



**PROVOST'S REPORT TO COUNCIL ON
THE REVIEW OF THE
SCHOOL OF NURSING AND MIDWIFERY STUDIES**

1. INTRODUCTION

This report presents the outcome of a departmental review exercise undertaken by Trinity College Dublin in relation to its School of Nursing and Midwifery Studies. An external peer review visitation was conducted on the 10th & 11th January 2002 by Professor Alison Tierney, Edinburgh University, and by Professor Paul Lewis, Bournemouth University. During the site visit the reviewers met with all staff of the School, staff of cognate departments, representatives of undergraduate and postgraduate students in the School, and senior officers of the College.

The report is based on (i) feedback from the external reviewers, received on 25th March 2002, (ii) a submission from the Faculty Dean received on 17th May 2002, and (iii) a submission from the School, received on 26th April 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 will have its undergraduate and postgraduate provision reviewed systematically once every five years.

2. OVERVIEW OF THE SCHOOL

2.1 Aims and Objectives of the School

1. To meet the education and professional training needs of the pre-registration nurse or midwife through the provision of appropriate teaching programmes, offered in conjunction with associated hospitals, and to provide access routes to undergraduate degree studies for registered nurses and midwives who trained in the traditional hospital-based context.
2. To provide a range of postgraduate programmes (both taught and research programmes) which enable appropriately-qualified nurses and midwives to strengthen and develop their knowledge and professional skills, and which facilitate the development of research skills and encourage research in nursing and midwifery.
3. To enable and support individual members of the School's academic staff in undertaking research with a view to publication and/or in pursuance of a doctoral degree, and to enlarge the research dimension within the School.
4. To further integrate the School, its staff and academic programmes into mainstream College life, and to consolidate the School's activities, staff, and students in new accommodation on the three sites designated.

2.2 Programmes to which the School provides teaching

Key programmes (undergraduate):

B.Sc. in Nursing (4-year course introduced in October 2002)

Bachelor in Nursing Studies (1-year course to be replaced by B.Sc. in 2005/06)

Diploma in Nursing (3-year course, last year of intake 2001/02)

Access Programme (1-year access course to Bachelor in Nursing Studies, for qualified nurses)

Diploma in Midwifery

Postgraduate (taught):

Postgraduate Diploma in Clinical Health Sciences Education

Postgraduate Diploma in Clinical Practice for Nurses

Postgraduate Diploma in Gerontological Nursing

Postgraduate Diploma in Specialist Nursing

Postgraduate Diploma in Oncological Nursing

Postgraduate Diploma in Paediatric Nursing

Postgraduate Diploma in Midwifery

M.Sc. in Nursing

M.Sc. in Midwifery

M.Sc. in Gerontological Nursing

2.3 Research

The School of Nursing and Midwifery Studies was founded in Trinity College 1996 in response to the changes taking place in nurse education and training in Ireland, and in particular the initiatives associated with moving these professions into higher education. A strong research ethos was established at the outset. Research planning at School level provides a framework for ongoing individual research studies and collaborative research projects in clinical practice between staff in the School and their clinical colleagues in health care settings. Through the publication of articles and presentation of research papers at conferences by individual staff members, the School is establishing a research profile in the field of health-related research. The School is at an early stage of its development; most of the existing academic staff members have joined the College's staff within the last eighteen months and the transfer of additional staff from hospitals to the School is scheduled to take place in September 2002. As the transition of nursing and midwifery studies to higher education is successfully achieved, the School's capacity to develop its research culture and to avail of opportunities for wider collaboration with established researchers will be strengthened.

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

Full-time staff FTE	Part-time staff FTE	Undergraduate FTE	Postgraduate FTE	School Staff: Student Ratio	Faculty Staff: Student Ratio
13.5	2.63	743.52	163.50	56	11

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

The full-time staff of thirteen includes one Senior Lecturer and twelve Lecturers.

2.5 Accommodation and Facilities (Physical Resources)

A substantial capital development programme is underway to provide permanent accommodation for the School on three sites: the Trinity Centre for Health Sciences at St. James' Hospital, the Trinity Centre for Health Sciences at Tallaght Hospital, and in the city centre, adjacent to the main College campus. The new accommodation will come on stream in phases, replacing the existing academic staff and administrative offices, teaching space and other support facilities, which are currently provided, largely in temporary accommodation, on the St. James' and Tallaght Hospital sites. Some teaching also takes place on the main College campus.

3. EXTERNAL PEER REVIEW REPORT

SUMMARY OF REPORT

CONTEXT

This report should be read in the light of the major change in the School's teaching programme that will take place due to the introduction in October 2002 of a four-year undergraduate degree programme. This will involve the discontinuation of the three-year Diploma in Nursing and ultimately of the one-year 'top-up' programme leading to the Bachelor in Nursing Studies. The financial arrangements that have been agreed for the new degree programme will enable an improvement in accommodation, teaching resources and staff:student ratios.

In their introduction, the reviewers note the context in which the School is currently operating by stating that *'It was evident that the School of Nursing and Midwifery, although only 5 years old, is preparing for a period of considerable change. It is recognised that this transition will provide not only opportunities but also challenges to the functions and facilities of the School and the wider Faculty.'*

TEACHING

Diploma/ Pre-registration students

Students on the Diploma programmes gave very positive comment about their teaching and the dedication of the staff. Generally they felt well supported in the educational environment but a number of issues arose in relation to teaching, clinical practice and resources. These included a sense of there being a lack of affiliation with the University, the large size of the student group, failure to receive due recognition and credit for practice assessments, a wide variation in the level of prior knowledge in biology and a need for more teaching in pharmacology, and the need for additional library and IT facilities.

With regard to integration with the university, the reviewers stated that *'the students we met did not feel that they were students of Trinity College and they felt little sense of community with the wider University. In part this was related to the geographical distance from their clinical sites and generally a lack of involvement in wider University activities.'* The large size of the student group *'was also seen as problematic and inhibited the exchange of ideas. In particular, the direct entry midwifery group, who were required to be with the larger group of students for three months, found integration very difficult.'* It was noted that attempts had been made *'to address this by breaking the larger group into smaller groups according to profession or discipline, but this militated against multidisciplinary working'*. The reviewers also drew attention to the very unsatisfactory staff:student ratio which they felt should be addressed as a matter of urgency. They also recommended that the University might address the variation in the prior knowledge base of those undertaking biology by modifying entry requirements or introducing access-type courses in biology.

Access and Degree programmes / post-registration

The School offers a one-year Access programme and a one-year programme leading to the degree of Bachelor in Nursing Studies (BNS). Students on these programmes work full-time and are registered nurses or midwives and the reviewers noted that the students *'reiterated many of the positive comments about teaching and support ... It was interesting that these practitioners clearly saw themselves as students of Trinity College and spoke highly of its reputation and their deliberate choice to take up a place on its programmes.'*

The reviewers indicated that *'the two-year Diploma in Midwifery was seen as a post-registration course and the demands of practice took precedence over that of the theoretical component. The recent increase of this from 13 to 26 weeks was seen as a real move forward but even so, is less than ideal in comparison with similar midwifery programmes within the United Kingdom and the European Community. A greater shift toward an equal balance of theory to practice in all programmes that lead to registration as a nurse or midwife would be more appropriate for professional and degree level programmes.'*

The reviewers noted that *'teaching methods on the Bachelor in Nursing Studies were constrained by the size of the groups. In addition, the student:staff ratio is unrealistic and needs to be addressed with some urgency'*

General issues relating to teaching programmes

The course curricula were considered to be demanding but relevant to the level of study although the need for more pharmacology was raised as an issue in discussions with students. The reviewers expressed some concern that *'the students had either not learned or failed to assimilate knowledge about 'models of reflection' or 'the process of reflection in and on practice'. The student nurses used a reflective diary as a part of their course requirements but it lacked any clear theoretical underpinning and its value is therefore questioned.'* The reviewers noted that this was not the case for the direct entry course in midwifery where a more robust process was apparent and *'a reflective diary was required as part of the course assessment and this was seen to be both effective and valuable'*.

The reviewers state that students on the BNS programme were of the view that greater recognition should be given to clinical practice. It was noted that in the direct entry midwifery programme, students received credit for practice and were working to 'outcome competencies' as part of their course, however the reviewers suggested that this could be improved in other courses. The reviewers indicated that *'the work of the clinical placement co-ordinators was highly valued by the students and greatly contributed to the strong clinical focus of the diploma in nursing programme'*.

The reviewers considered that the strengths and weaknesses detailed in the self assessment document represented *'an accurate reflection of the current provision of education in the School' and 'the recommendations should be acted upon with some degree of urgency'*. They noted that the *'move to all graduate education in nursing from September 2002 is welcomed and considerable preparation and support for this move is apparent'*. They acknowledged that while this is a positive development, it is unlikely to be without some difficulty in the transition period. *'The relocation of clinically based nurse teachers into Trinity College will be significant and efforts appear to be underway to assist in their assimilation and support. These teachers are essential to the proposed educational developments.'*

The reviewers urge the School to develop a written strategy for teaching and learning without delay.

While a range of teaching methods was clearly in evidence, the reviewers commented that the use of the formal lecture appears to predominate in the School. They indicated that *'students were supportive of the discussion groups that were held, but the process of reflection was less assured. In discussion the students were very able and articulate. They clearly embraced their own responsibility for the learning process although the notion of 'adult education' and the freedom and responsibilities which derive from it, were not so apparent in their experience of clinical practice'*.

The reviewers considered that courses *'have a strong professional focus and compare well with similar courses we have dealt with in other Universities'*. They felt that *'the need to integrate theory and practice is a challenge and could be enhanced by the use of problem-based learning and a greater recognition of the importance of the practice experience in the education and development of nurses and midwives.'* The reviewers acknowledged the established and supportive relationships with hospitals and clinical sites, but recommended that greater emphasis be given to the development of clinical placements. They considered this to be *'especially so in midwifery and is vital to meeting the move towards primary care led initiatives in health care'*.

The reviewers commented that *'programmes in the School are structured in such a way to enable students to undertake further study. A sound programme of in-service development for teaching staff was also evident.'*

Both formative and summative assessments were used in the School and the reviewers noted that the assessment process appeared to be sound and was well supported by the external examiner reports. The reviewers recommended that a number of procedures be formalised as part of the assessment process.

RESEARCH

The reviewers open their commentary on research by stating that *'research in the School of Nursing and Midwifery is, unsurprisingly, in the early stages of development. There is a clear need for a more strategic and selective approach to be taken if research development is to be accelerated. There is no slower route to progress than concentrating on a comprehensive PhD qualification for all staff members and relying primarily on individually driven research activity.'* The reviewers suggested that given the early stage of research development, the breadth of research interests in the School should be limited initially in order to allow the

development of a sustainable research profile. They also acknowledged that the current position regarding research is *'entirely unsurprising against the backdrop of intensive effort to establish a sizeable teaching portfolio in a new School in which, as pointed out, the majority of staff members have been appointed only within the past two years'*. The reviewers indicate that *'it is evident that there are research publications being generated, and some research income, and there is evidence of engagement with the wider world of nursing, midwifery and healthcare research'* and that while some staff members have yet to establish a research role *'more importantly, there is a small core of post-doctoral staff members who are well-prepared to provide a strong lead to the School's research endeavour. The work of those individuals might provide a core for the development of substantive work around selected themes.'* The reviewers recommend that *'the School would be wise to identify and exploit opportunities for collaboration with successful researchers elsewhere in the Faculty and College'* and note that *'inter-disciplinary, health-related research is increasingly attractive to funding agencies and, at the same time, members of the School would benefit from their association with more experienced researchers.'* The reviewers re-iterated and acknowledged that the recent establishment of the School had demanded that priority be given to the development of the teaching portfolio but encouraged the School to develop its research planning as a matter of priority. They recommended that *'a senior appointment should be made, ideally at professorial level, with the specific and sole remit of leading the School's research development and activity over the next five year period'*.

Postgraduate research students were very complimentary about the support and supervision that they received and suggested that *'a definite strategy to support and develop research methods and data analysis would be valuable.'* The absence of study space for research students was considered unsatisfactory *'not least because it limits the integration of post-graduate research students within the School which, both for students and staff, is an important aspect of a School's research culture'*.

With reference to both teaching and research, the reviewers express some regret that there had not been the opportunity *'to meet with some of the key stakeholders who are usually involved in the process of similar reviews within the College. In particular, the lack of involvement of other elements of the Faculty of Health Sciences appears to reflect the lack of integration and interdisciplinary collaboration which is important to the future development of health professions and the provision of multidisciplinary teaching and learning'*.

RESOURCES

The difficulties regarding resources available to the School were commented on by the reviewers *'especially those related to teaching and office space, library facilities and the availability of IT for students'*. They felt that some of these difficulties could be remedied and suggested that they be addressed as a matter of urgency.

The reviewers stated that the *'location of the School of Nursing and Midwifery underpinned much of the discussions about quality of education, access, facilities and resources. Course co-ordinators felt that the principles which should determine the future location of the School were those of the quality of education, parity of educational access and facilities with those of other Trinity students, and opportunities for multiprofessional learning and collaboration across the Faculty of Health Sciences.'*

It was acknowledged by the reviewers that while *'a not inconsiderable number of staff favoured a single site option, key stakeholders from the hospital sites were equally keen to see the School located within or near to their services'*.

ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT

Senior members of the School were held in high regard by the staff and the reviewers considered that the *'beginnings of a management structure in the provision of programmes of education were evident, if somewhat embryonic'*. There was a strong sense of being part of a teaching team within the School and the reviewers recommended that staff appraisal should be carried out more systematically. The reviewers commended the *'dedication and achievements to-date of the staff of the School and acknowledged the effective leadership provided by the current Director over its foundation period'*. The need for improved management systems was highlighted and it was felt that this could greatly assist in dealing with the current problems and overload of administrative work.

The reviewers indicate that the relationship between staff and students within the School was very positive and *'current communication is seen as excellent but this is in no small part due to the energy, commitment and motivation of the current educational workforce'*.

Recommendations

The reviewers recommended that the specific areas to be addressed are as follows:

1. Further integration of the School with the wider University is an important issue, requiring urgent attention.
2. The development of a Teaching and Learning strategy across the School should be taken forward without delay and should incorporate, where appropriate, a greater emphasis on the balance between theory and practice in the delivery of undergraduate/pre-registration programmes.
3. A multiprofessional education and learning strategy with close working partnerships between all parts of the Health Sciences Faculty is an imperative and should underpin all future developments within the School and wider Faculty.
4. The move to a single site for teaching purposes in which the wider Faculty is represented and in which access to benefits of the wider University are equally available to students of nursing and midwifery is highly desirable and should be given due priority.
5. On grounds of equity, nursing and midwifery students should have the same facilities and privileges as students from other faculties and programmes in TCD.
6. An improvement in the staff:student ratios requires immediate attention and should receive the highest priority possible.
7. Resources within the school appear in short supply. This had adverse effects upon teaching and administrative staff as well as students and improvements to address these needs should be given immediate attention. This extends to the need for space within the School for post-graduate research students.
8. Annual appraisals of staff should be carried out to identify personal and professional development needs.
9. There is a clear need to develop a strategy to advance research within the School. As part of this, a senior appointment should be made, ideally at professorial level, with the specific and sole remit of leading the School's research development and activity over the next 5-year period.
10. A strategy to develop the management and organisation of the School is necessary and should incorporate greater involvement of the Director and senior staff in the direction of the Faculty and College.

4. RESPONSES FROM THE SCHOOL AND DEAN OF FACULTY

The School welcomed the report and appreciated *'the positive comments of the reviewers particularly in relation to student support and the enthusiasm, motivation and commitment of the staff'*. The School also welcomed the acknowledgement by the reviewers that the School is at an *'embryonic stage of development, with the majority of staff employed only in the past 1-2 years, and has had a huge workload in terms of the design, introduction and development of 13 undergraduate and postgraduate programmes'*. The Dean also acknowledged the generally positive tone of the report and stated that *'the Director and staff of the School are to be congratulated on such an outcome in a situation in which they have been managing major change without, until recently, the necessary resources.'* The Dean noted that the reviewers particularly commend the School in respect of *'the programmes presented, keeping pace with the national agenda, its commitment to the very tight timescales involved, and the level of support and favourable comment from students and staff'*. Both the Dean and the School acknowledge that many of the issues identified in the report have been or are being currently addressed.

The Dean expressed concern that it had not proven possible for the reviewers to have meetings with the Chief Executive Officers of the main teaching hospitals or to visit the hospital campuses.

In relation to teaching, the School indicated that it has and continues to develop a coherent framework that identifies clear pathways and progression from one level to the next. It agrees with the reviewers' comments that problem-based learning can facilitate the integration of theory and practice but it recognises that this approach is not without limitations, especially in relation to midwifery education, and that it has fairly considerable resource implications. The School indicated that *'its deplorable staff:student ratio, together with the lack of suitable accommodation, presents a constant challenge to the implementation of innovative teaching methodologies.'* It acknowledged the importance of multidisciplinary teaching and learning and indicated that it is very open to collaborating in this area and building on existing contributions.

The School recognised that Diploma students felt a sense of detachment from College, primarily because the students do not receive the theoretical aspects of their curriculum on the main campus site while being taught the nursing component in the hospital schools. The School was of the view that the move to the Hawkins Street premises will allow for closer integration of both staff and students into mainstream College activities. The Dean acknowledged the need to address the students' lack of affinity with the University and also the integration of staff, and stated that these issues and a number of professional issues '*must be attended to within the context of the overall understanding between the University and the hospitals*'.

With regard to variations in prior knowledge of biology, the School was in the process of preparing an 'access type' course in biological science. It had also been successful in its bid for a postgraduate studentship under the broad curriculum initiative and this would allow for additional small group teaching in biology. In addition, with the introduction of the four-year degree, there would be an increase in the teaching of pharmacology. It was noted that students would be introduced to the concept of reflection early in the new degree programme and would use a reflective journal to support a literature review during the sophomore years. In relation to the need to provide recognition for practice placements, the School noted that this would be rectified in the new degree programme and practice competencies are being developed for each level of the programme. The School acknowledged the difficulties regarding the inadequacy of IT training and resources, however it is anticipated that all degree students will be able to avail of the ECDL programme facilitated by IS Services. The School queried the impression of the reviewers that the formal lecture predominates in its teaching and indicated that '*a formal lecture is always interspersed with periods devoted to buzz groups, problem-solving exercises, practical exercises and question and answer sessions*.' Strategies such as group work, role play, simulations and micro-teaching are also used and the School has recently employed a lecturer specifically to introduce web-based learning into the School to facilitate students in directing their own learning.

The School and the Dean recognise the need for improvement in relation to research and the School notes the reviewers' acknowledgement of its early stage of development and the very significant changes in staffing in recent years, including the influx of 18 new staff members. The School states that '*the academic members of staff and research students now meet once a month to consider and formulate a strategy to advance and develop the research profile of the School.... We value and recognise the need for multidisciplinary research activity within the Faculty and particularly appreciate the recommendation that a senior appointment be made to lead the School's research activity*'. The Dean supported the recommendation that a professorial appointment should proceed and stated that '*It is essential that this appointment be viewed within a context in which the School and Faculty operate in close partnership with the main teaching hospitals*'. The Dean endorsed the view of the reviewers that the appointee should lead the School's research and scholarship activity and should support the School in developing its research structure and strategy. The Dean acknowledged the need for strategic thinking both in relation to the development of a research strategy in the School and in terms of the development of closer integration of nursing into the Faculty and the College.

In relation to accommodation for postgraduate study space, the School indicated that this had been provided for in the plans for the new site for the School.

The Dean indicated that a memorandum of understanding on nursing issues with the main teaching hospitals would have to be developed with reference to existing teaching agreements.

The Dean stated his concern about the recommendation that the School should be located on a single site and indicated that most of the Faculty's '*departments, schools and infrastructure are on the College campuses associated with the two main teaching hospitals. It is therefore essential that the School be located primarily on these campuses to achieve the required benefits, as well as to add critical mass to these campuses*'.

5. CONSULTATION WITH THE TEACHING HOSPITALS

A copy of the report of the reviewers was sent to the Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) of the six associated teaching hospitals. One CEO commented that he regretted that the reviewers had not been able to visit the hospital campus or meet with him. He indicated that in relation to the location of the School, the hospital is strongly of the view that the School should have a presence on the hospital site. He urged the College to support collaborative opportunities within the Faculty of Health Sciences and in the wider College community, and requested a role in the appointment of a senior academic to lead the School's research agenda. He also commented on the lack of reference to the Teaching Agreement in the review documentation.

A representative of another hospital expressed concern at the reviewers' conclusions in relation to lack of integration and interdisciplinary collaboration within the Faculty. He was not in favour of a reduction in student numbers as a response to addressing the adverse staff:student ratio and he considered that course content should continue to give priority to the 'caring' role of the profession and the importance of clinical practice.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL

In addition to the School addressing the detailed recommendations outlined in the review report, the following recommendations are made to Council

- (a) that the School should:
1. Build on its existing commitment to teaching excellence by responding where possible to the specific suggestions of the reviewers.
 2. Develop a formal teaching and learning strategy.
 3. Develop a research strategy for the School and explore opportunities for research collaboration within the Faculty and within College as a whole.
 4. Encourage both students and staff to integrate more fully with the College community.
 5. Continue to explore the wide range of clinical linkages which have a crucial function in supporting and sustaining the School.
- (b) that the Faculty should:
6. Support the School as it increases in complexity and assist in developing an appropriate and effective management structure.
 7. Examine opportunities for ensuring the full integration of staff and students of the School into the Faculty and College and, if barriers are identified, to seek to remedy them.
 8. Explore ways of involving the School staff in existing research initiatives in the Faculty.
- (c) that College should:
9. Give its strong support to the School in this period of transition and facilitate its integration from a College perspective.
 10. Support the School as its becomes established in new premises in College Green, St James's Hospital and the Adelaide and Meath Hospital Dublin, incorporating the National Children's Hospital at Tallaght.
 11. Acknowledge and foster the important relationships between the teaching hospitals and the College.
 12. Proceed to establish and fill a Chair in Nursing and Midwifery Studies.

John Hegarty
Provost
