

University College Cork
National University of Ireland, Cork
Quality Improvement/Quality Assessment
Peer Review Group Report
Roinn an Bhéaloidis
Department of Folklore and Ethnology

26th March 2004

Members of the Peer Review Group

Name	Affiliation	Role
1. Prof. Máire Herbert	Department of Early and Medieval Irish, UCC	Chair
2. Dr. Elizabeth Twohig	Archaeology Department UCC	Rapporteur
3. Prof. Patricia Lysaght	Department of Irish Folklore UCD	Extern
4. Prof. Peter Narváez	Department of Folklore, Memorial University, St John's Newfoundland	Extern

Timetable

The timetable for the conduct of the review visit is attached as Appendix A.

Methodology in preparing report

The report was prepared jointly by all members of the PRG, working together during the site visit and thereafter through e-mail consultation.

The Department

An Leánn Dúchais, an interdisciplinary subject taught through the medium of Irish with Béaloideas at its core, was initiated at UCC in 1977, attached to the Department of Irish History. Folklore, though the medium of English, was added in 1989 as a subject in the second and third year BA degree. Having been part of an amalgamated Department of History from 1994, Béaloideas /Folklore and Ethnology emerged as a full Department in 2001.

The Peer Review visit

The PRG was very impressed by the ready co-operation afforded by the staff of the Department of Béaloideas/Folklore and Ethnology. It was evident that a great spirit of

collegiality, co-operation and good will exists in the Department, amongst staff and between staff and students. It was evident also that students, both past and current, have enjoyed a positive experience in the Department and they have praised the individual attention, support, encouragement, and academic training that they have received. It was clear to the PRG that the Department engenders feelings of respect and loyalty among students and graduates. The students of the Department of Béaloideas/ Folklore and Ethnology are clearly highly regarded and valued by other Departments within the Faculty of Arts, particularly by those with whom they have close academic contacts. The PRG was also particularly impressed by the Department's involvement with the Northside Folklore Project and its contribution thereby to the wider community.

Timetable arrangements

In regard to scheduling, the PRG was satisfied overall. However, while commending the attitude of inclusiveness underlying Departmental planning in this regard, we found that the scheduling of both part-time and full-time personnel within the time slot allocated for staff interviews caused difficulty in ensuring adequate dialogue with the core full-time staff. The PRG made arrangements to remedy this situation in the course of the site visit.

Overall Analysis

Self-Assessment Report

The PRG appreciated the frank self-appraisal contained in the SAR although a certain unevenness in the interpretation of the guidelines was apparent. In the opinion of the PRG, the SAR would have benefited from better preparation, organization, and editing. In matters of content, the description of the Department, its history, organisation, and budgetary details might have been more fully discussed. Its academic activities might have been more fully documented, for example, by incorporating data such as full outlines of the modules taught. Additional material, which was submitted during the site visit might have been provided in advance.

The SAR would have benefited particularly from more extensive analysis and reflection on strategic planning. The PRG was disappointed that such significant elements were not addressed. At this critical point in the Department's development it is vital to develop and formulate a realistic strategic plan for the future. In the critical absence of such a plan in the SAR, the Department's view of its future had to be elicited during the course of the site visit.

It was agreed between the PRG and the Head of the Department of Béaloideas/Folklore and Ethnology that Paragraph 5:1 of "Strategic Plan 2002-2004" forming part of the SAR should be amended in order to conform with the terms of the legal agreements existing between UCD and UCC in relation to present and future use of the National (IFC) Folklore MSS Archive materials and indexes in question.®

Despite the aforementioned reservations and the necessary corrective intervention, the PRG confirms its acceptance of the SAR in its amended form.

SWOT Analysis

Analysis in the SWOT format gave a good overall indication of the strengths and weaknesses of the Department. The Department is rightly aware that its relatively low student numbers constitute a weakness, and that the present teaching commitment is not commensurate with current student numbers in the Department. The PRG agrees that many opportunities exist to develop the community and regional profile of the Department and of its research, but that this is difficult to achieve in view of the present teaching loads. The PRG agrees that the imminent retirement of the most senior staff member constitutes a cause of uncertainty and a threat to the Department's morale.

® The amended version as agreed reads: "Boole Library holds microfilm copy of the National (IFC) Folklore MSS Archive. A major opportunity exists to reclassify this material and open it up to contemporary scholarly enquiry through the application of IT. This is a general disciplinary aspiration only".

Benchmarking

The benchmarking section was rather cursorily presented and was lacking in comparative detail and analysis regarding the institutions cited. Greater heed might have been paid to the curricula of the institutions to which reference was made; these should be analysed and taken into account in future Department planning in relation to teaching and learning.

Findings of the Peer Review Group

The PRG group has attempted to evaluate all aspects of the Department's activities with a view to making positive suggestions for strengthening and improving its position.

Department Organisation and Planning

The Department has an unconventional history, still evident to some extent in its informal structure and administrative profile. This may partly explain the lack of a planned response to the imminent retirement of the senior member of academic staff. The PRG acknowledges that aspirations in relation to the future profile of the Department were expressed in a letter to the former Dean of Arts (*in litt.* 5 June 2003), but the PRG considers that this falls short of a constituting a formal plan.

In addition to giving detailed consideration to future Departmental development, more routine administrative structures need to be put in place. The PRG considers it timely to institute a more formalized administrative structure, which would include regular recorded and minuted Department Management Group meetings. The PRG also recommends the establishment of a formal staff student committee with regular meetings throughout the academic year. Rotation of staff responsibilities is desirable so that all engage in, and gain experience in, departmental administration.

A particular difficulty for the efficient running of the Department is the dispersed nature of the staff and support offices in three separate houses along College Road. Given the small numbers of staff involved, this situation could be readily addressed.

Teaching and learning

Although a very copious amount of data was available from student evaluations concerning the status and quality of teaching and learning, there was a virtual absence of serious engagement with issues arising from these evaluations at several levels, viz. in the analysis of the Mission Statement and in the SWOT. The PRG noted that this was the first occasion on which student questionnaires for the purposes of teaching evaluation had been used. The PRG recommends that Departmental teaching should continue to be informed by this mechanism on a regular basis.

In the course of discussions during the site visit, the PRG elicited the Department's *desiderata* regarding the future development of its programmes, since this information was not clearly set out in the SAR. The PRG fully supports the Department's view that the introduction of Folklore at First Arts level is likely to constitute a fruitful way forward in terms of student awareness and enrolment. The PRG also noted the positive response of current students and of graduates to the Leánn Dúchais programme as the Department's historical core, and it recommends the maintenance of both Folklore and An Leánn Dúchais at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. The PRG urges a complete curriculum review, in association with the process of planning a three-year BA programme in Folklore. This should consider the introduction of genre courses that would inform students about the classic approaches and basic tools of folklore study and research. In keeping with benchmark folklore departments, we further encourage the adoption of public sector folklore courses (an area of study dealing with museum exhibitions, heritage planning, community projects, festivals). Such courses might directly involve students through internships with local institutions and groups (and, in particular, the Northside Folklore Project).

The PRG commends the Department's strength in Postgraduate studies and suggests an active development of this area - for instance, through use of the Higher Diploma in Arts programme as a conversion course for interested graduates from other disciplines.

The PRG was impressed with the significant number of international students that the Department has attracted at all levels, including the recent development of the Early Start Programme for foreign students, which was much commended in the student evaluations. This illustrates a widespread interest in Folklore and a recognition of the Department's scholarship. The international outreach of the Department should be maintained and enhanced.

The PRG welcomes the first draft of a Departmental Student Handbook, and recommends that the completed document should include course outlines, an overview of programmes, and, where appropriate, more recourse to publications of folklore scholarship in Ireland.

Folklore archives offer excellent opportunities for scholarly research as well as community outreach and should form an integral part of the teaching and learning experience at all levels. The Departmental Folklore Archive (presently directed on a part-time basis) has a fine collection and exhibits great promise, but is presently understaffed and suffers from a lack of sustained financial support. Such support would allow future planning and provide a full-time archivist, expanded staff, more supplies and better equipment.

Research and Scholarly Activity

The department has been remarkably successful in attracting research funding. It appears to have availed of all possible sources of revenue. In this context we commend the comprehensive and informative report on the Northside Folklore Project contained in the SAR.

The scholarly publications of the staff - though the volume might be greater - are highly commended, as are postgraduate theses, and the innovative graduate publication *Béascna*. Future issues of this journal might usefully include lists of theses completed. More submissions to appropriate international peer-reviewed journals are recommended. The

PRG also recommends that the southern region's rich traditions and resources should be a particular focus for fieldwork, research, and publication.

Staff Development

Bearing in mind the students' evaluation of teaching, the PRG encourages the teaching staff, especially more junior staff, of the Department, to avail of opportunities to develop and enhance pedagogical skills, especially in relation to the use of audio-visual aids, and the increased use of the Department's archival resources in teaching.

External Activities

The PRG recognises that the Department has many local, national, and international contacts. However, these operate more on an individual than on a Departmental basis. The PRG recommends, therefore, that further institutional links be sought and formalized, e.g. further student and staff exchange with European institutions through the Socrates programme, and research exchange programmes with benchmark departments abroad.

We suggest that the Department's profile within UCC be raised through public lectures or seminars, and by highlighting of valuable work with the Northside Folklore Project. In tandem, the Department's website should continue to be developed in order to provide more publicly accessible information concerning its diverse activities and services.

Support Services

Library

The Boole Library holdings of international folklore and ethnology journals are inadequate for staff and student research, due to inadequate funding. The PRG recommends that the most significant European journals of folkloristics and ethnology be added to its collections.

The PRG met with Mr. Denis O’Sullivan of the Computer Centre who advised that the computing facilities of both the Department of Béaloideas/Folklore and Ethnology and the Archives were inadequate, and needed urgent upgrading. The PRG recommends that, following a full assessment of both Departmental and archival computing requirements, including those of the Northside Folklore Project, that necessary upgrading be undertaken as soon as possible.

Key Recommendations

- It is crucial for the Department that, on retirement of the present Head of Department, a replacement be appointed without delay.
- It is critical for the Department at this juncture in its evolution that a realistic strategic plan be developed and formulated as soon as possible.
- It is vital for the Department’s future viability that serious concerted attention be given to the areas of teaching and learning. In this context, the PRG strongly recommends that:
 - A first-year programme in Folklore be initiated as soon as possible.
 - In tandem with future planning and curricular review, material culture be considered as an appropriate area of specialization for a new appointment.
 - Opportunities to develop or enhance pedagogical skills be availed of.
 - Archival resources and audiovisual aids be regularly used in teaching.
 - The Tenure B post be regularized.
 - The Departmental Folklore Archive be given sustained financial support to secure its future, and to provide a full-time archivist.
 - Both Departmental and Archival computing facilities, including those of the Northside Folklore Project, be upgraded.
 - Urgent steps be taken to ensure the safety of the Northside Folklore Project’s archival holdings.

Conclusion

The PRG concludes that the Department of Béaloideas/Folklore and Ethnology is to be commended on its scholarly endeavours thus far, and on its success in attaining Departmental status. This newly-fledged Department fulfills an important scholarly and cultural role within the university, and has a highly important link with the wider community through the Northside Folklore Project. The PRG recommends that the Department be supported in every way possible to enable it to reach its full potential.

Timetable for conduct of Peer Review Visit

Roinn an Bhéaloidis

Sunday 1st February 2004

- 18.00 Meeting of members of the Peer Review Group
Briefing by Director of Quality Promotion Unit, Dr. N. Ryan.
Group agreed final work schedule and assignment of tasks for the following 2 days.
- 20.00 Dinner for members of the Peer Review Group and members of the Department:

Monday 2nd February 2004

- 08.30 Convening of Peer Review Group
- Consideration of Self-Assessment Report
- 09.00 Professor Gearóid Ó Crualaoich, Head of Department
- 09.30 Meeting with all staff of Department
- Meetings with individual members of staff
- 10.45 Nuala de Búrca
11.00 Síle de Cléir
11.15 Stiofán Ó Cadhla
11.30 Meabh Ní Dhaibhéid
11.45 Margaret Humphries
12.00 Marie Annick Desplanques
12.15 Clíona O'Carroll
12.30 Diarmuid Ó Giolláin
- 12.45 Mr. Denis O'Sullivan, Head of Operations/Networks, Computer Centre
- 13.00 Working private lunch for members of Peer Review Group
- 14.00 Professor Aidan Moran Registrar & Vice-President for Academic Affairs
- 14.30 Professor David Cox, Dean of Faculty of Arts
- 15.00 Visit to core facilities of Department in Elderwood and at 54 College Road
- 16.00 Undergraduate Students - From all undergraduate levels, including Evening arts and Visiting Students:

Tara Ní Dhomhnaill,
Ciarán Ó Gealbháin,
Diarmuid Grainger,
Eimear Nic Suibhne,
Anna Walsh,
Jeffrey Walker,
Caroline Read,
Grace Fox,
Pauline Ahern

16.45 Postgraduate Students

Jenny Butler,
Angun Olsen,
Shane Lehane,
Karen Cafferkey

17.00 Meetings with groups of students representing past graduates and employers

Past graduates

Marcus Bale,
David Barry,
Catherine Buckley,
Joe Feller,
Liam Guiney,
Ita Harris,
Michelle Kingston,
Mary McCormack,
Seán Ó Duinnshléibhe

19.00 Meeting of Peer Review Group to identify remaining aspects to be clarified and to finalise tasks for the following day, including working private dinner

Tuesday 3rd February 2004

08.30 Convening of Peer Review Group

09.00 Professor Kevin Collins, Vice-President for Research Policy & Support

09.30 Ms. Carmel Cotter, Finance Office

09.45 Mr. Cathal Kerrigan, Subject Librarian

10.45 Visit to facilities for Northside Folklore Project (located at: Northside Community Enterprises Ltd., Sunbeam Industrial Park, Mayfield, Cork). PRG escorted by Professor G. Ó Crualaoich

12.30 Professor Gearóid Ó Crualaoich, Head of Department

14.00 Preparation of first draft of final report

- 17.00 Exit presentation, made to all staff of the Department by Professor Narváez, summarising the principal findings of the Peer Review Group.
- 19.00 Preparation of final report and plans for finalisation of report, followed by a working dinner for members of the Peer Review Group.