



PROVOST'S REPORT TO COUNCIL ON THE REVIEW OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS

1. INTRODUCTION

This report presents the outcome of a departmental review exercise undertaken by Trinity College Dublin in relation to its Department of Economics. An external peer review visitation was conducted on the 14th and 15th of January, 2002 by Professor Alan Winters, University of Sussex, and Professor Heinz Kurz, University of Graz, Austria. During the site visit the reviewers met with all staff of the Department, staff of cognate departments, representatives of undergraduate and postgraduate students and research fellows in the Department, and senior officers of the College.

The report is based on (i) feedback from the external reviewers, received on the 20th March, 2002, (ii) a submission from the Dean of Arts (Humanities) in his capacity as Pro-Dean, received on the 5th May, 2002 and (iii) a submission from the Department of Economics received on the 10th May, 2002.

The main purpose of the departmental review exercise is (a) to provide a structured opportunity for the Department to reflect on its activities and plans for development, while benefiting from a constructive commentary by senior colleagues external to College; and (b) to ensure that quality and standards in teaching, research and administration are being maintained and enhanced, and that any areas of concern in this regard are identified and addressed within an eighteen month timescale, having regard to the resources available. This review process ensures that each academic department in College is reviewed systematically once every five years.

2. OVERVIEW OF THE DEPARTMENT

2.1 Aims and Objectives of the Department

1. To provide a range of structured undergraduate four-year degree programmes capable of producing graduates who have a well-rounded knowledge and understanding of economics which enables them to find employment in all sectors of the economy and/or to progress to postgraduate programmes in Ireland or abroad.
2. To provide postgraduate programmes which enable students to deepen their knowledge of economics and to equip them with the skills necessary to access the domestic and global markets for economists.
3. To produce published research, in the form of books and articles, of a high international calibre.
4. To contribute to the development of the discipline of economics through a range of professional involvements and to provide expertise and guidance on economic issues of public importance.
5. To assist in the governance of the College through the provision of College officers and tutors.

2.2 Programmes to which the Department provides teaching

Key programmes (undergraduate)

Moderatorship in Economic and Social Studies (single and joint honor programmes)

Two-Subject Moderatorship in Economics

The introductory courses offered by the Department in economics and mathematics/statistics form an integral part of the common first year programme for the Moderatorship in Economic and Social Studies, and are taken by students intending to pursue single or joint honor courses in Business Studies, Political Science and Sociology. In addition, Freshman courses in economics are also taken by students of the degree programmes in Sociology and Social Policy, Social Studies, and Business Studies and a Language.

Postgraduate (taught):

M.Sc. in Economic Policy Studies

In addition, staff of the Department make a significant contribution to teaching on the Master in Business Administration (M.B.A.) and part-time M.Sc. courses in Management offered by the Department of Business Studies. The Department also provides formal teaching on aspects of the subject to students reading for the research degrees of M.Litt. and Ph.D.

2.3 Research

The Department's research activity covers a wide range of fields in economics with growing specialisation in international macroeconomics, transition economics, economic history and the history of thought. In addition to the publication of books and text books, articles by the Department's staff feature in leading international economics journals, and individual members have recently won major international prizes for their work. The Department has a long tradition of providing policy advice to government and public agencies, and in co-operation with the Department of Political Science, is centrally involved in the Policy Institute which was established in Trinity College to serve as vehicle for policy-related research and interaction with policy-makers. The Department is also actively engaged in cross-disciplinary research in the context of the Institute for International Integration Studies (IIIS), a forum for international and regional integration studies involving business studies, history and law as well as the social sciences. The IIIS has received research funding under the Higher Education Authority's Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions. The Department also has a formal programme of research seminars for its postgraduate students, and organises academic conferences.

2.4 Summary Statistical Profile of the Department for the Academic Year 2000-2001¹

| Full-time staff FTE | Part-time Staff FTE | Undergraduate FTE | Postgraduate FTE | Department Staff:Student Ratio | Faculty Staff:Student Ratio |
|---------------------|---------------------|-------------------|------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 17 | 2.46 | 497.28 | 67.63 | 29 | 25 |

¹ Figures approved by Council at its meeting on 9th January 2002

The full-time staff of seventeen includes two Professors, six Associate Professors, four Senior Lecturers, and five Lecturers.

2.5 Accommodation and Facilities (Physical Resources)

The Department is located on campus in the Arts and Social Sciences Building. Accommodation includes staff and administrative offices. Part-time staff and postgraduate research students have access to shared office accommodation. The Department does not have dedicated teaching space, computer facilities or a meeting room.

3. EXTERNAL PEER REVIEW REPORT

SUMMARY OF REPORT

TEACHING

The reviewers began by stating that the '*Department of Economics has a fine record of teaching and research, it is well run and highly motivated, and is respected internationally...*' The Department's undergraduate programme is known for its excellence and the reviewers '*were impressed by an almost unanimous and strong support of the programme among students, the members of the Department and the representatives of other Departments of the Faculty.*' While the reviewers felt that they could not comment fully on the Department's pedagogical approach, they were impressed by comments from the students interviewed and concluded that '*on the whole the Department appears to be very strong on the teaching front*'.

The reviewers focused the attention of their recommendations on postgraduate programmes and felt that the future development of these programmes in the Department might be curtailed by *'the highly demanding and resource intensive undergraduate programme that binds a large part of the Department's energies.'* They suggested that if the Department reduced the *'number of course options available to some 16 or 18'* this *'would not substantively affect the quality of the programme and would free some resources which could then be allocated to the postgraduate programme'*.

As to the content and level of the undergraduate programme the reviewers felt that they were *'on the whole just right'*. However, they did comment that some *'reading lists could be somewhat more detailed and that others would benefit from updating.'*

At postgraduate level, the reviewers responded generally to the internal debate within the Department concerning its future direction in terms of expansion at postgraduate level or strengthening the existing *'widely acclaimed'* undergraduate programme. It was the reviewers' opinion that *'a strong and research oriented department like that of TCD ought to have a solid, high-level postgraduate programme'* and since the Department of Economics at Trinity is *'the leading economics department in Ireland with an international reputation it is simply not conceivable ... that that reputation could be increased or even maintained were the Department to withdraw largely from postgraduate teaching and leave students to other institutions in Ireland or abroad.* In addition it was feared that to withdraw largely from postgraduate teaching *'... would quickly weaken the research basis of the Department and its satellite institutions and lead to a decline first in its research productivity and then in its national and international standing'*. The reviewers further suggested that since the Ph.D is now considered a necessary qualification and in light of the developments triggered by the Bologna Declaration, that instead of reducing its postgraduate activities, the Department should seriously consider strengthening and developing its postgraduate suite of programmes to include taught PhD courses. With respect to continuing to attract PhD students, it was suggested that the Department should require that *'... almost all students... do or have done coursework prior to research (usually in the form of a taught MA) and offer at least some of that coursework itself'* and that the Department should further consider whether it should *'provide some dedicated doctoral level courses'*.

The reviewers recognised the resourcing challenges for a small Department in providing doctoral and taught MA courses and suggested a number of possible solutions to this problem including (i) *'adequate long-term funding for the second Chair of Economics and an increase in the number of permanent staff'*, (ii) reduction in the number of undergraduate course options, (iii) *'co-operating with other universities in the area'* and extending linkages with other major European postgraduate programmes who provide a taught one year postgraduate course, (iv) *'involving some of the internationally renowned scholars who will visit the Institute for International Integration Studies (IIS) in the postgraduate programmes'* and (v) concentrating on a restricted range of subjects areas for postgraduate teaching based on relevant expertise in the Department.

RESEARCH

The reviewers stated that *'the Department of Economics has a distinguished record of research and scholarship and included some outstanding scholars.'* It was judged that about half of the staff members were *'researching and publishing at international levels and that most of the remainder were working at UK national levels of excellence'* and that this performance *'would easily earn it a '5' in UK's periodic Research Assessment Exercise'*...putting it on par with or above leading UK Departments of Economics.

However, the reviewers expressed concern about the uneven *'distribution of research publications across members of the Department'* and believed that *'if the Department is serious about its place in the international research community'* its management must address the issue of *'under-publishers'* which might mean assessing contractual issues, and providing awards and incentives to staff for high levels of achievement.

It was expressed that *'the contractual issue was a serious one for a research university'* and that *'TCD's current employment menu, comprising only short-term contracts or tenure, is inappropriate.'* The reviewers strongly recommended *'the introduction of a tenure track contract by which young staff can be offered a series of finite but renewable contracts (e.g. five years), but which after serious review can be converted into tenured posts.'*

Securing funding of the Institute for International Integration Studies was commended as a *'great achievement'*. However to build on this success, the reviewers felt that it was essential that *'effective'* administrative support be provided. They noted the IIS could play a valuable role *'in providing research facilities and inputs such as visitors and seminars'* and felt that it had *'the capacity to become a major international centre'*. However if this status were to be realized there were some issues that needed to be addressed at the outset. The reviewers expressed surprise at the *'apparent lack of communication about the IIS bid between the [College] Centre and the principal investigators and between the latter and the Department collectively'* and recommended that *'all possible efforts be made to rectify any mistrust'* that may have developed. They suggest that the College authorities and the Department must provide the necessary scope and support for the Director to launch and manage the IIS. This support must recognise that the

'withdrawal of Senior and High-Quality Staff to the teaching program cannot be made good by appointing temporary or less able replacements.' It was suggested that the Department and the College explore ways *'to relax constraints in the Department's normal business - e.g. providing specialist post-graduate courses'*. The reviewers also believed that there were *'potential economies of scale in research support as well as intellectual and motivational benefits in locating the Policy Institute within the IIS building.'*

The reviewers remarked on the large concentration in a few research areas by students with some 60% in economics of transition, and international integration and globalisation. This preference trend might suggest that there would be merit in developing a local MA course restricted in coverage to areas of high student interest and with options from a restricted list.

The reviewers commented on the poor level of incentives for the Department to take PhD students and felt that in order to counter some of the negative resource implications in taking on PhD students that *'supervision should be viewed as a regular Departmental activity to be included in the calculation of staff loads'* and that the College and Department should develop a formula for compensation. The reviewers also suggested that the Department should get a more *'substantial share of the revenue received for both EU and non-EU research students'* and that in respect of the latter there was scope for increasing non-EU fees as fees charged by Trinity were considerably less than those charged by UK universities.

While the Department's record in advising government on policy matters and its contribution to the *'dramatic improvement in Irish policy and economic performance'* are laudable, the reviewers cautioned the Department on concentrating on the local at the expense of the global market.

RESOURCES

The reviewers complimented the Department on making *'the best of the resources and facilities at its disposal'* while at the same time maintaining a significantly high international standing. However, they also expressed shock at the *'poor amount and poor quality of the available teaching facilities'* believing that *'there are very few universities in the EU in which the situation is as bad'*. They were strongly of the view that as a minimum the Department should have at its disposal *'one room to host staff meetings, research seminars, etc.'*

The establishment of the IIS and the addition of a new floor to the Arts and Social Sciences Building to accommodate it was seen as an opportunity to address *'the spatial dispersion of the (Department's) activities and the activities of the institutes it is engaged in.'* The reviewers felt that it would be advantageous if the Policy Institute and the Centre for Urban and Regional Studies could be accommodated in the same building as the Department of Economics and the IIS. This would also serve to *'counteract the widespread feeling that the Faculty is in danger of disintegrating because of existing space barriers to effective communications and cooperation.'*

The constraints on space also have a negative influence on learning and teaching. Students complained that *'their access to computers is less than optimal'* and the reviewers believed that the absence of a dedicated computer laboratory hindered development in the use of new teaching methods based on intensive computer use.

With respect to staffing levels, it was strongly recommended that *'given the high quality of the Department's teaching and research performance'* and the fact that *'the Department is operating with the same number of permanent staff as it did some twenty years ago, despite a substantial growth in the number of students and in the size of the Department's other activities,... TCD would hardly run a risk if it arranged for a better staffing of the Department.'* The reviewers noted that that the Department's *'major players'* will retire in a few years time and recommended early phased replacements of these posts *'to avoid dramatic changes in personnel if they leave together.'*

The availability of two secretaries to the Department was considered adequate and their work was repeatedly praised. However, it was felt that some of the academic administration such as the grading system and the anonymous marking was overly complicated and should be simplified.

MANAGEMENT AND ORGANISATION

The Department was identified as being *'very well managed and organised, ... and the relationships between its different members appear to be remarkably good.'* However, the reviewers noted the potential for disharmony if the Department does not *'try to tackle difficult issues frankly and openly.'* Despite the physically fragmented structure of the BESS Faculty, the reviewers concur that *'the social sciences degrees do benefit from a broad and common first year.'*

Staff/student relations appear to be very good and students commented on the *'good quality of the teaching.... and stressed the importance of the broad introduction into the various sub-disciplines of the social sciences especially in the first year.'* However, students also felt that the availability of only one tutor in the Department was not satisfactory and that some of the teaching assistants were *'ill-equipped for the task'*. Students also commented that the coordination of

study programmes with foreign universities was inadequate and that the scheduling of tests was not always well coordinated.

Postgraduate students interviewed during the review process were complimentary of the staff and the postgraduate programmes overall and felt valued as researchers and teachers themselves. However, students felt that some improvements could be made to the postgraduate programmes and believed that they would benefit from *'some obligatory taught courses in advanced microeconomics, macroeconomics and econometrics'* as well as a *'somewhat more formalized programme, with sufficient degrees of freedom to allow for the different kinds of research interest.'* Students were also in favour of a *'strong international component and the possibility of doing some of the course work abroad.'* There was some concern that the level of supervision was not adequate and it was suggested that the Department should *'consider introducing a second supervisor system to offer (students) a little more depth and security in their supervision.'* Students expressed regret that no taught Masters course available.

The reviewers commended the Department's *'hard-headed way in which (it) has coped with a failing unit of resource, by for example, using TAs and lecturing to large groups.'* However, by contributing College Officers, the Department has *'reduced the research output of those concerned and of other economists as well, as the latter has had to assume Departmental responsibilities that cannot be passed to temporary placements'.* It is recommended that the Department and College, in managing such commitments, should consider appropriate compensation to the Department when staff take up such positions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The reviewers confirmed that they *'found the Department of Economics to be in excellent shape'*, that *'its teaching record is impressive and its research performance remarkable.'* They made the following recommendations:

Teaching:

- (i) Establish a high level postgraduate masters and PhD programme. Students should be required to do course work prior to research, at least some of which courses should be provided by TCD.
- (ii) The above recommendation will require additional resources in the form of more permanent staff and some re-allocation of resources from the undergraduate programme. The latter could be facilitated by following the Bologna Declaration directive to move towards a 3+2 year programme in place of the current four-year programme.
- (iii) Work out a scheme to make supervision a regular Departmental activity to be included appropriately in the calculation of staff loads.
- (iv) Make sure that the establishment of the IIS does not undermine the Department's teaching capacity. A replacement of the future Director of the IIS is only possible at the senior level.
- (v) Consider introducing a second supervisor system to offer Ph.D. students more guidance, depth and security in their work.
- (vi) Ensure that teaching assistants are up to their task by providing more guidance and supervision.

Research

- (vii) Introduce a tenure track model by which young staff can be offered a series of finite but renewable contracts, which after serious review can be converted into tenured posts.
- (viii) Provide strong incentives for staff to engage in high quality research. At one end, this might involve contractual issues and at the other the provision of various rewards and incentives to high performers. The Department trades in a global market for talent.
- (ix) Provide effective administrative support to enhance the research productivity of the Department and its ability to raise funds for this purpose.

Resources/facilities

- (x) Given the excellent shape of the Department, it would be a sound investment to provide permanent funding for the second chair and even increase the number of faculty. Phasing the replacement of future retirees would be desirable.
- (xi) The Department badly needs more space and especially a seminar room of its own. The space situation is deplorable and ought to be improved immediately.
- (xii) Seize the opportunity of the establishment of IIS to bring together under a single roof the different institutes and the Department. Spatial dispersion prevents effective communication and collaboration.
- (xiii) Provide necessary support from central authorities effectively, or, perhaps better, think of decentralising responsibilities and correspondingly reallocating resources. The Department is certainly not over-manned, but perhaps somewhat under-supported.
- (xiv) Improve students' access to computers.

Management/organisation

- (xv) The communication structure, as illustrated by the negotiations about the IIS, is less than optimal and should be improved. The lack of transparency creates unnecessary concern and even mistrust.
- (xvi) The BESS Faculty is a genuinely useful grouping. However, the mutual understanding of this fact appears to be weak due to several factors, including its physical fragmentation. TCD and BESS should engage in a joint effort to re-establish the ties between the different units of the Faculty and increase their cooperation.

4. RESPONSES FROM THE DEPARTMENT AND THE DEAN OF ARTS (HUMANITIES)

The pro-Dean of BESS, Dr Smith, prefaced his response to the reviewers report by stating that the *'excellent self-assessment documentation produced by the Department and the very thorough report of the reviewers'* assisted him in preparing a response.

The Dean and the Department took pride in the reviewers' judgment that *'the Department is in excellent shape, with a fine record in teaching and research'* and in the fact that the reviewers considered it worthy of a '5' in the UK's Research Assessment Exercise (RAE). The Dean sees this as *'a truly impressive endorsement of the Department's overall performance by two eminent international assessors.'*

The Department stated that it *'is currently in a transition phase consolidating its excellent four year undergraduate programme and developing its postgraduate programmes.'* It commented that while traditionally the Department's emphasis was on the undergraduate programme, there were developments in recent years in the postgraduate area; an M.Sc. in Policy Studies has been developed and the Department actively encouraged students who wished to pursue a Ph.D.

The Department felt that *'is was natural for the reviewers to focus attention in their recommendations on the postgraduate programmes'* and agreed with the recommendation that *'a course work programme prior to research for those studying for a Ph.D'* would be useful. It also agreed with the suggestion that that it would be possible to *'re-structure the postgraduate course so as to move towards the Bologna Declaration of a 3+2 year programme in place of the current four year programme.'* However, the Department stressed and agreed with the reviewers that proper resources and additional permanent staff would be necessary to facilitate new developments. While it agreed that there may be some scope for re-allocating resources from the undergraduate programme, it was *'loath to re-allocate excessively, at the risk of jeopardizing one of the flagship undergraduate programmes in the university.'*

The Department felt strongly that the university *'has to recognise the need to increase its permanent staffing'* in light of the fact that *'a substantial increase in undergraduates and the launching of the different postgraduate courses.'* It emphasized the importance of solving the current issue of the funding of second Chair in Economics, and the need for the university to provide the Department with additional resources of *'at least five new permanent staff.'* The Department highlighted the external exigencies, such as the high cost of accommodation in Dublin and the competitive market for economists, which made it difficult to recruit economists of international standing and urged the university to be more proactive in addressing these problems.

The Dean concurred with the views of the reviewers that *'a PhD programme is necessary for a research university'* and agreed that some means of compensation for the supervision of students was necessary. However, he contested the suggestion that a 'rigid formula' can be devised to include supervision in the calculation of staff loads. He confirmed that *'the Department has been wrestling with this problem for some time, and has experimented with ways of taking research student supervision into account when attempting to ensure an equality of workloads. Experience has shown that a rigid formula is not a successful way of achieving a satisfactory solution to this problem, but such supervision is taken into account on a case-by-case basis.'*

With respect to the reviewers comments on research, the Dean welcomed the report's conclusion that the Department has *'a distinguished record of research and scholarship and included some outstanding scholars.'* He noted the comments that the distribution of publications across members of the Department is uneven and the suggestion that management attempt to address the problem of 'under-publishers' by introducing a *'tenure track' contract by which very young staff can be offered a series of finite but renewable contracts...* The Dean noted that this recommendation would have implications for College policy as a whole and believed that there were *'difficulties with implementing the recommendation as it stands but in (his) view consideration should be given to framing a more effective and helpful probationary period than that currently applied in College.'* He further suggested that *'this would be one way of overcoming the problems inherent in the current policy of requiring Faculties to maintain a minimum of 7% contract posts, and the sharp distinction between contract and permanent posts.'*

With respect to research, the Department commented that it would 'welcome a tenure track model and will investigate possibilities of improving incentives for staff to engage in high quality research.' However the department regarded its current system of supervision of graduate students as appropriate stating that '*when it involves a significantly high number of students supervision of graduate students is taken into consideration in the calculation of staff loads.*' It further disagreed with the notion of a second supervisor system for Ph.D. students, arguing that '*the Department does not propose to introduce a second supervisor system for Ph.D. students on the basis of its previous experience with this approach. Additional supervision is provided through the regular participation of staff members in weekly student seminar presentations and it is accepted that the supervisor should be able to send a student to any staff member who has expertise in the particular area concerned.*' The Department confirmed that it '*encourages teaching assistants to participate in induction programmes provided by the Staff Development Office.*

Concerning resources and facilities, the Dean and the Department noted the very adverse commentary on the quality of the available teaching facilities. The Dean added that while the reviewers pointed out the space situation in Economics may improve somewhat as a result of the establishment of the IIS, there was still '*an urgent need for the creation of more space as well as a programme of refurbishment of the Arts Building, along the lines recently initiated by the Bursar.*' The Department '*strongly endorses the principle of the BESS Faculty and would welcome the housing of all of the departments of the Faculty under the same roof in the Arts Building.*' The Department also commented that it '*is continually improving students' access to computers and with more resources will continue to do so.*'

The Department welcomed the reviewers' recommendation to replace the Director of IIS with staff at an appropriate level and noted that '*the links between the Department and the IIS are evolving and have become a great deal clearer since the reviewers' visit.*'

In conclusion the Dean welcomed the report noting that there were many issues for the Department and others to consider '*relating to the incentive structure of staff contracts, amount and location of accommodation, and the implications of the Bologna Declaration that have wider applicability to the BESS Faculty and to College.*'

5. RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL

In addition to the Department of Economics addressing the detailed recommendations outlined in the review report, the following recommendations are made to Council in light of the review report and the pro Dean of BESS and the Department responses:

(a) that the Department should

1. Continue to build on its excellent performance in both teaching and research
2. Develop a taught doctoral programme in line with the reviewers' recommendations
3. In conjunction with the above recommendation, consider ways of maximising the use of resources in the delivery of its undergraduate programme
4. Explore the opportunities for expanding departmental teaching and research resources which should emerge from the establishment of the IIS.

(b) that the Faculty should

5. Discuss and outline its plans in relation to bringing together its departments, centres and institutes in one location
6. Consider the provision of additional support for the administration and management of research proposals.

(c) that College should

7. Note and act on the reviewers' comments about the seriously inadequate teaching facilities available to the Department
8. Take into account the reviewers' comments on a tenure track recruitment model and the Bologna Declaration in the College's current discussions of these issues.

John Hegarty
Provost
