



RESEARCH PROPOSAL 2023 - 2028

Name of Academic Lead:	Professor Charles Quick
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Tick which research area this plan refers to:

Health and Wellbeing		Public Value Governance	
Place and Culture	x	Social Inclusion	

NB This proposal to be completed with reference to the WRL Business plan 2023-2028

Insert names and roles of other research team members:

Name	Role
Dr John Scanlan	Research Fellow

Q1. Define the research proposal for 2023-2028 for the above area with reference to:

- (i) the activities the team proposes to undertake;**
- (ii) the scope and, in general terms, methodology;**
- (iii) what is new and original and the capacity for invention, innovation and added value.**

We recognise that these plans will be more detailed for the early years than for the later years.

Project Title

‘Learning from the Contemporary: Emergent Cultural Practice and Policy Development’

Context and Background

Between 2017 and 2022 our work was concerned with the concept of ‘place’ and with the distinctive qualities and cultural characteristics of the region: its tangible and intangible cultural heritage, its unique history and topography, its peripheral location. Addressing issues related to an initial focus on ‘place development and promotion’, we found that the challenge of making the region more attractive to those looking in from the outside, depended to some extent on discovering or developing a unique sense of place — an image of place, or place identity — that

might convey something of its cultural distinctiveness. The project developed a range of partnerships with local organisations and institutions, published research outputs, and delivered a range of Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF) indicators and a REF Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2021 Practice Portfolio for Scanlan.¹

In one significant sense, a link between the original 'place development and promotion' focus (2017-2023) and the proposed project is found in the form of West Cumbria 'Creative People and Places' (CPP). This is a community arts engagement programme funded by Arts Council England (ACE), whose bid we played a key role in conceptualising and then bringing to the region through our bid development / writing role and our continuing contribution as the programme's Learning Partner. CPP will bring at least £1.8m investment in community arts and cultural infrastructure and activities, reaching places all across the region.

Building on the success of the initial phases of research and the networks that we have developed, this project will develop a broader approach to place and culture, investigating the interrelationship of the various cultural, economic, social spheres of life and how they shape the contemporary, looking not for final solutions to the challenges of the present but rather initiating inquiries and developing practices that reveal novel or better interventions, and more refined ways of interrogating and understanding the role of culture in the political economy of the region.

A key concept directing research and practice is the notion of 'the contemporary'. The contemporary is the present infused with the immediate past and pointed to the near future, which is the fluid context within which we live our lives. But, rather than merely pointing to the present, the contemporary must be understood to be much more complex than the term itself perhaps implies. We must understand that whatever present circumstance we are acting from or observing from is not only one that is mutable and potentially the source of uncertainties, but one that in drawing from the past, the present and also from actions and strategies that are future-directed, is actually multitemporal. Within the context of a region where collective memory runs up against heritage landscapes and the present and future of nuclear decommissioning and its uncertain impact on the economic future of the region, time and temporality are very much the complex and layered contexts that shape how we live, and arguably in ways that are more marked than in other regions or places.

Scope and Methodology

Our methods challenge how we understand and experience living in and with places. They foster long-term change by connecting institutions and communities, and will form part of an ongoing conversation about what places mean, who has the power to (re)make them and how cultural practice can help us to connect with and care for the places in our lives.

Our practice engages with culture in the broadest sense: from understandings that are rooted in the culture and heritage of place in the most local sense, to others that identify cultural production, participation and consumption as key aspects in how we live today. Within the context of the political economy of the region, culture refers also to the role of knowledge, discourse and the emergence of particular values in defining and giving form to policy and practice. Our project seeks to use our knowledge and expertise to influence these. In concrete terms, the project will develop through the following means:

- *Social Interaction*: Creating space for democratic community exchange.
- *A Virtual Practice Studio*: A space where our network can share ideas, and present issues relating to the practical and policy challenges they engage with in their work.
- *Desktop Research*: Underpinning engagement, developing contextual frameworks and framing knowledge of emerging cultural developments both locally and more widely.
- *Practice Development*: Collaborating with partners to help them develop objectives and actions to grow the cultural ecology of the region.

¹ Our Learning Partner role has been highlighted in the latest UCLan Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF) submission: <https://kef.ac.uk/data/10007141>

Ongoing and Future Activities

Our approach reveals the ways in which emergent actions or processes are already taking shape and how they may be brought into relation to create new assemblages that can, for example, allow for greater participation and benefit from the cultural life of the region. As researchers we occupy a role that can be seen to be both inside and outside of the forces that shape the political economy of the region. But in such a position, we are uniquely placed to observe developments and seek out ways of connecting those who share common goals, but who yet may not be fully aware of each others' existence or shared interests.

Learning Partner, Creative People and Places, 2022-2025

The role we established with 'Creative People and Places: West Cumbria' as Learning Partner involves occupying an objective and critical position in relation to the programme. The principal goal is to reveal how actions and relationships within the programme are working, and to suggest ways of improving or refining approaches, practices and actions. We are, therefore, an integral link between the various actors and components that make up the programme in an operational sense. Beyond this, the role also involves sharing our learning of how the practical implementation of ACE's 2020-2030 strategy ('Let's Create') is changing the ways that the arts are funded now, with the CPP programme forming part of a national strategy through which ACE shifts its focus from artist-based investment to community-led investment and activities as a means of increasing participation. In this sense, the role we developed — which was not a feature of CPP programmes elsewhere, is unique to our conceptual work in outlining a philosophy of learning for the programme — feeds into national arts and cultural practice and policy development through ACE's national Peer Learning Network.²

'Creative People and Places' illustrates one approach to developing the cultural infrastructure and broader cultural ecology of places insofar as it is intended to stimulate self-sustaining engagement at the community level through arts participation and, ultimately, community ownership of a commissioning process that is funded by Arts Council England. But, more broadly than that, as a collaborative effort between a range of organisations, institutions and economic partners, the development of the bid that brought this investment to the region involved another facet of the region's developing cultural ecology, which exists at the level of local government, arts organisations, economic players, and institutions like UCLan. Establishing and sustaining new relationships with these partners provides a model of cultural practice that we will build upon in the next five years.

Democratic Exchange and Policy Development, 2023-2024

Recently, in April 2023, a cultural strategy for West Cumbria was launched under the aegis of the new Cumberland council.³ To mark the creation of the new local authority, we organised a 'walking and talking' workshop in June 2023, which visited two places that could be taken to represent different facets of the new Cumberland. This workshop was originally intended to stimulate conversation on two contrasting places in Cumbria, if not to think about what the naming of the new council as 'Cumberland' might change about the region and the role of culture and the arts in the new local government configuration. We asked participants with an interest or stake in the culture of the region, or academic expertise in 'place' and culture — from organisations such as BEC, Whitehaven Harbour Commissioners, Cumberland Council, University of Manchester, University of Cumbria, Manchester Metropolitan University, Liverpool John Moores University, Eden Arts, and independent cultural producers — to reflect on the discussions that took place during the workshop and contribute two views or two perspectives of their own, and to consider more broadly how the demands of the contemporary are being addressed in their own thinking and practice in relation to place and culture.

From a methodological point of view, this initiative illustrates the importance we place on social interaction as a means of opening up a space of democratic exchange, and it is an important indicator of how we intend to continue. It also serves as one instance of how method and practice relate to outputs: the project is initiated through our intervention, it then develops further through

² See: <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/your-area/place-based-peer-learning-programme>

³ <https://www.allerdale.gov.uk/en/sport-leisure-arts-culture/cultural-strategy-west-cumbria-2022-27/>

the coming together of interested parties, stimulates dialogue and discovery, and continues through further refinements and discussions, which will result in a publication that will be produced some time in 2024.

Provisional Outline of Activities

Year 1 (2023-24)	Learning Partner CPP; Democratic Exchange and Policy Development; Publication outputs (articles and a book).
Year 2 (2024-25)	Continuation from Year 1, plus development of Virtual Practice Studio; Investigating External Funding Opportunities / Bid Development
Year 3 (2025-26)	Continuation from Years 1 & 2, plus establish Virtual Practice Studio; Publication and dissemination.
Year 4 (2026-27)	Continuation of new elements introduced in Year 3, plus Review and Reflection, Lessons for future practice.
Year 5 (2027-28)	Developing transition to post-WLR funding situation; Publication and dissemination.

Originality and capacity for invention, innovation and added value

Our approach is to work within the context of contemporary realities rather than with issues that will not be resolved for generations. In terms of added value, we are proposing to build on an approach that has demonstrably contributed to growth in the cultural ecology of the region.

We have, for instance, been a part of a series of funding awards that brought income into the local community: £1.8m for 'We Are Here!', the 'West Cumbria Creative People and Places' programme; c. £80,000 for Florence Arts Centre's 'Sense of Place' artist residencies in 2018-19; c.£30,000 for Irene Rogan's 'Unpublished Tour' programme, a series of artistic interventions in and around the Duddon Estuary (which later attracted further funding from Millom Town Fund and Liverpool John Moores University, to bring an exhibition to a non-Cumbrian audience at Bridewell Gallery in Liverpool).

Our focus on practice within the idea of the contemporary as the context for new knowledge that can inform policy, may also be seen to align with the recent social impact statements of the region's major economic force, Sellafield (e.g., in 2020's 'SiX: Social Impact Multiplied'), which outlines a desire to see greater economic diversity in the region, with the aim of arriving at a future in which the places and communities it currently sustains are not so dependent on its support.⁴ While ours is work that aligns with the aims being promoted by others, the nature of our position and academic role allows us to bring something that has not been initiated, anticipated or funded by any other body or interest, and this fact therefore sets our work apart as a distinctive source of added value.

Q2. Describe the expected outputs from the proposed work described in Q1, and how they might impact on discourse in the policy community and political economy through their dissemination.

Expected outputs include, but are not be limited to the following:

1. Workshops
2. Case study material
3. Exhibition or installation
4. Performance, film or recording
5. Commissions by the project
6. Journal articles
7. Book publications

⁴ See: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sellafield-ltd-social-impact-strategy-2018>

8. Conference contributions

The practice element of the project, which involves engagement with partners, and the sharing and exchange of knowledge (outputs listed 1-5), also forms the basis of a further stage of research. In terms of the REF definitions of that apply to our Unit of Assessment (UoA32), 1-5 are outputs that contribute to a *practice portfolio*.⁵

Additionally they are the means whereby the interventions that aim to produce changes in practice and policy are put to the test. Therefore, further outputs, such as those listed 6-8, follow on from the practical work we engage in, and — for instance — may examine the efficacy and impact of practice, thereby acting as a means of describing and disseminating the work as widely as possible and relating it to broader disciplinary and policy discussions and debates.

Q3. Describe a plausible chain of causality which suggests the impact the proposed work may have in creating public value and contributing to the Common Good

The pathways to impact reflect our desire to apply our methods within regional contexts, where the beneficiaries exist outside of academia, but at the same time to be developing, testing and reflecting on interventions that have a broader academic and non-academic resonance through their relationship to national and international policy and debate.

Local beneficiaries. Working in partnership with local organisations, public bodies and communities of interest to realise our objectives and initiate collaborative actions, this project will be disseminated locally within the policy field. We aim to convey and convince key decision makers through the lessons we have learned from our research and practice in order to inform broader questions of economic futures, which is to say, to enable informed choices to be made with respect to the situation the region finds itself in now.

National and international beneficiaries. Through its development of new research questions and its relationship to discourses and practices that are at the cutting edge of developments in the field, the project will contribute to subject knowledge within arts and cultural policy and practice, place development and, indeed, an understanding of the potential applications of thinking, knowledge and action that is concerned to understand the broader idea of cultural ecology, which can help to sustain life — and ideas such as the good life, or better living — beyond the mere economic determinants that shape contemporary societies.

Q4. State how the proposed plan will address the overarching charitable objects of WRL and the aims and objectives of the Business Plan 2023-2028.

The proposed project will bear out the aims of the Business Plan 2023-2028 by developing new perspectives on policy and practice, both within the local context and beyond, in such a manner that it substantially broadens and extends the scope of the original funded research programme ('place development and promotion'). It can be seen to integrate with the three other funded areas through the following (other projects here are followed by examples of integration in brackets):

- *Place* (each WRL project area has as its starting point the local context)
- *Health and Wellbeing* (we promote and develop cultural practice and policy for the common good, and as a means towards better living and thus health and wellbeing)
- *Community and Social Exclusion* (through our projects, such as CPP, that extend cultural participation our work integrates with the broad aims of this project)
- *Public Value* (in developing work whose context is the political economy of the contemporary, our project integrates with the cross-cutting theme of public value)

This project will undertake research and publication which advances the education of the public. Through its work, its outputs, and the impact it is able to achieve, it will further the aim of WRL to

⁵ REF 'outputs' specific to UoA 32 differ from other disciplines and are described on p. 27 of this document: https://ref.ac.uk/media/1450/ref-2019_02-panel-criteria-and-working-methods.pdf

establish an educational institution and to achieve public benefit. It will thereby additionally contribute to the common good.