

**Peer Review Group
Report**

2005

**English Department
St Patrick's College
Drumcondra
Dublin 9**

**Roinn an Bhéarla
Coláiste Phádraig
Droim Conrach
Baile Atha Cliath 9**

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INTRODUCTION

This Peer Review Group report, with regard to the English Department of St. Patrick's College, is based on an intensive three and a half-day study of the Department, carried out on February 7, 8, 9, and 10, 2005. The Peer Review Group (PRG) interviewed staff members, both full- and part-time, students at all levels, and administrators. In addition, the group had available to it the Department's own 78-page Self-Assessment Report, dated 2004/2005, and a number of other documents, including descriptions of the Department's programmes that are distributed to prospective and current students. The group was thus well primed before its first meeting on February 8 and was able to use its time together to flesh out the representation of the Department on paper, to clarify any points that required clarification, and to sample individual or minority views of the topics broached by the Self-Assessment Report. The group presented an outline summary of its findings to the Department on the last day of its meetings, February 10.

The work of the group was greatly facilitated by the high quality of the Department's Self-Assessment Report, which the group felt might serve as a model for such documents. It describes the present workings of the Department in admirable detail, substantiated by concrete data in the form of statistics, responses to surveys, etc. It is lucidly organized into ten topics that present a comprehensive picture of the Department. Best of all, its tone is constructive, balanced between a justifiable pride in what the Department has accomplished and a commendable openness to future challenges and opportunities.

This Peer Review Report can be seen in part as a dialogue with the Self-Assessment Report. It loosely follows the organization of the Peer Review Report, reducing the ten topics to eight and varying their content somewhat, reflecting the difference between inside and outside views of the discipline. But for the most part, the PRG interpreted its brief as a clarification and verification of the Self-Assessment Report in the light of meeting with various key stakeholders over the course of the visit.

In a Personal Note to the Self-Assessment Report, Dr. Brenna Clarke, Head of the Department, notes that the Department changed the acronym of the Quality Assessment, SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) to SWOC (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Concerns). The Peer Review Group found this not only amusing (despite the sacrifice of a pun) but quite appropriate. The seven members of the English Department (plus part-time staff) make up a strong Department, experienced, idealistic, and hardworking. They work as a team and are quite capable of turning a potential threat into a concern that they can address imaginatively and constructively.

The following is a summary/overview of the eight sections of the report:

Section 1: Background and Context

Section 2: Staffing, Accommodation and Resources

Section 3: Organisation and Management

Section 4: Programmes and Course Content

Section 5: Planning and Evaluation; Quality Assessment and Improvement

Section 6: Teaching and Learning

Section 7: Scholarship and Research

Section 8: The St. Patrick's English Department and the Broader Context: Future Development, Innovation, and Community Contribution

Members of Peer Review Group:

Mr James Hourihane
Professor James Hurt
Dr Margaret Kelleher

March 2005.

1. Background and context

To fulfil requirements in relation to quality assurance arising out of the Universities Act (1997) and to foster excellence in all its activities, as identified in the College Strategic Plan (p. 5), St Patrick's College adopted the Dublin City University model of quality review, adapting it as warranted, to reflect the unique profile and character of the College.

In pursuit of these objectives, in October 2002, the College appointed a Quality Promotion Co-ordinator to oversee the quality review of each Department and administrative section of the College. The decision was taken late in 2003 at a meeting of the English Department that it would be the first Academic Department to engage in the quality review process. Subsequent to this, the Quality Promotion Co-ordinator offered a presentation on the Quality Review Process to a complement of staff at an English Department meeting in February 2004 with the aim of providing staff with information in respect of both the context and the process of the exercise lying ahead.

Dr PJ Mathews was appointed to oversee the QA process but left St Patrick's College in August 2004 to take up a new job. In this time, too, a new lecturer – Dr Noreen Doody – was appointed, thus bringing a further change to the Department. Dr Derek Hand agreed to act as the *rapporteur* in September 2004, with responsibility for collating and compiling information for the Self-Assessment Report. This meant a shorter lead-in time for the Quality Assessment (QA) process as a whole. One of the difficulties with the ongoing process of QA is that, as a small academic department, the responsibility of continuing the process is done in conjunction with a heavy workload of teaching and other duties. It is a point, perhaps, to be kept in mind for other smaller academic departments who will be undertaking the process in future.

1. 1 Membership of the English Department Committee on Quality Review:

The English Department

1. 2 Methodology Employed in the Preparation of the Self-Assessment Report

The following section outlines, in summary form, the methodology engaged in by the English Department in the exercise of drafting the Self-Assessment Report. The tasks undertaken and events organised are presented in chronological order:

- Timeline developed for the English Department Quality Review Process. Circulated to and sanctioned by English Department Staff;
- Decision taken at sub-committee level in respect of nominations for participation in the Peer Review Group (PRG). Nominations forwarded to the College Committee on Quality Promotion, sanction received and invitations to participate circulated;

- Dr Derek Hand agreed to act as the *rapporteur*, with responsibility for collating and compiling information for the Self-Assessment Report.

Drafting of Self-Assessment Report in three stages as follows:

- i) Collation of information from English Department staff via the circulation of a battery of questionnaires to staff members including Staff Profile, Course Details, Staff Opinion and perceptions of S.W.O.C (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Concerns). The Department also conducted analysis of a large range of student responses to questionnaires from a number of years and these original questionnaires were also made available to the PRG;
- ii) Collation of information on Departmental structures, policies and practices via individual questionnaires to, and one-to-one meetings of the *rapporteur* with, the seven members of English Department and College-based staff with positions of responsibility and/or expertise in domains allied to the drafting of the Self-Assessment Report;
- iii) Departmental Feedback on Draft Self-Assessment Report in December 2004.

The staff of the English Department participated fully in the self-assessment process. They responded to the circulated questionnaires and helped draft sections of the report. Discussions on the various aspects of the process were constructive and frank. The quality review process and the development of a refined and innovative Department Plan would not have been successfully completed without the efforts and enthusiasm of all staff members. This was very apparent to the PRG – given the time frame within which the Department conducted its review and acknowledging its remarkable quality, it would not have been possible without the co-operation of all members of the Department. Healthy dialogue clearly took place – the Self-Assessment Report was all the better for it.

The English Department also expressed their special appreciation for the continuous support and great contribution of members of the administrative staff of the College in key stages of the preparation of this report. In particular, they identified Ms Gillian Clarke, Administrative Assistant to the English Department, Ms Bernie Collins, Co-ordinator and Ms Sharon King, Executive Officer, of Quality Promotion, and Ms Bernie Donnelly, Executive Officer, Administrator in Humanities.

The PRG wishes to acknowledge the exceptionally high level of the Self-Assessment Report presented by the English Department. In doing so we are aware that it ultimately became the collective property of the Department. We applaud the dedication and energy brought to this both by Dr Brenna Clarke as Head of Department and Dr Derek Hand as *Rapporteur* and congratulate Dr Hand for the clarity and thoroughness of this excellent report. Dr Hand's input was accommodated by some of his work being absorbed by his colleagues while he was engaged on the project. A block release, for a specified length of time, of such a person (especially when he/she is part of a small or medium-sized Department) for the purposes of Self-Assessment work would seem to the PRG to be worthy of the College's support and its cost effectiveness would seem to eminently justify such an investment.

1.3 Schedule of PRG Visit to English Department, 7 – 10 February

Monday 7th February

17.30 – 18.00	English Department Review Group convened
18.00–20.00	Welcome by the President, Dr. Pauric Travers Briefing by Ms Bernie Collins, Quality Promotion Coordinator Meeting with representatives of the English Department sub-committee to finalise draft schedule (Dr. Brenna Clarke and Dr. Derek Hand)
20.00	Dinner

Tuesday 8th February

9.00–9.30	Convening of Peer Review Group
9.30–11.00	Consideration of Self-Assessment Report
11.00–11.15	Coffee/Tea
11.15–13.00	Dialogue with individual staff
13.00–14.00	Lunch
14.00–15.00	Visit to Administrative Assistant and Department / Facilities
15.30–17.00	Meetings with representatives of students: MA Students; Third year BA and BEd students

Wednesday 9th February

9.00	Convening of group
9.15–10.00	Meeting with Head of Department
10.00 – 10.30	Meeting with the President, Bursar and Registrar
10.30–11.00	Coffee/Tea
11.00–11.30	Meeting with Human Resource Manager
11.30–13.00	Meetings with Students and Part-Time Staff:
11.30	Mr. Dave Meehan, Research student;
12.00	First Year BEds and First year BA students;
12.15	Second Year BA students and Second Year BEd students;
12.30	Part-Time staff: Ms. Ann Marie Byrne Mr. Stephen McMahon and Mr. Darren Kelly
13.00–14.00	Lunch
14.00–17.00	Preparation of draft report

Thursday 10th February

9.00	Convening of group
9.30–11.00	Preparation of draft report
11.00–11.15	Coffee/Tea
11.15–13.00	Preparation of draft report
13.00–14.00	Lunch
14.00–16.30	Preparation and agreement of exit presentation
16.30 – 17.15	Exit presentation to English Department
17.15	Reception for staff and Peer Review Group
19.00	Dinner for English Department and PRG

2. The English Department: Staffing, Accommodation and Resources

2.1 General

The last five to ten years have witnessed the greatest change in the Department since the introduction of the BEd (Bachelor of Education) degree in 1974. These changes have involved an increase in programmes, in student numbers and a greater specialisation among staff members in the Department.

The Department has been at the forefront in developing the St Patrick's College BA programme, as English as an academic subject has one of the highest Departmental intakes within the College. There has also been an accompanying significant increase in the numbers of BEd students taking English.

Two members of the English Department have been heavily involved in the development of the successful mature BA programme and English is one of the most popular subjects with the highly successful mature student body. The commitment to this aspect of College life is warmly acknowledged by the PRG.

There has also been the creation and development of two MA programmes taught by the Department staff: the MA in Children's Literature and the MA in Theatre Studies. 2002 saw the first PhDs graduating from St Patrick's College, one in Education and one in Humanities. Dr Carole Dunbar completed the College's first Humanities PhD in Children's Literature. The last two years witnessed an increase in the number of students (including an international student) doing MAs by research in English.

After twenty years during which no new permanent appointments were made within the Department, the last seven years have seen new staff entering the Department. Mr Jim Rigney was Head of Department in the early 1970s and then Dr. John Killeen was Head of English for 21 years. Subsequent to his retirement, the Department has had two Heads of Department in the last 7 years – Dr. Patrick Crotty and Dr. Brenna Clarke. There have been 4 appointments of lecturers since 1998 mainly stemming from the replacement of members of staff who have retired or gone to other institutions. The introduction of a Teaching Fellowship in 2001 to fill a half post in Dr. Mary Shine Thompson's job when she was appointed Director of Research has proved innovative and successful.

The graduate output and current student enrolment are presented in the tables below:

Table 2.1 Graduate Output, for the last 3 Academic Years, of Programmes Provided by the English Department

Graduate Output	2002	2003	2004
<i>Bachelor of Education (English)</i>	36	54	72
<i>Bachelor of Arts (English)</i>	35	50	51

<i>Professional English (1st & 3rd Year)</i>	562	557	533
<i>Curriculum English</i>	398	408	405
<i>Master of Arts (Theatre Studies)</i>		10	
<i>Master of Arts (Children's Literature)</i>		17	
<i>Doctor of Philosophy</i>	1		
<i>Graduate Diploma in Education (English Course)</i>	180	180	99

Table 2.2 Current Student Enrolment on Programmes Provided by the English Department, as of the 3rd of December 2004

Current Student Enrolment	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
<i>Bachelor of Education</i>	183	102	96
<i>Bachelor of Arts</i>	83	79	73
<i>Master of Arts (Theatre Studies)</i>		15	
<i>Master of Arts (Children's Literature)</i>		11	
<i>Doctor of Philosophy</i>	1	2	
<i>Master of Arts by Research</i>	4		
<i>Professional English</i>	219		314
<i>Curriculum English</i>		405	
<i>Graduate Diploma in Education (English Course)</i>	99		

2.2 Staff Profile

There are seven permanent academic members of staff in the Department. One of these (Dr. Mary Shine Thompson) is a half-time member while Dr. Julie Anne Stevens is in her second year of a Teaching Fellowship. In all, therefore, there are eight members profiled in the table that follows. The PRG felt its inclusion is worthwhile since it indicates both a strength at the present and a potential concern in the future.

Table 2.3 Staff Profile of the English Department

Number of academic staff who have spent more than 20 years in the English Department and whether they have taken leave within the last ten years	Number of academic staff who have spent less than 20 years in the English Department and whether they have taken leave within the last ten years
Four – two have spent 32 and 30 years while the other two have spent 27 and 24 years.	Four – one has spent 15 (5 full-time) while the remaining three members have spent 4, 3 and 2 years respectively.
Two have taken one year's leave within the last ten years.	None has taken any leave within the last ten years.

It is evident that the Department is effectively composed of two broad components. The first grouping has spent much of their academic life in the English Department while the second group has been appointed relatively recently. The blend of both represents a major source of strength in that the longer-serving group provide expertise, continuity and experience from which all can draw. Equally, the advent of the newer appointees brings with it a level of invigoration that is similarly rewarding.

The PRG also sees a potential concern in the profile of the Department. The lack of a 'middle' group in the profile suggests that within a number of years the recent appointees will, in effect, be the longest-serving group. When consideration is given to the expertise vested in all members of the Department it appears imperative to the PRG that strategic planning be engaged by the Department in order to make this transition as seamless as possible.

The concentration of responsibility for certain areas of the work of the English Department is also a concern, in particular in the MA programmes. The Directors of both programmes are in the longer-serving group and the PRG feels it prudent that additional expertise be provided as expeditiously as possible in order to facilitate the future success of the Programmes. Accordingly, the PRG urges that a new appointment be made in the Department – such a person would ideally possess expertise in at least one of the MA programmes taught by the Department. The PRG also felt it advisable that this new appointee would be able to contribute to the work done by the Department in Curriculum English.

The PGR also recognises the very substantial contribution made at various levels by part-time staff. This contribution, central to the successful operation of the Department, is dealt with in more detail in Section 6 – Teaching and Learning.

The existence of the Teaching Fellowship within the English Department was felt to be a most desirable method of using the half-time post released by Dr. Mary Shine Thompson's appointment as Research Coordinator for the College. The PRG would strongly support the creation of additional Teaching Fellowship(s). It/they would be time-limited for one year initially and renewable for a second. The transition of qualified post-graduates into full academic life would be both facilitated and supported by such post(s).

The Department has proposed the establishment of a Centre for Children's Literature, and the PRG endorses this proposal (see 8.3 below). Such a centre requires support from a number of sources. While the long-term financing of the Centre would almost certainly need to be external to the College it would benefit from an initial start-up grant provided by the College, in order to develop the concept beyond its present embryonic stage. The creation of a Research Fellowship – specifically dedicated initially to advancing the concept – should eventually become part of the Centre's own financing.

The PRG also proposes the creation of a Writing Centre (see section 4.4 below) to provide First Year writing/ study skills seminars to all students and to resource all sectors of the College, including the postgraduate sector. Such a centre would require

institutional resources with regard to space and staff. It is envisaged that the director of this centre could hold a half-time position and other part-time staff, training in writing instruction, be employed.

2.3 Accommodation

Overall, the Department expressed its satisfaction with the provision of accommodation for the full-time members of staff and with the availability and suitability of teaching space.

However, the lack of a room specifically dedicated to postgraduate students was felt by both the staff and the students to be an issue that should be addressed. If it is not possible to do so because of space constraints in the short-term it should certainly become a priority within the new building programme.

It was also felt desirable that the provision of postgraduate space within the library be addressed. Again, the PRG is aware of the current pressures on space within the library but would recommend that it again be targeted as an important issue within the new building programme.

The absence of a room for part-time staff was identified as a source of quite an amount of concern, both by the part-time and full-time staff. Space-constraints allowing, the PRG recommends that a dedicated room be provided as soon as is possible for this group.

2.4 Resources

It was notable that the staff generally felt that the provision of resources by the College was satisfactory – any reasonable request being generally met within the limits of budgetary constraints.

Postgraduate students identified the lack of full online access from home as being disadvantageous and felt that its provision would greatly improve their productivity and time-management.

2.5 Recommendations

- Recognizing the current vesting of expertise within the Department in areas that are of substantial importance in an institutional and national framework, an additional full-time post is recommended to sustain and develop these areas at undergraduate, postgraduate and research levels;
- Additional teaching / research fellowships are recommended, to facilitate proposed expansion, e.g. a Centre for Children's Literature; such fellowships to

- have clear time limits as currently established, and to facilitate recent postgraduates on a pre-entry level to academic careers;
- The creation of a Centre for Children's Literature, with support from internal and external sources;
 - A Writing Centre to provide first year writing/ study skills seminars to all students and to resource all sectors of the College, including the postgraduate sector.

3. Organisation and Management

3.1 Overview of Operation and Structure of the Department

Besides the Head of the Department, there are currently a number of senior positions within the English Department. These are:

- (i) Director of MA in Children's Literature: (Celia Keenan)
- (ii) Director of MA in Theatre Studies: (Dr Patrick Burke)
- (iii) Director of MA Programme Board: (Tom Halpin)
- (iv) College Coordinator of Research: (Dr Mary Shine Thompson)
- (v) Assistant Dean of Joint Faculty of Humanities: (Dr Patrick Burke)

3.2 Department Management Structure

The ultimate decision-making body of the English Department is the full Department meeting (subject to Academic Council and the Governing Body of the College). The Department meetings are planned to occur at least two to three times each semester and in practice happen more frequently than this.

The day-to-day running of the Department lies with the Head of the Department in consultation with relevant members depending on the issue being dealt with. It is also the function of the Head to implement the decisions of the Department and to report back to the Department on progress as appropriate.

There are two Programme Boards that have strong links with the Department but involve members of staff from other Department. These are the MA Programme Board and the Doctoral Programme Board. The MA Programme Board has been in existence for eight years while the Doctoral Programme Board is in the process of being set up.

3.3 Head of Department

As identified earlier in this report, there have been four Heads of Department since the early 1970s. The Department is in favour of a rotating headship, but for college structural reasons and reasons of contractual and pension rights, this has proved difficult. While the present holder was appointed on a permanent basis, this will not preclude discussions of other possible arrangements and structures.

The Head of Department is a member of the following committees:

- (i) Management Committee of the College
- (ii) Inter-Departmental Committee

The Head of Department also has regular meetings with the President of the College and with the Secretary/Bursar to consider matters of current importance, to plan for new developments and to consider the Departmental budget.

3.4 Department Support Systems

In describing the support systems, a distinction is made here between support systems that are exclusively or mainly involve the English Department and those that are shared with other Departments in the College.

The main support system dedicated to the English Department consists of one administrative assistant who is shared with three other Departments, one other very large Department, Geography, and two smaller Departments, Maths and Biology. Three years ago, the College agreed to place the administrative office for the English Department in closer proximity to the Head of the Department and to other members of the Department.

3.5 Academic Staff Workload

In their responses to the Course Details questionnaire, circulated to all full-time members of staff of the English Department, for the purpose of the quality review process, individual staff members indicated their number of contact hours and other academic duties for each course contributed to. Staff also provided details in respect of individual contributions to teaching practice supervision and undergraduate/post-graduate thesis supervision.

Staff made reference to a wide range of course duties beyond lecture/seminar/workshop contact with students. The following list is not intended to be exhaustive, but rather to give a sense of the diversity of duties comprising the academic staff workload within the English Department, with the majority of staff engaging in many if not all of the duties listed below:

Teaching:

- Individual and/or collaborative planning of course(s)
- Preparation of course material including: lecture notes, course outlines, reading lists, handouts and Power Point presentations
- Mentor to Part-Time Tutors
- Supervision of Undergraduate Dissertations
- Postgraduate Research Supervision: On average staff members meet PhD and MA by Research students 10 times a year and operate an open door policy generally in relation to postgraduate students.
- Postgraduate Teaching
- Pastoral Care
- Creative Project workshops

- Drama workshops
- Designing seminars/workshops and preparing resources for same
- Consultation with students, one-to-one/group meetings with students
- Liaison with external practitioners and facilitation of guest speakers
- Research

Teaching Practice:

- The Department contributes to the various teaching practice units conducted throughout the year.

Examinations:

- Examination and/or assignment setting, collection, marking, collation/data entry of marks and feedback
- Teaching Practice
- Engaging in pre- and/or post-examination consultation with students
- Standardising grading of examinations/assignments
- Departmental Examination Meetings
- College Examination Meetings
- Available for appeals and deferrals
- Available during examinations

Administration:

- Co-ordination of year groups
- Sourcing and ordering of books, journals, resource materials and equipment for Library
- Co-ordination of course timetable, schedule and/or session breakdown
- Interviewing applicant Graduate Diploma Students
- Convening, attending and/or chairing meetings with colleagues and students
- Writing References
- Interviewing applicant mature Students
- Interviewing applicant MA Students
- Updating student/subject notice boards
- Liaison with college administrative staff
- Recruiting, organising and mentoring part-time staff
- Monitoring work of Erasmus/International Exchange students on courses and provision of feedback on student's progress

The Self-Assessment Report provided by the English Department made available up-to-date quantitative information arising from a survey conducted by Dr. Derek Hand in late 2004.

It also needs to be stressed that the above duties cannot be easily extracted one from the other: all may be happening simultaneously. In addition, administrative work should be factored into this itemisation of work duties.

3.6 Rotation of Responsibilities and Teaching Duties

The English Department does not currently have a policy on the rotation of administrative responsibilities or of non-specialised teaching duties. All members of the Department, however, are involved in an on-going basis with examining and developing course direction and course design.

3.7 Review of Department Organisation and Management

The matter of how the Department should be organised and managed has received particular attention over the years. When the application was being made for a new career structure for members of the college staff, there was considerable discussion on the Department management structure and how positions of responsibility might be allocated within the Department. This resulted in the formulation at a College level of detailed proposals on this issue.

3.8 Personnel Management

The English Department's policy and practice in the area of personnel management adheres to the general guidelines as presented by the Governing Body of the College. The recent appointment in May 2003 of a Human Resources Officer for the College denotes a significant advancement in the areas of co-ordinating staff recruitment, staff training and ongoing staff support in this domain.

3.9 Issues Arising under the Domain of Organisation and Management in the Departmental S.W.O.C. Analysis

The PRG has chosen to reproduce the following table from the Department's Self Assessment Report. It presents the primary strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and concerns as identified in the domain of Organisation and Management by those full-time academic staff of the Department who responded to the S.W.O.C Analysis questionnaire in November, 2004. Some of the points presented here represent the collective views of the Department, while some points reflect the views of an individual member of the Department.

Table 3.1 Issues Presented Under ‘Organisation and Management’ by the S.W.O.C. Analysis

	Organisation and Management
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excellent communication by Department Head and within the Department as a whole • General sense of equality and helpfulness within Department as a whole • Excellent organisation and management • Open atmosphere fostered by good communication leads to welcoming and engaging Department • Respect for colleagues and students • All information to staff and students – meeting minutes, booklets, course descriptions – archived and accessible on computer and printed formats • Comprehensive record keeping • High quality and up-to-date information provided to students through Handbooks etc • Part-Time Newsletter
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for rotation and sharing of some responsibilities • Shared Courses between BEd and BA affects our course development • Lack of ‘University’ nomenclature
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing/ rotation of some organisational and administrative duties; e.g. Year Heads • Above would foster sense of ‘ownership’ of Department • Need for College Career Structure • Rotating Headship • Organisation of rotation of time off for Research • Fulltime secretary would aid work of Department
Concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of College Career Structure

The PRG closely examined and assessed the issues identified above. In broad terms it concurs with their thrust and would suggest a number of ameliorative actions that could be put in place in order to address items that fall within the various sub-categories of SWOC.

3. 10 Recommendations

- The PRG recognises the diverse and ever-accumulating tasks of the Head of Department. In recognition of these administrative responsibilities, and to facilitate future Departmental developments, the PRG recommends that the teaching duties of the Head be reduced significantly.
- Related to this recommendation, but also deriving its rationale from the need to facilitate the desire expressed by other members of the Department to engage in administrative responsibilities, the PRG recommends that a sharing and rotation of some administrative responsibilities be enacted e.g. website responsibility, year liaison, etc.
- It is the view of the PRG that the current reduction in teaching allowed to the Directors of the MA Programmes does not adequately reflect the duties and responsibilities attached to them. Consequently, the PRG recommends that appropriate recognition and compensation be put in place for such directorships.
- The co-existence of BA and BEd programmes within the College has undoubtedly brought with it levels of enrichment and growth. It has also brought the need to teach both groups at the same time in many courses, resulting in potential restrictions in course development. Accordingly, the PRG recommends that the English Department establish BA and BEd programme boards within the Department in order to examine existing and future practices. Such a development may also have longer-term implications for the College at large.
- The PRG recommends an increase in administrative support for the Department, with an accompanying extension of responsibilities and contributions of the holder of such a post (e.g. database work; e-publications; day-to-day management of web site). In addition, the Department has expressed a desire for increased institutional support concerning the computerization of examination marks and other data, and the PRG supports this.
- The importance of the part-time staff to the English Department was constantly stressed during the PRG review. While these staff felt valued and appreciated, an issue arose concerning communication with them. The PRG recommends that a part-time staff forum be developed and expanded and that the Department, through a meeting once per semester, enact a formalisation of means of communication with part-time staff with the full-time staff.

4. Programmes and Course Content

The heart of the English Department's programme is its two three-year undergraduate honours degrees: the Bachelor of Education degree and the Bachelor of Arts degree. In addition, the Department offers several post-graduate degrees: the Master's degree in Children's Literature, the Master's degree in Theatre Studies, the Master of Arts by Research, the Graduate Diploma in Education, and the PhD.

4.1 Bachelor of Education

The BEd is a three-year honours degree programme. Students take Education and two academic subjects in their first year. In the second and third years, students take Education and one academic subject.

The object of the First Year English course is to introduce students to a broad selection of literature and to the variety of the forms and functions of language. An important aim of the course is the promotion of the critical and creative abilities of the students through participation in seminars, workshops and the completion of written assignments and projects. In addition students in their third year of the programme independently undertake a research project (Dissertation) with individual supervision.

In the first year students are introduced to the three major genres of literature: drama, fiction and poetry. Chosen texts are from Irish, British and American writing. Students are also made aware of literary and theoretical concepts and how they can be applied to all aspects of literature. The first year is designed to be self-contained as it will be the sole experience of English Literature in the College for some students.

The design of the courses in the second and third years provides the opportunity to study the development of literature from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century (in second year) and from the nineteenth century to the present including recent developments in the eighties and nineties (in third year). It should be noted that some of the special courses in second year depart from this chronology in having a largely or exclusively twentieth century content. (*American Poetry, Culture Wars and the Drama of the Early Abbey Theatre, Contemporary Irish Fiction*, etc.)

In both second and third years, students are expected to develop their ability to use and engage with literary and theoretical concepts as well as use and engage with secondary sources.

In their third year, BEd students undertake a dissertation. This is an extended piece of work where students work independently on a topic/author of their choice. Students may also wish to approach their dissertation in a creative way and recent years have seen students do that. Examples of this creative approach include the writing and production of a play, the adaptation and performance of a novel, the making of a film, and the translation of poetry. The dissertation is read by the tutor and a second reader and a final mark is agreed upon.

In 2002 it was acknowledged by the English Department that BEd workload overall - between Academic and Education subjects - was very high. The initiative of offering BEd

students course choices in the second and third years was introduced. Students take three of five modules. (BA students must take the five modules offered in each semester.) The introduction of 2 Unit modules facilitated this process. One such 2 Unit course, *The Child in the Book*, was designed, though not exclusively, with the needs of BEd students in mind. This has proved extremely successful and popular among the BEd students.

Overall, the Department teaches to its considerable strengths in Children's Literature, Theatre, and Irish writing.

Professional English

Professional English is a single-unit course that must be taken by all BEd students not taking English as an academic subject. The purpose and aim of this course is to evaluate and enhance students' command of written English. If students have difficulties then remedial action can subsequently be taken. In first year, the course consists of a series of lectures on Children's Literature and books featuring childhood. Students must write a diagnostic essay and must pass an exam on the course material that also tests their written abilities. In second year, students must complete a study on the work of a writer of fiction or of poetry for children. This satisfies the examination requirements for Professional English in third year.

Curriculum English

Curriculum English is taken by all BEd students in Second Year.

Assessment of this course was traditionally by written examination, but for the last ten years the course has been examined solely by the submission of a folder put together by the student.

This is a useful and practical exercise for the students. Students examine a variety of works of Children's Literature and explore their uses in the classroom. Many students have said that the folder has become a very constructive resource for them to take with them into the classroom.

4.2 Bachelor of Arts (Humanities)

The object of this course is to introduce students to a broad selection of literature and to the variety of the forms and functions of language. An important aim of the course is the promotion and development of independent critical and creative abilities of the students, with an emphasis on authentic personal response of the students through participation in seminars, workshops and the completion of written assignments and projects. Essays assigned during the course of the year (dissertation in third year) form part of end-of-year assessment.

Outline of the Programme

The BA is a three-year honours degree programme. The structure of the degree is such that students take three subjects in first year, two in second year and two in third year.

First year students are introduced to the three major genres of literature: Drama, Fiction and Poetry. Chosen texts are from Irish, British and American literature. Students are also made aware of literary and theoretical concepts and how they can be applied to all aspects of literature. The first year is designed to be self-contained as it will be the sole experience of English Literature for some students given that second year students may drop English.

The design of the courses in second and third years provides the opportunity to study the development of literature from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century (in second year) and from the nineteenth century to the present including recent developments in the 1980s and 1990s (in third year).

In both second and third years, students are expected to develop their ability to use and engage with literary and theoretical concepts as well as use and engage with secondary sources. Unlike the BEd students, BA students do not have choices and must take all the courses offered.

In 1994, the English Department introduced an innovative element in the programme. It enabled first year BA students to gain significant credit for creative projects. The scope for students to express themselves is very wide: the project may be a film, the performance of a play, the adaptation of a novel for stage, a collection of poems or short stories, a painting or a model. In 2002, the creative project was extended to second year in response to student's requests on their questionnaires.

In third year, BA students undertake a dissertation. This is an extended piece of work where students work independently on a topic/author of their choice. Students may also wish to approach their dissertation in a creative way and recent years have seen students do that, examples being the production of a play, the translation of poetry and the making of a film. This is read by the tutor and a second reader and a final mark is agreed upon.

4.3 Master of Arts

In 1997, the Taught Masters Programme was introduced to St Patrick's College. The Department of English offers two Master of Arts Programmes:

- Children's Literature
- Theatre Studies

Outline of MA in Children's Literature

The taught MA in Children's literature is a part-time course taught over two years. There is a new intake of students every second year. In the first year students attend six hours of lectures or seminars per week. Much of this work is informal and discussion-based. Classes are scheduled twice a week between 4-7 p.m. Topics covered in these sessions include poetry for children, children's classics, modern and contemporary American, Australian, British and Irish children's literature, the arts of picture book making and illustration, traditional folk and fairy tales, myths and legends. A new course on

Children's Film was introduced in 2003. Students write essays and do project work on subjects of their choice. Each student has an individual tutor for the year who marks essays and written work. There is a written examination at the end of year one.

The second year of the MA is devoted largely to the writing of a dissertation. Topics covered so far have been wide ranging and exciting, from native American literature for children to Victorian school boys' stories, from women in American adolescent fiction to early Australian fiction, from the picture book art of Anthony Browne to the depiction of the west of Ireland in Irish children's literature, from stories about mermaids to the place of adolescent boys in recent Irish books for young adults. While students are working on their dissertations they have regular tutorials with their individual tutors and a three weekly research seminar to support them in their work. The completed dissertation is read by the tutor and a second reader and a final mark is agreed upon.

Organisation and Management of the Programme

Ms Celia Keenan is the Director of the MA in Children's Literature. Duties include timetabling, co-ordinating courses, being the link between students and staff, review of all applications for forthcoming cycles, the organisation of external/guest lecturers (invitation, reception, accommodation, payment), the organisation and chairing of Research Seminars, examination duties, being available at all times to respond to problems /queries of whatever kind from staff and students regarding any aspect of the programme.

The former Head of the English Department, Dr John Killeen, a founding member of The Children's Literature Association of Ireland, provided key support to the MA in Children's Literature programme. Department members Dr Mary Shine Thompson, Mr. Tom Halpin, Dr Derek Hand and Dr Noreen Doody teach on the course. Part-time member of staff, Dr Carole Dunbar, also teaches on the course. Experts from outside St Patrick's College are also involved, including colleagues from the Church of Ireland College, and illustrators, writers, editors and publishers.

Meetings are held regarding examination results in the first year and regarding thesis marks and overall marks in second year.

The MA course is constantly under review in light of student responses to questionnaires. The introduction of a unit on film in 2003 was as a result of this kind of review, and a revamp of research seminars has been undertaken, again in response to student comments. Issues concerning rigidity about deadlines, particularly those relating to submission of thesis proposals, arose as a result of the analysis of student performance in former years.

Recruitment of Students

Students come to the MA programme from a variety of professions. Teachers, both primary and secondary form the majority, but librarians, people working in the media

(both print and television), parents and those interested in working with children in the caring professions have also been represented. Advertisements are placed in the national press. These are institution wide advertisements of which the Children's Literature MA is one programme on offer. Advertisements for each two-year cycle are also placed in journals and magazines relevant to children's literature. Selection of candidates is based upon applications and an interview process.

Outline of MA in Theatre Studies

The taught MA in Theatre Studies is a part-time course taught over two years. There is a new intake of students every second year. There is also the option to do the course in one year. The overall aim of the programme is two-fold. The course aims to introduce students to a history of theatre from classical to modern drama. This academic study of drama and theatre is combined with a more practical engagement with and understanding of theatre - physical, sensory, spatial. Workshops address the overall work of the course as well as technical aspects such as lighting, design and movement.

The programme aims to:

- Deepen the students' knowledge of and insight into the themes and structures of representative major plays;
- Enhance the students' sense of theatricality;
- Offer the students an awareness of theatre history and the history of dramatic conventions;
- Complement cognitive understanding of drama by means of course-related workshops and practical theatrical experience in areas such as acting, directing, design and movement.

The first year of the programme introduces students to a broadly chronological history of the theatre from the Greeks, through Shakespeare to contemporary Irish theatre. Students are also introduced to various aspects of theatre: from lighting, stage direction, movement, acting for cinema.

Students produce two essays in each semester. An exam is written at the end of the year. Students are also involved in a group theatre project and a teaching-seminar.

The second year is taken up with a dissertation and a practical theatrical project which can cover any aspect of theatre, from acting in a play, or stage-managing a play, to directing a play.

Organisation and Management of the Programme

Dr Patrick Burke is the Director of the Theatre Studies MA. Duties include timetabling, co-ordinating courses, being the link between students and staff, review of all applications for forthcoming cycles, the organisation of external/guest lecturers (invitation, reception, accommodation, payment), the organisation and chairing of

Research Seminars, examination duties, being available at all times to respond to problems /queries of whatever kind from staff and students regarding any aspect of the programme.

Dr Derek Hand, Dr Brenna Clarke, Dr Noreen Doody and Mr. Peter O’Driscoll teach on the course. Experts from outside the College contribute workshops on various aspects of theatre: lighting, acting for cinema and so on.

Meetings are held regarding examination results in the First Year and regarding thesis marks and overall marks in second year.

Recruitment of Students

Students come to the MA programme from a variety of professions. Advertisements for each two-year cycle are placed in the national press. These are institution wide advertisements of which the Theatre Studies MA is one programme on offer. Advertisements are also placed in journals and magazines relevant to Theatre Studies. Communication is made, too, with drama conferences and summer schools. Selection of candidates is based upon applications and an interview process where students have the option of doing an audition or presenting a portfolio.

4.4. Recommendations

- **Revision of Professional English**

A number of the Peer Review Group’s interviewees expressed some discontent with Professional English, a writing course required of all BEd students not taking English as an academic subject. In the first year, students attend a series of lectures on Children’s Literature and write ‘diagnostic’ essays. In the second year, they produce an submit a longer essay on a children’s writer. The creation of a Writing Centre (see below) may render Professional English obsolete, since it would provide more individualized and continuing writing instruction than Professional English can do.

- **Specialized seminar options for BA students during the teaching practice period**

Like the suggestion for revision of Professional English, this idea came from members of the Department itself and struck the Peer Review Group as an excellent idea. The PRG recommends the introduction of ‘specialised seminar options’ / modules during teaching practice period for 2nd year BA students, with the creative project as one of the options provided. This would enhance opportunities and choices for students to begin to initiate their third-year dissertation at a conceptual level, and enable others to develop work begun in their first-year creative project. (This recommendation is made in the context of a warm and enthusiastic endorsement of the role of the creative project, and the PRG urges its continuance as central to the first year programme). These seminars

would not only bridge the gap in the instructional programme but also enrich the course content with specialised topics not otherwise taught.

- **Greater interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary emphasis in third-year dissertations and in MA and PhD work**
The move toward Cultural Studies is one of the most significant developments in literary studies in the past quarter-century. The application of the methods of literary study to non-literary topics is especially appropriate to students preparing for primary- and secondary- level teaching. The Department should act on its own impulse to encourage third-year dissertations and graduate studies that deal with popular culture, the non-literary media, the discourse of such fields as politics, education, advertising, etc. using the tools of literary criticism.
- **Development of a Writing Centre**
The proposal of a Writing Centre arises from the very positive feedback expressed by students as to the role of English tutorials in improving and developing their writing skills, and from their suggestion that such skills would be of use to all students in the College (for example through the existing modules in Professional English). In addition to staffing first year writing/ study skills seminar, this centre would resource all sectors of the College, including the postgraduate sector.
- **Graduate seminars in the second year of the MA programmes**
Several of the PRG's post-graduate interviewees commented that, although they liked the freedom of the second year of their Master's programmes, they would like occasional seminars throughout the year in order to share ideas and preserve a sense of group solidarity during the second year. The Group found this to be an excellent idea.

5. Planning and Evaluation: Quality Assessment and Improvement

5.1 Current Planning, Evaluation and Quality Assessment Practices

The PRG found that the St. Patrick's English Department excelled at self-evaluation and planning. At the end of each semester, all students complete questionnaires that elicit evaluations of both programmes and individual classes. These questionnaires are taken very seriously and often guide revisions in the programmes and classes. In addition to these student evaluations, the Department conducts regular self-evaluations in meetings at the beginning and end of each year. These meetings monitor the performance of students in third-year exams, specific issues in regard to individual courses, and the administration of essays and dissertation. They also receive feedback on the programmes from the end-of-year meetings with the External Examiner.

The Department, in its self-assessment report, expresses a justifiable satisfaction with this sort of continuing and short-term planning. It also points, however, to self-perceived weaknesses in longer-range planning. Some of these weaknesses are attributable to institutional practices: for example, in relation to obtaining projected student numbers, and the arrival of various elements of the Department's timetable; it was noted that ongoing improvements were being generated in these areas by the College. Other issues could be remedied within the Department. The PRG strongly endorses the Department's plans to strengthen its long-term planning and evaluation.

5.2 Recommendations

- The Department needs to engage in strategic planning for future appointments to sustain and develop existing programmes. The most obvious examples of these programmes are the MA programmes in Children's Literature and Theatre Studies. These are excellent programmes that fill felt needs in Irish postgraduate study and promise to enhance St. Patrick's high reputation for quality education. But they need the presence of adequate staff both for the present and for the future.
- Planning and evaluation need to be strengthened for the part-time staff. Part-time faculty make an increasingly great contribution to the English Department, helping it fulfil its teaching commitments but also bringing in a variety of new interests and skills. The Department needs to strengthen its two-way communications with the part-timers, both providing them with guidance about the programme as a whole and informing itself about the part-timers' work. In addition, as recommended earlier, a dedicated room for part-time staff is desirable.
- Members of the Department expressed some concern about ensuring the

consistency of grading essays and suggested the creation and circulation of essay guidelines and marking sheets. These seem to be excellent ideas.

- The college timetable should accommodate more detailed information about programmes and courses.

6. Teaching and Learning

6.1 Teaching

The Department shows excellence in teaching, throughout its courses and programmes; this is testified to warmly by student evaluations, external examiners' reports, etc. Types of teaching vary from 'chalk and talk', to use of power point, creative projects, and drama workshops. Teaching contexts involve a judicious balance of large lecture and small group seminars/tutorials. The seminar/tutorial system is especially to be commended, whereby all students have a weekly small-group seminar that guides them throughout their course for the year. The seminars are staffed by full-time lecturing staff and by part-time staff; the Department's training programme for part-time staff is also highly commendable and provides an excellent model for emulation.

Innovative Teaching Methods Employed:

The Department employs a wide range of innovative teaching methods, of which the following are just some examples:

- MA programmes: these include film, group and individual role-play, workshops, group and individual projects.
- Book to Film: this innovative course involves the study of film adaptation from novels, stories and plays. Teaching methods involve the showing of films, sometimes book-marked on DVD, to allow close shot analysis.
- The Creative Project undertaken by 1st and 2nd year BA students: described as unique by successive external examiners and very popular with students, it enables students to look at aspects of their academic course from a different and exciting creative perspective. Students learn about the craft of writing, film-making and theatre production – offering opportunities for group work as well as individual projects ranging from performance to art projects. The Creative Project is facilitated by workshops on the creative process.
- *Eng 308 Distance Voices, Local Echoes* is a third year course developed in collaboration with a PhD student of Cultural Geography and former student of English, that is interdisciplinary in approach combining the novel and poetry from Caribbean, European, Latin American and African texts. The course combines literary studies, cultural studies and cultural geography and makes use of a variety of critical theories as well as power point displays that include music, art and images evocative of the countries and cultures involved.

- *Eng 201: Child in the Book*: a cross genre course which combines the study of representations of childhood in a selection of fiction and poetry for children and for adults. This course draws on the students' interest in and expertise in the history and construction of childhood from their courses in Education and Human Development, and offers the potential for further multi-disciplinary co-operation.
- Throughout its courses, the Department provides useful and high-quality printed/electronic course materials for students, including course outlines, Departmental handbooks, timetables, reading lists, lists of recommended materials and resource, handouts on specific aspects of the course. In recent years, increasing use is made of the Departmental website in this regard.

6.2 Assessment

Procedures for Monitoring Student Progress

The monitoring of student progress is addressed thoroughly both at the level of the student body in general and at the level of the individual student. In the case of the student body in general, students' performance on each course is recorded and documented by the examinations office. Monitoring of an individual student's progress is undertaken through the tutorial system and includes noting student participation and engagement with course material at seminars.

Assessment Methods Employed on English Department Programmes

Currently, English Department courses employ various assessment methods, with continuous assessment (consisting of essays and seminar work and, for BA students, creative project or thesis) ranging from 20% to 30% of total assessment in the individual years, and examinations from 70% to 80%. In response to student evaluations and discussion with staff, it is recommended by the PRG (see 6.4. below) that consideration be given to reducing further the percentage allotted to examinations, and to increasing the percentage given to continuous assessment.

The Department conducts regular and careful monitoring, drawing on a broad range of methods, to ensure standardisation of marking within and between courses. The English Department also employs a useful 'Buddy' scheme for Part-Time tutors, whereby a permanent member of staff gives a second reading to essays and offers advice about grades and marking in general. Overall, standardisation of marking procedures on all courses is agreed with reference to the recommendations of the External Examiner.

Considerable care is taken by the Department to ensure students' understanding of the major grades, to provide opportunities for students to seek clarification of these requirements, and to communicate the procedure for appealing results of examinations.

The English Department Student Handbook offers the students a comprehensive Style Sheet to follow in the writing of essays and dissertations and also informs students as to the unacceptability of plagiarism.

External Examination and the Assessment Process

The report of the External Examiner is considered by members of the Department when they are drawing up assessment standards. In addition to this, the staff draw on their considerable experience over time and across other institutions to inform their decisions about assessment standards. Some members of the Department are External Examiners themselves and this experience, too, informs the general assessment process.

The position of external examiner is a three-year appointment with the possibility of an extension for a further three years if agreed. The External Examiner meeting is one that all members of staff attend. Professor Declan Kiberd of the Department of Anglo-Irish Literature and Drama in University College Dublin is currently external examiner for the BEd, BA and MA programmes and has provided detailed examination reports that address many relevant issues of concern to the Department in all the areas in which it teaches. The Department's relationship with its external examiner has clearly been productive and very positive.

6. 3 Student Support and Welfare

Students of the programmes provided by the English Department at St Patrick's College may avail of a number of excellent academic support services that operate on a college-wide basis. Of special relevance to students and staff of the English Department are the following initiatives:

- **Writing Workshop:** this was set up in 2002 by the English Department and was designed to cater for the needs of mature students across the undergraduate subject range of the College who experience difficulties with the techniques of writing. The writing workshop has been an integral part of the support system for second-chance learners and for students from less advantaged backgrounds. In a further welcome development, the writing workshop has expanded to cater for all B.A and BEd students with weaknesses in writing skills.
- **Senior Tutor Service:** established in January 2003, the role of the Senior Tutor is to ensure that issues affecting students are dealt with in a helpful way, and in the student's best interests. This has been a valuable service in providing students with a point of contact and a source of support and information both on arrival and in times of difficulty.
- **Student and Staff Induction:** the induction programme, first introduced for mature BEd and BA entrants, and now expanded to include all BA students in 2003/2004, is a very valuable initiative and facilitates students in their entry into

college life and third-level study. The plan to extend this programme in 2004/2005 to all BEd is also to be commended.

- **Student Tutor System:** A voluntary tutor system has been in operation for mature BA students since 1993, with each mature student on entry to the College being assigned a personal tutor. The proposed peer tutoring scheme for all first-year students represents a positive expansion of this service.

All of the above services are sustained by high levels of initiative and commitment from staff members. The success of these and other support services is evident in the very high retention rate of students, maintained across the range of programmes.

6.4 Recommendations

Undergraduate Programmes:

- The PRG sees as vital the continuance of the existing tutorial/ seminar system. These tutorials have immense educational value and have a vital role in relation to pastoral care and, most notably for first year students, for student retention. The small-group structures also facilitate student learning and assessment of students in ways that form a vital complement to large-group lectures. The PRG notes the Department's concern that growing numbers of students, and the absence of attendant rise in Departmental staff numbers, may pose a threat to seminars in particular and urges their continuing financial support. It is also suggested that a minor increase in tutorials be introduced for first-year students, namely an increase, during the 'creative project' period, to twice-weekly tutorials.
- The PRG also recommends that the Department consider the nature of its current teaching in relation to shared and solo teaching of courses. While shared teaching, as implemented at present, has obvious advantages, it may restrict the flexibility of staff (including with regard to the taking of research leave) and may on occasion be confusing for students. An increase in some solo teaching may also prove useful in the context of future movements towards modularization, and may facilitate staff in teaching in areas of their specialization/expertise.
- As noted above (in section 4.4), the PRG recommends the introduction of seminar options for undergraduate students, specifically in their second year of study and third year, if possible. In addition to drawing on staff expertise in more specialized areas, these seminars would also facilitate an expansion in continuous assessment, with a consequent and desirable reduction in the percentage allowed for end-of-semester examinations.

Post-graduate Programmes:

- The PRG recommends the introduction and/or expansion of graduate seminars in the second year of the taught MA programmes, thus allowing a continuation of group work and contact throughout the degree programme.
- The PRG recommends the development of a module in postgraduate study skills, early in the first year, to include an IT component taught in conjunction with SPCD's lecturers in IT. In addition, greater web resources for postgraduate

students are suggested. These resources could usefully draw from valuable expertise of previous students (e.g. on-line bibliographies of previous dissertations).

- Interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches are encouraged, as of especial value for postgraduate students. Current projects by research students are impressive in their multidisciplinary approaches, and such work could be usefully developed through links with other Departments within SPCD and with DCU. Opportunities exist to make connections with Graduate Seminars in other Colleges and Universities, thereby linking current postgraduate programmes with the wider research community.

7. Scholarship and Research

7.1 Department and College Policy on Scholarship and Research

In the past three years, SPCD has undertaken a significant reassessment of its strategic planning processes and documentation on a college-wide basis, and, more specifically, in relation to research and scholarship; the College recognises that deliberate and considered approaches are central to the success of its research initiatives. The policy of the English Department on Scholarship and Research is inextricably linked to SPCD's *Strategic Research Plan 2000-2006* and the College Mission Statement which identify the promotion of academic research in the fields of Education and Humanities as integral to SPCD's activities and academic development.

7.2 Stated Aims and Objectives

The following three core aims and objectives, relevant to the English Department's quality review process, have been identified in the College *Strategic Research Plan 2000-2006* and the College mission statement:

- *The Promotion of Research* as an integral and ongoing element of the work of academic staff, especially in the areas in which staff members have demonstrated expertise and accomplishment. The College also commits to extending existing research structures and establishing new structures based on flexibility and accountability, which take account of specific research contexts and themes.
- *Strategic alliances with other institutes* concerned with research in the fields of Education and Humanities. The College further aims to cultivate and enhance collaborative and interdisciplinary research while respecting academic and intellectual freedom.
- *Encouragement of Graduate, Doctoral and Post-Doctoral Research*. The College encourages research at graduate, doctoral and post-doctoral level through the extension of existing programmes, the identification of effective means of delivering these programmes, including outreach approaches, bilateral programmes with established universities, and the establishment of a fellowship scheme.

7.3 Strengths and Achievements of the Department in Scholarship and Research

Current Structures to Support Scholarship and Research

Recent developments within SPCD have put in place valuable structures and supports to encourage and facilitate staff's engagement in research activity. The appointment of the

Co-ordinator for Research within the College is a key strength in this area and, given the demands and significance of this position, it is both likely and desirable that the current half-time post should expand into a full-time position. In addition, the introduction of a scheme of research and professional education development fellowships, which offer staff members the opportunity to increase their involvement in research, is of benefit in terms of supporting research. Other strengths include the opportunity to disseminate research findings at Joint-Faculty Seminars and the College's Library and Inter-Library facilities.

Research Expertise and Experience

An impressive range of research interests and level of research expertise currently exists within the English Department. Individual members of the Department have contributed to prestigious journals and edited volumes, and are in the process of editing and writing articles and book length studies in the area of English literature. Members of the Department contribute to international literary conferences by organising and participating in panels and giving papers. Members of the Department are asked to give public lectures on a diverse range of topics and writers and have a considerable public profile in their areas of expertise. The English Department's involvement with the MA in Children's Literature – which is the first of its kind in Ireland – and the consequent promotion of, and involvement in, two International Children's Literature Conferences has produced one collection of essays and another in the process of being published.

Evolving Scholarship and Research Profile

In recent years, the profile of the English Department in terms of its research activity is clearly growing in strength and visibility. Among the many factors that have contributed to this evolving profile are the following:

- The recent appointment of new staff with developing research profiles within their fields of expertise; and recognition, within the Department and College, that future staff appointments will also bring with them a research background;
- MA by Research Students (four students registered in year one of their studies, for the academic year of 2004-5);
- The growth and development of the two MA programmes taught by the English Department and a consequent growth in the number of students engaged in research at graduate and doctoral level, all of whose research activity enhance the scholarship and research profile of the Department;
- The recent establishment of a Graduate Seminar to provide another forum for MA and PhD students to discuss and develop their ideas;
- The establishment of the Seamus Heaney Lecture Series, a prestigious series of lectures that has resulted in a heightened positive profile for the English Department and College as a whole, within the educational community;

- Staff members' involvement in professional organisations and attendance at conferences and lectures, including the "Moving On" Conference, a joint venture of SPCD, DIT and Notre Dame-Keogh Centre;
- Recent Children's Literature Conferences held under the auspices of the English Department, and contributions of MA students to these Children's Literature Conferences;
- On-going project to create on-line and electronic Data-base for Children's Literature;
- Annual lectures organised by the English Department: recent speakers include Brendan Kennelly, John McGahern, Merlin Holland, Tom Kilroy;
- Abbey Theatre Archive.

7. 4 Potential Barriers to the Enhancement of Research in the English Department

The perceived barriers identified by English Department staff and by the PRG in relation to the undertaking of research are as follows:

- The need for a medium to long-term planning strategy in respect of research activity at administrative and Departmental level and among individual members of academic staff;
- Insufficient formal recognition of research as important aspect of staff's workload by College authorities;
- The need to establish consistent and transparent structures e.g. rotated sabbatical/blocked release or other organized research time, in order to facilitate adequately the time of staff to engage in research;
- Lack of College-wide paid sabbatical leave.

7. 5. Recommendations of PRG in relation to Scholarship and Research

Research and Sabbatical Leave

The issue of research and sabbatical leave is an urgent issue and requires considerable institutional support. This will involve the identification and consideration of various options:

- Doubling of teaching work in one semester: this would involve a punitive teaching load either prior to or immediately consequent on the period of research leave, with significant disadvantages for staff and students;
- Semester leave, with coverage from colleagues on rotating basis: the seeming advantage of this option as a facility open to a large Department carries the significant disadvantage of adding to colleagues' already heavy teaching loads. This may also reinforce the general tendency whereby teaching workload demands and administrative duties take excessive priority over research;
- Partly paid / fully-paid sabbatical leave;

- More College research fellowships.

Seminar Options

This recommendation, described more fully in Teaching and Learning above (section 4.4), is also intended as a means of facilitating staff in teaching courses directly related to current research interests and areas of specialization.

8. English Dept, SPCD and the Broader Context: Future Development, Innovation and Community Contribution

8.1. Department Policies on Community Contributions

The Department subscribes to College policy in the area of community contribution, as delineated in the College Strategic Plan: *Beyond 2000*. This document recommends that the Department should ‘...strive to be an academic community, which in a rigorous and critical fashion, assists in the protection and advancement of human dignity and of a cultural heritage through teaching, learning, research and various services it may be able to offer to local, national and international communities’. The document outlines that this stated objective should be pursued by ‘...guaranteeing academic freedom, so long as the rights of individual and community are preserved within the confines of truth and the common good’.

8.2. Staff Contributions

Currently, members of staff, both individually and as a Department, make substantial and wide-ranging community contributions, with many significant innovations both within SPCD and in a broader context.

Staff Contributions to Department and College Committees and to the College Community:

English Department staff members demonstrate a very wide-ranging and extensive membership of College committees and groups and engage in a multiplicity of roles within these committees and groups, including acting as chairperson, secretary, co-ordinator etc. Members of staff from the English Department have initiated many groundbreaking developments in the College, including the Writing Workshop, Senior Tutor Service, Induction Programmes for Undergraduates/Graduates and Student Tutor system. Members of staff continue to have key roles in such programmes and support services, in particular with regard to students from mature entry and access programmes. It is clear that members of staff value this involvement greatly and this is an especially distinctive feature of SPCD’s College community. With the growth in degree programmes, both undergraduate and graduate level, this level of involvement may be difficult to sustain in the future, and increased institutional recognition, along with additional administrative support, for Department members are especially deserved in this regard.

Staff Contributions to Schools and Other Education Providers:

English Department staff engage in a range of activities with other education providers, including schools, other Colleges of Education and other third-level institutions. These activities include:

- Involvement in drafting European Policy on Teacher Education;
- Involvement in drafting new English Programme for Primary Schools;
- Involvement in various bodies and organisations concerned with children and their reading;
- Involvement in school-based E.U. initiatives e.g. Comenius Project;
- Involvement in in-service programme/course design;
- Membership of educational networks/associations;
- Author/Compiler/Reviewer of educational materials/resources/texts;
- External Examining;
- Green Paper on Primary Education.

Staff Contribution to the Wider Community outside College:

The contribution of members of the English Department to the Arts is richly diverse and wide-ranging. The following are examples of activities in which members of staff are engaged:

- Staff membership of numerous Professional Associations: International Association for the Study of Irish Literatures (IASIL), European Federation of Associations and Centres for Irish Studies (EFACIS), Irish Society For the Study of Children's Literature (ISSCL), Reading Association of Ireland, British Association of Irish Studies, International Research Society of Children's Literature, Children's Books Ireland, Society for the Study of Nineteenth Century Ireland, American Conference of Irish Studies;
- Office holders in said Associations and Organisations;
- Editorial Board Member for *Irish University Review*;
- Reviewing for academic journals and national newspapers; membership of award and judging panels;
- Organisation of Conferences;
- Invitations to give Public Talks/ Broadcasts/ Conference Papers/ Plenary-Keynote Papers and Involvement in Summer Schools as Lecturers and Seminar Leaders;
- Adjudication and direction of Theatre Work and other links to the Artistic Community.

8.3 Recommendations

The PRG recognises and commends the research culture already fostered among students and staff in the English Department and urges its support and continuation. Members of

staff have substantial public profiles in the general area of education and the humanities, and in their individual areas of expertise. Successful research initiatives have developed from the interaction between staff and students at both undergraduate and post-graduate level and provide an admirable model for the very real relationship between Research and Teaching/Learning in tertiary education.

In recognition of the excellent expertise already established within the English Department, and as suggestions towards its future development, the PRG recommends the following initiatives:

- The creation of a Centre for Children's Literature in the English Department, SPCD. A dedicated space for this centre would also facilitate the development of a library and archive, and the expansion of current projects to create an on-line and electronic database for Children's Literature. Valuable opportunities exist for research and teaching fellowship(s) attached to the centre. The PRG is confident that considerable funding opportunities exist for such a centre in the private and public sector, with institutional support also necessary in relation to financial, spatial and human resources.
- The expansion of the existing MA in Theatre Studies to the wider community, through distance education. Building on the existing national profile of staff members and of the postgraduate degree programme, this expansion would provide a much-needed resource for groups and individuals involved in theatre work throughout the country. Such an expansion could also involve the investigation of technological opportunities to aid community outreach. In addition to this expansion, it is recommended that a theatre studio be created on-campus as the centre for theatre programmes.
- The development of a centre of excellence in film studies, within the English Department (with viewing room and film library) by which existing developments in multi-media may enjoy further advancement.
- The introduction of working papers and occasional papers, potentially as e-publications. This innovation is recommended as an important means of supporting existing research initiatives within SPCD and also as a means of raising the Department and College's public profile. Such publications would build on existing excellence in research in a variety of areas. Working papers, in particular, would provide a valuable bridge for staff between teaching expertise and research publication, and would also aid the professional development of research students.

CONCLUSIONS

This summary of the recommendations of the PRG is structured following the sections of the main report but with a further subdivision to highlight *internal issues* and *external issues*. The first of these highlights issues that may be dealt with internally, at Departmental level. The second deals with issues that require a wider College and institutional support. The third identifies issues that require both internal and external actions for their implementation.

Staffing, Accommodation and Resources

Internal and External Issues:

- The introduction of a Writing Centre: to staff a first year writing/ study skills seminar for all students; to resource all sectors of the College, including the postgraduate sector.

External Issues:

- The creation of an additional post, with expertise in one or more of following areas: Children's Literature; Theatre Studies; Curriculum English.
- Creation of additional teaching fellowship(s):: as at present, for one year and renewable for a second year.
- Additional teaching / research fellowships; such fellowships with clear time limits as currently established, and to facilitate recent postgraduates on a pre-entry level to fuller academic life.
- The necessity for increased administrative support with accompanying extension of responsibilities and contributions of holder of post.
- Full online access for postgraduate students to electronic resources from home.
- Postgraduate room.
- Postgraduate space in library.
- Dedicated room for part-time staff.

Organisation and Management

Internal Issues:

- Sharing and rotation of administrative duties e.g. web site responsibility; year liaison.
- Enhanced communication with part-timers through the expansion of the part-time staff forum.
- Formalisation of means of communication between full-time and part-time staff.

Internal/External Issues:

- Creation of BA and B Ed programme boards (within Department initially and with longer-term implications for College).

External Issues:

- Proper College Career Structure: in the light of the quality of teaching, research and proposed administrative responsibility, the PRG concurs with the stated ambition of the Department for a proper college career structure.
- Recognition and compensation for MA course directors.
- Significant reduction of teaching duties for Head of Department.
- Support concerning computerization of systems, marks, data e.g exam results.

Programmes and Course Content

Internal Issues:

- Choice of ‘specialised seminar options’ / modules during teaching practice period for 2nd year BA students, with the creative project as one of the modules.
- The expansion of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary aspects to third year dissertation; also to Masters and PhD degrees (the size of the College and variety of subjects would allow the Department a pioneering role in this regard).
- Increase and/or introduction of group contact in second year of MA programme through graduate seminars.

Internal/External Issues:

- A critical analysis by the department of the place and role of Professional English within the current programme and the possible replacement of a Writing and Study Skills component for BEd students not taking Academic English.
- The progression of existing writing workshops conducted by English Department into a more fully fledged Writing Centre with input at undergraduate and postgraduate level.

Planning and Evaluation; Quality Assessment and Improvement

Internal Issues:

- The importance of strategic planning by the Department for future appointments to sustain and develop existing programmes.
- The monitoring of communication with part-timers, building on innovations and achievements in this regard to date.
- More comprehensive Essay Guidelines and Marking Sheets, building on existing structures, and detailed schedule and syllabi with regard to individual units and their interrelations.

Teaching and Learning

Internal Issues:

- The continuance of existing tutorial/ seminar structures, given their vital educational value, role in pastoral care and significance for student retention.
- An increase in first-year tutorials during ‘creative project’ period to twice a week.
- A consideration by the department of the nature of current teaching in relation to shared and solo teaching of courses.
- Introduction or expansion of graduate seminars / group contact in second year of MA programme.
- Development of postgraduate study skills to include IT component in conjunction with existing IT institutional resources.
- Improved web resources for graduate students (on-line bibliographies of previous dissertations etc).
- Consideration by Department of opportunities to further interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches (including links with DCU), with special emphasis on opportunities for post-graduate studies.

Scholarship and Research

Internal Issues:

- Identification and consideration of means to expand time available for research.
- Consideration of the option of doubling of work in one semester, with consequent advantages and disadvantages.
- Consideration of option of semester leave, with coverage from colleagues on rotating basis, and its consequent advantages and disadvantages.

External Issues:

- The urgent expansion of institutional support for scholarship and research.
- The consideration of partly paid / fully paid sabbatical leave as one option.
- Given their significance, the PRG urges the introduction of more College research fellowships.

English Dept, SPCD and the Broader Context: Future Development, Innovation and Community Contribution

Internal/External Issues:

- The creation of a Centre for Children's Literature (this dedicated space to include library/archive; database; research and teaching fellowships attached to centre) , with detailed consideration of potential funding opportunities in the public and private sector.
- The future expansion of the MA in Theatre Studies outside of the College through distance education: thus providing a resource for amateur groups, an extension of courses in wider arena and a consolidation of existing national profile and expertise. In relation to this, the creation of a theatre studio on-campus as the centre of such programmes is also recommended.
- The future development of the Department as a centre of excellence in film studies (with viewing room and film library) by which existing developments in multi-media may enjoy further advancement.
- The introduction of a series of working papers/ occasional papers (perhaps as e-publications) to build on existing good work in a variety of areas and as a bridge between research and teaching.