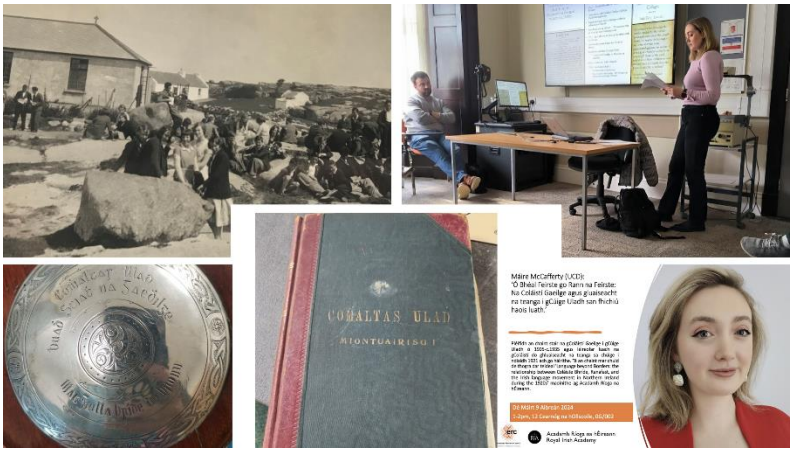
Acadamh Ríoga na hÉireann
Royal Irish Academy

Decade of Centenaries Grant Report

Recipient name:	Máire McCafferty
Amount and year awarded:	€5,417.00 in 2023
Title of project:	Language without Borders: The Relationship between Coláiste Bhríde, Rannafast, and the Irish Language Movement in Northern Ireland during the 1920s

Summary of project:

The Irish language and cultural revival period of the early 20th century was altered significantly by the partition of Ireland in 1921, as it quickly became clear that the language would occupy very different roles both North and South of the border. Before the official foundation of the Irish Free State at the end of 1922, the provisional government announced that the language would now be taught in all national schools. The Irish Summer Colleges had an integral role to play in the roll-out of Irish in the schools: from 1922–1928 inclusive, national school teachers were sent to summer courses at Irish Colleges to undergo training in the language. This was not the case, however, in the northern context during the 1920s. The new Northern government withdrew the funding for the only two remaining Irish Colleges in the Six Counties, leaving little choice for those wanting to learn or develop their Irish language skills outside of the education system. The place of Irish in the Northern Irish education system was also threatened, as new restrictions on the hours primary schools could teach Irish were announced, followed by the withdrawal of permission for the teaching of Irish to senior primary classes. This project sought to examine the significance of the Irish Language Summer College to the language movement in the Six Counties during the 1920s and aimed to highlight the need for increased scholarly awareness of the crucial role of the Irish Colleges as a lens through which to view the impact of partition on the language movement. The project ultimately sought to establish the key role of Coláiste Bhríde and other Ulster Colleges in providing Irish-language education to Ulster youth on both sides of the border in the wake of Partition, through two key research activities in Coláiste Bhríde Ranafast, and in the Comhaltas Uladh Archives, Newry.



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Objectives of the project:

Taking Coláiste Bhríde in Ranafast as a case study, the project's objectives were to establish the historical significance of the Ulster Irish Language College in the early post-partition years, particularly in relation to the language movement on both sides of the border during the 1920s. This included addressing questions such as:

- To what extent did the Donegal Irish College support the language movement in Northern Ireland during the 1920s?
- How did partition affect or alter the demographics of students attending Irish Colleges in Donegal?
- What role did Coláiste Bhríde play in the development of links between minority Irish language speaking communities in Donegal and the Six Counties during the 1920s?
- What kind of curricula and pedagogy did Coláiste Bhríde utilise during the 1920s?
- What was the relationship between Comhaltas Uladh and Coláiste Bhríde?
- What was the relationship between Comhaltas Uladh, the Irish Colleges, and the wider Irish language movement in the Free State in the 1920s?

These questions have formed the basis of past and future public lectures on this project, as well as the main publication which will be made available to the public via the Decade of Centenaries website.

Methodology used in conducting the research:

Key to the methodology utilised in this research was the perusal of primary sources in both English and Irish from the 1920s. Two key research activities formed the basis of this project:

1. Research in Ranafast Donegal, 5-10 August 2023. This involved a research trip to Coláiste Bhríde, Ranafast, where I examined historical papers, photographs and other primary sources that relate to the work of the College during the 1920s. There is a wealth of historical material available in the College, which I have incorporated into public talks given on this project thus far, and will continue to contextualise in the future, particularly in the publication which will form the main outcome of this project.

2. Research in Newry, Co. Down, 13-16 May 2024. I examined the archives of Comhaltas Uladh, the main Irish language body for Ulster that was established in 1926 in the wake of partition and the Irish Civil war. This newly deposited archives holds a diverse collection of primary material relating to Comhaltas Uladh over the years, and after examining material relating to the 1920s, the potential for further research on this topic is clear. Of particular interest and value to this project are the minute books of Comhaltas Uladh held in this archive.

The project ultimately involved the examination of material held in Coláiste Bhríde, and in the Comhaltas Uladh archive to examine questions such as those detailed above. Additional research was needed to contextualise research questions and material found in both research trips, thus I also utilised archives such

as the Irish Newspaper Archives, the RTÉ Archives Acetate Discs Collection and other archives held in the NLI.

Findings of research and milestones achieved:

The project allowed me to engage with a wealth of material in both Coláiste Bhríde and the Comhaltas Uladh archives that merits further and more widespread scholarly attention. Scholarly interaction with the historical significance of the Irish College in respect of the Republic and North of Ireland must be encouraged by the widespread dissemination of the findings of this project, such as the following:

- In March 2024 I was invited to give a talk in Naas library for Seachtain na Gaeilge on the history of the Irish Colleges from 1904-1940. This talk gave me the opportunity to share findings from my research trip to Coláiste Bhríde which I had been working on contextualising through additional newspaper and archival research since August 2023. The talk was fairly well attended and increased awareness among the participants of the significance of the Irish College to language affairs in Ireland.

- I was involved in the organisation of the first interdisciplinary conference through the medium of Irish for postgraduate students and early career researchers in UCD in March. I gave a talk at this conference on the history of the Ulster Irish Colleges which highlighted this project and included many of the findings from my research trip to Coláiste Bhríde. This talk represented a significant opportunity to increase awareness of the historical and linguistic significance of the Ulster Irish Colleges amongst a new generation of scholars, many of whom are historians and Irish scholars at the beginning of their careers.

- I gave a public talk on this project in Queen's University, Belfast, in April 2024 which was very well attended by scholars, students and members of the general public which promoted fantastic discussion. I was subsequently approached by Raidió Fáilte in Belfast to speak about the project, the talk in Queen's, and my wider Irish College research, and the recording remains available on Soundcloud.

There are also future milestones that have not yet been completed:

- Public keynote lecture at Irish College Conference to be held in UCD on 4th July 2024. This conference is being held to mark 120 years of the Irish Colleges, and I will speak about the history of the Irish Colleges drawing particularly on the research conducted as part of this project. This talk may also be recorded and can be publicised across relevant social media and the School of Irish UCD.

- A peer-reviewed article on the historical significance of Coláiste Bhríde and the Ulster language college will be made available to the public via the Decade of Centenaries Website upon publication.

There were some developments to the initial application. Access to archives proved more difficult than anticipated, and as such, I had to limit the number of days initially envisioned for the research trips, which resulted in an underspend of the funding. In addition to this, I have not yet been contacted regarding the documentary programme about Coláiste Bhríde, but as this is very much ongoing this may still be a future milestone. Regarding the public lectures detailed in my application, I stated that it was imperative these lectures would be given in both the Republic and the North, a task which will be completed through the public lectures given at Naas Library, Queen's University and UCD. Another potential lecture may be given at Éigse Cholm Cille in Derry, which will be held in Autumn 2024. There is great potential for further dissemination of the findings of this research project at historical and linguistic conferences and further cultural events such as Seachtain na Gaeilge over the coming years. The dissemination of these findings will highlight the historical significance of the Irish Colleges to historians, educationalists and the wider public on both sides of the border.

Dissemination of the project outcomes:

I routinely publicised this project through my personal Twitter account over the last year, particularly in relation to the public talks I have given thus far. I have given public talks on the project in Belfast and Kildare, a talk in UCD amongst early-career researchers in March and will give a keynote lecture at the Irish Colleges Conference on 4 July 2024. I talked extensively about the project with Storm Eaton-Kilgallen on Raidió Fáilte and have publicised the Irish Colleges Conference on Raidió na Gaeltachta. I also presented a poster on my research at the conference 'Gníomhachas, an Ghaeilge agus na Meáin' held in the University of Galway in April. In this poster I highlighted the significance of the Ulster Irish Colleges to the language movement on both sides of the border post-partition and recognised the significance of the Decade of Centenaries Bursary to this research. I subsequently posted the poster on Twitter and on the School of Irish Website and it has drawn significant interest from scholars and members of the public.

Published work/plans:

One forthcoming. My keynote public lecture at the UCD conference in July may be recorded and made available to the public via the School of Irish UCD. This could also be made available to the Decade of Centenaries Website. This lecture will form the basis of a peer-reviewed article on the significance of the Irish College in Ulster which will be the main outcome of this project. I am in the process of liaising with various suitable journals that will be interested in this topic, for example those such as Éigse and Irish Educational Studies. This choice will also inform the language of the article, and as my initial application highlighted the significance of Irish-language communities on both sides of the border, this may well factor in the decision. This article is very much underway and I look forward to making the final version available to the Decade of Centenaries Website upon publication.

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Lectures given:

Three.

Media coverage:

I was interviewed on Raidió Fáilte in April where I talked at length about the project and the significance of the Ulster Irish Colleges. I also spoke on Raidió na Gaeltachta in March about the upcoming Irish College Conference in UCD where I will give a keynote lecture. Link to Raidió Fáilte interview: https://soundcloud.com/raidio-f/storm-le-maire-mccafferty- 170424-stair-na-gcolaisti-gaeilge-1904-1940

Plans for continued communication of the project's results:

I will continue to communicate the results of my project through social media posts, public talks, conferences, and discussion at community language events in both the Republic and the North. The project is very much still ongoing and I anticipate that there will a wide variety of opportunities to platform the results of this project as commemoration events take place in the coming months and years, such as 120 years of the Irish Colleges in 2024, and the centenary of Comhaltas Uladh and Coláiste Bhríde in 2026.

Plans for furthering the project:

I am exceedingly grateful for the opportunity given to me by the Royal Irish Academy to undertake this research. The bursary gave me the opportunity to thoroughly appreciate how important the Ulster Irish Colleges have been to language communities on both sides of the border since 1922, and I feel there is ample scope to develop this project into a future IRC or similar post-doctoral application.

How the bursary enhanced professional development:

The bursary gave me the opportunity to enhance my professional development in a number of ways. As a PhD researcher, this was my first experience with writing a funding application and it allowed me to develop skills such as budget planning and outlining clear objectives which are important to any early-career researcher. Receiving this bursary also gave me a recognised platform through which to engage with local archives and it allowed me to cultivate relationships with academics and the general Irish language public both North and South which will be extremely significant for my future career.