# Quality Assurance / Quality Improvement Programme for Academic Units

# 2006-2007



PEER REVIEW GROUP REPORT

FOR THE

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION STUDIES

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**Introduction**

This Quality review has been conducted in accordance with a framework model developed and agreed through the Irish Universities Association Quality Committee (formerly CHIU – IUQSC) and complies with the provisions of Section 35 of the Universities Act (1997). The model consists of a number of basic steps.

1. An internal team in the Unit being reviewed completes a detailed self-assessment report (SAR). It should be noted that this document is confidential to the Unit and to the Review Panel and to senior officers of the University.
2. This report is sent to a team of peer assessors, the Peer Review Group (PRG) – composed of members from outside DCU and from other areas of DCU – who then visit the Unit and conduct discussions with a range of staff, students and other stakeholders.
3. The PRG then writes its own report. The Unit is given the chance to correct possible factual errors before the Peer Group Report (PGR) is finalised.
4. The Unit produces a draft Quality Improvement Plan (QuIP) in response to the various issues and findings of the SAR and PGR Reports.
5. The PGR and the Unit draft QuIP are considered by the Quality Promotion Committee.
6. The draft QuIP is discussed in a meeting between the Unit, members of the Peer Group, the Director of Quality Promotion and Senior Management. The University's responses are written into the QuIP, and the result is the finalised QuIP.
7. A summary of the PRG Report, the QuIP and the Executive Response is sent to the Governing Authority of the University, who will approve publication in a manner that they see fit.

This document is the report referred to in Step 3 above

## 1.    The Unit

### *Location of the Unit*

The School of Education Studies is located in the Henry Grattan Building in the centre of the DCU campus. It uses lecture and class rooms within the building but can access other lecture rooms through the University central booking system.

### *Staff*

The School did not supply a breakdown of staff contracts. In the following table eight staff whose status is unclear are counted under "permanent". Staff described as "researcher", "research officer", "teaching assistant" or "on secondment" have been included in the lecturer count because this would appear to best describe their role and standing.

Table 1.1:  Grade Structure of the School of Education Studies Staff

|  | Permanent | 3 year Contract | 2 year contract | 11 month contract | Part Time | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Professor |  |  |  |  |  | 0 |
| Associate Professor |  |  |  |  |  | 0 |
| Visiting Professor |  |  |  |  |  | 0 |
| Senior Lecturer | 1 |  |  |  |  | 1 |
| Lecturer above bar | 6 |  |  |  |  | 6 |
| Lecturer below bar | 8 |  |  |  | 37 | 45 |
| Technical Staff | 0 |  |  |  |  | 0 |
| Administrative Staff | 1 |  |  |  |  | 1 |

Two lecturers below bar supported by external funding.

### *Product / Processes*

The School delivers or contributes to the taught programmes described below. Unusually in the University, significant numbers of the students on these programmes do not come from traditional backgrounds. Some of these programmes are delivered in co-operation with other Schools, including the Schools of Physical Sciences and Chemical Sciences, the Business School, and the School of Health and Human Performance.

Many staff members also engage in research at an individual level, and engage in funded collaborative research programmes.

Table 1.2: Taught Programmes

| Programme | Duration (years) | Total ECTS Credits | Credits from Ed Studies | Student Numbers 2006/07 | FTEs 2006/07 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| BSc in Education & Training | 3 | 180 | 180 | 168 | 168 |
| BSc in Education & Training (Part-time) | 3 | 180 | 180 | 64 | 64 |
| BSc in Science Education | 4 | 180 | 60 | 78 | 26 |
| BSc in Physical Education & Biology | 4 | 180 | 60 | 32 | 10 |
| NAVET (Non-accredited Visitors in Education & Training) | 1 | 10 | 10 | 22 | 4 |
| International Foundational Course | 1 | 65 | 15 | 22 | 5 |
| Graduate Diploma in Education | 2 | 60 | 60 | 66 | 33 |
| MSc in Education & Training Management | 1 | 90 | 90 | 1 | 1 |
| MSc in Education & Training Management (Part-time) | 2 | 90 | 90 | 110 | 55 |
| MSc in Guidance & Counselling (Part-time) | 2 | 90 | 90 | 0 | 0 |
| MSc in Guidance & Counselling (APEL) | 1 | 90 | 37.5 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | | | | | 366 |

Assumptions in calculating FTEs: Full-time undergraduate and graduate diploma students take app. 60 credits p.a., and full-time M.Sc. students take app. 90 credits p.a. Research students are not included; in this category there are 18 part-time Doctor in Education students, and 2 full-time and 2 part-time PhD students.


## 2.    The Self-Assessment Process

### *The Co-ordinating Committee*

The members of the School Quality Review Committee were:

> Dr. James O'Higgins-Norman (Lecturer, Chair)
> Dr. Charlotte Holland (Lecturer)
> Mr. John Lalor (Lecturer)
> Dr. Majella McSharry (Lecturer)
> Mr. Conor Sullivan (Lecturer)

Dr. Brendan Walsh (Lecturer)

## *Methodology Adopted*

The Quality Review Process within the School of Education Studies was conducted as follows:

May 2006:           Chair of Quality Review Committee Appointed.
Sept 2006:          Briefing to all staff by chair followed by election of Quality Review Committee.
Sept—Dec 2006:  Quality Review Committee invited submissions from key staff for inclusion in Self Assessment Report.
Oct to Dec 2006: Quality Review Committee met to plan away day and consulted with all staff on working programme.
1$^{st}$ Dec 2006:     Away Day held in Athlone with outside facilitator; included reflections on strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.
Jan—Feb 2007:   Chair compiles SAR
Feb 2007:           Draft Report made available to all staff for comment
March 2007:        Report Finalised by Chair and Committee and sent to Quality Promotion Unit for distribution.
17$^{th}$ April 2007:  Day of Reflection held in Crown Plaza Hotel to finalise arrangements for visit of PRG.

## 3.    The Peer Review Group Process

## *The Review Group*

The members of the Peer Review Group were:

Dr Tom Mullins, Department of Education, University College Cork (Chair)

Prof. Arnold Danzig, Professor of Educational Leadership, Arizona State University

Dr Sinéad Breathnach, National Coordinator, School Development Planning Initiative, Marino Institute of Education

Prof. Robert Forster, School of Chemical Sciences, Dublin City University

Prof. Joe Morris, School of Computing, Dublin City University (Rapporteur)

The review process consisted of three discrete activities:

1. Familiarisation with the SAR in advance of the visit.
2. A site visit by the Review Group conducted over two and a half days to review and validate the SAR, to talk with members of the School and its stakeholders, and to present its preliminary findings and recommendations to the School.
3. The preparation of this report, involving further on-line discussion among the Review Group.

## *Site Visit Programme*

*Day 1 (Wednesday 25 April 2007)*

| 14.00 – 15.00 | Meeting of members of the Peer Review Group, and briefing by the Director of Quality Promotion. |
| 15.00 – 16.00 | Group agrees work schedule and assignment of tasks. |
| 16.00 – 17.00 | Consideration of Self-Assessment Report with members of the Quality Committee of the School. |
| 17.00 – 17.30 | Meeting with Staff in School, including a short film on the School. Inspect the School's accommodation. |
| 19.30 – 11.00 | Dinner for members of the Peer Review Group, Head of School, Director of Quality Promotion, and School Quality Committee. |

*Day 2 (Thursday, 26 April 2007)*

| 09.00 – 10.00 | Meeting with University Senior Management Group |
| 10.00 – 13.00 | Separate meetings with (i) Dean of Faculty; (ii) Head of School (accompanied by incoming Head); (iii) Chairs of Programme Boards; (iv) Year Co-ordinators |
| 13.00 – 14.00 | Brief discussion with the Director of Quality Promotion and working lunch. |
| 14.00 – 17.00 | Meetings with the following groups: (i) students; (ii) alumni; (iii) individual staff who asked to meet Review Group; (iv) stakeholders (Library, Registry, Education Services, Disability Services) |
| 17.00 – 17.30 | Meeting with VP for Research |
| 19.30 – 10.30 | Working dinner for Review Group |

*Day 3 (Friday, 27 April 2007)*

| 09.00 – 11.00 | Working session for Review Group |
| 11.00 – 12.00 | Meetings with outgoing and incoming Head of School |
| 12.00 – 12.15 | Brief discussion with the Director of Quality Promotion |
| 12.15 – 04.00 | Working lunch for members of Review Group, Preparation of 1st Draft of report, and preparation for exit presentation. |
| 16.00 – 16.30 | Exit presentation to all staff by the Chair of the Review Group |

### *Methodology*

The Review Group followed the timetable of meetings described above. It met initially with the Director of Quality Promotion to discuss the visit, and in particular the SAR. The Review Group then planned how it would proceed, and spent some time discussing the adequacy of the SAR. The Review Group met with the School Quality Committee and further discussed the SAR. Requests were made for missing data.

Some of this information was made available on the following two days. The meetings were followed by an evening meal for members of the Review Group and the School Quality Committee. The second day consisted of an intense series of meetings with various partners, followed by a working dinner in the evening. The third day included separate meeting with the outgoing and incoming Heads of School, followed by a working session to draft a preliminary version of the final report, and finishing with a presentation to staff.

### Schedule of Activity

The members of the School, Faculty, and University contributed fully and sometimes very generously to the work of the review. The Review Group worked as a team. Each major part of this report was first drafted by an individual member, who then led a group discussion on the area leading to a re-drafting.

### View of the Self-Assessment Report

The Peer Review Group was hampered by shortcomings in the self-assessment as supplied by the School. There was a significant absence of quantitative data with regard to student FTE's, staff contracts, hours worked by staff, proportion of staff hours given to various activities, breakdown of student numbers across years, retention rates, and research outcomes. The data pertaining to research outcomes was unclear regarding the value of research grants, and the publication data was organised so as to be impossible to interpret with reasonable effort. As a result, the Review Group were effectively unable to benchmark the research activity of the School. The descriptions of the taught programmes were sketchy, significantly limiting the Review Group's ability to assess courses.

## 4    Findings of the Review Group

### 4.1  Background and Context

The School of Education Studies was founded in 1995. Initially it was staffed almost wholly by part-time staff, and operated semi-independently of the main faculty structures in the University. Staffing has become more permanent in the last five years or so, and the School now has 16 full-time staff of which 10 are on permanent contracts. Additionally, it recently became part of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, following a reorganisation of the University into executive faculties. The ethos of the School was formed when it was independent, and adapting to a more structured operating environment has been one of the challenges facing the School.

Concurrent with these changes has been a strong growth in student numbers, from a small handful to around 500 today, equivalent to about 366 FTEs (full-time equivalents). The students are spread over three undergraduate programmes (plus some ancillary courses) and four taught postgraduate programmes. Two salient features of the courses are, firstly, that they involve significant co-operation with other schools in the University, and secondly that they are to a considerable extent targeted at non-traditional students.

The core undergraduate degree is the B.Sc. in Education and Training, delivered over three years in both full-time and part-time modes. It aims to develop educators and trainers who can design, deliver, and evaluate coursework in a variety of contexts. The other undergraduate degrees – the B.Sc. in Science Education and the B.Sc. in Physical Education and Biology – are each joint ventures with other Schools. They aim to develop teachers of science and PE, respectively, for 2nd-level schools.

The main postgraduate programmes are the M.Sc. in Education & Training Management (delivered full-time in one year, or part-time over two years) and the Graduate Diploma in Education (delivered part-time over two years). The former programme has two strands: Leadership and eLearning. They are designed to provide professional development in coping with a rapidly changing environment, to educators and trainers working in education generally, corporate training, industry, nursing, government departments and other state agencies. The Graduate Diploma in Education is designed to meet the certification needs of teachers in 2nd-level schools and colleges of further education. An M.Sc. in Guidance and Counselling is due to start in September 2007. Additionally, a professional doctoral programme in education leadership has been initiated in partnership with the Business School; it includes both taught and research elements.

The School has particularly sought to identify and address the education and training needs of those working in education outside the traditional schools (such as trainers in industry, in youth work, in further education, etc.) as well as those less well positioned to attend university full-time. To accommodate this constituency, the School delivers several of its courses in part-time mode, and runs a significant proportion of the classes at evenings and weekends.

Although most of the energies of the School have been directed towards teaching, the School has also engaged in research programmes, primarily at the level of individual academics. The main areas of funded research have been citizenship & intercultural education, equality & diversity, well-being and guidance in schools, curriculum & training, and technology and science education.

The staff of the School were formerly spread over several locations, but were all re-located to a single site in recent years. They now share the Henry Grattan building with several other schools.

Following the introduction of executive faculties, schools are no longer budget holders; rather financial control is the responsibility of the faculties, each led by an executive dean. Faculties are allocated resources by the University primarily in proportion to their share of the total number of students, and these resources are in turn distributed among the constituent schools. Resources come by way of a *pay* and a *non-pay* allocation, the former for covering salaries and the latter for covering running costs. Permanent staff are funded from the pay budget, and therefore teaching loads are the primary determinant of the number of permanent academics in a school. Schools can obtain additional income in various ways, of which the most significant are research contracts, trust funds, various competitive structural funding programmes operated by state agencies, and industrial sponsorship.

The development of research and teaching in each faculty is the responsibility of the Management, Research, and Teaching Committees in the faculty. This structure will typically be mirrored in the constituent schools of the faculty, and interactions between the corresponding committees are one of the primary mechanisms by which the school influences the major policies under which it operates. Each faculty is driven by its own strategic plan which in turn gives local expression to the University's strategic plan, currently *Leadership Through Foresight* covering the years 2006-2008 (`http://www.dcu.ie/strategy`).

See `http://www.dcu.ie/education_studies` for additional information about the School.

## 4.2  Organisation and Management

The School of Education Studies is a constituent school in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in DCU. Dr Gerry McNamara is currently the Head of the School but will shortly step down after many years in the post. The School has an academic full-time staff of 15 of whom 9 are permanent appointments, plus an additional 37 part-time staff on the lecturer grade. The contribution of each part-time staff member typically amounts to the delivery of a module or part of a module.

The School has been small until recent years, and capable of being administered without much formality. This has been successful in part because staff have been willing to give generously in a strong collegiate environment where everyone knows one another. There is a good team spirit in the School.

A School Committee has operated, meeting about 6 times a year, limited to full-time staff. We did not see what mechanisms are in place to get the views of the thirty-seven part-time staff, and to ensure that their needs are met. The Review Group was not given the opportunity to meet with a representative group of part-time staff, and so their experiences are not reflected in this report.

A Research Committee has recently been formed, and is in the process of establishing itself. This needs to be progressed urgently. The convenorship of the committee was unclear to us, and needs to be quickly established. The responsibilities of the convenor should extend to building the research profile of the School and supporting staff in growing their research.

Teaching is administered by Programme Boards, one per programme (with some sharing of meetings), supplemented by Year Heads and various co-ordinators (such as a co-ordinator for teaching practice). The teaching programmes of the School are already well-developed, but there is a need to oversee their efficient delivery and ensure that any future growth of teaching is focussed. The School should see to this by establishing a Teaching Committee.

The incoming Head of School might welcome the advice of a Management Committee meeting regularly, and we suggest that careful consideration be given to this.

The School should ensure that all staff are fully engaged in developing the new structures and polices, with every opportunity to contribute. In particular, committees should operate openly with published agendas and minutes. As the School grows it needs to take active steps to ensure good communication among staff. In particular it should develop an intranet that becomes a repository of minutes, staff responsibilities, policies, statistical data, etc.

There is some evidence that the School does not fully appreciate how it can best operate within Faculty and University structures. The School is still in the process of adapting to the structure of the new Faculty, having formerly been a wholly independent entity. It needs to make every effort to embrace the Faculty structure fully, and learn to work within its processes to achieve the School's goals. There is consistent evidence that the School is not the best at working within University processes; it needs to address this.

The School should work with the Faculty to develop administrative and support structures for research (e.g. accounts, reporting, IT/AV technician) at the Faculty level.

The School has now reached a size where it must adopt a more organised approach to data collection. It is being hampered both in its decision making and in making its case for new resources by the absence of defendable statistics. These include FTE's (full-time student equivalents) and SCR's (student credit ratios) and their distribution over the various teaching programmes, accurate figures for staff contact hours, retention rates for each year in each programme, research statistics (see Section 4.4), etc. In particular, the School needs to monitor the costs of resourcing each programme, and indeed the major component activities in each programme.

The School's workload allocation strategy is largely informal. It should be replaced urgently with a formal written policy for allocating workload, arrived at after full consultation with staff. The policy should be applied annually in an open and transparent manner, and the outcome made known to all (e.g. by publication of allocations on the School intranet). The agreed policy should allow for some individualisation, such as giving reduced teaching or administrative loads to new staff committed to developing a research programme, or to established staff who are starting a new research direction of strategic benefit to the School. Academics should be able to predict the impact of their actions (such as recruiting a graduate student) on their teaching contact hours.

The School justifiably prides itself on the success of its teaching programmes, and the quality of care given to its students. It measures its achievements primarily with regard to these. In the future development of the School, this measure needs to be supplemented with equal regard for research achievements. This is particularly important if staff members are to realise their potential to the full and develop rewarding careers within a university structure.

There is relatively little programmed interaction between the School and the linked colleges (St. Patrick's and Mater Dei). Such interaction is important if the linkage is to bring added value, but opportunities for developing it are not being vigorously

pursued. We suggest that the School's new emphasis on research and taught doctorates might lead to a new exploration of working more closely with the linked colleges. The support of the University will be required for this.

All of these developments are best pursued in the context of a strategic plan which the School should develop without delay to ensure that growth over the next few years and beyond is balanced, resourced, and properly focussed on achieving the desired outcomes.

### 4.3  Programmes and Instruction

The School is characterised by a strong commitment to a range of social and educational constituencies, both in the local educational community and outside it. As well as serving those who work in second-level and further education, it is unique in the context of university education in Ireland in offering degree courses to those who work outside conventional educational structures, such as in Youth Reach, Traveller Education, Adult Literacy and community development programmes. It also caters for part-time students working in industry, human resources, and FAS (the national training and employment authority), etc.

The School serves these constituencies in a series of programmes tailored to their particular needs. Thus the student intake ranges from young undergraduate students on pre-service teacher education programmes to mature adults in pursuit of personal development, professional accreditation and/or academic achievements.

The practices and policies of the School are imbued with a generous and caring philosophy and a social vision that is admirable. In their professional practice and in the culture of education they have created, the academic staff exemplify all the traits that are characteristic of such an outlook, including high availability to students, adaptability and flexibility in approaches to teaching and learning, and a constant willingness to introduce programmes that serve emerging needs. Staff show a high professional commitment to their students at all levels; in particular, the high contact hours they devote to them is remarkable and well above university norms. It was clear to the Review Group that students past and present are deeply appreciative of the supportive structures that have been put in place.

It is no surprise then that the policies the School has pursued over the last number of years have led to hugely increased student numbers, rising steadily from small numbers in 1995 to the present total of over 500. There is evidently a continual high rate of applications for most of the programmes which could push these numbers even higher. The School now has in place a firm foundation and should begin to think about consolidating its teaching achievements. This will allow for assessment and re-appraisal of the direction in which it wishes to proceed in the coming years without being committed to the view that "more is always better".

The Review Group was most sympathetic to the vision and commitment that lies behind this story of growth and success. It recognises that the School has achieved a national and international profile and reputation for its unique portfolio of programmes, but also that its innovative and radical approach makes non-stop and

significant demands on the staff of the School in terms of time and personal space. From the perspective of the hard-working staff, the School's request for an additional 22 staff for teaching purposes may be seen as an appeal for help to maintain and develop coherently the world that has been created. However, in the context of university education such a request is unrealistic and untenable in terms of financial and spatial constraints, and may be out of line with the overall strategic plans of the University. We advise that the School should adopt an alternative strategy as it looks to the future.

Essentially, the School has become a victim of its own success. It has pursued its stated objectives with dedication, but now the demands and expectations that have arisen could undermine what has been achieved. In the view of the Review Group it is not advisable for the School to develop any more new programmes, at least not until it has developed a strategy for deploying its resources more cost-effectively. In the immediate future the School should review its present portfolio of programmes with a view to rationalising student intake, reducing staff contact time, rationalising where possible the programmes' modular content, and reappraising the frequency at which some programmes are offered. These may be seen as radical suggestions, but they are realistic and necessary if staff are to fully develop as professional academics and if they are to take advantage of opportunities for advancement and promotion. The School will significantly benefit from nurturing and cultivating its staff in these important ways.

It is imperative that the workload issue, in particular the balance between teaching and research in the contribution of each staff member, should be addressed immediately. Every aspect of teaching should be assessed as to its cost, as to whether it can be done more cost effectively in some other way, and even as to whether it needs to be done at all. For example, we did not see that the cost of interviewing so many course applicants was justified (or even that it was a good process for assessing applicants). We saw little evidence of seeking to share modules across courses, and no argument was put to us that microteaching was needed to the full extent that it is offered in all contexts (some students with previous experience suggested it was less beneficial in their case). Day-long journeys to meet with one or two students in placement are not a good use of staff time. Some students also suggested that a minimum level of computer skills (such as ECDL) should be a prerequisite leading to both better preparedness in students and a reduced burden of support. It may well be the case that a less intensely hands-on approach to interacting with students might help the students to cultivate a more independent approach to learning.

Some students perceived a degree of overlap in modules. Teaching staff should discuss this to ensure that where overlap is intended – for example, to provide different perspectives on a particular topic – students understand why this is so and see the relevant linkage. Of course, any purposeless overlap should be eliminated.

The School should review its policy for placement in schools, developing a more structured arrangement that facilitates a fuller involvement of schools in supervision and mentoring. Additionally, the lack of a practicum in the final year of the B.Sc. in Science Education needs some consideration.

All of these initiatives should be undertaken in the context of a strategic plan which the School should set about developing without delay.

## 4.4  Scholarship and Research

The School values and encourages good quality research, particularly research that engages with issues of citizenship & intercultural education, equality & diversity, well-being and guidance in schools, curriculum & training, technology and science education as well as innovations in teaching and learning.

The members of the School are clearly motivated and keen to develop independent research programmes. There have been some significant successes, notably in the EU Framework Programme, that continue to be built upon and recognised, e.g., acting as the review site for Leonardo projects. While the overall level of external funding achieved (in excess of €1.2 m) is significant, the School should benchmark itself using this and other key performance indicators (KPIs) against national competitors and schools internationally whose performance the School might seek to emulate. In particular, it should promote a culture of excellence through the publication of research findings in leading, peer reviewed, international journals, presentations at formative conferences, as well as developing other DCU Executive approved KPIs.

Notwithstanding the standard practice in this field, research success appears to have been largely achieved by individuals rather than through teams of critical mass which are essential for international impact. Staff appear enthusiastic and open to developing alliances, as in the proposals for the Centre for Evaluation in Education (CEE) and the Centre for Pluralism in Education (CPE) although these activities do not appear to have been prioritised highly. Given a substantial investment of a collective effort, one of these Centres could apply for University Designated Research Centre status and attract some development funds.

The School is recognised both nationally and within the EU as a high profile, quality driven contributor to teacher training as well as teaching and training. The Review Group believe that the development and delivery of a focused research strategy that is consistent with Faculty and University priorities is the key step in the School progressing to the next level. An initial research strategy should be developed immediately through the Research Committee and further refined using an external facilitator. The strategy should fit within the framework of the Faculty (working through the Associate Dean for Research) and DCU strategic plans (working through the OVPR). The plan should identify prioritised research areas and mechanisms to establish critical mass in those areas.

The School needs to develop the role and operational model for the recently convened Research Committee. The Research Committee should assume full responsibility for the distribution of the School Research Allocation and work with the OVPR to explore additional funding sources to support their prioritised research areas. The convenor should have significant research experience, be appointed for a three year term (with an appropriate reduction in other duties) and directly support the development of research proposals both within the School and with partners inside and outside DCU. Most importantly, the School should work with the Faculty to

recruit a Senior Academic with significant experience of initiating, directing, and coordinating collaborative research projects.

There is a significant opportunity to become a leader in a national debate about national education policy. This activity could be pursued in cooperation with the Theme Leader and Theme Committee for the University's *Education and Learning* theme (as described in *Leadership Through Foresight*, the University's strategic plan for 2006-2008).

The Review Group held in high regard the School's expertise in areas such as pluralism, lifelong learning, educating disadvantaged members of society and multiculturalism and believes these areas offer significant research opportunities. However, current projects appear to be focused on "evaluation" type research rather than "discovery", and significant focusing on, and perhaps some realignment with national priorities will be necessary. Research success that complements those achieved in teaching, community and outreach activities, will best place academics to compete for promotion, which is essential in addressing the current small base of senior academics. However, the University may wish to consider innovative procedures so as to incentivise strong refocusing of the School's efforts to develop a significant research base.

The School's joint taught programmes with the Faculties of Business as well as Science and Health are a significant activity and provide an excellent base on which to create nationally distinctive research areas. Innovative programmes of this kind might open up new funding opportunities in Bio and ICT related research, e.g., through SFI and PRTLI. Within the Faculty the School could create novel, distinctive research programmes by building research links with, for example, the Graduate School with Law and Government.

The School should explore opportunities to drive closer linkage between its education and research missions. The School has an abiding interest in teaching and methodological approaches, and so it is ideally positioned to develop a strategic research plan built around the scholarship of teaching and learning. The range of students in the School, and the diversity of the programmes, should afford ample contexts and yield interesting data for significant research output in that field. This would deepen and broaden the vision of the School in relation to its chosen role, and could potentially establish it as a centre of excellence in the education of its particular social and educational constituencies. As far as the Review Group is aware, very little significant research has been done in the Irish context in the field of further education, and it is an opportunity that is worth investigating.

There are significant issues that need to be addressed if the School is to realise a significant, deep research mission that contributes to both Faculty and University strategies. The overriding commitment of the staff is towards excellence in teaching, often to somewhat challenging student groups, and involving the delivery of a significant number of programmes with little sharing of modules. This defining ethos must change to one in which research is not only increasingly valued, but also teaching workloads are significantly reduced (towards a typical load for a research active academic of approximately 150 hours).

The School should now consider consolidating its achievements and refining its offerings rather than undertaking further growth. These actions will reduce teaching hours so as to create time for creative, focused and high impact research that is strategically positioned. This shift of ethos needs to be followed through in *all aspects* of School activity including making strategic decisions about programme offerings, teaching methods and staff recruitment so as to create a sustainable critical mass of researchers in areas prioritised by the School. For example, current teaching loads make it impossible for junior staff to establish independent research programmes. Equally, the current practice of using very significant numbers of part-time staff makes it difficult to build a coherent, strategic research programme. There must be a shift to a higher proportion of permanent, full-time academics. The Review Group notes that an increased number of graduate students could contribute to the teaching mission, e.g. through tutorials.

Relatively few academics appear to appreciate internal DCU structures including funding mechanisms, national, EU and international research priorities or best-practice in directing research. It is essential for the School to create internal structures and processes, including mentoring by senior academics from across the Faculty and increased opportunities for academics to participate in Faculty and University committees. Also, the School appears to be largely unaware of where its research portfolio ranks in relation to national and international competitors, its vulnerability to duplication elsewhere or opportunities for collaboration either inside the School, Faculty, University or beyond.

### 4.5 Social and Community Service

The School has a strong ethic of social and community service. It has developed taught programmes that are accessible in part-time modes, and that meet the needs of non-traditional and non-mainstream students, including mature students. It provides accredited training courses for unqualified tutors, many of whom work in non-traditional settings serving local communities and disadvantaged groups. It collaborates with the Whitehall College of Further Education in an access programme for students from non-traditional backgrounds. In delivering all of these programmes, it recognises the need to give appropriate support to students, often on a one-to-one basis.

The concerns are that the approach to social and community service adopted by the School is not sustainable, and that it limits the possibility of giving expression to the School's social and community service ethic in research that would impact on national policy and practice. The model of course delivery imposes too high a teaching load on the staff of the School.

The School engages in research on a range of issues related to equality and diversity in society, and involves itself in research projects for a number of local area partnerships serving disadvantaged communities. That said, the research has been somewhat fragmented for want of an integrated coherent research policy in the School.

The School should try to increase its involvement in the administration and life of the University.

## 4.6 Staffing, Accommodation and Resources

The School has an academic staff complement of 15 of whom 9 are permanent, plus an additional 37 part-time staff on the lecturer grade. Staff gave a strong impression of dedication and commitment, particularly in developing and delivering innovative taught programmes. Their commitment is particularly evident in their dealings with non-traditional students, and in their willingness to teach at unsocial hours. That staff now find themselves overworked and lacking in balance as between teaching, research, support for students, and general administration may be viewed as a symptom of a maturing school of education entering a new phase of its development.

The School has grown strongly in recent years with the result that most of the academic staff occupy junior ranks. There are currently no staff of professorial rank, and just one at senior lecturer level. We understand that this will improve shortly, but both University and School must look to growing the number of senior staff to University norms over the next few years. In particular, there are few staff with experience of running research programmes.

The School will be in a better position to plan and argue for increased staffing in the future if staffing levels are justified by strategic plans supported by accurate data regarding levels of resourcing and growth in demand for its programmes.

The increasing emphasis on research should lead to a re-evaluation as to the best balance between permanent and part-time staff.

The Review Group has a concern that some commitments are made without fully thinking through how they are to be resourced. For example, the new professional doctoral degree (Ed.D.) in educational leadership will create a significant demand for research supervision that the School may struggle to provide. We recommend that planning for this should be proceeded with sooner rather than later, perhaps seeking supervisory support from academics in other schools in the University. Neither is it clear to us how the new M.Sc. in Guidance and Counselling will be adequately resourced within current working practices in the School.

There is one secretary in the School, and additional secretarial and administrative support is provided by the Faculty office. There are no technical support staff. All of this represents rather little support for a school of this size, although it follows the norm found throughout the University. The School would certainly benefit from some technical support; we suggest that the Faculty look to providing this in the same way that it provides central administrative support.

The School occupies 18 offices of an adequate standard. However, they are located in the Henry Grattan building which is architecturally poor, with crowded corridors, low ceilings, and poor quality class rooms. It is particularly unfortunate that the School is located in an annex of the building, and as a result lacks a significant physical

presence on campus. We understand that the University is aware of the building's shortcomings and is seeking funding for a long-term solution.

It is not usual in DCU for schools to have their own lecture rooms. Although the School of Education Studies has two of them it is not quite the blessing it might appear to be. Their low ceilings and absence of windows make them very unpleasant for more than occasional use, yet we are told that students may spend a three-hour stint in them in the evenings or weekends. In the short to medium term, the School might seek to make more use of the other lectures rooms in the university. The University should support them in this by making rooms in higher-quality buildings available for evening and weekend use, and by giving the School priority over outside use in the evenings and at weekends.

Overall, the School delivers education to significant numbers of students at unsocial hours. Many students are professional workers, and many of them pay substantial fees. Their educational experience and their impressions of DCU are not well served by poor facilities. The University should work constructively with the School to find short-term working solutions.

There is a significant practical element in teacher training, arguably justifying the provision of dedicated and fully equipped microteaching laboratories. We sense that a good case might be made for these, but the School did not provide us with sufficient details of taught programmes, supporting documentation, and quantitative data to make a judgement. The School should proceed to build a reasoned argument in favour of improved teaching facilities and teaching equipment (such as video, audio, micro-teaching cameras, video editing facilities, etc.), and then take their case to the Faculty. The School might support its case by identifying aspirational peer schools and providing comparative benchmarks.

In the context of a well-developed research strategy for the School, the University should aggressively seek support for the development of research space for the School, using sources such as the DCU Trust, laboratory sponsors, etc. The School and Faculty should be kept fully apprised of these efforts. The University should also investigate opportunities under institutional grant schemes, such as the Strategic Innovation Fund, to provide supports for research (e.g. library, IT and AV infrastructure) in the areas prioritised for research.

The mechanism by which the library budget for Education Studies is allocated appeared not to be understood either by the School or the Library. In any event, it is lagging behind the growth curve of the School. It should be increased to an amount justified by the size of the School. Additionally, the School should liaise better with the Library to ensure that its budget is fully spent and appropriately allocated across the various teaching and research activities of the School.

## 5    Recommendations for Improvement

The following notation is used in the recommendations for improvement.

- P1: A recommendation that is important *and* requires urgent action.

- P2: A recommendation that is important, but can (or perhaps must) be addressed on a more extended timescale.
- P3: A recommendation which merits serious consideration but which is not considered to be critical to the quality of the ongoing activities in the School.

Additionally, the Review Group indicate the level(s) of the University where action is required by using the following:

- S: School
- F: Faculty
- U: University Executive/Senior Management

## 5.1   Organisation and Management of the School

1.1      P1-S      Develop a strategic plan to ensure that growth over the next few years and beyond is properly focussed (see also 3.3).

1.2      P1-S      Develop strong teaching and research committees, and possibly a management committee.

1.3      P2-S      Purposefully adapt to and work with the structures and processes of the Faculty and University.

1.4      P3-SU     Re-examine opportunities for working with the linked colleges in teaching and research programmes.

1.5      P2-S      Develop a more systematic approach to data collection.

1.6      P2-S      Cost the delivery of programmes and component activities of programmes, with a view to deploying resources more effectively.

1.7      P1-S      Develop a plan for workload allocation that is agreed to by staff, and which is applied openly and transparently each year.

1.8      P3-FS     Work with the Faculty to develop administrative and support structures for research at the Faculty level.

## 5.2  Programmes and Instruction

5.2.1    P1-S      Review the number of contact hours devoted to teaching and student support, and consider what alternative more cost-effective approaches are possible, and how a more independent approach to learning may be inculcated in students.

5.2.2    P1-S      Review the content of programmes to ensure that there is an overall sense of coherence within modules and between modules.

5.2.3    P1-S      Continue to pursue vigorously national accreditation for the subjects SPHE and CSPE from the Teaching Council

| 5.2.4 | P2-S. | Review the range of programmes being offered and their frequency of delivery, with the aim of developing a more sustainable long-term strategy for on-going development of teaching. |

| 5.2.5 | P2-S | Review the policy for placement in schools, developing a more structured arrangement that facilitates a fuller involvement of schools in supervision and mentoring. |

## 5.3 Scholarship and Research

| 5.3.1 | P1-SF | Recruit a Senior Academic with significant experience of initiating, directing, and coordinating collaborative research projects. |

| 5.3.2 | P1-S | Develop the role and operational model for the recently convened Research Committee and its convenor. |

| 5.3.3 | P1-S | Develop an initial research strategy immediately through the Research Committee with the support of an external facilitator. |

| 5.3.4 | P1-S | Promote a culture of excellence through the publication of research findings in leading peer-reviewed international journals and presentations at formative conferences, and develop other DCU Executive approved Key Performance Indicators. |

| 5.3.5 | P2-S | Develop a critical mass of expertise in a small number of nationally or internationally prioritised areas with a long term view to seeking University Designated Research Centre status. |

| 5.3.6 | P2-S | Drive closer linkages between the education and research missions. |

| 5.3.7 | P2-S | Create novel, distinctive research programmes by building research links with schools inside and outside the Faculty. |

## 5.4 Social and Community Service

| 5.4.1 | P3-S | The School should seek to better represent itself within the University, and to generate more publicity for its strong engagement with the community. |

## 5.5 Staffing, Accommodation, and Resources

| 5.5.1 | P1-S | Prepare for the supervision demands of the Ed.D. degree, possibly with support from other schools. |

| 5.5.2 | P1-S | Identify aspirational peer institutions to help in the development of benchmarks for resourcing. |

5.5.3    P2-SU    Plan for increasing the proportion of senior personnel to a level closer to University norms, and additionally increase the number of full-time permanent staff at the expense of part-time and contract staff.

5.5.4    P2-S.    Develop short and long-term funding proposals to purchase needed equipment which supports instruction.

5.5.5    P1-U    Aggressively seek support for the development of research space including the DCU Trust, laboratory sponsors, etc.

5.5.6    P1-U    Investigate opportunities under institutional grant schemes, e.g., the Strategic Innovation Fund, to provide infrastructural supports for research in the prioritised areas.

5.5.7    P2-FS    Investigate the provision of technical support at Faculty level.