

SCHOOL OF ASIAN STUDIES – QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PLAN 8 AUGUST 2014

The School is grateful for the comments made by QPC in considering the School's response to the Peer Review Groups' response to the School's initial QIP in the self-assessment document. In the great majority of cases (20 out of 25 items) QPC marked the School's response as 'noted' or 'endorsed', recognising that potential improvements identified by the PRG had already been carried out by the time of the QPC consideration of the document. There are no formal recommendations as such remaining, but in a small number of cases (5 out of 20) where QPC has made a substantive comment, or encouraged the School to act in a particular way. These five items are reproduced below with the relevant elements of the School's QIP highlighted in **bold** under each item.

	Recommendations for Improvement made by Study of Religions	Response from the Peer Review Group	School Response	QPC Comment/Recommendation
	(none)			
	Recommendations for Improvement made by CHAS	Response from the Peer Review Group		
3	To clarify the governance of the Confucius Institute and to have this located unambiguously within the College of ACSSS and SAS.	There is institutionally no easy way to secure beyond all peradventure the interests of UCC students taught by the Confucius Institute, though such arrangements as best safeguard those interests should presumably be of paramount importance. While the PRG would therefore endorse the view that the primary location of	We are happy to report that this issue is now resolved (18/2/2014) with the President's appointment of Prof Sheehan as Co-Director of the Confucius Institute and governance located fully within the School of Asian Studies and CACSSS. We look forward to close cooperation. The new arrangement provides a mechanism for us to have more effective oversight of our Chinese	QPC noted that the Confucius Institute is a University entity with a ring-fenced external budget and that it is jointly governed by a joint UCC/Shanghai University Board. It noted that, whilst day-to-day management of the CI lies within the School of Asian Studies, it is a University entity. QPC is unaware of any delay in

		<p>the CI should be within ACSSS and SAS, we would also note that it plays an important role within UCC as a whole (and indeed beyond), and that any future arrangements should allow free scope for this role to continue.</p>	<p>language teaching while enabling the CI to pursue other activities beyond the School/College which have been held up for the last 7 months.</p>	<p>activities whilst acknowledging the change in management at local level.</p>
<p>QIP (1) Immediate. Day-to-day management of the CI is now vested within the School of Asian Studies with Prof Sheehan as Irish Director of the Confucius Institute. As indicated in the School's reponse, a number of problems arising from the absence of academic oversight of the language programme between July 2013 and February 2014 were identified and those issues, which arise mainly due to the transient nature of CI language teacher appointments, are already being addressed by measures <u>implemented for AY 2014-15 onwards</u>, namely that there will be close cooperation between academic staff in Chinese Studies and a few of the most experienced (returning) CI language teachers who will act as mentors for CI teachers who are new to UCC and/or less experienced or knowledgeable about UCC academic procedures and standards. In terms of Quality Improvement, this should be understood as a return to 'normal' academic governance and management of language teaching input in an academic department; it is a specific goal which is already both achievable and realistic under SAS governance of the CI. <u>Achievement</u> within this element will be measured in by a significant improvement in the quality of Chinese language teaching, as reflected not only in higher standards achieved and more reliable assessment of standards but also by a reduction in negative feedback in student surveys and in student complaints and appeals. (2) Medium-term. Within the five-year staffing plan currently being developed within the School, appointment of a highly qualified and fully UCC-appointed Chinese language specialist to act as language programme coordinator for Chinese Language teaching will be a high priority. Responsibility: HoS/HoCHAS/Irish Director of CI</p>				

4	To clarify the conceptual 'shape' of the areas covered by CHAS and to adopt a new and less confusing nomenclature	The PRG accepts the urgent need for rationalization of the various overlapping arrangements covering Chinese Studies, but notes both that the bodies relating to Japan and Korea remain important as potential locations for fundraising and for links with the wider community, so that their status needs to be maintained or even enhanced, and that any future arrangements for Chinese should likewise allow not simply for the integration of internal teaching and research but also the similar promotion of funding and outreach opportunities.	We have formally proposed an immediate implementation of a structure which retains the name 'School of Asian Studies' and has two departments; 'Study of Religions Dept.' and 'Asian Studies Dept.' as its constituent units. We understand this proposal is being progressed very actively at College/University level. The CI remains as above and the other CJK Institutes will remain as vehicles attached to the School for selected fundraising, research etc. activities and interactions with national and international bodies.	QPC strongly endorsed the importance of ensuring clarity around the identity of the School and its component parts. In particular it believes that Chinese Studies should have a clear identity.
<p>QIP</p> <p>Currently there is a legacy of differently named and overlapping structures within the School which confuse the identity of constituent elements such as Chinese Studies. The proposed new structure aims to foster a strong identity for individual programmes which attract high-quality students and to provide an enduring basis for coherent academic planning and development into the future.</p> <p>Restructuring of the School is a much-needed and easily achievable improvement which could, subject to College-level procedures, be in place for the start of AY 2014-15. The School has, as indicated in its response, already submitted a request to the College for a restructuring of the Department in line with the recommendations of the PRG and as a second step this is now progressing through the College committee structure.</p> <p>Once reconfigured, the School will as a third step seek to ensure that the new structure is recognised across UCC administrative and academic units and in representations of the School on the website and in UCC publications etc.</p> <p>Responsibility for this process is shared between the HoS and HoC.</p> <p>Achievement of this objective will be measured by restructuring of the School and UCC-wide and external acceptance and recognition of the new structure.</p>				

6	Significantly to raise average standards of language proficiency.	The PRG concurs in the view that low language proficiency in Asian Languages benefits neither UCC nor the future employers of its graduates, but notes that crucially for students of Chinese the issues raised under point 3 above must be realistically addressed.	See above – we recognise this as a priority area for the School; we have rationalised language provision in J&K with reference to the CEFR levels and will address Chinese in 2014/15 now that the CI is within the College.	See points made above regarding the governance of the CI (recommendation 3).
<p>QIP This is an issue similar to item 4 dealt with above, and our QIP in respect of Chinese language is dealt with in item 4. However the School's response on which QPC comments refers also to Japanese and Korean language standards. New academic appointments in the study of contemporary Korea and Japan have already been made with start dates of 1 August and 1 Sept 2014 respectively and in the case of Korean we have already secured a language teacher (externally funded) for AY 2014/15; it is likely that language support for Japanese will similarly be forthcoming in the wake of the academic appointment, from 2015 onwards. Academic governance and management of Korean and Japanese teaching falls entirely within the School and thus presents no specific challenges in terms of quality assurance.</p>				
Teaching & Learning				

	Recommendations for improvement that the Peer Review Group would like to make in addition to those made by School	School Response	QPC Comment/Recommendation
4	A benchmarking exercise should be completed by December 2014.	The legacy concept of benchmarking in UCC Quality Reviews differs from the normally accepted understanding of the term. 'Benchmarking' means assessing performance of different products or units against a single standard (which is what a Quality Review does), not comparing one's own unit with another elsewhere, chosen because it is either admirable or similar to one's own unit. There are significant resourcing issues for a small department if we were required to investigate, for purposes of reliable comparison, actual performance of another unit elsewhere rather than	Notwithstanding the different definitions of the term 'benchmarking' QPC would encourage the School to consider visiting at least one comparable unit in the areas of Study of Religions and Asian Studies in order to assist in the development of the Quality Improvement Plan.

	<p>relying on its public image. A realistic benchmarking exercise for SoR would involve assessment of SoR programmes against a reputable benchmarking statement such as the UK QAA's Benchmark statement for TRS at http://www.qaa.ac.uk/AssuringStandardsAndQuality/subject-guidance/Pages/Subject-benchmark-statements.aspx. For CHAS an appropriate comparator department might be Sheffield, with the caveat above about obtaining accurate data.</p>	
	<p>QPI</p> <p>The School has identified three comparable institutions against which the School might be benchmarked, namely SOAS (Study of Religions Dept and Faculty of Languages and Cultures, esp. CJK), Oslo University (Department of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages) and University of Turku (Comparative Religion & Centre for East Asian Studies). The School appreciates the value of a School visit to another institution and intends to arrange such a visit, but it is extremely unlikely that this can be achieved by December 2014 as the PRG suggested in November 2013. There are two main constraints which the PRG could not reasonably have foreseen in suggesting this timescale for the visit. One is the minimal level of staffing during the Autumn semester 2014 (in CHAS the third Chinese Studies post is still at the request stage so that there are only 2 f/t staff to deliver and/or oversee all of the Chinese Studies programmes, plus fulfilling major admin roles, while in SoR it is hardly possible that the vacant Islam post currently at the pre-shortlisting stage will be filled in time for the Autumn semester). This means that all key staff will have exceptionally heavy workloads until at least January 2015. The other factor is School funding, the budget being 16% down on last year and a further 20% withheld as College policy. Neither of these constraints can be overcome by the School alone.</p> <p>Step-by-step plan.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Acting HoS has requested, now that budgets for 2014-15 are known, whether funding is available for a benchmarking visit involving most or all of the School's staff during the Autumn term. 2. If funding is made available, senior staff in the School will assess the feasibility of a visit having regard to staff numbers and workloads and the potential impact of staff absence on quality of student provision. 3. Subject to provision of funding and a positive assessment of impact on provision, the three institutions identified will be approached with a view to identifying a suitable time and duration for a visit. <p>Responsibility: Acting HoS, College.</p>	

10	The Self-Assessment Report refers to staff leave being available 'every few years'. The PRG recommend a planned rota for staff leave.	SoR has a 5-year plan for teaching loads which incorporates spaces for annual sabbatical research leave each year. So far 2 members of staff have been on sabbatical in 2013 and 2014. In CHAS the multiplicity of programmes that have to be taught each year makes sabbatical planning considerably more challenging but semesterisation will help in planning sabbatical leave in advance. Sabbatical leave currently has to be sanctioned by a College Committee and there is no provision at all for 'backfill' when a member of staff is on sabbatical, a policy which very obviously discriminates against small departments whose need for a regular and guaranteed sabbatical research leave rota is highlighted by the PRG.	QPC recognises the problems raised in relation to staffing. It is pleased to see the approval of new staff appointments and hopes that this helps to alleviate the situation.
<p>QIP</p> <p>Periodic research leave is a fundamental requirement of a research-led academic unit which delivers research-informed teaching. The School in 2013/14 submitted bids for three permanent posts in CHAS: (Contemporary East Asian Studies (Korea), Contemporary East Asian Studies (Japan) and Contemporary East Asian Studies (China) for AY 2014/15 of which the first two were approved and excellent candidates have been appointed, as indicated above. The appointments relating to Korea and Japan significantly enhance the School's range and depth of study in these areas. In light of the two very good appointments made, the School will shortly commence planning to grow the study of Japan and Korea over the next few years, with the aim being to establish degree-level programmes (major/joint in the BA, analogous to Chinese Studies in the BA) within 2-3 years, as well as enhancing the new Asian Studies programme in the BA, with associated PG-level developments.</p> <p>In relation to a planned rota of sabbatical research leave, which is the focus of this recommendation, the characterisation of the new posts as 'East Asian Studies (region)' is part of a strategy to streamline programme delivery and maximise the utilisation of teaching capacity among a relatively small group of staff, <i>inter alia</i> to enable a planned rota of sabbatical research leave to be established in CHAS from at least 2016 onwards. This planning-led approach is already instituted in SoR, where planning of delivery of modules is done five years in advance with outline sabbatical research leave semesters incorporated. This approach makes things considerably easier when applications for research leave are submitted to the College, since the key problem posed by UCC's punitive sabbatical policy for a small unit - namely that any replacement teaching has to be provided at zero cost to UCC - has already been anticipated in the long-term planning process.</p> <p>SoR updates its 5-year plan annually. The step-by step plan here for CHAS is (1) to hold programme planning meetings from September 2014 with existing staff and the new appointees, (2) to develop viable and attractive</p>			

programme proposals and (3) to steer these through the academic development and approval cycle for implementation in 2015 onwards.

These are realistic objectives achievable within the normal annual planning cycle 2014-15. The School awaits approval of the strategically vital third post in east Asian Studies (China), which will enable meaningful planning for the further development of Chinese Studies including an outline sabbatical cycle over the medium term.

Responsibility: Acting HoS, Head of Asian Studies.

School of Asian Studies
8 August 2014