Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
The University of Dublin

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Report to Council on the Review of the
School of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures (SLLCS)

February 2015

This report presents the outcome of a Quality Review of the School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies which was undertaken from 12-14 November 2014 by Professor Guido Bonsaver (University of Oxford); Professor Mairéad Hanrahan (University College London); Professor Eric Hooglund (Lund University, Sweden) and Professor Stuart Taberner (University of Leeds). The internal facilitator was Professor David Ditchburn, Trinity College Dublin.

The report attached includes (i) the External Reviewers' report received on the 17th December 2014, (ii) a response from the Head of School received on the 16th January 2015, (iii) a response from the Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences received on the 25th February 2015 and (iv) a response from the Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer.

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

The Review Report and recommendations, along with the responses from the School and Dean of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences were discussed at the Quality Committee on 5th March 2015. The Head of School, Professor David Scott, was in attendance. The full discussion on the Review Report and responses is recorded in QC minute QC/14-15/028.

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1. Reviewers' Report

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1. Members of the Review Team

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2. Format of Review

The members of the panel received in advance of their visit a School Self-Assessment document and related documents. They requested and received further documents during their visit. The review consisted of an examination of the documentation and meetings with the following groups of staff.

Day 1: Wednesday 12th November 2014

Time	Meeting
09.10	Meet Reviewers at Davenport Hotel & escort to Trinity College for first meeting
09.30 – 10.30	Introductory meeting with College Officers
10.45 – 11.30	Meeting & coffee with Head of School
11.30 – 12.15	Meeting with Director of Teaching & Learning UG (DTL UG)
12.15 – 13.15	Meeting with Heads of Department & Director of European Studies

Day 1: Wednesday 12th November 2014 *continued*

Time	Meeting
13.15 – 14.15	Reviewers' private time & lunch
14.15 – 15.00	Meeting with Undergraduate students
15.00 – 15.30	Meeting with Dean of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences (AHSS)
15.30 – 16.00	Coffee
16.00 – 17.00	Meeting with School academic staff (all)
17.00 – 17.30	Reviewers' private time
18.15	Meet reviewers at Davenport Hotel & escort to restaurant
18.30	Dinner with College Officers

Day 2: Thursday 13th November 2014

Time	Meeting
09.00 – 09.30	Meeting with Acting Director of the Centre for Literary Translation
09.30 – 10.00	Meeting with Director of Two Subject Moderatorship programme (TSM)
10.00 – 10.30	Meeting with Director of the Centre for Medieval & Renaissance Studies
10.30 – 11.15	Meeting with the Director of Teaching & Learning PG (DTL PG)
11.15 – 11.45	Reviewers' private time & coffee
11.45 – 12.30	Meeting with Directors of M.Phil courses
12.30 – 13.30	Meeting & lunch with M.Phil students
13.30 – 14.00	Meeting with Director of the Long Room Hub
14.00 – 14.45	Meeting with Support Staff
14.45 – 15.45	Meeting with staff involved in developing new UG degree

Day 2: Thursday 13th November 2014 *continued*

16.00 – 18.00	Reviewers' private time & coffee
19.00	Dinner with Head of School & School Administrator

Day 3: Friday 14th November 2014

Time	Meeting
09.00 – 09.45	Meeting with academic staff recruited in the last five years
09.45 – 10.30	Meeting with Director of Research
10.30 – 11.00	Meeting & coffee with Research students
11.00 – 11.30	Meeting with School Administrator
11.30 – 12.00	Meeting with School Global Officer & Outreach Co-ordinator
12.00 – 14.00	Reviewer private time & lunch
14.00 – 14.45	Wrap-up meeting with Head of School
15.00 – 16.00	Wrap-up meeting with College Officers

3. Preamble

The reviewers would like to thank Trinity College's Quality Assurance Office, the Facilitator, Notetaker, the School of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures (SLLCS), its Faculty and members, and the College Officers for the information provided both in advance and during our visit, for their willingness to respond constructively to our questions, and their hospitality.

The reviewers recognise the extraordinarily difficult context within which Trinity College, the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences and SLLCS have been operating over recent years, and we are particularly conscious of the severe financial and staffing constraints that have been in place. We applaud the SLLCS for its efforts to mitigate the impact on students and for its hard work in maintaining the highest possible standards of student education. In particular, we note the high levels of collegiality, commitment to student education, and loyalty amongst all categories of staff.

We recognise the efforts that have been made to maintain an international research profile under extremely challenging circumstances. We also recognise the efforts made to integrate Near and Middle East Studies into the School.

Before and during our visit, the reviewers noted a number of issues, many raised by the College, Faculty, and SLLCS Officers or members of SLLCS, and others that emerged from our perspective as scholars working in institutions that in many respects resemble Trinity, while also differing in some significant aspects. We are confident that the College, Faculty, and SLLCS will forgive any errors or omissions arising from our inadequate understanding of the local and national context while giving due consideration to the benefits of an external perspective on SLLCS's operations and place within the College.

We have divided our report into three sections: College, Faculty and SLLCS; Management systems and information; and SLLCS. Of these, the third section of necessity will be longer, but we would want to emphasise that we see all three as equally important. Indeed, many of the comments we make in relation to SLLCS are interlinked with our perspective on the way that the College, Faculty, and SLLCS work together. At the end of the report, we make a series of concrete recommendations. It may be worth signaling in advance that many of these repeat the recommendations made in the previous SLLCS review of 2008.

4. The College, the Faculty and SLLCS

SLLCS depends to a very large extent on its constructive working relationship with the College and particularly on its interactions with the leadership of the College and on the effective functioning of College-wide systems (IT and so on).

It is the strong view of the reviewers that these do not currently work well. We would highlight a number of areas where it would appear to us that SLLCS does not receive adequate return for the top slice of 37% it pays on income generated.

4.1. **SITS**. While members of SLLCS noted some positives aspects of the Student Information System, there was a strong feeling that it too often fails to deliver the kind of information that is required to progress students efficiently and effectively through their degrees and thus added considerably to the burden on staff.

4.2. **Fixed timetable**. It was apparent to the reviewers that the lack of a fixed timetable across the College greatly adds to the administrative burden placed on administrative staff. This situation also has severe impact on staff research, specifically the difficulty of maintaining a research day.

4.3. **Degree programmes**. The complexity of degree programmes in the College makes it difficult for SLLCS to administer these programmes effectively without a huge investment of staff time and effort. It also was noted that this was a major source of complaint amongst students. SLLCS also adds to this complexity (see below) due to the persistence of different practices across its constituent departments.

4.4. **Committee and reporting structures**. There do not seem to be clear committee and reporting structures from College to Faculty to SLLCS, meaning that there is often confusion about where authority lies. This also raises quality assurance issues, to the extent that different parts of the College, different Schools, and – in this case – departments within a School are inconsistent in their application of procedures and rules.

4.5. **Financial model**. There appears to be a great deal of confusion about how the College's financial model operates, and indeed there are perverse incentives, for example that income generated by successful MPhils does not always flow back to Schools. There is also an issue of management information (see below).

4.6. **Strategic Vision**. We did not get the impression of a coherent and dynamic strategy for the role of SLLCS within the College's vision, for example, in relation to its internationalisation aspiration, or indeed more generally. This was also the case at Faculty level, where we did not see a forward-looking strategy beyond the replacement of imminent retirements. While we understand the extreme difficulty of strategic thinking when in crisis-management mode, we nevertheless sensed a lack of vision in relation to SLLCS's role in the Faculty and a reluctance to exercise leadership. We understand the College's tradition of consensual decision-making, but it is also vital that decisions, once arrived at, are implemented consistently.

Further to these points relating to systems and strategic vision, we wish to highlight the situation of junior, temporary, and hourly-paid staff in the School. Hourly-paid staff deliver a significant proportion (50%) of teaching in the School, and they have little or no security of tenure and few prospects for career progression. Dissatisfaction about the same issues was

expressed by a number of academic staff on short-term (1-3 year) contracts on whom SLLCS strikes the reviewers as being disproportionately dependent. Furthermore, many staff on permanent contracts who might have expected to be promoted but who remain 'stuck' at the top of their pay scale. These categories of staff are most negatively impacted by the additional burdens generated by the poor functioning of College systems and by the particular structures that operate within the School, as detailed below.

As a matter of principle and to ensure the fair treatment of talented, dedicated and hardworking colleagues, we would urge the College, Faculty and School to develop as a matter of urgency a coordinated approach to addressing the precarious position of these categories of staff.

5. Management Information

The reviewers felt it was important to address the issue of management information, since this issue cuts across College, Faculty and SLLCS, and given how important it is in developing strategy and driving change.

The reviewers were surprised that key management information was not readily available in advance of our visit, including (crucially) information on SLLCS's finances, but also data on research grant income, proportion of research-active staff, sabbatical policy at College, Faculty and School levels, committee structures, role descriptions and remits for committees, etc. SLLCS responded immediately to our requests for additional information to the best of its ability. Nevertheless, the reviewers were surprised that it proved difficult to assemble some of this information even during our visit. There does not appear, for example, to be a consolidated document detailing income, expenditure, College top-slice, and so on, which would produce a precise indication of SLLCS's budgetary position. The fact that College does not make this information systematically available exacerbates the difficulty of planning effectively at School level.

It also seemed to be difficult to produce this information historically, or to produce forecasts over the next planning period. While we appreciate the difficulties of planning in a highly volatile financial environment, we at least might have expected to see 'scenario planning', for example, what the costs of recruiting to senior positions would be versus SLLCS's deficit/surplus. Indeed, it was only with some effort that we were able to discover SLLCS's financial situation (we think a deficit of around EURO 300 000).

As worrying was the apparently different, or even incomplete, understanding of SLLCS's budgetary position at different levels of the College, Faculty, and School. SLLCS appears to have a very different understanding of its financial position, and indeed works from a different framework for its discussions. It does not see itself in deficit, since it only looks at its non-staff budget, and it was unaware of the level of the College top-slice. At Faculty level, we were surprised that we were unable to get an immediate and full answer to our questions about SLLCS's budgetary position.

It would seem to us to be difficult, if not impossible, to plan effectively if there is not a shared understanding of the financial processes and a sharing of information across the different levels. It is also vital, we felt, that colleagues in leadership positions know the financial data that surely must inform decisions, along with academic imperatives.

6. The School

6.1 Management and Structures

We understand that crisis management has been the dominant issue for the School over the Review period. In addition to the drastic cuts in funding implemented throughout the Irish Higher Education sector since the onset of the recession, the frequency of change in the resource allocation models and the uncertainty of the budget, as referenced in 5 above, have made it difficult for the School to plan strategically for the medium term future. Especially given the impending retirements of a number of senior colleagues and how this will exacerbate an already extremely heavy imbalance between senior and junior members of staff, providing leadership for the School as it goes forward in an unfavorable institutional context is perhaps the single greatest challenge it faces. As the Self-Assessment states, the School is facing a very severe staffing shortage, and we support its claim that its capacity to produce research of high quality and to continue the range of excellent teaching it currently delivers is not sustainable without further investment. As well as bedding down the developments detailed in its Strategic Plan, the leadership provided by chairs is needed to ensure that the School's most urgent priorities are identified and addressed.

We therefore unreservedly agree with SLLCS's view that additional posts are indispensable if SLLCS is to achieve its ambition to play a prominent role in Modern Languages nationally and internationally, and we welcome the confirmation by the University's Senior Management that they fully endorse the School's request for additional staffing. Our view is that the appointments to the vacant Chairs and the main-streaming of the junior posts identified as necessary in the SLLCS's Self-Assessment will indeed be needed to move SLLCS safely out of crisis management. The situation in the Italian Department is particularly serious, as rightly noted in the Self-Assessment document (p. 42). Two out of three of its members of staff will have retired by 2017, plus a fourth one has been kindly teaching on a voluntary basis since her retirement in 2002): this is clearly a delicate phase for a Department whose role within the School has been, and still is, recognised as central to the study of European culture (see for instance reference to the popularity of the 'Dantean Echoes' module in the MPhil programmes, pp. 235, 236). We believe that, in line with the support for Italian unanimously expressed by the School Committee, a clear and uncompromising commitment on the part of the Faculty is needed in order to guarantee the current level of staff with at least two appointments to replace the upcoming two vacancies. This is necessary in order to sustain the current teaching provision as much as to provide interdepartmental collaboration and leadership across the entire school.

It is the strong view of the reviewers that failure to make these appointments in Italian would disastrously compromise the capacity of the Italian Department to sustain its undergraduate programme, seriously hinder its contribution to the School's postgraduate interdisciplinary modules, and make it impossible for the School to present itself as a leading centre for the study of and research on Italian culture. There also needs to be a clear commitment towards providing an integrated addition to current staffing as soon as the emerita member of staff stops her commendable voluntary contribution to the teaching workload of the Department.

For the other appointments in the School, careful thought needs to be given to the direction SLLCS wishes to take to ensure that the process of filling them is informed by a strategic vision of where the School would like to see itself in five years' time, and not merely by the consideration of short-term staffing of existing courses and modules.

Furthermore, the reviewers strongly believe that it is important for the School to reconsider its medium term priorities, in particular the balance between teaching and research, which has been skewed towards the former because of the need to manage immediate crises. We note the extent to which the Departmental structures that preceded the constitution of the School in 2006 have survived. The priority has clearly been to maintain strong disciplinary identities, and we understand especially the desire to ensure that the student experience remains very positive. We feel, however, that this reflects a disproportionate prioritization of the needs of students over those of staff, and in particular of staff research (as, for example in the prioritization of student choice over a staff research day as mentioned above, or the persistence of double blind marking, which is very rarely practised today in other institutions), that may not correspond to the University's overall strategic aims. This situation has also created a widespread sense of frustration and dissatisfaction amongst staff at all levels, and particularly amongst junior members of SLLCS.

At a general level, the cost in terms of staff time appears often not to be taken into account in the reaching of decisions. By maintaining Departmental structures and practices virtually unchanged, the creation of the School appears in effect to have involved adding another layer of administration rather than replacing or rationalizing it. The role of the School committees and functions that have been set up remains somewhat opaque. The UG Teaching and Learning committee appears to serve a merely coordinating role. We were surprised, for example, that this committee does not appear to have played a central role in setting up the new course in EMES (see below), although the Director of the UG Teaching and Learning Committee sits ex officio amongst the group devising the programme. An overlap exists between the Director of Research and the PG DTL in the organization of the Graduate seminar series. The Director of Research does not seem to have a clear role in the monitoring and promotion of research quality (see below).

The very heavy administrative workload impacts particularly negatively on junior staff, many of whom are shouldering administrative burdens that make it extremely difficult for them to advance their research, with negative consequences not only for their own career progression but also for TCD's reputation as a research-intensive University.

The concentration of decision-making at the level of HoDs also works against the involvement of junior staff in policy-making; they were in general less convinced than senior staff that consensus drives the decision-making process. For example, serious concerns were raised about the degree to which they had input into the MPhil courses on which they were asked to teach. These appear on occasion to be driven by historical precedent rather than emerging out of the research interests of current staff who will deliver them. There was also a clear sense of disillusionment in the capacity of the School Committee to be an effective tool in its official role as 'the policy making committee for the School'.

The implications of retaining Departmental structures intact are most evident at the level of

support Staff. The School is fortunate in the highly-committed, helpful staff it employs who have played an important role in maintaining strong disciplinary identities and in providing a high degree of pastoral care for students in some of its constituent Departments. We note the decision taken in this respect not to implement the recommendation of the 2008 Review to change the administrative structure to a function-based rather than Departmental-based one. Again, however, the costs of this prioritization may not have been fully taken into account. It has created a student perception in those Departments whose offices are open on only a part-time basis that the academic staff rather than the EOs represent the first port of call, with a consequent expectation that academic staff are endlessly available to answer student queries of all kinds. This indicates that the continuation of Departmental offices has meant that more School resources are taken up with administration and fewer with academic matters than might otherwise be possible. The need for all the EOs to have expertise in the various IT systems, webskills, etc. necessarily involves a degree of reduplication, while also meaning that there is no contingency plan for replacing staff in the case of illness, etc. In addition, it reduces the opportunities for career progression for administrative staff. We therefore recommend that the degree of communication and cooperation between the Departmental offices be considerably developed, specifically addressing the areas where harmonization amongst different Departments is still lacking, and those where duplication of tasks creates unnecessary administrative workloads for both administrative and teaching staff.

The persistence of the Departmental structure has had consequences in a number of other respects. There is no consistent School-wide sabbatical policy, with the result that in some of the smaller departments research leave can be taken only if teaching is doubled up in the other semester. This is a regretful infringement of the School's commitment towards a fair treatment of all its members of staff. Furthermore, the recently implemented workload model used does not seem to have succeeded in equalizing loads among colleagues, and we would recommend that a more effective model be devised (or imported). The Head of School should have oversight of the final allocation in the interest of fairness but also so that colleagues can be confident it corresponds to SLLCS's strategic needs. The current practice whereby it is the responsibility of the MPhil directors to organize the staffing of their programmes should be discontinued and responsibility for this shifted to the Head of School. In terms of quality assurance, the fact that the School devolves the implementation of policy to the Departments means that the implementation of College policies on mentoring, on confirmation of status for PhD students, etc. is inconsistent and sometimes leads to embarrassing discrepancies (see below).

6.2 Teaching and Learning

We wish to emphasise the extremely positive feedback from undergraduate students on the quality of teaching, commitment of staff to their learning, and, for the most part, interaction with school support staff. Students felt that that they were engaged in an intellectual exercise that would equip them to think at a high level as they pursed their studies. Postgraduates too were generally positive about the support they received from supervisors and support staff.

We note exciting new initiatives in the School, for example the new BA in European and

Middle Eastern Studies and the two new Centres for Literary Translation and European Studies. (This list is not exhaustive.) We also note the tremendous support provided by the Global Officer, here and elsewhere, in recruiting non-EU students, and the School's commitment towards a lively Outreach events programme.

The reviewers would want to draw attention to a number of issues that arose in the course of our discussions with students and more generally in our discussions throughout our visit.

6.2.1 **Programmes**. Students complained about the complexity and number of programmes, with a large number of entry points and poor information about what following a particular programme would imply for a student's progression. Related to this, students could not understand the rationale for why some parts of the school would allow particular combinations while others would not, or, on the TSM, why some combinations would allow route A (both subjects in depth to four years) while others would not. On further investigation, it appears that which, and in what ways, subjects may be combined is largely a result of historical accretion. The consequence can be a lack of clarity, a degree of confusion, and, in some cases, potential unfairness.

6.2.2 **Erasmus**. The uncertainty around the availability/non-availability of the opportunity to spend time abroad via Erasmus on particular combinations causes a degree of distress for students and also seems to be a missed opportunity for the School in terms of the attractiveness of its programmes. Again, the range and type of degree programmes seems sometimes unnecessarily complex. TSM students also commented on the negative impact on their linguistic skills deriving from the unavailability of a fully-fledged Year Abroad.

6.2.3 **Diversity of Practice**. Students noted a great diversity of practice across the school and commented that while this was mostly unproblematic, it sometimes caused uncertainty and a sense of different degrees of efficiency amongst different departments.

6.2.4 **Quality Assurance.** From the perspective of the reviewers, the diversity in practice raises quality assurance issues. It was not clear to the reviewers that there are mechanisms in place to share best practice across the school in teaching and learning, whether this is classroom practice, assessment, or module design. It was also not clear to the reviewers how, or whether, the School could be assured that the quality of the delivery of teaching was uniformly high across the departments, or that students in different departments were being treated equally and fairly in relation to, say, contact hours, marking procedures, and so on. The School still seems to operate as a set of separate departments and it is not clear that, from a quality assurance point of view, this ensures best practice or fairness. This was noted by an External Examiner who, in his report, commented on his lack of contact and familiarity with the School's examining system as a whole.

6.2.5 **Staff-student Forum and Student Feedback**. It was noted that there does not appear to be a separate staff-student forum, either in departments (or perhaps in some but not others) or school level. Although all School and Departmental committees include student representation, students did not seem aware of this; those we met believed that their student representatives report to the Union but not necessarily to the School and that there was no consistent procedure for raising issues. The

undergraduate students we met were unanimous in their perception that different departments offer different practices when it comes to relations with student representatives and feedback in general.

6.2.6 **Teaching and Learning Committees**. The reviewers were not convinced that the purpose and remit of the UG and PG Teaching and Learning committees was sufficiently clear. They do not currently appear to have a remit for quality assurance, spreading of best practice, or ensuring (broad) harmonisation of practice across the school. Rather they seem largely to function to distill information from College and Faculty level. We understand that module questionnaires are to be introduced across the College this year, and we would expect that these would be considered in the School Teaching and Learning committees. We would also expect these to be the committees in which School policy on teaching and learning would be formulated and disseminated. We would also expect that new programmes (e.g. the new BA in European and Middle Eastern Studies) would be developed in collaboration with the UG Teaching and Learning committee, to ensure consistent practice and strategic fit.

6.2.7 **European Studies and Middle Eastern Studies**. The reviewers welcome the development of a new programme in European Studies and Middle Eastern Studies and understand the rationale for the introduction of this programme, both internally (to maximise teaching and research synergies and integrate Middle Eastern Studies) and externally (the current interest in the interaction of Europe and the Near and Middle East). It was not clear, however, how, in detailed terms, the new programme intersects with the School strategy. Initiatives such as this are certainly to be welcomed but might be encouraged still further if they could be related more strongly to the School's strategy, a business plan, discussions around workloads and the workload model, and future appointments in the School. Without a coherent strategy and vision, the reviewers feel strongly that this laudable new programme could harm rather than enhance both the current balance of teaching loads and the international reputation of the School.

6.2.8 **Postgraduates, taught and research**. The reviewers recognised the School's success in attracting high numbers of well-qualified postgraduates, both to its MPhil and Ph.D programmes. However, in terms of teaching provision, during our meeting with recently-appointed members of staff, there was a clear sense of lack of ownership of the School's current menu of MPhil courses. The teaching workload was understood by young members of staff mainly in terms of fulfilling teaching needs in the existing curriculum rather than the product of an active involvement in curriculum development.

6.2.9 **Postgraduates, taught and research – Quality Assurance.** The reviewers noted a number of quality assurance concerns. It was not clear what minimum expectations are for the student experience (number of supervision meetings, for example, or form and regularity of feedback), and how, or whether, the School could feel confident that best practice was occurring across the School. The effective devolution of postgraduate matters to departments made sharing of best practice and quality assurance difficult. The lack of a centralised (online) system for students records, recording of supervision meetings, and so on, makes tracking of student progression and quality assurance difficult and burdensome. There also appeared to be no standardisation of what students receive, and could expect, in relation to career development, teaching experience, or mentoring. The amount of teaching

experience gained by postgraduate students is extremely inconsistent, in many cases verging on zero hours, and in all cases with no shadowing/monitoring on the part of members of staff. There was also confusion about the complaints procedure, the role of the director of postgraduate studies and the director of research, and about the role of the postgraduate studies and research committee. The reviewers too were perplexed by the amalgamation of postgraduate studies and research, which seemed to detract from the strategic role that may be expected from a research committee and also complicate lines of responsibility in relation to postgraduate progression.

All of the above are significant areas of concern. However, the reviewers would emphasise that, for the most part, the issues listed above do not negatively impact on student education 'in the classroom'. There is an excellent range of modules that are delivered to a very high standard and with very high levels of student satisfaction. Most of the impact of the issues listed above is felt by academic and support staff who are required to invest enormous time and effort into resolving issues at departmental level where a School policy is missing (or inconsistently enforced), dealing with the complexity of the system and helping students through it, resolving problems that better functioning systems and greater harmonisation of processes might have prevented from occurring. The School is extremely responsive to its students—perhaps sometimes to the detriment of its staff, for example in not preserving research time and a research day (see below)—but it might be asked whether the same attention might be given at lower cost in time and effort with greater harmonisation of practices across the School.

Some of the issues listed above would need to be resolved at College and Faculty level (degree programme structure, etc.), and some at School level (harmonisation, etc.).

6.3 Research

In line with Strand 4 of Trinity's research strategy, SLLCS aims to contribute to a 'deeper understanding of culture' in relation to its various areas of scholarly expertise. The high quality of the research output by a large number of members of staff confirms this and presents the School as a leading research centre in Ireland and internationally. Furthermore, following the creation of the The Long Room Hub (TLRH), the School has been playing a leading role across the humanities, providing this centre with one of its Directors, and contributing to the development of collaborative and multidisciplinary research projects.

At the same time, the reviewers feel that the process of monitoring, facilitation and support of research in SLLCS is still lacking the priority and drive that would be expected from a first-class, research-led educational institution. On the one hand, this is due to external factors deriving from financial constraints imposed by current cuts in public funding. On the other hand, it is the result of the need to develop and implement structures and practices capable of allowing staff members to plan and deliver their research work at both an individual and collaborative level.

The Workload Model currently in use allows for a portion of individual members of staff's time to be apportioned to research activities. However, it is not clear whether this model is

simply a rough record of people's current activities or whether it is used as an effective tool in order to protect and foster research. Judging from our conversation with School members of staff, the former seems to be the case. Furthermore, the following statement in the Research section of the School Strategic Plan: 'individual research is still of primary importance and is supported by appropriate sabbatical and funding structures' (p. 40) does not seem to be supported by actual practices as described by the School members of staff. As already stated, sabbatical leave often appears to be available only if individuals double up their teaching load in the preceding or following term; and it is not exceptional for individuals to have their right to a sabbatical denied or delayed because of teaching constraints at departmental level. Some funding structures are in place but, as will be explained in more detail below, the resources currently invested in the facilitation of research work are not adequate. Finally, we have to reiterate that the practice of allowing for a weekly research day during term time does not seem to be factored into the implementation of the Timetable (as apparently is the case in other Schools) with the result that members of staff end up teaching throughout the five days of the week.

The abovementioned factors, in our view, impede the fully-fledged research activity to which the College aspires. This is particularly critical for younger members of staff who, because of the current imbalance between junior and senior staff, are expected to shoulder a substantial amount of the School administrative load.

Support towards research grant applications currently is provided at Faculty level through the help of two members of staff: a Research Programme Officer and a Director of Strategic Projects, both based at the TLRH. This is a commendable development and its effectiveness has already been proven by a successful track record of applications for external funding at both Faculty and School level. However, the reviewers would encourage the College to develop this even further, with a much stronger provision of staffing devoted to this task. Research-led institutions across Europe can boast staffing that is substantially in excess of the provision of two FTEs for the entire humanities and social sciences. This is critical since otherwise members of staff will compete for international grants against teams that are benefitting from better and more intensive support.

Furthermore, the reviewers identified space for improvement at both ends of the grant application process:

6.3.1 **Facilitation:** in their preparatory stages, major grant applications absorb a substantial amount of time and energy. The provision of pump-priming funding towards this would allow staff to free themselves from a portion of their teaching or administrative burden and thus be able to invest the necessary time to prepare competitive bids for major application grants. This could be introduced through competitive bids at Faculty level, coordinated by TLRH. The existence of Start-Up grants is noted in the Director of Research report (p. 112) but there is no mention of whether these are offered at Faculty or School level, or what success rate School members of staff have achieved. In addition to this, the current drive towards collaborative projects should be counterbalanced by equal emphasis being paid to supporting research grant applications organized and delivered by individual members of staff. The latter is often perceived as the main *modus laborandi* by

researchers in the humanities, and the School needs to emphasize its commitment to that level of research activity in parallel with its drive towards collaborative projects.

6.3.2 **Management:** at the other end of the process, it is our understanding from its Director that the TLRH is currently unable to support the administration of research grants. If this is a burden which is expected to be carried by members of staff or by the administrative staff attached to a particular department or school, the College has an obligation to implement measures which will allow this to happen without the creation of further burden to its staffing. Ideally, since the provision of research facilitation currently is provided at Faculty level (through TLRH), a similar investment should be made in order to provide adequate facilities and allow staff across Schools to benefit from an experienced team of ad hoc administrators at TLRH.

With regard to the identification of research strands that show the strength of SLLCS across different disciplines, the reviewers commend its implementation as presented in the School review document. The reviewers are also in agreement that the creation of senior positions implicitly fostering interdisciplinary and collaborative research (such as the post in Literary translation and the planned one in European Studies) will provide focus and momentum towards the maximization of the School's research profile. If this has been particularly successful at the level of Postgraduate teaching, the School should now try and turn it into collaborative research aimed at raising external funding.

6.3.3 **Research Seminars**: The reviewers commend the programme of fortnightly SLLCS Research seminars currently held at TLRH. However, the fact that this programme is mainly an extension of the traditional series of postgraduate seminars previously held within the School should be addressed as a limitation in two respects. First of all, its link to the process of introduction of research students to research activities across the School and to the presentation of their own research work (as described in p. 67 of the Self-Assessment document) limits the capacity of the programme to foster interdisciplinarity and collaboration amongst members of staff. The reviewers are left wondering whether the current programme ends up doing two different things at the same time, and thus risks doing neither effectively. Secondly, the fact that the programme is currently run by the Director of Research somehow creates ambiguity as to who is ultimately responsible for the training and welfare of postgraduate students. A clearly distinguished two-tier system, i.e., research seminars at TLRH run by the Director of Research, and postgraduate seminars run by the Director of Teaching and Learning PG – might be a more effective way forward. The existence of another, weekly research seminar is mentioned in passing (in p. 44 and then in p. 114) but there is no clarity about its relationship with the SLLCS Research seminar nor about who is responsible for it - and if it is the Director of Research, as the reviewers were told during one of the meetings, then it should be explained why this is not part of the Director of Teaching and Learning PG's brief)

6.3.4 **Director of Research:** the reviewers approve of the creation of the position of Director of Research as a means towards monitoring and promoting research. They are also very appreciative of his work towards the identification of major research strands amongst the many scholarly interests of members of staff. The current three Research Centres appear to provide umbrella groupings that act as an appropriate interdisciplinary forum and platform for collaborative initiatives.

However, during our meeting with the current Director, we had the impression that his role has serious limitations when it comes to the monitoring and facilitation of research with regard to individual members of staff. As reported during our meeting, last year's process of submission of individual Research Plans was fulfilled by only about 60/70% of research active staff, and the second phase envisaging individual meetings to discuss the plans has not even started to be implemented. This is an important part of the process of ensuring adequate support to research and as a way of monitoring the progress of the wide range of research activities conducted within the School. The Director of Research has to be given a clear role in this process, and School members of staff should perceive it as a positive, constructive development rather than as an attempt to 'control' their research interests and activities.

6.3.5 **Research Leadership:** if the School intends both to present itself as a first class research-intensive unit and to attract high-calibre doctoral and postdoctoral research students, it needs to formulate a detailed plan of how it intends to address current and future staff vacancies in relation to its research strategies and in unison with its teaching needs at undergraduate and graduate level.

7. Recommendations

The reviewers make the following recommendations, a number of which repeat the recommendations of the previous 2008 report:

1. That four Chairs be appointed to replace retirements. SLLCS should make a strategic case for the replacement of these Chairs, based on research quality and grant income, undergraduate and postgraduate numbers, growth, and inter-disciplinarity.
2. That the staffing crisis in the Italian Department be immediately addressed, with at least two new appointments, ideally in fields of study which are strategic at both departmental and school level.
3. That a strategic case also be made to ensure the continued presence of dynamic junior staff, given the extent to which at present the SLLCS is alarmingly dependent on staff whose short-term contracts will soon expire. Again, this case should not simply replicate the School's historic distribution of staff but look to growth areas in research and teaching.
4. That every effort be made, as a matter of principle and fair treatment of staff, to regularise the contracts of temporary, part-time and hourly-paid staff.
5. That the School make faster and more sustained progress towards rationalising its structures. This implies greater centralisation of administrative functions in particular, but also greater standardization of practices across the School led by the relevant committees. Furthermore, this more effective investment of time and effort should be achieved with no reduction in FTE of support staff, but rather with the view of decreasing the administrative burden of teaching staff.
6. That, as already noted in the 2008 Review, the TSM programme be revised with the view of introducing a model which allows students to spend a Year Abroad, similarly to European Studies students (and to the vast majority of Modern Languages joint-honours students in Irish and UK institutions).
7. That the School should address issues of quality assurance at UG and PG level, again driven through the appropriate committees and with a view to standardizing practice and efficient record-keeping.
8. That the School should establish a school-wide staff-student committee, as part of this quality assurance.
9. That the School/Faculty further develop its commitment towards better resources for the support of research activity of both an individual and collaborative nature.
10. That sabbatical leave should be guaranteed on equal grounds to individual members of staff across all departments.
11. That the organization of the postgraduate/research seminar programme be revised (see above 6.3.3)
12. That a better record of the members of staff's research output and plans should be kept and elaborated in order to allow the Director of Research and the Head of School to identify areas for improved support, collaboration and exchange of best practice.

2. Response from the Head of the School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies

Introduction
The School welcomed the four external reviewers and appreciated the energy and thoroughness they put into investigating its performance over the review period (2008-2014). The SLLCS values the reviewers' perspicacity and insight into the management and working relations not only within the School but also between the School and the Faculty and the College. The observations of the reviewers are largely accepted by the School as a useful point of reference for future development, and will be closely considered in the coming years in relation to acting on the School's revised strategic plan (2014). The Reviewers' report is well received also insofar as it underlines the crisis-management nature of the School's operations in the last few years owing to underfunding of staffing and research, and the lack of clarity re budgetary information and guidelines. But the need to establish and pursue as far as possible clear strategic goals is also recognized.

Key issues raised and recommendation made in the Report
Before responding to the issues and recommendations, the School is gratified to hear from the external Reviewers that its high international standing as a centre of quality teaching and research is fully justified by the nature and range of the courses offered both undergraduate and postgraduate and the high quality of the research produced by a large proportion of the School's staff. The School is also encouraged by the reported general satisfaction of its students (both UG, PG and Research), the motivation, efficiency and student-friendliness of School and department support staff (SAO, EOs), and the exceptional level of commitment and competence shown by lecturers and professors. The School also appreciates the recognition given, despite difficult conditions, to its development of a new UG programme in European and Middle Eastern Studies (EMES) both as a vital departure in itself but also as a means of further integrating the Dept of NMES into the School. And this at an exceptionally trying period for the university in the light of government cutbacks in funding, and a general shortage of financial resources and staffing provision within the College. However there are serious issues raised in the Report that need to be addressed by the School and the College, as set out under the following headings.

Staffing
Staffing is clearly a cornerstone not only of the School's strategic vision but also of UG, PG and research supervision. The School fully endorses the Reviewer's recommendation that the professorships or senior posts in four of the historically disciplines (French, German, Italian, Spanish) be replaced as they become vacant - in 2015 or as in two cases they have already become vacant as of 2013 and 2014. The School also endorses the Reviewers' recommendation that a strategic case should be made for these professorships in the light of research quality, student numbers (UG and PG) and interdisciplinarity, as already in part outlined in the School strategic plan. In addition, in

the case of Italian, as the Reviewers stress in their second recommendation, the replacement of posts is of both extreme urgency as well as strategic importance, in that for the Italian Department to have a viable future, a senior appointment will have to be made next year. The urgency of mainstreaming of junior contract staff, as outlined in the Reviewers' 3rd recommendation, is also an agreed priority within the School, one that is of immediate necessity as well as of strategic importance.

Strategic planning

It has been difficult over the last few years to vouchsafe with certainty viable long-term strategic plans in the light of the lack of clarity in relation to the School's funding and budget, the increasing shortage of senior staff and not least the lack of reassurance with regard to the mainstreaming of young colleagues initially appointed on fixed-term contracts. As the Reviewers make clear, the School has for the last few years been in a state of crisis management in which the main aim has been to maintain a high standard of teaching and research on the basis of diminished resources. This notwithstanding, the School is committed, as set out in its Strategic plan of 2014, over the next five years to maintaining the viability and the excellence of its seven disciplines, enhancing its pioneering interdisciplinary courses (especially at PGT level) and developing centres of research in European Studies as well as Literary Translation and Medieval & Renaissance. Also by launching an UG interdisciplinary course in EMES that should be widely attractive to non-EU as well as EU students. This plan's success, along with further initiatives, will be crucially dependent on new staffing, notably at a senior level, and on the mainstreaming of junior contract-staff. On the latter will depend the future integration into and ownership of PGT courses in the School by early career staff.

Management structures

The Reviewers' report pinpoints serious problems in relation to management structures, in relation to two areas in particular:
- between the School and Faculty, and School and College
- internal structural problems, in particular in relation to

the coordination of role of Heads of seven different disciplines and the three School academic directors (DTL UG, DTL PG and Director of Research).

In relation to the first, the College has over the last few years been operating on a rather short-term basis, both in relation to budgeting - hence the recourse to an annual budgetary cycle, (ABC)- and in relation to staffing and other strategic issues. The result of this has been that the ABC meeting have focussed less on the longer-time requirements of the School and more on how it may be made to produce even more on a diminishing income. In relation more specifically to planning staffing development, the question of mainstreaming of contract staff has over the last three years been a crucial area of indecision on College's part as a result of which neither the School, nor the Faculty seemingly, have any clear or consistent indication of the College's longer-term intentions. The Reviewers' suggestion that clearer lines of communication and reporting as between College and Faculty and Faculty and School be urgently established is therefore welcomed.

In relation to the second issue, that of the structure of management as between departmental Heads and School directors, this is an area of some ambiguity given the continuation within the School of historical departmental units with individual Heads of Discipline and the more recent School-based format of directors coordinating policy. Part of the problem has been that the shortage of senior staff within the School has often meant that relatively junior colleagues have to shoulder the burden of directorial authority, and their standard tenure of the role is quite short (normally two years). Overall, this area is one that would undoubtedly benefit from further development and coordination. At the same time, the School accepts the external reviewers' recommendation that continuing internal integration should not be at the cost of disciplinary cohesion.

Research

Since the time of the last review in 2008, the School has been undergoing a period of change in its research practice, as individual research projects and funding are supplemented with more team-orientated, internationally linked and grant-assisted patterns of development. In addition it has begun to stake out areas of thematic focus within the College's wider research theme programme, with currently strong commitment to two strategic topics (Identity; Manuscript, Print and Book Culture). While the role of the Research Director and of the Long Room Hub has been crucial in this, the brief of the former needs greater support and clarification. This should also lead to closer tracking of research development and funding, and better coordination of current research and fresh initiatives. This is certainly an area of major concern and one which the School will prioritize improvement over the next five years. Once again, the leadership that will, it is hoped, be provided by the appointment of new senior-level staff will be crucial in helping to achieve this.

Quality Assurance

While the external reviewers are strong in their praise of the overall quality of the teaching, research and administrative back-up and support within the School, they are critical of the Quality Assurance processes currently in place, both in relation to their variability and in relation their unequal distribution (in particular as regards PG students). There is no doubt that there is more work to be done in this area in relation both to harmonization of overall School practice and in improving both the feedback and action-on-feedback procedures. This is a College priority that will be acted on promptly and effectively.

Conclusion

Overall the School endorses the Reviewers' recommendations in relation to College or Faculty commitment to the School in particular nos. 1,2,3,9. As for recommendations concerning improving internal efficiency and quality within (points 7, 8, 10, 11 and 12) these will be pursued along the lines suggested. Since developing research, both individual and team, is a top School priority, the Reviewers' point 9 re commitment to

better resources is well taken. Issues raised in point 5 will also be addressed in the coming years, in particular as the structure and range of TSM courses in College is submitted to critical review.

In general, the School sees the External Review as an opportunity to review its practices and to refine its future strategic aims. It will work with the Faculty Dean and the College to address the recommendations and to prepare a detailed implementation plan.

3. Response from the Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences

I would like to begin by thanking the reviewers for their commitment and hard work. In broad terms, I support the findings of the review, and am happy to note the review's generally supportive tone towards the School, its staff, its students, and its activities. I would also like to thank Professor David Scott and the staff of the School, administrative and academic, for their hard work in producing the self-assessment document on which the report bases some of its findings, and also Professor David Ditchburn, the review's academic facilitator, for being on hand to help the review team during their time in Trinity.

I am particularly grateful to the reviewers for recognizing the very difficult financial and staffing conditions under which the School (like the University in general) has been operating over the past years. This is where the review starts, by acknowledging these difficulties, and and in many ways its recommendations all take place within the shadow of these critical financial times.

Staffing/Strategic Staffing Plans
It is important to start here, as I think that much of what the report points out flows from here. I strongly support the finding 'that additional posts are indispensable if SLLCS is to achieve its ambition to play a prominent role in Modern Languages nationally and internationally' (p. 10). I recognize the reviewers' sense that financial crisis management has made strategic planning for staffing effectively impossible over recent years, but note that the Faculty, and the College as a whole, are in the process of addressing this, with a view to a greater degree of planning for staffing in the future. Of course, the staffing plan for LLCS will have to take place within the context of the staffing needs of the Faculty as a whole, and under current conditions it is very unlikely that anyone will get everything they want. But that said, the Faculty is acutely aware of the very pressing staffing needs of the School. Like all Schools in the Faculty, LLCS has been asked to present its Strategic Staffing Plan, with a realistic list of staffing needs, in order of priority. From this, I will draw up a general Faculty Strategic Staffing Plan, which will play out over the medium term (3-5 years). It is imperative that Faculties be allowed to put these plans into operation.

On a practical level, I also want to note that immediate steps have been taken to address one particular staffing concern, which is the number of younger staff on temporary contracts. It is important to consolidate what we have, and so the two members of staff whose contracts were due to lapse at the end of the 2014-15 academic year have begun the process of mainstreaming. So far, this has led to the mainstreaming of the contracts of two Assistant Professors, in French and Hispanic Studies. This specifically addresses the reviewers' Recommendations 3 and 4.

Structures and Governance

The reviewers identify structural issues within the School, and most particularly the relationships between the School and its component departments and the implications of this for the School's administrative support. This is an issue which has been highlighted in previous reviews, and which now needs addressing as a matter of urgency. Most particularly, it is crucial that the School acts quickly and decisively to implement Recommendation 5: 'That the School make faster and more sustained progress towards rationalizing its structures.' With this end specifically in mind, I want to recommend the creation of a task force made up of key members of the School, and to be chaired by myself as Dean of AHSS: see **Conclusion** below for further details on this.

Research

I note the reviewers' comment that 'the process of monitoring, facilitation and support of research in SLLCS is still lacking the priority and drive that would be expected from a first-class, research-led educational institution' (p. 15) – but also their qualification that to a very significant extent 'this is due to external factors deriving from financial constraints imposed by current cuts in public funding' (p. 15). Steps are being taken to address these issues, including closer alignment with the Trinity Long Room Hub and with relevant College research themes, most notably 'Identities in Transformation' and 'Manuscript Book and Print Cultures'. I do note, however, the ongoing concern with the availability and systematization of study leave across the School (Recommendation 11.)

Teaching and Learning

I am very glad to see the reviewers' general support for the School's teaching and learning practices, and want particularly to note that they began their observations on this topic by stressing 'the extremely positive feedback from undergraduate students on the quality of teaching, commitment of staff to their learning, and, for the most part, interaction with school support staff' (p. 12). I strongly note the reviewers' comments about the need to harmonize practices across disciplines in the School, wherever possible.

Conclusion

In general terms, there is much that is positive to be drawn from the review, and I would like to congratulate the School for its hard work under difficult conditions. The Faculty is working hard to ameliorate the staffing difficulties within the School, both in terms of addressing the immediate concerns about the status of younger staff in contract positions and in terms of working towards the short- and medium-term outcomes of the School staffing plan. Recommendation 1 states 'That four Chairs be appointed to replace retirements.' While it is simply impossible for a Dean to promise four Chairs under current conditions, I note that steps are underway to fill the Chair of German, and that the Chair of French is the no. 1 staffing priority for the School for the 2015-16 hiring round.

However, it is important to recognize that the report does recommend improvements and measures of a serious, structural nature, some of which I have outlined above. Neither the Faculty nor the School will be complacent in their

response to the reviewers' comments. I would therefore recommend the drawing up of a task force in Hilary Term 2015. The new Head of School will be formally announced on April 29, and it is imperative that this person be a member of the task force, along with the current Head of School, a representative number of members of the School, including senior and junior colleagues (to whom the future of the School might properly be seen as belonging), and senior members of cognate Schools within the Faculty. I would propose that the task force meet very regularly over a relatively short period of time (c. 8 weeks), and work if possible in consultation with one or more of the reviewers. It should convene as soon as is practicable after April 29. The terms of reference of the task force should include the implementation of as many as possible of the reviewers' recommendations, but should emphatically deal with issues of governance, administration, and the relationship of the component departments to the School as a whole. I began my response by recognizing the urgency of the School's staffing needs. The realization of the School's staffing plan should be related to the implementation of the task force's recommendations.

4. Response from the Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer

The quality review of the School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies (LLCS) also raises important questions about the working relationship between the College, the Faculty and the School, under the headings of SITS, Fixed Timetable, Degree Programmes, Committee and Reporting Structures, Financial Model, Strategic Vision and management Information.

The reviewers observe that the failure of SITS to provide essential student information, the absence of a fixed timetable across College, and the complexity of degree programmes within the School create an unnecessary administrative burden on staff. The College has put in train a stabilisation project to address the gaps in SITS and in the Academic Registry, which if successful will address these impediments. In June 2013 the University Council approved the introduction of a fixed timetable recognising that in order to introduce a fixed timetable and realise the benefits, it would be necessary to review the size and structure of modules as otherwise it would be impossible to accommodate widespread variation where different cohorts have to interact. The Trinity Education Project, currently in the scoping phase, will be a driver for change that will enable this review of modules and introduce less complex degree structures across the College including those in the School of LLCS.

The reviewers noted a 'great deal of confusion about how the College's financial model operates...' This is complicated by the different lens and experiences of those interviewed as part of the review process. In future, all review panels will receive comprehensive financial information, prepared in conjunction with FSD, on the College's financial strategy, its current financial position, the principles governing the annual budgetary allocations, and the School's financial position.

We expect that the benefits arising from the changes introduced under the START project will address the paucity of management information necessary to inform strategy and drive change.

Professor Linda Hogan
Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer