

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

PEER REVIEW GROUP

- Mr J. Ruane, Department of Sociology, UCC (Chair)
- Professor W. Smyth, Department of Geography, UCC
- Professor W. Lyons, Department of Philosophy, TCD
- Professor J. Wolff, Department of Philosophy, University College London, UK

SITE VISIT

The site visit was conducted over 2.5 days from 6-8 March 2005 and included visits to departmental and library facilities 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
- Mr. Michael Kelleher, Secretary & Bursar
- Professor David Cox, Dean of Faculty of Arts
- Ms. Áine Foley, 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: Professor Desmond Clarke
Staff: 9 Academic Staff (1 Professor, 1 Senior Lecturer, 7 full-time Lecturers, 1 part-time Lecturer), 1 Administrative Staff
Staff Academic FTE: 9.71 (8.70 FTE academic staff; 1.01 FTE part-time budget)
Student/Academic Staff Ratio: 19.22
Location of Department: Bloomfield Terrace
Degrees/Diplomas offered: BA, BSocSc, MA, MPhil, PhD

NUMBER OF STUDENTS

The Department has 186.63 Student FTEs distributed as follows:

Undergraduate Student FTEs

Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Total U/G	Economic	Visiting American	Visiting European
109.67	35.67	29.75	0.00	175.08	19.72	13.16	3.33

Postgraduate Student FTEs

Master Taught	Master Research	PhD	Total P/G
8.55	2.00	1.00	11.55

MISSION STATEMENT

“We understand philosophy as an integral part of an education in the humanities.”

AIMS OF DEPARTMENT

- To help students to develop the critical skills of analysis and reflection which are characteristic of the philosophical enterprise.
- To apply those skills as widely as possible [both at work and elsewhere].
- To contribute directly and indirectly to the level of public awareness about all those issues, political, social, and economic, where Philosophy can benefit discussion.

GENERAL COMMENT ON QUALITY REVIEW

The importance of philosophy for this or any College is clearly indicated by the fact that Philosophy has been made a core part of the new programmes of ‘The Broad Curriculum’ (TCD) and ‘Horizons’ (UCD) whereby universities have been urged to make bridges between the two cultures of arts and sciences. This recognizes the intellectual importance of the mental discipline of rigorous objective logical argument, conceptual critique and clear thinking, that is at the core of philosophy, as well as the cultural importance of studying the classical philosophical texts (such as Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Hobbes, Locke, Kant, Wittgenstein and Popper) which form a major segment of the disciplinary core of our western culture including both arts and sciences.

The present review takes place at a critical time for the Department. The practice of replacing permanent posts with temporary appointments has created an atmosphere of uncertainty within the department. Despite this, the solidarity among the staff is impressive as is their commitment to the programme and the students and their own research activity. As a consequence, the department’s self-analysis exercise had only limited reflection upon opportunities for the department. Also the benchmarking exercise was not undertaken in any formal way. This is not surprising, given the department’s sense of lack of control over its own future. Nevertheless over two days of in-Department interviews the PRG was able to develop a clear understanding of the issues and to draw out a SWOT Analysis, and a rudimentary benchmarking exercise.

SWOT ANALYSIS

Strengths: Important contributor to education of students from wide range of areas; Growing interest in philosophy throughout Europe and the western world; Extraordinary range of teaching for such a small department; Enthusiastic, research active staff; Good, co-operative relations between staff; Effective informal administrative procedures; Well-received teaching, enthusiastic appreciative students, quality confirmed by external examiners’ reports; Natural place for people in region to study; Increasing FTEs; Good numbers of JYA students; Innovative and effective MA programme; Very active conference and visitor programme; Good community relations within university and region.

Weaknesses: Large number of contract staff, which impedes University’s mission of developing international research capacity and PhD programmes; Unbalanced staff structure; Historically poor (although improving) library resources; Impending retirement of all senior staff; Need for improved long term strategic vision/planning; Unresolved nature of governance of Politics degree.

Benchmarking: The department is of medium to small size, with a small number of senior staff facing retirement over a short period. This is a situation that a number of Philosophy Departments in the UK have faced over recent decades. It is natural that this situation can provoke feelings of crisis and panic, but there are examples of how this has been well handled.

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 Philosophy was held on 14 November 2006.

Present: Professor David Cox, Head, College of Arts, Celtic Studies & Social Sciences
 Professor Desmond Clarke, Head, Department of Philosophy
 Dr Norma Ryan, Director, Quality Promotion Unit
 Ms Deirdre O'Brien, Administrator, Quality Promotion Unit

Abbreviations

PRG: Peer Review Group

VP: Vice-President

QPC: Quality Promotion Committee

QIP: Quality Improvement Plan

ACSSS: Arts, Celtic Studies & Social Sciences

Recommendation of PRG	Recommendation of QPC	Follow-up Report November 06
That the retiring senior lecturer be replaced immediately by a permanent appointee.	Implemented. Approval has been given by the University for a permanent lecturer to be appointed.	Implemented. A Lectureship was advertised and the position has been filled at lecturer level (below the bar)
That College plan and work towards an establishment of five permanent members in post when the Chair and other senior positions are vacated. Without this, the department faces the risk of being unable to deliver its programme, putting UCC in danger of failing to meet its contractual obligations to students.	The QPC noted that this is a matter for the new College of Arts & Social Sciences and should be discussed with the Executive Dean in the autumn.	Implemented. The Department now has six permanent staff members (including one member who will not start until Sept 07 and excluding the present incumbent in the Chair). However, once the current Head retires there will be no member of staff at Senior Lecturer or Professorial level.
That the process for replacing the Chair should commence 18 months before the vacancy falls due. This is especially urgent given the retirement of all senior staff in the same period, and to give the department a much-needed senior figure to draw post-graduate students and to represent the department within the wider university.	QPC strongly endorsed this recommendation and referred the matter to the Dean	Ongoing The process has commenced and is progressing favourably.

Recommendation of PRG	Recommendation of QPC	Follow-up Report November 06
<p>That the department formulate a plan for its own development which commands wide consensus among current staff and presents a sound way through the critical transition period ahead.</p>	<p>Recommendation strongly endorsed.</p> <p>The QPC recommended that the Department should prepare a plan for a three year timeframe and include consideration of areas of discipline to be focussed on in UCC, including possibilities for the new Chair. Potential areas suggested could include ethics, politics and aesthetics, among others. These all have interdisciplinary aspects – something the university will be encouraging in the next few years. QPC recommended that the department engage a facilitator to assist them in planning the way forward.</p>	<p>Not implemented.</p> <p>This process is difficult to implement in the current transitional phase (up to now the majority of staff have been on fixed term contracts); however, the Department has confirmed that it will develop a plan this academic year.</p> <p>The Department is currently delivering a curriculum conforming to international norms at undergraduate level; however, specific disciplinary areas will be discussed further by the department. The Department will also look at developing a narrower focus at PhD level.</p>
<p>That the department should now begin reflection on the type of department they wish to be after the transition period is completed.</p>	<p>Recommendation strongly endorsed.</p> <p>See response to the recommendation above.</p>	<p>See response to the recommendation above.</p>
<p>That the department monitor student numbers and review strategies for consolidating and improving retention rates. In this context, the department should consider the possibility of direct entry degrees and that the College consider the development of a philosophy and science degree option.</p>	<p>Recommendation strongly endorsed.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>The Department currently offers the option of taking 10, 30 or 50 credits in Philosophy. Both the Department and the College of ACSSS are opposed to direct entry degrees at undergraduate level.</p> <p>A new staff member due to take up appointment shortly will make possible options in a Philosophy and Science programme; however, the degree option has proved impossible to implement.</p>
<p>That the department consider ways of developing and marketing the MA programme as a catalyst for strengthening the PhD intake. In this context, there should be serious consideration of a joint international PhD programme.</p>	<p>Recommendation endorsed.</p> <p>The QPC would encourage the department to consider strategies to increase the number of PhD students directly.</p>	<p>Implemented.</p> <p>The MA degree was reviewed and modularised. It attracts approximately 10 students per year with more than half the applicants coming from outside UCC.</p>

Recommendation of PRG	Recommendation of QPC	Follow-up Report November 06
<p>That the department consider its role as anchor department for the Politics degree</p>	<p>The QPC recommended that the current position and level of involvement of the department be maintained.</p>	<p>Ongoing.</p> <p>The Department chaired discussions in 2004/5 which resulted in a new MA in Politics programme.</p> <p>The College of ACSSS has announced a review of the programme in Politics, which will be focused on the organisation and management of the subject.</p>
<p>That the department consider developing recruitment materials for use in post-primary schools.</p>	<p>Recommendation endorsed.</p> <p>QPC requested that the department engage in specific actions as to how this recommendation be implemented. QPC considered that it is necessary to market Philosophy as a subject and also recommended that the Department should make links with the Admissions Office and Schools Liaison. The QPC considered that there is significant potential for the subject, if marketed correctly.</p>	<p>Not implemented.</p> <p>It has been agreed that Philosophy will increase its advertising, both to promote the subject and to ensure that potential and incoming students are aware of what is involved in studying Philosophy at third level.</p>
<p>That the department consider the production of a "Careers Guide for Philosophy Graduates" to better inform intending students or first-year students and so help retention rates.</p>	<p>Recommendation endorsed.</p> <p>See response to the recommendation above.</p>	<p>Not implemented.</p> <p>See response above – the Department will also consider producing a careers guide for students.</p>
<p>That the department consider expanding even further the income from JYA students to further support staff research.</p>	<p>Recommendation endorsed.</p>	<p>The Department offers a wide range of modules for JYA students.</p> <p>The Department confirmed that staff research, including research visits to other institutions is supported.</p>