Media, Arts and Humanities at Sussex

The School of Media, Arts and Humanities is a at the heart of the University of Sussex, and home to a diverse and vibrant community with strengths across emerging and interdisciplinary fields and core foundational disciplines, bringing together practice, critique, history and theory.

Our ambition is to set our terms collectively, with critical and creative excellence at our core, and shared commitments to social and environmental justice, sustainability, diversity and inclusion[i].

As a new School, our first strategy period is about emergence and building community, sharing and developing our existing curriculum and research strengths to collectively grow an exciting, inclusive and sustainable teaching offer and research ambition: 'staying separate enough not to crowd each other, aligned enough to maintain a shared direction, and cohesive enough to always move towards each other' (Brown, 2017)[ii].

We aim to support a University-wide Arts and Culture strategy, together with the Attenborough Centre for the Creative Arts (ACCA): to position the School and the University as a strong platform for media, arts and humanities; to bridge disciplinary areas and to foster cross-School opportunities; to position the University as a hub and anchor institution for arts, heritage and cultural recovery post-pandemic.

Description of our School

The School of Media, Arts and Humanities was inaugurated in September 2020, in the middle of the pandemic. A launch event, the Sussex Festival of Ideas marked our first year. We came together with an orientation to:

- Enable the sharing of physical resources and space
- Enable the synthesis and development of best practice from each group for the benefit of both staff and students
- Encourage both disciplinarity and interdisciplinarity in teaching and research, strengthening the curriculum and enhancing opportunity
- Enhance staff and student wellbeing and opportunities
- Enhance the ability of all staff and student groups to be heard, delivering a strong voice inside and outside the University
- Facilitate working collectively rather than competitively through coming together with unified budgets
- Improve the student experience at all stages and increase opportunities for student voice
- Nurture and celebrate local identities, sense of belonging and communities for both staff and students, within a broader, collective identity
- Provide an effective, collaborative structure of governance
- Provide greater flexibility and agility to respond within the contexts of both the University and the external environment
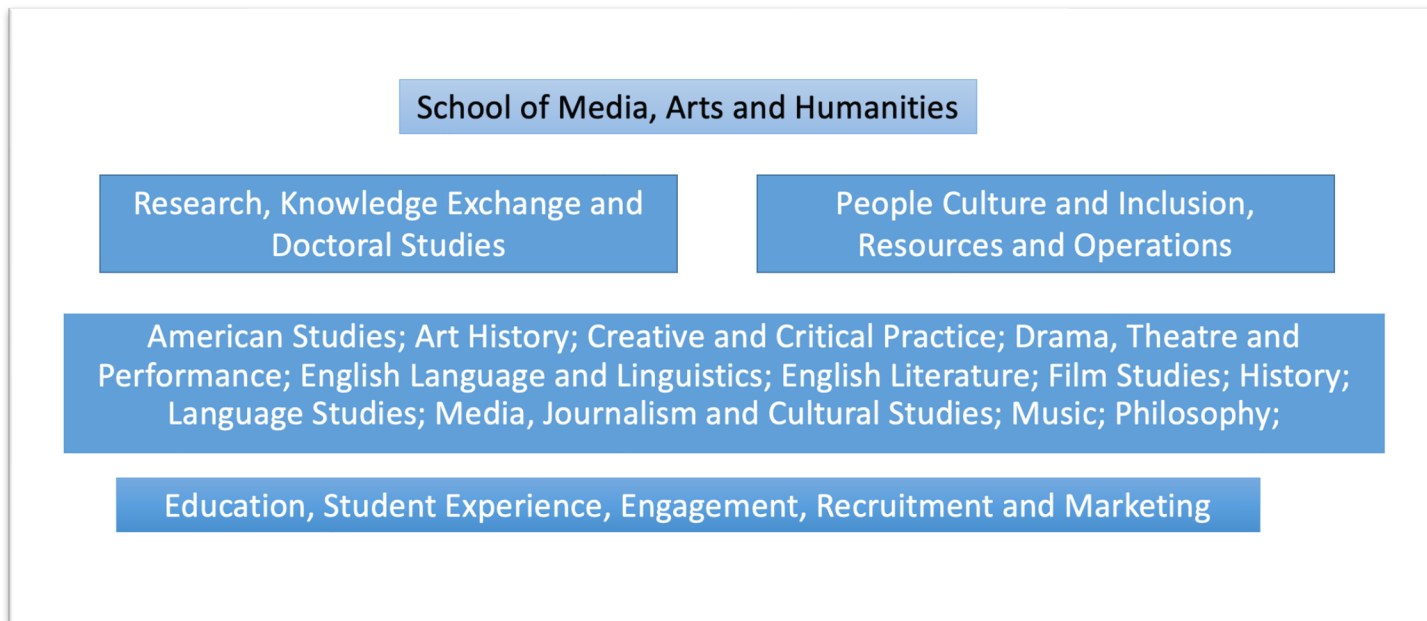
The School is comprised of the following subjects: Art History; American Studies; Creative and Critical Practice; Drama; English; English Language Teaching; Film; History; English Language and Linguistics; Media, Journalism and Cultural Studies; Modern Languages; Music and Philosophy.

With 300 staff across academic, professional and technical services and 3000 students studying across more than 20 programmes of study, it is a vibrant, multi-disciplinary platform, forward-looking and

inclusive, with a critical and creative ethos. Our aim is to work collectively to support each other to enable our subject areas, our staff and our students to flourish.

A strategic portfolio structure supports the work of the School across these areas:

- People: Operations, Staff Experience and EDI;
- Education; Student Experience; Engagement, Recruitment and Admissions;
- Research and Knowledge Exchange;
- Doctoral Studies.

School of Media, Arts and Humanities

Research, Knowledge Exchange and Doctoral Studies

People Culture and Inclusion, Resources and Operations

American Studies; Art History; Creative and Critical Practice; Drama, Theatre and Performance; English Language and Linguistics; English Literature; Film Studies; History; Language Studies; Media, Journalism and Cultural Studies; Music; Philosophy;

Education, Student Experience, Engagement, Recruitment and Marketing

Key Elements of Our Strategic Plan

- Education: forward-looking, inclusive*, curricula that combine subject expertise with excellent student experience, employability, sustainability, digital capacity, and critical and creative pedagogy.

- Research: a multi-disciplinary platform for research excellence in our fields, with the ambition to build on grant income, grow and deepen partnerships and support staff and doctoral researchers to develop collaborative, inclusive and engaged research practices.

- Engagement: lead on civic engagement and a University-wide Arts and Culture policy that embeds Sussex as an anchor institution in the region, nationally and internationally, for arts, heritage and culture, and builds creative production and performance spaces.

- People and culture: work with staff and students to foreground respect, equality, diversity and inclusion in all we do.

We aim to build on our radical intellectual traditions, transformative pedagogy, histories of resistance, international engagement and creative and critical approaches to social justice to position media, arts and humanities in the project of making a better world.

Education: Learn to Transform

We aim to deliver excellence in the student experience, and a distinctive curriculum offer in our core subject areas, with a synthesis of critical, historical and creative approaches, commitments to social justice, inclusion, employability and digital capacity.

We will build collectively on existing subject strengths, enhance existing core areas and expand into new ones, to develop and grow a full range of subjects in Media, Arts and Humanities. Our curriculum also supports cross-school courses and joint and combined degrees with other Schools, and external partners.

We will build on students' interest in what our subject areas have to offer by imagining what our disciplines will look like in 2030 and working to understand this with our students. Our curriculum will continue to be animated through engagements with alumni, external partners, industry master class speakers and visiting researchers.

Our indicative UG commitments work differently in relation to joints, pathways and other subject specific considerations, and includes an underpinning approach:

- Core first year, establishing subject expertise, cohort identity and disciplinary approaches; evidencing critical and creative approaches, sustainability and digital capacity; elective elements, pathways
- Second year that further develops core subject expertise; optionality, and evidence of employability/professional practice focus; elective;
- Final year with a focus on student-led core subject-based final project or dissertation, together with more specialist optionality
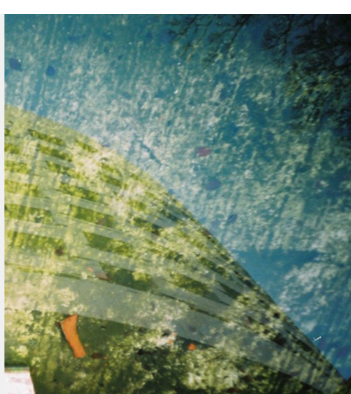
Our postgraduate taught curriculum enables subject specialism, advanced study, industry facing projects, international appeal, and experimentation with new areas. We aim to provide a hub for all PGT students to be supported through shared structures. We aim to develop and strengthen practice and industry synthesis, professional and academic progression, and key strengths in media production, cultural industries and histories of international activism and resistance and to enhance and consolidate our home, international and Online Distance Learning (ODL) offer.

Research with Impact: Institute for Media, Arts and Humanities:

Media, Arts and Humanities Research Institute

The Institute is the collaborative hub at the heart of research in Media, Arts and Humanities at Sussex. It draws on the Sussex traditions of radicalism and innovation to support our research and creative practice from across the School.

Find out more

The Media, Arts and Humanities Research Institute is the collaborative hub at the heart of research in Media, Arts and Humanities at Sussex. It draws on the Sussex traditions of radicalism and innovation to support our research and creative practice from across the School. It houses a Doctoral Hub with a community of 200 PhD researchers; a critical and creative school research community; and dynamic working relationships with internal and external partners, and residencies.

Research and engagement excellence underpins our subjects, and is evidenced in multiple ways. We currently submit to six Units of Assessment (discipline areas) in the UK Research Excellence Framework (REF), and received excellent results across outputs, impact and environment.

We believe in the radical creative and critical capacity of enquiry in the arts and humanities to understand and respond to the challenges of our time, in a transforming world. We recognise that mediation in all its

forms is central to our agency and engagement as critical thinkers, historians, writers and makers - and to the stakes of imagining our shared future.

Engage for Change
We aim to lead a University-wide Arts and Culture policy that embeds Sussex as an anchor institution in the region, nationally and internationally, for arts, heritage and culture. Working in partnership with the Attenborough Centre for Contemporary Arts, and local and national archives and cultural organisations we aim to provide a hub for media, arts and humanities related organisations, as well as outward facing work with partners. The wellbeing and sustainability of communities across the region, can be supported through the University. We are aligned to the University's international strategy and our ambition is to be a global hub for education, research and engagement.

This includes embedding staff and student engagement through links with the Brighton Festival, Glyndebourne Opera Festival, Brighton and Hove Council, ABCD Cultural Recovery Plan, Brighton and Hove Museums and Art Galleries, Charleston Farmhouse, Ditchling Museum, Cinecity, the British Library, British Museum and BBC, as well as multiple organisations across Sussex, Brighton and Hove, and nationally and internationally. We will nurture and develop civic engagements through key partnerships across the world, building on impact pathways, research partnerships, study abroad pathways and articulation agreements.

Engaging for change is also central to our research interests and commitments to accessible, engaged and outward facing research. These involve partnerships across cultural, arts, heritage and media institutions and activist and NGO organisations. We have strengths in impact and knowledge exchange in these sectors and PhD studentships and CHASE collaborations with these same organisations, are part of our strategy of engagement.

Build on Strengths
We aim to work with staff and students to foreground equality, diversity and inclusion in all we do. This includes building on our radical intellectual traditions, transformative pedagogy, histories of resistance, activist media, and creative and critical approaches to social justice to position media, arts and humanities in the project of making a better world. This also means ongoing critical evaluation, looking at our own structures and institution to challenge ourselves to make a better world much closer to home.

We aim to support the University in its antiracist aspirations and inclusive commitments, and develop our own EDI portfolio in tandem with the University and the sector. We aim to make the School inclusive and accessible, through widening participation and community and engagement work, and through development and support of an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion portfolio across all of our activity. We aim to clearly articulate and advance a diversity of views and voice, with a commitment to equalities which enable better conditions for all.

Timelines
- Appointment of transition team March 2020
- Inaugurate School September 2020
- Develop and Launch School Strategy (end date June 2022)
- Develop Professional Services structure for the School 2020-2022
- Build Portfolios to organise and support work of school 2020-2022 (interim evaluation spring 2022)
- Launch Research Institute 2022
- Curriculum Review 2020-2024 (map, evaluate, plan, implement)
- Development work with School Management Team to develop leadership (Spring/summer 2022)
- Review structures and academic shape of School (2022-2024)
- Review and Evaluate 2024 (March 2024 end of first Dean's term)

APPENDIX

MAH School Leadership Team Priorities 2022-2023

Sustainable Curriculum – balancing staff wellbeing, student experience and financial sustainability.

We are still on a savings trajectory and we have not yet settled into a sustainable model, although we are getting closer to this. Currently we are over-stretched in most areas, and plugging gaps with impacts on staff and student experience and the quality of our teaching offer.

We can deliver an excellent core curriculum with inspiring content, intentional pedagogy and rich student contact time, and reduce workload for staff by focusing on this goal collectively through some of the following:
•   Curriculum review and design - in MAH this is the most powerful mechanism for bringing about a sustainable working model for the School
•   Reduce optionality – especially in the first year – but across the whole curriculum – distinctive, selective and meaningful choices are much, much more important than variety or amount
•   Offer a mix of lectures, seminars and tutorials to enable large group and small group teaching across the offer (in all subject areas, regardless of cohort size, or staff numbers)
•   Team teach and share teaching across the whole School curriculum
•   Reduce and consolidate MA provision
•   Consolidate and share core and options across courses and subject groups where possible and make this an added value (both BA and MA)
•   Strategic approach to and investment in engagement, recruitment and marketing – including good data and analysis

This has to be a collective project and we have to take ownership, and responsibility for the School offer as a whole. We don't have capacity to do this separately within the different subject groups, we have to work collaboratively on this. The greater the sustainability of the curriculum framework the more capacity we have for research and scholarship leave, contingency for health/wellbeing, better employment practices, added value, headspace, thinking time and capacity to focus on transformative education, research and engagement.

Staff Experience, Culture and Wellbeing - focusing on good working conditions, inclusion, and reduction in stress and workload

Good staff experience is key to enabling everything else: student experience, education, research and engagement. Currently our staff survey results are poor, we have numerous instances of grievances, and repeated reports where people feel that rudeness and lack of respect can be a feature of staff interactions. On the upside we have lots of indicators of engagement, commitment and interest in participation in the work of the School. Work in this space includes:
•   A strategic focus on a staff experience framework, with EDI at the centre
•   Working towards creating a greater sense of shared cultures
•   Designing inclusive, equitable and supportive structures for recruitment, probation, appraisal, mentoring, promotion and reward
•   Work life balance and work load planning

Student Experience: creating the best conditions for a rewarding, transformative student experience is absolutely crucial. Good staff experience is key - and a focus on this - together with a sustainable curriculum model underpins this priority, which also includes:

- Consistency across learning resources, feedback and criteria: robust well designed, consistent Module sites; good use of reading lists; clear communication of resources; clear criteria with constructive and meaningful feedback aligned with a consistent School approach
- Robust and clearly communicated student support systems and structures
- Co-creative and student-centred approaches with capacity for students to engage with and contribute to shaping the content and the form of education, research and engagement
- Community building – sense of MAH and depts. as an inclusive community engaged in the same endeavour(s)
- An attractive and exciting teaching offer that combines criticality, creativity, and engagement – embedded in the cultures and communities relevant to the subject area

Research:
Ongoing development of the MAH Institute, channelling research energies and events productively across the School, developing strategy, learning from the REF, developing approach to advisory boards, developing and settling into PhD structures

Financial and Economic stability/sustainability:
- Academic Business Planning cycle – strategic combination of savings, investment and diversification
- Support SLT in staff development around School and University finances
- Induction and training for managing budgets in the context of financial regulations and economy of the University, and HE

[i] Inclusion primarily refers to gender, race, disability, sexual orientation and belief and a widening participation agenda in relation to demography and class.
[ii] adrienne maree brown (2017) Emergent Strategy Shaping Change, Changing Worlds. AK Press.