

Institution: Solent University
Unit of Assessment: 34 (Communication, Cultural and Media Studies, Library and Information Management)
<p>1. Unit context and structure, research and impact strategy</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Solent's 2015-20 strategy established research as a core pillar of the University's ambition, extending and enhancing its commitment to being research-informed and research active. Since 2015, the evolution of the Research Office, researcher development programme and increased strategic appointment of postdoctoral researchers has provided a foundation to developments within the UoA. The target-specific research sub-strategy provided the strategic framework and encouraged development of the research environment underpinning this Unit of Assessment (UoA) submission (see paragraph 14 of the institutional level environment statement). One of the key objectives for the University was 'to improve our performance in the next REF and enhance our position in the league tables'. This informed the research sub-strategy and consequently plans within this UoA submission to 'focus on the translation of knowledge into societal [...] benefit'. 2. Research in this Unit of Assessment has been driven by the development of an overarching theme that focuses on cultural politics and production, encompassing a pool of 18 staff with significant responsibility for research in the School of Media Arts & Technology and the School of Art, Design and Fashion. <p>Present Strategy</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. The cross-School approach followed a strategy harnessing a programme of staff development, a review of external stakeholder engagement and School-based financial support for networking, conferencing and publications. While encompassing different approaches across the Schools, the following 10-point strategy informed the aim and intent in planning for this UoA: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Develop critical mass for an improved REF submission. For example, postdoctoral researchers (Benjamin; Spence; Fathallah) were recruited to support research culture and community. They have been closely involved in the development of cross-disciplinary and cross-institutional research groups, including the Culture, Media, Place Research Group. Development of critical mass has also been supported via the introduction of academic career pathways which were used to focus research aims in ongoing appraisals. Through the research pathway, the UoA was able to evaluate and establish integrated, dedicated objectives on research activity focussing on subjects in support of the UoA, for example: screen culture and politics, and cultural production, and to support related impact case study work. (ii) Utilise newly appointed Strategic Leads in School research planning. Strategically focussed annual research plans supporting impact activity and staff development were introduced in the period to support the UoA and presented to the Research & Knowledge Exchange Committee. These plans targeted support for Strategic Lead-approved staff development funding to develop key areas. For example, Aldridge's ongoing archival work via the Agatha Christie estate and subsequent 'pathways to impact' activities were financially supported, culminating in the monograph and numerous public-facing events and appearances to share his findings. (iii) Develop collaborative relationships with cultural organisations in the city. The Solent Showcase Gallery significantly features in the city's community activity and reach and has featured in research plans for the UoA. The Gallery's work extends through the city's Cultural Development Trust and memberships/collaborations with organisations ranging from the SCEP (Southampton Cultural Education Partnership) to Go! Southampton, fostering environments of co-creation and co-production. Similarly, a long-

- standing relationship with regional film education charity City Eye has enabled outputs to be presented to a public audience in a range of venues across the city.
- (iv) **Assess current stakeholder, civic and public engagement events for potential research dissemination and impact activity.** This identified some long-standing opportunities used for research dissemination (Southampton Film Week) as well as bid development (Black Heritage Association; Positive Message Ltd).
 - (v) **Invest in impact-facing case studies and suitable research outputs.** Research Office programmes for support and investment in systems - including PURE and PIVOT, supported staff development and knowledge around funding relating to the UoA. This culminated in the development of impact case study work (Kerr and Peberdy; Aldridge) and paved the way for larger ongoing developments in the current City of Culture bid.
 - (vi) **Develop research potential and outputs for creative practice in film, culture and the arts.** The focus on developing cultural practice has led to the production of exhibitions (Moreton), a documentary film (Alamouti) and an Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) shortlisted essay film (McSweeney). The University's commitment to UoA34 continues in the next iteration of the research strategy which provides scope for further integration of theory/practice. The Strategic Lead for Media Arts and Technology, with a Media Production colleague, submitted a successful proposal to host the next Meccsa Practice Symposium on research impact (now scheduled for July 2021 due to the pandemic).
 - (vii) **Produce regular School-wide updates on research opportunities and support.** School-based Research Advisory Groups were established to support opportunities for development relating to the UoA and tethered to the School Research Plan developed by the Strategic Leads.
 - (viii) **Integrate research-facing performance and development objectives in staff appraisals.** The Strategic Leads introduced the research and Scholarly Activity objective into the annual appraisal scheme which could range from doctoral research completion to the submission of research findings to peer reviewed journals.
 - (ix) **Ensure staff-space for research specialisms in curriculum framework and curriculum content.** Research informed teaching is embedded in course and curriculum development to ensure research specialisms inform module options (McSweeney; Kerr; Alamouti; Slevin).
 - (x) **Support and guidance for early career researchers and postgraduate research students.** A culture of support and mentoring within the research community supported early career researchers (ECRs) and doctoral students in their development and established a growing strength in media cultures and practices. These emerged in cross-discipline research groups including the Culture, Media, Place Group referred to above, the [Work, Inequalities and Lifecourse Group](#) and the [Realist Evaluation Research Group](#).

Future Strategy

4. UoA34 is one of the University's strongest research areas and consequently a key element in University REF planning informed by i) supportive relationships with external stakeholders, ii) a strong creative-critical approach to exploring cultural politics and production and iii) a commitment to social and cultural equality and diversity. This research cycle has clearly established the groundwork for further future strategic aims relating to this Unit of Assessment. The University's new [Future Ready Strategy 2020-2025](#) identifies 'research impact' as one of five university-wide priorities. Following the direction of the newly appointed Pro Vice Chancellor for Research and Knowledge Exchange's enabling strategy, the ongoing strategic direction for this UoA is built around growing the number of research grant applications and awards, support for further affiliations to related learned organisations, and increased research outputs and impact case studies. UoA34 is already identified for a future submission drawing on research opportunities relating to Southampton's City of Culture bid, while building on research consultancy with cultural organisations and impact-driven work aligned to knowledge exchange programmes. We are developing a newly created research centre for screen cultures and targeting UoA34 activity through the introduction of staff-centred Individual Research and Knowledge Exchange plans. This will identify and prioritise research

project development, activity and funding support, and draw on a newly appointed UoA Lead to coordinate projects and outputs designed to work with and impact the creative and cultural industries.

2. People

5. The staffing strategy to enhance research has been supported by adopting several coordinated and parallel strands working to achieve the summary of aims noted above. The overall submission has increased from the six staff returned in 2014 to 18 in the current REF exercise, representing growth of the UoA. Attention has been given at the point of recruitment to research interests, specialisms, publications and practice to build critical mass. This has subsequently been supported by research-focussed staff initiatives. These include:

School-based initiatives:

- The Performance and Development Review (PDR) annual appraisal scheme – introduced in this current REF cycle – and deployed to identify subject-specific research objectives at School-level in support of the UoA.
- Career Pathways that publish attainment indicators for all grades/levels of staff have been used and followed to identify staff with significant responsibility for research.
- Academic Workload Planning – introduced during this REF cycle with specific allocated time for research and additional allocations to support development during this cycle (McSweeney; Peberdy; Moreton; Slevin).
- Using the Solent University Code of Practice for REF 2021 – introducing an annual 300hrs allocation for staff on the research pathway with significant responsibility for research that is impact driven and peer reviewed.

Research Office support

- The University's Researcher Development Programme demonstrably developed and supported colleagues in this UoA, whether via attendance to interactive workshops (Slevin; Joy; Spence), or in running workshops on, for example, publishing, networking and research and practice (Kerr; McSweeney, Foster).
- Financial assistance via the Research, Innovation and Knowledge Exchange Awards (RIKE) has been targeted and consistent in its support for this UoA (Peberdy; Moreton; Aldridge; Loscialpo).
- The Mentoring Scheme, which secured 34 signatories in the first call.
- The Annual Conference as forum for key stakeholders, project development and HE research sector representatives.

School-level strategy

- The creation of newly appointed Strategic Leads to produce and deliver on annual School research plans for staff development and research growth.
- The appointment of Doctoral Coordinators to build supervisory capacity and enhance the PGR community.
- The use of School budget to support targeted staff development funds for conferences.
- The School-wide audit to identify activity and then inform relevant Department Heads on support and PDR objective setting.

ECR development

6. The creation of the Culture, Media and Place research group (see above) is run by a research fellow (Adie) and postdoctoral researcher (Spence). This cross-disciplinary example of one of Solent's research groups strengthened research culture, reputation and profile around the UoA through a programme of external speakers discussing project development, advice and support for quality outputs and impact.

7. The ECRs and postdoctoral researchers work across the Schools, supported by Strategic Leads and research colleagues, collectively achieving success in publishing in a range of high impact journals (*Cultural Trends*, *The Journal of Arts Management*, *Transnational Cinemas*) and producing monographs (Joy, Slevin, McSweeney, Aldridge). Our postdoctoral researchers have made further contributions to ongoing policy debates in public-facing fora ranging from *The Conversation* to submissions to parliamentary sub-committees such as a cultural district initiative in Jamaica (Spence), policing facial recognition in Scotland (Benjamin) and tackling prosperity via global media cultures to a House of Lords Select Committee in the UK (McSweeney).
8. International collaboration during this cycle, some of which is ongoing, has extended to China, Jamaica, Italy, Belgium, Sweden and the U.S. Research links have been established to the Black Cultural Archives and United Nations' SPIDER Initiative and Jamaica's foreign cultural district initiative (Spence).

Promotion of Equality and Diversity

9. The UoA overall reflects the equality and diversity (E&D) profile of the University's submission as a whole (see paragraphs 32 and 33 of the institutional level statement), except in relation to gender, where the representation of women in the submission is 27%, which is below the institutional average. Activities to promote equality and diversity have included:
 - The appointment of postdoctoral researchers in support of the UoA, which promoted diversity in recruitment with active interventions at the point of advertising, encouraging applications from the BAME community and people from marginal identities.
 - The UoA works to actively identify stakeholders with a track record of community and cultural engagement informed by E&D, for example Southampton's City Eye. This also fostered a research culture that requires integrity to be informed by inclusivity.
 - Visiting speaker programmes specifically invited BAME and LGBTQ+ guests from the creative industries and areas of cultural production and practice.
 - Safe, open and inclusive forums were provided for staff to support research strategy planning across the Schools.
 - Attention to research activity that supports the mainstreaming of equality and diversity informed a number of UoA outputs, thus informing the research culture for this UoA.
 - Staff are aware of conduct and disciplinary procedures mitigating against prejudice and inequalities.

PGR completions and development

10. Within the Unit there have been two doctoral completions during the REF period. The recruitment to the doctoral programme during the review period has been increasing, with 25 currently registered doctoral students aligned to the UoA. The planned introduction of an institutional bursary scheme will drive further recruitment and ensure the sustainability of this growth. Doctoral students are supported by the Researcher Development Programme and further training provided through the University of East Anglia virtual online training, to which the University subscribes.

3. Income, infrastructure and facilities

11. The University has invested c.£6 million into the reconfiguration and development of its John Millais Building. The redevelopment has included refitting of screening facilities, and the building hosts the Media Academy, which provides a hub for research in creative and critical research and is central to the development of the Unit at Solent.
12. The focus on development of early career researchers is reflected in the profile of research income generation within the UoA. In total, £26,000 of research income was reported to HESA in the period. However, this is underpinned by significant work to enable a developmental culture shift towards embedding bidding activity as part of

academic career development within both the Schools of Art, Design and Fashion (SADF) and Media Arts and Technology (SMAT).

13. A bid development culture has been fostered across all academic staff in the Schools, and academics have been encouraged to engage with the Research Office bid support training and guidance. This important experiential career development has resulted in 22 external research and innovation bids across all academics within the Schools, with 11 successfully receiving an award (see below). Underpinning this growth in bid culture, the Schools encouraged engagement with the University's internal fund for pump-priming and seed funding projects with potential for external bid development. This fund (RIKE) supports both research and innovation. Seven academics across the two Schools were successful in the RIKE competition: Reynolds, 'Digital Archives', Chamberlain, 'ANTS', Daniel 'Training Programmes for Craftspeople', Khasreen 'Life-cycle Carbon Assessment', Pitts '3D Body Scans & CG Characters', Benjamin 'Speculative City', McSweeney 'Battleground'. In addition, Benjamin bid for and won an award from the University's Research England QR allocation for Policy through Evidence ('The Ins and Outs of Privacy'). Four of the academics supported in this way went on to develop external bids.
14. Across the UoA, external bids have included a number of collaborative applications with UK and international partners, providing researchers with important experience and growing confidence in bid development. These included:
 - Creative Europe Culture Cooperation Project for 'Transnational Creative Exchange' (Lloyd) £88,964
 - Interreg 2 Seas 'VIVID' (Lloyd) £151,691
 - AWZ GMBH 'Active Comfort' and 'Interpack' (Mann & Lloyd) £8467 / £17,454
 - Five Arts Council England awards:
 - 'Museum University Partnership Initiative' (Reynolds) £6,550
 - 'Smart Murals' (Reynolds) £5,217
 - A Network Support Grant (Reynolds) £1,500
 - 'Making Out' (Lannin & Maple) £8,837
 - 'Stand Together' (Ross & Maple) £15,000
 - AHRC/British Academy/University of London 'Being Human – Let's Get Lost' (Loscialpo) £1,000
 - 'UX, UI and Digital Marketing' consultancy (Al-Husban), £14,000
 - Two awards from the Southampton Cultural Development Trust
 - 'Music Creatives' (Anderton & Martin) £2,000
 - 'Music Audiences' (Anderton & Martin) £2,000
15. While unsuccessful, other bids to the Arts Council, AHRC, EPSRC, the British Council, and Horizon2020 represent the step change in the approach to academic career development and burgeoning confidence in bidding, which has in turn influenced the growth of the UoA and research pathway staff.
16. The majority of the successful bidding has been in the innovation space and knowledge exchange space in this period, and this reflects the focus on foundational activity to support emerging researchers and early career researchers. A further two bids have been developed and submitted since the beginning of 2021 (AHRC, Foster and Future Leaders Fellowship, Ito).
17. Further developmental engagement is planned to foster the continuing growth of a research bidding culture to enable an increase from the six academics on the research pathway who have currently engaged in the above bidding activity. The goal of the UoA is that all researchers on the pathway will have engaged in bid activity by 2027.

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

18. Collaborations and networks have underpinned both the research outputs and impact case studies for the UoA. The culture of public engagement and civic responsibility regarding dissemination and reach has informed the research base regionally and internationally. As noted, city-facing partnerships with our gallery, arts, cultural and music-based organisations, as well as charities and support groups, have extended our beneficiaries significantly since 2014. Close relationships with the Cultural Development Trust have linked researchers to audiences, as well as current and future stakeholders, which is now manifested in emerging City of Culture projects and partnerships.
19. There are clear research-informed collaborations with the City Eye, The Consent Academy and Pan Eros Foundation (Seattle, US), the UK Production Guild (film culture) and Modern Films supporting the Screening Sex charter work. The relationship with the Agatha Christie's estate continues with Aldridge's next project, and The Black Heritage Association continues to work with Spence. Cultural research activity continues with the Southampton Cultural Education Partnership and a range of stakeholders invested in the City of Culture bid.
20. Creative practice has seen partnerships with organisations supporting exhibition work such as Chicago's Neubauer Collegium (Moreton) and media outlets including Al Jazeera and Channel Four (Alamouti). These ambitions of reach with stakeholders and beneficiaries is equally reflected in the postdoctoral successes contributing to parliamentary subcommittees, cultural initiatives with the Jamaican government, policing/surveillance in Scotland and articles published in The Conversation.
21. Academic stakeholders are evidenced in the creation of the Screening Sex SIG - an approved scholarly interest group for the British Association of Film, Television and Screen Studies (BAFTSS), as well as symposia hosting for Media, Communication and Cultural Studies Association (MECCSA) and leading their Media Practice network event for 2020 (deferred to 2021) – itself focussed on research impact for 2027.

Summary

22. This UoA was central to the REF submission by the University in 2014, and this submission represents continued investment in growing the UoA at Solent. At the heart of the development over the past seven years has been the identification of the Cultural Politics and Production theme, enabling targeted growth in the areas of film and of culture in the arts. The UoA has enhanced the support for career development of research and researchers, building from a small base to develop a positive research culture for early career researchers and doctoral students, enabling the growth of research groups and fostering external collaborative relationships and building of strong networks. This is reflected in the threefold increase in the staff submitted within the UoA.