

UoA 49: Celtic Studies Overview Report

The Panel reports as follows:

1. With a few exceptions the standard of submissions to RAE2001 was higher than in the 1996 RAE. Overall, the submissions indicate the existence of a strong and vibrant research culture across the Unit of Assessment. The range of outputs demonstrating the qualities of intellectual rigour, originality, imaginative scope, and depth of scholarship was impressive. This improvement is linked in many cases to the development of effective structures for research management and monitoring, resulting in the formation of rich and supportive research environments.

2. The principal paradigm of research activity continues to be that of individual scholarship, and the health of Celtic Studies in the future will clearly require the protection and encouragement of this paradigm. This will in its turn require a framework of strong management structure and clear strategic planning. The alternative paradigm of collaborative involvement in large-scale projects has made significant advances in Celtic Studies in recent years, and a number of ambitious major projects have been brought to completion. Research management and strategic planning now require a balance between the two paradigms.

3. Postgraduate activity in Celtic Studies seems in general to be in a commendably healthy state as regards PG numbers and integration into the research culture.

4. The spectrum of research evidenced by the submissions was pleasingly wide, covering the whole of the area within the Panel's definition of its coverage: the Celtic languages in all periods, and the literatures and non-material cultures of their speakers.

5. There is a degree of complementarity, in Celtic Studies as a whole, between research activity that concentrates powerfully on a 'local' Celtic language or on a particular field (e.g. literary or linguistic) or period (e.g. modern or medieval), and activity which focuses on more than one Celtic language, and on general and comparative approaches. The Panel regards this current diversity of approach as healthy and commendable.

6. There is cross-disciplinary research activity ongoing both within Celtic Studies and between Celtic Studies and other subject areas including Linguistics, History (including Art History), English, Classics, Drama and European Studies. Some of this is of the highest quality. Some of the most impressive submissions show a balance between 'core' and cross-disciplinary research. The Panel commends such cross-disciplinary activity as important for the health of the discipline as a whole, while underlining the continuing importance of 'core' research in all the main areas of Celtic Studies.

7. The Panel notes examples of fruitful collaboration between two or more HEIs. Given the diverse range of Celtic Studies and the smallness of many of the Units of Assessment, a collaborative approach is regarded as constructive and appropriate in several key areas. Those submissions that report on such projects bear testimony to the benefits which such collaborative activity can bring.

8. The Panel notes in several submissions evidence of reflection on the nature and parameters of Celtic Studies and on the relationship between Celtic Studies and Irish Studies, Welsh Studies, etc. This reflection is welcomed as part of a continuing process of disciplinary self-evaluation and self-orientation in Higher Education as a whole.

9. The relative smallness of the Units of Assessment involved in Celtic Studies means that their fortunes can be considerably affected by staffing changes and fluctuations in the level

of institutional support. The Panel noted instances where such factors as these seemed to have had a bearing on the research environment and quality of output.

10. The special relationship between Celtic Studies and the national communities in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland was reflected, as in previous RAEs, both in the output and in the vision and plans of the Units of Assessment located in these countries. The same was true, *mutatis mutandis*, of Cornwall. The relevant HEIs in general seem to be aware of and supportive of this dimension of Celtic Studies, though the Panel felt that this was less obvious in one or two cases.

11. The Panel noted that certain Units had established constructive and fruitful links with industry and commerce and acknowledged the utility of such links where they can appropriately be established.

12. The Panel felt that overall the discipline had moved forward impressively during the assessment period. In a majority of HEIs there was a pleasing level of correspondence between the plans set out in the 1996 RAE and the actual achievement as related in RAE2001. Equally, the future research plans now outlined appear, in the majority of cases, to be forward-looking and achievable. Despite a certain vulnerability related to the size and number of units involved in Celtic Studies, the subject seems to be in good heart. At its best, the research conducted by the units reviewed in RAE2001 is of true international quality and gives a firm lead to Celtic Studies world-wide: The Panel noted the unanimous confirmation of this fact by the non-UK advisers.