I’m very pleased to welcome you to the Faculty of Arts and Humanities at the University of Sheffield.

Our four Departments (Music, Philosophy, Archaeology and History) and two Schools (English and Languages and Cultures) combine the very best elements of teaching, research and public engagement. All colleagues prize our reputation for research-led education on all levels, and from first-year undergraduate to advanced PhD candidate, our students contribute to the creation and advancement of scholarship.

Nested within our six units, you will find theatre, performance studies, film studies, visual art, religious and Biblical studies and more. Our expertise also draws in design, cognition, media studies, forensic science, and other disciplinary approaches outside of traditional humanities. We are particularly good at multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary research and teaching, as a perusal of our research institutes, centres, and teaching programmes will demonstrate.

Especially, we take pride in our Diversities of Practice: within our disciplines we emphasise variety, breadth, risk-taking and difference. Diversity characterises our understanding of the Arts and Humanities and encompasses our practices, our modes of teaching and research, and our approaches to our Faculty Themes and their practical and intellectual applications.

Through a wide variety of enterprise and engagement activities, our colleagues share their knowledge with the city, its region, and the world, and in turn learn from these interactions. Our approach to the Arts and Humanities is a living and continually evolving one: we enthusiastically promote and support collaboration and the mutual exchange of ideas.

I invite you to read further and to be in touch to talk more.

Professor Jacqueline Labbe FRSA
Pro-Vice-Chancellor
Faculty of Arts and Humanities
Engaged Humanities

We have a proud record of engaging the wider community in our research and teaching, from strategic partnerships with major institutions such as Chatsworth House and the National Civil War Centre, through to collaborations with diverse local civic groups. We share the design and delivery of projects to produce high quality work that has impact and relevance.
Going public with philosophy

As the country’s first Professor for the Public Understanding of Philosophy, Professor Angie Hobbs can be found wrestling difficult issues on national radio and television, commenting in the broadsheets, headlining at festivals and engaging the public in podcasts and videos.

She works with many different organisations and sectors including business, the military and faith groups.

“Professor Hobbs’ appointment reflects our belief that the thinking that takes place in universities can and should reach out beyond the academic realm and make a difference in the wider world. This is as true of Philosophy as it is of Medicine or Engineering,” says Vice-Chancellor, Professor Sir Keith Burnett.

The bones beneath

Our archaeologists have teamed up with parishioners in Rothwell to investigate the funeral rituals that took place in a charnel house beneath the town church. The site contains the bones of many hundreds of people who lived up to 800 years ago.

Several very successful open days have been held in Rothwell communicating our research into medieval funerary practices. With finance from the Engaged Curriculum Fund, we are building a web-based tool to promote our research to a much wider audience.

“Collaborative research between the University and local people will produce valuable teaching resources for use by local schools and civic societies,” says doctoral student Jenny Crangle.

Festival of Arts and Humanities

Building on the University’s hugely successful Festival of the Mind, we have created our own exciting annual event for the people of Sheffield. The Festival of Arts and Humanities explores what it means to be human through films, debates, concerts, exhibitions, talks and walks.

The inaugural festival in 2015 attracted thousands of people to more than 40 events across the city. Highlights included The Lost Songs of My Fair Lady concert which featured on BBC Radio 4’s Today programme, and a new animated film response to Elizabeth Bishop’s poem Questions of Travel, which premiered at Site Gallery before touring to Liverpool.
Arts Enterprise

Our Arts Enterprise programme makes smart use of seed corn finance from the Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF) to connect the power of our research with local, regional, national and international partners. It also helps us to bring in additional funds to develop more ambitious projects with bigger social impact.

Arts Enterprise holds formal and informal gatherings to connect local and regional partners with researchers to the benefit of staff, students and the wider community.

The dozens of initiatives funded by Arts Enterprise include the Centre for Archival Practices, a scheme that is helping bring to life hidden or neglected material locked away in the archives of our growing group of partners, including Sheffield Archives, Derbyshire Record Office and the British Library.

Another project is Opening Up the Book. This collaborative venture is raising awareness of our extensive collection of artists’ books, and exploring the feasibility of a book centre in the heart of Sheffield.

A rather different approach can be found in Stories of Activism, which celebrates Sheffield’s rich history of protest and civic engagement. “Behind each campaign banner, leaflet or badge, there are stories and personal accounts of obstacles and struggle, of anger and feelings of injustice,” says Dr Adrian Bingham from our Department of History. “Our goal is to collect and archive the materials that have made up these experiences and make them accessible to the widest possible audience.”

Political and Social Cultures

Using a diversity of methods, our approach to political and social cultures is always collaborative and often international. The big issues that we address transcend intellectual and national boundaries. Our research and teaching is designed to be mutually beneficial, enriching the experience of our academics while providing added value to our partners.
Ancient solution to modern crisis

Cereals first grown in Neolithic times, but since discarded, could become cash crops for hard-pressed Greek farmers with the support of research by archaeologist Professor Paul Halstead.

“Primitive glume wheat was ubiquitous across Europe until the early 20th century,” says Professor Halstead, an expert in Greek prehistory. “Partly in response to the current economic crisis, Greek smallholders are again growing these crops. Their antiquity and especially their association with the Classical past are seen as a guarantee of their benefits to health.”

This is where Professor Halstead comes in. His knowledge of how these crops were traditionally used in northern Greece and other parts of southern Europe could help their revival. “One solution to the present crisis is to look to the past. Traditional practices could not only provide ways of processing these crops, they could also be a powerful marketing tool to encourage their use,” he says.

Culture and Soviet rule

Researchers from around the world came to Sheffield for a series of conferences casting new light on the interactions between local writers and intellectuals and Soviet authorities in post-war Eastern Europe.

Organised by Professor Eugeny Dobrenko, with the support of the University’s Prokhorov Centre, the events brought together academics from states that were once former Cold War enemies to discuss the dialogue between writers and Moscow-sponsored institutions.

“Our research has shown that the institutionalisation of culture and literature in Eastern Europe was by no means limited to setting up regulating bodies and censorship offices, but required an active involvement of producers and consumers of cultural production,” says Professor Dobrenko, who leads the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)-funded Literary Pax Sovietica Project.

Home for research

Strategic partnerships are being formed with some of the most popular and best-loved stately homes in England.

Academics from Arts and Humanities disciplines are now working closely with Chatsworth House, the Yorkshire Country House Partnership and English Heritage, developing collaborative projects where our knowledge provides a vital resource.

We have engaged thousands of people in the Literature of the English Country House, a FutureLearn Massive Open Online Course that lets learners unlock the literary and historical secrets of the nation’s country houses.

The strengthening relationship with Chatsworth House has resulted in three AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Awards investigating the changing relationship between masters and servants in the household over 300 years. Our historians are also looking at the role woodland played in the domestic life of Chatsworth and what this tells us about sustainability. Around Brodsworth Hall our archaeologists are engaging the local community with projects to show how the landscape has evolved since prehistory.

And over at Cannon Hall, postgraduate student Nicola Walker’s research into the hall’s interior design gave Barnsley Museums the insight and historical context for the installation of new visitor information and interactive displays.

“Shelﬁeld has growing expertise in this field,” says Dr Jane Hodson, a pioneer of the relationship with Chatsworth. “But we want to do more. That’s why we are teaming up with other researchers and pooling our expertise with curators at 12 stately homes to establish the University of Sheffield as leading in practically-applied country house research. The groundbreaking work we are doing is a model for others to follow and puts Sheffield at the forefront of innovative research.”

Dr Jane Hodson, School of English
Dynamics of Representation

From the discovery and revival of long-lost musical scores, through to investigations into culturally significant – but neglected – literary forms, the use of innovative research and teaching methods is extending our understanding of how the dynamics of human creativity have represented and shaped the past, and what this knowledge could mean for the future.
Baudelaire in song

Song settings for one of Europe’s leading modern poets – with treatments ranging from Debussy to The Cure – are to be brought together for the first time using state-of-the-art digital technologies. The Baudelaire Song Project is an international collaboration led by Dr Helen Abbott of the School of Languages and Cultures. “We will compile the full dataset of song settings and enhance them using digital tools to enable comparisons between poems and music, and between different settings of the same poem,” Dr Abbott said.

An easily accessible website with a comprehensive database of Baudelaire songs, plus search and visualisation features, will be made available at the end of the AHRC-funded project.

Public concerts and workshops with Oxford Lieder, Toulouse Mélodie-Française and Sheffield SING! will form part of the project culminating in an interdisciplinary, international Baudelaire conference to be held in Sheffield in 2019.

Conversation pieces

The first major study into English dialogues – works written to sound like conversations – is underway to show how this neglected genre dealt with subjects ranging from philosophical inquiry and the teaching of archery, through to devotional and pornographic tracts.

Professor Cathy Shrank has been awarded a Major Fellowship by the Leverhulme Trust to lead a three-year project, Conversation and Community: English Dialogues, 1475–1675. “Conversational forms lie at the very heart of how late medieval and early modern Europeans talked to and argued with each other across cultural and national boundaries,” says Professor Shrank.

Despite its popularity at the time, it has been a neglected field of study. “This research will address a significant gap in our understanding of this important literary tradition and trace its impact on the culture of political participation and our emerging sense of citizenship,” Professor Shrank said.

The Image Speaks

A collaboration between postgraduate students and photographer Andy Brown resulted in a series of challenging images and texts that formed the heart of a multidisciplinary exhibition held in Sheffield.

From a comic-strip-influenced collage of demolished housing estates, to a stark photograph of burning newspapers evoking similar acts during the Spanish civil war, the collection provides an insight into not only the art of photography but also the diverse research themes of our students.

The show goes on

Songs removed from the smash hit Broadway musical My Fair Lady after its preview in February 1956 were performed for the first time in 60 years following their discovery by the Department of Music’s Dr Dominic McHugh.

The manuscripts for two songs and a ballet lay hidden in the Library of Congress Vaults until Dr McHugh came across them in research for his book Loverly: The Life and Times of My Fair Lady.

With permission and support from the Alan Lerner Estate and the Frederick Loewe Foundation, the music premiered at our Festival of Arts and Humanities in May 2015 (see page 7).

Variations on a theme

Fundamental research into how language is absorbed and develops is at the heart of a project funded by the Leverhulme Trust and led by Professor Neil Bermel in our School of Languages and Cultures.

Professor Bermel and his colleagues are exploring two large-scale surveys carried out under controlled conditions to see how speakers of Czech react to variations of the same word or phrase in different situations.

“We have mined large-scale text databases to determine which variations exist. Then we’re giving speakers two tasks to measure their attitudes and behaviour when faced with these choices,” Professor Bermel said. The result will be a deeper understanding of how language works.
Cognitive Practice

Our studies of how humans gain knowledge and understanding – and the mental processes that stimulate creativity and help shape our beliefs and attitudes – is a collaborative process that crosses disciplinary boundaries. Whether we are grappling with intractable philosophical issues, or finding a common language between linguists and digital modellers, our academics know the value of working together.

Creative writing

With an international reputation for excellence and innovation in creative writing, our team of established and emerging writers has expertise across diverse literary forms.

We have expanded our recognised strengths in poetry and fiction to include non-fiction and writing for stage and screen. This gives our students the opportunity and confidence to push their boundaries and explore new ways of writing. They are supported to write, publish and read their own work, becoming active and engaged writers working at the heart of local and national culture.

We are bold, ambitious and experimental. Our Catalytic Poetry project resulted in the creation of the world’s first pollution-busting poem, In Praise of Air, written by our Professor of Poetry Simon Armitage. It is a striking public work of art displayed on a huge banner. This has been coated in a photocatalyst that removes pollution from the atmosphere. The project was developed in collaboration with Professor Tony Ryan from our Faculty of Science.

Our students write for and help edit Route 57, an in-house publication that showcases cutting-edge creative writing. Our School of English also co-edits Blackbox Manifold, an online journal whose international contributors include some of the most exciting poets working today.

We are also an integral part of Sheffield’s Off the Shelf Festival of Words, an event that is bursting with innovation – creative, sassy, steely, authentic and alive – and are deeply engaged with the Sheffield Poetry Festival.

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In Praise of Air

Simon Armitage

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The search for the linguistic DNA of modern western thought is underway using digital methods to analyse more than 28 million pages of printed text.

Professor Susan Fitzmaurice from our School of English is leading a team of researchers funded by the AHRC and drawn from three leading UK universities. They are examining data representing works printed in English, or in England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales, from 1473 to 1800.

An authority on the evolution of the English language, Professor Fitzmaurice is working closely with data specialists in our Humanities Research Institute (see page 26). The team is using high-performance computing and data visualisation to identify lexical and semantic patterns in the texts.

From this they will create a research model that enables them to explore the history, linguistic features and characteristics of word formation and vocabulary in the evolution of modern western thinking.

“It’s a major undertaking involving complex data,” said Professor Fitzmaurice. “The possibility of mapping the linguistic and conceptual changes that quite possibly started modernity has long been a holy grail of the Arts and Humanities. Our research will now make it possible to discern trends, relationships and anomalies across an enormous amount of linguistic data to identify the often surprising complexities, continuities and discontinuities of conceptual change.”
Digital Humanities

By developing digital technologies, we are transforming research and teaching in the Arts and Humanities. Sheffield’s academics are pioneering new perspectives and opening up new intellectual territory. We are devising tools to provide the widest possible access to material and creative thinking, and grappling with the big issues of identity, cultural thinking, and intellectual property.

Of cogs and minds

A group of Sheffield postgraduates have got together to share their interest in all things cognitive. The loose association, which grew out of the work of philosophy graduates, is known as iCog. It is now a global network whose annual conference reflects a rich diversity of interests.

iCog’s inaugural event, which was held in Sheffield in 2013, set the tone for future events. A galaxy of stellar speakers was headed by the eminent neuroscientist, Sir Colin Blakemore, described by the Observer as “one of the most powerful scientists in the UK.”

While iCog still has a strong Sheffield flavour, postgraduates from Edinburgh, London, Warwick and Birmingham are now key members of the committee, illustrating both its eclectic passions and its ambition to connect with other disciplines and communities around the world.

Researchers from diverse disciplines – Philosophy, Anthropology, Psychology, Computational Intelligence, Neuroscience, and Linguistics – know they must work together if they are to unlock the mind’s secrets.

Blame and Forgiveness

A genealogical exploration of notions of blame and forgiveness that doesn’t depend upon fictionalised assumptions is the goal of Professor Miranda Fricker’s research funded by the Leverhulme Trust.

Professor Fricker – who is the director of the Mind Association and author of Epistemic Injustice, a groundbreaking book that explores the interface between ethics and epistemology – is once again venturing into largely uncharted philosophical territory, this time in search of a paradigm case of forgiveness.

She argues that the explanatory power of forgiveness rests on two things. “First it has to be psychologically simple enough, and socially necessary enough, to be a plausible candidate for something found in human nature,” she says.

And second? “We need to be able to convincingly represent other, non-paradigm, cases of forgiveness as derivatives – as iterations of the more basic practice,” she adds. Readers will have to wait until her next book to see how she has succeeded in meeting these two conditions.
"We have created a brilliant team of interdisciplinary talent for this innovative global project."

Professor Robert Shoemaker, Department of History

Digital Panopticon

When spinster Mary Johnson stole a silver spoon from a public house in Old Bedlam, she told the court that parish officers had refused her poor relief and instead suggested she go “whoring or thieving to get her bread".

Mary was convicted of theft and transported to Australia. Now, with AHRC funding, researchers at the Universities of Sheffield, Liverpool, Oxford, Sussex, and Tasmania are using digitised records to gain new insights into the fate of Mary and 90,000 other men and women convicted at the Old Bailey between 1780 and 1875.

“We have created a brilliant team of interdisciplinary talent for this innovative global project,” says Sheffield’s Professor Robert Shoemaker, whose work on the prize-winning digitised edition of Old Bailey trial records forms just one of dozens of remarkable data sets the team is mining.

Working closely with digital humanities experts at our Humanities Research Institute, the team includes specialists in medical history, crime and justice, convict transportation and migration. As part of the AHRC’s Digital Transformations initiative, the team is harnessing technology to create and improve public access to new knowledge.
Traditional and modern

The impact of digital technology on the future of English folk music is at the heart of new research into how grassroots performers are influenced by social media networks and modern computer software.

The two-year, AHRC-funded Digital Folk project is a collaborative venture between Sheffield’s Dr Simon Keegan-Phipps and Dr Cinzia Yates, and the University of Westminster’s Professor David Gauntlett. They will investigate how traditional musicians and dancers in England use digital resources and the effect performers think this has on traditional material.

Following a well-attended launch in London – in partnership with the English Folk Dance and Song Society – the project is now in full swing. Fittingly, an online survey went live in July 2015 to much acclaim on Twitter and Facebook.

“We will be using more traditional face-to-face interview methods as well,” says Dr Keegan-Phipps, a jazz pianist, English concertina player and ethnomusicologist in the Department of Music.

Libraries of the future

Researchers at HRI Digital are helping one of the UK’s most successful facilities management companies to develop a bright new future for Britain’s local libraries.

Carillion, who recently built the world’s biggest public library (£188 million) in Birmingham, says its mission is “to rethink and reinvent local public libraries to make them relevant and self-sustaining.” Doing that requires a radically different Library Management System (LMS) if libraries are also to become hubs for self-learning and spaces where small businesses can market test new knowledge technologies.

The joint project is attracting interest from the National Library Task Force, the Cabinet Office and the Reading Agency, who are all keen to breathe new life into the nation’s more than 4,000 local libraries.

“We will not be recycling existing views about the future of libraries,” says HRI Digital Director Michael Pidd. “We will make a business case setting out the longer-term research and commercial opportunities for co-developing and exploiting a LMS for the 21st century.”

Research Institutes and Centres

As Arts and Humanities academics we know that the most significant and interesting challenges require a collaborative effort: working with colleagues in other disciplines, sharing ideas and inspiration, pooling knowledge and resources. Our institutes and centres are the embodiment of this collaborative culture: the crucible where different elements come together to form stimulating and valuable partnerships.
Humanities Research Institute

The Humanities Research Institute (HRI) is one of the most vibrant collaborative ventures of its kind in the country. It is the hub of major, interdisciplinary projects. It is the place where scientists, social scientists, engineers and medical researchers come together with the Arts and Humanities to deepen our understanding of the world.

Whether we are exploring the linguistic DNA of modern western thought, or investigating how animal species evolve, the HRI breaks down boundaries, brings people together and supports them in a way that ensures success.

Backed by our talented digital technologists, researchers can make the most of high-powered computing and big data by using software developed specifically for them. Much of this work is helping to preserve our cultural heritage.

Medical Humanities Sheffield

One of our many projects explores the role of music in care – in particular, for helping people with dementia. The Music and Wellbeing research unit, launched by Professor Lord Robert Winston, brings together researchers from diverse disciplines to examine how music can help patient recovery and personal wellbeing.

The distinguishing feature of Medical Humanities Sheffield is its combination of the critical insights and methodologies provided by the Arts and Humanities with the clinical practices and expertise of medical practitioners, scientists and policy advisors. In this way it encourages a role for the Arts and Humanities that is truly transformative.

Medical Humanities Sheffield

The interface between Medical Sciences and the Arts and Social Sciences provides huge potential for multidisciplinary work, policymaking, and improvements in health and wellbeing.

To exploit this potential to the full, we have created an institute that draws together more than 100 researchers from the Faculties of Medicine, Dentistry and Health, Arts and Humanities, Social Sciences, and Engineering, along with clinical partners in Sheffield’s Teaching Hospitals, Children’s Hospital and Primary Care services.

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"These are just some of the many ways the HRI is bringing the Arts and Humanities together with other disciplines to push back the frontiers of knowledge," says HRI Director Professor Nikki Gibbon.
Music Mind Machine

Music Mind Machine uses behavioural research methods and technological tools to develop a deeper understanding of music and its impact on both performer and audience.

The centre hosted the first International Conference on the Multimodal Experience of Music, bringing 120 researchers together to explore the connections between the senses and their role in music listening and performance.

It is also involved in the White Rose College of Arts and Humanities-funded network on expressive nonverbal communication in ensemble performance. This brings together three PhD students and six supervisors from York, Sheffield and Leeds, who will investigate how members of musical ensembles coordinate sound and movement for musical, emotional and aesthetic outcomes.

Sheffield Centre for Early Modern Studies (SCEMS)

One of the largest centres of its kind in the UK, SCEMS is home to more than 50 researchers and postgraduates across a range of disciplines.

With strong links to Europe and the United States, SCEMS is a powerful magnet for scholars from around the world who want to connect with the best research in the UK.

Frequent workshops, seminars and masterclasses stimulate new ideas and research and create a culture of continuous improvement. The centre promotes excellence in both teaching and research, all sustained by a vibrant and active postgraduate community.

Sheffield early modernists run a range of externally-funded projects spanning the later fifteenth to early nineteenth centuries and covering a wide variety of subjects. They also enjoy good relations with a host of local and national institutions, from Chatsworth House to the British Library and the Victoria and Albert Museum.

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Medieval and Ancient Research Centre (MARCUS)

MARCUS facilitates cooperation and collaboration between a wide range of disciplines, from Biblical Studies and Philosophy to Languages, Archaeology and Music. We help academics work together for example to secure external research funding.

Among our many successful projects is The Migration of Faith: Clerical Exile in Late Antiquity, an international and interdisciplinary collaboration between the Universities of Sheffield, Halle, Aarhus and Vienna. This project investigates how the banishment of hundreds of clerics around the Mediterranean during the late antique period influenced and changed the history of Christianity.

Hang Seng Centre for Cognitive Studies

Founded in 1992 through an endowment from the Hang Seng Bank of Hong Kong, the centre aims to build bridges between different disciplines interested in the study of cognition, and to push back the frontiers of our understanding of the mind.

Housed in the innovative Humanities Research Institute, the centre has an international reputation as one of the foremost centres for interdisciplinary work in cognitive studies.

The centre’s current focus is an AHRC-funded project that investigates the interaction between culture and the mind. It brings together scholars in Anthropology, Archaeology, Psychology, Economics, Law, Linguistics, Neuroscience and Philosophy from more than 100 institutions around the world.
Get in touch

For information about any of our projects, contact arts.faculty@sheffield.ac.uk
For more about the Faculty and our work, see www.sheffield.ac.uk/faculty/arts-and-humanities

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