

**University College Cork
National University of Ireland, Cork**

Quality Improvement/Quality Assurance

Peer Review Group Report

Department of Ancient Classics

Academic Year 2001/02

INTRODUCTION

1. MEMBERS OF THE PEER REVIEW GROUP

Professor Tim J. Cornell, Department of History, University of Manchester, UK
Professor John Dillon, School of Classics, Trinity College Dublin
Professor Terence O'Reilly, Department of Hispanic Studies, UCC (Chair)
Dr. Grace Neville, Department of French, UCC

2. TIMETABLE OF THE SITE VISIT AND OUR COMMENTS ON ITS ADEQUACY

Satisfactory overall. We found that the 15-minute slots allotted to staff / student representatives were somewhat tight. We would have liked to see the Registrar (though we understand from the Vice-President, Prof. A. Hyland, that he is unavoidably off campus at the moment). We were nonetheless happy with the representation of other categories at UCC (Vice-President, library personnel, etc.). The timetable for the conduct of the visit is attached as Appendix A.

3. METHODOLOGY WE FOLLOWED IN PREPARING OUR REPORT

The various members of the review group took copious notes over the two days of the visit. We discussed, reviewed and collated these in our final report.

4: THE SELF-ASSESSMENT REPORT AND OUR COMMENTS ON IT

We would wish to stress our satisfaction that this section was splendidly prepared in every respect by the academic and administrative staff of the Department of Ancient Classics. The overall report was honest and open, and faithfully relayed all comments made in the individual self-assessment reports.

The report sees the Department mainly from the staff point of view: it does not give a clear enough picture of what it is like to be a student progressing through the various years. It was only when we met the students that we got a real grasp of their experience.

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FINDINGS

1. DEPARTMENT DETAILS, ORGANISATION AND PLANNING

We are pleased to note that the Department has been transformed in the past few years. It is still in state of transition. We commend UCC for supporting the Department of Ancient Classics after a difficult number of years and we stress that it is imperative that this support should continue. In particular, it is important that staffing levels in the Department be maintained at present levels so that it can fulfil its mission into the future.

The Department's Strategic Plan correctly emphasises its two main projects, the Documents of Ireland project and the Summer School, as well as the intention of providing service courses to other areas of Humanities at undergraduate level. We commend these developments.

The development of modularisation in an interdisciplinary direction would be desirable for a number of reasons, not least of which would be its favourable impact on student numbers in the Department.

The College Language Teacher post in Classics should be integrated into the Department. The issue of promotional outlets / career structure for CLTs should be addressed. The CLT in Classics has a huge workload especially because of the (highly successful) Summer School organised by this staff member; consequently, it is important that the question of the huge disparity in workloads between CLTs in the various language departments be investigated immediately.

Liaison with the UCC Library should be tighter – we would wish to encourage the Department to develop its contacts there. For instance, course bibliographies could be given to the subject librarian who suggested, *inter alia*, that she could collaborate with Department staff to facilitate book availability around essay deadlines.

We noted the problems associated with the lack of physical space in the Department. In particular, Room 220 (ORB), which is surrounded by Classics Department offices, presents a particular difficulty. Its use by the Department of Education for music education is disruptive due to the lack of soundproofing. We understand that this matter was referred to the UCC Buildings Committee and that a recommendation that this room should be soundproofed was made. To date, however, nothing has been done. This matter should be prioritised by the College authorities. This room represents very valuable space and should be available for use by the Ancient Classics Department if necessary in collaboration with the Education Department.

Post-graduate space is very cramped and insufficiently resourced at present. Our attention was drawn to the fact that there is only one computer in the Classics Post-Graduate Room (which is not even hooked up to the Internet!) and no printer.

We strongly recommend that a departmental student booklet be available. One of its purposes would be to provide students with required information on the following: list of staff, their research interests, contact details, office hours, etc. This booklet should contain student-friendly course descriptions at each level, explaining clearly students' intended progression from year to year, advice on study skills, definitions of what good written work should be, guidelines for presentation of written work, bibliographies, work and attendance requirements (stressing, for instance, that at least as much time again is imperative in private language study as in classroom contact), deadlines for written work, examination regulations, etc. In particular, the recommendations contained in various external examiners' reports regarding what is required at different grades could usefully be called to students' attention. It should also contain a general statement about the value of a Classics degree, employment possibilities for Classics graduates, etc. (liaison with the UCC Careers Office could be useful here.) The latter could be of particular benefit to students (and their parents) especially when students are selecting their Second Year subjects.

2. TEACHING AND LEARNING

In general, we recommend that the Department should do what it is good at rather than try to cover everything,

We were very impressed by the amount of material covered in the teaching of Latin and Greek. These areas are proving to be very successful and are much appreciated by the students.

Greek and Roman Civilisation is a highly successful First Year programme. It should be the flagship of the Department and ought to be attracting large numbers of students in Second Year. The Department should urgently consider how to attract more students into Second and later years.

We found that in First Year the Department is trying to teach too much: too much material is covered and students are in danger of being overfed. In addition, some of the material is too demanding and too sophisticated for First Year students. Student are expected to be able to adopt a well-informed approach to and undertake a sophisticated analysis of the subject, with insufficient library resources. We recommend instead a broad general account of classical culture as a basis for First Year.

Level one tutorials should be regarded as a back-up of lectures, not as a supplement. Part of their function should be to address ongoing student queries and to elicit student responses. To this end, tutors should receive more guidance.

Second and Third Year courses should be targeted more towards the research interests of staff, should be thematic in form and content, and presented in a way that would make them more attractive to students from the Department and from outside. Attractive courses should reinforce the work carried out in First Year.

Third Year should represent a further progression from Second Year, should be linked to research interests of staff and offer a challenge to the Department's best students to produce work of a high level.

In the area of modularisation, more flexibility should be encouraged at faculty level to allow students to take a 'discretionary sixth' ('floating' 5-credit module). Since the Department could benefit from this, it should consider offering a range of 5 or 10-credit modules. Courses on *inter alia* women in antiquity, mythology, ancient drama, and religion could be attractive to students from other disciplines as well as to Classics students.

The Department should encourage younger members of staff to avail of support in teaching that is currently being developed at a College-wide level. We also welcome the university's offer of training courses, and recommend that staff continue to avail of these. The mentoring of younger staff should be arranged.

3. RESEARCH AND SCHOLARLY ACTIVITY

We recognise with pleasure the radical and dynamic change in the Department's research culture since the appointment of new Head of Department. A serious, productive research culture is clearly evident in the Department at all levels. It seems to us that the Department has chosen well in developing expertise in Neo-Latin through the Documents of Ireland project. The gaining of one Government of Ireland scholarship and two Government of Ireland post-doctoral research Fellowships is a good indication of the Department's successful research strategy, and the impressive sums of money gained through the PRTL are remarkable for a department of its size.

A further impressive research initiative is the Summer School in Greek and Latin which is unique in Europe. It provides essential research training for graduate students from a wide range of backgrounds and is a valuable research resource for a wide range of disciplines within the Humanities.

All staff in the Department are actively engaged in research. We would therefore wish to encourage the maintenance of a research-friendly atmosphere. This should lead to greatly increased levels of publications in future. Greater efforts should be made to facilitate this through a proper system and programme of sabbatical leave (via provision of teaching cover). Lecture schedules could be organised to facilitate this.

We note the difficulties of pursuing a research strategy in the library culture that obtains at present.

We would recommend that staff explore the possibility of applying for *major* research grants in order to carry out major projects. All levels of staff should consider this. Among various benefits of such funding could be the possibility of obtaining more research staff.

4. STAFF DEVELOPMENT

We commend the University for deciding to fill position to be vacated by a senior lecturer, the failure to fill which would have rendered the Department incapable of fulfilling its mission, and we stress again the critical importance of maintaining satisfactory staffing levels in small departments.

We welcome the fact that in recent years the unacceptably high teaching hours of staff have been brought down to more realistic levels.

On the important issue of promotion, we note the need to develop more stability and more patterns to maximise promotion chances for staff, after recent years in which different realities prevailed.

5. EXTERNAL RELATIONS

The Department has played a long and important role in this area. Without wishing to highlight an exhaustive list of achievements, we note, for instance that members of the department have served as Director of the Irish Institute of Hellenic Studies in Athens, as a representative on the Classical Association of Ireland, as chair of the RIA's National Committee for Greek and Latin Studies (currently held by a member of the department). One of the members of staff is co-author of the standard texts on reading Greek and reading Latin: these are the most widely used textbooks for teaching of these languages at university in the English-speaking world.

The Department's involvement in the Hiberno-Latin project is of great significance, and we commend the conferences and post-graduate seminars it has organised.

Liaison with schools is very important, and we recommend that the work the Department has carried out (e.g. visits to transition year groups in secondary schools) be continued. An inventory / mailing list should be established of the schools in the region who teach Latin or Classical Studies, and the Department should invite students and teachers to visit the Department. Schools should be contacted with an offer of talks on Classics topics (as happens elsewhere). Lectures could be offered on the Leaving Certificate syllabi of Latin and Classical Studies.

6. SUPPORT SERVICES

It should be College policy that letters be acknowledged and that the relevant person responsible for an area be identified. Liaison with the Finance Office is not satisfactory. Much time is wasted trying (not always successfully) to identify the

person responsible for a particular area. We note similar difficulties in communications with the Buildings Office.

We would wish to recommend closer communication between the Department and the subject librarian. Greater benefit could be gained through closer contact with the subject librarian: copies of book orders could be discussed with/ sent to her. In particular, the Library staff we met were willing to make provision for the difficulties caused by large group teaching: reading lists should be sent to them to be put up on web; the Department should liaise with them on the matter of essay deadlines.

The whole question of the establishment of a working research library must be addressed urgently by the institution if research is to be fostered. Staff and students alike commented unfavourably on Library holdings/ services. The basic teaching holdings are not sufficient: library grants are insufficient to cover them. One researcher described the Library to us as 'more resembling a second-hand book shop'; a post-graduate stated that it is easier (less noisy) to read in the Students' Union building than in the Library. Staff must travel to other libraries in Ireland and abroad to access basic material. Given current problems with Library holdings, charges for inter-library loans should be waived for staff and post-graduates.

We were dismayed by the lack of security at the Library entrance. Clear failure to observe and enforce rules seems to make the Library unsuitable for serious work. The Library staff are aware of this but need support from the institution in enforcing rules.

Criticism was voiced of the service provided by Campbell's Catering. Why not allow more competition on campus in order to improve services for students?

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OVERALL ANALYSIS

1. STRENGTHS

From all sources (staff and students) it is clear that the key to the present buoyancy is the leadership of the current Head of Department. Morale is commendably high and an atmosphere of strong collegiality prevails: this, too, is due in no small part to the current leadership. We found that at all levels the Department is an admirably united, vibrant, forward-looking one where the overall atmosphere is conducive to serious work.

The students are positive overall, and recognise that some of the problems they encounter are outside the Department's control. They appreciate the teaching and dedication of staff.

The long tradition in the Department of teaching Greek and Latin is remarkably successful given how demanding it tends to be on students.

Niche areas are well chosen: the Summer School and the Centre for Neo-Latin Studies (with its Irish dimension): these are of huge importance for a wide range of scholars worldwide.

The Department is developing its research strengths and we expect it to be a serious centre for the study of the subject in the future.

Solid and productive work is being done on a wide range of areas including Greek tragedy and comedy, Lucian and late Roman military history, and other aspects of the late antiquity.

2. WEAKNESSES

Weaknesses are caused by some university structures and college policies within and between faculties. These have an inhibiting effect on the Department's capacity to recruit students especially at Second and Third Year.

We also noted weakness concerning the staffing level which is currently just now sufficient to deliver programmes. A crisis would ensue, however, if any post were to be lost. Due to staffing levels, there is little scope for sabbatical research leave or for the encouragement of sustained research.

Second and Third Year should be restructured: greater flexibility could be achieved if the department did not try to cover everything, and if structures allowed some courses to be dropped occasionally.

Student numbers present a concern. The syllabus offered by the Department should therefore be reorganised in order to attract more students. The existing syllabus (offered by the Department) is rigid and inflexible and needs to be reorganised to this end.

Library provision: see above.

3. OPPORTUNITIES

The restructuring of courses should lead to positive results e.g. the admission of more and better students, help towards the provision of sabbatical leave, and the fostering of a research culture. If the Third Year courses are research-led, this would also help.

The highly successful Summer School could develop into an opportunity to hire an additional staff member to teach and be active in the Department.

The Departmental Neo-Latin Centre could be a world centre, put the Department on the map and heighten its research profile. Its publications could assure the world-wide circulation of important documents such as sources for Irish history (see especially North America).

There is a real opportunity for the Department to apply for major interdisciplinary research grants of 2 - 3 year duration. Younger and established members of staff should be encouraged to apply for these e.g. in areas such as late Roman history, the Irish annals. The institution should supply support for such applications. This might result in the acquisition of research assistants with teaching duties who could ease workloads.

4. THREATS

In a period of recession, the Department might lose a staff member who might not be replaced. It is therefore constantly vulnerable. It currently has gained momentum and is visibly succeeding in its mission, but this could be lost.

A drop in student retention rates could lead to difficulties. Rigid departmental structures in the University make it difficult for the Department to fulfil its service role.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- reorganise the Greek and Roman Civilisation course to include flexible options on staff research interests
- provide an informative, student-friendly Departmental booklet
- liaise with schools – offer a course on the Leaving Certificate Latin / Classical Studies courses
- develop provision for sabbatical leave; the University should address with urgency the question of the provision of sabbatical leave in small departments
- staffing levels must be maintained at a viable level
- open up the modular system to make it more flexible/ open
- actively pursue major research grants
- develop the Summer School
- in the Department's literature, stress to employers the value of a Classics education
- get information from IBEC and similar organisations on desirable qualities required in graduates
- liaise with Careers Service re graduate employment
- liaise more closely with the Library
- We were particularly impressed by the role played by the manager of Neo-Latin project and feel it would be highly desirable that the important and valuable gifts of this project manager could be supported on an imaginative inter-departmental basis – this should be considered by the Faculty and the University.
- Change the name of the Department to 'The Department of Classics', in line with practice elsewhere.

Timetable for conduct of Peer Review Group Visit

Department of Ancient Classics

Monday 11 March 2002

- 18.00 – 19.30 Meeting of members of the Peer Review Group for briefing by Director of Quality Promotion Unit, Dr. N. Ryan.
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.
- 20.00 Dinner for members of the Peer Review Group and Head of Department and Departmental Co-ordinating Committee.

Tuesday 12 March 2002

- 08.30 – 09.00 Convening of Peer Review Group in Room 255, O’Rahilly building
- 09.00 – 13.00 Consideration of Self-Assessment Report and other inputs along with all department staff, including administrative / technical / support staff, as appropriate. Time will be allowed for private meetings of members of the Peer Review Group with members of staff.
- 09.00 – 12.30 Meetings with individual members of staff.
09.00 Dr. Pat Cronin
09.15 Dr. Conn Murphy
09.30. Dr. David Woods
09.45 Dr. Noreen Humble
10.00 Ms. Margaret Lantry
10.15 Mr. John Barry
10.30 Ms. Carmel McCallum-Barry
10.45 Ms. Vicky Janssens
- 11.30 Dr. Margaret Buckley
12.00 Ms. Olive O’Flaherty
12.15 Dr. Chris Gaynor
12.30 Professor Keith Sidwell, Head of Department
- 13.00 – 14.00 Working lunch for members of Peer Review Group
- 14.00 – 14.30 Visit to core facilities of Department
- 14.30 – 17.00 Meetings with representative selections of students and recent graduates
- 14.30 Sheila O’Mahony and Bryan Lovely (Post Graduates)
14.45 Beverly Bryan GK1001
15.00 Pdraig Coakley GR3 and LT3
15.15 Jessica Whitty GR1001
15.30 Fiona Foskin GR1001

15.45 Nora Comerford LT2 and GR2 and Claire Kenny LT2
16.00 Caroline Kemp LT1001
16.15 John Ring GR2
16.30 Amy Morel-Berthier GR3
16.45 Eithne Hurley, David Caulfield (Post Graduates)
Majella O'Callaghan (Past Graduate)

18.30 Meeting of Peer Review Group to identify remaining aspects to be clarified and to finalise tasks for the following day.
Working dinner for members for the Peer Review Group

Wednesday 13 March 2002

08.30 – 09.00 Convening of Peer Review Group in Room 255, O'Rahilly building

09.00 – 09.30 Visits to facilities such as lecture theatres and Computer Services, etc. as appropriate.
Rooms ORB 2.05, ORB 2.06, Blackboards in ORB 1.44 and ORB 1.45 and Room 2.21 (Wednesday afternoon approx 3.00 p.m. to hear noise from Room 2.20)

09.30 – 10.00 Professor Aine Hyland, Vice-President & member of Executive Management Group

10.00 – 11.00 Visit to Q+3, Boole Library. Meeting with Ms. Margot Conrick, Head of Information Services and Ms. Olivia Fitzpatrick, Subject Librarian

11.00 – 11.30 Professor Pat Fitzpatrick, Chair, Academic Council Committee on Research & Dr. Ruth Davis, Research Support Officer, Office of Vice-President for Research Policy & Support

12.30 – 13.00 Professor Peter Woodman, Dean of Arts Faculty

13.00 – 14.00 Professor Keith Sidwell, Head of Department (to clarify any outstanding issues)
Working Lunch for members of the Peer Review Group

14.00 – 17.00 Preparation of first draft of final report

17.00 – 17.30 Exit presentation made by the Chair of the Peer Review Group summarising the principal findings of the Peer Review Group. (Note: this presentation was not for discussion by the members of the department at this time)
Venue: Room 255, O'Rahilly Building

19.00 Working dinner for members of the Peer Review Group to complete drafting of report and finalisation of arrangements for speedy completion and submission of final report.

Thursday 14 March 2002

Externs depart