HCRC: Ahead of our times?

Crossing boundaries of institution, discipline & sector: advantages & challenges

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1989 The Way We Were

- State of the nations
- Policy context
- Funding climate
- University environment
- Research landscape

University & Research Landscape

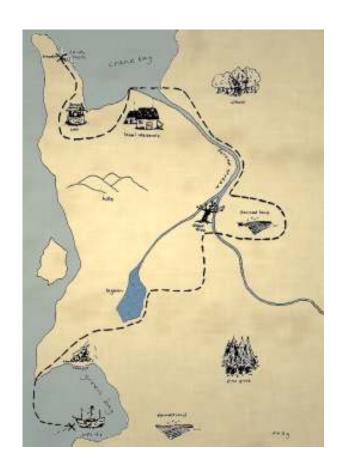
- Research Assessment was still new
- ESRC (funder formerly known as SSRC)
- RC budgets far smaller than now
- No research themes or grand challenges
- No RCUK & few cross-council activities
- No cross-university research pooling
- Little focus on industry links or impact
- Interdisciplinary Research Centres new

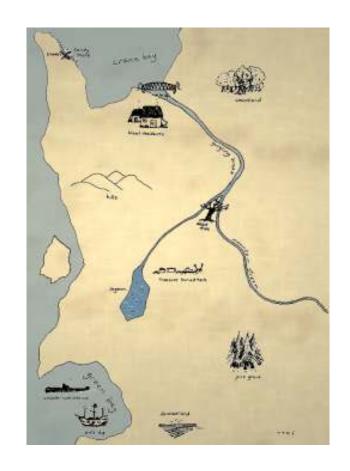
HCRC & the times they are a changing

- Pretty generous funding for 10 years
- Challenged to work across disciplines
- Research on a broad common theme
- Need to report on range of activities; papers, press, industry links, potential uses etc
- Reports assessed and mid-term review
- Challenge to show quality, impact, added value of long-term Centre funding

Interdisciplinarity – you say 'potayto' and I say 'potato'

- The challenges of working across discipline boundaries
- Developing a shared language & perspective
- Time and effort involved
- The need to find a common focus
- Why don't we all work together on??





The Map Task. Dialogue - Involves giving route instructions.

Instruction Givers and Instruction Followers

Speakers never see one another's Map.

They may or may not see one another's face – live or via technology

HCRC MAP TASK CORPUS

A corpus of 64 Face-to-face and 64 Audio-only dialogues Multiply coded to support a wide variety of research For example how visual access affected

- amount of speech
- amount of interruptions
- communication content:
 Conversational Games Analysis
- timing of speakers' contributions
- intelligibility of speech
- patterns of eye-gaze
- Major joint effort which engaged colleagues with wide spread of interests
 - Released as a public resource to the research community

IG: Neil IF: Craig (Deviation score = 11 cm. Sq.) Neil and Craig are undergraduate students

IG: OK?

IF: Right

IG Right starting at the top left isn't it?

IF: Right

IG: Right – if you come down sort of south – south east – you got a

burnt forest?

IF: Aye

IG: Now you come down

IG: Have you got a ravine?

IF: Yes

IG: Lorraine IF: Gordon (UGs) (deviation score = 112 cm.sq)

IG: OK – if you move down about 4 or 5 centimetres and around to the east about 10 12 centimetres past the springboks*

IF: What was that last one?

IG: About 10 10 centimetres past the springboks

IF: Springboks mm

IG: And got around the springboks to the northwest

IF: Springboks?

IG: About 3 centimetres

IF: Northwest 3

IG: And to the southwest past the safari truck truck about 6 or 7 centimetres – and along by the field station*- to the west around 10 centimetres – and around the banana tree around 15 centimetres to the bottom of the gold mine* - you got that?

IF: Mm suit yourself ...

Exploring Communication Technologies

- Extending our explorations of dialogue & the role of visual cues and feedback
- Exploring the impact of technologies
- Engaging in collaboration with industry
- Exploring which aspects of technology impact on the communication process and people's perceptions of the experience



Communicating via a videoconference link – and exploring communication via non-invasive eye tracking

Collaborating with Industry

- HCRC had industry on the Advisory Board
- ESRC encouraged us to engage
- We had some industry funded projects
- We had some industry co-funded PhDs
- We had ESRC-funded research that followed on from industry projects under the Realizing Our Potential Award scheme
- This + our interdisciplinary efforts led to my role as ESRC/EPSRC/DTI programme director

People@Centre of Communication & IT (PACCIT)

- UK study of collaborative R&D projects in IT/New Media
- Universities & business both funded
- 15 Collaborative projects across UK
- 26 in-depth interviews with lead academic and commercial partners post project
- Exploring the key advantages & disadvantages of the collaboration
- Outcomes & willingness to collaborate again

Themes from Academic Interviews

- Advantages
- Very positive overall
- Grounding in Real World
- 7 out of 11 e.g. wanting research to have an impact, test theories

Complementary Expertise
7/11 ogg partner's skills

7/11 egg partner's skills

Stakeholders Facilitating Access to Key (7/11)

Stronger Relationships (3)

Helped in volatile times

Discipline of LINK (4)

- Disadvantages
- Different Perspectives (5)

Egg on Time scales

Bureaucracy Costs (4)

Relevance vs. Depth (4)

Managing Volatility (4)

Funding for Commercials (3)

Themes from Commercial Interviews

- Advantages
- Overall very positive
- Academic input (7/12)
- E.g. academic rigour
- Skill mix in consortia
- 6/12 acads+other commercials
- Understanding Users
 (4) user studies, theory, extended trials
- Time Scale of Projects (3)

- Disadvantages
- None of note (4/12)
- Bureaucracy of Process(4)
- Lack of Support & Advice for Commercialization (3)

Research Policy Context Now

- •Research Councils (RCUK) themes focus on major interdisciplinary challenges such as Digital Economy or Living With Environmental Change
- More research funding on these themes and on major long-term research investments
- Increasing focus on the impact of research RCUK & REF
- •Increasing importance of knowledge transfer and the economic and social benefits of research —
- •KTPs, IKCs, Clark-Maxwell Centres??

Lessons from HCRC?

- We were ahead of our times
- Many of the present features of research policy we experienced in HCRC
- We know that interdisciplinary work can be tough & time consuming but rewarding
- We know that large scale investments on big questions can be effective
- We know that engaging in the impact agenda, commercialization, collaboration with industry can be worthwhile but shouldn't dominate

'If we had the chance to do it all again Could we? Should we? '