

Institution: University of Exeter
Unit of Assessment: 25 - Area Studies
1. Unit context and structure, research and impact strategy

1.1. Research vision

The Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies (IAIS) is an Area Studies department grounded in multidisciplinary approaches to research and training. Within a purpose-built space, it brings together anthropologists, archaeologists, literary scholars, linguists, political scientists, historians, sociologists and scholars of religion. Researchers collaborate within the Institute, as well as within disciplinary networks at Exeter, alongside their contributions at national and international levels. We strongly believe that the presence of a variety of disciplines, along with geographic and temporal specialisms, within one building enriches the work we produce as a collective.

The Institute pioneers interdisciplinary approaches, often through the work of doctoral researchers, who are treated as co-producers of knowledge. The shift towards this approach since 2014 has generated a more collaborative research culture, increasing the size and visibility of a research community from twenty-five to more than a hundred, whilst enhancing the career prospects of graduate researchers and postdoctoral scholars. It has been embedded into the life of the department through research centres, which serve as the principal organising units of research activity.

Although we sit within a College of Social Sciences at the University of Exeter, the majority of our staff were trained in the Humanities. This configuration has induced a helpful dissolution of the Arts and Humanities/Social Sciences boundary; seen in the intentionality with which major research projects, grants and publications mix methods, reach audiences and advance knowledge across HASS divides.

All researchers within the Institute are attached to at least one research centre. The Institute has a remarkable record of having formed the first units devoted to the academic study of Palestine, Kurds, and the Gulf, as well as Islamic Archaeology, and is committed to an organisational structure which allows for the development of new areas of research priority. It also exploits changes in staffing to recalibrate and challenge its centres to rethink their purpose, as seen in the development of 'Critical Gulf Studies' over the course of this cycle. All of our research specialisms are grounded in a desire to produce just scholarship. This aspiration is constantly interrogated with, for example, groupings in Palestine Studies learning how justice-centred approaches in Islamic Archaeology combine the production of academic knowledge with capacity-building initiatives, or our Gulf Studies collective borrowing from the strategies of Kurdish Studies in their training of new generations of indigenous scholars, alongside their openness to those ECRs and PGRs redefining the field of study.

Unit-level environment template (REF5b)

The department is committed to the equal value of “pure” and “applied” approaches within Area Studies, supporting scholarship which informs policymakers, NGOs and international organisations, whilst championing academic work which opens new understandings of social, historical and cultural worlds. By way of example (see See 2.5 *Institutional-Level Environment Statement (ILES)*), **Robins**’s substantial body of ethnographic work on Yezidism suddenly acquired new value in this cycle as international actors and Yezidi communities themselves relied on her detailed academic studies of a faith group in the face of genocidal massacres and forced migration. Affording staff time so that academic research can pivot towards impact and public engagement has become a key feature of our workplace.

Since 2014, the department has intentionally internationalised its research identity. On one level this is demonstrated by metrics which show that the proportion of outputs co-written with international collaborators rose from 15% in 2013 to 33% in 2018. As importantly, it has reaffirmed its commitment to a model of Area Studies scholarship which aspires to work with and learn from its areas of study, as much it does to look at and talk about those places. The ethics of this approach applies as much to disciplinary scholarship, such as **Stansfield**’s work in Political Science which informed the drawing and envisioning of new boundaries in the territories of the Kurdistan Regional Government, as they do to decolonial approaches, being pioneered by **Natanel, Porter** and many of our doctoral researchers.

We retain a strong commitment to publishing in, as well as researching with, the languages of the regions we study, with almost every member of staff having published in at least one language other than English in this cycle. We also embody a particular approach to research dissemination and welcome the commitment of REF Panel D to acknowledge distinct forms of open research. Alongside the use of institutional repositories and other conventional modes, we strive to make our work accessible to communities in the areas we study (and have acted as champions for such approaches at institutional and disciplinary levels). This can be as simple as re-publishing work in Arabic, Kurdish, Farsi or other local languages or through a philosophy of *digital openness*, in which non-copyrighted forms of research outputs and archival data are freely shared through platforms such as academia.edu and researchgate. Statistical evidence reveals how much work is read in such fashions and the means by which cutting-edge research is shared in countries which may not possess well-developed digital or analogue library infrastructures. This international outlook lies alongside a deep commitment to the presentation of research about the Arab and Islamicate worlds to local audiences in the South-West of England, one of the least ethnically and religiously diverse areas of the UK.

The Institute also recognises the intellectual and strategic need to contribute to and learn from global discussions in Area Studies outside the study of the Middle East. This commitment was

Unit-level environment template (REF5b)

formalised in 2020 through the establishment of a joint Chair with the Institute of International and Area Studies at Tsinghua University in China (to which **Hanieh** has been appointed), along with the inauguration of a new seminar (and staff/student exchange) on 'The Future of Area Studies' with Duke University.

Our vision for the department over the next ten years (described in greater detail at the close of this document) is one in which, working alongside international partners, we become a recognised global centre for research methods, theory and training in Area Studies. Through a programme of sustained investment over the period 2019-25 – funded primarily from our own endowment, along with support from the University, partners and research funders – our goal is to move beyond the moment of recalibrating our internal research architecture which characterised this REF cycle, to play a major role in redefining Area Studies in the twenty-first century.

1.2. Research and impact strategy

Our research centres and themes are each led by a director who has access to support from the College and generous seed funding from the Institute's endowment. The centres have weekly timetabled slots for their activities, as well as the flexibility to sponsor student-led research initiatives (each of the centres provides research training and mentoring, as well as sponsoring student-led seminars and conferences).

The Centre for Gulf Studies exemplifies our commitment to evolving our research agendas, our commitment to research mentoring, and the co-production of knowledge. In 2014, the Centre had an international reputation as the pioneer of social scientific study of the states of the Arabian Gulf. With the loss of key staff (**Niblock, Nonneman, Onley**), an opportunity emerged to rethink the study of the Gulf, prioritising the study of subaltern and marginalised groups, rather than political elites, reconnecting Gulf Studies with theoretical advances in fields such as Anthropology, and foregrounding the voices of Gulf Arabs, rather than those of western actors. This shift was led by **Valeri**, alongside internally-funded postdoctoral appointees (**Porter, Beaugrand and Jones**), who were subsequently offered permanent positions within the department. The editorship of the more traditional *Journal of Arabian Studies* was ceded and, in its place, a new book series in *Critical Gulf Studies* was established with Gerlach. This list publishes outstanding doctoral projects emanating from the Centre alongside cutting-edge scholarship workshopped at the revived series of Exeter Gulf Conferences.

Similarly, the Centre for Kurdish Studies has raised external funds to establish a series of postdoctoral positions (currently **Bakkour, Ghaderi and Hassanian**) as a means of strengthening its reputation for capacity-building amongst scholars of Kurdish origin. Each of these posts is grounded in co-publishing with established members of staff (**Scalbert-Yücel, Robins,**

Unit-level environment template (REF5b)

Stansfield), as well as the shared development of new research agendas, which are supported by grant applications, seminars and conferences. Having pioneered new approaches to the study of Kurdish literature, religions, politics and society through the sponsorship of 21 doctoral projects since its inception as a doctoral programme in 2009 (of which 15 were completed by Kurdish researchers), the CKS is committed to finding novel ways to lead the development of the field through the training of new generations of researchers.

The Institute's goal to sponsor work of academic value, alongside international and local partners, in ways which generate impact and training opportunities for ECRs is exemplified in the work of the Centre for the Study of Islam (core staff: **Gleave, Rizvi, Taji-Farouki, Kristo-Nagy, Baig and Selove**). Following a model established in the last REF cycle with the ESRC-funded LIVIT project (Legitimate and Illegitimate Violence in Islamic Thought), the Centre successfully managed projects on 'Islamic Reformulations: Belief, Governance, Violence' (2013-16, ESRC, £444,450, **Elibiary** and **Baig** as research fellows), 'Understanding Shari'a: Past Present Imperfect Present' (2016-18, HERA, £313,144, with Gottingen, Bergen and Leiden, postdoctoral fellows **Anchassi** and **Mekić**), 'Law, Authority and Learning in Imami Shi'ite Islam' (2016-21, ERC Advanced Award, € 2,212,638, **Gledhill, Rajani, Zargar, Rafii, Ehteshami** and **Halawi** as RFs). The Centre's understanding of research as a collective enterprise which provides opportunities for mentoring, alongside the establishment of Exeter as a hub for the study of Islam locally and internationally, is one which we aim to model across our research activity.

The department's commitment to a culture of co-production has also been apparent in the European Centre of Palestine Studies, where a small permanent staff base (**Pappé, Natanel, Nasser-Najjab**) works with a large community of doctoral scholars to produce ground-breaking conferences at Exeter, such as 'Settler Colonialism in Palestine' in 2016. This symposium, and its subsequent publication as a special issue of *Interventions*, was co-conceived and led by doctoral scholars. This itself has now led to our doctoral community establishing a *Global Palestine Studies Journal* and a network of Palestine Studies centres across Exeter, Ramallah, Jerusalem, Beirut, New York, London and Providence.

Our newest research grouping – the Centre for Islamic Archaeology (founded in 2017 by **Insoll, Cooper** and **Agius**) – demonstrates the Institute's and the University's commitment to strategically support new areas of research concentration. As the world's first such centre, it has enjoyed unparalleled opportunities to draw together hitherto disparate groups of researchers with regional interests in South Asia, the Middle East, North and Sub-Saharan Africa, and to open up new linkages between these worlds through its members' work, research symposia, collaborations with museums and heritage authorities, and the development of a doctoral programme specialising in crossing regional boundaries. The topics and sources of funding of this first cohort of doctoral researchers express this ethos well: **Anderson** (Exeter University Scholarship – the Swahili world), **Araya** (IAIS scholarship – Arabia and Eritrea), **Atkinson** (AHRC studentship – Koma Land

Unit-level environment template (REF5b)

figurines), **Efeoglu** (Turkish government scholarship – Anatolian Islam), **Parsons** (IAIS scholarship – Chinese ceramics in East Africa), and **Tait** (ERC studentship – Indian Ocean ceramics in Ethiopia).

With the establishment of a new Centre for Middle East Politics in 2020 (drawing together **Githens-Mazer**, **Gao**, **Brownlee**, **Storm** and **Stansfield**, as well as **Dumper**, **Fernandez-Molina**, **Mulaj** and **Allouche** from Exeter's Department of Politics), we have completed our move from a research architecture based around three research clusters (described in REF2014) to one centred on revived and rethought research centres.

We also anticipate constituting a new research centre on Climate Change in the Middle East, which would again be a global first. We have an unusual number of scholars with pre-existing expertise in the environment who we will draw together through a programmed series of workshops over the period 2020-22. They will also be joined by **Pettinato** and **Gleave**, who recently secured ESRC GCRF Facilitation funding for a project on Islam and water management in southern Tunisia. This research also presents us with the opportunity to establish new lines of research across HASS-STEMM divides and to draw on Exeter's concentration of expertise on climate change through its Global Systems Institute and its strategic partnership with the Met Office, which is based in the city.

Such a Centre would also embody the impact culture of the department, in which high-quality underlying research outputs are prized, alongside an entrepreneurial willingness to recognise the value of such work to diverse communities of end users over time. It may transpire that such topics become policy priorities at some future point – as has been the case with **Gleave**'s work on ethical explorations of violence in medieval Islamic theology.

Our guiding assumption is therefore that all our work has potential forms of impact which need to be envisioned and measured (facilitated through regular training sessions on impact and engagement for all researchers). This encourages an idea that impact in Area Studies is not limited to social scientific studies which inform the worlds of policy, politics and NGOs, but also to work in the humanities, which, as well as having the potential to influence those groups, also impacts upon fields such as heritage, culture and education. This philosophy has informed our selection of our chosen case studies and our identification of potential ICSs for future assessment exercises.

2. People

2.1 UoA staffing strategy.

After a period of retrenchment (RAE2008) and a cycle of growth (REF2014), the department remained numerically stable over this REF cycle. In 2013 there were 4.06 postdoctoral fellows

Unit-level environment template (REF5b)

(6.54 in July 2019), 20 Education and Research members of staff (21 today), 3.18 language teachers (3.5 now), giving a total of 27.24 staff in 2013 and a current figure of 31.04. This steady state reflected our belief that our staffing levels allow us to maintain a broad array of research centres with coverage across the region. Our Endowment currently funds around a third of the academic positions in the department, so our plans for expansion are predicated on growing its size, working with the Global Advancement and Philanthropy teams at Exeter (see **ILES 4.13**).

We are already the largest department in Europe dedicated to the study of the Arab and Islamic worlds, as well as graduating the largest cohorts of PhDs in our field globally (with 60% market share in the UK).

2.2 Recruitment policy

What is less readily apparent from the data is our recruitment policy in this cycle, which has been to attract and progress the careers of postdoctoral scholars; a group traditionally under-represented in the Institute. This was driven partly by the belief that thriving research centres and communities benefit hugely from the animating presence of such scholars and, that we recognised our duties to fostering the research careers of ECRs, particularly given our large PhD programme and our pioneering of new sub-fields such as Gulf and Kurdish Studies. This commitment to the national vitality and sustainability of our fields was also evinced in **Phillips'** securing funding from the British Academy for a Middle East Early Career Network, which has run a series of careers workshops, mentoring schemes and research promotion activities.

Having only rarely recruited internally in the past, it was satisfying to see a series of research fellows appointed on temporary contracts win permanent academic roles in the department (**Owen Jones, Porter, Brownlee, Baig, Beaugrand**), while a further group of scholars currently in post (**Gledhill, Khalaf, Pettinato**) are being intensively mentored to maximise their chances of making such moves. The placement record of the department with regards to other research fellows also speaks to its global reach and commitment to research training (across this cycle **Mallet** moved from Exeter to Tokyo, **Shanks** to Ulster, **Anchassi** to Edinburgh, **Mimouni** to Manchester, **Zazzaro** to Naples, and **Mekić** to Cambridge). This postdoctoral initiative has been substantially driven by internal funding and the capture of substantial grants from the ERC, ESRC, AHRC, Arcadia and HERA. It remains our goal to maintain a ratio of one postdoctoral scholar to every five members of staff, rotating pump-priming funding around our research centres to ensure an equitable model of development.

Our recruitment to permanent positions in the cycle has been chiefly driven by the need to replace particular research specialisms – as in the case of **Natanel** (Gender / Palestine Studies), **Brownlee** (Middle East Politics), **Porter** (Gulf Studies), **Owen Jones** (Gulf Studies), **Beaugrand** (Gulf Studies) and **Selove** (Islamic Studies). Except in the case of posts created to support short-

Unit-level environment template (REF5b)

term periods of leave and defined postdoctoral fellowships, we only appoint staff to long-term contracts.

Looking to the future, succession plans are in place for the European Centre for Palestine Studies, whose founding director, **Pappé**, will retire in 2023 (with **Hanieh** transitioning to head the Centre). Succession and contingency planning is a standing item at the Departmental Coordinating Group (made up of the Head of Department (HoD), Directors of Research, Education and Doctoral Study, along with Academic Leads and centre Heads), so that personnel decisions are driven by the interests of the whole department.

2.3 Equality and Diversity

We are a relatively young department with a small Professoriate (four full Professors as compared with fourteen colleagues at either Lecturer or Senior Lecturer level). All four Professors are male, while the bulk of colleagues at L/SL are female. We have long recognised this imbalance and have made gender equity a key strategic goal for the department.

We have promoted women into leadership roles, with **Robins** serving as the department's first female Director for most of this cycle, whilst both **Storm** and **Phillips** have served as Directors of Education and **Scalbert-Yücel** is currently Director of Doctoral Studies. **Storm** was supported in undertaking an Aurora qualification with the Women's Leadership Programme, while she is also leading the Institute in its application for an Athena SWAN silver sward (which the institution already holds at the University level).

We have also developed a departmental EDI strategy, grounded in all colleagues having undertaken training in the recognition of unconscious biases and a collective position that our future excellence will be significantly determined by the inclusivity of our research environment. We have committed to the development of a series of inclusivity indicators, a programme of promotion mentoring, regular surveying of staff and PGRs, and planning our representation of the department at symposia which allows us to project our inclusive environment.

While this support for equality and diversity has focused mainly on gender – in part because of the broader male domination of many our fields of study outside Exeter – we also deliberately celebrate and champion other forms of difference modelled in the department (and see **ILES 3.14-17**). These include age (through bespoke research support for colleagues post-retirement-age), pregnancy and maternity (through pre- and post-leave interviews with the Director of Research (DoR)), lone parenthood (through paid childcare during fieldwork and conferences), religion (through interfaith initiatives), disability (with a special focus on developing an open and tolerant culture with regards to mental health and other unseen disabilities), sexual orientation (as one of

Unit-level environment template (REF5b)

the homes of Queer Middle East Studies) and gender reassignment (which we explore in our teaching curricula and through visiting speakers).

Given the increasing importance placed on the acquisition of grant income in research careers, we have used seed funding to build research bidding capacity amongst women in the department. While in the period 2012-13 only 10.2% of grants were submitted by women, this figure had reached 42.8% in 2017-18 (in a department in which women make up 37.8% of staff). We set aside half of our department's seed funding budget for the support of ECRs and have expanded mentoring of female members of staff to include sessions with champions in other parts of the university (**Selove's** Leverhulme award is an example of a seed-funded project which generated a Research Council grant).

Given the gender imbalance at higher ranks, concerted attempts have been made to place female ECRs in positions of research leadership. Such initiatives have included the co-opting of **Beaugrand** onto the Departmental Coordinating Group and the formation of a REF output selection panel made up of the (HoD), (DoR) and Director of Impact alongside two S/L colleagues (**Selove** and **Natanel**), identified as future research leaders. Initial modelling shows outputs likely to be selected for inclusion in REF come disproportionately from female members of staff. Similarly, an outsize number of promotions in this REF cycle were awarded to female colleagues. We are also exceptionally proud that while ECRs make up 37% of our staff, they are the producers of 39% of outputs selected for REF.

The department has been led by colleagues (**Rizvi, Robins, Stansfield**) who have all had strong commitments to staff returning from periods of parental leave, ill health, the management of long-term illness and caring responsibilities. Return-to-work packages have included teaching relief, phased returns to duty, the bunching of teaching to create free terms, reductions in administrative loads, and the provision of seed funding for new lines of research. The College also systematically enables research performance through a process of teaching restriction applications, which allow staff with caring responsibilities to build their teaching around such needs.

Similarly, those who have served in leadership roles have benefited from extended periods of study leave to recognise their service and our collective need to reignite their research careers. More generally, the College of Social Sciences and International Studies operates an exceptionally generous study leave programme, such that every colleague who has applied for leave in this cycle has been relieved of all duties other than research for at least six months.

There is also active support in the department for the proposition that the topics and specialisms studied in its research groupings also play roles in either maintaining or dissolving structures of gender within the discipline. To take one example, the Centre for the Study of Islam has a long record of supporting doctoral projects exploring queer and feminist Islamic Studies, though the global reality is that the field (and especially some sub-fields such as Islamic Law) have historically

Unit-level environment template (REF5b)

been dominated (and reproduced) by male scholars. The Centre therefore has enjoyed a new long-term research project on menstruation and the menopause in Islamic law and cultures; an initiative which has impeccable research credentials in terms of its originality, while drawing together often lone female scholars studying such topics across the globe. This stands every chance of developing as a funded network similar to those which **Gleave** developed with the ESRC and ERC, whilst offering coaching and mentoring so that female scholars can PI the project.

Similarly, our relatively new appointment in gender studies – **Natanel** – has become a pivotal figure in our research environment, fostering work on gender from colleagues who have not formerly worked in the field (**Gallois** and **Gleave**), connecting the work of the department to wider networks at Exeter (the Gender and Sexuality Research Network and the Masculinities Research Unit) and (with **Scalbert-Yücel**) developing a new interdisciplinary PhD programme in Gender and Sexuality.

The department operates with broader commitments to equality and to the recruitment and promotion of staff with other protected characteristics. Beginning with **Rizvi**, Heads have specifically enjoyed the collective celebration of Passover, Ramadan, Christmas, Nowruz and other religious festivals at the Institute, whilst introducing a new space for prayer in the department. A strong culture of anti-racism and opposition to discrimination unites the whole department, evinced in the programmes of activity coordinated as part of the Respect Festival – the South West’s largest celebration of diversity – as well as our opening ourselves up to internal critique from our student body in 2020 (and the subsequent raft of changes to our teaching, culture, research and identity).



Staff presenting at the Respect Festival



Unit-level environment template (REF5b)

We also recognise a commitment to recruit colleagues from the regions we study, particularly in the case of Palestine Studies (**Nasser-Najjab** and **Pappé**), Gulf Studies (**Dailami**) and Kurdish Studies (**Bakkour**, **Ghaderi**, **Hassanian**). 38.4% of our staff self-identify as BAME (along with 55% of PGRs) and as a collective we have played major roles in critiquing institutional racism in the HE sector, as well as working with a variety of police forces to challenge instances of Islamophobia and other hate crimes.

2.4 Career Development

All research-active staff, including those on temporary contracts, are a part of a departmental mentoring programme with a defined peer support structures. Academic Leads (ALs) are assigned to each member of staff and regularly meet with them both formally and informally, including undertaking an annual Performance Development Review, which is shared more widely with the HoD and the Directors of Research and Education. This enables strategic decisions to be made with regard, for instance, to prioritising research leave and sourcing discipline-specific mentoring. This cycle, a significant proportion of our staff (**Kristo-Nagy**, **Gao**, **Cooper**, **Rawan**, **Selove**) have been promoted from Lecturer to Senior Lecturer, with defined career progression paths established alongside a new leadership development programme.

Similarly, internal mapping and review exercises primarily designed to establish REF-readiness are pro-actively used as a means of regularly providing feedback from internal and external 'critical friends' which can shape and refine drafts of written work, as well as providing insights for future publications. Such processes are coordinated by a DoR, who meets with all staff annually and who has an overview of all work produced by colleagues, as well as a responsibility for the management of research careers. This includes the provision of tailored support for ECRs and postdoctoral scholars who, in this REF period, have been provided with their own office along with specialist IT equipment. While postdocs are managed by Directors of research centres, they are fully integrated into the culture of department through being invited to all departmental meetings and awaydays.

Exceptional contributions by staff are recognised formally at both department and university levels; in the latter case through 'Above and Beyond' awards which provide substantial bonuses to staff who have excelled in the roles. We also champion staff wellbeing through university-wide surveying and a local pastoral system (by way of example, in 2020 this has taken the form of holding walking meetings with isolated colleagues).

Research careers are also supported through the provision of an annual College research allowance, internally administered funding opportunities (attached, for instance, to GW4, an Impact Accelerator Account and a GCRF Facilitation Fund), the Researcher Development Concordat (see **ILES 3.8**), the Research Integrity Concordat (see **ILES 2.9**), funding from research centres, and a

Unit-level environment template (REF5b)

departmental seed fund, which can be speedily accessed and which avowedly supports work which takes risks.

2.5 Doctoral researchers

As already outlined, doctoral candidates are treated as researchers first and students second. They form the largest research grouping in the department (exceeding UG and MA students, as well as staff) and are integral to our research identity. They drive research agendas in our centres and we are proud that in showcasing their work we exemplify the best of our research environment. One of the main vehicles for the public presentation of our research – in Exeter and, globally, by digital means – is through our dedicated art space, The Street Gallery, which is one of only three galleries in the UK devoted to exhibiting art and culture from the Arab and Islamic worlds. Its programme is increasingly dominated by the work of doctoral scholars at Exeter, with recent presentations of the art of boat-building in Islamic east Africa (**Ghidoni**), cultures of masking on both sides of the Arabian Gulf (**Goto**) and the use of Chinese pottery in Islamic east Africa (**Parsons**). In each case, we are convinced of the importance and originality of these shows and their ability to shape our future research agendas.

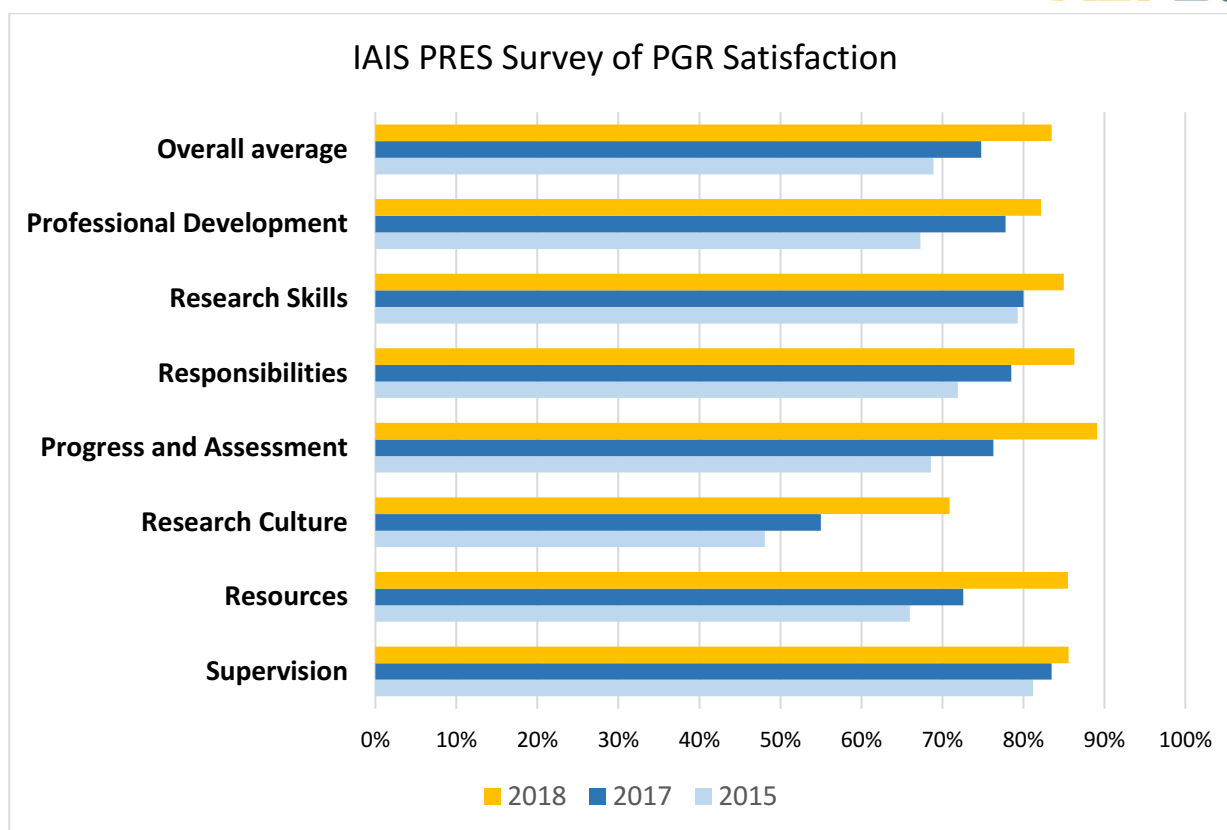


Goto presenting her doctoral work in Osaka



The culture of mutual respect and co-learning which we promote with our doctoral researchers is also fostered through our longstanding support for research trips, conference presentations, technical costs and other research needs through a ring-fenced annual doctoral research support budget which ensures that doctoral researchers receive the same levels of needs-based assistance which are enjoyed by staff. Such funds lie distinct from annual research allowances which are provided by the Doctoral College and a separate departmental travel budget available to all students, generously funded through a donation to the Institute.

The remarkable progress we have made this cycle in embedding a culture of greater equality and respect with our doctoral scholars is apparent in the results of the nationally-administered bi-annual doctoral Student Experience Review (PRES) which measures PGR satisfaction in the following areas:



The headway we have made in improving our performance in each separate category survey-on-survey also reflects a series of enhancements to the doctoral experience made at University, College and Departmental level over this cycle.

This has included the establishment of a Doctoral College in the University (see **ILES 3.9**), with significant enhancement of support mechanisms, wellbeing services and training opportunities through a university-wide Researcher Development Programme (including impact training), a radical overhaul of the upgrade system to assist in faster and more effective completions, and an increasing emphasis on Annual Monitoring Reviews to better identify training needs.

At the departmental level, we have increased doctoral representation on all staff-student liaison committees, initiated customised Institute Inductions, as well as inaugurating a new IAIS-wide PGR Research Seminar. Distance-based students are able to access research and training opportunities remotely, whilst we also provide personal work stations and hot-desking for all PGRs. At the level of recruitment, we now operate a significantly more rigorous admissions process, as well as growing our research capability through the provision of Institute-funded al-Qasimi studentships (these have also been used strategically to provide opportunities to asylum-seeker and refugee applicants, recognising our responsibilities to the regions which we study). Researchers have also benefited hugely from the extra training and networking opportunities emanating from our membership of both the South West Doctoral Training College (ESRC) and the South West Doctoral Training Partnership (AHRC).

Unit-level environment template (REF5b)

These incremental improvements have also helped our doctoral researchers to use their qualifications from Exeter to move on to academic positions (**Saidin** – National University of Malaysia, **Danielle** – University of Lisbon, **Goto** – Tokyo, **Badarian** – Uppsala, **Wildeman** – Bath, **Bdaiwi** – Leiden, **Razavian** – Birmingham, **Che Mantra** – University of Malaya, **van Lit** – Jvaskyla University, **Erdt** – University of Warsaw, **Lagmari** – IBEI, Barcelona) and to positions of enhanced responsibility in the cultural, political and heritage sectors (**El-Badawy** – head of research, Tony Blair Foundation, **Al Ghannam** – senior researcher, King Faisal Centre, **Hawari** – Palestine Policy Fellow at al-Shabaka).

3. Income, infrastructure and facilities

3.1 Income

We are a research-intensive department, the breadth of whose portfolio depends on the acquisition of external grant income. Our average annual research income per FTE is generally around £36k and higher than that of our peers, as is our absolute research income with successive £1M+ years (in 15/16 and 16/17). Across the REF cycle, we brought in £6.1M of research income, or £253K per FTE. We recruit significantly more PGRs than our peer group (80 FTE in 2017-18, as compared with a competitor group median of 20) and have concomitantly high ratios of PGRs per FTE (3.5 versus 1 in 2016-17).

These metrics, however, capture only one aspect of our research strategy, which is based more on maximising opportunities for discovery, training, development of the discipline and the advancement of knowledge, than it is on capturing grant income.

As a department, College and University, we monitor and manage grant applications and awards with great care, benefitting from expertise which ranges from funder-specific intelligence (from our Research Services team; see **ILES 4.6-4.7**), Impact planning (from our Impact, Innovation and Business directorate, inaugurated in this cycle), through to engagement with Foundations and Trusts through our Global Advancement team.

Across this cycle, we have been most successful in winning major awards when colleagues have identified topics in which we have a comparative research advantage, both in terms of the expertise of individuals in what are often niche areas, alongside the backdrop of a research environment where we possess critical mass in key subfields.

An example of such an area is magic in the Arabic-speaking world, in which colleagues at two ends of the research journey were awarded major grants. From 2014-16 Emeritus Professor **Agius** was PI on an AHRC award (£233,281) which supported the study of Inquisitional documents discovered in the Mdina archives in Malta. For us, the award was deeply significant for the fact that

Unit-level environment template (REF5b)

it brought together scholars of the northern and southern littorals of the Mediterranean, capitalising on the linguistic abilities of the team to work with handwritten documentation in Arabic, Maltese, Latin and Italian, whilst opening up new areas of research enquiry in both our fields and Early Modern History.

This specialism in magic encouraged us to hire a scholar (**Selove**) in the area in 2016, who went on to convene a cross-university Magic research group, which in turn provided her with significant support when she successfully applied to the Leverhulme Trust for support (£126,588) to create the first scholarly edition, translation and study of al-Sakkākī's 'Sorcerer's Handbook'.

Another major grant success achieved by a new member of staff is **Insoll**'s ERC Advanced Award (€1,031,105): 'Becoming Muslim: Conversion to Islam and Islamisation in Eastern Ethiopia'. In recruiting **Insoll** in 2016, we recognised his capacity to galvanise what would be a unique grouping of archaeologists of the Islamic world, as well as the unparalleled breadth of his research experience across SE Asia, South Asia, Arabia, West and East Africa, which would benefit all parts of our research community. His ERC award is based on a question central to colleagues in Islamic Studies and the history of the Middle East – Why do people convert to Islam? – yet it explores it in what would, for most theologians and historians, be the unlikeliest of sites: Harar in Ethiopia. This thematic extension of the Islamicate world beyond the Arabic-speaking world is of critical import across our branch of Area Studies. The innovative quality of this work has since been recognised in a new, major, award to **Insoll** from the Arcadia Fund (£246,956).

3.2 Facilities

The richness of our research environment depends upon the quality of our research facilities. In particular, we benefit from a bespoke building which offers communal spaces (common room, lobby, gallery and significant outside spaces) as well as lecture theatres, seminar rooms and offices. This plays a major role in our cultures of research openness and dialogue, as well as affirming a flat structure in which all ranks and all students are in everyday contact.



Unit-level environment template (REF5b)

Over the course of this cycle, we have enhanced these public spaces in a series of small, but incrementally important ways. These include the: purchase of outdoor seating, recommissioning of seating in the common room, acquisition of museum-quality display cabinets in the Street Gallery, the erection of flatscreens promoting research events and successes. We have also installed a state-of-the-art language laboratory and a postdoctoral suite, and commissioned a series of public artworks by contemporary artists working with Islamic traditions. These changes have greatly expanded our capacity to present our research to local audiences, whose attendance at our events has leapt upwards since 2014.



Public art commissioned by the Institute

3.3 Infrastructure

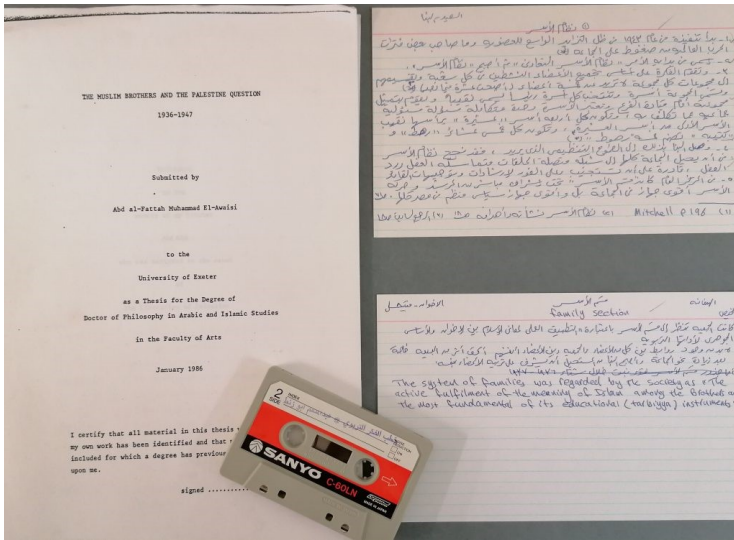
Our research is also supported by an operational and scholarly infrastructure that prizes the production of high quality outputs and impact. Critically, such infrastructure also often offers broader gains to research communities both in the UK and overseas.

This has been apparent in one of the major developments this REF cycle as the university, for the first time, appointed a Middle East Collections Project Archivist. This appointment was secured through a broader institutional '21st Century Library' initiative, which aimed to provide a step change in promoting the unique archival resources and special collections held at Exeter, making

Unit-level environment template (REF5b)

them more available for research and teaching on site, as well as increasing their visibility and accessibility externally.

This has been a huge gain for us as a department as a dedicated member of staff (**Downs**) has worked with us to prioritise, catalogue and digitise a series of unique collections – numbering more than 100,000 items collected and donated over three decades, most especially in areas of our core research specialisms, such as Gulf, Kurdish and Palestine Studies. These resources now increasingly serve as the documentary bases of doctoral and staff research projects at Exeter.



Typed, handwritten and audio material recently digitised from our El-Awaisi archive, which provides scholars in and beyond Exeter with unique interviews with members of the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1980s.

This initiative has also coincided with one of the university's major infrastructure investments: the establishment of a Digital Humanities Laboratory (see **ILES 2.3**). This serves as a production hub not only for the digitisation of documentary resources – written, visual and material – but also the production of websites, podcasts and digital media associated with research projects. The increasing importance of such modes of dissemination matters especially to us as a department focused primarily on countries in the Global South, for it aids our mission to provide open and free access to our work, and the materials on which it is based, to audiences across the regions we serve.

In December 2020 we signed a major collaborative research agreement with Tsinghua to co-develop an enhanced Digital Area Studies Archive at Exeter, with our Chinese partners investing £1.5M in IAIS over three years, whilst Exeter contributes £250,000 as well as the unique archival resources on which this open-source collection will be based. This funding will establish a fully-staffed digital laboratory at IAIS, as well as affording the possibility of the purchase and digitisation of a series of new archival collections.

Our research mission is also substantially supported by our library, both in traditional areas such as the building of specialist collections and through inter-library loans, through their active promotion and support of open research and data management (through training, funding gold

Unit-level environment template (REF5b)

open access publications, the attribution of DOIs to research datasets, and a “request a copy” scheme which – with author approval – allows access to embargoed work). The library also regularly provides download statistics which enables us to see how open access publications are reaching broader audiences. This in itself has an impact on the production of research, for it has the potential to prove the value of research topics, as we saw when the data revealed that the most consulted work in the department over this cycle was an essay by **Agius** on Sicilian Arabic. This had originally been published in a niche journal, but has now been viewed more than 5,000 times.

3.4 Research integrity

Given the nature of our work, we also wish to highlight a specific focus on research integrity in our department. We work closely with the university’s Research Ethics and Governance manager (as well as College and University ethics committees) both to ensure that we adhere to current best practices and that we can help to shape new standards. Over this cycle we have instituted a new training programme for researchers working in high-risk environments, embedded new data integrity and security protocols, led at a national and international level on campaigning for researcher safety in the MENA region, run an ethics awayday with the whole department to explore issues ranging from securing ethical approval for fieldwork through to explorations of the ethical judgements made regarding the origins of philanthropic and governmental funding of research, alongside the duties which we have as scholars to the communities in which we work. We are also increasingly aware of the interface with questions of EDI in this regard, which we actively foreground in, for instance, the consideration of gender, religion, race or sexual orientation in undertaking fieldwork. We also consider our championing of academic freedom, especially in contentious areas such as Palestine Studies, to be a vital part of our research DNA.

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

4.1 Research collaborations, networks and partnerships

Given the international focus of the department and its researchers, it seems self-evident that its research collaborations and networks should lie primarily outside the UK. While, in past cycles such networks may have been mainly tied to individual researchers or projects, greater emphasis is now placed on establishing and deepening research relationships with a select group of partner institutions. In practice, this we have pared down the numbers of our collaborators, whilst encouraging longer-lasting research ties to a smaller number of departments and institutions. This aims to ensure a resiliency which comes from such partnerships not being tied to individuals and to foster longer-term work, in the form of research outputs, staff and student exchanges, and coordinated research agendas.

Unit-level environment template (REF5b)

These relationships are generally centre-specific. The European Centre for Palestine Studies has established close ties to the Palestine Studies programme at Brown in the US. Being a priority partner for the University, members of IAIS staff have been able to access international mobility funding to visit colleagues at Brown. The focus of collaborative activity, however, is primarily at the level of doctoral researchers, for both Brown and Exeter have significant cohorts producing cutting-edge research. Through Exeter's alumni-funded Annual Fund and our seed funds, we have sent a group of our researchers each year to Brown's annual symposium in Palestine Studies, offering them international exposure and a chance to shape a research agenda in their field.

In the Humanities and Islamic Studies, we have also signed a comprehensive Memorandum of Understanding with American University Beirut, which is perhaps the strongest research-intensive university in these areas in the MENA region. Starting with individual initiatives (led by **Rizvi**), the collaboration has since expanded to include a workshop series co-convened in Beirut, research grants and projects on Syrian refugees in Lebanon which cut across both institutions (led by **Brownlee**), and projected staff and student exchanges, with the eventual goal of establishing co-taught doctoral degrees which would allow researchers to split their time between Exeter and Beirut (we already possess a similar co-tutelle arrangement in Islamic-Christian studies with Hartford Seminary in the US).

Our dual stress on the international and the local, and our duties to communities in both spaces, is also apparent in research collaborations such as the Understanding Religion and Law project (led by **Baig** and **Gleave**). Coordinated and funded under the auspices of the regional GW4 alliance (which groups Exeter with Bath, Bristol and Cardiff universities; see **ILES 1.8** and **3.9**), this project explored the provision of Islamic legal advice, bringing academic specialists together with students and teachers from a traditional seminary in Blackburn (the Jamiatul Ilm Wal Huda). Large groups from both institutions visited each other to explore connections and differences between the study of Islam in a university setting and in centres of traditional learning.

4.2 Wider contributions to economy and society

As a department we are deeply driven to ensure that we produce valuable research which positively impacts on the MENA region and the UK.

Two vignettes relating to the work of newly-appointed ECRs make this point, whilst also stressing our commitment to the generation of impact across the department and a long-term approach to nurturing potential impact case studies for future REF cycles. This also includes the development of a heritage pathway – represented by **Robins's** ICS in this exercise – which moves our impact profile beyond its focus on foreign and security policy in REF2014.

Unit-level environment template (REF5b)

The work of these colleagues also speaks to the intertwined character of academic research and civic work. **Brownlee**, for instance, came to academia with experience of working in development and the NGO sector, firstly with the Italian Development Corporation in Jerusalem and, secondly, the European External Action Service, Crisis Response Unit in Brussels. It was her experiences of working with displaced Palestinian and Syrian communities which led her to develop what would become an ESRC GCRF-funded project on 'The micro-politics of the refugee crisis', which looked to establish how Lebanon's policy of dispersing refugees into the general population (as opposed to housing such groups in camps) worked in practice in different Lebanese municipalities, and how and whether such councils were able to share expertise and knowledge. The idea for this project and the deep web of local contacts which made it possible emerged from the researcher's professional work, but at each stage the academic project was also conceived of as work which would feed back into the governmental and NGO sector, both in Lebanon and across the MENA region more widely, as well as informing UK and EU policy.

Similarly, **Beaugrand's** academic work on the *bidun* (or 'stateless') community in Kuwait has been recognised globally by national and international agencies charged with assessing asylum and other citizenship claims of a group whose complex position requires the kind of careful nuancing and country-knowledge which sustained periods of ethnographic and legal study provide. Groups who have relied on **Beaugrand's** expertise include the Commissariat général aux réfugiés et aux apatrides (Belgium), the Immigration and Refugee Board (Canada), the Danish Immigration Service, the Home Office (UK) and the Independent Advisory Group on Country Information (IAGCI).

4.3 Wider influence of, contributions to and recognition by research base

Members of the department were also widely recognised through fellowships, prizes and invitations to present keynote presentations. These included: **Agius** serving as an FBA, **Stansfield's** election to the ASS, **Fierro** being awarded the MESA Lifetime Achievement Award in 2019, **Baig** chairing the International Abrahamic Forum, **Ghiabi** winning the Nikki Keddie Book Prize at MESA 2020, **Natanel** winning the 2017 Feminist & Women's Studies Association (UK & Ireland) book prize, **Agius** delivering in-region keynotes in Sharjah (UAE), Riyadh (Saudi Arabia), Beirut (Lebanon), and Doha (Qatar), **Insoll** delivering keynotes in Istanbul (Turkey), Bern (Switzerland) and Tartu (Estonia), as well as organising and chairing conferences in Bahrain, Japan, France and Burundi, and **Scalbert-Yücel's** membership of the French TRANSFAIRE research project ("History and Social sciences of a (post)ottoman globalisation"), CETOBAC, Paris (funded by the Agence Nationale de la Recherche (ANR), the ERC Project on Civil Wars in Paris, and her serving as the Head of the Contemporary Studies Department at the Institut Français des Etudes Anatoliennes in Istanbul, along with **Gallois's** keynote in Constantine (Algeria) at the invitation of the Algerian government, in the first ever academic meeting to discuss political and colonial violence in Algeria.

The after-effects of the production of such academic work evidently do not map neatly onto REF cycles and there is extensive evidence that the chief impact of major projects described in REF2014 are still in the process of moving between academia and other sectors of society. The MARES (Maritime Ethnography of the Red Sea) project (**Cooper, Zazzaro, Semaan, Van Rensburg, Agius**), which sought to provide a unique multi-disciplinary record of endangered maritime culture and heritage of the Red Sea and Gulf formally ran from 2008-11, but its success in identifying cultural loss and the means to its preservation is still being felt today. Significant outcomes include Saudi plans for a major heritage centre on the Red Sea coast (working with the Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage), an ongoing museum partnership with Qatar using the team's knowledge and skills to develop museum content and research methodologies (working with the Qatar Museums Authority), as well as increasing public understanding of the cosmopolitan maritime traditions of the western Indian Ocean through its contribution to exhibitions and media productions, such as the Shindagha Maritime Museum of Dubai.

Cooper's recent GCRF award *Bahari Yetu, Urithi Wetu* (Our Sea, Our Heritage) promises to deliver similar long-running and sustainable forms of impact over the coming years through its establishment of a Tanzanian NGO (Chamaboma Bagamoyo – a cooperative of boat-builders charged with representing the group's interests and establishing new income streams), the staging of community exhibitions and tourism promotion activities grounded in the project's development of local maritime heritage, and a commitment to work with the national government and other stakeholders to create policies which will protect and evaluate the tangible and intangible maritime and coastal heritage of Tanzania (leading to Tanzania ratifying the 2001 UNESCO Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage).

4.4 How the UoA contributes to the sustainability of its discipline

Members of the department are frequently contracted as external examiners of academic programmes (**Insoll** – History of Art and World Art Studies, UEA, **Gallois** – Humanities Research Institute, New York University Abu Dhabi), as external PhD examiners (Leeds, Bath, SOAS, KCL, Oxford, Paris1–Sorbonne, Ghana, East Anglia, Bristol), and to serve on the editorial boards of journals (*Antiquity*, *Carnets de l'Ifpo*, *Arabian Humanities*, *Maghreb-Machrek*, *Rethinking History*, *Journal of African Archaeology*, *Journal of Islamic Archaeology*, *Material Religion*), as readers for academic presses (Cambridge University Press; Oxford University Press; Routledge; Edinburgh University Press; Springer; the Council for British Research in the Levant; Penn Press; British Archaeological Reports; Wiley-Blackwell; The British Museum Press; I.B. Tauris; Bloomsbury; Penguin; Berghahn; International Association for the Study of Arabia), as assessors of grant proposals (ERC, British Council Cultural Protection Fund, Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research, Flemish Council for Research, Research Foundation Flanders, ESRC, AHRC, National

Unit-level environment template (REF5b)

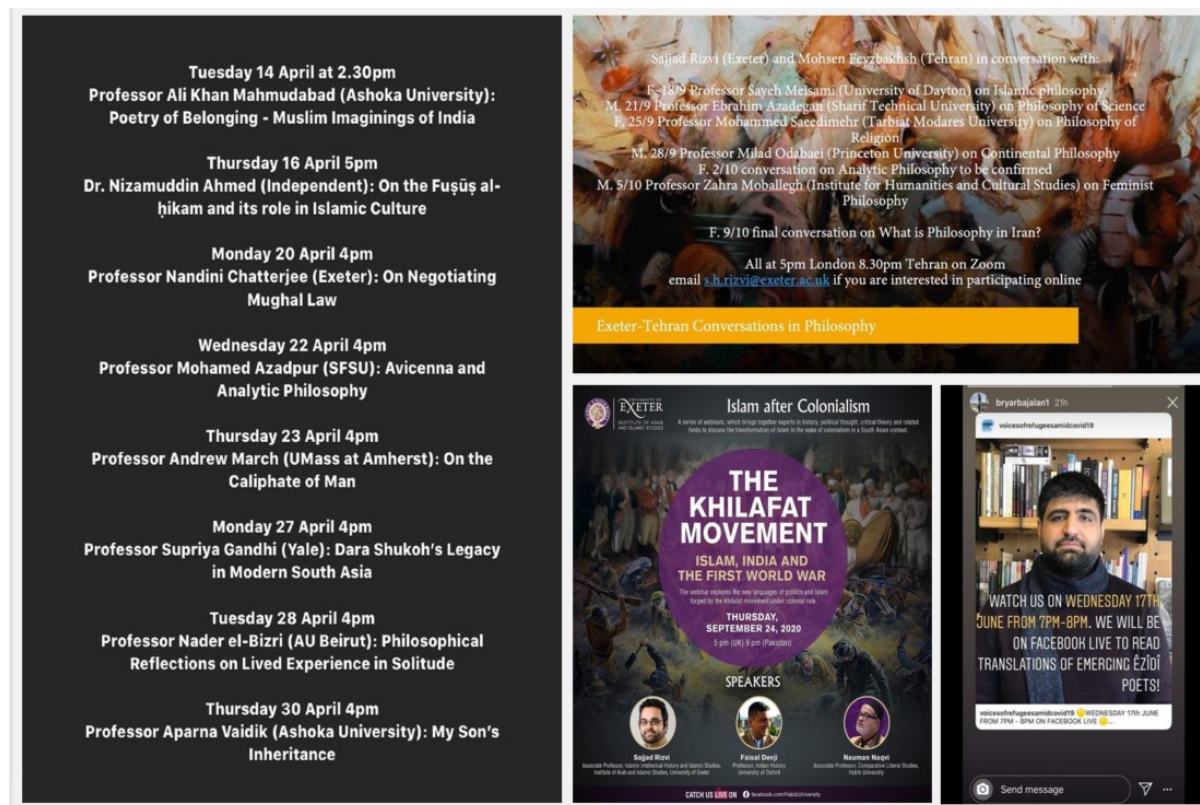
Science Foundation, British Academy, Leverhulme Trust) and exhibition consultancies (British Museum, Institut du Monde Arabe, Manchester Museum and Art Gallery, Al-Khamis Mosque Museum and Visitor Centre, Bahrain).

Our development of a refreshed research strategy for the period 2019-25, supported by a significant programme of investment, is directed as much towards the vitality and sustainability of our discipline globally as it is to a growth in staff numbers at Exeter. We plan to strategically invest in emerging areas which we think have the capacity to shape the discipline – such as climate change in the Middle East, digital Middle East Studies, and Islam in East Asia – primarily through funding doctoral and postdoctoral positions, along with sponsoring international symposia and publications. We also plan to invest in the research careers of ECRs who specialise in the Rohingya, Uighurs and other Muslim minorities in Asia and Africa, drawing on our existing strengths in such areas and recognising the moral demands which human rights emergencies place on our field.

Along with Duke and Tsinghua, we intend to develop the first global forum for teaching and research in Area Studies, with a special emphasis placed (through a new journal) on decolonial work and the promotion of research from the Global South. Our relaunched gallery will also support such initiatives through its revised focus on presenting and reevaluating popular forms of culture and artistic production, disseminated through digital programmes of cultural preservation and publishing, as well as exhibitions and catalogues. As a collective, we also aim to return to what is generally viewed as one of the most intractable problems and areas of study in Middle East Studies through the establishment, with regional partners (particularly the Kenyon Institute, AUB and Bir Zeit), of a multidisciplinary One State Laboratory, which will draw together a range of academic specialisms and cultural forms to envision a future state shared by Palestinians and Israelis (as well as affording space to those who reject the desirability or viability of a single state). We will also establish a Translation Fund, which allow more of our work to be translated into “target” languages, as well as generating versions of works hitherto unavailable in English (in both cases, our PGR community will be actively engaged in the selection of works and translations).

While the global pandemic has accelerated our move to digital modes of work, we have striven to find ways in which this shift could enable us to deepen our commitment to some of our key research principles, including:

- 1) The need to maintain a sense of **research fellowship** so that our people and their collaborators do not feel isolated but are instead plugged into conversations at a global level. We have exploited a range of social media as a means of structuring research into our community’s lives on a more regular basis than in normal times.



Clockwise from left to right: (a) Instagram Live conversations; (b) Exeter-Tehran Conversations in Philosophy; (c) a series of cultural perspectives; (d) live-streamed webinars on 'Islam after Colonialism'

2) The **focus of our research communities** has also been maintained through challenging each of our Centres to find new ways of innovating, as seen in the first online 'Global Islamic Archaeology Showcase', conceived and wholly run by PhD researchers, with significant numbers of contributors from the Arab world and the Global South.

3) An **openness to new ways of working** and a conviction that **Area Studies needs to develop more equitable modes of exchange between the Global South and the Global North**. This is taking shape through new seminar series shared with our equal partners, American University Beirut, Tsinghua, Habib, and Duke.

The speed with which this network has developed in these extraordinary times has also helped us to crystallise the idea that IAIS is an organising hub of a network of institutions rethinking Area Studies in the twenty-first century. This will significantly affect our hiring in the coming years as we recruit increasing numbers of theorists, comparativists and methodologists who can lead such discussions, and through a shift towards the formal sharing of posts between institutions (on the Exeter-Tsinghua model).

The period 2014-20 saw the Institute develop a local research culture founded on forms of co-production. This meshed with the redevelopment of our research centres and their increasingly global reach. Over the next REF cycle, our goal is to co-produce work and research communities

Unit-level environment template (REF5b)

with our international partners, with the conviction that the future of Area Studies lies in shared models of knowledge production.