

Institution: University of Chester
Unit of Assessment: D25 Area Studies
1. Unit context and structure, research and impact strategy

1.1 Unit Context and Structure

Research in Area Studies at Chester operates within a framework of inquiry into national and global identities that crosses several language disciplines including Francophone and Hispanic language-based area studies as well as Germanic, Chinese and Celtic Studies. A common thread running through the richly interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary work of the research team is that of diverse modes of representation of self and social identities in global cultural contexts from the post-war/post-colonial periods to the present. This fully aligns with the commitment in the University's Mission Statement to an "open, inclusive and supportive environment" enabling staff and students to "serve and improve the global communities in which they live and work".

Research is located within the Departments of Modern Languages together with Music, Media and Performance, which is itself an expression of the interdisciplinarity of Chester's research activities in Area Studies. The Unit is part of a vibrant community featuring international staff and students of all ages bringing their diverse culture and experience to enhance all areas of research within the Faculty of Arts and Humanities. Research activities occur across the Faculty through interconnections with the Departments of English, Theology and Religious Studies, History and Archaeology, Art and Design, and Music, Media and Performance. The Institute for Gender Studies also provides a named focus for interdisciplinary research and collaboration across the Faculty.

Since 2014, the Area Studies team has been meeting regularly for research seminars that have included external invited speakers from the UK and Europe as well as opportunities for staff to disseminate and receive peer review on their research and to facilitate collaborative projects. This has produced a lively research environment and contributed significantly to the quality of research outputs. This dynamic context was further enhanced by the presence of three successive postdoctoral Research Assistants in Area Studies, three postdoctoral Visiting Lecturers and eight visiting scholars from China and Spain who have been provided with office spaces in the Modern Languages Department during their stay, and who have contributed to research seminars and informal conversations. Subject to approval by the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, the Unit is currently in the process of developing a new research centre with a more systematic focus on representing global identities in order to facilitate further collaborations between colleagues in Area Studies and to foster opportunities for interdisciplinary projects with researchers outside Modern Languages. This development will ensure the ongoing vitality of the UoA as well as contributing to its sustainability.

The Area Studies team currently consists of 7 full-time permanent members of academic staff. Due to enhanced focus, and more strategic release of time and resources over the review period, the UoA has increased substantially the quality of its submission of outputs and has seen a step change in the development of the research environment from its inception during the previous cycle.

1.2 Research and Impact Strategy

Researchers at Chester aim to develop a sustainable culture of internationally significant and world leading research with a broad geographical coverage. This is focused on interdisciplinary approaches and methodologies which lie at the core of the UoA's character and identity. Following REF 2014, the Unit identified seven key priorities for enhancement that provide a strong foundation for further development beyond REF 2021.

Implementation of REF 2014 Objectives

The publication of the REF 2014 results presented an ideal moment for reflection within the Unit, Faculty and the wider University to plan and name priorities for further development in the next REF cycle. The main objectives identified in our REF 2014 return aligned well with the results and

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feedback received, highlighting seven key priorities within the overarching objective of transforming our focus, by the end of 2020, to a global profile in language-based Area Studies on a platform of innovative transdisciplinary research with a particular focus on transcultural identity formation in the postcolonial world. We named ways in which we aimed to achieve these priorities and the key metrics against which we would be able to measure success. The seven key priorities were as follows.

1. Reinforce public engagement as a platform for research outputs

Following REF 2014, Area Studies determined to sustain and enhance the Unit's long-standing commitment to research activities that intersect with policy and practice. To that end, the Faculty has supported academic staff with peer reviews of impact strategies. The Unit has also provided researchers developing impact case studies with time, through reduced teaching hours, to realise the potential of their research for fostering change locally, nationally and internationally through fieldwork and dissemination of findings. The result of this activity is the two impact case studies that form part of this REF submission: 'Francophone Africa and the Equality Challenge: a digital humanities and knowledge transfer project' (Griffiths) and 'Public Perceptions of East Germany: Enhancing Understanding' (Millington). Further support, increasing the capacity of the Unit, has been provided in the form of three consecutive fixed term research assistants, Dr Kaya Davies Hayon, Dr Paul Earlie and Dr Monika Kukulova. Their research and teaching skills were developed during their period at Chester, and they have each progressed to research and teaching posts within other larger institutions (see 2.1.3 below).

As outlined in the Institutional Level Environment Statement, the University works closely with Storyhouse which provides a location where research engages with community through activities such as the Chester Literature Festival, Lunchtime Lectures and the International Film Festival. Researchers in the Unit currently contribute to each of these events, presenting new research, hosting guest speakers and introducing films at the Chester International Film Festival and other screenings. This will be further reinforced through ongoing collaboration on more recent initiatives such as the Pint-sized philosophy programme and the Festival of Languages. Following very positive feedback, the Chester International Film Festival is keen to adopt the Area Studies team as their lead partner for the next edition of the festival in 2022 and the Literature Festival also value our collaboration in bringing an international dimension to their portfolio of events since turnouts at collaborative events have been healthy.

2. Increase internal and external research revenue

In a smaller UoA with a number of early career researchers and limited experience of grant capture, we determined to secure small grants to build the foundations of a funding portfolio around key individuals. During the next REF cycle they will be supported to use their experience in applying for, securing, and managing these grants to mentor others and as a basis for medium scale grants. The UoA was successful in securing a substantial increase in internal research funding from a range of sources: QR grants, the Santander IREA scheme, the Global Challenges Research Fund and the Faculty of Arts and Humanities Research Fund.

Researchers have also secured a number of external research grants. These include:

- 20/06/17 – 27/06/17: Dr Paul Earlie, "African Lives and the French Colonial Archive: A Pedagogical Workshop. Society for French Studies award of £850
- 15/04/19 – 31/08/19: Dr Richard Millington, "Criminal Motives Under State Socialism: Petty Theft in East Germany", 1963-1989. British Academy – Leverhulme Small Research Grant of £2154
- 13/12/19: Prof Claire Griffiths, "Re-exploring the Empire: from Colonial Encounters to Transnational Communities". Language Arts and Worldmaking (AHRC) Small Grants Funding award of £500

3. Consolidate the research group as a centre of excellence in language-based Area Studies

REF 2014 determined that 33.3% of outputs in Area Studies from the University of Chester were of international significance or world-leading. A key priority was, therefore, to ensure that at least

50% of research outputs in the next cycle would be 3* or 4*. This included a focus on ensuring researchers published in leading international journals or produced substantial research monographs. Of the outputs submitted to REF 2021, 5 are submitted as double-weighted research monographs, while the remaining submissions represent what we believe are high quality submissions. Beyond REF 2021, we aim to sustain and enhance the quality, character and reach of research outputs and activities.

4. Enable transdisciplinary research collaboration within and beyond the group

As a smaller research group, the Area Studies team took a strategic decision to build networks and collaborations beyond its boundaries and this has been a particularly strong feature of the Unit's work since 2014. Griffiths' work on slavery in West Africa has intersected with the Creative Arts where, for example, she chaired a round table discussion at the Gallery of African Art in London in 2018. Obergöker is an Associate Fellow of the Institute for Gender Studies at Chester, which enables collaboration and cross-fertilisation within and beyond the Faculty of Arts and Humanities. Roberts' research on the Welsh language engages fully with Media Studies. Hull's work on Graham Greene draws on literary and historical studies, while Millington's research is both historical and contextual. The Unit is submitting a number of publications that are the result of collaborations such as those by Haili Ma (2015) and Obergöker (2016). In addition, the Faculty has provided financial support to enable participation at leading national and international conferences in order to help with the dissemination of research and to provide opportunities for networking.

5. Continue mentoring and supporting early career researchers

The Faculty has fostered equality and diversity through a mentoring scheme for ECRs and mid-career researchers implemented by the professoriate in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities introduced in 2017 to guide colleagues with applications for promotion. This had a particular focus on younger women in the Department who were encouraged to participate in the Aurora initiative and in national subject specific networks, for example Women in French. Both Garvey and Clayfield were promoted within the REF cycle and contributed to Faculty-wide events in 2018 and 2019 that were designed to showcase women's research. All ECRs in the Unit were promoted within the REF cycle and the Unit, Faculty and University commitment to the development of ECRs remains central to activities and will continue to be at the forefront of our work in the next cycle.

6. Expand the research cluster across a global network of partner institutions

As research projects have evolved in the Department, complementary themes have emerged which support collaborative ventures within the Unit, across the Faculty and with partners abroad. The establishment of the Centre for Representing Global Identities brings many of these groupings together into a more formalised collective which will support future grant capture and PGR recruitment. Global partners involved in projects in the course of this REF cycle include Université Cheikh Anta Diop, Dakar, Senegal (Garvey), Musée de la femme "Henriette Bathily", Dakar, Senegal (Griffiths), University of Paris 7 'Denis Diderot' (Griffiths), Federation of Gay Games, Hong Kong (Ge), Mc Gill University, Montreal and the University of British Columbia, Canada (Obergöker).

7. Develop a thriving postgraduate community in the field of transcultural identity formation

Prior to 2014, PGR recruitment in Area Studies was non-existent. During the REF cycle to 2021, we have established a productive research team with more widely developed skills in supervision and have successfully recruited students, particularly those from our own MA programme, into PGR study. Two students have registered for the MRes in Modern Languages. One is current and the other completed successfully and has since registered for a PhD. A second PhD student also completed successfully, a third has registered and a fourth is awaiting bursary confirmation. Colleagues from Modern Languages will begin to work with supervisors in other departments with high PGR numbers to build experience and capacity to increase PGR student recruitment further.

1.3 Future Objectives Beyond REF 2021

The institutional level REF Strategy Beyond 2021 is aligned with the University's 'Citizen Student' strategy, which seeks to "equip its staff and students with the skills and knowledge to be confident world citizens." The strategy forms an effective framework for our key priorities as a Unit since, amongst other goals, it stresses the global dimension of the University's work, the fostering of increased collaborative interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary research activities, development of a clear impact agenda, increased PGR recruitment and training and the development of infrastructure to support research.

1. Research Outputs

To improve further on the strength of our submission to REF 2021, we aim to:

- use lead and developing researchers (Obergöker and Roberts as well as senior-career researchers elsewhere in the Faculty) to mentor early/mid-career researchers (Garvey, Hull, Min Ge, Clayfield, Millington) in developing future research trajectories
- use mentors from across the Faculty to support all Area Studies researchers in developing research plans that will lead to a higher proportion of outputs being ranked as internationally significant or world leading
- respond to national guidance and regulations about open-access.

2. PGR Recruitment

To increase PGR Recruitment in the next REF cycle. We will do this by making greater use of the University PGR Bursary scheme, promoting PGR study to undergraduate and Masters students including the benefits of the national PGR loan scheme and to write PGR roles into larger research grant applications. Activities and initiatives based in the Centre for Representing Global Identities will raise profile for the UoA and promote opportunities for postgraduate study nationally and internationally.

3. Grant Applications

The quality of our research is confirmed by our success in securing peer-reviewed small grants in the current REF cycle. We now seek to increase external research funding, with the aim of continuing to develop skills through feedback and support mentoring through the planned Faculty grant capture scheme and the institution-wide Chester Grant Support Initiative. We will also continue to release time to facilitate staff working specifically on grant capture supported by the recently appointed Research Grant Development Writers in the RKTO team:

- support all early and mid-career researchers to apply for research monies
- identify interdisciplinary research projects in order to apply for Research Network funding
- identify and support the development of research projects that may be eligible for larger research grants.

4. Research Impact and Engagement

To develop our expertise in impact and engagement, we aim to:

- identify and support a range of potential impact and engagement activities early on in the next REF cycle
- use Departmental QR allocations to support impact activities and provide researchers with time to develop those activities.

5. A Research Environment for All

In line with the University Strategy that seeks to foster engagement with research for staff and students at all levels, we aim to:

- ensure exposure to and engagement with research skills and activities for all students at every level

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- enhance the Unit's Research Seminar series and increase engagement with them from a wider staff and student audience by focussing on topics of general interest or which are debated in the media and which also intersect with staff research areas
- increase the number of public events and activities that engage local and regional communities with the research of the Unit and pursue opportunities to contribute to local and regional initiatives.

6. Equality and Diversity

In line with the University commitment to Equality and Diversity, we aim to:

- contribute to formulating a strategy for international PGR recruitment and diversification as part of a Faculty of Arts and Humanities Working Group
- work with the University as it develops further recruitment strategies to foster a more diverse staff body
- continue to pursue research projects that engage with local, national, and international questions of equality and diversity
- work with the Faculty in supporting all colleagues in the development of their research profiles and to participate in mentoring schemes that support promotion and advancement between Early-Career, Mid-Career, and Senior-Career roles.

2. People

2.1 Staffing Strategy and Development

2.1.1 Staffing, Gender and Age Structures

Since REF 2014 we have grasped the opportunity of staffing changes to maintain our research expertise in German, Spanish, French, Welsh and Chinese language contexts. Griffiths left the University in early 2020 and her responsibilities for research have been allocated to a Research Advisory Group consisting of the Head of Modern Languages, Obergöker and Garvey. Haili Ma who was in post until 2016 was replaced by Min Ge who leads Chinese Studies. Hennuy left the University in 2018. Research on Francophone contexts is now led by Obergöker and Garvey. Clayfield and Hull lead research related to Spanish speaking contexts while Millington's research focuses on Germany. Roberts has led research on Welsh language contexts. Positive action is taken to ensure diversity is at the forefront of the recruitment process. Appointments continue to be shaped by a concern for gender and age equality amongst the Area Studies researchers, ensuring that posts are widely advertised, flexibility of conditions is explained and a range of candidates selected for interview. Following the staff changes outlined above, there is currently a gender ratio of 2 females to 5 males but in line with University recruitment policies (see 2.3 below), the Department will take positive action to appoint staff from more diverse backgrounds as posts become vacant. For example, a fixed term maternity cover appointment of a female ECR was made in September 2020. We now have two senior researchers (Obergöker and Roberts), and five mid/early-career researchers (Clayfield, Garvey, Hull, Millington, Min Ge).

2.1.2 Research Staff Management

The University's PVC Research is hugely important in raising the profile of research across the institution and has signified a commitment by the University to the promotion of research. In 3.2. below, the wider University infrastructure to support research is also described. In Arts and Humanities, Area Studies research is line managed by the Deputy Dean of Arts and Humanities. The Deputy Dean chairs our termly Faculty Research Advisory Group comprising Research Coordinators from six other Units of Assessment located within the Faculty.

The Group's activities include:

- the development of the Faculty's research strategy and priorities
- the provision of a forum for sharing good practice across disciplines
- providing an environment for the peer review of REF documentation across the Faculty

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- overseeing and providing support to staff at all levels of their careers in order to help with professional development
- the organization of two Faculty wide events to both disseminate research across the Faculty and ensure all Faculty researchers have a voice in contributing to the development of research priorities
- coordination of the peer review of grant applications
- coordination of staff mentoring to support research career development
- oversight of PGR Recruitment and Development
- coordination of Faculty Research Funding Processes.

The Head of Modern Languages oversees our annual Personal Development Plan (PDP) process: he meets with individual staff members annually to review achievements and set objectives and less formal progress conversations take place alongside the formal requirement of reporting to Departmental Meetings. The Area Studies researchers are led by a Departmental Research Advisory Group that includes the Unit's lead researcher (Obergöker) and the Head and Deputy Head of Department. This ensures that research strategies and activities speak to and are integrated with wider departmental priorities in terms of allocations of workload and funding of library resources and public events. The Department's Research Coordinator (Obergöker) facilitates an annual Research Away Day, organizes termly Research Events focused on strategic issues, and convenes the Area Studies Research Seminar Series. Since 2014, the University has allocated a significant proportion of QR funding to Units of Assessment ensuring Units have financial resources to support research.

The effectiveness of these structures is visible in a number of ways:

- The annual Research Away Days produced our Departmental research strategy document, our research priorities, and plans for a new interdisciplinary research centre.
- PDPs have helped staff identify priorities for publication and to negotiate time to complete them through targeted teaching relief as well as setting plans for their development and for addressing skills gaps such as training in making grant applications.
- The Department Research Advisory Group has coordinated a lively and thriving research seminar series showcasing research from colleagues at Chester as well as a range of external speakers which serves as space to integrate PGR students, engage PGT students and to stimulate interdisciplinary links through attracting audience and inviting speakers from elsewhere in the Faculty.
- At interdisciplinary Faculty workshops staff have exchanged experiences and ideas on devising projects and writing grant applications, and how research and teaching contribute to and complement each other. Garvey contributed to the Faculty Celebration of Women's research in March 2018, an event bearing witness to both the vitality of research and awareness for questions related to diversity.
- Researchers have peer-reviewed each other's work for submission to international journals and assisted in addressing editorial feedback and comments.
- Investment in Area Studies staff research from the Faculty (details in section 3.1.1).
- The provision of short periods of research leave and research assistance from allocated QR funds (details in 2.1.3). A key objective for the next cycle is to focus some reduction in teaching hours on writing grant applications.

2.1.3 Research Staff Support and Promotions

The structures outlined govern the strategic deployment of Research Funding. REF 2014 QR funds have supported short periods of competitive Research Leave and funded some teaching relief for all researchers. Following the 2014 REF, a decision was taken to use some QR funding to invite researchers to apply for up to one month of research leave at a time in order to strategically build capacity within the Areas Studies team. This scheme is administered through a formal application process to the Department Research Advisory Group. This has enabled colleagues to engage in fieldwork and to find time to finish key publications and to focus on ensuring the quality of those publications. For example, in 2017 Millington successfully applied to undertake research in the Federal Archives in Berlin and to lay the groundwork for an exhibition in Magdeburg contributing to his impact study. In the same year, Obergöker used his time to complete and refine his monograph

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on postcolonial masculinity. In addition, all researchers are funded one day of teaching relief each week to support on-going research, impact, and engagement activities.

These structures are further employed to support researchers in those research elements required for promotion applications: ECRs have been awarded targeted teaching relief to complete publications that have contributed to successful applications for senior lecturer positions. Mid-career researchers have also been able to apply for teaching relief and Obergöker was promoted to Professor in 2016 following two successful applications which enabled completion of publications. In 2018 the University introduced a new academic rank of 'Associate Professor' to support colleagues in their advancement between Senior Lecturer and Professorial positions. The Faculty provides mentors to ECRs who are working towards becoming mid-career researchers, and one has recently received advice and support from the Faculty in developing their research profile in preparation for a future application to Associate Professor.

In addition, the three Research Assistants (Davies Hayon, Earlie, Kukolova referred to in 1.2 above) and three Visiting Lecturers (Dr Mary Farrelly, Dr Nicola Astudillo-Jones, and Dr Joseph Twist) working in Area Studies over the period have all obtained full time posts at the end of their contracts. These were at Lincoln, Bristol, Salford (temporary contract), UCD, Chester (maternity cover) and UCD respectively, Chester having contributed training and experience at this key stage in their career development.

2.1.4 Research Staff Collaborations

Through these structures Area Studies researchers are encouraged to participate in University and Faculty interdisciplinary research events. At the University level this includes the annual University Staff Conference and University Research Festival and Diversity Festival, where staff have participated in events showcasing women's research (Garvey and Griffiths) and Research-Led Teaching (Obergöker). At the Faculty level this includes termly Faculty Research Workshops, where staff have participated in events on devising projects and writing grant applications. Area Studies researchers have further reached out across Departments and Faculties to identify new potential collaborators in History and Archaeology (Millington) and English (Hull and Garvey). Obergöker has taught on the MRes programme in the Institute for Gender Studies.

2.1.5 Early Career Research Support

The University is committed to the development of every member of staff at all stages of their career and consequently has renewed the Concordat for Researchers as a framework within which UoA research teams operate. In Area Studies, there is clear evidence of support for colleagues who are at the early stage of their careers. For example, since 2014, Millington and Clayfield have both been supported and provided with time to publish their first major research monographs. Garvey has successfully completed her PhD supported by the University with a fees bursary, and by the Department with time to complete her thesis. She already has a contract to publish an edited collection of essays. All academic staff can apply for, and have been successful in getting, departmental and faculty funds to support research activities such as conference attendance. For example, since 2014, the Faculty has provided over £9,000 to Area Studies to support conference attendance at which researchers have presented papers. Clayfield has served as ECR representative on the Faculty Research Advisory Group and the growing maturity of the research team as well as their productivity is reflected in a series of promotions that took place towards the latter end of the REF cycle. Hull was promoted from TSR4 (Senior Lecturer A) to TSR5 (Senior Lecturer B) in 2018 and ECRs Clayfield and Millington were promoted from TSR3 (Lecturer) to TSR4 (Senior Lecturer A) the same year with Ge following in 2019. ECRs receive a reduction of 3-4 teaching hours per week in their first year, reducing proportionately through the first three years of appointment.

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2.2 Post-Graduate Research (PGR) Training and Supervision

2.2.1 PGR Management

One of the most significant developments in research culture in the department since REF 2014 has been the establishment of a PGR community. Research-informed teaching at all levels of the curriculum means that students have been increasingly exposed to the range of projects and investigations carried out by the unit and have been able to work on undergraduate independent projects and dissertations which some have carried through to Masters level study and beyond. The taught MA and MRes programmes have supported and nurtured graduates as they begin their research and the current PhD students and deferred candidate have followed these pathways.

Recruitment to postgraduate taught programmes is growing steadily and, from here, dissertation supervisors are able to encourage the step to PGR. As this learning community grows, a more concerted recruitment campaign is planned alongside the founding of the named research centre and the increased national and international recognition of researchers in the UoA.

PGR students have monthly scheduled supervision sessions and are subject to a standard institutional PGR Review Process to support their progress. Students are encouraged to identify gaps in their training and knowledge which can be redressed through workshops and support provided by the University and disciplinary networks. They set goals and plan for development not only in their project work but in related areas of academic practice and their personal skill set.

2.2.2 PGR Funding

Our current and prospective PGR students are all working and we support and facilitate part-time study and recognise the competing pressures on their time. The students are encouraged to apply to the University PGR Discount Scheme to provide further financial support, those who have done so have been successful.

2.2.3 PGR Support and Training

All Area Studies PGR Supervisors and Students are required to complete a University and Departmental induction and training course. Supervisors are introduced to the University's policies, procedures, and resources, and engage in team-work with supervisors from other disciplines to address particular scenarios confronted as a research supervisor. This is managed at Faculty level with an annual training event. Students complete a skills audit to identify their strengths and weaknesses and then access a series of workshops aligned with the Research Development Framework. All students are encouraged to undertake the Learning and Teaching Institute's training programme and complete modules leading to Associate Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy.

2.2.4 PGR Research Community

PG supervisors communicate regularly with their M level and PGR students and share details of publications and conferences, encouraging students to participate where possible (Sue Gettins attended The Society for French Studies annual conference and the Deleuze and Guattari Studies Camp and conference both at Royal Holloway University in 2019; Austen Lowe presented a poster at the Cambridge Undergraduate Conference in German Studies 2017). PG students are invited to all departmental research seminars, public events and lectures and to the annual University and Faculty PGR research conferences. The PG students also offer each other significant peer support online and face-to-face with the current PhD candidate mentoring applicants and MA graduates offering advice and support to those just starting out during the induction period. Opportunities are provided for informal, social meetings and PG students are encouraged to use dedicated postgraduate study facilities in the same building as the Department of Modern Languages and to feel fully engaged with developing this growing community of researchers. More broadly, Griffiths chairs the Fieldwork and Modern Languages Working Group as part of the Postgraduate Online Research Training Project of the School of Advanced Study in the University of London.

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2.2.5 PGR Trajectories

The first PhD awarded in the department was to a current member of the French team who is now supervising her own doctoral candidate. The three research assistants mentored within the Area Studies team have all progressed to academic positions at other universities (see section 2.1.3). One recent MA graduate is progressing to postgraduate research at the University of York.

2.3 Equality and Diversity

The University has a longstanding and active Equality Forum, whose members organise events within and outside the institution. The University of Chester was an inaugural member of the Partnership Equality and Diversity Group which organised the first Chester Pride at the beginning of this REF period, and our continued involvement in this event has supported its growth from 2,500 attendees to over 15,000. A member of the University's Senior Executive Team, who can therefore represent its members and their needs during institution-wide decision-making, chairs the Forum. The appointment of the new Vice-Chancellor in 2020 led to the creation of a Race Equality Challenge Group, which has produced a positive change in the use of language in the institution, as well as a set of interview competency questions designed to ensure we hire staff who value and promote diversity and equality across all aspects of the university. In recognition of these activities, our Athena Swan Bronze Award was renewed, we received the Navajo Charter Mark in 2019, and we became members of the UK Government's Disability Confident scheme.

Our academic appointments follow a fair and transparent recruitment strategy, advertising throughout the UK and beyond via jobs.ac.uk and subject associations. The University is committed to "appoint, train, develop, reward and promote on the basis of merit and ability, regardless of age, disability, ethnicity or race, gender identity, religion or belief (including lack of belief), gender, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity". The institutional recruitment process is facilitated and audited for equality and diversity by the Human Resources Department and is fully aligned with national standards and practice under the Equality Act (2010). Managers receive training in equality and diversity and are provided with a Guide to Positive Action which helps them to understand when and how they can use the positive action provisions when recruiting candidates and promoting staff.

Given not only the research scope and interests of the members of the UoA but also the international background of colleagues within the Department of Modern Languages, a recognition of and concern for equality and diversity is evident and embedded in our culture. Students experience the rich, linguistic diversity of the Department daily. Staff are involved in a range of special interest groups including the Parent's network, LGBT support network and Chaplaincy and some members of the UoA have become parents during this REF cycle and are protected by family-related leave policies. Staff have been involved in the University Diversity Festival and Women's Day Events and are contributing to Faculty and University wide workshops on Diversifying and Decolonising the Curriculum and to Faculty Gender and Research events. In order to ensure equality, the Department has moved to a transparent Workload Allocation Model and recognises caring responsibilities through flexible scheduling.

Research in Area Studies enthusiastically engages with questions of diversity and the research pursued at Chester is no exception. Roberts' research, for example, has examined Welsh language media and the ways in which diversity has been represented within Wales. Griffiths' research has explored the ways that slavery has been represented in African art, while Min Ge is currently developing an empirical project on the impact of the 2022 Gay Games scheduled to take place in Hong Kong.

Research within the UoA interrogates voices from the peripheries as well as the centre and these concerns inform teaching at all levels so that students are exposed to explicit questions around identity, equality and diversity in core and option modules at undergraduate and postgraduate level. The PG student body is also diverse in its make-up and outlook. One PhD candidate is a late career professional working in the community and another applicant awaiting funding works is Diversity Consultant in a multinational company. Their projects examine minority cinema in Algeria and identity politics in Germany.

3. Income, infrastructure and facilities**3.1 Income****3.1.1 Internal Research Funding**

Area Studies researchers draw on a range of internal research funding to support their activities. The University's Research and Knowledge Transfer (RKT) office administers several substantial annual research funds. The Knowledge Transfer Funding scheme provides £200 000 for developing contract research activities, consultancy, Intellectual Property rights, Continuing Professional Development collaborations, new products, and industrial studentships. Top-sliced QR income is used for QR Research Grants directed towards particular University priorities and for a Research Staff Conference Attendance Grants of up to £500.

Through the Santander Universities Agreement there are International Research Excellence Awards of up to £5000 for bringing Visiting Research Fellows to Chester and of up to £1000 for staff research activities. Millington was a beneficiary of a £1,000 Santander grant in 2017-18 for 'Everyday Criminality in East Germany, 1961-1989' carrying out fieldwork in Magdeburg examining East German police crime files. Griffiths was awarded £12,649 from the Global Challenges Research Fund for 'Francophone Africa and the Equality Challenge: is a literate world still a man's world?'

A proportion of QR funding is returned to academic departments annually and is used to support the Departmental research activities including teaching buyout for research staff to protect one day per week. QR research grants allocated by RKT office to fund Area Studies post-doctoral researchers, fieldwork, training events, equipment and support for impact projects and publications totalled £115,116 in the period 2014-20.

Within the Faculty of Arts and Humanities the annual Faculty Research Fund invites all academic staff to apply competitively for Research Grants of up to £1000 and Early Career Researchers may apply for up to £2000. In total, Area Studies has successfully applied for £26,218 of Internal Funding for projects, archival research, and conference presentations from University and Faculty sources.

3.1.2 External Research Fellowships

The developing UoA has made good progress from its establishment to the present in building up research experience to form a basis from which team members are better prepared to apply for fellowships with the support of mentoring and advice at Faculty level.

3.1.3 External Project Funding

In the next REF cycle, a key priority for the UoA will be to improve grant capture. We will do this by fostering the capacity of ECRs and mid-career researchers, and supporting them in applying for funding. The strategy for achieving this will be to ensure that teaching relief is focused on time for writing grant applications alongside increasing the level of advice from the recently strengthened specialist team in the Research and Knowledge Transfer Office and implementing internal and external peer review as appropriate.

3.1.4 External Grants

The UoA received a total of £12,520.35 in external grants over the review period. Haili Ma received £4,400 from the AHRC International Placement scheme for a placement at the Shanghai Theatre Academy in 2016. Claire Griffiths was awarded an AHRC grant of £500 for the 'Re-exploring the Empire: from Colonial Encounters to Transnational Communities' workshop as part of the Language Acts and Worldmaking project. In 2019 Millington was awarded a British Academy Small Research Grant of £2,154 for his archive research project 'Criminal Motives Under State Socialism Petty Theft in East Germany, 1963-1989'.

3.2 Infrastructure and Facilities

3.2.1 University Research Infrastructure

The University's Research and Knowledge Transfer Office provide the hub for all of the University's research activities. This is a team of 14 staff, headed by the PVC Research and Innovation and a University Director of Research. This team provides infrastructural support in the distribution of research funds, the support, refinement and management of research grants, the setting up of third sector collaborations, the dissemination of research, and has provided funds for external input in preparation for REF 2021 – support that was not available in 2014. In addition, the Research and Knowledge Transfer Office has recently appointed staff to help with writing grant applications, which is a new and important development that will support Area Studies' future work to secure external funding. Alongside this Office, the University has a Research and Knowledge Transfer Committee that includes representatives from all of the University's faculties. This committee reports directly to Senate and is key to supporting the University's strategic priorities for all Research and Knowledge Transfer activities.

3.2.2 Faculty and School Research Infrastructure

Infrastructure at a Faculty and School level directly shapes the research strategy in the Department. Obergöker participates in the faculty-wide work of the Institute for Gender Studies providing opportunities for intra-faculty cooperation and partnership building for the UoA team. The Faculty Research Advisory Group is chaired by the Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities and our Area Studies Research Coordinator (Obergöker) attends termly meetings. This group formulates and reviews Faculty and Departmental Research Strategies, has established the Faculty Research Grant, and organises Faculty Research Events.

3.2.3 University IT Facilities

The University's Learning and Information Services (LIS) manage the IT services that support staff research. All research staff receive up-to-date hardware and software including office PCs, and laptops, iPads and these are renewed on a rolling cycle. Mobile PowerPoint projectors are also provided on loan when not working on site. All research students have access to computers in public spaces, workrooms, and study booths, including a dedicated PGR workroom. Through LIS, staff have obtained access to IT resources particular to their research needs (See section 3.2.4 for details). Within LIS the University has created an online repository – ChesterRep – as an outward facing resource in which researchers can make their research available to wider academia, external organisations and the general public. The University has an excellent Department of Computer Science, Electronics and Electrical Engineering: here fifteen computer science specialist staff are available for collaboration in the Digital Humanities which has been important especially in the development of Impact-related activities including the Francophone Africa Archive website www.francophoneafricaarchive.org (Griffiths) and the Volksaufstand des 17 Juni 1953 platform <https://17juni1953live.wordpress.com/> (Millington).

3.2.4 University Library Facilities

Area Studies research at Chester relies on access to a range of excellent research libraries and archives. Nine University Libraries housed across its campuses hold over 750,000 e-books, 350,000 printed books, and 65,000 full-text journal subscriptions: for the Faculty LIS provides a team of six subject specialists through which we coordinate our undergraduate and graduate research training and place orders for books and electronic resources. From University funds, the Department receives an average annual budget of about £22,000 for Library provision, from which we purchase specialist journal subscriptions and provide each member of staff with an annual Library budget of c. £1000 for purchase of resources of their choice. Through the University Libraries, Area Studies researchers now have access to subscriptions to 12 major electronic collections of online primary sources, to 19 major providers of international electronic e-book and journal collections, and 648 subscriptions to individual subject relevant journals, as well as the resources on the same scale for other allied disciplines (Geography, Modern Languages, English Languages and Literature, Politics, Psychology, Sociology, Theology and Religious Studies). Outside the University, researchers benefit

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from the internationally renowned Gladstone's Library at Hawarden, which has formed a venue for annual team Away Days as well as for a location for writing retreats for individual staff.

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

International Research Collaborations have enhanced the vitality of our research environment and the developing profile of the Area Studies team at Chester has led to a diverse range of research collaborations.

In April 2014 (23rd-24th), the Department of Modern Languages hosted the Fourth UK-China Marxist Aesthetics Forum with 50 delegates both from the English and Chinese speaking world. The debates were organised around several key themes: Culture and Economics, or the Economization of Culture, Multiculturalism, Cultural Identity and the view of the Other.

The conference on Cuba (Regarding the revolution. Cuba and the foreign gaze since 1959) organised in September 2016 by Clayfield and Hull was attended by an international audience from Canada, Cuba, Portugal and the United Kingdom. Likewise, in 2018 Clayfield published a co-edited volume in cooperation with Canadian and British colleagues: 'Cuba's Forgotten Decade: how the 1970s shaped the Revolution'.

The French team have implemented a research cluster dedicated to urban cultures in Brussels and Montreal, called ExCentriCité. The ExcentriCité conference was organised in September 2017 with participants from Canada, Belgium, France, Italy and the United Kingdom. Subsequently, to commemorate the 50th anniversary of May 68, Clayfield, Hennuy and Obergöker organised a panel at the German Conference for French Studies (Frankoromanistentag) in Osnabrück, dedicated to the legacy of 68 in Paris, Brussels and Montreal. The proceedings of this cooperation with colleagues from Canada, Belgium, Germany, France and the UK will be published at Peter Lang early in 2021. The panel also bears witness to the interdisciplinary endeavours between Latin American Studies and French Studies within the University.

Garvey has been working in collaboration with colleagues in Université Cheikh Anta Diop, Senegal on youth futures with an initial round table organised in Dakar in November 2019. This meeting led to the preparation of small grant applications and a conference postponed due to Covid-19 and to the submission of chapters by both Garvey and Griffiths alongside international colleagues to a book project scheduled for 2021.

Millington collaborated with the Deutsches Historisches Museum for his Project on Twitter on the events of 17th of June 1953: <https://17juni1953live.wordpress.com/>

4.2 Third Sector Collaboration

The interdisciplinary nature of Garvey's new project on relational ethics which includes research into the repatriation of art objects from Britain and France to museums on the African continent, lends itself to future collaborations with institutions such as the Grosvenor Museum in Chester, the International Slavery Museum in Liverpool, Musée Quai Branly in Paris and the Musée de Civilisations Noires in Dakar,

4.3. Fellowships

Griffiths and Roberts are both Fellows of the Royal Geographical Society and Griffiths is a fellow of the Royal Society of Arts.

4.4 Membership of National and International Committees

Min Ge is currently a Committee Member of the International Gay Games Hong Kong 2022.

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4.5 Membership of National and International Societies

As the Area Studies research team has continued to mature and develop, staff membership of professional associations has grown. Garvey has been an active member of the Association for the study of Modern and Contemporary France since 2005, hosting regional events, Obergöker was Membership Secretary of the same association between 2017 and 2020 and Griffiths served as Treasurer from 2016 to 2019. Obergöker is also a member of the German Association for French Studies, the German Association for Romance Studies, the Conseil International d'Études Francophones, the MLA and the ACLA. Clayfield is a member of the Cuba Forum and of the Society for Latin American Studies, Hull is also a member of the latter. Within the wider environment for Area Studies at Chester, Associate Professor Mark Gant has been Chair of the Association for Contemporary Iberian Studies since 2016 and has chaired their annual conferences in 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019 as well as organising the programme at the Universidade Católica do Porto in 2017.

4.6. Editorial Positions

Obergöker is member of the Scientific Committee of the French-speaking review *Quêtes littéraires* at the Catholic University Lublin in Poland and of the *Bulletin für Textmusikforschung* (an academic journal for the Study of Popular music). He has also peer-reviewed articles nationally and internationally for: *Romanische Forschungen*, *Francosphères*, *French Forum*, *French Studies*, *Quêtes littéraires*, as well as book manuscripts for Peter Lang and Palgrave. He also co-guest edited a special edition of *Loxias* 'Romain Gary. La littérature au pluriel'. Griffiths is a member of the Editorial Board of the collection *After the Empire: The Francophone World and Postcolonial France* at Lexington Books.

Obergöker and Hull are active members of their fields by submitting book reviews on a regular basis (*Modern and Contemporary France*, *Journal of Latin American Studies*, *New West Indies Review*, *Latin American Studies*). Roberts is a member of the Editorial Board of Chester University Press.

4.7 Examining

Millington was invited to examine a PhD at UCL on 'Social Perspectives on Nationalism, Normalization and East-German-Polish Relations, 1965-1985'. Griffiths was an invited examiner for the thesis 'L'histoire scolaire comme champ de bataille. La conflictualité de l'enseignement de l'histoire interrogée à partir des controverses sur l'histoire de l'esclavage en France et en Angleterre (décennie 2000)' at Université de Bordeaux 3.

4.8 Conference Attendance:

The continuing maturation of the UoA has resulted in the hosting of a number of international conferences at Chester: Clayfield and Hull organised 'Regarding the Revolution: Cuba and the Foreign Gaze since 1959' in 2016. Hennuy and Obergöker organised 'Urban cultures in Brussels and Montreal' in 2017. In 2018 Obergöker organised two panels at the Annual meeting for the German Society for French Studies: one on the French chanson in film (jointly with Dr. Renaud Lagabrielle, Vienna which led to an edited volume) and a transdisciplinary project on May 68 in Paris, Brussels and Montreal with Hennuy and Clayfield. Both conferences were well attended by colleagues from Canada, Belgium, France and Luxembourg.

Invitations as guest speakers have also increased in this REF cycle, further demonstrating the vitality of the unit. Of particular note have been Griffiths' invited contributions to major conferences and events at the Universities of Leeds and Arizona, Further, Obergöker was invited to speak at the following conferences: 'Mai 68, Provokation und Pop', Johannes Gutenberg Universität Mainz, November 2018; 'Les états généraux du roman contemporain', Universität Regensburg, October 2019; 'Écrire le voyage centrifuge', Université de la Côte d'Azur, October 2018.

Area Studies team members have attended numerous other conferences with funding from the University such as, for example, : The International Communication Association; The Association for Contemporary Iberian Studies (London, Madrid, Porto, Norwich, Lisbon); The Latin American Studies Association (Chicago, San Juan, Porto Rico); Anarchist Studies Network Conference (Loughborough); Caribbean Visual Cultures Conference (Birmingham); The Annual Conference of the International Society for Cultural History (Trieste); The Society for Latin American Studies

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(Glasgow); The Cuba Research Forum Annual Conference (Havana); Society for French Studies; Society for the Study of French History; the MLA conferences 2014 and 2019 (both in Chicago), the NEMLA conference in 2016 (Hartford, CT), the 2017 ACLA conference; Association for French and Francophone Studies in Ireland (Orléans, 2017); 'Power of Language in Post-colonial Africa' (Portsmouth); Yorkshire African Studies Network conference on 'Africa rising' (Sheffield); The German History Research Seminar Series at Cambridge, the Annual Conference of the Association for the Study of German in the UK and Ireland; New Directions in Modern German History workshop (UCLAN).