NUI MAYNOOTH

Ollscoil na hÉireann Má Nuad

# Quality Review of the Department of Business and Law April 2009

# Peer Review Report

## Peer Review Group:

**External reviewer:**      **Professor David Tranfield,**
**Emeritus Professor of Management,**
**Cranfield School of Management, UK.**

**Internal reviewer:**      **Dr David Redmond, Registrar, NUIM.**

# Contents

## 1.0  Preface

1.1  Business and management schools are generally regarded as the most extensively audited and externally assessed and accredited of all university departments.  The explosion in their number and size resulted largely as a response to the Ford and Carnegie reports in North America some 50 years ago.  Since then business and management schools have pursued independent academic and research agendas, becoming noteworthy for their rapid growth rates and significant teaching, financial and continuing professional development (CPD) contributions to university life as well as their extensive corporate contacts and international reach.  In order to meet the corporate pressures and expectations with which they are faced, schools have had to develop wide ranging agendas and work at a pace rarely found in other university departments.  Experience suggests that often these differences can lead to significant internal tensions within universities in the competition for resources.  Sometimes university administrations have resolved these matters by setting schools free from traditional funding patterns thus encouraging them to import resource from outside.  Because of the dynamic environment in which business schools find themselves, many have found that committing long term to research programmes has proved a challenging part of their agenda.

1.2  There are thought to be about 1000 business and management schools worldwide of all shapes, sizes and persuasions.  Traditionally, North American schools have been regarded as world leaders with very large 'full service' schools[i] such as Harvard Business School, MIT, Stanford Graduate School of Business, Columbia and the Kellogg School of Management leading the way. In Europe, a number of significant schools have emerged, but two have predominated, INSEAD in France and the London Business School in the UK.

---

[i] The notion of the 'full service' model is often taken to mean that a school has operational capability to deliver in all four key functional areas of business (operations, marketing, accounting/finance and HR/OB), and in strategic management and entrepreneurship, all underpinned by significant input in business economics.  Additionally individual schools may then offer one or more 'niche' specialisms in fields such as logistics and supply, information management or business ethics/law etc.

1.3  The primary contributions to business school brands have resulted from the ability of schools to develop and deliver CPD either as qualification programmes (the most influential and controversial of which has been the Master of Business Administration degree – MBA), or as executive education delivered in short course format either as open programmes or bespoke in-house formats.  Of recent years, the latter of these two has been the main engine of growth as markets for the MBA and open programmes have matured and become saturated with suppliers both within education sectors and outside of it entering the market at all levels of cost and quality.

1.4  Within an Irish context, Queens University Management School in the North and the Smurfit Graduate School at UCD have led the way.  However, there is no reason to believe that a suitably tailored and formed school of high quality would be anything less than successful.

1.5  Finally, it is important to note that many business and management schools are postgraduate only with no undergraduate portfolio.  Often, the postgraduate schools specialise not only in MBA with a smattering of masters and doctoral programmes, but also have large executive education portfolios.  It is rare to find examples with undergraduate, postgraduate and post experience  activities all significantly represented within the offerings of any individual school.

1.6  The Department of Business and Law at NUI Maynooth is, as yet, a small player against the above backcloth.  Nevertheless, it is into this bigger picture that NUI Maynooth have stepped and against which comparisons of the NUI Maynooth brand will be made.  The Department is very young, making rapid progress and is already experiencing the tensions and challenges which come as part of the landscape of any university business and management school.

## 2.0 Procedures for this review

2.1  The author has international experience of business school review and evaluation both at the level of individual course offering and whole school assessment.  Each international context differs and consequently whilst this experience provides an invaluable backdrop I have used it only to inform the current review only in the most general terms.

2.2  In undertaking this review I have:

- Read in detail and analysed the departmental self-assessment sent 10 days in advance.
- Used the internet to explore the wider Irish context in business and management education and to look worldwide for examples of recently instituted business schools.
- Reviewed my earlier notes on a specific project with very senior British Civil Servants charged with the early inspection and review of the establishment of a major Agency in the UK public sector.
- Walked the North and South campus in order to obtain a 'feel' for the institution.
- Held discussions with the President and Vice-President of NUI Maynooth.
- Interviewed the Head of Department of Business and Law and Dean of the Faculty.
- Conducted a telephone interview with the Head of Department of Economics and Accounting and Finance who was in the USA at the time.
- Interviewed and held discussions with all of the faculty of the Department of Business and Law as well as the Department administrator.
- Interviewed and held discussions with various student groups representing undergraduate and postgraduate courses.
- Held an extensive feedback session with all faculty at the end of my visit.

2.3  There is no doubt in my mind that the 24 hours allocated to visiting Maynooth is seriously restricting of the depth to which an outsider can go in understanding and appreciating the heritage of NUI Maynooth and the formation of the new Department.  Nevertheless, I am convinced that it is possible to obtain some significant insight into the style and culture of the Department given the available time, particularly when faculty numbers are small as they were in this case.

2.4  The Department is effectively a small entrepreneurial business at present. One is struck by the ease of communications between faculty and the palpable enthusiasm shared by both staff and students.  Identity is not yet fully formed (see 3.0 below) and as one might expect 'all things remain possible'. When the Department grows as it must, the challenge will be to retain at least some of these early features and incorporate them into a more substantial, robust and inevitably more systematised unit than at present.

## 3.0 Identity

3.1   The Department is little more than a year old which means that some staff had been in post only for a few months at the time of this review.  At this time Irish universities are facing heavy restrictions on public spending and nationally Ireland has just received its toughest ever national budget. Creating identity is always a difficult process for a new organisation but these external factors impose further burdens at this critical time for the Department.

3.2  Internally, the aetiology of the Department resulted from its separation from the Department of Economics and Accounting and Finance.  Business and Law therefore has roots in the social sciences.  Where new business schools have roots in the social sciences (historically some have resulted from the servicing work in engineering departments) overlapping interests mean that it is inevitably more challenging to differentiate and justify a separate and distinct agenda and epistemological approach.  There is some evidence of

this phenomenon in Maynooth.  Of course, it remains important from course design and student experience perspectives that all social science departments in the faculty sustain their ability to teamwork and contribute collectively to courses where appropriate.

3.3  There is recent research on 'The Future of the Business School' conducted by my colleague Professor Ken Starkey at the University of Nottingham in which he identified four possible types of school:

- The social sciences school
- The professional school
- The servicing school offering input to other university departments
- The design led school

These ideas offer intriguing thoughts that might help and provoke further discussion internally on the type (or combination of types) that could be held as possibilities for strategic shaping as the new school emerges.

## 4.0 Teaching, Learning and Assessment

4.1  The Department has worked extremely hard to ensure over 30 modules are in place over the last year in order to deliver the programmes to which it is committed.  My conversations revealed that students at undergraduate level solidly supported the quality of teaching and pastoral care provided. Postgraduate students, as always, were more circumspect.  Their views uniformly appreciated the strength and quality of course leadership but they had noted the small faculty numbers contributing to some programmes and students receiving tuition in the nearby Glenroyal Hotel reported feeling somewhat dislocated from the university experience.  All students would like to see expansion of the library and its quality improved (this is backed up by the evaluations in Appendix C of the self-assessment document where the feedback appears to reflect that students grade lectures highly but course texts less so).  Feedback also mentioned the vagaries of the Moodle system and the difficulties of post experience returnees to education discovering "the

wonders of what it means to become a student in the 21$^{st}$ century coupled with the anxieties and self-doubt (that it might be my fault) when the system doesn't work".   More support could be effectively deployed here usually in unsocial hours (evenings and weekends) when these students are finding space in their busy lives to pursue their studies.

4.2   With regard to assessment, in my view students have two very legitimate concerns, namely 'what is expected of me' and 'how am I doing'?  Regarding the former, no marking schemes were made available to me at the visit and there was variability in student response regarding the meaning of marks/grades and standards.  Regarding the latter question, students reported variability in terms of timeliness of faculty response and a non-uniform standard in the volume and quality of written feedback on assignments.  Verbal feedback was uniformly thought of as excellent.  My view is that these comments are symptomatic of the 'early days' of the Department and can easily be rectified to produce a more regularised approach to meet student expectations.

## 5.0 Research and scholarship

5.1  No data was provided to me on external research income earned from either public or private sponsors.

5.2  The Department does not, at present, offer a doctoral training programme or a doctoral degree.

5.3  There is evidence of publication mostly in professional journals or journals possessing regional or national significance within the Irish context.  As the Department profile develops, there needs to be more emphasis placed upon publication in journals of international standing.  Faculty also would benefit from making appearances at substantial international conferences both in Europe (such as EGOS) and North America (such as the Academy conferences) where the entry demands are high but the feedback is excellent.

5.4  There is already in the self-assessment document a proposal to develop one research centre in the Department.  Centres can provide a focus internally and externally for engagement as well as valuable external contacts in policy and practice.  My view is that research centres should be subject to interrogation at four levels and should be launched only if the following four questions can be answered with resounding approval:

- Is the proposal externally topical and relevant?
- Do we have (or could we quickly obtain) internal track record and momentum?
- Are there funding possibilities in the medium term sufficient to sustain the centre?
- Will the 'centre' structure add value rather than cost?

The department has a golden opportunity here to shape its future both with regard to its choice of academic areas and also its modus operandi for selection.

## 6.0 Theory/practice relations

6.1   The Department  possesses a refreshingly open approach to linkages with policy and practice.  This is in contrast to many business and management schools with a different heritage and possessing a primary (and sometimes singular) commitment only to the development of social science theory.  Faculty were uniformly focused on the importance of the need to 'make a difference', and external appointments of high profile outsiders to visiting or adjunct positions already supports this commitment.  The Department has a real strength here and as long as it is able to balance such a commitment with an equally strong desire to ensure the academic rigour of its scholarly contributions, there could be unique positioning possibilities for the Departmental brand within the Irish context.

## 7.0 International issues

7.1  Possibly the most significant challenge to be faced as the Department moves forward is that of its internationalisation, a major criterion of differentiation between high quality business and management schools and those less so.  The Department begins with approximately 10% of its student body from international sources but sitting within a university with a strong regional and national reputation.  The internationalisation agenda might be thought of as including:

- The internationalisation of the faculty.
- Internationalising the student body.
- International visits for student groups.
- An international doctoral programme
- Faculty attending and addressing international conferences.
- High level contact and advice to international companies.
- Publication in journals or media of international standing.
- International partners.
- Recognition by internationally approved bodies.

7.2  Whilst the Department is in its infancy at present and it would be unrealistic to expect significant advancement on the internationalisation agenda for a number of years, there is much thinking and planning that can be done immediately to 'sow the seeds' for the future regarding all of the above and pursuing them vigorously.

## 8.0 Management and leadership

8.1  I have already referred to the excellent start made by the Department in terms of the high level of motivation and enthusiasm amongst faculty which is already impacting student experience.  I have no doubt that these features of

the culture are due in large part to the leadership and the tone that has been set.

8.2  Departmental governance structures are, quite rightly, minimal at present. Given the small number of faculty, the Department operates in typical small business fashion with minimal internal bureaucracy and informal communications.  Nevertheless there is role clarity and appropriate delegated authority concerning course administration and teaching responsibilities. Teaching has been the prioritised area in this early phase.

8.3  Over the next time period a clear vision for the Department needs to be further developed, shared and agreed with both faculty and senior management, identifying:

- Features of scale (faculty, turnover and contribution)
- The strategic balance to be achieved between the emphases placed on teaching/learning, research and knowledge creation and executive development/outreach.
- The number and type of qualification programmes offered (for example, is there to be an MBA and a doctoral programme?)
- The extent and role of executive development which at present focuses on the activities of the Innovation Value Institute and its relationship to Intel.

8.4  At an operational level over the same time period Departmental leadership will require more formal (perhaps written) strategies on some or all of the following:

- Partnering (internal and external)
- International aspects (see above)
- The student experience, client services
- Alumni development
- Facilities and infrastructure
- IT and systems
- Research development

- Research management, publication and impact
- Faculty development including induction and mentoring

8.5   Because of the rigorous and plentiful external review and evaluation of business school performance, there is a need to develop within the Department an information rich environment.  A key role in achieving this end is that played by Departmental administration and extra dedicated resource will be required to ensure success.

8.6   All of the above create a challenging agenda for a Head of Department who also serves currently as Dean of the Faculty (part-time).  In these early months, undertaking the role of Dean in parallel to the role of Head of Department has been useful for the purposes of induction and communication internally across NUI Maynooth.  However, my view would be that the Department faces a significant agenda and as it grows the demands placed upon its leadership will require increasing recognition and there will come a time when the two roles require separation in order that Departmental development is not affected.  This may occur as a part of the natural cycle but needs monitoring in the short term.

## 9.0  Training and development

9.1   Generally speaking all university faculty take as a given the need personally to manage their development and careers.  Because of the special needs of business and management schools to function in a wide variety of pedagogical and androgogical learning environments, faculty usually find it not possible to rely solely on internal provision made by the host university, although at NUI Maynooth a view was expressed that this reliance was the prime means of personal development.  My view is that a richer and more devolved pattern would benefit the school and complement provision made by the university and could take the form of bespoke development plans determined by and tailored for each individual faculty member.  My suggestion would be that individual faculty might be mentored and encouraged to self-set

improvement priorities using the performance improvement cycle (benchmark, vision, measure).

## 10.0  Integrating support services

10.1  Mention has already been made of the special needs of business and management schools in relation to support services such as the international office, library, IT and alumni relations.  Certainly the former and the latter will be crucial to the long term brand development of the new Department.  A further challenge may be the provision of sufficient and timely financial information and services in order to allow the Department to deal effectively with the corporate world which tends often to engage a series of sophisticated systems and make judgements concerning the credibility of the Department to respond.  Making adequate and appropriate arrangements to ensure effective support and service level agreements from across all university services is therefore an important consideration.  My advice would be that these relationships need to be monitored and assessed regularly and systematically by the Head of the Department with follow-up action meetings with relevant support service managers and involving a member of the NUI Maynooth senior management team if necessary.

## 11.0  Relationship to other NUI Maynooth departments

11.1  I have referred already to the importance of the relationship for course development and for the student experience between the new Department of Business and Law and the Department of Economics and Accounting and Finance.  However, this relationship is only one of several potentially important relationships between faculty departments and also across the whole of NUI Maynooth.  Given the present youth of the Department and its lack of full-time resources inter-departmental teamworking is vital to the Department.  The potential of the new Department for growth as well as its ability to link to the world of practice and therefore bring research contacts and important and interesting cross-functional and thematic research agendas to

the university, is also crucial if NUI Maynooth is to obtain best benefit from the new Department.  My experience would suggest that cross departmental relationships and inter disciplinary working are best managed 'bottom-up' on a piecemeal and pragmatic project basis.  Management can help by ensuring that university systems (such as financial and funding frameworks or resource allocation mechanisms) do not inhibit relationships.  When relationships blossom and grow management can also help by advancing innovative structures where appropriate such as interdisciplinary (research) centres sitting across mainstream university structures.  I see all such developments as no more than medium term possibilities at present and would encourage current attitudes both within the Department and the university more widely to continue exploring all avenues of potential for cooperation.

## 12.0  The Quality Implementation Plan

12.1  There is much incorporated into this ambitious plan when considered in relation to the resources available within the Department.  Many of the points included in this review including the suggestions in 8.0, 9.0 and 10.0 above, if taken on by the Department, could be seen as contributing to the further development of the plan.  My view is that the Department should be encouraged to move forward as quickly as possible to make the plan a reality.

## 13.0  Strategy to 2011

13.1   This is an exciting time for the Department and future strategy is certainly difficult to discern.  The context in which the Department and NUI Maynooth itself sits is highly dynamic.  Innovation generally requires extra resource (whilst business as usual continues untouched) and there is no doubt that financial stringency and resource scarcity make this period a difficult one in which to innovate enthusiastically and to derive a credible and deliverable strategy.

13.2  However, having grasped the nettle of introducing the new Department last year, it is now important to see it through and reap the potential of the new Department.  I have already alluded to decisions that are required to develop further the identity and vision for the new Department (see 3.0).  Balancing the relative emphasis on qualification programmes and executive education is crucial, as is the decision whether or not to introduce doctoral training into the portfolio.  My advice would be to develop a clear view of the precise scale of any programme and define the precise benefit to accrue to the Department prior to the introduction of such a resource heavy endeavour.  The selection and prioritisation of academic sub-areas to act as beacons of outstanding research and practice in order to place the Department in the lead of national thinking is a further important set of choices.  Precisely for what, in academic terms, does the new Department wish to be really famous?

13.3  Elsewhere in the self-assessment document, there is mention of the possible pursuit of EQUIS (European Quality Information System) accreditation.  Whilst the Department is to be congratulated on thinking ahead and in focusing on international recognition, I would regard the establishment of any working party or serious resource commitment to this end as premature at this stage.  EQUIS is very focused upon the international aspects and corporate connections of the schools that it considers.  The EQUIS process has an eligibility assessment as its first stage.  This assesses whether or not the department in question has a good chance of accreditation within the next five years.  My view would be that the Head of Department should pursue informal discussions with the EQUIS administration as a first step in further developing the thinking in this area.

## 14.0  Conclusion

14.1  There is much to admire in the creation of the new Department and the start that has been made and it is important to read this review document as attempting to offer formative help to enable the Department to make its transition to the next level.  Having worked hard on the birth of the new

structure there now begins a challenging process of growth with which to grapple.  The realised strategy will result from a series of important decisions that will have to be made as the Department takes its next steps across its whole portfolio of offerings.  The Department management will require every support from the senior management team of NUI Maynooth to achieve success.  This review has suggested that both the ability and willingness are already in place both within the Department and the NUI Maynooth senior management to make the Department a success.

## Summary of key recommendations

1. Currently there is no signage on campus concerning where to find the Department.  Rectify as soon as possible.

2. Visit or invite Professor Ken Starkey to discuss his work on the 'Future of Business Schools'.

3. The Head of Department and other faculty to engage on a more regular basis with postgraduate students undertaking their studies at the Glenroyal Hotel.

4. Student satisfaction with course texts requires review.  Library service and resource provision to be revisited.

5. The Moodle system is reported as variable in reliability.  Support is required particularly for postgraduates.

6. Course leaders and faculty to develop a brief and clear statement of the necessary standards for overall success/failure of courses/modules and the meaning of specific marks/grades.  This information to be regularly communicated to students.

7. Faculty to set service level agreements with students on the timeliness and extent of feedback on assignments and assessed pieces of work.  A common standard not exceeding 'x weeks' to be in receipt of feedback would be helpful as would a standard feedback sheet to be completed for all assessments.

8. A planning and resources for a programme of conference visits for all faculty (if possible two each per annum).

9. Development of a publications plan for all faculty including journals of international academic excellence, professional journals and press and media outlets.

10. Installation of a process for the interrogation of all proposed specialist centres against the four criteria, external relevance and topicality, internal track record and momentum, funding possibilities in the medium term and the added value (rather than cost) of the proposed structure.

11. Establish a small working group to identify an international strategy (in all of its forms) for the Department.

12. Check the list of required strategies in 8.0 and develop written documentation where appropriate.  Establish procedures to regularly check progress.  This could form the basis of a Departmental executive meeting.

13. Develop and communicate to all faculty a vision for the school in the medium term balancing the constituent components of teaching, research and outreach aspects of the overall portfolio.  Clarify strategy for 2011 across all of these dimensions.

14. Develop a plan to create an information rich environment documenting Departmental and faculty achievements.  Ensure resourcing is in place for its delivery and faculty are clear on data capture and the importance of the system.

15. Pursue EQUIS accreditation only informally at this stage.

_____                                      _____

**Professor David Tranfield**                                         **Dr David Redmond**

**External Reviewer**                                                      **Internal Reviewer**