Institution: Middlesex University		
Unit of Assessment: UoA34		
Title of case study: Bridging the Digital Divide: Creativity research resulting in digital upskilling		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 1st Sept 2012 – 15th April 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Dr. Josie Barnard SFHEA	**Role(s) (e.g. job title):** Senior Lecturer in Creative Writing with Journalism	**Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:** 1st Sept 2012 to 15th April 2020
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 1st Aug 2013 to 31st Dec 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		

1. Summary of the impact

Despite increasing emphasis on online access in the public and private sphere, the digital divide is widening, with 52% of the workforce (17.2 million) lacking essential digital skills for work (Lloyds Digital Index, 2020). Barnard's research uses creativity to provide an adaptable model for effective and future-proofing digital upskilling which has:

- Influenced development of qualifications by OCN London (particularly their Essential Digital Skills Qualifications) and the Royal College of Nursing's Learning and Development Pathway for RCN Representatives;
- Changed perceptions of digital exclusion and influenced practice in charities/NGOs;
- Influenced policy thinking within the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) via membership of its Digital Skills and Inclusion Working Group (DSIWG);
- Enabled professional writers to advance their digital practice;
- Resulted in new methods for generating and capturing 'backlist' sales in publishing.

2. Underpinning research

Barnard's research, located within writing practice, analyses problems of 'digital exclusion' and provides solutions to digital skills acquisition with an emphasis on creativity and humanisation. Change in the digital sphere is rapid; equipment and discrete digital skills can quickly become obsolete. However, digital upskilling largely centres on provision of online access, equipment and/or technical training. Barnard identified that this approach alongside entrenched assumptions of 'digital natives' were inhibiting progress in enabling digital skills acquisition. First outlined in a submission to a House of Commons' Culture Media and Sport Select Committee report on *Supporting the Creative Economy* (Dec 2012), Barnard identified creative flexibility as key to providing 'future-proofing' digital upskilling. Leveraging her experience outside academia, including as an award-winning writer, radio producer/presenter and publishing editor, Barnard noted the impact of digital on workplace communication, with employees expected to absorb and process information from multiple sources and 'remain adaptable as new technologies emerge'. Later, during a speech to Parliament on the importance of digital for employability, MP Sharon Hodgson quoted one of Barnard's key points (2014): 'Students who are taught creative writing are taught creative thinking'.

This positioning of the centrality of creative thinking in the development of digital skills led Barnard to consider and empirically test if such creative thinking could be taught. Despite the rise of digital, use of new media technologies in the HE classroom was limited **[3.1]**, and there was an assumption that young people as 'digital natives' did not need to be 'taught' social media. Via pedagogical pilots using Twitter commencing 2012, Barnard provided evidence demonstrating both that the notion of 'digital natives' is a myth and that the myth can actively inhibit learning **[3.1]**. She also established that social media skills could, with measurable effectiveness and identifiable benefits, be taught **[3.1]**. Barnard then focussed on how so-called 'digital natives' could re-purpose existing leisure-time digital skills for use in employment and learning contexts. She highlighted fear (of failure, of 'looking a fool') and shame (due to assumptions that you should just be able to 'do' digital) as inhibitors of skills acquisition and argued that these barriers could not be overcome with exclusive focus on *external* provision of access, equipment and/or 'top down' training. Instead, she argued for the humanisation of digital skills acquisition and empowering learners. Barnard then developed a set of

assignments, which focused on using learners' *inner* resources to tackle digital challenges including repurposing of existing skills (reflective 'remediation of practice'). She also identified 'in person' support as key, and 'affect' (human senses, emotion) as a usable resource, deploying familiar 'old' technology (e.g. pencils) to build confidence **[3.2] [3.3] [3.4]**.

Humanisation of digital skills acquisition and barriers to learning were further examined in Barnard's BBC Radio 4 documentary *Digital Future: The New Underclass* (2019)**.** Here adopting a case study approach via interviews with employees, volunteers and clients of organisations (charities and NGOs) impacted by digital exclusion, Barnard interrogated the use of 'in person' support to enable empowerment**.** The documentary communicated prior insights (e.g. on the value of creativity for digital upskilling) as well as new insights on digital exclusion ('de-Othering') by making lived details of digital exclusion accessible and empathetic. Utilising a combination of statistics and interviews with digitally excluded citizens, Barnard showed that digital exclusion is not the preserve of an unlucky few but is indiscriminate of age and circumstance, and a 'piece of technology that's new to us' can induce panic and/or feelings of inadequacy **[3.5]**.

The Multimodal Writer (2019) extended thinking in relation to the role of creativity in digital skills acquisition and writers' ability to work across genres and platforms in the face of rapid technological change. To establish commonalities of experience, Barnard interviewed eight writers with long-held experience of 'multimodal' practice (including Simon Armitage CBE, Juliet Gardiner, Charlie Higson, Rhianna Pratchett and Michèle Roberts), identifying 'paradigmatic aspects' of their practice. Utilising these insights and those developed through her overall body of work, Barnard identified a set of skills that remain constant in the digital sphere. She then devised a set of assignments to develop digital skills (e.g. 'code-switching' identity between social media platforms or writing 'non-linear narratives') that enable learners to overcome inhibitors such as fear and shame. As part of this, Barnard outlined a 'model of creativity' comprising 'writerly resources', 'writerly personas', 'expert intuition', 'inner auteur' and 'creative projects', to be personalised by each user and applied to digital challenges according to need. This model uses creativity to apply internal multimodality to external multimodal problems **[3.6]**.

3. References to the research

3.1 Barnard, Josie. (2016). 'Tweets as microfiction: on Twitter's live nature and 140 character limit as tools for developing storytelling skills'. *New Writing: The International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing*, 13 (1), pp. 3-16. DOI:10.1080/14790726.2015.1127975. [Journal article]. Selected by Taylor & Francis for period of Open Access and blog.

3.2 Barnard, Josie. (2019). 'Twitter and Creative Writing: generating an "authentic" online voice'. In Innocent Chiluwa and Gwen Bouvier (eds) *Twitter: Global Perspectives, Uses and Research Techniques*. New York: Nova Science Publishers, pp. 191-214. Nova Science is a 'leading STM (Scientific, Technical and Medical) publishers worldwide', indicating reach of research beyond humanities. [Peer Reviewed Book Chapter].

3.3 Barnard, Josie. (2015). 'Live and public: one practitioner's experience and assessment of Twitter as a tool for archiving creative process'. *Journal of Writing in Creative Practice*, Writing-PAD, 7(3), pp. 493-503. DOI: 10.1386/jwcp.7.3.493_1. [Journal article].

3.4 Barnard, Josie. (2017). 'Testing possibilities: on negotiating writing practices in a 'postdigital' age (tools and methods).' *New Writing: The International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing*, 14 (2), pp. 275-289. DOI:10.1080/14790726.2016.1278025 [Journal article]

3.5 Barnard, Josie. (2019) *Digital Future: The New Underclass*. BBC Radio 4, 3rd Sept. 11am & 9th Sept 9pm. [Audio documentary] https://bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000823p.
Prime time documentary (rigorous selection process, only 1 in 23 proposals commissioned); mean live audience figure of 2,200,000-2,250,000, plus ongoing audience via BBC Sounds.

3.6 Barnard, Josie. (2019). *The Multimodal Writer: Creative Writing Across Genres and Media*. London: Macmillan International Higher Education UK/Red Globe. [Authored book]. Due to the significance of the impact of the 'digital turn' on writers, in 2021, the international double

blind peer reviewed journal *Writing in Practice* (*WiP*) will publish a special issue on the subject of multimodal writing, co-edited by Barnard http://bit.ly/3olO3EK. Barnard's membership of the Digital Skills and Inclusion Working Group (DSIWG) is based on the body of research represented by this monograph.

Monograph and journal articles all double-blind peer reviewed.
(Books, chapter and article available from Middlesex on request.)

4. Details of the impact

It is generally assumed that as more lifeline services go online, citizens will automatically gain necessary digital skills. However, the UK's main measures of 'digital exclusion' (Ofcom, ONS and Lloyds Bank Consumer Digital Index) shows this to be false, with 13% of UK adults not using the Internet, a figure 'unchanged since 2014' (Ofcom, 2020). Moreover, as widely reported, CV-19 lockdowns deepened the digital divide and exacerbated inequalities. Against this background, Barnard's research has been utilised to benefit individuals and organisations addressing digital exclusion including education providers, charities/NGOs and the Department of Culture Media and Sports (DCMS). It has also supported professional writers in advancing their digital practice, and benefited the publishing industry, developing a new method of generating and capturing 'backlist' sales.

Influencing the development of qualifications at OCN London and the Royal College of Nursing. OCN London is a not-for-profit organisation which provides access to learning and qualifications regardless of educational background, with 28,000 registered learners in 2019/20. Barnard's research not only influenced the development by OCN London of a new suite of Essential Digital Skills Qualifications (EDSQ), but also supported adaptation of existing qualifications after CV-19 mandated remote delivery. OCN London's Head of Qualifications and Innovation, Colin Rugg-Easey listened to Barnard's documentary 'several times' as part of the process of developing new EDSQs. He then approached Barnard, who acted as a consultant for the organisation during 2020. Examples of the influence of Barnard's research reported by Rugg-Easey **[5.1]** include the identification of 'shame' and 'fear' as a barrier to engagement, which prompted 'a more extreme "skills-based" and practical approach' to increase accessibility; and the emphasis on the myth of 'digital natives' influencing the drafting of a 'learner profile' which 'informed a more rounded understanding of target learners' requirements'. The latter 'led to the qualification design using learning tasks and assessments that consciously aim to work and minimise bias for learners across different ages and cultures.' **[5.1]** OCN London's announcement of OFQUAL approval of the EDSQs submitted for technical evaluation (Dec 2020) reflects Barnard's influence, highlighting the EDSQs' 'non-traditional learning and assessment methods' and assessments which 'will provide all learners an equal opportunity to demonstrate their learning' **[5.2]**. An indicator of the significance of the EDSQs in addressing digital exclusion is full Government funding to take OFQUAL approved EDSQ for 16-19 and 19+ employed or unemployed adults to develop their digital skills.

Barnard's emphasis on humanising digital skills acquisition and consequent focus on 'in person' support, also resulted in Rugg-Easey understanding that effective remote delivery during the CV-19 lockdown required more (not less) 'in person' support **[5.1].** This insight benefited the Royal College of Nursing (RCN), for which OCN London provides external quality assurance and accreditation. RCN's flagship UK Learning and Development Pathway for RCN Representatives had been delivered 'in person' since 2008, and as Mairead O'Siochru (RCN's Learning and Development Quality Assurance and Improvement Lead) notes, the programme is 'based on experiential learning and a humanist approach which seemed the opposite of on-line learning'. During CV-19 lockdown, Rugg-Easey advised RCN that if remote delivery incorporated more human support, not less, it could be effective. This led to RCN 'taking the risk' of developing an online version of this training programme (devised June 2020, launched Sept 2020, approximately 400 learners 2020-21) **[5.3].**

Influencing thinking and practice within charities and NGOs. Organisations that took part in Barnard's BBC Radio 4 documentary report that it encouraged new thinking and raised

awareness in relation to digital exclusion. Cliff Manning, Research and Development Director of Parent Zone, has worked for twenty years to support young people's digital participation. He notes how taking part in and listening to Barnard's documentary resulted in a widening of his understanding which became 'more nuanced' leading him 'to think further about the experience of people with dyslexia, for example, and the intersectional nature of digital exclusion' Manning also commented on the role the documentary played in highlighting the extent of digital exclusion and the fact that it affected 'young people too.' **[5.4a].** Julie Sarson, Job Club Manager at London's Ealing branch of Christians Against Poverty (CAP) changed her 'view of digital exclusion after participating in and listening to the documentary, seeing that a key barrier was clients' shame at not having the necessary digital skills.' Consequently, Sarson advised CAP volunteers to give 'more tailored, sensitive support' **[5.4b].**

Participation in the documentary and Barnard's clear articulation of the impact of digital exclusion on fundamentals such as securing housing had a major influence on Leeds based Refugee Education Training Advice Service (RETAS). Charlotte Hagerty, the RETAS Volunteer Co-ordinator, was particularly affected by two things: Barnard's assertion that 'in person' support can be critically enabling when working to support digitally excluded citizens; and Barnard's emphasis of statistics such as the numbers of UK citizens who are unable to even turn on a device (6 million) or open an app (7.1 million). Subsequently, Hagerty changed how she and her team worked with clients, devising an apparently simple method whereby volunteers sit with homeless clients to physically help them download apps to help them search for a home and then ensuring they had the digital skills to use them, thus 'improving their chances' of finding accommodation **[5.4c]**. The documentary also informed the charity's approach during the onset of the CV-19 lockdown (spring 2020) which forced all RETAS's services online, including the teaching of English. Influenced by the documentary, RETAS recognised it 'would be a huge challenge, especially for lower-level learners to access online classes' and introduced a blended approach that incorporated 'in-person' support ('face-to-face' video and phone calls) and study packs, alongside on-line elements **[5.4c].**

Influencing policy thinking within the DCMS. In 2018 Barnard was appointed to the DCMS Digital Skills and Inclusion Working Group (DSIWG) and via membership contributed to the development of *Enhancing Lives Through Digital Engagement: The 'What Works' Toolkit*, released to selected NGOs and charities working with digitally excluded citizens late 2020 (due for publication by the Government 2021). Professor Leela Damodaran (Professor Emerita of Digital Inclusion and Participation, Loughborough University; founder and Director of Digital Technologies and Social Inclusion (DTSI) Community Interest Company (CIC); and member of the DCMS Digital Skills and Inclusion Working Group) was commissioned by DCMS in 2019 to develop the *Enhancing Lives Through Digital Engagement* toolkit to address the needs and guide the digital engagement activities of digitally-disadvantaged people. Professor Damodaran notes that Barnard's direct contribution to the work of the DSIWG and insights from her research, specifically **[3.2] [3.4] [3.5]**, influenced the development of the *'What Works' Toolkit*. Examples include 'the notion that 'digital natives' is a myth' being reflected in the 'NEETS' section, which 'makes the argument for the use of one-to-one learning and support'; and the toolkit benefiting 'from Barnard's evidence-based demonstration that there is much to be gained when the nurturing of creative thinking is fostered – instead of a fixed, imposed curriculum.' The toolkit has as a 'key principle' 'making one-to-one support available in community venues' and Professor Damodaran adds that Barnard's work 'added considerable weight to the argument for investment in localised community-based human support for digital participation in all aspects of life' and 'makes clear the important role of support and active, empathetic teaching in giving confidence and promoting creativity' **[5.5]**. Commenting on the 'considerable expertise' Barnard contributes to DSIWG, Anais Bauduin (DCMS Head of Digital and Technology Analysis) and Danya Long (DCMS Economic Adviser, Digital Skills and Inclusion, Digital and Tech Policy Directorate) note how publications by Barnard, including *The Multimodal Writer*, demonstrate the key role of creativity in 'effective and future-proofing upskilling' and highlight the importance of embedding 'a practical understanding of how creativity functions in the context of digital upskilling in order to improve the clarity, accuracy and usefulness of our narrative on digital skills' **[5.6]**.

Impact on professional writers. Barnard's research has improved engagement across platforms and genres and increased productivity for the professional writing community. Former Chair of the National Association for Writing in Education (NAWE) and Principal Editor of *Writing in Practice*, Professor Derek Neale, notes how creative writing practitioners were 'becoming split between those who felt "techy" and those who felt they were falling behind', and that Barnard has 'made available to creative writers internationally an enabling new area of research, one that she has pioneered: namely, multimodal writing' which has 'empowered a wide range of writers' **[5.7a]**. Examples include award-winning author Michèle Roberts, who notes how her interview with Barnard for *The Multimodal Writer* helped her 'explore and clarify my thinking about my writing practice and methods. Afterwards, her book helped me see more clearly what those were, and how they might be enriched. Her book has inspired me to understand how different kinds of writing can cross-fertilise each other, and has been crucial in helping me make experiments to do with expanding the kinds of writing I do and the genres in which I write.' **[5.7b]** The myth of the 'digital native' perpetuates an idea that digital skills are young people's prerogative. By 'busting' this myth, Barnard's research empowers writers of all ages. Bestselling historian Juliet Gardiner, whose writing career spans 40 years, notes that Barnard's research 'legitimised the Internet for me', leading Gardiner to use online archives for her memoir, *Joining the Dots* (2017). Gardiner continues, 'Dr. Barnard's research […] opened my eyes to the possibilities of new technologies that can help and gave me the confidence to start experimenting and using them.' **[5.7c].** Further evidence of the significance of Barnard's research to the writing community is given by a chapter on her work being included in *Just You and the Page: Twelve Writers and Their Art* (Seren Books, 2021) by Sue Gee (Orange Prize-longlisted novelist) alongside writers including Anna Burns, Penelope Lively and Roy Strong. Due to the relevance of Barnard's research to writers facing ongoing technological change, *Just You and the Page* concludes with the chapter on Barnard **[5.7d].**

Impact on publishing. Erin Niumata, Folio Literary Management Senior Vice President and Literary Agent (New York), took Barnard's MA Writing for Creative and Professional Writing 2018-19 (Middlesex). An assignment required students to apply Barnard's multimodal writing research to the creation of a marketing campaign for a book. Niumata took the model she developed here into the 'real world' where she used it to promote both internationally best-selling author Carolyn Brown's then new novel, *Cowboy Bold* (2018) and, significantly, Brown's 'backlist'. Niumata notes that 'in publishing it is notoriously hard to gain visible increases in 'backlist sales''. To address this Brown and Niumata worked together on a three-week multimodal campaign via Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram and Facebook with readers invited to post photos of their favourite Brown novels. It resulted in over 6,000 reader submissions across all the platforms, 11,921 sales of *Cowboy Bold*, and tracked approximately 90,000 sales of backlist titles. Due to its success 'the promotion has become the boilerplate for launch campaigns with several other Folio authors' as well, including for three Eve Calder titles, three Dana Dratch titles and five Holly Jacobs titles, with overall sales increasing by 50-62%, 40-50% and 40-60% for all titles of each author respectively **[5.8]**.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

5.1 Statement Colin Rugg-Easey (OCN London).
5.2 OFQUAL approval of OCN EDSQ https://www.ocnlondon.org.uk/readmore/ID/1547
5.3 Statement from Mairead O'Siochru (Royal College of Nursing)
5.4 Statements from (a) Cliff Manning, Parent Zone (b) Julia Sarsons, Christians Against Poverty (c) Charlotte Hagerty, RETAS.
5.5 Statement from Leela Damodaran (member of the DCMS DSIWG).
5.6 Statement from DCMS Head of Digital and Technology Analysis and DCMS Economic Adviser, Digital Skills and Inclusion, Digital and Tech Policy Directorate.
5.7 Statements from the professional writing community (a) Derek Neale, Principal Editor *Writing in Practice* (b) Michèle Roberts (c) Juliet Gardiner (d) Sue Gee.
5.8 Statement from Erin Niumata (Folio Literary Management).