

Department of Economics

Peer Review Group:

Mr. J. Fitzgerald, Librarian, UCC (Chair)
 Professor S. Fahy, Department of Physics, UCC
 Professor A. Matthews, Jean Monnet Professor of European Agriculture Policy, TCD
 Professor F. Stephen, Professor of Economics, University of Strathclyde, UK

Brief Summary of conduct of Site Visit:

The site visit was conducted over 2.5 days from 28th February – 2nd March, 2001 and included meetings with

- i) Head and staff of the department as a group and individually,
- ii) Representatives of undergraduate and postgraduate students,
- iii) Professor M. A. Moran, Registrar & VP for Academic Affairs,
- iv) Professor B. Harvey, VP for Research Policy & Support

and visits to departmental and library facilities in UCC. Professor S. Green, Dean of Commerce Faculty was unable to meet with the Peer Review Group during their visit. However he did meet with the internal members of the Group subsequently.

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 Economics

Head of Department: Professor C. Fanning

No. of Staff: 31 academic staff (14 permanent full-time, 9 contract full-time, 8 contract part-time) and

4 administrative staff

Location of Department: Aras na Laoi

Degrees/Diplomas offered: BA, BComm, BSc (CS + Economics), H Dip Economic Science, MEconSc (Economics), MBS (Business Economics), MA (Economics), PhD, MBA. The Department contributes modules of Economics to other degree and higher diploma programmes.

No. of students: In 1999/2000 the Department had 582 U/G FTEs and 66 P/G FTEs, distributed

as follows:

Arts	Commerce	Food Sc & Tech	Medicine	Science
290	328	6	4	20

Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Evening courses	Socrates	Total U/G	Diploma	MA Taught	MA Research	PhD	Total P/G
177	190	145	63	3	3	582	22	42	1	2	66

Mission Statement

“To identify and train young scholars, create an internal environment to support teaching, research and career advancement for all staff, and ensure a student-focused, quality and innovative approach to academic programmes and their delivery.”

Aims & Objectives

- To create an internal capability for delivering existing undergraduate and postgraduate programmes and for course innovation on a continuous basis
- To devise a staff development programme to complement external recruitment possibilities and underpin staffing stability and competencies

- To develop a portfolio approach to departmental staff competencies in teaching, research and administration/management
- To create the capability and ethos for sustaining research and peer reviewed publishing geared to achieving international recognition
- To develop management processes to support delegated decision authority on the principle of subsidiarity with shared responsibility
- To ensure respect for the actual contribution made by all academic and administrative members irrespective of status.
- To target resources and activities at the core university functions of teaching and examining/validation, research and its dissemination, and academic management
- To foster a co-operative culture through policy formulation, departmental committees, values based decision-making and trust-based management.

General Comment on Quality Review

The review group commended the department for the comprehensive and professionally produced documentation provided for review, and for the open manner in which it responded to requests for information on, and clarification of, programmes and activities. The balance in allocating staff time between undergraduate teaching and administration, on the one hand, and time for research and professional development, on the other hand, should be continually kept under review. There is strong evidence of innovation in the delivery of the curriculum, including excellent teaching methods, well-structured courses and well-organised support activities. The student body appears positive and well disposed. The Department is successfully growing its research activities over the last decade. However there is a need to explore ways of increasing research funding into the Department.

Progress on Recommendations for Improvement

Space Requirements: The Department of Economics is of the view that more space, especially in the form of small group tutorial rooms is required for the support of existing postgraduates and the continued development of postgraduate programmes. One suggestion is that the coffee room/ video conferencing room in Aras na Laoi could be converted into a small group teaching room which would ensure use of the room all day every day.

The Department welcomed having been included at an early and timely stage in the Quality process, having previously had an independent review process conducted according to UK methods to provide a base line for its strategic management. It also wished to acknowledge the exceptional work of the PRG and the support of the QPU.

Recommendation of PRG	Recommendation of QPC	Follow-up Report – Oct. '02
QPU should assist in determining format and content of SA Report	This is currently done. Detailed guidelines have been prepared by the QPC and were made available to the department. However there is no absolute obligation on departments to comply with the Guidelines for Preparation of the SA Report. Central administration does normally provide statistical data to departments as a matter of course.	Implemented. Had been in place prior to the review and followed by Department

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Library document should be referred to departments	This was referred to the department as soon as the document became available. It is now incorporated into the Guidelines for Preparation of the SA Report	Implemented.
A meeting with relevant Dean during the visit of the PRG is essential.	This is a standard part of the conduct of the visit and occurred for all other reviews of academic departments. The Dean of Commerce was unavailable for the visit of the PRG. However the Dean met with the internal members of the PRG subsequently.	Implemented. Had been in place prior to the review. This is scheduled as part of the activities of the PRG for every review visit. It is now standard that all relevant Deans of Faculties that a department is involved with meet with the peer reviewers during the site visit, if at all possible.
It would have been useful to have an initial meeting with the departmental 'co-ordinating committee at beginning of review visit.	This is also recommended by the QPC as part of the structure of the review visit. Not all departments followed this procedure – departments have discretion as to the precise organisation of the timetable for the conduct of the site visit. Will be recommended strongly to departments in the future.	Implemented. This is now standard and is scheduled as part of the review visit for all reviews.
Department is currently at a point where strategic priorities could be usefully re-assessed.	QPC endorsed recommendation and asked Department to include the outcome of the re-assessment when it reports back to the QPC approximately one year from the review.	Department has followed a strategic approach to development since 1992. Currently in final year of 3 year programme. Department will be conducting strategic review of development during the academic year 2002/03, starting with comprehensive review of B.A. programme in November 2002. Strategic work programme for period from 2003/4 will be formulated for October 2003.
Department should prioritise its future activities to make best use of resources	QPC endorsed recommendation and asks Department to include the outcome of the re-assessment when it reports back to the QPC approximately one year from the review.	Department has based actions on strategic approach for a decade and prioritises resource management to make best use of resources to meet academic goals. Department will be conducting a review of its strategic priorities during the academic year

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		2002/03.
<p>Balance of staff workload between UG teaching, administration and research and professional development to be continually kept under review.</p> <p>Consideration should be given to the possibility of consolidating teaching of similar courses to maximise efficiency while retaining quality of UG teaching. Department should allow programmes to run for a period of time and should minimise changing of staff teaching allocations to facilitate freeing up of staff time for other activities.</p>	<p>QPC endorsed recommendations, noting the emphasis on maximising the balance between the quality of delivery of teaching to undergraduates and the necessity of the participation in active research by all staff. It was also noted that individual staff members will have different levels of specialist knowledge in areas of the discipline and recommended that maximum advantage be taken of this.</p>	<p>Consideration of this recommendation has informed decisions taken in 2001/02 on workload allocations and assignments in department. The department is working towards developing a comprehensive measure of workloads for all staff. The Department is reducing teaching loads towards average teaching workloads of the faculty cost centre in which the department is based. Consolidating teaching has implications for quality of teaching, student experience and security (note UCD concerns) etc. issues. Will be considered during strategy review 2002/3.</p>
<p>Students should be better informed in first year of the significance of their choices of modules for subsequent years.</p> <p>Curriculum should be reviewed with particular attention to progression through degree courses.</p>	<p>The QPC noted this recommendation and requested that the department pay particular attention to the possibilities for allowing students maximum choices and commented that streaming of students into particular sub-divisions of the discipline should be avoided if at all possible – in particular in the early years of the programme.</p>	<p>The department acknowledges that this is an issue for the department. The skills acquired by a student during the years of study, as well as the acquisition of factual knowledge, must be marketed to the students and prospective students. The department is actively working to implement this recommendation but is constrained by limited resources and support services.</p>
<p>Analyse high failure rate in Arts 1 in 99/00.</p>	<p>The QPC recommended that the high failure rate be analysed as to all possible causes.</p>	<p>Detailed analysis conducted in context of pattern in other years. The Department considers that 1999/2000 was exceptional. The pattern has returned to that observed prior to 99/00.</p>
<p>Commended efforts of department to inform students of programme of international exchanges.</p>	<p>QPC noted and welcomed the efforts of department</p>	<p>Department is continuing its efforts in this area.</p>
<p>Very good QA procedures for Teaching & Learning. Recommend course review among committees in a more</p>	<p>QPC endorsed recommendation and suggest it be implemented immediately.</p>	<p>Department welcomes and will use the new electronic system for conducting surveys as a means of enhancing units efforts in</p>

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co-ordinated way. Short annual report should be produced on each class/programme, based on student feedback and performance.		acquiring student feedback. Department are currently reviewing the survey questions to be used and are trialling the electronic delivery system which it is hoped to use for all students in 2003/04.
Recommend closer links with Subject Librarian for Business and Economics.	QPC endorsed recommendation.	Librarian to be consulted and, following this, identified actions will be undertaken.
Recommend agreement should be sought to provide access for at least some of the Economics degree programmes to BIS facilities.	The issue of adequate provision of access to computing facilities is being addressed on a university-wide basis. The QPC endorsed the need for discussion on this with Professor C. Murphy, Head of BIS.	Access to the 5 computer laboratories in the School of Mathematics located in the same building would be more convenient and appropriate. Assistance of QPC in arranging access is requested.
Review of desirability of continuing H. Dip. Applied Economics in the light of current developments.	The QPC recommended the department should undertake such a review and report back to QPC as soon as the review is completed.	Programme re-structured on foot of recommendation. As a result H. Dip. App. Econ. attracted 18 fee paying students in 2002/3, with H Dip Bus Econ having 27 fee paying students.
Consideration should be given to extending Staff Development Programme in department. Consider use of sabbatical leave to develop research programmes and contacts. Seek means of increasing research funding into department.	These recommendations were made by the PRG with a view to encouraging development and enabling of research activity among the academic staff. The QPC fully endorsed the recommendations and stressed the need for all staff to be engaged in active research and that commitment of staff to activities such as administration should be kept at a minimum so as to facilitate the freeing up of time for research activities.	Department supports PRG recommendation and QPC endorsement and notes that staff development has always been prioritised in strategies for development since 1990. Through this it has achieved international standards and innovated a highly successful programme for new/young staff through which ensures completion of Ph.D. degrees primarily through top U.K. universities.
Efforts should be made to keep administrative functions in department simple and to retain focus on academic and research priorities.	The QPC noted that this recommendation is encouraging a focus on the two principal academic activities: teaching informed by research and research. The QPC endorsed the recommendation and encouraged the department to implement with immediate effect.	The Department has been acting on this recommendation and continues to function and organise structures for maximum effectiveness. Notes that contribution to academic management is College criteria for promotion. As part of strategy of developing staff the Department considers that a

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		balance of experiences is desirable for providing academic staff with capabilities for achieving personal excellence. The Department has reduced the workloads of academic staff in line with the Faculty of Commerce norms.
University should recognise high skill-level of administrative staff of Department.	The QPC noted with approval the commendation of the quality of the administrative staff and suggested that the high skills level be availed of with the aim of reducing the administration burden on the academic staff, thus freeing up time for further engagement in research activities.	Department has clearly defined roles based on academic management and administrative functions. The Department notes that the University expects academic staff to contribute to academic management for, e.g., promotion. This is very demoralising for administrative staff in the Department.
The University should implement a university-wide staff induction programme for both academic and administrative staff.	Department of Human Resources, in association with the SEDC of Academic Council, has already such a programme in place. The programme is under constant review and expansion. All new staff are invited to participate.	This has been implemented and well-developed induction programmes are now in place for both academic and administrative staff. Staff are now required to attend these. Department suggests that there is a need for focussing aspects of induction programme for academic staff features and on needs of specialised fields rather than treating all as homogeneous 'staff' or 'human resources'.
Department should seek to fill the 3 vacant senior academic posts in department as a means of attracting senior staff who could contribute to building up research capacity in line with the Department's research strategy.	The QPC noted the reason the PRG made this recommendation and suggested that the Department bring forward proposals for filling the vacant posts.	Department recently sought to fill at statutory lecturer level and had process aborted by University authorities after short-listing stage. Department has followed a strategic process of long term development during which it has systematically created international research capability and delivery in 4 strategic research groups.
Up-grading of Postgraduate Laboratory an urgent priority.	The QPC was aware of existing developments in this area. The QPC noted the recommendation, and endorsed the continuing emphasis being placed on these developments.	This recommendation has been implemented and the Department acknowledges the support of Vice-President for Planning, Communications & Development and the Computer Centre. There

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		<p>are now 2 H Dip programmes running, with approximately 50 fee paying students registered. This is a significant growth since the review and there are no computing facilities currently available to support that growth. The success of the Department in attracting students into the H. Dip. Programmes means that the support provided by the Department is no longer sufficient.</p>