

Institution: University of Chester		
Unit of Assessment: English Language and Literature		
Title of case study: Flash Fiction: Inspiring, Developing, and Publishing Writers Across the UK and Around the World		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: January 2006 – December 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Peter Blair Ashley Chantler Ian Seed	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Dr, Senior Lecturer Dr, Senior Lecturer Dr, Senior Lecturer	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 2004 – ongoing 2001 – ongoing 2013 – ongoing
Period when the claimed impact occurred: August 2013 – December 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		

1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)

This project has played a major role in establishing flash fiction (stories of up to 500 words) in the UK and beyond, through local, regional, national, and international initiatives. It has inspired beneficiaries of all ages to read and write flashes, nurtured creativity, developed literacy and writing skills, and provided opportunities for publication. *Flash: The International Short-Short Story Magazine* has published c. 600 writers (350 in 2013–20) from 48 countries across six continents; since 2015, its not-for-profit Press has published 300 authors in seven books, one in aid of a UK national charity. Impacts on commercial publishing and authors' careers included 83 flashes reprinted in 33 books by 22 publishers. Public engagement included: social-media forums and webpages with users in 180 countries; writing contests (two international, one local); and live events (two in Italy, 23 in the UK), with talks, readings, and workshops for literary festivals, libraries, arts venues, community groups, and adult-education courses attracting 1,150 people. Schoolchildren, students, and teachers – in primary, secondary, and higher education – benefitted from six workshops, seven annual National Flash Fiction Youth Competitions, and learning resources including set texts. Aspects were featured on broadcast, print, and online media, extending the project's considerable reach.

2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)

Drs Peter Blair and Ashley Chantler, founding Directors (2015) of the **International Flash Fiction Association (IFFA)**, have since 2006 been at the forefront of establishing flash fiction as a popular form of contemporary storytelling and a new field of academic research. They were joined in 2016 by Dr Ian Seed as Assistant Director. Their theoretical and analytical scholarship informs, and is informed by, two modes of practice-led research: the Directors' and Assistant Director's creative writing; and the Directors' editing of a leading literary magazine and a respected small press.

In the early 2000s, flash fiction was little known outside the USA. In 2006, Chantler introduced the form at 'The Short Story' conference (Edge Hill University) and edited ***An Anatomy of Chester: A Collection of Short-Short Stories*** (Chester Academic Press), comprising 55 flashes by local writers, three by Blair. In 2008, Chantler published '**Notes Towards the Definition of the Short-Short Story**' [3a], the first sustained academic consideration of very short fiction.

Blair and Chantler researched print and online literary magazines, revealing a paucity of outlets for flash. To stimulate writing in the genre and to broaden publishing opportunities, they launched (Oct. 2008) ***Flash: The International Short-Short Story Magazine*** [ISSN 1756-5200], the first biannual print periodical for flashes and reviews (of up to 360 words). **22 issues** (typically 115 pages, comprising Editorial, 50 flashes, six reviews, and occasional essays) appeared (excluding issues delayed by Covid). Approx. 8,000 stories were submitted, and 1,100 published, by 600 authors from 48 countries (with translations from nine languages), plus 130 reviews. In 2015, they founded **Flash: The International Short-Short Story Press**, which has published seven books [5e]. Bibliographic research led them to establish and curate the **Flash Fiction Special Collection** (Seaborne Library, Chester). For researchers, they maintain (since 2008) the **IFFA Archive** [5f].

In 2014, Blair and Chantler published **interviews** with David Gaffney and Vanessa Gebbie, the UK's leading flash authors, in peer-reviewed journal *Short Fiction in Theory and Practice* (4.1: 125–30; 4.2: 233–39); this research underpinned four collaborative festival events (Box 4). Blair and Chantler were interviewees for Canada's *Maclean's Magazine* (2012), USA's *100 Word Story* (2012) and *SmokeLong Quarterly* (Chantler, 2016), and the Bath Flash Fiction Award (Blair, 2016).

Blair was commissioned to write a 'Flash Fiction' article for Bloomsbury's bestselling ***Writers' and Artists' Yearbook*** for 2014, 2015, and 2016 [3b], reflecting the form's increasing popularity

Impact case study (REF3)

in the UK. Twice updated, it researched flash's publishing history and contemporary opportunities. His path-breaking 12,000-word article '**Hyper-compressions: The Rise of Flash Fiction in "Post-transitional" South Africa**' (2018 [3c]) surveyed short-story collections and analyzed flashes to demonstrate that flash is emerging there as a significant, yet critically neglected, form; a version was commissioned for a Routledge book on the contemporary South African short story.

Blair and Chantler's publications are cited eight times in the first academic collection on flash: *Critical Insights: Flash Fiction*, ed. Cocchiarale and Emmert (Ipswich, MA: Salem Press, 2017). Other recognition includes **invited papers**: Blair's 'Flash Fiction and the Oral Short Story' (OU Contemporary Cultures of Writing Research Group, University of London, 2014) and **keynote** 'Flash Fiction Now: Theory and Practice' (Poetics and Linguistics Association conference on 'Creative Style', University of Kent, 2015); and Chantler's 'David Gaffney's Flash Fiction' ('Mapping Flash Fiction: Linguistic and Cultural Pathways' colloquium, LUMSA University, Rome, 2017).

Seed's small stories explore the interface between flash and the prose poem. They have appeared in *Flash* (for which he reviews), and such prestigious publications as *Granta*, *PN Review*, and *The Best Small Fictions 2017* (Braddock Books). His books include four collections: ***Makers of Empty Dreams*** (2014); ***Identity Papers*** (2016) [3d]; ***New York Hotel*** (2018) [3e]; and ***The Underground Cabaret*** (2020). *New York Hotel* was a TLS Book of the Year.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

[a] **Book chapter**: Chantler, 'Notes Towards the Definition of the Short-Short Story', *The Short Story*, ed. Ailsa Cox (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2008), pp. 38–52.

[b] **Book chapter**: Blair, 'Flash Fiction', *Writers' and Artists' Yearbook 2014* (London: Bloomsbury, [Nov.] 2013), pp. 279–82; *WAYB 2015* (2014), pp. 279–82; *WAYB 2016* (2015), pp. 248–51.

[c] **Journal article**: Blair, 'Hyper-compressions: The Rise of Flash Fiction in "Post-transitional" South Africa', *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 55.1 (March 2020): 38–60 [Special issue: The Short Story in South Africa Post-2000]; first pub. July 2018. DOI 10.1177/0021989418780932 [in REF2].

[d] **Collection (creative writing)**: Seed, *Identity Papers* (Bristol: Shearsman, 2016) [in REF2].

[e] **Collection (creative writing)**: Seed, *New York Hotel* (Bristol: Shearsman, 2018) [in REF2].

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Publishing writers, inspiring readers: *Flash: The International Short-Short Story Magazine* is 'the best UK magazine' dedicated to the form [5a], internationally one of the two 'most notable' [5b], and in 'the top ten literary magazines to send very very short flashes' [5c]. It has featured university-based writers and such luminaries as Ama Ata Aidoo, Margaret Atwood, Beryl Bainbridge, James Kelman, Bernard MacLaverty, and Jon McGregor, but the large majority of submissions and accepted flashes are by amateur writers from outside HE. The editors work with accepted authors to help them polish their flashes for publication. Since August 2013, c. 5,000 stories have been submitted to *Flash*, which in 12 issues published 600 by 350 authors from over 40 countries across six continents, including translations from seven languages: Arabic, Dutch, German, Greek, Hebrew, Icelandic, and Spanish [5d,f]. Typically, 250 copies are printed, with two issues exceeding 400. Approx. 5,800 copies are in circulation (3,500 printed after August 2013), 10% in libraries. ***Flash: The International Short-Short Story Press*** published seven books: four single-author chapbook collections, two anthologies featuring almost 300 authors, and a novella-in-flash [5e,f] – giving a fillip to an emerging flash-fiction form; 1,200 copies were distributed. The IFFA is self-sustaining, with print costs offset by sales (mostly online); a small surplus helps fund the National Flash Fiction Youth Competition. International submissions, acceptances, and distribution (including complimentary author copies) indicate wide reach in inspiring readers and nurturing diverse, fresh writing.

Public engagement through broadcast, print, online, and social media has raised awareness of flash, prompted discussion, and encouraged creative participation. Seed read his flashes and was in conversation with host Ian McMillan on **BBC Radio 3's *The Verb*** (18 Mar. 2016) [c. 17,000 listeners]; *New York Hotel*, a ***Times Literary Supplement*** Book of the Year, featured on **BBC Radio Merseyside** (17 Jan. 2019). The *TLS* also ran a paid *Flash* advert (14 Aug. 2015) and Blair and Chantler's letter on the form (6 April 2018). Their competitions, public events, and school collaborations featured in *The Chester Standard* (Jan. 2015, Oct. 2019), *The Chester Chronicle* (April 2018), *Cheshire Live* (March 2018), and *Oswestry Life* (Sept. 2020). A story from *Flash* was

republished on *Huffpost* (13 June 2014); two were translated in **Poland's** psychology magazine *Charaktery* (Feb. 2014, March 2014). This publicity drew visitors to the **IFFA website** (<http://www.chester.ac.uk/flash.fiction>), which includes 'an excellent bibliography of flash fiction materials' [5a], *Flash* Editorials and sample stories from each issue, plus full open access to our tenth-anniversary issue and interviews with Gaffney and Gebbie. For April 2014–Dec. 2020, **Google Analytics** records 98,595 sessions (160,771 page views by 65,682 unique users from 180 countries), an average of 1,232 sessions per month. Our social-media accounts are the premier forums for flash: on **Twitter**, Flash Fiction @shortstorymag has 8,450 followers; on **Facebook**, the **International Flash Fiction Network** has 3,500 members. Described by users as the 'best' and 'go-to FB page for flash connections', it 'Opens up new possibilities to so many aspiring new writers', including 'Receiv[ing] good feedback from other writers', and 'Ha[ving] stories published based on leads I've gotten in this group'. On **Twitter** and **YouTube**, 12 flashes by Seed were translated into Urdu. By providing online resources, and impacting public-service and commercial media organizations, the project has thus created an active international community of flash readers and writers. [5f]

The publishing industry and authors' careers [5f]

The project helped give publishers confidence to invest in the form by cultivating a readership, demonstrating a market, helping writers build a track record, contributing our own stories, and endorsing and reviewing flash books. Our direct impacts were significant and wide-ranging:

(i) At least **83 stories first published in *Flash* or Press collections were reprinted in 33 books by 22 publishers** (trade, independents, and small presses). For authors, prepublication in *Flash* created a 'stronger proposal' (Michael Loveday, UK) and was a 'decisive factor' (Niles Reddick, USA) in securing contracts. **In the UK:** four books published by Salt (Cambridge/Cromer), four by Shearsman (Bristol), three by V. Press (Droitwich), one each by Cultured Llama (no place), Hamish Hamilton (London), Like This Press (Timperley), Red Ceilings Press (Derbyshire), Vagabond Voices (Glasgow). **In South Africa:** Deep South (Grahamstown), Dye Hard Press (Johannesburg). **In the USA:** four by Blue Light Press (San Francisco), one each by Aakenbaaken & Kent (Georgia), Apprentice House (Baltimore), Arcadia (Oklahoma), Big Table (Boston), Farrar, Straus and Giroux (New York), Matter Press (Pennsylvania), Monkey Puzzle Press (Colorado), Pelekinesis (California), Press 53 (North Carolina), Ravenna Press (Washington). Norton's landmark anthology *Flash Fiction International* (New York, 2015) reprinted three stories, selling over 18,000 copies.

(ii) Blair and Chantler supported this book and five other US or UK publications by co-writing **cover blurbs/puffs**; they are also quoted on **New Zealand's** National Flash Fiction Day website (2016).

(iii) *Flash's* Reviews section evaluated (in 2013–20) 85 flash collections and craft texts, providing 'important publicity' for 'small presses' often overlooked by reviewers (Managing Editor, V Press).

(iv) Blair's 'Flash Fiction' articles offered writers strategies for getting published, while providing Bloomsbury with innovative content for three bestselling *Writers' and Artists' Yearbooks* [3b].

(v) Seed's four collections sold 750 copies for Shearsman; his *TLS* Book of the Year 'increased our profile and brought good publicity' (Editor and Publisher). Two stories were republished as exemplary texts in Bloomsbury's *Literary Non-Fiction: A Writers' and Artists' Companion* (2015).

(vi) Blair and Chantler wrote stories for four books by new flash-specialist Ad Hoc Fiction (Bath).

(vii) **In Italy**, Seed's *Makers of Empty Dreams* was translated as *Sognatore di sogni vuoti* (Rome: Edizione Ensemble, 2018) and reviewed in *Patria Letteratura* and *L'Ombra delle Parole Rivista Letteraria Internazionale*, extending our impact on overseas publishers and non-Anglophone readers.

Third-sector charities: *Funny Bone: Flashing for Comic Relief*, 60 humorous stories by 60 of the world's best flashers, from Lydia Davis to Roddy Doyle, ed. Blair and Chantler (2017), was sold in aid of Comic Relief; profit of £620 was donated in 2018. In 2019, other Press books were donated to a Flash Fiction Festival raffle to support Air Ambulance South West. Because *Funny Bone* 'filled the publishing gap of humorous flash fiction' (Katey Schultz), US authors Meg Pokrass (2018) and Schultz (2019) set it for writing-group webinars, extending our influence on new writing. [5f]

Twenty-eight public-engagement events: competitions, festivals, talks, readings, workshops publicized the genre, deepened understanding, and inspired would-be writers. At our 25 live events, which attracted over 1,150 people, engaging discussion of example flashes helped audiences/participants recognize the rich potential of compression and so think differently about brevity. Workshops stimulated writers to create and improve flashes. [5f]

(i) Competitions: Blair and Chantler inspired and judged Gladstone's Library's 'Mystery Lady' Flash Competition (Aug. 2013 [120 entries]) and Chester Library's Flash Fiction Competition (2014 [50 entries]), publishing winners in *Flash*. Their involvement conferred prestige, attracting entrants. Blair was a judge for New York's NYC Midnight Flash Fiction Challenge (Nov. 2013), giving *'excellent helpful feedback'*.

(ii) Public seminars (London 2014, Rome 2017): Blair's *'brilliant'* paper in London and Chantler's in Rome [30 & 80 attendees] (see Box 2) put academic and amateur writers in *'inspiring'* dialogue.

(iii) Lancaster Litfest (2014, 2019): Seed gave two invited readings [65 attendees]: *'His reading had a profound effect on me, and on my approach to my own writing – both poetry and prose.'*

(iv) Chester City Library's 'Flash Fiction Event' (2015): For Cheshire West and Chester Council's Adult Education Week, Blair gave a *'fascinating'* talk [30 attendees] introducing four local writers' groups reading specially written flashes; two were subsequently published.

(v) Vale Royal Writers' Winter Wordfest (2015): Blair was a headline reader [60 attendees].

(vi) Chester Literature Festival (2015, 2017, 2018, 2019): Blair and Chantler delivered four admission-free 'Uni at the Fest' events, in City Hall and Storyhouse. Two talks with Press authors: David Swann (2015 [50 attendees]), Vanessa Gebbie (2018 [35 attendees]). An illustrated public lecture on humorous flashes (Blair, 2017 [60 attendees]): *'Inspired me to have a try', 'I now want to write flash fiction!'* And a flash reading-to-write workshop (2019 [11 attendees]): *'Very interesting and informative', 'Inspiring and thought provoking', 'Might even inspire me to write my own!'*

(vii) Gladfest (2016) (Gladstone's Library, North Wales): Blair's talk, 'Flash Fiction Now (and Then ...)' [75 attendees], *'sparked requests for flash workshops, and because of the impact of your talk we recently featured flash writer and novelist Pippa Goldschmidt'* (Louisa Yates, Festival Director).

(viii) Verbose 'Live Literature' Night (Manchester, 2017): To celebrate Verbose's second birthday, Blair, Chantler, and Press author Swann read flashes [40 attendees], followed by *'an open mic of flash-fiction performances inspired by the guests'* (Sarah-Clare Conlon, Host).

(ix) Friends of Chester Literature Festival (2017): After Blair contributed an article on flash to the group's *Newsletter*, he and Chantler ran 'Crafting Flash Fiction' [20 participants] at Chester Little Theatre: *'So encouraging', 'Practical experience of writing flash. I intend to produce more'*.

(x) Flash Fiction Festival (Bath 2017; Bristol 2018, 2019): At the Arts Council-funded inaugural Festival, Blair gave the **keynote address**, 'Briefs and Bloomers: Revealing Flash Fiction' [130 attendees]: *'brilliant', 'extremely informative'*. Blair and Chantler ran **four workshops**: 'Submitting Your Flashes to Magazines' (2017, 2018 [50 & 20 participants]): *'Interesting, insightful', 'Really useful, practical'*. 'Tips from the World's Best Flashes' (2019 [22 participants]): *'Very thought provoking', 'I learnt a lot', 'Made me analyse flashes more closely'*. 'Publishing with Flash Press' (2019 [6 participants]): *'Very informative', 'Practical insights into how to publish works'*. **Five other events** included guest readings (2017 [45 attendees]) and presenting a *Funny Bone* book launch, with readings by nine contributors (2018 [140 attendees]). In 2018, Chantler was 'In Conversation with David Gaffney' [10 attendees]; Blair's 'Flashpoint South Africa' talk [10 attendees] was *'educational as well as useful in terms of writing'*. In 2019, Blair represented South African flash and Chantler British flash in a panel discussion, 'Flash Fiction Around the World', with leading authors and editors from Cyprus, Germany, Ireland, New Zealand, and the USA [120 attendees]. These *'excellent workshops and talks have had very positive feedback at the three Festivals. Experienced and beginner writers of short-short fiction have been inspired to write more and submit their stories to magazines as a result of your contributions'* (Jude Higgins, Director).

(xi) Book launch (Rome, 2018): Seed gave a well-received reading and was in conversation with his Italian translator to launch *Sognatore di sogni vuoti* [35 attendees].

(xii) English Short Course, University of Chester (2019): Blair and Chantler facilitated 'An Introduction to Writing Flash Fiction' workshop [10 participants], free for people on benefits or aged 16–18 or over 60 to further extend our impact's reach: *'Plenty of opportunities to write', 'Gained a lot'*.

Education: schoolchildren, students, teachers [5f]

(i) **Primary Schools:** To nurture creativity, Blair and Chantler collaborated with Chester's University Church Free School to develop a portfolio of flashes by ten Key Stage 2 (Year 6) children, presented to literacy patron HRH The Duchess of Cornwall at Chester Cathedral (March 2018).

(ii) **Secondary Schools:** The annual **National Flash Fiction Youth Competition** (for students aged 15–19) was established in 2013 by Blair and Chantler. Almost 1,000 entries were received from 79 schools across England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. It provided 'a very good learning experience for students, encouraging creative talents' (Head of English, Ellesmere College, 2020), with long-lasting effects; a 2016 prizewinner emailed: 'It gave me the confidence to study Creative Writing at Brunel [BA] and Chester [MA]' and 'to embark on writing as a profession' (2020). They delivered **six flash workshops** for 87 KS 3, 4, and 5 students at five schools (two as part of a Widening Participation initiative for demographics underrepresented in HE): Helsby High School; Wirral Grammar School for Girls; The Catholic High School, Chester; South Wirral High School; The Bishops' Blue Coat Church of England High School, Chester: 'Really useful, enjoyable', 'I am interested to explore more of this form', 'Inspired me to write my own flash fiction'. **Learning resources:** 200 copies of *Short on Sugar* were given gratis to school students visiting the University (2018–19). The IFFA website provides 88 flashes, bibliography, and a Flash Schools page with handouts for teachers and recommendations for young readers. Two *Flash* stories were reprinted in *Spotlight on Literacy: Creative Interventions in English and Across the Curriculum* (KS 3) by the English & Media Centre educational charity (2013). A flash by Seed was reprinted with discussion points for A-level in *English Review*, 29.3 (Feb. 2019).

(iii) **Higher Education (BA, MA, PhD):** At Chester, *An Anatomy of Chester*, three *Flash* issues, and four Press books have been set on BA and MA modules; two flash PhDs are in progress. Two of Seed's collections were set texts at Manchester Metropolitan University (2016–18). *Flash* is recommended reading at Chichester and Bath Spa. Subscribers include 19 UK and three US university libraries, and South Africa's national literary archive Amazwi. Our IFFA Archive (2008) and Flash Fiction Special Collection (2015) inspired the Harry Ransome Center (University of Texas at Austin) to establish (April 2020) the USA's first Flash Fiction Collection (Prof. Robert Shappard), for which they acquired copies of *Flash*. Blair's 'excellent keynote' for PALA (2015 [200 attendees]) 'has impacted significantly on the research and teaching practice of delegates' (convenor Dr Jeremy Scott). At Central Connecticut State University, 'Flash [magazine] was useful to enlarge student perspectives beyond US borders' (Dr Tom Hazuka, 2020). In South Africa, 'Flash has been a powerful tool in the teaching of compressed fiction to postgraduate creative writing students at the University of the Western Cape and the University of KwaZulu-Natal. It has also provided an opportunity for overseas publication for the students' (Prof. Kobus Moolman, 2020). Building on our flash-publishing initiatives, and complementing our public-engagement activities, these pedagogic and archival interventions at primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions are having a far-reaching ongoing impact, securing the future of a unique literary form.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

[a] Assoc. Professor, Northumbria University; 'Flash Fiction', in *The Handbook of Creative Writing*, second edition, ed. Steven Earnshaw (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), p. 316.

[b] Author 'The World's Shortest Stories', *The Author* ([Soc. of Authors] Winter 2017): 130.

[c] Professor of English, Dartmouth College, USA; 'Top Ten Literary Magazines to Send Very Very Short Flashes' (Sept. 2013): <https://michaelalexanderchaney.com/2013/09/06/top-ten-literary-magazines-to-send-very-very-short-flashes/>

[d] *Flash: The International Short-Short Story Magazine*, 6.2–12.2 (Oct. 2013–Oct. 2020).

[e] *Flash: The International Short-Short Story Press* books [all have ISBNs]: David Swann, *Stronger Faster Shorter* (2015); Meg Tuite, *Lined Up Like Scars* (2015); *Funny Bone: Flashing for Comic Relief* (2017); David Steward, *Travelling Solo* (2018); Vanessa Gebbie, *Nothing to Worry About* (2018); Mark Budman and Tom Hazuka (eds), *Short on Sugar, High on Honey: Micro Love Stories* (2018); Gillian Walker, *The World at the End of the Garden: A Novella-in-Flash* (2020).

[f] **International Flash Fiction Association (IFFA) Archive.** Includes all stories submitted to *Flash*, the Press, and competitions; bibliographies of published flashes and reviews; flashes reprinted in books; blurbs/puffs; Google Analytics and social-media data; publicity materials; workshop handouts and photographs; media coverage; correspondence with, and feedback from, beneficiaries (including authors, publishers, teachers, public-event organizers and participants).