

**UNIVERSITY COLLEGE CORK  
NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND, CORK**

**QUALITY IMPROVEMENT/QUALITY ASSURANCE**

**PEER REVIEW GROUP REPORT**

**SCHOOL OF LANGUAGES, LITERATURES  
AND CULTURES**

**ACADEMIC YEAR 2012-13**

**Date 25.3.13**



## **PEER REVIEW GROUP MEMBERS**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>	<b>Role</b>
1. Professor Bill Richardson	NUI Galway	external Hispanic
2. Professor Margaret-Anne Hutton	University of St Andrews	external French
3. Professor Shane Kilcommins	UCC	internal Law
4. Dr. Linda Connolly	UCC	internal Sociology/ISS21
5. Professor Stuart Taberner	University of Leeds	external German
6. Professor Simon Gilson	University of Warwick	external Italian

## **TIMETABLE OF THE SITE VISIT**

- The timetable of the site visit is inserted as Appendix 1.
- The Review Panel appreciated the range and balance of staff at School, College, and University level with which it met, as well as the variety of students and stakeholders. The panellists felt that the number of meetings was somewhat tightly packed and would have appreciated more time to see further support staff (including from HR) and PGT students. It appreciated the difficulty of drawing together external stakeholders, but felt that local employers and recent graduates in a range of career destinations might have received strong representation here.

## **PEER REVIEW**

### **Methodology**

The Review process was co-ordinated and chaired by Professor Simon Gilson.

The panel adopted an inclusive and collaborative approach in exploring six key aspects of the School's structures, with members of the School:

- Vision and Sustainability
- PG students and Finance
- Teaching and Learning
- Governance
- Research
- External Relations

Each panel member took detailed notes on all the themes, during the course of the Review, which were pooled in the final panel discussions and discussed collectively. The review findings and recommendations were unanimously agreed.

Comments on these categories, where relevant and not covered in the Recommendations, are provided below.

- The Panel felt that the School's understanding of its own mission needed to be clarified and made more explicit. The SAR document indicates some degree of confusion about the vision the School has of its activities and purpose and, in particular, there may be an unresolved tension between a concern with language teaching and interculturality, on the one hand, and dedication to the pursuit of literary and cultural studies, on the other. In addition, the Panel recommends that the School

highlight more vigorously the important ways in which it contributes to the University's strategic aim of internationalisation.

- PGT: the Panel noted the value and efforts of School level work into new PGT programmes (PLANETS) but wished to draw attention to the benefits likely to accrue from further integration of programmes and practices at PGT level. For example, the four Departmental programmes in Translation Studies could easily be integrated into single School Translation MA with pathways and resultant economy of effort through team-teaching some generic module on translation methodologies. PLANETS as it stands is unlikely to bring in new FTE or create savings since it is, in effect, the sum of all the already existing Departmental MA modules. The School might reflect on how it could cut some of these out and add some generic team-taught module for real economies of scale to follow.
- PGR: as well as reiterating its commendation of the numbers and quality of PhD provision, the Panel suggested further integrated thinking regarding the entire cohort of PhD students across the School in particular with reference to a single School PhD induction, seminar and annual conference. Specifically, the School might seek to standardise and spread best practice with regard to quality assurance, including documentation of supervisory meetings with PGR students and preparing students for teaching within the School, career development and internationalisation. The School should consider an issue raised about transparency regarding the PhD application processes within the School and how this conforms with College regulations. PGRs asked for some mechanism whereby they could continue to maintain and develop their language skills. Finally, the Panel suggested that the School could make use of Marie Curie PG programmes (intra and extra European fellowships) and encouraged it to prepare the 4-year structured PhD programme.
- Teaching and Learning: while recognizing the value of the work undertaken across the School, the Panel wishes to draw attention to recommendation 3), in particular the value and significance of a School-level Director of Teaching and Learning so as to allow enhancement, strategic thinking and a strong degree of coherence in the delivery, monitoring and evaluation of the UG programme. A School-level director of Teaching and Learning would be in a position to enhance best practice and quality assurance. Such School-level coordination would allow further attention to be paid to feedback mechanism such as module questionnaires and staff-student committees with consideration of reports, including external examiners' reports, and implementation of recommendations taking place at School level.
- Governance: the Panel recommends that the School review the role and duties of leaders of Discipline and Departments and consider the generally accepted practice of rotating Heads of Departments for fixed periods in order to devolve workloads and share governance. Such a discussion should incorporate the development of opportunities and supports for Lecturers to take on the role of Head of Department and the implementation of shared and inclusive governance for staff at all grades. The panel encountered a number of highly qualified staff at all levels who would be suitable to serve as Heads of Department/Discipline in the School. The Panel also noted some lack of clarity in the election and nomination of some members to the SEMC, and recommends that procedures are made uniform and transparent. In this regard, the Panel draws attention to recommendation 2 and recommendations 6-8, in particular the provision of mentoring at School level.
- Research: as well as noting again the quality of much research undertaken across the School (which is particularly commendable in an environment where posts are not being replaced and library budgets are under pressure), the Panel wishes to reiterate the finding of the RQR in relation to the strategic placement of outputs in high profile journals and monograph series. Further to this, the Panel wishes to reiterate the

importance of effective monitoring systems at School level to ensure all staff, in particular ECRs, are able to develop strong research profiles and develop their research careers. The School is encouraged to continue taking advantage of the excellent support for grant applications at College and University level.

- External Relations: the Panel draws attention to recommendation 10, specifically the Panel would like to reiterate the importance of developing a strong School brand, of effective market research, particularly beyond the traditional regional student intake.
- The panel strongly recommends that the University make greater provision for Senior Lecturer promotions in the College of Arts, Celtic Studies and Social Science.

### **Site Visit**

The Panel visited the accommodation of the School in the O’Rahilly Building and also visited the University Library. While it felt that the School was relatively well provided for in terms of accommodation, it wondered about the possibilities of considering pooling resources and space in order to provide media rooms for all UG students in the school in a way that might enhance the environment and facilities on offer. Panel members were very impressed both with the high quality material presented to them in the subject area, in the Library, and the strong degree of communication and collaboration in place between School members and Library staff, including contributions made by the Head of School to modules taught within the Library context.

### **Peer Review Group Report**

The report was drafted on the basis of notes and inputs from all colleagues involved in the review process.

### **OVERALL COMMENT**

The Panel considers that the School, though at an early stage of development and in a complex and difficult financial situation, is functioning well and positively. Much of the review process, in line with SAR and SWOT, focused closely on the concept of the School itself, its current, emerging position and structures, and its potential for future development. The Panel nonetheless saw evidence that teaching and research are good, and that the student body is strongly satisfied with the quality and range of provision. The Panel noted how key research performance indicators – PGR and PGT numbers, research grant income – were very good in relation to other comparable institutions, and that there was a record of achievement in these areas. The Panel also noted the high quality of staff, including the quality of recent appointments, and the strong sense of collegiality and commitment to discipline areas. The Panel felt that Head of School has played a key role in the recent history of the School.

### **OVERALL ANALYSIS**

#### **Self-Assessment Report**

The Panel felt that a fuller data set of management information could have been provided in the initial documentation. However, once the Panel requested further information, this was provided in full and was extremely helpful. The Panel felt that this very positive data (e.g. on PGRs and PGTs) could be highlighted more prominently both in the report and in other promotional or related material to underscore the level of achievement in certain areas in the School. In addition, the Panel felt that the School itself should make more effective use of management information in developing a more strategic response to the threats and opportunities it faces.

### **SWOT Analysis**

The Panel felt that the SWOT analysis captured an early phase of deliberations in the School and did not reflect fully the reality that emerged in the course of discussions during the Review process, and did not provide full information on the opportunities provided by schoolification. A more complete analysis, including self-reflection on internal as well as external factors, will better inform strategic and pro-active decision making.

### **Benchmarking**

The Panel noted the value of the benchmarking exercise undertaken in the School of Languages and Cultures at Bristol University. It noted that the exercise was undertaken at an early stage in reflection upon the structure and potentialities of the Cork School of Languages, Literatures and Cultures. However, the Panel nonetheless would have expected to see a greater level of analysis of the outcomes of the benchmarking exercise; for example, comparisons of benchmarking data (e.g. PGR/PGT numbers, research income) with insights into what might be learned. The Panel wishes to draw attention to the potential value of further consideration of the Bristol structures in line with recommendation 3.

## **FINDINGS OF THE PEER REVIEW GROUP**

### **Governance**

See especially Recommendations 2, 3 and the overall comment.

### **Services**

The Panel noted favourably the strong support provided by Research Support Services to the School at College (CACSSS Research Officer) and University level (OVPR), and by the College Finance Officer. It noted that engagement with Careers had also been undertaken but it was keen that the School engage more closely with Careers to address perceptions related to the employability of language graduates. The Panel was favourably impressed by the 'buddying' and 'UCC works' schemes offered by Student support services.

### **Staffing**

See recommendations 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8.

### **Accommodation**

See comment on site visit above

### **Financing**

See recommendation 11 and Services above.

### **Communications**

The Panel noted that further work was possible on the School website and the way that this profiled the School both internally and externally. See also the comment regarding marketing noted above.

### **Implementation of recommendations for improvement made in Peer Review Group Report arising from last quality review**

See in particular Recommendation 5 which remains unaddressed. The Panel reiterates that the status and role of CLTs needs to be reviewed by School and College leadership in consultation with HR/University management at an early opportunity. The Panel noted that the current PWC review might be helpful (or should be made helpful) in this regard. The Panel felt that a considerable element of financial and strategic planning for the School rests on the CLTs.

**The Peer Review Group are also asked to comment specifically on developments and actions taken since the last quality review undergone by the School.**

See in particular Recommendation 5 which remains unaddressed.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

**Recommendations for improvement made by the School** (given the emphasis placed by the Panel on the structure and operations of the School, recommendations set out in the SAR are addressed throughout this report and in the recommendations listed below).

In addition:

- the Panel notes and commends the significance of efforts made to develop and diversify both UG programmes (the establishment of Film and Screen Media as a Discipline) and integrated PGT programmes (e.g. PLANETS) and draws attention to recommendation 11) and encourages the School to engage in further targeted marketing and branding of these programmes
- the Panel notes the improvements made in grant capture and urges the School to continue prioritising this area, especially via the effective mentoring of staff and ECRs.
- the Panel notes the advances made in collaboration across the School, in both teaching and research and urges the School to seek to ‘scale up’ these collaborations in a strategic and focused manner.
- The Panel notes and commends the leading role the School is playing in the University’s links with the Brazilian government’s initiative entitled ‘Science Without Frontiers’, as an important response to the Internationalisation objective of the University’s strategic plan.
- the Panel commends the School for its high number of doctoral students.

## **Recommendations for improvement made by the Peer Review Group**

The Panel encourages the School to

- 1) reflect upon the relationship of the School to the University, and its overall articulation, especially in a precarious financial situation where, in a landscape of rationalization and deficit, there are implicit threats to all its constituent units
- 2) reflect upon the role and duties of leaders of Discipline and Departments, on the rotation of Heads of Department (and on the development of opportunities for Lecturers to take on the role of Head of Department), and the availability of shared and inclusive governance for staff at all grades. The Panel noted some lack of clarity in the election and nomination of some members to the SEMC, and strongly recommends that procedures are made uniform and transparent.
- 3) engage in further reflection on the benefits, for all units and institutionally, for shared, strategic roles across the School, in particular introducing such roles as Director of Teaching and Learning, Director of Research, Director of Postgraduate Studies, Director of External Relations. This recommendation is suggested in order to allow the School’s contribution to internationalization, employability and research to be more strongly recognized, to allow further harmonization and coherence in its degree programmes, and to allow any unnecessary duplication to be avoided. The Panel recommends that such roles are conceived not as a further layer in addition to Departmental structures but as a strategic means of bringing focus and coordination to the current sets of duties in each Department and avoiding duplication (e.g. around the Year Abroad or Health and Safety). The Panel notes that the College/University

will need to be aware of the acceptability for School (rather than departmental) level representation for these roles.

- 4) reflect upon the provision of teaching programmes and the number and range of specialist modules offered across the School at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, with a view to streamlining and creating economies of scale, especially in the first two years of programmes. This could enable the development of new areas that are strategically and financially important (options here may include: increasing the amount of language teaching carried out by research active staff at all levels – in line with other institutions; increasing the size of language groups) in order to allow the provision of more language modules (and repeating of one-term language modules) in a range of disciplinary areas across the University
- 5) in tandem with point 4) to actively engage with senior management to review the contractual status and career structure of CLTs, noting that this is the third time that this issue has been raised in reviews; specifically, the lack of any opportunity for promotion for CLTs is viewed by the Panel as hindering the future development of the School.
- 6) reflect on how, at School level, practices, processes and structures can be further developed in order to mentor staff, ECRs and provide full equality of opportunity for all staff (issues here include a School workload model and a clear strategy for sabbatical rotas).
- 7) the Panel recognizes the current difficulties with regard to promotion and is deeply sympathetic: the Panel encourages the University to make greater provision for Senior Lecturer promotions in a context where there is scope for promoting a number of highly qualified people across the Departments
- 8) consider how recommendations for promotion might take place at School level via the School Executive Management committee
- 9) reflect on the sharing or pooling of support/secretarial resources
- 10) encourage the School to project and exploit further – through marketing and involvement with Careers – the major contributions that languages make to employment and internationalization across the University, in the community and beyond
- 11) encourage – again in a context of a landscape of rationalization – the University to keep exploring how it can involve all staff in creative thinking and initiatives in order to bring down the School deficit

**Recommendations for improvement that the Peer Review Group would like to make in addition to those made by the School.**

- See Recommendations 3, 5 and 7 above



## Appendix 1

### PEER REVIEW GROUP SITE VISIT - TIMETABLE

Tuesday 19 March 2013	
16.00 – 18.00	Meeting of members of the Peer Review Group. Briefing by: Professor Ken Higgs, Acting Director of Quality 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.
19.00	Dinner for members of the Peer Review Group & Head of School & the School Co-ordinating Committee:  Professor Patrick O'Donovan Mr. Stephen Boyd Dr. Manfred Schewe Dr. Paul Hegarty Dr. Rachel MagShamhráin Dr. Daragh O'Connell

Wednesday 20 March 2013			
08.30 – 08.45	Convening of Peer Review Group		
08.45 – 09.30	Professor Patrick O'Donovan, Head of School		
09.30 – 10.30	Group meeting with all School staff		
10.30 – 10.55	Tea/coffee		
10.55 – 11.10	School Executive Management Committee		
11.15 – 13.00	<table border="0"> <tr> <td style="vertical-align: top;"> <p><b>Private meetings with individual staff members</b></p> <p><u>Group 1</u></p> <p>11.15: Daragh O'Connell 11.30: Siobhán Nally 11.45: Louise Sheehan 12.00: Stephen Boyd 12.15: Angela Ryan 12.30: Janet Milner 12.45: Silvia Ross</p> </td> <td style="vertical-align: top;"> <p><b>Private meetings with individual staff members</b></p> <p><u>Group 2</u></p> <p>11.15: Sofia da Silva Mendes 11.30: Maria O'Sullivan 11.45: Martin Howard 12.00: Mark Chu 12.15: Martín Veiga 12.30: Helena Buffery 12.45: Gert Hofmann</p> </td> </tr> </table>	<p><b>Private meetings with individual staff members</b></p> <p><u>Group 1</u></p> <p>11.15: Daragh O'Connell 11.30: Siobhán Nally 11.45: Louise Sheehan 12.00: Stephen Boyd 12.15: Angela Ryan 12.30: Janet Milner 12.45: Silvia Ross</p>	<p><b>Private meetings with individual staff members</b></p> <p><u>Group 2</u></p> <p>11.15: Sofia da Silva Mendes 11.30: Maria O'Sullivan 11.45: Martin Howard 12.00: Mark Chu 12.15: Martín Veiga 12.30: Helena Buffery 12.45: Gert Hofmann</p>
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13.00 – 13.45	Working lunch		
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	13.45: Christine Montané 14.00: Ana Siles	13.45: Eugenia Bolado 14.00: Rachel MagShamhráin
14.30 – 15.00	Visit to core facilities of School, escorted by Professor Patrick O'Donovan, Head of School; Dr Mark Chu, Head of Italian; Professor Nuala Finnegan, Head of Hispanic Studies; Dr Paul Hegarty, Head of French and Dr Manfred Schewe, Head of German.	
15.00 – 15.30	Heads of Department: Dr Mark Chu (Italian), Professor Nuala Finnegan (Hispanic Studies), Dr Paul Hegarty (French) and Dr Manfred Schewe (German)	
15.30 – 16.00	<u>Representatives of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Year Students</u> Niamh Carey (French 1 <sup>st</sup> yr) Niamh Desmond (French 1 <sup>st</sup> yr) Adrian Kenny (French 1 <sup>st</sup> yr) Ruairi Coffey (German 2 <sup>nd</sup> yr) Ryan O'Leary (Hispanic Studies 1 <sup>st</sup> yr) Micheál Coghlan (Hispanic Studies 1 <sup>st</sup> yr) Sean Layton (Hispanic Studies 2 <sup>nd</sup> yr) Caoimhe Ni Chuilleagain (Italian 1 <sup>st</sup> yr) Julianne O'Leary (Italian 2 <sup>nd</sup> yr)	
16.00 – 16.30	<u>Representatives of Final Year Students</u> Melissa Collins (French) Niamh Lynch (French) Daniel Mahon (French) Fiona Mason (French) Jennifer Whitford (French) John Kidney (German) Elaine Linehan (German) Emma Ross (Hispanic Studies) Aoife Beville (Italian) Brian McCarthy (Italian)	
16.30 – 17.00	<u>Representatives of Graduate Students</u> Jennifer Browne (French) Oliver O'Hanlon (French) Ian Creaner (German) Mandy Collins (German) Claudia Lönze (German) Donna Alexander (Hispanic Studies) Tristan MacCana (Hispanic Studies) Yuanyuan Chen (Italian) Annette Feeney (Italian)	
17.00 – 18.00	<u>Representatives of stakeholders, past graduates and employers</u> Dr. John Doran, UCC Ms. Cecilia Gamez, EIL Mr Seán Ó Broin, Principal of Kinsale Community School Mr. Seán Ó Luasa, Italian past graduate	

	Mr. Pól Ó Seanacháin, Guidance and Careers Counsellor, Christian Brothers College, Cork Dr. Renata Plaice, Coláiste Choilm, Ballincollig Ms. Lisa Power, John Smith Bookshop Ms. Niamh Sweeney, Alliance Francaise
19.00	Meeting of Peer Review Group to identify remaining aspects to be clarified and to finalise tasks for the following day, a followed by a working private dinner.

<b>Thursday 21 March 2013</b>	
08.30 – 09.00	Convening of Peer Review Group
09.00 – 09.45	Professor Caroline Fennell, Head of College, CACSSS
09.45 – 10.00	Mr Paul Moriarty, Interim Chair of Student Services
10.00 – 10.15	Professor Anita Maguire, Vice-President for Research & Innovation
10.15 – 10.30	Mr. Cormac McSweeney, Finance Office
10.30 – 10.45	Ms Anne Marie Cooney, Financial Analyst, CACSSS
10.45 – 11.00	Tea/coffee
11.00 – 11.15	Dr. Bettie Higgs, Deputising for the Vice-President for Teaching and Learning
11.30 – 12.00	Professor Paul Giller, Registrar and Senior Vice-President for Academic Affairs
12.00 – 13.00	Visit to UCC Library, meeting with Ms Margot Conrick, Head of Information Services and Mr Ronan Madden, Subject Librarian, Boole Library.
13.00 – 14.00	Working lunch
14.00 – 16.15	Preparation of first draft of final report
16.15 – 16.45	Professor Patrick O'Donovan, Head of School
17.00 – 17.30	Exit presentation to all staff, to be made by the Chair of the Peer Review Group or other member of Peer Review Group as agreed, summarising the principal findings of the Peer Review Group.  This presentation is <u>not</u> for discussion at this time.
19.00	Working private dinner for members of the Peer Review Group to complete drafting of report and finalisation of arrangements for completion and submission of final report.