

<b>Institution: University of Sussex</b>
<b>Unit of Assessment: 34: Communication, Cultural and Media Studies, Library and Information Management</b>
<p><b>1. Unit context and structure, research and impact strategy</b></p> <p><b>Introduction</b></p> <p>Research in media, culture and communication is written into our DNA at the University of Sussex. Our second Vice-Chancellor, Asa Briggs, wrote an early and influential social history of the media '<b>from Gutenberg to the Internet</b>' and while we have developed and extended this legacy, we have also pioneered new fields of research and initiated new ways of doing research beyond Briggs' social history model. This flexible innovation has resulted in sustainable development. We are a large unit that has grown by a third in this REF period (currently <b>45.1 FTE</b>) and are composed of filmmakers, digital artists, media historians, critical theorists, philosophers of digital culture, and scholars of journalism, film, cultural studies, and digital humanities. Our broad areas of concern are digital culture, cultural and media history, and the analysis of relationships of power and resistance.</p> <p>We want our research to <b>intervene</b>, to <b>initiate</b>, and to <b>innovate</b> and we want it to be <b>accessible</b>, <b>inviting</b>, and <b>useable</b>. For us this has meant utilising the full range of media formats which has resulted in a heterogeneity of outputs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ruiz's project <b>Engaging Youth in Heritage</b> worked with skateboarders to intervene in debates about heritage. Ruiz produced the award-winning film <i>You Can't Move History</i> (AHRC's Best Research Film of the Year, 2016) as part of the project.</li> <li>• Spinelli's work on <b>podcasts</b> initiated a new field of study, and it does so through a book and through a series of podcasts (<i>For Your Ears Only</i>) that explore and develop the affordances of podcasting.</li> <li>• Lebow's <b>Filming Revolution</b>, an interactive platform exploring documentary and independent filmmaking in Egypt since the Egyptian Revolution, won the 2020 <b>Anne Friedberg Innovative Scholarship Award</b>.</li> <li>• Hendy's <b>BBC's Connected Histories</b> investigates the oral history archives of the BBC and consists of a digital catalogue of the BBC's oral history (available in 2022), plus a series of eight curated websites hosted by the BBC, and an online invitation for a public audience to 'share your memories'.</li> <li>• Callaghan's <b>Love in the Post</b> presents an enticing and unusual mixture of drama and interviews to explore Derridean philosophy and was the 2016 winner of the British Association of Film, Television and Screen Studies Practice Research Award.</li> </ul> <p>The best showcase of our research would be a large <b>expanded media show</b> replete with film screenings, sound installations, exhibitions, archives, web-platforms <i>as well as</i> a shelf of books. And this showcase would have an <b>audience</b> made up of community groups, activists, academics, and a diverse general audience. <i>We research the media world and we research the world through media.</i></p> <p><b>Context and Structure</b></p> <p>The research fields itemised in REF2014 (<i>digital technologies; media and cultural histories and transformations; well-being and public science/knowledge; media arts, film and visual culture; and the cultural politics of sound and listening</i>) still characterise what we do, but now there is a much stronger identity around three key overlapping themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Techno-Digital Politics, Philosophy and Culture (Digital Culture)</li> <li>• Cultural Histories of our Troubled Present (Cultural and Media History)</li> </ul>

- Spaces of Power, Spaces of Protest, Spaces of Negotiation (The Analysis of Power and Resistance)
- **Techno-Digital Politics, Philosophy and Culture** captures the capacious way we understand our current techno-social world, its myriad digital articulations, and its future-oriented trajectories. It includes studies of online journalism, digital activism, and the use of social media in political campaigning (Chen, Jordan, Gaber); the use of social media within military cultures (Maltby); the development of new modes of consumption through Airbnb (being developed by Lekakis); digital theatre (Krell); the recalibrations of identity in digital worlds and their attendant algorithms (Kant); bio-technology (Fubara-Manuel, O'Riordan,); the digital possibilities for new cultural forms (Lebow, Krell, Richterich, Spinelli); technophobia and anti-computerization (Bassett, Roberts) and digital philosophies and digital aesthetics (Berry, Fazi).
- **Cultural Histories of our Troubled Present** captures the way that we use cultural history to refashion an understanding of the present. It includes work on war and revolution (Bull, Lebow); studies of traumatic pasts and the way these are registered in film, photography, painting and sculpture (Cieplak, Goycoolea, Highmore, Mroz, Tierney); radical approaches to unrecognised and intangible heritage (Ruiz, Krell, Jolly, Thynne); the troubled history of modernism in media history (Lacey, Hendy) and the recasting of post imperial history at the centre of British Broadcasting (Hendy, A. Webb).
- **Spaces of Power, Spaces of Protest, Spaces of Negotiation**, captures our attention towards both physical space and the space of representation. Themes of presence and communication are key to work in film, performance and filmmaking (Callaghan, Brown, Chevalier); the phantasmatic representation of feared others across spaces of policy and petition (Rashid, Ruiz); media as a space for negotiating culture (Cheema, Dekavala, James); and the urban and the non-urban as gendered, racialised and narrativized space (Thornham, L. Webb, Krutnik).

These are the themes that orchestrate our research. But we are always open to new avenues of research, and flexible enough to respond to new initiatives. We make strategic space for such dynamism in our research seminars and through our **annual research away-days**, where fledgling research projects are described and developed. The away-days also provide space to learn about research by new members of staff, and opportunities to target strategic goals (for instance, learning about how large, complex grants are 'grown').

The research culture of the unit is overseen by a **School Research Committee** (SRC) chaired by the Director of Research and Knowledge Exchange [DRaKE] (currently Highmore). This is a committee made up of directors of the unit's research centres, the director of doctoral studies, and includes representation from PGRs, and from members at all career stages, with specific emphasis on early-career-researchers (ECRs) and EDI concerns.

The research culture of the unit benefits from a series of **research seminars** that take place bi-weekly, alternating with a research-in-progress seminar run by our doctoral researchers and attended by faculty. **Annual symposia and research events** take place across the unit: besides away-days there is an annual film conference featuring an under-studied director and an annual cultural studies conference. Other events take place in accord with the rhythms of research projects. One recent development in the research culture is the annual appointment of a **Stuart Hall Fellow**, which began in 2018-19 with the photographer **Ingrid Pollard** who was followed in 2019-2020 by the investigative journalist and campaigner **Rebecca Omonira-Oyekanmi**. The Stuart Hall Fellow allows us to focus research energies around the theme of **race and racism** and to draw out our research into civic society.

Since 2014 the biggest change affecting the unit has been the development of the **Sussex Humanities Lab** (SHL). It is a key **enabling resource** for the unit and drives a significant element of our intellectual orientation. Today it is recognised both nationally and internationally

as a centre of digital humanities research. How the SHL operates and the infrastructural role it plays is detailed in section 3 below.

Alongside the SHL, our research is nurtured and amplified by two specific research centres:

The **Centre for Life History and Life Writing** (CLHLW) was established in 1999 to champion the interdisciplinary value of oral history, auto/biography, and the Mass-Observation archives located on the edge of the campus. The centre has developed research in partnership with external organisations (particularly the British Library and the British Film Institute) and has supported doctoral scholars through postgraduate training. The centre has been instrumental in securing funding for the research projects *Jill Craigie: Film Pioneer* (Thynne) and *The Business of Women's Words: Purpose and Profit in Feminist Publishing* (Jolly) (both detailed in section 4).

The **Sussex Centre for Cultural Studies** (SCCS) was formed in 2006 to promote and support cultural studies research and to connect with other research projects both in Sussex and further afield. It is deeply committed to the project of Cultural Studies, its history of political and critical engagement, and its scholarly rigour. An example of SCCS's practice is the 2018 symposium investigating how the year 1948 still reverberates seventy years on. This was an interdisciplinary challenge to 'join-up' different 1948 events both in Britain (nationalisation of the health service, and the arrival of the Empire Windrush) and globally (the establishment of North Korea, the formal adoption of apartheid by the Nationalist government in South Africa, the independence of Burma [Myanmar] from British colonial rule and the creation of the state of Israel and Nakba [exodus] for Palestinians). It was an event that involved 12 members of the unit, and 6 internationally renowned scholars from outside Sussex (Bland, Brunsdon, Brunt, Cacqueray, Lumley, McNeil).

### Open Access

Open Access has always been championed by our unit. We believe we are pioneers in this area. The unit produces, curates, and hosts the **REFRAME** platform, which is an open-access digital space for online practice, publication and curation of internationally produced research and scholarship in our field. It was founded in 2012 as a nimble, cross-disciplinary, and rigorous 'Publisher and Press for the digital era'. To date REFRAME has created, supported and launched over twenty distinct research projects: from eBooks such as *Post-Cinema: Theorizing 21st-Century Film* (a book which has had over **100,000 online views**) to public-facing academic blogs to peer-reviewed publications such as SEQUENCE. Our flexible publishing formats allow us to support formal academic publications and multi-media innovations such as video essays (a section which has also attracted over **100,000 views**). It has provided a platform for some of our most responsive activity including a set of short public-facing essays (curated by Tierney) about the use of indigenous languages on screen prompted by *Roma*.

### Research and Impact Strategy

Our research strategy in 2008 was to 'intervene to shape the fields of media, new media, cultural studies, and film [and now journalism] at local, national, and international levels' (RAE2008): this is still our broad goal. In REF2014 we identified key areas for developing our research strategy, and it is this strategy that has been implemented across REF2021:

*Continue to build critical mass in our key research fields.*

The most obvious evidence for meeting this objective is the establishment of the **Sussex Humanities Lab** and the range of research fellows and doctoral students that this has facilitated. But critical mass has also been built and maintained around media and cultural history and documentary practices with three large research projects focusing on the history of British cultural practices (the BBC; feminist publishing; and the pioneering work of the documentary filmmaker Jill Craigie).

*Maintain and develop interdisciplinary work both within and beyond Media, Film and Cultural Studies.*

Members of this unit regularly work with colleagues from other disciplines. It is usual now for digital scholars to move across humanities, social sciences, and informatics. We work with doctors, health professionals, festival organisers, curators, as well as anthropologists, geographers, and historians. Our fields emerged on the fault-line that separates the humanities and the social sciences; our fields are intrinsically interdisciplinary.

*Expand and develop our external partnerships and, thus, the dissemination of our research.*

Our partnership with the BBC on the AHRC **BBC Connected Histories** project is a clear indicator of our success in this area. Similarly, we have developed important relationships with institutions such as the **British Library**, **BFI**, and **Tate**. Other relationships are being fostered through projects such as **The Digital Ghost Hunt** with its partnership with the Battersea Arts Centre. Our partnerships are deep and constitutive of our research. The BBC, for instance, constitutes the topic of our research, but it is also the arena through which this research is publicly disseminated. In our partnership with the British Library, the BL hosts the archives we research, and disseminates and archives the research we produce.

*Expand our research capacity by increasing external funding, especially for collaborative work.*

We have increased external funding by 109% (our growth would only account for an increase of 30%). So far in this census period the unit has raised £3.14m in research monies, whereas in the census period for REF2014 we raised £1.5m. In 2016-17 alone we generated £1,286,113 in external funding, primarily through the AHRC and the Leverhulme Trust. The collaborative capacity of this funding is evident through the range of HEIs (UEA; LSE; etc) and non-HEIs (BBC; British Library; BFI) involved. But we have also been successful with small grants and these have been excellent sources for research initiatives.

*Extend our work into new research areas and shape emerging research fields as they develop.*

We continue to develop ground-breaking work in the area of digital humanities. We are also producing cutting-edge work in the field of affect studies and cultural history. Research using film and video has resulted in a set of award-winning films (Ruiz, Callaghan, Cieplak). We are extending into game design and animation (Fubara-Manuel), and hacking culture (Richterich).

We have welcomed the growing importance of impact across the sector: Cultural Studies, an allegiance for many within the unit, was founded on the principle of creating useable and useful knowledge. Our **impact strategy** is unashamedly designed to promote **progressive** interventions and initiations across civil society and state formations. This has meant taking our research to new audiences and new beneficiaries and is enhanced by a broad set of associations and partnerships from local cinemas and festivals to national bodies. All the unit are involved in forms of public engagement.

Unit members have access to a range of resources to identify the potential impact of their research. We have dedicated professional service staff who are experienced in working with NGOs, local businesses, the media, and community groups, who help faculty develop their research impact. Anyone applying for research support and research leave is directed to explore possible pathways to impact and include their impact plans in their applications. The unit also employs a consultant (Lee) who is available to faculty to offer bespoke guidance and partnership development. Our deputy director of research for impact (Tierney) is proactive in auditing our research projects for potential impact development, and in working with faculty to realise this potential. Our **impact ethos** strives for a practice of **co-creation** whereby beneficiaries are involved in the design and implementation of impactful research. Examples of beneficiaries include:



- **Youth:** O’Riordan with LGBT+ teenagers in Brighton; Spinelli with secondary schools across Sussex; James with BAME teenagers in London; Ruiz with young people using London’s Southbank.
- **Refugees:** Austin with refugees and refugee support organisations; Munt with various Brighton refugee organisations.
- **Institutions:** Hendy and Webb with the BBC; Jolly with the British Library; Highmore with local councils and civil action groups; Maltby with the British Army.
- **Post-conflict communities:** Maltby with grassroots peace and reconciliation groups in Sierra Leone; Cieplak with the families of the disappeared in Argentina.

Our selection of impact case studies was chosen for their **range, depth**, and their connection to our **impact priorities**. Priorities for impact work are threefold:

1. We seek to mobilise the **power of history** for reimagining the social. Hendy and Jolly, for instance, articulate concealed national histories that enable new forms of agency (the long and difficult history of BAME presence within the BBC, for instance). Such a priority is currently being developed by Mroz, Cieplak, Brown.
2. We seek to **redirect cultural tools** to new ends. Ruiz redirects the cultural category of intangible heritage for marginalised social groups. Such a priority is being developed by Spinelli, Austin, James.
3. We seek to recognise obscured and misunderstood **cultural infrastructures** and show their progressive benefits. Maltby throws light on the infrastructure of social media in the British Army. This priority is being pursued by Highmore, O’Riordan, Richterich.

### Beyond REF2021

Our ‘research and impact strategy’ has proved sustaining and vitalising. The context of Covid-19 will prove challenging in the coming years and our immediate planning is cognisant of the requirement to develop even more robust and sustainable infrastructures.

Our ambitions align with the **AHRC’s Delivery Plan 2019** which is insistently interdisciplinary in nature. It promotes creativity, curiosity, agility, and the ability to respond to global and planetary challenges. Some of the challenges that we face go to the heart of our disciplinary foundations and will sorely test the capacities of our field: is media studies up to the task of registering the impact of our new media ecologies? Can it counter the onslaught of ‘fake news’ and the amplification of anger and distrust of scientific approaches? What can the humanities contribute to the protection of the biosphere against the forces of capitalist growth? Such onerous challenges required substantial reimagining of how the unit will operate.

During this REF period we were based in the School of Media, Film and Music (MFM), but since 2018 we have been working on a faculty-led merger with cognate disciplinary fields (History, English, Art History, Languages and Philosophy). Since September 2020 our new base is the merged School of **Media, Arts and Humanities (MAH)**. Our unit has taken a leading role in developing this collaboration and the new Dean of MAH was previously head of MFM (O’Riordan). This has been a bottom-up merger fuelled by our collective sense of the benefits of working together at scale and we agreed to fashion the new school in a way that would protect the thriving research culture already in place and to design new collective infrastructures and spaces that would enhance our research vitality and sustainability. Most importantly we decided that the new school would be built on principles of **fairness, transparency, and accountability**.

Our sense of what working at scale could achieve focuses on three concrete initiatives that are currently being designed and implemented and will strategically shape the next phase of the unit’s development.

1. An inclusive **Institute of Research and Social Engagement** that will support inter-unit research and substantially build on our capacities for impact and knowledge exchange (detailed below).

2. A rigorous and bespoke **wrap-around support system** utilising collective and trained mentoring designed to promote equalities, diversity, and inclusivity (detailed at the end of section 2) and ensure transparent staff progression.
3. A **Peer Review College** as key to our strategy of maximising grant capture (detailed at the end of section 3).

The **Institute of Research and Social Engagement** will be a significant resource for the unit. It will recruit an international advisory board from academia, from the culture industries, and from grass-roots civil society organisations (community activists, anti-racist organisations, LGBT+ advocates, environmental campaigners, etc.). It will be a home for our research centres and for the Sussex Humanities Lab. It will significantly build capacity for our impact strategy by offering **visiting fellowships** to cultural workers who facilitate the sort of engaged impact work we want to promote. It will allow us to develop new interdisciplinary momentum in areas that we are currently keen to grow (media and cultural studies approaches to environmental humanities; AI and the future of work; etc.). We are convinced that this institute will deliver significant infrastructural benefits that will sustain and grow our research environment.

## 2. People

Demographically the unit is comprised of 47 researching staff (45.1 FTE), of which almost exactly 60% identify as female. The unit currently has 14 professors, 3 readers, 10 senior lecturers, and 20 lecturers and research fellows. We started this REF period with 4 professors (two men, two women); we end the period with 14 professors; out of the 10 new professors 9 were internal promotions and 80% of the new professors are female. We have had 17 new research faculty appointments since 2017, 30% of these appointments have been women of colour. Nearly all members are on permanent contracts. In 2019 the unit decided to transfer all fixed-term contracts, some of which had been 'rolling' from year to year, to permanent contracts unless they were attached to a specific 'time-limited' funded project. We recognised that precarious working conditions were not conducive to quality research.

*Our recruitment and staffing strategy have the following aims:*

- To increase the diversity of the unit and to make it more representative of our multicultural actuality.
- To nurture a convivial and inclusive environment for flourishing research.
- To allow for the development of all faculty through transparency in promotion criteria, and by promoting with fairness and equality based on merit.
- To develop areas that have been identified for strategic growth.

During this REF period most appointments have been of early-to-mid career faculty. The strategic reasons for appointing at this level has been two-fold: we have been keen to develop emergent areas of research such as digital humanities and game design, where many of the best scholars are ECRs; to guarantee sustainability we need an even spread of levels (currently 30% of staff are professors). Our strategy of **career mentoring** through **annual appraisals** has meant that staff have clear and supported routes to promotion and haven't had to leave to progress their career. This has given us stability and good staff morale. Where staff have left it has been to pursue new ventures: Jordan to University College London (UCL) to head their programme in Arts and Science; Bassett to Cambridge to direct Cambridge Digital Humanities (both colleagues continue to be associated with the unit and have deepened our research networks).

### Staffing Strategy, Staff Recruitment, and Staff Development

We have added 20 FTE researchers to the unit enabling us to extend existing research energies, while also developing new trajectories. The recruitment of Brown, Callaghan, Chevalier, Cieplak, and Devereaux, for example, has consolidated a growing area of **creative research**. In the last ten years the unit has been growing in confidence as a research group that expands the potential of creative research. Similarly, recruiting Jordan, Kant and Chen has

added to our major interest in digital forms and digital networks but has also extended the reach of our work. Film studies, which has such an energetic research presence in the unit, has been strengthened by the employment of researchers working in the areas of teen film (Smith), urban representation (Webb), Chinese cinema (Robinson), and trauma and film poetics (Mroz). As well as building and consolidating our research capacities, we have been keen to reconfigure ourselves in response to new research energy. A central concern with **race, and racism** for Rashid, James, Cheema, Chen, Robinson and Mroz has been an important motivation for planning **decolonizing** initiatives for our research agendas (for instance in setting up the Stuart Hall Fellowship).

We work to encourage collegiality and a clear sense of a research trajectory from arrival. We recognise that the most pressing concerns, especially for ECRs, will be managing a new teaching load, and we give them support to also maintain a focus on research (ECRs have a 20% reduction in teaching for the first year; other new staff have a 10% reduction). All new staff are assigned a peer mentor from within the school to help them navigate their new environment. Induction always includes meeting the director of research (DRaKE) for a full research induction (explaining and detailing the unit's research ethos and its practices). We recognise, though, that inducting someone into a research culture is a *process*. This happens gradually or swiftly depending on the individual. The quickest way that new staff access the unit's research culture is by regularly attending the weekly research seminars, and the lively research culture it fosters.

Annually, all faculty will fill in a **Personal Research Plan (PRP)** which forms the basis of a meeting with the DRaKE. The PRP allows the member to discuss research plans for the next five years; to discuss how the unit can best support these plans (with funds, with research leave, etc.); to identify funding streams and potential impact; and to discuss whether additional research mentoring would be beneficial.

In 2018 the DRaKE held extensive discussions with a broad spectrum of **ECRs and new colleagues** to identify their research needs as a group. One of the outcomes of this process was a critique of top-down mentoring by senior colleagues. Many ECRs already had well-functioning **networks of peer-support** or had been seeking out advice from specific colleagues who they worked with and found to be sympathetic. A smaller group wanted specific research mentoring but to choose their mentors. Mentoring support was much more effective when it was self-generated. We learnt to be wary of trying to manufacture support cultures indiscriminately and at scale. Instead we have worked to seek out good practices that can be replicated (rather than scaled-up). For instance, several ECRs belong to closed social networking groups that provide collective support. It is effective because it is small and wasn't directed by a senior colleague. We see such practices as enormously beneficial and have encouraged other colleagues to replicate them. But we also offer much more targeted research mentoring where it is required and where it would be effective (and we plan this with the mentee).

We support members by ensuring that they have one clear day for research each week during term time and by providing them with a semester of **unit-funded research leave** after every six semesters of teaching and service. Between the annual PRPs and appraisals each colleague has a clear sense of career and research development. A tailored plan of development is designed that might include, for instance, a programme of leadership training offered by the university; a strategy of grant bidding over a period of years; and a set of manageable goals to achieve in the short and medium term. Each member is fully supported in developing grant bids and this is detailed in section 3.

### Post Graduate Researchers (PGR)

**The Doctoral School** co-ordinates the Researcher Development Programme, a comprehensive set of training activities for both postgraduate researchers and ECR staff. Sussex co-ordinated the successful bid by the **Consortium for the Humanities and the Arts South-East England (CHASE)** of seven institutions for an AHRC Doctoral Training Partnership (DTP) grant of £17m and has secured further funding for 2019-2023. This DTP grant, along with generous match-

funding from member institutions, enables the funding of some 375 doctoral studentships over five cohorts, and seeks to support the arts and humanities scholars of the future. As well as biannual cohort conferences, CHASE offers training in interdisciplinary methods and professional skills which are open to **all doctoral researchers**. It is administratively based in Sussex and the current director is a member of our unit (Lacey). Since 2014, we have hosted twelve CHASE scholarships in the unit, and our students have participated in a range of training events organised by the consortium. In addition to this, we have hosted three doctoral projects funded by the **Leverhulme Doctoral training programme**; four funded by **Sussex University's Chancellor's International Research Scholarship**; and one by the **China Scholarship Council/University of Sussex joint scholarship**.

Since 2014, we have maintained a healthy number of PGRs (with a small increase from 93 to 100 registered candidates) within the School, contributing to a diverse community of doctoral researchers in a diverse range of subjects. Many of these doctoral projects involve links with the media and creative industries, as well as engagement with external organisations, such as charities, galleries, performance organisations and media institutions. In this REF period we have had **67 PhD completions and 1 MPhil**.

PGRs are integrated into the unit's culture through research centre activities, by organising regular School-wide research-in-progress seminars and an annual **doctoral conference**, both funded by the School. They participate formally via representatives in the **School Research Committee**. PGR projects have also secured funding by the University's Researcher-Led Initiative Fund, which complements the training and development opportunities provided elsewhere in the university, by giving students the opportunity to organise their own training and public engagement activities. A recent example of the scheme was a 'community support' project to facilitate discussion surrounding wellness and mental health, and how to build a stronger sense of community within the doctoral research environment. PGRs also have opportunities for career development in online publishing: each year REFRAME, our open-access publishing platform, offers an editorial internship to a doctoral researcher.

Equal Opportunities criteria are central to both recruitment processes and operational support. Work on gender, sexuality and forms of embodied difference is strongly represented within doctoral research. The unit also has a dedicated student experience officer who works with PhD representatives on student welfare, and who worked with students to establish the unit's dedicated student-led peer mentoring scheme, **PhD Pals**.

All new supervisors receive training. Supervision meetings are recorded on the University VLE, providing a progress record and clear work plans. Annual progress review is by panel, with oversight from the **Director of Doctoral Studies**, and highlights progress, training, and resource needs. The School provides earmarked funding for conference attendance to PhD students, and there is an additional university-wide fund to support attendance of international conferences.

We firmly believe that fulfilling a commitment to EDI requires day-to-day conditions of openness and support to all, and we see all attempts to demystify authoritarian practices as hugely valuable. We encourage our doctoral students to champion new ways of working towards more inclusive practices. One example of this was the **Digital Blackness** conference organised by Fubara-Manuel which combined academic papers with contributions from digital activists and artists.

Another example was our graduate conference **Faking It 2019**. As part of the conference they ran workshops for 'live' peer-reviewing for their in-house journal **Excursions**. This was partly to reveal the hidden labour involved in academic work but was also a practical intervention in some of the most intimidating aspects of academic practices. In this they were developing **new peer-review practices** associated with 'affect theory' work, where peer-review is used as a way of mentoring and nurturing academic work.



We treat our PGRs as fledgling ECRs and we see it as part of our obligation to them to mentor them in terms of publication opportunities, teaching and postdoctoral research. Bull has taken a lead in this area and has established a **repository of successful book proposals**. Alongside this there is a **registry of faculty** who are happy to mentor newly post-PhD researchers to help them turn their theses into publishable books. Within our unit Bull has already helped six PGRs to secure book contracts. The unit's PGRs have gone on to publish with Methuen, Palgrave, Manchester, Routledge, Texas, Bloomsbury, and Oxford. Many of our PGRs pursue academic careers in this country and abroad. Westling, for instance, graduated in 2017, published her thesis in 2020 (*Immersion and Participation in Punchdrunk's Theatrical Worlds*), has participated as Co-I on two AHRC projects, and currently works at Bournemouth University. But increasingly PGRs are seeking careers outside HEIs: for instance, Tavernor, who graduated in 2018, edited *Global Humanitarianism and Media Culture* in 2019 and is currently the international co-ordinator for 'Side-by-Side: Faith Movement for Gender Justice'.

Once doctoral researchers have passed their degree, they are able to apply for **research associate** status for a period of three years. This is particularly important at a time where academic jobs are hard to obtain. It gives the applicant an academic email address and affiliation, and library access and encourages them to think strategically about their research. We currently have 17 research associates who are pursuing research projects in Portugal, Chile, etc. One recent research associate used the process to develop a pilot project in Portugal overseeing the housing of Syrian refugees on a university campus and has linked this to research developments at Sussex (Sussex achieved **University of Sanctuary** status in 2020).

### Supporting Equality Diversity and Inclusivity (EDI)

The unit has a fundamental commitment (both in terms of research and socially) to anti-racist, to feminist, and to LGBT+ and disability struggles. Unit members have been at the forefront of establishing university-wide LGBT+, BAME, Trans and non-binary and disability staff networks, as well as leading research in these areas. The university has enacted EDI priorities through **Inclusive Sussex** and by signing up to the **Race Equalities Charter**. Many of our members have protected characteristics and EDI concerns are a lived experience across the unit. Members have taken leading roles in EDI across the university: Devereaux is the academic lead for LGBT+ and Disability concerns; Rashid is part of the BAME Attainment gap group and is the Race Equality Director across MAH, with Kant as one of two deputies. We are becoming more diverse in relation to race (currently around 10% identify as BAME) but we want to do much more to increase this diversity, and recent recruitment has started the process of what had historically been an overwhelmingly white unit. The unit is committed to all forms of **decolonising** and a major part of this is to create a faculty that reflects this commitment in demographic terms.

During the REF period, we have been working towards **Athena SWAN** Bronze rating (achieved in October 2020). As part of this we have analysed records across REF2014 as well as REF2021 to identify any anomalies that might express bias against anyone with protected characteristics. We have clear evidence that, marginally, women are more strongly represented in REF audits than men, but it is a negligible difference. Athena SWAN has alerted us to the training and development resources, and training courses, events and programmes that are available to all staff at all career stages. Formal training is provided by HR, and while unconscious bias training is now mandatory, they provide a huge range of EDI resources that members are encouraged to access. We are looking to include EDI training and development as an essential aspect of the annual appraisal.

We are also engaged in supporting staff through **Aurora: Advance HE's leadership development initiative for women**. As a research unit, our one overriding concern is to develop a nurturing, supportive and sustaining environment. For instance, we have supported a **Women ECR Network** and a peer-to-peer **Women's Writing Group**. The unit has supported such initiatives by providing finances for **writing retreats** for these groups. Good research, we

firmly believe, is only produced in an environment where respect and conviviality are ubiquitous, where success and hard work is rewarded, and where collegiality is paramount.

Out of the Athena SWAN audit and questionnaire, grew conversations about our general working environment and about the lack of time we had for developing a friendly community across the entire staff. The outcome was the **Staff Wellbeing Action Group** (SWAG) which has so far resulted in communal bi-weekly lunches (which before the pandemic also included a lightly competitive bake-off element), wellness walks (with and without canine accompaniment) and various forms of convivial activities (e.g. book clubs). We also implemented an email policy to cut down the workday 'bleed': members only send and reply to work emails during the hours of 8am-6pm during the working week. These are the first steps in materialising some of the ethos of EDI strategies.

Many of our members have health issues and caring responsibilities that mean flexibility is key to creating an inclusive environment. **Flexible Sussex Handbook** has been crucial in helping us organise members' commitments in ways that are cognisant of their needs. The commitment to flexibility has allowed some members to move to part-time work and to organise their part-time work to suit other commitments both professional and personal (for instance, instead of working half the week across the year, members can plan to work for half the year). Maternity leave and extended absences due to health count as service and don't threaten research leave eligibility. We want to go much further here and enact a policy of research leave for members returning from maternity leave and long-term illness so that they can regain their research momentum.

In compiling our REF2021 submission we took EDI as a fundamental condition for judging our list of outputs. It was easy enough to make sure that our output selection wasn't biased towards men more than women. We were interested in the way that compiling a set of outputs might encourage a 'conservative' mindset, favouring traditional outputs and work by senior members. We set up a small committee to scrutinize the chosen outputs from the perspective of a more finely tuned response to the types of work that were being favoured and whether this was discriminatory to those with protected characteristics. The committee included representation from the EDI group.

All REF outputs have been looked at by internal and external assessors and the final selection has been audited by a School EDI group. The unit's REF leader undertook EDI training before starting the selection process. Members were invited to view the selections that have been made of their work and to examine the evaluation process and challenge it if they felt it was unjust.

### Beyond REF2021

We are building our new School with EDI priorities at its centre. We want to extend some of the informal mechanisms that this unit has developed (for instance; 'The Second Book Club', a group of early and mid-career researchers grappling with the 'difficult' second monograph) as well as cross-unit initiatives such as the LGBT+ support networks and the Women Professors group. We want to maintain the energies of these informal practices and provide them with more structured support. We are putting peer mentoring at the centre of our approach to research staff. We are proposing a **wrap-around mentoring system** as the basis for ensuring the quality of staff experience and research development.

By 'wrap around' we mean something agile and light and available across a career. We recognise the importance of sympathetic mentoring at the beginning of a career and this has tended to be where the energy has gone. We are planning a system where peer mentoring is available to everyone at any point. Where we think mentoring can be specifically beneficial, and where it is currently less visible is:

- For faculty after a period of heavy administrative service.
- For faculty (at any point in their career) during research leave, or during a research fellowship.

- For faculty after maternity leave; after family bereavements; after illness.
- For faculty facing writing/research blocks.

We want to make peer mentoring an ordinary collegiate part of our day-to-day life. We want to democratise it. Mentoring is often thought of as something senior faculty offer to more junior staff, but we think that a more horizontal approach can be very productive both for the mentor and the mentee. We plan to make mentoring training available to all and to tailor it to the specific needs of our unit. We will take advice from our EDI experts and from our Race Equalities directors on how to implement it.

### 3. Income, infrastructure, and facilities

As already mentioned, the unit has increased its external funding by 109%. This period has also seen a massive investment in research infrastructure through the **£3 million** investment in the **Sussex Humanities Lab** (see below). Research within the unit is supported by an energetic administrative infrastructure; by a dynamic set of facilities; and by financial and peer support. The unit 'grows' research and researchers carefully and methodically, but it is also sensitive to the needs of agile and responsive research. Research in the unit is *often* a collaborative venture; it is *always* a collegiate one.

#### Research Income and Infrastructure

The unit has access to a research budget which is overseen by the School's Director of Research and Knowledge Exchange and by the School Research Committee (SRC). This fund (£70,000 annually, the majority allocated to our unit) has been a crucial resource for researchers to attend conferences and to meet potential collaborators. In 2019, after extensive discussion, the SRC disseminated a **research budget ethos** that responded to the environmental impact of academic 'globe-trotting' while recognising the importance (particularly for ECRs) of presenting research at international conferences. We aim to reassert a set of values that can direct us into the future where climate change is a reality, but where we also want to support ECRs and contribute to the **decolonisation** of our field (which can involve travelling to the Global South, for instance). We are advising grant applicants to address environmental concerns when costing travel and planning conferences. We are advising the unit to shift priorities away from extensive travel (often for the sake of a 20-minute paper) and instead to base travel priorities in relation to ECRs and mid-career researchers' needs and in relation to decolonising agendas. We are also encouraging UK and European train travel even where it is more expensive than flying. We hope, as we start a new decade, that the unit will be part of an intervention and innovation in the way knowledge is exchanged within the academy and how knowledge travels around the planet.

**Life histories of research projects** will demonstrate how the unit operates. A review of the research plan of an early to mid-career unit member might find a researcher who had recently completed the monograph of their PhD and is in search of the next project. The yearly research review would then help them identify a possible project from a fledgling set of concerns and interests. They would then be encouraged to look at possible funding bodies. Seed-funding from the School would be available by contacting our School's Research and Enterprise Co-ordinator. During the process of scoping-out the research potential of the project a meeting would be set up with our Research Development Officer (the unit has a dedicated RDO [Bowyer]) who would help them identify the right funding scheme, taking into account the developed state of the project and the career profile of the researcher. In preparing the bid the researcher would be supported by the RDO, by the finance office (to prepare costings) and by the University's Research Impact Officer (Blackadder). They would be required to identify somebody who would informally peer-review the proposal as it was being developed (this could be a mentor, or a colleague researching the same field, or the DRaKE). They could also use the collective critical imagination of one of the research centres who regularly run bid-review workshops. When the bid is submitted it is then formally reviewed for quality assurance in grant applications.

An example of how a project might grow can be seen in Spinelli's work on podcasting, and the way he has developed podcasting practice as a tool for supporting teenagers with mental health concerns. In 2015 Spinelli successfully applied for £9,960 from the BA Small grant scheme ('**Podcasting: the articulation of a new audio format**'). The following year he applied to the Arts Council of England (ACE) for £16,500 to develop this research '**For your ears only: exploring the creative potential of podcasting**'. This application was rejected. The following year Spinelli reworked the proposal and applied to ACE again. This time he was successful with a grant of £15,000. In 2018 he was ready to prepare a larger project developing a series of podcasts and co-creating them with a group of young people. Again, this application was successful, and ACE awarded him £81,698 for a project titled '**ReZillience**'. Spinelli's work successfully intervened in debates about the digital delivery of sound media, but it also ended up by innovatively generating new podcasting formats for a new audience. Throughout this entire process an intricate network of support has been at work.

The resilience that Spinelli's research seeks to engender for his young producers and listeners is required in the context of funding. In this the unit supports researchers when they are unsuccessful as well as when they are successful. The ability to reimagine projects in the face of rejection (and when some grant schemes only have a 6% success rate this will be inevitable) is a practice that we foster in the unit. Mroz's Mid-Career British Academy fellowship (**Holocaust Legacies in Polish Visual Culture**, £119,162) was initially unsuccessful when it was submitted in 2018 but was given the option of re-submitting. The following year Mroz successfully developed the bid with the help of the RDO and the DRaKE and a supportive autopsy of the previous bid. The development of projects beyond their first award is something we have also been developing within the unit. Krell's **Digital Ghost Hunt** went through an extension process through the AHRC. The initial digital performance which was a collaboration with the Battersea Arts Centre as well as another university and began with £24,940 but was extended for impact and engagement with a further £16,423.

Strategic bid applications have allowed the unit to consolidate one of its most evident strengths in exploring and innovating forms of documentary and documentation. Thynne's collaboration with scholars from UEA and LSE and with the BFI resulted in a successful AHRC grant (£412,786) for a research documentary about the first woman documentarian **Jill Craigie: Film Pioneer**, while Jolly and her team have been using archival documents to pursue the **Business of women's words: Purpose and profit in feminist publishing** (Leverhulme Trust £383,248) – a project that investigates feminist entrepreneurialism. We are interested in exploring how activism can be documented, and how documentation can be a form of activism. An important aspect of Ruiz's Leverhulme Research Fellowship (**Remembering and Forgetting; Media, Memory, Activism** £54,807) was the use of one of the unit's important resources, the Mass-Observation Archive and Project, which allowed her to generate exceptional qualitative data, in this case about memories of protests. Such work crosses over into the digital humanities in Alisa Lebow's Leverhulme Research Fellowship (**Filming revolution**, £44,773) where she explored creative filmic strategies deployed in the revolutionary wave of the early 2010s in the Middle East.

A key policy that has been adopted by the School is to return 10% of the indirect costs of grants as an **incentive** to the PI (to be spent on materials related in some way to research). The material consequences of this has, for instance, allowed Highmore to fund the permission costs (roughly £7,000) for the images in his book **The Art of Brutalism**.

### Sussex Humanities Lab (SHL)

**The SHL** was established in 2015 by key unit members Bassett and Berry as a research-intensive centre for digitally oriented, interdisciplinary research. It encapsulates our desire to make the humanities fit for purpose in a digital age. The SHL not only allows the unit to produce well-resourced, competitive bids from funding bodies, it also supplies the expertise to produce highly complex and convincing data management plans and technical overviews for projects where this is a central aspect of the grant. (AHRC reviewers recently stated the technical



management plan for a SHL-flagged Leadership Fellow application was the best that they had seen.)

The SHL has been instrumental in developing successful bids for the unit. For instance, Berry's project **Reassembling the University: The Idea of a University in a Digital Age** (funded by the British Academy's Mid-Career Fellowship Scheme £114,828) benefitted enormously from support from the SHL as well as from the School's research leave scheme that allowed him to take up a fellowship at CRASSH at the University of Cambridge in preparing his application. Both Fazi and Roberts started out as research fellows within the SHL, before becoming faculty members of the unit (a succession pathway that the SHL implements). Roberts's **Automation Anxiety Network** grant (AHRC £22,312), for instance, connected the unit and the SHL with other scholars in the UK and abroad and produced a critical intervention in debates about the future of computational automation. Similarly, Jordan embedded his European Union grant (**HACKIT: Hacking your way to IT expertise**: £190,443) at the centre of the SHL orbit, with a full-time three-year postdoctoral researcher.

The way that the SHL functions as a nurturing environment for research development *in tandem with* other research infrastructures that support the unit is most clearly seen in Hendy, Jolly and Webb's **BBC Connected Histories** (an AHRC grant of £787,311). The grant for this ambitious project was initially funded by an internal, university-wide **Research Development Fund** for 'The BBC Centenary History Project', 2014 (£21,549). This fund gave Hendy the research support to launch a successful bid. But it was by taking the bid to the SHL, and developing the digital aspect of the bid, that shaped the final project which resulted in its ultimate success. And here the SHL isn't a 'service provider', but a powerful intellectual forum that allowed Hendy *et al.* to place the digital (as an archival and as a disseminating form) at the intellectual heart of the project.

### Beyond REF2021

Currently the unit's success rate with grants is around 14% and we aim to increase this to 20%. One of the reasons for coming together as a combined School (MAH) was the extraordinary resources that a much larger school could offer. Across MAH we have had grant success (within the last five years) from the following providers: Arts Council England (3); AHRC (23); British Academy (13); British Council (2); ESRC (2); European Union (4); Google (1); Irish Research Council (1); Leverhulme Trust (16); Paul Mellon Centre (3); and Royal Society (1). We think that this group experience is a vital resource for increasing grant success. Building on our established peer-reviewing practices we have begun to design a **Peer Review College (PRC)** within MAH that will shift the emphasis from a subject-focused process to one that will combine subject expertise with peer experiences of specific providers (through grant success or through experience of grant reviewing). This more rigorous and supportive process of peer-review is designed to respond to a research environment where the emphasis is on ambitious, interdisciplinary, and institutional research where 'good management' is often a central concern. While there is not space to fully detail the mechanisms of this PRC process, it is worth noting the following highlights:

- Peer reviewing will be **anonymous** (to eradicate unconscious bias) and **strenuous** (it will mirror the processes that a UKRI or charity will employ in judging applications).
- To ensure the process is as supportive as possible where vulnerabilities are perceived, PRC colleagues will suggest **possible solutions**.
- For large complex applications, PRC **support teams** will be convened early in the process of development.
- All researchers within the unit will have access to targeted **research mentoring** to identify relevant providers and to support them in bid development.
- Unsuccessful bids will undergo a supportive **autopsy** to see how they could be creatively reimaged.

While we have already been employing many of these processes the larger scale that MAH provides will allow us to be more systematic and more supportive.

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

The unit's research field is part of an **ongoing conversation** amongst peers and amongst civil society at large. Our strategy for **sustaining, directing and animating** that conversation requires a set of commitments: to the upkeep of **disciplinary and cross-disciplinary infrastructures**; to the initiating and growing of **collaborative networks**; and to **enriching and widening the scope of the conversation** by opening it up to new discussants and new priorities. To this end we aim to innovate and intervene at all scales: from collaborating with local organisations to shaping disciplinary fields at a global scale.

##### Regional

Our local collaborations are tied to our belief in our civic mission. The University of Sussex was one of the first wave of UK universities to pledge commitment to local communities through the **Civic University Agreement**. For our unit this has meant continuing and developing our work within the environs of Brighton and East Sussex and expanding the audiences for our research. Our relationship with Brighton international film festival **Cine-city** has been growing since 2016, through the co-curation of screenings, the inclusion of staff films in the festival, post-screening discussions, and masterclasses. Lewes (our nearest town) opened a three-screen independent community cinema in 2017 called **the Depot**. In 2018 we began what will be a long-term relationship that will allow us to have a regular regional audience to go alongside our academic audiences and national and international public talks. Austin, as part of his research around refugees and film, participated in **Refugee Week** screenings. Bull, with funding from Lewes Council, organised the **Sensing World War** event in November 2018. In May 2019 as part of our Hayao Miyazaki Symposium, the Depot hosted the keynote speech **Miyazaki's Worlds of Women: Feminism in the Films and Working Practices of Studio Ghibli**. These symposia on a named filmmaker are part of the unit's annual calendar of events, and it has been a significant development to make them public through the Depot.

##### National

Our commitment to supporting national infrastructure, particularly the **UKRI**, is demonstrated by our service to the **AHRC's** peer review college: during this REF cycle **seven** members have served with the college. We have also been active in specific areas of UKRI: Highmore for the **Global Challenge Research Fund**; Fazi for the **Artificial Intelligence Review Group**; Krell for **UK Climate Resilience** call and more recently for the **AHRC-COVID-19** peer review group. Callaghan has served as a reviewer for the AHRC's **Research in Film Awards** and as Chair of the **Practice network** of our subject association **MeCCSA**. Unit members also regularly contribute to reviewing for the EPSRC and ESRC as well as charity funders. (Our service to national research infrastructures outside the UK [from Austria to Australia] is evidence of the global reach of our research, and our recognition that other national infrastructures are crucial to sustaining our field.)

Unit members are encouraged to design research projects in tandem with other HEIs and non-HEIs, and this is facilitated by the Research and Enterprise offices and by the unit's research funds which can be used to support research development meetings and workshops. Recent projects have brought the unit together with the University of **Cambridge** and the **British Library** (Jolly); **Newcastle** University and the Universities of **Glasgow** and **East Anglia** (Ruiz); **King's College London**, the **Battersea Arts Centre**, and the **KIT Theatre Company** (Krell)

The unit is deeply engaged in the **national conversation** and committed to public engagement around contemporary issues of cultural politics, particularly around race issues, and issues of journalism. At times this continues our contribution to local culture: Gaber, for instance, has engaged systematically with various bodies within Brighton (the Brighton Fabians, Brighton

Labour Party) to share his ongoing research concerning the media's influence on the shape of political consciousness within the South East of England. The national scale of our collaborations is concisely seen by naming some of our most important partnerships: the **BBC**, the **British Library** (a long-standing collaboration on feminist history), the **British Film Institute**. The unit's desire to innovate and intervene within a national conversation is pronounced in our relationship with the **BBC**. The important factor here is the way that the unit uses media history to tell stories of the BBC that refuse hagiography, and instead set out to remap the cultural and political geography of Britain. In this way Webb's 2015 book *London Calling: Britain, the BBC and the Cold War* ('Longman-History Today Book of the Year') shows a BBC casting a web of soft power into the world. Building on this work and in collaboration with Hendy's sustained research, their AHRC project 'BBC Connected Histories' and the website they conceived and curate, *100 Voices that Made the BBC*, intervenes to remap Britain as a post-imperial island, as a politically fraught country, and as a country where the 'new' voices of the twentieth century (women, the working class, LGBT+ communities, and new commonwealth arrivals and their descendants) struggle to make themselves heard and seen. Hendy also briefed BBC executives in the Spring of 2020 to explain how wartime crisis communication could inform news reporting in the wake of Covid-19.

On a different national scale Ruiz's AHRC collaboration with a skateboarding film collective (the **Brazenbunch**) alongside inter-university scholars may seem much more spatially contained ('You can't move history: Engaging youth in cultural heritage', one of our ICS). It focuses on the contested site of the Undercroft passageway, part of the **Southbank Centre** in London, and the plans the Centre had to develop the Undercroft as a site for retail. In collaboration with the **Heritage Lottery Fund's** Young Roots programme Ruiz's team worked with the skateboarders on a campaign that recast the Undercroft as a site of 'intangible heritage' and stymied the decision to turn it into a shopping complex. While this is a project materially connected to a few hundred square feet of paving slabs and concrete its reach has been much wider, altering the very terms on which the young might engage with national history in the UK.

### International

The international scale of our contributions and collaborations, and the way that this has impacted on the unit's field can be most clearly seen in two project clusters. In the **Filmmaking Research Network** PI Callaghan started by bringing together filmmaking researchers from the UK and Australia (including Brown, Goycoolea, Grant, and Thynne from this unit), but in the end produced a network that had over 100 members from more than 40 institutions spread across the globe. The Network set out to develop understanding and consolidate the field of filmmaking research by sharing best practice internationally and developing key resources (such as a register of research films and doctoral projects). In this way the project not only worked internationally to draw a robust identity for filmmaking research, it established a thriving field for future filmmaking research.

The second cluster of projects that show how our unit collaborates on an international scale is the very different work of Cieplak, Maltby and Garber in countries in Africa. Working in **Rwanda**, Cieplak's research film *The Faces we Lost* (2017) investigates the 1994 genocide by looking at the way that the mass deaths (anonymised through the brutality of their murder) are memorialised using vernacular photographs such as passport or wedding photographs. Cieplak's film became an important resource for Rwandans to talk about their grief and their collective trauma. Gaber's work also establishes media resources on that massive continent (in **Nigeria, Tanzania, Rwanda**), and in countries such as **Afghanistan and Pakistan**. Through aid organizations and government (**USAID, UNESCO, the Foreign Office Consultative Group**) Gaber supplies media training in relation to election preparations and other political forums. Gaber is also an expert advisor to the UK Government's National Committee for the Safety of Journalists and an expert consultant to the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (which provides worldwide electoral assistance). If Cieplak's work looks 'back' with memorialisation, and Gaber's work looks at the media present, both look forward to a different media future for their fields and for their (inter)national contexts.

Some of the most important work we do in sustaining the international vitality of our field is through our commitment to **journal editing** and to peer-reviewed **publishing**. We have unit members on the editorial boards of 9 cultural studies journals, 7 media journals, 5 film journals, 3 digital culture journals and various other media practice and sensory culture journals. Feminism is a core value and commitment, and this can be seen in ***Feminist Encounters***, which Munt founded in 2016 and of which she is chief editor. Farrimond plays a key role for ***Feminist Theory*** as reviews editor.

Open Access priorities are key to establishing a thriving and sustainable research culture. The unit, of course, boasts its own platform of Open Access publications (**REFRAME**, see section 1), but Open Access has a much larger role to play in the unit's collaborations and contributions. Berry and Fazi, for instance, are both active on the editorial board of the open access

***Computational Culture: A Journal of Software Studies***, and Highmore and Munt are both on the editorial board of the open access ***Journal of Cultural Analysis and Social Change***. While all these journals have an international scope, members of the unit are also involved in more explicit attempts at internationalising our field as can be seen in Lacey's involvement in the ***International Journal of Cultural Studies*** and Jordan's in ***Global Media and China***.

During this REF cycle the unit has delivered over **200 keynote presentations** at conferences and symposia across the globe. Our geographical profile follows a commitment to planned internationalism for shaping research agendas in the field. Thus, when Bassett gave the keynote at the Digital Humanities in the Nordic Countries Conference in 2018, she was building on research that had been developed within SHL in collaboration with others in the unit (Berry, Fazi, Roberts, etc.), as well as work undertaken in Finland, where she had previously held the prestigious **Helsingin Sanomat Foundation Fellowship** at the Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies (2014-2016). This worked to build relationships across Nordic and Scandinavian countries and to help set international research priorities for Digital Humanities. In a similar way, when Bull provided the keynote to the **Sound in Motion** conference at the Center for Global Studies at the University of Bern in 2019, he was consolidating the unit's commitment to sound studies, shared with other members (Lacey and James) and the extensive capacity-building work that he has undertaken in the last decade: as book series editor of *Study of Sound* (Bloomsbury), as founding editor of *The Senses and Society Journal* and *The Sound Studies Journal*, as well as founding member of the European Sound Studies Association.

This strategic use of keynote presentations also includes our commitments to **decolonising academia**. While the unit has systematically cut back on carbon emissions (before the pandemic) it is still particularly keen to connect with countries outside of the Global North. An example of this is our growing relationship with **India** and the **subcontinent** in general; our involvement in journalism and politics in parts of **Africa**; and our connections to the **Middle East**. Thus, when Lebow gave a keynote presentation for the 2014 Visible Evidence conference in **New Delhi** (the first time this conference had travelled to Asia) she wasn't simply enlarging the disseminating reach of her documentary research; she was taking a project that was being produced in collaboration with radical documentary makers across Egypt, Turkey, and Syria and putting it in the context of the Global South.

The international reach of the unit is demonstrated by the way our work has been translated into Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, Korean as well as a host of European languages, and the fact that unit members have examined doctoral theses in countries from Australia to South Africa.

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In our REF submission in 2008 we stated that the unit's intention was to 'intervene to shape fields of media, new media, cultural studies and film' (and now journalism). Twelve years later this is still true. Today we are producing work that intervenes, while also sustaining those fields through substantial innovations that speak to our academic colleagues and to a wider world. What unites all our work is our determined ability to rescue 'future hopes' from the difficult and unpropitious circumstances of our contemporary world.