

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

Quality Improvement/Quality Assurance

Peer Review Group Report

Ionad na Gaeilge Labhartha

Academic Year 2003/04

20th May 2004

Members of the Peer Review Group:

1. Professor Niall Ó Murchadha, Department of Physics, UCC (Chair)
2. Dr. Donal Hurley, Department of Mathematics, UCC
3. An tStiúthóir Peadar Mac an Iomaire, Ionad na Gaeilge Labhartha, NUI Galway
4. Dr. Seán Farren

Timetable of the site visit

The timetable for the site visit is inserted as Appendix A. The Peer Review Group was very appreciative of the efficient organisation of the timetable by the office of the Quality Promotion Unit. It also appreciated the opportunity to meet with the wide range of representatives of people who avail of the Ionad's activities and members of the UCC authorities who interact with the Ionad.

Peer Review Members

1. Professor Niall Ó Murchadha, Department of Physics, UCC (Chair)
 - Chair and overall coordination of review process. Drafting of the Irish version of report.
2. Dr. Donal Hurley, Department of Mathematics, UCC
 - Drafting of English version of report. Aspects of review related to Gaeltacht activities
3. An tStiúthóir Peadar Mac an Iomaire, Ionad na Gaeilge Labhartha, NUI Galway
 - Aspects of review related to strategic planning and work with external bodies.
4. Dr. Seán Farren
 - Aspects of review related to courses.

Site Visit

The Peer Review Group visited the Ionad in the O’Rahilly Building and Brú na Laoi at the Castlewhite Student Apartments

- At the Ionad Offices/Teaching area, we were very concerned with the severe lack of space in the Ionad. Each of the offices, and the teaching space, are used for several purposes. This is now causing severe constraints on developing several aspects of the Ionad’s work.
- At Brú na Laoi, Castlewhite Apartments, we were impressed with the fine facilities the student residents have and with the fact that they are located together so that there is a mini Gaeltacht on campus.

Overall Analysis

- **Self-Assessment Report**

The Report was well presented and gives a full and accurate account of the many activities. It highlighted difficulties which are related to understaffing and lack of special accommodation.

- **Overall Analysis**

The members of the Peer Review Group were very impressed by the Ionad and its staff. The wide ranging activities provide the total UCC community with support to foster and develop the Irish language. Irish language courses are delivered by a dedicated and enthusiastic staff in a professional manner. The success of the bilingualism policy at UCC is due to the Ionad and, in addition, its critical role in the support of all Irish language activities in the surrounding community is a very important positive aspect of the Universities outreach activities.

Given these impressions, the Peer Review Group believes there is now a need for strategic planning. It is regrettable that this planning was not clearly evident in the self-assessment report.

However, in interviews we had with Ionad staff, it is clear that there is some (informal) discussion about this among staff and that they do indeed have ideas about the further development of the Ionad. We formed the impression that the staff are so absorbed with their day-to-day activities that there is little time to engage in the type of formal strategic discussions required to develop the Ionad to its full potential. Related to this is the fact that we are concerned that some staff may lose their effectiveness as a result of the heavy work burden they are enduring.

- **Benchmarking**

We note that the Ionad has selected the corresponding Ionad at National University of Ireland Galway for benchmarking purposes. This is very appropriate as both have similar duties and operate in Universities of similar size. The Peer Review Group is also aware of the significantly better staffing and special facilities which are available to the Galway unit.

Ionad Activities

It is clear to the Peer Review Group, from the Self-Assessment Report and from meetings with representatives of beneficiaries of its services, that Ionad na Gaeilge Labhartha is involved in a very wide range of activities, within UCC and externally, supporting and extending the use of Irish. These include the provision of courses for students and staff of the University as well as for the general public. It is also involved in activities with the Gaeltacht community as well as many of the Gaelscoileanna (primary) and all-Irish Secondary schools in Munster. The Irish speaking section of Castlewhite Apartments and the Seomra Caidréamh, which is the centre for all Irish related activities at the University, are administered by the Ionad. Translation services for the University and the public are provided by the Ionad.

1. Courses

Beginner Courses

These courses are provided for students and staff of the University who have no knowledge of Irish or who wish to refresh their knowledge of the language. The

emphasis is on oral work and extensive use is made of I.T. and audio-visual equipment in the classes. Visits to the Gaeltacht and guest lecturers ensure that these classes provide a broad Irish cultural experience.

In our meetings with representatives of foreign students, it is clear that they very much appreciate the basic knowledge of Irish language and culture which they acquire at these courses. The professionalism of the delivery of the courses was highly praised. Indeed, the exact same sentiments were expressed by all the different groups we met who take courses from the Ionad.

Diplomas

The Ionad currently offers two Diploma programmes, “An Ghaeilge Fheidhmeach” and “An Dioplóma í bhFoghlaim and i Múineadh Ríomhchuidithe na Gaeilge”. Both are two-year part-time courses and their objectives are the provision of oral and written skills which will enable students carry out effectively their professional activities through the medium of Irish. The second one is directed at those who teach Irish at primary and second levels and at those teaching other subjects through the medium of Irish. Both Diplomas are clearly very successful and are important components in the continuing education activities of UCC.

Evening Courses

These courses are available to the public at large. According to the Self-Assessment Report, the objective of the courses is to enable learners acquire the ability to converse freely in Irish and to develop precision in the use of the language. These courses are now so successful that all the Irish language organisations in Cork city have withdrawn from the provision of such courses. Consequently, the Ionad is playing a significantly strategic role in the development of Irish throughout the city and surrounding areas in the provision of these courses and other the support it provides for Irish activities.

Professional Courses

Recently the Ionad has initiated two courses to support professionals working through the medium of Irish. One course is targeted at journalists and the second at I.T. personnel.

2. Brú na Laoi and Student Activities

The Ionad is extremely active in encouraging and supporting activities through Irish among the students. Brú na Laoi, which is a mini-Gaeltacht residential unit for 26 students located in Castlewhite Apartments, and the three Irish societies (an Chuallacht, an Cumann Drámaíocht, an Cumann Ceol Traidisiúnta) all receive strong support from the Ionad. Representatives from the three societies and Brú na Laoi met the Peer Review Group and confirmed to us the extent of the support they receive from the Ionad and state that their successful activities are very dependent on support from the Ionad.

3. Gaeltacht, Gaelscoileanna and Second Level Schools

The Ionad has strong links with the Corca Dhuibhne Gaeltacht through the weekend visits by students and its courses and the Gaeltacht Scholarship Scheme. These activities enhance the strong connection between UCC and the strongest Munster Gaeltacht to their mutual benefit. The Ionad is also active with Primary and Second Level schools. For example, it administers the Scéim na Scól for the benefit of all-Irish Second Level schools in Munster. This programme which is run in parallel with the universities 'Schools Liaison Programme', is designed to publicise UCC in general and, in particular, the Irish language activities of the College. Schemes, such as the Ó Ríordáin Scholarship, give support to the Gaelscoileanna.

4. Seomra Caidrimh

The Seomra Caidrimh is the nerve-centre of Irish activities at UCC. Its activities include being a staff common room, a meeting centre for Student Societies involved in Irish culture, a venue for public lectures in Irish, etc. By taking responsibility for the overall running of the Seomra Caidrimh, the Ionad facilitates interaction and cohesion of all Irish activities at UCC.

Recommendations

Staffing

It was clear to the Peer Review Group (PRG) from reading the Self-Assessment Report and interviews with the Ionad staff that they are having great difficulty sustaining the wide-ranging activities they are engaged in. Indeed it seemed to us that they are close to breaking point due to under-staffing. Furthermore, as a result of the *Official Languages Act (2003)*, the Ionad will be required to extend their activities. For these reasons, it is essential that the staffing levels of the unit are addressed by UCC as a matter of urgency.

Recommendation 1

The PRG recommends that the two full-time temporary positions (Senior I.T. Assistant and Director of Applied Irish Courses) be immediately established as permanent positions. Furthermore, as a result of the extra demands which will be made on the Ionad to service UCC and External Bodies in meeting their obligations resulting from the *Official Languages Act (2003)*, the Ionad will need extra staff in the short term.

Space

In visiting the Ionad offices and laboratory, the PRG was impressed with the highly efficient use of their meagre spatial resources. Every room is multipurpose. The teaching room acts also as a language laboratory, a storage room and a meeting room. An office shared by two staff functions also as an IT resource room, and as a storage room. The requirement to have multipurpose rooms is placing severe constraints on their language instruction classes and IT training activities.

Recommendation 2

The spatial requirements of the Ionad need to be properly met as a matter of urgency so that it can carry out its many teaching and training activities without constraints and so facilitate the development of these and new activities it will shortly be required to undertake. In particular, there is

need for a second instruction room, a computer laboratory and extra office and storage space. In addition there is need for a student common room.

Staff of the Ionad

The PRG were very impressed by the dedication, skills and progressive approach of the Ionad staff. They also have a vision as to how the current activities could be developed and new activities undertaken. The questions of research into instructional methodology, establishing collaborations with people/units at other institutions engaged in similar activities were raised. We believe that their ideas for development should be encouraged and facilitated.

Recommendation 3

A sabbatical / study leave scheme, similar to that available to Academic Staff, should be made available to the Ionad staff to enable them to develop and engage in research related to the language and IT instructional activities. UCC must recognise that this will place extra burdens on the Ionad. It is also necessary for the Ionad to continue its work in the development of courses and teaching materials. It is important to collaborate with other institutions (especially their sister Ionaid in the other universities) in this work.

The Ionad staff should be encouraged and facilitated in the development of a professional society which would promote contact and collaboration with other Institutions.

Courses

The PRG was impressed by the wide range of courses offered by the Ionad and the highly professional manner in which this is done. Groups of students praised all the courses highly. A number of issues were raised about the Diploma in Applied Irish by UCC staff we met as well as some of the UCC students. Both groups said that this Diploma is very valuable and suggested it should be made available free of fees to UCC full time registered students and UCC staff. Such a fee concession would be

much appreciated and would serve to encourage many more to avail of the Diploma. The students were also of the view that full-time students should be allowed take this Diploma concurrently with a regular degree programme.

Recommendation 4

We recommend that UCC pays the fees for the Diploma in Applied Irish for UCC staff.

We recommend that fees be waived for full-time registered students and that they be allowed study for the Diploma in Applied Irish concurrently with a regular degree programme.

In addition to the Diploma in Applied Irish, the PRG believes that there is need for a Higher Diploma in Applied Irish. This is as a consequence of the *Official Languages Act* (2003). Such a programme would need to be sponsored within the Academic programmes of the University by Roinn na Nua-Ghaeilge. The PRG believe that such a course could be delivered by the Ionad staff working under the direction of Roinn na Nua-Ghaeilge.

Recommendation 5

The Ionad should consult with Roinn na Nua-Ghaeilge and the Dean of Arts on the possibility of introducing a Higher Diploma in Applied Irish.

Professional Activities

Since its establishment, the Ionad has been engaged in the provision of professional services to UCC Departments and Units as well as to bodies external to UCC. These include translation services, research, training and consultations. Until such time as there is a realistic fee for these services, they will not command respect. The PRG believes that the time has come for the Ionad to insist on professional fees for these services. At a time when the demand for such services will increase and since they are not of the traditional University functions, the Ionad should consider the establishment of a Campus Company as a more appropriate way to administer and provide these services

Recommendation 6

The question of requiring fees for the professional services provided by the Ionad should be examined. Furthermore the Ionad needs to consider the structures which are most appropriate for those services it provides which are not of the traditional university type. The question of a Campus Company should be investigated.

Corca Dhuibhne Gaeltacht and Baile Mhúirne

The Gaeltacht in Corca Dhuibhne is the largest Gaeltacht in Munster. The Ionad has been responsible for a wide range of activities at its Dún Cíomháin premises in the heart of Corca Dhuibhne. These activities are beneficial to UCC students and staff. It is appropriate that UCC continue to take every opportunity to enhance benefits to the Gaeltacht community from which it has derived so much over the years. The PRG very much welcome the fact that the recently built Computer Laboratory installed in Dún Cíomháin, is being made available to the local community for IT training activities. We also note the plans of Comharcumann Forbartha Corca Dhuibhne (CFCD) to extend its training and cultural activities in a proposed new building near Ballyferriter. It seems to us that there is a great opportunity for UCC to avail of these developments to extend its Distance Learning activities directed at the Gaeltacht and Irish language communities. These should be done in close collaboration with CFCD.

Furthermore, we do not believe that the proposed developments in establishing Coláiste Íosagáin, Baile Mhúirne, as a University level institution are likely to proceed given the current financial restrictions.

Recommendation 7

We recommend that the Ionad should give urgent consideration to the matter of extending activities at Dún Cíomháin for the benefit of the local community and the Irish language community. They should engage in discussions with Comharcumman Forbartha Corca Dhuibhne as to how this can be done jointly.

UCC

With the enactment of the *Official Languages Act (2003)*, UCC is faced with extra duties in facilitating the use of Irish in conducting its business at all levels. UCC is fortunate in that it can avail of the experience and facilities of the Ionad to meet these responsibilities. But UCC also needs to recognise the implications for extra resources for the Ionad resulting from this.

Recommendation 8

We recommend that UCC authorities consult with the Ionad on developing a strategy to meet the evolving duties resulting from the enactment of the *Official Languages Act (2003)*.

Bord na Gaeilge (UCC)

The UCC Bord na Gaeilge is the statutory body charged with the advancement of Irish language activities at UCC. The Board has depended on the Ionad to implement these tasks. But the distinction between the Ionad and the Board are very blurred. We note that the Annual Report of the Board is essentially about the Ionad's activities only. It is the view of the PRG that the Ionad needs to develop some of its activities independently of the Board. It seems to us that the question of the relationship between the Ionad and the Board should be reviewed.

Recommendation 9

We recommend that the Ionad and Bord na Gaeilge review their relationship and clarify their mutual obligations.

Timetable for conduct of Peer Review Visit

Ionad na Gaeilge Labhartha

Monday 8th December 2003

- 18.00 Meeting of members of the Peer Review Group
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 the members of the co-ordinating committee

Tuesday 9th December 2003

- 08.30 Convening of Peer Review Group
- 09.00 An tStiúthóir Pól Ruiséal
- 09.30 Consideration of Self-Assessment Report and other inputs along with all unit staff
- 10.30 Tea/Coffee for PRG + all staff

Meetings with individual members of staff of An tIonad.

- 11.00 Ann Ní Ghadhra
11.15 Claire Ní Mhuirthile
11.30 Rós Ní Dhubhda
11.45 Gobnait Ní Loingsigh
12.00 Seán Ó Laoi
12.15 Marian Ní Shúilliobháin
12.30 Ciarán Dawson
- 13.00 Working private lunch for members of Peer Review Group
- 14.00 Mr. Michael Kelleher, Secretary & Bursar/VP for Administration & Finance
- 14.30 Visit to Ionad Conaithe. PRG escorted by Pól Ruiséal & Ciaran Dawson

Meetings with representative selections of students

- 15.00 Mic léinn Fochéime (CDG, ATO)

Aoife Ní Gheannán
Alice Phelan
Barra Ó Cearna
- 15.15 Mic léinn Fochéime (GA1120)

Etchegoyhen, Maylis

Graham Eilís

15.30 Cúrsaí i scileanna

Noelle agus Gordon (ríomhaireacht)
Gearóidín de Buitléir (ríomhaireacht)
Julie-Anne de Róiste (iriseoireacht)

16:00 Ionad Cónaithe Gaeilge

Frank Milling
Tríona de Faoite
Sinéad Garnett
Tomás Óg Ó Ceilleachair (Oifigeach Gaeilge an Aontais)
Gearóid Breathnach (Reachtair na Cuallachta)
Marc Ó Donnagáin (Reachtair na Cuallachta)
Gillian Nic Coitir (Reachtair na Drámaíochta)

16:55 GA1040 & GA1050

Dónall Ó Ceallaigh (GA1040)
Eilís Uí Bhriain (GA1040)
Niamh Ní Mhaoláin (GA1050)
Seán Ó Ceilleachair (GA1050)

17:15 Ranganna Oíche agus Foirne

Olivia Fitzpatrick (rang foirne Sheáin)
Caroline O'Donnell (rang Sheáin)
Catriona Martin (rang Chiaráin)
Kathy Glavanis (rang Chiaráin)
S. Ó Buachalla (rang oíche)

18.00 Meeting with representatives of external local interested individuals

Gearóid Ó Brosnacháin, Chief Executive Ballyferriter Co-op
Micheál Ó Coileáin, Bord Sláinte an Deiscirt
Barra Ó Caoimh, Gaeltaca

19.00 Meeting of Peer Review Group to identify remaining aspects to be clarified and to finalise tasks for the following day followed by a working private dinner

Wednesday 10th December 2003

08.30 Convening of Peer Review Group

08.30 Visit to core facilities of Unit in O'Rahilly Building. PRG to be escorted by Pól Ruiséal & Ciarán Dawson

09.30 Professor Aine Hyland, Vice-President

10.00 Paul Ryan, Manager of Employee Relations, Department of Human Resources

10.15 Professor David Cox, Dean of Faculty of Arts

- 11.00 Seán Mac Aoire, Foras na Gaeilge
- 11.30 Professor Seán Ó Coileáin, Head, Roinn na Nua-Ghaeilge
- 11.50 Tony Perrott, Head, Audio Visual Services Unit
- 12.10 Donnchadh Ó hAodha, Chair, Bórd na Gaeilge
- 12.30 An tStiúthóir Pól Ruiséal
- 14.00 Preparation of first draft of final report
- 17.00 Exit presentation made to all staff of the Unit by the Chair of the Peer Review Group, summarising the principal findings of the Peer Review Group.
- 19.00 Working private 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 11th December 2003

Externs depart