



**PROVOST'S REPORT TO COUNCIL ON
THE REVIEW OF THE
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIAL POLICY**

1. INTRODUCTION

This report presents the outcome of a School review exercise undertaken by Trinity College Dublin in relation to its School of Social Work and Social Policy. An external peer review visitation was conducted on the 11th to 13th of April, 2007 by Professor Jonathan Bradshaw, University of York, Professor John Carpenter, University of Bristol and Ms Sylvia Langford Director General, Office of the Minister for Children. During the site visit the reviewers met with all staff of the School, staff of cognate disciplines, representatives of undergraduate and postgraduate students and research fellows in the School, and senior officers of the College.

The report is based on (i) feedback from the external reviewers, received on the 10th May, 2007, (ii) a submission from the School of Social Work and Social Policy received on the 12th July, 2007.

The main purpose of the School review exercise 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; and (b) to ensure that quality and standards in teaching, research and administration are being maintained and enhanced, and that any areas of concern in this regard are identified and addressed within an eighteen-month timescale, having regard to the resources available. This review process ensures that each academic School or Discipline in College is reviewed systematically once every seven years.

2. OVERVIEW OF THE SCHOOL

2.1 Aims and Objectives of the School

The School of Social Work and Social Policy, through its teaching and research, addresses many of the challenges of social development and social inclusion facing Irish Society. It aims to make a major contribution to building understanding and capacity in its area of expertise nationally. It also seeks to contribute to international debates and understanding in relevant forums.

- (i) In its research and teaching, it seeks to contribute to building the national knowledge base about how to respond more effectively to the social questions of our day, especially in its areas of particular strength. The range of disciplines and strengths present in the School creates rich opportunities for synergies and collaborative 'joined up' thinking about complex multi-dimensional issues.
- (ii) Through high quality research, teaching and continuing professional development, the school seeks to have scientific, policy and service level impact. It sets out to equip policy and service level personnel in the public and non-government organisation sectors with the knowledge, skills and values to achieve more effective approaches to fostering social development and combating social exclusion.
- (iii) It seeks to cultivate a capacity for effective investigation, analysis and intervention across the spectrum of responses to social need, from developing high level policy to serving marginalised groups and troubled individuals.

- (iv) It seeks to have active working links with fellow researchers in relevant institutions in Ireland and abroad, and also with what it sees as its key stakeholders in the public and non-governmental sectors.

2.2 Programmes to which the School provides teaching

Key programmes (undergraduate)

- Bachelor in Social Studies (Social Work)
- B.A. (Mod.) in Sociology and Social Policy
- Diploma in Addiction Studies
- Modules in social policy are offered to students in Economic and Social Studies, and in TSM Sociology.

Postgraduate (taught)

- M.Sc. in Applied Social Research
- M.Sc. in Drug and Alcohol Policy
- Masters in Social Work
- Postgraduate Diploma in Child Protection and Welfare
- M.Sc. in Child Protection and Welfare.

The School also admits students to read for the research degrees of M.Litt. and Ph.D.

2.3 Research

The School's key areas of research strength are

- Children: welfare and social development
- Drug and alcohol policy.

Ageing, intellectual disability and immigration are emerging as new areas of strength for the School. Individual staff research interests also include crime, family policies, assisted reproduction, health policy, the history of social policy, housing and homelessness, lone parents, poverty, and pensions and social security.

2.4 Summary Statistical Profile of the School for the Academic Year 2005-2006¹

Full-time staff FTE	Part-time staff FTE	Undergraduate FTE	Postgraduate FTE	Department Staff:Student Ratio	Faculty Staff:Student Ratio
15.5	7.59	138.75	107.29	11	21

¹ Figures approved by Council at its meeting on 6th December 2006

2.5 Accommodation and Facilities (Physical Resources)

The constituent parts of the School are located across a number of sites in the College:

• Arts Building	• Pearse Street
• College Green	• 3-4 Foster Place
• Goldsmith Hall	• 30 Anglesea Street.

3. EXTERNAL PEER REVIEW REPORT

SUMMARY OF REPORT

The overall impression of the reviewers is that, in the two years since its creation, the School, is *“already a viable structure with considerable promise.”* They observe that *“it has striven to respond to the challenges of the College’s Strategic Plan, increasing its doctoral students rapidly, increasing its external research income in a short time-frame and reducing its deficit on the Academic Resource Allocation Model (ARAM)...”* They note that the *“combination of a core of well-established undergraduate and postgraduate courses and associated research units, focusing on different themes has proven successful elsewhere. Some of these resonate well with the Strategic Plan – ageing, immigration, disability. Others build on existing strengths.”* The reviewers consider that the School has *“a good national reputation and a developing international reputation and makes an important contribution to Trinity’s mission of service to the community, accessibility to mature and non ‘traditional students’ and generally to Irish society.”* From the organisational point of view the Report recognises that *“the School is still developing its processes and procedures and is mainly well aware of the challenges it faces.”* Overall, the reviewers were *“impressed by the level of motivation of the staff, the excellence of the students and the leadership of the Head of School.”*

3.1 TEACHING AND LEARNING

Having met with students from all programmes offered by the School, the reviewers comment on the excellence of the students and their very positive assessment of the quality of the teaching and the support received from their tutors, views which, they note, were confirmed by the reports of professional review panels and external examiners.

With regard to the professionally accredited programmes in social work - the Bachelor in Social Studies and the Masters in Social Work - of particular interest to the reviewers were the opportunities for students to undertake practice placements abroad and the recruitment of external examiners from North America - *“given the internationalisation of social work, this is to be commended.”* The requirement for students on the Masters in Social Work programme to undertake empirical research for their dissertation is also favourably commented upon. The reviewers express some reservations about the high staff workload on the Bachelor in Social Studies arising from a *“very high level of direct teaching and support to students both in College and while on practice placement,”* and suggest that the number of visits to students on placement might be reduced from three to two in order to allow for more staff research time.

The one-year undergraduate Diploma in Addiction Studies, which caters for many non-traditional students, and the two-year part-time Masters in Drugs and Alcohol Policy were also highly spoken of by students who regarded the courses as equipping them well for future and better employment in the social services. The multi-professional intake of students and very positive assessments by external examiners are remarked upon in relation to the Post Graduate Diploma / MSc in Child Protection and Welfare, and the reviewers’ assessment is that it *“undoubtedly makes a valuable contribution to child protection in Ireland.”*

Commenting on the programmes offered in social policy, the reviewers consider that the M.Sc in Applied Social Research represents a *“very considerable coup for the School...,”* generating a core of highly-trained social researchers for Ireland as well as a pool of students who proceed to do doctorates in the School. However, while acknowledging that the programme is clearly of *“very good quality,”* the reviewers urge greater integration with the rest of the work of the School, for example through providing more of the teaching by staff in-house. They suggest that the research component of the Masters in Drugs and Alcohol Policy could be drawn from this programme instead of being separately taught, and in relation to teaching they suggest that there is scope *“for some sharing of this teaching”* thereby achieving *“economies of scale across the School – and indeed possibly the College.”*

In relation to the B.A. (Mod) in Sociology and Social Policy, the reviewers endorse the recommendation made by previous reviewers that, despite its *“relatively small numbers, problems of attrition, and the demands of teaching the subject with a relatively small staff base,”* the School should retain this programme on account of its *“strategic importance leading to masters and doctoral study; it attracts non-standard entry (hence the attrition); it is popular with students; and maintains a clear focus for the subject of social policy in Trinity in the absence of a Professor in the subject.”* Finally the reviewers point to potential problems

ahead for the School in terms of teaching provision if the implementation of the Bologna Process should lead to demand for more courses or programmes in the area of social policy.

3.2 RESEARCH

The reviewers report that the School is developing rapidly from “a fairly low base” in terms of research. They endorse the decision taken in forming the new School to combine existing research centres with the former department offering the teaching programmes. They consider that “*the Centres have contributed to the research strengths of the school,*” and that “*there is a good mix of research themes represented in the Centres and good links and synergies are developing.*” The School has also been successful in exploiting funding opportunities. They believe that “*it is quite appropriate for the School to have developed a broad portfolio of research interests rather than to have focussed on one or two, as is common in most disciplines.*” From the research management perspective, however, the reviewers perceive the various components as continuing to function “*mainly in their separate silos.*” They remark that research in the School “*reflects the fact that the School is a number of parts and not a whole, a lot of pockets of research within the parts with no whole-of-school research strategy or action plan.*” For the purposes of comparison, the reviewers estimate the School’s research performance over the last few years would probably be awarded a grade ‘4’ in the UK Research Assessment Exercise rating system, defined as “*quality that equates to attainable levels of national excellence in virtually all of the research activity submitted, showing some evidence of international excellence.*” They go on to express the view that “*this would be very creditable at this early stage of the School’s development.*”

Against this background, the reviewers describe the research and publication activity of lecturing staff as “mixed,” observing that some staff have excellent publication records while others have found it difficult to find the space to develop their research profiles. The reviewers consider that the School can improve its research performance, but note that to achieve this “*it needs to develop procedures for monitoring individual’s research performance and helping staff to develop research plans.*” They point to good examples of mentoring the development of research among the newer members of staff but comment that this “*seems to be rather uneven.*” In this context the reviewers perceive “*a lack of clarity between the Research Director and Head of School’s role in encouraging research and ensuring that performance review takes place,*” and suggest too that “*a more formal relationship between the College Research and Innovation office and Research Director*” would be of benefit. A further suggestion for enhancing publication output is to put in place a system of research leave.

The reviewers note that there has been a substantial increase in the number of research students since the School was established, and a significant increase in the number supported by studentships, although “*it would appear that the supervisory and support systems for students had not developed commensurately...*”. In their meeting with the reviewers, students had expressed a wish for “*much greater clarity about the respective roles of the supervisor and the student,*” and the Report proposes that this could be addressed in the form of learning agreements which could be reviewed annually. The provision of a postgraduate handbook is recommended as a priority. The reviewers also note that for the growth in the number of research students to continue there will need to be an increase in the number of staff trained and experienced in the supervision of research students. Citing the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) requirement for Ph.D. students to attend courses in research methods, it is suggested that similar supports would enhance the learning of research students in the School and might attract more social workers to undertake study at doctoral level.

Under the heading of service to society at large, the reviewers applaud the School’s aim of making a major contribution to increasing understanding of social development and social inclusion in Irish society and to building capacity to deal with these issues, and they attest to having encountered “*numerous examples of the School’s success in this respect.*” The engagement of individual members of staff with a wide range of professional, academic and public bodies, as advisors, assessors and consultants, and their capacity to advise government and national organisations is also remarked upon, and the reviewers consider the School should be commended for “*its contribution to Irish Society and to the College.*”

The reviewers also provided detailed comment on the associated research units individually.

3.2.1 Children's Research Centre

The reviewers consider that the Children's Research Centre "*is extremely well established with strong links to both the Schools of Social Work and Social Policy and Psychology. The Centre has a large staff and has carried out many significant research and evaluation projects.*" The reviewers state that the centre "*is internationally excellent in a field of policy research in which Ireland is becoming internationally excellent.*" The reviewers welcome the creation of the post of a Policy Officer which will "*enhance the centre's impact,*" and consider that "*it is of mutual benefit that School staff associate their research with the Centre and the Director of the Centre and other staff contribute to some teaching and supervision in the School.*" The reviewers consider the Centre's association "*with the internationally acclaimed 'Growing Up in Ireland' survey is of great importance.*"

3.2.2 International Institute for Intellectual Disability

The reviewers consider the International Institute for Intellectual Disability to be of great value stating that it is "*an extraordinarily innovative development. It is a credit to the College for the imagination to include the Certificate in Contemporary Living Course and much credit is due to the support it receives from the School of Social Work and Social Policy, and in various ways from other Schools such as those of Education, Nursing and Law.*" They commend the Institute for the three EU Marie Curie awards it has received, which has enabled the visits of international scholars to the School. The challenge pointed to in the Report is now to "*build a matching reputation for academic rigour*", which will allow it "*to establish its potential for service evaluation which is an obvious source for research funding.*"

3.2.3 Social Policy and Ageing Research Centre

The reviewers note that the Social Policy and Ageing Research Centre was established as a response to the recommendations of the last review, and consider it "*a good example of a new young able lecturer in the School being supported to lead this new initiative.*" The reviewers observe that there is "*already a good interdisciplinary thrust to the work, with involvement of other Schools and centres in the University,*" and expect that the "*centre's involvement in the TILDA project will bring an internationally high profile.*" They note that the Centre is already the base for five of the School's Ph.D. students, but question the rationale for the proposed Dementia Centre to be a separate development.

3.2.4 Centre for Addiction

The reviewers comment that the Centre for Addiction "*does not seem to have developed in the same way as the other three centres,*" and suggest that the future for Addiction might lie not in a centre, but "*in developing the courses run by staff who are research active.*" They consider that "*very interesting research is being undertaken,*" and describe the Diploma course in Addiction Studies as "*excellent and.....very influential in Ireland and internationally.*"

3.3 RESOURCES

In considering the resource issues for the School, the reviewers' analysis is that the School will be most effective if it can "*demonstrate that the objectives and main priorities of the School have a strategic alignment with those of the College,*" and if the College for its part can adopt an enabling strategy *vis à vis* the School. They comment that a number of the indices used within the College for the purposes of measuring activity and allocation of funding have a "*disproportionate negative impact on the School.*" Examples cited are the low ARAM weighting for taught Masters and the weight given to citation indices for research publications. In relation to the latter, they comment "*While this may be appropriate for the natural sciences, this approach has been explicitly rejected by the UK social science community. The Social Work and Social Policy panel guidelines are, instead, concerned with peer evaluation of the quality of the research and its public policy impact.*" The Report continues "*the Academic Resource Allocation Model creates tension for the School between its vocational and research objectives due to the fact that the cost of social work placements, essential for the vocational objective, absorbs roughly half of the College allocation per student which in turn mitigates against the incentive to grow the undergraduate cohort.*" The reviewers are of the view that the School "*has the potential to be a world leader amongst its international peers but for this to be realised these constraints must be mitigated.*"

3.4 MANAGEMENT AND ORGANISATION

With regard to the organisational structure and planning within the School, the reviewers are of the view that *“the oral and informal management structures which worked for the parts are not functional for the larger structure.”* They point to the need to complete the change management process by instituting *“a new formal management structure,”* and improving cohesiveness by establishing a ‘corporate’ identity for the School. Specific actions suggested include achieving parity of esteem between the social work and social policy strands, strengthening the role of the School’s research committee and improving coordination between the School’s Director of Research and Director of Teaching and Learning, and adopting a more “corporate” approach to funding and resource allocation within the School by pooling resources and allocating according to need, without which *“will result in poorer funding outcomes for the School as a whole.”*

The reviewers were impressed by the skill, experience and commitment of the School Administrator and Executive Officer who were *“keen to think strategically about the School’s use of resources and systems..,”* and suggest that the lack of an integrated and real time on-line financial system hinders financial management.

With regard to accommodation, the reviewers recognise that the School values its location within the College campus, but consider that *“better integration of the component parts of the School, including research units, would be helped by co-location.”*

The reviewers point out that attention needs to be given to the future leadership of the School, particularly as the present Head is due to stand down in 2008. They observe that the staff profile in the School *“appears to be bottom heavy,”* and recommend developing the role of the Directors within the School, and encouraging junior staff to apply for promotion so as to *“widen the pool of potential candidates for Headship in the future.”*

The reviewers conclude with the hope that *“ as a result of this review the College will recognize the great merit of the School of Social Work and Social Policy and support it to carry through the change process. It has achieved a great deal in a very short time. There is of course still much to do and much to achieve. But teaching is already excellent, research is very promising and administration is developing well.”*

3.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

3.5.1 Teaching and Learning:

- (i) The M.Sc. in Applied Social Research should become more integrated with the rest of the work of the School.
- (ii) The Report recommends an increase in the number of staff trained and experienced in supervision of postgraduate students; improved information and supports for research students, including more clarity around the supervisor’s role; introduction of learning agreements; production of a postgraduate student handbook.
- (iii) Maintain teaching programmes which provide a clear focus for the subject of social policy in the absence of a chair in the subject.
- (iv) The emphasis currently being given in practice in Ireland to multidisciplinary teams for the delivery of health and social services should be exploited by the School as there is a vacuum in training opportunities for multidisciplinary team practice in Ireland.

3.5.2 Research

- (v) Procedures for monitoring individuals’ research performance and aiding staff development plans should be developed, along with a system for research leave.
- (vi) In order to better exploit the full potential contribution of the School’s Director of Research post, greater clarity is needed regarding the role.
- (vii) The role of the School’s Research Committee also needs to be strengthened, and enhanced co-ordination is recommended between the Director of Research and the Director of Teaching and Learning (Post Graduate).

- (viii) A more formal relationship is also proposed between the College Research and Innovation Office and the School's Research Director.
- (ix) The research centres should become more integrated into the School.

3.5.3 Resources / Facilities

- (x) Better integration of the component parts of the School, including research units, would be facilitated by co-location of teaching, research and office accommodation.
- (xi) College should give consideration to how the ARAM constraints which exist for the School within the broader College framework of measurement might be mitigated.

3.5.4 Management / Organisation

- (xii) The School should complete the change management process initiated by the College, with a view to achieving greater cohesion through development of a corporate identity and vision, and a more effective pooling of resources.
- (xiii) Consideration should be given to how the constraints which exist for the School within the College framework of measurement might be mitigated.
- (xiv) A new formal management structure needs to be developed to meet the needs of the developing School.
- (xv) Attention needs to be given to forward planning for future leadership of the School.

4. RESPONSE FROM THE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIAL POLICY

The School of Social Work and Social Policy welcomes the reviewers report, and particularly values the *"positive comments about the relevance of the School's role and contribution, the achievements of the School in its short existence to date and the future potential of the School and its constituent part."* The School also acknowledges the challenges facing it, as identified in the Review, and in its response indicates a way forward in relation to those issues which it considers to be most critical.

The School accepts that it is very important to achieve greater integration across the various elements of the School, and commits to engaging with the problem on various fronts, such as *"in key recruitment decisions, in the next strategic plan, in seeking to promote ever greater links between research and teaching activity in the School."* The School recognises the need to enhance the research performance of the School, and proposes to address this in a number of ways including *"a clear policy and regime around research sabbatical leave, more formalised systems of mentoring staff in relation to research activity, etc."* While pointing that much has already been achieved in terms of supports to postgraduate research students, the School will follow through on the specific actions outlined in the report. With regard to the development of new formal management structures and the need for greater pooling of resources, the school responds that it is already embarked on discussions within the School on these issues, and that they will be treated in the context of the School's strategic planning process. Space needs and the existing accommodation arrangements will be *"a key focus"* for the School in the coming period, and it signals its intention to undertake *"a systematic planning process around space needs"* leading to a formal report.

The School also acknowledges the feedback from students on matters of concern to them, and will endeavour to address the issues raised, *"especially those within the School's power to resolve."* The School welcomes the Reviewers comment that College would benefit from a real-time on-line financial management system, and points out that in the interim it has implemented its *"own manual procedures for procurement and accounts payable..."*

5. RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL

In addition to the School of Social Work and Social Policy addressing the detailed recommendations outlined in the review report, the following recommendations are made to Council in light of the review report, the response from the School, and the new academic organisational structure.

1. Working within the new three Faculty structure and closely with the Research and Innovation Office, the School should develop an integrated School research strategy.

2. College should put in place a mechanism to enable the School's activities to be located if not in one location, at least within close proximity.
3. College should prioritise the procurement and implementation of a new finance system that will enable Schools to conduct their business in an efficient and effective manner within a devolved financial organisational model.

John Hegarty
Provost
