

DEPARTMENT OF ITALIAN

PEER REVIEW GROUP

- Professor P. Fletcher, School of Clinical Therapies, UCC (Chair)
- Professor K. Sidwell, Department of Classics, UCC
- Dr U. Fanning, Department of Italian, UCD
- Professor B. Moloney, Emeritus Professor of Italian, University of Hull, UK

SITE VISIT

The site visit was conducted over 2.5 days from 10-12 November 2004 and included visits to departmental and library facilities in UCC and meetings with

- Head and staff of the department as a group and individually
- Representatives of undergraduate and postgraduate students
- Representatives of employers, past graduates and other external stakeholders
- Professor Áine Hyland, Vice-President
- Professor J. Kevin Collins, Vice-President for Research Policy & Support
- Professor David Cox, Dean of Faculty of Arts
- Mr John Doran, Commerce Faculty Co-ordinator for the B.Comm (Italian)
- Ms Carmel Cotter, Finance Office

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

Note: Data given is for the academic year 2004/05

Head of Department: Dr Mark Chu
Staff: 6 academic staff (1 Senior Lecturer, 5 Lecturers, 1 Lettrice, 3 College Language Teachers), 1 Senior Executive Assistant
Staff Academic FTE: 8.33 (7.0 FTE academic staff; 1.33 FTE part-time budget)
Student/Staff FTE Ratio: 10.15
Location of Department: O'Rahilly Building
Degrees/Diplomas offered: BA, BCL, B.Comm (European), HDip, MA, MPhil, PhD

NUMBER OF STUDENTS

The Department has 84.53 Student FTEs distributed as follows:

Undergraduate Student FTEs

Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Total U/G	Economic	Evening Courses	Visiting American	Visiting European
27.04	18.49	7.43	14.27	67.23	0.87	2.00	0.90	2.06

Postgraduate Student FTEs

HDip	Master Taught	Master Research	PhD	Total P/G
3.67	7.63	5.00	1.00	17.30

MISSION STATEMENT

“The Department sees its educational mission as twofold: first, the formation of students able to communicate in a competent and correct Italian, both oral and written; second, in the case of our Arts programmes, the development of students’ transferable critical skills through the study of the most important and representative Italian literary movements and figures that have influenced European culture and civilisation from the Middle Ages to our time. Students are also afforded the opportunity to gain basic notions and, after level one, specialised knowledge in a variety of subjects, such as Italian art, history, institutions, cinema and other media. Courses in the B.Comm (European) with Italian programme have similar aims, but focus primarily on aspects of modern and contemporary Italian society.”

AIMS OF DEPARTMENT

- To instil in its graduates intellectual curiosity in general and to cultivate their enthusiasm for Italian language and culture in particular.
- To provide an equitable environment, founded on mutual respect, in which staff are able to achieve their full potential in the execution of their research, teaching and administrative duties.
- To advance the discipline of Italian studies through its teaching and research.
- To contribute to cultural, social and economic development at regional, national and, indeed, international level.

GENERAL COMMENT ON QUALITY REVIEW

The reviewers found the Self-Assessment Report to be comprehensive and informative. It reflected a departmental consensus as well as individual views. The brief history of the Department provided in the Report documents recent staffing changes, including the loss of two senior members of staff. This was a significant part of the context of the Review for the panel. The reviewers were unanimous in forming a very positive view of the Department’s research achievements to date. In the context of the University’s commitment to excellence, as outlined in the strategic development plan, the reviewers considered that it is essential that the Department benefit as soon as possible from the leadership of an experienced and established senior researcher.

SWOT Analysis: The reviewers were of the opinion that the Department appropriately identified its strengths in administration, teaching and research. The Department administration is highly efficient and student-friendly. The Department maintains good communication with students, both when they are at UCC and on their year abroad. Students feel valued. The reviewers were struck by the commitment of all the staff – full-time, part-time and college language teachers – to teaching and learning. Documentary support for specific modules is most impressive. The Department contributes to a range of intra-Faculty and cross-Faculty undergraduate programmes, runs a taught MA, and supervises a significant number of research students. Students are employable. Italian employers in particular appreciate the students’ cultural knowledge as well as their linguistic skills, which indicates clearly that a good range of cultural courses must be maintained. Language teaching is a particular strength of the Department. Staff are active in research and publication, and their output is internationally recognised. Staff organise a regular research seminar series, drawing

on the intellectual resources of the Department, the Faculty and outside contributors, which is of enormous benefit to both staff and research students. There is no doubt that this is, despite the difficulties they have faced, a successful department, which can face the future with confidence.

The reviewers agreed with the Department that the development of Computer Assisted Language Learning presents a significant opportunity which they should seize. This is first and foremost a way of raising linguistic standards even further, as well as motivating students. And because it increases student confidence in language it also helps to raise standards significantly in other areas of academic activity, and improves retention rates. Other opportunities may exist in developing new intra-Faculty courses, in exploring possible links with Law and Engineering, and in generating resources from recreational language courses. From our perspective, threats to the Department are in the main external, having to do with resource constraints resulting from the size of the Department and from University budget cuts.

Benchmarking: The Department benchmarked itself against reputable departments in Ireland and the UK which have similar numbers of staff and students, and comparable research achievements. Overall, the Department emerged very well from this exercise. Validation of the Department's teaching emerges from the reports of external examiners from outstanding departments in prestigious universities.

Teaching & Learning: Discussions with students and perusal of a large number of student questionnaires made available to the Panel revealed a high level of student satisfaction with their experiences in the Department. Mentoring of students at all levels makes them feel part of the Department and aids retention. All Staff are clearly committed to delivering high quality courses, in language, literature and other areas of culture.

Research & Scholarly Activity: There is a very lively research culture in the Department. The close fit between staff research interests and their teaching benefits staff and students. Research in the Department ranges widely from the Renaissance to aspects of contemporary cultural studies, including film studies. Staff research output is prolific. Members of staff produce monographs with publishers of international reputation. They contribute articles regularly to the main journals in the fields of Italian and Film Studies. Staff (and indeed postgraduate students) have repeatedly been successful in obtaining funding for research projects from within UCC and from external sources.

PROGRESS MADE ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PRG RECOMMENDATIONS

A meeting to discuss progress made in implementing recommendations for improvement arising from the review of the Department of Italian was held on 6 October 2006. It was noted that the Department had developed a Quality Improvement Plan and the plan was considered at the meeting together with all recommendations for improvement made by the review team.

Present: Professor David Cox, Head, College of Arts, Celtic Studies & Social Sciences

Dr Mark Chu, Head, Department of Italian

Dr Norma Ryan, Director, Quality Promotion Unit

Ms Deirdre O'Brien, Administrator, Quality Promotion Unit

Abbreviations

PRG: Peer Review Group

QPC: Quality Promotion Committee

QP: Quality Promotion

VP: Vice-President

QIP: Quality Improvement Plan

RAM: Resource Allocation Model

HR: Human Resources
 CALL: Computer Assisted Language Learning

ACSSS: Arts, Celtic Studies & Social Sciences
 FTE: Full Time Equivalent

Recommendation of PRG	Recommendation of QPC	Follow-up Report October 06
<p>That the Chair of Italian be filled as soon as possible.</p>	<p>Not endorsed.</p> <p>Comment: If the Chair was to be approved for filling it would mean that the unit costs of the department would return to the level at which they were previously considered (by a policy document approved by GB) to be untenable. The Committee endorsed the proposal from the Faculty of Arts for approval of a three-year appointment of a Lecturer (BB). This leaves open the possibility of re-establishing the Chair if there is a significant increase in demand for the subject.</p>	<p>Not implemented.</p> <p>The Head of Department is working to increase demand for the subject. The quality of students is also very high, with this year's PhD group of 10 in receipt of 9 scholarships.</p> <p>The Head of College of ACSSS confirmed that the Chair of Italian will not be filled in the immediate future.</p>
<p>The continued exploration of the provision of resources from the Faculty of Commerce for the expansion of courses relevant to the BComm with Italian.</p>	<p>Noted.</p> <p>The Committee noted that if the department could increase its student numbers then resources for these students would follow. The Committee also noted that the University's Strategic Planning Committee is presently considering the introduction of a transparent and equitable RAM and that inevitably this would mean allocation of resources would follow students.</p>	<p>Ongoing.</p> <p>One enhancement to the BComm (European) with Italian programme has been implemented; this year's graduates have the opportunity to take part in a work placement scheme with MPS Asset Management, the Dublin-based operation of a major Italian bank.</p>

Recommendation of PRG	Recommendation of QPC	Follow-up Report October 06
<p>That the Faculty review the Department's Library grant, with a view to improving resources for postgraduate students and staff to pursue their research interests.</p>	<p>The Committee supported the principle behind this recommendation noting that the Faculty of Arts does not control the library budget allocated to departments. The Dean of Arts has been involved in the discussions about a new library funding mechanism and the proposal considered, if implemented, would have led to an increase in the size of the grant for all smaller departments in the university.</p>	<p>Implemented. The QPU will follow up with the Library to ascertain their exact funding mechanisms.</p>
<p>Department to pursue the implementation of CALL (computer assisted language learning) for reasons given above.</p>	<p>Strongly endorsed. The Committee suggested that the Department should discuss possible means of resourcing this initiative with the Computer Centre</p>	<p>Implemented and ongoing. The Department has secured funding for a pilot project which will be implemented for all students in 2006/07.</p>
<p>That the department pursue further opportunities for academic collaboration, with a view to improving its FTE standing. These could include:</p> <p>(a) Joint degrees with Law and Engineering</p> <p>(b) Italian literature in translation courses for arts students (e.g. Dante and Boccaccio in English translation for students of English; courtly literature for students of history)</p>	<p>Endorsed. The QPC expressed a word of caution in pursuing option (a) as such initiatives do not always prove successful and require very significant work input. The QPC recommended that the Department ensure there is a need for such professional language courses before they are developed and offered. The QPC welcomed the recommendation for cross-disciplinary options in Italian. Liaison with other departments such as History of Art should be considered.</p>	<p>Not implemented to date, currently under consideration.</p>
<p>That the Faculty and/or College review the status of year abroad students with respect to FTEs accruing to the Department.</p>	<p>Endorsed. The committee noted that this issue will be reviewed and considered as part of the discussions in the development of an appropriate RAM for the university.</p>	<p>Not implemented. The Head of Department and the Head of College are to write to the Head of the RAM Committee, Mr Diarmuid Collins, and query this issue with respect to the new resource allocation model.</p>

Recommendation of PRG	Recommendation of QPC	Follow-up Report October 06
<p>That financial provision be made to enable part-time teachers and College Language Teachers to attend conferences and/or courses.</p>	<p>This issue will be considered and addressed under the devolution of resources as referred to earlier.</p> <p>It should be noted that it is currently within the remit of a Head of Department to allocate resources to this and thus implementation of the recommendation does not need to await the development of the RAM.</p> <p>The issue of the university policy in relation to provision of financial support to part-time teachers and College Language teachers should be considered and addressed by the University. The Committee referred the issue to the Department of HR for clarification</p>	<p>Implemented within the Department.</p> <p>The wider university policy in regard to College Language teachers has not been addressed.</p>
<p>That the terms and conditions of College Language Teachers be reviewed, with a view to providing promotional opportunities as rewards for research activity of various kinds.</p>	<p>Not endorsed.</p>	<p>Not implemented.</p> <p>This is an issue for the university as a whole and not something over which the Department has control.</p>