two dedicated spaces, and access to several common areas. The School also benefitted from £30k of investment in a Media Lab with iMacs for research and teaching, and a technician post. The School was awarded £75k central infrastructure funding for a Data Lab and software to conduct Big Data research.

The unit is supported by the David Wilson Library which offers state of the art facilities to researchers and graduate students, and extensive library resources such as archives and special collections. Staff and students in this unit have benefited from £35k of REIF funding (see IES) to access the online Women and Social Movements Library, containing nearly 400k pages of primary source documents related to women's public activism around the globe from 1600 to the present. This resource has supported ground-breaking research undertaken by staff and PGR students, particularly those taking a historical look at feminist activism (**Kay**, **Mendes**). In 2017, the unit secured £28k to purchase the last part of the Digital Archive of British Newspapers allowing access to the complete package, and in 2019 £50k to update the digital newspaper archive, including the Los Angeles Times, the Sunday Times, and the Financial Times. We also secured access to The Telegraph Historical Archive (1855-2000) worth £41k.

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

In the current census and with the transition to the School of Media, Communication and Sociology the focus has been on broadening the horizons of research in terms of funding, impact and collaboration across the university and beyond. This has been achieved by establishing and engaging in networks, research groups and via CAMEo to deliver interdisciplinary collaborative, impactful research initiatives with academics in other universities and non-academic partners.

Our diverse staff base, from 13 nationalities, is crucial in supporting our commitment to conducting interdisciplinary, collaborative research on 'real world' problems with impactful outcomes across the Global North and South. Staff have worked with national and international organisations such UNICEF, the Council of Europe, UN Women, UNESCO, the NHS, BFI and Cancer Research UK. Indeed, our success in grant income generation is built upon major collaborative international projects including **Karatzogianni's** 'DigiGen' project (with Oslo Metropolitan University, Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences, University of Vienna, Universitat de Girona, Universitatea Babeș-Bolyai, Tallinn University and The University of Paderborn), Ong and **Lunt's** 'Tech4development network' (De Salle University), Harvey's 'Reconfiguration in Games' (York University, Canada), and Veltri's 'Re.Cri.Re' project (Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich). With research outputs made open access via Figshare since 2019, 27k downloads of our scholarly outputs have been accessed by scholars in 90 countries. For example, **Mendes** et al.'s 2018 publication on #MeToo has been downloaded over 34k times.

Partnerships, Networks & Collaborations
Supported through University funding, academics in media and communication have developed multiple international and cross-disciplinary partnerships, networks and collaborations. **Somerville** used £4.5k to travel to Kenya to work with colleagues from the Technical University of Mombasa resulting in several forthcoming articles exploring Al Shabaab's media channels to recruit women into terrorist networks. **Mendes** using an AHRC Follow on Funding for Impact and Engagement application, worked with colleagues at UCL, Kent, and a range of third-sector organisations to develop digital defence and activism lessons

for secondary school students and teachers which are currently being rolled out across the UK (ICS1).

UoA members have also been proactive in gaining external financial support to develop partnerships. **Puppin's** AHRC 'UK-China Creative Industries Partnership Development' project (2019) explores and develops relationships amongst advertising agencies in the two nations, leading to subsequent publications. **Bain** was part of the Jean Monet funded project 'External Images of the EU as a Normative Energy Player' (2014) in collaboration with scholars in New Zealand and Europe, resulting in several publications. Five academics secured GCRF grants in media and development. For example, funded by the Hellenic Foundation for Research and Innovation, **Touri** (2019-2022) collaborates with Aristotle University of Thessaloniki leading to academic outputs and educational activities for Journalism professionals in Greece. **Lunt** secured funding from an institutional GCRF-QR grant to organise a workshop and network of researchers and NGOs on community media in Malawi. Stemming from this event, the group submitted a Newton Fund grant application to work with community radio stations on the reporting of COVID-19 in Malawi. Several projects developed by **Lunt**, Noske-Turner, Ong, and Tufte in communication for development developed research partnerships UNICEF, Tech4Dev and Communication 4 Development (C4D). This work reflects our strong interest in the social outcomes of communication policy and practice.

Members of the UoA have also been proactive in obtaining funding to develop collaborative research networks. Das used a small grant from the University, matched with departmental research funds, to develop a successful AHRC network bid to launch the Consortium on Emerging Directions in Audience research (CEDAR) in collaboration with the University of Bergen and 29 researchers across Europe (2016-2018). The project resulted in a monograph, a report and several other publications. **Gong**, gained a University LIAS Tiger Team award, to form a network of scientists working with NHS trusts across the UK to roll out services enabling Chinese migrants to access maternity services (2017-2018). **Osman** has been part of the EU-commissioned international collaborative research project 'Research and Evidence Facility' on Migration in the Horn of Africa supported by the EU Trust Fund to explore media's role in migration patterns and violent extremism (2019-present).

Disciplinary Contribution
Media academics at UoL play key roles in sustaining the discipline through subject associations, and organizations beyond the academy. For example, UoA members were founding members of the International Association for Media and Communication Research and continue to play a significant role in the association. This includes hosting the Annual IAMCR conference in 2016, drawing 2k delegates from around the world (chaired by **Lunt**). **Hansen** and **Karatzogianni** both organized pre-conferences at the 2016 IAMCR. In 2017, **Lunt** organised a post conference in Segovia of the IAMCR2019 Conference in Madrid on Mobile Socialities which fed into a Routledge Companion contract. **Lunt**, **Hansen** and **Mendes** have also acted as Chairs for IAMCR sub-sections.

Fourteen staff held roles in other subject associations, including **Matthews** as a stream coordinator for the BSA (Media Study Group), **Somerville** as vice-Chair (2012-2016), and Chair (2016-2018) of the Organizational and Strategic Communication Section of ECREA, and Miazhevich as a member of ECREA's Executive Board member (2016-2020). **Hansen** is an active member of the IAMCR Working Group on Environmental Issues, Science and Risk Communication and is Chair of the international research network on Media, Communication and Energy. **Serafini** is co-founder of the independent network Politically Led Art and Networked

Knowledge, and **Smith** is member of the ARCHER (A Representative Corpus of Historical English Registers) Consortium, a group of 14 universities in seven countries that are building and developing a digital resource that allows scholars to track changes in English across genres and time.

Building on UoL's reputation as a centre of excellence in media and communication scholarship, we have hosted over 65 events, symposia and conferences during the census period. **Hansen**, **Forchtner**, **Matthews**, **Campbell** and **Puppin** organised the International Conference on Communication and the Environment (COCE) in 2017. **Forchtner** organised a workshop attended by scholars from across Europe in Leicester on The Far Right and the Environment. In 2016, Leicester hosted the annual MeCCSA Post-Graduate Network conference, led by a PGR student team supported by academic staff members (Banks, Harvey, **Lunt**, **Mendes**, **Touri**). Now in its 9th year, PGR media students organise an annual New Directions in Media and Sociology (NDiMRS) conference, attracting an average of 50 post-graduate students from around the UK and Europe. Colleagues have also organised five pre-conferences beyond those for IAMCR, including **Davidson** and **Somerville**, who organised pre-conferences at ECREA 2018 and ICA 2019, and **Serafini**, who co-organised a symposium in Buenos Aires, leading to a co-authored an article for the journal *Ecología Política,* and an open access book.

Colleagues contribute to the wider profession by editing major journals and book series and participating in peer-review and grant awarding panels. 11 academics sit on editorial boards of 24 journals, and three academics (**Hansen**, **Lunt**, **Karatzogianni**) are the general editors of or on the editorial boards of book series. Furthermore, *The European Journal of Cultural Studies* was run through the University of Leicester from 2016-2018, with Wood as its Editor and **Kay** as Assistant Editor. Seventeen staff provide peer review for national and international funders from Europe, Australasia, the Middle East, North and South America. Thirteen staff have held visiting scholar positions at 22 institutions such as University of São Paulo (**Karatzogianni**), University of Pennsylvania (**Lunt**), University of Rhodes (**Matthews**), Fudan University (Harvey, **Mendes**), the University of Johannesburg (Tufte) and Copenhagen University (Veltri).

Members of the unit have been consulted as media experts for various outlets, including BBC Radio 4 programmes *Thinking Allowed* (Wood) and *Woman's Hour* (**Mendes**)*;* BBC Wales, BBC Radio Leicester (**Mendes**, **Kay**), Radio Ireland (**Mendes**), BBC Sunday Politics (**Puppin**), BBC's *100 Women* (**Mendes**), *Rolling Stone* Magazine (Harvey), *Vice* Magazine (**Forchtner**), *Wired Magazine* (Chen), KNON FM, Dallas, TX (**Moylan**), WHIV FM, New Orleans (**Moylan**), KPYT FM, Pascua Yaqui Reservation, Tucson (**Moylan**), The *New York Times* (**Gies**), *The Guardian* (Ong) and *The Conversation* (13 academics)*.*

Our staff have presented at 160+ conferences or symposia, delivered 75+ invited talks and 30 keynotes in nations such as Australia, Brazil, Canada, Columbia, Croatia, Ireland, Germany, South Africa, China, France, India, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, USA, UK in the census period. Highlights include **Mendes'** keynote at Cambridge University (2019), **Lunt's** address at the Annenberg School of Communication (2015), **Karatzogianni's** keynote at the University of Paris (2016), and **Forchtner's** keynote at Lund University (2019).

We have hosted scholars from around the world (Kenya, Brazil, Argentina, Hong Kong). In 2018, **Morgner** secured funding from the Rutherford Fund Fellowship scheme, to bring a scholar from the University of Nairobi, Kenya to Leicester for six months and **Mendes** secured funding from the University of Brasilia to bring a scholar here to work with her for six months.

Broader Engagement

Staff in our unit collaborate with a diverse range of stakeholders including museums, migrant groups, artists, charities, NGOs, government bodies, schools and educational institutions and the public, the NHS, Fair Trade organisations, Ofcom, and the BFI and Creative Diversity Network. In the REF period, we have offered over 50 public engagement and impact activities, many of which led to changes amongst individuals, organisations, and policies. For example, Rovisco acted as a member of the selection panel for the Arts Council funded programme 'The Art of Migration' which offered career development support and new work showcases for emerging artists with a migrant or refugee background. **Gies** acted as an expert to the Council of Europe's Judicial Reform in Georgia project and delivered a report in March 2018. Parry's research has important implications for the museum sector in the US and UK, leading to tangible changes in practice amongst workers and creating an international community of academics, cultural organisations and professional bodies around museum related digital literacy (ICS2).

Our staff have contributed to the economy and society by advising national and international governing bodies and institutions. **Whiteman** acted as an expert contributor to the Australian Government Office for Teaching and Learning for online research ethics. Wood provided consultation and content provision for the BBC's history website, while several other staff have made consultation and policy submissions to various public and governmental bodies. For example, we have response to Ofcom's consultation 'BBC thematic review of representation and portrayal' (Wood), the UK Commons Select Committee's Inquiry into the Social Impact of Participation in Culture and Sport (**Serafini**), the Government's Industrial Strategy Green Paper (Banks), and submitted evidence to the Labour Party's Future of Work 'Acting Up!' Inquiry (Banks).

Members of the unit have provided expertise to international bodies. For example, **Gies** advised on media and the judiciary, including consultation for the Council of Europe (CoE). The Montaigne Centre also invited **Gies** for Judicial Administration and Conflict Resolution (Utrecht University) to act as a respondent at the Conference for Procedural Justice and Legal Practice. **Somerville** was commissioned by UN Women to produce a report on communication for gender equality and provided evidence to the Department of Culture, Media and Sport's Select Committee on 'Homophobia in Sport.' In 2020, **Forchtner** gave evidence to the Social & Democratic parliamentary group of the European Parliament on the far right and environment. We also build on a strong tradition in health communication (**Hansen**, **Gong**), enhanced by our environment with sociology to include engagement with the NHS and Cancer Research UK (**Gong**).

Equal opportunities form a key part of our external partnerships, including Harvey's role as on the Diversity and Inclusion Committee for the Higher Education Video Alliance, and the Digital Games Research Association, while Banks is a member of the Board of the disability-arts focused Attenborough Arts Centre Leicester. Also, Marsden works on an Arts Council England project mentoring BAME authors and writers.

Local Community Engagement

Media academics have also contributed to Leicester's local community. Rovisco led an event at the Leicester Cathedral in 2018 'The Migrant and Refugee Crisis: Artistic and Civil Society responses' which brought together academics, artists and refugees to shed light on refugee experiences. Under its 'Cultural Publics' programme, CAMEo has organised an average of 10

events per year (over 40 in total), including its well-attended Research Salons series, many of which are held off-campus in creative hubs such as Leicester's Curve Theatre, Phoenix Arts Centre, and Attenborough Arts Centre. Through CAMEo, Banks co-led a new creative economy strategic research initiative funded by Midlands Innovation and is a steering group member for the Arts Council England-funded Midlands Higher Education and Culture Forum. All these events regularly attract and involve local creative workers, artists and academics, and diverse publics and communities, cementing CAMEo's role as an open and inclusive platform for media researchers to work together and alongside peers from other disciplines and non-academic organisations.

Prizes

Further evidence of the external recognition of our work, staff have received awards such as an ICA top paper (Rovisco, 2016), Book of the Week from the *Times Higher Education* (**Mendes**, 2015), the Philippine Social Science Council Excellence in Research Award (Ong, 2016), and the PRIDE outstanding book prize from National Communications Association (**Somerville**, 2017). **Zhu** was awarded Popular Communication Top paper at the International Communication Association Conference (2020).

Informing research-based curricula in degrees in Media and Communication

Our staff have played key roles in informing research-based curricula. For example, **Lunt** was instrumental in establishing the MSc in Social Science Research for PhD training as a condition of UoL membership of the ESRC Midlands Consortium. Members of the Health, Communication and Well-being cluster have developed a CPD course with the University of Thailand on Health Communication. The course targets students, health professionals, and public members, drawing from theoretical discussions to map the field, and three case studies supported by the cluster's active research. **Lunt** was also a member of the QAA Subject Benchmarking Group for Degrees in Media and Communication in 2016-17.

Concluding Statement

The 2021 REF period has been a period of substantial growth of our research environment, evidenced by a 54% increase in research income, 65% increase in PGR completions, and 78% increase in staff progression. For over 50 years, Leicester academics have played leading roles in media and communication scholarship, which has benefited the broader academic and civic communities we work with. We have and continue to develop local, national and international networks and collaborations, pushing the discipline forward, asking new questions about pressing social and political problems, and developing impactful outcomes that contribute to the economy and society. Through maintaining a commitment to a critical perspective on the role of media and communication in social justice, we have pursued projects addressing key social issues such as digital futures, media and gender, global media, media and the environment and media and security. Our research strategy reflects our commitment to nurturing and developing emerging talent while aiming for academic excellence through scholarship that has impact and social relevance. As we move forward into the next REF cycle, we will continue to respond to real-world problems, develop the breadth and depth of our research, initiate new collaborations and networks with other HEIs and beyond the academy across areas of production, content and consumption of media and communication.