

Research Environment (REF5)

UoA 25: Education

Introduction

Education has an established tradition of innovative development and research, reflecting Ulster University's mission to be *a model of an outstanding regional university with a national and international reputation for quality*. Most of its work takes the Northern Ireland (NI) community as the points of departure, contextualises the problems, nationally and internationally, and impacts constructively upon policy and practice both at home and further afield. This is reflected in the award of substantial research grants, the endurance of the internationally recognised UNESCO Centre, and regular invitations to its academics to address national and international conferences. Since 2008, it has held over £2.5M in research and development grants (over £1.8M new grant income since 2008).

Staff

Currently, 12 faculty staff (Austin, Smith, Moran, Clarke, Pritchard, McCully, Bates, Reilly, Skinner, O'Connor, Irwin and Campbell) and three research associate staff (Hansson, Smith Ellison and Monteith, ex-officio) are members of IRiSS. Of the 13 staff submitted for RAE 2008, three have retired (one professor and two experienced researchers) and one colleague from another School is no longer involved in education. This represents a 38% diminution and, therefore, it has been important to re-energise the Unit. Two early career researchers in 2008 (O'Connor and Irwin) have gained IRiSS membership, and Bates became a member on appointment (September 2010). Two other new appointees, Roulston (2010) and Hou (2010) are producing research outputs. Skinner has moved from part-time to full-time employment and has become research active. In addition, Professor Moran has returned to the Unit. Apart from the dedicated researchers in the UNESCO Centre, all staff are committed to aligning teaching duties with research activity, thereby creating an organic and dynamic platform for research informed teaching.

Research Profile

The Unit has operated under, and been responsive to significant changes in education nationally and internationally. Representative of this, its research coalesces around three clusters that have evolved from the RAE 2008 themes: teacher education; children and youth; and conflict and peace-building.

Teacher Education and Pedagogical Practice focuses particularly on research related to learning and teaching issues which both emanate from, and inform, the Unit's teacher education programmes, its TESOL programme, its work in continuing education and its Library and Information Services activities. Publications by Moran and Clarke, drawing on research previously collected through a TLRP / ESRC project, *Values in Initial Teacher Education*, and other research, have critiqued NI Initial Teacher Education (ITE) structures and practice in a comparative international context. Since RAE 2008 the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in teaching and learning has been successfully integrated into this strand. Evaluations of ICT applications feature strongly in the work of Clarke and Skinner, with a particular emphasis on learning communities linked through technology, on-line learning and the use of e-portfolios to enhance teacher creativity and reflection. In collaboration with the School of Health Sciences, and with funding from the Wellcome Trust and Astra Zeneca, Clarke's work has extended to include communities of practice working in the field of personal development in primary schools. An investigation of the potential use of iPad technology in ITE begins in September 2013. Internationally, Moran (with Clarke) have actively enhanced the Unit's profile in Development Education, through their leadership of a four country initiative developing and researching more effective school - HEI partnerships in initial teacher education.

Children, Youth and Adults (Educating for Inclusion) has been strengthened by the establishment of a Children and Youth Programme (CYP), an academic collaboration with NUI Galway, which is supported by grants of £1.4M from Atlantic Philanthropies (AP). Adopting a rights-based approach to monitor the well-being of children and youth across the island of Ireland, the CYP has carved a niche expertise and interdisciplinary focus that is recognised within academic and non-academic sectors. Work by Monteith and O'Connor on child's rights outcome indicators has been acknowledged by First Minister, Peter Robinson and will inform State reporting to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. Since 2010, O'Connor, Monteith and Hansson have been involved in the production of five influential independent monitoring reports on issues affecting children and youth in Ireland and Northern Ireland (rights and well-being, policy development, youth justice, the role of classroom assistants in supporting inclusion, and civic engagement in post-primary schools). Monteith has provided evidence to the Committee for Social Development on welfare reform proposals and O'Connor and Hansson have provided evidence to the Education Committee on classroom support for inclusion. Within this cluster, the Unit has an established research focus on inclusive educational practice, with an emphasis on special educational needs (SEN) and social marginalisation, and this has been advanced by participation in two major initiatives. First, the Department of Education (DE) has funded work (jointly with Queens University, Belfast) to better prepare teachers to provide effective SEN provision. Second, the Unit, in partnership with Community Youth Work colleagues, is researching the concept of restorative practices in fostering greater inclusion within schools in NI and County Donegal. Aspects of Pritchard's outputs focus on diversity and ethnic and gender equality in higher education. The Unit's work in Library and Information Services has increasingly focused on issues of literacy development and the marginalization and inclusion of both youth and adults, whilst Irwin's work examines inclusivity in the context of adult prisoners in the justice system.

Education and Conflict is a longstanding research theme within the Unit. From the 1970s a series of educational interventions has been pioneered in Religious Education, Integrated Education, Community Relations and Citizenship Education, each of which has been the focus for significant education policy responses to conflict in NI. Currently, Austin directs an enduring, extensive north-south programme, *Dissolving Boundaries*, in conjunction with NUI Maynooth. Involving 600 schools since its inception in 1998, it investigates the use of innovative technologies to build stronger relationships between schools on each side of the Irish border by working on topics common to both curricula. The outputs have international comparative application and Austin is currently working with authorities in Israel to explore the potential use of ICT to link Jewish and Arab youth in Israeli schools. A recent major initiative, *Creative Change*, funded by the International Fund for Ireland (IFI) Sharing in Education programme, has a focus on fostering personal development and mutual understanding through creativity in the early years. Reflecting government commitment to *Delivering Social Change*, thirteen primary schools in the immediate vicinity of the Coleraine campus are involved in this cross-sectoral project that brings together principals, teachers, pupils, classroom assistants, student teachers and parents.

Other research, related to the contribution of education to build greater social cohesion and facilitate transformation from conflict, has strengthened and sustained the Unit's profile in this area. Roulston and Hansson, jointly funded with the School of Environmental Studies, are using GIS systems to monitor young people's social movements beyond their own immediate environs, in the context of divided communities. In 2011-2013, Hunter, McCully, Bates and O'Connor evaluated the work of the Primary Integrating / Enriching Education (PIEE) project, an IFI funded North Eastern Education and Library Board (NEELB) initiative promoting co-operation between small, rural primary schools from different cultural backgrounds. This research has been extended to examine the impact of sharing teachers across adjacent rural primary schools. The work of Campbell, from the School of Psychology, relates to such 'bridging' in divided societies by investigating the outworking of the contact hypothesis in both formal and informal educational settings. In the field of history education, a Standing Conference of Teacher Education North and South (SCoTENS) funded initiative is examining the contrasting importance given to political history in primary schools, north and south (McCully).

O'Connor has undertaken a four-year evaluation of the implementation of the Local and Global Citizenship programme within the NI Curriculum whilst Reilly, working with QUB, has assessed the impact of Global Citizenship Education in a NI context. A recent UNESCO report (Smith and Hansson) funded by the Integrated Education Fund (IEF) has challenged the shift in government policy towards support for the concept of Shared Education without commitment to structural reform to bring about a fully integrated system.

Research outputs, through the UNESCO Centre, have been instrumental in informing research, policy and practice on education, conflict and peace-building in a range of international development contexts. Smith was an advisor and contributing editor to the *Education for All, Global Monitoring Report* (2011) and is currently technical advisor to the UNICEF *Peace-building, Education and Advocacy Programme* (2012-15), a \$150M global initiative in 14 conflict affected countries, funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Netherlands. Field-based research has been completed in Nepal (DFID and EU), Sierra Leone (GiZ) and Uganda (UNICEF). An analysis of Norway's support to education in fragile situations (Smith Ellison) has been compiled for NORAD and presented at the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Oslo, 2013).

Research Culture

Since 2008, there have been dedicated efforts to develop the research culture of the Unit, internally in terms of energising innovative research activity and externally in terms of engagement with wider academic communities and civil society. Strategic and sustainable mechanisms are in place to support both experienced and early career researchers. A collegiate mentoring system, both horizontal (among co-equals) and vertical (from more experienced to less experienced), helps encourage and support high quality research outputs. Special career planning and research induction sessions are offered to less experienced researchers who also obtain publishing experience by collaborating with internal and/or external co-authors. All staff are actively encouraged to network within the wider academic community as well as with key stakeholders in government, statutory, non-statutory and voluntary sectors, and to present papers at national and international conferences. IRiSS has provided resources to support conference attendance by those aspiring to research institute membership, the Faculty Intranet provides guidance on funding agencies and regular updates on funding sources are circulated to staff within their areas of interest. The Unit has active links with IRiSS' social media accounts to increase visibility and opportunities for engagement, alongside regular research blogs from the UNESCO Centre, which encourage and welcome contributions from across the School. Research achievement is widely disseminated to internal and external audiences through newsletters, committee items, via the internet and other social media and on campus noticeboards. The annual away day, held each June, has become an integral feature of the Unit's work, affording opportunities to strengthen the research rationale, build research capacity, share research activity and outputs, and strengthen professional relationships.

Indicative of this approach, in 2010-11, the Unit held three major events. A lecture and a seminar on *Communities of Practice* led by Etienne Wenger and two seminars on the theme of *Restorative Practices in Schools* attracted strong composite audiences of researchers and practitioners. In 2011-12 there were five events: Professor Blaise Cronin, Indiana University, gave a seminar on *What it means to be an author?* to academics and practitioners in library information services; Professor Colin Brock, Oxford University, led a seminar on *Education as Humanitarian Response*; Professor Keith Barton, Indiana University, and Professor Diana Hess, University of Wisconsin (currently on secondment to the Spencer Foundation), ran a one day research workshop for faculty and research contract staff, post-graduate student teachers and their teacher mentors on *Teaching Controversial and Sensitive Material through History*; the Unit co-hosted a two day invitational symposium with St Patrick's Drumcondra, Dublin on the theme of *Commemorating 1916, the Battle of the Somme and the First World War*; and the Children and Youth Programme held a seminar for MLAs and key statutory, non-statutory and voluntary stakeholders in Parliament Buildings Stormont, to discuss the *Provision of Education for Young People in Detention: Rights, Research and Reflections on Policy and Practice*.

Six major events occurred between September 2012 and December 2013: Professor Hazel Hall addressed the NI Library Management community on the future role of libraries in education. The Children and Youth Programme ran a research seminar for academics, social service practitioners, political advisors and educationalists on *Capacity Building for Inclusion: The Role of Classroom Assistants in Northern Ireland*. The Unit hosted the IRiSS Annual Lecture for 2013 where Professor John Furlong, Oxford University, gave an address on *Education: An Anatomy of the Discipline: Rescuing the University Project?* The PIEE team and the Children and Youth Programme contributed to the Knowledge Exchange Seminar Series (KESS) in Parliament Buildings on sharing in education and child rights outcome indicators respectively. Bates co-ordinated an IRiSS supported one-day North-South symposium on the *Value of the School Library* to showcase local research and good practice.

Since 2009, the Unit has convened a series of key events for international participants. In October 2012, the UNESCO Centre co-hosted a *Plan With Youth* Policy Forum in Paris (in conjunction with NUI Galway and the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP), focusing on how young people can help shape education systems to cater for their educational, social, cultural and professional needs. The Unit has hosted two international events in the field of history education: the sixth History Education International Research Network (HEIRNET) Conference was held in Coleraine in 2009, and in 2012 the UNESCO Centre co-operated with Euroclio (the European umbrella organisation for national history teaching associations) to host a five day international seminar for teachers and teacher educators from nine countries on the theme of *Teaching History in Divided Societies*.

Research Plans

As well as sharing current research interests the annual IRiSS and UoA away days are opportunities to discuss and plan future directions for research activity. Over the next five years, the Unit proposes to:

- Seek funding with other institutions working in the Conflict and Education field (currently grant applications are being prepared for UNICEF and USAID) to develop, monitor and research intervention programmes in conflict affected states based on previous research experience;
- Further develop the UNESCO Centre as the research 'hub' for the Unit by fostering collaborative, inter-disciplinary projects relating to the rights and well-being of children and young people, synergising inter and intra faculty expertise with the research capacity of the Centre;
- Increase the amount of research funded by external bodies, in particular Research Councils (currently grant applications are being prepared for ESRC and AHRC), to further develop the inter-disciplinary focus of the Children and Youth Programme.
- Expand the research capacity of younger staff members and those recently appointed through a targeted mentoring and support strategy that ensures the completion of doctorates, where applicable, that are in keeping with the identified research strands and that lead to research active status;
- Strengthen the research capacity and outputs of all research active staff through a robust internal peer review strategy in relation to the preparation and submission of grant applications and journal articles and strategic use of bibliometrics to identify and target top Education journals.

Research Students

New members of staff without a PhD are encouraged within three years of appointment to enrol for part-time doctoral degrees as a first step on the research ladder. Currently, Skinner and Marlow are studying for PhDs and McGill and McFlynn are due to enrol.

Ulster (and QUB) are not eligible for ESRC research scholarships; instead the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) in NI fund competitively awarded scholarships. Post-graduate research students are integral to the research culture of the Unit. The research degree programme is managed through the Research Graduate School (RGS) and the Head of the RGS, in collaboration with relevant supervisors, monitors the progress of students over the duration of their studies. The Unit currently has five full-time and five part-time PhD candidates. Since January 2008 there have been 13 successful completions. Academics formulate a range of PhD themes that are widely advertised to attract quality external candidates for full-time studentships and staff supervise within their areas of expertise. Over their period of study, students complete research and skills training; each student has two supervisors and an advisor, one of whom is normally a member of IRiSS whilst the other may be a transitional member or an IRiSS aspirant. Research students are included in information networks facilitated both by the Unit and the RGS; the RGS provides financial support for fieldwork costs and academic conference attendance.

Indicators of Esteem

The Unit, through its published outputs, national and international conference presentations, national and international partnerships and links to policy makers, has made strategic and significant contributions to research in several fields, including educational responses to conflict, the use of electronic communication in formal education across social and ethnic boundaries, the rights and well-being of children and young people, and the implementation of inclusive practices in schools. Inter-disciplinary co-operation is encouraged within the university. The Unit takes the lead on educational research within the Inter-Institute Peace and Conflict Cluster (IPAC), established to co-ordinate the strong disciplinary strands working on peace and conflict studies, thus enhancing the university's international reputation in this field. The UNESCO Centre Children and Youth Programme actively applies an inter-disciplinary approach to its research activity to better inform policy makers in Ireland and Northern Ireland, thus leading to more meaningful outcomes for children and young people in the two jurisdictions. The work of Monteith and O'Connor on child rights outcomes indicators is a significant contribution to immediate and longer term planning for children and young people in NI.

National and international partnerships have had a significant impact on research output allowing research to be developed in a comparative context. Smith (Novelli, Sussex), Austin (Hunter, Ontario Institute for Technology) and McCully (Barton, Indiana) have sustained writing relationships with British and international colleagues. Smith's work with Novelli has been used by UNESCO to formulate international policy. McCully's work with Barton has led to three refereed journal publications, two of which are included in the current REF submission. Two of the publications in the submission attributed to Austin (including a co-authored book) are a result of his collaborative work with Hunter. In June 2011, in recognition of the university's mission for 'regional engagement, the Unit's existing links with ROI institutions and its commitment to sustaining educational co-operation on the island, a decision was taken to make north – south research collaboration a central platform of the Unit's work. The Unit has consolidated relationships with southern Irish institutions through the UNESCO Centre (NUI Galway), Dissolving Boundaries (NUI Maynooth) and engagement with the Standing Conference of Teacher Education, North and South (SCoTENS). Professor Clarke is currently the latter's northern chair. McCully is an Executive member of the Educational Studies Association of Ireland, the national research organisation in Ireland.

The Unit contributes regularly to sustaining the national and international scholarly community through their involvement in editorial boards, peer reviewing, membership of learned societies and PhD examining. Editorial board membership during the 2008-13 period includes Clarke (Technology, Pedagogy and Education), Pritchard (Compare, Technology, Pedagogy and Education, Carrefours de l'Éducation and the Malaysian Journal of Education and Development), Smith (Associate Editor Irish Educational Studies, Education, Citizenship and Social Justice, International Journal of Development Education) and McCully (Theory and Research in Social Education). In addition, staff have undertaken regular peer reviewing for a range of other

journals including the British Education Research Journal, the American Educational Research Journal, Computers and Education, Technology, Pedagogy and Education, International Journal of Education, Journal of Peace and Conflict, International Journal of Education, European Journal of Education, Oxford Journal of Education and the British Journal of Educational Studies. Individual esteem has been accorded to Pritchard who has been a member of the Academy of Social Sciences since 2007 and was elected a member of the Royal Irish Academy in 2013. As a former Chair she was made an honorary member of the British Association for International and Comparative Education (BAICE) in 2009 and is secretary to the European Association for Institutional Research (EAIR). From 2008 UoA members have examined doctoral work in Lancaster (Smith, Pritchard), Oxford (Smith 2011, 2012, 2013), Birmingham (Smith) Dublin (McCully), Institute of Education, London (Smith 2009, 2010; McCully), Nottingham (McCully), Sussex (Smith), Bates (Loughborough) and CQ University, Australia (Pritchard).

Members of the Unit contribute regularly to prestigious national / international conferences. These include the American Educational Research Association (McCully, Denver 2010; McCully and Reilly, New Orleans 2011), the British Educational Research Association (Clarke, Glasgow 2009; Irwin, 2009; Clarke and McCully, Sussex 2013), the European Association for Institutional Research (Pritchard, Vilnius 2008; Copenhagen 2009; Warsaw 2011; Stravanger 2012), the British Association for International and Comparative Education (Pritchard, Glasgow 2008), International Geographical Union, CGE Conference (Clarke, Tokyo 2009), European Distance and E-Learning Network Annual Conference (Irwin, Paris 2009), UKFIET Conference on Education and Development (Smith, Oxford 2011), IS Academie for International Development (Smith Amsterdam 2011), Comparative and International Education Society (Smith, Puerto Rico 2012; Smith Ellison 2012) and GIZ (German Development Agency) Seminar Series (Smith, Bonn 2012).