TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN

Report to Council on the Review of the School of Social Work & Social Policy

April 2014

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Reviewers' Report

1.   Introduction

The External Review Committee reviewed an extensive set of self-assessment materials and participated in a range of meetings and discussions on November 4th-6th to conduct a quality review of the School of Social Work and Social Policy at Trinity College. The review assessed the current level of research and scholarly activity, the quality of teaching and learning, engagement with the College and society in general, issues related to resources, and effectiveness of the School's organization and strategic planning. It is important to point out that this quality review comes at a point in time where the School is experiencing a "perfect storm" in terms of the overall recession, reductions in higher education funding, the drying up of external research funding and the constraints on the ability to fill current and future vacant positions. The report provides a set of recommendations, which should contribute to the consolidation and future development of the School.

2.   Research and Scholarly Activity

In terms of research activity the School, after a period of significant growth and accomplishment, has been experiencing a decline in research income and a reduction in the number of research centres (Social Policy and Ageing Research Centre and Living with Dementia). The Children's Research Centre in collaboration with both schools has been quite successful in undertaking multidisciplinary policy and practice-relevant research into the lives of children and youth. The National Institute for Intellectual Disability (NIID) has undergone an extensive review and a decision regarding its governance is yet to be determined.   This Institute is an extremely good fit with the School of Social Work's research mission and of the values of the profession of social work. The Committee has reviewed the External Review of NIID and concurs with the recommendations provided on P.18 of the report which propose that the Institute be anchored in the School of Social Work and Social Policy.   We would suggest however that the External Advisory Committee meetings be held 2-3 times annually rather than quarterly. The proposed administrative reorganization, strong leadership, and rebranding with a more focused niche and performance indicators for NIID activities would appear to be the foundation of a more manageable and sustainable agenda for the Institute.

Given the turbulent economic environment the School has begun a process of consolidation and nurturing of new opportunities for research. The Committee, while seeing this approach as prudent, felt that there needs to be a greater investment of time (primarily by the Research Committee) in developing a more detailed and updated strategic plan for the research mission of the School, including consideration of how to unify to a greater extent the various (and currently fairly diffuse) research strands under a more identifiable School 'badge'. This plan would build on the previously identified strategic priorities and be aligned with the priorities of the College. One illustrative example is the transition of the SPARC initiative into a more visible role for the School in the university-wide Trinity EngAGE Centre.

The steadily increasing level of participation in international research networks is impressive, and could be further encouraged by connecting the Principal Investigators more intensively to the Trinity Research and Innovation office that is able to support Faculty in major EU applications.

In terms of scholarly productivity, the School has been on an upward trajectory over the past four years. They report 118 peer-reviewed articles, 14 books and 47 book chapters over the 2008-2012 period. The Committee, prior to the visit, requested and received a more detailed analysis (2007-2013) of publications which clearly distinguishes between peer reviewed and invited publications. This analysis demonstrates a growth in productivity over the past four years. This has no doubt been partially fuelled by the staff employed in research centers and on research projects. A further detailed analysis of core staff productivity may be important to both identify potential recipients of sabbatical leaves and to get a productivity figure that is comparable to other schools in the UK, Europe and North America. The Trinity Metrics only require faculty to have four quality publications over a four-year period. North American standards would be closer to two refereed publications per year per faculty member and the top schools would be four per faculty member per year. The Committee would encourage the School going forward to use a more detailed benchmarking system so that international comparative analysis can be conducted. It should be noted that many of the peer reviewed articles produced by faculty are published in some of the more highly ranked international journals. It is also important to recognize the School's broad commitment to dissemination of scholarly work through publication in professional journals, the media and through participation in a wide range of policy and advisory committees. The health and social care community is both aware and appreciative of this scholarly work.

We did hear, however, that a more focused effort on the dissemination and promotion/visibility of scholarly work at the College level was needed. Another issue related to scholarly productivity is the availability of sabbatical leave. To date the School has not been able to implement the new Faculty sabbatical policy. This is reportedly due to heavy teaching loads and the limited availability of teaching staff to cover off for those who are going on leave. This is compounded by the non-replacement of those who retire. The Committee would observe that while there needs to be continuing work on these barriers to enabling full implementation of the leave policy, initial steps such as mini-sabbaticals can be provided. Best practices from a number of research intensive schools have included reduced teaching loads, mentorships, and leaves to ensure that faculty members can achieve a high level of research activity. A related concern, from an equity perspective, is the utilization of a systematic and transparent system of workload allocation.

Another strength that should be highlighted is the growth in the number of post-graduate and PhD students and the research that is being produced as a result of this growth. This

also has had implications for teaching and research staff who have increased their level of commitment to the supervision of post-graduate and PhD students. The students we met with were very positive about the availability and quality of research supervision they had received. A number of research staff voiced their concerns about the decline in the number of research centers and projects and felt that their expectations for continuing work and possibly teaching posts were not being met. The School has been clear with these staff that there are no guarantees for continuing research or teaching positions.

3.   Teaching and Learning

Overall the School performs well at three levels; faculty are very committed to high quality teaching, guiding and supervising students, which is reflected in students' satisfaction with the School's courses, teachers and administrative staff. Moreover, students' report that they are well prepared for the Irish labour market, which was in turn, confirmed by representatives of potential employers. Finally, the School succeeds in connecting effectively to the field of social work and the community. Since its creation the School has been successful in the development of two undergraduate courses and six postgraduate programs, though with various numbers of students and, more important for internal synergy, various streams of financial support. Currently, the latter has resulted in challenges for maintaining high quality, coordination of the curricula, and cooperation between faculty in the School as well as for adapting the Bologna criteria.

The School is the only institute for higher education in Ireland providing an undergraduate programme for students who enter the programme as school-leavers and graduate with a qualification that makes them eligible to register with CORU as Social Workers. Programs that qualify for that accreditation are both at postgraduate (2 year program after having obtained another social science degree) and undergraduate level (4 year program in Social Work). The students we have met were quite enthusiastic and spoke with a lot of respect about their courses, teachers, tutors as well as about the integration of the academic curriculum and their placements in Ireland and abroad. Also students in the undergraduate program Social Policy and Sociology highly valued their curriculum and the quality of teaching.

Increasingly the School's orientation is on research-led courses which shows clear academic engagement and offers an inspiring environment for students at all levels. However, it also bears the risk of a creating a widening gap between the two main pillars of the school: the practice, community and applied research-oriented Social Work division on the one hand; and the international research-oriented Social Policy division on the other hand. The risk becomes visible in the demands for the dissertation which are challenging for students that have limited expertise in (statistical) research methods. Although the third year course 'research in society' offered by the Department of Sociology is appreciated as very helpful in preparing for the dissertation, some students ask for exams instead of writing a dissertation.

In response it should be made more explicit what criteria could be applied for various categories of students given their future careers, but without undermining the increasing interest of Social Work students in pursuing a PhD trajectory.

The six postgraduate degree programs of the School are 1) M.Sc. in Applied Social Research, 2) M.Sc. in Drug and Alcohol Policy, 3) M.Sc. in Disability Studies, 4) P.G. Dip/M.Sc. in Child Protection and Welfare, 5) P.G. Dip/Masters in Social Work and 6) PhD program. Annual numbers of students vary widely, with no students in 2012/13 in the M.Sc. in Child Protection and Welfare program (due to insufficient candidates), less than 15 in the Disability Studies and Drug and Alcohol Policy programs, 14 students on the P.G. Dip. In Child Protection and Welfare, 25-30 students in Applied Social Research, to over 40 students in the P.G. Dip/Masters in Social Work program. The students report high quality teaching, and the reviewers were impressed by their compliments on the teachers knowing their students personally, the support and services offered to the students, lots of contact opportunities and intensive e-mail contacts. Also the students' observation that they develop interest in following up their master's program by doing a PhD illustrates the academic orientation of the master's programs in the School. However, most students reported that they will conduct qualitative studies only, indicating the somewhat limited research methods orientation of the programs.

The curriculum of the undergraduate students in Social Work exceeds the regular 240 ECTS by 60 ECTS due to the curriculum composition in which the compulsory yearly placements are in fact extra-curricular and taking place during (summer) holidays. Actually, students and staff are effectively trapped between the accreditation criteria of the CORU and the regular criteria for a four year course in higher education. Some students have seen reduced compensation for placement expenses (for example the Health Service Executive) and others told the Review Committee that they can hardly afford the additional costs of housing and transportation related to the longer placements. Both issues need serious attention; one suggestion is to renegotiate the accreditation criteria with the CORU, including reduction of the number of weeks required for placements.   This would probably have to be addressed, if the suggestion is taken up, in conjunction with the other three universities in Ireland providing similar programmes.

Because the programs with lower number of students i.e. M.Sc. In Drug and Alcohol Policy, the P.G.Dip. in Child Protection and Welfare and the M.Sc. in Disability Studies are externally supported, these lower numbers do not directly result in financial deficits. However, this financial structure leads to less than optimal conditions and vulnerability of the courses; one staff member bearing responsibility only, no 'economy of scale' benefits, and less than optimal integration, innovation and shared responsibility of faculty. Emphasis should be placed on the shared responsibility of faculty for a common innovative module as a first step to maintain quality, flexibility and inter-changeability of School staff between different

courses and modules, enhance their ability to adjust to new developments in the field and improve synergy. A course on 'methods of evaluation of policy and interventions' could serve as an example of such an innovative module, applicable in all fields of study.

An important initiative of the National Institute for Intellectual Disability (NIID), the two-year Certificate in Contemporary Living, may not be the best fit with the School of Social Work and Social Policy. While the School might have adequate expertise in care and support for reaching self-development and social participation, it has less expertise in the domain of education, disability teaching and cognitive development. The committee does not want to intervene in a current discussion on the issue but underlines that reconsideration of position of the CCL course in the wider context of Trinity College might result in a more beneficial option for the learners.

Due to financial constraints (limited state budgets for higher education, limited resources for social work organisations, ending sponsorships, etc.) facilities for students are sub-optimal. Here the committee points at the impact this has had and the risk this involves for teaching and learning, including the negative impact on any drive to attract international students to School programmes. Students are hampered in exploring all aspects of placements because of non-subsidized high costs for living elsewhere and transport; tutorials and lectures are frustrated by shortage of well-equipped meeting and lecture rooms, computer facilities are not always accessible and PhD students have inadequate financial support. The committee recognizes that not all constraints can be solved immediately, and that macro-economic processes are at play here. Nevertheless the School can implement some more common measures to solve some problems, such as offering PhD students a part-time paid position as lecturer and/or supervisor of undergraduate students (some are currently available but more are needed), developing an annual time and space schedule for all the undergraduate and postgraduate courses and negotiating with other faculties for more space and with placement organisations for some financial compensation for placement related transportation costs. Our understanding is that the space issue is a long-standing issue and needs a multi-level collaborative approach between the College, the Faculty and the School. As previously mentioned this will require some short-term innovative solutions and some long-term commitments by the College. The physical space that a School occupies is critical to it sense of identity, the growth of a positive culture and its ability to attract both academic colleagues and international students.

4.   Engagement with Society and Service to College

Particularly when the size of the School, and the internal resources currently available to it are taken into account, School staff and the School in general make a very substantial and positive contribution to the wider society. There is clearly a significant amount of contact with organisations that specifically take under-graduate and post-graduate students on work experience placements, agencies that provide a range of social work services and

those that contribute to the development of social policy. There is also an obviously direct and rich liaison with the social work field placements. However, in relation to the latter, although there is a huge amount of contact with both individual social work practitioners and organisations in the field, there could be a better co-ordination of this activity. Even in relation to organisations that provide significant numbers of placements for School students each year, the School-organisation link is somewhat *ad hoc* and would benefit from a greater usage by the School of single points of contact within the relevant organisations. There was a sense in discussions with School staff and with employer representatives that School to placement contact tends to happen largely on an individual student basis, even in the case of organisations that provide relatively large numbers of placements to the School.

While much of the School-organisation contact arises in the context of student practice placements, the School also has additional contact with both those and other social work and social policy agencies, for a variety of other reasons, including research, consultation, one-off guest lectures, etc. It appears that there would be a major benefit to both the School and to the relevant external organisations, in having a more co-ordinated approach to all of this. The reviewers were told that in the past there had been a more structured process for engaging with employer organisations' representatives in the social work field. This was a structured liaison group, but it had fallen into abeyance for a number of reasons. Included in these reasons was the fact that membership of the liaison group or committee seemed to be understood to be on an individual rather than an organisational basis. As a result, some members of this committee or stakeholder consultation group remained in place even when they had moved on from the organisation they originally joined the committee to represent. School staff and management agreed that there would be a benefit in reviving this group, with clearer terms of reference, and greater clarity around organisational representation on it. Another potential benefit from greater co-ordination of contact with the social work and social policy employer 'group' would be potentially more streamlined arrangements for organising work/practice placements. These are currently organised on a college to individual practice teacher basis. If that could be organised on a School to organisation basis, particularly in the larger employing organisations, there would be clear efficiencies to be gained by the School. In addition, it might open up other synergies of mutual benefit, including improved efficiency and research opportunities.

It is clear that students emerging from the School at both under-graduate and post-graduate level, particularly in the areas of social work and social policy, have a 'high value' in terms of the quality of the education they have received and their readiness for the workplace. The reviewers also felt that if the School to employer/organisation contacts and links could be improved, it might provide greater opportunities for collaboration in research, fundraising, and generally enhance the public profile of the School as well as perhaps make a wider range of practice placements and teaching inputs to the School available. While there was a positive view among staff, students, and external stakeholders that the School makes a

positive contribution to wider society, in terms of comment on issues of public concern and policy making, it was felt that this could be strengthened even more. In particular, rather than being predominantly *reactive* to social and professional issues as they arise, a variety of respondents indicated that a more *proactive* approach to be taken by the School and individual staff members could raise the profile of the School as well as making a more positive contribution to how social problems are addressed and also how social work and social policy professionals are perceived more widely. In addition, given the very positive profile of the School in civil society, and particularly among the employer group, the reviewers speculated on the potential fundraising possibility of School-specific initiatives and believe this could be explored further. While the School is well known for its social work practice placements, the placements of social policy students with employers was perceived to be a potentially rich source of possibilities both for the School and for employers and wider society. The development of placements for Sociology and Social Policy students has reportedly been under active discussion and the committee would certainly encourage this initiative.

The contribution that School staff and the School in general make to the governance of the college is significant, particularly when compared to the relatively small size of the School. While School staff are already visible to a certain extent in a variety of college-focused roles, the reviewers felt that this visibility and benefit could be increased, to the advantage of all concerned. In common with the point made above regarding the School's role in influencing policy making and related decision making, it was felt that the college in general could be 'in the game' earlier in terms of influencing the public/political narrative about social issues, particularly where these impact on the work of the School.

The School provides under-graduate and post-graduate programmes in a variety of fields that have particular relevance to social issues and challenges that Ireland and the global community in general face at present. For example these include practice and research in relation to ageing, disability and support to the vulnerable more generally in society. Given that fact, it was felt that the School has a particularly valuable contribution to make in relation to the debate on how those specific issues are dealt with in society. The already significant engagement that the School has with government ministers and departments in a number of areas (e.g. children and young people, ageing, disability etc.) should not be underestimated. This influence could be further developed and the profile arising from it maximized. In general, there is a need to build both the impact on wider society and policy as well as the visibility of these achievements.

Overall there was a view that there is a huge variety of contributions to the School from external (including employer organisations) sources, but that these need to be 'captured' more in terms of their value and contribution to the School. Furthermore given the high value placed on the education and training provided in the School, it was felt that greater

use could be made of the post-graduate activities of alumni, and in particular how the alumni group could be seen as a valuable resource for a variety of activities, including fundraising, to the School over time.

## 5.	Resources

While some of the concerns with the financial information systems have been addressed, a pivotal issue from the School's perspective is the financial model, which does not incentivise the expansion of postgraduate courses. The Faculty Dean on the other hand maintains that the new financial system in fact has an explicit mechanism for generating incremental income through new activities such as new or expanded postgraduate courses. The issue of space continues to be a difficult area and is one that requires collective action by the School, the Faculty and the College. Interim solutions such as donated space, teaching courses on evenings and weekends, collaborative teaching with UCD, providing on-line courses and other creative options such as more post-qualification programmes for practitioners in the field, should be explored. While the School would like to increase its number of international students (and has great potential to do so) the lack of welcoming, modern space that gives a positive physical identity is a clear impediment to this objective. There is also a perception in the School that the School itself, when compared to other Schools, and probably the College itself, when compared to others, is being particularly 'hard-hit' by recent budgetary cuts. There is a need for the College to address and clarify this one way or another if for no other reason than to improve School morale.

Another important issue is revenue generation to cover teaching and other expenses not covered by the College budget allocation. Currently there is no financial incentive for the School to take on more students in the existing programs and further negotiations should be undertaken with the College to see if a win-win solution can be reached. Another area for renewed emphasis is a more focused effort on fundraising. Most top level schools invest in fundraising to obtain endowed chairs, targeted research funding, memorial endowments and scholarships for post doctoral students. Perhaps an alumni committee of social work graduates could work with the Trinity Foundation to develop a more strategic approach to seeking financial support.

One of the most critical issues to be addressed is the replacement of permanent teaching staff who retire. The School is in the unfortunate position that there are six individuals who are scheduled to retire in the next few years. Usual practice in most universities is to replace senior staff with a junior position. The current policy at the College is to replace (with the approval of the Faculty) only one position after three staff have retired. We would argue that this policy should take into account the size of the school and potential negative impacts this will have on the quality of programs and programs of research. Given the current commitments and the quality of the programs that it is delivering, it is essential that *at the very least* one senior replacement be allocated to the School for every three retirees.

The Committee is unanimous in agreeing that anything less than this allocation will be a tipping point in *significantly reducing the quality* of both the research and teaching activities of the School.   The School should also proactively engage with the Health Service Executive (HSE) in relation to release of social workers to increase participation in the M.Sc/P.Grad.Dip. in Child Protection and Welfare, and also ensure long term funding by HSE for the Post Graduate Diploma.

6.   Organizational Structures and Planning

In moving towards providing a set of recommendations we found it very useful to review the recommendations made in the previous quality review conducted in 2007 and to connect this to the current strategic plan. One of the key points identified in the previous report was the observation that various elements (both the programs and research centres) of the school operated in silos and needed to be better integrated and committed to pooling resources. The Committee, while noting some steps in the right direction, such as significant changes in management structure, also felt this issue of silos was still a major area for continuing development and is critical to identifying efficiencies in program delivery. An organizational culture that promotes much more internal cohesion, cross-program teaching and a stronger sense of School identity is needed to be able to adapt to the current challenging circumstances.   While the current management structure has been improved in recent years, we were struck by the need for stronger but inclusive leadership to address the current challenges. Having only six staff members attend the SWOT meeting may also be illustrative of the lack of cohesion and low morale in the school. The Head of School and School Executive Committee need to be supported by academic staff to provide leadership in the development and implementation of a clear vision for the School and an agreed-upon detailed strategic plan going forward.

Other aspects of strong and inclusive leadership can be recommended for implementation at the School. A clear reporting system on annual research staff, post-docs and PhD students for benchmarking and monitoring purposes, discussed on a yearly basis with the Research Director, will stimulate research performance. Such a yearly routine can also be used to make review appointments with those colleagues who need to be more research active. In addition, clearer visibility of the managing role of the Head of the School in directing annual module schedules, facilitating teaching, giving direction to discussions on integrative courses, implementing the Bologna criteria at all levels of the School, and stimulating alumni activities on behalf of the School might contribute to more awareness among the staff regarding their position and responsibilities as members of the School.

The administrative staff are highly appreciated by the School's students as very supportive and approachable. Only one administrative staff member has a permanent job while the other five administrative staff members have a non-permanent job for a maximum of one to two years. As a consequence, both the position of individual staff members and the support

system as such are rather vulnerable. With increasing decentralization, tasks have been delegated to the lower levels of the organization but without financial resources coming with these tasks. Given the orientation of the administrative staff to primarily assist students and the higher levels of the organization, faculty have very little administrative support. Administrative staff themselves expressed the wish for less paperwork and more intensive use of digital technology. The committee agrees with this position but acknowledges that decisions will have to be made at the College level before the School will be able to keep track with the best universities in this respect. Examples of such systems - a digital library systems for storing theses and dissertations (such as Igitur), digital systems to keep track of grades (Osiris) and publications (Metis) - are gradually being implemented in higher education all over Europe. Nonetheless, the use of Outlook agendas by all faculty is a step in the right direction.

7.   Conclusion

In general, the reviewers formed an impression of a School that is very well regarded by external stakeholders such as employers and research partners, and is greatly appreciated by students at all levels and in all programmes. Unfortunately, the existing structure and fabric of the School has been built up over a number of years on the basis, to some extent, of programmes being dependent on individual external sources of funding and linked predominantly with individual members of teaching staff. The School needs the support of the Faculty and College to generate and articulate a clear vision and strategic plan, accompanied by a clear work plan of actions to be taken, over the coming few years, designed to get the School moving in the direction it needs to go to survive and grow. The School's current strategic plan is largely descriptive and the next one should clarify what the School is working to achieve in terms of strategic goals, and spell out the steps required to achieve those goals. While the School's 'product' in terms of teaching, research and related activities is very strong, the infrastructure that it sits on is weakened by the various challenges described above and as a result will take some work to arrive at a point where management can be working proactively rather than predominantly reactively as at present, which the reviewers acknowledge is understandable, given the pressure to 'firefight to maintain quality' in the School's various programmes and 'keep the show on the road.' A number of specific challenges, that prevent the School from achieving higher quality outcomes, need to be addressed as soon as possible, including staffing, space, and the disincentive to taking on more students.

8.   Recommendations

In forming our priority set of recommendations for this report we found it very useful to refer back to the previous 2007 external Quality Review report and the School's current strategic plan (2009-2014). We are hopeful that our report and its recommendations should be of use in developing a new strategic plan for the period 2015-2020.   It is very important to state at the outset that the School has made very significant quality improvements in a

number of important areas identified in the previous External Review and the Strategic Plan, particularly in the growth of its research activity and publications and in the breadth and quality of its educational programs.   The School has, however, been challenged by the recent recession, reductions in higher education funding, phasing out of charitable funding and the government initiated staff reduction scheme.   Difficult times such as this can often expose underlying structural weaknesses in the operation of an academic unit but also provide opportunities for innovation. In closing this report we are identifying a core set of recommendations that emerge from our review. The detailed justification of each of these points is provided in the previous discussion in the text of our report. The key points for recommended action include:

- The Faculty in collaboration with the School should identify alternative measures to prevent the negative impact of a number of retirements, particularly in a relatively small School where the impacts would be disproportionate. Short term contract hires, PhD teaching stipends and other funds to ensure teaching commitments are met will be critical as is replacement of at least some of the positions lost to retirement.

- The Research Committee of the School should undertake to consolidate research centre activity and develop, in consultation with faculty, a new and more focused strategic plan to achieve the School's research mission. More detailed benchmarking of both research and scholarly productivity should be included in this plan.

- The School should implement the Faculty's sabbatical leave policy in the School over time by starting with mini-sabbaticals and other supports to further increase the level of research activity by faculty.

- The Head of School should mandate a task force composed of members of both the Undergraduate and Graduate Committees to identify and develop efficiencies both within and across the School's delivery and management of its educational programs. This could involve synergies with other universities.

- The Placement Office should develop, where feasible, an organization-based approach to practicum which would involve the identification of key liaison persons who would help streamline the negotiations for practicum to be offered on a year by year basis.

- Faculty members should identify and share more efficient means of keeping connected with students, and organize administrative support so that they have more time for research and writing. This will involve a further increase in digitalization of paperwork and scheduling.

- The Head of School in collaboration with the Trinity Foundation should form an Alumni Task Group to undertake a significant targeted fundraising initiative using the School's 80th Anniversary and Reunion as a pivotal means of garnering more financial support. College may be in a position to assist with the provision of dedicated fundraising resources for the School.

- The College in collaboration with the Faculty and the School should undertake to address the space issues that have been raised by the School over a number of years. The School should draft a specification of requirements, which should be agreed with College. Some innovative short term strategies could be employed until more adequate long term space is acquired.

We would like to close by thanking everyone from the School for the time and effort that they put into the quality review process. We were also impressed with the organization and support received from the Quality Office. We found the site visit extremely interesting and helpful and hope we have provided some useful insights as the School evolves into its next stage of development.

Response from Head of School to the Reviewers' Report

The School of Social work and Social Policy was subject to a Quality Review from November 4-6, 2013. The School welcomes the report of the reviewers and would like to express its sincere gratitude to all members of the review team for their hard work and commitment to ensuring the review was a success.   The members of the review team were:

• Professor Dr. Trudie Knijn, Utrecht University
• Professor Wes Shera, University of Toronto
• Mr Vivian Geiran, Irish Probation Service
The internal facilitator was Professor John Saeed, Trinity College Dublin.

We particularly value the positive comments about the relevance of the School's role and contribution, the achievements of the School in its existence to date and the future potential of the School and its constituent parts.

The School also acknowledges the challenges and recommendations the Review has identified. It should be noted that the University, and in turn the School, has been placed under severe financial constraints over the last number of years. This will directly impact our ability to implement some of the recommendations. The following items seem the most critical and each is discussed in turn in terms of our view and proposed response:

Recommendation 1: The Faculty in collaboration with the School should identify alternative measures to prevent the negative impact of a number of retirements, particularly in a relatively small School where the impacts would be disproportionate

Response from the School: The School has submitted a number of compelling cases of need via the Faculty Strategic staffing process over a number of years to address the negative impacts of two impending retirements in the School. Due to various internal and external constraints, it does not seem likely that these retirees will be replaced. As an interim alternative, we are seeking to avail of the HEA buy back scheme to teach modules previously taught by one of the retirees and planning to redeploy other staff to fill the other teaching gaps. We also plan to use our PhD students more widely for tutorials and teaching on freshman modules, subject to matching their skills with teaching needs. We will advertise a number of PhD studentships to ensure that we have the requisite number of students to assist in managing the teaching load in the School. However, in the absence of recruiting full-time academic staff, this ongoing casualization of teaching will have a detrimental impact on the teaching, research and reputation of the School.

Recommendation 2: Consolidate research centre activity and develop, in consultation with faculty, a new and more focused strategic plan to achieve the School's research mission

The Director of Research, in consultation with the School Research Committee, will develop a more focused research strategy and vision over the next six months in line with the new strategic plan and vision for the University. This is to take into account the fact that the Children's Research Centre (managed jointly with the School of Psychology) and which has recently had a new Director appointed, is the only remaining Centre in the School. The Director is currently developing a strategic research plan for the Centre.

Recommendation 3: Implement the Faculty's sabbatical leave policy in the School over time by starting with mini-sabbaticals and other supports to further increase the level of research activity by faculty;

The School is currently endeavoring to implement the Faculty Sabbatical Policy but we are constrained both financially and in our ability to replace staff who teach mandatory courses (this is a particular issue in the area of social work, where an external body, CORU, impose certain conditions in order for the social work courses to be accredited). Due to the relatively small number of academic staff within the School, and the fact that individual members of staff have responsibility for specialist courses with no other person in the School with the requisite skills to replace them, it may be necessary to periodically pause intakes to courses (particularly PG courses) to facilitate staff wishing to take sabbatical leave. We have recently approved one member of staff for leave in 2014/15.

Recommendation 4: Identify and develop efficiencies both within and across the School's delivery and management of its education programme

The School has developed a number of efficiencies to date such as joint teaching on modules between our postgraduate taught courses. The School is also progressing new forms of delivery of modules via online teaching of current modules and the roll out of the Postgraduate Diploma in Applied Social Studies is an important component of our strategy to develop further efficiencies.

Recommendation 5: Develop an organization-based approach to placements which would involve the identification of key liaison persons who would help streamline the negotiations for placements to be offered on a year by year basis

An organizational based approach to fieldwork is already in place in the School for students undertaking their placement within the probation service. The School will endeavor to meet with the other key employers for student placements to address this issue and establish if similar arrangements can be made.

Recommendation 6: Form an Alumni Task Group to undertake a significant targeted fundraising initiative using the School's 80th Anniversary and Reunion as a pivotal means of garnering more financial support

The School can confirm that plans are already underway regarding the event to celebrate the School's 80th Anniversary of the Social Work programme. We are liaising with the University Alumni Association, and will convene an alumni task group to act as a steering group. This group will have a membership that includes staff, former staff and distinguished alumni. However, we do not believe that the financial support from our Alumni will ever reach the critical point that it will fund academic posts in the School, rather it will provide very important sources of funding to support, for example post-graduate students, and assist in raising the profile of the School.

Recommendation 7: Address the space issues that have been raised by the School over a number of years by drafting a specification of requirements, which should be agreed with College. Some innovative short term strategies could be employed until more adequate long term space is acquired.

The School is participating with the current space audit of the Arts Building and will be drafting a case of need specifically relating to a dedicated teaching space for the Master's in Social Work. We are hopeful that the School will be able to benefit from the results of the space audit and that we may be able to secure some unused space in the Arts Building. However we would like to stress that many of the teaching spaces in the Arts Building require redesign and re-investment to ensure they are fit for purpose and meet the needs of our current students.

In conclusion the School intends to work with the Faculty Dean and other appropriate College Officers to address the key recommendations arising from the report and will prepare a detailed Implementation Plan outlining the timeframe for implementation in the coming months.

Response from the Faculty Dean to the Reviewer's report

Introduction

I welcome the report by the external reviewers on the School of Social Work and Social Policy. The reviewers acknowledge the School's progress in terms of research since the last review (2007); they recognise the high employability of the School's graduates. However, they also highlight the potentially catastrophic impact of pending retirements. On behalf of College I would like to thank the review team for the thoroughness and collegiate spirit with which they carried out their work; the Faculty especially appreciated how the team judged the School against international standards but were at pains to recognise the specificities of the current Irish situation.

School level recommendations

The reviewers urge the School to continue raising the quantity and quality of its research. They suggest that most staff are still less research productive than would be expected in comparable institutions. Increasing the School's **research** requires the further development of a research culture within the School, not least through the open discussion of individual research plans. It would also be greatly aided by a greater appreciation of the importance of applied social research by College, not least through the creation of a Trinity Social Science Research Institute as per College's last strategic plan. Such a research institute could profile, support and crucially *develop to international standards* the research within the School. It would further develop the links between School staff and high profile inter-disciplinary funded projects such as Growing Up in Ireland and TILDA.

The reviewers recommend the full implementation of the Faculty's **sabbatical leave policy**. The School has claimed that staff shortages prevent this, but the reviewers stress that much can be done immediately (e.g. mini-sabbaticals). The School, like other Schools in the Faculty, must plan its teaching in line with its resources. The Faculty has made clear that sabbatical leave is not an optional extra: research (as carried out during sabbatical leave) is an inherent part of each staff member's work and every relevant individual's workload allocation must take account of this. Furthermore, an effective sabbatical leave policy requires that, as the reviewers point out, teaching areas (especially in the masters' programmes) cannot be the private property of individual members of staff.

Although the School has made progress in **integrating** its different components, the reviewers stress the need to identify possible efficiencies across its programmes. They point out that separate areas of the School still operate as distinct silos so that it does not utilise the benefits of, for example, cross-programme teaching. Similar issues arise in relation to the management of student contacts. Short-term and long-term solutions to the School's staffing crisis must tackle this problem, not exacerbate it. The School is already exploring collaboration with UCD for the joint delivery of some programmes and this must be further developed.

The School's programmes require extensive **placements**. These placements use and develop the School's impressive links with the social policy and social policy communities; they clearly contribute to the very high employability of the School's graduates. However, like some other aspects of the School's work, these placements are overly dependent on individual staff members and their individual contacts; this in turn exacerbates administrative loads. I therefore fully support the reviewers' suggestion that the School develop a Placement Office to management placements on an organisation to organisation level. The School could notice similar developments in the organisation of teacher placements in the School of Education's new programmes.

The reviewers suggest the School develop its **alumni network** in order to support its fundraising activities.   Realistically the School's alumni are unlikely to include high net worth individuals such as we would hope to find amongst our business alumni. However, alumni work can contribute to further development of the School's impressive links to practitioners and policy-makers, both in Ireland and increasingly abroad. Furthermore, the School should recognise that its work is highly attractive to philanthropy; it needs to work with the Foundation to develop an approach to philanthropic fund-raising which is integrated in the College's strategic plans.

Last but not least, the reviewers commend the **high quality of most of the teaching** delivered by the School. The Faculty believes that other areas of the Faculty could learn from the careful planning, delivery and evaluation of most of the modules taught by the School. The reviewers recommend the development of on-line programmes. Subsequent to the review, the School has become the first in the Faculty to propose an on-line postgraduate programme.

Faculty/College recommendations
The reviewers alert College to the impending **staffing** crisis in the School, with fully *six* staff members due to retire in the next few years (two in September 2014). The School has already discontinued the MSc. in Drug and Alcohol Policy because the HSE withdrew funding for the programme. However, it will need to use adjunct staff, doctoral teaching assistants etc. merely to retain all its other programmes (for which there is a high demand). If this is anything more than a short-term solution, it is clear that the School's reputation and performance will spiral downwards.

It may well be the case that College has no interest in maintaining high quality training in the social work area and that it has no interest in further developing its research in the social policy and social welfare domain. On the assumption that this is not the case, the Faculty has already made an assistant professor in social policy an essential priority appointment.

This research area can however also be supported and developed by appropriate appointments in other areas. The recent appointment of quantitative social research specialists in sociology (in the School of Social Sciences and Philosophy) could be used to address the deficiencies which the reviewers note in the School of Social Work and Social Policy's research training. Crucially, filling the chair of Applied Economics would be a qualitative increase in the College's social policy research profile and indirectly a major boost to the School.

The reviewers propose that Faculty and College address the **space** issues that continue to be a problem for the School. The Faculty is aware that teaching facilities are now well below international standards and already jeopardise attempts to increase international students; given the facilities in other Irish colleges they will soon undermine our national recruitment. The reviewers call for innovative short-term solutions which in fact require better use of existing space – the Faculty is tackling this in collaboration with the Space Utilisation programme. However, the infrastructure needs of social work and social policy teaching and research can probably best be tackled in the context of a full refurbishment of the Arts Building; they certainly must be included in the overall campus development plan.

Conclusion
Assuming that the College wishes to continue to maintain and develop teaching and research in social work and social policy, the Dean will work with the Head of School and College Officers, in particular the Dean of Research, to implement these recommendations.

James Wickham
9 March, 2014