

Industrial Relations Research Unit  
Warwick Business School  
University of Warwick

**Annual Report, 2005**

## INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

IRRU embraces the research activities of the industrial relations community at Warwick Business School (WBS). The aims of IRRU are to produce high quality, independent research which is critical in nature; thereby to contribute to the conceptual and empirical development of the field; and to improve the information and analysis available to national and European-level policy and practitioner communities. Achieving these aims requires securing research funding to support the employment of existing and new dedicated research staff and thus maintain a critical mass of active researchers. 2005 saw successful funding applications which will enable us to continue our research activity on a scale which is comparable with that sustained over the past three years. In combination with new appointments, the scope of our research activity has been enhanced. In addition, our own income-generating activities have continued to fund a senior researcher engaged on an important research project. Achieving our aims also requires sustained engagement with the policy and practitioner communities, at national, regional and European levels. The value of our existing activity in this domain is kept under review, as are potential opportunities to strengthen the impact of our research findings amongst policy makers and practitioners.

IRRU's research projects are clustered around five main themes, and research activity around each is detailed later in the report. A combination of new appointments and a major funding award have justified 'employee representation and employee voice' becoming distinguished as a separate research theme during the course of 2005. Main developments under each theme included:

- **Europeanisation and internationalisation of employment relations.** Analysis was progressed and initial findings presented at a series of workshops in central Europe, as well as at academic conferences, on the ESRC-funded research on the impact of inward investment on employment practice in three central European countries. The initial, screening, phase of fieldwork for the large-scale survey of employment practice in multinational companies operating in the UK – also funded by ESRC – was completed, and the main survey involving interviews with senior HR respondents, went in to the field. Parallel surveys are now being undertaken by teams in Canada, Ireland and Spain, opening up exciting future possibilities for comparative analysis.
- **Equality and diversity.** Fieldwork in a range of organisations has been completed on the two projects funded by the European Social Fund, and findings presented to practitioner workshops which included the organisations participating in the research. Analysis of the findings from the ESRC-funded study of women's groups in trade unions is well advanced.
- **Pay, performance and employment relations.** A series of case studies and targeted surveys have been undertaken for the ESRC/EPSRC AIM research programme study of the organisational roots of productivity in smaller firms. Sector-level fieldwork has been completed, and company case studies commenced for the ESRC-funded study of the interface between variable payments arrangements and collective bargaining, which - under a European Science Foundation scheme - also involves parallel projects undertaken by teams from Austria and Norway.

- **Employee representation and employee voice.** Continuing research on the implementation and impact of the UK's 2005 Information and Consultation of Employees regulations has been considerably augmented by a successful tender bid to the DTI for a major case-study-based investigation. New research is being developed on the effectiveness of union organising strategies.
- **Legal regulation of employment.** Work on employee information and consultation arrangements intersects with this theme. In addition, a review of research into the impact of employment legislation enacted since 1997 was undertaken for the DTI.

IRRU enters 2006 having successively tendered for a significantly enhanced role in the three Observatory activities of the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions. During 2005 IRRU continued its role as UK national centre of the European Industrial Relations Observatory, the output of which continues to attract increasing use from both the academic and practitioner communities. In addition, IRRU secured a contract to become the first UK national centre for the European Foundation's parallel European Working Conditions Observatory. The output from this Observatory is aimed at practitioners, as well as academics. IRRU successfully tendered for a wider role as the single UK national centre for all European Foundation Observatories from early 2006, which will involve monitoring and reviewing developments in industrial relations, working conditions and industrial and company restructuring. Its joint tender with IRS as a provider of significant comparative analysis was also successful.

The occasion of the fourth annual Warwick-Acas public lecture in honour of Sir Pat Lowry marked the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Acas. The main speaker was Rita Donaghy, Chair of Acas, whose theme was the changing landscape of employment relations in Britain, and the need for a measure of institutional renewal. Responses came from a high-level panel including John Cridland, CBI Deputy Director-General, Frances O'Grady, TUC Deputy General Secretary and Professor William Brown, Master of Darwin College, Cambridge and member of the Low Pay Commission. The West Midlands Employment Relations Forum, which is jointly organised by IRRU and Acas Midlands, together with the regional bodies of the CBI, TUC and EEF, held three successful events during 2005. The Forum, which brings together companies, public service organisations, trade unions and employment relations professionals across the west Midlands aims to promote discussion of key developments and raise the profile of employment relations in the region.

## 1 STAFFING

There are currently 20 academic staff in IRRU, a number of whom are also members of the Industrial Relations and Organisational Behaviour (IROB) subject group of Warwick Business School. In addition two colleagues in the research centre on Skills, Knowledge and Organisational Performance (SKOPE) are also members of IRRU. IRRU has 11 associate fellows. IRRU membership during 2005 is listed in Appendix A.

During 2005 Trevor Colling and Melanie Simms joined IRRU following their appointments to Warwick as senior lecturer and lecturer in industrial relations, respectively. Molly Gray commenced work as a research fellow on the project on 'variable payments systems and collective bargaining' in January, and in October

Duncan Adam commenced work as survey research assistant on the survey-based study of employment practices of multinational companies operating in the UK. Valeria Pulignano left in April to take up a position at the European Trade Union Institute, and has subsequently moved to the Catholic University of Leuven. Shafaq Afraz and Sam Bairstow left in the spring at the end of their contracts working on the study of equal opportunities for workers with disabilities. Changes in University policy in order to comply with the UK's regulations implementing the EU's directive on fixed-term employment contracts resulted in Mark Hall and Jim Arrowsmith being transferred to open-ended contracts from February.

Chin-Ju Tsai and Sukanya Sen-Gupta were both awarded their PhDs, at the Universities of Cambridge and Cardiff respectively. Melanie Simms was awarded her PhD at the University of Cardiff just before she joined Warwick in July.

IRRU welcomed several international visitors during 2005:

- Steven Frenkel (AGSM, Universities of Sydney and New South Wales), funded under the AIM research programme's international fellowships scheme, May-July;
- Christian Levesque (HEC, Université de Montréal) were visiting fellows, also funded under the AIM research programme's scheme, June-August;
- Jacques Bélanger (Université de Laval, Quebec), June;
- Di Kelly (University of Woollongong, NSW), September-October;
- Richard Long (University of Saskatchewan) September 2005 - May 2006.