



Quality Improvement Plan (QuIP)

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**Education Department
St. Patrick's College
Drumcondra
Dublin 9**

**Roinn Oideachais
Colaiste Phadraig
Droim Conrach
Baile Atha Cliath 9**

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MEMBERSHIP OF THE COLLEGE QP COMMITTEE

Ms Maeve Fitzpatrick (Higher Executive Officer, Education Unit)
Dr Patricia Flynn (Lecturer, Music Department)
Dr Liam Mac Mathúna (Registrar)
Dr Ruth McManus (Lecturer, Geography Department)
Dr Mark Morgan (Head, Education Department)
Ms Orla Nic Aodha (Assistant Librarian);
Ms Celine O'Connell (Administration, Special Education Department)
Ms Susan Pike (Lecturer, Education Department, College Co-ordinator Teaching and Learning)
Dr Mary Shine Thompson (Lecturer, English Department, College Co-ordinator of Research)
Mr Martin Ward (Secretary, Bursar)

MEMBERSHIP OF THE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT SUBCOMMITTEE ON QUALITY REVIEW

(All are academic staff in the Education Department)

Dr Catherine Maunsell (Chairperson)
Ms Siobhan Cahillane-McGovern
Ms Bernie Collins
Dr Catherine Furlong
Ms Margaret Leahy
Dr Mark Morgan
Ms Fionnuala Waldron

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Glossary

BA	Bachelor of Arts
BEd	Bachelor of Education
DCU	Dublin City University
DES	Department of Education and Science
ECTS	European Credit Transfer System
EdD	Doctor of Education
ERC	Education Research Centre (St Patrick's College, Drumcondra)
Grad Dip	Graduate Diploma in Education
IUQB	Irish Universities Quality Board
LRC	Labour Relations Commission
MEd	Master of Education
PRG	Peer Review Group
QuIP	Quality Improvement Plan
QR	Quality Review
SAR	Self-Assessment Report
SPCD	St Patrick's College Drumcondra
TP	Teaching Practice

1. Introduction

This plan represents the third major outcome of the quality improvement review that the Education Department has undertaken over the past 18 months. It follows the Department's Self-Assessment Report (January, 2004) and the report of the Peer Review Group (April, 2004).

In undertaking this review, the Education Department has acted in accordance with a framework model developed and agreed through the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) and which conforms with the provisions of Section 35 of the Universities Act (1997). The Department has benefited from the opportunity afforded by this review to examine its performance closely and to put in place a Quality Improvement Plan which it is intended will inform discussion and strategic planning well beyond the present quality review process.

2. Profile of the Department

Background and Context

St Patrick's College has enjoyed a leading position in the education of primary teachers in Ireland for almost 130 years. The Education Department of the College formally came into being on September 1st 1973, bringing together staff who had until then worked relatively independently of each other. Since 1993 and in accordance with an institutional linkage agreement, St. Patrick's College is designated a College of Dublin City University. The Departments of Education, Religious Studies, Special Education and Biology, of the College, together with some staff of the University, form the Joint Faculty of Education of Dublin City University.

The education of primary teachers, general and special, has historically been the main activity of the College, in general and of the Education Department, in particular. In more recent times, programmes in initial teacher education, special education and remedial education have been complemented by the introduction of other postgraduate and continuing education courses for teachers. The Humanities have traditionally played an important part in the College's initial teacher education programme. In recent years, separate undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in the Humanities have also been developed.

The last five to ten years have witnessed the greatest change in the Department since its inception. These changes have involved an increase in programmes, in student numbers and a major increase and a greater specialisation among staff members in the Department.

Programmes

The Education Department delivers two undergraduate programmes; a Bachelor of Education (BEd) and a Bachelor of Arts (BA) and two taught postgraduate programmes, a Master of Education (MEd) and a Graduate Diploma in Education (Grad Dip). Its contribution to the BA programme is confined to courses in Human Development. It also offers research degrees to Masters and Doctoral level. It proposes to deliver a BA (International) and a taught Doctor of Education (EdD) programme from 2004. The College has established an award-bearing structure of in-career education. This allows modules to be taken for audit or credit towards a University validated Certificate, Diploma or Master of Education degree.

Staff

The Education Department currently employs 53 staff on a permanent or contract basis including a number of staff on secondment. The secondments include school principals, class teachers, members of the Inspectorate (from the national governmental Department of Education and Science) and the Primary Curriculum Support Programme. 16 of the staff possess a PhD degree while many of the remaining staff are pursuing doctoral programmes. Of the 53 staff, 42 have been employed by the college for 6 years or less.

3. Summary of the Self-Assessment and Peer Review Group Processes

The Education Department Sub-committee on Quality Review was established in June 2003 to oversee the preparation of the self-assessment report of the Education Department. Membership includes a cross-section of representatives from curricular studies, foundation studies, human development and teaching practice. The Committee met approximately weekly to review progress and to plan future activity, and liaised with and reported to the College Quality Promotion Committee. Coordination of the process was the responsibility of Ms. Bernie Collins, Quality Promotion Coordinator. The staff of the Education Department participated fully in the self-assessment process. They responded to the battery of questionnaires circulated and helped draft sections of the report. Discussions on the various aspects of the process were constructive and frank.

The Education Department Sub-committee undertook a fact-finding exercise as a basis for the review. It also conducted and facilitated an away day, compiled a departmental research profile and drafted a quality review self-assessment report for 2003/4.

In turn, the Peer Review Group process consisted of three discrete activities:

- Familiarisation with the self-assessment report provided by the Department in advance of the site visit.
- A comprehensive site visit which took place from the 16th-18th February, 2004 to review and validate details of the self-assessment report.
- The preparation and delivery of a review report documenting the findings and making recommendations for future development.

The PRG, thus considered the self-assessment report, dialogued with a selection of academic and administrative staff groupings, singly/ in pairs, toured the College and Departmental facilities and met representatives of students from BEd, BA, Masters and Graduate Diploma programmes prior to their compilation of the PRG Report.

The Peer Review Group found the Department's self-assessment report very useful and informative. It provided considerable data on the department and its activities and the PRG noted that the information collated 'was presented in an honest and open way'. They also noted that 'the SWOT analysis at the end of each section was particularly helpful'. Overall, the PRG commented that they found the review process, as a whole, very positive.

4. Main Findings In Self-Assessment And Peer Review Processes

In its Self-Assessment Report the Department summarised its strengths as lying in its positive, affirming and committed leadership, the collegiate spirit amongst staff, the effectiveness of management committee and sub-committee structures, departmental openness and commitment to programme evaluation and restructuring, the diversity and range of courses on offer and the calibre of the student body both at entry and at graduation, the level of staff experience and expertise in course development, delivery and assessment ensuring that students have access to best practice and the highest standards of current research, the wealth of innovative and creative teaching & learning approaches employed by staff in the course of their work, the range of research interests and expertise across the staff complement and the high number of staff engaging in masters and doctoral studies, and finally the on-going and extensive contributions of department staff on a personal level to the wider college and educational community.

At the same time, the Department identified the following as areas for improvement: enhancement of communication flow in respect of Management Committee and Sub-Committee decisions, increased transparency in appointments to committee/sub-committees and defined procedures for the rotation of the membership of these structures, the allocation of formal time for Departmental planning and evaluation, the needs for increased clarity in respect of staff roles, responsibilities and career structure, the balancing of staff workloads, the re-examination of staffing needs/arrangements in certain areas, the need to restructure programmes offered to reduce overall staff and student workload, course overlap and fragmentation, the standardisation of marks across courses offered, the introduction of Department-wide guidelines on Course/Programme Evaluations, the introduction of additional mechanisms to acknowledge and support staff research and to integrate research more fully into staff workloads, the promotion of the

Department in the wider educational and broader community, need to integrate community contributions into formal work of Department, promotion of access and student diversity, addressing the adequacy and condition of the physical facilities, such as office-space/research facilities, available to staff and students of the Department.

The Peer Review Group (PRG), in its report, echoed many of these points in summarising the Department's strengths and areas for improvements across the range of domains reviewed.

Domain 1. Staffing, Accommodation and Resources

The PRG viewed that the current level of staffing in the Department was adequate, given the size and scope of the activities and programmes in the Department, within a medium-sized teacher-education institution. Given the recent growth of staff and student numbers, it was held that the general procedures adhered to by the Education Department, in relation to staff recruitment protocol and appointments procedures are satisfactory and inclusive. The staff-training and professional staff development proposals, as outlined in the College's Strategic Plan were viewed as commendable and there was evidence that many of the excellent schemes are being implemented with positive effects. The PRG highlighted that the majority of staff members have recent and relevant experience in the field of education and the high proportion of staff with appropriate higher degrees was also found to be noteworthy and commendable. The PRG held the belief that the College's staff development initiatives contribute to the high percentage of staff undertaking study at doctoral level and concluded that this will serve to raise the research profile of the Department.

The PRG cited the College Library as a particular strength in respect of resources available to the Department. The Library, in their estimation, houses an excellent collection of foundation and methodological texts in education and a reasonably extensive range of professional and academic journals.

The PRG commented that the SAR and their subsequent site visit revealed a high incidence of academic staff carrying heavy teaching, administrative and teaching-practice supervisory duties. However, the PRG believed that the load did not appear to be evenly spread in all cases and this had resulted in some degree of workload inequity in the Department. In expanding on this, issues of inequity in relation to the number of core staff in subject teams were highlighted, in that many subject areas were believed to be quite heavily staffed by part-time or short-term contract lecturers, which leads to some degree of frustration and over-burdening of permanent staff members within a subject area. Furthermore, the PRG noted, in respect of staff development initiatives that care must be taken at management level that opportunities exist for all staff, particularly where only one person forms the core staffing for a subject.

While it was acknowledged as advantageous that staff members are engaged in an appropriately diverse range of activities within the Department and College as a whole, nevertheless, the PRG noted that this may lead to some degree of duplication. It was thus, indicated by the PRG that a more co-ordinated approach may reduce the amount of time that academic staff members spend on generic activities.

The Department was deemed to provide an acceptable level of accommodation for both staff and students, resulting in a productive teaching and learning environment, nonetheless, the recent significant increase in both staff and student numbers had, according to the PRG, resulted in an unprecedented level of pressure on the existing facilities, which has been further exacerbated by the pause in the proposed building programme. In addition, access to Information Technology (IT) facilities while believed to be currently adequate, will require expansion in the near future in line with the new programmes coming on-stream and consequent increasing student numbers.

Domain 2 Organisation and Management

On organisation and management, the PRG were impressed by the enthusiasm, dedication and commitment of staff. Staff members, in general, were very happy in their work environment. The PRG highlighted in particular, the great sense of collegiality and the very high calibre of student intake. Students were uniformly positive on the approachability of and support from staff. Students reported that they were happy in general with college life. Even those who were critical of some aspects of their courses were highly positive of the College experience. Courses were reported to be both intellectually stimulating and challenging for students. In noting areas for development, the PRG noted that the

management structure, role and responsibilities needed to be more transparent and communicated to all staff, particularly in the light of the greatly increased size of the Department in recent years. Though the PRG did acknowledge that members of staff were very positive about the ease with which they can approach the Head of Department.

The PRG believed that greater visibility and awareness of structures and policies of the College would be useful and that greater use of the web for communication purposes should be encouraged, including the availability of minutes of meetings.

Domain 3 Planning and Evaluation

On planning and evaluation, the PRG noted that the outline planning and administrative activity of the Department in relation to the collection of assignments, collation of examination results and maintenance of student records are dealt with centrally by the Education Department administration personnel, in relation to planning at the Departmental-level, the PRG focussed on the 'biennial away-day' system which they noted staff spoke of very highly. However, the PRG noted that a number of staff indicated that they were not very aware of planning outside their own subject areas, with the majority of staff agreeing that programme boards for all pathways, including the B.Ed. and Grad. Dip. programmes would be useful.

Domain 4 Programmes and Courses

On Programmes and Courses, the PRG indicated the workload of students to be very high, by contemporary third-level standards.

Specific to the B.Ed. Programme, the PRG commented that the study of an academic subject by students on the BEd programme was generally valued by staff in the department as making an important contribution to the personal development of the students. However, the PRG noted that it is situated within a BEd and is not a separate degree and the students interviewed, while recognising its value, were concerned about the resulting workload.

BA in Human Development: The PRG noted that this programme has benefited tremendously from a process of recent review. The PRG noted meeting a number of highly-motivated (mature) students, who were uniformly positive in their comments on this programme. The students felt fully supported by staff.

Master's/Doctoral Programmes: The PRG intimated that the strength of the postgraduate work in the Department lies in the staff's commitment to postgraduate level work and the level of expertise of several members of the Department who are international experts in their respective fields. A further strength is reflected in the ability of the Department to respond to the need for curriculum leaders in schools. The PRG held that appropriate quality assurance measures are in place in the taught Master's programme. Currently all staff involved in the delivery of the taught Master's programme sit on the Programme Board, but with the recent expansion of initiatives such as the taught doctoral programme, the PRG indicated that a middle tier of management may be required to carry out the day-to-day running and administration of postgraduate programmes. It may also serve to formalise reportage structures in the Department and facilitate greater communication.

Domain 5 Quality Assessment and Improvement

The PRG noted that it is common practice for members of the Department to evaluate their courses on an individual basis and furthermore that formal feedback has been sought from graduates about the programmes as a whole and on individual components in the programme. This has been common practice for some years for both the Graduate Diploma and Human Development programmes.

In highlighting areas for development, the PRG outlined that there is no common format for course evaluation, although it does acknowledge that staff members are encouraged to engage in this practice. According to the PRG the results of any such evaluation, where it is practised, should feed back to the College or to the Department Head.

Domain 6 Teaching and Learning

General: The range of innovative teaching methods employed by staff was found by the PRG to be impressive. The PRG believes that greater sharing of good teaching practice among colleagues might be beneficial. The PRG noted are many models to enhance the sharing of good practice, one of which is peer review, in which staff members observe and evaluate each other's classes.

In interviews, several staff members raised the issue of the lack of collaboration. Members felt that both themselves and the students would benefit from more joint planning of and collaboration in the delivery of courses.

Both staff and students complained of student work overload caused, to some extent, by lack of communication between staff in relation to the broad overview of what students are expected to submit by way of assignments. Interviews with staff revealed that they would benefit from structured feedback from students in relation to courses and their assessment. Staff members interviewed were unclear about the nature of student workload outside of their own subjects, although they did acknowledge that students were overburdened with assignments.

The PRG noted the appointment (on a half-time basis) of a college-wide teaching and learning co-ordinator and also noted the developments in the area of a virtual learning environment.

Teaching Practice: In view of the fact that the 'defining responsibility' of the College is the education of primary teachers, teaching practice occupies a pivotal position in the lives of all BEd and Grad Dip students. The PRG commented that the management and administration of teaching practice are conducted with admirable efficiency. The documentation for the students, supervisors and school personnel is commendably detailed and was organised in sufficient time for all concerned to have assimilated its contents. The expectations of the students in terms of teaching and learning and the requirements for the various grades are clearly expressed. The number of part-time supervisors (over half of the total) involved in teaching practice is a serious concern for students due to differing expectations and possible variations in grading. In the interests of Quality Assurance, it is also an issue that the Department must urgently address.

In-Service: The PRG acknowledged that the appointment of a Director of In-Service Education in Autumn 2002 gave an impetus to the process of addressing what the Strategic Plan referred to as a notable weakness. At this juncture, the number of participants involved in in-service courses is not substantial, but it is vitally important that partnerships with the other stakeholders such as the Education Centre network, other Colleges of Education, the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) and parent groups are further developed. The framework for providing accreditation for the facilitators who work with the Primary Curriculum Support Programme is a valuable initiative. The use of distance education for the provision of in-service education could be developed to a far greater extent. The issue of personnel to provide in-service courses has not been addressed sufficiently within the context of overall workloads. It would not be beneficial for the Education Department or its in-service students for their courses to be taught on the basis of the goodwill of full-time staff or taught entirely by part-time staff.

Domain 7 Scholarship and Research

The PRG highlighted that the Departmental research profile indicates a high level of research activity, and noted that some individual members of the Department are internationally recognised experts in their fields. It is clear to the PRG that the traditions both of individual and collaborative research are well established in the Department, and that the Department makes a unique contribution to research in the field of childhood and education. Teams from within the College have formed a number of significant strategic research alliances and some attract considerable funding. The PRG has noted that significant numbers of staff hold PhDs or are currently pursuing doctoral degrees. It also notes the considerable rise in the number of students registered in the Department who are pursuing higher degrees, and the demands that supervision of research degrees make on staff members. It was clear to the PRG that research is encouraged in the Department, that many undertake it with considerable enthusiasm and commitment, and that it is integrated into teaching.

Among the supports for research activity which the College provides are: the appointment of a College Research Coordinator (a half position); the establishment of a research fellowship which may be awarded

annually to a member of staff; an annual scholarship, which may be awarded to a research student of the College and two research fellowships supported by a commercial body; a scheme of paid leave of absence for research purposes; the provision of 1% of the College's annual budget for research-related activities; the publication of an annual College-wide research report; the provision of €630 annually for members of staff to attend conferences.

The PRG commends the Department for the high level of participation in research. The expectation that a member of academic staff would contribute to the College research profile is relatively recent and an addition to the teaching work of the Department. The current career structure does not acknowledge excellence in research.

Domain 8 Community Contributions

The PRG commends the substantial contribution of the Education Department to the arts. The involvement of Education Department personnel in over 50 committees within the College was found to be indicative of the very substantial contribution that the Department makes to the continued development of the College.

The PRG noted that Education Department co-operates actively with the education departments of the other colleges of education, and the establishment of a research consortium of the other colleges of education is an important initiative. The Department's involvement with the INTO in a major in-service project, with FORÓIGE, and with the DES in planning and research activities is indicative of the advances which have been made since 1999. The National Pilot Project on Teacher Induction represents one of the many possibilities which exist when the DES, Education Departments of the other colleges of education and schools co-operate in order to develop an effective, systematic and rigorous approach to the induction of newly qualified teachers.

The work of the Educational Disadvantage Centre constitutes a good example of the Education Department's involvement in the wider community. The Centre provides many opportunities for the College and its students to respond to the changing nature of Irish society and to its changing educational needs. The Centre provides a wide range of programmes at pre-service and in-service levels, in addition to its developmental work in the national and international spheres of activity.

The PRG commented that the Education Department does not have a formal written policy in respect of the contributions that its members make to the college community or to the wider community. In addition, the PRG held that the lack of a formal policy on involvement in schools means that for the most part these initiatives are dependent on the goodwill of individual staff members and the voluntary co-operation of schools.

Overall, the PRG acknowledged that the Department and College operates subject to a number of external constraints, which limit its flexibility and autonomy. Some of the recommendations in this report depend on progress being made in relation to matters such as:

- The control on the intake of students into the BEd and Grad Dip programme by the Department of Education and Science (DES) and the timing of such notification to the College
- The control on the creation of staff posts (in the area of Education) by the DES
- The academic career structure [which is currently being processed by the Labour Relations Commission (LRC)]
- The restarting of the New Building Programme for the College.

Comparing the two sets of findings, the Department observes a high level of agreement between its own self-assessment and the view taken by the review group. The Department could not identify a significant point in the Peer Review Group's report with which it could not agree.

5. Recommendations for Improvements

The Peer Review Group prioritised the following recommendations and the Departmental Response to each recommendation arising from the Departmental Away Day are presented in this section of the QuIP, in the sequence in which they occur in the PRG report.

Domain 1. Staffing, Accommodation and Resources

1.1. PRG recommends the immediate establishment of a career structure that will reward and recognise excellence in research, teaching, the arts and community contribution is essential to the restructuring of the Department along the lines that it's size and complexity demand.

Education Department Response: The Department accepted this recommendation but deemed it to be outside of its control. The issue of a 'proper' career structure in St Patrick's College is being reviewed and currently lies with the Labour Court. Once resolved the Education Management Committee together with the Education Department intend to establish and implement the proposed career structure within a 6-12 month time-frame following the decision of the Labour Court and subject to sanction by the Governing Body of St. Patrick's College.

1.2. PRG recommends a risk assessment exercise needs to be conducted in relation to the size of core staffing within the different subject areas in the Department

Education Department Response: The Department understood this recommendation to mean that clarity on what is meant by 'adequate staffing levels' will be attained and each subject area within the Department should then be audited to ensure that it is adequately staffed. The Department agreed that the Education Management Committee would carry out this assessment within the coming academic year 2004-2005.

1.3. PRG recommends that the issue of designated holiday periods and entitlements should be addressed in the context of employment contracts.

Education Department Response: The Department did not fully accept this recommendation and decided to put the recommendation under advisement. The Department contended that due to the nature of the work and on-going commitments of staff *inter alia* research, committee involvement, having designated holiday periods would not be appropriate. The Department highlighted the 'culture of trust' that has operated in the College in respect of this issue and suggests that any amendment in the practice to date would warrant referral to Irish Federation of University Teachers.

1.4. PRG recommends the proposed building programme needs to be re-instated immediately

Education Department Response: The Department endorsed this recommendation but held that its attainment was beyond the remit of the Department. The Secretary-Bursar reported that the master building plan had been submitted to the HEA and further developments are awaited. The timeframe for commencement of this project was indicated as 2006-2007 at the earliest.

1.5 PRG recommends dedicated workstations and workspace needs to be provided for research students.

Education Department Response: The Department accepted this recommendation and indicated the need to provide both individual and collective workspaces for research students. The implementation of this recommendation was deemed to be the responsibility of the Secretary/ Bursar and Buildings Maintenance Officer in consultation with the College Research Committee. New individual workstations will be in the College Library and Resource Centre by mid-September, 2004 while provision of collective workspace will follow negotiation between Education Management Committee and the aforementioned officers of the College. Such negotiation should take place within the academic year 2004-2005.

Domain 2 Organisation and Management

2.1. PRG recommends the size of the Department (at 53) requires a formally defined and articulated organisational structure with consistent and transparent management structures and clear, accessible documentation describing this.

Education Department Response: The Department accepted this recommendation and noted that it has been formally raised by staff heretofore. The Department contended that implementation of this recommendation should be delayed until the issue of a proper career structure (see Recommendation 1.1. above) has been determined. Following this the Education Management Committee in consultation with the Department could then define the structures as outlined.

2.2 PRG recommends the relationship between the academic and administrative sections needs to be clarified and formalised to reflect adequately the input from administrative staff

Education Department Response: The Department endorsed this recommendation in the interest of enhanced communication and interaction between academic and administrative staff. In response to this recommendation, the Senior Education Administrator is a member of the Education Management Committee as and from September, 2004.

Furthermore, a Joint Academic-Administration Quality Implementation Committee is to be set-up. This committee will be responsible for ensuring that both academic and administrative staff are appropriately represented and consulted during the Quality implementation process.

2.3 PRG recommends there is a need to look at post-holder roles and, subject to progress on the career structure, posts of responsibility should be rotated.

Education Department Response: The Department accepted this recommendation subject to progress in respect of Recommendations 1.1 and 2.1 as outlined above. The Department supported the notion of rotating roles/posts of responsibility.

2.4. The PRG recognises that there are limits to the amount of devolved budgeting that is possible in a College of this size. However, it is recommended that the Head of Education needs to participate in drawing up the budget for his department and should assume responsibility for its administration.

Education Department Response: The Head of the Department is already involved to some extent in budgeting for the Education Department in providing expenditure estimates at the beginning of each academic year. Any further negotiation in respect of devolving budgets needs to be addressed at college-wide level with the Heads of all Departments. A series of workshops to academic staff on budgeting in third level institutions, is to be provided by the Secretary-Bursar in the coming academic year.

2.5 The PRG recommends an agreed and transparent framework needs to be developed for academic workload in relation to contact hours, course allocation, administration, research and contributions to college life.

Education Department Response: The Department agreed with this recommendation and suggested compiling a database of all work carried out by staff. This database will help to quantify the workload of staff in relation to all aspects of their roles. It was proposed that the framework for this database be developed by a specially constituted committee of the Department. It was noted that the Department has been assured by the College President that this is a continuing priority to be dealt with by College Management Committee by December, 2004.

2.6. PRG recommends that in-service education, MEd and upcoming Ed.D. should be core activities of the Department and be included in academic teaching duties.

Education Department Response: The Department agreed with the recommendation. It was agreed that the Department examine 'best practice models' on this issue in other academic institutions and that the responsibility of this task would lay with the Department Management Committee to be pursued in conjunction with Recommendation 2.5 above.

Domain 3 Planning and Evaluation

3.1. PRG recommends that the Department should seek from the DES a commitment to longer-term planning in relation to its role in teacher education eg. funding graduate and research programmes and anticipated numbers of students, in order to facilitate planning at SPCD Departmental level

Education Department Response: The Department endorsed this recommendation, and acknowledged the difficulties in planning independently of the DES. The Department has proposed to liaise with the Education Minister, to lobby for and encourage development of policy on the issue of longer term-planning. The Department acknowledged that a more formal relationship needs to be developed between the DES and SPCD, to progress this the Department will nominate one member of staff as a liaison person between the Department/College and the DES. This will be implemented by December, 2004.

3.2. PRG recommends that in view of the nature and extent of the external constraints on the College, a policy should be developed which identifies those areas that are in the control of the Department and such areas should be prioritised and further developed (e.g. Postgraduate programmes). This is particularly important in view of the continual flux of the education sector.

Education Department Response: The Department agreed with this recommendation. St. Patrick's College is in the process of reviewing its Strategic Plan wherein an examination of the strengths and areas for priority will be conducted. Through membership of the Strategic Planning Committee, the Education Department is actively contributing to this process. The timeframe set for this task is 12 months.

3.3. PRG recommends following an away day, a list of priorities for action and a timetable and procedure for implementation should be produced.

Education Department Response: The Department agreed with this recommendation and hosted an away day for all Education Department staff at the commencement of the academic year 2004-2005. The decisions taken at that planning day provides the information base for the preparation of this document.

3.4. PRG recommends that the Education Department should continue the phased implementation of its strategic plan. In addition, each subject group within the Department should devise its own strategic plan, which is fed into the departmental plan. This could be facilitated and collated by programmes boards

Education Department Response: The Department accepted this recommendation. The first stage of the response is to develop a Department Strategic Plan arising from the Quality Review process, to which a facilitated staff development day was held in September, 2004, see Recommendation 3.3. above. The second stage at the intra-department level is dependent on the resolution of career structure issue as per recommendations 1.1. and 2.1. above.

3.5. PRG recommends that the relationship with the ERC and DCU should be extended.

Education Department Response: The Department agreed with this recommendation and highlighted the mutual benefit of developing the relationship between Education Department and the ERC and DCU. A Liaison Committee between SPCD and DCU has been established and is currently examining ways to collaborate in mutually beneficial areas. The link between the ERC and SPCD is under active consideration and the Department agreed that it should be encouraged and developed as a strategic link of some importance.

Domain 4. Programmes and Courses

4.1. PRG recommends that a Programme Board should be established for the BA, B.Ed and Grad. Dip.

Education Department Response: The Department agreed with this recommendation but highlighted that a number of steps be taken prior to the establishment of such programme boards particularly in relation to clarity of the terms of reference of such boards. Responsibility for the implementation of this Recommendation lies with Academic Council. Following any decision taken at Academic Council, it is intended that sub-committees for each programme will be established to progress these steps. The time-frame for this exercise is 1-2 years.

4.2. PRG recommends that the courses that comprise the B. Ed and Grad Dip should be urgently reviewed with a view to considerably reducing student contact hours, creating more electives, avoiding duplication, over-teaching or over-examination and ensuring equitable distribution of marks for elements of the courses.

Education Department Response: The Department accepted this recommendation and saw it as a direct follow-on from Recommendation 4.1. Thus, the Programme Boards established as a result of the process as outlined in the previous recommendation will undertake a comprehensive review of each programme. Acknowledgement is given to the work undertaken already by the Education Department's Teaching and Learning Committee in its examination of coherence across these programmes and in detailing student contact hours/workloads on the B.Ed. programme using the ECTS system. It was accepted that the implementation of this recommendation was an acknowledged priority of the Department, and the review and action proposals arising from such a review will be undertaken at the earliest possible date. The time-frame for completion of this exercise is 2-5 years.

4.3. PRG recommends that there needs to be more co-ordination re: submission and timing of assignments.

Education Department Response: The Department agreed with this recommendation. The need for ongoing monitoring and review of practices in this area was acknowledged. Responsibility for the implementation of this recommendation was assigned to the Education Department Management Committee along with the Heads of the Programmes. The time-frame for this exercise is set as one-year.

4.4. PRG recommends a more formal and clearly understood system of student representation needs to be developed and the minutes of staff-student meetings need to be available to all students.

Education Department Response: The Department agreed with this recommendation. There is a model of student representation currently in place for the Graduate Diploma programme. Extension of this model to the B.Ed. and B.A. programmes will be explored by the Management Committee in this academic year 2004-2005.

4.5. PRG recommends (for B.Ed programme) that the proposal to set a limit on maximum number of contact hours need to be put into operation as a matter of urgency and assessment levels of students needs to be reduced. **Education Department Response:** The Department accepted the recommendation but questioned the feasibility of undertaking this as an urgent priority without reference to Recommendations 4.1 and 4.2 outlined above. Thus, decisions in respect of this recommendation will be taken following the decision of the Academic Council as per Recommendation 4.1 and the establishment of Programme Boards as per Recommendation 4.1.

4.6. PRG recommends (for the Grad Dip. Programme) that there is a need to consider the position of exemptions or electives to reflect the heterogeneous background of the intake.

Education Department Response: The Department agreed with this recommendation and assigned responsibility for the implementation of this recommendation to the Director of the Graduate Diploma in Education and to be undertaken within a one-year timeframe.

Domain 5 Quality Assessment and Improvement

5.1 PRG recommends a more formal system of student evaluation of individual courses and programmes is necessary, for the purposes of good practice and particularly in the light of the requirements throughout the third-level sector to involve assessment by students availing of the teaching provided by the institution.

Education Department Response: The Department agreed with this recommendation. The suggested strategy is to conduct course evaluations on a two-year cycle whereby that each course within a programme would be evaluated on alternate academic years. The Management Committee will agree a schedule for course evaluations for this two-year cycle. This recommendation is to be implemented within the academic year 2004-2005.

5.2. PRG recommends that Students should formally evaluate each course. Data from these evaluations should be used for future planning by individual tutors, subject groups and programme boards. Evaluation pro-formas should be structured in such a way as to provide information from which detailed planning can be made which will improve the quality of the courses delivered by each programme.

Education Department Response: The Department agreed with this recommendation and linked it with Recommendation 5.1 above. A sub-committee will be convened at the request of the Management Committee to develop the pro-formas which will be employed in the two-year evaluation cycle as outlined in the previous recommendation.

Domain 6 Teaching and Learning

6.1. PRG recommends that assignments should be standardised in terms of length and expected time for completion so that students in all subjects carry an equivalent assignment load. There should be a timetable for submission for all student assignments, which is made available to all staff and students.

Education Department Response: The Department agreed with the recommendation and acknowledged that since 2001 there has been a timetable for submission of all Education student assignments which has been made available to students and staff. Acknowledgement is also given to the work undertaken by the Education Department's Teaching and Learning Committee in, *inter alia*, the area of assessment reduction. It was proposed that a sub-committee will be convened at the request of the Management Committee and in conjunction with the Administration Unit to standardise assignment requirements across courses and to further ensure equitable distribution of assignment submission dates throughout the academic year. This recommendation is to be implemented within the academic year 2004-2005.

6.2 PRG recommends that there should be at least one different external examiner for each programme whose subject expertise should be closely related to the course for which s/he is responsible, particularly at Master's level and higher.

Education Department Response: The Department agreed with this recommendation and suggested the appointment of a cluster of external examiners. The responsibility for appointment of external examiners would lie with the Head of Department/Programme and the Education Management Committee. This recommendation is to be implemented within the academic year 2004-2005.

6.3. PRG recommends that Teaching Practice should be evaluated formally by the students after each module and period of school-based practice.

Education Department Response: The Department agreed with this recommendation. Currently after each Teaching Practice session a review is undertaken in conjunction with students which aids future planning in this area, in addition, any new changes in relation to teaching practice are formally reviewed by all students to whom such changes applied. Responsibility for the implementation of this recommendation is assigned to the Director of Teaching Practice and Teaching Practice team in conjunction with the Education Management Committee. The formal evaluation will begin during this academic year 2004-2005.

6.4. PRG recommends that the proportion of part-time supervisors involved in teaching practice needs to be reduced appreciably.

Education Department Response: The Department agreed with this recommendation, not as a cost cutting measure but to ensure that standards are maintained. Responsibility for the implementation of this recommendation was seen to lie with the Heads of all College Departments and with the College President. This recommendation will be implemented before the May/June 2005 teaching practice period.

6.5. PRG recommends that additional resources are required for the development of in-service as a priority especially in view of changes in demand for initial teacher education.

Education Department Response: The Department agreed with this recommendation. A working group is to be formed, at the commencement of the academic year 2004-2005, with its membership including the Director of In-Service Education, the Secretary-Bursar and the Head of Department, to address the issue of resource requirements and workload issues in respect of in-service education.

Domain 7 Scholarship and Research

7.1. PRG recommends that Research must be recognised as part of academic staff workload.

Education Department Response: The Department agreed with this recommendation and noted the inclusion of research as an element of contractual obligation for the majority of newly-appointed academic staff. The Department linked this issue with Recommendation 2.5. outlined above with reference to the Department's examination of staff workloads. The Department proposed that full-time dedicated research assistance be made available. Responsibility for implementation of this recommendation was assigned to both the College Management Committee and the Education Management Committee to be undertaken within a one-year time-frame.

Domain 8 Community Contributions

8.1 PRG recommends that the Community contribution should be recognised formally in the career structure.

Education Department Response: The Department agreed with this recommendation and suggested that the recommendation could lead to the development of a designated post of responsibility in this area. This recommendation was seen as inextricably linked to the resolution of career structure issue as per recommendations 1.1. and 2.1. above.

8.2 PRG recommends that the Department should promote more positive links with schools, parents and the general public, and disseminate details of its' work.

Education Department Response: The Department agreed with this recommendation and highlighted four areas to be addressed. Firstly, to address the issue of student diversity at the pre-service level with the goal to increase access to the college through non-traditional routes. Secondly, the Department highlighted the need to develop formal policy *vis a vis* Departmental involvement with schools. The third area identified was to enhance liaison with Curriculum Development Units and finally, the continuation and expansion of the Department's role in mentoring of newly qualified teachers. Responsibility for the implementation of this recommendation lies with the College Management Committee, the Education Management Committee and the incumbent of the post of responsibility as outlined in Recommendation 8.1. above. The timeframe given for the implementation of these initiatives is 2-5 years.

6. Summary of Recommendations

ONE-YEAR PLAN

- A risk assessment exercise re: Department core staffing
- Provision of dedicated workstations and workspace for research students
- Clarification and formalisation of the relationship between the academic and administrative sections
- Development of a framework for academic workload
- In-service education, MEd and upcoming EdD as core activities of the Department [In conjunction with framework for academic workload]
- Commitment to be sought from DES re: policy on longer-term planning
- Identification of areas within Departmental control to be prioritised and further developed
- Drafting of Departmental Strategic Plan via away day process
- Phased implementation of Education Department Strategic Plan. [Dependent on Career Structure Deliberations]
- Extension of relationship with the ERC and DCU
- Establishment of Programme Boards for the BA, BEd, and Grad Dip.
- Co-ordination re: submission and timing of assignments.
- Development of a more formal and clearly understood system of student representation
- Consideration of exemptions or electives for Grad Dip students.
- Introduction of a formal system of student evaluation of individual courses and programmes
- Development of Evaluation pro-formas.
- Standardisation of assignment length and expected time for completion.
- Appointment of different external examiner for each programme
- Formal student evaluation of Teaching Practice
- Reduction in the proportion of part-time supervisors involved in teaching practice.
- Provision of additional resources for the development of in-service.
- Recognition of Research as part of academic staff workload.
- Appointment of Dedicated Full-time Research Co-ordinator/Support Person
- Setting up of a Joint Academic-Administration Quality Implementation Group

FIVE-YEAR PLAN

- Definition and articulation of the Department's organisational structure [Dependent on Career Structure Deliberations]
- Development of further post holder roles and rotation of same [Dependent on Career Structure Deliberations]
- Review of BEd and Grad Dip programmes [Dependent on Academic Council/Programme Board/To be implemented at the earliest possible date]
- Set a limit on maximum number of contact hours and assessment levels of B.Ed. students. [Dependent on Academic Council/Programme Board/To be implemented at the earliest possible date]
- Formal recognition of staff's community contributions in the career structure. [Dependent on Career Structure Deliberations]
- Appointment of Post of Responsibility in the area of Community Relations
- Promotion of positive links with schools, parents and the general public

RECOMMENDATIONS VIEWED AS OUTSIDE OF DEPARTMENT'S CONTROL/REMIT

- Establishment of a career structure
- Address the issue of designated holiday periods and entitlements
- Re-instatement of proposed building programme
- Devolution of budgeting to the Head of Education