

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: University of Glasgow (UofG)		
Unit of Assessment: 27 English Language and Literature		
Title of case study: Raising the profile of Scottish Literature through writing and consultancy		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2001-ongoing		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Alan Riach	Professor of Scottish Literature	2001-present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 1 st Aug 2013-31 st July 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>Riach's expansive body of research into Scottish literature and related arts has extended the reach of Scottish literature in a concerted way via a diversity of channels. Riach's research expertise has raised the profile of his subject amongst a broad constituency through (i) advising on literary texts in the design of RBS banknotes, (ii) as author of VisitScotland's popular guidebook <i>Literary Scotland</i>, (iii) an ongoing series of 170+ research-driven essays covering major and obscure writers and themes, published in the daily newspaper <i>The National</i> since 2016, and (iv) as poetry contributor to the exhibition <i>Landmarks: Poets, Portraits and Landscapes of Modern Scotland</i>.</p>		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>Professor Riach's research in Scottish literature and Scottish culture more broadly has been his priority since 2001. While centred on modern literature (as General Editor of the Collected Works of the major twentieth-century poet Hugh MacDiarmid, 14 volumes published), Riach's approach is distinctively interdisciplinary, connecting literature and other arts, and contextualising specialist studies culturally and politically. The result is a body of work extending the field of Scottish literature. Riach, previously involved in the successful campaign to ensure that Scottish literature be taught in Scotland's schools, has used his expertise to embed his subject as a distinct public provenance.</p> <p>Riach's research explores key cultural questions such as the relationship between Scotland's cultural production and the meaning of 'popular culture' [3.1], combining canonical authors with modern perspectives (e.g. Shakespeare and Scotland, Scott and 'savagery', Stevenson and magical realism, Victorian and postcolonial literatures). His research highlights inter-relations between literature and visual art, classical music, film, cartoons and comic books, theatre and television, and how the arts change and develop through new technologies. His research output includes editorial curation of anthologies. <i>Scotlands: Poets and the Nation</i> [3.2] collects Gaelic, Scots, Latin and English poems from the 8th-21st centuries on the national theme. His English translations of classic 18th-century Gaelic poems have been highly praised by Gaelic scholars ('the best yet') and poets ('non-Gaels are allowed unusual access').</p> <p>His approach distinctively locates the 'literary' in the context of popular songs, philosophical enquiries, satires, rhapsodies, and political questions about union and independence, as well as individual biographies. For example, in the extensive research-based introduction to Riach and Moffat's new edition of J.D. Fergusson's book <i>Modern Scottish Painting</i> (1943), Riach argues that Fergusson's 'manifesto', addresses not only painting but also literature and architecture, setting a crucial precedent for understanding the arts as interconnected and politically engaged [3.3]. Riach proposes that this is as fundamental to the book's form as a modernist text as it is to its subject and intention. Scholarly annotations explore these matters both historically and in</p>		

their lasting relevance. A key value, therefore, is in approaching the arts holistically, appreciating individual works in their historical contexts and their cultural implications for the future. This is exacting in terms of traditional scholarship, and stimulating as contemporary intervention in public debate.

Editing the *International Companion to Edwin Morgan* [3.4], Riach draws together chapters by various authors to highlight the unique diversity of Morgan's literary achievement. In his introductory essay Riach appraises Morgan's life and work as comprehensively integrated for the first time. Riach's scholarship on other individual Scottish authors include studies of Norman MacCaig, a twentieth-century Edinburgh-born poet [e.g. 3.5], and a series of publications on Hugh MacDiarmid, exemplified by [3.6], and he has written numerous scholarly essays and chapters on many other Scottish writers. When acting as a consultant in his work for The Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS), Riach's selected examples from Scottish writers represented gender balance, time range across centuries and language diversity (Gaelic, Scots and English); achieving this balance necessitated application of both his broad expertise and new research into appropriate Scottish writers.

3. References to the research

- 3.1 [Riach, A. 2005. *Representing Scotland in Literature, Popular Culture and Iconography: The Masks of the Modern Nation*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan.](#) ISBN 1403945918 [Available on request from HEI]
- 3.2 [Riach, A. and D. Gifford \(eds.\) 2004. *Scotlands: Poets and the Nation*. Edinburgh: Scottish Poetry Library.](#) ISBN 9781857547405 [Available on request from HEI]
- 3.3 [Riach, A. and A Moffat \(eds.\) 2015. *J.D. Fergusson's Modern Scottish Painting*. Edinburgh: Luath Press](#) ISBN 9781910021880 [Available on request from HEI]
- 3.4 [Riach, A. \(ed.\) 2015. *The International Companion to Edwin Morgan*. Glasgow: Scottish Literature International.](#) ISBN 9781908980144 [Available on request from HEI]
- 3.5 [Riach, A. 2005. Norman MacCaig. In M Fazzini \(ed.\) *Alba Literaria: A History of Scottish Literature*. Venezia: Amos Edizione.](#) ISBN 1403945918 [Available on request from HEI]
- 3.6 [Riach, A. 2007. Hugh MacDiarmid. In Brown, I., Clancy, T., Manning, S. and Pittock, M. \(eds.\) *The Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. pp. 75-83.](#) ISBN 9780748624829 [Available on request from HEI]

4. Details of the impact

The Royal Bank of Scotland Banknotes

The Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS), on the basis of his reputation as a scholar of Scottish literature and its connection with visual arts, appointed Riach as 'literary advisor and validator' for their *The People's Money* project. This involved consulting on the redesign of £5, £10 and £20 banknotes being reissued in polymer form, with the [concept](#) of 'telling a story of the Scottish people to be shared with future generations', incorporating consultation with 1,178 people in Scotland. As part of a team of specialists, designers, calligraphers and photographers, Riach advised on literary aspects of the redesign, prioritising Scots, Gaelic and English quotations across centuries, from Mark Alexander Boyd (16th c.) to Norman MacCaig (20th c.). Nile Design, the design consultancy firm for the project commented [5.1]:

There was a strong desire to educate and share the less well known treasures of our culture. Alan has been key in delivering on this aspect of the public desire. ... Since their launch the notes have generated a great deal of public acclaim and been shortlisted for Bank Note of the Year ... Alan has helped ensure snippets of our literary culture are

wending their way through the whole population, available to all, there are few projects where the resultant output ends up in the pockets of every individual in the country.



Figure 1: example of a new [£20 polymer RBS note](#) designed by Nile Design with Riach's input. The text chosen by Riach from the poem *Cupid and Venus* by Mark Alexander Boyd reads: '*Fra bank to bank, fra wood to wood I rin / Ourehailit with my feeble fantasie.*'

Supporting literature-based cultural recreation and tourism

Building especially on his scholarship exemplified by [3.1, 3.2], Riach produced a visitor guide at the request of VisitScotland, *Literary Scotland: A Traveller's Guide*. This guide presents an accessible overview of selected Scottish writers in every region of the country, across history, cross-referenced with their associated locations identified and mapped. 30,000 copies were distributed up to 2014. The *Traveller's Guide* has been [available online](#) since 2014 [5.2a], following the publication of 7,500 hard copies in 2013 and their circulation from all VisitScotland tourist centres. The Film & Creative Industries Manager at VisitScotland [5.2b] commented that the *Traveller's Guide* has since served as the basis for other publications and initiatives, as well as seeing VisitScotland's role in cultural tourism being more widely recognised. In addition:

The guide has acted as an overall marketing aide to illustrate Scotland's literary landscape ... The guide has not only helped raise awareness of Scottish literary tourism within our consumer marketing – it has helped to create a platform for VisitScotland to work across new sectors and more collaboratively with publishing and literary organisations. [5.2b]

Publishing popular and accessible research-based articles

In January 2016, Riach was invited to publish a series of essays based on his research in *The National*, a Scotland-wide daily newspaper, giving its readership of over 11,000 access to an overview of Scottish literature from its inception to the 21st century. This is an extremely unusual inclusion for any national newspaper: as Michael Russell MSP commented at the time: '*to think we have lived to see cultural writing in a Scottish newspaper again - a time of marvels*' [5.3]. Over 170 weekly essays have been published, each between c.1,400-2,000 words and c.120 by Riach, with approximately 75% drawing directly on his own scholarship. For example, six were on Hugh MacDiarmid [e.g. 3.6]. A selection of 35 essays from 2016-17 were collected as a book, *Arts and the Nation: A Critical Re-examination of Scottish Literature, Painting, Music and Culture* [5.4] (2017, reprinted 2018), further increasing circulation.

The *National's* editor [5.5] stated that:

Alan's essays set The National apart from other newspapers as the only platform for such work in the Scottish marketplace. They are a vital part of our brand identity in promoting all things Scottish and providing added value for our readers/digital audience.... Alan's essays are well received by our readers/audience and this is highlighted by positive comments online and contributions to [our] letters pages.



Figure 2: Examples of articles by Alan Riach published in *The National*

Emails addressed to Riach, letters published in the newspaper, and the comments pages in *The National's* website have indicated meaningful engagement with the scholarship published in this unusual context. As illustrative examples of comments on *The National* online edition [5.6]:

'Thank you! I am completely ignorant of everything in this article. It was not a thing that came up at school. Ever. I can perhaps begin to learn more of Scotland's literary history. Thank you again.' (17 March 2017)

'As always, an excellent "free lecture" from Mr Riach.' (5 July 2019)

'Great to see and read the wonderful poets you reference.' (30 September 2019)

'What a marvellous article.' (5 July 2019). *'Excellent. More of this kind of stuff.'* (4 July 2019)

The Landmarks exhibition: making the intersection of the arts accessible

Riach was also invited to make a research-based contribution to the Landmarks exhibition in 2018. The exhibition toured 2018-20 with online and further iterations scheduled, introducing the major poets, singers and musicians of modern Scotland and the inter-relations between poets, artists, landscapes, and literature with other arts, especially painting and music. Riach's contribution used his research expertise in the selection and production of poetry and the curation of biographical essays on the poets. The exhibition was innovative in bringing together poetry, portraits of the poets, references to music, and representations of associated landscapes.

At the Lillie Gallery, Milngavie, the Director [5.7] noted that due to the innovative approach taken, the exhibition attracted 2,061 visitors, adding: *'this is a very good total indeed for the time of year and the fact that it was a relatively short run'* – c.25% more than would normally be expected. At

the Junor Gallery in St Andrews, 1,189 visitors attended according to its Gallery Director [5.8], who added that this was '*substantially higher than during the previous and following years in the same period. I can't emphasise strongly enough how important such a difference is to a small independently run gallery. ... Qualitatively, Landmarks was a unique exhibition in terms of its visitors' engagement with the poems and paintings.*'



Figure 2: Alan Riach at two of the five events held at the Junor Gallery as part of Landmarks. On the right, with artists Sandy Moffat and Ruth Nicol and Gallery Director Beth Junor. Source: [5.8].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- 5.1 Testimonial letter, Jeni Lennox, Principal Design Consultant, Nile Design [PDF], corroborating and detailing the contribution of Riach and his research expertise to shaping the banknotes on the project.
- 5.2 Documents corroborating the VisitScotland guide produced by Riach [PDF]
 - a. Copy of *Literary Scotland: A Traveller's Guide*
 - b. Testimonial letter, Jenni Steele, VisitScotland
- 5.3 Michael Russell, MSP [Email as PDF], commenting on the importance of cultural writing being available in a Scottish newspaper.
- 5.4 Example reviews of *Arts and the Nation* by Samuel Reilly and the bottle imp [combined PDF], commenting on the significance of the volume and its subjects.
 - a. Review by Samuel Reilly in *The Bottle Imp*
 - b. Review by Andrew Hook in *Scottish Review*
- 5.5 Testimonial letter, Editor, *The National* [PDF], corroborating the significance for *The National* as a newspaper in incorporating Alan Riach's scholarship essays, and the positive response of readers.
- 5.6 Various examples of comments taken from *The National* online edition together with quoted emails from readers [PDF], corroborating the positive response of many readers to Riach's essays in *The National*, many indicating learning and intellectual stimulation.
- 5.7 Testimonial letter, James Higgins, Curator, Lillie Art Gallery, Milngavie, and subsequent email clarifying figures [combined PDF], detailing the importance of the *Landmarks* exhibition for Lillie Art Gallery, the visitor numbers, and the visitor and critical response.
- 5.8 Testimonial letter, Beth Junor, Director of Junor Gallery. [PDF], corroborating the visitor numbers at the exhibition, and detailing the positive visitor response to its unique combination of art forms displayed as well as to Riach's talks.