

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

**Quality Improvement/Quality Assurance**

**Peer Review Group Report**

**Department of Italian**

**Academic Year 2004/05**

13<sup>th</sup> January 2005

**Members of the Peer Review Group:**

1. Professor Paul Fletcher, School of Clinical Therapies, UCC (Chair)
2. Professor Keith Sidwell, Department of Classics, UCC
3. Dr. Ursula Fanning, Department of Italian, UCD
4. Professor Brian Moloney, Emeritus Professor of Italian, University of Hull, UK

**Timetable of the site visit**

(Please see Appendix A for the timetable of the Review)

The timetable worked well and the Review was efficiently prepared and helpfully administered by the Quality Assurance team. On day 1, we were able to meet all staff, collectively and individually, students from all undergraduate years, and postgraduate students. An evening meeting allowed us to meet recent graduates and national coordinators for the primary and post-primary language initiatives. Due to unavailability of employers in the local Cork area it was not possible to meet with some employers' representatives. On Day 2 we were able to discuss a number of relevant issues with officers of the University, and engage in further discussions with the Head of Department. Suitable time was also provided for panel members' private discussion.

**Peer Review****Methodology:**

The external members of the Panel took particular note of the Department's research and publications, and of the Library collection. Otherwise members of the panel took an equal interest in other areas of the Department's activities. Undergraduate students were split into two groups, with first and fourth year students being seen by Dr. Fanning and Professor Fletcher, and second and third year students meeting Professor Moloney and Professor Sidwell. For all other meetings all members of the Panel were present.

The external members of the panel wish to put on record that this was the most rigorous review they have taken part in.

### **Site Visit.**

Members of the panel had a brief tour of the Italian Department, and visited the Language Centre. They also visited the Library and had the opportunity to inspect the collections, and talk to the subject librarian, Olivia Fitzpatrick.

### **Peer Review Group Report put together?**

By discussion on the final afternoon of the review, and in the evening immediately after its conclusion. A draft was then circulated by the Chairman to all members. Responses to this draft were incorporated into a second version, which was again circulated to allow members of the panel to make further comments, before the final draft version was sent to the Quality Promotion Unit.

### **Overall Analysis**

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

The Self-Assessment Report in the opinion of the Review Panel is comprehensive and informative. It reflects a departmental consensus as well as individual views. The brief history of the Department provided in the Report documents recent staffing changes, including the loss of two senior members of staff. This was a significant part of the context of the Review for the panel. We were unanimous in forming a very positive view of the Department's research achievements to date. In the context of the University's commitment to excellence, as outlined in the strategic development plan, we consider that it is essential that the Department benefit as soon as possible from the leadership of an experienced and established senior researcher.

The Department has appropriately identified its strengths in administration, teaching and research. The Department administration is highly efficient and student-friendly. The Department maintains good communication with students, both when they are at

UCC and on their year abroad. Students feel valued. We were struck by the commitment of all the staff – full-time, part-time and college language teachers – to teaching and learning. Documentary support for specific modules is most impressive. The Department contributes to a range of intra-Faculty and cross-Faculty undergraduate programmes, runs a taught MA, and supervises a significant number of research students. Students are employable. Italian employers in particular appreciate the students' cultural knowledge as well as their linguistic skills, which indicates clearly that a good range of cultural courses must be maintained. Language teaching is a particular strength of the Department. Staff are active in research and publication, and their output is internationally recognised. Staff organise a regular research seminar series, drawing on the intellectual resources of the Department, the Faculty and outside contributors, which is of enormous benefit to both staff and research students. There is no doubt that this is, despite the difficulties they have faced, a successful department, which can face the future with confidence.

We agree with the Department that the development of Computer Assisted Language Learning presents a significant opportunity which they should seize. This is first and foremost a way of raising linguistic standards even further, as well as motivating students. And because it increases student confidence in language it also helps to raise standards significantly in other areas of academic activity, and improves retention rates. Other opportunities may exist in developing new intra-Faculty courses, in exploring possible links with Law and Engineering, and in generating resources from recreational language courses. From our perspective, threats to the Department are in the main external, having to do with resource constraints resulting from the size of the Department and from University budget cuts.

### **Benchmarking**

The Department has chosen to benchmark itself against reputable departments in Ireland and the UK which have similar numbers of staff and students, and comparable research achievements. Overall, the Department emerges very well from this exercise. Validation of the Department's teaching emerges from the reports of external

examiners from outstanding departments in prestigious universities. They are without exception impressed by the standards achieved by graduating students.

## **Findings of the Peer Review Group**

### **Department Details**

The main issues raised under this heading in the self-assessment report relate to the departure of a senior academic for a Chair elsewhere in 1999, and the recent retirement of the current Professor. These are significant losses to a small department. We return to the issue of academic leadership in 'Recommendations for Improvement' below. Other staffing issues relate to part-time teaching, and the somewhat anomalous status of College Language Teachers, which we also return to below.

### **Department Organisation & Planning**

An efficient and student-friendly departmental office is overseen by a highly competent Senior Executive Assistant whose work is clearly appreciated by staff and students alike. The Department's successful strategy for dealing with the complexity of its teaching arrangements involves delegation of responsibilities, and all staff are involved in discussions of the Department's strategic direction.

### **Teaching & Learning**

Discussions with students and perusal of a large number of student questionnaires made available to the Panel revealed a high level of student satisfaction with their experiences in the Department. Mentoring of students at all levels makes them feel part of the Department and aids retention. All Staff are clearly committed to delivering high quality courses, in language, literature and other areas of culture. There is good documentary support for courses, via handbooks and Blackboard. The Panel was impressed with the high quality of postgraduate students, and the academic opportunities available to them. The taught MA course has recently been revised, and

is attracting increasing numbers of students. For a small department, Italian has a strong cadre of research postgraduates.

It was not clear from the statistics made available to us or in answers to our enquiries whether any credit is given to the Department, in the form of FTEs, for its management of the year abroad programmes. This represents in fact a considerable burden. Alliances have to be established and then, given the Italian system, maintained by assiduous personal contacts. Students have to be prepared for the year abroad and supervised while abroad, which in some cases generates substantial correspondence, as well, sometimes, as requiring visits. UK Universities give FTE credit to departments involved in such programmes, usually, we believe, 0.5 per student – divided in the case of Joint students.

### **Research & Scholarly Activity**

There is a very lively research culture in the Department. The close fit between staff research interests and their teaching benefits staff and students. Research in the Department ranges widely from the Renaissance to aspects of contemporary cultural studies, including film studies. Staff research output is prolific. Members of staff produce monographs with publishers of international reputation. They contribute articles regularly to the main journals in the fields of Italian and Film Studies. Staff (and indeed postgraduate students) have repeatedly been successful in obtaining funding for research projects from within UCC and from external sources. Staff frequently contribute to international conferences in the British Isles, Italy and the USA. Staff act as external assessors and invited speakers at other institutions. It is notable that even some of the staff whose contracts do not require them to engage in research, are active scholars, and to a high level. The strong research culture in the Department facilitates this, even though this work is neither funded nor formally recognised. The Department's research culture is also evidenced by regular research seminars, which provide an interesting and varied programme, to which research students also contribute. They also attend the post-graduate research seminars of the Society for Italian Studies. We were favourably impressed by the intelligent and

enthusiastic accounts the research students gave of their work and the supervision they are receiving.

We understand that colleagues in other Universities are urging a senior member of the Department to lead a research group in Sicilian Studies. This development, which could lead to conferences and possibly a journal, deserves strong support.

### **Staff Development**

While opportunities for support conference/course attendance exist for full-time staff, this is not the case for part-timers and College Language Teachers. It is, however, an indication of the strength of the Department's research culture that part-time staff have conducted research. One such member made the point that she had not included her research in her personal profile precisely because it had not been supported by College funds. Staff make full use of opportunities for development offered within the College.

### **External Relations**

The Department is an active member of the School of Language and Literature, and contributes teaching to many interdepartmental courses. It is also involved in course collaboration with Faculty of Commerce. A member of staff coordinates the Film Studies programme in the Faculty. Members of staff are involved in the Teaching and Learning Support Group, and are active in University and Faculty committees. There is excellent outreach via recreational courses offered locally, as well as support for the national primary schools Italian programme, and the Higher Diploma for Post-Primary Language Teachers. Members of staff are actively involved in the Society for Italian Studies (UK and Ireland) and organised a successful conference of the Society for Italian Studies in Cork in 2003.

### **Support Services**

The Library visit revealed that while core texts in Italian are readily available, making the collection a good teaching resource, provision in the Department's research areas is distinctly patchy. There are concerns about the Department's limited library budget. It was not clear to us whether the Department's library allocation is based solely on FTEs or on a more complex formula that takes into account staff numbers and the spread of research interests. In an institution undoubtedly committed to fostering excellence in research, consideration could usefully be given to the latter. The library budget also needs to take account of the need of CLTs to keep up to date with developments in Linguistics.

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

All members of the Department were involved in the preparation of the report, and endorsed its content and recommendations.

### **Recommendations for Improvement**

#### **Recommendations for improvement made by the department in the Self-Assessment Report.**

- In the context of the Department's strong research culture, and the University's commitment to excellence, we wholeheartedly endorse the Department's recommendation that the Chair of Italian be filled as soon as possible.
- We recommend the continued exploration of the provision of resources from the Faculty of Commerce for the expansion of courses relevant to the BComm with Italian.
- We would ask the Faculty to review the Department's Library grant, with a view to improving resources for postgraduate students and staff to pursue their research interests.

- We would encourage the Department to pursue the implementation of CALL (computer assisted language learning) for reasons given above.

### **Further recommendations from the Review Panel**

We would advise the department to pursue further opportunities for academic collaboration, with a view to improving its FTE standing. These could include:

- Joint degrees with Law and Engineering
- Italian literature in translation courses for arts students (e.g. Dante and Boccaccio in English translation for students of English; courtly literature for students of history)

We would request the Faculty and/or College to review the status of year abroad students with respect to FTEs accruing to the Department.

The Department has several part-time staff, and three College Language Teachers. These individuals make important contributions to the Department's teaching, and in some cases to its research profile. We recommend that:

- Financial provision be made to enable part-time teachers and College Language Teachers to attend conferences and/or courses.
- The terms and conditions of College Language Teachers be reviewed, with a view to providing promotional opportunities as rewards for research activity of various kinds.

## APPENDIX A

### Timetable for conduct of Peer Review Visit

#### Department of Italian

##### *Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> November 2004*

18.00 – 19.30 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

20.15 Dinner for members of the Peer Review Group and Head of Department and members of department

- Review Team
- Dr Mark Chu, Head of Department
- Dott. Laura Rascaroli
- Dr Silvia Ross
- Ms Ann Callaghan
- Dott. Gabriella Caponi Doherty
- Ms Aisling O'Leary

##### *Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> November 2004*

08.30 – 09.00 Convening of Peer Review Group in Room 1.24, ORB

#### Consideration of Self-Assessment Report

09.00 – 09.30 Dr. Mark Chu, Head of Department

09.30 – 10.30 Members of the Department

Dott. Sara Arienti  
Dott. Teresa Briganti  
Ms. Ann Callaghan (from 10.00)  
Dott. Gabriella Caponi Doherty  
Dr. Mark Chu  
Mr. Donald O'Driscoll  
Ms. Aisling O'Leary  
Ms. Madeleine O'Rourke  
Dott. Laura Rascaroli  
Dr. Silvia Ross  
Professor Eduardo Saccone  
Ms. Louise Sheehan

10.30 – 10.45 Tea/Coffee for review team + department staff

- 10.45 – 13.00 Private meetings with members of staff.
- 10.45 Ms. Louise Sheehan (CLT)  
 10.55 Dott. Gabriella Caponi Doherty (CLT)  
 11.05 Dott. Sara Arienti (PT Lecturer)  
 11.15 Ms. Madeleine O'Rourke (PT Lecturer)  
 11.25 Dott. Laura Rascaroli (Toyota Lecturer in Film and Media Studies)  
 11.35 Mr. Donald O'Driscoll (CLT)  
 11.45 Dott. Teresa Briganti (Italian Government *Lettrice*)  
 11.55 Interval  
 12.05 Dr. Silvia Ross (Lecturer)  
 12.15 Ms. Ann Callaghan (PT Lecturer)  
 12.25 Ms. Aisling O'Leary (Senior Executive Assistant)  
 12.35 Professor Eduardo Saccone
- 13.00 – 14.00 Working private lunch for members of Peer Review Group
- 14.00 – 14.30 Visit to core facilities of Department, escorted by Dr. Mark Chu
- Meetings with representatives of students
- |                           |  |   |
|---------------------------|--|---|
| 14.45 – 15.15<br>parallel | <u>Group A: P. Fletcher + U. Fanning</u>                                     | <u>Group B: K Sidwell + B Moloney</u>   |
|                           | Room 1.24  | Room 2.18   |
|                           | <u>First-Year Undergraduates</u>   | <u>Second-Year Undergraduates</u>   |
|                           | <u>Arts I:</u><br>Miriam Kelly<br>Rebecca Broomfield                         | <u>Arts II:</u><br>Myvanwy Birds<br>Fiona Kearney                               |
|                           | <u>LCS I:</u><br>Valerie Healy   | <u>LCS Italian II:</u><br>Patrick McGauley<br>Orla Ní Cheallacháin<br>Anna Ryan |
|                           | <u>Evg Arts I:</u><br>Deborah Gannan<br>Hilary Waller                        | <u>LCS French II:</u><br>Noëmi Haire  |
|                           | <u>BComm (European) with Italian I:</u><br>Paddy O'Toole<br>Elaine Gallagher | <u>Euro. St. II:</u><br>Sive Thomson  |
|                           |  | <u>BComm (European) with Italian II:</u><br>Michael Butler<br>Jillian Healy     |
| 15.15 – 15.45<br>parallel | <u>Group A: P. Fletcher + U. Fanning</u>                                     | <u>Group B: K Sidwell + B Moloney</u>   |
|                           | Room 1.24  | Room 2.18   |
|                           | <u>Final-Year Undergraduates</u>   | <u>Final-Year Undergraduates</u>  |
|                           | <u>LCS Italian IV:</u><br>Katy Bibby   | <u>Arts III:</u><br>Lorna Day Murphy  |

Rebecca Commane  
Tara McSherry

Enda Horgan  
Arlene O'Sullivan

Euro. St. IV:

Amanda Butler  
Lynsey McCarthy

BComm (European) with Italian IV:

Clare Ardley  
Deirdre Cody  
Emer O'Halloran

15.45- 16.15 MA (taught) Postgraduates

Triona Barry  
Annette Feeney  
Mike Hodder  
Emma Keane  
Aisling O'Connor  
Maeve O'Sullivan  
Siobhan O'Sullivan

HDip Postgraduate

Deirdre Creagh

16.15 – 16.45 MPhil and PhD postgraduates

Stefano Baschiera (MPhil I: commenced Jan. 2004)  
David Best (PhD III)  
Gianluca Cinelli (MPhil I)  
Ilaria de Seta (MPhil recently submitted)  
Fiona Duffy (MPhil I)  
Marian Hurley (PhD I)  
Barry Ryan (MPhil I)

17.00 – 18.30 Graduates and other stakeholders:

Ms. Pascaline Horan, BA, MA, and Project Leader of the Pilot Project  
on Modern Languages in the Primary School  
Ms. Rosalyn Kiely, BA LCS Italian  
Mr. Francesco Liguori, BComm (European) with Italian  
Ms. Orla Murphy, BComm (European) with Italian  
Ms. Clodagh McCarthy, BComm European  
Ms. Meaveen Murray, BA, MPhil  
Ms. Michelle Nelson, IT Carlow, National Co-ordinator HDips in  
Italian and Spanish for Post-Primary Teachers

Venue: Staff Common Room

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.

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

***Friday 12<sup>th</sup> November 2004***

- 08.30 – 09.00 Convening of Peer Review Group in Room 1.24, ORB
- 09.00 – 09.30 Ms. Carmel Cotter, Finance Office
- 09.30 – 10.30 Visit to Boole Library, meeting with Ms. Margot Conrick, Head of Information Services and Subject Librarian, Ms. Olivia Fitzpatrick
- 10.30 – 11.00 Coffee/Tea
- 11.00 – 11.30 Professor David Cox, Dean, Faculty of Arts
- 11.30 – 11.50 Mr. John Doran, Commerce Faculty coordinator for the BComm (European) with Italian
- 11.50 – 12.20 Professor Áine Hyland, Vice-President
- 12.20 – 12.45 Professor Kevin Collins, Vice-President for Research Policy & Support
- 13.00 – 14.00 Working private lunch for members of the Peer Review Group
- 14.00 – 14.30 Dr. Mark Chu, Head of Department
- 14.30 – 17.00 Preparation of first draft of final report
- 17.00 – 17.30 Exit presentation made to all staff of the Unit by the Chair of the Peer Review Group, summarising the principal findings of the Peer Review Group. The presentation was not for discussion at this time.

Venue: Room 1.24, ORB

The presentation was 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.

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

***Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> November 2004***

Externs departed