

Impact case study (REF3b)

Institution: Oxford Brookes University
Unit of Assessment: 29 - English Language and Literature
Title of case study: Breaking Barriers: The Oxford Brookes Poetry Centre
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>The Oxford Brookes Poetry Centre has, since its inception, been a focus for original research, community engagement and external collaborations. This relationship between research and outreach activities has resulted in significant cultural, educational and economic benefits. Work with refugees has empowered the individuals involved and contributed to social inclusion debates, tackling social and economic issues in creative forms. Children from underprivileged educational and economic backgrounds have had poetry made accessible to them through the establishment of the Oxford City Poet, encouraging their own creative writing and re-inspiring teachers. These projects have directly improved the cultural and creative life of Oxford and given a voice to those who would have been otherwise unheard.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Since its launch in 1998 The Poetry Centre has been the focus for academic events, seminars and community projects related to the research of Centre staff. This can be grouped into the following key areas: translation and travel (Sampson); postcolonialism and diaspora (Flannery and Matthews); English poetry and other cultures (Buxton, Matthews); poetry and religion (Huk); and creative writing (Sampson and Clanchy).</p> <p>Underpinning and linking many research outputs is a shared concern with the connections between poetry and historically disadvantaged groups in society. For example; poetry as a means of expression for those culturally or politically-oppressed members of the community; the use of poetry to mediate and to reflect upon social issues and crises; poetry as a means of expressing, and exciting, social conscience and civic responsibility. This research focus has meant that systematic external engagement has been embedded in the research activity from the outset, with genuine knowledge exchange, collaborations with non-academic individuals and organisations and co-production of new work at the heart of the Centre.</p> <p>The T.S. Eliot Prize short-listed poet, Sampson undertook an Arts & Humanities Research (AHRC) funded Creative Fellowship at the Poetry Centre, and its main output was the verse novel, <i>The Distance Between Us</i>. Research for the novel included archival work in the History Department's 'Refugee Practitioners' collection, and the piece intersected with the research outputs of other members of the Centre including, Flannery³, Matthews⁴ and Huk.⁵</p> <p>The Poetry Centre's open collaborative approach was exemplified in the Centre's <i>Poets and Refugees</i> project in 2009, which evolved from the research outputs of Buxton,¹ Sampson,² Flannery³ and Matthews.⁴ Buxton, Matthews, and Flannery were the principal researchers active in the project. Flannery's and Matthews' publications both focus on postcolonial cultures, Ireland and Australia respectively, and their knowledge of the politics, histories, poetics, and critical theorizations of colonial and postcolonial cultures were key informants of the project. Buxton's research on the poetics of place, and communal and ethnic identities in Irish and transatlantic contexts, further informed the thematics of the project.</p> <p>The Poetry Centre has housed and facilitated the production, dissemination and teaching of poetry and other forms of creative writing,⁶ and in tandem with research outputs in the areas of; diaspora, post colonialism, and religious faith, the role and remit of the <i>Oxford City Poet</i> was conceived. Research focused on ethnicity, migration and displacement, cultural difference and social exclusion which fed directly into the remit of the Oxford City Poet role. Collaboration between the Poetry Centre, Oxford Brookes University and Oxford City Council saw the appointment of Kate Clanchy to the position in July 2011.</p> <p>Clanchy's work in disadvantaged schools across Oxford has built on the research areas of the Poetry Centre, and projects have had lasting impacts on the education and lives of students from migrant and culturally marginal backgrounds. This work on immigration and migration has continued, as evidenced in Clanchy's most recent publication, <i>Meeting the English</i> (2013).</p>

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3. References to the research

¹ Rachel Buxton, *Robert Frost and Northern Irish Poetry*, Oxford University Press, 2004.
Submitted to RAE2008, Oxford Brookes University, UoA57- English Language and Literature, RA2, RE Buxton, Output 1.

² Fiona Sampson, *The Distance Between Us*, Seren, 2005.
Arts & Humanities Research Council, Creative Fellowship at Oxford Brookes University, "Voice, authority and cultural translation in the testimony of refugee clinicians to Britain 1930-1960", 2002-2005, Award value £54,000, <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/Funded-Research/Pages/Voice-authority-and-cultural-translation-in-the-testimony-of-refugee-clinicians-to-Britain-1930-1960.aspx>

³ Eóin Flannery, *Ireland and Postcolonial Studies: Theory, Discourse, Utopia*, Palgrave 2009.
Submitted to REF2014, Oxford Brookes University, UoA29- English Language and Literature, REF2, EPW Flannery, Output identifier 5947.

⁴ Steven Matthews, *Les Murray*, Manchester University Press, 2001.
Submitted to RAE2008, Oxford Brookes University, UoA57- English Language and Literature, RA2, SJ Matthews, Output 1.

⁵ Romana Huk, "Poetry and Religion" in *A Concise Companion to Postwar British and Irish Poetry*, Nigel Alderman and C. D. Blanton, eds., Oxford University Press, 2009, 221-42.

⁶ Kate Clanchy, *Meeting the English*, Picador, 2013.
Submitted to REF2014, Oxford Brookes University, UoA29- English Language and Literature, REF2, KS Clanchy, Output identifier 9076.

4. Details of the impact

From its inception the Poetry Centre has sought to embed external impact within its research by developing a symbiotic relationship between its research and outreach activities. This has resulted in both wide-ranging external impact and significant cross-fertilisation of ideas leading to new research insights and outputs. Impacts have been:

- Conceptual - influencing thinking and ways of seeing important social and economic issues.
- Instrumental - leading to tangible impacts such as the establishment of a new Oxford City Poet role and new co-produced publications.
- Capacity building - providing a focus through events and opportunities to encourage and support new writers from diverse cultural and socio-economic background.

The Centre makes extensive use of digital media to ensure its research reaches a global audience, with over 2700 subscribers worldwide from 50 countries, across its digital channels (Twitter, Facebook, a Weekly Poem mailing list). From 31 July 2012 to 31 July 2013, there were over 12000 visits to the Centre's Website.^{7,8} The Poetry Centre maintains a continuous lively and dynamic presence, through podcasts of poetry readings, to providing resources and opportunities for interaction with writers and researchers, publishing new centre research and highlighting events and projects.

Specific Project Impact examples include:**Oxford Poets and Refugees Project 2008-2009**

The work was driven by a concern with place and displacement, and migrant experiences in a neo-colonial context. The project operated in collaboration with *Asylum Welcome* and *Refugee Resource*. Oxford-based poets, including Bernard O'Donoghue, Jamie McKendrick and Carole Angier, were teamed with 14 exiled and refugee writers. A series of workshops explored and created new writing based on stories and experiences of exile, leading to the writing of 43 new pieces of work and the publication of an anthology, *See How I Land* (Heaventree Press, 2009). To date this has sold 1500 copies, raised £3000 for *Asylum Welcome*, as well as making the public more aware of the charity. The work was showcased at eight readings and events, including the

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Oxford Literary Festival, 'Freed Speech', a Poet in the City event at Amnesty International's headquarters in London¹⁴, and an event at Woodstock Bookshop which was attended by 90 schoolchildren.

The project produced high-quality literature and broke down some of the perceived barriers between higher education, poetry, and the community. The project gave a voice to those whose voices are seldom heard and contributed to debates and awareness about the social inclusion of asylum seekers, immigration, and refugees. The project was widely publicized in local and national press, including in the *Oxford Times*¹⁰ and *Modern Poetry in Translation*¹¹. The project was shortlisted in the 'Excellence and Innovation in the Arts' category at the 2009 *THE Awards*.¹² And a one-hour interview was broadcast on BBC Radio Oxford on October 23rd 2009.¹³ Through these means, it reached over 6,500 people.

A trustee at *Asylum Welcome*, confirmed that 'the project made demonstrable impacts on both its participants and on local refugee, public, and academic audiences'. For the refugee writers, she says, 'the project served as a vital source of self-confidence and actualization and enabled them to communicate their stories, ideas and experiences in creative forms. Other writers, already very well established in their home-countries of Palestine and Afghanistan, gained access to writing, publishing and media in the UK.'¹⁵

The Arts Council South East Literature Officer, 2003-2010, writes: 'Fulfilling one of the Arts Council's key aims of social inclusion, the project helped demonstrate to readers and audiences that today's refugee would probably be tomorrow's upstanding and hard-working citizen... The exiled writers for the most part felt validated, accepted and better able to live confidently in a difficult environment.' She added, 'locally, they can make a strong and influential impact, both for the participants and the communities they live in, helping overcome prejudice on both sides of ethnic divides.'¹⁶

The Oxford City Poet 2011-2013

The role of Oxford City Poet was established in 2011 as a direct result of Poetry Centre research and undertaken in collaboration with Oxford City Council. The Poetry Centre manages the role, most recently held by Kate Clanchy. Clanchy has taken poetry out to a range of ethnic and migrant communities in the Oxford area, encouraging the creation of new work by schoolchildren from underprivileged educational and economic backgrounds across the city.

The conceptual and capacity-building impact of the role has been praised by the teachers involved. The Head of English at Cheney School, notes that Clanchy 'has a very clear drive to make poetry accessible to young people from all backgrounds'.¹⁷ A Cheney governor, states that Clanchy's work 'proved inspirational to the students who felt that their efforts were being valued by a "real writer". This enabled the teaching staff to better appreciate and foster the creative talents of their students and has contributed to a shift of culture within the school.'¹⁸ He concluded that because the school library stocks the annual booklets of the Writing Group's work, 'other young people either aspire to see their own writing in print, or to value creative writing, knowing it has been achieved by their peers. In a school community as mixed as Cheney's, this is of key importance in raising standards and aspirations and is a positive outcome of Kate's encouragement of the Creative Writing Group.'¹⁸

Similarly, the Cultural Development Manager at Oxford City Council, believes 'The Poetry Centre's research and outreach expertise has been crucial in creating and shaping the role of the City Poet and has had a positive effect upon the cultural and creative life of Oxford, particularly in respect to the ethnic diversity of participants and social inclusion.' She felt that Clanchy's work as City Poet successfully promoted the usefulness of creative writing in relation to literacy and quality of life. The City Council's Culture Team is now supporting the development of Writer Squads for young people in the city to build on this legacy.

The City Poet has also helped the City Council deliver on the objectives of the Culture Strategy 2012-15, in particular with regards to sustaining, developing and improving the cultural life of the

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city and improving opportunities for young people to access and actively participate in high-quality cultural activities.¹⁹

According to the National Director of *First Story*, a national literacy charity for deprived schoolchildren, the Oxford programme 'produces consistently excellent work from students of all abilities from the gifted and talented to challenging and troubled students. She [Clancy] has also engaged and re-inspired the teachers she works with and built lasting and strong relations both with them and with the school as a whole.'²⁰

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

The extensive external impact of the Centre and the specific examples mentioned can be corroborated in a number of ways, including direct testimony; media mentions; and extensive altmetrics on the use of the website, Twitter, Facebook usage and resource subscribers. Specific indicative references are:

Website and Social Media:

7. Oxford Brookes University Poetry Centre Website: <http://poetry.brookes.ac.uk/>

8. Altmetrics for website usage and social media channels (12, 209 visits to the Poetry Centre website between 31 July 2012 and 31 July 2013, and at 31 July: 885 Twitter followers; 1019 subscribers to the Weekly Poem; 805 likes on Facebook): <https://twitter.com/brookespoetry> and <https://www.facebook.com/oxfordbrookespoetrycentre>

Poets and Refugees Project:

9. End of Grant Report submitted to Arts Council

Media highlights and reviews:

10. Fran Bardsley, *Oxford Times*, 19 November 2008:

http://www.oxfordtimes.co.uk/search/3861983.Uni_to_publish_refugee_poets/

11. *Modern Poetry in Translation*, 3.12: <http://www.mptmagazine.com/feature/see-how-i-land-oxford-poets-and-exiled-writers-31/>

12. Shortlisting for the 'Excellence and Innovation in the Arts' category at the 2009 *THE Awards*: <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/408071.article>

13. BBC Radio Oxford interview with Yousif Qasmiyeh, 23 October 2009.

14. *Poet in the City* website: an audio interview with Bernard O'Donoghue at the 'Freed Speech' event which featured O'Donoghue, Yousif Qasmiyeh, Jamie McKendrick, and Dawood:

<http://www.poetinthe-city.co.uk/events/53/audio>

Supporting Correspondence:

15. Corroborating statement author 1. Trustee, *Asylum Welcome*.

16. Corroborating statement author 2. Arts Council South East Literature Officer, 2003-2010.

Oxford City Poet:

17. Correspondence with Head of English, Cheney School, Headington, Oxford (Statement and details available from Oxford Brookes Research Support office upon request)

18. Corroborating statement author 3. Correspondence with Governor, Cheney School, Headington, Oxford.

19. Corroborating statement author 4. Correspondence with Cultural Development Manager, Oxford City Council.

20. Corroborating statement author 5. Correspondence with National Director of *First Story*.

21. English teacher and Director of the Cherwell School Creative Writing Club (Statement and details available from Oxford Brookes Research Support office upon request)