

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

Quality Improvement/Quality Assurance

Peer Review Group Report

Department of Law

Academic Year 2005/06

6th April 2006

PEER REVIEW

Members of the Peer Review Group (PRG)

Professor Geraldine McCarthy, School of Nursing & Midwifery, UCC (Chair)

Professor Colbert Kearney, Department of English, UCC

Professor William Binchy, School of Law, Trinity College Dublin.

Professor Hector McQueen, School of Law, University of Edinburgh, Scotland.

Timetable of the site visit

The timetable for the site visit is attached as Appendix A.

The reviewers found the timetable for the site visit to be well structured, covering all aspects considered necessary by the PRG. The PRG met with staff and students of the Department, with external stakeholders, including recent graduates and employers, and with Senior Officers of the University. The PRG viewed the facilities of the Department, visited the UCC Library and viewed IT facilities and holdings together with a meeting with members of the Library support staff.

Methodology

The PRG worked as a group throughout the site visit and conducted all meetings as a team. The external members took primary responsibility for the commentary on the academic programmes and the research activity together with consideration of the provision of adequate and appropriate support facilities to support these programmes. All members contributed to the sections on departmental organisation and planning, external relations and staff development.

Peer Review Group Report

The PRG Report was drafted during the afternoon and evening of the second day and was finalised by use of email communications following the site visit. All reviewers agreed the PRG Report.

OVERALL ANALYSIS

The PRG noted with admiration the achievements of the Department of Law, transforming what was predominantly a part-time department into an impressive, modern and forward-looking academic department. The PRG noted that the excellence which has been achieved in the Department reflects a sustained commitment over time on the part of many staff, some of whom are still serving in the Department. Recent years have seen an exponential growth in student numbers, research output, curriculum development etc., but the success of the Department has been sustained over a significant period. This is equally true of the Evening Law Degree which has been running from 1987 to the present, a period of nearly twenty years, reflecting considerable dedication on the part of all of the academic staff involved. The PRG noted that this rapid development has not been matched by commensurate development by the University in a number of key support areas. The PRG encourages the Department to continue to improve in line with the evolving University ambitions and developments.

Self-Assessment Report (SAR)

The SAR presented by the Department was comprehensive informative and the content was confirmed by students and staff. The analysis was honest and mature and genuinely reflective and convincing. The SAR formed an excellent basis for the conduct of the review and the PRG applauded the Department on the high quality of the document and its presentation.

SWOT Analysis

The PRG considered that the SWOT analysis was carried out in a very inclusive manner and was very comprehensive, leading to an excellent overall analysis in the Self-Assessment Report. The PRG found this analysis to be very helpful to the group in its reflection on the Department.

FINDINGS OF THE PEER REVIEW GROUP

Benchmarking

The PRG would have welcomed a more extensive benchmarking statement in order to inform its views on the future development of the Department in line with the present reforms of the academic structures in UCC. The PRG acknowledges that the present discussion in the University on academic re-structuring may have hampered the Department in its strategic deliberations.

The PRG encourages the Department to look confidently to the future.

The PRG recommends that the Department benchmark itself against other European Law Schools that it would wish to emulate; this would enable the Department to identify its strengths and key areas, such as found in a successful front-ranking law school.

Department Details, Organisation & Planning

It is important – for its own sake and that of UCC – that the Department of Law assert and promote its identity in such a way as to continue to attract students, undergraduate and graduate, national and international. The PRG understands the anxiety of such a successful department faced with the prospect of being joined with Business in a new College structure and strongly recommends that UCC ensure that, in the course of the forthcoming reform, nothing be allowed to prevent or inhibit the continuation of the Department/Faculty of Law as an autonomous entity, independent in academic and budgetary affairs.

The PRG recommends that the identity of the Department and Faculty of Law be preserved, along with its academic and financial autonomy, within the new University structures. It further recommends that a review of the workings of the new College be performed after a two- year period.

The PRG noted that the Student/Academic Staff FTE Ratio is, with one exception, the highest in the University and expressed some concerns at this and the ability of the Department to continue to sustain their activities with such levels of staff.

Committees and Structures

The Department exudes an enviable esprit de corps and the PRG acknowledges that this may be partly due to its committed staff and very extensive committee system. The Group detected some signs that attendance at and contribution to such a large number of meetings was becoming a burden for staff. The following recommendations are made to address this issue.

The PRG recommends

- [a] that consideration be given to amalgamating some of the departmental committees;**
- [b] that meetings be more time controlled;**
- [c] the establishment of ad hoc working parties to deal with specific issues and then dissolved; and**
- [d] the establishment of an executive management group.**

Administrative Issues

There is a real recognition that the roles of administrative staff have changed over the past few years. All new initiatives have impacted on administrative staff and considerable work is being devolved to them, including the HRIS System, the DMIS System and other central administration functions. The administrative staff are to be commended for their willingness to cope with the rapid changes.

The PRG considers that there is a need for continuing consideration of the impact of workload on administrative staff. The need also for some privacy for students in dealing with sensitive issues with administrative staff must be recognised. The PRG reminds the Department and the University that any increase in student or staff numbers has serious implications for administrative support.

Consideration should be given to some flexibility in office opening hours in considering the needs of students, especially at particular times in the year, for example when work is due for submission.

The PRG recommends that when staffing levels are being considered administrative support must also be determined.

Given the strains and stresses of students in a modern university the PRG recommends that some facility be available for administrative staff to speak with students in privacy when the need for one-to-one attention arises. This should be urgently addressed as space becomes available.

The PRG recommends that some flexibility be introduced in office opening hours at appropriate times.

Teaching & Learning

The PRG noted with approval the range and diversity of programmes offered by the Department, at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. The PRG commended the student-focused processes of teaching and learning at both under- and postgraduate levels in the Law Department, evident in interviews with staff and students. Most staff and students evidently appreciate the widespread use of Blackboard, and its continued development is to be encouraged. The Department should bear in mind the continuing need to encourage and develop independent student learning, and the PRG endorsed the significance attached to teaching research and other information skills from the beginning of the undergraduate degree programmes. These should be reinforced throughout any student's career. The Department has also been innovative with regard to the clinical dimension of many of its programmes.. The support of the clinical co-ordinator with an overview of the whole situation may be helpful in this regard.

The PRG supports the intention of the Faculty to review the curriculum of the core BCL degree. Special attention should be paid to maintaining close liaison with other contributors to the programmes, for example the language departments and part-time teachers.

The PRG recommends that all degree programmes be reviewed at regular and cyclical intervals.

The PRG noted the concerns of the Department of Law concerning the Personal Tutor System, and the desire to change the emphasis from support of students with problems

to general guidance of students with regard to such matters as curriculum, careers and forward planning.

The PRG recommends a thorough review of the Personal Tutor system

Evening Law Degree

The PRG noted the success – both academic and social - of the Evening Law Degree, in particular its importance to the profile of the Law Department in the local region and the innovative nature of its facilitation of practitioners in a diverse range of areas.

The PRG recommends that the staff continue to commit themselves fully to the Evening Law Degree which has added so much to the external profile of the Department.

Law and Language Degrees

The PRG also noted the success and popularity of the Law and Language Degrees for which there was universal student approval and appreciation.

The PRG recommends that the Department maintain a close working relationship with the Language Departments in the continuation and development of these successful programmes.

Postgraduate Programmes

The recent success in expanding the postgraduate programme suggests that the Faculty may be nearing the limits of what is possible in its student-focused approach with current staffing resources. The rapid expansion of the doctoral programme has been hugely impressive. Over the coming years it may be sensible for the Department of Law to assess the potential for growth and sustainability of the programme in the light of the Law Department's resources and the pressures of staff time, which further rapid expansion would involve. If the Department of Law wishes to continue to aspire to and attract the participation of international students on the doctoral programme, it should pay particular attention to anticipating special requirements that may be involved, such as those relating to language or immersion in the common law system.

The PRG recommends that further expansion of the postgraduate programmes be made contingent upon the existence of appropriate staffing resources.

The PRG recognised and commended the benefits that an internationally attractive postgraduate programme, involving student research and writing, would bring to students but expressed a concern as to the difficulties that may be encountered by students for whom English is not the first language.

The PRG recommends that the Department and the University together consider the support available for international students, its adequacy and further supports required.

Research & Scholarly Activity

The PRG was greatly impressed by the range and depth of research carried out by members of the Department of Law. The progress that has been made in a short period of time has been truly remarkable. The Department of Law could benefit from combining with other institutions when applying for research grants at national and European levels. The Law Department should investigate new areas which offer opportunities for research liaison at University level, for example in areas such as law relating to medicine and health care and environmental law. The PRG were of the opinion that there is no area of legal research to which external funding is irrelevant. At the bare minimum such funding would be helpful to the Department in bringing visitors to UCC, whether for seminars, conferences to other kinds of meetings and events. It should also further enable staff of the Department to participate in networks and collaboration beyond Ireland so that the international research profile continues to be developed strongly. There may also be ways of extending traditional desk-bound forms of legal research for which funding of research assistance, or even some interdisciplinary work, will be extremely helpful (e.g. law in action, effect of legal change, development of law outside the courts, etc.).

The identification of key areas of strength, development and implementation of strategies to support these including key appointments at senior level is an approach that is typical of successful front-ranking Law Departments/Schools.

The PRG recommends that the Department of Law identify particular areas of strength in its research; prioritise these and base recruitment of senior staff on these developments.

The PRG makes the recommendation to the University that a new senior post should be established, with a brief to facilitate research funding in Law. It does not consider that the precise location of the post is crucial, provided it maximises effectiveness.

Staff Development

The PRG applauds the use of the Departmental sabbatical leave policy as an essential staff development tool which has facilitated staff in development to its present standing. The PRG recognises the need for academic staff to visit other institutions elsewhere, to observe practice in similar Schools of Law, and to develop their own research in cooperation with international researchers in their field. The PRG also noted that the lack of an adequate library resource in UCC necessitates the travel by staff to institutions where such a resource is available.

The PRG notes the participation of many staff in staff development opportunities within UCC and in other external organisations and that staff of the Department participate in all opportunities offered and as workload allows.

The PRG welcomes and commends the re-introduction of the formal mentoring scheme whereby the senior staff work closely with and mentor junior members of academic staff.

External Relations

The Law Department enjoys a very high reputation and profile within the Munster region and at national levels in consequence of its Evening BCL Degree, its Programmes of Continuing Professional Development, the placement of students, the regular contributions of members of staff to media and the links with the professionals and State agencies.

Support Services

The PRG noted the planned introduction of a RAM and devolved budgeting in UCC and hopes that this should provide the Department with an opportunity in the future to prioritise its support service needs.

Library

For historical reasons the UCC Law Department is inadequately served with library holdings. The PRG recognises that the Department of Law has advanced very rapidly over a short period of time and that the Library is trying to catch up with the development of the Department of Law and the modernity of academic law against a background of very significant changes in technology and in types of issues arising now.

The PRG agrees that the library resource available to staff and students in the Department is insufficient, both in terms of numbers and range, based on the views of staff and students. It is not consistent with the needs of a research-intensive Law School, with a heavy undergraduate commitment.

The PRG commends the willingness of library staff to seek professional development as well as enhancement of the research and teaching/learning environment in the Law Library, but believes that these efforts will only bear fruit to a fully satisfactory extent with appropriate investment.

The PRG recommends that the Department continue its development of access to electronic resources and stresses the vital importance of bringing its holdings in books and journals and e-library to levels commensurate with its needs and aspirations for teaching and research.

IT Support

The group was convinced that the Department had good grounds to complain at the inadequate technological support offered by the Computer Centre. Both students and staff indicated valuable equipment was left idle for months because it was not configured or loaded.

The PRG endorses the recommendation made by the Department that there is an urgent need for an IT support officer for routine maintenance of staff and postgraduate facilities, for servicing the requested undergraduate computing facility, and for assisting staff in developing further the innovative work of the Department.

While the PRG was not convinced of the need for further microlab facilities (due to personal computer ownership and growing use of wireless technology), the Law Library does certainly require further investment in relation to teaching and learning (which might be reinforced by the further need for investment in relation to research). The case for better support of students (at all levels), as well as staff, in relation to the provision of information technology was also strongly evidenced by the material put before the PRG.

Space

As referred to earlier, the PRG noted that, for historical reasons, the Department of Law is cramped by its inadequate accommodation. Due to its recent success in attracting new staff and students – especially doctoral students – the Department can barely function within the available rooms. This situation should be remedied as soon as possible.

The PRG recommends that, should adjoining space become available in Aras na Laoi, the University should give priority in allocation to the Department of Law while also pursuing a separate facility for the Department.

The PRG also notes the necessity of high quality maintenance of space allocated to departments in the University.

Parking

The PRG notes the views of staff of the Department of Law in relation to the unsatisfactory arrangements re parking. However the PRG also recognises the constraints under which the University is operating because of its central location in a city and with limited ability to expand its parking facilities. Thus the PRG did not

specifically endorse the recommendation made by the Department in relation to parking facilities.

Departmental Co-ordinating Committee & Methodology employed in the preparation of the Self-Assessment Report

The PRG commended the methodology used by the Department in the preparation for the quality review. The Department established a small co-ordinating committee to oversee the preparation for the review and the documentation and evidence were detailed and thorough. It was evident that all staff of the Department had engaged in the process and the PRG applauded the Department for this inclusiveness and engagement with the process.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Recommendations for improvement made by the Department

The PRG considered all the recommendations made by the Department in its SAR very carefully. The PRG has included commentary on these recommendations in the text above. All the recommendations, where the PRG endorsed them, have been incorporated into the recommendations made by the PRG and are detailed in the following section.

Recommendations for improvement made by the Peer Review Group

1. The PRG recommends that the Department benchmark itself against other European Law Schools that it would wish to emulate; this would enable the Department to identify its strengths and key areas, such as found in a successful front-ranking law school.
2. The PRG recommends that the identity of the Department and Faculty of Law be preserved, along with its academic and financial autonomy, within the new University structures. It further recommends that a review of the workings of the new College be performed after a two- year period.
3. The PRG recommends

- [a] that consideration be given to amalgamating some of the departmental committees;
 - [b] that meetings be more time controlled;
 - [c] the establishment of ad hoc working parties to deal with specific issues and then dissolved; and
 - [d] the establishment of an executive management group.
4. a) The PRG recommends that when staffing levels are being considered administrative support must also be determined.

b) Given the strains and stresses of students in a modern university the PRG recommends that some facility be available for administrative staff to speak with students in privacy when the need for one-to-one attention arises. This should be urgently addressed as space becomes available.

c) The PRG recommends that some flexibility be introduced in office opening hours at appropriate times.
 5. The PRG recommends that all degree programmes be reviewed at regular and cyclical intervals.
 6. The PRG recommends a thorough review of the Personal Tutor system.
 7. The PRG recommends that the staff continue to commit themselves fully to the Evening Law degree which has added so much to the external profile of the Department.
 8. The PRG recommends that the Department maintain a close working relationship with the Language Departments in the continuation and development of these successful programmes.
 9. The PRG recommends that further expansion of the postgraduate programmes be made contingent upon the existence of appropriate staffing resources.

10. The PRG recommends that the Department and the University together consider the support available for international students, its adequacy and further supports required.
11. The PRG recommends that the Department of Law identify particular areas of strength in its research; prioritise these and base recruitment of senior staff on these developments.
12. The PRG makes the recommendations to the University that a new senior post should be established, with a brief to facilitate research funding in Law.
13. The PRG recommends that the Department continue its development of access to electronic resources and stresses the vital importance of bringing its holdings in books and journals and e-library to levels commensurate with its needs and aspirations for teaching and research.
14. The PRG endorses the recommendation made by the Department that there is an urgent need for an IT support officer for routine maintenance of staff and postgraduate facilities, for servicing the requested undergraduate computing facility, and for assisting staff in developing further the innovative work of the Department.
15. The PRG recommends that, should adjoining space become available in Aras na Laoi, the University should give priority in allocation to the Department of Law while also pursuing a separate facility for the Department.

Timetable for conduct of Peer Review Visit

Department of Law

Tuesday 24th January 2006

- 17.30 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.
- 19.30 Dinner for members of the Peer Review Group and Head of Department and Departmental Co-ordinating Committee.

Wednesday 25th January 2006

- 08.30 Convening of Peer Review Group in AL142, Aras na Laoi

Consideration of Self-Assessment Report

- 09.00 Professor Caroline Fennell, Head of Department
- 09.30 Meeting with all members of staff of the Department
- 10.45 **Private meetings with members of staff.**
- 10.45 Ms Mary Donnelly (Senior Lecturer)
Dr Catherine O'Sullivan (Lecturer)
Dr Ursula Kilkelly (Senior Lecturer)
Dr Owen McIntyre (Lecturer)
- 11.10 Ms Mary O'Regan (Senior Executive Assistant)
Ms Imelda Rodgers (Executive Assistant)
Ms Aimée Mullins (Executive Assistant)
Ms Patricia O'Shaughnessy (Executive Assistant)
- 11.30 Ms Claire Jackson (part-time Lecturer)
Mr Pat McCarthy (part-time Lecturer)
Ms Liz Skally (part-time lecturer)
- 11.50 Professor David Gywnn Morgan
- 12.05 Ms Mags Walsh (Departmental Manager)
- 12.20 Professor Irene Lynch-Fannon
- 12.35 Dr Shane Kilcommins (Lecturer)
- 12.50 Mr Gerard Murphy (Clinical Education Coordinator)
- 13.00 Working private lunch for members of Peer Review Group
- 14.00 Visit to core facilities of Department, escorted by Ms. Mags Walsh, Departmental Manager
- 15.00 **Representatives of Undergraduate Students**

Joanna Wilford, (BCL, year 1; mature student)
Mark Collins, (BCL, year 1)
Elaine Houlihan, (BCL Evening degree, year 1)
Lyn McCarthy, (BCL, year 2)
Con Dudden, BCL, year 2)
Chris Bollard, (BCL, year 3)
Karole Cuddihy, (BCL, year 3)
Stephen Coutts, (BCL Law and French, year 4)
Joanne O'Mahony, (BCL Law and French, year 4)
Niamh O'Sullivan, (BCL Law and Irish, year 4)
Denise Roche, (BCL International, year 4)

15.45 Representatives of Postgraduate Students in Taught Programmes

Jim Gannon, (LL.M. General)
Niall Martin, (LL.M. General)
Peter Szlovak, (LL.M. General)
Aisling de Paor, (LL.M. E-Law)
Adrian Bannon, (LL.M. E-Law)
Brendan O' Sullivan, (LL.M. Criminal Justice)
Susan O'Sullivan, (LL.M. Criminal Justice)
Kenneth Kerins, (LL.M. Criminal Justice)
Bernadette Raleigh, (LL.B.)
Emer O'Hanlon, (LL.B.)

16.15 Representatives of Research Masters and PhD Postgraduate Students

Liam Thornton (PhD year 1)
Pablo Cortes (PhD year 1)
Silvana Rendel (PhD year 1)
Claire Murray (PhD year 2)
Liz Campbell (PhD year 2)
Nidal Jurdi (PhD year 2)
Paul Daly (Research LLM year 1)
Micheal O Dowd (Research LLM year 2)

17.00 Conference Call with Mr. Pádraig Ó Ríordáin, Managing Partner, Arthur Cox, Dublin.

17.15 Representatives of recent graduates, employers and other stakeholders

Venue: Staff Common Room

Ms. Susanne Bhattacharya, *Graduate & Legal Assistant to Kathy Sinnott MEP*
Mr. Eamon Harrington, *Graduate & Solicitor, Conway Kelleher Tobin, Cork*
Mr. Philip Coffey, *Graduate & Solicitor, Noonan Linehan Carroll Coffey, Cork*
Mr. Mortimer Kelleher, *Graduate & Solicitor, Barry Turnbull & Co., Cork*
Mr. Brendan Kelly, *Graduate & Barrister*
Ms. Patrice O'Keeffe, *Graduate & trainee solicitor, Conway Kelleher Tobin, Cork*
Ms. Helen Boyle, *Graduate & Barrister*
Ms. Jane Anne Rothwell, *Graduate & Barrister*
Mr. Brian Leahy, *Graduate & Barrister*
Mr. Eoin McSweeney, *Graduate & Solicitor*
Ms. Emily Ryan, *Graduate & Solicitor*
Mr. Barry Sheehan, *Graduate & Solicitor*
Ms. Fiona O'Connell, *Graduate & Solicitor*

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 for members for the Peer Review Group.

Thursday 26th January 2006

08.30 Convening of Peer Review Group in AL142

09.00 Professor Paul Giller, Registrar & Vice-President for Academic Affairs

09.30 Visit to Boole Library, meeting with Ms. Margot Conrick, Head of Information Services and Ms Helen Mulcahy, Law Librarian

11.00 Professor Peter Kennedy, Vice-President for Research Policy & Support

11.30 Ms Carmel Cotter, Finance Office

11.45 Professor Áine Hyland, Vice-President

12.15 Ms. Veronica Calnan, Administrator Faculty of Law

12.30 Representatives of Language Departments

Professor Patrick O'Donovan, Department of French

Dr. Neil Buttimer, Department of Modern Irish

Dr. Gert Hoffman, Department of German

13.00 Working private lunch for members of the Peer Review Group

14.30 Professor Caroline Fennell, Head of Department of Law

15.00 Preparation of first draft of final report

17.00 Exit presentation made to all staff of the Department by the Chair of the Peer Review Group and other members of 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.