TORCH | The Oxford Research Centre in the Humanities

Mission Statement

TORCH | The Oxford Research Centre in the Humanities stimulates, supports and promotes research activity of the very highest quality that transcends disciplinary and institutional boundaries, and engages with wider audiences.

Summary: Launched in May 2013, TORCH provides an important opportunity for Oxford's humanities scholars to collaborate with researchers across other disciplines, and institutions; work with academics across all stages of their academic careers; develop partnerships with public and private institutions; engage with wider audiences; and bring together academic research, diverse industries, and the performing arts.

TORCH is led by an academic director: Professor Stephen Tuck (Modern History), until September 2015, and now Professor Elleke Boehmer (World Literature in English). TORCH has continued to be a nucleus of intellectual energy for the humanities and a place to develop new ideas and collaborations both within and beyond the academy. During 2014-15, TORCH hosted almost 400 events, involving over 13,000 people, supported 400 affiliated researchers, Knowledge Exchange and Early Career Fellows, 21 networks and 10 programmes. Since its creation, TORCH has raised £1.2million in grants and philanthropy so far to develop research projects.

TORCH hosted a range of interdisciplinary projects, collaborating with all 9 humanities faculties, departments in the sciences, and cultural organisations. Some of the highlights included the launch event for its headline series Humanities and Science – 'Narrative and Proof' which had an audience of over 450 and was livestreamed around the world, 'That Other Place' exhibition at the O3 Gallery in the Oxford Castle Quarter, Ian Bostridge as the Visiting Professor in Classical Music, and hosting the Callaloo Writers' Workshop, the leading journal of African Diaspora, Arts and Letters.

Core values:

- We emphasise quality over quantity, and facilitate the best proposals on a competitive basis
- We foster collaboration across disciplines, divisions, and colleges
- We do not set a central research agenda but nurture research networks and projects that emerge from within our academic community
- We encourage intellectual risk-taking and incubate new ideas
- We promote engagement with the world outside of Oxford and beyond academia
- We ensure early career scholars are involved in leading research projects
- We make the case for humanities more broadly, and work closely with partner organisations in the UK and around the world
- We prioritise support for projects that will leave a research legacy in terms of publications, successful grant applications, wider public impact, knowledge exchange, and postgraduate recruitment

Through the provision of seed-funding, administrative support, publicity, research space, conference facilities, and advice from senior faculty, TORCH supports:
- 21 research networks
- 10 major research programmes
- 22 early career fellows
- knowledge exchange fellows
- the Humanitas Visiting Professor Programme
- training programmes for knowledge exchange and early career researchers
- partnerships with leading universities in the UK and beyond
- partnerships with public and private institutions

TORCH is a fundamental part of the University of Oxford's Strategic Plan Priorities and the Humanities Division's Strategic Plan.

Priority 2: Networking, communication and interdisciplinarity – to build on Oxford's multiple disciplinary strengths and enable collaborations in new and developing areas

University of Oxford Strategic Plan

To ensure the Oxford Research Centre for the Humanities (TORCH) plays a key role in incubating new interdisciplinary research agendas and fostering and brokering interdisciplinary collaboration with academic staff, early career researchers, graduate students and with college research centres

Humanities Division Strategic Plan

TORCH seeks to develop into a World-Leading Research Centre, which stimulates and supports interdisciplinary research of the very highest quality and impact, and adds value to existing humanities research in Oxford and beyond.

- **Generate new, high-quality, interdisciplinary research networks and programmes**
  - Approve 3 new networks each term (each to last for a maximum of two years)
  - Support c. 10 research programmes each year (a programme brings together existing clusters of researchers in a given theme, with no fixed time limit)

- **Support and stimulate collaboration across divisions**

- **Build early career scholar community (in liaison with the Humanities Training Officer)**
  - Select c. 20 early career researchers to be based at TORCH in an gathered field
  - Provide weekly training programme for all early career researchers
  - Run annual postgraduate competitions to promote interdisciplinary engagement
  - Ensure that all funding opportunities include provision for early career leadership
  - Seek partnerships with colleges for early career posts and research opportunities

- **Develop external collaboration**
  - In liaison with Knowledge Exchange Champion, develop partnerships with local and national institutions, formalising three relationships: (i) Science Museum; (ii) National

Trust; and (iii) British Library, and exploring further links with business and industry

- Include provision for knowledge exchange in applications to funding bodies and donors

- Develop research partnerships with humanities centres abroad: formalise opportunities for collaboration and exchange with humanities centres at Harvard, Virginia and Delhi, and the Cini research centre in Venice

- Engage with appropriate global and European humanities centre consortia

▪ **Maintain research quality**

- Ensure that all major research projects and personnel are selected on a competitive basis, overseen by the steering committee

- Ensure that the key criteria by which applications are evaluated all relate to the likely research legacy of any project, including:publications (academic, popular and in the media); wider public impact; successful grant applications; collaborative partnerships; postgraduate recruitment; knowledge exchange; and becoming self-sustaining research projects

- Director to meet annually with leaders of TORCH networks, and termly with leaders of major programmes, to discuss future plans; encourage three networks and programmes to submit external grant applications each year

- Produce a major published output from each year's headline programme

- Monitor achievements of TORCH projects annually, including grants secured, publications, partnerships and public engagement, and opportunities for early career researchers

▪ **Increase TORCH's wider impact**

- Create TORCH Annual Headline Research Series – building on local strengths from the ground up – to include a major launch event, with demonstrable public impact, and a series of strategic and innovative collaborative workshops to set new research agendas

- Promote and support colleagues' research projects that have won major external grants, including provision of prominent space on TORCH website and desk space for early career researchers associated with the project

- Host and support appropriate conferences, public events and performances that colleagues would like to host at TORCH (and in most instances already have funding)

- Promote new interdisciplinary publications through the website and public book discussions
- Engage the wider Oxford community in appropriate research events, including local schools
- Maintain the high quality and impact of the Humanitas Visiting Professor Programme, while continuing to integrate the programme into the research life of the university
- Host annual public Digital Humanities lecture and summer school, as well as other smaller-scale Digital Humanities events

- **Develop communications**
  - Media: place articles in external media or online outlets on a regular basis
  - Website: increase usability, measure and analyse 'virtual visitors' numbers and behaviour, seek regular feedback from users, and improve website according to results
  - 'Branding toolkit' to ensure consistency and professional visual identity and brand
  - Social media: TORCH Twitter feed and Facebook page
  - Newsletter: communicate regularly and coherently with our audiences