

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

Quality Improvement/Quality Assurance

Peer Review Group Report

**Department of History
including History of Art**

Academic Year 2004/05

Confidential

13th April 2005

MEMBERS OF THE PEER REVIEW GROUP:

Dr. Ger Fitzgibbon, Department of English, UCC (Chair)

Dr. Maeve Conrick, Department of French , UCC

Professor Nicholas Canny, Department of History, NUI Galway, Ireland

Professor Christopher Andrew, Department of History, Corpus Christi College,
University of Cambridge, UK

Timetable of the site visit

The timetable is attached as Appendix A.

The reviewers deemed the timetable to be suitable and adequate for the purposes of the review. Full access to all facilities and to staff of the Department was included in the review.

Peer Review

Methodology

The external reviewers took primary responsibility for the areas of Overall Analysis of the Department's Self-Assessment; Research & Scholarly Activity; External Relations; Teaching and Learning. They also paid particular attention to questions relating to the Library facilities.

The internal reviewers took primary responsibility for the areas of the structure and presentation of the Self-Assessment Report; Department details; Department Organisation and Planning; Staff Development; Support Services (other than Library); Departmental SAR Co-ordinating Committee.

The site visit, while a little crowded in terms of schedule, was conducted with great thoroughness by all involved and with considerable assistance from the Department's Administrative staff.

All four reviewers were involved in the drafting of the final sections of the report and all parts of the report were agreed unanimously.

History of Art

The History of Art programme, while hosted by the History Department as a matter of administrative convenience, is an independent entity for all practical day-to-day purposes and presented its own Self-Assessment Report. Consequently the Peer Review Group felt that its response should be presented in two distinct sections, Part One dealing with the Department of History and Part Two dealing with History of Art.

PART ONE: DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

OVERALL ANALYSIS

The Department's Self-Assessment Report was admirably thorough in a great many respects. It was delivered in two volumes, the first part forming the actual self-assessment and the second with related appendices containing supporting information. Additional information and clarifying details were readily provided during the site visit at the request of the PRG. Only two aspects of the report attracted less than favourable comment from the PRG:

- The absence of a clearly-defined benchmarking exercise in relation to comparable departments elsewhere
- An occasional excess of detail at the cost of clarity of analysis.

Both our own review of the History Department and the evidence received by us from other parts of the University and various representatives of outside bodies confirm the department's self-assessment as committed to and achieving excellence in both research and teaching at graduate and undergraduate level. The evidence of a number of former students who confirmed how much they gained from their education at UCC and the continuing value of it in their subsequent lives and careers also struck the reviewers. The PRG were impressed not only by the quality and quantity of the publications of members of staff but also by the extensive high quality work that had been published by research students of the department over the past decade. Another measure of the department's high standing is the success rate of both staff and students in national competitions for research support under the Government of Ireland schemes, the Fulbright fellowships and National University of Ireland awards.

DETAILED FINDINGS OF THE PEER REVIEW GROUP

Department Details

The Report provided very full details of all academic staff. The PRG noted a concentration of academic staff below the rank of senior lecturer. As noted in the Self-Assessment Report, there is a noticeable imbalance in gender representation among lecturing staff, which, given the profile of the student body, may need to be addressed.

Facilities

At present the Department occupies a range of houses in the Perrott Avenue and College Road areas. Some of these houses appear to be in need of renovation; others are perfectly adequate. The physical spread of the Department, however, does not make for ease of administration. The Department has begun to develop plans for a dedicated History Building on the Perrott Avenue site, incorporating the existing structures. The PRG recommended that the Department forward its plans for the building to the appropriate college bodies for consideration, while at the same time participating actively in the development of a strategic plan for the housing of the Arts Faculty.

Department Organisation and Planning

The Department has a highly-developed committee structure assisted by very effective administrative support. The Schools Liaison Committee seems to be particularly effective in promoting the work of the Department and the profile of the discipline and has been largely responsible for recruitment of growing undergraduate numbers in the subject area.

With respect to the committee structure within the Department, while the PRG recognised the importance of continuity in committee membership, in view of the uncertainty encountered among some staff regarding procedures for budget allocation and for appointment and rotation of Committee members the PRG suggests a number of steps to be considered by the Department (*see recommendations later in this report*).

Teaching & Learning

The members of the group had an opportunity to meet a broad section of the undergraduate and graduate students of the Department. All the undergraduate representatives rated very highly the quality of the teaching as well as the approachability of both academic and administrative staff. The range of courses available to undergraduates stretching from the earliest times to the present day was as extensive and imaginative as that provided to any undergraduate cohort in a university History department with similar resources. Though the Department contains particular strengths in Irish history and in international relations, in all instances undergraduate courses are research-led and bring students into contact with documentary evidence and recent historiography. One straightforward measure of the success of the Department's teaching is the increasing number of those taking 1st year courses and extraordinarily high proportion of 1st year students who continue with History courses in subsequent years, producing a remarkable 35% growth in undergraduate student History numbers over the past five years. A retention rate of 70% with a 4 subject First Arts programme is an extraordinary record to have achieved. The 1st year class in the current academic year is 55% higher than in 1999, an achievement for which the Staff/Student Committee and the Departmental Schools Liaison Committee must take some share of the credit. Another measure of the attractiveness of the Department as a place to study is its steadily growing appeal to overseas students, some of whom the review team met in the course of the site visit. The reviewers took particular note of the early start induction programme for JYA students, which clearly helps new arrivals in the University as a whole to gain maximum benefit from their stay in UCC and in Ireland.

The Department retains a proven record for the welcome and consideration that it gives to mature and non-traditional students at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

The PRG could think of few History departments that offer such diverse courses of study at undergraduate and graduate levels. One notable innovation in recent years has been the introduction of the European Integration Studies programme, which has been successfully run on somewhat exiguous resources. The MA in International Relations has drawn a dramatic enrolment of 32 students in the present academic year

and as such must be one of the most attractive and competitive taught graduate courses in any faculty of any Irish university. The PRG noted with approval the plans to introduce two if not three taught MA courses in History in academic year 05/06 including one covering the full span of Irish history and one in American history.

One area of concern expressed by the PRG was the apparent disparity in teaching workloads among the fulltime academic staff. In the light of current promotion and establishment procedures this is a matter of considerable significance and should be addressed.

Taking account of the Department of History's long association with the European Studies Degree programme and its more recent involvement with the Degree course in European Integration Studies, the PRG recommended that the existing staff in the department be augmented by an additional position in Continental European History of the modern and contemporary periods.

In the view of the PRG, the University's success in attracting American students to the Arts Faculty and the Department of History in particular may face challenges in the near future as a result of the diversion of attention towards newer markets in Asia and away from the traditional recruitment base for Arts students. These changes could well erode the earning capacity and resources of the History Department and the Arts Faculty. This is a matter on which the Department should consider making representations to the appropriate College bodies.

Research & Scholarly Standing

The number and the quality of publications by academic staff and past and present research students provide ample evidence of the excellence of the department's research and its high scholarly standing.

The PRG were however concerned that the only group they encountered with a particular grievance were those students proceeding to MPhil and PhD degrees. The complaints of the students concerned not the level of their academic supervision, of which they spoke highly, but what they perceived to be inadequate facilities and contact with each other. This is a problem which needs to be addressed at faculty and

college level, since the Department's own resources can only partially address this difficulty. New graduate students arriving at UCD and NUI, Galway can expect to have access to an individual study space as well as computing and printing facilities. For UCC to continue to attract high quality research students, it will need to become competitive in the facilities which it offers to research students.

The Department's current research students are also concerned because they, unlike their equivalent of previous years, could not expect either financial support from the department through tutorial scholarships or the opportunity to gain teaching experience which they see as a vital part of their career development. The reviewers encountered two specific examples of high quality students deterred by these problems from applying to do research in the department. While the Department of History and the Office of Vice-President for Research, Policy & Support encourage and support students in making application for Government of Ireland awards only a few can hope to be successful in any given year. The University will obviously have to address the issue of providing financial support from its own resources if it wishes to retain and expand the number of research students that the Department of History has customarily trained.

The fact that the university charges full economic fees to non-EU students is a significant obstacle to expansion of numbers at PhD level. If the University wishes to continue attracting non-EU students into PhD programmes in Arts, it should review its policy of charging the full economic fee for research students.

The research students whom the members of the PRG met would also value more opportunities to meet collectively in, for example, a seminar programme addressing large historiographical and methodological issues. While assured by the Department that such a forum already exists, the reviewers were struck by the fact that the majority of these research students had not previously spoken to each other and the PRG therefore felt that the Department may only need to review its provision in this area. The PRG wishes to emphasise the appreciation by these students of the quality of their individual supervision and the support from administrative staff. One former graduate student in the department told us, "*My abiding memory of the department is its accessibility*".

Also notable is the interdisciplinary nature of much of the research. One notable example is the CELT Project, a pioneering digital and research project in humanities computing which blends current technology with advanced historical scholarship. CELT's worldwide popularity is reflected in the fact that hyperlinks to it have been created on 64,700 pages in the worldwide web. CELT serves as an ambassador for UCC and as a window on its research. It brings together both senior scholars and research students in a collaborative enterprise which is recognised as a world leader.

The Department's outstanding contribution to research and education in History and Irish Studies has been built up over many years and is now reaching new levels. It is vital that the areas of specialisation that generated this work be maintained in the future and that arrangements be put in place to ensure continuity in key projects and courses. Taking account of the standing and reputation of the endeavours of the Department in Medieval Studies the PRG recommends that the Professorship in Medieval History which is due to fall vacant in the near future should be advertised and filled at the appropriate time.

External Relations

Senior members play a significant part in a wide range of College and Faculty committees. Many in the Department are actively involved in national and international professional bodies. Members of the Department also contribute to enhancing the profile of the Department and the University through contributions to the media in Ireland and internationally. One very recent example is the role of the Department in recovering much of the fast disappearing historical record of the Irish Jewish community.

At a time when the numbers taking history in the Leaving Certificate are in decline the work of the Department in upholding the status of the profession has a significance which goes beyond university life. In a context where History has suffered an effective demotion within the secondary school curriculum and in which numbers pursuing History at university might be expected to suffer, this department has put considerable efforts into maintaining the numerical and intellectual strength of their discipline.

Staff Development

Sabbatical leave is essential for staff development, given the limited research and library facilities in UCC. Scheduled and planned sabbatical leave at the departmental level is a vital necessity for the maintenance of a research culture within academic departments. Unpredictable elements in the current system seem to be militating against the systematic planning of research, applications for fellowships and grants and the arrangement of teaching assignments elsewhere. Where staff succeed in winning Government of Ireland Fellowships, these awards should not be construed as sabbatical leave since full provision is made for staff substitution.

Since the reviewers have no knowledge of the record of the successful candidates in the recent round of promotions to Senior Lecturer in UCC, the PRG cannot comment specifically on the failure to award promotion to any of the candidates from the Department of History. Mindful of the exceptional academic achievements of the history staff, the PRG hopes that these will be recognised in future promotion rounds. The PRG would welcome an early review of the P&E scheme, particularly with regard to the rigid application of some requirements .

Support Services

Through co-operation with various services departments, the History Department is very actively involved with the development of new technologies in support of teaching and research.

The reviewers were greatly impressed with the creative and increasing use of *Blackboard.com* by the Department.

The PRG was impressed with the Department's proactive approach to liaison with the Disability Support Office and the International Education Office.

Library

The problem most frequently mentioned by academic staff and students was what they believe to be the inadequate purchase of books for the Library. This is plainly a funding issue which can only be adequately addressed at faculty and college level. The PRG believes, however, that at \$7,000 per annum the current level of funding

goes nowhere near meeting the book purchase requirements for a department committed to the very high levels of teaching and the high quality of research which currently characterise History at UCC.

Though the History Department can only go a part of the way to resolving this problem from its own resources, there are some significant minor improvements which the PRG commends to its consideration. The first is closer contact with the Library staff. The relevant Subject Librarian in the Library would welcome an invitation from time to time to take part in meetings of the Departmental Library Committee. The PRG also recommends that the Departmental Library Committee give consideration to the current balance of expenditure on books and journals. In the last academic year €24,402 were spent on journals as compared with €7,215 on books. There are no easy choices here but the possibility of a slightly higher proportion of expenditure on books rather than journals merits consideration. The PRG were given to understand that next year there is likely to be an increase of the order of 8% in the Library fund for History, though no confirmed figure is yet available. This represents at least a small opportunity for additional book purchase.

The PRG encountered considerable concern in the Department that the University was contemplating a new system for allocating Library funds to departments – a system which, if adopted by the University, could result in a substantial diminution in the History library budget. In the view of the PRG there is unanimity in History departments around the world that libraries are as essential to historians as laboratories are to scientists. This is a crucial criterion in ensuring equity during budget allocation to history and scientific departments. The PRG was assured, however, that the whole issue of the proposal to change the funding mechanism was still under discussion, that its potential deleterious effect on Arts departments was appreciated by Library staff and others and that this would be given full consideration in due course. The PRG received assurances in the Library that they would press their case for copyright books more vigorously than heretofore and recommended that the members of the department continue to push this issue.

The removal of special collections from the Library to other premises during the building work which is due to start this May will cause inevitable disruption to some

research and teaching. Though the PRG were struck by the determination of the Special Collections staff to minimise this disruption, they hope that every effort will be made to complete the work within the planned two-year timetable.

Departmental Co-ordinating Committee and Methodology

The Department has clearly invested a great deal of time and energy in the whole Self-Assessment process through the work of its large co-ordinating committee and, in particular through the work of the Chair of the committee. A long-range and detailed process of information-gathering, planning and analysis was undertaken and the findings were presented with great attention to detail.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Facilities

1. *That the Department forward its plans for a History Department building to the appropriate college bodies for consideration, while at the same time participating actively in the development of a strategic plan for the housing of the Arts Faculty.*

Departmental Organisation and Planning

2. *That the following recommendations be implemented in relation to the committee structures in the Department:*
 - a. *Introduction of a regular, cyclical rotation pattern for committee membership.*
 - b. *Introduction of a system of election of staff to serve on committees.*
 - c. *Establishment of a Department Finance Committee to support the work of the Head of Department and ensure transparency in financial planning and allocation.*
 - d. *Establishment of a Workloads Committee to monitor and review workloads in the Department.*

Teaching and Learning, Research and Scholarly Standing

3. *That the resources issues relating to postgraduate student support and facilities should be given urgent consideration at Faculty and College level as these are vital to maintain UCC's competitiveness in attracting research students.*

4. *That Departmental and Faculty representations be made to the University that Government of Ireland Fellowships should not be construed as sabbatical leave by the University since full provision is made for staff substitution.*
5. *That the Department institute a more effective and more inclusive seminar programme designed specifically for MPhil and PhD students, addressing large historical and methodological issues.*
6. *That consideration be given to the suggestion that there may be small but significant scope for improvement of Postgraduate student facilities through re-allocation of some existing office space in the Department and that the Department should apply to the Space Allocation Committee for any additional requirements*
7. *That urgent consideration of the resources necessary to sustain a teaching and research library capable of maintaining the current distinguished levels of teaching and research in History be given at Faculty and College level.*
8. *That the Professorship in Medieval History which is due to fall vacant in the near future should be advertised and filled at the appropriate time without significant pause. .*
9. *That the existing staff in the Department be augmented by an additional position in Continental European History of the modern and contemporary periods.*

Staff Development

10. *That the Department address the significant disparities in teaching workloads among the academic staff.*
11. *That there needs to be an early review of the Promotion & Establishment scheme, particularly with regard to the rigid application of some requirements for promotion to Senior Lecturer.*

12. *That the Department seek an early review of the current scheme for granting of sabbatical leave in order to restore some degree of predictability to research and leave planning.*

Library

13. *That the History Department explore possibilities of closer contact with the subject specialists among the library staff and invite them from time to time to participate in meetings of the Departmental Library Committee.*

14. *That the Departmental Library Committee give consideration to the current expenditure on Books and Journals, which is at present heavily weighted in favour of Journals.*

PART TWO: HISTORY OF ART.

The Peer Review Group considered the Self-Assessment Report presented on behalf of History of Art and met with Prof Elkins and a number of staff and students and visited the offices used by the programme.

In the opinion of the PRG the process of self-assessment for the History of Art sub-Department needs further work. This is, perhaps, not surprising in view of the particular circumstances of that unit:

- the very recent development of the undergraduate programme,
- a change in the Headship of Department at a crucial point in the QR cycle
- a number of logistical problems in relation to the drafting and consultation process.

Recommendation

We recommend that the History of Art sub-Department consult with the QPU with a view to setting up a modified timetable for their engagement with the QR process.

Timetable for conduct of Peer Review Visit

Department of History & History of Art

Sunday 23rd January 2005

- 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.
- Review Team
 - Dr. Norma Ryan
 - Dr. Damian Bracken
 - Gabriel Doherty
 - Professor James Elkins
 - Professor Dermot Keogh
 - Dr. Hiram Morgan
 - Professor Donnchadh Ó Corráin
 - Dr. Mervyn O'Driscoll
 - Dr. Jennifer O'Reilly
 - Professor Geoff Roberts
 - Dr. David Ryan
 - Dr. Diarmuid Scully

Monday 24th January 2005

- 08.30 Convening of Peer Review Group in Seminar Room, Tyrconnell House, Perrott's
Avenue
- Consideration of Self-Assessment Report
- 08.45 Professor Dermot Keogh, Head of Department of History
- 09.25 Professor James Elkins, Head of History of Art
- 09.45 Meeting with all members of Department
- 10.00 Time allowed for meetings of members of the Peer Review Group with individual
members of staff.
PRG split into two groups for these meetings
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| parallel | <u>Group A: Seminar room</u> Dr. G. Fitzgibbon Professor N. Canny | <u>Group B: N. Buckley's office, History Dept</u> Dr. M. Conrick Professor C. Andrew |
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| 10.00 | Donnchadh Ó Corráin | Geoff Roberts |
| 10.15 | Andy Bielenberg | Jennifer O'Reilly |
| 10.30 | Diarmuid Scully | Clare O'Halloran |
| 10.45 | Donal Ó Drisceoil | Mervyn O'Driscoll |
| 11.00 | Tea/Coffee for PRG | |
| 11.15 | Finola Doyle O'Neill | Larry Geary |
| 11.30 | Hiram Morgan | Dave Edwards |
| 11.45 | Gabriel Doherty | David Ryan |
| 12.00 | Damian Bracken | Mike Cosgrave |
| 12.15 | Andrew McCarthy | Liz Steiner-Scott |
| 12.30 | Gillian Doherty | |
| 12.45 | Professor Joe J. Lee | |
| 13.00 | Administrative staff of Department | |
| 13.15 | Working private lunch for members of Peer Review Group | |
| 14.00 | Visit to core facilities of Department. The PRG divided into 2 groups: Group A consisting of Professor C. Andrew and Dr. G. Fitzgibbon escorted by Ms C. Wiseman; Group B, consisting of Professor N. Canny and Dr. M. Conrick. escorted by Professor Keogh and Mr Doherty. Both groups visited the buildings used by the History Department, and viewed the proposed site for the dedicated History Building. | |
| 15.00 | <u>1st Year Undergraduate students</u> | |
| | Dara Gilroy – 1 st year History | |
| | Ida Holdus – 1 st year EIS | |
| | Michelle Hennessy – 1st year History | |
| | Margaret Taylor – 1st year History | |
| | Michelle Foley – 1st year History | |
| 15.20 | <u>2nd/3rd/4th Year Undergraduate Students</u> | |
| | Siobhan Hopcraft – 3rd year History | |
| | Michael Murphy – 2nd year History | |
| | Laura O'Connor – 2nd year Politics | |
| | Billy Costelloe – 2nd year Politics | |
| | Denise McElligott – 3rd year History | |
| | Suin Horgan – 4th year EIS | |
| | Teresa Murphy – 4 th year Art History | |
| | John-Paul McMahon – 4 th year Art History | |
| 16.00 | <u>Postgraduate students</u> | |
| | Deirdre Hennessy – MPhil1 | |
| | Rory O'Dwyer – PhD2 | |
| | Victoria Pearson – MPhil2 | |
| | Patrick McLoughlin – MA IR | |
| | Eve Marie Crowley – MA local history Library | |

Seamus O’Keeffe (Hiram) – Mansion House Winner MPhil1
Mairin McCarron – PhD 3
Jason Johnsen – (US student) PhD 2

17.00 Meetings with representative selections of recent graduates, employers and other stakeholders as appropriate

Venue: Staff Common Room

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| Emma Cunningham | History Graduate. Currently employed in Department of Finance |
| Lucette Murray | Public relations consultant employed by University College Cork |
| David Costello | History Graduate. Currently employed as teacher in Ballincollig Community School |
| Carol Leland | European Integration Studies Graduate. Currently employed as a solicitor in Johnson & Johnson |
| Joe Carey | Local businessman. Closely involved in funding several departmental projects, including Battle of Kinsale conference, CELT, Multit-Text, purchase of NI Cabinet papers |
| Mary Buckley | History of Art Graduate |
| Fred Rosehill | Leading representative of local Jewish community. |
| Mairín Quill | Prominent local councillor. Former TD. |
| Jim O’Brien | Director, European Parliament Office, Dublin. Close involvement with European Integration Studies Programme, conference organisation |
| Kevin McCarthy | Chief Inspector of History for Department of Education |
| Timmy O’Connor | History Graduate. Assistant Archivist. Cork Archives Institute |
| Finbarr O’Shea | History Graduate. Editor. Currently employed by Institute of Public Administration, Dublin |
| Stephen O’Leary | History Graduate. Formerly employed by Disability Support Office. Currently studying for Higher Diploma in Education |
| Catherine O’Brien | Academic. Currently employed as Professor of Italian, National University of Ireland, Galway |

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.

Tuesday 25th January 2005

08.30 Convening of Peer Review Group in Seminar Room, Tyrconnell House, Perrott’s

Avenue

- 08.45 Mr. Ned Fahy, Deputy Librarian in his office
- 09.00 Visit to Q+3, Boole Library, meeting with Ms. Olivia Fitzpatrick, Subject Librarian and including a visit to Q-1 and a meeting with the Special Collections Librarian
- 09.45 Mr. Michael O’Sullivan, Vice-President for Planning, Communications & Development
- 10.00 Ms. Carmel Cotter, Finance Office
- 10.15 Ms. Louise Tobin, International Education Officer
- 10.30 Professor David Cox, Dean, Faculty of Arts
- 11.00 Professor Áine Hyland, Vice-President, Acting Vice-President for Academic Affairs and Acting Vice-President for Research Policy & Support
- 11.40 Dr. Flavio Boggi
- 11.55 Dr. Jennifer O’Reilly
- 12.10 Initial consideration of outstanding issues
- 12.30 Working private lunch for members of the Peer Review Group
- 13.20 Professor James Elkins
- 13.35 Professor Dermot Keogh, Head of Department
- 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.

The presentation is not for discussion at this time.

Venue: Seminar Room, Tyrconnell House

The presentation will be followed by a reception for staff and members of the PRG.

- 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.

Wednesday 26th January 2005

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