

## TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN



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### PROVOST'S REPORT TO COUNCIL ON THE REVIEW OF THE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND PHILOSOPHY

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

This report presents the outcome of a review of the School of Social Sciences & Philosophy. An external peer review visitation was undertaken from the 1<sup>st</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2009 by Professor David Archard, University of Lancaster, Professor John Driffill, Birkbeck College, University of London, Professor Simon Hix, London School of Economics and Professor William Outhwaite, University of Newcastle. The internal facilitator was Professor Sheila Greene, School of Social Work & Social Policy, Trinity College Dublin.

The report is based on (i) feedback from the External Reviewers received on the 12<sup>th</sup> May 2009, (ii) a submission from the School of Social Sciences & Philosophy received on the 11<sup>th</sup> June 2009 and (iii) a submission from the Pro-Dean of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences received on the 8<sup>th</sup> June 2009.

The main purpose of the School review is (a) to provide a structured opportunity for the School to reflect on its activities and plans for development, while benefiting from a constructive commentary by senior colleagues external to College; (b) to ensure that quality and standards in teaching, research and administration are being maintained and enhanced and that areas of concern in this regard are identified and addressed. Each School in College is reviewed systematically once every seven years.

#### 2. OVERVIEW OF THE SCHOOL

##### 2.1 Aims and Objectives of the School

Trinity College School of Social Sciences and Philosophy was formed in 2005 to create a sharper focus for research and teaching in the Social Sciences; to integrate philosophy more closely with the social sciences; to provide a larger and more flexible platform from which to promote existing areas of excellence while developing innovative teaching and research programmes and activities; and to disseminate the knowledge and expertise of School members to the benefit of the wider community with the Policy Institute providing an important channel for policy analysis and evaluation. The School aims to become Ireland's premier site for research and teaching in the Social Sciences, building on the School's internationally recognised research strengths in particular areas so as to be seen internationally as a centre of excellence as new and existing graduate programmes with a strong training component are developed around the School's high quality research activity.

##### 2.2 Programmes to which the School provides teaching

###### Undergraduate:

- B.A.(Mod.) in Economic & Social Studies (BESS)
- B.A.(Mod.) in Philosophy, Political Science, Economics & Sociology (PPES)
- B.A.(Mod.) in History & Political Science
- B.A.(Mod.) in Philosophy & Political Science
- B.A.(Mod.) in Philosophy
- TSM Philosophy
- TSM Economics
- TSM Sociology
- B.A.(Mod.) in Sociology & Social Policy
- B.A.(Mod.) in European Studies

- B.A.(Mod.) in Political Science & Geography
- LL.B. in Law & Political Science

#### Postgraduate:

- M.Sc. in Economics
- M.Sc. in Economic Policy Studies
- M.Sc. in Comparative European Politics
- M.Phil. in Ethnic & Racial Studies
- M.Phil. in Psychoanalytic Studies

### 2.3 Research

The School is one of the leading social science research centres in Ireland. It brings together several groups of researchers with international profiles. Particular strengths are the study of comparative institutions and party competition in Political Science and international economics and trade within Economics, which also has a concentration of strength in the area of competition, regulation and productivity. Within Sociology there is a particular focus on the sociology of globalisation, migration, and employment. Across the School there is a particular interest in the European area, with Eastern Europe an important subfield.

### 2.4 Summary Statistical Profile of the School for the Academic Year 2007/08<sup>1</sup>

Full-time Staff FTE	Undergraduate FTE	Postgraduate FTE	School Staff: Student Ratio	Faculty Staff: Student Ratio
<b>52</b>	<b>1026</b>	<b>134</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>19</b>

*Figures from Senior Lecturer's Annual Report approved by Council at its meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> January 2009*

### 2.5 Accommodation and Facilities (Physical Resources)

The School has one specifically allocated teaching space, a 10-15 seat seminar room (5012) in the Arts Building. All remaining teaching is within the various pool rooms of College. Lectures and seminars occur largely in the Arts Building. There are also seminar rooms in College Green, one of which is a dedicated student computer space. A key resource for the School is the Institute for International Integration Studies (IIIS) which occupies the Sutherland Centre on the sixth floor of the Arts Building. The Centre comprises 8 offices, with desk space for 37 occupants, primarily postgraduate research students, in an open plan area plus a well-equipped seminar room. The School has access to these resources in proportion to its funding commitment (currently approximately two-thirds of the total IIIS budget).

Doctoral research students in the School have access to facilities in College Green (Political Science; Sociology), Foster Place and the IIIS in the Arts Building (largely Economics). In Economics and Political Science nearly all doctoral students have their own desk space either in a shared office, study carrel, or within the IIIS, and each desk is equipped with a networked computer. Workspace for doctoral students in Sociology is available mainly on a shared basis. In Political Science, M.Sc. students share their own dedicated study room on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor of 3 College Green with access to computers, desks, and shelf space, though this is the only cohort of Masters students to have dedicated workspace. Research space in College Green houses the Employment Research Centre (four desk spaces). The Social Attitude and Policy Group has offices in Westland Row.

The Course Office which supports the undergraduate programmes is centrally located in the Arts Building and is shared with the Two-Subject Moderatorship (TSM) office. All full-time academic staff in the School have individual offices. Each discipline has a dedicated administrative office. The School Administrator's office is in College Green. In Economics, teaching assistants have the use of some offices on a shared basis. There is no dedicated space for teaching assistants in the other disciplines. Economics and Political Science have been able to use income from self-financing activities to ensure that all members of staff are

<sup>1</sup> The staff FTEs include all Professors, Associate Professors, Senior Lecturers and Lecturers funded from the core HEA grant, or from self-financing courses, and all part-time and occasional staff and demonstrators, converted to an FTE, who are funded from core grant or from self-financing courses.

equipped with new PC/laptop with access to rapid networked printers. Political Science has also purchased several ultra-portable computer projectors. In Sociology, several staff members have out-of-date computers; there is little additional teaching equipment. There is a common room in College Green currently allocated to sociology, which it is planned to renovate for the shared use of the two disciplines in College Green. There is some limited social space (coffee facilities etc). The School usually can access the Conference Rooms in College Green but these are a College facility.

### 3. EXTERNAL PEER REVIEW REPORT

#### SUMMARY OF REPORT

The Reviewers feel that *“Social Sciences at TCD are very strong internationally.”* They state that *“the School is unique in the constellation of subjects taught”* and therefore difficult to compare with similar Schools in other universities. As a result, the Reviewers have focused their comments on the component disciplines in the School. They feel that Political Science is very strong in international comparison and that *“Economics has great strengths in international economics, development and economic history. The strength and high profile of the department in open economy macroeconomics is a great advantage for TCD because this is an area where there is an identified weakness in other European countries (the UK for example).”* The only issue of concern to the Reviewers is the lack of resources available in the teaching and research of applied micro-economics. There is a good wide-ranging undergraduate programme in Philosophy which reflects the various interests and competences of the teaching staff. In terms of its research, however, the Reviewers feel that *“Philosophy is currently underperforming and displays research excellence only in a limited number of areas.”* The Reviewers note that Sociology has some particular areas of strength, but that these, and its activities overall, *“are threatened by an anomalous age structure and recent and impending departures.”* They feel that the IIS has been very successful in raising both the funds and the profile of Economics and Political Science in the School.

#### 3.1 RESEARCH

The Reviewers base their comments on research in the School largely on the volume and the location of output, and clarify that they were unable to make as systematic a comparison of the output from TCD with other institutions as, for example, the UK’s research assessment exercise does.

The Reviewers feel that Political Science has a very high international standing in some of the main sub-fields of political science in Europe, including elections and parties, comparative political institutions, EU politics, and quantitative methods. In per capita terms, it is the Reviewers’ opinion that *“the Department would be in the top ten of its kind in Europe”* with publications in all the top global journals and they note that *“the volume and quality of work produced is impressive considering its size.”* The Reviewers report that Economics has *“a very high international standing in certain fields, with publications in prestigious and high-impact journals.”* In particular, they feel that open economy macro-economics, development, and economic history are very strong. The output, they report, is comparable in location and volume to a top department in Britain and *“most of the output that has received substantial international attention has come from a small concentration of people.”* The Reviewers are confident that the prospects for publications in the coming years are excellent. With regard to Sociology, the Reviewers note *“substantial output in some areas, notably race/ethnicity/migration and the sociology of contemporary Ireland and contemporary Europe.”* The Reviewers find it *“difficult to make a useful judgment of Philosophy’s national strength since there are only a small number of active philosophy departments throughout Ireland.”* However using the United Kingdom’s recent Research Assessment Exercise as a basis for a comparative assessment they conclude that *“Philosophy would have probably entered only a minority of its permanent staff as research active and would have secured an overall grading in the bottom half of the U.K. rankings.”* The Reviewers are of the firm view, however, that *“despite the Philosophy Department’s small size, it can still thrive and that prospective improvement is promised through judicious appointments.”* They note that *“an excellent appointment to the Chair has been made which will undoubtedly strengthen the Department’s research profile”* and suggest that the planned imminent junior appointment will further enhance this profile.

The Reviewers are of the opinion that both Political Science and Sociology have been very successful in securing funds considering their small size, and note in particular the large proportion of staff on short fixed-term contracts in Sociology. They report that *"IIS has been a particularly useful vehicle for placing TCD on the radar of international funders of political science research, and for generating research income for political science at TCD from a variety of sources, particularly from the European Union."* Although *"Economics does not appear to have raised a huge amount of external research funding in the last two years given its size and distinction"*, the Reviewers state that this is quite common among economics departments in other countries and note that it can be accounted for by the fact that much of their research funding is streamed through the IIS. The Reviewers are confident that Economics is well placed to raise funds in the coming years *"as members of its large cohort of recent appointments develop their research agendas."* The Reviewers report that although Philosophy has not been successful in securing external research funding, this may be largely due to the fact that research funders do not tend to support the kind of academic projects characteristic of philosophy. They are confident, however, that *"things are changing, and there is no reason why Philosophy could not in the future be successful in raising funds."* The Reviewers suggest that *"consideration should be given to the idea of giving priority to work with obvious practical application, and to interdisciplinary projects."* Although it will be increasingly difficult to raise external funds given the national and international climate, the Reviewers *"are confident that the disciplines are well placed to bid for European funds in the future."*

The Reviewers report that *"on average across the School, the ratio of PhD students to academic staff is 4:1, which, they feel, is broadly in line with international standards."* The large number of PhD students in Economics at present (45) reflects the unusually large intake (20) in 2008, and is not large relative to the number of staff members. In relation to the small size of the departments, the Reviewers report that Sociology and Philosophy have larger numbers. The Reviewers are confident that *"completion rates look good overall, partly reflecting the quality of research support compared to many other European countries."* Judging from the paths followed by PhD graduates of the School, the Reviewers report that the quality of PhD research is high. They note that supervision arrangements and support for PhD students vary widely across disciplines with *"differences in terms of frequency of meetings with and availability of supervisors; the extent to which there are taught courses in the first year(s) of the PhD programme; the provision of one or two supervisors; the extent of PhD student participation in research seminars; progress reviews of PhD students; the extent to which PhD students form a community."* In their discussion with both staff and students, the Reviewers report that the issue of whether there should be a clearer and more consistent policy towards sole versus joint supervision was raised.

The Reviewers note that *"there is a general move towards greater provision of taught PhD courses in year one of the programme (further advanced in some disciplines than in others), in parallel with developments in the UK and other countries."* They applaud the *"growing collaboration amongst institutions in and around Dublin in providing these taught courses"* and cite the planned 'Dublin Economics PhD' in conjunction with University College Dublin (UCD) and the National University Ireland (NUI) Maynooth as *"an excellent development."*

The Reviewers feel that *"there is an identifiable research culture in all disciplines except one"*, observing that *"in Philosophy at present a thriving research culture...does not appear to be obviously present."* However, they are confident that *"it can undoubtedly be fostered by the new head [...]and will be assisted through good future appointments."*

With regard to funding for research students, the Reviewers are confident that *"funding is currently up to international standards"*, especially in comparison with the top UK universities. However, they express concern that *"future maintenance of this position is highly uncertain"*. Support in terms of space and desks made available for PhD students, they feel, is very impressive.

The Reviewers report that *"many PhD students are supported through teaching assistant positions, and a high number of teaching hours are allocated to PhD students."* While this is clearly beneficial for the career development of PhD students, the Reviewers express concern about its benefits for the undergraduates. They report, however, that most undergraduates they met expressed satisfaction with the teaching they received from postgraduate teaching assistants (TA's). The Reviewers feel that *"it is clear that TAs need*

*some general induction or instruction in teaching, and that good liaison with academic staff is essential.*" Given the large differences between departments in this regard, they recommend that *"further attention should be given to raising the minimum standard across the School"* and they welcome the School's introduction in the academic year 2008/09 of a requirement that all teaching assistants avail of training provided by the Centre for Academic Practice and Student Learning (CAPSL) before they start teaching.

On the subject of staff-student liaison in relation to research, the Reviewers report that this varies widely across the disciplines. They recommend that *"a School policy be developed on student-staff liaison for PhD students and their supervisors. Such a policy would set out clear criteria on annual appraisals and the division of roles between both parties, and would detail the frequency of meetings to be held."*

The Reviewers are happy that the balance of published research, research supervision and other research-related activities in the School seems appropriate for a research-led institution. They welcome *"the developing culture of TCD, UCD and other institutions working together on research activities"* which not only has efficiencies in terms of staff costs, but also provides for better quality and diversity of research students. They applaud the bilateral collaboration with UCD but suggest that *"this should not exclude collaboration with other institutions."*

The Reviewers note that *"many members of the School engage in activities in the wider academic world, as officers of learned societies, journal editors, and so on"* and that *"many also appear regularly in the media in Ireland and other countries, and contribute to public debate and formulation of policy."*

In conclusion, the Reviewers state that *"the School has not succeeded in implementing the findings in the last research review on inter-disciplinary and policy research."* They suggest that *"research objectives need to be defined by each discipline rather than by the School as a whole, but there is very little school integration evident."*

### **3.2 TEACHING & LEARNING**

The Reviewers report that *"the School's undergraduate programmes appear to enjoy healthy demand from good quality students."* In fact, as student numbers are very high, there is considerable pressure on teaching resources, both in terms of academic staff and in terms of physical space in lecture theatres. While this pressure is felt most keenly in Philosophy and Sociology where staff numbers are low, the Reviewers feel that some of the pressure is self-inflicted, as these small departments offer a full range of courses with high contact hours for both students and staff using traditional teaching methods and sustaining the use of small-group teaching. The Reviewers feel that *"the large number of undergraduate degree programmes and the variety of different structures that have evolved over time appear to the outside observer rather complicated, perhaps unnecessarily so."* Although a view was expressed to the Reviewers in some of their meetings with academic staff that this complexity may discourage some applicants, the Reviewers report that the undergraduates they met seemed to be happy with these arrangements. The Reviewers are concerned that *"way the undergraduate programmes are organised does not give much autonomy to individual disciplines"* and suggest that *"the structure of the School does not fit in with the undergraduate course structure."* However, they concede that *"these things seem to be an inevitable aspect of offering students a wide choice of subject combinations and flexibility in degree programmes."*

The Reviewers report that the portfolio of master's courses available in the School is growing and that the course offerings are being developed and extended. They feel that *"the new MSc in Comparative European Politics is a good initiative and early indications suggest that it can compete directly with similar programmes at other top political science departments in Europe (such as LSE, Oxford, and UL Brussels)."* While the M.Phil. course in Sociology does not attract many applicants, the Reviewers consider that applicants are of a high quality and note that the course quota in 2008 was filled. They suggest that, in addition to the M.Phil. in Psychoanalytic Studies, a taught masters' course in general Philosophy, *"could be taught within the existing staff resources and would be an attractive option."* The Reviewers observe that *"master's courses appear rarely to cross School boundaries and do not raise the same issues of complexity of offerings and*

*collaboration with other Schools as arise in the case of the undergraduate courses.” They express the view that “while student numbers are high enough for these programmes to be sustainable, but small enough to allow good interaction between staff and students, it would obviously be attractive to increase student numbers.”*

The Reviewers are happy that *“the content of the programmes at both undergraduate and master’s level seems to be appropriate to the level of the courses, up-to-date, and wide-ranging.”*

The Reviewers welcome the newly-introduced matrix outlining staff responsibilities and they recommend that the School consider introducing a workload template which would allow for transparency and equity in workload across the School. They suggest that *“administrative work undertaken by academic staff appears to be of kind that is better and more appropriately done by administrative staff”*, citing the tracking of School-specific data for the preparation of research grant bids as an example. The Reviewers welcome the use of a common template for contact hours in undergraduate teaching, as they feel it provides for a common delivery experience. In general, they feel that in relation to undergraduate teaching *“the School needs to raise the bar in terms of online learning and delivery and in how it engages with its students”* in order to be on par with international state of the art models. They encourage more collective thinking on using innovative teaching methods and recommend that *“all Teaching Assistants and all new appointments be required to undergo substantial CAPSL training.”*

The Reviewers are concerned that *“the lecture space available for the largest lecture courses in the School, Introduction to Sociology and Introduction to Political Science, is inadequate.”* They note that in 2008/09 the School managed the problem by *“providing for two parallel lecture groups in the first weeks of term, and then re-combining them when attendances have fallen to allow the entire class to fit into the largest lecture theatre.”* The Reviewers *“do not find this a satisfactory solution”* as it *“institutionalises non-attendance at lectures”* and signals to undergraduates that the College does not expect them to attend all their lectures. They feel that the problem of insufficient capacity needs to be addressed in a better way and suggest that *“the School review its attendance policy and look at absenteeism rates, to compare more favourably with international standards.”* With regard to the tutorial class sizes, the Reviewers recommend that *“a maximum number per tutorial of 15 students”* in order to bring the School’s provisions closer into line with that in top universities elsewhere. They suggest that *“the School should consider having a balance between the number of course requirements and the resources they require, in order to keep student numbers lower for the tutorials.”* They report that *“student contact hours are very high in comparison with similar Schools internationally.”* The Reviewers are of the impression that the formal staff committees are not working effectively and recommend that *“disciplines should have procedures in place to inform students of decisions made at these meetings.”*

The Reviewers report *“very positive comments”* regarding supervision and support from the students they met on the postgraduate taught courses. With regard to arrangements for curriculum review and revision, the Reviewers feel that the *“documentation seems standard and arrangements appropriate.”* However, they note that attempts to revise the curriculum have been hampered by the highly complicated set of course offerings which have evolved.

The Reviewers describe the voluntary nature of the student survey mechanism at TCD as *“very extraordinary”*, given that almost all comparable universities have a system for automatic and universal gathering of and use of student feedback on teaching. The Reviewers conclude that the methods of evaluating teaching and learning used *“are not appropriate or adequate, and need to be reviewed”* and they recommend that *“the School develop a policy on having its own evaluation system”* which should have a qualitative element to it. They feel that in relation to evaluation of teaching and learning *“consistency of good practice across the School is needed”* and suggest that the good practice elements already mentioned should also include *“a framework for marking schemes and staff undergoing the three day CAPSL training programme.”* This good practice model should be part of School policy. They recommend that *“some thought should be given to formalized monitoring of TAs”* and suggest that *“consideration be given to professional training and development of TAs, as well as professional development of teaching staff.”* The Reviewers did not find much evidence of opportunities for study abroad, student exchanges or relevant outside experience but note that generally *“the curriculum fits in with the Bologna process.”*

### 3.3 SERVICE TO COLLEGE AND SOCIETY

The Reviewers report that there is a very strong historical tradition of TCD academic staff engaging with media and policy makers in Dublin and they welcome the practice. They feel, however, that *“the standard method of measuring research outputs does not take these efforts into consideration.”* They recommend that *“young scholars should be encouraged to engage with Irish policy makers and not concentrate only on international issues.”* The Reviewers applaud the School’s respected connections to international institutions.

### 3.4 RESOURCES

The Reviewers are unclear from the way the Performance Management Development Scheme (PMDS) is structured whether it constitutes an appraisal scheme or a mentoring scheme and feel that *“the operation of PMDS would be more effective if this was articulated better.”* They recommend that *“there should be a School policy advocating its full engagement with the PMDS process.”*

The Reviewers report that *“feedback from staff has indicated that the promotion system in TCD needs to be more transparent.”* They feel that *“although the written criteria for promotion are clear, the operation and interpretation of them by the Promotions Committee is unclear and there is poor feedback provided to those staff unsuccessful in promotion applications”.*

They consider the provision of administrative support and advice in relation to research grant submissions to be inadequate in comparison with international standards, and suggest that this particularly disadvantages the social sciences which *“are more dependent on collectively provided support.”* The Reviewers suggest that *“College infrastructure does not seem adequate to support social scientists.”*

The Reviewers observe that the physical learning environment provided for PhD students is *“excellent”* and that the rooms provided for staff are *“comparable with international standards.”* They report that *“students have expressed concerns about the availability and quality of IT equipment in teaching rooms.”*

### 3.5 ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURES AND PLANNING

The Reviewers feel that the *“overall School structure seems to be designed for a single discipline, which has been transposed to a multi-discipline school with adverse consequences.”* They also express concern that the administrative structure is leading to duplication of certain tasks e.g. in the management of PhD students. They suggest that *“the School primarily exists to provide a framework for a small subset of the undergraduate teaching and also for College led administrative convenience.”*

The Reviewers report that with regard to Philosophy, there is *“a clear perception that ARAM does not match the strategic objectives that the Department might set for itself or have set by the School.”* This, they state, is seen as particularly true in respect of the creation of Masters programmes. They feel that *“it is important that there should be congruence between ARAM and strategic objectives, and that Departments should understand what they have a clear incentive to develop and to maintain.”* They are also concerned that *“the School structure should not make it difficult for any Department to forge productive links with other Departments and institutions”* and cite Philosophy as a discipline that viewed itself as *“most obviously not a natural member of the new School.”* The Reviewers note that *“the budgeting structure measures research success by number of students and funds secured. This is not a qualitative measurement.”*

In conclusion, the Reviewers feel that *“the new School has not yet become embedded in the intellectual life and administrative structures of the disciplines or of the College, whose administrative structures are themselves new in relevant respects.”* They also feel that, in general, *“the School’s strategic priorities have not been realised.”*

### **3.5 RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **3.5.1 Research**

- i) *TCD, given its history, profile, aspirations and existing international recognition, is uniquely placed in Ireland to be a world class research university. Achieving this standard should be a collective aspiration of the School as a whole, as well as individual aspirations of the disciplines. It is apparent that two of the disciplines are already close to achieving this standard.*
- ii) *Given the relatively small size of the discipline groups, the Reviewers believe that they should consider specialising in their research priorities, rather than spreading themselves too thinly. There is potential for more research and research training collaboration between Political Science and Economics, and perhaps Sociology, using, for example, the infrastructural resources of the IIS. Collaborations between these disciplines have enjoyed success in many of the top universities around the world. TCD is well placed to pursue such collaboration with success.*
- iii) *The Department of Sociology needs to consider how it can move up to the next level. A Chair and Lectureship or a broader appointment strategy are urgently needed and may be the best mechanisms to achieve this objective. Sociology should identify its research strengths, i.e. its national and international comparative advantage and should develop and build upon these strengths.*
- iv) *The Department of Political Science needs to consider how it can consolidate on its already strong position. Given its relatively small size, specializing in a few key areas has paid off so far. Moving forward, though, the department should think about how it can develop the natural synergies with Economics and broaden its research and teaching coverage to other key areas in the modern discipline, such as international political economy*
- v) *The Reviewers suggest that the School should introduce good practice for PhD programmes to include there being clear guidelines, annual appraisals, regular meetings between students and supervisor, regular seminars and so on.*

#### **3.5.2 Teaching & Learning**

- vi) *We have received positive feedback about the Master's programmes and would encourage the School to consider expanding them in the future. In relation to the high level of contact hours for undergraduates, we are not sure that this level of contact is sustainable. The issue of rebalancing time and resources needs to be looked at. Also, more permanent staff should be delivering more of the teaching.*
- vii) *We recommend the School introduce a School wide induction course for their undergraduates on arrival. Topics covered could be essay writing, study skills, critical thinking, etc. We recommend that the School give serious consideration to reviewing and refreshing the undergraduate programme, with a view to simplifying degree formats. We do not wish however to propose changes in detail. Absenteeism and undergraduate class sizes – it is not satisfactory for the School to provide teaching resources on the presumption that a substantial fraction of the students will not attend class.*

#### **3.5.3 Resources**

- viii) *We recommend that IIS be made a resource priority. It's imperative that the project is continued as it provides a mechanism to promote international collaboration and research activities.*
- ix) *We feel that it is inappropriate for junior staff in the School to be overloaded with senior administrative duties.*
- x) *The lack of resources available in the teaching and research of applied micro-economics is an issue of concern.*



### 3.5.4 Organisational Structures & Planning

- xi) *The School needs a new strategic plan which should set out clearly the School's self-perception of its collective added value in terms of teaching and research collaboration. Some consideration should be given to future re-structuring of the School, if this helps to implement the strategic plan.*
- xii) *We feel that there are missed opportunities for co-operation with other Schools (e.g. medicine, education) and Faculties in TCD, at undergraduate teaching level, master's level and on research activities.*
- xiii) *We believe that the planning of teaching resources for a university of TCD's calibre should be better.*

## 4. RESPONSES FROM THE SCHOOL & THE PRO DEAN OF ARTS, HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES

The School welcomes the Reviewers' report and states that the review was "*a challenging but ultimately rewarding experience, largely thanks to the reviewers' collegial and supportive approach.*" The Pro-Dean of the Faculty "*welcomes the general recommendations made throughout this report, particularly the production of a new strategic plan, the need to 'review and refresh' the undergraduate teaching curriculum and to provide consistent PhD supervisory arrangements*" and reports that "*the School is aware of the importance of acting on these recommendations and has already begun to address a number of them.*" The Pro-Dean also notes that "*the very real challenges involved in running a multi-disciplinary and multi-departmental School are highlighted, especially with regards to communications and junior staffing being 'overloaded' with senior administrative duties.*"

The School states that when it was formed, its Strategic Plan stressed the importance of inter-disciplinarity, especially in research. However, the review of TCD Social Sciences in 2008 stressed that 'Research excellence in the social sciences rests upon coherent and well-articulated core disciplines'. The School now sees its priority as consolidating its four constituent disciplines. While it will encourage inter-disciplinary work, the School states that it no longer sees this as an absolute priority. At the same time, it welcomes the challenge set by the Reviewers – to make achieving the standard of a world class research university the 'collective aspiration of the School as a whole'.

At a discipline level, the School notes that while the Reviewers "*commend the high profile of research in Economics in particular in open economy macro-economics, in development and in economic history*", they also identify a lack of resources in both research and teaching in applied micro-economics. The School reports that it has already identified this as the priority for future appointments in Economics in its staffing plan. With regard to Philosophy, the School "*fully accepts the need to dramatically improve the Department's research culture and output*" but also stresses that some existing members of the Department do have solid publication records. In 2007/08 the School decided to prioritise the appointment of a Chair in Philosophy and report that the appointment in 2008/09 of the new Professor and of a new junior lectureship (currently frozen because of the moratorium) has begun the process of renewal. The Faculty Dean stressed the importance of noting "*the very positive statements made about the new chair and the opportunities available to the department.*" The Reviewers suggest that Political Science is now in a position to broaden its research and teaching and the School reports that "*in its staffing plan the School has already taken steps in this direction with a new lectureship (currently frozen because of the moratorium)*". The School recognises that there is now a staffing crisis in Sociology. However, the School feels that "*this situation is also an opportunity to focus the department along the lines suggested by the reviewers: the department 'should identify its research strengths and...develop and build upon these strengths.'*" It reports that Sociology "*has already recognised the need for specialisation with two appointments in the area of migration/ethnic relations.*" The School has already initiated the appointment of a new Chair in Sociology (currently frozen because of the moratorium) and the School's last staffing plan identified a lectureship in sociology for a specialist in quantitative methodology as a priority. The School expects the new Chair to "*lead a process of renewal and strategic specialisation.*" It also suggests that "*new strategic appointments should ensure that the department can collaborate more closely with Economics and Political Science in postgraduate training as also suggested by*

*the reviewers; some of the new appointments should also develop collaboration with sociologists in the Economic and Social Research Institute.*” The Pro-Dean of the Faculty welcomes the Reviewers’ recommendations about how best to consolidate and further strengthen Political Science and Economics and how to build up Sociology.

With regard to undergraduate teaching, the School states that the Reviewers have *“correctly identified a series of problems, most of which we have already begun to address during the academic year 2008/09.”* The School shares the Reviewers’ concern that the complex range of degree programmes can create confusion for students and a disproportionate level of administrative work for staff. The School also concedes that it creates further timetabling problems. The School is simplifying its programmes by discontinuing the Philosophy & Political Science degree and reviewing the large number of options available within TSM. They will also explore other measures to simplify their programme offerings. Any further increase in student numbers in the recently introduced PPES *“will therefore be by increasing the PPES quota rather than additional programmes.”*

The School agrees with the Reviewers that it is ‘extraordinary’ that not all courses are subject to student feedback and evaluation. It notes *“the recent Council decision confirming that module evaluations should become mandatory.”* The School reports that it has *“already initiated discussions with CAPSL to develop more effective and probably on-line student evaluation”* and that from autumn 2009 *“it will be assumed that all courses are evaluated by CAPSL unless lecturers explicitly request otherwise through the Head of School.”* The School reports that *“the Director of Undergraduate Teaching and Learning (DUTL) will develop more effective dissemination of results to lecturers and heads of discipline.”* With regard to training of postgraduate teaching assistants (TA’s) the School reports that in the academic year 2008/09 it implemented a mandatory CAPSL course for all new TA’s in the School and that from the autumn of 2009 *“all TAs who are starting their second year as TA will attend a further CAPSL course.”* Currently, all lecturers in the School who use TAs must confirm to the DUTL that they have agreed a work programme with their TA and in the academic year 2009/10 *“each department will put in place a programme for the professional development of its TAs with an interim progress report in January 2010.”* The School also undertakes to develop a more consistent marking scheme across the School.

The School states that it is committed to the professionalisation of its teaching and in autumn 2008, it initiated a formal mentoring programme for new staff members. The Head of School reports that the Director of Undergraduate Teaching and Learning will develop a more extended version of the School’s existing one-day induction programme for all new academic staff in conjunction with CAPSL. In 2009/10, it is also planned to hold a ‘Teaching Day’ for all staff during the academic year each head of discipline will develop a professional teaching development plan for all lecturers below the merit bar. The School accepts the Reviewers’ comment that ‘more permanent staff should be delivering more of the [undergraduate] teaching’ and reports that *“it is now School policy that as far as possible freshman courses should be taken by permanent members of staff.”* Implementation of this policy has been facilitated by the publication of each department’s Teaching Plan on the School’s local webpage. The School agrees with the comment that the ‘School needs to raise the bar in terms of online learning and delivery’ and in the 2008/09 academic year it has begun to work towards a common virtual environment for all undergraduate programmes. The Head of School reports that *“by start of academic year 2010 all basic material for all our undergraduate and postgraduate courses will be available on WebCT.”* Already almost all essay-type assignments are submitted through turnitin.com, and this will be mandatory as from 2010. The School *“will explore the possibility of using WebCT to record coursework results during the year, so that students can monitor their own progress on-line.”* The School agrees that ‘student contact hours are very high in comparison with similar Schools internationally’ and suggests that *“high contact hours are the result of an unreflective and out of date pedagogy.”* By professionalising its teaching, the School anticipates a reduction in contact hours per course as from 2010/11. The School welcomes the Reviewers suggestion of an induction course for new undergraduates and will consider it for introduction as from 2010/11. It is the view of the School that *“it will be impossible to bring teaching in the School up to international standards while promotion is perceived to depend entirely on research.”* Given the small size of the School’s constituent departments, it cannot afford to appoint lecturers who are not required to develop a skill-set appropriate to teaching in both freshman and sophister years. The School wishes to stress that *“in a research university such as Trinity teaching and research should be complementary”* and is concerned that younger staff are often implicitly and sometimes

explicitly encouraged to see them as alternatives. With regard to tutorial class sizes, the School recognises the value of small group teaching and is therefore *“committed to offering undergraduate students teaching in small groups, besides lectures, specifically in the Freshman years.”* The School is currently calculating the implications in terms of teaching space, teaching time and teaching assistant costs of reducing all classes to 15 but suspects that this is *“quite impossible given our existing funding for teaching assistants and given the limited space available for undergraduate seminar teaching.”*

The School expects to finally introduce a long-planned second masters programme in sociology in 2010/11 and is exploring a general M.Phil. programme in philosophy. The School reports that during next year the Director of Postgraduate Teaching and Learning will develop School-level guidelines for PhD students. Following the Reviewers' recommendations, it will also consider whether there should be a 'clearer and more consistent policy towards sole versus joint supervision'. The School plans to appoint one member of the School executive to develop international links for its undergraduate and graduate programmes.

The School is implementing the second stage of PMDS in autumn 2009; this, it feels, will clarify that PMDS is indeed a mentoring scheme. The School considers this imperative *“to ensure effective staff development in the School.”* The School concedes that a full review of all administrative work in the School is needed, but feels that *“realistically this cannot be undertaken at the moment due to staff shortages.”* In the meantime, the School is encouraging its most senior staff members to take on key managerial roles within the School. The School would like to highlight the involvement of Sociology in the IIS *“both currently through the Trinity Immigration Initiative and earlier through Professor Holton's work on globalisation.”* It states that *“the IIS is a major resource for the School; it facilitates collaboration between our different disciplines; it is a crucial mechanism for international collaboration and international grant applications.”* The School suggests that its high level of research will be consolidated if the IIS is granted Trinity Institute status. The School fully supports the Reviewers' comments that support for grant applications and administration is inadequate 'in comparison with international standards' and considers that a research officer located within the IIS and working with Research & Innovation Services would make a major contribution to the School's funded research. While the Reviewers consider that space for doctoral students is 'excellent', the School considers that they are comparing this with resource-poor British universities. At the moment the School reports that it is not able to offer all its doctoral students facilities comparable to those in competitor universities in Continental Europe. Furthermore, it states that *“facilities for taught master's courses are woefully inadequate.”* The School hopes that both these problems will be addressed through space in Phoenix House. The School reports that it has abandoned the practice of timetabling courses on the assumption that not all students will attend the lectures. They report that the School plans a task force *“to develop and disseminate more effective large group teaching methodologies leading to the introduction of new teaching methods in first year courses in 2010/11.”* The School does not consider it practical to make lectures compulsory and in the medium term, feel that *“the lecture will become less important as a means of delivery.”* By contrast, the School Executive has already decided that in the Freshman years seminar attendance should be mandatory and the School undertakes to closely monitor seminar attendance in the Freshman years. The Pro-Dean shares the disquiet expressed about absenteeism and undergraduate class sizes and suggests that *“these issues clearly need to be addressed as a matter of urgency.”*

With regard to the Reviewers' concerns that the School structure should not inhibit the individual disciplines from establishing productive links with other schools and institutions, the School welcomes such developments. To ensure greater interaction with policy makers in Dublin at both city and national level the School plans to use the Policy Institute to host a programme of policy seminars and public lectures. This will require the appointment of a part-time executive officer to provide administrative support. The School accepts the need to communicate decisions arising from formal Staff Committees more effectively to students.

## 5. RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL AND BOARD

In light of the review report and the responses from the School of Social Sciences and Philosophy and the Faculty Pro-Dean it is recommended that:

1. The School of Social Sciences and Philosophy working closely with the Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Science and other relevant Academic Officers consider the detailed recommendations of the Review Report and draw up an implementation plan<sup>2</sup> for Council approval.
2. The Dean working closely with the Head of School and the Head of Philosophy should develop a plan to strengthen the position of Philosophy in the School, in College and nationally.
3. The Head of School working closely with the Dean should develop the School into a fully cohesive and integrated academic unit.
4. College should develop a system-wide workload model for academic staff to ensure an equitable share of research, outreach and administrative responsibilities and, of undergraduate and postgraduate teaching.

**Provost,  
June 2009.**

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<sup>2</sup> See *Procedures and Protocol for Quality Review of Schools 2008/09* at <http://www.tcd.ie/vp-cao/qu/qopdf/adrpack2.pdf>