

Evaluation of ARK 2005

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Summary

The purpose of this evaluation was to review the work of ARK over the period 2001-5, noting key developments, examining performance, studying ARK's institutional position and looking at ARK's options for the future. The evaluation was carried out by means of interview, on-line survey, examination of products and documentation and survey of users and clients. The process of consultation was extensive, involving 45 interviews and 56 written contributions.

ARK expanded its work considerably during the period under review. The three previous resources grew to eight. Among the original resources, there were significant additions to CAIN; at least five modules of *Life and Times* were run each year, the results for four years being published as books; and ORB expanded from 900 entries with 270 summaries to 1,300 entries and 884 summaries. New series established were *Young Life & Times* (YLT), *Elections*, the Household Panel Survey, Surveys On Line and the Research Centre. YLT was run for two years and the results published in a book. A series of surveys dating to 1989 was made available through Surveys On Line. The Household Panel Survey made available discrete data on Northern Ireland for 2001-3 for researchers. *Elections* provided a range of popular electoral material. The Research Centre carried out commercial and *pro-bono* work.

Web use rose from 4.4m hits for CAIN in 2001 to 6.5m hits in 2005, up 48% and from 0.1m to 2.8m hits for the rest of the ARK site. 21 issues of *Research Update* were published during this period. Income generated totalled almost £1.68m, averageing £419,214 annually, with an upward trend. 17 seminars were held. ARK was rebranded with a range of marketing materials. The staff complement rose to 8.5 full time equivalents. A number of proposals were made for future development, both formally in the corporate and operational plans and also informally.

ARK was cited substantially in 46 books, edited books or journals. 12 reports or fact sheets were published. Media coverage averaged 56 citations a year, totalling 224, from local to international press, radio to television and the digital media. The seminar series was rated positively in contemporary evaluations.

The interview group, clients and survey groups rated ARK's work highly. The interview group described ARK as a quality resource, commended the navigability of its website, praised the seminar series and indicated that ARK was used as a significant resource in the academic and teaching community. Clients described ARK as first class, well organized and professional at all times. The on-line survey rated ARK at between 68% and 94% for usefulness and in a band from 80% to 100% for navigability. Among users, 72% gave ARK a high rating, 28% a moderate rating and none a negative rating. 68% believed that ARK had made a lot of impact on the social and political knowledge of Northern Ireland, 32% a little and none no impact. Ratings for accessing services, advice and professionalism were 100%. ARK was widely praised for its combination of quality, quantity, utility, depth, breadth and substance; its ability to generate public interest; its high media profile; the clear, free, accessible, easy-to-understand manner in which it publishes, summarizes and presents its findings; and its openness to ideas, themes, people and partners. Commentators described it as an impressive, invaluable, interdisciplinary resource and the standard by which others should be judged.

Six issues arose or were examined in the course of this research. These were the changed university environment, staffing, ARK as a joint venture between the two universities, accounts, the database/ mailing list and future agenda. The changed university environment was the most important, involving the requirement that university researchers, either individually or collectively, raise all their own costs, charge for services on the basis of Full Economic Costing (FEC) and a much increased overhead and are expected to contribute to the Research Assessment Exercise. ARK must also face changes in the university institutions, with its probable relocation in Queen's University to a new, larger school of social policy, sociology, social work and social care. These changes come at a time when funding for a number of staff positions is coming to an end over 2005-6. Positively, ARK's experience as a joint enterprise between the two universities was well regarded. ARK continues to experience problems with accounts in the University of Ulster, the situation showing no improvement in four years. There are problems with the database/ mailing list, which is out of date, unrevised and uncirculated. A series of themes and working methods were outlined for the development and extension of ARK's original and new resources.

ARK's value, substance and quality are unchallenged. Despite its impressive performance, the prospects of the universities finding a way to accommodate ARK outside the rigours of FEC and its implications are dim. ARK faces three options for its future development. These choices are fundamental, affecting its orientation, role, future work and staffing and all are consequences of the changed university environment. Two options give ARK the opportunity to act pro-actively, using its strengths, reputation and performance to best advantage.

ARK could choose, first, to embrace the the new university environment and develop as an academic body, operating full economic costing, developing a teaching role and making a significant contribution to the RAE.

Second, ARK could choose to expand its applied role in the service of the governmental and non-governmental community, becoming an independent applied social research institute outside the universities.

A third, but more passive possibility is for ARK to await the decisions of the universities and attempt to negotiate a position that manages to preserve its existing role and form.

These options are a matter for the director and staff. It is recommended, as an interim step, that (1) an internal paper be prepared outlining how the academic role could be put into effect and that (2) advice be taken on forming ARK as an independent institute. As a result, these courses of action could be better understood and sketched out as options before decisions were finally made.

Finally, recommendations are made to address accounting problems within the university and to put the database/ mailing list in order.

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Terms of reference

The general purpose of the evaluation is to:

- Assess ARK's current work in the context of its aims, objectives and targets.
- Present options for its future development.

The specific objectives of the evaluation are to:

- Identify the key developments of ARK over the four years that have elapsed since the last evaluation;
- Look at ARK's performance in comparison to its targets in a manner that is:
 - quantitative, examining its performance in respect of usage, enquiries, publicity and interest;
 - qualitative, obtaining views of those within and outside ARK of the value of the service provided.
- Note plans for the development of ARK over the next three to five years;
- Specifically examine the institutional position of ARK as a joint venture of the universities, with particular reference to ARK and its members within the Research Assessment Exercise; and
- Re-examine ARK's market, past, present and future, especially its potential to go beyond the academic community.

The evaluation aims to look at ARK's work both in its totality and also in the context of its eight individual services (CAIN, *Life & Times*, On line Research Bank, Surveys Online, ARK Research Centre, *Young Life & Times*, *Elections*, Household Panel Survey, Research Centre), including its outreach and marketing strategies. Performance will be examined in the context of the resources available.

Method

The evaluation was carried out by the following methods:

- Interviews with ARK staff;
- Study of ARK publications, resources and related material published on the web;
- Examination and analysis of ARK user statistics; publicity and press record; external recognition and awards; comments of ARK users; queries and other feedback; resources available to ARK;
- Interviews with those familiar with ARK and its development;
- Survey of users of the different elements of ARK's services to test for the nature of their usage and their satisfaction level. Surveys were carried out of users of *Life & Times*, *Young Life & Times* and those familiar with ARK drawn from its mailing list. An on-line survey was carried out of users of the ARK website;
- Interviews with university staff with responsibilities for ARK and others familiar with its work and activities.
- Desk research and interviews as appropriate into issues relating to ARK's future development.

Interviews were done on a not-for-attribution basis. Details of the surveys are provided in the methodological note at the end. 16 personal and 29 phone interviews were carried out. 56 people made written contributions and 37 responded to the on-line survey.

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Chapter 1: Context

This chapter briefly outlines ARK's objectives, structure, location and institutional framework.

ARK is the Northern Ireland Social and Political Archive, operating as a web-based resource (www.ark.ac.uk). Its mission is to be:

A web-based resource with the aim of providing easy access to social and political information in Northern Ireland.

ARK has eight separate, but linked resources:

- CAIN, or Conflict Archive on the INternet, which provides a wide range of information and resources on the conflict from 1968 to the present;
- Northern Ireland Life & Times (NILT), which has questionnaires, data and results tables from annual surveys of attitudes to contemporary social policy issues;
- The Online Research Bank (ORB) which has a bibliography and summaries of academic, government and voluntary sector research in Northern Ireland;
- *Young Life & Times* (YLT), the core of which is a survey of attitudes among 16-year olds but also encompasses its work with schools and young people;
- *Elections*, a resource on election results in Northern Ireland;
- Surveys On Line, a compilation of social survey material;
- Northern Ireland Household Panel Survey (NIHPS) Analysis Unit, enabling download access to the Northern Ireland part of the British Household Panel Survey from 2001;
- ARK Research Centre, providing a commercial and *pro bono* service to assist people in social research and in the use of large-scale social survey datasets.

The service is provided free. Persons enter the ARK site by a number of routes: either directly through the home page; through the use of search engines; from linked sites; or through their knowledge of an individual ARK resource (CAIN being the best known).

ARK was developed in 2000 as a joint enterprise between the University of Ulster and Queen's University. The staff (see *Acknowledgements*) are divided between the two universities and work from the respective campuses in Belfast, Derry, Jordanstown and Coleraine.

ARK is institutionally located in INCORE (International Conflict Research), which is part of the Faculty of Social Sciences in the University of Ulster; and in Queen's University since July 2001 as part of the Institute of Governance, Public Policy and Social Research. ARK staff report to the INCORE board and to the board of the Faculty of Social Sciences in the University of Ulster; and in Queen's University, staff report to the Institute of Governance.

ARK received funding for a pilot year from Atlantic Philanthropies and following an evaluation of the pilot year, this was extended to core funding for 2002-7.

ARK currently operates according to a three-year general framework *Corporate plan 2002-5* and an annual operational plan, the current one being the *Operational plan 2004-5*. ARK publishes an annual report. The annual reports for 2001-2 and 2003 have been published and the *Annual report, 2004* is now in draft.

Chapter 2: Key developments

Here we summarize the key developments in ARK over the period 2002-5. This review covers: existing web-based resources (2.1); new web-based resources (2.2); publications (2.3); seminars (2.4); branding, marketing and outreach (2.5); staffing (2.6) and future development plans (2.7). Conclusions are drawn (2.8).

First, the web-based resources. It should be noted that although ARK is branded as a single identity, most visitors to the website come to the individual eight sites and only a small proportion (estimated at 5%) come in through the front page.

2.1 Consolidation of existing web-based resources

At the beginning of this period, ARK had three resources: CAIN, NILT and ORB. These resources have been consolidated.

CAIN provides background to the troubles, chronologies, databases of facts and figures, abstracts of organizations, key events and key issues. Additions to the CAIN site over 2001-5 have included:

- Biographies;
- Ephemera;
- Recent political developments and speeches;
- New key topics: the Convention, the Brooke/Mayhew talks, the 1975-6 truce, collusion, victims of the conflict, New Targeting Social Need;
- New sections: Bogside artists, guide to the Bloody Sunday inquiry, polls and attitudes, elections, the Lancaster House talks, Leeds Castle talks, guide to source material.

Earlier sections have been updated, for example:

- Chronologies;
- Key documents (e.g. from government, Democratic Dialogue, Institute of Conflict Research);
- State papers (e.g. 1973 public records);
- Bibliographies;
- Fiction about the troubles;
- The Sutton index of deaths;
- The Heathwood listing of television documentaries;
- The Good Friday Agreement;
- The mural directory;
- Abstracts on prominent organizations;
- Glossary of terms.

CAIN devotes attention to making itself reachable by establishing links to well-known and heavily used sites (e.g. the BBC). This in turn means that CAIN will score prominently on search engines, which is the method by which most visitors reach CAIN. CAIN's visitors are divided into three broadly equal groups: the British Isles, Europe and the rest of the world, mainly north America. It should be stressed that a substantial amount of CAIN's work is routine but important for a quality service: scanning for new material, obtaining permission to use material and refreshing existing parts of the site.

Northern Ireland Life & Times survey has been run and published by ARK each year since 1998 and the results are made available within six months of the collection of data. NILT comprises a number of modules, normally five and ARK must win funding for each in turn every year from funders such as the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), the Nuffield Foundation, government departments and other public sources. The survey normally includes a random sample of 1,800 people. The modules covered were as follows:

2001
Political attitudes/devolution
Education
Health
Community relations
Culture and the arts
Social networks

2002
Rights of the child
Women in politics
Political attitudes
Europe
Community relations
Family and changing gender roles

2003
Education
Attitudes to older people
Political attitudes
Disability
Community relations

2004
Men's Life & Times
Victims
Grandparenting
Countryside
Community relations

2005 (proposed)
Community relations
Complementary medicines
Race
Political attitudes

The data are analyzed and cleaned and basic results together with a full dataset for download made available on the web. In some cases, a summary is written for the client. When the module is concluded, the normal pattern is to publish the tables of results on the website (generally by mid-June), publish a research update, issue a press release and hold a seminar on the topic.

Life & Times was published in book form in 2002 as *Social attitudes in Northern Ireland - the eighth report* (Pluto press) and in 2004 as *Social attitudes in Northern Ireland - the ninth report*. Funding was secured in 2005 for the beginning of a qualitative archive as part of *Life & Times*. NILT data are also used across the University of Ulster as a teaching dataset for secondary analysis. Course validation panels have commented favourably on the significance of this for students, giving them the ability to develop skills with meaningful local data and a large number of respondents. NILT published papers and books are core reading material on a number of social policy modules.

ORB has expanded its number of entries from 600 in April 2001 to 1,300 at present (May 2005). ORB material is designed to be of use to the academic, governmental and non-governmental community and aims to capture the broad range of publications from formal reports to grey literature. One can search ORB by author, year and field. ARK staff track down most of the ORB material directly but others will bring material to ORB's attention. Material is also contributed to ORB from the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action and OFMDFM.

ORB entries and summaries are dated back to 1993. Where ORB has not been in a position to do summaries for reports, the practice has been to provide a direct internet link to the report's own summary. At one stage, funding was obtained from the Nuffield Foundation to pay consultants to write summaries and this cleared a backlog of unsummarized entries. At present, 68% of the entries have summaries. ORB encourages fresh material through University of Ulster and Queen's University Belfast news magazines. New entries are sought by scanning local newspapers (via the Queen's University clipping service), government publications and BBC and UTV on line services. The following is the growth in ORB:

ORB entries and summaries

Year	Entries	Summaries
2000	330	
2001	900	270
2002	1,000	500
2003	1,110	600
2004	1,250	850
2005 (May)	1,300	884

ORB was recently awarded a contract from OFMDFM to develop a children's sub-section and work is under way on this, with a view to launch in June 2005.

2.2 New web-based resources

In the past three years, the following five resources have been added:

Young Life & Times (YLT)

Surveys on Line (SOL)

Elections

Research unit - commercial and *pro bono*

Northern Ireland Household Panel Survey (NIHPS)

Each is reviewed in turn.

Young Life & Times was a significant development. Here, with funding from the Community Relations Council (CRC) (Peace II programme) and later the Carnegie Foundation, ARK developed survey material to gauge the views of 16-year olds on a series of contemporary issues such as community relations. Collection of data was facilitated by the Department for Social Development, which contacted the age group through the child benefit register. One reminder was issued to non-respondents and the overall response rate was 46%, which is considered good for a postal survey. Key results from YLT 2003 and YLT 2004 were published in brochure form and as a book in Shirley Ewart & Dirk Schubotz: *Voices behind the statistics - young people's view of sectarianism in Northern Ireland* (2004, National Children's Bureau and YLT). An important aspect of YLT was working with schools and organizations associated with young people and this took the form of contributions to conferences (e.g. Save the Children, citizenship education) and liaison with youth organizations (e.g. Northern Ireland Youth Forum, Youth Link, Barnardos). The director has made ten presentations on *Young Life & Times* in the past year, as far afield as London and Glasgow. Two modules were prepared for the GSCE curriculum *Learning for work and life* and these will be used from September 2005 onward.

The *Elections* resource was set up following an approach by political expert Nicholas Whyte. He operated a personal site on Northern Ireland elections and this was then made part of the ARK site under his continued supervision. *Elections* provides detailed information on election results, constituencies and voting patterns and attracts a high level of interest at election time. *Elections* has information on assembly, local government, Westminster and European elections; political parties, voting systems, constituency boundaries and electoral history. Predictions were added in 2003. The site is mainly used by political activists, journalists, academics and politics students. The use of the site is monitored by Technorati and Feedster. Two thirds of visitors arrive by search engines, other election sites being the next source. Nicholas Whyte contributes his time free of charge.

The function of **Northern Ireland Household Panel Survey (NIHPS)** Analysis Unit is to provide Northern Ireland specific data from the annual British Household Panel Survey. NIHPS is a detailed and complex survey of 2,000 to 5,000 people following the social patterns

of households especially in respect of income, housing and health. The main users are academics, postgraduate students and government. The Analysis Unit was funded for three and a half years by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) but there does not appear to be funding for a continuation. Data waves 1, 2 and 3 are available from ARK and fieldwork for wave 4 has been completed. NIHPS works somewhat differently from the other ARK resources: although it has a dedicated section on the website, the data are not made available directly on line. Instead, a visitor requests the data, which are sent in a download of between 8 and 15 files in zip format. The UK Data Archive has a requirement to know who uses the panel, which can be done when the information is requested, but not if it is free-to-view on-line. Three workshops (two in Jordanstown, one in Queen's University) were held to train users in Northern Ireland on how to use the NIHPS. Thirty four people attended the first two workshops, which used wave 1 cross-sectional data; and twelve people attended the third workshop which used longitudinal waves 1 and 2 data. The project included the setting up, in 2003, of a user group where common issues could be discussed. The first two user groups, held in December 2003 and June 2004, attracted six users, two of whom presented findings from their research using the NIHPS at the June meeting. No users attended the third user group meeting held in January 2005.

In **Surveys on Line** (SOL), ARK expanded the range of material provided to include other surveys and analysis apart from those which it collected itself. The following were provided at first: modules within the British Social Attitudes survey (1996, 1998, 1999), Women and political participation (1991), Northern Ireland social attitudes (1996), Northern Ireland election referendum study (1998) and the Community Relations time series (1989-2001). 2003 additions were Northern Ireland social attitudes (1995), British social attitudes on the environment (2000) and attitudes to social mobility and political preferences (1996). 2004 saw the addition of more Northern Ireland Social Attitudes (1995) and the European Social Survey (2002).

The **Research Centre** (at one stage called the Survey Analysis Unit) was designed to provide assistance for social surveys on a commercial basis and to assist research work undertaken in the voluntary and community sector on a *pro bono* basis. A grant of £25,000 was received for *pro bono* work from OFMDFM and a further £5,000 from Queen's University Belfast. Criteria were that the research should be related to social policy, short to medium term in nature and require a level of expertise beyond that normally available to the sector. Referrals for the research came from the Northern Ireland Science Shop.

Projects undertaken were as follows:

- Headway Belfast: analysis of user satisfaction.
- Deafblind UK: assistance with questionnaire, analysis, findings, report.
- Men's project: Assistance with publication of five short reports on the changing role of men in Northern Ireland (vital statistics, work, health, education, family life).
- Share Holiday Village: feasibility study of holiday dialysis facility, done with Northern Ireland Kidney Patients Association.
- Terry Enright Foundation: evaluation of youth leadership programme.
- Donegall Pass Residents Association.
- Survey of baby clinics.

ARK assisted these organizations with field work, in-putting of data and carrying out analysis. Advice was also provided to a number of other organizations: the Integrated Education Fund, the Parents Advice Centre, Shine FM, Newcastle Gateway Centre Initiative, the Association of Chief Officers of Voluntary Organizations, Volunteer Development Agency and the Fermanagh Trust. The time commitment given to this work was 56 days by end March 2005 when a final report including an assessment was issued (though some of the

projects listed have yet to conclude their programmes). A presentation on the resource was also given to Queen's University Belfast Community Network.

Commercial work was undertaken for the Education and Library Boards (e.g. review of youth services, school meals, physical activity), Atlantic Philanthropies (older people) and Queen's University (student attitudes). There are a number of small projects and these include Mornington Community Project, Conwal parish, the Rural Community Network and the Equality Commission.

2.3 Publications

34 issues of *Research Update* have now been published. These are attractively presented 4-page A4 size colour broadsheets with findings, tables, key points, references and analysis drawn from NILT and other sources. During this period, *Research Update* covered the following topics: community relations, teenage stress, Protestant views on the Good Friday Agreement, ageing, sectarianism, caring, women in politics, children's experience of school, women and the family, the experience of Catholics of Northern Ireland, the perspective of Presbyterians, attitudes to the European Union, constitutional preferences, lifelong learning, attitudes to academic selection, views on the environment, attitudes to healthcare, policing, views on transport, segregation, men's issues, mixed marriages and social activities.

A newsletter was introduced in 2001. The purpose of the two-page newsletter was to report ARK's news, inform people of ARK's activities, provide notification of forthcoming events and give details of how ARK can be contacted. Although the intention was to publish five times a year, the newsletter was published only twice. Consideration was given to an e-mail newsletter in 2004, but this did not progress.

Publications were marked by the issuing of press releases. Such press releases totalled 5 in 2001, 5 in 2002, 3 in 2003 and 12 in 2004. Extensive use was made of the media to highlight ARK publications, especially *Life & Times* and *Young Life & Times*.

2.4 Seminars

Seminars were a key development. The purpose of the seminars was to share research findings arising from ARK's work and disseminate them among the academic, governmental and non-governmental community. Most seminars were held at the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action in Belfast and in the 2004-5 series, two were held in Magee College in Derry. The seminars generally ran from 12-1, with refreshments and informal discussion afterwards, designed to facilitate people to return to work for the afternoon. 17 seminars were held during the period under review.

Contemporary evaluation forms showed that people learned of these seminars through e-mail, word of mouth, noticeboards, the university websites, postal notices, leaflets, colleagues at work, magazines (e.g. *Scope*), lecturers, local authorities or promotion by individual organizations (e.g. Community Relations Council, Democratic Dialogue, Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action). The seminars covered attitudes to the following topics: community relations, social inequality, transport, healthcare, education, lifelong learning, political divisions, the European Union, caring, current political developments and disability. Seminars also covered such issues as Christianity, comparative attitudes (Europe and the Republic), pensions, poverty, family and gender roles, women and politics, ageism, young people's mental health and political ephemera.

2.5 Branding, marketing and outreach

Following the 2001 evaluation, a number of measures were taken to improve the branding and marketing of ARK. Consultants, *Level 7*, were contracted to assist in the process. A *Marketing strategy document 2003-5* was drafted.

The branding exercise involved:

- Redevelopment of the website;
- New logo standardized across all ARK services;
- Standardization of colours, formats, messages and headed paper;
- Restatement of ARK as a joint project between the two universities;
- ARK folder and pack, with leaflets on each of the individual services;
- ARK display stand/banner for use at events or backdrop for television interviews;
- ARK formatting for powerpoint presentations;
- Staff business cards;
- Postcards;
- Mousemats;
- Publication of annual reports.

ARK extended its programme of outreach to the academic, governmental and non-governmental community. This took the form of presentations to:

- Undergraduate and postgraduate students at the University of Ulster and Queen's University Belfast;
- Visiting students, especially INCORE visitors in Magee College;
- The academic community - within the two universities (e.g. senior staff, INCORE summer school);
- The academic community - further afield (e.g. Royal Irish Academy, conference in Berlin);
- The governmental community - OFMDFM;
- Funders (Economic and Social Research Council, Nuffield Foundation);
- Special events (e.g. Community Relations Week).

The staff calendar for 2002-5 records 28 such outreach events or presentations. They vary in intensity. For example, CAIN made three presentations to visitors in one week in spring 2005, but that was unusually high.

Within the universities, ARK staff and especially its director devoted considerable energies and time to explaining ARK's work, role and future. Two meetings were held with senior management staff in Queen's University in spring 2005 and individual meetings have also been held with senior management in the University of Ulster.

ARK has a database or mailing list. This is held by the secretary and a version is currently with the senior analyst for updating. It is held on ACCESS format and about 2,000 entries. The database is not normally printed, nor circulated to other members of staff, for the reason that only one person should be responsible for ensuring that it is amended and corrected. The list is used as the basis for sending out annual reports, invitations to the seminar programme (the main purpose) and Christmas cards. People who make enquiries about ARK are normally added to the list. It has been due for updating for some time. A cross-section of the mailing list, comprising 118 persons drawn from the academic, voluntary and community and governmental sectors, was made available for purposes of this research by the secretary. ORB has its own mailing list of 200 people, mainly comprising academics, voluntary and community sector and government. The purpose of the mailing list is to ask people, generally quarterly, if they have new publications which they might wish to draw to the attention of ORB.

2.6 Staffing

Staffing in ARK rose to 8.5 Full Time Equivalents (FTE), its current complement, in the period since the previous evaluation. The following is the staffing arrangement, including sources of funding. Staff who are part of the team but not budgeted by ARK are [bracketed].

<u>Person</u>	<u>Position</u>	<u>Funding</u>
<u>University of Ulster (UU)</u>		
Prof Gillian Robinson	Director	University of Ulster, Director ARK, INCORE (50/50)
Ann Marie Dorrity	Programme administrator	3 year contract 2004-6, half funded by Atlantic (50/50)
Michael McCool	IT consultant director	University of Ulster, permanent, seconded from Faculty of Engineering to October 2006 (50/50)
Martin Melaugh	Director CAIN	University of Ulster research budget to October 2005
Brendan Lynn	Deputy, CAIN	Atlantic Philanthropies to October 2005
Lizanne Dowds	Deputy director	External awards, though underwritten by UU to June 2005
Patricia McKee	Senior analyst	Northern Ireland Household Panel to June 2005 (NISRA)
[Ann Marie Gray	Policy director	Lecturer, School of Policy Studies]
Shonagh Higgenbotham	Secretary	University of Ulster, (ARK/INCORE 50/50) to August 2007
<u>Queen's University Belfast (QUB)</u>		
[Robert Miller	Deputy director	Senior Lecturer, School of Sociology and Social Policy]
Paula Devine	Research director	Funded by QUB Institute of Governance SPUR to end 2005
Katrina Lloyd	Research director	Funded by QUB Institute of Governance SPUR to end 2005
Dirk Schubotz	Director, YLT	Funded by external awards to July 2005
[Nicholas Whyte	Director, <i>Elections</i>]	

As may be seen, four staff are funded 50/50 between ARK and INCORE (the director, the IT consultant, secretary and programme administrator). Two staff give management time to ARK as part of their work in the respective universities (Bob Miller, Ann Marie Gray) but are not paid members of the team. Their time contribution is estimated to be in the region of 20% and 10% respectively. Funding from Atlantic Philanthropies is due to expire in the case of the CAIN deputy director in October 2005 and in the part case of the administrator at the end of 2006. External awards expire in the case of the household panel survey in June 2005; in the case of the deputy director in June 2005 and in the case of the YLT director in July 2005. University of Ulster research budget for the director of CAIN expires in October 2005. Although both have permanent contracts, funding for the two research director posts in Queen's University expires at end 2005 with the relocation of the Institute of Governance.

Some staff spend a considerable amount of time searching for opportunities for future funding or projects. ARK's finances are shared between the two universities, with incoming funding allocated to accounts in the two, according to the part of ARK for which the money has been raised. In the University of Ulster, incoming resources are allocated to ten accounts, or cost centres, generally based on the funder. A half-time member of staff is responsible for the University of Ulster accounts, where most of ARK's incoming resources are channelled.

2.7 Future development plans

For ARK, the principal priorities are the consolidation of the existing work and activities and securing the necessary funding to make this possible. The present *Corporate plan 2002-5* formally commits ARK to development of its constituent parts; defining a new corporate identity; making itself a recognized entity within the universities; vigorous outreach and marketing; and flexibility, efficiency and cost-effectiveness. The present *Operational plan 2004-5* commits ARK to action in 17 areas, which cover promotion and marketing, computing, publicity, outreach, seminars, database development, monitoring and evaluation.

Specific actions are set for each of the ARK services. Much of the operational plan focusses on on-going and scheduled work, doing so in some detail.

Several future developments have been informally under consideration in ARK. These include:

- *Children's Life & Times*, for a much younger age group than *Young Life & Times*, dealing with such issues as bullying, smacking, school selection and rights.
- *Older Persons' Life and Times*, with further documentation on the situation of older people.
- Building the planned qualitative archive on social attitudes, to complement the existing quantitative nature of the resource.
- Publication of comparative data on social attitudes through cooperation with similar bodies outside Northern Ireland, for example in the Republic.

Within ORB, there could be further distinct sub-sections (e.g. lone parents).

Elections envisages an expansion as follows:

- Fuller coverage of local election results, with first names of councillors.
- Inclusion of spoiled votes in election counts and calculations.
- New constituency boundaries after 2005.
- Development of an election archive.
- Manifestos.
- Candidate profiles.

A part-time assistant would be desirable to make this possible. Assistance is also desirable at times of peak interest in the site (e.g. election time).

Desirable developments for CAIN include:

- Strengthening of the chronology prior to 1996.
- Cataloguing of 8mm film and videos of the troubles.
- Developing an *Emerging from conflict* theme, to assist students of how societies cope with the phase of post-conflict.

There is an on-going need for editing and re-editing as fresh material and insights become available.

2.8 Conclusions

ARK has expanded its work significantly in the past three years. The traditional backbone of ARK, namely CAIN and NILT, has developed considerably. ORB, a smaller but important service, has continued to develop. Important new services have been added and have attracted interest and attention, like YLT and *Elections*. The research centre has attracted a broad range of clients. The seminar series has become well established. ARK publishes attractive, well branded materials. This has been a period of rapid, substantial growth.

Chapter 3: Outcomes, performance and impact

Here we assess ARK's performance, outcomes and impact under a number of headings: use of ARK web-based services (3.1); publications and citations (3.2); media (3.3); finance (3.4); the seminar series (3.5) and, in some detail, external opinion (3.6). Conclusions are drawn (3.7).

3.1 Use of website services

ARK is a web-based research and it is appropriate that we first look at the use of the website. ARK statistics give a breakdown of access to CAIN, the original and most used site and then the rest of the site.

CAIN, ARK hits and unique sites

<u>CAIN</u>	<u>Hits</u>	<u>Unique sites (monthly average)²</u>
2001	4.4m	36,808
2002	4.9m	40,916
2003	5.4m	47,932
2004	6.5m	55,843

<u>ARK</u>	<u>Hits</u>	<u>Unique sites (monthly average)</u>
2001	111,396	341
2002	820,736	3,403
2003	2.7m	8,270
2004	2.8m	7,302

This shows a continued growth in both sites. CAIN has risen steadily from 4.4m hits in 2001 to 6.5m hits in 2004, up 48%. The rest of the ARK site has risen from 0.1m in 2001 to 2.8m in 2004, an enormous expansion. Monthly unique sites are up by similar proportions.

There is also an on-going level of enquiry to the sites. Figures here should be treated carefully. At one level they indicate a level of interest. At another, though, well presented websites will provide a quality of information that would preclude callers needing to contact the services.

CAIN attracts the highest level of enquiries, about 6 to 8 a day during term-time, but lower in mid-summer. Most are requests for additional information, enquiries about further sources, or requests for assistance in writing essays. There are some suggestions for further information. Many comments are compliments. Complaints are about 1 in 100 and tend to be about bias or about insufficient attention having been given to a particular political topic or party. *Elections* receives feedback from users at the rate of one or two comments a month. These are positive and come mainly from students and journalists. Feedback from the political parties has been relatively muted, the two showing the most interest being the Alliance Party and the Democratic Unionist Party. NILT receives about one query a week. The helpline is called by undergraduate and postgraduate students, journalists, academics, voluntary and community organizations. Enquiries to NIHPS are occasional, with some from government. *Young Life & Times* attracts enquiries at the rate of one a week.

² 'Unique sites' is the technical term used for the number of identifiably distinct visitors coming to the site.
Evaluation of ARK, 2005

3.2 Publications and citations

ARK aimed to achieve 20 academic publications during this period. In practice, the total has been 35. 34 research updates have now been issued, 21 during the period under review, as follows:

Research updates

2001	2
2002	4
2003	6
2004	6
2005 (to May)	3

ARK has now been cited or used substantially in 46 books, edited books or journals. Most of these citations relate to NILT. Journals include such titles as *Social policy and administration*, *Political studies*, *the Irish journal of sociology*, *Peace and conflict studies*, *Electoral studies*, *Government and opposition*, *Contemporary politics*, *Sociology and Regional and federal studies*.

In addition, ARK or ARK staff or associates have published the following:

Two NILT books - the eight and ninth reports (see NILT, above).

Voices behind the statistics (see YLT, above).

12 reports or fact sheets: *Older people in Northern Ireland* (2); the Men's Project (5); paper on Protestant identity presented at European Consortium for Political Research; article on gender and the Northern Ireland Assembly in *Democratic Dialogue*; paper on pensions presented to International Social Security Association; paper on older people for *Help the Aged*; and paper on peacemaking presented to workshop in Haifa.

Four book chapters: men and masculinity; teaching in integrated education; young people's sexual experiences (2).

ARK deputy director Robert Miller is credited with four books, three chapters in books, three refereed articles, and five consultancy reports.

ARK director Gillian Robinson is credited with one journal article, two book chapters, one edited book and a co-authored report.

3.3 Media

ARK aimed to achieve two mentions per month and the following is the level of media citation. The total is 224, averaging 56 a year.

Media citations

	<u>TV</u>	<u>Radio</u>	<u>Newspaper</u>	<u>Total</u>
2001-2	4	35	58	97
2003	3	8	40	51
2004	1	18	57	76

The following selection from 2004-5 gives an idea of the types of media outlets where ARK's work has been publicized:

<u>Television</u>	<u>Radio</u>	<u>Newspaper</u>
<i>UTV live</i>	<i>Citybeat</i>	<i>Irish Independent</i>
<i>BBC</i>	<i>SPIN FM</i>	<i>Dail Mail</i>
<i>BBC NI</i>	<i>Radio Foyle</i>	<i>Times Higher Education Supplement</i>
<i>UTV</i>	<i>Radio Wiltshire</i>	<i>Washington News</i>
<i>UTV newsroom</i>	<i>RTE Pat Kenny</i>	<i>Irish Daily Record</i>
	<i>Radio Ulster</i>	<i>NICVA News</i>
	<i>Q 101</i>	<i>News Medical Net</i>
	<i>Radio Midland</i>	<i>Belfast Newsletter</i>
	<i>Radio Luton</i>	<i>Belfast Telegraph</i>
	<i>Classic Gold</i>	<i>Irish News</i>
	<i>BBC Three counties</i>	<i>Daily Mirror</i>
	<i>Downtown</i>	<i>Observer</i>
	<i>R 106 Cookstown</i>	<i>Queen's Now</i>
		<i>Derry Journal</i>
		<i>Newtownards Chronicle</i>
		<i>Irish Times</i>
		<i>Sunday Times</i>
		<i>Antrim Guardian</i>
		<i>Sydney Morning Herald</i>

This shows not only a continuing high rate of coverage, but also a broad range, from local papers in Northern Ireland to national papers in Australia; from radio to television; and taking in the new digital media.

3.4 Financial performance

A key test for ARK is its ability to generate income for its projects. ARK has taken in a total of almost £2.6m over the period 1998 to 2005. Details for 2001-4 are as follows (over):

Year	Funder	Amount £	Purpose
2001	DCAL+	17,764	NILT culture
2001	ESRC	15,572	NILT social networks
2001	OFMDFM	114,332	NILT CRC
2001-2	DHSSPS	27,000	Research Centre*
	Rural Development Council		
	Equality Commission		
	Assembly Library & Research		
Subtotal		174,668	
2002-6	Atlantic Philanthropies	£438,000	Core funding
2002-5	NISRA	£150,000	NIHPS
2002	ESRC	37,000	NILT women
2002	ESRC	37,681	NILT Europe
2002	OFMDFM	20,080	NILT family & gender
2002-4	CRC Peace II	48,890	YLT
Subtotal		731,651	
2003-4	Nuffield Foundation	5,750	ORB summaries
2003	ESRC	500	NILT devolution
2003-4	Nuffield Foundation	35,519	NILT disability
2003-4	Atlantic Philanthropies	139,289	NILT ageing
2003-4	ESRC	67,688	NILT elections
2003-4	National Council Ageing	13,000	NILT ageing
2003-4	OFMDFM	13,000	NILT ageing
2003	OFMDFM	56,535	Research Centre*
	Southern E&L Board		
	Rural Community Network		
	National Children's Bureau		
Subtotal		331,281	
2004	OFMDFM	21,000	NILT men
2004	ESRC	38,160	NILT countryside
2004	CRC	32,325	NILT victims
2004	OFMDFM	151,509	NILT CR
2004	NISRA	38,454	NIHPS
2004	Nuffield Foundation	9,000	ORB
2004	ESRC	80,177	Qualitative archive
2004	Central education & library boards	68,630	Research Centre*
	OFMDFM		
	Atlantic Philanthropies		
Subtotal		439,255	
Grand total		1,676,855	

*Note that these are annual totals. The main clients are listed in the second column where, for the sake of clarity, very small clients have been excluded. + Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure.

Here, ARK has attracted in substantial sums of money, nearly £1.68m over 2001-4, an average of £419,214 annually. Even allowing for the substantial Atlantic Philanthropies grant in 2002 to cover four years, the overall trend is upward.

3.5 Seminar series

Seminars were introduced in 2001 and the standard programme is for six a year in an autumn to spring cycle, with three in the autumn and three in the spring. 17 have now been held. These seminars are important for several reasons: as part of the process of dissemination; in the promotion of debate on the policy issues arising; and as an interface between ARK and the academic, government, voluntary and community sector communities.

ARK's seminar series was evaluated on an on-going basis, with participants asked to return evaluation forms to ARK staff on the day. The consolidated outcomes were as follows:

	General organization			
	Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Poor
Pre-seminar communication	48	86	28	4
Seminar organization	77	79	13	
Venue	91	72	5	1
Food	45	76	9	

	Overall assessment				
	Strongly agree	Agree	No comment	Disagree	Strongly disagree
A positive experience	92	77	3		
Recommend to colleagues	81	83	6		
Enough time for discussion	67	90	1	10	
Interesting content	93	69	2		

To 22nd March 2005. N=174.

These are overwhelmingly positive, with very few comments in the right hand columns. The few negative sentiments were more apparent in the early run of the seminars, indicating a subsequent improvement. Typical comments were:

Interesting (several), good time of day and location, not too formal, relevant, stimulating, topical, thoughtful, well organized, excellent, very valuable, useful for research, informative, good as ever, good opportunity to make links, accessible, made feel comfortable, not intimidating.

There were some negative comments, but these were infrequent. Some speakers were criticized for 'lacking depth' or being 'too general'. One seminar appears to have experienced problems of overheads not being available on the day. This internal evaluation is checked against a user survey below (3.6).

3.6 External opinion

Opinion on ARK's performance and impact was surveyed in four ways:

First, through the interview group of the two universities and others, through semi-structured questions (33 persons);

Second, through e-mail survey of ARK users and those otherwise familiar with ARK (181). These comprised a cross-section of the database using a structured questionnaire (118 persons), a cross-section of persons who downloaded data from *Young Life & Times* (8) and *Northern Ireland Life & Times* (25) and a cross-section of those who used the *Northern Ireland Life & Times* query service over 2003-5 (30). Of these 181, 56 responded (31%). Opinions were also sought from clients who contracted services from ARK (4) and these are treated separately.

Third, through an on-line survey posted on the ARK site from 14th April through 4th May using a short, structured questionnaire. This was a self-selected group to which 37 responded.

Full details of the method and issues arising are given in the annexe. The identity of the interview group is given in the acknowledgements.

3.6.1 Interview group

The interview group took a universally positive view of ARK. ARK was commended for:

- The high quality of its resources, publications and data.
- The combination of quality, quantity and substance.
- The navigability of its site and ease of downloading. None experienced problems, nor did they know of others doing so.
- Its ability to attract media interest.
- Its success as a joint project between the two universities (only one disagreeing).
- Holding resources that are otherwise difficult to get, especially local election results.
- The speed with which Northern Ireland Life & Times was published, compared favourably to attitude surveys in the rest of the UK.
- The manner in which it was building opinion data across time.
- The seminar series, which were described as solid, useful, well organized, attracting a wide range of groups including the political parties and with a consistent line-up of good speakers, being organized away from the colleges and at a suitable time of day.
- The accessibility of its information to non-academics.
- Familiarity with the technical issues around attitude surveys; expertise and experience in research design.
- Preparedness to tackle contemporary issues e.g. bullying in schools.
- Its interdisciplinary nature between social science, social policy and politics, but also reaching further afield into science, health and medicine.
- The quality of its staff and personnel, especially its director.
- Openness to working with voluntary and community organizations.

Those interviewed repeatedly used terms such as 'impressive', 'invaluable', the 'yardstick by which others were judged'. Other comments were: 'the major electronic reference resource on Northern Ireland social issues' 'a major scholarly and policy resource'. 'improving steadily, I feel assured as to their quality'. CAIN was described as a 'world-class resource'. No comparable archive existed for other zones of enduring conflict, for example the middle east. NILT was now a comprehensive database on attitudes in Northern Ireland. ORB had a lower profile than some of the other services but was regarded as providing a valuable, useful, on-going service.

Academic members of the interview group referred to ways in which ARK was used:

- By their colleagues, fellow lecturers and researchers;
- By lecturers to illustrate to their students how survey data should be applied;
- By their postgraduate students; and
- By undergraduates.

In the course of the research, it became clear that several lecturers and teachers both in Northern Ireland and further afield were making very substantial use of ARK resources and directing their students there. One critical comment was that whilst the ARK site was rich and substantial, ARK did not push back the intellectual or theoretical frontier.

The interview group believed that ARK was making a significant impact:

- On public opinion, through the level of interest shown by the media;
- On government, which seemed interested to use its data on opinion;
- By voluntary and community organizations, which use its findings to inform their work.
- In the international community, where CAIN is considered to be well known.

Several spoke of the importance of government, political parties and legislators being informed by a good knowledge of the state of public opinion as they took key decisions, knowledge which NILT provided. Similarly, *Young Life & Times* was a welcome initiative that should help enlightened policy makers anticipate the new needs and directions of the younger generation.

Except for senior university management, most were unaware of the funding or institutional difficulties which ARK was facing or about to face, but many speculated that it must be hard to survive and that funding, with associated insecurity, was an on-going struggle.

Several suggested future areas of opinion work for ARK, such as:

- Community safety.
- Criminality, crime and social disorder.
- Gender.
- Poverty.
- Europe.
- Globalization.
- Integrated education.
- Conflict.
- Citizenship.
- Ethnic minorities.
- Racism and homophobia.

For future developments, some specific issues were raised:

- The desirability of links being established to the Centre for Cross Border Studies in Armagh;
- The possibility of building links to national data archives in Germany (Mannheim), Australia (Canberra) and the United States (Michigan);
- The desirability of development postgraduate fellowship programmes, bursaries and placements;
- The possibility of running summer schools;
- ARK staff developing more papers of analysis and synthesis out of their work: journal articles, monograph series, books;
- Analysis of census data (2011);
- The possibility of working with local government;
- The desirability of roadshow demonstrations of how to use ARK, in all its main markets (academic, governmental, non-governmental/community) and bringing that roadshow abroad to conventions of academics (e.g. sociologists, political scientists);
- Expanding ORB into more grey literature;
- The desirability of more academic material and abstracts appearing on CAIN. The possibility of CAIN beginning an oral history of the troubles; and
- Consideration of making the sites more interactive, posting comments and questions.

3.6.2 User group

The user group broke down into the following elements:

Voluntary and community	32%
Government/ government agency/ public service/ local government	19%
Lecturer (university)	22%
Student	
Researcher	22%
Journalist/press/ media	3%
Other	3%

All members of the group were asked how they rated ARK's work generally:

Highly	72%
Moderately	28%
Poorly	
Of no value	

All were asked what impact or contribution ARK had made to the social and political knowledge of Northern Ireland:

A lot	68%
A little	32%
None	

Those who attended an ARK seminar were asked how useful did they find it:

Very useful	73%
Moderately useful	27%
No use	
Well organized	79%
Moderately well organized	21%
Poorly organized	

Those who used *Life & Times* and *Young Life & Times* were asked how useful did they find the data that they accessed?

Very useful	88%
Moderately useful	12%
Little use	
No use	

They were asked how they rated the NILT/YLT site for accessibility and navigability:

Very easy	
Easy	100%
Difficult	
Very difficult	

Those who made an enquiry were asked did they get the assistance or advice that they sought:

Yes	100%
Partly	
No	

Those who made an information enquiry were asked how useful did they find the specific service which they accessed?

Very useful	100%
Moderately useful	
Little use	
No use	

Those who made an information enquiry were asked were they dealt with in a professional manner?

Yes	100%
Partly	
No	

Many additional comments were received, as follows:

General

*An invaluable site, used a lot, in an area where there is a lot of misinformation.
A valuable asset to the voluntary and community sector, providing knowledge, skills and services to influence policy and provision.
Especially impressed with inclusion of the views of young people, often lacking.
Work on attitudes is especially important in a society like ours, when a lot of opinions are often wrongly assumed.
You look at actual data, not summarized or interpreted data.
Recommend it to researchers abroad who have information requests about Northern Ireland. Useful for teaching undergraduates about Northern Ireland.
NILT is invaluable because it is over time and then presented and published.
Well run, professional, high quality output.
Excellent, up to date, easy to use, seminars well organized, publications accessible and to the point, good way to bring social science research to a wider audience.*

Quality of service

*Information accurate, timely, always dealt with in a professional way.
Response was prompt, most helpful for our organization in accessing information on current developments. Quick, friendly and helpful response.*

Seminars

Seminars are the best attended in Northern Ireland - but bring them out of Belfast at least twice a year. Some more interesting than others but all worth attending. Summaries are excellent starting points for seminar discussion.

Impact

*ARK is so frequently cited that it can only be considered to have a huge impact.
Should have more influence than it does - few colleagues in education have heard of it.
ARK has made a significant contribution to peace building.*

Criticism

*Seminars very academic. Too academic. Not enough interaction with a captive audience.
Tree structure of data files is confusing and hard to manipulate - make navigability between different layers more easy.*

Future

*Keep up the continuity of data over the years.
Bring researchers and policy makers together - at present seminars are too much geared to academics.
Run seminars on different days, times of day. Request for papers from seminars.
ARK should consider holding an open space seminar to consider new themes and partners.
Expand into archiving qualitative data.
More research on cannabis and drug use.
Raise the profile outside Belfast and Derry.
Would like to get details of seminars directly e.g. e-mail or post, not from someone else.
Address awkward, difficult, contentious research areas, like women and sectarianism.*

These are positive responses, by any standards. 72% gave ARK a high rating, with 28% giving it a moderate rating, none giving it 'poor' or 'no value'.

The user group shows that ARK is rated highly for:

- Impact, 68% believing that it has had a lot of impact, 32% a little, none saying none;
- Seminars, 73% finding them very useful, 27% moderately useful, none of no use;
- Seminar organization, 79% finding them well organized, 21% moderately so, none poorly organized;
- 88% rating *Life & Times* and *Young Life & Times* as useful, 12.5% moderately so, 100% giving them an 'easy to navigate' judgement;
- 100% getting the assistance or advice that they sought;
- 100% finding the specific service that they accessed useful;
- 100% considering that they were dealt with in a professional manner.

3.6.3 Client group

ARK clients took a positive view of their experience of ARK. All considered ARK to be professional at all times. A typical view was that ARK was professional, of high quality, presented a superior tender and left the commissioning agency with the certainty that the assignment was in 'safe hands'. Its staff were 'reliable, knowledgeable and helpful'.

Colleagues were impressed likewise. The ARK product was always of high quality and user friendly. ARK was commended for:

- *Making high quality research accessible and practical, in ordinary language, without the use of jargon.*
- *Being a free service.*
- *Openness to new ideas and partnership in exploring issues.*
- *Preparedness to tackle unfashionable issues.*
- *Making available research outcomes in a manner that they can be widely circulated and used.*
- *Making a link between the university and the community.*
- *The multiple formats used in publications, from fact sheets to research updates to books.*
- *The good atmosphere at ARK events.*
- *Its independence.*

ARK clients commended ARK as a productive and effective partner. ARK showed a common understanding, flexibility, 'nor were there any problems around ownership or dissemination'. The ARK staff members were committed, skilled and flexible.

3.6.4 On-line survey

The on-line survey was run for three weeks and attracted 37 responses. It was a self-selected sample in which visitors to the site were invited to file a return form. Those who identified themselves did so as students (10), followed by researchers (7), university lecturers (5), voluntary and community (4), government (2), others (2) and one teacher. They came to the ARK site by another internet site (15), word of mouth (12), search engine (7), meeting or event (2) and leaflet/publicity (1).

The on-line survey asked respondents to assess ARK's services by their usefulness and then by how easy they were to find one's way around. Rounded percentages are given:

	Useful		Easy	
	Very	Not	Easy	Not
Life & Times	90%	10%	96%	4%
Young Life & Times	80%	20%	91%	9%
NIHPS	81%	19%	80%	20%
Elections	94%	6%	100%	0%
CAIN	90%	10%	100%	0%
ORB	73%	17%	90%	10%
Research Centre	68%	32%	88%	12%

This shows a high and positive evaluation of ARK's services and their navigability. The services rated between 68% (Research Centre) and 94% (Elections). For navigability, services rated between 80% (NIHPS) and 100% (CAIN and Elections). The 80% level for NIHPS is still a remarkably positive level, granted the known complexity of the data provided.

Some additional comments were volunteered by those surveyed. Here is a sample:

Very useful website.

A great resource for elections.

Researching mixed marriages and found it useful to find how many there were.

Liked the way results were broken down into age groups and religion.

CAIN is an excellent resource and brings together a wealth of primary information which each writer would otherwise have to assemble individually.

Elections a superb resource.

Some section defy belief in their depth of analysis.

Especially useful for housing, community relations, sectarianism, public policy.

3.7 Conclusions

This chapter assessed the performance of ARK, based on an examination of its products, output, revenues and the judgement of external groups - the interview group, the user group, clients and the survey group. The results give us a measured picture of ARK and a sense of opinion about its operation. They show:

- A continued growth in website use. CAIN has risen steadily from 4.4m hits in 2001 to 6.5m hits in 2004, while the rest of the ARK site has risen from 0.1m hits in 2001 to 2.8m in 2004.
- Publication of 21 *Research Updates*; two books; ten other publications; with 46 citations in publications and ARK staff published in a range of journals and papers;
- Extensive coverage in television, radio, the digital media and the press, the latter ranging from local to national and international. There were 224 citations, averaging 56 a year, with the trend upward.
- Generation of income of nearly £1.68m, an average of £419,214 a year, with an upward trend;
- Holding of 17 seminars for academics, policy makers, voluntary and community organizations, all well rated by participants at the time;
- A positive assessment by the interview group, user group, client group and survey group. ARK has a 72% high and 28% moderate rating from the survey group;
- ARK is considered to be making an impact on the social and political knowledge of Northern Ireland, 68% crediting it with having made a lot of impact, 32% a moderate and none with no impact.
- The client group was rated its experience of working with ARK very well;
- Those who used ARK services were given the assistance they asked for and were all treated in what they considered to be a professional manner.
- The seminars were considered to be useful and well organized.
- The on-line survey group rated the sites for usefulness at between 68% and 94% according to site and from 88% to 100% for ease of use.

The overwhelming state opinion about ARK was strongly positive. Although there was some criticism, it was muted in comparison to the upbeat, enthusiastic nature of the general and specific comments. From this we can see that ARK has:

- Grown and performed productively;
- Attracted a growing level of use in its primary function, as a web-based resource;
- Generated substantial revenues;
- Published a series of hard products in the form of books and papers;

- Been cited extensively in books, book chapters and other publications;
- A well established profile in a broad range of media;
- Been rated well by its users for usefulness, relevance, quality;
- Provided a service that is regarded as extremely professional;
- Made an impact on the social and political knowledge of Northern Ireland;
- Attracted many suggestions for future work and activities.

Chapter 4: Issues arising

From an examination of the work of ARK, discussions with the interview group, staff interviews and views provided by those surveyed, a number of issues emerged. None of these related to ARK's high performance. This is uncontested and accordingly little more will be said about it. Here, chapter 4 takes up the issues arising from ARK's work. Some will have emerged from the previous chapter, but others not. These are, in descending order:

- The changed university environment, which requires a lengthy discussion;
- Staffing;
- ARK as a joint venture between the universities;
- Accounts;
- Database/ mailing list;
- Future agenda and directions.

Each is now dealt with in turn (4.1 to 4.6) before some conclusions are drawn (4.7).

4.1 The changed university environment

Significant changes are under way in the university environment. These were the principal pre-occupation of ARK staff during this evaluation and were also a pre-occupation of the senior academic members of the interview group. Some members of the interview group in the governmental and non-governmental communities were aware of these issues in the background.

On foot of governmental reform, universities have made it clear that they expect researchers, either individually or as a group, to:

- Raise all their own resources for their work;
- Charge an overhead, recently recalculated, for their use of university facilities;
- Contribute to the Research Assessment Exercise.

This financial requirement, with the associated overhead, is called Full Economic Costing (FEC). This system is to be introduced in September 2005. Research bodies or enterprises within universities, such as ARK, will be expected to pay entirely their own way and will not be in a position to access university funds. Not only that, but they are expected to charge for their presence within the universities. This is termed the overhead and a formula is used to calculate the value of the use of university facilities (office space, utilities, services, administration etc). The overhead to be charged is additional to the basic cost of the research to be undertaken. The new rate for overhead in Queen's University is 152% the value of the work to be undertaken, a threefold increase on the current overhead rate of 46%.³

Staff are also expected to contribute to the Research Assessment Exercise by the contribution of published papers. The UK Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) was a related, central issue in this evaluation. Under this system, universities are publicly rated for their ability to present high-quality research products, which in the social policy area principally take the form of articles published. Universities present their best-performing departments and the individual academic staff therein for this review. The most highly rated receive star ratings (up to 5-star) and may then subsequently attract additional research resources to the university in question, called QR, Quality Research. The next research assessment exercise will take place in 2008, but its terms will be determined this summer, 2005. The exercise lays a heavy stress on the publication of printed papers written by individual academic staff in

³ There is some variation on these and subsequent overhead figures quoted, with 150% sometimes cited instead of 152%.

peer-reviewed national and international journals, and these can be expected to count for 65% to 75% of the assessment (two to four papers may be expected from each staff member contributing). The 'research environment' and 'community outreach' may be expected to count for the balance, 25% of the university's assessment. The ability of universities to raise funding is also assessed positively, from scientific research councils to foundations to charities, in that order. There is some speculation that only 20 or so universities in the UK will be rated as of research standard in the next assessment and both of the Northern Ireland universities will be anxious to be in the 'top 20'. A further consideration is that for academic papers to be published in time for the 2008 assessment, they must be published by end 2007, and, granted the long lead-in time for publications, must be submitted accordingly over 2005-6.

ARK's research is primarily applied, facilitating others to make use of quality information. If more time were available, individual ARK staff could attract RAE ratings if they presented such original research products based on an analysis of ARK data. The applied nature of ARK's work does not lend itself easily to the RAE system, although ARK can be cited by the presenting universities as an example of the 'research environment' and 'community outreach'. The Research Assessment Exercise was designed to drive up standards in the universities, incentivize publication and provide a means whereby their performance could be objectively rated. It has also been strongly criticized for steering the academic community toward a narrow form of research product, one which gives no recognition to the practical value of the broader range of activities undertaken in the universities and that it has a distorting, destructive effect on university life. The preparation of papers and securing them for publication is a highly time-consuming process. The 152% overhead rate and the demand for profit have also been criticized as an inappropriate basis on which universities should operate in a commercial research and consultancy market.

For the next RAE, it is expected that the work of the two ARK paid staff in Queen's University will be presented. ARK's work will be cited in the 'research environment' of the University of Ulster's presentation, but it is not certain if staff will be. CAIN's work, although highly valued by the academic community, is not rated as suitable for the RAE.

For ARK, these changes in the university environment have serious implications. They mean that:

- The two universities are less likely to be able or willing to find resources, indeed any resources, to support ARK's operations;
- ARK will have to find an increased level of resources from external sources;
- Such external funding will, under the rules of FEC, have to be charged out at a much higher rate;
- A substantially increased portion of those additional resources will have to be returned to the universities as overheads.

ARK could adapt to the new environment in the following ways:

- By adjusting for the Full Economic Costing regime and charging for its services accordingly;
- ARK staff providing time for teaching, for which university funding is available;
- Successful contribution to the RAE, which will attract subsequent QR allocations.

Some provision may be made to alleviate the rigours of FEC, as follows:

- FEC will be introduced over a period of time, giving groups like ARK a period to adapt. Such a period is likely to be a number of months and has been termed a 'soft landing' period.

- There is some small leeway for waiving FEC for research work undertaken for charities, 'human good', small or start-up organizations.
- Some government funding may be available to bridge the gap between FEC and work done for charitable organizations. This is estimated at £2m annually, divided equally between the two universities.

The impression has been given that FEC will be introduced more rapidly and more severely in Queen's University than the University of Ulster. There are mixed views as to ARK's ability to charge out for work at the new rate of overheads. Within ARK staff, there is considerable apprehension that ARK will lose contracts to commercial consultancies, think tanks and independent researchers, most of whom would have lower overheads. There is great doubt among ARK staff that the market in which ARK operates will support full economic costing. Current information suggests that government will pay 100% of FEC and that the ESRC will pay 80%, but smaller charities and the voluntary and community sector will not have the financial resources to do this. Amongst some within the universities, there is confidence that the market will quickly adapt to full economic costing and that ARK would have no difficulty attracting contracts on this basis. ARK is not in a position to circumvent university demands for full economic costing, for all research proposals must be routed through and vetted by the research office before submission.

ARK has made the argument that it should be a special case because of the applied nature of its work. ARK provides a bridge between the academic world and the community, making available data and information of an academic standard for popular use. There has been discussion within ARK of the importance of 'winning hearts and minds' in the universities to this position. An underlying assumption has been that if ARK were to prove its excellence, then an acceptance of the value of applied research would follow and the universities would find their way to fund a service of ARK's nature. The hope has existed that although ARK was an unusual, non-traditional service within the universities that it would over time win the kind of support that would attract some core funding from the universities. The universities are adamant that such possibilities are not open to them, so this hope has not been realized.

The issue of the RAE was discussed by the interview group and other respondents voiced their views. The majority of academic opinion was that ARK staff should adjust to, work within and perform to RAE standards. There was a small group, which included some academic opinion, vehemently opposed to the RAE as a whole, seeing it as compromising and dangerous to ARK's mission and urged ARK to free itself from this restraint.

These developments take place at a time of institutional change, which is a sub-theme within this discussion. In the University of Ulster, ARK may in the future be located in a new Institute of Social Policy Research, although this should mean no significant change in its current status. Institutional change is a more immediate issue in Queen's University. Here a significant process of reorganization is under way, led by the vice-chancellor. From 1st August 2005, the present five faculties will be reduced to three and the present 40 schools to 21. It is understood that the process is led by a small 'change management committee' of senior university management.

ARK at Queen's University belongs to the Institute of Governance, which is currently being brought into the Law School. This, it is universally agreed, would be an inappropriate location for ARK, which must now negotiate a new location for itself. This will be either in the newly constituted school for social policy, sociology, social work and social care; or, less likely, the new school of politics. A new head of school for sociology will be appointed in June 2005 and ARK will ask the school to make two posts available for the current two staff there. Senior university staff have already made it clear, though, that such staff would be

expected to be self-financing through the system of full economic costing. The change will also mean a physical relocation. Within schools, there are expected to be 'research clusters'. Although the exact nature of the research cluster proposal is uncertain, it is possible that ARK could be so designated.

The decision-making process around the present university reorganization is unclear to ARK. To date, there has been no meeting with the vice-chancellor. The time schedules and parameters of the current process are not well understood and it is perceived to be a top-down process in which decisions will be presented as a *fait accompli* at some future stage.

4.2 Staffing

Within ARK, there is a sense that the present service is over-stretched and this pressure was evident to the evaluator. In other circumstances, ARK would be looking for extra staff in order to cope more effectively with the present workload. ARK has projected a desirable staffing complement as follows:

- Full time director
- Two full-time research directors
- One full-time director for *Young Life and Times*
- CAIN: full-time director and full-time deputy director
- 50% of each of secretary, programme administrator, IT consultant
- 40% senior analyst
- 20% time of current unpaid staff members in Queen's University and University of Ulster
- Consultancy time as required.

In reality, ARK faces a difficult staffing situation with a trend in the opposite direction instead. Funding for a number of staff comes to an end in the near future and there is the prospect of a diminished number of staff. The following table shows current staff funding expiry dates:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Position</u>	<u>Expiry date</u>
<u>University of Ulster (UU)</u>		
Ann Marie Dorrity	Programme administrator	End 2006
Martin Melaugh	Director CAIN	October 2005
Brendan Lynn	Deputy, CAIN	September 2005
Lizanne Dowds	Deputy director	June 2005
Patricia McKee	Senior analyst	June 2005
Shonagh Higgenbotham	Secretary	August 2007
Mike McCool	IT Consultant/director	October 2006

Queen's University Belfast (QUB)

Dirk Schubotz	Director YLT	July 2005
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Research directors Paula Devine and Katrina Lloyd have permanent contracts but are expected to generate income to cover their costs from 2006.

As may be seen, the funding of a significant portion of positions ends in the course of 2005. This is a matter of considerable and growing concern within ARK, both at organizational level and at a personal level. A sense of insecurity is high at present, accompanied by the danger that staff will soon begin to leave in search of other opportunities if the situation is

not clarified. An application has been made for the continuation of CAIN to the Arts & Humanities Research Board (AHRB), but its prospects are not considered good. In the distance, there may be some funding possibility through the Maze memorial project. The present situation arises, in part, because of the expiry of the substantial Atlantic Philanthropies Funding provided for 2002-6. If Atlantic were in a position to make available some resources to ease the transition in the meantime, that would of course be welcome. Should a number of ARK posts terminate, the site could remain in existence for some time, but the longevity of electronic preservation in the absence of maintenance is not well known. No ready solutions appear to be imminent. One more distant possibility is the 7th EU Framework Research Programme, but that will not be available for a number of years. The University of Ulster has funded a post of grant-writer for INCORE, starting summer 2005 and part of her task may be to search for funding opportunities for ARK as a subsidiary part of INCORE.

4.3 ARK as a joint venture between the two universities

An important task of this evaluation was to examine whether ARK worked successfully as a joint enterprise between the two universities. This was also a concern in the previous evaluation. The view of those interviewed in the course of this research was clear:

- ARK *does* work as a joint enterprise between the two universities (only one interviewee took a different view). Some commented that it was one of the few truly successful joint ventures;
- The concept of joint enterprises between the two universities is a welcome one. It makes particular sense in such a small community as Northern Ireland;
- The *perception* both within and without the university community is that ARK is a joint enterprise. A small number perceived ARK to be more one university than the other, but the numbers holding this view were only a handful and were evenly balanced between the two universities.;
- Some parts of ARK are seen as belonging more to one university than the other, but not to the extent of undermining the principle or integrity of ARK overall as a joint project;
- The only practical problem arising was the practical complexity of moving money between the two university account systems and ensuring that incoming money was correctly apportioned between the two;
- There was no support for the idea that ARK should, as a desirable option, be located in one university rather than the other.

4.4 Accounting

As noted earlier, ARK's finances are shared between the two universities, with incoming funding allocated to accounts in the two, according to the part of ARK for which the money has been raised. Most of ARK's accounts go through the University of Ulster, including those awards where accounting systems are most demanding (e.g. derived from the Peace II programme). The handling of the accounts within the University of Ulster system has presented on-going difficulties. These are as follows:

- A large number of mistakes and errors are made by the university staff, requiring the ARK programme administrator to spend a considerable amount of time rectifying figures;
- No one within the University of Ulster ever acquires an on-going familiarity with ARK accounts, meaning that ARK accounts have to be continually re-explained to the financial staff there. Staff are rotated between the different accounts at some speed and there also appears to be a high turnover.

- There are lengthy delays in payments and claims, sometimes for months on end.

Much time is wasted as a result. These problems were raised with the Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences and it is understood that they were onforwarded to the Head of Finance in the University. It is not known if there was any response back and the situation did not subsequently get better. It is disappointing that the problems reported now are virtually identical to those documented in the previous evaluation in 2001 (*section 3.2, Finance*) and it was recommended then that a resolution of these problems should be a priority. There has been no discernible improvement by the university in the past four years. The worst effects of these problems are currently blunted by the diligence and determination of the programme administrator, but there are more constructive ways of using staff time (e.g. 4.5, below).

4.5 Database/mailing list

The situation in regard to the database/ mailing list is unsatisfactory. ARK has a database with about 2,000 entries on it, from which a number of e-mail mailing lists have been compiled for particular purposes. The problems with the mailing list/database are as follows:

- There does not appear to be a system for readily printing out the full database;
- Access is limited to one person, with a copy made available to the senior analyst to review;
- It does not appear to have been fully reviewed or updated since 2001;
- Other members of staff have not seen it and are unaware of who is on it.

Mailing lists are one of the most important tasks in any organization. The list is an important statement of how it reaches out to the world and markets its product. Effective mailing lists:

- Are available to all members of staff;
- Are circulated for updating frequently;
- Can be amended or added to in the event of people moving;
- Have a number of distinct categories for different purposes.

ARK staff all took the view that this was, along with the newsletter, one of two tasks that had slipped in the past three years. Whilst not a crippling problem and one that must be kept in proportion with the high level of output of ARK demonstrated in chapter 3, it is nevertheless an issue that must be attended to.

4.6 Future agenda and directions

Many suggestions arose in the course of the research for the future agenda areas of work. These are now grouped together here. They are put forward in the context that the basic product of ARK is a sound and balanced one, to which additional elements, dimensions, methods and approaches should be added incrementally.

First, there were proposals for the establishment of new sections to add to the existing eight web-based resources: Those most commonly suggested were:

- *Children's Life & Times*;
- *Older people's Life & Times*.

There were proposals for themes for Northern Ireland Life & Times. Many commentators emphasized the importance of building a qualitative archive alongside the existing data. Themes most suggested were:

- Community safety, criminality, crime and social disorder;
- Gender;
- Poverty;
- Europe;
- Globalization;
- Integrated education;
- Conflict;
- Citizenship;
- Ethnic minorities;
- Racism and homophobia.

For CAIN, the following proposals were made:

- Construction of an oral history of the troubles;
- An expanded chronology for 1968 - 1996;
- Compilation and cataloguing of 8mm film and videos of the troubles;
- Development of an 'emerging from conflict' theme, to assist students understand how societies cope with the phase of post-conflict.

Within ORB, there were proposals for the development of distinct sub-sections, such as lone parents.

For *Elections*, the following directions were envisaged:

- Full coverage of local election results;
- Details of the new constituency boundaries after 2005;
- A full section on manifestos;
- Candidate profiles.

Proposals were made for means of working. Those proposed were:

- Building fresh or more extensive formal website links to other national data archives as part of an international data archive network (Essex, Mannheim, Canberra and Michigan);
- The development of formal website links to the new cross-border resources in the Centre for Cross Border Studies in Armagh (www.crossborder.ie);
- Collaborative work and studies done in conjunction with similar bodies in the Republic of Ireland (e.g. Economic and Social Research Institute);
- The development of postgraduate fellowship programmes, bursaries, placements and summer schools;
- An aim to pioneer contentious, difficult, frontier areas of research;
- Introduction of interactivity on the site, with a moderated list.

One contributor to the research made a strong case for ARK to present such a list to a seminar discussion to which its constituencies of academia, government and the voluntary and community sector would be invited, so as to hold an open, brainstorming discussion on future directions and priorities. This may be worth considering. Ultimately, though, what parts of this agenda may be possible or feasible will depend on ARK's future orientation, an issue which will be confronted in chapter 5, next.

Several people raised the issue of whether ARK should charge for its services. The overwhelming view both within ARK and outside was against charging and that information should be free at point of use. 'Charging for the information would defeat the purpose of ARK', many said. It has also been pointed out that much of the material contributed to CAIN

was made available on the basis that it would be available without charge. Having said that, a minority does favour charging. One way to bridge these positions is to charge for a newsletter advising people of the availability of new data, publications and services. The scope for doing so may still be limited: a low charge might not cover the cost of collecting subscriptions, while a higher charge that did might be a disincentive to some. Another approach, should ARK take a more academic direction, is to charge for its services to the universities on a similar basis to existing electronic portals, such as ATHENS and SOSIG.

4.7 Conclusions

Five issues of concern emerged in the course of this evaluation. None are about ARK's performance, which was rated highly. Instead, they concern the funding of staff positions; the place of the project within the changed university environment; and institutional change within the universities themselves, the situation in Queen's University being the most pressing. Two minor but nonetheless important matters must also be attended to: accounts and the database/ mailing list. A range of desirable future developments was tabled, but these are dependent on the future orientation that ARK will follow. All these issues will now be dealt with in the final chapter, *Conclusions and recommendations*.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and recommendations

Here, in the final chapter, following the issues arising in chapter 4, the evaluation presents general conclusions (5.1). Options for ARK's development and orientation are then explored (5.2). Specific matters raised in chapter 4 are then addressed (5.3). Some final comments conclude the evaluation (5.4).

5.1 General conclusions

The purpose of this evaluation was to measure ARK's performance over the past three years and deal with a number of distinct issues arising from its work. This first task has led to clear, exceptionally positive outcomes. The second part is more problematic, for it is evident that ARK now faces some difficult decisions about its future and these loom large over its current activities.

ARK's work is rated highly both within and without the academic community. It has set a high standard, which it has maintained consistently and has grown in a short time on limited resources against a background of instability and insecurity. ARK is a productive organization, with high levels of output and a distinct impact in the academic, voluntary and community and governmental sectors.

Despite these achievements, some underlying questions remain as to ARK's role and orientation. ARK is a mixture of an academic body, a resource, a business and a service. This is not unusual, for there are many bodies, research institutes and think tanks that operate in this kind of public space. They adapt and mutate, surviving and indeed thriving on any latent contradictions. The present changes in the university environment may, though, force ARK to make some difficult choices as to the thrust, emphasis and direction of its future work and the form which it should take. Because ARK's work is so broadly based and its reputation so high, it is at least in a strong position to make such a choice.

Some of these contradictions did emerge in the course of the research. There was evidence that the academic community wanted ARK to be 'more academic', focussed on assisting the academic community, presenting research papers and more detailed analyses. Equally, there was evidence of 'pull' from the non-academic community, arguing that ARK should be more about serving the voluntary and community sector, government and policy-makers.

A theme of ARK's work in the past year has been the importance of 'winning hearts and minds' within the universities. If ARK's work is perceived to be of high quality and the value of applied research were appreciated, then the universities would find their way to accommodate ARK within their new funding arrangements and structures. As noted in chapter 2, the director and other staff have met frequently with a broad range of senior staff, many outside the field of social policy. Specific meetings were held to discuss ARK's future position with senior management in Queen's University. ARK has worked hard to win an appreciation for its position within the universities.

It seems at this stage that the value of applied research is intellectually understood and that ARK's work is appreciated as excellent. However, the logic has not stood up and has not led, nor will it lead, to the universities modifying their position on structures or funding arrangements. Universities do not feel prepared or able to modify their position on FEC, overheads or RAE. Senior management in both universities made it clear that the prospects of the universities being able to 'find' core funding or other resources to sustain ARK are so small as to be not worth considering and the message is that ARK must adapt to the new environment. The inability of the universities to find their way to support ARK's ventures

directly is a cause of some dismay, especially when some of its resources are recognized as world leaders (CAIN being the prime example).

A further point should be made before consideration of these options. Section 4.6 above presented an agenda and future directions for ARK. Before committing itself to these, more fundamental questions must be asked and answered about ARK's future orientation.

5.2 Three options for ARK

ARK appears to be faced with three options for the future. Before doing so, it is worth making the comment that ARK's strategy for its own future has to date been more passive than active. ARK has sought clarification of its role within the new university environment and intends to meet with the new head of school within Queen's University where its new position there will be determined. Effort has been devoted to attempting to ascertain the nature of the implications of full economic costing and university reorganization and this has been done in an atmosphere of growing unease. The insistence of senior management at Queen's University that ARK staff must adapt to full economic costing and participate fully in the RAE, or face the suppression of the two posts there, turned a sense of anxiety into one of fear for the future of the ARK project. There is a sense of decisions being made elsewhere, by people unknown and according to time schedules that are little known, in an environment in which ARK must await its fate. If the senior university staff there had sympathy for the position in which ARK finds itself, they did not show it.

Although ARK is not in a strong negotiating position with the senior management of the universities, it is not helpless either. ARK may still underestimate its own strengths in the current situation. Several observers drew attention to its significant strong points:

- Track record, performance, ability to deliver, name, brand and results;
- Reputation for excellence;
- Worldwide market;
- Personnel and human resources;
- Entrepreneurialism and demonstrated ability to generate resources.

Several people averted to ARK facing a number of possible directions. The changing university environment pushes ARK toward a more academic orientation; at the same time ARK is clearly a pioneer in applied social research and is highly valued for its role in the community. When asked for their views on ARK's future role, some pressed for ARK to be more academic and that it should concentrate on serving this, its primary market, ever better and more effectively. An equal number appealed for its role in the community to be reinforced. With limited resources, it is difficult to do both.

Rather than await its fate, it is possible for ARK to take a more pro-active role:

- To be aware of and assertive of its strengths;
- To use them to negotiate a new position for itself;
- To make more deliberative choices as to future direction.

The following are the three broad routes which ARK may now wish to consider.

5.2.1. Academicization

In effect, this route suggests a reinforcement of the academic, university orientation of ARK. It would not rule out a role in the community, but it would direct the resources and energies of ARK much more to the academic field. The injunction, in the terms of reference, to 'examine ARK's potential to go beyond the academic community' would certainly be put to one side. Moreover, ARK should actively and willingly embrace the new world of full economic costing, the Research Assessment Exercise and university reorganization. Here, ARK would, according to this approach:

- Argue for a particular position within the new school in Queen's University;
- Look for an active, defined, but limited role in teaching;
- Turn its existing skills into the provision of particular courses, for example in research methods, on-line research or archival research. This could include the development of courses that maximized ARK as a web-based resource, for example e-learning;
- Make a maximum contribution to the Research Assessment Exercise and recruit and choose staff accordingly;
- Go out for and win funding on the basis of full economic costing.

In effect, this approach would make a virtue of necessity, but one in which ARK actively carved out for itself a new role firmly within the university environment. It would embrace, rather than resist or accept reluctantly the changed environment. A first step here would be for ARK to prepare an internal paper to outline how the ground on this could be done. If this is the course chosen, such a paper could then be presented to the two universities explaining how ARK could work in the changed university environment and invite both to work in partnership in spelling out that role in detail. In terms of ARK's future work, this would steer ARK toward development of those fields, services and interests likely to be of most use to the academic community. Such an approach would not suit several present members of staff and this is an important consideration.

5.2.2 Independent applied social research institute

This approach works from quite different assumptions and judgements. This secular approach assumes that the changed university environment:

- Makes a mature negotiation between ARK and university management impossible;
- Makes it impossible for ARK to continue its community role;
- Would not provide ARK with the flexibility or scope in which it could continue to operate with its present mission;
- Is unsuitable for some of its present staff.

Moreover:

- Full economic costing would price ARK out of its market;
- Teaching and participation in the RAE would require so many hours and reordering of priorities that insufficient time would be left for ARK's current mission to continue.

In effect, there is no acceptable room or role for ARK in the changed university environment. This option makes the judgement that there is no space, sympathy or flexibility for an applied social research body in this new world. Although no one within ARK wishes ARK to leave the university environment, quite the contrary, nevertheless ARK may reach the situation where the disadvantages of staying within the universities outweigh the benefits. Here ARK would relocate itself clearly 'beyond the academic community' and make a contribution to policy-making, government and non-governmental arenas, building on its achievements over 2001-5.

Could ARK survive *outside* the university environment? Amongst those who were prepared to venture an opinion, there was no doubt but that it could. These arguments went as follows:

- ARK is now well branded and now has a high recognition factor;
- ARK has a track record in attracting money, which would be little affected by working outside the universities;
- As a self-determining body, it could set its own, competitive rates and have fully independent finances;
- ARK would retain those staff not interested in teaching or participation in the RAE;
- It would be free from the destructive energies associated with university reorganizations.

Accordingly, ARK should take itself out of the universities and operate as an independent, not-for-profit, charitable company, along the lines of an independent research institute or applied think tank. Here, ARK would be in a position to continue its current range and portfolio of activities through contracted research, but would certainly come under pressure to apply charges and diversify funding sources through membership, subscriptions and merchandizing. There is little danger that existing funders would be reluctant to support such a redefined ARK - indeed some opposite indications were given. It could also have the option to engage in wider survey work, for example opinion polling. There would be concerns about the consequences of being 'contract driven', but many existing research institutes set criteria for the type of contracted work that they will seek (for example, that prospective research must be put into the open domain and that it must be of a broad public interest).

The idea of functioning as an independent research institute has been considered by ARK staff to only a limited degree. None favour it as a desirable course of action, all taking the view that it should only be contemplated if other options become impossible. Several ARK staff took the personal view, for reasons of career, security and personal preference, that they would stay within university life regardless and would not follow ARK into independence. Some did say that they now reluctantly regarded independence as an increasingly attractive option.

In terms of ARK's future areas of work, this option would steer ARK toward applied social research with a broad user community; toward government and the market for contracts; with strong outreach strategies; and toward the non-governmental community.

5.2.3. A middle way. This is not a pro-active strategy. In effect, this strategy is based on the following assumptions and judgements:

- That a decision to follow either course above would be premature until such time as the changed university environment, the new situation in Queen's University and the parameters of the 2008 RAE are clarified;
- That ARK in Queen's can negotiate itself an acceptable position within the new school of social policy, sociology, social work and social care;
- That the rigours of full economic costing will be introduced slowly and that some allowance, either formally or informally, will be made for the nature of ARK's work by both universities;
- That government will compensate for the gap between full economic costing and the rate at which consultancy is undertaken for charities;
- A minimal level of teaching can be negotiated that will enable most of ARK's core work to continue;
- The 2008 RAE may demonstrate a higher degree of sympathy for applied research than has been the case in the past;

- A contribution to the RAE will be made by ARK staff in such a way that will still protect ARK's core work.

There is a disposition among ARK staff to wish for this benign approach, one of 'hopefully things will sort themselves out'. This strategy has the advantage of avoiding hard, potentially divisive choices in the short and medium term. It works on the assumption that there will be sufficient goodwill, flexibility and ambiguities within the new arrangements in the university that will enable ARK to steer a course that is minimally disruptive of its current role. ARK has an uncontested excellence and an ability to attract resources, so that surviving and thriving in the new environment should not be in doubt. After a period of uncertainty, the new system will settle down. One interviewee, familiar with similar bodies abroad, pointed out that entities like ARK always lead a precarious existence, that such a state of organizational uncertainty is normal. One must expect to be in a state of permanent flux and continually forced to adapt, improvise and overcome.

It is up to the director of ARK and the staff therein to decide on which option should be pursued. The first or second options empower ARK to act more pro-actively than it has done to date in determining its own future. A useful course of action in the meantime would be to get advice on the feasibility of ARK operating as an independent institute, the start-up costs and activities involved and the legal procedures required (presumably, ARK would need to form itself as a limited company and charity). As a result, such a potential option would be clearly understood.

5.3 Accounts and database

Accounts and the database were raised as specific issues in chapter 4. The unsatisfactory nature of accounts in the University of Ulster require improvement if further time is not to be wasted, as it has been over the past three years. Here is recommended that:

- The precise nature of errors, mistakes and delays be fully documented;
- A report be presented accordingly to the financial and other authorities in the university;
- The issue be pursued relentlessly with those concerned until there is a resolution, with an observable improvement to the standard quality control levels and norms operating outside the universities.

In regard to the database/ mailing list, this must now be put in order. The mailing list/database must be recognized as a priority task within ARK. It is recommended that:

- The database be printed and circulated to all members of staff;
- All members of staff participate in the task of cleaning and updating the database;
- The database be categorized according to key segments of ARK's market (academic, governmental, voluntary and community, media) and key purposes for communication (newsletter, seminars, annual reports, reports, announcements, press);
- The revised version be made available to all staff on line. All staff members should be entitled to amend the database at will, provided that such amendments are visible and noted to a central controller;
- Written protocols be adopted for the amendment, striking out and addition of names on the database/ mailing list;
- A printed version of the mailing list be circulated to staff every three months for revision.

5.4 Summary of recommendations

ARK's performance and record are beyond dispute and could not be more highly regarded. ARK's funders can be reassured that they have obtained more than good value for their investment and support. The regrettable finding of this evaluation is that these count for little in the situation in which ARK now finds itself. Hopefully, this evaluation will chart some avenues which may be of help in ensuring that ARK's achievements can be further developed. ARK must consider which option it wishes to pursue:

- An academic orientation, fully integrated into the new university environment. Here, a paper could be prepared within ARK outlining how this could be done;
- As an independent applied social research institute, operating outside the universities and toward the governmental, policy-making and non-governmental communities. Here, advice should be sought on:
 - Start up costs;
 - Legal form;
 - Practical considerations as to how this can be done.
- Attempt to negotiate a position within the changed university environment that seeks to protect ARK in its present form.

A key message is that ARK should not underestimate its strengths and its ability to make pro-active choices.

Second, the issues concerning and accounts and the database should be attended to.

Third, depending on the critical choices made under 5.2, consideration can then be given to ARK's future programme of work and areas of development.

Annexe: methodological note

This evaluation was carried out through an examination of the records of ARK made available by its director and other members of staff; through interviews; and by survey.

The interview group of 33 persons was nominated by the director. This group was sent a set of semi-structured questions and asked to respond:

- In the case of senior academic staff, by a personal interview
- Through telephone interview or
- To provide views in writing depending on their availability or inclination.

They were interviewed on a not-for-attribution basis. Some additional persons were nominated, but interviews did not prove possible.

The user group (181) comprised:

- A cross-section of the database selected by the secretary (118 persons).
- A cross-section of persons who downloaded data from *Young Life & Times* (8) and *Northern Ireland Life & Times* (25).
- A cross-section of those who used the *Northern Ireland Life & Times* query service over 2003-5 (30).

The client group comprised four clients identified by the director who had commissioned work for ARK: OFMDFM, the National Children's Bureau, the Men's Project and the Terry Enright Foundation.

The on-line survey group was self-selected, participants responding to a request for feedback placed on the ARK website (37 responded).

Interview group

The interview group was interviewed according to a set of semi-structured questions designed to reflect the priorities of the terms of reference. This was as follows:

Questions

1. What has been your own impression of ARK's overall work and development over the past three years? What impressions do you have of the manner in which ARK's services are used? What do you think is the perception of ARK in the academic and broader community that uses its services? How do you rate the ARK website for (1) the quality and utility of information provided and (2) its accessibility/navigability?
2. What is your view of the quality of ARK's work and its different individual components?

e.g.: CAIN, Northern Ireland Life & Times (NILT), Online Research Bank (ORB), Young Life & Times (YLT), Elections, Surveys on Line (SOL)
Seminar series and other events
Publications, books, ARK Research Centre, NI Household Panel Survey Analysis.
Publicity, media profile, promotion, marketing, schools work
3. What do you consider to be ARK's principal achievements, milestones over the past three years? What do you see as the principal difficulties, problems, obstacles and concerns?
4. What developments would you like to see for ARK for the next three to five years? What do you consider to be the principal challenges and difficulties? How do you think its services can be improved? What should be added (or dropped)? What new themes or fields of work should be developed (or not)? Should ARK work with new partners or organizations (if so, who?) Are there ways in which it can be better promoted and marketed in the future? What is its potential to reach

further beyond the academic community and how? Do you have views as to its future funding and staffing? What would you like ARK to be like in three, five years time? What factors will be critical for its success?

5. ARK is a joint project between the University of Ulster and Queen's University Belfast. How well do you feel it operates as a joint project? For the future, do you think it should continue as a joint project, or should an alternative arrangement be developed? Is there a better 'institutional architecture'? How should ARK relate to the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE)?

User group

The user group was sent a standardized questionnaire. Some parts of the questionnaire were varied, according to whether they downloaded data from NILT or YLT or used the query service. It should be noted that many respondents replied to some questions but not others, leading to some variation in the levels of response to the different questions. The number of respondents is listed after each question (N).

Which of the following best describes you?

Voluntary and community
Government/government agency/public service/local government
Lecturer (university)
Student
Researcher
Journalist/press/media
Other

N=37

How do you rate ARK's work? (website, publications, other activities)

Highly
Moderately
Poorly
Of no value
N = 46

What impact or contribution do you think ARK has made to the social and political knowledge of Northern Ireland?

A lot
A little
None
N = 44

Those who attended an ARK seminar were asked:

How useful did you find it?
Very useful/
Moderately useful/
No use
N = 26

How well was it organized?
Well organized
Moderately well organized
Poorly organized
N = 28

Those who used *Life & Times* and *Young Life & Times* were asked:

How useful did you find the Northern Ireland *Young Life & Times* data that you accessed?

Very useful/
Moderately useful
Little use
No use
N = 8

How do you rate the Northern Ireland *Young Life & Times* site for accessibility and navigability?

Very easy
Easy
Difficult
Very difficult
N = 6

Those who made an information enquiry were asked:

How useful did you find the specific service which you accessed?

Very useful
Moderately useful
Little use
No use
N = 7

Those who made an information enquiry were asked:

Did you get the assistance or advice that you sought?

Yes
Partly
No
N = 8

Were you dealt with in a professional manner?

Yes
Partly
No
N = 8

All were asked for any additional views or comments that they might have.

On-line survey

The on-line survey was posted on the ARK site on 18th April and kept there until 4th May. 37 visitors responded. The following is the text of the survey:

On-line survey

Can you spare two or three minutes to fill in a survey? ARK is currently undergoing external evaluation. The views and opinions of those who use ARK's services are of great importance to us. You do not need to give your name. Please answer for those sites with which you are familiar.

1. First, which of the following best describes you:

- Lecturer (university)
- Teacher (school)
- Student
- Researcher
- Voluntary/community
- Government/public service
- Journalist/press
- Other

2. How useful do you rate ARK's different services? How easy is it to find you way around?

	Useful		Easy	
NI Life & Times	Very useful	Not useful	Easy	Not easy
Young Life & Times	Very useful	Not useful	Easy	Not easy
NI Household Panel Survey	Very useful	Not useful	Easy	Not easy
Surveys on Line	Very useful	Not useful	Easy	Not easy
Elections	Very useful	Not useful	Easy	Not easy
CAIN	Very useful	Not useful	Easy	Not easy
ORB On Line Research Bank	Very useful	Not useful	Easy	Not easy
Research Centre	Very useful	Not useful	Easy	Not easy

3. How did not find ARK or one of its sites?

- From another internet site
- Search engine
- Word of mouth
- Leaflet/publicity
- Meeting/event

4. Any additional views or comments?

There were no responses to 'Surveys on Line'.

The number of persons who identified themselves as users of the individual services were as follows:

NILT	29
YLT	25
NIHPS	21
Elections	32
CAIN	30
ORB	22
Research Centre	19

Some identified as using several of the services, some only one or two.