# Report on Quality Review of Department of Sociology

*Peer Review Group*:

      Professor K. Sidwell, Professor of Latin and Greek, UCC (Chair)
      Professor P. Coughlan, Department of English, UCC
      Professor J. Jackson, Department of Sociology, TCD
      Professor J. Eldridge, Department of Sociology & Anthropology, University of Glasgow

*Brief Summary of conduct of Site Visit*:
The site visit was conducted over 2.5 days from 12th – 14th March, 2001 and included meetings with

    a) Head and staff of the department as a group and individually,
    b) Representatives of undergraduate and postgraduate students,
    c) Professor P. Woodman, Dean of Arts Faculty,
    d) Professor A. Hyland, Vice-President and member of EMG,
    e) Professor B. Harvey, Vice-President for Research Policy & Support
  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 Sociology

*Head of Department*:  Professor A. Szakolczai
*No. of Staff*: 13 academic Staff (10 f/t perm, 3 p/t temp), 3 administrative staff (2 f/t perm, 1 p/t temp)
*Location of Department*:  Safari House, Donovan's Road
*Degrees/Diplomas offered*: BA, MA, MPhil, PhD
*No. of students*: In 1999/2000 the department had 262 U/G FTEs and 23 P/G FTEs, distributed as follows:

| Arts | Medicine |
|------|----------|
| 266 | 19 |

| Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 | JYA | Socrates | Total U/G | Diploma | MA Taught | MA Research | PhD | Total P/G |
|--------|--------|--------|-----|----------|-----------|---------|-----------|-------------|-----|-----------|
| 137 | 74 | 46 | 3 | 2 | **262** | 1 | 14 | 3 | 5 | **23** |

*Aims & Objectives*
➢ To be the best Sociology department in Ireland
➢ To achieve a European and world reputation in key fields of social theory, development and identity.
➢ To make a substantial contribution to the advancement of sociology in Ireland.
➢ To provide excellent undergraduate and postgraduate teaching programmes.
➢ To lead the field in research.

## General Comment on Quality Review

The Peer Review Group were very impressed with the high intellectual quality, enthusiasm and commitment of all the department academic personnel and found that there was patent student enthusiasm about the stimulating nature of their courses at undergraduate and postgraduate level.  Some omissions from the documentation supplied to the review group in advance were supplied during the review visit. The review group would also have liked a short account of the history of the department and how it relates to cognate departments in UCC.

## Progress on Recommendations for Improvement

|  | Recommendation of the PRG | Recommendation of the QPC | Follow-up Report – Oct. '02 |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | That all staff, including part-time should be included in staff meetings and circulation of full minutes of staff meetings to all. | Endorsed recommendation and welcomed action | Implemented |
| 2. | That the department continue to acknowledge the breath of activities appropriate to a university department | Endorsed recommendation. Action should be taken by all staff | Implemented. The members of the Department are continuously working on this. |
| 3. | That the development of a postgraduate programme should not lead to the exclusion of some members of staff from that programme | Endorsed recommendation. Appropriate action should be taken by Head of Department | The Department agrees with this recommendation and will ensure that the appropriate action is taken. |
| 4. | That the department should more actively engage in the ongoing development of interdisciplinary subject areas at undergraduate level. | Recommended that consideration should be given to possible actions by all staff | The Department of Sociology is significantly involved with the Departments of Epidemiology & Public Health, Nursing Studies, Applied Social studies and the Centre for Migration Studies. The Department is the leading department in the Faculty of Arts in allowing its students access to modules in other departments and in allowing students in other programmes access to the Sociology modules. |

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| 5. | That the department be more active in applying for IT facilities | Endorsed recommendation strongly. Suggested that the Head of Department should meet with the VP for Planning, Communications and Development to discuss the needs of the department in this regard and how a development plan might be devised to meet those needs. | See copies of letters to VP for Planning, Communications & Development attached. The Department is still awaiting a response. It is hoped that the Dean of Arts will be able to commit some resources to the Department of Sociology shortly to assist in the provision of facilities. |
| 6. | That training in statistics and IT skills be recognised as essential and developed | Comment as for recommendation 5 above | Students are encouraged to take Statistics & Computer Science in $2^{nd}$ year. These modules have always been a part of the degree programme. |
| 7. | That consideration be given to increasing the course content in Economics and Political Science | Noted that the Dean of Arts is willing to discuss this. Suggested that the Head of Department should initiate discussions with the Dean of Arts as to how to progress this | Implementation of this recommendation is currently under discussion in the Faculty of Arts. Progress is slow. The Department is actively participating in 3 discussion groups on the matter. |
| 8. | That the structuring of programme choices for MA students be considered | Endorsed recommendation. Welcomed proposed action. | Further improvements of structuring and development of the programmes is on-going. |
| 9. | That the $1^{st}$ Year curriculum be re-considered in the light of the beginner's level of the students | Endorsed recommendation. Welcomed proposed action. | The curriculum has been re-considered and substantial changes have been made and a new programme is now being offered. |
| 10. | That fuller staff-student liaison arrangements be developed | Recommended implementation of staff: student committee asap | There is a departmental staff/student committee that meets regularly. New representatives are elected every year. |

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|---|---|---|---|
| 11. | That the Department seek Tenure B contracts for its research-active non-tenured staff | Suggested that the Head of Department discuss issues with the Director of Human Resources. It was noted that some of the issues concerning contract staff will be addressed in new legislation which is due to be applied to contract staff shortly | The Head of Department has had discussions with the VP for Human Resources and is awaiting new information concerning contract staff. |
| 12. | That the Department continue to be active in seeking funding from external sources | Endorsed recommendation and proposed action | Members of the department have been successful in securing extra funding from the EU and form the HEA under the PRTLI 3 programme in the past year. |
| 13. | That the Department develop pro-active research initiatives of an inter-disciplinary nature | Endorsed recommendation and noted departmental response | The Department is already engaged in multi-disciplinary projects and the aim and practice is that all research projects are inter-disciplinary. |
| 14. | That the Department develop active liaison with the Research Office | Endorsed recommendation and welcomed proposed action by department. | Implemented. The Department took the lead in developing a faculty-wide proposal under PRTLI 4, which engaged the support of up to 50 members of faculty. |
| 15. | That the Head of Department engage fully with the pragmatic processes involved in college and department administration and governance | Endorsed recommendation. Clearly it is essential the Head engage fully with the university. It is recognised that there is an increasing administration burden on heads of departments. Suggested that delegation of some issues to other members of staff be considered as a means of dealing with the load. It was noted that departmental committees could be of great assistance in getting the work done. | The Head of Department is fully engaged and participates as fully as possible. |

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| 16. | That the Department increase its profile within the university – it is currently perceived to be 'remote' | Appropriate action should be taken by department staff | The members of the Department are actively working on this and are involved in the following committees: Faculty Academic development Committee, Academic Council, Board of Language and Cultural Studies, Staff Student Relations Committee, Faculty of Arts, Regulations Committee, Board of Film Studies, Library Committee. |
| 17. | That the university address the issue of adequate contractual arrangements for part-time and temporary staff | This is an issue for the Head of Department to discuss with the Director of Human Resources. | The Department does its best to insure the adequacy of contractual arrangements – this is contingent on budget allocation by the Finance Office. |
| 18. | That the Office of the VP for Research Policy & Support improve its communication of opportunities to all staff and departments | The department should discuss this with the Office of the VP for Research Policy & Support. The Committee noted that there is very wide dissemination of information from the Office of the VP for Research. It is important to ensure that all staff are connected to the college network so that they may receive the extensive information that is circulated by the Office on a regular basis | No specific action was required. |
| 19. | That the university should re-consider the percentage of the overall budget allocated to the Library with a view to making it comparable with that in other Irish universities and European institutions. | QPC is aware of the issue. It is an issue that is currently being discussed centrally within the university. | This is a central issue and is under on-going active consideration by the university. |

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| 20. | That new staff, and in particular, Heads of Departments, undergo a formal induction process to acquaint them with the structures and procedures of the college. | This in already on-going. There is a formal induction programme for all new staff and it is planned to expand the programme this year. In addition HEA funding has been secured to organise a training programme on management and organisational skills for Heads of Departments. | The Department of HR have expanded their induction programme and are holding regular sessions designed to assist Heads of Departments in their duties, including an induction for new Heads of Departments plus follow-up training as identified by the group. A training programme on management and organisational skills for all Heads of Departments will commence in the second teaching period of the 2002/03 academic year. |
| 21. | That a working party be set up to formulate an academic strategy for the implementation of the planning of a new Social Sciences Building | Suggest that the Head of Department meet with the VP for Planning, Communications and Development to discuss the needs of the department in this regard and how a development plan might be devised to meet those needs. Development of the Social Sciences area is included as part of the Strategic Plan. QPC suggested that the head and staff of the department hold discussions with cognate depts and be pro-active in furthering the debate on the issues | The Department has set up a space committee and is awaiting any recent developments from the VP for Planning, Communications and Development. |

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| 22. | That the Faculty of Arts should consider the setting up of a body to represent the 16 departments whose budgets are derived from the Dean of Arts | The Dean of Arts is already considering how best to organise the faculty business and to involve all departments | Has a committee of Heads of Departments which meets – also faculty executive which meets regularly to decide budget allocations and issues. The decisions are taken by the Dean, following discussions with the Heads of the Departments, and all allocations are informed to everyone concerned. |