



Trinity College Dublin

Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath

The University of Dublin

**Report to Council on the Quality
Review of the School of English**

30 March - 1 April 2016

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Reviewers' Report

1. Introduction

This report builds upon the findings of the detailed report provided by the previous review, held in 2008, upon the School's Self-Assessment Report (SAR) and Strategy Document, upon a comprehensive suite of documentation and data supplied by the College, and on two and a half days of intensive meetings with College officers, School staff, and students at all levels of the undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes in English.

The reviewers would like to place on record their gratitude to all those involved in the review process for the professionalism with which they entered into the process, and for their generosity with their time and energy in support of the review. We are confident that, during the course of the review, we have gained a clear, comprehensive, detailed, and honest account of the nature of the work of the School in all areas of its activities, of its many strengths and of the challenges it faces in pursuit of its principles and strategic goals. We seek to reflect the same level of critical engagement in this report.

2. Executive summary

The School of English, having weathered the impact of the Irish economic crisis since the last quality review, now begins a fresh phase of its long history, under a new Head of School. Trinity has responded wisely to the financial shortfalls of recent years, examining multiple options for income generation, rather than simply increasing student numbers without considering resource implications. That policy has protected the integrity and quality of English at Trinity. There are now many opportunities for new growth and strategic planning. But change will need to be carefully managed, cognizant of the organic culture of Trinity English that has developed through adjustment and adaptation over many years. The commitment of School staff to small group teaching and wide and deep coverage of the discipline, together with independent scholarship and a strongly collegial ethos, is deeply rooted and, rightly, much valued. We have sought in our recommendations to reflect the unique offerings of Trinity English while also making a range of practical suggestions for both College authorities and the School itself that will help it deliver and perform more effectively. We have identified areas where practice can be tightened and procedures improved to better deliver student experience and to help the School to run more smoothly. Where relevant, we have pointed towards possible new opportunities and resources. In making suggestions for change, we recognise that English at Trinity is one of the most successful disciplines in the College and has an international reputation for research and teaching. Our report details our findings in general terms, before proceeding to a list of concrete recommendations under relevant headings.

3. Review Findings

General

The Trinity School of English is outstanding. Its academic staff, who are 100% research active, continue to gain international recognition for scholarship, academic research and creative writing. The range of its research, from medieval literature to contemporary writing, from American and comparative literatures to creative writing is exemplary, and a strong feature of the School's identity. The School offers first-class teaching and learning, which attracts elite students from across Ireland, the United Kingdom and (increasingly) the world. One metric of that recognition is the reaffirmation of its high standing in the latest QS ranking (32nd in the world and 7th in Europe for 2015).

A relatively small and highly productive school, Trinity English is, in our experience, exceptional in its ethos. We were consistently struck by the commitment and institutional loyalty shown by staff and students, evidenced by extremely high retention rates. Staff and students clearly believe in the distinctive quality of the Trinity English education. The School has succeeded in preserving an intimate connection between teaching and research. It is all the more to the credit of the School that its excellent standing has been achieved and sustained during a period of national economic crisis and funding cutbacks. Staff handle extremely high workload pressures with considerable grace and resilience.

The School's small administrative team shares this collective commitment and ethos. It combines staff who possess long-standing experience and knowledge of the School with more recently appointed colleagues who bring valuable expertise from elsewhere in the College. Collectively they demonstrate an enviable dedication to the School and its students, and, despite a heavy workload and some extremely challenging problems created by the IT systems they have to engage with, provide the academic staff with admirable, and much-appreciated levels of support.

We discovered a very high level of student satisfaction: undergraduates and graduates appreciate the high teaching standards, the coverage, the depth, and the degree to which they themselves become individually known to teaching staff. The small-group teaching model is clearly valued and rightly protected. There is a commendable undergraduate Access programme, which affords excellent preparation, including in essay writing skills, for mature students and those without conventional educational qualifications to study English at Trinity. Pastoral support is prioritised throughout the degree, with counselling, health care, and academic support underpinned by an extensive tutor system.

Given all the above, the School is exceptionally well placed to lead the College's delivery of its strategy, in terms of non-EU student recruitment, online courses, and philanthropic donations, and in the generation of research grant income. However, a number of persistent issues need to be addressed in order to maximize the opportunities for the School to focus on strategic thinking and longer-term development, and there are some areas in which practices need to be tightened up or revised. Some of these fall within the School's own remit; others require a more strategic intervention at Faculty and/or College level. We will address each of these in the sections that follow.

Opportunities and Challenges

The arrival of a new Head of School at the same time as a new School Administrator presents an opportunity for long-sighted strategic planning. But there is currently a risk that this potential for planning and innovation will be dissipated in short term fire-fighting and the development of workarounds for institution-wide systems that do not adequately meet the needs of day to-day functioning at School level. More bluntly, a number of central College support systems are not working, to a degree that is causing day-to-day exasperation and preventing work being done. For example: Oracle/FIS (the Financial Information System) is currently unable to deliver a clear budgetary account of the School's position that would enable the Head of School to make basic financial decisions; the problems with SITS (the Student Information System) are numerous and are impeding the smooth and efficient running of the administration of teaching and learning.

There are more intractable and institutional issues here than we can comment on, but our recommendation to help redress these systemic impediments for the School of English is the immediate provision of a dedicated Faculty IT Partner. Such support offers a relatively low-cost, short-term solution that can alleviate the current consequences of unsatisfactory system delivery, while a longer-term solution is addressed at College level. Most institutions in our experience have such IT support as a matter of course. If the College was to cost the amount of time being wasted at School level in seeking answers to systems problems, and add the reputational risks of (for example) being unable to deliver J-term transcripts, the financial case would be unanswerable. The current situation prejudices all strategic and growth plans.

Undergraduate Teaching and Learning: The Trinity Education Project

The School offers a remarkably broad academic curriculum of literary studies, with a cohesive core course and a striking number of options for its students in each of the four UG years. The implications of this breadth of choice, coupled with the School's admirable commitment to small group teaching are, however, considerable for staff workloads. When the commitment to c.10 hours of UG teaching is added to PG teaching and supervision, and in many cases the responsibility of College Tutorships (with

'chambers' of personal tutees numbering 100 or, when covering a colleague's absence, 150 or even 200), these workloads threaten to become unsustainable, or at least to jeopardise any opportunity for sustained research outside leave periods. We would thus recommend that the School take the opportunity provided by the current ongoing curriculum review to consider seriously whether it might reduce the number of courses offered in the freshman years without undermining the breadth or depth of the education it provides to incoming students. If there is deep reluctance to sacrificing particular options, it should be possible to rotate what is on offer so that in any given year slightly fewer options run than is the case at present. (There is an obvious opportunity to arrange what is on offer to fit with patterns of leave.)

The UG students we met (both Single Honours and TSM) were universally approving of the intellectual stimulation, attentive teaching, and pastoral care offered by School staff, and in many cases compared the courses taken in English very favourably to those they were familiar with in other parts of the Faculty. The content and teaching of the courses, and the standards achieved by the students (recognized by external examiners' reports and by other universities at graduate admissions) are enviably strong. Responses to the modes of course delivery and assessment were, however, more mixed, with some students expressing frustration at the lack of engagement with IT in particular modules, while greatly appreciating the uses made of IT in others.

There is a remarkable degree of synergy between the ambitions of the School strategy and the ambitions of the Trinity Education Programme (TEP), although lines of communication have to a degree blurred that fact at School level. The TEP helpfully sets out an overall architecture that emphasizes the distinctive qualities instilled by the Trinity student experience. These are entirely compatible with the aims of the English School, but in order to be delivered effectively the College-wide implementation of these principles needs to be sufficiently agile and attentive to specific disciplinary imperatives. In the case of English, the goal of 20 external credits (which seems to us reasonable) will need to be enacted without prejudicing the foundational nature of the Freshman curriculum and the carefully developmental nature of the degree thereafter. English is likely to be a very attractive option as an external subject for other Schools, so robust systems will be need to be in place to regulate that traffic and to ensure that resources follow the students. In its current form SITS appears not fit for the purpose of regulating that traffic.

That the two-subject moderatorship has different criteria for examination passes in some subjects than the single honours is an anomaly that needs to be addressed, especially if the TEP is to achieve greater mobility between courses.

Processes for Quality Assurance, Teaching and Learning:

These processes are fundamentally well-embedded within the School. All the necessary structures are in place. External examiners' reports, student feedback, 5-yearly internal curriculum reviews and 7-yearly external (quality) reviews have all served their purposes well and attest to a well-delivered and highly successful curriculum. The collegiality of the School has produced a culture of constant self-scrutiny and quick reaction to problems. All this said, some problems clearly identified in the past still require attention. The last external review (2008) remarked on the strikingly paper-based nature of student-staff transactions in the School. This looks increasingly anomalous in a digital age, and is out of kilter with our experience of other international peer-group universities. It is also creating (as remarked above) a frustrating unevenness of experience for students exposed to some staff members who actively engage with on-line resources and others who have not engaged at all. As remarked in the last review, many staff members are still not using Blackboard; those who use it well (including enabling on-line discussion) are warmly appreciated by students. The School is also limiting its capacity to make good use of its own administrative support. The absence of the possibility of using anti-plagiarism software, given the practice of paper essay submissions, is particularly concerning. The School could profitably undertake a review of best practice within its own ranks, which might include exploring recent developments in technologically-assisted learning strategies. Educational technology, blended learning, and the 'flipped classroom' can assist more active student participation and more efficient use of staff time.

To some degree the problem goes back to infrastructure: clearly not all classrooms are technologically supported as one would now expect. Global recruitment will at some point soon start to be negatively impacted unless a basic investment is made. The commendable moves to diversify assessment methods would also be enhanced by greater technological support. Staff training at a central college level is limited. The School would benefit from the provision of a bespoke 1-hour training class in School, which might encourage more colleagues to attend than have yet made use of centralized training provision.

More generally the provision of teaching and learning spaces across the School remains a matter of serious concern. The lack of a dedicated School seminar room able to accommodate 25-30 people remains the most obvious issue, but questions of timetabling, cohort harmonisation and cohesion, and the development of collective student identities within programmes, especially at PG level, remain problematic owing to the lack of dedicated School classrooms and social spaces.

Postgraduate Teaching, Learning and Research

Postgraduate Research Students

As is to be expected from a School with a longstanding international reputation for the excellence of its research, postgraduate research direction is of a very high calibre. We were impressed by the intelligence

and professionalism of the research students who spoke with us; it is clear that they are hard-working, intellectually engaged, and enjoying the stimulating atmosphere of Trinity's research culture. Since the last external review the school has clarified the Confirmation of Status process, which is now working well and is clearly understood by the students. The professional training elements of the PhD programme received warm praise from the students. However, we would recommend that this training includes explicit treatment of research methodology. Research students should be aware of different methods and approaches in literary studies, be able to reflect upon them explicitly, and to position their own work within them. We also think the College could helpfully review provision of language courses for research students. At present, numbers on language training courses are capped, with the result that some students are obliged to use IRC monies to pay for external language training (for example in French and Russian/Polish). In one area we would encourage the School to review its teaching at PGR level: Confirmation of Status remains the only occasion on which a research student is guaranteed to have a second pair of trained eyes on their dissertation as it develops. We would warmly encourage the school to introduce a light-touch second-supervisor structure, in which, once a year, a 'back-up' supervisor or co-supervisor would read a sample of work—which need not be long. This is now common, if not uniform, practice elsewhere and brings obvious advantages: backup for the first supervisor where needed, an alternative and supplementary perspective in certain areas (always valuable), and clear identification of a second referee, competent to write in support of the student and with direct knowledge of recent work.

A major addition to Trinity's Humanities research culture since the 2008 review is the Long Room Hub, which is clearly fostering exciting interdisciplinary work, both individual and collaborative in nature, and attracting major scholars from around the world. Many research students in English are benefitting from the broad scope of the research pursued in that space, and the opportunity to hear and engage with leading figures in the Humanities today. Those students fortunate enough to have been allocated a desk on the top floor of the Hub were greatly appreciative of their ability to work in close contiguity with other doctoral students in the Humanities, the easy access to organised events including the weekly staff-student seminar, and the opportunity to socialize with established researchers (local and visiting).

The wide variation in circumstance of research students—some of whom are now well provided for, but many of whom are unfunded and without a dedicated work space—is very largely outside the School's control. As in other areas, the collegial atmosphere of the School, the dedication of the staff, and the excellent archival resources compensate significantly for inequalities of financial support (we were impressed at the very large turn-out of research students at a Creative Writing public reading and following social event, during our visit).

We welcome the move to restructure the process for appointing Teaching Assistants (TAs), with preference given to PhD students (post Confirmation of Status) as part of their training and preparation for the job market. A substantial proportion of research students are taking up this opportunity, and gaining valuable professional expertise, as well as financial income, by that means. Those we spoke with

said that they would welcome a structured system of peer mentoring, whereby more experienced TAs would be paired with less experienced in order to provide some support and guidance. TAs are now receiving well-targeted professional training, including some advice on job-searching beyond the university. In order to maximize the visibility of such training, we would encourage the School to formalise its provision, perhaps along the lines of the year-long programme of ‘professionalisation’ classes and workshops provided by major North American Universities to prepare students approaching the end of their degrees for job applications (both academic and non-academic).

Masters Students

The six M.Phil courses now offered by the School (and additional stakeholder interests in other Faculty courses) have evolved from staff interests. The Irish Writing and Creative Writing Courses are particularly well-established, and maintain outstanding international reputations, but all courses can claim to have a distinct sense of purpose. They are recruiting well—in the case of Creative Writing, exceptionally so, with 90-100 applicants per year for 16 places. Continuation rates to the PhD are excellent, and we were struck by the degree to which Trinity English succeeds in educating distinctive and highly qualified students who remain with the School across the whole of their Higher Education careers, even as new students come into the system and refresh the student culture at each level.

The Oscar Wilde Centre is an attractive building with an august history that forms an enviable home for M.Phil students in Creative Writing and Irish Writing. There are seminar rooms and shared spaces here that support collegiality and community. However, these advantages are not enjoyed by the other M.Phil courses, and it quickly became clear on talking with the students (we met c. 20, covering all M.Phils except Irish Writing and Literatures of the Americas) that the Masters courses are generating the most uneven student experience in the School. The unevenness extends beyond the space and infrastructure. With the exception of students from Creative Writing, who expressed unqualified praise, the current cohort seemed insecure in their sense of what is expected from them. All expressed a desire for clearer guidance on essay style and structuring—a matter which could readily be dealt with via a gathered lecture for all students at the start of the year, and an amplified section on essay writing in the handbooks (one that goes beyond stylistic matters and examination criteria). There was also fairly widespread support for earlier and more sustained guidance on the preparation of the Dissertation. A few vocal students were very unhappy at the perceived mismatch between what is offered by the prospectus and their experience of course delivery and content. We would recommend that staffing levels be looked at again; also that the School either make a more substantial time investment in setting up worthwhile external internships, where they have been advertised, or withdraw that part of the offering. It is essential that the preliminary syllabi on M.Phil courses are updated—something currently not happening in every case.

Income Generation and Growth

In principle, we endorse the School's strategic aims for income generation, which are based upon three main areas:

1. increased philanthropy and alumni engagement
2. increased non-EU student numbers
3. the introduction of on-line courses.

1. Philanthropy seems to us the most promising avenue for income generation here, and to represent relatively 'low-hanging fruit'. The location of the city, its rich literary culture, the long history of interaction between the university and the creative writing scene (including arts organisations and publishers), and the exciting range of current public engagement activities, could all easily be leveraged to cultivate alumni and external donors. Trinity English is well positioned with its outward-facing ethos to enhance the College's reputation as a great cultural institution with a long and distinguished heritage. Fruitful discussions might be had between the School and the College about how to capitalize on these opportunities to best effect. That the Head of School has a place in the College Philanthropic Cabinet is a salutary step in that direction.

2. Increasing non-EU student numbers at both UG and PG level is also easily achievable for this School. Trinity English is a globally recognized brand associated with a high quality student experience. The School rightly holds to the principle of entry on academic merit. But that is compatible with the potential for considerable non-EU growth. Expansion will, however, have to be combined with additional staff recruitment if it is not to have a destructive effect on the School's activities, and to risk reputation loss in the medium and longer term. Again, we are not convinced that the College's information systems are currently able to support such growth; nor is the physical infrastructure at present adequate to take increased numbers or to meet the high level of expectations of overseas students, particularly from North America and the Far East, wanting state of the art facilities. The College will need to resolve these issues before pursuing higher admissions targets.

3. Plans to launch online versions of existing M.Phils will need to be carefully resourced and thought-through. Each of the proposed courses currently being considered by the School with the Associate Dean of Online Education brings its own risks and challenges. In the case of Creative Writing, this would be managing student expectations for one-to-one feedback and the implications it has for staff workload, particularly as the staffing of this programme is in transition owing to an impending retirement. In the case of Digital Humanities it is unclear that the current course is yet sufficiently resourced, distinctive, or institutionally embedded to be offered more widely in a very competitive online market. Any introduction

of Online Courses would have to make substantial use of additional staff, possibly TAs, and would need to be carefully considered and modelled within the School before it can proceed with confidence.

The school needs more financial clarity on the proportion of funds that will come to the school from each potential mode of income generation. It is crucial to have estimates of future funding for adequate planning and strategizing, and for the School to be in a position to pick up the costs of the new Ussher posts at the end of five years.

We would suggest that there is an attractive fourth strand to income generation that the School should also prioritise: the sustained pursuit of external grant income, both from within Ireland, and from overseas. In Ireland the Irish Research Council is an obvious first port of call, but there are also international and European opportunities. The time-consuming nature of developing convincing grant applications is well understood, but the benefits of a successful application, both intellectual and financial, are considerable. The fact that overseas (i.e. non-UK) researchers can now be full Co-Investigators on AHRC grants opens a new route to fruitful collaboration here. Crucial to the process of developing successful applications, however, will be the provision of adequate levels of institutional administrative support and specialist guidance for would-be applicants. A degree of further investment will be required to make this possible (see **Recommendations, Research**, below).

Organisation, Management, and Administrative Support

The 2008 Review noted that, as a consequence of a wider Faculty reorganisation of administrative functions, 'many of the administrative roles [in the School] are not yet as clearly defined as they might be and in many cases staff are struggling to make them effective'. To a degree, this still remains the case. We note with approval that the Head of School and School Administrator propose to review the range and division of roles across the administrative team, and would see this as an opportunity to clarify roles and responsibilities, harmonise and streamline workloads, and generally simplify lines of responsibility and communication within the School. The fact that there is currently no dedicated administrator for PGR students, and that administrative support for the suite of M.Phils seems to be distributed somewhat piecemeal across the administrative team seems to call for urgent review. The opportunity to align administrative roles more directly with academic roles and responsibilities so that each academic role has dedicated administrative support and a single point of contact in the administrative team should be seized. (See **Recommendations**, below).

Staff Numbers and Profile

The 2008 report remarked upon the relatively small size of the School in terms of its academic staff numbers relative to comparator institutions internationally, suggesting that increasing the overall size of the School to nearer 32 FTE from, as it was then, 'just over 21' FTE was a matter for 'urgent attention'.

There has been significant expansion since then, largely as a result of successful applications to the Ussher scheme, but staffing levels are still short of those for equivalent departments in UK Russell Group universities, where English departments tend to be in the range from 35-40 FTE and above. The current staff-student ratio of 31:1 is significantly higher than the OECD average. While the current funding situation means that substantial expansion is not practical in the short term, we would encourage the School and College to plan for structured, income-growth-based expansion, not least at the senior level, where two of the School's named Chairs (the 1867 in English Literature and the Medieval/Renaissance (1977) Chair), remain unfilled.

We strongly support the introduction of a simple, clear workload formula that aims for a fairer distribution of responsibilities across the school. This would include teaching relief for staff with large administrative roles. That currently only the Head of School receives any teaching remission is a clear index of understaffing.

4. Recommendations

We recommend that the School (and, where relevant, the College) introduce the following:

Organisation, Management, and Administrative Support

- A review to consider the reorganizing of administrative functions within the School, to be led by the Head of School and School Administrator. This should consider a more rational division of tasks within the administrative team, especially in relation to the support of programmes. We recommend that the Admin roles should map on to the academic leadership roles within the School, so that each role has dedicated support from one member of the admin team.
- The provision by College of a Faculty IT Partner or similar (along the same lines as the Faculty Finance Partner) to provide dedicated IT support and a consistent point of contact for School Staff, ideally with at least two days scheduled presence within the School each week to provide face-to-face practical support.

Space and Resources

- The provision of a dedicated School Seminar room is essential for the support of all School activities, from UG and PG teaching, through administrative meetings and internal and externally-facing events, to the maintenance and further invigoration of the School's sense of collective identity.
- The teaching spaces within the School need to be upgraded urgently to match the level of those in the excellent Long Room Hub and the Oscar Wilde Centre. At present the lack of even basic IT facilities in the Arts Building rooms, the patchy availability of wifi, and the general décor and lack of natural light inhibit most innovative forms of teaching and learning. We welcome the news that the refurbishment of the Arts Building is a priority for the College.
- Staffing: The School remains relatively small for a unit with its record, reputation and national and international significance. In the UK the most successful departments of English in Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2014 were almost all over 35 FTE. A medium term plan for the managed expansion of staff numbers, based on the costed plans for income generation discussed above, should be a priority.

- In the short term we support the School's ambition for the filling of the two vacant named Chairs as a matter of urgency, both to support academic leadership within the school and allow for succession planning for the Headship, and to reinforce and develop the School's external profile, within Ireland and internationally.
- A clear workload formula should be introduced for the School. While absolute equity cannot be achieved, it is important in a busy and demanding School that the administrative burden is clearly understood, transparent, and equitable.

Teaching and Learning

- TEP: We recommend that the School take serious steps at its earliest opportunity to explore how best to incorporate the requirements of the TEP into its programmes without jeopardizing the structure and principles on which they are based. Such steps might involve consideration of how the requirement for 20 external credits might be spread across the first 3 years of the degree, perhaps adapting provision made for student choice under the existing Broad Curriculum route; also consideration of how a range of external courses might be ear-marked for English students, adding rather than detracting from their development of valuable experience. A 'capstone project', most likely in the form of a dissertation or extended essay(s), might enhance the current final year student experience in English. We encourage the provision of adequate training in research skills if this dissertation is introduced, utilising library staff.
- Syllabus Review: The School should continue with its review of the Freshman curriculum. In our view a degree of streamlining of the courses available and taken in the junior freshman year might well be productive. If there are concerns about the vulnerability of certain aspects of the curriculum to the vagaries of student choice in later years, unless those aspects are introduced substantially in the Freshman years, the School might consider the introduction of a degree of structured choice into the Junior Sophomore options. It might also consider having a maximum number of options on offer in any one year, but with regular rotation to ensure preservation of valued areas of specialization.
- Whether or not the Freshman 'Theories of Literature' module is reformed or removed (an issue under consideration by the current internal curriculum review) we feel that it is important that students are given the opportunity to reflect critically upon method and

approach within literary studies, through appreciation of the diverse practices and debates around reading, interpretation, criticism, and scholarship within the field.

- All postgraduate research students should receive training in research methods.
- Criteria for examination passes between single honours and two-subject moderatorships need to be standardised, especially if the TEP is to achieve greater mobility between courses.
- The M.Phil Programmes: Given the significant expansion in M.Phil numbers, both current and projected, we recommend that the School takes a number of steps to rationalize and harmonise the management and provision of the suite of 6 M.Phil programmes within its purview.
- We recommend the creation of a new leadership role within the School responsible for the direction and oversight of all taught PG programmes to support the School Postgraduate Director. This role should come with *ex-officio* membership of the School Executive.
- Urgent steps should be taken to ensure the greatest degree of parity of experience between students taking the various M.Phil programmes offered by the School. Some factors here are more amenable to redress than others: the improvement of the facilities available for those programmes not taught in the Oscar Wilde Centre may, for example, have to wait for the refurbishment of the Arts Building. But even here some marginal improvements might be possible. Other factors are well within the scope of improvement now.
- As far as is possible, the structures of the various M.Phils should be harmonized, allowing for some sharing of resources, such as joint induction sessions at the start of the programme; standardization of deadlines for the completion of assessed work and the return of marks and feedback, and clear, centralized and readily accessible guidance on expectations concerning written work for essays and dissertations.
- Where possible, all assessed work, at undergraduate and Masters level, should be submitted electronically, using plagiarism software such as Turnitin. Where staff

members prefer to mark essays in paper-based form, a parallel paper copy could be submitted.

- All courses should make effective use of Blackboard, at least for the distribution and archiving of course materials (important for all students, and invaluable for those with varying forms of visual and/or cognitive impairment); ideally also for additional forms of staff-student and student-student engagement such as course blogs, wikis, and discussion groups.
- Teaching assistants should always be registered on Blackboard, so that they can fully integrate into the communication provisions of the courses on which they are teaching.
- Timetabling: we recommend that the deadlines for submission and return of formative assessment at both UG and PG be reviewed in order to ensure that formative assessment is returned in time to be of maximum value to students in advance of their summative assessment.
- We recommend that the School liaise with providers of support such as the Centre for Academic Practice and Student Learning [CAPSL] so that courses and workshops that will be useful to staff, TAs and students are provided at times that do not clash with lectures and other events within the School.
- Assessment and Feedback: We recommend that the maximum 20 working day turnaround period for feedback currently in place for UG assessed work be extended to cover PGT assessment, replacing the existing 30-day rule. M.Phils offer an intense period of specialist study, so the need for swift return of feedback is, if anything, greater for students on these programmes than for those on 4-year UG programmes. A 20-day rule would also improve the chances of feedback on assessed work being returned to students in time to be of use to them when they are writing the next summative pieces of assessment. Again, if submission were made online, this would be more readily achieved and easily monitored.
- Student evaluation of Teaching and Learning: There should be a formal process for the collection and scrutiny of Student evaluation responses by a single responsible officer within the School (perhaps one individual for UG, another for PGT). Such an individual

should review the responses collectively and report to the School annually, where necessary suggesting steps that might be taken to address issues that seem so consistently expressed as to require action.

- We recommend that the School review the timing of termly course evaluations (M.Phil forms seem currently to be going out before course written work has been returned, preventing responses to supposedly formative feedback).
- We strongly recommend that School administrators rather than academic staff act as the clearing house for receiving and entering marks at all levels, with a single member of the administrative team being responsible for each set of marks (whether by year or programme).

Research

- We encourage the School to recognize that external research funding is an opportunity that can be exploited to very good effect without distorting the School's research culture. IRC, ERC, and UK AHRC Co-Investigator roles can be used in ways that enhance and protect the independent researcher rather than threaten his/her independence. Individual researchers may pursue a variety of research activities in their career, and periods of collaboration do not preclude a primary focus on individual, single-researcher projects.
- Current research facilitation support within the Faculty is significantly out of kilter with provision in other institutions. 2 people covering 9 schools does not provide adequate support for the dissemination of funding calls, the development of grant applications, etc., especially where there is a need for an element of evangelizing about the value of such applications. Investment here would repay itself many times over. In our experience, Research Facilitators, like Development Officers, not only quickly pay for themselves but generate considerable additional revenues. One priority would be to make more use of the Senior Faculty Research Support Officer and to seriously consider making a School application for one of the facilitator roles available to be bid for from the College.

Fundraising and other Outward Facing Activities

- The School website must be continually upgraded, maintained, and modernized if it is to be fit for purpose in supporting the School Strategy adequately and reflect the changing roles that it needs to perform for different audiences, internal and external. We recommend a Faculty-wide investment of resource to support a consistent approach to website development and maintenance.
- A fundraising strategy is in the early stages of being devised. We support the initial ideas outlined by the Head of School, and would want to see them developed in close consultation with the Development Office, with a view to raising philanthropic donations that will support the work of the School. The Long Room Hub can share good practice in this area and existing public events can be used as cultivation opportunities.
- The School should consider initiating a discussion with the Globalisation Office regarding the possibility of a Summer School in English or Irish Literature, provided that this involve no additional workload implications for existing staff. A successful, globally-recruiting Summer School might be a driver for significant income generation and staff expansion for the School.

2. Response from the School to the Quality Review of English

Preamble

All members of the School of English would like to echo the sentiments of the Faculty Dean in welcoming the report of the Quality Review team, and in thanking them for their commitment, perceptiveness, and constructive approach to the process. There is a widespread feeling in the School that the reviewers managed that delicate balance between intelligent sympathy and critical detachment that makes such an exercise worthwhile. In particular, the reviewers highlight the fact that “the commitment of School staff to small group teaching and wide and deep coverage of the discipline, together with independent scholarship and a strongly collegial ethos, is deeply rooted and, rightly, much valued”(pg 1). The word “collegial” is easily said, but less easily lived; it often involves a lengthy process of discussion and consideration before a decision is taken; however, once taken, that decision will be stronger for having been made collectively. Over the years, that collective decision-making process in the School of English has, as the reviewers have noted, resulted in a strong commitment to small-group teaching and coverage of the full range of the discipline, from Anglo-Saxon verse to postmodern horror fiction, both in what is taught, and in the research output of members of the School. Indeed, the reviewers highlight the “intimate connection between teaching and research” (pg 2), which is particularly promising given the emphasis placed on this nexus in the Trinity Education Project (TEP). The reviewers further underlined the potential within the School to pursue research funding, based on its research profile.

In short, the reviewers identify much that is working well with the School, and are clear that it is in this context that we need to consider “a number of persistent issues [that] need to be addressed in order to maximize the opportunities for the School to focus on strategic thinking and longer-term development, and [...] areas in which practices need to be tightened up or revised.” (pg 5) The points that follow need to be framed in this context:

- **Strategic Planning and Systems:** The report highlights difficulties created, both in the area of day-to-day operations, and in relation to long-term planning, by IT systems. In terms of the running of the School, they highlight issues with SITS and related systems, which can lead to a series of what the reviewers call “short-term fire-fighting” distractions (pg 5), which detract from the pursuit of long-term objectives. The development of long-term objectives is further hampered by systems of financial reporting, which make it difficult for Schools to gain a clear picture of the financial situation at any given moment. These are clearly College-level issues; but they are issues that need to be addressed nonetheless. Work is on-going on both of these issues, and the School has engaged particularly with FIS in relation to the latter.
- **Staffing:** Given current staff-student ratios, the reviewers strongly recommend managed growth in staff numbers. In particular, they are firmly of the view that the vacant chairs in the School need to be filled “as a matter of urgency” (pg 13). The School will work with the Dean of AHSS to pursue these goals, which are near the top of the School’s strategic aims.

- **Workload and Curriculum:** The reviewers expressed concern about the current workloads of staff, and suggested that the on-going School-level curriculum review, which will be carried out in conjunction with the TEP, might provide an opportunity to address this. “We would thus recommend that the School take the opportunity provided by the current ongoing curriculum review to consider seriously whether it might reduce the number of courses offered in the freshman years without undermining the breadth or depth of the education it provides to incoming students. If there is deep reluctance to sacrificing particular options, it should be possible to rotate what is on offer so that in any given year slightly fewer options run than is the case at present.” (pg 6) More generally, the reviewers suggest that the School take advantage of the TEP to pursue syllabus reform in the undergraduate curriculum (and specifically recommend the retention of a form of the ‘Theories of Literature’ module in JF). These issues will be very much to the forefront of School planning over the coming year, and the process of curriculum reform has already developed a very specific series of curricular models to be carried forward at School level once the basic TEP architecture has been agreed.
- **Transformation From a Paper-Based Culture:** The reviewers comment: “The last external review (2008) remarked on the strikingly paper-based nature of student-staff transactions in the School. This looks increasingly anomalous in a digital age, and is out of kilter with our experience of other international peer-group universities.” (pg 7) On the foot of this recommendation, the School will need to consider adopting policies for on-line submission and archiving of student work, as well as more innovative use of new teaching technologies. Concern over the need for adopting anti-plagiarism software is a related matter that is already being actively discussed in the School.
- **Space:** The previous School review in 2007 highlighted problems with teaching spaces, and this emerged once again. “More generally the provision of teaching and learning spaces across the School remains a matter of serious concern. The lack of a dedicated School seminar room able to accommodate 25-30 people remains the most obvious issue” (pg 7). Given the profile of the School in the university, as the highest ranked academic unit in Trinity over a number of years, the lack of a dedicated seminar room for the School of English struck the external reviewers as a stark and inexplicable anomaly. The School would agree.
- **Teaching Assistant Reform:** The reviewers noted a need to consider the ways in which TAs are recruited, trained, and in which their work is considered an element of postgraduate professional formation. This process is already underway in the School, and a new policy on this matter has since been adopted and is in the implementation phase.
- **M.Phil Programmes:** Apart from the M.Phil in Creative Writing, some of the students from other M.Phil. programmes who met with the externs expressed concerns about dissertation writing and other matters (pg 9). The School has since met with these students in a variety of fora, and is satisfied that these concerns have been addressed. The more general concern about staffing levels in the M.Phil.

programmes is a matter of on-going monitoring. It is worth noting that the M.Phil. programmes in Literatures of the Americas and Popular Literature were not represented at these meetings.

- **Taught PG Administration:** The reviewers also strongly recommend closer harmonisation of M.Phil administration, in relation to the overall role of the administrative staff in the School (see below) and in the creation of a new staff administrative role, in parallel to the current DPGTL, who would focus purely on taught PG programmes – effectively a “Director of Post-graduate Teaching and Learning – Taught” (pg 15). The School is actively considering both of these recommendations.
- **Administration: School:** The reviewers recommend a reconfiguration of administrative roles, with particular attention to the ways in which administrative functions carried out by administrative staff map on to those taken by academic staff. This process has been underway since the beginning of the current academic year.
- **Administration: Faculty:** The reviewers strongly recommend the appointment of a Faculty-level IT advisor, who would, among other things, help address the systems issues identified above in relation to College-wide IT systems, as well as in other matters. The School strongly supports this recommendation.
- **Operational Matters:** The reviewers also make a number of suggestions regarding operational matters, ranging from turn-around times for PG marking, to the use of Blackboard and other issues. All of these are either in the process of being considered by the School at the moment, or will be considered over the coming year.

Conclusion:

The matters raised by the reviewers in their report are almost all currently under consideration by the School in some form: curriculum review (both at School level, and in the College-wide context of the TEP); administrative reorganisation (both in relation to the roles of administrative staff, and in related areas); training and formation of TAs; staffing levels, and filling of vacant chairs. Specific recommendations, whether in relation to on-line submission of student essays, greater support for research funding and development of a philanthropic strategy, are also currently underway. In short, there is nothing in this report that the School would reject out of hand; at the same time, the collegiate spirit of decision-making that the reviewers praise so highly will inevitably guide the direction that the implementation of these recommendations will take over the coming months.

*Prof. Chris Morash
Head, School of English
May 5, 2016*

3. RESPONSE FROM THE FACULTY DEAN TO THE SCHOOL OF ENGLISH QUALITY REVIEW

30 March – 1 April 2016

This is an **excellent** review. I would like to thank the review panel, Professors Greg Walker, Helen Small, and Rónán McDonald, for their highly professional and very generous approach to the review. I would also like to thank Professor Oran Doyle, the internal facilitator. As a member of the School of English, I should say that I did not myself participate in this review as Dean. I am grateful to Professor Gail McElroy for acting as pro-Dean.

The report begins by asserting that 'The Trinity School of English is outstanding' (p. 4). It is 'one of the most successful disciplines in the College, and has an international reputation for research and teaching' (p. 3). The School is 'exceptional in its ethos ... [of] commitment and institutional loyalty' (p. 4), and has 'a very high level of student satisfaction' (p. 4). The culture of postgraduate research is of 'a very high calibre' (p. 7). The reviewers praise 'the commitment of School staff to small group teaching and wide and deep coverage of the discipline, together with independent scholarship and a collegial ethos' (p. 3). It is difficult to imagine a more positive report.

The report does make a number of observations, suggestions and recommendations. Some of these are matters internal to the School, others are College-wide or even sectoral issues. It is important to note that the recommendations are made in the context of the reviewers' recognition of the need to protect 'the organic culture of Trinity English that has developed through adjustment and adaptation over many years' (p. 3). The reviewers are concerned that the School's energies may become dissipated in 'short-term firefighting' (p. 5), most particularly with sub-optimal College systems.

I note in particular the following observations and recommendations:

- The School should undertake a review of best practice with regards to online resources and submission of work.
- Student responses at PGT level were 'uneven' (p. 9). The School should consider appointing a designated PGT Director, with oversight of all courses, who would be a member of the School Executive.
- A review of TA culture is recommended, with a view to greater professionalisation; this should be considered part of PhD training.
- The reviewers recommend increasing non-EU student numbers, at UG and PG level; this should be 'easily achievable' given that 'Trinity English is a globally-recognised brand' (p. 10).

- The current student:staff ratio of 31:1 is 'significantly higher than the OECD average' (p. 12).
- The School's vacant chairs should be filled 'as a matter of urgency' (p. 14).
- The School should have a dedicated seminar room; more generally teaching spaces are in urgent need of an upgrade.
- Faculty-level research support is 'significantly out of kilter with provision in other institutions' (p. 17).

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Darryl Jones', with a stylized initial 'DJ' to the left.

Professor Darryl Jones, Dean AHSS
3 May 2016