



University College Dublin

Quality Improvement Plan

School of Applied Social Science

June 2012

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1. Introduction

The composition of the Review Group for the UCD Human Resources was as follows:

- Professor Pdraig Dunne, UCD School of Physics (Chair)
- Dr Oonagh Breen, UCD School of Law (Deputy Chair)
- Professor Cheryl Regehr, Vice-Provost, Academic Programs, University of Toronto (Extern – Social Work)
- Professor Alan Deacon, Emeritus Professor of Social Policy, University of Leeds (Extern – Social Policy)

The Review Group visited the School from 10-13 October, 2011 and held meetings with School staff, University students and staff, including: the Head of School; College Principal; the UCD Deputy Registrar for Teaching and Learning, SAR Co-ordinating Committee; School academic staff; School support staff; external stakeholders from statutory and voluntary agencies, both employers, those involved with placement and training of students and external collaborators with the School; the Director of the College of Human Sciences Graduate School and College Finance Officer; postgraduate students, both taught and research; recent graduates and undergraduate students.

The School set up a Self-assessment Co-ordinating Committee in accordance with the UCD Quality Office Guidelines. The members of the Co-ordinating Committee were:

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| • Professor Bryan Fanning | Head of School |
| • Professor Colette McAuley | Chair of Social Work |
| • Dr Hilda Loughran | Head of Teaching and Learning |
| • Dr Marie Keenan | Head of Research |
| • Dr Michelle Norris | Director of Graduate Studies |
| • Ms Anna Jennings | Director, MSocSc (Social Work), full-time |
| • Ms Catherine Baulch | School Office Manager |

The progression of this Quality Improvement Plan was delayed due to the need to undertake and complete a planning exercise aimed at responding to anticipated budgetary reductions for 2011/12 and following years. The QIP was developed by the Co-ordinating Committee (with Dr Valerie O'Brien replacing Dr Hilda Loughran as Head of Teaching and Learning) and completed in consultation with academic and administrative staff.

The School was a position to be able to implement most of the recommendations immediately following the review. However the biggest challenges facing the School in the next few years are financial ones. Some issues have arisen where budgetary cuts, cuts in external funding and anticipated staff reductions will impede the ability of the School to implement some of the recommendations of the Review Group.

2. Recommendations for Improvements – Follow-Up Action Taken and/or Planned

CATEGORY 1: Recommendations concerning academic, organisational and other matters which are entirely under the control of the unit

Category 1(a) : Recommendations already implemented

Recommendation 10.2: The Review Group recommends that all administrative posts be rotated amongst senior and junior staff on a 3-yearly basis.

Action: From the 2012/13 workload review (May 2012) this is now in place.

Recommendation 10.3: Minutes of all meetings – management committee, research committee and Teaching and Learning Committee – should be taken and disseminated to all staff in time for subsequent School meetings.

Action: This has been implemented.

Recommendation 10.4: The workload allocation model should be revised to reflect that different administrative posts require different amounts of time and commitment. The points allocated for these different functions should be recognised.

Action: This will be reviewed on an on-going basis beginning with the 2012/13 workload allocation process.

Recommendation 10.5: The workload allocation model should also incorporate reference to planned research leave to allow the Head of School to plan around leave and teaching issues.

Action: This is and will be done on a year by year basis as part of workload planning.

Recommendation 10.10: The Review Group recommends that the roles of “subject head” be clarified both in terms of the academic and management aspects.

Action: This has been clarified following discussions between the Chair of Social Work and the Head of School.

Recommendation 10.14: The Review Group recommends that the School perform an evaluation of the space, with a view to improving both staff and graduate student common space provision.

Action: As part of a review undertaken in 2012 plans to convert office space into an additional social work classroom are being implemented.

Recommendation 10.16: The Review Group recommends that measures be taken to support college lecturers in their preparation for application to promotion in the University.

Action: Support is being coordinated by the Head of School for the forthcoming 2012 promotion round.

Recommendation 10.27: The Review Group strongly recommends that the School examine its use of pre-admission interviews for selection of students for the MSW program in light of the large number of resources required for this activity and the lack of research evidence that it improves outcomes to any significant degree.

Action: A project group Chaired by Professor Tony Fahey was established to undertake a review of admissions processes with a brief to ensure that these be redesigned facilitate internationalisation of the M.Soc.Sc (Social Work) from 2013/14. This work will be completed in June 2012 in time to facilitate student recruitment for 2013/14. As part of this review a decision was made to retain the use of pre-admission interviews for 2013/14.

It is anticipated that there will be further review during the 2012/3 academic year aimed at reviewing the efficacy of the selection process. This will be co-ordinated by the holder of a new Director of Social Work Admissions post of responsibility who will be responsible for progressing the internationalisation of the programme.

Recommendations 10.28: Students should be more fully informed about means for raising concerns about practicum experiences. The School may wish to consider mid-term written feedback from the field instructor in addition to the existing verbal feedback.

Action: The School has established procedures for the submission of written mid-placement feedback from practice teachers and mid-term reports from students on their placement experiences and these are set out in the course handbook

Recommendation 10.29: Additional training for field instructors via CPD should be explored as this will both enhance the student learning and career development of field instructors. It also represents a potential revenue stream if developed further.

Action: The School has created Director of Professional Practice a post of responsibility who together with the Head of School will review CPD opportunities in the 2012/3 academic year.

Recommendation 10.30: Students should be asked to buy books, in groups, or second hand. To this end, it would assist students greatly if academics made clear recommendations as to core text or texts required for particular modules.

Action: Module coordinators have been instructed to do so.

Recommendation 10.8: The Review Group recommends that operationally the management of both the Teaching & Learning and the Research aspect would benefit from the input of junior and senior staff.

Action: Professors have been appointed to both the teaching and learning and research committees.

Recommendation 10.39: The School should consider enhancing content on child development and child protection services in the Master of Social work Programme.

Action: A new half module on Child Development and the Impact of Trauma, Abuse and Neglect was suggested by the Chair of Social Work and has now been approved by the Head of School. Professor McAuley has held preliminary discussions with the current Programme

Director of the Full-Time Programme regarding timetabling and with the Module Co-ordinator who covers some related teaching to ensure the best content for the students. A paediatrician has been identified who is interested and has teaching experience. Further planning regarding the content will take place over the summer and the plan is that it is timetabled in the first term of the next academic year.

Recommendation 10.40: The MSW students requested training to prepare for the HSE interview. Given the importance of this interview process in a professional master's programme we would recommend that this request be followed up.

Action: This was implemented during the 2011/2 academic year and will form part of the curriculum in future years.

Recommendation 10.49: External stakeholders suggested that faculty research could be better disseminated through a research centre that pulls together the research strengths of the faculty, provides research seminars, and develops an electronic research newsletter.

Action: A School Research Seminar series commenced in January 2012 in which academics of the School present their research with an invited co-presenter. External stakeholders are invited to seminars. It is aimed to host four such seminars each academic year. In addition external stakeholders are invited to the Public Lecture Series hosted by the School. In April 2012 The School co-hosted a Senior Fullbright Social Work Specialist with Trinity College Dublin and organised four public events to which external stakeholders were invited. The recommendation to produce an electronic newsletter has not been progressed because of resource constraints.

Recommendation 10.50: The absence of a written sabbatical policy was noted. It is recommended that the School develop a transparent sabbatical policy that allows for future planning. The sabbatical policy should be linked to the workload policy.

Action: A written sabbatical policy has been devised in consultation with the Chair of the Review Group. This has been presented to a staff meeting and circulated to all members of the School

Recommendation 10.51: The School should capitalize on research opportunities that exist through community partnerships, student placements and the pedagogy of social work.

Action: This recommendation has been discussed amongst academic staff and individual staff members have progressed such opportunities individually with the Irish Association of Social Workers, THE Health Service Executive and the Irish Prison Service. Progress will be reviewed during the 2012/3 academic year.

Recommendation 10.52: The social work faculty members could take advantage of the fact that Masters level students are in field placements during the spring term and use this time to focus on research activities.

Action: This is taking place. Research active and output amongst members of the Social Work team has risen significantly in recent years.

Recommendation 10.54: PhD students should be made aware that modules can be spread over a few years and that they can substitute modules with other courses across the University and outside the University.

Action: This will be done during orientation meetings with incoming students from the 2012/1 academic year. Supervisors will also be advised in writing regarding the options available to students for completing the requisite number of modules.

Recommendations 10.60 and 10.61: The School should formally document policy and practice in the following areas: plagiarism, sabbatical leave, remediation, and processes for field practice evaluation. When in place these policies and practices should be readily available and disseminated to interested parties e.g., through Blackboard, School website etc.

Actions: A review of School documentation on plagiarism and sabbatical leave was undertaken during the 2011/12 academic year and relevant advice on plagiarism will be posted on the School website before the start of the Autumn 2012 term. Documentation on remediation and processes of field work evaluation are set out in the M.Soc (Social Work) handbook distributed to all students. This documentation is updated each year.

Recommendation 10.62: Given the wide usage of occasional lecturers, the School should put in place a robust system to ensure quality with regards to teaching offered by these individuals, their availability to students and in situations in which those lecturers are responsible for assessment (whether of dissertations or placements) or student feedback.

Action: In response to budget cuts the use of occasional lecturers has been radically curtailed for 2012/3 (by approx. 420 hours) and their work assimilated into the workloads of full-time lecturers. Occasional lecturers will be employed in future in exceptional cases only and will be subject to close monitoring.

Recommendation 10.71: The Review Group believes that the formation of a student society will enhance student cohesion and identity and encourages the Head of School to facilitate the establishment of such a society at university level by working directly with the University's Societies Officer to clarify and resolve the existing perceived obstacles to such formation.

Action: Efforts were made in conjunction with student representatives to revive the Social Science Society during the year (meetings chaired by the Head of School). It was deemed that there was insufficient support amongst students for new/revived society to be established.

Recommendation 10.7: The School should instigate regular meetings between the HOS and College Finance Manager and the HOS and college HR partner. The HR partner should in addition be based in the School one day per month to facilitate staff interaction with HR.

Action: The School will seek to instigate such meetings. The recommendation that the HR partner should be based in the School does not make clear sense. The HR partner has been responsive to the needs of the School on an issue by issue basis.

Category 1(b): Recommendations to be implemented within one year

Recommendation 10.12: Given that the practicum is half of the programme for MSW students, the role of the practicum coordinator in arranging and contracting for placements is central to the student experience and the success of the programme. Given the pending retirement of the placement coordinator, the Review Group recommends most strongly the continuation of this position, and that time is allowed for transition.

Action: The School will develop proposals for a replacement post following on from the retirement of the current post-holder in 2012, and will seek approval from the College Principal and the Budget Review Committee.

Recommendation 10.38: The Higher Diploma provides an opportunity for growth in the student numbers. There is a high demand for this programme and quality candidates are currently rejected due to the existence of the cap. This programme is extremely cost effective as many of the modules are shared with the undergraduates and an increase in the cap would not cost more money. Moreover, the HDip serves as an external recruitment tool for the Masters in Social Work.

Action: A review of scope for expansion will be undertaken with the aim of fostering internationalisation of the programme.

Recommendation 10.67: The Review Group recommends that the School prepare a set of one-on-one meetings with key service providers, in order to tease out issues that exist. This could be scheduled for an off-peak period.

Action: A programme of meetings with external partner organisations has been on-going since the beginning of 2012 aimed at coordinating programmes and reviewing contracts. Further meetings will be organised for 2012/13.

Recommendations 10.63: The School should begin to track its progress in relation to research output, funding obtained, and teaching and learning outcomes and prepare a 5-year strategy that begins to identify targets in relation to each of these headings. This strategy should be discussed, further developed and reviewed annually at Management Committee level. This activity should be tied into a College-wide process, if possible.

Action: The School will develop a plan covering these areas in accordance with College-wide policies and criteria.

Recommendation 10.41: The Review Group strongly recommends that the School investigates every possible alternative for retaining the drug related programmes. This could involve moving these programmes more closely into the university structure while maintaining the important community links. Over time, these programmes may be close to self-sustaining in this scenario. Although a key staff member is retiring in this field and there is a threat to government funding, a small budget adjustment within the School may allow this and the Review Group strongly recommends that the long-term viability of these programmes be reviewed.

Action: The situation is under on-going review. Much of the external funding for these programmes has since been withdrawn by the Department of Health. One of the partner

organisations (An Cossain) has withdrawn due to cuts in their funding. A new more economically viable programme is being piloted for 2013/4 which shares some teaching between the remaining community partners, Merchants Quay and Ballymun. This new scheme replaces existing part-time two year diploma with a full-time one year diploma programme aimed at attracting greater numbers of students. During 2012/3 three will be review of the long-term viability of these programmes.

Recommendations 2.10: The workload allocation model should be revised to reflect that different administrative posts require different amounts of time and commitment. The points allocated for these different functions should be recognised.

Action: This is being reviewed year on year.

Recommendation 10.9: The School would benefit from a review of the administrative roles within the School. There are currently 15 roles among 19 academic staff, and some rationalisation may be appropriate.

Action: A review will be undertaken during the 2012/3 academic year. This will (1) clarify duties associated with each post (2) review the rotation of posts of responsibility typically with a change of role after three years in a given post.

The issue needs to be considered alongside workload increases resulting from budgetary cuts, reductions of external funding and staff reductions. It is likely that all staff will have administrative duties for 2012/13 and subsequent years until the budgetary outlook improves. The School has responsibility for a wide a wide range of programmes and rationalisation of administrative posts of responsibility is not feasible given staffing constraints. The workload weighting for different administrative roles will be reviewed.

Recommendation 10.53: The School should explore the possibility of making its working papers series available through SSRN (social science research network) online thereby ensuring greater international dissemination of research carried out within the faculty.

Action: It is aimed to implement this recommendation during the 2012/3 academic year. Action will be coordinated by the Director of Research but will be dependent on resources being identified.

Recommendation 10.55: The development of some designated space within the School and the establishment of a seminar series would help to foster a scholarly community for PhD students. The reallocation of space currently assigned to the Geary Institute would greatly assist in this endeavour.

Action: A review of options will be undertaken in 2012/13 by the Director of Graduate Studies and the Head of Research. This will draw on university-wide review of models for engaging doctoral students. Doctoral students are invited to public lecture and seminar series run by the School.

Recommendation 10.31: The development of a formalised Committee for Teaching and Learning within the School along the lines and composition of the Research Committee is recommended. This structure would facilitate annual module enhancement reviews, review and implementation of external examiner report findings and student module feedback, amongst other tasks.

Action: A formal teaching and learning committee has now been established with the following programme of work for 2011/12:

1. Review terms of reference
2. Collaborate actively with programme coordinators to ensure that teaching and learning developments at university level can be shared widely within School
3. Develop action plan in respect of curriculum development, assessment, teaching methodology and skills/attribute development by utilising module enhancement process and other review information available.
4. On-going liaison with Teaching and Learning Unit

Category 1(c) Recommendations to be implemented within five years

Recommendation 10.17: The Review Group recommends the creation of a small fund, from within School resources, to finance both research visits and visits to co-ordinate funding applications, including workshop and conference attendance. This fund could be dispersed in connection with the sabbatical policy.

Action planned: School discretionary expenditure will be severely cut for 2012/3 and for subsequent years. The issue will be reviewed year on year with the aim of building in support for research leave funded by the School.

Category 1(d) Recommendations which will not be implemented

Recommendation 10.15: The Review Group recommends the creation of a dedicated administrative role within the School to support research activity, e.g. grant writing and management of research projects.

Reason for not implementing: The School anticipates serious budgetary and resource constraints over the next few years. Given the need to strategically focus on internationalisation and the challenges of safeguarding core programmes, the recommendation clashes with other priorities. As an alternative the Director of Research will liaise with the College of Human Sciences to develop alternative means of support and liaise with the Vice President for Research to highlight the need to improve the practical support available to academics compiling research bids.

Recommendation 10.6: The Review Group recommends the creation of a written sabbatical policy, based on an open rotational process and not solely dependent on funded research opportunities. The sabbatical process should be combined with the workload allocation model, in order to facilitate planning in the medium to long term.

Reason for not fully implementing: A research policy has now been circulated however the elements of this policy that pertain to un-funded research leave will be extremely difficult to implement due to budgetary cuts, reductions in external funding and staff reductions.

CATEGORY 2: Recommendations concerning shortcomings in services, procedures and facilities which are outside the control of the unit

- **Category 2(b)**

Recommendations to be implemented within one year

Recommendation 10.37: The University should re-visit the decision regarding the flattened stage two in the undergraduate programme. In line with its forthcoming review of the pathways structure in January 2012, the School should prepare to enunciate its position with regard to the flattened structures within the College. To this end, the proposed Teaching and Learning Committee in SASS may be able to work with other Teaching and Learning Committees at School level within the College of Human Sciences to formulate a cross-College perspective on this issue.

Action: This issue has been raised by the Head of School at the College Executive. There is at this stage a cross-college consensus about the need to move away from the flattened stage model. The Teaching and Learning Coordinator will liaise with the College Teaching and Learning Committee to review progress.

- **Category 2(c)**

Recommendations to be implemented within five years

Recommendation 10.13: The Review Group recommends that the administrative offices be located beside each other in the School in order to facilitate sharing of tasks and student access to administrative staff.

Action: Given the configuration of the present office and teaching space this is not possible at present. Administrative staff currently share tasks during busy periods and at other times where appropriate, in addition to providing programme, cohort and task specific expertise in their respective offices. This is currently the optimum way to meet the needs of both staff and students. The issue will be re-examined as part of a longer-term plan to move the School to new premises to see if any change would be more efficient and meet the needs of the School more effectively."

Category 2(d) : Recommendations which will not be implemented

CATEGORY 3: Recommendations concerning inadequate staffing, and/or facilities which require recurrent or capital funding

Recommendation 10.48: The School should invest funds in a research officer who would assist with the writing of research grant applications and with the development of budgets (costs of staffing etc). In the end this position could become self-funded. Savings proposed elsewhere in this report could fund this proposal initially.

Reasons for Not Implementing: This is not seen to be feasible within the current financial and resources.

Category 3(a) : Recommendations already implemented

Category 3(b) Recommendations to be implemented within one year

Category 3(c) Recommendations to be implemented within five years

Category 3(d) Recommendations which will not be implemented

Recommendation 10.6: The Review Group recommends the creation of a written sabbatical policy, based on an open rotational process and not solely dependent on funded research

opportunities. The sabbatical process should be combined with the workload allocation model, in order to facilitate planning in the medium to long term.

Reason for Not fully Implementing: A written sabbatical policy has now been put in place but financial restrictions are, in practice, undermining the ability of the School to offer sabbaticals when no replacement funding can be identified.

3. Prioritised Resource Requirements

This section should only contain a list, prioritised by the Quality Improvement Committee, of recommendations outlined in the Review Group Report, which require additional resources. The planned action to address each recommendation with an estimate of the cost involved should also be included:

The review group made the following recommendation about the need to ensure that a replacement Practice Coordinator post is approved to be filled from September 2013 following the retirement of the current post-holder:

Recommendation 10.12 Given that the practicum is half of the programme for MSW students, the role of the practicum coordinator in arranging and contracting for placements is central to the student experience and the success of the programme. Given the pending retirement of the placement coordinator, the Review Group recommends most strongly the continuation of this position, and that time is allowed for transition.

Comment: This role is crucial for the viability of the M.Soc.Sc (Social Work). The M.Soc.Sc Social Work programme has at any one time 120 students that need to be accommodated on practice placements; practice teachers need to be coordinated and placements evaluated. Practice placements account for about 50% of the content of this two year M.Soc. programme. At present all aspects of placements – including the recruitment and management of in-post practice teachers - are managed and coordinated via a post that is falling vacant due to retirement. Failure to resource this role would undermine the entire M.Soc.Sc (Social Work Programme) programme. The programme is externally accredited and accreditation is strongly focused on the quality of support for placements.