UNIVERSITY COLLEGE CORK
NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND, CORK

QUALITY IMPROVEMENT/QUALITY ASSURANCE

PEER REVIEW GROUP REPORT

SCHOOL OF APPLIED SOCIAL STUDIES
....

ACADEMIC YEAR 2012-2013

Date April 11, 2013

PEER REVIEW GROUP MEMBERS

Name	Affiliation	Role
1. Dr Cathleen Callanan	Health, Information and Quality Authority, Cork	Member
2. Professor Heikki Ervasti	University of Turku, Finland	Member
3. Professor Donald Lyons	University College, Cork.	Rapporteur
4. Ms Mary McNulty	University College, Cork	Member
5. Professor Steven M Shardlow	University of Salford, UK	Chair

TIMETABLE OF THE SITE VISIT

The timetable for the site visit is attached as Appendix A

The Quality Promotion Office is to be commended for arranging a very comprehensive timetable for the review visit. The PRG met with a wide range of staff, students and external stakeholders over the two day visit. The PRG asked to meet with staff in groups and staff concerned added valuable comments. However, the PRG consider that the timetable did not provide adequate time for reflection on and evaluation of the information gathered during the visit. Whilst the programme schedule was amended slightly during the review visit, it may be helpful to consider the possibility for future events of engaging in some prior discussion with panel members about the review timetable.

PEER REVIEW

Methodology

The PRG appointed Professor Steven M Shardlow as its Chair and Professor Donald Lyons as the Rapporteur. The PRG worked as a team for all the meetings with the School and its stakeholders. The whole PRG toured the School's facilities and the University Library. Areas of specific responsibility for each member of the PRG were agreed at the beginning of the visit and additional areas were assigned during the visit and are set out below. In respect of these designated responsibilities the appropriate panel member took the lead in asking questions in the given area, although all members were at liberty to explore any issue that they considered pertinent. In the preparation of the report, the panel member with the designated responsibility prepared an initial draft of the given area for discussion by the whole pane.

Area of Primary Responsibility of Each Member of the Peer Review Group

Name of Individual	Area of Responsibility
Dr Cathleen Clallanan	- External Relations - Communications
Professor Heikki Ervasti	- Research - EU Standards
Professor Donald Lyons	Teaching and Learning
Ms. Mary Mc Nulty	- Staff Development - Services
Professor Steven M Shardlow	- Governance - Finance

Site Visit

The PRG were given a comprehensive tour of the School's facilities and premises by the Head of School, Professor Fred Powell, which was most informative. Attention was drawn to the current state of buildings.

Peer Review Group Report

An initial draft of the Peer Review Group Report (PRGR) was drafted during the site visit. Remaining sections were assigned to individual members with comments emailed to the rapporteur. The draft document was circulated to the committee for further editing and the final draft completed on April 11th, 20112

OVERALL ANALYSIS

Self-Assessment Report

The Self-Assessment Report (SAR) did not conform to the University published structure and format. The SAR comprised two documents, volume 1, a narrative and Volume 2, appendices A-G. Appendices H-R were not provided. To the best knowledge of the Review Panel the report is an accurate account of the School. There was a very high level of correspondence between the content of the written SAR and the comments and opinions expressed by School staff during the site visit.

Items identified as missing were:
1. Staff CVs (Profiles)
2. A statement on the process adopted by the School for the preparation of the SAR
3. An account of the previous Peer Review Exercise in 2007

Some of the content of these items may have been present in the combined volumes of the SAR, in narrative form. There may be very good reasons for the School's particular and unique approach to the SAR document: it would have been helpful for the Peer Review Group to have been appraised of these reasons.

Nonetheless, the Peer Review Group found that the documents presented, as part of the SAR, provided a good descriptive overview of the work of the School, which comprised the bulk of Volume 1 of the SAR. More detail on the School's future strategy would have been

desirable. The information about future strategy, that was available, was contained in pages 12-17 of Volume 2 in section headed " 5 Leading Actions" & "6 Implementing the Strategy". The broad shape of the future of the School is mapped in these sections but more detail of targets and how some of the strategic developments could be realised would be helpful. For example, implementation 6.2 (Volume 2, page 16) includes the objective "support colleagues in the School to complete PhDs; it would be helpful if this included numbers of staff to be supported, the nature of support to be provided, the ideal percentage of staff expected to complete PhDs by 2018, the impact on recruitment policy, and the impact on School resources. The latter is particularly important in determining if additional resources may be required from the College to support the policy. This element of the School's strategy is grounded in the distinctive nature of the School, which provides both academic and professional education. Many professionals do not enter academia with a PhD and require support to achieve the standard qualification as a pre-requisite for an academic career. Similar details about the other dimensions of future strategy should be encouraged.

Recommendations

The development of a more detailed strategic plan, that includes a description of the ideal characteristics of the School in 5 years time and the actions to be taken to realise this strategy. Importantly, this plan should document additional resource requirements to realise the vision.

SWOT Analysis

The PRG noted the SWOT analysis completed by the School and commended the inclusivity of the process. The PRG found the analysis presented to be a realistic reflection on its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

Benchmarking

The School provided a benchmarking report (section 4, volume 1 of the SAR); the benchmarking exercise was completed based on documentary analysis and site visits. This element of the report described the outcome of a benchmarking exercise against three other Universities (UCD, NUIM & TCD). UCD was identified as the main competitor and therefore the main comparator institution. More detail is provided about UCD in the report, appropriately.
Staff profile
Course profile
League table analysis
International analysis
The School should be encouraged to benchmark with at least one University outside of Ireland to enhance international comparability of the School's achievements and profiled

FINDINGS OF THE PEER REVIEW GROUP

Context

In drawing up this report and making recommendations, full account has been taken of the current economic context at national and regional levels, which has placed severe financial restraints on the University along with other similar organisations in Ireland. Many developments have had to be curtailed and necessary improvements to, for example, University infrastructure have had to be postponed until there is a brighter national financial climate. The very difficult national financial situation has impacted significantly on the School staff and students.

Department/School Organisation & Planning

School Name

The School has been advocating, within the College for a change of name. There has been some concern expressed by some academic units about possible overlap and potential confusion that may be caused by some of the possible names suggested by the School. The arguments advanced by the School for a change of name include:

- the need to strongly differentiate the scope of the School from Institutes of Technology (IoTs) that have recently emerged in the academic market place

- to help maintain the level of student recruitment though clarity of the type of courses offered;

- to align with titles offered by other similar Schools and Departments in the country.

An argument, not advanced but of importance, is the use of the suggested name "School of Applied Social Sciences" to align with similar departments overseas, where this name has acquired a level of currency and is well understood. It is not for the Peer Review Committee to make a recommendation about the desirability of name change. It must be for the School to produce a well-argued and persuasive case that details all relevant facts and projections about the implications of the proposed change of name.

Teaching & Learning

The panel noted that the School demonstrated through the SAR document and the discussions with the various groups that the School has great strengths in teaching and learning. It offers a wide variety of programmes at both the undergraduate and postgraduate level with steady or increasing enrolment across the spectrum and new programmes emerging. The review panel commends, in particular, the School ethos of reaching out to a diverse range of students, with innovative programs and recruitment strategies targeted at non-traditional learners and communities that do not have a history of university education.

The panel further notes the emphasis on and commitment across the staff group to the provision of a critical intellectual environment that engages with social issues and is grounded in a strong ethos of inclusion giving the various programmes a strong sense of unity, utility and relevance for the students. In addition, the balance between the theoretical knowledge acquired in the classroom matches well with the skills students need to benefit from the placement structure experiences. The recent development of an online journal, entitled *Critical Social Thinking* as an output for undergraduates and recent graduates provides additional opportunities for students to develop critical thinking and writing skills.

Students are all levels were very supportive and appreciative of the openness and quality of access that staff provided to students and were very positive about their educational experience. One minor exception to this was that 2nd year BSW students felt that they were somewhat overburdened by assignments in term 2 of the second year. However, this complaint was couched within the realisation that this timetabling of assignments may be simply a logistical reality and expressed a generally highly positive appraisal of the overall assessment structure throughout the undergraduate programmes.

However, in some ways the very success of the inclusive, open and variety of programmes and modules offered may hinder developments in other areas of the School's remit. The unrestricted access to staff as described by the students, the efforts devoted to the needs of non-traditional learners, the wide variety of elective modules offered and the heavy load associated with the supervision of dissertations for every undergraduate student requires rebalancing if the School is to reach its full potential in other Ares such as research profile

To deal with this potential over commitment of time given to teaching, the panel suggests that the elective module choices be re-examined with a view to module consolidation and/or shared teaching. In addition, while recognising that a number of staff employ online

educational tools, engage with the Teaching and learning Office, and others have secured external funding from NAIRTL and IADEF, more extensive use of new technologies and pedagogical services provided by the Teaching and Learning Office may be useful in rebalancing time allocated to teaching and contact with students.

Research & Scholarly Activity

The PRG noted that the SASS has reviewed its research strategy recently. It has established a School Research committee and acted as a founding department for the Institute of Social Sciences in the 21st Century, an interdisciplinary research institute. Moreover, it has expanded research support activities and established the *Critical Social Thinking* initiative. The staff have participated actively in Irish and international conferences and hosted a significant number of conferences in Cork. Currently the School hosts five collaborative research projects with ISS21 with other departments and holds strong research links with public and voluntary sector bodies.

The School has been very successful in attracting external research funding. It has received more than 30 grants amounting to 2,7M€ A notable part of the research projects are related to child welfare issues but also other fields are covered widely.

During the 2007-2012 period, staff in the School published 76 articles in peer-reviewed journals together with 19 books, 62 book chapters and other publications. The PRG considered that that the number of peer-reviewed articles could be higher at an average publication of less than 0.4 per staff member per year. Most research in the School is finally reported in other than peer-reviewed publications or even left unpublished in the form of conference papers. The PRG expressed the view that the quality of research publications should be increased.

Recommendations:

- The School should continue to increase the number of publications in peer-reviewed journals.

- The School should consider the possibility of formulating explicit publication guidelines that specify where the staff should aim to publish.

- The School should actively seek possibilities to develop collaborative teaching with other Schools in an effort to streamline the number of modules offered.

- The Staff should consider possibilities how to arrange personal teaching loads to allow staff to find more time for writing high-quality articles.

Staffing

The School of Applied Social Studies has a staff group of thirty three full-time academic staff, one full-time field co-ordinator and six full-time members of administrative staff. There are two professors in the school.

From reviewing the Benchmarking Report and discussion with staff it would appear that UCC has an unequal academic staff profile when compared to UCD, which has five professors compared with two at UCC. The PRG considered that would be helpful for staff members to develop their staff profiles for a number of reasons. Firstly, promotional opportunities are very limited and highly competitive within the University, and staff will need to develop excellence in teaching, research and community engagement in order to position themselves to take advantage of the limited promotional opportunities that may arise. Secondly, staff can maximise their impact and visibility by becoming more actively engaged in committee structures in central administration and governance. This strategy would also lead to improved networks and access to resources. Thirdly, in the event of likely staff turnover it would be prudent to have in place a strategy to enable succession planning.

Recommendations:

- Staff members to develop their staff profiles to position themselves for promotional opportunities as they arise and to have in place a strategy for succession planning.

Staff Development

A particular characteristic unique to the school is the background of academic staff, many of whom come from a professional practice background. In order to successfully pursue an academic career, many have to undertake a PhD, in addition to maintaining professional certification. This on top of a heavy teaching load and research commitments can cause tensions. Staff on this trajectory should be encouraged to take advantage of sabbatical leave and any other supports to fast-track their academic careers.

From reading the SAR Report and talking to staff it would appear many staff in the school have heavy teaching loads and are committed to an open door policy to seeing students, in addition to having practice education and service learning commitments. As new programmes come on board, staff will need to look at strategies to manage their student contact hours in order to ring-fence research time and maximise their own opportunities for career progression.

It is evident from the SAR and discussions that many staff members are very engaged with teaching and learning, and have embedded many innovative Teaching & Learning best practice methodologies into their approach to teaching. In addition, staff in the School have secured a number of awards related to teaching and learning, as well as a number of research grants specifically related to research and scholarship in teaching from NAIRTL. As reflective practice is part of the teaching pedagogy in the School of Applied Social Studies, staff should be encouraged to continue to engage with teaching and learning programmes and to avail of the many opportunities offered by Ionad Bairre (UCC's Teaching and Learning Centre) to become certified in teaching. These opportunities include certificate, diploma and masters programmes. Further, , staff should be encouraged to take advantage of the opportunities to further develop teaching technologies in order to position themselves for future developments in blended learning or distance learning opportunities.

From discussions with staff it became apparent that Contract Research Staff were finding anomalies in their contracts. Recently issued contracts have changed from fixed term contracts to specific purpose contracts. Again, from discussions with staff it would appear that, recently, the Irish Research Council only recruits at the Research Assistant grade, which has a lower starting salary. The PRG realise that these are not school specific issues; however, more information and support from Human Resources would be appreciated by Contract Research Staff.

Recommendations:

- Staff need to start positioning themselves in order to remain competitive in light of the limited promotional opportunities available. This may mean streamlining the School's open door policy to students. The big issue is making time to allow staff to carry out international quality research. This must be given the highest priority.

- Staff who are engaged in pursuing doctoral degrees should be encouraged by the School to take advantage of sabbatical leave and any other supports to fast-track their academic careers.

- Staff should be encouraged to take advantage of the teaching and learning opportunities offered by Ionad Bairre to further the development of innovative approaches to teaching, learning and assessment, as well as teaching technologies, in order to position themselves for future developments in blended learning or distance learning opportunities.

- Human resources should provide Contract Research Staff with information, advice and support on understanding the conditions outlined in new contracts.

External Relations

It was evident from material presented to the peer review group, and from information provided by staff, students and stakeholders, that there is strong commitment within the School to promoting external relations both within the university and the broader community. There was evidence of strong interdisciplinary cooperation and a willingness on the part of School staff to support their colleagues in delivering services across the university. Students made specific reference to the breadth of understanding they acquired from exposure to other disciplines.

The School demonstrated a very strong commitment to the establishment and maintenance of relations with the broader community and with marginalised communities. The principle of social inclusion espoused by the School is reflected in the recruitment of non-traditional students, and the availability of support services to enhance their capacity to participate on courses.

The recruitment of social work students as mentors to support innovative projects such as the Contemporary Living Course, for students with intellectual disabilities, is further evidence of its commitment to social inclusion and the promotion of external relations with communities of interest.

School staff participate in a wide range of community groups, many of which are committed to social justice and inclusion, and has further promoted this agenda through Community-Academic Research Links (CARL), an initiative developed to foster research links between UCC and Civil Society Organisations in the region.

The School is in the process of developing a project in partnership with the Shanghai Institute of Technology, which, if successful, will further expand its sphere of external relations.

*Recommendations***:**

- The School might consider auditing its participation in community groups to identify the benefits to the school and the groups, in relation to the staff commitment required.

- There may be some merit in the School capitalising on the presentation of papers at conferences by using them as a baseline for more advanced research.

Support Services

The PRG was given a guided tour of the Library facilities and the Applied Social Studies Computer Lab. They both appeared to be adequate and appropriate. The PRG was impressed with the Information Literacy Skills Workshops and accredited PG6009 Graduate Information Literacy Skills Programme delivered by library staff for students in Social Studies. Students had also commented that library staff were very approachable and helpful. However, the PRG was surprised to see that the book fund for the School of Applied Social Studies was down by 50% from last year's budget.

From discussions with a cross section of students, ranging from undergraduates to postgraduates, the PRG learnt that students were very appreciative of the support they received and they identified a number of support services that they commended highly. These include:
- Student Support Officer;
- Disability Support Service;
- Mature Student Office and especially the new mature student common room;

- uLink Peer Support mentoring programme;
- Counselling and Development Service;
- Discounted vaccinations from Student Health and Welfare;
- Access Office;
- Accredited courses for doctoral students offered by the CACSSS Graduate School in collaboration with Career Services.

However, a number of students pointed out that the Disability Support Service was under increased pressure due to recent cuts. Also, wheelchair access to Carrigbawn is inadequate. The SAR report, in addition to discussions with staff, supported the student experience that wheelchair access to Carrigbawn required attention. Postgraduate students highlighted the need for the provision of a flexible learning space to be provided for them to progress their studies and to develop further collaboration.

Other resources used by the School, for example the library, IT resources seem appropriate for the delivery of the courses offered by the School. Resources are not allocated to by the University to provide a conferment ceremony for Higher Diploma Students, this may save money but it does not enhance the Universities reputation, disappoints existing students and may dissuade some students from studying for a second higher award from the University.

Recommendations:
- Adequate library funding is a prerequisite for the continued advancement of scholarly activity in the School.

- Increasing student numbers and decreasing budgets will have an adverse effect on support services. Essential support services like disability support and mature student support should be protected for Access students.

- A dedicated, flexible learning space should be made available for postgraduate students.

- Buildings and Estates need to review wheelchair access to Carrigbawn

Governance

The School has a very inclusive approach to governance, which is to be commended. There is a democratic internal management structure that provides opportunities for staff at all levels to contribute to the running of the School. This approach to governance strongly aligns with the Schools academic ethos, around critical thinking, the encouragement for non-traditional students, and community engagement.

Accommodation

The School is located in several converted houses on the edge of the main University Campus. This type of accommodation provides a traditional academic environment for the School, similar to that of several other departments in Ireland and the UK. However, this type of accommodation would not be considered appropriate in some other countries, for example Finland. This type of accommodation, a converted house, is perhaps not best suited to the provision of modern university education, as rooms tend to be of unequal size and may not be

fit for the ascribed purpose. For example, the PhD students do not have a room in which to work; there are two general offices located on the ground floor of two separate buildings; some rooms allocated to academic staff are excessively small. The particular accommodation in which the School is housed is in a varied state of repair, some buildings have been modernised, other have not. Some elements of the accommodation are in a poor state of repair and require not only general refurbishment, but also professional advice regarding the safety of items such as the state of electrical wiring, which may constitute a health and safety risk. There have been past attempts to identify a site for and build a new social sciences building; similar attempts seem highly unlikely to come fruition in the foreseeable future given the financial position of the University. Similarly, given the current financial position, it is equally unlikely that funding will be found by the University for the refurbishment of the accommodation. This should not prevent the School from pressing its case vigorously on an annual basis through the appropriate committees. In addition the School could consider the solution adopted by other academic units within the University that have successfully generated the funds to pay for similar refurbishment.

Financing

The public sector in Ireland faces a challenging economic climate, over the medium term, as the Government deals with the consequences of the 2008/2009 global financial crisis. University College Cork has seen its core state funding fall by approximately 50%, since that financial crisis. The School of Applied Social Studies, in common with other academic and professional units within the University, has had to share some of the financial burden imposed by the current economic situation. In the current academic year, this has led to a budgetary shortfall of approximately €150,000. Given the current financial context this level of overspend is not unexpected. Taking account of the current climate, the School will need to address the deficit in the medium term and return to a balanced budget. In addition, if the School intends to undertake minor improvements, for example to the fabric of the accommodation occupied by the School, it will need to increase the extent of income generation activities.

It is suggested that the School develops a strategic financial plan that will both bring the finances back into balance and also to develop a strategic approach to income generation that will allow additional expenditure to meet some desired areas of improvement.

Communications

The peer review group had an opportunity to meet with senior college personnel and noted the extent to which there was a shared understanding of the vision of the School across the spectrum of senior colleagues. Where, for example, it may have proved more economical or expedient to limit, or tailor the courses offered to a different market, there was an appreciation that the School had adopted a considered approach to the contribution it wished to make to civil society, and was committed to promoting this in practice in spite of the associated challenges.

The quality of communication within the staff group was reflected in their knowledge and understanding of the overall business of the School, and the engagement between administrative and academic staff. Staff were very familiar with courses in which they may have had no direct input, and there was no indication of any culture of exclusivity or hierarchy of status between courses. For example, staff on the Bachelor of Youth and Community Work (BYCW), Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) and those on the Masters in

Social Work (MSW) course, had a shared understanding of the varying needs of their students in terms of placement needs and opportunities. There had developed, therefore, a strong culture of collegiality and open communication pathways.

With regard to communication between staff and students, it was made very clear by students that they enjoyed unrestricted access to staff to communicate any concerns, staff were available on a face to face basis as well as by email and phone, and there was a nominated student support officer was available to them. The peer review group formed the view that this willingness to maintain open and relatively unstructured channels of communication with students, was influenced by the particular demands of such an eclectic student body within which a significant number of students might be expected to struggle with a return to third level education, and the communication limitations inherent in the use of English as a second language for some students. In addition, for students on the BYCW, there are particular demands associated with returning to education while continuing in employment.

The peer review group noted the availability of Blackboard and Turnitin as communication tools and their particular advantages for students on placement: students who commented on the usefulness of Blackboard also made reference to the need to maintain the quality of exchange between students and teachers in the classroom environment. The group also noted the additional range of communication options and training opportunities available to students, in particular through the library and staff support services, and the School has also undertaken student surveys and reviews.

Recommendations:

Some consideration might be given to the burden created by offering students unrestricted access to staff. While there may be merit in offering such open access for first year students, it seems reasonable to expect that experienced students might be offered more structured and limited options.

- Implementation of recommendations for improvement made in Peer Review Group Report arising from last quality review

  The staff have put considerable time and effort into implementing significant changes since the last QA/QI exercise. In particular, the School has adopted a model of shared governance, with a number of committee established to organize various tasks (e.g., Finance sub-committee). In addition, the School developed course teams that are designated to deliver it various programmes, a point also lauded in the 2006 review.

  Following on from the last review, the school has increased their emphasis on publishing their work in peer-reviewed journals and staff continue to make major contributions to scholarship both nationally and internationally. Furthermore, it consolidated its research clusters and was a major actor in the establishment of the Institute for Social Sciences in the 21st Century (ISS21) leading to a marked increase in external research funding.

Compliance with European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area – especially relevant sections of Part 1 of the ESG

Concerning the methodology employed in the preparation of the self-assessment report the PRG found that it carried out in an inclusive manner which reflects enthusiasm amongst the staff group. As the PRG requested for some further information it was soon provided. All in all, the PRG found that the ASSS has a clear quality assurance policy. The SAR and other documents exhibit a strong commitment in SASS to policy and procedures for quality assurance which correspond to the European Standards and Guidelines for Internal Quality Assurance within Higher

Education Institutions. This is very explicit about designing and monitoring programmes and the assessment of students. Also quality assurance of learning resources, information systems and public information about the school are clearly stated. Also the various ways to assure the quality of the teaching staff were informed to the PRG.

The Peer Review Group are also asked to comment specifically on developments and actions taken since the last quality review undergone by the Department/School.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Recommendations for improvement made by the department/school

Leading Actions

To promote critical and high quality teaching and learning
Leading Actions: We will continue to:

- provide and develop where possible programmes which are flexible and responsive in their delivery to meet student needs. We will continue
- emphasise the importance of research led teaching by actively encouraging and supporting staff in their teaching and research engagements.
- ensure curricula are designed in ways which stimulate the critical enquiry, central to the ethos of this particular school.
- focus on the development of existing and new fourth level programmes where demand for such programmes exists.
- be responsive to the need for continued development in professional education in the social sciences.
- build our international profile and to attract international students we will continue to build and consolidate our successful links with Shanghai Institute of Technology.
- seek to sustain our reputation as a student centred school by promoting the highest standards in how we engage with students, give feedback on progress and address their enquiries or concerns.

To produce and promote publically and politically engaged critical social research

Leading Actions: In acknowledging the changing environment in which interdisciplinary research is an expectation, we will:

- pursue new interdisciplinary research networks within the university and beyond and consolidate those that already exist and are very productive.
- increase our publication output and to ensure that we broaden the range of scholarly sources in which we publish our work.
- continue to diversify the modes of disseminating our output so that we enhance our reputation as a community of scholars but also actively contribute to local, national and international debates on policy and practice issues in the public sphere.
- actively respond to the need to ensure that staff members are continually upgrading their research skills and that undergraduate and postgraduate students are highly

trained to take advantage of research opportunities in universities and in the broader labour market. This will involve the furtherance of our already strong community academic research links so that we can positively respond to research needs which emerge in communities.

- encourage and support staff members to undertake funded and non-funded research projects so that the research profile of the School is sufficiently expansive and critical in accordance with the School's ethos and orientation.
- continue to devise ways of improving the research infrastructure and culture within the school, recognising that this is vital for nurturing a research informed teaching approach.
- continue our efforts to ensure that sabbaticals are provided and pursued by staff members to further their research profiles and we will do our utmost to foster the kind of collegiate atmosphere and to put in place the timetabling arrangements which better enable staff members to undertake their PhD research projects and to bring them to completion.

To integrate theory, research and practice in teaching and learning

Leading Actions: We will:

- seek where possible to allow staff members to integrate their research and teaching portfolios as part of our commitment to being a strong research informed teaching school.
- endeavour to provide postgraduate students with opportunities to tutor and to deliver seminars to student groups, which are informed by the research projects they are undertaking.
- as a school with an excellent reputation in servicing other programmes in the broader university, continue this commitment to ensure the social sciences maintain their relevance beyond the confines of the school.
- avail of funding sources towards better enabling us to integrate theory, research and practice for the benefit of enhancing the teaching and learning opportunities provided by the school.

To actively promote equality of access to Higher Education

Leading Actions: We recognise that the diversity of our student group is one of the features, which enriches our school but also makes it so unique in the wider university context. With this in mind, we will:

- find new ways to proactively market our programmes with a view to continuing the recruitment of students of diverse ages, backgrounds, levels of education, spheres of work and life experiences.
- continue to prioritise the support required for non-traditional students, who might struggle to access or continue in higher education for a range of different reasons.
- continue to play an active part in investigating the barriers to higher education for diverse student groups and make these barriers known to college authorities and to other stakeholders, who are in key positions to improve access and retention policies and practices in our university.
- sustain our links with colleges in the wider community and university adult education courses, towards ensuring that students interested in and pursuing social science programmes at certificate and diploma levels have clear pathways into such programmes in third level.

To engage in civic-engaged and collaborative community-focused based activities

Leading Actions: We will:

• pursue funding opportunities to provide information and learning opportunities for agencies, practitioners, campaigners relevant to our fields of teaching and research enquiry.
• recognise and will continue to support our staff members and students in their significant voluntary contributions to community based organisations and campaigns, many of which have limited resources.
• pledge to work harder at disseminating our research findings in sources where they may be more accessible to those outside of the confines of the academic community, thus ensuring the school and indeed the university maintains its relevance beyond the academy.
• continue to develop and sustain where they exist, reciprocal and respectful relations with agencies, social activist groups and ex-graduates, recognising the value of these relations for the furtherance of our teaching, research and practice agendas.

To promote an open, collaborative and supportive working environment within the School

Leading Actions: We will:

• continue to develop and maintain decision-making fora which are participative and representative of the diverse constituencies within the school.
• find ways to encourage mutual formal and informal learning opportunities to share our research and publication knowledge and experiences as well as to discuss and debate contributions by scholars relevant to our fields of enquiry.
• through school committees, sub-committees, course teams, research teams, co-authoring and co-editing arrangements, formal and informal mentoring relationships, we will do our best to ensure all staff members feel they are part of a unit and supported in their endeavours.

Implementing the Strategy

Teaching and Learning
Expansion of postgraduate teaching

• Part-time evening MSoc (Social Policy) – to start in September 2012
• New website and web-based learning community platform for DSocSc – to be launched in 2012
• PhD Social Work – to start in 2014
• MSocSc Youth Work, Community Arts and Sports Studies – to start in 2013

Internationalisation of students
• Build links with Shanghai Institute of Technology (run a summer school with the School for Asian studies – create joint modules for SIT social work students and UCC BSW students) - summer school to run in 2012

Continual Professional Development / Professional training
• Develop a framework for continual professional development in social work

Research and publication/dissemination
- Focus efforts to ensure on successful applications on the next round of IRCHSS funding -2012
- Development of Science Shop – 10 students per year from 2012 undertaking Science shop projects
- Promote work of ISS21 within the School
- Support college system of sabbatical leave
- Support colleagues in School to complete PhDs

External Engagements
- See Development of Science Shop above
- Conferences (including Bi-Annual Child Welfare and Protection Conference 2012

School governance
- Establish Research Committee - 2012
- Establish academic reading group - 2012
- Provide seminars on research and publication in collaboration with ISS21

Resources and infrastructure
- Refurbish Ashford – 2012
- Refurbish Carrigbawn

A key element of any strategic planning process and the implementation of a strategic plan is the monitoring of its implementation. The School will review the implementation of plan through the monthly School Council meetings and the annual School Planning Day. The implementation of the strategic plan will be a standing item in the School Executive Council meetings.

The PRG noted the recommendations made by the School in the SAR and would endorse the recommendations as being appropriate and relevant.

Recommendations for improvement made by the Peer Review Group

Strategic Plan

The development of a more detailed strategic plan, that includes a description of the ideal characteristics of the School in 5 years time and the actions to be taken to realise this strategy. Importantly, this plan should document additional resource requirements to realise the vision.

Teaching and Learning

The elective module choices be re-examined with a view to module consolidation and/or joint teaching.

More extensive use of new technologies and pedagogical services provided by the Teaching and Learning Office may be useful in rebalancing time allocated to teaching and contact with students.

Research

The School should continue to increase the number of publications in peer-reviewed journals.

The School should consider the possibility of formulating explicit publication guidelines where the staff should aim to publish.

The School should actively seek possibilities to develop collaborate teaching with other Schools in an effort to streamline the number of modules offered.

The Staff should consider possibilities how to arrange personal teaching loads to find more time for writing high-quality articles.

Staffing and Staff Development

Staff members to develop their staff profiles to position themselves for promotional opportunities as they arise and to have in place a strategy for succession planning.

Staff need to start positioning themselves in order to remain competitive in light of the limited promotional opportunities available. This may mean streamlining the School's open door policy to students. The big issue is making time to allow staff to carry out international quality research. This must be given the highest priority.

Staff who are engaged in pursuing doctoral degrees should be encouraged by the School to take advantage of sabbatical leave and any other supports to fast-track their academic careers.

Staff should be encouraged to take advantage of the teaching and learning opportunities offered by Ionad Bairre to further the development of innovative approaches to teaching, learning and assessment, as well as teaching technologies, in order to position themselves for future developments in blended learning or distance learning opportunities.

Human resources should provide Contract Research Staff with information, advice and support on understanding the conditions outlined in new contracts.

External Relations

The School might consider auditing its participation in community groups to identify the benefits to the school and the groups, in relation to the staff commitment required.

There may be some merit in the School capitalising on the presentation of papers at conferences by using them as a baseline for more advanced research.

Support Services

•   Adequate library funding is a prerequisite for the continued advancement of scholarly activity in the School.
•   Increasing student numbers and decreasing budgets will have an adverse effect on support services. Essential support services like disability support and mature student support should be protected for Access students.
•   A dedicated, flexible learning space should be made available for postgraduate students.
•   Buildings and Estates need to review wheelchair access to Carrigbawn

Accommodation

Lack of funding should not prevent the School from pressing its case vigorously on an annual basis through the appropriate committees.

In addition the School could consider the solution adopted by other academic units within the University that have successfully generated the funds to pay for similar refurbishment.

Financing

That the School develops a strategic financial plan that will both bring the finances back into balance and also to develop a strategic approach to income generation that will allow additional expenditure to meet some desired areas of improvement.

Communications

Some consideration might be given to the burden created by offering students unrestricted access to staff. While there may be merit in offering such open access for first year students, it seems reasonable to expect that experienced students might be offered more structured and limited options.

APPENDIX A

SCHOOL OF APPLIED SOCIAL STUDIES

PEER REVIEW GROUP SITE VISIT
TIMETABLE

In Summary

Tuesday 19 February:	The Peer Review Group (PRG) arrives at the River Lee Hotel for a briefing, followed by an informal meeting with School staff members.
Wednesday 20 February:	The PRG considers the Self-Assessment Report and meets with school staff, student and stakeholder representatives. A working private dinner is held that evening for the PRG.
Thursday 21 February:	The PRG meets with relevant officers of UCC. An exit presentation is given by the PRG to all members of the School. A working private dinner is held that evening for the PRG in order to finalise the report. This is the final evening of the review.
Friday 22 February:	External PRG members depart.

Tuesday 19 February 2013	
16.00 – 18.00	Meeting of members of the Peer Review Group. Briefing by: Professor Ken Higgs, Acting Director of Quality Group agrees final work schedule and assignment of tasks for the following 2 days. Views are exchanged and areas to be clarified or explored are identified. **Venue: Tower Room, River Lee Hotel, Western Road**
19.00	Dinner for members of the Peer Review Group, Head of School and members of the School Co-ordinating Committee: Dr. Paul Burgess Professor Alastair Christie Dr Carmel Halton Dr Máire Leane Dr Cathal O'Connell Professor Fred Powell Dr Pat Twomey **Venue: Jacobs on the Mall, South Mall, Cork.**

Wednesday 20 February 2013	Venue: Tower Room 1, North Wing, Main Quadrangle UCC *(unless otherwise specified)*
08.30 – 08.45	Convening of Peer Review Group
08.45 – 09.30	Professor Fred Powell, Head of School
09.30 – 12.00	Group meeting with all School staff Tea & Coffee **Venue: Council Room, North Wing, Main Quadrangle**
12.00 – 13.00	**Private meetings with individual staff members** Group 1 12.00: Dr. Jacqui O'Riordan 12.15: Dr. Eluska Fernandez 12.30: Dr. Mairead Considine & Dr. Maire Leane 12.45: Dr. Siobhan O'Sullivan **Venue: Tower Room 1**
13.00 – 14.00	Working lunch
14.00 – 14.30	Meeting with Fieldwork Staff
14.30 – 15.30	Visit to core facilities of School, escorted by Professor Fred Powell, Head of School and Ms. Fionnuala O'Connor, School Manager.
15.30 - 16.00	Representatives of 1st and 2nd Year Students Ms. Sarah Dunphy, BSW 1 Mr. Joe Whelan, BSW 1 Ms. Jean Domican, BSW 1 Mr. Barry O'Rourke, BSW 1 Mr. Hugh Delahunty, BSocSc 1 Mr. Paul Bray, BSocSc 2 Mr. Gerard Rice, BYCW 1 Ms. Geraldine O'Mahony, BYCW 1 Mr. Jerry Lucy, BYCW 2 Ms. Ann Marie O 'Regan, BYCW 2
16.00 – 16.30	Representatives of Final Year Students Ms. Margaret Buckley, BSocSc3 Ms. Noella Ngenwie, BYCW 3 Mr. Shane Hayes, BSW 4 Ms. Gloria McClafferty, BSW 4 Ms. Teri Whelan, BSW 4 Ms. Sharon Scully, BSW 4
16.30 – 17.00	Representatives of Graduate Students

	Mr. Alexander Amah, HDip Social Policy 1 Ms. Ndemazia Fualefock, HDip Social Policy 1 Ms. Treasa Tansley, MSW 1 Ms. Susan Mackey, MSW 2 Mr. John Paul Peters, MSW 2 Ms. Derek Chambers, DSocSc 4 Ms. Maria Power, DSocSc 4 Ms. Joan O'Mahoney, PhD 1 Ms. Rebecca Jeffers, PhD 2 Ms. Andi Kenneally, PhD 2 Ms. Katharina Swirak, PhD 4
17.00 – 18.15	Representatives of stakeholders, past graduates and employers Mr. Liam Ahern, Coordinator of Services, Downs Syndrome Cork Ms. Gillian Barrett, Social Worker, the Other Place Cork Ms. Jacinta Flynn, Senior Practitioner Cope Foundation Ms. Helen Hayes, Certificate in Contemporary Living programme Mr. David Roche, Manager, Cork Gay Project Ms. Mary Stoyle, Director Rosmini Resource Centre **Venue: Staff Common Room, North Wing, Main Quadrangle**
19.00	Meeting of Peer Review Group to identify remaining aspects to be clarified and to finalise tasks for the following day, a followed by a working private dinner. **Venue: Tower Room, River Lee Hotel, Western Road**

Thursday 21 February 2013	
	Venue: Tower Room 1, North Wing, Main Quadrangle UCC *(unless otherwise specified)*
08.30 – 09.00	Convening of Peer Review Group
09.00 – 09.45	Professor Caroline Fennell, Head of College, CACSSS
09.45 – 10.00	Mr Seamus McEvoy, Interim Chair of Student Services
10.00 – 10.15	Dr David O'Connell (Director of Research Support Services) representing the Vice-President for Research & Innovation
10.15 – 10.30	Mr. Cormac McSweeney, Finance Office
10.30 – 11.00	Tea/coffee
11.00 – 11.15	Dr. Bettie Higgs, Deputising for the Vice-President for Teaching and Learning
11.30 – 12.00	Professor Paul Giller, Registrar and Senior Vice-President for Academic Affairs

12.00 – 12.50	Visit to UCC Library, meeting with Ms Margot Conrick, Head of Information Services and Ms Geraldine Prendergast, Subject Librarian, Boole Library.
12.45 – 13.15	Meeting with Research Staff: Dr. Etaoine Howlett Dr. Angela O'Connell Ms. Margaret Scanlon
13.05 – 14.00	Working lunch
14.00 – 16.15	Preparation of first draft of final report
16.15 – 16.45	Professor Fred Powell, Head of School
17.00 – 17.30	Exit presentation to all staff, to be made by the Chair of the Peer Review Group or other member of Peer Review Group as agreed, summarising the principal findings of the Peer Review Group. This presentation is <u>not</u> for discussion at this time. **Venue: Council Room, North Wing, Main Quadrangle**
19.00	Working private dinner for members of the Peer Review Group to complete drafting of report and finalisation of arrangements for completion and submission of final report. **Venue: Tower Room, River Lee Hotel, Western Road**