

Institution: University of Oxford		
Unit of Assessment: 27 English Language and Literature		
Title of case study: Enhancing public understanding of the cultural significance of trees, and assisting preservation of trees and woodlands		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2008-2018		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Professor Fiona Stafford	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Professor of English Language and Literature (Somerville College)	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 1 October 1992 - present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: Jan 2016-July 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words) <p>Fiona Stafford enhanced the work of the Woodland Trust, Royal Forestry Society and other organisations, enriching understanding of the cultural importance of trees in the history of the British Isles and advancing present-day conservation and new planting. Through authorship and promotion of the Charter for Trees, Woods and People she improved UK environmental policy-delivery at national and local level, increasing institutional and individual engagement with planting and preservation. Her exemplary work of New Nature Writing, <i>The Long Long Life of Trees</i>, informed 2019 Pulitzer-prize winning novel <i>The Overstory</i>. <i>The Brief Life of Flowers</i> inspired 'literary garden' design at Oxford Botanic Garden.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words) <p>The research brings literary criticism, history, ecology, art history, plant sciences and politics to bear on the study of trees. The principal underpinning publication is <i>The Long, Long Life of Trees</i> (LLL T) [3.i], which brings a cross-disciplinary view to its subject and addresses an audience beyond academia. Stafford's first book-length endeavour in New Nature Writing, it interweaves individual emotional and imaginative responses to actual trees with a practical response to contemporary ecological threats. Paying 'lyrical tribute' to the diversity and beauty of trees, their special characteristics, uses, and 'ever-evolving' meanings, it examines past and contemporary conservation challenges: tree diseases, environmental loss, and the role of trees in helping to counter climate change. Stafford reveals pressures on particular species as well as general threats to woodlands: the extraordinary longevity of the yew, for example (the Ankerwycke Yew bore witness to Magna Carta), once threatened by harvesting of timber for long-bows, faced renewed threats after 1992 when Taxol – extracted from bark and needles – was found to have powerful anti-carcinogenic properties. <i>The Brief Life of Flowers</i> [3.ii] is a companion text, unpacking the cultural, social and medicinal history of flowers including bluebells, daisies, foxgloves, poppies, and ghost orchids.</p> <p>Several academic articles articulate the critical-theoretical methodology. 'Memory, Imagination and the Renovating Power of Trees' [3.iii] argues for a new kind of dendrocriticism attentive to physical arboreal facts as well as literary/artistic representations. 'The Roar of the Solway' [3.iv] offers a novel literary-critical approach to nature writing, grounding texts from Ruskin to Ciaran Carson in a shared, fully realised place: the Solway Firth as 'a border between England and Scotland, opening towards the Isle of Man, Ireland, Wales' and beyond.</p> <p>These cross-over publications, read within and beyond academia, build on Stafford's expertise as a scholar of Romantic poetry, with interests in nature writing and writing place. She has written extensively about the history of literary responses to the natural environment. Relevant</p>		

work includes the monograph *Local Attachments* (2010) [3.v], identifying and examining a Romantic-period shift toward viewing local specificity as a strength rather than a limitation of poetry: close readings of Heaney, Burns, Wordsworth and others demonstrated the development of a perception that the local contains the universal. The larger implications of local environment were further explored in Stafford's critical edition of a canonical text of Romanticism, Wordsworth and Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads* (2013) [3.vi]. Her introduction and notes elucidated the relationship between first-hand experience and literary traditions such as Aesop's poetic dialogues, the Virgilian *Eclogues*, and subsequent adaptations. Stafford has contributed to *Archipelago*, a literary journal of place and nature, and is currently editing an anthology of the magazine.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- i. [Authored Book, listed in REF2] Fiona Stafford. *The Long, Long Life of Trees*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2017.
Collected reviews at <https://yalebooks.yale.edu/book/9780300207330/long-long-life-trees>
Translated into Chinese, Korean and Italian.
- ii. [Authored Book, listed in REF2] Fiona Stafford. *The Brief Life of Flowers*. London: John Murray, 2018. Translated into Korean.
- iii. [Journal Article] Fiona Stafford. "Memory, Imagination and the Renovating Power of Trees." *Philological Quarterly*, 97:2, 2018, 155-76. Accessible at:
<https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:37fbae32-5e6b-4958-8a57-3dba7d49cc36>
- iv. [Chapter, available on request] Fiona Stafford. "The Roar of the Solway." in *Coastal Works: Cultures of the Atlantic Edge*. ed. Nicholas Allen, Nick Groom and Jos Smith. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2017, 41-60. DOI: [10.1093/oso/9780198795155.003.0003](https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198795155.003.0003)
- v. [Authored Book, available on request] Fiona Stafford. *Local Attachments: The Province of Poetry*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010. ISBN: 9780199558162. Winner of the 2011 British Academy Rose Mary Crawshay prize for English Literature.
- vi. [Scholarly Edition, available on request] Fiona Stafford. (ed.) [introduction and notes] to Wordsworth and Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads, 1798 and 1802*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013. ISBN 9780199601967.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Stafford's exploration of close connections between physical characteristics of tree types and their cultural associations has **encouraged public involvement in woodland conservation and tree planting**. The Woodland Trust's Tree Charter Project Lead acknowledges her '**pivotal role in ... defining and communicating**' a new Charter for Trees, Woods and People, 800 years after the Carta Foresta re-established free men's access to royal forests (5.1). Public interest was raised by Stafford's 15 BBC Radio 3 programmes on *The Meaning of Trees*, 2012-17, based on *LLLT* research (5.2.i). Recognizing the value of the programmes' approach, the Trust appointed her in June 2017 to write the charter (5.1). Stafford worked closely with Trust management, creating the wording—drawing on her own expertise, a text analysis of the Tree Story Project (60,000 members of the public articulated how trees and woods enhance their lives), and consultation with representatives of 70+ cross-sector organisations and 130,000 people. Her achievement was to **capture common goals between often disparate groups**: conservationists, commercial wood managers (e.g. Forestry Commission, Royal Forestry Society) and mixed-interest organisations (e.g. Church of England, National Trust, National Farmers' Union). Stafford gave numerous talks, **making the case for shared interests in conservation, disease prevention and halting spread of pathogens** (e.g. Institute for Chartered Foresters, 300 attendees; National Association of Local Councils, 150) (5.2.ii). GreenBlue Urban, a sustainable cities consultancy, praised her 'eloquen[t], ... at points poignant[t]' **articulation of a political way forward**: 'the combination of narrative to create a sense of place and community' and accessible expertise 'will help us to win the argument for increased canopy cover on a global scale' (5.3). The final Charter text, distilling 10 principles that define and protect the place of Trees in Britain, acknowledges Stafford's authorship (5.4).

Publication of *LLL T* in mid-2016 assisted engagement with the Charter's development and enactment, the Project Lead reports, **'rais[ing] the profile of trees and their associations with ... culture and history'** (5.1). At July 2019 *LLL T* has sold 23,378 copies (25,521 copies, December 2020) (profit undisclosed; cover-price equivalent, GBP318,000.) The editor recognises 'a break out book for Yale University Press', **'an anchor for further books in ... cultural history and nature writing'**; it **'changed the perceptions of booksellers and buyers towards [the press]'**, showing 'that we could [have] broad commercial appeal' (5.5). 17 UK book-talks **encouraged local uptake**: Stafford worked with The Reading Agency, a reading promotion charity, **inspiring regional libraries** to create displays centred on *LLL T* and visiting the winner, Hartlepool (photographic evidence, 5.2.iii).

The Charter officially launched at Lincoln Cathedral and Castle on 6 November 2018. The National Association of Local Councils applauded **the first 'clear, unifying statement about the rights of people in the UK to the benefits of trees, woods and forests'** (5.6). Stafford encouraged institutional and personal engagement with the principles through linked events including a talk for the Sylva Foundation environmental charity (attendance c. 150) and British Library conversation with a legal sustainability expert (5.2.ii). **11 oak Charter Poles, carved by sculptor Simon Clements, were erected across the British Isles**, providing **durable expression of the principles** (one per pole, a chief pole at Lincoln). From 2018 Stafford served as Woodland Trust Special Advisor **assisting delivery of the Charter's objectives** through (e.g.) an annual Tree Charter Day engaging communities, schools, businesses, families with planting and education (5.1.ii, 5.4—'Legacy' page). Commissioned radio programmes and interviews in the UK, Ireland and USA **maintained the prominence of the conservation message**. **By March 2020, individual signatures stood at 144,413; 639 Charter Branches (community groups)** operated across the country committed to delivering the principles (5.4). **Local practices have started to replicate the old tradition of meeting at trees** (photographic evidence, 5.7). The Woodland Trust and partner organisations honoured a commitment to plant a tree marking each signature, with **114,000 trees planted** by the end of the 2018-19 planting cycle (5.2.iii and 5.8). Assisting local involvement, Stafford wrote articles for the Trust's newspaper *Leaf!*, distributed to schools, leisure centres and community centres (print run 10,000, readership 80,000-90,000) (5.2.iv). Numerous **councils have incorporated the Charter in biodiversity planning and communications** (indicatively, Cam Parish, City of Edinburgh, and Wolverhampton Councils) (5.9.i-iii). The **Northern Forest Scheme** reforestation large areas around Liverpool, Manchester, Sheffield, Leeds, and Hull (**GBP5,700,000 government funding**) **acknowledged that it was 'Inspired by [...] the Tree Charter'** (5.9.iv-v).



Map showing Charter Branch locations across the UK (5.8)

In the wake of the Charter Stafford's ongoing collaborations with biologists and arborealists have **validated incorporation of the emotional significance of trees (hitherto under-acknowledged by scientific studies) into conservation agendas**. The Sylva Foundation Chief Executive credits her with **assisting this environmental charity in 'convey[ing]**

complex ideas and messages to stakeholders, ranging from woodland owners and professional foresters to members of the public (5.10.i); she is 'transforming hearts and minds' through literature's 'capacity to translate difficult concepts, not only into palatable ideas, but into engaging stories' (5.10.i). Through *LLLT* itself and close involvement in subsequent cross-constituency conversations (e.g. co-organiser, 'Trees and Wellbeing' conference, June 2018; keynote lecturer for ArtdotEarth and the Royal Forestry Society conference, June 2019—respectively 130 and 229 delegates from forestry, conservation and creative sectors) she has 'set the framework for discussion' (RFS Chief Executive): 'Using examples of how poets and artists ... have captured the value of trees beyond the utilitarian, she was able to illustrate how the emotions that trees provoke [are] deeply rooted in human experience. ... It was clear that forestry is not the preserve of STEM disciplines and that cross pollination ... with other disciplines is hugely valuable' (5.10.ii). Her RFS lecture was published in a general-audience interdisciplinary art book, *Evolving the Forest* (2020) (5.10.iii).

Writer Richard Powers credited *LLLT*'s 'attention to the literary and cultural meaning that humans have assigned [trees] throughout history with **'inform[ing]' his best-selling work of New Nature Writing, The Overstory** (5.11). A German reader of *LLLT* was 'inspir[ed]' to start a Dresden Treetrail project, creating an urban tree trail and integrating it into English as a second language teaching exercise for 'students of horticulture, environmental monitoring and landscape planning (also ... business and IT students on demand)' (5.12). An Oxford Botanic Garden lecture on trees (March 2020, 230 attendees) led to **development of a 'literary garden'**, using *A Brief Life of Flowers* as guidance (5.13.i). The garden was seen by 178,344 visitors in its first year (to Dec 2019) (5.13.ii).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- 1) Statements from the Woodland Trust:
 - i) Letter from Project Lead – Charter for Trees, Woods and People, Woodland Trust, 15 January 2018.
 - ii) Letter from Chief Executive, Woodland Trust, 18 January 2018.
 - iii) Email from Senior Campaigner, Woodland Trust, 28 June 2019, accompanied by start date confirmation email from Urban Projects Officer, Woodland Trust, 23 October 2020.
- 2) Evidence relating to examples of public engagement by Stafford:
 - i) Details of BBC programmes.
 - ii) Select list of presentations to forestry sector.
 - iii) Details of regional libraries engagements.
 - iv) Email from editor of *Leaf!* newspaper, 27 March 2020, containing circulation data.
 - v) Sample images of 48 feedback forms from 'Trees and Wellbeing' conference, 18 May 2018.
- 3) 'Trees, People and the Built Environment' conference report, GreenBlue Urban website, 20 April 2017, <https://www.greenblue.com/gb/trees-people-builtenviron3/>.
- 4) 'Charter for Trees, Woods and People' website: 'About' webpage, <https://treecharter.uk/about.html>.
- 5) Email feedback from Publisher & Managing Director, Yale University Press London, 9 July 2019, including sales data for *LLLT* (10,339 copies in hardback – now out-of-print; 12,427 in paperback; 612 as e-book).
- 6) National Association of Local Councils website: 'The Tree Charter' webpage, <https://www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/treecharter>.
- 7) Selected evidence relating to local interaction with Charter Poles:
 - i) Indicative photographic evidence.
 - ii) Launch of a poetry competition at the Alder Hey Charter Pole, Liverpool, <https://twitter.com/LiverpoolParks/status/928304294692114432>.
 - iii) Video associated with 'Positive Belfast' YouTube vlog (4,700 subscribers), 4 January 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rzKICjiTjwk>.
 - iv) Twitter post announcing Bute Park Charter Pole, Cardiff, 27 November 2017, <https://twitter.com/cardiffcouncil/status/935146498471464960>.

- 8) 'Find a Charter Branch Near You', interactive map on the Charter website (see 5.4), including side-listing of institutional signatories (251 Community Charter Branches, 270 Parish Councils, 70 Tree Charter Branch Schools, 48 Student Groups), <https://treecharter.uk/get-involved.html>.
- 9) Evidence relating to examples of local government implementation of the principles of the Charter:
 - i) 'Tree Charter oak tree gets a new home in Cam', article on Gazette Series website describing interaction by Cam Parish Council with local Charter activity, 22 April 2019, <https://www.gazetteseries.co.uk/news/17589660.tree-charter-oak-tree-gets-new-home-cam/>.
 - ii) 'Tree Time in Edinburgh!', article on NEN – North Edinburgh News website discussing Edinburgh Tree Time pilot initiative, 22 June 2019, <https://nen.press/2019/06/22/tree-time-in-edinburgh/>.
 - iii) 'Tree and Woodland Strategy for Wolverhampton 2019-2029: Consultation Draft', July 2019.
 - iv) 'A New Northern Forest', manifesto of the Northern Forest scheme, 2017.
 - v) 'Why We're Creating a New Northern Forest', article contributed to Greater Manchester Green City Region website by co-instigator of the Northern Forest scheme, <http://gmgreencity.com/article/why-we-re-creating-new-northern-forest>.
- 10) Forestry sector testimonials:
 - i) Chief Executive, Sylva Foundation, 23 October 2020.
 - ii) Chief Executive, Royal Forestry Society, 3 November 2020.
 - iii) Publisher's webpage for *Evolving the Forest*, ed. S. Lloyd, R. Povall and J. Ralph (art.earth Books, 2020), showing Stafford's contribution, <https://art-earth.org.uk/product/evolving-the-forest/>.
- 11) 'Loved *The Overstory*? Richard Powers recommends 26 other books on trees', article on PBS NewsHour website, 29 November 2019, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/arts/loved-the-overstory-richard-powers-recommends-26-other-books-on-trees>.
- 12) Email from German reader of *LLLT*, 10 August 2020.
- 13) Evidence relating to the creation of the 'Literary Garden' at the Oxford Botanic Garden:
 - i) Reference to the Literary Garden in *The University of Oxford Botanic Garden & Arboretum Friends' Newsletter*, Summer/Autumn 2019, p. 3.
 - ii) Email from Deputy Director and Head of Science, Oxford Botanic Garden, 22 October 2020.