

Department of Geography
BSc (Earth Science) Degree
BA (European Studies) Degree

Peer Review Group:

Professor G. Kiely, Department of Civil & Environmental Engineering, UCC (Chair)
 Professor D. Lucey, Department of Food Business & Development, UCC
 Professor D. Gillmor, Department of Geography, Trinity College Dublin
 Professor B. Bluck, Division of Earth Sciences, University of Glasgow, UK
 Professor J. Burgess, Department of Geography, University College London, UK

Brief description of conduct of site visit

The site visit was conducted over 2.5 days from 6th to 8th March 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 P. Fitzpatrick, Chair, Academic Council Committee on Research
- v) Dr. R. Davies, Research Support Officer, Office of VP for Research
- vi) Professor P. Woodman, Dean, Faculty of Arts

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 Geography

Head of Department: Professor W. Smyth

No. of Staff: 18 academic staff (13 permanent full-time, 5 contract full-time, contract part-time),

5 technical support staff (1 contract) and 4 administrative staff (permanent full-time)

Location of Department: Geography/Geology Building, Muskerry Villas, Connolly Building,

Bloomfield Terrace

Degrees/Diplomas offered: BA, BSc (Earth Sciences), BA (European Studies), MA, PhD

No. of students: In 2000/02 the Department had 331.26 U/G FTEs and 34.80 P/G FTEs, distributed as follows:

Arts	Science
318.00	48.06

Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Ev'g	JYA	Socrates	Total U/G	M Taught	M Research	PhD	Total P/G
90.38	117.38	93.00	9.83	7.14	3.86	9.67	331.26	9.80	15.00	10.00	34.80

Mission Statement

“The Department of Geography’s central concern is to create, preserve, communicate and interrogate all forms of geographical knowledge and so enhance the environmental, socio-economic and cultural well being of the city of Cork, Munster, Ireland, Europe and hopefully the earth as a whole and its peoples.”

Aims & Objectives

- To challenge both ourselves and the students under our care (undergraduate, postgraduate, mature, extra-mural etc.) to create better ways of analysing, understanding, representing (and mediating) the closely interconnected geographies of environmental, socio-economic and cultural/political transformations across the earth
- To maintain the quality of our teaching/learning relationships in spite of very large and increasing numbers of students
- To enhance student performance and ensure a significant increase in the number of first class and 2.1 honours awarded every year
- To develop a still stronger postgraduate school with more focused masters and doctoral programmes
- To support the postgraduates in the continued publication of the most outstanding student geographical journal – Chimera – in these islands
- To continue to develop and foster a much stronger and relevant national and international research output which is influential at the theoretical, scholarly and applied levels, in all five research clusters now defined as central to the department i.e. Cultural-Political, Developmental-Planning, Environmental, Applied Techniques and Regional/European
- To optimise the organisation of the department and its activities and above all to further enhance the working conditions/lives of all staff members
- To deepen further our already strong teaching and research links with the city, the city-region and the Munster-South Leinster regions as well as providing – as for the Diploma in GIS – professional courses for both private and state/semi-state bodies in the country as a whole
- To further develop existing collaborative links in Coastal and Marine Research (see CRC) and Climate Change, Global development and underdevelopment, particularly in cooperation with International Famine Centre, on enhancing GIS and Remote Sensing linkages and on (Im) Migration Studies (Historical and Contemporary) particularly in conjunction with Irish Centre for Migration Studies as well as the highly specialised Atlas of Irish Names project
- To sustain and enhance existing active involvement in specific regional and national activities
- To seek improved resources in the areas of (a) Laboratory spaces and field equipment (b) Information Technology; (c) New academic and academic support staff; (d) An integrated Geography building and (e) Better fieldwork funding.

General Comment on Quality Review

The reviewers found the Self-Assessment Report to be detailed and honest and supported by information obtained during interviews over the two-day visit. The group did not find any significant omissions in the report. Further requests for information by the chairman of the Peer Review Group prior to the visit were dealt with expeditiously. The Departmental Co-ordinating committee and its Chairman were congratulated for an excellent report and for being most helpful, forthcoming and honest with the Peer Review Group.

The reviewers noted the very favourable comments of the extern examiners about the high quality of the department's students, the care given to the students by the staff of the department and the range of opportunities offered by the department's programmes, given its small staff size. The group commended the department for the superb accomplishment in managing the growth so successfully, especially in an environment where expansion was encouraged in spurts sometimes accompanied by conflicting signals between the exhortations and provision of resources. While growing the undergraduate student numbers, the

department has simultaneously increased its research and postgraduate base, which the group noted as a major accomplishment.

Progress on Recommendations for Improvement

The Quality Promotion Committee noted the comments concerning the emphasis on the Department of Geography and the corresponding lack of emphasis in discussions and in recommendations on the interdisciplinary BSc (Earth Science) and BA (European) Degree programmes. The Committee will consider this when scheduling reviews of other interdisciplinary programmes.

Recommendation of PRG	Recommendation of QPC	Follow-up Report – Oct. '03
Review the curriculum with the objective of thinning out the excessive number of modules	Strongly endorsed recommendation and welcomed proposed review by Department. It is the view of the QPC that the core curriculum must be based on the appropriate core for a degree in Geography and not on available staff in any one year.	Implemented in part and action is on-going with respect to the remainder. The Department is committed to informing teaching by research. Some modules in Year 2 BA have been discontinued/amalgamated. A radical review of the BSc Earth Science Degree programme has been undertaken and 6 modules have been deleted. The number of field trips is under active consideration in discussion with the Department of Geology. BA European Studies programme is being reviewed in 03/04.
Reinstate the final year project as compulsory.	QPC endorsed recommendation. QPC did not accept departmental response, but felt if the numbers of modules offered by Department were to be reduced this would free up staff time to facilitate final year projects for all students. QPC requested immediate action on this recommendation.	The final year project is compulsory for BSc (Geography), BSc (Earth Science) and BA (European Studies) Degree programmes. It is an elective for the BA Degree students (approximately 200 each year) and this is because of the scarcity of staff resources. Every student has the option to undertake a project but because the project work is undertaken during the summer months not all students opt/can afford to opt for a project. Project work is included in other modules so all students are exposed to some degree to research methods/techniques. Department will review in 03/04 the weighting of the project with a view to making it more attractive to students to undertake it.
Find a mechanism to add some % of the second year marks to the third year marks in arriving at the total marks for the award of the degree	QPC endorsed recommendation and noted action planned by Department for 2003 to carry forward 20% of marks from 2 nd year to the final year.	Implemented.
Appoint two undergraduate externs	QPC did not endorse	Actions as endorsed by the QPC have

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for the BA in Geography: one in Human Geography and the second in Physical Geography	recommendation of PRG but did endorse proposal from the Department that a separate extern for the BSc (Earth Sc) Degree should be appointed. The QPC also felt that the externs should not be 'shared' with the other NUI universities.	been implemented.
The BSc in Earth Science should have a dedicated co-ordinator with a separate budget and a dedicated multipurpose room/laboratory	QPC recommended that the Department discuss these requirements with the Deans of Arts and Science. The committee commented that no additional resources would be forthcoming for staff, and that the budget allocation to the department is a matter for the relevant Deans.	<p>Head of Department has discussed the possibility of appointing a co-ordinator with the Deans of Arts and Science. It is an issue for the BSc (Earth Science) and the Dean of Science. The Department is considering broadening the degree bas to include other departments. The students are very high quality but there is a lot of effort in supporting the degree on the part of the Department.</p> <p>The matter of a dedicated multipurpose room/laboratory has not been resolved. This is a space issue and currently there is no available space.</p>
Thin out the number of Department Committees.	QPC strongly endorsed recommendation and requested immediate action on this.	<p>Implemented.</p> <p>A number of departmental committees have been merged to reduce the overall number of committees.</p>
Establish a Departmental Research Committee. A five-year strategic plan for research should be developed	QPC strongly endorsed recommendation.	<p>Implemented.</p> <p>Department organised departmental workshops to explore the issues surrounding research strategy of the Department. Staff are currently engaged on a collaborative project to map Cork City. Department has clear objectives in relation to research and is very supportive of staff.</p>
Set up a mentoring system whereby younger academic staff members are guided in their teaching and research career by established senior members	QPC strongly endorsed recommendation and would like to see immediate implementation	<p>Implemented.</p> <p>At present all staff of the Department are established scholars. Department will respond as the need arises. Department will participate fully in the Performance Management Programme when it is established by the Department of HR.</p>
Review the policy of computers for postgraduates, making sure that	QPC recommended that the Department discuss this with the	The Department received a grant since the review which enabled them

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adequate computers are available to all postgraduates and that access times to computers are increased to include night time and weekends	<p>General Services Officer to see what means might be available to facilitate increased access without compromising security. Perhaps a swipe card system could be introduced?</p> <p>QPC also referred the generic issue of access outside normal working hours to university facilities to the Deans-EMG for consideration</p>	to increase by 25% the number of computers in the Department. However, there is a major difficulty in access by students to facilities in Connolly Building after 6pm in the evening. Thus the computers housed there are not available to students outside normal working hours and the resources there are very under-utilised. Access to computers in the Geography Building is reasonable. The Head of Department will continue to make representation to General Services and at all levels.
Cap the first year student intake at 250 students or below	QPC noted that this recommendation has already been implemented. QPC endorsed recommendation and welcomed prompt action by Department and Faculty.	<p>Implemented as far as possible.</p> <p>However there is a major problem in First Arts due to large numbers of students opting for Geography as one of the first 2 choices. Thus these students must be accepted into Geography. The issue of numbers is compounded by the high retention rate of the Department into 2nd and 3rd Year BA.</p> <p>This is an issue for the Faculty of Arts and the manner in which it interacts with potential students. Double-teaching may be required which would require additional staff. The Dean of Arts undertook to consider the issues further. However no change in procedures is anticipated in the short-term.</p>
Increase the academic staff numbers (full time and/or joint appointments) to attain a student/staff FTE ratio closer to the Arts faculty average.	QPC noted the recommendation and recommended that the Dean of Arts consider the staffing situation in the Department of Geography and that action should be taken to address the difficulties in future staffing proposals from the Dean of Arts, and within the current staffing levels in the Faculty of Arts.	Notwithstanding the staff resourcing issues, the Department is continuing to work towards implementing the recommendations of the reviewers. The Dean of Arts undertook to consider further the issue of staffing levels in the Department.
Initiate a programme of building refurbishment to the Geography Building in line with recommendations for space and building consolidation to be achieved by 2005. Such a strategy should include comprehensive disability access.	QPC is aware of the difficulties and recommended to the Buildings Committee that the space allocation to the Department of Geography be re-considered. Action is dependent on other initiatives currently on-going within UCC.	Since the review the Department has not been allocated any additional space. Some work on improving the accommodation for administrative and technical staff in the Department has been done. The numbers of computers in the Department has increased and the computer laboratory has been extended. The Department is based in a number of

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		<p>locations and this leads to serious on-going difficulties.</p> <p>The Disability Committee is working on the access problems in the Geography Building. There is an existing lift shaft which could be used to install a lift.</p>
<p>Set up an Academic Council Committee with the objective of reducing the excessively long exam period (starts in early May and finishes in September)</p>	<p>Recommendation of the PRG is based on a misconception and was not endorsed by the QPC.</p>	<p>-----</p> <p>Notwithstanding the lack of endorsement by the QPC the Department wishes it to be noted that there is a strong feeling that summer examining now runs from early May to July. This is followed by the Appeals process. The autumn supplemental examinations begin in mid-August and the Department recommends that these be deferred to September 1st. The QPC did not endorse this recommendation.</p>
<p>Develop an equation that determines the earning power of the Departments that includes research income so that research active departments such as Geography are rewarded.</p>	<p>QPC noted that the university is in the process of addressing this recommendation and is considering mechanisms for distribution of overheads.</p>	<p>Implemented.</p> <p>The University has introduced a scheme whereby some of the overheads that are earned on research grants are transferred back to the Department where the staff member who won the research grant is based.</p>
<p>Develop and implement a strategy for the increase in the University research overhead to at least 30% by the year 2005</p>	<p>QPC noted that the university is in the process of addressing this issue with external funding agencies.</p>	<p>Through CHIU a report has been published in October 2003 recommending the 30% overheads for laboratory-based projects and 25% for desk-based projects.</p> <p>SFI are actively supporting this and are working with Enterprise Ireland for the next round of call for proposals. SFI has agreed to the 30% research overhead with immediate effect.</p>
<p>The Department of Human Resources should be more proactive in assisting the department with staff development requirements.</p>	<p>There is a very comprehensive programme of courses organised mainly by the Training & Development section in the Department of HR run at all different times. There is rarely a perfect time to run anything! The Department of HR would welcome all suggestions for improvement of the scheduling to facilitate increased access.</p>	<p>This issue is under active consideration and a number of proposals are being considered by the Department of HR. It is anticipated that when the Performance Management Scheme is introduced into UCC that benefits in the organisation will accrue.</p>
<p>63% of the students and 2 of the 12</p>	<p>The university is aware of the</p>	<p>This is not an issue that the</p>

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<p>full-time academic staff are female. The gender imbalance should be urgently addressed</p>	<p>issue and will continue to promote equal opportunities for all genders</p>	<p>Department can act on. The gender balance of students and staff is not something the Department can change overnight. The Department has undertaken to make every effort to encourage all school leavers to opt for Geography.</p>
<p>The University should understand the benefits of sabbatical leave and should introduce a more enabling sabbatical leave policy college wide.</p>	<p>The issue of sabbatical leave for academic staff is currently under review by the SEDC. The committee hopes to report to AC in the autumn</p>	<p>An amended scheme for sabbatical leave for academic staff, in terms of procedures and application mechanism has been introduced. However the University needs to encourage staff to take sabbatical leave. This is a major issue and a large department needs to be able to plan well in advance. The Department considers sabbatical leave to be a vital element of staff development and will encourage staff to take leave as appropriate and within the regulations. The Department fully supports the concept of accountability and evidence of benefit from the staff member who has been allowed sabbatical leave. The Department has been successfully operating a leave rota for many years which has met with College approval until this year.</p>
<p>The University should immediately address the financial crises in the Library particularly regarding journals. A system of planned sharing of journals amongst Irish University (at little or no extra cost) might go a long way to help students and research staff.</p>	<p>The university is aware of the difficulties of the escalating costs of journals and the staff of the UCC Library is investigating all possible means to ease the situation. The QPC noted that some research funds need to be put into the purchase of journals if departments wish to retain their holdings.</p>	<p>A review is planned for late 2003 of journal purchases by the Library. The review will be externally validated. The Department has been required to cancel journal subscriptions for the past number of years and are now at a point where the lack of library resources is seriously affecting its ability to provide a proper university programme.</p>