

Research Newsletter



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

NEW RESEARCH STRATEGY 2017-2020

The College's new Research Strategy 2017-2020, produced by the Research Committee, was approved by the Board of Governors in 2017. It sets out plans for the development of research and scholarship over the next three years in the College and builds on the previous plan for research development 2014-2017 by providing strategic direction for the College's community of researchers. The strategy provides a point of reference, at institutional level, for decision-making relating to the enhancement of academic standards. It identifies priorities for building an active research environment and for establishing strong connections between the community of researchers' activity and the academic programmes delivered in the College. This includes supporting engagement in original research as well as developing the application of research that is relevant to the academic programmes. The research strategy is fully aligned with the College's commitment to providing a high quality academic experience and to ensuring that teaching and learning are informed by research.

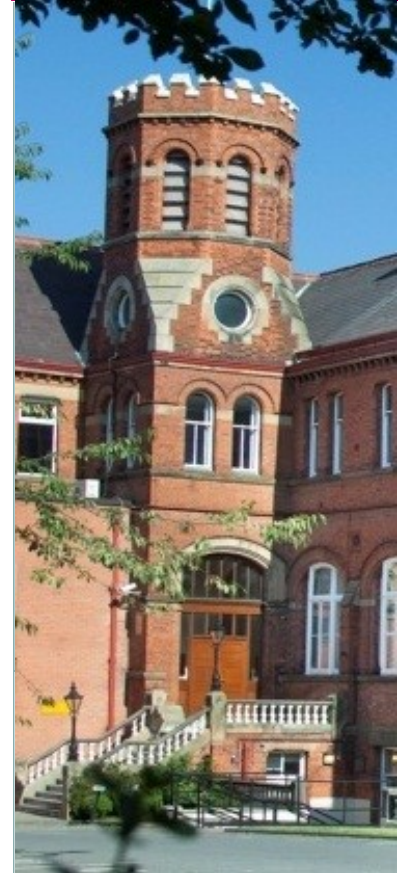
The three aims of the Research Strategy 2017-2020 are:

- to ensure that engagement with research, fully integrated into the roles of Senior Lecturers, Principal Lecturers and Senior Tutors, is evidenced by research output and application;
- to maintain and develop the College's infrastructure supporting the development of research and scholarship;
- to use staff research to enhance teaching and learning and help our students transform and extend themselves to be powerful self-directed life-long learners.

The model for research is designed to provide a unifying theme for all academic research and to facilitate smaller, specialist hubs where staff can pursue their research interests within a collegial environment, whilst staying on track with regard to the College's priorities. This has resulted in four research groups.

Catholic Education	Curriculum, Pedagogy & Assessment	International Relations & Global Justice	Irish-medium Education
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This model accommodates an interdisciplinary approach. It allows research groups to operate more coherently with closer connections to one another and to a common educational theme integral to teacher education as well as accommodating research in subject areas that enhance the liberal arts. This research model suits a small institution that has distinctive areas of expertise and maximises the College's resources to best effect. It also facilitates innovative developments and the integration of collaborative interdisciplinary projects.



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Research seminar series (Nov. 2017—Feb. 2018)

Staff profile

STAFF RESEARCH EVENT

The College held its annual research event for academic staff in September 2017, which was coordinated by the Research Office. The main purpose of the event, titled *Sharing Research with Colleagues*, was for academic staff, within their corresponding research groups, to be given an opportunity to reflect on the previous academic year and to share details of their recent research with each other. Dr Gabrielle Nig Uidhir (Chairperson of the Research Committee) spoke at the event and emphasised the importance of strategic research development in the College.

She referred to the new Research Strategy 2017-2020 and how the approach to research needs to be focused and integrally connected to teaching and learning. Gabrielle focused on the importance of academic staff conducting research that is integrated within the College's educational programmes, mission and ethos, as well as external policy initiatives and agendas. She reminded those present at the event that research, referred to as investigations that reveal fresh understandings of phenomena that are

communicated to others, should underpin the teaching that takes place in the College and should enrich the learning experienced by the students during the whole of their journey through higher education.



Dr Gabrielle Nig Uidhir speaking at the annual research event for staff

“... the importance of academic staff conducting research that is integrated within the College's educational programmes, mission and ethos, as well as external policy initiatives and agendas.”

The Principal of the College introduced the event by indicating its significance to the future development of research in the College and was confident that, as an annual event, it would contribute to the community of researchers' understanding of research practice in the College. One of the sessions involved presentations from members of the Curriculum, Pedagogy & Assessment research group, followed by a presentation from a member of the International Relations & Global Justice research group. Examples of research referred to during the presentations included projects related to critical literacy; the professional learning of teacher educators; Northern Ireland students' perspectives of teaching in England; STEM teacher training innovation for gender balance; STEM education in schools; borders & memory; global ethics & human rights; and international development.

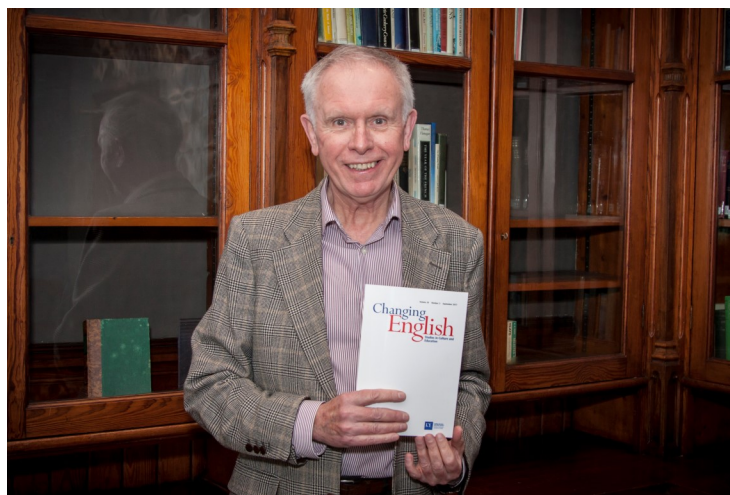


Academic staff attending the annual research event

A second session involved presentations for members of the Irish-medium Education research group, followed by members of the Catholic Education research group. Examples of the research projects included Irish language competence of key stage 3 Irish-medium pupils; the educational outcomes of Irish-medium preschool education in the north of Ireland; the theme of scripture and mercy; the theological bases for pastoral councils; and Catholic schools in a multi-religious Europe.

RESEARCH ARTICLE FEATURED IN JOURNAL AIMED AT ENGLISH TEACHERS

Dr Brian Hanratty achieved success recently by having his research featured in the journal 'Changing English: Studies in Culture and Education' published by Routledge. This is an established journal for English teachers in primary, secondary and higher education. The journal aims to encourage international dialogue between teachers and researchers and to support teachers and schools on issues surrounding literacy and language. In particular, the journal considers the future of English as a subject in the context of its history and the scope for development and change.



Dr Brian Hanratty with the journal that featured his research article

Brian's paper, titled *Selected Representations of Teachers and Teaching in Twentieth-Century Anglo-Irish Fiction and Memoir: Some Literary-Critical and Pedagogical Explorations*, was published in January 2018. The paper had two complementary objectives. After providing some theoretical perspectives on fiction generally, and on the teaching of fiction more specifically, it firstly evaluated, from a literary-critical perspective, a reasonably representative selection of the portrayal of teachers and teaching in some twentieth-century Anglo-Irish fiction and memoir. That initial, literary-critical evaluation of the texts, while focusing on aspects of both form and theme, sought also to uncover the fascinating spectrum of models of teaching represented, some benign, but many quite dark and even, to a degree, sinister. The second half of the paper suggested a range of pedagogical strategies which could be used, in the sixth-form classroom, to explore the richness and complexities of those portraits and of the contexts against which they were written. That in-depth pedagogical exploration was closely informed by the specifications for AS and A-level English teaching provided by two representative Examination Boards – the Council for Curriculum Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), which is based in Northern Ireland, and the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA). The exploration thus was linked closely to the demands and contexts for sixth-form English teaching both in Northern Ireland and in the UK as a whole.

THE CASE FOR USING HISTORICAL PICTURE BOOKS IN SCHOOLS

The Literacy Association of Ireland featured an article, titled *History is Literacy*, written by Catherine Gilliland and Teresa Cash for the October 2017 publication of 'Literacy News'. Drawing upon their joint research initiative, combining literacy with history, Catherine and Teresa presented a case for using historical picture books.

They outlined how these unique forms of fiction are based on historical events or people and include pictures. They suggested that some aspects of the story may be true and both the settings and the characters can be real or imaginary, but the conflict or problem would have been real for the particular time period - they are a marriage of actual historical facts with fiction. Both authors argued that historical picture books have the ability to empower historical non-fiction through imagination and demonstrate how history is literacy.



ERASMUS+ FUNDED RESEARCH GENERATES THOUGHT-PROVOKING BOOK

Dr Tracey McKay coedited a book with Dr Olivier Mentz that was published in December 2017 as a result of the ERASMUS+ funded research project 'Border Education - Space, Memory and Reflections on Transculturality'. This book is a very relevant example of the type of research output that can arise from international research projects, involving academic scholars and key stakeholders from various countries across Europe.

The book, titled *Unity in Diversity: European Perspectives on Borders and Memories*, presented chapters that report on different individual case studies. Drawn from a range of different contexts, the individual contributors explored the different ways that borders help create (or indeed reflect) difference and constitute the separation lines not only between states and geographical spaces, but also social and cultural distinctions. That is to say the distinctions between, 'us' and 'them', the 'here' and 'there', and the 'insiders' and 'outsiders'.



Dr Tracey McKay holding her recently published book

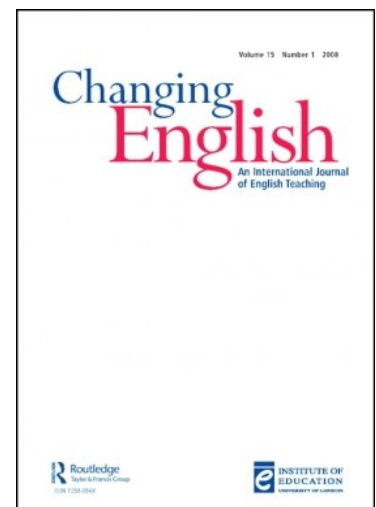
“... the individual contributors explored the different ways that borders help create (or indeed reflect) difference and constitute the separation lines not only between states and geographical spaces, but also social and cultural distinctions.”

POETRY USED TO ENABLE PUPILS TO EXAMINE TRADITIONAL IDENTITIES AND ALLEGIANCES



The 41st annual conference for the Literacy Association of Ireland took place at the Marino Institute of Education, Dublin in October 2017 and it featured a research paper presented by Dr Brian Hanratty titled *Teaching a Selection of Heaney's Troubles Poetry to Upper Post-Primary Pupils in Northern Ireland's Divided Schools: Educational Contexts and Pedagogical Opportunities*. The conference paper was also transformed into a research article and was featured in the journal 'Changing English: Studies in Culture and Education' published by Routledge at the end of 2017.

Brian's paper centred on a carefully chosen selection of Heaney's Troubles poems and explored pedagogical opportunities that the poems present in the context of upper post-primary classrooms in Northern Ireland's divided schools. The five poems were 'The Other Side', 'A Constable Calls', 'The Toome Road', 'The Strand at Lough Beg' and 'An Ulster Twilight'. Brian argued that while the five poems represented only a small selection of Heaney's Troubles poems, they nonetheless covered an interesting spectrum in terms of their politico-cultural perspectives. The analysis of the poems focused on exploring how teachers could use the poems to enable pupils to examine their traditional identities and allegiances and perhaps re-evaluate them in the light of new insights provided by the poems. While suggestions for this pedagogical exploration was at the heart of the paper, Brian noted that the early section established some relevant theoretical and educational contexts and the concluding section situated the paper in the context of previous related curricular initiatives within Northern Ireland. Brian hoped that the curricular initiative proposed by the paper could contribute, if even in a small way, to the ongoing search for peace and reconciliation between Northern Ireland's two main, and still divided, communities.



RESEARCH REPORT LAUNCHED AT SCOTENS ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Ciaran Walsh co-authored a research report, titled *Teacher Educator Professional Learning: Shaping the Conversation of Teacher Education*, that was launched at the annual Standing Conference on Teacher Education, North and South (SCoTENS) conference, which took place in October 2017 at the Crowne Plaza, Dundalk. Ciaran was a member of the research team, which included researchers from Mary Immaculate College Limerick, Ulster University, University of Jyväskylä Finland, University of Limerick, and the Institute of Education at Dublin City University. The research study examined the professional learning of individual teacher educators scaffolded within a developing professional learning community. The learning focus was the pedagogical area of communication. Members of the research team were interested in how this professional learning might influence their individual pedagogical practices with pre-service teachers. Insight into both the professional learning that teacher educators implement in their teacher education practices and the influence of the professional learning process on individual approaches, can contribute to an understanding of features of effective professional learning for teacher educators. Understanding how teacher educators develop their practices to enhance student learning in physical education teacher education, can inform the design of future professional learning programmes for teacher educators.

Communication is paramount to develop interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships, therefore outdoor and adventure activities were chosen as the medium for the professional learning aspect of the research project. To analyse communication during these activities, participants were encouraged to be reflective and to inform each other about their observations, experiences and feelings during the various activities. The intention was to help sort and order information in a meaningful way to support learning.

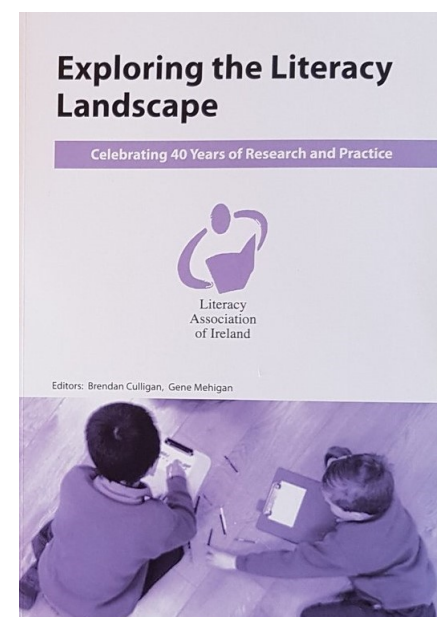


Ciaran Walsh with co-authors of the research report and members of the committee

CHAPTER INCLUDED IN BOOK CELEBRATING LITERACY RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

Catherine Gilliland focused on one of her recent research conference presentations to write a chapter for a book published by the Literacy Association of Ireland (LAI) in September 2017. The book, titled 'Exploring the Literacy Landscape: Celebrating 40 Years of Research and Practice', considered the development of literacy from the widest of perspectives and reflected upon the current educational context where children acquire skills to equip them in an ever-evolving literacy world.

Catherine's chapter, titled *Addicted to Literacy*, focused on the playful approaches that teachers can use to help children become not only literate, but addicted to literacy. It addressed three interconnecting themes. Firstly, rich storytelling is at the epicentre of all effective learning environments and this was explored in relation to picture books and the ancient craft of oral storytelling within a localised context. Secondly, the brain sees music as language and children need to be immersed in rhyme, rhythm and repetition to stimulate and enrich their literacy development. The ways in which practitioners can help the children's bodies come together as a self-conducting orchestra was illustrated through a case study set in a nursery environment. Thirdly, the world of puppetry was delved into, as well as the magical ability of puppets to ignite language, creativity and a motivation to learn.



THE RESEARCH SEMINAR SERIES

The College's newly reformed Research Seminar Series (formerly known as the Teacher Education Seminar Series – TESS) was launched in November 2017. Dr Brian Hanratty and Dr Peter McPolin worked with the Research Office to organise the timetable of research presentations for the 2017-2018 academic year. The Research Seminar Series is a College-based forum designed to primarily facilitate the dissemination, through presentations and feedback, of academic research relating to the four research groups in the College – Curriculum, Pedagogy & Assessment; Catholic Education; Irish-Medium Education; and International Relations & Global Justice. It includes research projects conducted within and outside of the College, with an emphasis on strengthening links with other higher education institutions. It provides a supportive platform for the sharing of work-in-progress and information exchange on matters pertaining to the pursuit of academic excellence. Participants are drawn from a variety of academic and research-orientated organisations as well as, on occasion, from the undergraduate and postgraduate student body. In November and December 2017, five members of academic staff presented their research to an enthusiastic audience, who offered constructive feedback thus creating an environment where ideas and opinions are listened to and valued.

In January and February 2018, two external visitors to the College participated in the Research Seminar Series. The first presenter was

Professor Joanne Hughes (Director of the Centre for Shared Education at Queen's University Belfast) who spoke about her journey on becoming an established researcher. Professor Hughes offered advice and guidance on writing research articles, getting published, applying for research funding, and achieving impact from research. The second presenter was Dr Benjamin Mallon (Post-Doctoral Researcher at the Institute of Education, Dublin City University) who spoke about his doctoral research, which explored school-based peace-building education programmes across the island of Ireland, with a focus on the perceptions and experiences of young people involved with such initiatives.



Dr Gabrielle Nig Uidhir, Dr Benjamin Mallon (DCU) and Dr Gerard McCann

“It provides a supportive platform for the sharing of work-in-progress and information exchange on matters pertaining to the pursuit of academic excellence.”

COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH PROJECT ON RELIGION AND BELIEF IN IRELAND

Rev Dr Niall Coll was successful in being part of a research team that gained funding from the Standing Conference on Teacher Education, North and South (SCoTENS) in September 2017. The research project, titled *Religions and Beliefs in Changing Times: Perspectives of Student Stakeholders in Third Level Irish Educational Contexts*, is in collaboration with academic staff from the University of Limerick, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick Institute of Technology, Stranmillis University College and Ulster University.

The multi-strand, inter-institutional, inter-disciplinary project aims to provide a systematic and critical literature review of religion and belief in Ireland between 2000-2017, as well as obtain the perspectives of second year university student stakeholders through an on-line survey. The research also aims to explore students' perspectives on religions and beliefs through focus groups, as well as highlight key issues for policy and professional practices.



COLLEGE ACADEMIC DELIVERS ENZO GRILLI LECTURE IN ROME

The prestigious annual 'Enzo Grilli Lecture' was delivered by Dr Gerard McCann and held at the Centro Studi Americani Rome in November 2017.

Gerard's presentation, titled *Negotiating Brexit: The Process of the United Kingdom's (UK) Withdrawal from the European Union (EU)*, was the third lecture in memory of the Italian development economist, Enzo Grilli. During his talk, Gerard drew upon his recent research on Brexit and provided the audience with a thorough account of the process by focusing on, for example, Article 50, the results of the UK referendum on EU membership, and the timeline leading up to Brexit. He also outlined the steps to the UK leaving the EU, the Brexit white paper and other position papers, negotiations and legal issues between the UK and the EU, and the EU withdrawal bill.

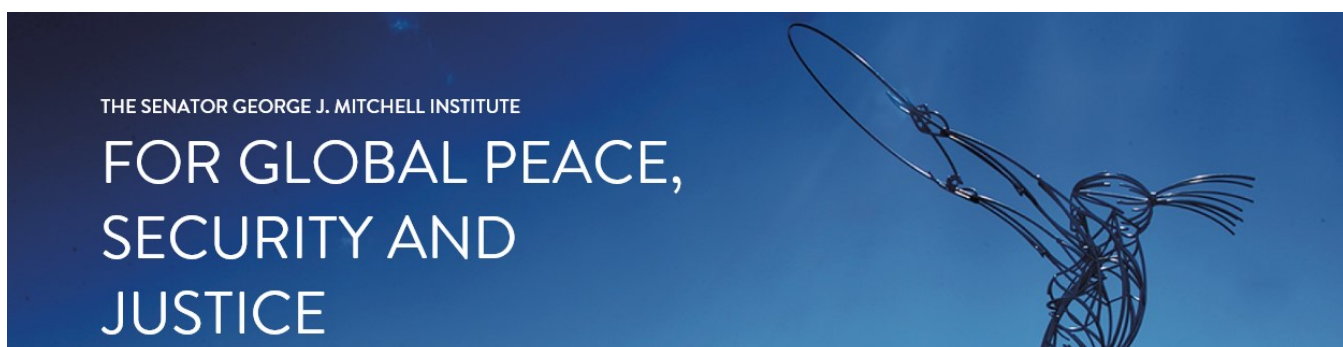
The lecture was chaired by the former prime minister of Italy, the Honorable Giorgio La Malfa, and ended with a discussion between Professor Giovanni Farese (Università Europea di Roma) and Professor Riccardo Perissich (Vice Presidente esecutivo del Consiglio per le Relazioni Italia-USA). The event was organized by Paolo Savona (Director of Fondazione Ugo La Malfa), Paolo Messa (Director of the Centro Studi Americani) and Professor Farese from Università Europea di Roma.



Dr Gerard McCann speaking at the annual Enzo Grilli Lecture

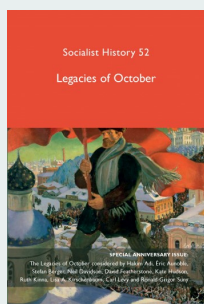
VISITING FELLOWSHIP AT QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY BELFAST

Dr Birgit Schippers, who has been a visiting fellow in the Senator George J. Mitchell Institute for Global Peace, Security and Justice at Queen's University Belfast since September 2017, carried out a number of research related activities during her fellowship. Examples of these include, as a panellist at a research event, titled 'Human Rights and Humanities: Culture and Critique', held at the Royal Irish Academy, Dublin in December 2017. Birgit's presentation, *'More-Than-Human Rights': Re-imagining Human Rights Through the Post Humanities*, featured in the panel under the theme of Transforming Human Rights. Birgit also wrote a review article related to the book 'Foucault and the Politics of Rights' by Ben Golder, which appeared in The Journal of Politics in January 2018.



REVIEW ARTICLE ON BIOGRAPHY OF JAMES LARKIN

Issue 52 of 'Socialist History', published in the autumn of 2017, featured a review article written by Dr Peter Collins that related to the book 'Big Jim Larkin, Hero or Wrecker?' by Emmet O'Connor. In his review, Peter referred to O'Connor shining a light on a private man by referring to recent personal and family research, therefore producing an all-encompassing and revealing biography.



St Mary's University College, Belfast
191 Falls Road
Belfast
BT12 6FE
Northern Ireland

Phone: 02890 327678

Fax: 02890 333719

E-mail: research_admin@smuc.ac.uk



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University College
Belfast
A College of Queen's University

RESEARCH SEMINAR SERIES (NOV. 2017— FEB. 2018)

Donna Hazzard — Critical Literacy: A Pedagogy Powered by Love.

Rev Dr Niall Coll — The Catholic School and Intercultural Dialogue.

Orla Nugent — Student Teachers' Perceptions of their Competence to Teach in a New Phase Primary School Placement – The Value of Pre-Placement Exposure.

Dr Seán Mac Corraidh — Séamus Ó Grianna: the enigmatic journey from the prolific 'Gaeltacht writer par excellence' (Ó Cadhain, M. 1969) to fervent supporter of the Language Freedom Movement of the 1960s.

Dr Gerard McCann — Post-Truth Society and the New Cold War.

Professor Joanne Hughes (QUB) — Becoming A Researcher.

Dr Benjamin Mallon (Dublin City University) — Peacebuilding, Human Rights Education and The Question of Responsibility.

STAFF PROFILE



Dr Peter Collins, a senior lecturer in history, focuses much of his research in the area of labour history and has a concrete understanding of the history, traditions and culture of the trade union movement. He was a founding member of the journal 'History Ireland' and currently sits on its editorial board. In recent years, Peter has developed his research activities by writing chapters, presenting papers at conferences, and producing review articles.

In 2010, he contributed a chapter, *1932: A Case-Study in Polarization and Conflict*, to the book 'Conflicts in the North of Ireland, 1900-2000' edited by A.F. Parkinson and E. Phoenix. In 2015, Peter wrote another chapter, *British Labour and Developments in Ireland in the Immediate Post-War Years*, for a book edited by L. Marley titled 'The British Labour Party and Twentieth-Century Ireland: the Cause of Ireland, the Cause of Labour'. Very recently, Peter wrote a chapter in 2017, *A Tale Of Two Cities: The 1913 Lockout, The View From Belfast*, which featured in the book 'The Dublin Lockout, 1913: New Perspectives On Class War & Its Legacy' edited by C. McNamara and P. Yeates.

Peter has presented his research at conferences, seminars and workshops over the years. In 2013, he delivered a paper, *British Labour and Developments in the Immediate Post-War Years*, at a research conference held in the National University of Ireland. The following year he delivered a paper, *Belfast Labour and the Great War*, at a seminar hosted by the Federation for Ulster Local Studies held in the Cardinal Tomás Ó Fiaich Memorial Library & Archive. A joint research seminar in 2016, organised by the Federation for Ulster Local Studies and the Federation of Local History Societies, featured Peter's paper, *The Impact of War and its Immediate Aftermath on the Working Class in the North of Ireland*, which was subsequently selected for a publication stemming from this research seminar.

Peter has spent many years reading and reviewing monographs related to his area of research, which has resulted in him writing review articles for publication. Examples include a book review that featured in the 2012 edition of the 'Irish Literary Supplement' and another published during 2014 in the journal 'Familia: Ulster Genealogical Review'.