

TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN



QUALITY REVIEW OF THE SCHOOL OF HISTORIES AND HUMANITIES

1. INTRODUCTION

This report presents the outcome of a review of the School of Histories and Humanities. An external peer review visitation was undertaken from the 16th – 18th February 2009 by Professor Robert Evans, University of Oxford, Professor Thomas Harrison, University of Liverpool, Professor Peter Humfrey, University of St Andrews and Professor Imelda Whelehan, De Montfort University. The internal facilitator was Professor Eilean Ní Chuilleán, School of English, Trinity College Dublin.

The report is based on (i) feedback from the External Reviewers received on the 21st May 2009, (ii) a submission from the School of Social Sciences & Philosophy received on the 10th July 2009 and (iii) a submission from the Dean of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences received on the 10th July 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 Histories and Humanities was formed in 2005, bringing together the Departments of Classics, Modern History, Medieval History, History of Art, and the Centre for Gender and Women's Studies. The aim of the School is to maintain and promote a culture of excellence in research measured by international criteria and to support research on both an individual and collaborative basis. The School hopes to maximise the research potential of the School by fostering a community of scholars – academic staff, postgraduate students and post doctoral fellows. The School is also committed to maintaining and enhancing the quality of its taught programmes through small group and research-led teaching, and maintaining its contribution to the interdisciplinary programmes in European Studies, History and Political Science, Irish Studies and the Moderatorship in Ancient and Medieval History and Culture.

2.2 Programmes to which the School provides teaching Undergraduate:

- B.A. in Classics (Single Honors)
- B.A. in History & Political Science (Single Honors)
- B.A. in Ancient & Medieval History and Culture (Single Honors)
- B.A. in Irish Studies (Single Honors)
- B.A. in History (Single Honors and TSM)
- B.A. in History of Art & Architecture (TSM)
- B.A. in Ancient History & Archaeology (TSM)
- B.A. in Classical Civilisation (TSM)
- B.A. in Greek (TSM)

- B.A. in Latin (TSM)
- B.A. in European Studies (Single Honors)

Postgraduate:

- M.Phil. in Irish Art History
- M.Phil in Classics
- M.Phil in Medieval History
- M.Phil. in Modern Irish History
- M.Phil. in Reformation and Enlightenment Studies
- M.Phil in Gender and Woman's Studies

2.3 Research

The School is known nationally and internationally for its research into Classics, Greek Philosophy, Mediterranean Archaeology and Ancient History, Medieval, Early Modern and Modern History, for its work on World War I, on Irish History, on the History of Irish Art and aspects of European Art, and for its work on Gender Relations in Ireland and Western Society. The research activities of the School are currently divided between two broad areas: (a) the development of Europe in ancient, medieval and modern times and (b) Irish studies, the latter to be seen in a broad context that embraces relationships (historical, cultural and sociological) with other countries in and beyond Europe. The School aims to consolidate and expand these research activities, while at the same time promoting new areas of study, for example in US History and Asian Studies.

Research activity is currently divided between individual and collaborative projects, the latter based principally in the seven research centres:

- Centre for Gender and Women's Studies.
- Centre for Irish-Scottish and Comparative Studies.
- Centre for Medieval History.
- Centre for Mediterranean and Near Eastern Studies, including the Centre for the Study of the Platonic Tradition.
- Centre for Contemporary Irish History.
- Irish Art Research Centre (TRIARC).
- Centre for War Studies.

Much of the research strategy of the School is linked to the Trinity Long Room Hub, which provides a valuable internal platform for the development of research. Over the course of the next few years it is hoped that the Hub will facilitate new research groupings, ensuring that the School's research programmes remain at the highest international level.

2.4 Summary Statistical Profile of the School for the Academic Year 2007/08¹

Full-time Staff FTE	Undergraduate FTE	Postgraduate FTE	School Staff: Student Ratio	Faculty Staff: Student Ratio
38	557	154	19	19

Figures from Senior Lecturer's Annual Report approved by Council at its meeting on 14th January 2009

2.5 Accommodation and Facilities (Physical Resources)

The School is housed in approximately 1451 square metres across 6 locations
Current space is located in:

Arts Building (3rd floor) – History

¹ *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.*

Arts Building (5th floor) – History of Art
Arts Building (6th floor) – Classics, Centre for Contemporary Irish History, Centre for Irish, Scottish and Comparative Studies, Centre for War Studies
1937 Reading Room (Basement) – Classics (Centre for the Study of the Platonic Tradition)
192 Pearse Street – Centre for Medieval History
3&4 Foster Place (Basement, Ground, 1st & 2nd floors) – History, Centre for Contemporary Irish History
28 Westland Row (1st & 2nd floors) – Centre for Gender and Women's Studies
Provost's stable building – History of Art

3. REVIEWERS' RECOMMENDATIONS

The Reviewers make the following recommendations:

- 3.1 In the light of the College's strategy to increase postgraduate numbers, it is recommended that staffing levels should be reviewed in areas where staff are currently particularly overloaded (CGWS, Classics, History of Art, 19-20C Irish and British history).
- 3.2 Staff workloads should be reviewed to ensure an even balance of (undergraduate and postgraduate) teaching and to allow for appropriate levels of research activity associated with a research-intensive university. Best practice would include the institution of research days free of teaching and a cycle of sabbaticals of at least one term every four years for all research-active staff. We recommend a more formal mentoring system for probationary staff.
- 3.3 The Centre for Gender and Women's Studies should be further supported by the School and College, given the highly valued combination of resources and research it produces. It is recommended that another academic position be made available to support the current Director as a matter of urgency, and that the successor to the current Director be sought from any relevant discipline rather than necessarily from History.
- 3.4 The School should develop a research strategy and funding plan which allows for strategic focus and long-term calculations. In addition, EU funding opportunities could be more fully exploited.
- 3.5 The Long Room Hub is an important initiative, but there remain concerns over sustainability and focus. It is suggested that this facility could do more to encourage internal research leave and grant support as well as steering interdisciplinary research.
- 3.6 Language teaching (ancient and modern), which is currently a strength, requires continued support and maintenance. This provision is regarded as essential to graduate study and further recruitment. Foreign-language accessions by the Library should be enhanced as far as possible.
- 3.7 CAPSL course surveys should function as a review tool, and be used more consistently in sophister years. In the Panel's view this process should be mandatory.
- 3.8 There is a need for consistency across the School in the practice of returning coursework at undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

- 3.9 The panel suggests that the School consider introduction of peer observation as a way of sharing good practice in teaching and learning, ensuring that it is not directly related to appraisal or promotion structures.
- 3.10 More resources should be made available to support staffing and reflect the inevitably more complex structure of a multi-disciplinary School.
- 3.11 Maintenance of the website at College and School levels requires some review: there needs to be clarification about where responsibility to maintain and update information lies. Appointment of a Communications Officer from among existing staff could help to deliver this, as well as to field student queries about course details and enhance the profile of school events.
- 3.12 The university's course-approval process should be rendered less unwieldy, and that more incentives to initiate new postgraduate programmes be provided.
- 3.13 The College's ARAM model needs to be sensitive to the specific Arts context, and its processes need to be more clearly outlined to staff.

4. PROVOST'S RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL

In light of the review report and the responses from the School of Histories and Humanities and the Faculty Dean it is recommended that:

1. The School of Histories and Humanities working closely with the Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Science, and other relevant Academic Officers, should consider the detailed recommendations of the Review Report and draw up an implementation plan² for Council approval.
2. College should ensure adequate support and structures for:
 - a. implementing an online student evaluation system,
 - b. further developing a Virtual Learning Environment, and
 - c. developing and implementing academic workload models.
3. College and the Faculty should assess and address barriers to enabling integration and cohesion of Schools formed from two or more former Departments.

Provost
17 September 2009

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

Quality Review, 16-18 February 2009
School of Histories & Humanities, Trinity College, University of
Dublin

Introduction

We are grateful to the staff of the College and the School of Histories and Humanities for the warmth of the hospitality extended to us during our visit of 16-18 February. The programme for the Quality Review was efficiently organised, and the staff and students present at our various meetings were without exception open and co-operative in providing us with the information we requested. We extend particular thanks to the Internal Facilitator, Professor Eilean Ní Chuilleanáin, for giving us the full benefit of her professional experience. We have only two suggestions for the future conduct of such reviews. First, it would have been helpful for more time to have been allocated to discussions between ourselves, so that we could have drafted a preliminary version of our report while we were still together on site. And second, we would have appreciated secretarial assistance during the private meetings of the review panel.

In general, we were highly impressed by the School's performance in both of the principal areas of its activity, teaching and research, and we found its organisational structures well-considered and effective. We judged the observations (made by external reviewers in 2006) that the School constituted a flagship of excellence within an academic institution of high international prestige to be largely justified. The following report will highlight aspects of the School's operation deserving of particular commendation, while also drawing attention to current deficiencies or areas of concern. A survey which, like this one, is called to address the whole range of a school's activities cannot possibly do full justice to any of them; in particular we can say less than we should have wished about the actual *quality* of research and the actual *delivery* of teaching. However, we believe that we have seen enough paperwork and consulted sufficiently with members of the School at all levels to present a reasonably comprehensive picture, and to give substance to our points of criticism. A summary of our key recommendations appears at the end of this document.

Academic Structures

It is clear that the integration of several different departments and research centres into a single School has resulted in considerable benefits, both for staff and for postgraduate students; we were impressed that the formation of the School was so evidently and widely seen as a positive development. In particular the smooth merging of Medieval and Modern History has brought a real broadening of horizons on both sides of the former divide. The appointment of experienced School-wide officers (Directors of Undergraduate Teaching, of Postgraduate Teaching, of Research etc, and especially of the School Administrator, with responsibility for the budget) is having the desired effect of energising and streamlining these various areas of activity, and of reducing unnecessary duplication of administration.

The creation of the School is also resulting in closer academic relations – developing research and teaching links – between colleagues and postgraduates in different departments, making the ideal of a community of scholars to a large extent a reality. At the same time, we quickly became aware that the low level of support staffing at school level (especially given the complexity of the operations of a multi-disciplinary School with a wide range of programmes and a split location) are putting current support staff under considerable strain and retarding the possibilities for the School's development. There is need in particular for a greater number of specialised administrative functions at school level.

The School also provides a highly effective umbrella for the various Research Centres, and promotes interdisciplinary links between them. Although the scope for interdisciplinary research and teaching within the School remains to be fully explored, staff are clearly aware of the potential. In this respect, the well-established Centre for Gender and Women's Studies [CGWS] provides a model. At the same time, it is worth emphasising that the convergence of departments based around distinct academic disciplines can only go so far before it damages the disciplinary identity so strongly valued by staff and students. In the case of a small department such as the History of Art, it will be important to retain the high profile provided by a chair after the retirement of Professor Stalley. Similarly, staff and students alike appreciate having their own departmental secretary, and would find it a matter of regret if the

school secretaries were to be reallocated into a single pool. Dr Maryann Valiulis acts as an important hub for the work of the CGWS and the school structure provides an important location. Given the faculty-wide reach of the discipline, however, a dedicated administrator remains essential to the running of its postgraduate programmes.

The intellectual and administrative coherence of the School is at present seriously compromised by the physical separation of its various constituents. This is especially true of the CGWS, but even within the Arts Building it would be highly desirable if the three departments were housed in adjoining spaces. Everyone is, of course, well aware of the practical difficulties attending any relocation, but every effort should be made to overcome them in the longer term: the entire rationale of a co-ordinated School requires closer juxtaposition of its several parts.

Easier to achieve should be closer lines of communication between the School, and college administration and the Faculty of Arts. From the documents provided, it is difficult to get a clear sense of the relationship of school to faculty structures and of links between committees at both levels. Staff on the ground seem unclear about college budgetary policies, especially in relation to ARAM; and there appeared to be little understanding of what the Faculty might expect or provide.

Research and Scholarly Activity

Most members of staff are research-active, and many of them are clearly producing scholarship that is internationally recognised. It is difficult, however, to compare overall quality levels with those in leading UK universities because we have not had the opportunity to read and assess a sample of outputs. In terms of quantity, some of the staff are prolific by any standards, but probably a majority are slower to produce than staff in UK institutions in general. This may certainly be attributed on the one hand to a heavier burden of teaching, and on the other to fewer opportunities for funded research leave.

We were disturbed that despite the issuance of new guidelines, there is still no regular entitlement to sabbatical leave, which is crucial for the planning and implementation of extended research objectives. Sabbatical leave needs to be better funded if staff,

and especially early career staff, are to reach their full potential as researchers. In developing research projects, some members have been enterprising in applying for and gaining funding from external sources such as the Getty Trust, but other sources, for example the EU, have not been fully exploited. There is also room for more strategic management of the School's research activity. At present the School's research committee does not seem to audit staff research, share news of national and international research initiatives, or scrutinise school research income. We suggest that this issue probably needs to be considered at a College level. The Research Support System might be developed in such a way that it can be exploited more effectively to produce the data needed to support the work of the Committee.

The research of individuals could be more systematically mentored, perhaps by means of an annual review to discuss plans and applications for funding. Workloads could be more effectively managed, perhaps by allocating weekly research days, or by offering lighter teaching in alternate semesters. Although the School seeks to protect new appointees by giving them less teaching, heavy teaching loads prevent the policy of research days being a full reality and it seems to be applied unevenly. The School might also create a repository of successful applications, and introduce a more formal system of peer review of external funding applications. The remit of the School's Research Committee and its relationship with faculty committees remain unclear. Better co-ordination is needed if these structures are to be of the best advantage for researchers and facilitate their search for funding. We experienced a widespread sense among staff of a lack of clarity over the College's strategy with regard to research (especially Humanities research, less tied to external grant income) and the priority it accords it.

The institution of the Long Room Hub is to be applauded, both for its potential to energise research in the Humanities, and for the practical help it promises to give individual researchers in providing information on funding opportunities and support both in the often time-consuming process of application and in the post-award phase. Every effort should be made by the College to seek philanthropic support for the Hub, and to ensure that its activities continue to flourish and expand. Given the concerns over the financial sustainability of the vastly ambitious plans for the Hub, we felt that a clearer sense of priorities might be required in due course; we would recommend, in

particular, that greater weight should be given to the funding of internal research leave (tied to specific projects). A focus on the particular strengths of the Library in English-language materials should not distract from its serious weaknesses in provision of foreign-language books and periodicals. Maintenance of research strengths in continental European history, and in Classics and History of Art, demands at least a minimum kit in that respect, and if possible some enhancement of acquisition, the more so as such resources are still much less readily available online.

The College is obviously right to aim to maintain its premier position in all aspects of Irish studies, but the School is notably successful in placing these in the wider context of research into British, European and non-European history. In the department of History of Art there is a good balance between Irish and non-Irish historical research. In History much excellent work is done in the clusters designated 'Irish' and 'European', though the department could do more to advertise its distinctive contribution to the study of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain, and to build on the remarkable library resources available to it in this area. There remains scope for consolidation, and if possible expansion, in this respect, as was recommended in the 2006 Research Review. Research in Classics covers a wide area, from early Greek archaeology and ancient history to Greek and Latin literature. Though greater focus on distinctive areas of strength might be possible with a larger staff base, this diversity of research interests is the essential prerequisite for Trinity's international profile in this area; it is worth emphasising also that 'world-leading' research is carried out in each of the three main areas of activity in Classics (literature, ancient history, and archaeology), and that the high-profile collaboration of Classics in Mediterranean and Near Eastern Studies includes the full range of Classics staff. The various Research Centres associated with the School all make significant contributions to its intellectual life, and act as a vital link between staff, postdoctoral fellows, postgraduates, and even final-year undergraduates. A model in this respect is TRIARC, which successfully fills a dual role as a semi-autonomous research institute and as an additional support for the teaching and research undertaken in the department of the History of Art. Independent of any one department, but making productive interdisciplinary connections with a number of departments, within and beyond the School, is CGWS. The panel was highly impressed by the quality of the research and the broad social engagement of this Centre, and we strongly urge the

College to continue its support for this unique resource after the retirement of its present director, but also to consider the appointment of one additional member of staff to allow for modest growth and maintenance of its high national and international profile. As with the Hub, it is essential for the future strength of the School's research activities for philanthropic funding to be found to sustain the CGWS and the other Centres in the long term. We understand that the Centres are subject to triennial review; we suggest consideration be given to some kind of annual report from each, and to a regular overview of the Centres as a whole, in their relation to each other.

The School contains an impressively high number of postdoctoral fellows, most of whom are constructively widening their academic experience and enhancing their CVs by combining research with teaching, and sometimes with other academic-related tasks such as the digitisation of archives. This can be a difficult balancing act, and there is always the danger – of which we certainly saw some evidence – that routine chores absorb too much of their time to the detriment of their career prospects. The working environment for postdoctoral fellows is sometimes attractive and spacious, as in TRIARC and in Classics, but more often dark and cramped.

The research culture of the School is positive, and there exists a programme of frequent, if not ideally regular guest lectures and research seminars. These are well attended by staff and postgraduates, although it was put to us that attendance might be improved further with a more efficient system of publicising them (cf. below).

Teaching and Learning

Undergraduate

There is clear evidence of excellent undergraduate teaching in all disciplines within the School. The documentation provided for the panel showed that the structure of the four-year degree, whether Single Honours or TSM, is logically organised, and offers a good but distinctive balance of topics. In the History of Art, for example, there is a greater emphasis on architecture, as well as on Irish art, than is usual in comparable courses in the UK; but these emphases are rightly grounded in the particular strengths of local resources. The balance between language work and non-language based work

in Classics seemed entirely appropriate, with an impressive additional focus on material culture; it is worth noting that the curriculum is delivered with a high level of efficiency (essential, given staffing levels), with very little choice of courses, and with cohorts of language students being gathered together into the smallest feasible number of groups. The range of fourth-year Special Subjects clearly corresponds to the research interests of the staff, and even at a lower level some of the undergraduate teaching can justifiably be described as “research-led”. As such, we thought that the Special Subjects might be subject to more regular and searching review, for which the CAPSL surveys could provide a trigger and also helpful supporting information.

The attractiveness of the syllabus was amply confirmed by our meetings with groups of students. We found them to be lively and articulate, and highly appreciative of the quality of teaching. Much of this is clearly inspirational, delivered by staff who remain intellectually engaged with, and enthusiastic about, their subjects. The students are also well aware of how accessible staff are and how generous with their time, and they value the sense of community engendered by friendly personal relations. Since they appreciate that class sizes in most other universities are considerably larger, many of them expressed the hope that there would not be an excessive increase of student numbers in the future. Similarly, they value the sense of identity provided by the existing departmental structure.

Students expressed discontent with some of the facilities and teaching materials. Seminar rooms in History and History of Art are dark and small. There is a shortage of printer terminals in the Library. More copies of standard textbooks are needed, particularly in History. It was suggested that course reading-lists might be made available to those responsible for book purchase. The course handbooks are uneven in quality. While there is evidence of a very productive and widespread use of WebCT in Classics, History students find this difficult to access. Students across the School have suggested that more support be provided in the junior freshman year for study skills: for instance, how to access electronic resources, or how to compile a bibliography. One practical suggestion volunteered by History students was that one of the existing support team be designated a Communications Officer, with the brief to trouble-shoot for students on points of detail (especially re TSMs) and to publicize school events more widely.

A particular problem is faced by History of Art in the period of transition from analogue to digital technology. At present the Slide Librarian is overwhelmed by the task of maintaining two simultaneous technologies, to the detriment of the teaching programme. There is a good case for funds to be made available for a limited period to enable the department to employ temporary assistants (postgraduate students?) to expedite the digitisation process by scanning images for the teaching collection, and inserting metadata into the database. In time the database will become an invaluable resource accessible throughout the College.

The College and School should be aware that the current range of degree classifications (about 60% Firsts and 2.1s) is low by UK standards. Although one might reasonably deplore any trend which encourages grade inflation for its own sake, Trinity students perform on a level that compares very well with that of their UK counterparts, and they may be unfairly disadvantaged in the employment market if the criteria for the higher classes of degree remain too severe. Staff could be encouraged to use a greater range of marks within the first-class category. On a related issue, some students expressed discontent at the failure of certain staff (notably in Classics) to return work punctually and to provide feedback, but this was a minority experience. The practice of providing financial assistance towards field trips in Classics and the History of Art, for example by means of the Stanford studentships, is to be applauded. Such trips can greatly enhance the quality of the students' learning experience.

The very success of the School's teaching programme carries with it the danger that the staff become overburdened with teaching and marking, to the detriment of their research. Staff-student ratios are higher than is usual in the UK, and should not be allowed to increase further if the College wishes its staff to produce internationally excellent research. On the other hand, it was also put to us that achievements in teaching can be undervalued when staff are being considered for promotion. One area of particular pressure is the History dissertation: though a showpiece of the department, it can lay heavy loads on modernists, given the pattern of student choices. It seems reasonable to counterbalance this by allowing lecturers to be rather more directive in the guidance they give to those embarking on theses.

Postgraduate

The creation of the role of Director of Postgraduate Teaching and Learning is warmly welcomed by students, and with it several of the cross-school initiatives. These include: the annual progress review, which is recognised as challenging yet rewarding; the CAPSL courses for postgraduates who teach; the programme of intellectual and social events that bind the students into a genuine community; and the practical and social benefits provided by the MPhil generic skills programme. There remain, however, teething problems with the last, and it has been constructively suggested that it should (at least in part) be held at the beginning of the academic year, as part of an induction course. Students also expressed particular appreciation for the energy invested in her role by the current Director.

Despite the enlightened programme of IRCHSS grants, many postgraduates face serious financial problems, and the opportunity to undertake high-quality research would be significantly improved with the award of even modest bursaries. The existence of a number of bursaries attached to Centres is to be welcomed, but more opportunities need to be provided for students who happen to be unaffiliated to a Centre. The support provided by the Trinity Foundation for research student travel is to be commended.

Students are largely satisfied with the quality of supervision by the academic staff, though here too some comment was made about delays in return of work. Students are appreciative of the role played by subject librarians in safeguarding essential resources such as the *Corpus Christianorum*. They are aware of the pressure on study spaces in the Library, and would very much welcome the development of the 1937 Reading Room (where the facilities are currently deficient) as a postgraduate resource centre for the Arts and Humanities. The Reading Room is regarded as an important supplement to the library, because it allows for extended study time. They note that the college websites needed to be updated more regularly and co-ordinated with those of the School when providing the same information. MPhil students have experienced problems in communicating with the Graduate Studies office, and in using the electronic application process. They found that the contact details provided on the website were out of date, and encountered difficulties in processing payments.

The MPhil course on Reformation and Enlightenment gives cause for concern. Though several members of staff are strongly committed to retaining and developing it, they have experienced problems with their efforts to change the title (something like 'Early Modern Cultural History' would be more appropriate today) and reframe the content. Apparently a change of title will require a new course proposal which has potential financial implications for the School, as the existing course has the status of a core course. A simple change in title could resolve most of the recruitment issues with this course.

There are wider concerns about recruitment too. We encountered complaints about the slow and inefficient processing of applications by the Graduate Studies office. Moreover, staff sense a lack of clarity about the College's strategy regarding the recruitment of postgraduates from abroad, and about the levels of fees. In particular, they feel a disincentive to recruit because the School receives such little financial benefit in relation to the work involved. With respect to international students taking taught courses there remain issues about the timing of examinations.

The number of postgraduates, at both MPhil and doctoral level, is impressively large by the standards of most UK universities, and the group makes an important contribution to the intellectual vibrancy of the School. As a result, however, many staff have to undertake an unacceptably large amount of supervision. Numbers should be carefully monitored, and individual workloads should not be allowed to become excessive.

Service to the College and Society

Particularly to be applauded in this area are the various extra-mural courses offered by the School. These have been extraordinarily successful over the past five years, and more support should be given from the centre to provide an incentive for sustaining and developing them. The courses provide valuable additional income streams for the individual departments (often used for core academic support) which deserve to retain the full financial benefit from them. The courses bring further benefit to the School and College by reaching out to the wider community. They can also act as a feeder for undergraduate and postgraduate courses.

Some of the Centres, notably CGWS but also TRIARC, likewise play an important role in engaging with the wider community and in developing projects of social relevance. Several members of the School's academic staff are highly valued within the College for their experience and sense of corporate responsibility, and serve on a range of College committees. Several members also play prominent roles in the wider cultural and intellectual life of Dublin and Ireland through the media (newspapers, radio, television etc) and membership of learned societies.

Human Resources

Many of the staff, support as well as academic, are overstretched, and the great majority clearly perform their responsibilities with selflessness and dedication. The Director of Postgraduate Teaching and Learning, with her multifarious tasks, clearly needs more support. Staff under particular pressure are those junior lecturers whose appointments are not permanent, and who feel constantly under threat of the termination of their contracts. These include young academics of enormous promise who ought to represent the College's future. The issue exists throughout the School; but represents a particular concern at present for those modern historians who may bear extra burdens through the allocation of theses (cf. above). It is in the College's own long-term interest to maintain a good balance between senior and junior staff in the School. The existing Start-Up Fund for new lecturers is to be commended, and should be maintained at least at its current level. It was also represented to us that M.Phil. convenors did not feel fully supported, and would appreciate some scope for trade-offs with undergraduate teaching.

Recommendations

- In the light of the College's strategy to increase postgraduate numbers, it is recommended that staffing levels should be reviewed in areas where staff are currently particularly overloaded (CGWS, Classics, History of Art, 19-20C Irish and British history)
- That staff workloads be reviewed to ensure an even balance of (undergraduate and postgraduate) teaching and to allow for appropriate levels of research activity associated with a research-intensive university. Best practice would include the institution of research days free of teaching and a cycle of

sabbaticals of at least one term every four years for all research-active staff. We recommend a more formal mentoring system for probationary staff.

- That the Centre for Gender and Women's Studies be further supported by the School and College, given the highly valued combination of resources and research it produces. It is recommended that another academic position be made available to support the current Director as a matter of urgency, and that the successor to the current Director be sought from any relevant discipline rather than necessarily from History
- That the School develop a research strategy and funding plan which allows for strategic focus and long-term calculations. In addition, EU funding opportunities could be more fully exploited.
- The Long Room Hub is an important initiative, but there remain concerns over sustainability and focus. It is suggested that this facility could do more to encourage internal research leave and grant support as well as steering interdisciplinary research.
- Language teaching (ancient and modern), which is currently a strength, requires continued support and maintenance. This provision is regarded as essential to graduate study and further recruitment. Foreign-language accessions by the Library should be enhanced as far as possible.
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- There is a need for consistency across the School in the practice of returning coursework at undergraduate and postgraduate levels
- The panel suggests that the School consider introduction of peer observation as a way of sharing good practice in teaching and learning, ensuring that it is not directly related to appraisal or promotion structures.
- That more resources be made available to support staffing and reflect the inevitably more complex structure of a multi-disciplinary School.
- Maintenance of the website at College and School levels requires some review: there needs to be clarification about where responsibility to maintain and update information lies. Appointment of a Communications Officer from among existing staff could help to deliver this, as well as to field student queries about course details and enhance the profile of school events.
- That the university's course-approval process be rendered less unwieldy, and that more incentives to initiate new postgraduate programmes be provided.

- The College's ARAM model needs to be sensitive to the specific Arts context, and its processes need to be more clearly outlined to staff.

Professor Robert Evans, University of Oxford

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21 May 2009

School of Histories and Humanities
Response to the Quality Review Report

Introduction

The School welcomes the many positive comments made in the review, not least the conclusion that the ‘observations (made by external reviewers in 2006) that the School constituted a flagship of excellence within an academic institution of high international prestige to be largely justified’. In retrospect it is clear that in three short days it was difficult for the reviewers to engage with all the activities of a complex multi-disciplinary school. Individual disciplines would have welcomed more opportunity to discuss their own activities with the review team and to receive advice on such matters as undergraduate and masters programmes. It was also unfortunate that the reviewers had few opportunities to learn about the situation in Ireland as a whole: as the team was drawn from the UK, there was an implicit assumption that British universities provided the benchmark, and this was especially the case in regard to research where the operation of the RAE seems to have governed many of their comments. The reviewers make the point that they were not in a position to comment on the *quality* of the School’s research achievements. This is understandable given the range and quantity of the outputs, but it should be noted that a wide range of recent publications was made available to the team during their visit. The lack of comment about the ‘actual *delivery* of teaching’ is more puzzling. The self assessment document, and in particular the individual programme templates that the School was required to complete, provided plenty of relevant information in advance of the visit and further information was given during the course of interviews. Access was given to Web CT and the other online resources that now play a critical role in the delivery of the School’s courses; it is unfortunate that the reviewers did not have an opportunity to engage with this material. The School would have liked to have seen more recognition of its strategy in regard to non EU recruitment, not least the huge effort that has been taken in establishing the Semester Start-Up programme which has boosted recruitment from the USA. Nor is there any comment on the remarkable success of the School in raising philanthropic funds (in excess of €8 million). The report contains no observations on the School’s plans for future development, which would have been of value to the School’s Executive Committee.

Academic Structures

The School's Executive Committee is pleased that the reviewers were impressed with the organisation and running of the School, and particularly drew attention to the positive manner in which the staff had reacted to the way it has developed over the course of four years. It was good to note that the review team appreciated the fact that 'closer academic relations' have helped to make 'the ideal of a community of scholars to a large extent a reality'.

The reviewers rightly noted, however, that 'the low level of support staffing' at School level was a serious weakness. Since the review was completed, this problem has been exacerbated by the moratorium which has deprived the school of its part-time executive officer. This threatens to overstretch the School administrator and other School officers still further and to jeopardise many of the successes of the School, most notably the re-organisation of postgraduate studies where a highly effective system of reviews and progress reports has been introduced.

The reviewers also drew attention to one of the fundamental issues for multi-disciplinary Schools – the extent to which 'the convergence of departments' should take place before it 'damages the disciplinary identity so strongly valued by staff and students'. The School supports the recommendations (a) that executive officers must be maintained at discipline level and (b) that academic leadership should be maintained in the individual disciplines: this is a particular concern in History of Art where the reviewers stress the need to 'retain the high profile provided by a chair' following the retirement of the present incumbent.

Research and Scholarly Activity

Many of the comments in this section of the review are based on UK procedures which have developed in response to the RAE. For example, the auditing of staff research is not currently within the remit of the School's own Research Committee and, as the reviewers point out, changes in this regard are an issue for College.

The School feels that the reviewers underestimated the proportion of staff that is research active. The overwhelming majority (94%) of the academic staff are research active by current Trinity criteria, an impressive figure. Given the time available, the School appreciates that the reviewers found it difficult to reach any overall assessment on quality, but it should be noted that the external review of Research in the Arts and Social Sciences (2006) was extremely positive in this regard. The reviewers were

presented with complete lists of staff publications and every effort was made to supply the reviewers with the materials they needed; this included a wide selection of recent publications. It is difficult to know on what basis the reviewers came to the conclusion that ‘probably a majority are slower to produce than staff in UK institutions’. However the School notes that the reviewers were sympathetic to the particular pressures placed on staff in TCD, noting ‘the heavier burden of teaching’ and ‘fewer opportunities for research leave’.

Contrary to the impression created in the review, the School has a well established policy on sabbatical leave which requires each discipline to produce a rota in which all members of staff have equal opportunities. Within the smaller departments, however, it is difficult to organise research leave without funding for replacement teaching and the School thus welcomes the reviewers’ recommendation that some means of providing regular, *funded* sabbatical leave should be established. However, it is difficult to see how this can be accommodated within existing financial frameworks. The School would welcome College guidance in this matter.

The School supports the suggestion of a weekly research day for each member of staff, and wherever possible the School administrator endeavours to arrange this. However, the constraints of the timetable mean that in many instances this is not a practical proposition.

The College should be aware that the School’s Research Committee has met with regularity over the course of the four years of the School’s existence (the minutes of meeting were made available to the reviewers) and that it has indeed developed research strategies, albeit not as formal or precise as those required under the RAE. The success of the School in securing both project and philanthropic funding would not have occurred without a massive strategic effort on the part of the staff concerned. Moreover, the research committee has worked hard to bring EU funding opportunities to the attention of the School and it has been a regular item on the agenda of School Committee meetings. The School accepts the need to build on its existing successes in the area of EU funding, especially under FP7, and it will maintain its policy of encouraging staff to develop the type of networks that form the basis of successful applications.

There is no doubt that it would be useful if each member of staff prepared a research plan (updated each year) to assist the Research Committee in developing its priorities, through close auditing, complete with an annual review of each member of staff, is

not within the remit of the research committee. The School would be reluctant to embark on any approach which was over directional or excessively 'managerial'. The success of the School in recent years has been based on the initiative and independence of individuals, rather than 'top-down' management. The School accepts the point, however, that there is scope for mentoring younger members of staff and for establishing a more formal system of peer review of external funding applications. The reviewers comment on a lack of clarity in the relationship between the School and the faculty (a 'lack of coordination') and in this regard the School would welcome the establishment of a faculty research committee, drawing directors of research together on a regular basis.

The School is happy to endorse the many positive comments about the Long Room Hub.

With regard to the Library the School shares the reviewers concerns about the weaknesses in the area of foreign language books and periodicals. The Review does not however mention a number of other serious issues: these include the need to sustain the existing arrangements on the Research floor of the Berkeley and the impending removal of subject librarians. There is also widespread concern about the lack of consultation between the Library and its academic users following the demise of the Library Users' Committee.

The review notes the 'remarkable library resources' in the area of British history in the eighteenth and nineteenth century and the need to develop these further. These resources underline the importance of teaching positions in this area, and the urgent need to fill the vacant lectureship in nineteenth century history.

The School welcomes the many positive comments made about its various research centres and the need to ensure that they are supported in the future. The School fully endorses the recommendations made with regard to the CGWS and welcomes the fact that the reviewers regarded these as critical issues. The School supports the recommendation that each centre should produce an annual report, on the understanding that these are short reports and not excessively bureaucratic. The Research Committee has already instituted a rolling system of verbal reports and plans to devote specific meetings each year to the individual centres.

The School notes the suggestion that guest lectures should be arranged with greater frequency and regularity in order to maintain a healthy research culture. There is

certainly an aspiration to do this but in contrast to universities in the UK such events in Trinity demand more time and more resources.

Teaching and Learning Undergraduate

The School welcomes the reviewers' observation that 'there is clear evidence of excellent undergraduate teaching in all disciplines within the School'. The School also welcomes the reviewers' recognition that fourth year special subjects clearly correspond to the research interests of staff and that 'even at a lower level some of the undergraduate teaching can justifiably be described as research-led'. We also welcome the reviewers' comments that much of the teaching 'is clearly inspirational, delivered by staff who remain intellectually engaged with, and enthusiastic about, their subjects.'

The School accepts the need for more regular review of Special Subjects but feels that for small group teaching at Sophister level there is a need to design more appropriate evaluation procedures than those currently provided by CAPSL.

The School endorses the reviewers' comments relating to the inadequacy of some facilities including small, dark seminar rooms in both History and History of Art and the lack of printer terminals in the Library.

The School already provides on-going support for students in relation to study skills and regularly draws their attention to the courses being run by College. The School does not support the suggestion that 'one of the existing support team be designated a Communications Officer, with the brief to trouble-shoot for students on points of detail'. Given that there are eleven undergraduate degree programmes within the School, student enquiries about particular courses must remain with individual disciplines.

The School concurs with the reviewers' opinion that the transition to digital technology in History of Art is a problematic area and that the extensive slide collection urgently requires systematic scanning and cataloguing. The reviewers rightly point out the potential value of this collection as a College-wide resource and the School would wish to emphasise the need for an accurate, searchable online catalogue.

The School notes the reviewers comments that the 'current range of degree classifications (about 60% Firsts and 2.1s) is low by UK standards'. This situation has not been the subject of criticism from external examiners and while there might be a

case for employing a greater range of marks in the first-class category, the School is determined to maintain existing standards and not to succumb to grade inflation. In relation to the criticism about the slow return of work, this issue has already been addressed at departmental level.

The School welcomes the reviewers' recognition of the educational value of the study visits organised on a regular basis by various disciplines within the School. This is one of many extra commitments that staff make towards teaching, and the School accepts the reviewers' conclusion that they are becoming overburdened, to the detriment of their research.

Teaching and Learning Postgraduate

The School is proud of its achievements in the area of postgraduate teaching and learning and is delighted that the reviewers recognised the importance of the role occupied by the postgraduate director. Given the number of postgraduate students in the School (124 in 2008-9), this has become a time consuming and arduous position. The School is extremely concerned that, with the imposition of the current moratorium, and the loss of the School's Executive Officer, some of these achievements might be jeopardized.

The School welcomes the support it received from the reviewers for its initiative with regard to the Generic Skills course and values their constructive advice which is already being acted on. It acknowledges that there have been teething problems with the course but is seeking to rectify these in the forthcoming year.

The School shares the concern expressed about the serious financial problems faced by many postgraduate students. In the coming year the School intends to explore new avenues of philanthropic funding, one aim of which will be to increase the number of scholarships available to postgraduates within the School.

We note the reviewers' comments that 'students are appreciative of the role played by subject librarians in safeguarding essential resources' and the School thus views with alarm the impending removal of dedicated subject librarians. The School endorses the reviewers' comments that there should be additional study space available to postgraduate students and that this should be available outside of normal library hours.

The School has sought advice from Graduate Studies on several occasions about the possibility of changing the name of its M.Phil in Reformation and Enlightenment Studies. As the reviewers discovered, this would seem to require the preparation of a completely new M.Phil proposal which has implications for its status as a core course. The School accepts the reviewers' opinion that the system is too inflexible. It is clear that the management of such issues should encourage modifications and improvements to courses rather than hinder them.

The School would welcome improvements in the processing of postgraduate applications. It recognises that, with the introduction of the new PAC system, significant improvements have taken place in relation to M.Phil applications.

The School acknowledges the point made by the reviewers that the high proportion of postgraduate students within the School has resulted in 'an unacceptably large amount of supervision' with serious repercussions for workloads. Given current resources and College financial structures, however, it is not clear how this issue can be resolved.

The School has agreed that five research students should, in normal circumstances, be regarded as a maximum for any one supervisor, but it is understandably reluctant to turn away well qualified candidates.

Service to the College and Society

The School particularly welcomes the reviewers' praise for its extramural courses and their observation that College should provide more support and incentive for sustaining and developing these. There is concern that the development of these initiatives may be jeopardized (unintentionally) by the College's revised funding formulae; without the existing incentives they would not have grown as they have.

The School also welcomes the reviewers' acknowledgment of the important role played by some of its centres 'in engaging with the wider community and in developing projects of social relevance' and of the role played by many members of the School in the life of College and in the wider community.

Human Resources

The School welcomes the comments made by the reviewers with regard to human resources. The School is pleased that the reviewers recognised that 'the great majority (of staff) clearly perform their responsibilities with selflessness and dedication' and as

a consequence many of them are severely overstretched. With regard to M.Phil convenors, the School accepts that there is a need for greater recognition of their role and responsibilities.

Recommendations

Bullet 1

The School strongly endorses the recommendation that, in the light of College's strategy to increase postgraduate numbers, staffing levels should be increased in areas of high demand. This has become a serious problem given the moratorium which has prevented the filling of the vacant position in 19th century Irish history – one of the areas of highest demand for postgraduate research.

Bullet 2

The School is itself concerned about the current balance between teaching and research, in particular the effect of the inroads into research time that have arisen as result of administrative and teaching demands. Wherever possible the School administrator endeavours to arrange for one day free of teaching each week, but the constraints of the timetable mean that this is rarely possible. The School is committed to the principle of sabbatical leave of one semester every four years. Last year the School instituted an informal system of mentoring for new members of staff. The School's Executive Committee has agreed that in future the Head of School should take responsibility for ensuring that appropriate mentoring arrangements are in place for each new member of staff.

Bullet 3

The School strongly endorses the recommendation that the Centre for Gender and Women's Studies should be given additional support and that another academic position be created as soon as possible. This will, however, be dependent on the identification of new income streams. The appointment of the director of the Centre has never been tied to one particular discipline. This is a practice the School would wish to maintain.

Bullet 4

The School accepts some, but not all, the recommendations in this bullet. Had the reviewers had more time to discuss research with senior members of the School, we believe their suggestions might have had a different emphasis.

The College should be aware that the School's Research Committee has met with regularity over the course of the four years since the School was formed (the minutes of meetings were made available to the reviewers) and that it has indeed developed research strategies, albeit not as formal or precise as those required under the RAE. The success of the School in securing both project and philanthropic funding would not have occurred without a massive strategic effort on the part of the staff concerned. Moreover, the Research Committee has worked hard to bring EU funding opportunities to the attention of the School and it has been a regular item on the agenda of School Committee meetings.

In current conditions it is hard to see how the Research Committee could produce a 'funding plan' that was anything more than aspirational. The School has already introduced clear policies in sabbatical leave, but it is not willing to privilege one research area over another in this regard.

The School accepts the need to build on its existing successes in the area of EU funding and to make maximum use of the opportunities available under FP7. It will maintain its policy of encouraging staff to develop the type of networks that form the basis of successful applications. With this in mind the School is planning a special day long meeting for all academic staff in September devoted to the subject of research applications.

The School also believes that it would be useful if each member of staff prepared a research plan (updated each year) to assist the Research Committee in developing its priorities.

The School would also welcome the establishment of a Faculty-based research committee on which directors of research would serve. (Unlike UGT&L and PGT&L, there are no College committees for directors of research).

Bullet 5

The School agrees that the sustainability of the Hub is vital to its long term interests. The funding of sabbaticals for members of the TCD staff, however, is not currently a priority for the Hub, though the provision of work space and facilities will be a major asset and the School will look to the Hub for guidance in seeking external support grants. The School regrets that, with the demise of the Berkeley fellowships, there is no longer any College based support for sabbatical leave.

The School welcomes the role of the Hub as a facilitator and coordinator of interdisciplinary research, but would not accept a situation in which the Hub is

deemed to be 'steering' the research of the School. The initiative for research should come from individual Schools, with the Hub acting as facilitator.

Bullet 6

The School endorses the recommendation that provision for language teaching should be maintained and enhanced.

The School also shares the reviewers concerns about the need to boost the level of foreign language acquisition in the Library. It recommends the creation of a separate funding stream for purchasing non English language, non copyright materials. While improvements in this area will depend on an increase in the accessions budget, the School would nonetheless welcome a greater responsiveness on the part of the Library to its particular needs. It regards the abolition of the Library Users Committee as a disaster and it is alarmed by the impending removal of dedicated subject librarians. There is major concern about the way in which library policy is now being conducted without consultation with its academic users.

Bullet 7

The School accepts that CAPSL surveys should be applied consistently to undergraduate courses. However, the School is not satisfied with the current survey methods employed and the disruptions that this brings to lectures. It fails to understand why an online system has not been introduced and tested long before now. The School also feels that for courses based on small group teaching, prevalent at Sophister level, there is a need to design more appropriate evaluation procedures.

Bullet 8

The School accepts that coursework should be returned as promptly as possible and that consistency across the School is desirable. However, the marking of coursework is resource dependent and the setting of precise targets will inevitably vary according to the staff available in each discipline.

Bullet 9

The School agrees that the discussion of shared experience is beneficial and as such has already conducted several seminars on aspects of undergraduate teaching which were well attended both by academic staff and by teaching assistants. However it would not be prepared to embark on a process of 'peer observation'. Quite apart from the fact that such a scheme would undoubtedly be regarded as a form of appraisal and assessment, it would involve senior staff in an additional time-consuming activity.

Bullet 10

The School fully endorses this recommendation. With the imposition of the current moratorium there is no longer an executive officer to support School officers and both the School administrator and the executive officers at discipline level are seriously over stretched (it should be noted that most of the executive officers are part time). With the loss of executive energy at the centre, there is a very serious danger that the School will fragment and that the achievements of the past four years will be lost.

Bullet 11

The School accepts that a vibrant and well constructed web site is essential and will review this area as a matter of priority. The websites of individual disciplines are currently undergoing major revision and every effort will be made to ensure that information is accurate and up-to-date. As the reviewers point out, the College also needs to ensure that its own pages are updated when Schools submit amendments and updates about their own particular activities.

The Schools accepts that there is a need to maintain the profile of School events but feels that the reviewers may not have appreciated the amount of work that has taken place in this context – as for example with the regular appearance of the School newsletter. Preparation of the newsletter and related tasks has been the responsibility of the School executive officer (position currently vacant under the moratorium). The School is not convinced that the appointment of a dedicated ‘Communications Officer’ would improve the situation. Given that there are eleven undergraduate degree programmes within the School, student enquiries about particular courses must remain with individual disciplines.

Bullet 12

The School endorses this recommendation. In view of the current economic situation, the opportunity to modify programmes in a flexible and speedy way is essential. The School is extremely concerned about current proposals to incorporate income from self funding postgraduate courses into the ARAM model. It is convinced that this will prejudice the introduction of new courses and may affect the viability of existing ones.

Bullet 13

The School endorses this recommendation. It is encouraged by recent discussions within College in regard (for example) to making the research proxies more relevant to specific disciplines.

REVIEW OF SCHOOL OF HISTORIES AND HUMANITIES
Response to External Assessors' Report
Deans' Response

As this is one of the first reviews of a multidisciplinary School I am pleased to note the comment from the reviewers 'that the integration of several different departments and research centres into a single School has resulted in considerable benefits, both for staff and for postgraduate students'. However, in common with the reviewers of the School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies the report points to the need for more specialized administrative functions at school level.

I expect that as the policy on leave of absence becomes embedded the outcomes will be more evident and I note that College is developing a policy on mentoring. Similarly the Faculty is currently developing a policy on academic workloads.

Good practice would indicate that research centres should report annually to School Executives and address, where appropriate, their interaction with each other and the School in general. It is expected that the provision of additional space in Phoenix House will improve facilities for research staff.

I support the mandatory evaluation of undergraduate modules but I think there should be more interaction between Schools and CAPSL on the mode and context of the evaluation mechanism.

The School, like others in the Faculty, would benefit from increased staffing. However, the current economic climate presents serious challenges to this aspiration. Continued interaction with the Trinity Foundation to identify philanthropic funding opportunities will be important. The measures of research activity to be used in the resource planning model will be more appropriate to the Arts context and the new resource allocation model, with five-year planning, should be more transparent.

Professor Michael Marsh
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