

**Institution: University of Liverpool**

**Unit of Assessment: 34 Communication, Cultural and Media Studies**

### **1. Unit context and structure, research and impact strategy**

The Department of Communication and Media at the University of Liverpool has more than tripled its research active staff from 7.5 FTE eligible staff in 2013 to 28.6 FTE in 2021. Our interdisciplinary research in online political communication, digital inequalities, global urban events, visual media and LGBTQ+ diversity has enhanced community resilience and participation in media, and impacted on policy and practice at national and international levels. Our research and impact strategy sets out to support and nurture Early Career Researchers (ECRs), strengthen collaborations with partners within and beyond academia, and pioneer new analytical approaches. This ambitious vision has fostered new specialisms in photography, cultural labour and media arts and developing impact projects on topics such as online incivility and misinformation.

One of five departments within the School of the Arts (SotA), Communication and Media was identified by the University in 2016 as a priority for expansion. Our policy of appointing high-potential early career staff (32% of Cat. A. staff in the submission are ECRs) has been supported by the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. The Faculty identified the Unit for major investment in the first wave of a Faculty scheme of 'tenure-track' Derby Fellowships, intended to attract highly talented researchers, resulting in the appointments of Mahoney and Rossini. We have also invested significantly in senior leadership, and an audit in 2017 of existing research in the Department led to the launch of two new research groups, 'Culture, Space and Memory' and 'Discourse and Society', in addition to our existing groups 'Media, Politics and Society' and 'Screen and Film Studies'. With every member of staff joining a research group at point of recruitment, the groups provide a sustainable and robust structure to underpin our research ambitions.

This systematic recruitment strategy, coupled with a strengthened focus on equality, diversity and inclusion, has produced an international, interdisciplinary body of staff with a good gender balance. Our cultural diversity supports a strongly international emphasis, enabling our research to address key contemporary issues such as migration, populism and nationalism, Brexit and European identities, digital exclusion, COVID-19 and climate change. It facilitates our engagement with global communities from Eastern Europe to the Global South, in our ethnographic work and studies of global film, international journalism and world news. Staff diversity also informs our strong specialism in issues of gender and sexuality, notably LGBTQ+ inclusivity and online othering, intimacy and relationality in gay film, postfeminism and queer representation in television

and online. Our diversity of academic backgrounds enhances interdisciplinarity in the Unit, enabling us to pioneer new methods, and linking the close analysis of media representations and cultural practices with new computational and machine learning techniques for multimodal and discourse analysis.

### ***1.a. Strategic aims for research and impact during the assessment period***

The strategic aims for this period, set out in our REF 2014 submission, were to strengthen the research groups, invest in future research and impact, deepen our partnerships and extend our collaborations. We achieved and surpassed these goals as follows:

**1. Strengthening the existing and emergent research groups, to develop the quality of our outputs, to foster in-department collaborations and secure funding:** each research group hosts events, facilitates mentorship, and cultivates collaborative projects and funding bids. Each is flexible and draws on a diverse range of disciplinary specialisms: the 'Culture, Space and Memory' research group houses cultural/anthropological research around memory and material cultures, photography, everyday life, media arts, mega-events and the spatial humanities, and partners with cultural organisations such as museums; the 'Discourse and Society' group (renamed Discourse, Data and Society in 2021) brings together ground-breaking work in multimodal studies, artificial intelligence and data analytics with expertise in critical discourse studies, language and strategic communication; the 'Media, Politics and Society' group responds to urgent political challenges around the spread of misinformation, online harms, digital news audiences, democratic deliberation, human rights and climate change; the 'Screen and Film Studies' group boasts an unusually comprehensive approach to film and screen that includes industrial and institutional aspects, stardom and performance, and encompasses Hollywood, American independent cinema, documentary, cult television, animation and virtual reality.

The groups are distinct, but their research agendas are interlinked, informed by shared concerns (such as populism and politics, gender and sexuality, cultural labour, digital cultures and social inequalities) and with some staff contributing to more than one area. Collaboration within and between the research groups is facilitated by regular research events (such as 'Keyword Conversations' and the Media, Communication and Politics Seminar) involving both staff and postgraduate students and hosting international visiting speakers. These include events co-organised with other institutions such as the Liverpool Film Seminar, jointly hosted with Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU) which has welcomed around 50 world-leading international film scholars during the audit period.

The groups organized six international conferences in the period, and brought four visiting professors under a scheme initiated to expand the Department's visibility. The guests, from major

US universities, delivered masterclasses to PGRs and ECRs and held meetings to advise on research and career matters. The research groups have also successfully facilitated co-editorships and co-authorships, journal editorship and books series. The 'Discourse and Society' group, for example, houses a leading international journal (*Journal of Language and Politics*) and two book series (*Bloomsbury Advances in Critical Discourse Studies* and *Routledge Studies in Multimodality*), while 'Screen and Film Studies' hosts two book series with Routledge (*Hollywood Centenary* and *Cinema and Youth Cultures*).

**2. Investing in future research and impact through recruitment, promotion and postgraduate research:** this investment was targeted to attract and facilitate exciting, high quality, impactful research. We now have a large body of permanent staff who are active researchers, a third of whom are ECRs. The two Derby Fellows are accelerating innovative research in television-mediated histories (Mahoney) and uncivil online political discourse (Rossini), and a further seven ECRs have been appointed since 2017. These early career researchers bring new pathways to impact via their consultancy and collaborations with corporate actors and platforms, from Rossini's work with WhatsApp, Twitter and Facebook to Musi's work in digital citizenship and AI.

The need for sustainable leadership in a growing department, and the need to expand mentoring and postgraduate supervision, provided the case for more senior appointments (Henning, Krzyżanowski, O'Halloran), with high profile research in photography /cultural history, critical discourse studies and digital multimodal analysis (respectively). Our promotion strategy recognises and rewards impact as well as outstanding research and teaching, and has elevated four staff to senior lecturer and three to reader. Staff in the Unit now have significant leadership roles within the School of the Arts: Balabanova is Associate Dean for Research and Impact since 2018; Tzioumakis is Director of Postgraduate Research since 2017; Thomas is Deputy Director of Postgraduate Research as of 2020. Additionally, Garcia directed the Institute for Cultural Capital (ICC) until 2018, Buse is the Dean of SoTA, and Yates is Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research Environment and Postgraduate Research. This leadership presence has enhanced our research and management expertise and aids our ambitious plans for future collaborative research and research centres.

Since 2014 we have more than tripled our postgraduate awards, and expanded our cohort and capacity via reputation-building, investment and staff recruitment. The School has introduced annual internally funded studentships since 2017, and our students take advantage of the training offered by the AHRC and the ESRC (via engage@Liverpool and 'Methods NorthWest' and through our new partnership with the ESRC's National Centre for Research Methods). Further details of our postgraduate successes are in section 2.

**3. Deepening our partnerships and extending the range of our collaborations and influence:**

this is facilitated by the research groups, by School and Faculty research centres, co-taught programmes, and research networks. Our impact strategy embeds pathways to impact in our research projects and activities. This is led by an Impact Lead (Hallam until 2016, Balabanova until 2018, Blejmar since 2018), who mentors and supports colleagues through twice-yearly 'impact conversations', and a programme of departmental training workshops and events supplementing those provided at School and Faculty levels. This strategy has produced a portfolio of impact projects aligned with our key research areas, which will continue to develop beyond the current research cycle (e.g. new initiatives led by recently appointed staff Musi and Palmieri). To extend our reach, we are investing in open research, utilising the University's publisher agreements with major journals publishers to publish our work Open Access and University-supported Gold OA arrangements. Where possible (e.g. in Yates' funded projects), publications are in open journals and data sets and reports are publicly shared.

Our research groups play a key role in building partnerships, including collaborations with other research centres in the University, with other universities in the UK and abroad, with external cultural organisations from museums to festivals, and with international NGOs, business organisations and big industry partners (see sections 3 and 4). The University and Faculty research themes and centres have provided opportunities for the development of our research and impact. Our research groups directly address the University 'Heritage' and 'Digital' research themes and the Faculty themes of 'Transforming Conflict', "Slavery and Unfree Labour", and 'Children and Childhood'. We are also actively involved in the Faculty Centre for Digital Humanities and Social Sciences through which Yates and colleagues' influential work on digital inclusion/exclusion is impacting UK, Canadian and Australian digital policy.

**1.b. Future strategic aims and goals for research and impact**

Against the background of major growth of our research base, our future strategic aims and goals involve a step-up in scale and ambition. We are now well-positioned to exert greater influence on governmental, social, corporate and cultural policy agendas and to better inform strategy at regional, national and international levels in relation to online digital media, political representation and urban cultural initiatives. We will continue to address urgent contemporary issues, and to enhance community resilience in relation to media. We plan to extend our international reach and impact, to collaborate across a broader set of disciplines, to develop new analytical and critical tools, and to initiate largescale and ambitious projects with our partners. These aims will be realised by:

**1. Proactively building our relationships** with external bodies and stakeholders, and internally, with new partners in different disciplines such as Computer Science. We aim to develop new, well-resourced and impactful infrastructural projects, with integrated postgraduate and postdoctoral research, specifically, to create a research centre for multimodal analysis of online media, which will bring together world-leading interdisciplinary teams of social scientists, computer and data scientists and media and communication theorists to investigate the nature and spread of information on online platforms. Immediately this involves the development of a Multimodal Analysis Platform (MAP) (detailed in section 3) and recruitment of two data scientists (appointed after the REF census date) to develop new analytical methodologies and enable colleagues to engage critically with them.

**2. Growing our cohort of PhD students, postdocs and research assistants** through new recruitment initiatives, redoubling efforts to access funding sources and establish scholarship schemes and increasing BAME recruitment through outreach and targeted promotion of opportunities. We have begun redesigning and expanding our taught Masters provision to support a thriving postgraduate research culture, providing a pathway from undergraduate to high-level research. Our goal is to maintain and strengthen the upward trajectory of our PhD recruitment (see section 2), strategically building PhD supervision experience among staff, to enhance capacity and to share best practice, while continuing interdisciplinary joint supervisions across the School. We will build on our partnerships through the AHRC North West Consortium Doctoral Training Partnership's Collaborative Doctoral Awards scheme, with new and existing partners such as Tate Liverpool, and with projects addressing cultural diversity, ethnicity and migration.

**3. Nurturing ECRs and enhancing equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) to support the production of world-leading research and impact** by continuing to improve our processes for mentoring, feedback and researcher skills development, sustaining and enhancing a lively, transparent and open research culture for all staff. A systematic approach to building from internal to external funding will enable existing research partnerships to scale up and increase impact. The robustness of our EDI policies and practices will be critically examined by our departmental EDI Working Group (Needham, Whitehurst, Ruffino) which has initiated (in May 2020) projects to address the challenges for women academics in the Department, promote research addressing underrepresented groups in our student population, and allay potential experiences of exclusion and isolation stemming from the pandemic.

**4. Building cohesion and a shared sense of project in a rapidly expanded Department** through the proposed research centre on multimodal analysis, internal collaborations and departmental research seminars. From March 2020, we have had weekly whole Department online meetings, which helped maintain cohesion and collegiality in the face of the COVID-19

crisis. The Unit is now home to two projects resulting from COVID-19 related rapid-response external funding calls, led by Balabanova and Musi (see section 3 and 4). Capitalising on this, we are devising more shared projects, drawing on our interdisciplinary expertise.

## **2. People**

The Unit's 31 staff (28.6 FTE) comprises four full-time Professors and two on fractional posts, three Readers, six Senior Lecturers, eleven Lecturers, one Senior Researcher and two Derby Fellows. Of the 31 staff, 19 are new appointments in the REF period. All are on permanent contracts, usually subject to a three-year probationary period. The staff profile is well-balanced in terms of gender and international diversity (see subsection 2c).

### **2.a. Staffing strategy**

As described in section 1, the staffing and recruitment strategy has been to invest in high-potential early career staff, in research and impact projects extending beyond the current REF cycle, to expand our postgraduate research capacity and recruit researchers with international recognition and standing. The recruitment also set out to enhance the diversity of both staff and research, and strengthen the relation between research and the curriculum. Diverse disciplinary approaches and backgrounds, from anthropology and art history to computing and social statistics, enable us to meet the challenge of increasingly pervasive media. The effect has been to broaden our research but also sharpen and consolidate existing strengths in online political communication, digital inclusion and digital inequalities, global culture and LGBTQ+ diversity.

More senior appointments bring experience and boost the international reputation of the Department's research, strengthening leadership and mentoring practices and expanding our postgraduate supervision capacity. The appointments of Krzyżanowski and O'Halloran (Head of Department) brought international recognition in critical discourse and multimodal analysis. Other professorial appointments of Buse (Dean of SoTA ) and Henning (Research / UoA lead) enhance the expertise represented in the 'Culture, Space and Memory' group. Appointments at Senior Lecturer level strengthened our work in 'Media, Politics and Society' (Slavtcheva-Petkova) and 'Film and Screen Studies' (Needham). In this period of great change, stability and continuity were ensured by retaining senior staff who have moved onto fractional posts for personal reasons (Richardson, Krzyżanowski) and through a promotion strategy that recognises and rewards research and impact. Since the last REF, three internal candidates have been promoted to Readerships (Balabanova, Tzioumakis, Roberts) and four to Senior Lecturer (Palmieri, Haslop, Thomas and Turner).



The high number of ECRs in the Department means that particular importance is attached to staff development opportunities, training and mentoring. All research-active staff have a research mentor within the Department, and benefit from the University's system for cross-disciplinary mentoring. ECRs also have lighter teaching loads during the first year of their appointment. They are part of the Faculty ECR Network, and are represented on all key committees including REF governance committees. Mahoney was on the University's Research Staff Association Committee until early 2020 and is the ECR representative on the University's Concordat Steering Group, aimed at embedding the principles of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers via an institutional action plan.

Career development and progression is supported through biannual Research and Impact conversations with the Research Lead and Impact Lead, and the annual Professional Development Reviews (PDR) held with the Head of Department. The confidential Research and Impact conversations encourage staff to reflect strategically on their plans and arrange support where needed. The PDRs give researchers a safe and respectful context to reflect on career progress and facilitate research leave, promotion, and funding applications in line with the appraisal and career development recommendations of the Concordat. The University is a signatory to DORA (see REF5a, section 3.6), and our commitment to responsible metrics applies to our recruitment policy, promotions, PDR and peer review processes. Leadership opportunities enable staff to gain experience: key roles in the Department are held by ECRs (e.g. Blejmar is Impact Lead). Thorough induction and role handovers ensure smooth transitions. Members of the Department have taken advantage of internal and external programmes of Research Leadership training (Balabanova and Tzioumakis) and programmes aimed at diversifying leadership: Balabanova's University-funded place on the Aurora Women in Leadership course supported her successful application to be an Associate Dean for Research and Impact for SotA.

The Department provides systematic support for colleagues appointed on fixed-term contracts to cover periods of illness and parental leave or for externally-funded projects, involving them in Department activities while helping them build their research portfolio. At the census date, we have four (3.8 FTE) fixed-term research associates. Over the review period, the Department recruited 15 fixed-term research associates and assistants to work on funded projects. Through the conversion of fixed-term lectureships into permanent posts, the University redeployment policy, and Department extension of contracts, we were able to retain researchers beyond the initial period (O'Rourke, Carmi) and secure permanent posts for two colleagues (Whitehurst, Blejmar).

Departmental policy enables all staff on Teaching and Research contracts to apply for research and impact leave after five semesters, subject to research plans and workload considerations. Ten colleagues have taken leave in the current REF cycle. Further adjustments to teaching and

administrative loads are made to support specific research and impact activities. All the processes for supporting research through leave, adjusted workload and research funding take into consideration issues of equality, diversity and inclusion (detailed in section 2c). Staff research and impact is also supported through several SotA, Faculty and University funds, detailed in section 3, and the impact workshops and events mentioned in section 1.

The Department operates a reading programme for work accepted for publication, involving a transparent peer review process in line with the University Code of Practice. Reviewers use REF assessment criteria in line with the open research and responsible metrics principles of DORA. Pre-publication work is also reviewed within the research groups (e.g. 'Cake for Comments' in 'Media, Politics and Society'), to help improve the quality of outputs ahead of submission for publication.

The UoA lead (Henning) gives guidance for staff on REF criteria, and updates on the reading programme at regular departmental meetings. Outputs submitted to the programme are peer reviewed by two colleagues chosen for their subject knowledge; feedback and moderated scores are returned to the author and can be appealed or queried. This process informs the selection of outputs for REF by the UoA lead and the Department's REF governance committee. To ensure all subject areas are represented, the four research group leads sit on this committee, which cross-checks our internal review and scoring of outputs according to EDI principles. Similar principles and practices guide our choice of Impact Case Studies.

### **2.b. Research students**

During this REF period, 15 students were awarded doctorates in Communication and Media. At the REF 2014 census, the Unit had 8 PGR students registered and in various stages of progress, this has grown to 13 (including students co-supervised with the University's partner institution XJTLU in Suzhou, China) as of the 2021 census. Average PGR completions per annum have increased 46% since REF 2014 (from 1.1 To 1.6). The Department's expansion and the growing external visibility of our research, along with renewed attention to the PGR experience, accounts for the recent increase in PGR recruitment: we recruited eight new students in 2019-20 alone. The recruitment of experienced supervisors with PhD completions has increased supervision capacity, as has the PGR supervisor training provided by the University's Liverpool Doctoral College (LDC) (see REF5a, section 3.5).

As with staff, the recruitment of PGR students follows EDI principles (see EDI section below). We are conscious that scholarships and studentships aid inclusivity, and are prioritising accessing further funding (see section 1b). Currently eight students (4.5 supervisions in our Department) receive funding from various competitive University and School schemes, the Chinese Scholarship



Council, and XJTLU sponsored scholarships. Students benefit from the selected doctoral training and development courses we promote, from over 50 provided by the LDC. Additionally, they take PGT modules and research skills training sessions including through engage@liverpool, the University of Liverpool's contribution to 'Methods NorthWest', a research methods collaboration involving a range of institutions across the North West of England and part of the ESRC North West Social Sciences Doctoral Training Partnership (NWSSDTP) and the AHRC North West Consortium Doctoral Training Partnership (NWCDDTP) to which we contribute training sessions. Students have benefitted from the School's placement scheme Liverpool Network of Knowledge Exchange programme (LINK) and its replacement, the LDC Placement programme: our students have been placed with Open Eye Gallery, a major photography gallery and archive in Liverpool, and Red Ninja, a design-led technology company.

As well as following Faculty and School procedures for monitoring, progress and support, the Department, led by the Departmental Director of Postgraduate Research (Zappettini), supports PGR students to organise the annual PGR conference, which all staff attend, and conducts an annual progress review to follow. This process enhances colleagues' familiarity with PGR research across the Department. PGR students also gain substantially from the Department's Visiting Professor scheme (see section 1). This is accompanied by a symposium co-organised by PGRs and in which many PGRs present work.

An important part of our approach is the integration of postgraduates into the Department's and School's research culture. Our PGR students are represented on the SotA PGR Committee and the Staff-Student Liaison Committee. They take part in the Department's research seminars, where they meet established external speakers, get to know the staff and their research, and present their own research. The students also participate in monthly PGR community meetings ('jour fixe'), in which staff and students focus on various issues from training and advice to research and impact-related debates and workshop papers.

Given this emphasis on research environment integration, our students have been successful on several fronts. Funded by the PGR Support Fund, a SotA fund which covers research costs up to £600 p.a., they have participated in international summer schools and presented at major national and international academic conferences run by leading discipline bodies such as the Political Studies Association (PSA), the Media, Communication and Cultural Studies Association (MECCSA), and the European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA). Their research has been exceptionally well-received, with one student twice awarded prizes for 'Best PhD Student Paper'. They have published articles in books such as *Film Marketing into the 21st Century* (British Film Institute), engaged in collaborative projects with filmmakers ('Heritage and Conflict in the Middle East'), set up the Aya Institute for Women, Politics and Media in Ghana,

published a manual to support the switch from analogue to digital in Kurdistan, and found high-level employment (e.g., as government analyst in Ghana).

### **2.c. Equality, diversity and inclusion**

The Department's increasing cultural diversity and international orientation, our expanding postgraduate provision, and our research specialisms relating to social inequalities and LGBTQ+ identities, have shaped our approach to equality, diversity and inclusion in the REF period, as well as our planning for the future. The energy with which we pursue these goals is also due to the centrality of issues of inequality, marginalisation and discrimination in much of our research.

Balabanova, Krzyżanowski and Zappettini address questions of human rights, migration, and European identity; Blejmar researches the experience of children of the disappeared in Argentina; Mahoney, Needham, Turner and Whitehurst deal with the ways in which women, ageing and LGBTQ+ people are represented on screen; Way's research focusses on popular music as a vehicle for protest in Turkey; Yates and Carmi study class-based inequalities in digital media use, in relation to the national digital inclusion agenda; and nearly a quarter of staff deal with issues relating to online misinformation and discrimination. Haslop and O'Rourke's #Speakout project (detailed in their impact case study), addresses online harassment and hate speech in universities and schools. This work has led to O'Rourke joining the University of Liverpool's Safe and Welcoming Campus Board, which acts to reduce harassment and hate crime within the University community.

Needham leads the Department's EDI working group, and Ruffino, Whitehurst and Balabanova represent the Department in the School's EDI committee. This group was established to address issues of inequality, ensure an inclusive teaching and research environment and develop our Athena SWAN Bronze award application for 2021. Needham also sits on the Faculty's BAME Education working group and Mahoney represents the Department in disability fora. An EDI researcher (Hair) was appointed in May 2020 to conduct qualitative research on EDI in the Department, using data from interviews with departmental staff and students to devise recommendations for future practice. Staff also engage with University-wide networks and initiatives such as Wellbeing Week, and the University's Migration Race Borders network.

Our marketing and recruitment, shortlisting and interview procedures follow EDI principles and our staff profile shows a good gender balance overall, 17 women and 14 men are represented in the UoA. Two women (Richardson, O'Halloran) and two men (Krzyżanowski, Palmieri) have led the Department during the REF period. Of the six Professors in the UoA, three are women. This gender-balanced staff base has been made possible by recruitment practices that are sensitive to issues of gender equality in advertising and job descriptions, and with gender-balanced short-

listing and appointment panels; we aim when possible to do the same with respect to ethnicity and disability.

We have also been successful in diversifying internationally (48% of the submitted staff are from outside the UK). The staff profile does not yet sufficiently represent non-white communities (6% are BAME), and we are working to address this (see below and section 1b.) but staff are diverse in heritage and first languages, with Latin American and different European backgrounds alongside Anglo (UK, US, Canadian and Australian) ones. LGBTQ+ diversity, age diversity and different family circumstances are well-represented in the Unit (16% of staff identify as LGBTQ+). The diversity of background is matched by geographic diversity in our research: outputs included in the submission focus on cross-national and international media comparisons, Eastern European and Russian media and everyday life, Latin American culture and politics, North American and Greek films and underground culture.

The PGR cohorts have enjoyed a good balance in terms of gender and ethnicity and between Home/EU and international students. Of the cohort awarded PhDs in the period, over half were women, five students identified as white, four Asian, and one black, five students were Home/EU and five were international. The cohort recruited in the REF assessment period is similarly diverse. Nevertheless, led by the Director of Postgraduate Research, we are taking steps towards decolonising and diversifying our research and supervision (see section 1b).

The Department supports flexible and remote working, colleagues set their own academic support and feedback hours, and can request early/late starts and finishes on grounds of disability, health, or caring responsibilities. We aim to ensure that all staff have opportunities for Masters and PhD teaching and supervision and one research day a week is timetabled for all research-active staff. During parental leave we offer Keeping in Touch (KIT) days: Thomas took three of these days in 2020 for PhD supervision and for her successful interview for the Deputy School Director of PGR role. In addition to University-wide arrangements, we have local practices to support parental leave, which have benefitted several staff (Thomas, Blejmar, Balabanova, Haslop). A detailed return to work meeting with the Head of Department ensures that teaching and research commitments are fitted around childcare needs. Recent Professional Development Reviews (PDRs) have enabled staff to address, for example, the difficulties of balancing parenting and work during the COVID crisis. This informs PDR reports and EDI working group plans, shaping our future EDI strategy.

We recognize the advantages of enhanced EDI for staff and student wellbeing, for building community among researchers, enhancing retention and creating opportunities for collaborative work and global impact. In line with the University's commitment to the Race Equality Charter, we

plan to increase BAME representation and wellbeing in the Department through strategic projects, partnerships, and new funding and with EDI projects aimed at decentring our research and curriculum.

### **3. Income, infrastructure and facilities**

Research income rose 64% from the start of the assessment period (£170,690 in 2013-14) to the end (£279,547), with income diversifying from two types of sources (EU government bodies and UK government) in 2013/14 to seven different types of funding sources in 2019/20. This success is evident too in the awards the Unit gained in this REF period, which suggest a strong future trajectory, with over £2 million in external funding (total award value). £1.3 million of this was received by PIs and Co-Is in the Unit, from a range of national and international sources including research councils (ESRC, AHRC, EPSRC), EU bodies, UK government bodies, and several UK charities as well as corporations such as Twitter and Facebook. The increase and diversification in external funding results from several initiatives: University investment in the Unit since 2016, the recruitment strategy outlined above, new mentoring and review processes, and a new grant capture strategy initiated by Balabanova in 2018 at School level and focussing on widening the pool of colleagues submitting grant applications. Between the 2018/19 and 2019/20 academic years we saw a 56% rise in external funding awarded from £308K to £482K.

#### **3.a. Our funded research and impact**

The projects funded in the REF period reflect many of our areas of specialism: over £550K (total award value to the Unit) was won by projects on social media, including gendered online harassment; £900K was awarded to projects on digital inclusion, AI, everyday digital media use and digital identity; and nearly £450K for projects on global urban culture, community sustainability, and cultural heritage. Of our external funding applications made in the period (some pending), 55% were by women, and 23% by colleagues who are currently ECRs. Of the awards made, 50% were by women, and 19% by current ECRs.

Reflecting the Faculty, Department and School's support for interdisciplinary collaboration, several of our awards are collaborations with colleagues across the University: in Music, Health and Life Sciences; Histories, Languages and Cultures; and Electrical Engineering and Electronics. Many funded projects also involve inter-institutional collaboration: these include O'Halloran's 'Multimodal Rhetoric in Online Media Communications' (£80K), a collaboration between University of Liverpool, University of Bielefeld, Germany, University of Bremen, Germany, and Örebro University, Sweden. Yates' ESRC funded project 'Ways of Being in a Digital Age' (£500K in total) includes funding to seven other British HEIs and draws in nine international HEIs, including in

Singapore and the USA. Garcia led projects on the cultural programme of the Olympic Games, with three other UK HEIs and the University of Sao Paolo, funded by the AHRC, the Newton Fund and the International Olympic Committee (Switzerland) to a total award value of £157K. Her ICC projects on other major international cultural events in partnership with LJMU were funded by the British Council, Culture Liverpool, Agenda 21 for Culture, the AHRC and both Universities (to a total of £256K).

The ability to draw on such extensive networks for large scale international projects is not restricted to senior staff. Derby Fellow Rossini is Co-I on a Twitter funded project on incivility and intolerance on Twitter (£60k, total project value £950k), a WhatsApp project on misinformation (£37K) and a Facebook-funded project on social media and harm (£110K), attesting to her expertise in informal political talk online and including Co-Is in five countries. The research environment enables ECRs to build from small applications to large funding bids, devising and leading innovative projects supported by more experienced colleagues. For example, Musi was mentored and supported by Yates. Awarded £9K for her project 'Parli: An Encyclopaedia of Opinion' by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation in 2019-20, she went on to lead a fast-tracked ESRC project, 'COVID-19: Being Alone Together: Developing Fake News Immunity', awarded £330K (total award value) to the Universities of Liverpool and Dundee in May 2020. With Professors O'Halloran and Yates and Reed (Dundee) as Co-Is, this project in 'crisis informatics' develops AI techniques to train citizens and journalists to detect and flag semi-fake news.

Haslop's successful funding bids have also benefitted from the Department's mentoring and review system. Senior colleagues commented on drafts and provided advice for his successful 2017 HEFCE award, 'Speakout: Calling out Harassment, Changing the Online Campus' (£70K) which, together with other ongoing research in this arena, underpins one of our impact case studies, and for his 2018 ESRC New Investigator Award for '#Ladcultures: Social Networking Sites, 'Laddism' and Young Masculinities' (£260K). Through these projects, Haslop gained mentoring and leadership skills, working with a postdoctoral fellow (O' Rourke) on both projects.

The Unit supports staff at all career stages to build their grant profile through the research groups structure and the peer review it facilitates, the PDRs and Research and Impact Conversations. The School Research and Impact Team identifies appropriate funding calls and peer reviewers and assists with costings. The Faculty Research Development Officer provides an annual programme of funding support workshops, ECRs benefit from tailored workshops via the Faculty ECR Network and the Faculty Impact Officer gives one-to-one support in planning projects. Applications over £20K go to the School Peer Review panel, and the Faculty also oversees scoping workshops and rigorous internal peer review for postdoctoral schemes and supports bids to complex themed calls.

**3.b. Seed funding and pump-priming**

Our success in gaining external funding in this period has been underpinned by new institutional funding programmes. The Unit has made good use of the School's Research Development Initiative Fund (RDIF) to support a wide range of activities from conference organisation and attendance to research assistance, public events, overseas research visits and proof of concept. Our Impact Case Studies authors were supported by the Faculty Flexible Fund, a quick-response call supporting impact development. The University's Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) Seed Fund has helped our internationalisation agenda in line with University Strategy to address UN Sustainable Development Goals, and the Liverpool COVID-19 ODA Rapid Response Fund has seed-funded our new studies of COVID-19 misinformation. We have drawn on the University's Knowledge Exchange, Impact and Public Engagement (KEI) Voucher Scheme, the University's Industrial Strategy Challenge (pump-priming) Fund (ISCF) as well as University schemes for engaging graduate and undergraduate students in research. Small research expenses are funded by the Department's research budget (total of £14K p.a.), as is the seminar series organised by the research groups, and the visiting professors programme.

The RDIF fund has seed-funded several new initiatives. For example, Southern and Harmer received an RDIF award of £5K in 2018 for a proof of concept on the gendering of online abuse of politicians. This resulted in publications and further external funding applications. Balabanova and Blejmar's project 'Art and Transitional Justice in Argentina and Bosnia and Herzegovina' was financed by the University's ODA Seed Fund (£10K). From this, Blejmar has developed her ongoing project 'Art as a Tool to Contest Abuses of Power in Latin America' in collaboration with Tate Liverpool, major museums in Spain and Argentina, and the Argentine Embassy. Yates was awarded £19K seed funding from the ISCF for his project with Unilever, 'Scoping Research on the Use of Scraped Digital Data'. Rossini and Kalogeropoulos' project on COVID-19 misinformation on social media was aided by the Liverpool COVID-19 ODA Rapid Response Fund (£10K), and Kalogeropoulos' research has also been supported via the Early Career Researchers and Returners fund (£2K).

The KEI Vouchers (mentioned above) funded one-off events, such as Roberts' exhibition *Reel Stories: Liverpool and the Silver Screen* with the Museum of Liverpool (2014-15, £5K), and ongoing partnerships such as Balabanova's work with the UN Refugee Agency (since 2013, £6K). The vouchers have funded Balabanova and Palmieri's collaboration with online fashion retailer ASOS (£9K), which produced guidance for business interactions over social media on ethics and sustainability, and Palmieri's collaboration with the UK Investor Relations Society (£10K), addressing how argumentation can help build trust-based relationships. Small internal schemes also support the initiation and conclusion of funded projects: following her AHRC Fellowship on



the archives of the Ilford photographic company, Henning enlisted an undergraduate student via a University scheme to catalogue the visual materials collected; Palmieri and Balabanova recruited two graduate students through a similar scheme to compile a dataset of all 2019 modern slavery statements and human rights reports published by FTSE100 firms: this, together with the ASOS project, will form the basis of future funding applications.

### **3.c. Infrastructure and facilities**

Our location in interconnected Georgian buildings, at 19-23 Abercromby Square, alongside other departments in SoTA, enables interdisciplinary exchange and shared events, usually in the historic Old Library housed in the same buildings. The buildings have been refurbished to provide wheelchair access, and a room for breastfeeding / expressing milk. PGR students are housed here as well, with their own kitchen facilities and social space. The University also includes the Victoria Gallery and Museum, with which the Department collaborates in events and exhibitions (e.g., Roberts for the 2019 *Triangulation* exhibition).

Leveraging research grant income, the Department has invested in Qualtrics survey software, initially acquired through Rossini's Facebook grant, with a wider license for colleagues and students purchased through Department funds. This software is being used in our UKRI COVID-19 projects, enabling research teams to set up comprehensive surveys to solicit feedback from participants. We also forge our own platforms, notably O'Halloran and Pal's ongoing development of a cloud-based multimodal analysis platform (MAP), funded by O'Halloran's Bielefeld research grant. This combines natural language processing, image processing and machine learning techniques for analysis of large multimodal datasets.

The Sydney Jones Library supplies resources essential to our research, including newspaper databases (Gale OneFile, Lexis Library and Nexis), multi-disciplinary databases, including package subscriptions providing access to Communication and Mass Media Complete with full text access to over 500 journal titles, and the Library's research data management service (detailed in institutional statement). The Media and Communication collections are managed by expert subject librarians who respond swiftly to staff recommendations for purchase. The Library spend for Communication and Media specific material has been approximately £172K in this REF period. PGR students have access to a dedicated research reading room, and the Library also provides them with Researcher KnowHow training.

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

Working with partners within and outside academia, the Unit endeavours to shape policy agendas, raise cultural awareness, promote inclusivity and define future directions for the field. Our research and impact strategy pursued has boosted our research collaborations, networks and partnerships, with mutual and reciprocal approaches that engage partners in collaborative research and practice.

##### ***4.a. External collaborations and research and impact priorities***

Having established strong regional collaborations through our REF 2014 City in Film impact case study, our affiliation with the Institute of Cultural Capital (ICC), a collaboration between University of Liverpool and LJMU, gave us new international reach, with ICC staff returned to the Department when this project concluded in 2018. The UoA benefits from their research connections with high-profile organisations and public bodies: such as Garcia's work with the International Olympic Committee and high profile events in partnership with Culture Liverpool, the British Council and the European Parliament, and her current role as Associate Director of the AHRC funded national Centre for Cultural Value (with the University of Leeds), and Yates' collaborations and consultancies with the Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), Ofcom, CISCO and the Home Office. Their mentorship of colleagues extends and sustains this influence and reach. New lecturers also bring new international engagement, notably Rossini, whose ongoing research and impact projects involve social media giants such as Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp, and Kalogeropoulos, who is closely involved in the Reuters Institute Digital News Report.

The Unit is sustaining and expanding these strong international networks aided by our international and disciplinarily diverse staff base and supported by the infrastructure described in section 3. Colleagues collaborate with organisations across the world, mainly in Europe and the Global South: from Blejmar's work with Argentinian Museums of Memory, and Slavtcheva - Petkova's collaborations with UNESCO, to Krzyżanowski's and Tzioumakis' high-profile work in Polish, Swedish and Greek contexts, to Rossini's and Yates' large funded projects with colleagues in Africa, Asia, North and South America.

Nationally, our impact and research show the ongoing importance of community collaboration: Haslop's current projects draw on his work with charities offering community and youth services and organisations that foster positive masculinity such as the Good Lad Initiative. Southern joins forces with organisations that deal with online abuse such as Reclaim the Internet and Fix the Glitch. The Unit has also initiated several projects with social housing organisations, community

hubs and charities. In addition, our research engages closely with educational and cultural bodies, from UK HE funders and regulatory bodies to international arts organisations including major museums.

In line with the University's emphasis on Civic Engagement, the Department makes a strong contribution to the region. Colleagues work with numerous cultural organisations including the Victoria Gallery and Museum, National Museums Liverpool, FACT, Open Eye Gallery, Culture Liverpool, and Tate Liverpool. Exemplary here are Roberts' collaborations with regional cultural institutions in spatial humanities research which directly engages with the Liverpool region's distinctive character, and Balabanova's new collaborative project (with the English department, funded through the UKRI-COVID-19 call), to assess the impact on mental health of restricted access to art and cultural institutions in Liverpool during the pandemic.

Our ongoing partnerships also include other HEI's, as well as non-academic collaborators. Internationally, we can point to Grossman's work with the Observational Practices Lab, based at the Parsons School of Design, New York, and to her affiliation with the HDK-Valand Academy of Art and Design, University of Gothenburg (Sweden). Within the UK, Kalogeropoulos is collaborating with the University of Oxford on a COVID-19 news and information project funded by the Nuffield Foundation. He is also a project partner for Greece at the Digital News Project, funded by organisations including Google and the BBC. We sustain links with other Universities in the city through long-term projects and events: examples include the ICC's partnership with LJMU; the 10-year collaborative film seminar series run by Tzioumakis and Needham also with LJMU; and the 'Theorising the Popular' international conference in 2018, organised by Way with colleagues at Liverpool Hope University.

The mutual approach to researching together with our partners and co-producing knowledge is evident in Yates' use of action research across a range of projects including the Nuffield funded project 'Me and my big data', and the ESRC commissioned project 'Ways of Being in a Digital Age', and Haslop's impact work with UK HE bodies. Consultancy work arises from such collaborations and embeds our influence in organisations, from Yates' secondment to the DCMS (where he chairs the Research Working Group on Digital Skills and Inclusion detailed in the Impact Case Study) and his consultancy for the Good Things Foundation, to Garcia's consultancy for the British Council and Agenda 21 for Culture, and appointment as cultural attaché in the International Olympic Committee.

Through our partnerships within and outside academia, the Department endeavours to enable both organisations and communities to better negotiate a mediatised world: through resilience in the face of 'fake news' as in Musi's collaboration with the ARG-tech Centre for Argument

Technology at the University of Dundee; enhanced strategic communication, as in Palmieri's work with the UK Investor Relations Society, Balabanova and Palmieri's collaboration with ASOS (detailed in subsection 3a) and Motta's work with Brixton Finishing School; by devising metrics for assessing 'uncivil' discourse online, in Rossini's work with Twitter; strategies for dealing with online gendered harassment (Haslop, Southern and HE partners) and increasing representational visibility, e.g., Turner's work with LGBTQ+ groups and DIVA Magazine.

The research groups structure supports staff involvement with diverse communities, publics and institutions. Our engagement with media and wider publics can be highlighted through the work of the 'Screen and Film Studies' research group with groups of comics fans, 50+ women (Whitehurst), and LGBTQ+ television viewers (Turner). Through public talks at festivals and film screenings, members of the group engage with film audiences in the UK and abroad (Thomas, Tzioumakis, Needham). Needham's research reaches wider publics through performance and installation (Nottingham Contemporary, Florence National Library, Italy). This group also takes advantage of press interest to disseminate their research widely, e.g., Thomas was interviewed about her research on stardom in Vox magazine, and for the British Film Institute (both 2019), and Mahoney was interviewed on BBC Radio Three for her work on WWII propaganda and representation (May 2020).

The 'Culture, Space and Memory' group exemplifies our partnerships and collaborations at regional (Tate Liverpool - Roberts, Blejmar), national (National Science and Media Museum - Henning), and international levels (International Olympic Committee - Garcia). The benefits of these partnerships include impacts on museum policy and exhibitions strategy via collaboration with curators, and direct engagement with the contemporary arts and photography community, e.g. in Blejmar's work with Argentinian artists and human rights organisations, and her exhibitions and workshops in Liverpool, Uruguay and Argentina, as well as Ruffino's exhibitions with the artist group IOCOSE in Italy and Germany in 2019-20.

A particular strength of the 'Media, Politics and Society' research group is its involvement with human rights organisations and NGOs, including the UN Refugee Agency (Balabanova), Transparency International UK (Wozniak), and UNESCO (Slavtcheva-Petkova, Wozniak). The group's research findings are conveyed directly to parliament: Harmer gave evidence to the Committee for Standards in Public Life on media coverage of the EU Referendum campaign (2016) and, with Southern, to the House of Lords Democracy and Digital Technologies Committee on the online exclusion/abuse of women MPs (2019); Kalogeropoulos and Rossini gave evidence to this Committee in 2019 on the challenges to democracy of encrypted and private groups in applications such as WhatsApp; Carmi presented at the same Committee in Feb 2020, representing the findings of the Nuffield Foundation project, 'Me and My Big Data: Understanding

Citizens Data Literacy' (PI Yates), one of several projects linking 'Media, Politics and Society' with the University's Centre for Digital Humanities and Social Sciences.

The work of the 'Discourse and Society' group around topics such as Brexit (Zappettini, Krzyżanowski) and fake news (Musi, Krzyżanowski) further highlights the Unit's international orientation, from visiting professor appointments to media appearances overseas, to organisation of international conferences. For example, O'Halloran is Visiting Distinguished Professor in the School of Foreign Languages at Shanghai Jiao Tong University (2017-present), and runs research projects with the Centre for Interdisciplinary Research (ZiF), University of Bielefeld, Germany. Krzyżanowski holds a Chair in the Department of Informatics and Media at Uppsala University. Palmieri is the organiser of the International Conference on Discourse Approaches to Financial Communication (2014, 2017) and director-at-large of the 'Association for Business Communication' (ABC).

#### **4.b. Contribution to the discipline and indicators of influence**

The Unit has capitalised on the interdisciplinary nature of the field, appointing staff who contribute to other disciplines (linguistics, politics, sociology, history) as well as to media and communication research. This cross-fertilisation of ideas is evident in the range of journals in which we publish, and in the external roles to which we have been appointed.

Internal collaboration has been fostered to enhance collegiality in a rapidly expanding Department, to extend external networks and increase peer review experience. ECRs, mid-career and senior academics all engage in peer review for journals (we review for over 60 different journals). Colleagues regularly peer review publications and proposals for more than 20 different presses and review grant proposals for international funders in Europe, USA, Hong Kong, South America, and South Africa, as well five national bodies (ESRC, AHRC, EPSRC, BA, British Council Newton Fund).

Cross-institutional collaboration is valued within the UoA, and we participate in a diverse range of research networks, including the Discourses of Marriage Research Group (Turner), the Women and Ageing Research Network (Whitehurst), the Leverhulme-funded network Childhood & Nation in World Cinema (Blejmar) the Subcultures, Popular Music and Social Change Network and the Protest Music Research Group (Way). Slavtcheva-Petkova sits on the Executive Board of the influential international Worlds of Journalism study as Regional Coordinator for Central and Eastern Europe.

Several ECRs now hold key positions in networks and societies e.g., Harmer co-convenes the Political Studies Association Media and Politics Specialist Group; Rossini serves on several

committees for the American Political Science Association (APSA) and within the International Communication Association (ICA); Ruffino chairs the Italian division of the Digital Games Research Association (DiGRA Italia); Wozniak is a member of the ICA's Sustainability Committee.

Disciplinary recognition of our expertise is evident in regular invitations to give plenary papers and keynotes across the world, helping to set research agendas internationally. In the 2019-20 academic year, ground-breaking research by O'Halloran on the development of new digital tools and techniques for multimodal analysis has been showcased in plenary papers in Italy, Estonia and China. Similarly, Buse and Henning's keynote invitations since arrival at Liverpool have helped to set the agenda for a new photography studies oriented toward material cultural practice. Slavtcheva-Petkova's invited talks on journalism and safety are linked to her ongoing collaboration with UNESCO on press freedoms. An indicator of the success of our recruitment strategy and mentoring policy in attracting and developing high quality researchers is that several early and mid-career colleagues are also invited to give keynotes, plenaries and invited papers. Supported by both departmental and school funding described in section 3, Blejmar, Kalogeropoulos and Rossini have given keynotes and plenaries at several overseas international conferences in 2019 and early 2020 (in Sweden, Ireland, Spain and Denmark), with Rossini giving four invited talks in 2019 alone.

Colleagues at all career stages are engaged in field-defining work, and edited collections are one means to review the sub-field and set future directions. For example, Ruffino's 2020 book, *Independent Videogames*, is the first, state-of-the-art collection of studies on games production, while Maartens' co-edited *Propaganda and Public Relations in Military Recruitment* (2020) establishes a new subject area in the study of media, war and conflict. Yates' co-edited *Oxford Handbook of Digital Technology and Society* (2020) is a comprehensive overview including contributions from Blejmar and Carmi; Tzioumakis' co-edited *The Hollywood Renaissance* (2018) brings fresh perspectives to one of the most studied periods of American cinema. We have organised six international conferences at our London and Liverpool campuses in 2018-2020 alone, (on themes such as youth culture and screen, digital inclusion, art and archives, and political discourse), worked with partners to organise international conferences in the UK and abroad, and sit on selection committees for major annual and bi-annual conferences such as the Society of Cinema and Media Studies annual conference (Needham) and the International Conference of the European Society for Periodical Research (Buse). Our engagement with the field and disciplines is also evidenced in the number of journal editorial boards on which we are represented (more than 22) and influential book series we edit (six).

The excellence of our research has been recognised through the award of international prizes. Palmieri won the 2015 Ambassador Award from the Association for Business Communication, and



working with Holby City fans, Turner won the 2018 Fanzine of the Year award for a fanzine produced as part of an impact project on mental health and positive LGBTQ+ representation. The authority of our staff in their fields is evidenced in their advising for tenure review and professorial promotions in other HEIs in the US and the UK (Buse, Henning, Needham, Tzioumakis). Richardson was a member of the AHRC Peer Review College (until 2016) and Yates is an associate college member of the EPSRC.

Despite the difficult circumstances of 2020, we are ambitious for the future of our Unit, knowing that we have put in place robust structures and processes that will continue to support our research and impact initiatives. Our collaborations and relationships, with other departments and faculties of the University, the international academic community, and wider sectors of society, will enable us to continue to exploit the strong position we have established in the seven years since the last national exercise in research evaluation. We have great confidence in our recent appointments at senior and junior levels to take our plans forward with imagination and commitment.