



## **PROVOST'S REPORT TO COUNCIL ON THE REVIEW OF THE CENTRE FOR LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION STUDIES**

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

This report presents the outcome of a departmental review of the Centre for Language and Communication Studies (CLCS). Two separate external peer review visitations were undertaken: the first on the 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> of February, 2004 by Professor Lesley Milroy, University of Michigan, and Professor Bernd Rüschoff, Universität Duisburg-Essen, and the second on the 7<sup>th</sup> of May, 2004 by Professor John Laver, Queen Margaret University College, Edinburgh who could not attend, as planned, the February visitation.

The report is based on (i) feedback from the external Reviewers received in May and September, 2004, (ii) a submission from the Dean of Arts (Letters), received on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of November, 2004 and (iii) a submission from the Centre for Language and Communication Studies received on the 1<sup>st</sup> of November, 2004.

The main purpose of the departmental review is (a) to provide a structured opportunity for the Department 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 (c) that areas of concern in this regard are identified and addressed within an eighteen month timescale. This review process ensures that each academic department in College is reviewed systematically once every five years.

### **2. OVERVIEW OF THE CENTRE**

#### **2.1 Aims and Objectives of the Centre**

1. To engage in leading edge research in applied linguistics, linguistics, phonetics and speech science
2. To provide programmes of postgraduate and undergraduate teaching that are informed as far as possible by the research of the staff involved and constantly updated in response to new research developments
3. To support language learning and teaching in the College by providing technical support that is organised according to the CLCS research insights and capable of providing a basis for the empirical exploration of language learning
4. To contribute to the national and international development of the disciplines in which CLCS staff are involved.

#### **2.2 Programmes to which the Centre provides teaching**

##### *Undergraduate Programmes*

Although there are no undergraduate students enrolled in the CLCS, the Centre makes a major contribution to two undergraduate degrees: (i) the B.Sc. in Clinical Speech and Language and (ii) the BA (Mod) in Computer Science, Linguistics and a Language. Undergraduate language modules are also integrated into the curriculum of the BA (Mod) in Information and Communications Technology. The Centre also runs a one-year Introduction to Language Study for undergraduate language students, and one term undergraduate options are offered to modern language, visiting and exchange students.

##### *Postgraduate (taught) Programmes*

M.Phil. in Linguistics  
M.Phil. in Applied Linguistics  
M.Phil. in Speech and Language Processing.

In addition, the Centre offers various courses in a range of languages to both the general public and to staff and students of the College. It also provides self-access language learning facilities, which are open to all members of the College.

### 2.3 Research

CLCS has a strong international research reputation in applied linguistics, linguistics and phonetics/speech science. The Centre has a tradition of more than twenty years' research and development in language learning technology. Internationally it is one of the pioneers in self-access language learning and staff remain pioneers in their work on tandem language learning, especially in text-based virtual reality. The phonetics and speech laboratory has a strong international profile, and is particularly known for its research on the voice.

### 2.4 Summary Statistical Profile of the Department for the Academic Year 2002-2003<sup>1</sup>

Full-time staff FTE	Undergraduate FTE	Postgraduate FTE	Staff:Student Ratio
15.28	97.73	36.53	9

<sup>1</sup> Figures from Senior Lecturer's Annual Report approved by Council at its meeting of the 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2003.

### 2.5 Accommodation and Facilities (Physical Resources)

The Centre is located on the fourth floor of the Arts Building in room 4091. The facilities include computers, language laboratories and satellite/video workstations. There are 24 computer workstations with a range of computer-assisted language-learning (CALL) and authentic target-language software in a range of languages. The computers can also be used for DVD playback. There is one audio language laboratory for self-access use (15 booths) and one for class use (25 booths). In addition there are 15 satellite televisions/video players for individual use (satellite channels currently received are Russian, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese and Japanese).

The space allocated for the Centre's equipment-based activities is compact and easy to supervise. However, the three rooms that house the technical support for language learning and teaching are windowless, and the space allocated to the phonetics laboratory is insufficient, making it necessary to duplicate laboratory teaching.

## 3. EXTERNAL PEER REVIEW REPORT

### SUMMARY OF REPORTS BY PROFESSORS MILROY & RÜSCHOFF, MAY 2004 AND PROFESSOR LAVER, SEPTEMBER 2004

The overall impression of Professors Milroy and Rüschoff, supported by Professor Laver, of the CLCS is of an academic unit "*which delivers high-powered research and teaching, while simultaneously providing language teaching and learning resources for the College as a whole*". They add that the CLCS can "*certainly be viewed as a Centre for excellence*", with staff who are *exceptionally committed to the task of delivering a high quality service*".

#### **TEACHING**

Professors Milroy and Rüschoff begin their report by outlining the major teaching activities of the Centre at postgraduate, undergraduate and broad curriculum levels. With regard to the three taught M.Phil courses, in Linguistics, Applied Linguistics and Speech and Language Processing, the Reviewers note that "*very different types of students were attracted to each course*". Commenting chiefly on the M.Phil in Applied Linguistics, they found that while the students appreciated the quality and commitment of their teachers, they felt that "*the balance between lecture and student led activity should be changed so that lecture time is increased*", a matter which was raised in the self assessment document.

Commenting on the two undergraduate degrees to which the CLCS makes a major contribution, the Reviewers note that regarding the B.Sc. in Clinical Speech and Language Studies "*both the Head of the Clinical Speech and Language Department and the staff member responsible for the Linguistics component expressed satisfaction with the quality of the course*". Regarding the BA (Mod) in Computer Science, Linguistics and a Language, the

Reviewers are concerned about a worrying drop in the numbers of students enrolling on this course as documented in the self assessment document. While they feel that *“this is to some extent attributable to a global downturn in the IT industry”* they also note comments from two students who suggest that more students might be attracted to the course if the *“intellectual relationship between Linguistics and Computer Science”* was more clearly defined. In his report, Professor Laver comments that in order to counteract this decline in student interest, the Centre may have to change the type of programme it offers.

With regard to the one-term undergraduate options that are offered to modern language, visiting and exchange students, Professors Milroy and Rüschoff found that students felt *“well integrated into the courses offered to them at Trinity, including the teaching offered within the CLCS”*. However, they found that *“almost all of the visiting students felt that language support in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) and particularly ESP (English for Special/Academic Purposes) was lacking at Trinity”*. The Reviewers recommend honing the Centre’s expertise to develop a *“course profile in EFL and ESP which will be attractive in regions from which Trinity might attract foreign students”*.

The Reviewers note that the undergraduate language modules which contribute to the broad curriculum initiative do not attract as many students as other options and state that *“this is particularly worrying as they constitute an important ‘bread and butter’ teaching function of the department”*. They recommend *“a more formal and more effectively publicised integration of modern language modules”* into the Broad Curriculum programme.

The Reviewers were impressed by the commitment of staff to the first year Introduction to Language Study course, and noted the dissatisfaction of staff with the way in which this course was currently integrated into the undergraduate curriculum.

## **RESEARCH**

Professors Milroy and Rüschoff judged the departmental research plan to be *“well considered and realistic”*. They note that the *“quality and quantity of research carried out by individuals in this small academic unit is impressive”* and that the *“many indicators of the excellence of research at the Centre”* include high level consultancy work carried out for government and international agencies and the publishing of work in *“the best publishing houses and most competitive journals”*. The Reviewers also comment that *“the CLCS occasional paper series and the in-house Authentik press are highly regarded internationally”*.

The Reviewers note that *“the Centre is particularly well-known for the close integration of teaching and research in Applied Linguistics”* and that the research into several areas of second language acquisition conducted at CLCS is *“particularly recognised as cutting edge”*. Of the Phonetics and Speech Science laboratories, the Reviewers say that they are *“particularly notable for the excellence and impact of their experimental research”*. They remark that the *“work of staff in the CLCS laboratories attracts researchers from overseas and provides much needed funding for research students”*. Professor Laver also notes in his report that *“the quality of research published from the Phonetics and Speech Science Laboratory fully stands being compared with....leading laboratories in Japan, the United States, continental Europe and Cambridge (England)”*.

Professor Laver notes that while staff are free to select their own research topics, many leading institutions have organised their departmental and school-based research on a thematic, programmatic and collaborative basis and suggests that the Speech and Phonetics Laboratory *“could fully participate in the benefits of thematic research only by collaboration with other partners outside the Laboratory”*. With regard to collaboration with the School of Clinical Speech and Language Studies he stated that *“a strengthening of collaborative links with the work of staff in the Phonetics and Speech Science Laboratory might be mutually beneficial”*. In addition, links with scholars knowledgeable about linguistics who work in the Computer Science Department should be developed further. He feels that *“the greatest lost opportunity for collaborative interaction seems to be with the modern languages”*.

Regarding the Centre’s research students, Professors Milroy and Rüschoff note that *“the number of research students attracted to the Centre is large for such a small academic unit”* and that the PhD students with whom they spoke were *“clearly satisfied with the supervision that they received”*. They note that the Centre uses questionnaires, student representatives and course reviews to obtain student feedback. In his report, Professor Laver also applauds the number of postgraduate students in the Department, particularly the numbers from overseas, and reports that the students with whom he spoke seemed very happy with the quality of supervision and the level of support they were receiving. However, he highlights a drop in the staff:student ratio and acknowledges that the Department is trying to *“retrieve the postgraduate recruitment shortfall”*. Professors Milroy and Rüschoff note that funding for PhD students *“was clearly tight and limited to three years”* and that as a result, *“students were acutely aware of the need to complete their PhDs within this short period”*. They observe

that a number of the completed PhD projects were “*closely associated with the modern language modules offered at the CLCS*” and recommend that the existing research base be maintained and expanded “*in order to ensure continued financial resources for both the Centre and for promising postgraduate students*”.

## **RESOURCES**

There are two main types of resources: (i) a phonetics laboratory and a phonetics teaching laboratory, and (ii) a range of technology enhanced facilities for language teaching and learning. Professors Milroy and Rüschoff state that the facilities are “*very much in need of updating*”. With regard to equipment funding, Professor Laver notes that the Language Laboratory is in an “*extremely difficult position*”. He recommends an “*urgent review of funding mechanisms for equipment of all categories in the Centre*” and suggests “*that the equipment funding of the Laboratory should be based on criteria appropriate to the science base rather than the arts and social science base*”.

Professors Milroy and Rüschoff remark that the Centre’s strategic plan is “*realistic and cogently argued*”. They feel that the plan ties in perfectly with their recommendations, particularly in relation to setting up an EFL programme that would generate funds for the CLCS, and that it is “*designed to maintain the research ethos of CLCS, which sees the language teaching/learning resources as a hub of a research and development cycle*”.

The Reviewers note that the Centre has relied on building up funds over a number of years in order to support and upgrade its facilities. College’s decision to recall reserves in response to the current budget crisis has adversely affected the Centre’s ability to support and upgrade its facilities. While the Reviewers appreciate that College is facing serious financial cutbacks they, nonetheless, feel that “*College might reconsider its policy in this matter*”. They cite an example of the more flexible budgeting systems being established in some European universities which project “*a budget for more than one academic year and specifically provides for the building up of strategic reserves and the option of transferring funds from one year to the next*”.

## **ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT**

The Reviewers praise the very efficient management of the Centre, but feel that the Director carries an enormous administrative load. In order to ensure the continued smooth running of the Department when the Director retires, they suggest a system whereby the Head of Department would manage the Centre with the assistance of an executive committee. They recommend that “*members of this executive committee would take turns to serve as Head of Department for three year terms, with responsibilities delegated in accordance with areas of academic research and teaching*”.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Professors Milroy and Rüschoff recommend the following – all recommendations are in quotation:

1. “*That foreign language modules are integrated into the broad curriculum. The current arrangement is detrimental to the morale of staff who have invested considerable effort in developing these modules, which constitute an important part of their teaching mission. The current arrangement also results in severe attrition of student numbers. We also consider that a more formal and more widely publicized integration of modern language modules into the broad curriculum would stand a leading University within the European Union in good stead.*”
2. “*In addition, it is recommended that the College consider harnessing the outstanding expertise of the CLCS in language learning and pedagogy to set up an EFL programme at Trinity. Again, it is appropriate for a leading European University to offer language support when recruiting overseas students. Visiting students quite openly commented to us on the lack of such provision, which is also a source of embarrassment to some of the staff we spoke to.*”
3. “*A well-designed EFL programme could become a profitable venture, initially as a popular choice for overseas students. Subsequently such a programme might offer special summer schools for external participants or course options similar to programmes at other universities. For example, the English Department at Munich University offers successful post-graduate programmes combining language and subject areas such as business administration or cultural studies. But if such a course of action is considered, appropriate resources (both technical & human) would be needed. A good initial move would be to authorise a replacement for Dr Ridley, who might be specifically charged with the task of planning and initiating an EFL programme. Any development of such a programme would however need to be undertaken cautiously and with full involvement of the Director and staff of the Centre. Otherwise it could develop into something*”

very large, with the unwanted result that the tail (an EFL programme) might end up wagging the dog (the Centre).

4. *Language learning and teaching facilities are in urgent need of an upgrade. Many items are already obsolete, and an upgrade will not only benefit the innovatory activities of the Centre but will enhance the effectiveness of its provision.*
5. *Cutting edge research is currently being carried out in the phonetics laboratories. However, the very success of this sub area in winning research grant income to sustain itself creates a problem if there is a gap in continuity or if some particularly promising student becomes available to work as a research assistant between grants. We recommend that the College consider some provision for bridging funds to help deal with these problems.*
6. *Because of the nature of the research and teaching carried out in the Centre, we recommend that the College consider it from a funding perspective as more like a science or technology department than an arts/humanities department. The hardware and software facilities maintained by the Centre are essential for its teaching, research and service functions. This recommendation follows from 3 and 4 above.*
7. *Furthermore, a recent reduction in secretarial staff means that access to self teaching in the Centre's language learning has had to be reduced, resulting in uneconomical use of resources. We recommend that secretarial support, which was already quite limited, be reinstated. We also recommend that the College consider funding the appointment of a technician to maintain the Centre's language resources. At present this substantial job falls to a member of the academic staff.*
8. *Problems with the introductory course need to be addressed, and a range of solutions singly or in combination should be considered. For example, the course could be restructured so that it is addressed to specific client interests. More use could be made of web technology to offset the effects of a large lecture-only course. Staff might consider teaching several introductory courses with a focus on specific target groups, e.g. one more technical than the other; the less technical one might address general language and culture issues. In this case the first few lectures could be given to all students, with the course subsequently branching in several different directions. Perhaps also postgraduate students could be used to teach small group sessions and tutorials designed to supplement lectures. This would help address the student funding problem. A further option might be to place this course in the students' second year (a suggestion made by one of the language department Chairs)".*
9. *Since the Centre operates as a high-powered academic unit in addition to fulfilling its service functions, we recommend that the College consider establishing a Chair as Head of Department. The position of Head of the Department could then be rotated, as in other departments".*

Professor Laver endorses all of the above recommendations made by Professors Milroy and Rüschoff, and adds that:

10. *"In the oncoming academic reorganization, the Centre should be given the status of a School in (an) Arts and Social Science Faculty. Its present structure should be preserved, and a number of initiatives added. These are: consolidating the Centre for Deaf Studies; developing a semi-commercial programme for the teaching of English as a Foreign Language with hypothecated funding; developing a collaborative group to deliver enhanced teaching and research into the Irish language and culture, based in the Centre.*
11. *The equipment funding for the Centre should be treated as science-based".*

#### **4. RESPONSES FROM THE DIRECTOR OF THE CENTRE AND THE DEAN OF ARTS (LETTERS)**

Both the Director of the Centre and the Dean of the Faculty find the report by Professors Milroy and Rüschoff to be positive and fair. They also welcome Professor Laver's report, but the Dean feels that parts of his report were "influenced by the excitement of restructuring". Both the Dean and Director are in broad agreement with the Reviewers' recommendations.

However, the Director of the Centre expresses disappointment with three aspects of the reports: firstly, the Reviewers do not explicitly recognise *'the fact that what unites our sometimes quite disparate activities in*

teaching and research is the fact that they are all based on a sound linguistics footing”; secondly, they fail to mention the Centre’s ‘important empirical research in applied linguistics’; and thirdly, they say little about the Centre’s ‘research in linguistic theory and work in semantics, sociolinguistics and computational linguistics’.

The Reviewers refer to CLCS as a small department but the Director feels that the following additional staff should be taken into consideration when looking at the size of the Centre: (a) in addition to the full-time permanent academic staff, CLCS currently employs 16 hourly paid lecturers and 16 student teaching assistants; (b) there are three full-time, ten part-time/hourly paid academic staff and one executive officer in the Centre for Deaf Studies, which is part of CLCS; (c) since the Reviewers’ site visits two staff from the Institiúid Teangeolaíochta Éireann have joined the Centre. He also notes that the Centre would necessarily increase its staff if it were to introduce the English language support service recommended by both reports.

The Director of the Centre concludes by saying that CLCS is currently considering the options for restructuring proposed by Professor Laver, namely, that CLCS should stand alone as a School of Language and Communication Studies, or that CLCS should join with the School of Clinical Speech and Language Studies. The Dean of the Faculty concludes by saying that the governance of the School will be an issue in the long term but that with the current restructuring environment “*there is little that can profitably be said on the subject*”.

## 5. RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL

In addition to the CLCS addressing the detailed recommendations outlined in the review reports, the following recommendations are made to Council in light of the review reports and the responses from the Dean of Arts (Letters) and the Director of the Centre.

- (a) that the Centre should:
  - 1. Consider the Reviewers’ suggestions concerning establishing an English as a Foreign Language programme.
  - 2. Prepare a costed proposal concerning the upgrading of facilities.
  - 3. Consider the matter of continuity in research funding and how, in the first instance, the Centre might address the concerns noted.
  - 4. Address the issues raised with regard to the Introduction to Language Studies and the outline proposals made by the Reviewers.
- (b) that the Faculty should:
  - 5. Facilitate the Centre during the current process of reorganisation in exploring possibilities for new configurations with other departments that could work to the Centre’s and the College’s best interests in teaching and research.
- (c) that College should:
  - 6. Consider the recommendation with regard to the weighting attributed to students of the Centre in a new academic resource allocation process.
  - 7. Consider proposals brought forward by the Centre concerning facilities, administrative staffing and the matter of a chair in the Centre, to be evaluated in the context of College funding and any new academic resource allocation process.
  - 8. Consider the recommendations made with regard to the positioning of the Centre in the new academic structures.
  - 9. Consider the role of the Centre in the provision of any English as a Foreign Language schemes that might be brought forward by College in the future.
  - 10. Increase awareness of the language modules as part of the broad curriculum initiative.

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John Hegarty  
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