

Roinn na Sean- agus na Meán-Ghaeilge

Peer Review Group

Professor Á. Hyland, Professor of Education and Vice-President, UCC (Chair)

Professor É. Ó Carragáin, Professor of English, UCC

Professor F. Kelly, Director of the School of Celtic Studies, Dublin Institute of
Advanced Studies, Ireland

Professor T. Charles-Edwards, Jesus Professor of Celtic, University of Oxford, UK

Brief Description of conduct of site visit

The site visit was conducted over 2.5 days from 11th – 13th January 2004 and included meetings with

- i) Head and staff of the department as a group and individually
- ii) Representatives of undergraduate and postgraduate students
- iii) Representatives of employers, past graduates and other external stakeholders
- iv) Professor M. Aidan Moran, Registrar & Vice-President for Academic Affairs
- v) Professor J. Kevin Collins, Vice-President for Research Policy & Support
- vi) Professor Seán Ó Coileáin, Dean, Faculty of Celtic Studies
- vii) Professor David Cox, Dean, Faculty of Arts
- viii) Ms. Carmel Cotter, Finance Office

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 Roinn na Sean- agus na Meán-Ghaeilge

Head of Department: Professor Máire Herbert

No. of Staff: 4 academic staff, 2 administrative (shared with Roinn na Nua-Ghaeilge)

Location of Department: O’Rahilly Building

Degrees/Diplomas offered: BA, MA, MPhil, PhD

No. of Students: Department has 99 Student FTEs: 93 UG and 6 PG FTEs distributed as follows:

Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Evening Courses	JYA	Socrates	Total U/G	Master Research	PhD	Total P/G
38	11	13	1	5	18	7	93	2	4	6

Mission Statement

“The aim of the Department is to provide an open and inclusive learning environment which promotes student understanding and development, and which draws on, and stimulates, the primary research of the teaching staff. The Department is committed to providing high-quality instruction, in both Irish and English, to a broad and diverse student body, both undergraduate and postgraduate, on the language, literature, and cultural history of Early Ireland, and on its interconnections with the Celtic and medieval European cultural worlds. The Department is also committed to research of the highest possible standard in these subject areas. In pursuing its goals of communicating, developing, and creating knowledge, the Department aims for optimal staff-student contact, collegiality among all staff of the Department, and ready co-operation with colleagues both within the university and beyond.”

General Comment on Quality Review

The reviewers found the self-assessment report very readable and coherent. It was realistic, and self-critical where appropriate, and successfully identified all the major strengths of the department and the threats to its further development. The reviewers considered that this impressive report was most helpful, and gave the reviewers an excellent starting-point for their work. The reviewers agreed with the self-assessment report that there is excellent communication among staff, and that there is 'an ethos of teamwork, efficient use of resources, and valuing individual skills'. The reviewers felt that the harmonious relations within the department had equally benefited the department's research and its teaching.

The reviewers were particularly impressed by the close and creative cooperation between the Department of Early and Medieval Irish and the Department of Modern Irish. This cooperation is enhanced by the joint participation of staff of both Departments in the organisation of the annual Irish Texts Society Seminar, and by the welcome occasional participation from the Modern Irish Department in the Department of Early & Medieval Irish weekly staff-postgraduate seminar.

The students whom the review-group met, both undergraduate and postgraduate, were unanimous and unstinting in their praise for the staff's attitude to students. They repeatedly testified to the staff's generosity with their time, expertise, and even with their own personal libraries.

The reviewers, and in particular the external reviewers, were agreed that the department has an outstanding reputation, both within the National University of Ireland and internationally. This was fully confirmed by the range and quality of the universities from which the post-graduates came. These included highly prestigious universities in the USA, Europe and Great Britain, including universities which are themselves centres of excellence in Early and Medieval Irish. The reviewers considered that a department that can so ably attract postgraduates from overseas is a most valuable resource in which it would be wise for the University to invest.

The reviewers were impressed by the success of the Department in attracting research money. The Locus project was originally funded through PRTL11 and is currently funded under Scheme 4 (Projects) of the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences (IRCHSS). A number of research post-graduate students in the Department are funded under the Schemes 1 and 2 of the IRCHSS (post-graduate and doctoral students) and others are funded from various sources including Finnish and U.K. sources. The reviewers were also impressed at the success of the Department in attracting funding through its involvement in the Early Start programme and through JYA students. The continuing ability of the Department to generate income through initiatives of this kind will strengthen the viability of the Department in future years as the university's dependency on government funding will perforce be reduced.

Taking account of the stage they have each reached in their academic development, all members of the Department, both junior and senior, have excellent research records. The senior members of the department have an enviable record in major research and have published innovative works of the highest scholarly standard. The reviewers were glad that the retired Professor continues to play an active part in the research agenda of the department, particularly through his continued leadership of the 'Locus' project.

The reviewers noted that, in spite of their remarkable achievements, the members of the department felt that there was a 'difficulty in making their voice heard' within UCC. The reviewers were of the view that this, rightly understood, was a sign of strength rather than

weakness: the department is evidently fully and creatively engaged in excellent teaching and in the development of the subject. It is evident that the students from other departments, such as History, who come looking for instruction in Early and Medieval Irish, get an excellent reception and outstanding teaching. The reviewers hoped that, partially as a result of the present review, the College will make efforts to demonstrate to the department that their feeling, that it is difficult to make their voice heard, will be shown to be unfounded. The reviewers were unanimous in the view that the department is an outstanding centre of excellence, both in research and in teaching, within the Arts Faculty, and that the successful consolidation and development of the subject is, and should continue to be, central to the development of the Humanities in the College.

Progress on Implementation of Recommendations for Improvement

A meeting to discuss progress made in implementing recommendations for improvement arising from the review of the Department of Early & Medieval Irish was held on 6th January 2006.

Present: Professor M. Herbert, Head, Department of Early & Medieval Irish
 Professor D. Cox, Acting Head, College of Arts, Celtic Studies & Social Sciences
 Dr. N. M. Ryan, Director of Quality Promotion

Abbreviations

PRG: Peer Review Group

ACSSS: Arts, Celtic Studies & Social Sciences

QPC: Quality Promotion Committee

Recommendation of PRG	Recommendation of QPC	Follow-up Report January '06
That the UCC Authorities help and encourage the Department of Early and Medieval Irish, under the auspices of the East-West dimension of the Anglo-Irish agreement, to reinstate the Celtic Studies network which worked well in the 1980s.	Endorsed. The QPC recommended that the Department take the initiative and make appropriate suggestions for action	On-going. The Department has acquired another partner, which will lead to developing further connections to universities in Wales. The Celtic Studies Network is an EU matter, and some progress is being made through EU links.
PRG considers that, particularly in First Arts, it is important to move away from the more passive forms of learning associated with the traditional lecture format, and to encourage a more active engagement in learning through discussion, writing and debate.	Endorsed	The Department has reviewed its curriculum and has implemented alternative forms of continuous assessment for First Year courses, focussing on the acquisition of understanding. The use of Blackboard is becoming more frequent, and the Department are attempting to encourage its use as an ancillary to teaching. The Department seeks to avoid use of Blackboard merely as a repository of factual information.

Recommendation of PRG	Recommendation of QPC	Follow-up Report January '06
That the provision of Welsh on the curriculum be enhanced.	Endorsed. QPC welcomed positive attitude of Department to the recommendation.	The Department continues to develop this area. A visiting lecturer scheme has been put in place. A Medieval Welsh course has been put in place for Masters programmes but it is difficult to progress much further without a staff member specialising in this area.
That the possibility of enhanced tutorial support for students be explored.	Endorsed and welcomed action by Department	Implemented. The Department has introduced tutorials for the night class. The Department stated that 2 nd and 3 rd Year classes are conducted in a discursive manner and this obviates the need for tutorials.
That the Department establish close working relations with the administrators of the PRTLTI grant for 'Transmissions and Transformations of the Ancient World'.	Endorsed.	Implemented.
That the separate identity of the Department of Early and Medieval Irish should continue to be recognized.	Very strongly endorsed	Implemented.
That separate budgets, under two separate budget codes, be allocated to the Department of Early and Medieval Irish and to the Department of Modern Irish.	Endorsed.	Implemented
That the vacant Chair in Early & Medieval Irish be filled as a matter of urgency.	Endorsed. QPC referred the issue to the Deans-EMG for consideration, acknowledging the importance	Implemented. Chair was advertised and filled in 2005.
That the College Authorities give consideration to lengthening the Christmas Vacation to three weeks.	The QPC recommended that the issue be considered by the Registrar and Deans.	Implemented. This is being tried on an experimental basis for 2006/07 with a review following the experiment to decide the structure of the academic year for the following years.

Recommendation of PRG	Recommendation of QPC	Follow-up Report January '06
<p>That the possibility of an introduction of a reading week be discussed at the level of the Faculty of Arts, but if such a development occurs, it would be important to ensure that the overall student experience be maintained at its current high level and that no dilution occur in the course quality or in the length of the teaching year.</p>	<p>QPC referred this recommendation to the Dean of the Arts Faculty for consideration. The QPC strongly endorsed the view of the PRG that the “<i>overall student experience be maintained at its current high level and that no dilution occur in the course quality or in the length of the teaching year.</i>”</p>	<p>The Acting Head of the College of ACSSS affirmed that it is the policy of the College to ensure that the quality of the student experience is maintained, and also that the student is exposed to a variety of learning experiences as well as teaching in the course of the teaching year. The Acting Head prefers the use of the term ‘consultation week’ which implies staff must be available to discuss projects, etc., while noting that the precise activities do depend on the particular discipline.</p>
<p>That the Department should be given an increased proportion of the fees paid by overseas students. An appropriate portion of the Summer School and Early Start fees should be assigned to the department.</p>	<p>The QPC noted and welcomed the comment from the Dean of Arts which confirmed that the Department are receiving an increased proportion of the fees from the current year.</p>	<p>Implemented.</p>
<p>The College should assign extra space to the Department as a matter of priority.</p>	<p>Noted by QPC. The QPC suggested that the Department should make a submission to the Space Subcommittee of the Buildings Committee making a case for extra space.</p>	<p>Not implemented. The issue of space allocations is under active consideration by the Space Subcommittee of the Buildings Committee for a number of years. The Space Subcommittee has conducted an audit of the space usage of the O’Rahilly Building and has yet to make recommendations for change in space allocation to the Buildings Committee.</p>
<p>That the Department should gain a post-Doctoral Teaching Fellow, so as to release full-time members of the department for regular Study Leave. This Fellowship might be funded from increased revenue from, and increased departmental sharing of, JYA funds. The Department</p>	<p>Noted by QPC. The QPC observed that when the recommendation concerning the allocation of fee income to the Department is implemented the Department will be able to use the monies accruing from all sources for this purpose if the Department deems it appropriate.</p>	<p>The Acting Head of College noted that proposals are being considered in the College of ACSSS to put in place a Postdoctoral Fellowship Scheme. The Department confirmed it would consider use of some of the monies accruing from JYA fee income, but needs to accumulate a surplus for a couple of years in order to have</p>

Recommendation of PRG	Recommendation of QPC	Follow-up Report January '06
<p>should be given an increased proportion of the fees paid by overseas students. An appropriate portion of the Summer School and Early Start fees should be assigned to the department.</p>		<p>sufficient funds. Some of the JYA fee income is already going towards funding the Locus Project (http://www.ucc.ie/locus/).</p>