

**Roinn na Sean- agus na Meán-Ghaeilge
Department of Old and Middle Irish
Peer Review Group Report**

**National University of Ireland, Maynooth
Quality Improvement and Quality Assurance**

Academic Year 2003/2004

2004

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Introduction

The peer review of Roinn na Sean agus na Meán-Ghaeilge, NUI Maynooth [NUIM], was conducted by Prof. Erich Poppe, Philipps-Universität, Marburg, and Dr Nollaig Ó Muraíle, Queen's University, Belfast, as External Assessors, assisted by Dr David Redmond, Registrar, NUIM, and Dr Peter Denman, Dean of Arts, NUIM, and facilitated by Saranne Magennis of the Quality Promotion Unit. The external assessors visited NUIM between Monday, 22 March 2004, and Wednesday, 24 March 2004.

1. Brief factual introduction to Department of Old and Middle Irish

1.1 Location of Department of Old and Middle Irish [DOMI]

The Department is located in the Arts Block on the New (i.e. North) Campus of NUIM. There are to be found the rooms of the Head of Department and the Senior Lecturer, the Departmental Office (shared with the Department of Modern Irish), and most of the classrooms used by the Departmental teaching staff. The room of the Lecturer in Medieval Irish History is located, along with those of other members of the Department of Modern History, in Rhetoric House on the Old [South] Campus.

1.2 Staff and students

1.2.1 Currently, there are three full-time permanent academic members of staff (one of whom is shared with another department) and five part-time, non-permanent members, as well as one member of administrative staff (who is shared with the Department of Modern Irish):

FULL-TIME PERMANENT STAFF

Professor and Head: Kim McCone, DPhil. (Oxon.), 1979

Senior Lecturer: Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin, PhD (NUI), 1981

Lecturer (shared with Mod. Hist.): Colmán Etchingham, PhD (Dublin), 1992

NON-PERMANENT STAFF

Project researcher and part-time lecturer: Dr Ailbhe Mac Shamhráin

Project researcher and occasional part-time lecturer: Dr Aidan Breen

Part-time lecturer: Ms Ailís Ní Mhaoldomhnaigh, MA

Part-time occasional lecturer: Ms Nora White, BA

Exchange lecturer, Basque & Spanish (shared with Spanish): Ms Nora Iriarte,
MA

1.2.2 In the current academic year the Department has just over one hundred students – 95 undergraduates and seven postgraduate. The following are the figures for the past five years:

FULL-TIME REGISTERED UNDERGRADUATES AND POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS BY YEAR

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
First year	41	37	45	54	50
Second year	20	8	23	24	22
Third year	20	19	6	24	23
Total Undergrad.	81	64	74	102	95
Taught MA	2	3	-	1	4
PhD	-	3	5	6	3
Overall FTE	51.97	45.276	48.74	62.628	59.228

The fluctuation in continuing second-year students is sometimes quite striking – especially the drop from 41 to 8 between 2000 and 2001 – but, as the figures for the following years indicate, this may have been an unusual constellation.

2 Resumé of DOMI Self-Assessment Document

2.1 Chair of Old and Middle Irish, 1961–

While Maynooth’s Chair of Irish is the second oldest in the country (after TCD’s), its Chair of Old and Middle Irish is the second most recent (again after TCD’s), dating from 1961. (At that time Maynooth was a Recognised College of the NUI; it is now a Constituent University of the same.)

2.2 Staff turnover, 1961–

Since its inception the Department has enjoyed a low turnover in staff, including a highly experienced, long serving executive assistant shared with Nua-Ghaeilge, Gearóidín Ní Ruadháin. Prof. Pádraig Ó Fiannachta held the Chair of Old Irish 1961-81; Prof. Kim McCone succeeded him as Professor of Old and Middle Irish and Welsh in 1982. Dr Máire Herbert was Lecturer in Old and Middle Irish in 1975-79; when she moved to UCC she was replaced by Dr McCone. Dr Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin was appointed to this post in 1983; she has been Senior Lecturer since 1997. When, in 1992 a Lectureship in Medieval Irish History was established (to be shared with the Modern History Department), the post was filled by Dr Colmán Etchingham, bringing Old and Middle Irish to its current numerical strength of two and a half full-time permanent staff.

2.3 Change to teaching through English

The change from the practice of the early 1980s of teaching through the medium of Modern Irish (which led to most students combining Old and Middle Irish [OMI] with Modern Irish – but rarely the converse) to teaching primarily through English has drawn in a wider range of undergraduates than hitherto. Now only a small proportion of undergraduate students combine the subject with Modern Irish, although Dr Ní Bhrolcháin gives a course of lectures (in Irish) on Early Irish literature to students of Modern Irish as a BA subject. The change in the language of instruction has also made the Department's courses available to students from abroad. Although the Department does not currently operate a Socrates or other exchange agreement, it welcomes international students in NUIM who wish to take its courses (subject to suitability and availability of space). An appreciable proportion of such students attend certain of its courses, especially at Yr 1 level.

2.4 New courses: Introduction to Medieval Irish Studies; Medieval Irish Studies; Medieval Irish and Celtic Studies

There is a certain tension between language courses (OMI grammar and texts) and those of a more general literary and cultural import – with a drift from the former towards the latter. The difficulty of learning OMI causes students eager to learn about Medieval Ireland's rich heritage to be less inclined to tackle the languages in which the sources are written (and some may simply lack the aptitude). The Department therefore furnishes courses on early Irish literature, society, history and archaeology with no compulsory language modules, while ensuring that language courses essential for effective postgraduate research are available to a minority of enthusiasts.

In 1996 the First Arts course was changed from one with a significant proportion of language instruction to an 'Introduction to Medieval Irish Studies' consisting of various courses on pre-Norman Irish history and literature (with texts read in English translation) plus a beginners' OI language course that was no longer compulsory as hitherto. This led to a significant increase in student numbers for First Arts, only a small minority of whom would choose the language option. But, since OMI language components continued to be obligatory in Yrs 2 and 3, transfer rates from First Arts tended to be well below the statistical mean of 66.6%, and it was also increasingly difficult to teach OI language effectively to larger classes of students who were manifestly unenthusiastic for this part of the BA course.

In response to this it was decided to introduce 'Medieval Irish Studies' without a language component as a pass or honours BA subject in 1999 alongside the traditional 'OMI' course. Overall numbers, transfer rates (although still somewhat below the mean, *given the subject's lack of any direct connection with an obvious subsequent career path such as teaching*) and results have since improved quite dramatically: last year for the first time Roinn na Sean- agus na Meán-Ghaeilge recorded a staff/student ratio above the average for the University as a whole. As anticipated, the vast majority of students, including a very high proportion of mature students, have opted in First, Second and Third Arts for 'Medieval Irish Studies' (renamed 'Medieval Irish and Celtic Studies' [MICS] in 2001, to reflect the broader range of topics on offer – including archaeology since 1997). The few students who since 1999 have opted for the 'OMI' courses have generally displayed keenness and ability, and have achieved results ranging from good to excellent.

In anticipation of the advent of modularisation in 2004, the OI language option has been eliminated from First Arts, while 'OMI' has been incorporated into the 'Medieval Irish and Celtic Studies' course as an optional component that may be given up after one or two semesters in favour of a non-linguistic option. Currently two Yr 3 and four Yr 2 students are studying the language on this basis. The Head of Department has developed *A First Old Irish Grammar and Reader including an Introduction to Middle Irish* in conjunction with this course and hopes to publish it shortly.

2.5 Medieval Irish History, Archaeology, Cultural and Political Identities

The shared lectureship in Medieval Irish History has been deployed most effectively in the interests of both departments involved. Since 2001 this arrangement has involved flexible arrangements that have benefitted students in both areas. The forthcoming introduction of modularisation has necessitated certain modifications, which have been agreed by the relevant staff.

In the absence of a permanent lecturer in archaeology and related courses, the Department has been fortunate to have the services of Dr Ailbhe Mac Shamhráin on a part-time basis for the past few years. There has been fruitful cooperation with the Department of Modern History in relation to this subject also. A further development relates to a new module on 'Cultural and political identities in Ireland and Britain over the last two thousand years', available to students of Modern History as well as those of MICS and taught jointly by the two Heads of Department.

2.6 Basque

The Head of Department's increasing interest – in a comparative and general linguistic context – in Basque has led in recent years to the enhancement of NUIM's offering in the fields of Celtic studies and modern languages by the introduction of an entirely new undergraduate course, 'Minority Languages (Basque and Celtic)', in 1998. In 2000 NUIM and the University of the Basque Country (UPV) concluded an academic exchange agreement whereby a Maynooth postgraduate spends from one to four years as a paid lecturer in English and Irish at UPV and a postgraduate of UPV comes to teach Spanish and Basque at NUIM under similar conditions. Although only a handful of NUIM students have taken the Minority Languages/Basque and Celtic course to date, fresh impetus has been provided by the recent introduction of Basque as an option on the Yr 3 honours programme offered by the Department of Spanish at NUIM. A number of Socrates exchange students, particularly from Spain, have also taken the course which is unique in Ireland. Other recent developments include the creation of a scholarship to enable an NUIM student of Basque to attend a month's language course in the Basque Country and the establishing of access from Maynooth to an exciting new interactive Basque course delivered via the internet with the help of a CD-Rom.

2.7 Postgraduate courses: various MAs and PhD

Although a number of students have taken a taught MA in OMI which has been offered by the Department since the 1970s, a new MA in Early Medieval Irish History and Sources was introduced after the appointment of the lecturer in Medieval Irish History. Both MAs have recently been merged as a single MA in Medieval Irish Studies – to help alleviate the burden upon the Department's small staff. While this new course has been taught for the first time in the current academic year to four students, it has recently been decided that permanent staffing levels and the occasional staff budget in the Department are too low for a taught MA to continue, pending some significant improvement in this state of affairs.

The Department's first PhD was awarded in 1996 and this has since been followed by further doctoral awards in 1998, 2000 and 2001. The first recipient of these, an Austrian, is soon to be appointed to a Chair of Indo-European linguistics with a Celtic emphasis in the University of Vienna. The successful PhD in 2000 was subsequently offered a Government of Ireland Postdoctoral Award but finally declined it in favour of a permanent position with the Placenames Office. Of late there has been an increase in the number of PhD students registered in the Department from three in

2001 (including the holder of a Government of Ireland Scholarship) to five in 2002 and six in 2003. The current number, three, is due to the fact that two of the students in question (one Japanese and one Irish) have submitted their theses and are due to be examined shortly, while another (from Germany) has gone off the books for the time being after obtaining a two-year lecturing post in the University of Bonn. Preliminary indications are that there will be a further rise in numbers to at least five or six next year. The strain imposed upon the Department's limited staff resources by this amount of doctoral supervision is alleviated to some extent by the availability of postgraduates to teach suitable undergraduate courses and even certain parts of the MA course. Two students currently providing this service are Ailis Ní Mhaoldomhnaigh and Nora White.

2.8 New research project: *Monasticon Hibernicum*

Last year the Department was one of just three in NUIM to be awarded significant project funding by the Irish Research Committee for Humanities and Social Sciences. A sum of a little more than E180,000 spread over three years (2003/4 to 2005/6) was awarded for a project entitled *Monasticon Hibernicum*; devised principally by Dr Ailbhe Mac Shamhráin, it aims to furnish a comprehensive computerised database of pre-Norman Ireland's monastic establishments and the documentary evidence relating to them.. The Head of Department has responsibility for the overall direction of this undertaking but compilation and evaluation of the data will be left largely to two virtually full-time researchers, namely Dr Mac Shamhráin himself and Dr Aidan Breen (each of whom is on a three-quarter contract paid for by the IRCHSS funding, leaving a small amount over for other approved purposes).

2.9 Departmental publishing

During his time first in the Old and Middle and then in the Modern Irish Department Pádraig Ó Fiannachta pursued a very active and successful Irish-language publishing policy under the aegis of *An Sagart*. 1987 marked a new departure with the publication of the first of an English-language series of *Maynooth Monographs* devoted to Medieval Irish topics that now comprises seven volumes. After his retirement from the Chair of Modern Irish Mgr Ó Fiannachta's indefatigable labours on behalf of Maynooth, the Irish language and Celtic Studies were honoured by a multi-authored *Stair na Gaeilge* written in Irish and over 900 pages long. This, the first full-scale history of the Irish language from earliest times down to the present, appeared in 1994 and marked the beginning of Roinn na Sean- agus na Meán-Ghaeilge's direct publishing activities. These continued in 1996 with publication of

the first volume in a new series of *Maynooth Studies in Celtic Linguistics*, which now comprises five titles (one by the Head of Department, two by scholars from abroad, and two based upon PhD theses produced in the Department). The same year saw the appearance of the first of (to date) three *Maynooth Monographs – Series Minor* and also of a volume of essays by various scholars in the field entitled *Progress in Medieval Irish Studies*, while *Maynooth Medieval Irish Texts* were inaugurated in 2000 with a critical edition of the early Irish tale *Echtrae Chonnlai*. Volume two, an edition of the tale *Fled Bricrenn ocus Loinges mac nDuíl Dermait* by Kaarina Hollo (former head of the Celtic Department, University of Aberdeen) is about to go to the printer and at least two further additions to the series (including *A First Old Irish Grammar and Reader, including an Introduction to Middle Irish* alluded to above) are expected in 2004/5. Apart from much appreciated subsidies for *Echtrae Chonnlai* from the NUI and for volume V of *Maynooth Studies in Celtic Linguistics* from the University of Notre Dame, these publishing activities have been and continue to be entirely self-financing.

2.10 Maynooth Summer School in Celtic and Medieval Irish Studies

In 1989 the Head of Department, helped by colleagues within NUIM's Faculty of Celtic Studies and in cognate departments in other Irish universities (especially TCD's School of Irish), launched, organised and directed a *First Maynooth Summer School in Celtic and Medieval Irish Studies*; lasting a fortnight, it attracted about thirty participants from Ireland, Britain, Europe and America. Since then the school has been held triennially (1992, 1995, 1998, 2001) in early Autumn, attracting some 40-50 participants on each occasion. Since its inception this entirely self-financing venture has attracted undergraduate and postgraduate students from a wide range of institutions and countries – a notable and enthusiastic participant in 2001 having been Prof. Gerhard Meiser, holder of the Chair of Indo-European Linguistics at the University of Halle in Germany and President of the Indogermanische Gesellschaft. Unfortunately, increasing demands upon the Head of Department's time and other developments have placed a serious question mark over the continuance of this enterprise and there are no plans to hold a sixth school in 2004.

3 List of academic programmes furnished by Department of Old and Middle Irish

MEDIEVAL IRISH AND CELTIC STUDIES (2003/4)

FIRST ARTS

This foundation course consists of the following four compulsory modules, each (as in 2nd and 3rd Arts also) of one semester's duration, consisting of 24 lecture hours and worth ECTS 5 credits.

First Semester:

SG101. Women in Early Medieval Ireland (Dr M. Ní Bhrolcháin)




SG102. Introducing the Ancient Celts (Dr A. Mac Shamhráin)

Second Semester:

SG103. Survey of Irish literature down to the twelfth century (Dr M. Ní Bhrolcháin)

SG104. Outline of Irish history down to the twelfth century (Dr C. Etchingham)

SECOND ARTS

The honours course normally consists of block  which is taught cyclically, 'Yr 1' and 'Yr 2' below being taken in second or third year  depending upon the point of entry into the cycle) and any two others (it is also possible to substitute an individual course from E for a course from A or B, subject to the head of department's agreement). Courses A, B and C make up the special, and courses A and B the pass course. 

A. PRE-NORMAN IRISH HISTORY:

SG 203 Saint Patrick - legend and reality (Dr C. Etchingham; *First Semester*)
or HY250 Introduction to Irish historical settlement

(Mr. J. Bradley; available to a limited number only)

SG204 Pre-Viking Ireland (Dr C. Etchingham; *Second Semester*)

B EARLY IRISH LITERATURE:


SG201 The *Táin* and satire in Early Irish literature (Dr M. Ní Bhrolcháin and A. Ní Mhaoldomhnaigh; *First Semester*)

SG202 Early Irish poetry and women in early Irish literature (Dr M. Ní Bhrolcháin; *Second Semester*)





C. LITERARY AND CULTURAL SURVEYS:

First Semester

SG205 Early Irish narrative  literature (Prof. K. McCone; *Yr 1*)
or The Celtic warrior cult and some early Irish literary reactions
(Prof. K. McCone; *Yr 2*).

Second Semester

SG206 Early Irish hagiography (Dr A. Mac Shamhráin; *Yr 1*)
**or Cultural and political identities in Ireland and Britain over  last two
millennia** (Prof. K. McCone and Prof. V. Comerford; *Yr. 2*) 

D. OLD IRISH LANGUAGE:



SG207/8 Old Irish grammar and readings I/II
(A. Ní Mhaoldomhnaigh; *First/Second Semesters*)

E. OTHER LANGUAGES

SG209 Basic Medieval Latin (Prof. K. McCone; *First Semester*)

SG210 Introduction to Welsh (Prof. K. McCone; *Second Semester*)

THIRD ARTS

The honours course consists of block C and two others (A and B; D and A or B; D and E).
Courses A, B and C make up the special, and courses A and B the pass course.

A. PRE-NORMAN IRISH HISTORY:

SG301 Ireland and the Vikings (Dr C. Etchingham; *First Semester*)

SG303 Law, society and the learned classes in early Christian Ireland

(Dr C. Etchingham; *Second Semester*)

or SG311 Ireland before the Normans, 1014-1169

(Dr. C Etchingham; *Second Semester*; available to a limited number only;)

B. EARLY IRISH LITERATURE AND ARCHAEOLOGY :

SG302 The archaeology of Ireland down to the coming of the Normans

(Dr A. Mac Shamhráin; *First Semester*)

SG304 Sovereignty, liminality and the heroic life cycle

(Dr M. Ní Bhrolcháin; *Second Semester*)

or HY377 The medieval Irish town (Mr. J. Bradley, available to a limited number only)

C. LITERARY AND CULTURAL SURVEYS: see Second Arts above.

D. OLD AND MIDDLE IRISH LANGUAGE:

SG307 Old Irish grammar and readings III (Prof. K. McCone; *First Semester*)

SG308 Middle Irish grammar and readings (Prof. K. McCone; *Second Semester*)

E. COMPARATIVE CELTIC LINGUISTICS:

SG309 Middle Welsh grammar and readings (Prof. K. McCone; *First Semester*)

SG310 Introduction to comparative Celtic grammar (Prof. K. McCone; *Second Semester*)

MEDIEVAL IRISH AND CELTIC STUDIES (modular 2004/5 onwards)

There will be some trivial renumbering of modules and a shift from written examination to continuous assessment as the principal means of grading first-semester modules (except for block C), but no significant change to the above apart from the following: *Early Christian Ireland* and *Ireland and the Vikings and Normans* (both in 2nd Semester) for SG203 and SG204 above respectively, plus a compensatory shift of *Early Irish poetry and women in early Irish literature* from 2nd to 1st Semester; a Yr 3 course move of *Law, society and the learned classes in early Christian Ireland* from 2nd to 1st Semester and conversely of *The archaeology of Ireland down to the coming of the Normans* from 1st to 2nd Semester.

BASQUE (AND CELTIC)

FIRST ARTS:

SG 105 Introducing the Basques and their language

(Prof. K. McCone and N. Iriarte; *First Semester*)

SG 106 Introducing the Celts and their languages (Prof. K. McCone; *First Semester*)

SG107 Basic Basque grammar and readings I (N. Iriarte; *Second Semester*)

SG108 The linguistic history of Ireland and Britain (Prof. K. McCone; *Second Semester*)

[From 2004/5 onwards the subject will be simply entitled 'Basque' in all three years and Yr 1 course will consist of a ten-credit (4 hours per week) course *Introducing the Basques and their language* graded on the basis on continuous assessment in 1st Semester and of a further ten credit (4 hours per week) course *Basic Basque grammar and readings* graded on the basis of a written university examination in 2nd Semester. There will be no significant change in the Yr 2 and Yr 3 courses]

SECOND ARTS: no students at present.

First Semester:

SG 212 Basic Basque grammar and readings II

SG213 Basque written and oral exercises

SG214 The Basques and other Western European linguistic minorities
or (in alternate years) **The history of the Basques and their language.**

Second Semester

SG215 More Basque grammar and conversation practice (*Second Semester*)

SG216 Kirikino's *Abarrak* and *Bigarren Abarrak* (standardised Batua versions)

SG217 The linguistic history of the Iberian peninsula

or (in alternate years) **Extempore *Bertsolaritza* and other Basque poetry**

THIRD ARTS: no students at present.

First Semester:

SG 316 Atxaga's *Sara izeneko gizona*

SG315 Advanced Basque grammar and conversation

SG314 (= SG 214 above).

Second Semester

SG315 Basque dialects and dialectology

SG317 (= SG 217 above)

MA IN MEDIEVAL IRISH STUDIES

Each of the modules below entails two hours of class per week. In the case of SG501 and SG504, students are assigned a level (basic, intermediate or advanced) appropriate to the amount of Old Irish that they have already studied.

First Semester: SG 501 plus two others: assessment of SG501 is by class work only; that of the remainder is chiefly on the basis of a one-and-a-half-hour written examination, supplemented by presentations and/or other class work.

SG 501. *Old Irish (or Hiberno-Latin) Grammar and Readings I* (6 credits)

SG502. *Early Irish Law, Annals and Genealogies* (6 credits)

SG503. *Early Irish Saints' Lives and Wisdom Literature* (6 credits)

Second Semester: SG 504 plus two others: assessment of SG504 is by class work only; that of the remainder is chiefly on the basis of a one-and-a-half-hour written examination, supplemented by presentations and/or other class work.

SG504. *Old Irish (or Hiberno-Latin) Grammar and Readings II* (6 credits)

SG505. *Early Irish Sagas and Voyage Literature* (6 credits)

SG506. *Early Irish Metrics, Poetry and Palaeography* (6 credits)

MINOR THESIS: Ten to fifteen thousand words with proper referencing and bibliography to be written on a suitable topic (24 credits).

EXAMINATIONS: The minor thesis above will be worth 40% of the total marks awarded. Each of the six modules taken will be worth 10% of the total. Where assessment is by a combination of examination and continuous assessment, the former will account for three quarters and the latter for one quarter of the marks attached to the module. Thus 30% of the overall marks will be accounted for by continuous assessment and the remaining 30% by written examinations.

4 The Site Visit

The site visit by the external assessors took place between Monday, 22 March 2004, and Wednesday, 24 March 2004. (The detailed timetable for the visit is provided as an appendix to this report.) The peer reviewers met informally with all staff-members and with members of the Quality Promotion Unit [QPU] on the first evening. On the second day the external assessors had a lengthy meeting with the Head of Department; this was followed by a brief tour of the departmental facilities (including the library) and a period spent reviewing the documentation furnished by the Department. The assessors also met the Professor of Modern History – because of the arrangement whereby one lecturer is shared by the two departments. Throughout the afternoon each member of staff (apart from the Head of Department) was met individually for a period varying between 15 and 30 minutes. In the evening there was a meeting with a large, representative and very lively group of undergraduate students, followed by a meeting with a small but articulate group of postgraduate students. The final morning of the visit was devoted to compiling a draft report; it concluded with a meeting of the Peer Review Group. Before departing, one of the assessors also paid a brief visit to the Russell Library.

The PRG wishes to place on record its sincere appreciation of the warm welcome and the assistance it received from both staff and students, as well as from the members of the QPU, during the three days of the site visit. It also wishes to express its appreciation of the valuable documentation – including the well-written Self-Assessment Document – with which it was furnished.

5 Response to the Self-Assessment

5.1 Course Aims and objectives

These were deemed to be satisfactory within the general academic framework of the subject of Medieval Irish Studies, both in terms of a national and an international comparison.

5.2 Course Information

This was clear, well laid-out and easy to follow.

5.3 Course Assessment

This was considered to be generally satisfactory, but students did express disappointment that essays – which were so demanding in terms of time and labour – accounted for only a niggardly 16% of the overall marks. This, of course, is due to change with the forthcoming introduction of modularisation.

5.4 Course content

This was deemed to be entirely satisfactory and highly commendable in terms both of its range and variety. Students expressed themselves highly satisfied and stimulated by all aspects of the course.

5.5 Course delivery

The main format is the lecture, but there is an awareness on the part of the staff of the need to integrate more student participation into the current format. While the small size of many of the lectures does lend itself to a more tutorial approach, both staff and students were unanimous in their desire for proper tutorials and they expressed themselves frustrated at the lack of these, due to the absence of the requisite resources. Many of the lecture rooms are clearly unsatisfactory, especially as student-numbers are growing. It is particularly undesirable to have to hold classes in lecturers' offices – this was a point reiterated by both staff and students.

A number of changes in course content and delivery would appear to merit some comment. The introduction of Medieval Irish Studies in response to perceived difficulties with the language aspect of OMI is explained convincingly and appears, overall, to have been very successful. (The problem with the linguistic side of Old and Middle Irish is worryingly widespread throughout the discipline, both in Ireland and overseas.) The dropping of the popular Taught MA course (or, rather, its incorporation in the MA in Medieval Irish Studies) and the regrettable abandonment of the well-established and successful triennial Summer School, due to unsustainable burdens on staff, might seem somewhat at odds with the introduction of an entirely new course in Basque. However, since part of the Basque course is not taught by the head of department, it is not as great a burden on his time as might otherwise be the case. The recent changes are probably acceptable in themselves and in terms of their benefit for the teaching and research profile of the Department – although they might appear to reflect less a longterm strategic plan than short-term responses, however acceptable and useful, to situations as they arise.

5.6 Course administration

This appears to be generally satisfactory. By and large, staff and students appear to be well informed about what is going on in the Department. There were, however, some areas where there may have been need for better communication of certain details – such as times and location of opening classes at the beginning of term. This appears to have arisen particularly in relation to the Taught MA (now discontinued). There would therefore seem to be a need to tighten up procedures in this area.

5.7 Communication

Staff-student communication appeared highly satisfactory because of the remarkable openness of the Department and the ready accessibility of staff-members. The general informality and ease of communication was repeatedly remarked upon and commended by students.

Intrastaff communication was generally considered to be satisfactory, though not unreservedly so. Structural and other issues, such as the location of staff at either end of the campus, would seem to be contributory factors, adding considerably to difficulties. Some suggestions as to how the problem just alluded to might at least be alleviated are made below (6.3).

5.8 Support services

Some support services appear quite satisfactory, others less so. For example, no difficulties were reported with registration – it appears to work quite smoothly.

In relation to the library, the staff were considered to be sympathetic and helpful, but students felt library resources were inadequate in some respects – especially in relation to space and to provision of multiple copies of books. This latter lack is partly offset by the provision of splendid and imaginative collections of reading material within the Department. Mention was also made of some inadequacies in relation to sources for postgraduate studies, but it was acknowledged that this was offset by the proximity of Dublin with its important research libraries (e.g. the National Library, TCD, the Royal Irish Academy, etc.).

The area of computer facilities is considered to be especially unsatisfactory, although this is felt to be through no fault of the Department. Students find it difficult to access computers and staff are very frustrated by the lack of online access in classrooms.

PG students urgently need a sizeable room of their own. It is simply not satisfactory that they should have to resort to the library, where space is already at a premium, or have to use the canteen for study purposes.

It is understood that, with the recent opening of the John Hume Building, enhanced teaching spaces are now available, and the Department should be encouraged to request that its classes be appropriately timetabled in more suitable rooms so as to make the best use of the new facilities.

The level of general pastoral support for students is excellent. Emphasis was placed again and again on the friendly informality of the Department and its staff.

5.9 Research

The research culture in the Department is exceptionally healthy. All members of staff are research-active and research activity informs teaching both at PG and UG level. Students are very aware of the cutting edge research activity of staff-members. The research conducted is of international standard and is characterised by its variety. It has resulted in several important monographs published over recent years, with a number of further significant works forthcoming. The Department's record of publishing activity – under the imprint of An Sagart – is most impressive. (The advent of a new imprint, Lagenia Publications, is also to be welcomed.)

The prestigious new *Monasticon Hibernicum* project is an especially admirable example of an imaginative research initiative originating within the Department which will be of enormous value to future generations of scholars.

5.10 Staff Development

The level of staffing in relation to growing student numbers and the great variety of courses offered is a matter for concern. The heavy teaching load on staff, and particularly on the Head of Department, has meant that very regrettably – as has already been mentioned – the excellent Taught MA is to be discontinued (or at least incorporated in a MA in Medieval Irish Studies). In order to maintain the high standards of teaching, research and student support for which the Department is noted, it would seem that an increase in the staff complement to 3 fulltime members is warranted.

There is a commendable emphasis on self-development by staff-members, including attendance at, and organisation of, conferences – notably the annual Irish Conference of Medievalists, held until recently in Maynooth and now held each summer in Kilkenny. Another regular feature of the Department's activities – now, alas!, suspended – has been the prestigious Summer School.

5.11 External Relationships

All members of staff have regular and productive contacts with colleagues in cognate Depts in other universities, both in Ireland and abroad. Particularly notable and commendable is the link with the University of the Basque Country – a unique development which is mutually beneficial, offering students of NUIM the chance to spend time in the Basque Country and to study a linguistically fascinating minority language. The *Monasticon Hibernicum* (already mentioned) is a particularly prestigious project for which external funding has been obtained and which will involve a degree of interaction with scholars in various outside institutions.

6 Conclusions

6.1 Strengths

1. Varied and exciting courses which are offered to an enthusiastic group of students.
2. Excellent pastoral care of students.
3. Openness and informality that characterise the Department
4. High quality research.
5. High national and international esteem.
6. The Department has one of the two chairs of Old Irish currently filled in Irish Universities, North and South.

6.2 Weaknesses

1. Lack of resources leading to inadequate facilities which hinder the department from attaining the level of excellence to which it aspires and which it could achieve under more favourable conditions. The resources in question are, firstly, rooms, computer-equipment and the like, and, secondly, staff. It is understood that progress is now possible in this area with the opening of the John Hume Building.
2. The dropping of the taught MA in Medieval Irish Studies and of the Maynooth Summer School in Celtic and Medieval Irish Studies is a cause for regret (but understandable as a response to the staffing situation).
3. Mention must here be made of deficiencies, particularly in relation to intrastaff communications, which manifested themselves in disagreement on structural and methodological matters.

6.3 Recommendations for quality enhancement

1. Allocation of resources commensurate with a growing department.
 - (a) Extra room-space, for teaching and for post-graduate students. It is to be hoped that the extra space about to become available in the fine new John Hume Building – located very convenient to the Arts Block – may help to alleviate this problem, which is clearly causing considerable aggravation to both staff and students, undergraduate and postgraduate alike.
 - (b) Extra staff: the complement should increase from 2.5 to 3 fulltime staff. (If this is currently not feasible, then there should be a greater allocation of funding for part-time teaching.)

2. The administration of the Department would be enhanced by the initiation of more regular small-scale minuted meetings, which would include student-representatives, convened when necessary. This might help to alleviate at least some of the problems in relation to internal communications.
3. The arrangements for the post currently shared with Modern History have proved less than satisfactory. We suggest that if, by mutual agreement, the postholder were to agree to move entirely into the Department of Modern History, this might prove more satisfactory to all concerned. The resulting decline in the staffing level of the Department would have to be alleviated by the immediate appointment of one fulltime member of staff.
4. Another possible approach to the difficulty just mentioned might involve the transfer of the present Head of Department to a new role of Postgraduate Supervisor (with appropriate adjustment in salary to fund the consequent necessary Undergraduate teaching) and the appointment of the fulltime senior lecturer to the position of Head of Department. This proposal is particularly attractive in the context of the Department's excellent research profile which would be further significantly enhanced by the speedy completion of the Comparative Celtic Grammar, the Head of Department's current major research project – this work can confidently be expected to be a milestone in the history of the subject, to become the standard work of reference. On the other hand, this might well prove a difficult change to implement unless suitable resources can be found.

7 Comments on Methodology of Review Process

The methodology of the review process was deemed satisfactory and the high quality of preparation for it both by the Department and by the Quality Review Officer helped to facilitate the process and ensure that it ran very smoothly. (It would have helped, however, if the functions of the internal members of the Review Panel had been more explicitly defined and explained.)

Appendix

Sean-Ghaeilge: Peer Review Visit

Timetable

22nd – 24th March 2004-05-05

Monday 22nd

- 6.15 p.m. External Reviewers welcomed to University Meeting of Peer Review Group
- 7.15 p.m. *Reception* – Meeting of peer reviewers with staff of the Department and members of QPU
- 8.30 p.m. *Dinner* (Team with QPU and Head of Department)

Tuesday 23rd

- 9.30 a.m. Meeting of External Assessors with Head of Department and tour of facilities
- 10.30 a.m. Review of the documentation presented by the Department.
- 11.30 a.m. Meeting of the External Assessors with Professor Comerford of Modern History Department
- 12.00 noon Meeting of the External Assessors with Dr Etchingam
- 12.30 p.m. *Lunch* (External Assessors and departmental staff)
- 2.00 p.m. Meeting of External Assessors with individual staff:
2.00 p.m. Dr Ní Bhrolcháin
2.30 p.m. Dr Mac Shamhráin
2.45 p.m. Dr Mac Shamhráin and Dr Breen
3.00 p.m. Ms Ní Mhaoldomhnaigh
3.20 p.m. Ms Iriarte
3.40 p.m. Ms Ní Ruadháin
- 4.00 p.m. – 5.30 p.m. Meeting of the External Assessors with undergraduate students
- 6.00 p.m. Meeting of the External Assessors with postgraduate students
- 7.30 p.m. *Dinner* (External Assessors and representatives of QPU)

Wednesday 24th

- 9.30 a.m. Drafting of the Report
- 11.30 a.m. Meeting of the Peer Review Group
- 1.00 p.m. *Lunch* (Review Team)

Peer Review Board

Name:

Signature:

Dr. David Redmond,
Registrar
National University of Ireland, Maynooth

Dr. Peter Denman
Dean of Arts
National University of Ireland, Maynooth

Dr. Nollaig ÓMuráile
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