

About CCCS: history and project



History of the Centre

In the inaugural lecture that followed his appointment as Professor of English at the University of Birmingham in 1962, Richard Hoggart announced his intention to conduct research into 'mass' culture. Two years later, Hoggart had founded the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies.

Under the directorship of first Hoggart and then Stuart Hall and Richard Johnson, and with the commitment of Michael Green throughout, the Centre operated at the intersections of literary criticism, sociology, history and anthropology. Rather than focus on 'high' culture, the intention was to carry out group research on areas of popular culture such as chart music, television programmes and advertising. **This approach went profoundly against the grain of conventional academic practice.**

The Centre had few members of staff and much of the work it produced was the result of collaborations between students, many of whom came from backgrounds that were under-represented in universities. Work produced at the Centre showed that popular culture was not only worthy of academic study but often also politically significant. It showed, for example, the importance to young people of subcultures based around style and music, the ideological influence of girls' magazines over their young readership, and why a 'moral panic' over the presence of black communities had evolved in 1970s Britain.

The Centre's focus on the 'contemporary' in Birmingham, Britain and later around the world was combined with an engagement with critical theory, often introduced from the continent. The application of these theories to contemporary society was rigorously debated during weekly 'sub groups'.

Conventional boundaries between teachers and students were intentionally broken down at the Centre, creating a democratic approach to learning that was a training ground for several noted public intellectuals and produced numerous foundational texts. The Centre also had an important influence outside the academy, with numerous former students playing significant roles in altering the political and cultural landscapes of Birmingham and beyond. Having been merged with the Department of Sociology, the Centre was closed down by the University of Birmingham in 2002.

The project

To mark the 50th anniversary of the Centre's establishment, this project seeks to re-examine its significance. Its contribution within academia is now largely well-known – open any cultural studies handbook and you will find a section on the 'Birmingham school'. The focus for the project is on how a body with relatively little funding was able to arrive at these contributions, and the impact the Centre had outside academia, on the city of Birmingham and beyond. How, for example, did the Centre's commitment to multi-disciplinarity and collaboration approach work in practice, and how did this affect wider relations with the university? What was the Centre's relationship with its subject of the 'contemporary'? What was – and is – the broader political significance of the Centre?

Through the creation of a CCCS [archive](http://schools/historycultures/departments/history/research/projects/cccs/archive.aspx) ([/schools/historycultures/departments/history/research/projects/cccs/archive.aspx](http://schools/historycultures/departments/history/research/projects/cccs/archive.aspx)), recorded [interviews](http://schools/historycultures/departments/history/research/projects/cccs/interviews/index.aspx) ([/schools/historycultures/departments/history/research/projects/cccs/interviews/index.aspx](http://schools/historycultures/departments/history/research/projects/cccs/interviews/index.aspx)), with key figures as well as events including an [exhibition](http://cccs50.co.uk) (<http://cccs50.co.uk>) and a major [conference](http://schools/historycultures/departments/history/research/projects/cccs/conference.aspx) ([/schools/historycultures/departments/history/research/projects/cccs/conference.aspx](http://schools/historycultures/departments/history/research/projects/cccs/conference.aspx)), this project seeks to offer answers to these questions and communicate the significance of the Centre's work to the widest possible audience. If you have any comments or queries, or material that could be deposited in the archive, please [contact us](http://schools/historycultures/departments/history/research/projects/cccs/contact.aspx) ([/schools/historycultures/departments/history/research/projects/cccs/contact.aspx](http://schools/historycultures/departments/history/research/projects/cccs/contact.aspx)).