

Centre Director:	Professor 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	Programme of Centre fully conforms to the stated aims and objectives
Research Programme and Activities	Staff movements could not have been predicted. Indicated shifts in focus of F and K appropriately argued for, evaluated and organized.
Outcomes and Targets	Met in a comprehensive fashion and claim that outcomes go beyond original anticipations is justified.
Dissemination/Exploitation and Outreach	Met in comprehensive fashion and claim that outcomes go beyond original anticipations is also justified.
Collaboration	No major shift but satisfactory indications of proliferating contacts and connections
Institutional Support	University support clearly in evidence - providing a density of scholarly activity in cognate areas.

People	
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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
Publications	An impressive range of monographs. In toto they confirm the vitality of the projects from which they arose and enhance the standing of the Centre.
Training	Wide recruitment and evidence of a group dynamic at work amongst postgraduates. Wide range of conference activity with involvement from appropriate institutions of standing within the academic field. Evidence of strategic planning for future developments clearly indicated.

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
	Looked at across the whole award period, the realisation of the project objectives is superb. The only slight slippage in a couple of instances is due to factors of health. The outcome is a testimony to their development and management. The published output sits impressively alongside the development of a strong graduate school and the establishment globally of a strong identity for the work of the Centre. It is easy to see that the Centre could have found itself concentrating on one side of its work to the detriment of another but this appears not to be the case. A convincing balance has been maintained and the sense of participating in a common mission has shown itself in the sustained commitment to all of its aspects.

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.

	Comments
Subject area(s)	<p>The Director's self-assessment of the impact of the Centre's work is entirely credible. It has brought together history, language, literature and culture (in its broadest sense) in a way frequently aspired to but not often achieved. It has brought an impressive contribution to the inter-insular study of 'the British Isles' but in that process also highlighted emigration patterns and relationships on a global scale. This enterprise has ample justification simply in academic terms but, for obvious reasons, has a significance which extends into contemporary politics. The achievement of the Centre lies in its perception of the complementarity of these objective. It has not been 'narrowly' academic but neither has it been driven by an external agenda. There is much current academic (and more general) interest in 'Britishness' and the work of the Centre has ensured that the Scottish-Irish dimension has appropriate prominence in contemporary discussion of these issues.</p>
Outside academia	<p>Following from what has been said above, the 'public dissemination' has been an impressive and fruitful aspect of the Centre's work attracting the involvement of impressive figures from political and academic life. One senses, too, that this has not been a matter of 'one-way traffic'. That is to say the centre has itself been stimulated by its 'outreach' and has been able to generate a real discussion in public about matters which remain of great importance to Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland and, indeed, the 'British Isles' as a whole.</p>

<p>Strategic impact of the Centre's achievements on the institutions' strategies for the research area</p>	<p>The evidence of the institution's commitment to the development of the research area is clear and persuasive. There has been substantial investment in high quality staff and while this reviewer does not fully grasp what its identification of a 'core cross-College research theme' entails in terms of allocation of resources there can be no doubting the seriousness of the commitment in terms of physical space and intellectual effort.</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 continuation programme has been carefully thought through to build on the strengths and profile established in its early phase - continuing to see a central strength in the way its academic profile relates and its outreach activities relate to each other. The 'diaspora' theme is intelligently developed further with the clear identification of a research community which would come to focus on Aberdeen as its hub and the same is true of the Research Consortium on Comparative Literatures and Languages. The striving to make the necessary intellectual connections between strands should take further what has already been part of the mission of the Centre. The particular projects which have been identified fit coherently within these overall objectives. The 'step-change' towards 'systematic comparison' is ambitious but I am convinced that the ambience of the Centre, and the skills available, will make it possible to turn this often-expressed aspiration, in other contexts, into a reality in this one. The outline of the proposed 'linkages' between the two spines is persuasive as far as it goes but it will clearly be a major part of the responsibility of the Director to ensure that these connections do indeed become a reality rather than sink into being pious gestures.

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
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Academic, technical and other staff	So far as I am able to judge, the Centre has been appropriately supportive of career development for the individuals concerned. Nothing I have read suggests that there have been shortcomings - a comment which also applies to the two slots below - though I am obviously unable to comment on whether individual staff or particular students might have concern. The overall environment, and record of achievement, gives insight into project management which must be beneficial.
Post-doctoral researchers	
AHRC funded PhD students (for Phase 2 Centres only)	

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 collaborations seem entirely to justify the statements made by the Director about them. The partner institutions have all made significant investment and are themselves of excellent standing. There is no doubt that collaboration is not 'window-dressing' but as is stated something which is 'explicit in the structure of the Centre'.
Less formal networking activities	These too are impressive. A 'multiplier' effect is clearly at work. The more the work of the centre gets known the more that researchers across the world seek some kind of association. It is difficult to be certain what these connections amount to but appropriate time and energy appears to be devoted to this area.

6. Governance/Management

A. Formal partnerships

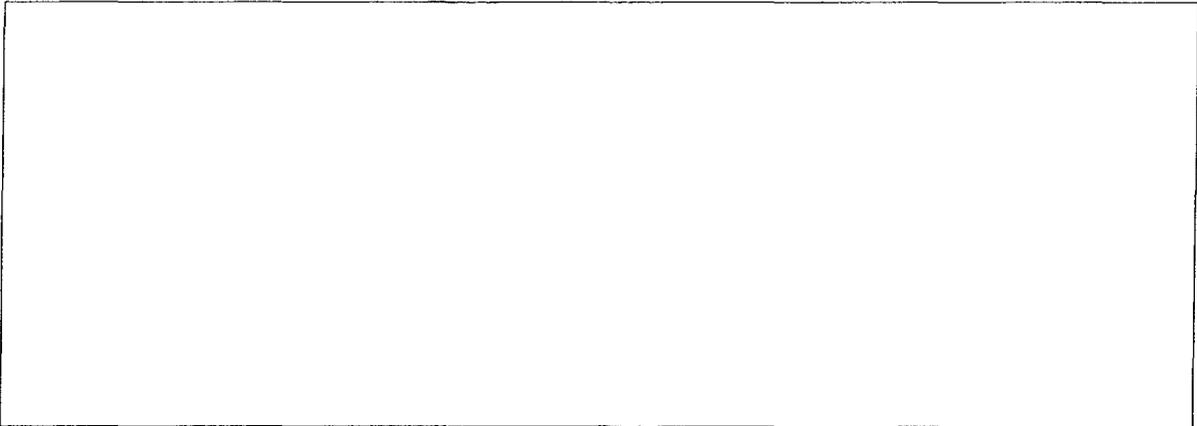
With reference to the end of award report, please comment on the Centre Director's self-assessment of the strength and weaknesses in the relationship between the host institution and the partner institution(s).

There is no reason to question the Director's assessment of the relationship between the Centre and the partner institutions. All the factors which he adduces have combined to give real depth and mutual 'ownership'. It is the involvement of senior figures in the institutions in combination with the strong (and antecedent) academic connections between individuals which has made all the difference between success and failure. The absence, or malfunctioning, of any one of the factors which have been listed could have seriously weakened the work of the Centre. My reading of their collective presence in this case is that it constitute a shining example to the sector as a whole.

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.

I have no reason to question what is said about the performance of the Management Committee. From indications elsewhere it is evident that when problems have arisen they have come before the Committee for consideration and its composition has been such that it has been possible, in very large measure, to resolve them effectively.



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 Director argues that the close correlation between the original Strategic and Operational Plan and its implementation has meant that the Board has not had as much of a role as might have been expected. He draws attention to 'a good deal of duplication' between it and the Management Committee. His point, in his particular circumstances, appears to be well-made and might be worth reflecting on further. Of course, it is the fact of the close correlation which has made the AAB less important than it might be in relation to other Centres where such correlation has not been quite as close. Whether there is a more general case for re-examining the role of an AAB in relation to a Committee can perhaps only be considered in the light of observations which are received from other Centres in this respect. There are clearly issues here which need further attention as the present structure has clearly been found to be somewhat cumbersome. Equally, however, we are talking about structures which might have had a rather different function if the Director had been other than what he was. I suspect that no 'law' can be laid down here -but that is not to say that there should be 'a pause for reflection'.

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)	I can only repeat here what I have already said - there is an impressive record of achievement in relation to the outcomes originally anticipated. The Director's managerial role, central to the effectiveness of the Centre has not been at the expense of his own publication and this commitment has fed through to his colleagues.
Outputs and outcomes in addition to those initially anticipated (not direct replacements) (Please refer to section 7B in the End of Award Report)	While these additional outputs and outcomes naturally vary from project to project, the 'knock-on' effect has in some cases been quite staggering and overall is comfortably above what might have been anticipated.
Effectiveness of dissemination and knowledge engagement activities	The dissemination, in a wide variety of contexts, is very effective.

<p>Please list any further opportunities for dissemination and knowledge engagement activities</p>	<p>I am at a loss, looking at the range of activities engaged in and the contacts made - press, media, 'public life' - to identify 'further opportunities'. It may be, however, that there is further scope for dissemination through appropriate contacts with Churches Together in Britain and Ireland and individual church bodies - again for obvious reasons.</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.

I regret that I do not think I can add anything usefully under this heading.

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.

I have no hesitation in saying that the the work of the Centre, as indicated under earllier headings, is of a very high quality. As 'value for money' it represents an excellent investment and, in all its manifold aspects, can be properly held up as an example to the sector. The brevity of this summary is in itself testimony. To write at more length would be only to repeat superlatives.