

<b>Institution: University of Chester</b>
<b>Unit of Assessment: English Language and Literature</b>
<b>1. Unit context and structure, research and impact strategy</b>

Research in this unit is built on **English Literature; English Language; and Creative Writing**. This work encompasses interests in literary criticism from the Renaissance to the present; literary and cultural theory; the production of original creative work (including flash fiction; poetry; prose-poems; creative non-fiction; and novels); gender studies; disability studies; popular cultures; world literatures in English; translation; history of the English language; stylistics; discourse analysis; corpus linguistics; sociophonetics; sociolinguistics; and typology. The present submission comprises 20 researchers across two campuses in Chester and Shrewsbury (19.6 FTE); among these are 3 Professors (2 female); 3 Associate Professors (2 female); and 6 early-career researchers (3 female), with an overall 10:10 gender balance in the unit.

During the review period the unit developed its existing strengths in nineteenth-century studies and creative writing, and augmented the linguistics research team. It also invested in new areas related to the University's Research Strategy, particularly the commitment 'to advance local and global agendas in relation to inclusion, equality, diversity and human rights' (**REF5a**). This new research includes interventions in gender studies (encompassing queer theory, political discourse, (dis)ability, and women's writing); and popular culture (including children's and LGBTQIA+ YA fiction; comics; and linguistic studies of popular music). The unit's research specialisms are to varying degrees interdisciplinary, with distinct groups of researchers working in informal teams. Our reputation is built on these areas of specialism, attracting PGRs to the Department and forming the basis of the unit's public engagement activities. Nevertheless, we value diversity in research: individuals pursue interests in other fields, including the literature of South Africa and Ireland and early modern, modernist and contemporary literature.

#### **a. Research Strategy: review of developments since 2014**

The 2014 research strategy prioritised four objectives, to: 1) improve staff retention by enhancing the research environment; 2) support early-career and mid-career researchers who did not submit to REF 2014; 3) increase routes to postgraduate research; 4) expand interdisciplinary research and collaborations. The University's strategy encourages 'adventure and risk-taking' in research, and when researchers face setbacks they should view these as 'learning opportunities', rather than failures (**REF5a**). This culture has played a major role in supporting the unit's objectives during the review period. Since 2014:

- 1) The unit retained the majority of its researchers and expanded its research base with 6 new appointments. Despite a challenging financial climate, the research-leave rota continued to be implemented, whereby two colleagues are allocated 0.5FTE teaching and administration remission for a year. QR funds are directed to maintaining the scheme and lessening the teaching/administration loads of all researchers. At Faculty level increased sources of internal funding have enabled colleagues to apply for small grants to reduce teaching/administration loads to work on impact and publishing projects and funding bids.
- 2) The unit has increased its number of early-career researchers. A mentoring and peer review system supported ECRs in converting their PhD theses into monographs; all are now developing new research projects. The Faculty's ECR Network with its Writers' Gym offers additional support. Increasing time for research enabled new ECRs (**Andrew, Leahy, Piesse, Pollard** and **Tankard**) to publish their first books. Mid-career colleagues not submitted to REF 2014 were allocated time to reinvigorate research and publication plans, and are included in the current submission. The Head of Department (**Heaton**) encourages all colleagues to discuss with her their research plans and development needs, which has built confidence and, for ECRs, fostered research independence.
- 3) Enhancing the unit's research culture and confidence has increased our PGR population from 7 in 2014 to 19 in 2020, the result of the development of new MRes programmes in

Gender Studies, English, and Storytelling. These offer advanced training in research skills which has led successful students to enrol on our doctoral programmes.

- 4) New interdisciplinary collaborations have arisen from impact-related research, e.g. the Institute of Gender Studies (IGS, funded and staffed by the English Department) involves UK and overseas academics and community organisations in research projects (including two *Talking Bodies* edited collections: Palgrave 2017, 2020).

#### b. Impact Strategy: review of developments since 2014

The 2014 Impact Strategy crystallised the unit's commitment to enhance its established public engagement activities, leading to investment in new research with impact potential. To facilitate this, impact-related research has been supported by >20% of the unit's QR funds each year. The ethos of involving people and organisations outside the academy in research is central to the unit's plans. The following changes have been implemented since 2014:

- 1) Departmental meetings now include discussions of research planning leading to the development of impact projects.
- 2) Existing impact projects, e.g. *Textile Stories* (submitted to REF2014 & 2021) and the *Flash Fiction Project* (submitted to REF2021), continued to be supported with periods of teaching relief, administration support, and internal and external funding to deliver a range of public-facing events, including creative writing competitions for schools, liaisons with the heritage sector, and study days.
- 3) New research projects with impact potential have been initiated to consolidate our ethos of inclusivity and opportunity for all and these are a priority for future QR funds, including:
  - *Preserving Guernésiais, an Endangered Language*. **Parkin** (Co-I) and Dáibhidh Grann (PI, Glasgow) manage a project (awarded seed-funding of £16,000 for 2021 from the States of Guernsey) to record local speakers as a way of preserving this endangered language. Plans are underway to liaise with Guernésiais speakers to expand the project collaboratively.
  - *Talking Bodies*: the biennial conferences (organised by **Rees**) so far attracting over 6,000 participants, range far beyond academia, being attended by professionals (including mental health and health professionals, performance artists, sportspeople) and members of the wider community (including sex workers and disabled activists) from around the world (including the US, Australasia and Africa). Related to **Rees's** research on gender and the body, the annual IGS seminar series features at least six external speakers from the UK and abroad each year, academics and non-academics, all of whom address issues relating to gender, equality, discrimination and embodiment in contemporary society.
  - *Chester Retold*: **Pollard's** research on the practical benefits of experiential learning in community settings has resulted in the Chester Retold initiative, offering English students the opportunity to learn about storytelling alongside participants from the Chester community. Members of marginalised, disadvantaged groups work with undergraduates to find ways of telling stories about individual experiences and communities. **Pollard's** project, begun in 2018, was nominated for the 2020 Educate North Community Engagement Award and a *THE* Outstanding Contribution to the Local Community Award. It was the subject of a TEDx talk published on the TED website.

Our new impact projects will be prioritised for QR funding in the next REF cycle, with researchers supported with mentoring and periods of teaching relief.

#### c. Research Planning

Following REF2014 the unit took a strategic approach to research planning, creating a more specialised research culture, focused on our strengths, to enable us to make a greater contribution to the discipline and society. A Departmental Research Coordinator (**Wynne**) was appointed in 2014 to coordinate research activities, encourage collaborations and networks, allocate and advise research mentors, and organise grant capture workshops, away days, and training events. The DRC's role involves responsiveness to the needs and interests of the unit's researchers; she draws up the research strategy in consultation with all colleagues. A professor since 2010, **Wynne**

## Unit-level environment template (REF5b)

represents the Faculty at the University's Research Committee, and was trained in mentoring and research leadership at AHRC Fellowship-holder events in 2014 and 2015.

The DRC and HoD work together to promote confidence and support the unit's researchers. The HoD, through the PDP process and less formal confidential meetings, advises individual researchers on planning and balancing teaching and research workloads. She is responsible for implementing the research leave rota, and ensuring that each colleague has a full 'research day' each week, expecting this time to be devoted to research projects.

### d. Initiatives in support for research

The most significant improvement in the review period is the increase in the number of research-active staff in the unit. While 11 out of 20 FTE colleagues were submitted to REF2014, some colleagues producing no outputs, the current review period has 19.6 out of 21.6 FTE being productive in research (with two colleagues choosing to pursue teaching leadership roles). The increase in research productivity was achieved through the organisation of more frequent research-focused workshops and seminars (many of which involved external speakers and invitations to people outside the Department); research being included as a standing item on the agenda of Departmental meetings; and an annual away day devoted to discussion of research matters. Additionally, Faculty 'Research Enhancement' events inspire and motivate colleagues.

The appointment of six ECRs (**Andrew; Flanagan; Leahy; Parkin; Pollard; Tankard**: replacing Alsop, Herrmann, Piesse, Siddle, and Walsh) afforded opportunities to invest in new research fields and develop sustainable and vibrant research groups. The ECRs are mentored by the unit's Professors and Associate Professors, plus other senior researchers in related fields. The unit values risk-taking and experimentation, and colleagues are supported in finding new directions to invigorate the discipline. This ethos has inspired newly-appointed colleagues to develop interdisciplinary research groups, notably *Reimagining Popular Culture* (overseen by **Tankard**, involving **Andrew; Flanagan; Leahy**). These new ventures adopt interdisciplinary approaches and work with academics across the University and beyond. For example, Faculty restructuring has enabled **Tankard** to develop peer support relationships with colleagues in Media and Archaeology, reviewing each other's manuscripts in progress and delivering informal seminars on active research projects to students across the University. The unit's new impact projects, *Talking Bodies*, *Chester Retold*, and *Preserving Guernésias* (along with those submitted in REF3a), offer models for initiating and sustaining open research environments which the *Reimagining Popular Culture* group are already engaging with.

Indeed, investment of time and resources in new public engagement activities has been an important focus since 2014. The organisation of regular summer schools for members of the public at Chester and Shrewsbury campuses since 2016, and schools liaison and widening participation work, are driving us to make our research of value to the wider society, as well as within our disciplines. To imbed impact at the heart of future research, we include VLs and PGRs in impact activities as part of their research training, offering them opportunities to adapt their research projects for public engagement at our summer schools and public events.

### e. Research groups

Most colleagues work in literary studies, with three creative writers and five linguists, although some colleagues specialise in two or more of these disciplines (e.g. **Blair, Chantler** and **Stephenson** publish both literary criticism and creative writing, while **Neary** works within literature, language and cognitive psychology). Details of the team's research groups are detailed below:

**Nineteenth-century studies:** In this group, which supports research-led teaching on the MA Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture, with its linked PGR seminar series, are 5 researchers: **Fegan** (the Great Famine in literature); **Leahy** (technology and literature, resulting in a monograph, *Literary Illumination*, 2018); **Tankard** (interdisciplinary research on disabled identity, queer history, and eugenics in literature and culture, with a monograph, *Invalid Lives* published in 2018); **WestS** (Romanticism) and **Wynne** (Victorian literature and material culture).

**Gender studies:** Rees's interdisciplinary research on issues of gender and embodiment underpins her work directing the IGS. She leads a research group espousing intersectional, inclusive feminism, which includes **Atkin** (American literature and representations of the body), **Heaton** (fashion cultures and the body) and **Wynne** (women's writing). Postgraduate students working in the IGS engage fully with its biennial international conferences and seminar series involving a broad spectrum of external speakers.

**Popular Culture:** This new research group emerged with the appointment of three new ECRs, including **Andrew** (specialises in children's crime fiction, resulting in a monograph, *The Boy Detective in Early British Children's Literature*, 2017; now researching LGBTQIA+ YA fiction and popular culture); **Flanagan** (also in the Linguistics team, researches identity and popular culture); **Tankard** (writing a new monograph on representing the history of asexuality in literature and television); and **WestS** (physical and psychological spaces of crime fiction, particularly in Patricia Highsmith's work). This group has developed a lunchtime seminar series for academics and students from across the University.

**Twentieth-/Twenty-First Century Literature:** This group involves **Blair** (South African literature in English, recently published on post-apartheid flash fiction); **Chantler** (modernism and the writing of Ford Madox Ford); **Neary** (Indian literature in English, focusing on lifewriting); **Pollard** (contemporary fiction; her monograph, *Origin and Ellipsis in the Writing of Hilary Mantel*, the first to be published on the author) and **Stephenson** (modern and contemporary poetry and fiction, focusing on posthumanism).

**Creative Writing:** **Blair** and **Chantler** direct the International Flash Fiction Association, are founding co-editors of *Flash: The International Short-Short Story Magazine* and run Flash: The International Short-Short Story Press. **Seed** publishes poetry, prose poetry, short fiction, and translations. **Stephenson** publishes poetry, as well as researching modern and contemporary literature, thanks to the close communication between the two teams; **Wall** is a novelist and poet, also publishing creative prose essays on modernism. This group organises readings of original creative work involving students and visiting speakers. The group benefits from the input of novelist, Francesca Haig (author of the *Fire Sermon* trilogy, HarperVoyager, 2015-17), formerly a lecturer in Creative Writing at Chester and a Visiting Writing Fellow since 2013. She visits the Department regularly to present talks and workshops for graduate students.

**Linguistics:** **Davies** researches the discursive construction of individuals, groups and events. His monograph, *Oppositions and Ideology in News Discourse*, applies corpus linguistic techniques to news reports and editorials. **Flanagan** researches language typology, as well as language and identity, having researched the Bantu language of Northern Sotho. **Neary's** interdisciplinary research covers the areas of stylistics; cognitive stylistics; postcolonial literature in English, particularly Indian lifewriting; she also applies cognitive science to popular music. **Parkin's** research focuses on the history of the English language, analysing linguistic variation and change using historical surname and place-name data. **WestH** researches sociolinguistics and language variation and change. The group holds regular research seminars with external academics contributing talks.

#### f. Research Strategy, 2020s

To enhance and sustain our research culture through the 2020s we have formulated the following objectives to:

- 1) increase grant applications/capture: to be achieved through mentoring, workshops and the provision of shorter-term teaching cover for colleagues to write grant proposals;
- 2) encourage experimentation and risk-taking in research: to be achieved by using the example of the IGS to stimulate new, and develop existing, interdisciplinary research groups and projects;
- 3) enable current ECRs to transition successfully to mid-career status, encouraging applications for promotion to Associate Professor and Professorial roles: to be achieved through mentoring and the PDP process.



**g. Impact Strategy, 2020s**

The development of impact projects has stimulated new, topical research in the unit and we plan to maintain the momentum and foster ambition in this area, aided by the University's strategy to encourage engagements with non-academic audiences. In order to enhance our dedication to open research environments and sharing research with wider communities, we have formulated the following objectives to:

- 1) explore and exploit the impact potential of the unit's research: to be achieved by experienced colleagues advising on new initiatives and acting as mentors to those new to public engagement and interactions with third sector organisations;
- 2) direct sufficient QR funds to support promising impact projects;
- 3) organise workshops and training events focusing on developing impact projects.

**h. Research integrity**

The unit's research is overseen by the Faculty and the University's ethics committees and policies for the avoidance of academic malpractice are in place and taken very seriously. Additionally, Epigeum online training in research integrity is available, with plans to make this mandatory for staff, while the University's Chester Open Research Alliance (CORA) group advocates Open Research principles and practices, thus raising the unit's awareness of the value of open, ethically-based research environments.

**2. People****2a Staffing strategy and staff development****i) New appointments**

Since 2014, the unit has made 7 new appointments, all of whom are ECRs. Increased staffing has enhanced research provision in areas targeted for investment, namely research linked to the IGS and in popular culture. Most of our ECRs were appointed to strengthen the relationship between English and gender studies and they are currently developing new work in the fields of representations of gender, sexuality, disability and queer studies, popular culture, minority cultures, and women's writing. One ECR, **Piesse** (0.6FTE appointed in 2015), moved to another HEI in 2017 (replaced by **Andrew** 1.0FTE). Our ECRs work alongside, and are mentored by, more established researchers in these fields; they have reduced teaching loads in the first year to develop their next research projects or convert their PhD theses into monographs (**Andrew**, **Leahy**, **Piesse**, **Pollard** and **Tankard** successfully published books for inclusion in this REF). Newly appointed staff undergo a probationary period during their first year, supported by the HoD and DRC, along with a research mentor from a related field.

**ii) Staff Development: mentoring**

The unit's mentoring strategy involves informal pairings of mentors and mentees. ECRs are allocated a mentor on arrival, while mid-career colleagues can request support to reinvigorate research projects which may have stalled. ECRs have benefited from freedom to change their research focus since publishing their first monographs, guided by mentors in planning, publication strategies, making funding applications, and exploiting impact opportunities. Mentoring has enhanced their research independence and confidence, evidenced by increasing numbers of post-PhD publications and the development of a new ECR-led research group in popular culture. VEs and PhD graduates also benefit from mentoring support to help them move to secure positions, closing gaps in CVs, building publication profiles, and organising conferences and public engagement events.

**iii) Increasing REF participation**

11 researchers out of 20 FTE members of staff were submitted to REF2014, with some colleagues focusing mainly on teaching or administration roles; however, our success in the 2014 exercise energised the unit's research ambitions. Mid-career colleagues not submitted in 2014 are entering this REF for the first time. Invigorating research ambition in mid-career colleagues, and building confidence in less experienced researchers, has been achieved in two ways:

- **Accessibility and inclusion:** All research training events, workshops, seminars, research focus groups and departmental research seminars are scheduled well within the working day (10am to 4pm) in order to ensure maximum attendance. Following an anonymous survey, 80% of colleagues identified as belonging to a protected category (e.g. caring responsibilities, gender-related changes, including pregnancy and menopause, part-time staff, disabled and having family issues). Awareness of colleagues' diverse needs has led to increased participation in the unit's research culture, thus strengthening our research base and increasing the number of research outputs we produce.
- **Training and mentorship:** The DRC responds to requests from colleagues to organise mentoring, as well as research training events (e.g. on grant-capture and publishing strategies for ECRs, and developing impact). This has been supplemented by Faculty-wide events, including two specifically designed to address the gender imbalance of researchers Chester submitted to REF2014.

#### iv) Promotions

Gaining the Athena Swan Bronze award has helped frame the University's policies for promotion, and in 2017 a new, transparent route to professorial title was introduced. Within the unit colleagues seeking promotion are supported by the HoD and DRC, who advise on strategies for progression in research and on presenting research achievements in applications. Since 2014, **Rees** was promoted from SL to Professor; **Heaton** from SL to Associate Professor.

## 2b Research Students

### i) PGR Management

All English PhD students progressing to submission have graduated with the award (with 5.2 completions in the review period). The following robust support mechanisms are in place for PGRs:

- **Supervision:** PGRs are allocated a supervisory team, consisting of a principal and at least one other supervisor. Supervisors are trained by the University on a periodic basis; in addition, the Faculty runs 'Good Supervisor Workshops'. An online mandatory module ensures that all supervisors are aware of University regulations and equality and diversity issues.
- **Progress reviews:** New PGRs undergo a departmental and university induction and their probationary period of 9 months is followed by a review with subsequent annual progress reviews. They are required to deliver an oral presentation each year, preferably at an external conference, as part of their academic development. The APR structure is rigorously applied, keeping PGRs focused on their research goals.
- **Wellbeing and support:** Should there be obstacles to progression, the supervisory team work closely with PGRs to find solutions (e.g. full-time students transferring to part-time or provided with targeted skills training). Clear advice is available to those facing problems, and options include interruption of studies and referral to in-house counselling services.
- **Training:** In addition to the Department's PGR events and training workshops, and those offered by the Faculty and University, there are online training opportunities provided via Moodle, careers advice sessions, and opportunities for mock vivas.
- **PGR Forum:** This is a University-wide forum for postgraduates to raise issues with the Research Office and Senior Management. The forum enables PGR representatives to sit on the University's Research Committee, thus affording opportunities to understand the wider context in which they conduct research.

The MPhil/PhD registrations in the unit have increased from 7 students in 2014 to 19 students, resulting in more research-active staff in supervision roles. To support the latter the unit offers training and personalised mentoring to supplement the mandatory University training programmes. While the unit welcomes growth in its PGR community, it plans to stabilise the number of registrations over the next review period to ensure that the quality of supervision, pastoral support and collegiate research environment are maintained. The University offers a small number of bursaries for PGR students (a 50% reduction in the annual fee, available on a competitive basis and applied for annually) with most current English PGRs in receipt of bursaries.

## ii) **PGR recruitment and progression**

Increasing routes to PGR study enabled the unit to enhance the vitality of its research culture. In the review period 3 new MRes programmes in Gender Studies, English, and Storytelling were established to train students to be independent researchers and offer pathways to our MPhil/PhD programmes. The significant increase in PGRs since REF2014 is directly related to the Department's reputation in research, as graduates seek supervisors whose research they admire. The establishment of the IGS has led to 7 new PhD students working in interdisciplinary gender studies overseen by the English Department. In 2014, only one PGR had gained a PhD in creative writing; currently 5 students are registered for PhDs in this area. Many of our graduate students undertake PhD study as life-enhancement after retirement. For example, one recent PhD graduate (Rewhorn), a former Maths teacher, gained her PhD in English (2018) in her eighties. PGRs studying within the IGS often have a range of different career goals, using postgraduate study to address issues of inclusion and diversity, before returning to the workplace with new solutions. Some PhD graduates have successfully pursued academic careers; for example, **Leahy** gained his PhD at Chester in the review period and is now employed on a full-time contract in the unit; his thesis was published as a monograph (REF2). Others have found employment as research librarians and in the heritage industries, while one PhD graduate in the IGS (Hutchinson, thesis: 'Experts by Experience: "Madness" Narratives, Language, and Politics') now has a professional career in the mental health sector. One of the unit's Creative Writing PhD students, Sian Hughes, currently in her second year, has already published a poetry collection, *Sunshine & Nothing Else* (Cinnamon Press, 2020), reviewed by Kate Clancy as 'frank, pithy, and terrifyingly precise'.

### **Postgraduate Research Environment:**

The high level of satisfaction signalled in PRES results has been achieved by the support mechanisms in place to ensure that supervisory teams offer the best possible advice and encouragement. From 2015 the English PGR seminars have been organised by students themselves; they meet regularly (approximately six times annually) to present and discuss research projects in an informal, sociable, supportive atmosphere. Staff are regularly invited to offer talks. Masters students also attend the seminars, some being inspired to continue their education to PhD level. The majority of the PGRs at Chester study on a part-time basis; many have caring responsibilities and full-time or part-time non-academic jobs, while others are retired. They meet as a close-knit supportive community of researchers.

PGR seminars in the unit incorporate in-house skills training and career guidance to supplement that offered by the Faculty and the University. The unit's PGR Tutor (**Fegan**) works closely with the students to assess their needs and recruit members of staff to deliver talks and training workshops on topics such as 'Preparing for an Academic Career', 'Careers Outside Academia', 'Understanding Research and Impact', 'Understanding the REF', and 'The Early Career Research Journey'. In addition, the University runs a 2-day Postgraduate Research Symposium, while PGR events at Faculty-level ensure that there are multiple opportunities to present research within the university. The biennial *Talking Bodies* conference run by the IGS encourages PGRs not only to present but also to volunteer to help with the organisation, gaining valuable experience. PGRs also gain experience in organising public engagement activities; some have worked with **Wynne** on the *Textile Stories* annual study days as co-organisers and presenters. Some students have organised conferences with the advice and support of staff; for example, one-day symposiums were delivered on Patricia Highsmith (2018) and on women writers, 1850-1950 (2019). Many PGRs teach sessions based on their research interests at the short English and Creative Writing summer courses for members of the public, including A level students and retired people, enabling them to understand the challenges and benefits of exploring the impact potential of their research.

The University offers a free annual Writing Retreat to PGR students designed to focus attention on the practice of writing frequently and efficiently. There is a dedicated Postgraduate Centre on campus, intended as a quiet working space, with bookable meeting room. The University invites PGR students to apply for financial support for presenting at relevant conferences: most PGRs have been financially supported with conference attendance and travel costs to visit archives. Many PGRs use the nearby Gladstone's Library, a unique residential library with a substantial collection of

materials and important archives. Some have been successful in gaining Gladstone's Study Bursaries, enabling them to spend time in residence at the Library devoted to research.

## 2c. Equality and Diversity

All staff within the department are on full-time contracts, apart from one permanent colleague who requested a 0.6 FTE contract at interview and was granted this. As a unit there is a 50:50 ratio of female to male staff. The Athena Swan action plan devised at university level provides a framework for departments to promote gender equality, with the result that 70% of the unit's staff in professorial and assistant professorial roles are now women. This is a significant increase from REF2014, when the unit had only 1 female professor and 1 female reader (compared with 3 male professors and 1 male reader). The improvement in terms of more women participating in REF has been brought about by the confidence-building strategies the unit has put in place, as well as the strategies to increase participation in departmental research events and training workshops. Additionally, the use of MS Teams ensures inclusion for colleagues unable to attend meetings in person. Flexible working and remote working were implemented even before COVID-19, and colleagues who have had extended periods of leave (for health issues; maternity leave; or compassionate leave) have reduced teaching loads on their return to ensure that they can resume research projects. In fact, 80% of current colleagues identify as belonging to a protected category: the considerable increase in REF participation demonstrates that the unit has worked effectively to enable everyone to engage in research.

An important focus for new research and impact activities relating to issues of equality and diversity has been the establishment in 2015 of the Institute of Gender Studies, the core ethos of which is that academic research in gender studies should drive (and be driven by) activism. Public engagement is thus integral to the Institute's activities: for example, not only are regular seminars featuring invited speakers open to the public, but the biennial *Talking Bodies* conferences welcome speakers and delegates from outside academia (including artists and practitioners in many fields).

The unit has also benefitted from the University's drive to improve equality and achieve a more inclusive research culture (**REF5a**). Two Faculty Research Coordinators organise events specifically designed to incentivise and inspire female researchers to pursue their ambitions and seek promotion. In REF 2014 only 57 female researchers at the University of Chester participated, compared to 94 male researchers. Redressing this imbalance has been a priority for all, and the unit benefits from various opportunities to raise awareness of the work of female researchers. For example, **Wynne** organised an event celebrating women's research in the Faculty for International Women's Day in 2018 as a way of inspiring colleagues to engage more with the research culture, helping to focus attention on the importance of equality and diversity in research. The popularity of this event led to the follow-on 'Professorial Pathways Roundtable' (2019), whereby female professors and associate professors from across the Faculty were interviewed by two ECRs. Attracting people from across the University, ECRs were inspired by the female role models to consider how the various 'pathways' to research excellence discussed could inform their own career plans. Such events are supplemented by the Faculty's 'Research Enhancement' days (established in 2015), where issues of diversity and inclusion are among the subjects discussed.

Additionally, the University organises annual Diversity and Research Festivals (**REF5a**), to which members of the unit contribute talks and workshops. The Festival includes 'Making Professor' workshops, which female staff and those belonging to protected categories are encouraged to attend. It demonstrates to researchers how engaging with issues of equality and diversity can enhance the reach of their research, even providing answers to problems of inequality. The University also runs Equality Forum and the Director of IGS takes an active role in its work.

As a department our research strategy reflects our commitment to promote and encourage research relating to equality and diversity issues. These include: gender studies; disability studies; LTBGQIA+YA fiction; women's writing; queer studies; and postcolonial studies. These research pathways inspire colleagues and students and generally raise awareness of the realities and iniquities of discrimination, prejudice and ignorance. For example, the IGS research seminars and events raise awareness of FGM and violence against women and minorities. A new research project linked to the



## Unit-level environment template (REF5b)

undergraduate module *Chester Retold* devised by **Pollard** works with the local Storyhouse arts centre to find ways of including disadvantaged members of the community in storytelling, the arts and academic study. **Pollard** established the new MRes in Storytelling, associated with this project, to attract a diverse group of students from different educational backgrounds, many of them mature and some without an undergraduate degree. It has informal relationships with other cultural institutions, such as charities for addiction recovery. **Tankard** was appointed to enhance the unit's research related to inclusion and equality; her 2018 monograph on disability representation is submitted to REF2. **Tankard**'s new research project on queer and disability representation in literature and popular culture has significant potential for public engagement (and impact) with opportunities for research-led teaching, schools liaison and public events. The unit is also represented at Chester Pride, staffing the University's stall alongside the IGS's PGR students to welcome the local community, particularly local LGBTQIA+ youth and allies, and new undergraduate students. This participation aids our focus on inclusion and diversity in research.

### Open, inclusive, transparent policy for REF selection

The unit prides itself on its collegiate and inclusive culture which respects the contribution of all researchers, whatever their circumstances or stage of development. The new REF regulations have benefitted our ethos to be fair and inclusive. Selection of the unit's outputs for the REF was a collective decision. The DRC, who had experience of preparing the submission for REF2014 and had received University training in equality and diversity issues, including awareness of unconscious bias, was chosen by the HoD and Dean to act as UoA Coordinator. She was assisted by an ECR (**Tankard**) and they recruited colleagues at all stages of career development to act as peer reviewers of potential outputs, before a general selection meeting at departmental level, which was followed by a Faculty review. The unit ensured that inclusivity was prioritised, and this informed the selection process at every stage, resulting in a greater number of colleagues being included, which has improved the unit's morale and confidence for the future.

## 3. Income, infrastructure and facilities

The unit sits within the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, consisting of 6 departments, overseen by a Dean and 2 Directors of Schools. The unit is part of the Faculty's Research Advisory Group (RAG), which meets regularly to share best practice, plan research strategies, and foster collaboration and interdisciplinary research. RAG enables the unit to view its research in the context of broader developments in the arts and humanities. The Faculty Research Coordinators (one of whom belongs to the unit) create opportunities for Faculty-wide discussion, organising regular 'Research Enhancement' events to which researchers contribute. These involve discussions of research strategy, new developments in our disciplines, and creating and sustaining high-quality impact projects. The unit's identity as a research-active collective is thus shaped in part through its interactions with colleagues within the Faculty.

### External research income

Since 2014 the unit has enhanced its infrastructure to meet our research goals, one of which is to increase grant capture. This has involved directing resources, both human and financial, to assist colleagues with teaching relief to make grant applications. This has been supplemented by grant-capture workshops. In this reporting period 7 applications for external funding have been made, 4 of which (including 2 by ECRs) have been successful.

In 2013-14 **Wynne** gained an **AHRC Fellowship** of **£58,858** as PI on the project, *Literary Fabrics: Textile Languages of Novels and Costume Dramas* [AH/K00803X/1]. She later gained **£20,000** as Co-I on a major interdisciplinary project, *Marie Duval Presents Ally Sloper: The Female Cartoonist and Popular Theatre in London, 1869-85*. 2014-2016. [AH/M000257/1]. The total grant was £250,000 awarded to the PI, Simon Grennan in Art and Design, University of Chester. Wynne acted as research mentor to Grennan (an ECR at the time).

**Successful bids not recorded in REF4:**

ECRs have benefitted from grant capture workshops and short-term teaching relief to make successful applications which will be recorded in the next REF cycle. **Pollard**, author of the first monograph on Hilary Mantel, with co-applicant, Lucy Arnold (University of Worcester), gained funds of **\$30,000 (£23,000)** for conference organisation at The Huntington Library, Los Angeles for a conference on Rereading Hilary Mantel in **October, 2021**. The funding covers travel costs and accommodation for all speakers. **Parkin** is currently Co-I on a collaborative project, *Preserving Guernésiais, an Endangered Language*, awarded seed funding of **£16,000** from the States of Guernsey for 2021 (see **1.b.3**).

**Internal funding**

Staff can apply competitively for Faculty research grants of up to £1,000 and since 2014 researchers in the unit have received a total of **£11,922**. This has been spent on conference attendance, visiting archives in the UK and abroad, and organising symposia and public engagement events. Three researchers (**Davies, Neary, Wynne**) have used Faculty funding to employ research assistants to help with data collection on research projects.

**Facilities**

Spaces in which to conduct research are provided for all staff, with fully-equipped offices in a dedicated building. VLs have access to shared office space and PGRs have a dedicated working space with facilities for group discussions in a building adjacent to the main campus library.

Library resource provision at Chester includes an excellent range of physical and virtual library resources. Eight University libraries housed across its campuses hold over 750,000 e-books, approximately 300,000 physical books and 65,000 full text online journals. With a further extensive investment in electronic resources since March 2020, the size of our e-book collection now outnumbers print books 3 to 1. For the Faculty of Arts & Humanities, LIS provides a team of five specialist subject librarians with whom we collaborate to ensure the currency of the collection and to design both UG and PG research and resource training, including information literacy. The University's Libraries subscribe to 14 major electronic collections of online primary sources. The Flash Fiction Special Collection is housed in the Seaborne Library, a unique resource for researchers and creative writers (**REF3**), which has led to creative writing PGRs choosing to study at Chester. The University holds membership of the SCONUL network, augmenting access to research materials for staff and postgraduates. Additionally, the LIS supports researchers, advising on accessing online resources and offering training in relevant research skills to PGRs.

Gladstone's Library, in nearby Hawarden, is an affiliate of the University and staff and postgraduates regularly use its facilities. **Wynne** recently co-authored a book, *Victorian Manufactured Objects* (forthcoming, Routledge), with Dr Louisa Yates, Director of Research and Collections at Gladstone's Library (formerly a PhD student at Chester) using the Library's archives.

**Open Access**

The University of Chester promotes its Open Access policy, and is committed to supporting researchers in making their work freely and publicly available. This is ensured by the depositing of all research outputs, where possible, in the University's online repository, ChesterRep. In order to increase the visibility and dissemination of research, the University operates a mandatory policy requiring that bibliographic metadata and the full text of all items accepted for publication after 01/09/2014 should be deposited in ChesterRep. The unit is fully committed to exploring ways of developing open access further. For example, **Rees**, Series Editor for Palgrave's interdisciplinary *(Re)Presenting Gender*, has successfully negotiated with the publisher for the series' first book to appear on an OA basis. She is involved in ongoing negotiations with Palgrave for the cost of all books in the series to be made affordable to non-academics.

**Income strategy**

The research leave rota will continue to be prioritised in terms of the deployment of QR funds, ensuring that entitlement to 0.5FTE research leave for one academic year is allocated on an

equitable basis. Internal funding sources will continue for administration support for impact projects and teaching relief for those applying for grants, initiating impact-related research and the completion of publishing projects.

External research income generated by the unit increased from **£17,547** in REF2014 to **£78,858** in this review period (**REF4**). Currently 2 members of the unit are working on grant applications, while other projects have been identified as having funding potential. The unit will provide more practical support (in terms of allocated time) and encouragement (through mentoring and peer review) to increase successful funding bids in the next REF cycle.

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

The University of Chester is committed to engaging with a range of stakeholders and it encourages the ambition in researchers to 'influence the development and improvement of society' (**REF5a**). Members of the unit have thus focused their expertise on activities addressing the following areas: enriching regional cultures and heritage; engaging local communities in research and creativity; and initiating discussions around diversity and inclusion. The appointment of ECRs whose research is dedicated to these priorities ensure that our engagements with academics and the wider community are sustained in our interactions with the media, national and international organisations, research networks and learned societies, schools, and local community groups.

The founding of the interdisciplinary IGS, along with regular Faculty 'Research Enhancement' events, have enabled us to find ways to improve our contribution to the research base and take our research out into the community. This raising awareness of the value of collaboration and interdisciplinarity has informed the unit's thinking about challenging disciplinary boundaries. What follows is (necessarily) a selection of examples of some of the ways we have contributed to the research base and wider communities since REF2014.

**Media engagements** have increased considerably as our research specialisms became better known, whereby colleagues have been approached by media professionals on the strength of their reputation in research. **Rees's** expertise on representations of gender led to her appearance as a specialist guest on BBC One's *The Big Questions* (04/02/18) and twice on the BBC's World Service as a member of the expert panel discussing the #metoo movement (18/03/18) and gender and 'kiss cam' at sporting venues (14/02/19). She has also written regular 'Opinion' pieces for *Times Higher Education* (2014-18). **Wynne's** research on Victorian textile recycling led to her appearance on BBC One's *The Great British Sewing Bee* (27/05/20). **Seed** was interviewed about his book, *New York Hotel* on BBC Radio Merseyside 17/01/19) and read his prose-poems on BBC Radio 3's *The Verb* (18/03/2016).

It is significant that ECRs have been active and visible in the media, suggesting that the unit's contribution to TV and radio will be sustained over the coming years. **Tankard** was interviewed by Mark Gattis for a BBC Four documentary on Aubrey Beardsley (27/03/20) based on her research on Victorian tuberculosis. **Parkin's** involvement in the *Family Names in the UK* research project led to interviews in 2016 for BBC Radio 5 Live, BBC Radio 1, and BBC Radio Bristol. **Andrew's** research on crime fiction led to TV appearances on *Murder Maps* (3DD productions), 'Jack the Ripper 1' and 'Jack the Ripper 2', Season 5 Episodes 1 and 2, *Yesterday*, (12/01 and 19/01/20), while her research on children's literature led to an interview for French TV, the Mary Poppins episode of *Invitation au Voyage*, ARTE (20/07/18). Since June 2019 **Andrew** has a regular 'seminar' slot on BBC Radio Shropshire's *Seven O'Clock Show* where she talks about children's literature and crime fiction, along with other literary topics. The increasing visibility of the unit's research has largely resulted from its public engagement activities, as well as publications, offering a strong indication that our impact strategy is effective.

The unit has significantly increased its engagements **internationally** with more **collaborations** occurring with overseas scholars. Leading this development is the IGS; its biennial conferences and research seminars include speakers from: Australia; Bangladesh; Canada; China; India; Iceland; New Zealand; North America; Pakistan; South Africa; South Korea; Turkey; as well as many

European countries and the UK. Academic speakers working in English, Media, Sociology and Criminology, Theology, Disability Studies, and Anthropology have offered talks, while non-academic speakers include an FGM survivor/campaigner, Oxfam's Director of Gender Justice, and the Director of the UK Intersex. Our response to COVID19 has created a more democratic platform for the 2021 IGS conference (now online) attracting increased registrations from around the globe.

**Chantler** and **Blair** edit *Flash: The International Short-Short Story Magazine*. Contributors include Ama Ata Aidoo and Margaret Atwood, while 350 authors from over 40 countries across 6 continents have been published since 2013 (REF3). **Wynne** collaborated with scholars from the Universities of Alberta and Victoria (Canada) in 2020 on a new online project, *Crafting Communities: A Series of Victorian Object Lessons & Scholarly Exchanges in COVID Times*. She presented (and will present) online talks on Victorian textile recycling to a global audience of academics and members of the public (REF3).

Colleagues who have conducted research with **overseas** scholars leading to publications include: **Stephenson**, who collaborated with colleagues from Shanghai Jiao Tong University (China) to arrange a seminar which led to an article translated into Chinese for publication (REF2); and **Parkin**, who is co-editing *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Family Names in Britain* with Richard Coates (UWE) and Adam Rambousek (Masaryk University, Czech Republic).

This review period has seen an increased number of **research collaborations** with external academics in the UK. These include **Flanagan**, currently co-authoring a book with Anthony Grant (Edge Hill) on linguistic typology and its applications (forthcoming, Palgrave); **Neary** has co-written a chapter with Helen Ringrow (Portsmouth) for *The Routledge Handbook of English Language Studies* (2018) and is collaborating with Sonja Lawrenson (MMU) on a cognitive stylistic analysis of *The Siege of Krishnapur*. **Wynne** co-edits with Amber Regis (Sheffield) books on the Brontës (MUP, 2017, and EUP forthcoming).

The strategic use of QR funds and research leave has enabled the Unit to engage more effectively in co-creating research projects with **third-sector organisations**, using our research expertise to lead new initiatives. These engagements are closely related to the unit's and the University's impact strategies. The University's partnership with Storyhouse, Chester's arts centre (REF5a), has provided incentives to initiate innovative collaborations. **Pollard** has worked with Storyhouse and Fallen Angels Dance Theatre (a charity helping people recovering from addiction) to bring together students and disadvantaged members of the community in Storyhouse's creative learning environment. **Pollard** has published pedagogical research based on this project in the *Journal of Perspectives in Applied Academic Practice* (2018). **Leahy** and **Parkin** also collaborate with Storyhouse, contributing to its 'Lockdown Lectures' series and its community engagement project based on *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

The IGS is actively involved in community work, with **Rees** acting as Chair of the Board of Trustees of CSASS (Chester's Sexual Abuse Support Service, 2013-17), and liaising with local schools. **Rees** has worked with the OED on redefining the word 'clitoris' to register female experience (rather than patriarchal biomedicine) across the English-speaking world. **Tankard's** research on disability led to an invitation to speak on Victorian consumptives at the Royal Hospital for Neurodisability (04/10/19). Research related to representations of the body will underpin the unit's commitment to explore new avenues in interdisciplinary research.

Research into literature and textiles cultures led **Wynne** to collaborate with fashion and costume designers; textile artists; sheep farmers; textile restoration experts; teachers of needlecrafts; spinners and weavers; and workers in the heritage industry (including the National Trust), collaborations which underpin her *Textile Stories* public engagement project (see REF3).

The development of our research environment has led to increasing numbers of researchers in the unit receiving **external recognition** in a variety of ways. Many colleagues act regularly as expert reviewers for publishers (including Palgrave; Bloomsbury; Peter Lang; CUP; MUP; SUNY; Ohio State UP), and journals (including *Victorian Studies*; *Life Writing*; *Tulsa Studies in Women's*



## Unit-level environment template (REF5b)

*Literature; Studies in the Novel*). Similarly, we have acted as external examiners for 12 PhD theses in the review period (at universities in the UK and overseas). Some colleagues act as reviewers for grant and promotion applications; for example, **Blair** was a member of the expert panel on 'Culture and cultural production', at the National Science Centre (NCN), Poland's major research funding body, and an external reviewer of an NCN funding application. **Fegan** acted as peer reviewer for a funding application for the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. **Wynne** acted as external reviewer for two professorial applications and a funding bid for the Leverhulme Trust. **Neary** reviewed an ESRC End of Award Report in 2015. Most colleagues in the unit have been invited to deliver plenary lectures at academic conferences in the UK and abroad.

Other indicators of **external regard** for our research include **Seed's** *New York Hotel* being chosen as a 2018 *TLS* book of the year (commended as 'beautifully-crafted prose poems'). His work has also been translated into Italian and Urdu. **Stephenson** acted as the head judge of the Cheshire Prize for Literature in 2018. He was chosen as Selected Poet for the prestigious journal *Magma* 55 (2014), while his poem, 'Long Stay One', was Winner of the Nantwich Words and Music Festival Poetry Competition (2014). **Rees** was appointed as the first Gladstone's Library's Political Writer in Residence in 2016, in recognition of her research on gender and politics.

The unit is committed to realising the potential of its research to enrich the discipline and the wider society. To this end, we are building on our experiences with the media and public engagement activities, along with collaborations with external academics and third-sector organisations, to ensure that our research continues to have relevance within and beyond academia.