

# Trinity College Dublin



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## Provost's Report to Council on the Review of the School of Psychology at Trinity College Dublin

### 1. Introduction

This report presents the outcome of a review of the School of Psychology. An external peer review visitation was undertaken from the 28<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> March 2011 by Professor Nancy Budwig, Clarke University, USA; Professor Trevor Robbins, University of Cambridge; Professor Nicholas Ladany, Loyola Marymount University, USA and Professor Vincent Walsh, University College London. The Internal facilitator was Prof William Binchy, School of Law, Trinity College Dublin.

The report is based on (i) feedback from the External Reviewers received on the 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2011, (ii) a submission from the School of Psychology received on the 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2011 and (iii) a submission from the Pro-Dean of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences received on the 8<sup>th</sup> June 2011.

The main purpose of the School review is (a) to provide a structured opportunity for the School to reflect on its activities and plans for development, while benefiting from a constructive commentary by senior colleagues external to College; (b) to ensure that quality and standards in teaching, research and administration are being maintained and enhanced and that areas of concern in this regard are identified and addressed. Each School in College is reviewed systematically once every seven years.

### 2. Overview of the School

#### 2.1 Aims and Objectives of the School

The Department of Psychology was established in 1964 and became the School of Psychology (a single discipline school) in 2005 when the College was restructured. The School of Psychology seeks to promote individual and collective research and scholarship and to contribute to evidence-based policy and practice. It seeks to be inclusive of the diverse interests that are characteristic of psychology, as well as being supportive of a number of areas of concentrated research strength. The School's aim is to help individuals in achieving their research goals. The School is structured around four tiers of research activity: Individuals, Clusters, Centres and Institutes. The intellectual resources and leadership of individuals within their chosen field of

research is the building block of research within the School and, where practicable, it encourages individuals to work in Clusters, Centres or Institutes, both with other staff within the School and also with staff in other Schools in Trinity and in other organisations. As such the School actively encourages inter-disciplinary and international collaboration and is fortunate to have a significant number of staff who are internationally leading authorities in their areas of expertise.

## 2.2 Programmes to which the School provides teaching

### Undergraduate:

- Single honours Psychology (B.A.)
- Two subject moderatorship (B.A.)

### Postgraduate:

- Professional Doctorate in Clinical Psychology
- Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology
- M.Phil/Post Graduate Diploma in Psychoanalytic Studies
- M.Sc. Applied Psychology
- M.Sc./Post Graduate Diploma in Clinical Supervision
- M.Sc. in Psychology (Applied Behaviour Analysis) & M.Sc. Applied Behaviour Analysis
- Post Graduate Diploma in Applied Behaviour Analysis
- Higher Diploma in Psychology

## 2.3 Research

The School is associated with 4 research groupings: The Trinity College Institute of Neuroscience (TCIN), the Children’s Research Centre (CRC), the Aerospace Psychology Research Group ((APRG), which is currently in a process of development to establish the Centre for Innovative Human Systems (CIHS)), and the Centre for Global Health (CGH). Two additional research clusters exist within the School – The Counselling Psychology Cluster and the Clinical Psychology Cluster. The main areas of research interest are neuroscience, organizational safety systems; clinical, counseling and health psychology; child development and global health.

## 2.4 Summary Statistical Profile of the School for the Academic Year 2009/10<sup>1</sup>

Full-time Staff FTE	Undergraduate FTE	Postgraduate FTE	School Staff: Student Ratio	Faculty Staff: Student Ratio
<b>30</b>	<b>179</b>	<b>267</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>21</b>

*Figures from Senior Lecturer’s Annual Report approved by Council at its meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2010*

<sup>1</sup> *The staff FTEs include all Professors, Associate Professors, Senior Lecturers and Lecturers funded from the core HEA grant, or from self-financing courses, and all part-time and occasional staff and demonstrators, converted to an FTE, who are funded from core grant or from self-financing courses.*

## **2.5 Accommodation and Facilities (Physical Resources)**

Members of the School are housed in three separate locations around the campus. The main part of the School is based in Áras an Phairsaigh (approx 60% of staff), while members of TCIN are based in the Lloyd Building (approx 30% of staff), and the remainder – two staff members associated with the Children’s Research Centre – are based in Foster Place. The Centre for Global Health is located in 6-9 South Leinster Street (Phoenix House). All full-time members of staff have their own individual offices, but space for research staff and postgraduate research students is more restricted.

## **3. Reviewers’ Recommendations**

The Reviewers make the following recommendations:

### **1. Short term**

1.1 The School criteria for establishing, evaluating and sustaining Centres need review.

1.2 Criteria of research quality and productivity should be measured against external indicators of international and national standing.

1.3 A number of small initiatives would contribute to potentially transformative cultural changes within the school, e.g.:

- Introduction of a seminar series.
- Community building activities such as daily or weekly tea-making in the common room by one of the groups operating via rota.
- A weekly informal, internal seminar at which students, post docs and PIs can present ongoing work/ideas should be set up.
- Incentives for junior faculty to write grant applications. 1000 Euros could be given to their research fund for every full application submitted.
- A weekly or monthly news ‘round-up’ of the publications, lectures, grants and personal news (e.g. births) of members of the School could be made more generally available.
- A database of grants could be made available by the Director of Research, forwarded to all members of the school.

1.4. A Public Engagement committee should be formed to encourage and develop the presentation of the public face of the School.

1.5 Encouragement of co-supervision of PhDs between CRC, TCIN and the School members in the Áras An Phiarsaigh building could be enhanced.

1.6 Ways of relieving post-graduate course organizers of the additional administrative loads of undergraduate teaching should be considered.

1.7. There was an urgent need for appraisal of junior faculty and post-doctoral research fellows focusing on career development and their roles in the School.

1.8 Methods of obtaining destination data of students and post-docs should be enhanced. Compiling data-bases on undergraduate academic profiles (e.g. science or non-science) and on general demographics may aid future University financial planning.

## 2. Long Term

2.1. Strategic hiring of senior academics would enhance synergy between different groups in Psychology (TCIN, Centres and other research groups). Careful attention should be given to retention, as well as searching and hiring, strategies. e.g. Appointment of a Chair with a strong reputation in developmental psychology or cognate discipline with the ability to bridge research interests in genetics, neuropsychology and other areas.

2.2 A process should be created that would determine the strategic direction of the School of Psychology, that is in line with the Strategic Plan, and would eventually result in the appointment of a new Head. This strategic plan should inform the direction of new hirings in the School and be linked more transparently to budget allocations.

2.3 The process of appointing the next Head should be reviewed. Although the traditions and regulations of the College should of course be respected, it would be appropriate for an internationally-recognised School to appoint by interview via a panel including external, possibly international members, whilst taking into careful consideration the views of the Faculty.

2.4 An overall comment on the form of the return by the School for this Review is that it could have been made easier for the Committee to do its work and draft this report had the Review materials provided by the School been presented more succinctly, with their main topics being related more directly (and sequentially) to the headings requested by the Central Administration of the College in their written instructions for the compilation of our report. This could perhaps be borne in mind for future Reviews.

#### **4. Provost's Recommendations to Council**

In light of the Review Report and the responses from the School of Psychology and the Faculty Dean, it is recommended that:

- (i) The School working closely with the Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, and other relevant Academic Officers, should consider the detailed recommendations of the Review Report and draw up an implementation plan for Council approval.
  
- (ii) The quality review process of schools should include a more robust assessment of research output and quality. College should consider ways to address this as part of the overall review process.
  
- (iii) College should review the current method of appointing a Head of School to ensure that procedures allow for strong leadership across disciplines.

## **5. Review Report for School of Psychology**

The Visiting Committee met on March 28-30<sup>th</sup> to review the School of Psychology at Trinity College in terms of research, teaching, and other areas, including strategic planning. Since the last Review significant reorganization had taken place with the founding of a new interdisciplinary Institute. This restructuring had led to some faculty being affiliated to the Institute of Neuroscience, one of the possible consequences of which was lack of coherence within the School. This and other issues are discussed below.

### **1. Research**

In terms of scholarly outputs or publications over the past three years, it was clear that most members of the School had attained national, and a few, international competitiveness. The School covered broad areas of the subject, with strengths in cognitive neuroscience, cognitive science and experimental psychology, as well as clinical, counselling, developmental and social psychology. However, there were significant gaps in some areas, for example, in human sensory psychophysics. And considering the longevity of the Children's Research Centre and its funding potential, the lack of critical mass concerning issues of longitudinal research and human development was surprising. Moreover, performance across the School was variable in terms of productivity and quality, in terms of papers submitted to the best journals in the respective fields.

The School's research was organized into four basic structures; an interdisciplinary Institute, Research Centres, Research Clusters, and individual researchers. Whilst this structure had served the School well in the previous period, it was debatable whether this organization was optimal in terms of future research outputs and aspirations of the School. The success of this

model for Psychology requires the building of a strong 'home community' as well as attention to ways future hirings in Psychology can contribute to the success of inter-disciplinary units.

1.1. The School contributed 5 members, including the Director, to a very successful interdisciplinary enterprise, the Trinity College Institute of Neuroscience (TCIN). Whilst this Institute was not the object of the present review, it was apparent that the Institute has had significant impact and was also aware of the need to be visible internationally. It was a feather in the School's cap to have a substantial input into what was evidently a cross-school enterprise. It had a common sense of purpose, and had attracted adequate funding. Two main issues were pertinent: First, the relationship with the rest of the School: the TCIN should be looking internally to maintain relationships within Psychology and 'sell their role', as well as to maintain their commendable external perspective. The Deputy Director is a model in this regard: a Cognitive Psychologist who has embraced the mission and collaboration of TCIN and maintained her standing in the School. TCIN may also consider becoming involved in appointing the new CRC Director in order to foster a developmental programme that incorporates Developmental Neuroscience. Second, although there was the prospect of appointing a new Lecturer in Social Neuroscience TCIN had lost two significant figures in the past year in the field of human functional neuroimaging, including an internationally distinguished individual who had given the School considerable prestige. The College and School need to be aware and proactive in future not only in attracting but also retaining, internationally leading staff.

1.2 The Children's Research Centre (CRC) clearly exhibited great commitment and passion in its work, the implications of which were considerable. Although outreach to the public was outstanding, there was a sense of marginalisation with respect to the School and the Centre was housed in somewhat dingy accommodation. The present Director was due to retire and there was a need to recruit a world-leading researcher to bring the Centre to a new level, harness its considerable resources in terms of its current cohorts, and forge international collaborations. The retirement of the Director creates an opportunity to build on her significant achievements by appointing a Director with a strong reputation in developmental psychology and the ability to bridge research interests in genetics, neuropsychology, neuroimaging and lifespan development.

1.3. The other main Research Centres of the School were perhaps less well developed. They were smaller and had not attained sufficient critical mass. Their relationship to mainstream psychology could be better defined, although they had some elements of interdisciplinarity and capacity to build a strong base around innovation and usable knowledge. To get to the next level and heighten the resource base and visibility of Trinity College through these enterprises will involve further support. Overall, the Committee considered that the College criteria for establishing, evaluating and sustaining Centres urgently needed review. It may be better for the

cohesion of the School for the smaller Centres to be reincorporated into the School to help give more common purpose. One possibility is that each PI gives their research group a title. At present the web page is a collection of names with research interests. A stronger research presentation may be one of the small acts that would change the dynamic of the School.

1.4. There was a lack of another suitable and counterbalancing 'grand theme' (such as lifespan psychology) to bind together other members of the Department whose interests were only tangentially associated with Neuroscience or the other areas of critical mass. One possible integrating theme which bound together existing Centres, was that of applied psychology, or translation of theory to practice, but this required much further discussion by the School. Trinity has the capacity to provide leadership for the field of Psychology around issues of translational psychological science and usable knowledge and this path seems preferential to a focus on applied psychology since the emergence of translational science has nearly replaced the arbitrary division between theory and practice.

#### 1.5. Benchmarking and external assessment of research

Whilst the Committee was much impressed with the high level of organization and flexibility of arrangements of the present Review, there was a lack of provision of quantitative indicators of excellence in research productivity and quality. In the documentation, there were references to the international standing of the College in terms of published indicators, however these could not be taken as reflections of the standing of the School. There was no detailed bibliometric analysis with comparisons drawn with other international institutions, acknowledging of course the limitations of such analyses and the care with which such indicators have to be interpreted. Calibration of indicators across areas could be achieved to some extent by a suitable panel of external assessors benchmarked against peer and aspirational schools around the globe. The definitions of what was acceptable as peer-reviewed publications were rather broad and inclusive. The Review Committee thinks it is necessary to use some quantitative system of analysis in order for the School to measure its excellence and goals relative to international rather than national standards. The Committee believes that the School has the potential to be internationally competitive and that by making its ambitions explicit (without setting targets) the output and impact of all staff, especially the junior faculty, will be enhanced. We are cognizant of the need for measures of impact other than papers and citations, but these too should be made explicit and be recognised in international practice. The description of research grant funding in terms of FTEs across the College was considered frankly to be somewhat complacent: simply performing better than the Trinity average should not be the goal. In terms of esteem, the School has further capacity to build up international research leadership and officialdom in learned/professional societies.



## 2. Teaching and Learning

As a whole the Faculty appeared remarkably committed to high quality teaching. From self-report of both Faculty and students, it was evident that the quality of teaching is at least equal to that of other prominent schools of Psychology and the School should be congratulated on this level of provision for what is an unusually impressive population of undergraduates. Past and present Undergraduate Directors of Teaching and Learning noted that the task is nevertheless formidable: it is for example critical in ensuring high quality instruction to undergraduates and the provision of constructive feedback to struggling instructors. The Committee noted that the current and former Undergraduate Director of Teaching and Learning, both of whom are to be unreservedly commended, were both relatively junior academic appointments and considered whether it was appropriate for such a demanding role to be undertaken by staff still in the midst of attaining their research credibility; it is a task that surely siphons energy from scholarly activity. Further, although the role of the Undergraduate Director of Teaching and Learning is certainly valued by the School, this should be made explicit by making it a consideration for academic promotion. A further recommendation would be to offer opportunities for more formal reviews of Faculty teaching (e.g., peer observation, video of teaching for Provost teaching award).

2.1 The undergraduate courses appeared to be comprehensive for the most part, and of uniformly high quality. The undergraduate students were largely positive about their learning experiences, and conveyed a clear sense of the intellectual engagement of Trinity coursework and the research-led spirit of the School of Psychology. Although overwhelmingly positive about their experiences, some complained about lack of timely, detailed feedback on essays. They were particularly impressed by receiving instruction from faculty members who were not only notable researchers, but also had produced recognized course text-books and other teaching materials.

2.2 Post-graduate students described the culture of the School of Psychology (including TCIN) in a very favourable light, identifying it as supportive, collaborative, and facilitative of their professional and academic development. They were encouraged to present papers at meetings and to publish from an early stage.

2.3 Requests from post-graduates of changes to the existing provision were minor and included the suggestion that it may be useful to have a graduate tutor (not necessarily in the same discipline) for the teaching experiences of post-graduates, as well as published guidelines about expectations related to their roles and expectations. In addition, they expressed a desire for a more rapid and accessible means of receiving communications about departmental events, job postings etc. perhaps through a student listserv of which all Faculty and students were part. There were good office and research facilities available for graduates although the lack of the

social and intellectual focus provided by a regular departmental seminar was noted. The Committee observed that the vast majority of the PhD students amongst those interviewed had received their first degrees at Trinity and wondered whether this adequately reflected the state of affairs in the School. If so, greater diversity in intake might be a goal for the future.

2.4. The Directors of Post-Graduate Courses offered important insights about how post-graduate instruction is linked to the School of Psychology. They were clearly providing outstanding post-graduate provision. But overall, the links to the School were somewhat tenuous and strategic decisions needed to be made about how formal (if at all) these links should be. It was clear that the administrative and teaching activities limited the desired amount of research and scholarship in which this teaching faculty would prefer to engage (They preferred a ratio of on average 50:50, whilst the norm was tilted too far towards teaching and administration). In particular, the amount of time devoted towards administering these courses was grossly underestimated by the School, and did not apparently figure sufficiently in the allocation of other administrative responsibilities of the School.

2.5. The introduction of a new undergraduate module (or modules) in professional psychology (e.g., introduction to professional psychology, helping skills) should be considered in order to create a firmer link between the post-graduate professional programs and the undergraduate students. Post-graduate students are able to find placements and the professional disciplines seem to work together well to maximize their resources. The current financial structure is working adequately but potential changes to the financial model could pose problems. In particular, for better or worse, creative ways to ensure that sabbaticals do not have a disruptive effect on course delivery, whilst honouring this essential period of leave, required assurance.

2.6. The recent accreditation of the Counselling Psychology programme was particularly laudable. It is recommended that the post-graduate programmes examine ways to strengthen the links with the School of Psychology, create avenues for more time for scholarship, and continue to determine outcome criteria that indicate the overall excellence of the programmes. The linkages to recent alumni were viewed extremely favourably by the students and is a practice that should be continued.

2.7. Post-Graduate and Post-Doctoral Career Development. There was some concern about preparation and opportunities for the role of PI expressed by some Post-Doctoral researchers. There is a need for some explicit mentoring arrangements to be put in place. These could be in the form of career advice seminars, 6 monthly career meetings with PIs (some reported never having had a career meeting with their PI, others were very happy with their PIs as mentors). The academic ladder and realities of the funding schemes and procedures was opaque to some of this group. The assessors felt that improvements here would also contribute to the cohesion

of the School.

### 3. Miscellaneous issues

3.1 Resources: The service support staff seems to be adequate in meeting the needs of the staff and administration. The technology area was particularly notable and the attention to detail and interpersonal assistance of the support staff were laudable. There may be an uneven distribution of teaching and administrative tasks across faculty. In particular, the junior Faculty's teaching load is not consistent across members and junior members appear to be taking on roles that are more traditionally staffed by senior faculty. What remains less clear was the model for allocating funding within the school. It is not clear that funding is aligned with the stated academic priorities of the unit and this is worth further consideration.

3.2 Physical Infrastructure The physical infrastructure is adequate and would meet the needs of most academics working in internationally recognized institutions; however, it would be important to consider ways in which the staff may work in closer proximity to one another and whether the physical structures and built environment can be made more conducive to positive working conditions (e.g., adequate and consistent heating in the Children's Centre).

3.3 Engagement with Society. There is no doubt that the School of Psychology has done an admirable job of conveying its research and scholarly work in ways that impact society. This was evident at several levels in our examinations of specific research areas. Not only did the different research groups have specific initiatives underway to link with the public, the research materials we were given referenced impact on society in discussions of future initiatives. It appears the School of Psychology does not yet recognize the substantial ways they are addressing this important and emerging theme and this will serve them well as they progress into the future.

### 4. Future Leadership and strategic goals of the School

The Committee much appreciated the stabilising influence the present Head of School had achieved following appointment. With this stabilization now attained, the School is ready for a new phase in which certain aspects of the workings and presentation of the School will require a strong visionary influence. How the School sets the balance between research aspirations and post-graduate teaching objectives is in urgent need of clarification. The junior membership of the School appeared somewhat disengaged (perhaps because of the embargo on promotion, perhaps due to the refocus on centres/institutes over the last years, or perhaps due to a lack of clarity about what is expected, valued or possible). Post-doctoral research fellows were concerned about career development, and there was an apparent lack of common purpose

among the senior staff. The absence of a departmental seminar, for example, was perhaps symptomatic of an apparent lack of cohesion among staff members. The apparent inability to make significant efforts to retain key individuals with international prestige was also disturbing. Overall, although a strategy was described in the documentation, it lacked complete credibility and needed review. The practice of electing Heads by democratic vote from the body of the School is quaint and questionable. Whilst it was important for there to be democratic consultation in any appointments, these should also be made in the best strategic interests of the College, as well as the School. The next Head of School will need to have a deep understanding of the recent stabilization and a compelling vision that will unite the Faculty together as part of a School of Psychology.

## 5. Recommendations

### *5.1 Short term*

5.1.1 The School criteria for establishing, evaluating and sustaining Centres need review.

5.1.2 Criteria of research quality and productivity should be measured against external indicators of international and national standing.

5.1.3 A number of small initiatives would contribute to potentially transformative cultural changes within the school, e.g.:

- Introduction of a seminar series.
- Community building activities such as daily or weekly tea-making in the common room by one of the groups operating via rota.
- A weekly informal, internal seminar at which students, post docs and PIs can present ongoing work/ideas should be set up.
- Incentives for junior faculty to write grant applications. 1000 Euros could be given to their research fund for every full application submitted.
- A weekly or monthly news 'round-up' of the publications, lectures, grants and personal news (e.g. births) of members of the School could be made more generally available.
- A database of grants could be made available by the Director of Research,

forwarded to all members of the school.

5.1.4. A Public Engagement committee should be formed to encourage and develop the presentation of the public face of the School.

5.1.5 Encouragement of co-supervision of PhDs between CRC, TCIN and the School members in the Áras An Phiarsaigh building could be enhanced.

5.1.6 Ways of relieving post-graduate course organizers of the additional administrative loads of undergraduate teaching should be considered.

5.1.7. There was an urgent need for appraisal of junior faculty and post-doctoral research fellows focusing on career development and their roles in the School.

5.1.8 Methods of obtaining destination data of students and post-docs should be enhanced. Compiling data-bases on undergraduate academic profiles (e.g. science or non-science) and on general demographics may aid future University financial planning.

## 5.2 Long Term

5.2.1. Strategic hiring of senior academics would enhance synergy between different groups in Psychology (TCIN, Centres and other research groups). Careful attention should be given to retention, as well as searching and hiring, strategies e.g. Appointment of a Chair with a strong reputation in developmental psychology or cognate discipline with the ability to bridge research interests in genetics, neuropsychology and other areas.

5.2.2 A process should be created that would determine the strategic direction of the School of Psychology, that is in line with the Strategic Plan, and would eventually result in the appointment of a new Head. This strategic plan should inform the direction of new hirings in the School and be linked more transparently to budget allocations.

5.2.3. The process of appointing the next Head should be reviewed. Although the traditions and regulations of the College should of course be respected, it would be appropriate for an internationally-recognised School to appoint by interview via a panel including external, possibly international members, whilst taking into careful consideration the views of the Faculty.

5.2.4 An overall comment on the form of the return by the School for this Review is that it could have been made easier for the Committee to do its work and draft this report had the Review materials provided by the School been presented more succinctly, with their main topics being related more directly (and sequentially) to the headings requested by the Central

Administration of the College in their written instructions for the compilation of our report. This could perhaps be borne in mind for future Reviews.

#### 6. Summary and Closing Comments

In summary, the School of Psychology has settled after a period of transition to accommodate a complex structure involving the incorporation of a new and powerful Neuroscience Research Institute. The next phase should focus on counterbalancing this Institute integratively with another large cross-cutting research theme. This could be done in conjunction with new appointments that enhance the School's capacity to conduct cutting-edge inter-disciplinary research with a translational focus to capitalize on its excellent research-led undergraduate and post-graduate teaching. Teaching provision and utilization of the intellectual resources of the high quality undergraduate and postgraduate body was outstanding. The Visiting Committee has confidence that the School and the College will be able to respond to the challenges posed by this Review.

We would like to close by noting the exceptional professionalism of the staff, both within the School and also the Central Administration, organizing the external review process. The entire Committee experienced a visit that allowed it to discharge its duties efficiently and, we hope, well.

## **6. School's response to the Review report for Psychology**

The report of the review of the School of Psychology has been discussed by the School Executive and the School Committee. The School welcomes the report, which favourably evaluates the achievements of the School and offers some valuable recommendations for the future.

### **Research**

At the time of the review no clear comparative measure of the research performance of the School was available, and the reviewers regretted the lack of any way of benchmarking the School in this respect. However, subsequently, the QS World University Rankings for Psychology have now been published. These place TCD's School of Psychology at 48<sup>th</sup> in the world and 10<sup>th</sup> in Europe. Had this information been available earlier, the reviewers would surely have commended the School even more highly for its research.

### **Teaching and learning**

The reviewers were laudatory about the high quality of teaching provided by the School, which they judged to be *'at least equal to that of other prominent schools of Psychology.'* They described the undergraduate courses as *'of uniformly high quality'* and the undergraduate students as *'an unusually impressive population.'* The reviewers judged that the Directors of the School's postgraduate courses were *'clearly providing outstanding postgraduate provision,'* and reported that postgraduate [research] students described the culture of the School in a very favourable light, identifying it as *'supportive, collaborative, and facilitative of their professional and academic development.'* The reviewers questioned the number of postgraduate research students that were graduates of TCD, as the majority of those whom they met fell into this category. It has subsequently been established that they met a rather unrepresentative sample, and, in fact, over the past five years the proportion is only 37%. The School does have

a goal of recruiting international students to the greatest extent possible, but this is hampered by the number and level of postgraduate studentships that are available, both from within and outside the university. When the School had sufficient funds a few years ago it created a number of postgraduate studentships, but it has not been able to repeat that initiative subsequently due to the financial cuts required by the College.

### **Engagement with society**

With regard to the School's engagement with society, the reviewers reported that *'there is no doubt that the School of Psychology has done an admirable job of conveying its research and scholarly work in ways that impact society.'*

### **Physical infrastructure**

The School welcomes the fact that the reviewers reinforced the School's own view that the geographical fragmentation of the School onto three separate sites has deleterious effects on the intellectual and social cohesion of the School. Undoubtedly the School would benefit enormously in both of these respects if it could be brought together in a single location. Meanwhile, the School will attempt to implement the recommendations of the reviewers with regard to ways of ameliorating the problems this fragmentation causes.

### **Miscellaneous**

Retention of staff. The reviewers lament the fact that the School was unable to retain some of its most valuable staff, and say that the College and the School need to be proactive in retaining internationally leading staff. This School naturally endorses this view, but is unable to offer any immediate solution to the problem.

Research themes. The reviewers suggest that the School needs to develop a 'grand theme' to counterbalance neuroscience that will bind together the other (non-neuroscience) members of the School. They mention two possibilities: lifespan psychology and translational psychological science. The breadth of interests in the School is such that the development of a single alternative 'grand scheme' would probably not be appropriate, but anyway the reviewers themselves mention two possibilities. Both of these ideas emerged from discussions with School members – that is, they were ideas that members of the School were already considering. The School Committee welcomed the comment that the School has the capacity to *'provide leadership in the field of Psychology around issues of translational psychological science and usable knowledge'* and agreed that this should be pursued.

Directorships. The reviewers noted that *"the current and former Undergraduate Director of Teaching and Learning ... were both relatively junior academic appointments and considered*



*whether it was appropriate for such a demanding role to be undertaken by staff still in the midst of attaining their research credibility.”* The difficulty of recruiting members of Schools (senior or junior) to undertake Directorships of this kind is widely understood within the College. The School itself has no immediate solution to the problem. The suggestion that serving in such positions should be made a consideration for academic promotion is outside the power of the School. ‘Contribution to College’ is one of the criteria employed by the committee that considers applications for promotion, though whether this kind of service is given sufficient credit is open to question.

Academic priorities. The reviewers’ comment that *“It is not clear that funding is aligned with the stated academic priorities of the unit”* did come as something of a surprise. Decisions on the School’s strategic direction and its priorities, including the formulation of the School’s Strategic Plan, and on how significant funds are to be utilised (if any are available) are made by the School Executive (and also discussed at School Committee meetings). Decisions concerning day-to-day expenditure are made by the Head of School, who has rarely found it necessary to deny any request from staff for financial assistance.

## **Recommendations**

The recommendations from the reviewers’ report are listed in italics below with a response from the School provided for each one.

### **5.1 Short term**

#### **5.1.1. *The School criteria for establishing, evaluating and sustaining Centres need review.***

The School has already commented (in its previous response on the factual accuracy of the reviewers’ report) that the criteria and procedures in relation to Research Centres are determined at College level and not School level. This was corrected in the main body of the reviewers’ report, but the recommendation was not removed. Such a recommendation would need to be considered by College. It is also worth noting that Centres are necessarily inter-school entities and the nature of those with which the School is involved is not under the sole control of the School.

#### **5.1.2. *Criteria of research quality and productivity should be measured against external indicators of international and national standing.***

The absence of such information may have been an issue when the reviewers were undertaking the review, but the recent publication of the QS World University rankings (in which the School emerges as 10<sup>th</sup> in Europe and 48<sup>th</sup> in the world) should satisfy this requirement.

**5.1.3.** *A number of small initiatives would contribute to potentially transformative cultural changes within the School, e.g.*

- *Introduction of a seminar series.*

The School has always mounted an annual seminar series, though the format has changed from year to year. The Director of Research will ensure that such seminars occur in future, arranged in such a way as to perform their function most efficiently.

- *Community building activities such as daily or weekly tea-making in the common room by one of the groups operating via rota.*

The School operates in a collegiate and harmonious way, but members of the School are conscious that it would be desirable if an even better sense of community could be developed. Something along the lines recommended has already been initiated, with a 'coffee and pastries' session being organised in association with each of the School Committee meetings.

- *A weekly informal, internal seminar at which students, post docs and PIs can present ongoing work/ideas should be set up.*

Seminars of this kind are, in fact, run in various forms. Whilst recent experience has shown that seminars are successful in attracting an audience of staff and students working in the specific area of the seminar topic, the challenge has been to mount seminars which appeal more broadly across the discipline, and the School is constantly experimenting with new ways of organising this kind of activity.

- *Incentives for junior faculty to write grant applications. 1000 Euros could be given to their research fund for every full application submitted.*

The School will give favourable consideration to this proposal.

- *A weekly or monthly news 'round-up' of the publications, lectures, grants and personal news (e.g. births) of members of the School could be made more generally available.*

- The School web pages include an announcements section which provides for the dissemination of information of this kind. Consideration will be given to expanding this as appropriate

- *A database of grants could be made available by the Director of Research, forwarded to all members of the school.*

The Director of Research will compile and disseminate this information in future.

**5.1.4.** *A Public Engagement committee should be formed to encourage and develop the presentation of the public face of the School.*

This recommendation was favourably received, and the proposal will be discussed by the School Committee at a future meeting.

**5.1.5.** *Encouragement of co-supervision of PhDs between CRC, ICIN and the School members in the Aras an Phiarsaigh building could be enhanced.*

Such co-supervision is already encouraged. It is difficult to know how it could be enhanced.

**5.1.6.** *Ways of relieving post-graduate course organisers of the additional administrative loads of undergraduate teaching should be considered.*

The overall teaching load of staff on postgraduate courses is the issue here, and continual attempts are made to reduce this load. Such staff are not required to make a major contribution to teaching on the undergraduate programme, but it is desirable to utilise their expertise of on that programme where possible.

**5.1.7.** *There was an urgent need for appraisal of junior faculty and post-doctoral research fellows focusing on career development and their roles in the School.*

This recommendation will be considered favourably by the School Executive at a future meeting.

**5.1.8.** *Methods of obtaining destination data of students and post-docs should be enhanced. Compiling data-bases on undergraduate academic profiles (e.g. science or non-science) and on general demographics may aid future University financial planning.*

First destination information is routinely gathered at College level for undergraduate students by the College Careers Advisory Service. Information is gathered locally at School level in relation to research student destinations and it is intended to expand this in the future to incorporate the postgraduate taught courses and post-doctoral research fellows (to the extent that resources allow). The suggestion that the School should compile information on the academic backgrounds of undergraduate students (e.g., science or non-science) is an interesting one which the School will explore with the College Student Records Office. It is expected that the provision of reports for Schools in College in relation to all of these issues will be much improved by the implementation of the new Student Information System.

## **5.2 Long Term**

**5.2.1** *Strategic hiring of senior academics would enhance synergy between different groups in Psychology (TCIN, Centres and other research groups). Careful attention should be given to retention, as well as searching and hiring, strategies.*

This is and always has been the case.

*e.g. Appointment of a Chair with a strong reputation in developmental psychology or cognate discipline with the ability to bridge research interests in genetics, neuropsychology and other areas.*

This suggestion was made too late to affect the recruitment process of the Chair of Childhood Research, and anyway does not take into account the fact that this Chair (as Director of the CRC) needs to have interests that link the School of Psychology and the School of Social Work and Social Policy.

*5.2.2. A process should be created that would determine the strategic direction of the School of Psychology, that is in line with the Strategic Plan, and would eventually result in the appointment of a new Head. This strategic plan should inform the direction of new hirings in the school and be linked more transparently to budget allocations.*

The Strategic Plan does inform the 'direction of new hirings' and is linked directly to budget allocations.

*5.2.3. The process of appointing the next Head should be reviewed. Although the traditions and regulations of the College should of course be respected, it would be appropriate for an internationally-recognised School to appoint by interview via a panel including external, possibly international members, whilst taking into careful consideration the views of the Faculty.*

The procedure for the appointment of a new Head is covered by College regulations. These do permit the kind of process suggested in this recommendation, but the recruitment of someone from outside would almost certainly be ruled out by financial and other restrictions.

*5.2.4. An overall comment on the form of the return by the School for this Review is that it could have been made easier for the Committee to do its work and draft this report had the Review materials provided by the School been presented more succinctly, with their main topics being related more directly (and sequentially) to the headings requested by the Central Administration of the College in their written instructions for the compilation of our report. This could perhaps be borne in mind for future Reviews.*

The School Committee supported the reviewers comments that the format of the requirements of the self assessment document which Schools are asked to complete should be standardised to a template which matches the headings under which the reviewers are asked to report. Currently, the guidelines for the completion of the self-assessment report by the School and the guidelines for completion of the report for external reviewers are different.

**School of Psychology**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> June 2011**

## **7. Pro-Dean's response to the Review report for Psychology**

I commend the School of Psychology on the results of this review, which while overwhelming positive, perhaps underplayed a number of the School's achievements. Some of the reviewers' recommendations have been overtaken by events, for example, their suggestion that there was a lack of quantitative indicators of the School's performance in research productivity and quality. Subsequent to the carrying out of the review, the School was ranked 48<sup>th</sup> in the World and 10<sup>th</sup> in Europe in the QS World University Rankings and the publication of this ranking should satisfy the need for external indicators measuring the School's performance in this field.

I note that the external reviewers describe the School as 'remarkably committed to high quality teaching.' Undergraduate students conveyed a clear impression of the research led spirit of the School and postgraduate students described it as 'supportive, collaborative and facilitative of their professional and academic development'.

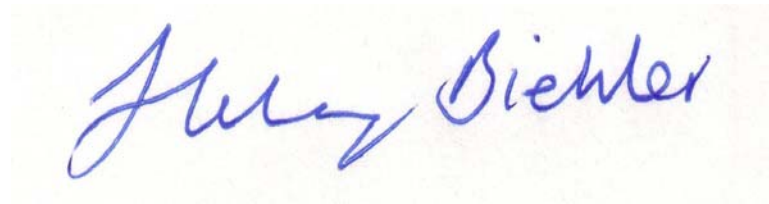
While the reviewers suggested that the School criteria for establishing, evaluating and sustaining research centres need review, as the School points out in its response, this is a matter to be determined at College level and the recommendation from the Research Committee that Trinity Research Centres should be required to submit annual reports should go some way towards meeting the reviewers' concerns.

The School in its response to comments made in the reviewers' report made specific reference to the difficulty in recruiting members of staff to undertake directorships and questioned whether the taking on of such roles is given sufficient weight in the context of promotion applications. I feel that this may be an issue across College and that more explicit recognition of the role played by such directors should be given, both in terms of workload models which schools may develop and operate and also in the promotion process.

The external reviewers describe the practice of electing a head of school from amongst its current members as 'quaint and questionable' and recommend that the process of appointing heads should be reviewed. I suggest that the method currently used to elect heads has in most cases served schools well. However, it should also be pointed out that the method of appointment of a head of school proposed by the reviewers is consistent with that for professorial appointments and, in general, individuals appointed to such positions are expected to take on a leadership role in Schools.

The fact that the School's activities are spread over a number of locations is clearly of concern and I will work with the Director of Buildings and the School to consider how best to locate the various parts of the School in contiguous space, having due regard for College's constraints on space particularly in the current financial climate.

Finally I would draw attention to the recommendation made both by the external reviewers and the School in its response that the format of the self-assessment document which schools are asked to complete should relate more directly to the headings under which reviewers are asked to report.



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Professor Hilary Biehler  
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Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences

8 June 2011