University College Dublin

Quality Improvement Plan

School of Languages and Literatures

V6 - 22 March 2010

Contents

1. Introduction

Following final consultation with the School Council on 10 March 2009, the Self Assessment Report of the School of Languages and Literatures was completed and sent to the UCD Quality Office on 19 March 2009. The Peer Review site visit took place over three full days from 20 April to 23 April 2009. The Peer Review Group Report was received in the School on 3 June 2009, was circulated to the members of the Self Assessment Report Co-ordinating Committee and was discussed at a special meeting of the SARCC on 9 June 2009. Corrections and a response from the SARCC were sent to the Quality Office on 12 June 2009. The final Peer Review Group Report was received in the School on 3 July 2009. It was circulated to the School Executive on 28 August 2009 and to all school staff on 18 September 2009. Finally, it was approved by the Governing Authority of UCD at its meeting of 13 October 2009.

The Quality Improvement Plan was drafted by the Quality Improvement Committee, which comprises the following members:
  Dr Philip Johnston (Chair), Deputy Head of School
  Dr Derval Conroy, French, Head of Teaching & Learning
  Dr Paolo Acquaviva, Italian, Head of Research & Innovation
  Dr Jeremy Squires, Spanish and Portuguese, Head of Graduate Studies
  Dr Georg Grote, German, Head of Subject

A first draft of the plan was submitted to a meeting of the School Council on 30 October 2009 and two subsequent revisions were submitted to the School Executive on 13 November 2009 and to the School Council on 20 November 2009.

The school response to the recommendations in the Peer Review Group Report have been classified into three categories:
Category 1: Recommendations concerning academic, organisational and other matters which are entirely under the control of the unit;
Category 2: Recommendations concerning shortcomings in services, procedures and facilities which are outside the control of the unit;
Category 3: Recommendations concerning inadequate staffing, and/or facilities which require recurrent or capital funding.
The recommendation codes (e.g. A.3, D.8 or G.4) refer to the coding used in the Summary of the Peer Review Group Report published on UCD Quality Office website. Where PRG recommendations fell into more than one category, original entries have been duplicated.

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

1. Recommendation A.3:
   The RG is of the opinion that the situation with respect to the Head of French is not sustainable and to the detriment of the subject, its staff and students. In particular, if the School is to develop as an academic unit which is more than the sum of its parts, it is essential that all subjects fully participate in the management and development of the School. Hence the RG strongly recommends that the College Principal and Head of School should urgently address the issue of the Head of Subject for French and if necessary bring the issue to the attention of senior University authorities.

   Action taken:
   After extensive consultation with colleagues in French, Dr Douglas Smith has agreed to take on this role. His appointment has been approved by the College Principal and is scheduled to be ratified by the Academic Council on 18 February 2010.

2. Recommendation A.5:
   The RG noted that an active and junior member of the School administrative staff was leaving. The work within the administrative office of the School needs to be distributed in an equal and fair way so that the business of the School can be conducted in an efficient manner.

   Action taken:
   The Deputy Head of School, mindful of the valued contribution of all administrative staff, has already initiated a dialogue with all parties with a view to re-distribution and equitable assuming of duties. Continuing Professional Development has been offered. In 2008-2009, a full round of PMDS training, assessment and reporting was undertaken by SLL staff. These processes are now continuous and on-going.

3. Recommendation B.6:
   The School should review its policies with regard to the employment of native language assistants on permanent contracts. This is an issue for Human Resources.

   Action taken:
   The School values and cherishes the contributions made by its native language assistants on permanent contracts, but has also put in place bilateral agreements with French Universities as well as with the Cervantes. External links with DAAD (Germany), Camões (Portugal) and Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, all sponsors of language assistant posts in UCD, will be fostered and vigorously maintained. The School

consistently engages with and takes advice from UCD HR on these and related matters.

4. Recommendation D.7:
    The School should expand its range of collaborative research activities and seek to develop new opportunities with other Schools, Institutes and Centres.

    Action taken:
    Despite the difficult economic circumstances, members of the School have every intention of continuing to build on what the Peer Review Group rightly called the "highly impressive range and diversity of the profile of the School in external contexts" (*PRG Report* 9.7). Initiatives taken in that regard include:
    - Joint application from Italian with Irish, Celtic Studies, Irish Folklore, and Linguistics to IRCHSS for Ulysses scheme, joining research with Paris 7.
    - Application for NetWordS (The European Network on Word Structure) - proposal for a Research Networking Programme with the European Science Foundation, from Italian with School of Computer Science and Informatics.
    -Italian's acceptance of an invitation to join the Irish Environmental History Network, an initiative involving academics from institutions across Ireland.
    -French's collaboration with School of English, Drama and Film on a joint project entitled "Teaching the Early Modern Period: Appropriations and Negotiations", which brings together scholars from 8 countries and 3 disciplines.
    -The Early Modern Research Strand, headed by a colleague from French, involves 4 Schools in the College.
    - The Negociating Space and Place research strand and the recent high-profile conference with the Schools of Art History and Architecture, both with considerable SLL involvement.
    - Collaboration with the UCD School of Music, including a conference on E. Hanslick held in UCD in May 2009, which will result in a jointly edited publication scheduled for 2011.
    A range of other initiatives is also being actively pursued.

5. Recommendation F. 3:
    There is need for a programme of continuing professional development to be put in place for members of the School administrative staff.

    Action taken:
    Such provision is on offer without impediment.

6. Recommendation G.4:
    In order to facilitate the projection of the School through a web-based approach it is necessary to ensure that the School moves to the university based Content Management System (CMS) in order to make the updating process easier and more efficient.

    Action taken:

The CMS system is already used in the school at administrative level. For academic matters, a web users committee was established in October 2009, with a view to making the School web pages more user-friendly and to facilitating the updating of the information contained on these pages. The first stage of that process is now complete.

- **Category 1(b)**

  Recommendations to be implemented within one year

1. Recommendation A.4:
   The RG was concerned that the transition from Departments to School has not been embraced at all levels of administration within the School. The RG recommends that this situation be addressed as a matter of urgency employing all resources available within the University to resolve outstanding issues.

   Action planned:
   This issue involves a substantial culture change and a winning of hearts and minds to a pragmatic engagement with current structures. The School is gradually and thoughtfully moving towards this recommendation, by constantly encouraging collegiality, shared practice, and pooling of expertise and resources. Specific examples of the aforementioned are manifest both in the new BA in Modern Languages programme and in the suite of new Taught MA programmes on offer, where colleagues from all four former departments are now very cross-culturally active.

2. Recommendation C.10:
   The Group recommends that consideration be given to the introduction of an induction programme for language assistants which would include, inter alia, guidelines on language teaching and an introduction to the resources available

   Action planned:
   Under experienced, permanent colleagues, an Induction Programme for incoming language assistants and tutors will be established in the week before Semester 1.It is intended that the same colleagues will chair a regular forum in-semester to support and listen to this group. The School recognises, however, that the primary responsibility for monitoring and supporting language assistants and tutors rests with the individual coordinators of the modules to which the assistants and tutors contribute and/or with the relevant subject heads.

3. Recommendation C.11:
   The use of varied assessment tools in language teaching is strong, and the extension of this range since modularisation is to be welcomed. However, the RG felt that further attention could be given to strengthening both oral and aural aspects of language assessment

   Action planned:
   As part of an envisaged inter-subject review of language teaching, current practice with regard to assessment of language competency will be

revised. The School has already created elective modules specific to linguistic competencies.

4. Recommendation D.6:
    The Research and Innovation Committee should be empowered to ensure the implementation of good practice in mentoring younger staff in the development of their research careers.

    Action planned:
    The R&I Committee will discuss and propose a set of guidelines on mentoring and support of junior colleagues. It will also facilitate the communication between younger members and staff outside their subjects, identifying individual needs and suggesting contacts. Finally, it will coordinate the School's research seminars so as to avoid clashes and maximise the potential for interaction, encouraging the contribution of younger staff and postgraduates.

5. Recommendation D.8:
    The RG welcomed the School's support for research through its sabbatical rota and policy on semester leave. However, there is a need for clarity around the criteria that are used to determine whether research leave should be awarded.

    Action planned:
    This involves a re-statement at College level of UCD's "clear policy of encouraging academic staff to avail of leave of absence for research." (Staff Manual 2.10: *Leave of Absence for Research for Academic Staff*). Every application for research leave coming from the School, in accordance with the existing rota, shall make clear the mutual dependence of research leave and wider scholarly activity, including teaching.

6. Recommendation E.3:
    The RG recommends that feedback be obtained from language assistants and tutors regularly with regard to the delivery of language teaching in the School.

    Action planned:
    Building on existing practice, feedback will be collected at subject level at the end of the current academic year.

7. Comment 2.2:
    Not a recommendation of the Peer Review Group as such, but in its Report (2.2) it mentions that "the role of the School Council in the overall decision making process is not clearly defined".

    Action planned:
    Review of School Constitution, with a view to making necessary amendments & implementing its provisions.

- **Category 1(c)**

Recommendations to be implemented within five years

1. Recommendation C.7:
   The School should consider whether, in the light of its stated aim of achieving language acquisition level C1 in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, 5 ECTS per semester per language in core language teaching is enough.

   Action planned:
   This issue will be addressed by the envisaged inter-subject review of language teaching.

2. Recommendation C.8:
   The School should give greater consideration to the sharing of good practice in language teaching across the languages than is currently the case. There remains a strong degree of individual subject practice, which appears to be a legacy of the old departmental system, but which may not always bring out the best in the learning environment.

   Action planned:
   Again, the issue will be addressed by the proposed inter-subject review of language teaching, with a view to achieving not imposed harmonisation, but mutual enrichment.

3. Recommendation C.9:
   The School should consider whether a common, rationalised approach to the issue of the language of instruction for "content" (i.e. non-language) modules would be desirable and appropriate to the intended learning outcomes for students. One possibility might be that by final year an agreed proportion of, or even all, such modules be taught in the target language. The development of such an approach should be considered in conjunction with the recent development of offering general elective modules and the desirability of enhancing the School's profile.

   Action planned:
   Inter-subject review of content teaching, limited to those modules that do not aim at attracting elective students from non-language subjects.

4. Recommendation C 12:
   It is recommended that the ongoing development of Erasmus Mundus programmes in the newly represented area of Portugal and Brazil be encouraged.

   Action planned:
   The School will implement this when the new Portuguese Minor programme has bedded. Links with Portugal already exist.

5. Recommendation G.5:

The School should consider working with other Schools in the University who have links to post primary schools to facilitate the promotion of the various languages within the School.

Action planned:
An academic staff member of the school will be asked to forge and foster these links on a regular basis.

6. Recommendation G.6:
The School should actively engage with other areas within the University where complementarity exists particularly in relation to language teaching, programme development and research at all levels

Action planned
The School will appoint a senior member of staff to initiate a dialogue with the ALC, with a view to reducing duplication of electives provision and creating a more equitable platform for the promotion of both the ALC's and the SLL's elective modules at student recruitment events and in Orientation Week. The potential for collaboration on postgraduate programmes (Translation Studies, Second Language Acquisition) will also be explored.

- **Category 1(d)**

Recommendations which will not be implemented

None

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

- **Category 2(a)**

    Recommendations already implemented
    None

- **Category 2(b)**

    Recommendations to be implemented within one year

    1. Recommendation B.4:
        The RG was informed of regular problems in relation to the maintenance of teaching resources (projectors, DVD players and televisions in the teaching facilities). The management and identification of appropriate teaching facilities (rooms with multimedia capabilities in particular) requires attention. The identification and scheduling of rooms through the central room allocation system also needs to be addressed.

        Action planned:
        Action will grow as a result of dialogue and liaison with the appropriate partners in UCD. The School will undertake a needs analysis, with a view to producing a plan for IT requirements for Teaching and Learning, to be presented to the College.

    2. Recommendation B.5:
        The College and School must give serious consideration to the establishment of multimedia resources for language learning if the programmes are to retain contemporary relevance and maintain their attractiveness. If this is not done there is a danger that students may potentially be faced with facilities that are inferior to those they enjoyed in second-level schools.

        Action planned:
        Same as for B.4.

    3. Recommendation F.4:
        Constant attention needs to be given to the relationship with library staff to ensure that supports for subject areas that are necessary and appropriate can be continuously monitored and updated where appropriate.

        Action planned:
        Appointment of a very visible library liaison officer to report regularly to the whole School. UCD Library staff are more than willing to support and advise meaningfully.

4. Recommendation D.5:
   The RG recommends that the School seek to develop a coherent research strategy. This may include defining policies in relation to supporting staff in their research activities

   Action planned:
   The School has a fair and equitable rota system for staff research leave and will re-double its efforts on information flow for staff seeking funded research leave. Furthermore, the School will request assistance from the Office of Funded Research Support Services, in the form of an administrator helping School staff source relevant funding opportunities and manage research projects.

- **<u>Category 2(c)</u>**

  Recommendations to be implemented within five years
     None

- **<u>Category 2(d)</u>**

  Recommendations which will not be implemented

     None

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

- **Category 3(a)**

  Recommendations already implemented

  None- not possible in the current climate of budgetary restrictions and staff embargo.

- **Category 3(b)**

  Recommendations to be implemented within one year

1. Recommendation A.5:
   The RG noted that an active and junior member of the School administrative staff was leaving. The work within the administrative office of the School needs to be distributed in an equal and fair way so that the business of the School can be conducted in an efficient manner

   Action planned
   Apart from the departure of the active and junior member of the School administrative staff referred to in the PRG Report, the School has also lost another member of the administrative staff, who opted for early retirement. The administrative staff is now reduced to the School administrator and two half time SEAs. Two full time administrators are not enough to conduct the business of a large School in an efficient manner. The school will request the appointment of one administrative staff to fulfil essential duties formerly carried by the two members of staff who left UCD.

- **Category 3(c)**

  Recommendations to be implemented within five years

1. Recommendation D.5:
   The RG recommends that the School seek to develop a coherent research strategy. This may include defining policies in relation to supporting staff in their research activities

   Action planned:
   The School will request assistance from the Office of Funded Research Support Services, in the form of an administrator helping School staff source relevant funding opportunities and manage research projects.

2. Recommendation B.4:
   The RG was informed of regular problems in relation to the maintenance of teaching resources (projectors, DVD players and televisions in the teaching facilities).

   Action planned:
   As a result of the plan based on the needs analysis mentioned under Recommendation B.4, the school will request the provision of additional

rooms compatible with modern teaching methods, including interactive white boards and multimedia capabilities.

- **Category 3(d)**

  Recommendations which will not be implemented

  None.

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:

1. Category 3(b) 1 : Appointment of one administrative staff at SEA level (scale of €37,931.00 p.a. to €47,243.00 p.a. over 7 increments).

2. Category 3(c) 2: Equipment resources (updating of language teaching facilities, in conjunction with the Newman/Library Development taskforce).