

# Research Newsletter

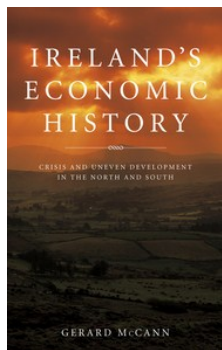


St Mary's  
University College  
Belfast  
A College of Queen's University

## IRELAND'S ECONOMIC HISTORY REVEALED

A highly respected and authoritative figure in the field of economic development at St Mary's University College Belfast, Dr Gerard McCann, has had his book **Ireland's Economic History: Crisis and Development in the North and South** published recently (September 2011) by Pluto Press. With depth and clarity, Dr McCann explores the complex factors which have shaped Ireland's economic development on both sides of the border and which have led to recurring crises and instability.

The Irish economy has been traditionally portrayed as a product of its political divisions and the colonial legacy, divided and analysed in terms of the hegemonic tensions that exist on the island.



Influenced by these divisions, academics have tended to look at a two-region approach to economic development, without adequately acknowledging the interactive nature of the island economy as a source of the crises or as a solution to systemic divergence. Dr McCann's definitive and dynamic history of the Irish economy circumvents conventional analyses and investigates the economic development of the island economy as a whole, highlighting where aggressive differentiation has been divisive and destabilising.

## NEW VISION FOR GCSE STUDY OF POETRY

The commitment of Dr Brian Hanratty towards his research work has resulted recently in the publication of an article **Poetry and gender: a comparative evaluation of boys' and girls' responses to poetry at Key Stage 4 in Northern Ireland** in the authoritative journal 'Research Papers in Education', which became available in the September 2011 issue.

The article is predicated on the idea of the central importance of poetry within the English curriculum and also on the assertion that the imaginative and broader educational benefits to be gained from fostering pupils' engagement with and enjoyment of poetry ought to transcend a purely functional pursuit of enhanced grades in GCSE English and English Literature examinations. The early, more theorised, part of the paper, firstly evaluates the gender debate as it impinges on English studies in general and on poetry in particular and also explores a number of ideas around the pedagogy of poetry; with regard to the latter, the 'experience' versus 'analysis' debate is touched on, as is the focus on creative writing of poetry. Against that theorised context, the paper presents the results of a mixed methods research programme, which included pupils' answers to a questionnaire and their verbal and written responses to a selection of poems.

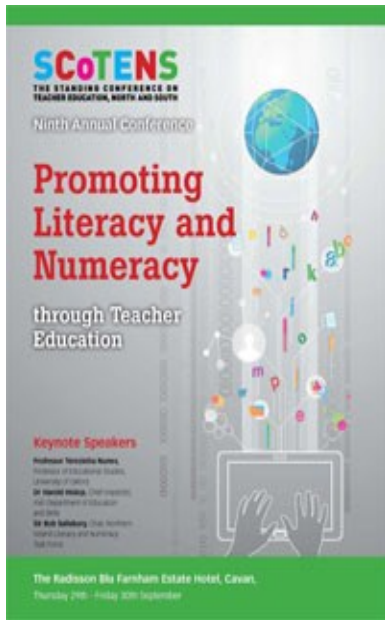


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### SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST

- Dr Birgit Schippers has submitted a proposal for a research fellowship to the Arts & Humanities Research Council.
- Mr Padaí de Bléine has translated a new book in Irish 'Anne Frank—Dialann Cailín Óig'.



## ‘LEONARDO EFFECT’ BOOSTS PUPILS’ LEARNING

Dissemination of a research project is an integral aspect of academia, and Mrs Deirdre Robson has been very active recently in pursuing various opportunities to showcase the outcomes of the **Leonardo Effect** project, which is growing in stature. In September 2011, Mrs Robson was invited by the committee of the Standing Conference on Teacher Education, North and South (SCoTENS) to lead a workshop with a focus on literacy at its annual conference, the title of which was ‘Promoting Literacy and Numeracy Through Teacher Education’. This workshop, which was also facilitated by Dr Eithne Kennedy from St Patrick’s

College Drumcondra, presented the **Leonardo Effect** as an interdisciplinary methodology that facilitates the development of literacy skills among young children through first-hand experiences. Mrs Robson, in collaboration with her colleague Dr Ivor Hickey, has secured numerous research grants related to the **Leonardo Effect** project. A national pilot of this interdisciplinary teaching methodology, built on the exploration of ideas, skills and processes common to art and science, has been shown to boost pupils’ commitment to learning and attainment across ability levels, particularly in the area of literacy.

*“... an interdisciplinary methodology that facilitates the development of literacy skills among young children through first-hand experiences.”*

### RESEARCH SEMINARS

#### Teacher Education Seminar Series (TESS)

“Discourse analysis of Irish primary teachers’ perspectives on visual arts appreciation at primary level and their implications for teacher education” - Dr Michael Flannery, Marino Institute of Education Dublin.

#### European Studies Research Seminars (ESRS)

“Neoliberal Ireland: the Myth of a European Miracle” - Dr Gerard McCann, St Mary’s University College Belfast.

“EU—ACP Relations: the Cotonou Agreement and the Lisbon Treaty” - Ms Danielle O’Neill, Queen’s University Belfast.

## EUROPEAN PARTNERS FOR ‘STIMULA’ PROJECT

The first meeting of the Project Management Board for the EU-funded research project **Stimulating Science and Technology Competences Through Innovative Means for Teaching and Learning (STIMULA)** took place in the Basque Country in November 2011. This meeting brought together members of the project team from Northern Ireland, Spain, Romania and Germany and the focus was on the project management, co-ordination and associated work packages.



Mr Kieran McGeown, who is the College’s representative on the Project Management Board commented, “This offers St Mary’s a unique opportunity to work with European partners in developing a STEM enhancing project for post-primary schools”. Partners gave presentations about their institutions and then proceeded to focus on the various work packages for which they have responsibility. **STIMULA** aims to develop innovative methodologies to foster aspirations towards science and technology careers among pupils in post-primary schools, using as a strategy the active involvement of the world of work in educational activities. The ultimate goal is to improve the acquisition of key competences in science and technology by pupils, therefore contributing to personal development and future employment. ( [www.stimula-project.eu](http://www.stimula-project.eu) )



*Launch of the report “Teachers’ Voice 2010” 12th October 2011. L-R Ivan Arbuthnot (Chair, GTCNI), Barney Bell (Acting Registrar, GTCNI), John O’Dowd MLA (Education Minister), Professor John Gardner (formerly School of Education, QUB)*

## GTCNI REPORT HIGHLIGHTS TEACHERS’ VIEWS

October 2011 saw the launch of an important report by the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI), which is titled **Teachers’ Voice 2010**. This report was a result of the efforts of a group of contributors from the five Higher Education Institutions in Northern Ireland, alongside representation from the GTCNI, who worked together to form a strong research-based team led by Professor John Gardner (formerly of the School of Education at Queen’s University Belfast). St Mary’s University College Belfast actively participated in the design of the research project, the analysis of the data, and the writing of the final report.

The report was launched by the Minister for Education, John O’Dowd MLA, who addressed an audience of eminent educationalists at the Stormont Hotel, Belfast. The report details the most reliable and up-to-date views of teachers on a wide range of professional matters. It covers areas such as: being a teacher; professional development and accountability; the school curriculum; pupil behaviour; special educational needs; teachers’ perceptions of ICT; and general policy developments in education. Speaking at the launch the Minister commented, “It is important that the voice of the classroom practitioner is heard in the on-going debate as to how our education system can best meet the needs of our children and young people. I can assure those involved in producing this report that I listen very carefully to all those with a genuine interest in improving our education system. It is incumbent on all of us who make policy, whether at a political or administrative level, to ensure that the professional voice of teachers is heard and acted upon”.

The chairperson of the GTCNI, Mr Ivan Arbuthnot, commended the report and urged policy makers to listen to the teachers’ voice as articulated in the report. He commented, “At a time when there is clearly a need for evidence-based policy making, this report will provide a wealth of data to inform the decision making which directly impacts on the professional lives of teachers”.

## RESEARCH EXCELLENCE FRAMEWORK

The Research Excellence Framework (REF) will publish the findings of the assessment of the quality of UK research in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) by the end of 2014, covering the period 2008-2013, i.e. 6 years. The main functions of the REF include determining how research funding is to be allocated to HEIs in the UK, gathering relevant information and data to establish a benchmark on academic research excellence in the UK, and demonstrating the benefits of investing public funds into HEIs in the UK by providing accountability.

Three elements relating to research excellence will be reviewed and include research output, impact of research, and research environment. There are 36 units of assessment (UoA), which cover the typical subject disciplines offered at higher education.

Research output (generally 4 outputs per person) refers to publications, with typical examples including academic journal articles and books.

Impact of research involves demonstrating how research has had a positive impact on culture & society, policy, the economy, and ultimately the quality of public life for citizens throughout the world.

Research environment demonstrates the vitality of the HEI’s culture of research and strategic development, management and support of research.

Each of the three elements will be rated by expert panellists under different weightings and the outcomes of the assessment will demonstrate the proportion of submitted work on a 5-point scale.

## ‘LEONARDO EFFECT’ COLLABORATION

Dr Geraldine Magennis has recently completed a chapter for a forthcoming book to be edited by Mrs Deirdre Robson and Dr Ivor Hickey. The title of the chapter by Dr Magennis is **Buried Treasure: Uncovering Literacy Jewels in the ‘Leonardo Effect’**.

It examines the presence of literacy within the Leonardo Effect pilot which took place in a selection of primary schools across the British Isles. Although not planned for specifically, it became apparent that literacy in its many forms was both serving and being served by the overall knowledge and skill acquisition afforded by the nature of the Leonardo Effect project.

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## ‘LITERATURE OF THE TROUBLES’ IN CANADA

The Principal of Green College at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada invited Dr Brian Hanratty to present his research on the **Literature of the Troubles Project** in Northern Ireland in September 2011. This invited talk was associated with the Principal’s Series titled ‘Thinking at the edge of reason: interdisciplinarity in action’ which is designed to be accessible to a non-specialist audience to showcase important work of visiting researchers. Dr Hanratty’s presentation was introduced by Associate Professor Veronica Gaylie from the Faculty of Education at Green College.

During the talk Dr Hanratty commented, “One of the ironies of the Troubles of Northern Ireland is that the violence on the streets coincided with an amazing renaissance in literature and the arts generally, and in poetry, specifically. It is also the case, however, that, despite the rhetoric of normality and reconciliation following the peace process, Northern Ireland remains a deeply segregated society. However, as the Nobel Laureate, Seamus Heaney, has observed: *Literature has the potential to get at the truths about who and what we are and might be*”. The **Literature of the Troubles Project** was a school-based, cross-community initiative, funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, the aim of which was to encourage pupils in schools across Northern Ireland to use literature, and poetry in particular, as a prism through which to discover the humanity which unites them, despite the continued existence of real or perceived sectarian differences.

## STAFF PROFILE

Dr Birgit Schippers is a political theorist with teaching responsibilities in modern and contemporary social and political thought. Her main area of expertise is feminist theory and the politics of identity, and she has recently published her first book, **Julia Kristeva and Feminist Thought** (Edinburgh University Press). Birgit has also written on democratic theory and civil society, and she has a long-standing interest in the affective, emotional and embodied dimensions of politics.



Birgit’s current research brings together perspectives from international political philosophy and ethics. She is working on a new book, provisionally entitled ‘**From “Gender Trouble” to Post-9/11 Politics: The Political Philosophy of Judith Butler**’ (contracted with Routledge). In this research, Birgit appraises the recent writings of the influential American philosopher Judith Butler, and she engages with some of the most pressing problems in contemporary political thought, such as the debate over the legitimate use of state violence; the prospects for citizenship under conditions of multiculturalism and bi-nationalism; and the role of religion in public life. A key aim of this project, and of Birgit’s current interests, is to highlight the importance of political philosophy for our understanding of public policy and public political debate.

Birgit has presented her research at many national and international conferences; she was convenor of a roundtable on Julia Kristeva and political thought at the Manchester Workshops in Political Theory, and most recently was invited to present her work at the Centre for Citizenship, Civil Society and Rule of Law at the University of Aberdeen. She has also been successful in receiving external funding from the British Academy.

In addition to her own research pursuits, Birgit contributes widely to the research development activities in the College. She serves on the Research Committee and she convenes the European Studies Research Seminar.