

Research Environment (REF5)

UoA 36: Communication, Cultural and Media Studies, Library and Information Management

THE RESEARCH ENVIRONMENT OF THE CENTRE FOR MEDIA STUDIES (CMR)

The Centre for Media Research (CMR), located in the School of Media, Film and Journalism, was established originally in 2004 following the award of a SPUR grant of £3.1 million. Our aim in Media Studies is to produce world leading research which makes a contribution to the social, cultural and economic wellbeing of the community – whether in education, in the media industries, in government, in policy-making bodies, or in the population at large. We do this at local, national and international levels. Our research combines both established and newer research interests. Our traditional interest in film, television, photography and the press, has been influenced by thinking emerging from Digital Humanities, and has developed an expanding emphasis on digital arts, exploring their impact on the creative industries generally and their relationship to archives and archiving particularly.

During this REF cycle, the CMR has brought in a further £4.5m of research funding and produced an extensive portfolio of different research publications, including books, articles, book chapters, photographic exhibitions, films, mobile phone apps, and online interactive projects. We have diversified and expanded research interests in Digital Arts, Journalism, Media Policy, Archives and Archiving and Media Practice, as well as preserving the traditional strengths of the Unit (film, television, photography and Irish media).

We have also built on productive links with local creative and cultural industries, media support organizations such as the BUFVC (British Universities Film and Video Council), and public bodies, such as the National Trust, NI Tourist Board, Ofcom and InvestNI. In 2013, in addition to many other seminars and symposia, we brought together a diverse and creative international body of scholars to help launch the first UK City of Culture year in Derry/Londonderry, in January 2013, by hosting the MeCCSA (Media Communication and Cultural Studies Association) conference 'Spaces and Places of Culture' - (<http://www.arts.ulster.ac.uk/meccsa2013/index.php>).

Research Themes

Since 2004, research within the CMR has been organised into five strands:

- Film, Television and Photography;
- Media Policy and Journalism;
- Digital Arts and the Creative Industries;
- Comparative Media Studies;
- Research as Practice;
- Film, Television and Photography.

While international in reach, there continues to be a particular emphasis on the media in Ireland and Britain, a considerable area of strength in previous research assessment rounds. Both Edge and Baylis have progressed their research in Irish and British photography (together and separately) developing a particular interest in nineteenth century photography; McLoone has also expanded his interest in Irish film and television to include popular music and ECR (Early Career Researcher) Ciara Chambers has completed a major study of the British Newsreels' coverage of Ireland in the early 20th century and is now embarked on a new research area looking at amateur and independent filmmaking. She has also developed the CMR's interest in archives and archiving, exploring how digital technologies have allowed archive images to be recirculated for a totally contemporary cultural experience. Issues around archives and archiving will be a major research concern for the CMR over the coming years.

Research in media policy and journalism has reflected a particular concern with the local newspaper industry and the role of journalism and public relations in the post conflict environment that has developed in Northern Ireland over the last ten years (McLaughlin and Baker; Somerville). The strong emphasis on policy research from previously and noted in the 2008 RAE report, has also been sustained, especially in relation to the creative and broadcasting industries (Murphy), Arts Council policy (Jewesbury) and to children's and young people's programming (Messenger Davies).

With regard to Digital Arts and the Creative Industries, the social, cultural and political impact of new technologies has long been of interest to Media Studies researchers at Ulster and has been built up, increasingly overlapping with Research as Practice. This area of research has coalesced around the theme of 'space and place' (geographic, cultural, virtual), also the theme of the MeCCSA conference hosted in January 2013. Alan Hook's research has explored and developed on-line and mobile games that facilitate interaction across themes – literary place, urban space – as well as with various communities of gamers and has pioneered the development of gaming technologies that can benefit museums, galleries and arts spaces.

Helen Jackson is involved in projects that look at the use and potential of mobile apps and locative technology to enhance the tourist experience of historical space and place and has successfully developed two mobile phone apps for tourism. Colm Murphy has researched and published an important analysis of the Irish government's successful development plan for digital technologies and their use in job creation and development of the creative industries. The report offers many lessons for the local Northern Ireland industry, and has wider international relevance too.

Another new area was opened up by Richard Ekins in popular music studies, resulting in a number of important publications, the production of CDs and a series of seminars and conferences that looked at aspects of popular music history and the implications for popular music of contemporary digitization developments. This new area of research complements McLoone's development of Irish popular music studies. Research as Practice was identified as an area of strength in RAE 2008 and has been further developed since. The practice element – the making of media after a sustained period of research – continues to be central to the photography work of Edge, who curated two photographic exhibitions in this REF cycle. Film and video production is still central to the work of Jewesbury, Crilly and ECR Mairs, all of whose practice intervenes in debates about post-conflict culture nationally and internationally.

Outreach and PR

In this research round, we put a greater emphasis on devising new ways of disseminating our research, and set up a CMR blog and Twitter feed so that researchers could respond swiftly to media issues in the news and set the agenda on media matters generally. We were able to make research-informed contributions to national debates (for example on the Leveson Inquiry, on the Savile affair, on media coverage of the death of Baroness Thatcher, on the emerging HE skills agenda and on EU and governments' digitisation policies – see: <http://cmr.ulster.ac.uk/>). We were also able to host live feeds from the many conferences and symposia that were organised during this research round and hosted in particular a live feed from the keynote sessions at MeCCSA 2013, held at the Magee campus in Derry in January 2013. Other major events include a collaboration by McLoone with Dr Noel McLaughlin from the University of Northumbria to host a major conference, *A Special Relationship? Irish Popular Music in Britain*, hosted by Northumbria in June 2012 with a range of scholars from across Ireland, Britain and the USA. In 2011, the CMR organised a journalism research strand at the National Council for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ) conference. This annual conference and awards ceremony for journalism trainers in the UK was organised by the School at the Belfast campus, attracting journalists and journalism trainees from all over the UK.

Interdisciplinary and Collaborative Research

The basic principle underlying research in the CMR is that it is essentially interdisciplinary in nature, drawing upon methodologies and practices from across the humanities and social sciences. In addition to academic collaborations with colleagues in a range of universities across the UK, Europe,

the USA and China (the Faculty of Arts hosts a Confucius Institute at its Coleraine campus), the CMR has developed many collaborations with outside bodies, organisations and institutions, emphasizing its impact on the wider community. These include: Baylis with the Ulster Museum; Messenger Davies with the BBC, Ofcom and the Voice of the Listener and Viewer; Edge with the Arts Council and various art galleries; Hook with the Arts Council, the Museums Trust and the Verbal Arts Centre; Jackson with colleagues in the Northern Periphery Project in Scotland and Scandinavia and with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and the National Trust; McLaughlin and Baker with a range of Northern Ireland community groups and ex-prisoners' groups; Somerville with Uefa and the Irish Football Association (IFA) and McLoone and Chambers with the BUFVC, the Irish Film Archive, Northern Ireland Screen's Digital Archive, the BBC and UTV. The result is a healthy interchange between the local and the global, between the UK and Europe and between Ireland and Britain, confirming the CMR's research standing at national and international level.