

Centre Director:	Prof.T.M. Devine	Host Institution:			University of Aberdeen			
Title of Research Centre:	The AHRC Centre for Irish and Scottish Studies							
Dates:	Start date of Centre	1	1	2001	End date of Centre	31	12	2005

Please note that your comments will be forwarded in an anonymised format to the Centre Director.

1. Changes

With reference to the Strategic and Operational Plan (attached) and to any significant changes indicated in the end of award report, please comment on the impact of any changes during the lifetime of the Centre, particularly the extent to which such changes:

- might have been anticipated by the Centre Director at the time of application
- were due to factors beyond the Centre Director's control
- were made following appropriate consultation with the AHRC
- had an impact, positive or negative, on the outputs and outcomes of the Centre.

	Comment
Aims and Objectives	No change reported
Research Programme and Activities	Sensible, approved, refocusing of four of the associated research projects. One data-compilation project (project F) was given a more limited time-frame because it proved too ambitious given extent of material (a natural and not necessarily foreseeable consequence of actually doing the work). One (project K, on radical verse in Scotland and Ulster) was very fruitfully given a broader focus. One (project I), was originally quite specialised (Gaelic Bibles) but given broader and less idiosyncratic focus in consequence of unanticipated departure (presumably beyond Centre Director's control) of designated project leader, replaced by more junior scholars who did not stay beyond second year of project. Project M developed a stronger emphasis on travel literature than originally expected, which seems a perfectly reasonable and natural development of a research project actually in process.
Outcomes and Targets	In three of the four cases the effect of change has been very positive, involving additional outcomes. In the case of

	<p>project I there seems to have been some delay attributable to personnel changes and the ill health of the Research Officer so the project monograph, projected for 2005, is now expected at the end of 2006, but it should be noted that despite these difficulties there was a successful project international conference.</p>
Dissemination/Exploitation and Outreach	<p>Extremely impressive that there has been substantially more dissemination than originally envisaged.</p>
Collaboration	<p>No formal changes reported</p>
Institutional Support	<p>Reported as excellent with significant expansion in staff posts in cognate fields. It might however be observed that an effect of the entire enterprise has been to concentrate expertise in Aberdeen, drawing in people already involved in this kind of work from other universities (for example Professor Cairns from Edinburgh, Professor Crotty from the University of Ulster, Dr Delaney from QUB (already a partner institution)) in ways that could be construed as harmful to the 'donor' institutions and perhaps ultimately to this kind of research which depends on the collaboration of people in different institutions with access to different kinds of local research material.</p>
People	<p>Apart from project I staff retention has been good and there has clearly been a serious attempt to replace departing participants. Foreseeable and inevitable departures or semi-departures such as that of Professor Watson on reaching retirement age have been sensibly anticipated and catered for. Like has not necessarily been replaced with like, which seems sensible as it has allowed projects to evolve and grow in relation to the research interests of the best new people who could be appointed.</p>

2. Achievements

A. Please comment on the main achievements or highlights of the Centre **for the final project year**, relative to those anticipated in the Centre's Strategic and Operational Plan. You are asked to comment both on those achievements that relate directly to the Centre's Strategic and Operational Plan and to any that were not anticipated when the Centre commenced. If possible, please refer to each achievement in turn as identified by the Centre Director.

Achievements	Comments
i 7 major publications	Very impressive delivery of what was promised: some of the 13 research projects are still producing the book/major publication of the project but a slight time-lag is understandable and acceptable given publisher's production schedules.
ii substantial research student recruitment and associated postgraduate training workshop on a central theme of the project	Represents serious progress towards (rather than achievement of) declared goal of developing 'strong postgraduate training facility .. and effective recruitment of both MLitt and PhD students'.
iii ambitious programme of international symposia, conferences and seminar series with participation from much of English-speaking world (except Australia, for some reason).	Appropriate way of delivering on targets 3 and 4, ensuring dissemination and making use of collaborations with partner institutions and other centres.
iv Dissemination at two well-attended public gatherings	But apart from a large gathering (c.150) graced by Irish Ambassador and another attended by c.250 not much hard evidence supplied (for 2005 at least) of 'dissemination to widest possible audience' - the plain people of Scotland and Ireland who do not attend academic conferences, seminars or symposia were not very directly reached, though the indirect effects of in the first instance academic dissemination are of course incalculable.

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B. Please comment on the main achievements or highlights of the Centre **for the whole award period**, relative to those anticipated in the Centre's Strategic and Operational Plan. You are asked to comment both on those achievements that relate directly to the Centre's Strategic and Operational Plan and to any that were not anticipated when the Centre commenced. If possible, please refer to each achievement in turn as identified by the Centre Director.

Achievements	Comments
i Successful (on the whole) organisation and operation of all 13 proposed research projects.	Success impressively confirmed by prestigious invitation to showcase Centre's work at Smithsonian. Project I (Boll) was hampered but commendably not scuppered by personnel changes and by illness as already noted, and project L (Watson) was delayed by Watson's serious illness, but momentum seems to have been restored. Sustaining these aspects of the operation despite such difficulties merits praise rather than criticism.
ii Postgraduate training programme.	Student numbers are impressive both at Master's (M.Litt.) and Ph.D. level, and the international postgraduate colloquia in Aberdeen, Dublin and Belfast, leading to published proceedings, were obviously very successful. But little evidence supplied of the nature and distinctiveness of the projected training programme/facility in Irish and Scottish Studies (successful training workshop in 2005, while highly commendable, does not of itself constitute a training programme), and the plans for continuation seem tacitly to acknowledge that further development is still needed in this area.
iii Programme of conferences and symposia.	Extraordinarily impressive even in bald statistical summary - successful well beyond the modestly phrased aspirations of the original Corporate Plan.
iv Dissemination to widest possible audience	Also impressive. Actually more successful in earlier years, with very useful TV and radio broadcasts which are particularly commended, than in final year of project.

3. Importance

Please comment on the Centre Director's self-assessment of the potential importance of the Centre's research activities and how its findings will advance creativity, knowledge and understanding. Taking account of the evidence provided in the report, your comments should incorporate an evaluation of whether you consider the Centre Director's self-assessment to be credible. You should, if possible, refer separately to the potential importance to the subject area(s) as a whole, to non-academic audiences and what the strategic impact of the Centre's achievements has been.

Subject area(s)	Comments
Subject area(s)	<p>Director's self-assessment is in general quite credible, but the exercise more or less invites 'optimization' and artful presentation (aka 'spin'). The tactic of quoting back to the AHRC the comments of some of its own reviewers of the Phase 2 proposal cleverly evades the need to blow his own trumpet too loudly. The usual implicitly required claims to originality and innovation are represented by the key terms 'fresh' and 'new'. The suggestion that anglocentric perspectives once dominated the field is perfectly true, but the work of a generation of distinguished Scottish and Irish scholars to redress the balance before this project took shape is quietly played down. While there could be protracted historiographical debate as to whether the approaches and perspectives are quite as new and original as is claimed, and interdisciplinary enquiry in this general area is not quite as recent as is claimed, that is not to say that the claims to advance knowledge and understanding are ill-founded. The pioneering work of scattered scholars, some of them generalising ahead of detailed evidence, has now been consolidated so that further development and more detailed research can now proceed, and this has indeed already started to happen. I am a little sceptical about the rather opportunistic invocation of the Irish 'Peace Process' (and there is an argument that cultural traditions research of the kind fostered by the project, however interesting in itself, can actually enhance a sense of irreconcilable community difference instead of supplying a basis for mutual respect as one might hope and expect) but that overused journalistic term now means so little anyway that it is fairly harmless here.</p>
Outside academia	<p>I am satisfied both that dissemination outside the academy is important, as claimed, and that it has happened, quite effectively, which is also claimed. Involvement of political leaders, diplomats and senior civil servants, as reported, could help to influence and provide historical perspectives on continuing political debate about migration, immigration and the</p>

	<p>formation of national identity. Outreach, particularly through broadcasts, to the more general public could speak to the natural interest of many of ultimately Scottish, Irish, or Irish-Scottish ancestry in where they and their families (and indeed their speech-patterns) ultimately come from, culturally as well as geographically. Amateur family and local history projects could be stimulated by popular awareness of the work and feed back into the developing knowledge-base.</p>
<p>Strategic impact of the Centre's achievements on the institutions' strategies for the research area</p>	<p>Has obviously had a very positive impact, as intended, on Aberdeen's profile in Arts and Social Science research, with good new appointments, although this may to some extent have been at the expense of other institutions as noted earlier. Positive if more modest impact on TCD and QUB as associated institutions. The stimulus to the development of the carefully planned QUB Seamus Heaney Centre for poetry is important regionally and should be ongoing. While one welcomes in principle the relaunch of the QUB Institute of Irish Studies, boldly associated with this project though other factors were perhaps also involved, it is not yet entirely clear that this will now flourish once again.</p>

4. Continuation: projects and structures

With reference to the end of award report, please comment on the Centre Director's plans for the continuation of the AHRC-funded Research Centre after the end of AHRC funding.

The plans for continuation are not plans for continuation after the end of AHRC funding but plans for Phase 2 which have been welcomed and recognised by the award of additional AHRC Phase 2 funding. In effect it seems we will need to wait for the Phase 2 end of award report for detailed post-funding plans. But Phase 2 represents a series of natural developments building on the solid achievements of Phase 1. I particularly commend the greater emphasis in Phase 2 on expressly comparative work on Scottish and Irish literatures and languages, the practical proposals for developing and reinforcing interdisciplinary links between the predominantly historical investigation of Identity and Mobility and the predominantly literary investigation of Narratives of Exile and Belonging, and the development plans for the Graduate School and its fuller integration into the Centre's research projects

5. People

A. Staffing

With reference to the end of award report, please comment on the extent to which the Centre has helped to realise the career potential of all those who were employed using funds from the AHRC Award, including both the more established academic staff working on projects/research activities, as well as researchers, project students and administrative and technical staff. Please also comment on the role of, and effectiveness of management and supervisory arrangements for, any post-doctoral researchers or project students (if applicable), including training provision.

	Comments
Academic, technical and other staff	No technical staff listed in the report, so comment not possible. There is evidence that all the academic staff, with the possible exceptions of the most senior, the Direct and Professor Watson, now Emeritus, have clearly been stimulated to greater things and have benefited considerably in terms of research opportunity and career development

Post-doctoral researchers	The evidence here is more equivocal: some have moved on to temporary or permanent posts within the academy; others have not yet entered or re-entered the academic job-market (at the time of reporting). It is difficult to assess management, supervision and training from the outside and at a distance, though being able to ensure that at least some can stay on or even move up the increasingly difficult academic career ladder is evidence (of a sort) of effectiveness and success. It should perhaps be noted that training and management in the nature of things will have been specifically and quite narrowly project-oriented rather than career-development-oriented, at least in the first instance. But some researchers, notably Boll on Project I, will, perforce, have had opportunities to develop marketable managerial and administrative skills of their own in addition to developing as researchers.
AHRC funded PhD students (for Phase 2 Centres only)	N/A

B. Interactions – Collaboration & Networking

With reference to the end of award report, please comment on the range and effectiveness of the formal collaborations and the less formal networking activities within the Centre. Taking account of the evidence provided in the report, your comments should incorporate an evaluation of whether you consider the Centre Director's self-assessment of the significance of these interactions to be credible.

	Comments
Formal collaborations	The formal collaboration with TCD and QUB (to which Liverpool will be added for Phase 2) has been extremely successful, ensuring satisfactory Irish (and Scots-Irish) input on the basis of local expertise and specialist research. QUB in particular, with its long-established strengths in language and literature as well as Irish history, has responded very positively to the additional opportunities provided by the collaboration and has benefited from it. The Director's assessment seems credible, though the new QUB Seamus Heaney Centre for poetry is not perhaps exclusively attributable to the project.
Less formal networking activities	Conspicuously successful in this respect: contacts and collaborations have proliferated vigorously, greatly assisted by conferences and symposia and an invigorated sense of common

	<p>purpose. The Director's comments, buttressed by figures for associated scholars and related conferences, seminars and symposia, are credible, indeed compelling.</p>
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6. Governance/Management

A. Formal partnerships

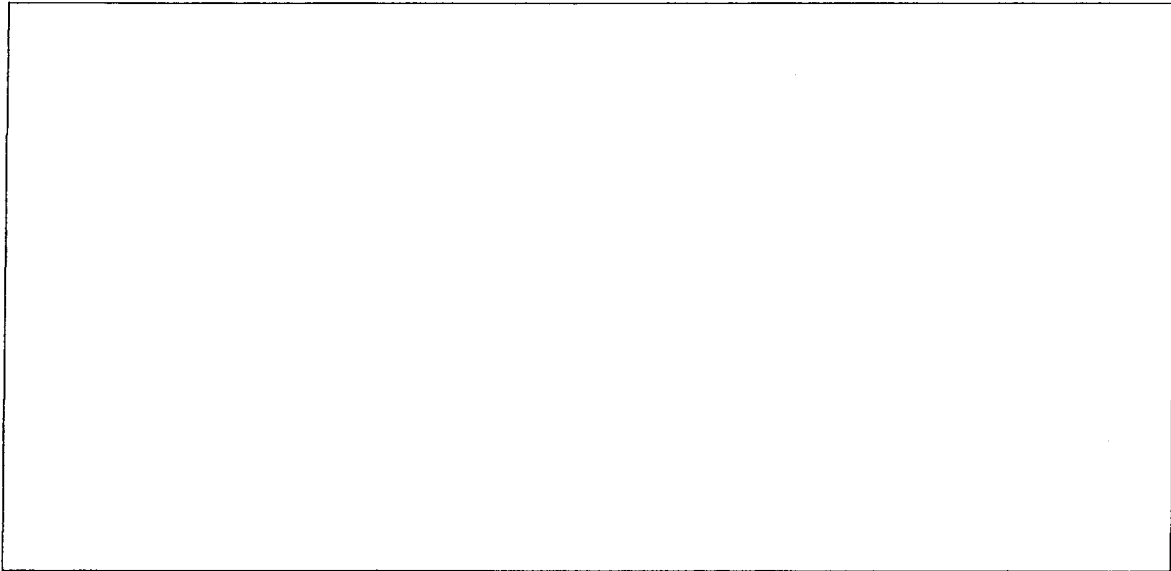
With reference to the end of award report, please comment on the Centre Director's self-assessment of the strength and weaknesses in the relationship between the host institution and the partner institution(s).

The assessment is overwhelmingly - and hearteningly - positive, with no serious weaknesses identified. This is impressive and believable and is plausibly attributed to excellent communications among the key personnel, well-selected for the purpose, building on previous professional and research contacts.

B. Structure of the Management Committee

With reference to the end of award report, please comment on the Centre Director's self assessment of how effective the Management Committee has been at overseeing the management of the Centre.

The assessment is thoughtful as well as positive, noting the committee was critical and rigorous where necessary as well as supportive and that its balanced composition was an important element in its effectiveness.



C. Academic Advisory Board

With reference to the end of award report, please comment on the Centre Director's self assessment of how valuable a contribution the Academic Advisory Board made in advising the Director and Management Committee on significant questions relating to the academic priorities of the Centre.

The report is tactful and polite and pays tribute to the distinction and general supportiveness of the Board but it is not difficult to conclude from it that the Board was of limited value, not perhaps strictly necessary or particularly helpful, and could contribute little that was not better supplied by the Mangement Committee.

7. Outputs/outcomes

With reference to the end of award report, please comment on the delivery, nature and range of outputs and outcomes, considering both those that were anticipated in the original Strategic and Operational Plan (including any direct replacements) and those that were in addition to those originally envisaged.

You should also comment on the effectiveness of dissemination and knowledge engagement activities, in terms of whether they have been, or will be, adequate to make the research findings available to both the research community and any relevant audiences beyond academia. If you consider that there might be opportunities for further such engagement that could be considered by the Centre Director or by the AHRC, please highlight these below.

	Comments
Outputs and outcomes indicated relative to those initially anticipated and/or any direct replacements (please refer to section 7A in the End of Award Report)	Delivery of projected outputs and outcomes in general very impressive. Some problems with projects I and L attributable to personnel changes and/or illness of key personnel leading to relatively minor delay in production of published outcomes but not, commendably, to their cancellation.
Outputs and outcomes in addition to those initially anticipated (not direct replacements) (Please refer to section 7B in the End of Award Report)	This was particularly commendable. In almost every one of the 13 projects there were publications, media publicity and academic contacts or networking above and beyond what had been initially envisaged.
Effectiveness of dissemination and knowledge engagement activities	As already noted, this was effective, particularly to academic audiences, but curiously non-academic dissemination had been rather less effective in 2005 than in earlier years.

<p>Please list any further opportunities for dissemination and knowledge engagement activities</p>	<p>None really come to mind - all the practical means and opportunities seem to have been shrewdly exploited at one time or another</p>
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8. Electronic Resources

If the Centre Director has indicated one or more electronic resources as an output arising from the Centre's research programme and activities, please comment on the strategy proposed for their storage, dissemination and maintenance in the longer-term.

Two electronic databases developed in connection with projects A and F have been put on the web, on websites associated with and so presumably maintained by the University of St Andrews and the University of Aberdeen respectively, so they can be accessed by other researchers and used for teaching purposes. A general Centre website has also been established, linked with the University of Aberdeen website.

9. Value for Money

In light of your comments in the sections above - particularly in relation to achievements, importance and outputs/outcomes - and the information on the total cost of the Centre in the end of award report (section 9D), please comment on the Centre's overall value for money. Do you consider that the Centre represents an effective investment of the AHRC's funding? You should not comment on the detailed budgetary information in the end of award report as this will be analysed by Officers of the AHRC.

In general, given that the outcomes and outputs have usually impressively exceeded expectation and that the associated conferences seminars and symposia have been conspicuously successful in attracting a very wide constituency and initiating academic networks, I judge that the Centre has represented excellent value for money and provides a model (which might be very difficult to emulate elsewhere) of effective AHRC investment in interdisciplinary inter-institutional research on a large scale.