

Department of English

Peer Review Group:

Professor B. Ó Conchúir, Modern Irish Department, UCC (Chair)
Professor G. Ó Cruaíoch, Roinn an Bhéaloídis, UCC
Professor M. Clayton, Department of English, University College Dublin
Mr. B. O'Donoghue, Department of English, Wadham College, University of Oxford, UK.

Brief description of conduct of site visit

The site visit was conducted over 2.5 days from 26th to 28th February 2002 and included meetings with

- i) Head and staff of the department as a group and individually
- ii) Representatives of undergraduate and postgraduate students
- iii) Professor A. Hyland, VP
- iv) Professor B. Harvey, VP for Research Policy & Support
- v) Dr. R. Davies, Research Support Officer, Office of VP for Research
- vi) Professor P. Woodman, Dean, Faculty of Arts
- vii) Professor S. Green, Dean, Faculty of Commerce
- viii) Ms. L. Tobin, Head, International Education Office
- ix) Mr. D. O'Sullivan, Computer Centre

and visits to departmental and library facilities in UCC.

An exit presentation of the principal findings of the peer review group was made to staff of the department in the afternoon of the second day.

Description of Department of English

Head of Department: Professor C. Kearney

No. of Staff: 18 academic staff (14 permanent full-time, 3 Senior Demonstrators and 1 Senior Tutor) and 4 administrative staff (2 permanent full-time and 2 permanent part-time)

Location of Department: O'Rahilly Building

Degrees/Diplomas offered: BA, MA, PhD

No. of students: In 2000/01 the Department had 417.59 U/G FTEs and 75.00 P/G FTEs, distributed as follows:

Arts	Commerce
480.84	11.75

Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Ev'g	JYA	Socrates	Total U/G	MA Taught	MA Research	PhD	Total P/G
81.67	134.42	104.67	5.00	14.00	56.92	20.92	417.59	55.50	8.00	11.50	75.00

Mission Statement

"The Department of English exists to develop the study of the tradition of writing and related arts in English. Teaching is grounded in a research culture of international significance."

General Comment on Quality Review

The reviewers commented that the Department of English is hugely successful. In the opinion of the reviewers it not only meets but well exceeds the normal criteria for determining success in such a department – student numbers (and most significantly high retention rates), quality of teaching, research and scholarly profile, and postgraduate scholarships. It can

justifiably claim to be the benchmark against which other departments might measure themselves.

The Department is managed with the help of a well-devised committee structure, allowing staff participate in decision-making, and encouraging good internal relations. The administrative staff deserve high praise for their key contribution to the work of the Department and for the good working relationship built up with the teaching staff. The reviewers were very impressed at the quality of teaching and learning that is regularly achieved, in the case of both students and teachers, despite a very adverse student:staff ratio and the drawbacks of frequently overlarge class size and the volumes of correction and marking this involves. They were particularly aware of the crucial role that the senior tutors and the administrative staff have in making this achievement possible.

The review group commented that the English Department in UCC is recognized, both nationally and internationally, as an excellent and vibrant one, with a membership which is highly productive in both scholarly and creative fields, and stated that “*On all objective measurements, the Department has done extremely well*”.

Progress on Recommendations for Improvement

Recommendation of PRG	Recommendation of QPC	Follow-up report – Oct. ‘03
That the Head of the Department pursue the issue of the position of the senior tutors with the Department of Human Resources	QPC noted the response of the Department and will await a report	Not yet implemented. The issue has been referred to the Department of HR for consideration and has been referred to the Labour Relations Commission for consideration and recommendations.
That two additional lecturing staff be appointed.	The QPC noted the comments of the Dean of Arts in relation to the requirement for a detailed analysis of the teaching loads of staff in the Department. The QPC referred the issue to the Dean of Arts for further consideration	Approval has been given for a two-year contract lectureship to be filled with a commitment to the post becoming a permanent one if demand for the subject persists. It is anticipated that the Department may have to double teach First Years in 2004/05 because of the numbers of students and this post has been granted to assist the Department in its delivery of the additional load.
That a representative of the Department would liaise with the Room Bookings Office to provide for the tutorial teaching needs of the department	QPC endorsed recommendation and welcomed action by Department	Implemented. The problem of adequate provision of teaching facilities and in particular the provision of adequate tutorial rooms is very acute for the Department. The numbers of students in First Year exceed 450. The tutorial group size has increased from 8 to 12 to accommodate the increases. The Dean of Arts has made available additional funds to support First Year Tutors. However the availability of tutorial rooms is an on-going issue. The lack of appropriate space in UCC is the

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		major difficulty.
That the Department explore ways of giving its research students a greater sense of belonging.	The QPC felt this is an issue for the Department and should be addressed.	On-going. The Department has a programme of regular research seminars which are attended by all postgraduate students. A programme of informal seminars has been initiated.
The reporting process from departmental committees to the remainder of the Department should be improved.	The QPC felt this is an issue for the Department and should be addressed. If the Department feels a requirement for additional help perhaps this may be sought from the Department of HR. Benchmarking of other practices in this regard should be conducted within UCC.	Implemented. All departmental committees report to the departmental staff meeting on a regular basis. A Curriculum Development Committee has been set up for the purpose of development of the curriculum. The Department has a very open system of management with all agendas open for discussion and input by any member of staff.
That the system of rotating Headship be extended to include other qualified staff members (as well as the full professors). That the period of the Headship be extended to 3 years (from the current 2)	The QPC welcomed this recommendation and the willingness of the professors to enter into a new system, similar to that in practice in other departments in UCC. The QPC feels the period of the Headship should be extended to 3 years. The QPC referred the issue to Department of HR for action, including confirmation of their agreement with the 2 full professors.	Not yet implemented. The Department is in favour of change and it is understood that the matter is under active consideration by the Secretary & Bursar and Deans-EMG. It is understood that the University wishes to bring in a system of appointment of Heads that would apply to all academic departments. The Dean of Arts undertook to raise the issue at Deans-EMG.
Regular surveys to facilitate increased levels of student feedback should be considered	QPC welcomed action of Department	Implemented. The year committees have undertaken to continue to seek views of students and to acquire feedback on the concerns of students and to implement actions where appropriate. Regular surveys will be undertaken.
The issue of assessing and equalising (academic staff) workloads should be addressed.	QPC strongly endorsed recommendation and agreed that this is a management issue for the Head of Department. The committee referred it to the Head for appropriate action	The Head of Department has initiated a survey of academic staff workloads and this will be reviewed on an on-going basis. Workloads are reviewed on an on-going basis.
That the department seek to agree a policy in the context of all interdisciplinary programmes, particularly the new Drama and Theatre Studies (DTS) course. That the university address the	The QPC noted that the Academic Council has agreed a policy for the implementation and conduct of interdisciplinary degree programmes. The Department of English has	The programme is working well. The Department remains concerned at the effect that the numbers of students in the programme has on altering the FTE situation for the

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question of resourcing of interdisciplinary programmes.	responsibility for the DTS programme and must address the issues raised by the programme. The resourcing of the DTS programme is a matter for the Head of Department of English and the Dean of Arts.	Department of English. The Department has no difficulty with staff employed for the DTS programme being located in the Department of English but would seek that the budget lines be made distinct and separate. The Dean of Arts undertook to consider the issue further.
The Department should consciously identify its teaching strengths and plan to move in these directions. Anglo-Irish Literature and Creative Writing are areas worth considering	QPC endorsed this recommendation and recommended that the Department should consider how best to use available resources, including by rationalisation of existing courses being delivered.	The Department is actively considering the development of the areas as indicated by the PRG. However development of these areas would necessitate additional resources
Attention should be given to the possible re-balancing of second and third year student options	QPC endorsed this recommendation and referred the matter to the Department for appropriate action	Implemented. The Department is introducing changes in 2003/04 and will monitor effects.
Provision of a theory/ideology module to be taken by all students.	QPC endorsed this recommendation and referred the matter to the Department for appropriate action	It is planned to develop such a module in 2003/04. Theory elements have already been introduced to the First Arts programme.
Advice and mentoring should be given to second and third year students in regard to the quality and consequences of particular option combinations with the degree pathway	QPC endorsed this recommendation and referred the matter to the Department for appropriate action	The Department is actively exploring ways of encouraging students to explore new options and has implemented a process whereby detailed information is given to 2 nd Year students on options.
That arrangements be put in place to promote more small group teaching in years one and two.	QPC endorsed this recommendation and recommended that the Department should consider how best to use available resources, including by rationalisation of existing courses being delivered.	The major difficulties in implementing this recommendation are the limitations on space resources (inadequate provision of small group teaching rooms) and on staff resources. Until one or both of these improve it is impossible for the department to increase the level of small group teaching provided from the current situation.
There should be more direct and sustained involvement of lecturers in the training and supervision of postgraduate tutors.	QPC would welcome more information from the Department on how the Department proposes to act on this	Implemented. Future tutors are being trained in 2003/04 for the following academic year. Senior tutors have held induction meetings with tutors and have regular meetings during the year to guide tutors in marking assignments to ensure consistency of

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		marking.
Department should organise departmental teaching Portfolio seminars to facilitate the desire of staff to learn in the area of pedagogy	QPC would like to see more members of the Department attending the centrally organised Teaching Portfolio seminars and contributing to them.	Implemented. Staff are attending the University sessions and the Department is encouraging staff to participate in all activities.
Additional lectures to students studying for the taught MA Degree in the subject content of their specialisations should be considered.	QPC felt that this is an internal matter for the Department	Implemented. Additional contact hours for the MA students have been specified as well as additional courses in French/Latin.
Department should identify a room to be devoted to open-access computers for students.	QPC requests that the department identify a room and if the room is made open-access UCC will assist in the provision of the computers	The space allocation to the Department in the O’Rahilly Building is already totally inadequate in relation to its size relative to other departments. The Department referred the matter back to the QPC.
Department should celebrate its achievements in research and scholarship. The university should formulate a way of counting practice alongside publication for such purposes as promotion.	QPC endorsed this recommendation and will welcome action by the Department.	Implementation on-going. The Department is celebrating its successes, for example, holding receptions to celebrate book launches. The Department undertook to further consider means of publicising the achievements of its staff.
The university should consider the introduction of a satisfactory sabbatical leave system.	QPC noted that the issue of sabbatical leave is under active consideration by the AC Staff Enhancement & Development Committee which will be reporting shortly to the AC and faculties.	The Department fully supports the scheme recently introduced whereby increased accountability from staff who have had sabbatical leave is required. However the Department is of the view that with a large number of staff advance planning is necessary, (subject to normal conditions). For members of staff sabbatical leave means the ability to do research that cannot be undertaken in UCC because of lack of resources, e.g. Library holdings, etc. The Department expressed concern that the current scheme may limit this opportunity.
The Department might consider whether the proposal for a shared UCC/NUIG Irish Studies initiative might provide opportunities for further development in the area of Anglo-Irish Literature.	QPC felt that this is an internal matter for the Department	Under active consideration by the departmental Curriculum Development Committee of the Department. A report is expected in November / December 2003.
That the teaching and	QPC endorsed recommendation,	Senior tutors are not contractually

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administrative workloads for senior tutors should not be so heavy as to exclude time for research.	and recommended transparency in workloads within the Department	obliged to do research and thus this is not a matter for the Department.
The University should recognise and support the Department's outreach initiatives	QPC endorsed this recommendation. Proposals for such recognition and support should come from the Department	<p>Implemented.</p> <p>The Department organised a launch of its programme. However as yet no funds have been forthcoming from UCC. Students have paid fees in September 2002 and at the date of this report the Department had not received the 70% of the fee due to the Department. This has placed additional strain on the resources of the Department.</p>