

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

**Quality Improvement/Quality Assurance**

**Peer Review Group Report**

**Department of Archaeology**

**Academic Year 2004/05**

**19<sup>th</sup> April 2005**

## **MEMBERS OF THE PEER REVIEW GROUP:**

Professor Barry Cunliffe, Institute of Archaeology, University of Oxford, UK  
(External Peer Reviewer)

Professor John Waddell, Department of Archaeology, NUI Galway  
(External Peer Reviewer)

Dr. Clare O' Halloran, Department of History, NUI Cork  
(Internal Peer Reviewer)

Professor Gearóid Ó Cruallaich, Department of Béaloideas, NUI Cork  
(Internal Peer Reviewer and Chair of PRG)

## **PEER REVIEW**

### **Timetable of the site visit**

The timetable is attached as Appendix A.

The timetable, as drawn up prior to the visit and finalised at a meeting attended by the Director of the Quality Promotion Unit, Dr. Norma M. Ryan, the Chair of the Peer Review Group, Professor Gearóid Ó Cruallaich and the Head of the Department of Archaeology, Professor Peter Woodman, proved very suitable and adequate to the purposes of the Review. Certain adjustments to the schedule, involving the Acting Vice-President for Academic Affairs and Research Policy, Professor Áine Hyland, and the representative of the Finance Office, Ms. Carmel Cotter, were necessitated by last minute circumstances. These adjustments were effected without difficulty, as were certain changes to the order in which members of the staff of the Department of Archaeology met with the PRG on the morning of Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> February. Overall, the PRG is satisfied that it was able to carry out its visitation of the Department of Archaeology in a way that complies with the requirements of the Quality Review process.

## **Peer Review**

### **Methodology**

The allocation of areas of primary responsibility among members of the PRG was agreed as follows at the Group's initial coming together on the evening of Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup> February:

- a) Consideration of the Department of Archaeology as organisation, institution and workplace - in respect of structures, resources, administration and staff development.

- Professor John Waddell

- b) Consideration of Curriculum aspects of the work of the Department of Archaeology, including matters of syllabus; undergraduate teaching, assessment and evaluation; staff-student relations and communication.

- Dr. Clare O' Halloran

- c) Consideration of the Scholarship of the Department of Archaeology, including its research and publications record; its research programme in respect of staff and students; its ability to fund research; its supervision of research; its contributions to the wider local community and to the Archaeological profession; the appropriateness, in respect of scholarship, of the Department's Benchmarking exercise.

- Professor Barry Cunliffe

- d) Facilitation of the PRG's work on-site in the Department of Archaeology; delivery of the main aspects of the PRG's Exit Presentation to the Department of Archaeology on completion of the on-site visitation; collation and editing of the various drafts in the preparation of the final version of the PRG's Report.

- Professor Gearóid Ó Cruaíoch

### **Site Visit**

In the course of the site-visit the PRG were afforded every cooperation and courtesy by the members of the Department of Archaeology and by the officers of NUI Cork with whom they consulted, e.g. Vice-President, Dean of Arts, Subject Librarian, Financial Officer, etc. In particular the PRG benefited from the willingness of the students of the Department of Archaeology – in all categories – and that of employees and other stakeholders attending for the purposes of the Review, to share very fully with the members of the PRG their ideas and experiences regarding the Department and its work.

### **Peer Review Group Report**

Each member of the PRG participated in the work of developing a set of materials for the purposes of the Exit Presentation and of further elaborating on this in the course of the final evening of the on-site visitation. Members transmitted further drafts and suggestions to the PRG Chair for incorporation into the initial overall draft Report which was circulated and commented on by all members. A final draft Report was prepared by the Chair and again circulated for further refinement and approval.

## **OVERALL ANALYSIS**

### **Self-Assessment Report**

The Peer Review Group found the Department of Archaeology's Self-Assessment Report (SAR) to be both thorough and explicit in its coverage of the greater part of the work of the Department. One aspect, however, of the Department that could have done with more detailed clarification is the organisation and operation of the Archaeological Services Unit. Further comment and recommendation regarding this issue is made below.

In being satisfied that all other major issues relating to the work of Department were addressed and in congratulating the compilers of the SAR for the quality of their work the PRG wishes to comment on the somewhat overly modest character of the Department's Self-Assessment. We feel that a more explicit highlighting of the many real and impressive strengths of the Department would have been both justified and

appropriate. It was clear to the PRG that the Department of Archaeology had benefited from its participation in the initial pilot Quality Improvement Exercise of 1996/7 and from its efforts to implement the issues arising in its own strategic planning 2000-2004. Its present degree of insight into its own nature and functions is to be commended and give it a platform from which it could reasonably have presented itself to greater effect. It is the hope of the PRG that ways will be found for the Department to proceed to do this within both the University and the wider community.

### **SWOT analysis**

The PRG considered the SWOT analysis as presented by the Department of Archaeology to be result of a careful, reflective exercise whose chief value was to articulate for the Group – and for the Department itself – a correct understanding of where the Department stands at present and of what circumstances and contexts are pertinent to the future of the Department

In terms of Strengths, the PRG would estimate the Department as being in robust health, overall; functioning in an effective and productive manner and ready to both contribute and collaborate further within the University and in the wider professional and community setting.

As regards Weaknesses, the PRG would acknowledge, along with many staff, a weakness which has to do with the period of rapid, rotating Headship of the Department in the recent past. Arising from the then prevailing circumstances, this rapid rotation of the Headship impeded and militated against strategic long term planning. While there is no doubt that the Department was well managed, it was, nevertheless, difficult for strategic planning to be actively pursued given the commitments of the succession of serving Heads.

The Opportunities identified for the Department in the SWOT analysis were correct ones in the PRG's estimation, though there are a number of other opportunities to which the Group would wish to draw attention, hereafter.

The PRG found that the Threats to the Department indicated in the SWOT analysis reflected a realistic assessment of issues that could hamper the workings and development of the Department in the future. The PRG is satisfied that such Threats are addressed under Recommendations (Department 's and Group's) and notes here that such Threats have also been discussed with the appropriate Officers of the University in the course of the site visitation.

### **Benchmarking**

The methodology underpinning the Benchmarking exercise was clearly laid out and demonstrated the effort put into choosing an appropriate department in Britain. The Department of Archaeology at the University of Exeter is of comparable size to Cork and, unlike most English universities, could be seen to have a distinct regional presence.

The analysis was thorough and the results were carefully analysed allowing several areas of difference to be identified. Most notable was the fact that, though Exeter is the major university in the southwest of Britain, its staff spends little time involved in extramural teaching. This contributes to their much lighter teaching load when compared to Cork. A second point of difference to emerge is the heavy stress placed on research output at Exeter resulting from the imperative to gain a high score in the Research Assessment Exercise to which all British universities are subjected on a five-year cycle. The comparison between Exeter and Cork gives the distinct impression that the department at Cork is the more 'rounded' in that its staff contribute to the full educational spectrum: the breadth of their activity is not distorted by undue governmental pressure.

The PRG is satisfied that the Benchmarking exercise was executed to an admirably high standard and that the insights deriving from the comparative analysis involved have been properly used by the Department in the preparation and presentation of its Self-Assessment and its Recommendations for improvement.

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

### **Department Details/Department Organisation & Planning**

The PRG found the Department of Archaeology to be a complex organisation comprising three distinct elements. At its core is a conventional University Teaching and Research Department to which are added two specialised units, the Archaeological Survey Unit and the Archaeological Services Unit. Both of the latter are maintained by the outside funding income they generate. The Survey draws mainly on State funds in order to engage in field survey in various Irish counties. The Services Unit provides technical and scientific support to outside agencies and to the Department

Although the details of the core Department were fully and helpfully expressed in the Self-Assessment Report as required, there was less clarity about the structure and integration of the two Units. A brief Self-Assessment Report relating to the Survey Unit was provided together with a brief report on the nature and activities of the Services Unit. The PRG were at an initial loss in attempting to ascertain something as basic as the list of staff on the Services side. It would have been helpful to the PRG if the work of both Units and their relationships to the Department had been described in greater detail. The PRG formed the opinion that, in this respect the Archaeology SAR reflected real structural uncertainties inherent in the present system of the Department overall. This issue is addressed hereafter in some detail in the course of the Group's Recommendations.

In general the Review Group was greatly impressed by the overall governance and management of the Department of Archaeology and with the efficiency of its sub-committee system. The role of the Departmental Management Group was found to be both effective and clearly appreciated by staff. The Department's Finance sub-committee in particular introduces a welcome measure of budgetary transparency to the workings of the Department and perhaps offers a model in this regard for other Departments of the University.

The question of the condition of the listed building in which the Department of Archaeology and its associated Units are housed gives rise to very considerable concern in the view of the PRG.

The group recognises that the Connolly Building is an especially important resource for a laboratory-based subject like Archaeology in University College Cork. While it has great potential, we found the physical condition of the building to be deplorable and it gave the Group an impression that the Office of Buildings and Estates was not effective and that the University did not appreciate or fully recognise its responsibilities to a listed building. It was evident that the provision of services in several areas fell short of what might be reasonably expected in a modern University. The professional advice of a qualified architect is very necessary to improve working conditions and access as a matter of some urgency. It is unnecessary to emphasise the importance of well-appointed working conditions for the morale and self-esteem of staff and students and for the public perception of the University. The Peer Review Group is particularly concerned at the Health and Safety issues raised by the condition of the building, and wishes to emphasise again its grave concern at the existing state of affairs.

### **Teaching & Learning**

The PRG was extremely impressed by the teaching ethos and commitment of the Department and the enthusiasm for teaching expressed by staff members. The students we interviewed were, without exception, most complimentary about staff dedication, their teaching skills and their approachability.

The PRG was particularly impressed by the range of teaching engagement from PhD through Adult and Continuing Education to schools level.

The PRG also noted the exceptionally broad scope of the undergraduate curriculum, which placed Irish Archaeology in an international context and which introduced a significant science-based element into the study of Archaeology. The latter is an exceptional feature of the Cork programme, unique in the State.

The PRG noted the Department's participation in the full range of subject weightings: 50, 40, 30, 20 and 10 credits. It noted that in Third Year neither the 50 nor 40 credit syllabi have a dedicated module to distinguish them from the 30-credit syllabus. This is in contrast to Second Year, where such 50-credit and 40-credit students take a compulsory 10-credit module on Archaeological Practice (AR2024).

The PRG notes the suggestion from some staff that a move away from Single Honours (50 credit subject) would free extra resources for the postgraduate area, but would point out that this would only involve a drop of 10 credits worth of undergraduate teaching. This would seem to risk reducing current student choice without producing significant resources to divert elsewhere.

The PRG recognises the extra burden of administration and marking which is placed on those members of staff who teach the large number of core modules (5 in Second and 4 in Third Year).

The PRG noted student dissatisfaction with the burden of work associated with AR3023 Archaeological Field Survey and the timing of the project work so late in the year. Some visiting students, in particular, had major difficulties in completing the Field Survey Project, commenting on the difficulties of relying solely on public transport and of finding someone to assist them in the field.

The PRG noted students' desire for information to be provided on the following year's modules and on the career options associated with the discipline.

### **Research & Scholarly Activity**

The PRG found the research record of the staff to be impressive particularly given the heavy involvement of most of the staff in teaching - something which was drawn out in particular by the Benchmarking exercise. The increase in the number of Ph.D. students in recent years is, in some measure, the result of the Department's growing research reputation and, of course, further enhances that reputation.

The presence of the Survey Unit and Services Unit adds considerably to the research ethos of the department. Their output is also admired not only locally but also

nationally and internationally. The Survey Unit sits comfortably within the department as a discrete research unit focussed on a clearly circumscribed set of tasks. Its presence and its archive feed into the student experience. The Services Unit is more wide-ranging in its activities involving a number of researchers with specific skills in the more practical aspects of archaeological research. Taken together the two units considerably extend the capabilities of the department to teach and to pursue its own research.

Overall we found that the department serves the discipline in an appropriate scholarly fashion at all levels from the strictly local to the international. Its science-base and practical involvement in excavation and survey make it a distinctive contributor to the archaeology of the State.

### **Staff Development**

The PRG noted and approved the Departmental concern to promote inclusiveness in Department affairs in respect of Part-time and Temporary Staff.

The PRG noted with concern the anomalous situation of a number of Researchers in the Department – in particular within the Services Unit – and wishes to register its surprise that a resolution to their plight has not already been found within moves currently under way to regularise such staffing problems College-wide in terms of recent employment legislation.

The PRG recognised the important part that sabbatical leave has played in maintaining the impressive research record of the Department – especially in the face of heavy teaching loads – and records its conviction that sabbatical leave is a continuing requirement for the well-being of the Department into the future.

### **External Relations**

In discussion with past graduates, employers and other ‘stakeholders’ in Archaeology, the PRG received a very positive impression of the impact which the Department has had on the profession and on the lay audience in terms of continuing education and information dissemination.

It is the PRG's view that the very considerable contribution of the Department outside the University to the region and the country has not been sufficiently appreciated by the College or sufficiently emphasised.

Similarly, the involvement of the Department with colleagues in other European countries that has led to both creative research programmes and the provision of opportunities for postgraduate research abroad has not been sufficiently recognised.

### **Support Services**

Except in the case of the Library, the PRG considered the provision of central services to the Department to be seriously deficient in a number of respects. Three issues deserve particular mention:

1. The dangerous and crumbling nature of the building which houses the Department
2. Dissatisfaction with the services provided to the Department by the Department of Human Resources – especially in the areas of contracts and the filling of posts.
3. A lack of consultation with the Department in respect of plans to convert essential car-parking and materials delivery space to a green area.

As regards the library the PRG noted that, while basically or narrowly adequate, the present holdings of Journals relating to Archaeology do not allow for serious international involvement with theory and research in the discipline. In respect of the inability to hold current subscriptions to international journals and in respect of building the book stock to an adequate level commensurate with the teaching and research aims of the Department, the PRG notes the less than adequate funding available to the Library itself and, consequently, to the Department. There appeared to the PRG to be a lack of perception by the College of the considerable interdisciplinary range of the programme in Archaeology and, in particular, of the fact that at UCC, Archaeology can properly be regarded as being essentially a science-based discipline.

## **Departmental Co-ordinating Committee & Methodology employed in the preparation of the Self-Assessment Report**

The PRG was satisfied that the work of the Departmental Co-ordinating Committee was properly organised and executed with the knowledge and cooperation of all members of the Department of Archaeology. The resulting SAR is, in the view of the Review Group, a valuable and enlightening document giving very substantial evidence of the way in which Archaeology at UCC rightly regards itself as constituting a major and successful subject area within the Arts Faculty and a professional and educational resource in the Munster region in general. The Group wishes to congratulate the Department on the production of such an excellent SAR in terms both of the methodology employed for its various components and of the presentation of the Report in such a decidedly usable format.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

### **Recommendations for Improvement made by Department**

The Peer Review Group agrees with the broad thrust of all 13 Recommendations made by the Department and listed here. In the Group's own Recommendations hereafter, some more detailed comment will be made and specific guidance given as to the Departmental Recommendations which were as follows:

1. Review Aspects of the Curriculum with particular reference to the Undergraduate Programme.
2. Expand the Role of the Higher Diploma.
3. Examine Changes to the Postgraduate Programme.
4. Further Develop the Research Ethos within the Department.
5. Identify New Research Foci.
6. Expand the Contribution of Archaeology to Other Programmes within the University.

7. Enhance the Position of the Department of Archaeology within UCC.
8. Develop the Department's Role in Archaeology.
9. Improve Communication with Support Staff.
10. Expand Department's Curriculum and Activities through the Provision of New Staff.
11. Formalise Relationship between the Department of Archaeology and the Archaeological Survey Unit.
12. Re-visit and Formalise Relationship between the Department and the Archaeological Services Unit (ASU)
13. Produce a new Strategic Plan.

### **Additional Recommendations for Improvement made by PRG**

The Peer Review Group unanimously recommends:

1. That the college now agrees a) to retain and fill the Chair of Archaeology on the retirement of the present holder, and b) to take whatever steps are needed to ensure that the Department continues to teach and research in the field of prehistory.
2. That a realistic Strategic Plan for the next five years of the Department's existence be drawn up as a matter of urgency.
3. That immediate attention be given to clarifying the position of the Services Unit within the Department. There should be a designated Director answerable to the Head of Department. The Director should draw up a business plan (with the assistance of the Finance Office) aiming to make an annual profit to fund further research. A services agreement should be

drawn up between the department and the unit with respect to teaching time, space resources, etc. to help clarify the financial relationship of the two organisations.

4. That the Survey Unit be treated as a research unit embedded within the Department. This relationship should be formalised by appointing a staff member to the role of Principle Investigator – reporting to the Head of Department.
5. That the Department explore ways in which its research ethos can be further developed, including
  - a) establishing regular research seminars
  - b) developing new research foci and programmes on the lines suggested in the SAR
  - c) exploring the ability of the Services Unit to generate monies to support the research work of the Department (including the furnishing of study leave in the case of Service Unit Staff.)
6. That workloads should be weighted to take account of the extra burden of core module teaching.
7. That the Department should include group work as part of all of its taught programmes - given the lack of formal group work in both the undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, which was commented on by students. The practical module AR3023 Archaeological Field Survey would seem to provide one opportunity in this regard.
8. That the 50 and 40 credit syllabi for Third Year should provide for one 10-credit module to be taken by all such students. The PRG noted that the current AR3010 Dissertation module, at present optional and under-weighted at 5 credits, could well be increased to a 10 credit module and made compulsory for all 50 and 40 credit students.

9. That an element of double marking of exams should be introduced into all years, either by the sampling method, and/or by selecting one core module for each year - bearing in mind that the Department operates a carry-forward system whereby a portion of Second Year marks count towards the BA result.
10. That serious consideration be given to the development of Continuous Professional Development programmes for the Archaeological profession in the wider community.
11. That urgent attention be given by the Department and the College to the rectification of the contractual position of research staff.
12. That the second Executive Assistant post in the Department be maintained and filled as an essential requirement of proper Departmental administration.
13. That the College and the department should together develop ways to publicise the achievements of the department since Archaeology is eminently newsworthy and will bring credit to the College.
14. That the College should pay immediate attention to the serious shortcomings of the Connolly building particularly with respect to the stability of the structure, disabled access and the need to maintain ease of access for bulk archaeological materials.

This final recommendation is a matter of the utmost gravity concerning, as it does, urgent issues of Health and Safety as well as issues relating to the delivery of the teaching and research programmes and the image of the University in the eyes of students and of the public at large.

**Timetable for conduct of Peer Review Visit**

**Department of Archaeology**

***Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup> February 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.

Venue: Suite 1, Business Centre, Kingsley Hotel, Cork

- 19.30 Dinner for members of the Peer Review Group and Head of Department and Departmental Co-ordinating Committee.

***Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2005***

- 08.30 Convening of Peer Review Group in Old Office, Department of Archaeology, Connolly Building, UCC.

Consideration of Self-Assessment Report

- 09.00 Professor Peter Woodman, Head of Department

- 09.30 Meeting with all members of the department, including representatives from the Archaeological Survey Unit and the Archaeological Services Unit

Venue: O'Riordán Seminar Room

- 10.30 Time allowed for private meetings of members of the Peer Review Group with members of staff.

10.30 John Sheehan  
10.45 Rose Cleary  
11.00 Elizabeth Twohig  
11.15 Barra O Donnabhain  
11.30 Mick Monk  
11.45 Sue Erridge  
12.00 Joy O'Callaghan  
12.15 Margaret McCarthy  
12.30 Denise Sheehan

- 13.00 Working private lunch for members of Peer Review Group

- 14.00 Tour of departmental facilities

- 14.45 Undergraduate Students, 1<sup>st</sup> Years

Rosari Harrington, BAI

Andrew Mills, BAI  
Edwina Roycroft, BAI  
Fiacc Murphy, EBAI  
Helen Buckley, EBAI

15.10 Undergraduate Students, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Years

Jerry O'Connor, BAII  
Erica McCarthy, BAII  
Ann Sheehan, BAII (Archaeological Society)

Robert Mcguire, BAIII  
Pamela Dorney, BAIII

15.40 Visiting/International students

Kourtney Donahoe (Higher Diploma International student)  
Mark Ryan (taking module AR1111)  
Kim Thounhurst (Early Start and AR2021, AR3025 and AR3034)  
Mat Radermacher (Early Start)  
Jonathan Waldron (Early Start)  
Aislinn O' Keeffe (Early Start, AR2026, AR2027, AR3016, AR3020, AR3021)

16.00 Postgraduate Students

Tom O'Driscoll, HDip  
Jessica Whitty, MA  
Carmelita Troy, MA  
James Lyttleton, PhD  
Griffin Murray, PhD

17.00 Recent graduates, employers and other stakeholders

Venue: Staff Common Room

Michael Lynch, *past graduate*  
Marion Dowd, *past graduate*  
Naoise Connelly, *Adult & Continuing Education experience*  
Owen Binchy, *Adult & Continuing Education experience*  
Felicity Philpott, *Adult & Continuing Education experience*  
James Eoghan, *Regional Archaeologist with the National Roads Authority*  
Mary Cahill, *National Museum of Ireland*

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.

***Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> February 2005***

08.45 Convening of Peer Review Group

09.00 Visit to Boole Library, Q+3, meeting with Ms. Olivia Fitzpatrick, Subject Librarian

09.30 Professor David Cox, Dean of Faculty of Arts

- 10.00 Ms. Carmel Cotter, Finance Office
- 10.15 Professor Aine Hyland, Vice-President
- 10.45 Return to Connolly Building
- 11.00 Tea/coffee
- 11.15 Visit to departmental facilities escorted by Professor P. Woodman
- 12.30 Working private lunch for members of the Peer Review Group
- 13.30 Professor Peter Woodman, 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 and members of the Peer Review Group, summarising the principal findings of the Peer Review Group.
- The presentation to 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.

***Friday 25<sup>th</sup> February 2005***

Externs depart