Vision

Our research vision can be articulated in terms of a shared and common commitment: through critical interrogation, creative practice, scientific experiment, and technological development to conceive and develop new forms of mediated expression and communication and to make visible what is currently invisible, obscure or misunderstood in theatre, film, television, interactive media and the inter-disciplinary space wherein they converge.

Scope

Our vision has a strong focus on contemporary articulations of mediated creative expression, communication and interaction, but it acknowledges that this is necessarily informed and underpinned by a sound understanding of the corresponding historical developments, science and technology.

While acknowledging that some activities will be medium-specific and, thus, aligned with more traditional disciplines, we will foster inter- and multi-disciplinary research, identifying and embracing commonalities between these media, as well as conceiving and developing new forms of mediated communication and creative expression.

We will employ and further develop complementary research methods that exploit and uncover mutually reinforcing links between theoretical investigations, creative practice, technological developments and experimental enquiry.

We envision a strong integration of our research with professional practice. Research questions will be co-created and routes to impact will be developed in dialogue with the creative industries, relevant government bodies and third party institutions as well as the general public.

Context

The Department of Theatre, Film and Television (TFTV) was founded in 2007. The period 2007-2014 was a period of rapid growth, with a stronger focus on teaching, but with a very healthy research output as well: 3 new undergraduate
and 5 new postgraduate programmes have been developed and the department’s research has been submitted as a unit$^1$ to REF 2014 to D34: Music, Drama, Dance and Performing Arts. Currently$^2$, the department has 24 members of academic staff, of which 20 are on teaching and research contracts, 12 (60%) being early career researchers$^3$, and 4 are on teaching and scholarship contracts. The period 2014-2020 is envisaged to be of greater research focus, with significantly increased research funding and a clearer positioning of the department as a centre for excellence in research in theatre, film, television, interactive media and the interdisciplinary space wherein they converge.

The university research strategy states 7 research themes as its current areas of research excellence. Our department’s research is very well aligned with 3 of them, namely creativity, culture and communication; and technologies for the future; and currently has connections with another two, namely health and wellbeing and justice and equality.

The sector. The Creative Industries are among the fastest growing industries in the UK. In 2012 they accounted for 1.68 million jobs (1 in every 18) and had a growth rate of 8.6%, compared to 2011, more than 11 times faster than the UK Economy as a whole$^4$. The Gross Value Added generated by the Creative Industries in 2012 was £71.4 billion, 5.2% of the overall UK Economy, having increased 3 times faster (15.6 %) since 2008 than the economy as a whole$^1$.

**Foundations**

Aligned with the university strategy, the following drivers are expected to underpin our research and will be seen as the basis for research success:

1. **Excellence**

We will promote research excellence and will define “excellence” in accordance to the REF guidelines, considering, for example, key criteria such as “originality”, “rigour” and “significance”. Quality of outputs will be favoured over quantity.

2. **Innovation**

We will promote research that introduces new ideas, insights, scientific results, theoretical frameworks and methodologies, and/or which leads to the development of novel (media) artefacts, systems and practices. We will support the development of research concepts that break the boundaries of traditional media and originate new forms of mediated expression and communication.

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$^1$ with referrals
$^2$ November 2014
$^3$ As defined by AHRC [http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/Funding-Opportunities/Research-funding/RFG/Eligibility/Pages/Early-career-and-research-projects.aspx](http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/Funding-Opportunities/Research-funding/RFG/Eligibility/Pages/Early-career-and-research-projects.aspx)
$^4$ Department for Culture Media and Sports, Creative Industries Economic Estimates, January 2014
3. Impact

We will concentrate on the impact of our research, nurturing close relationships with industry, government, third parties and the general public, co-creating research questions and maximising the economic, cultural and social reach of our research results.

Strategic objectives

The department’s research vision will be realised through achieving the following strategic goals:

1. increase research income and the percentage of staff holding grants
2. focus research on high-quality REF outputs and major impact case studies
3. deploy appropriate departmental and university resources to nurture a vibrant, dynamic and cohesive research environment and to create optimal conditions for excellent research
4. develop a stronger relationship between commercial enterprise and research
5. provide appropriate guidance to help individual researchers make strategic choices and optimise their own research agendas
6. strengthen research convergence and define a distinctive department research identity, expressed through a small number of core themes aligned with the university’s main research themes
7. develop postgraduate research, well integrated with the department’s research environment

Implementation

The following actions will be undertaken to ensure the realisation of the strategic objectives.

1. Increase research income and the percentage of staff holding grants

We will

- Set targets for the overall department research income, and the number and sizes of grant submissions (an initial proposal is drafted in Annex 1)
- Translate the overall department target into individual indicative targets
  - they will reflect the non-uniformity of our research activities, the experience and individual needs of each individual member of staff, as well as the overall department needs
  - a set of criteria will be developed to guide this process
  - this more detailed individual planning will happen in the first term of each academic year, possibly combined with the performance review process
• Prioritise the deployment of department resources to support grant applications (an initial proposal is started in Annex 2)
  o safeguard time devoted to research and to grant application in particular
  o prioritise the allocation of research funds to activities that could lead to robust grant applications
  o provide guidance and support at the write-up stage, in framing cases of support and developing project implementation plans (via the Department Research Committee and individual research mentors)
  o create an appropriate managerial or administrative role in the department (not necessarily 1FTE) to support research projects
  o get stronger involvement from the department’s commercial enterprise section in the development of research projects
• Formulate research proposals that exploit our excellent facilities (equipment, space and technical support), which could set us apart from other universities
  o optimise the use of department facilities and space between research, teaching and commercial activities
  o align the set targets for research income with the department’s capacity to support research in terms of facilities, space and technical support
• Make good use of the central university resources to support grant applications
  o use the resources available in the Humanities Research Centre for project costing, project planning and constructing cases for impact
  o increase the department’s research budget in parallel with the increase of the department’s overall research income (Annexe 1)
• Disseminate relevant opportunities for funding and organise the support required by staff to make good use of such opportunities, such as meetings to discuss financing and scope of projects, but also to constructively critique and improve project ideas, etc. (via the Research Committee)
• Disseminate successful project proposals as well as ideas for new research projects
• Support participation in networking events that could lead to grant proposals, focusing on opportunities for large collaborative projects
• Organise internal events that showcase our research and facilities with a view to fostering links for collaborative research projects

2. Focus research on high quality REF outputs and major impact case studies

We will

• Focus individual efforts towards the production of five very high quality outputs within the current REF period, thus prioritising quality over quantity (through research mentoring and guidance from RC)
• As a department, identify research that has potential for high impact and, in such cases, support activities that create pathways for impact amplification
Devise a departmental REF strategy, after the publication of the REF 2014 results and of the initial guidelines for the next REF process
  - In particular, devise a strategy for best framing inter-disciplinary research results to guide the way we think about research outputs (e.g. the REF 2014 methodology was not particularly supportive of inter-disciplinary research)
  - Define an appropriate balance between “impactful” and “blue-sky” research

Prioritise the allocation of research funds to supporting research that generates high quality outputs and major impact case studies (Annex 2)

3. **Deploy appropriate departmental and university resources to nurture a vibrant, dynamic and cohesive research environment and to create optimal conditions for excellent research**

We will

- In making future appointments, seek to attract individuals with established research track record and potential for developing high-calibre (world-leading) research, preferably carrying out inter- and multi-disciplinary research as stated in our research vision
- Safeguard the time planned to be devoted to research, through the workload model. Where this is not entirely possible due to teaching commitments and admin responsibilities, use sabbaticals to make up for the “lost” difference.
- Organise a diverse range of department-centred activities and meetings, including:
  - research seminars held by prominent researchers
  - quick presentations (pitches) of potential research projects followed by discussions aimed to enhance as well as challenge the proposals
  - round the table discussions on themes of mutual interest
  - celebrations and summaries of what is currently going on in the department (projects, publications, presentations, etc.)
- Strengthen links between postgraduate and staff research activities
  - include PhD presentations in the research seminar series
  - organise a research students event, with short pitches from PhD students and staff attendance
- Disseminate the department’s research (through Pure, department web page, notice board, etc.)
- Strengthen links between research and teaching
  - delegate this task to LTC and BOS
- Develop the role of a department research administrator/manager
- Increase the involvement of the technical team in supporting research activities
- Define criteria for an optimum share of department’s facilities between research, teaching and commercial activities
- Seek university support to expand the research capacity of the department (particularly in terms of space)
• Strengthen links with other departments
• Develop long-term strategic external collaborations
  o with excellent international academic institutions
  o with major players in the creative industries
  o with key government and third party institutions

4. Develop a stronger relationship between commercial enterprise and research

We will

• Get stronger involvement in the development of research projects
  o disseminate the results of existing research
  o identify opportunities for collaboration with industry, government and third party institutions (not just knowledge transfer, but also for more fundamental research)
  o help formulate pathways to impact in research proposals
• Support existing projects in developing their potential economic, cultural and social impact

5. Provide appropriate guidance to help individual researchers make strategic choices and optimise their own research agendas

We will

• Define a system of individual research performance indicators (or targets), covering funding, outputs, impact amplification activities, participation in external activities such as journal editorship, conference programme committees, guest and invited lectures, PhD examinations, etc., guided by the forthcoming REF documentation
• Develop a more rigorous departmental research mentoring system – all members of academic staff are assigned mentors who are normally members of the department’s research committee. The role of mentors is to advise and support staff on all aspects of their research including developing new projects, identifying potential sources of funding, assisting with grant applications, investigating appropriate publishing opportunities, identifying potentials for enhancing research impact, etc.
• Devise process whereby all research active staff will formulate a research plan with the assistance of their research mentor, stating their strategic choices and seeking to optimise the quality of their research outputs
• Organise annual meetings between all research active academic staff and the department’s Chair of Research to discuss current activities, future plans, opportunities and challenges

6. Strengthen research convergence and define a distinctive department research identity, expressed through a small number of core themes aligned with the university’s main research themes
We will

- Encourage and support research initiatives that inherently bring together topics from theatre, film, television and interactive media and thus create new themes for inter-disciplinary research
- Organise departmental discussions and debates to refine our identity in a bottom-up manner, from individuals’ research strengths and interests, ongoing or planned research projects, etc.
- Exploit, in research activities, our existing expertise in professional practice and develop mutually re-enforcing links between research and professional practice
- Inform the definition of our research identity by strategic documents (RCUK, UK Government, EU H2020, etc.) that set policies for the creative industries sector
- Inform the definition of our research identity by enhancing our understanding of similar developments that are taking place at other prestigious universities worldwide
- Acknowledge that the area in which theatre, film, television, and interactive media converge is only just emerging and therefore has no established taxonomy or vocabulary with which to be described; the department’s research activity will not only define the areas as such, but will also have to create an appropriate terminology.

7. Develop postgraduate research, well integrated with the department’s research environment

We will

- Set targets for the overall number of postgraduate students (see Annex 3)
- Seek resources to create more studentships and bursaries (e.g. on the basis that the department’s research income will grow as planned).
- Continue to organise a department event centred on research students