



**University College Dublin**

**REVIEW GROUP REPORT**

**Periodic Quality Review**

**UCD School of Sociology**

**February 2021**

**Accepted by the UCD Governing Authority at its meeting of 24 June 2021**

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## Summary Findings of the Review Group

The Review Group has identified a number of key findings in relation to areas of good practice operating within the School and areas which the Review Group would highlight as requiring future improvement. The main section of this Report sets out all observations, commendations and recommendations of the Review Group in more detail. A list of all commendations and recommendations is set out in Appendix 1.

*Please note that the numbers below refer to the relevant paragraph in the body of the Report.*

### **Examples of Good Practice**

The Review Group identified a number of commendations, in particular:

- 3.5 A large number of diverse and talented faculty, including Ad Astra Fellows, have been recruited to the School within the last five years. This will broaden and deepen the potential for the School to increase their graduate taught provision, and establish critical mass in priority areas of research.
  
- 5.10 The School is commended for developing and implementing the MSc Comparative Social Change. The degree is able to attract high calibre national and international students by offering the combined resources from UCD and Trinity College Dublin (TCD). The Review Group also commends the School for developing and implementing the MSc Social Data Analytics. This forward-looking programme recruits from the global student market.
  
- 6.16 There appears to be a willingness and a drive across the School to put research activities on to a new level such that in five years' time, the research component of its work in particular will have been transformed.
  
- 7.10 Overall the student feedback indicates a high level of student satisfaction with Sociology modules, with a small number of exceptions which are being addressed.
  
- 10.7 The team from the School took on and developed the *Irish Journal of Sociology* on behalf of the Sociological Association of Ireland, appreciably improving its content and impact in volume and spread.

### **Recommendations for Future Improvement**

The Review Group would suggest that the following recommendations be prioritised:

- 2.8 Recommendation 2.9 of the 2013 Quality Review Report recommended that the School develops a new strategic plan, and established an Advisory Board with terms of reference which should focus on helping the School develop and implement its vision for the future. In the current review, the Review Group advises that there is an urgent need for clear definition of the School's vision and priorities. Neither of these were articulated in the Self-Assessment

Report (SAR) or forthcoming in the various meetings with the Review Group. In particular, no priorities were identified in respect of graduate taught programmes, and no coherent focus or stated ambitions for the School's future research activities were identified. An Advisory Board can also provide ongoing advice and feedback on the "fitness for purpose" of the educational offerings. Addressing this recommendation requires oversight from the Advisory Board and the College Principal.

- 4.17 The School needs to work towards a consistently high quality of undergraduate tutorial teaching. Key to this will be a clearly articulated strategy of tutor recruitment and training. Tutors should be trained in pedagogy and have regular meetings with Module Co-ordinators to facilitate and coordinate their teaching.
- 6.18 The School should pursue a more explicit and proactive programme for research rather than simply relying on it to emerge as an outcome of general scholarship and teaching. It should set itself measurable targets such that, for example, by the time of the next Periodic Quality Review it will have hosted two ERCs, and at least one major EU collaborative venture every three years.
- 6.21 The School should institute a major revision of its collective publications strategy such as targeting top-tier English-language journals in Sociology, and publishing impactful books in the discipline with leading publishing houses.
- 8.13 As mental health and finances were noted as the most significant Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) issues for Sociology students, the Review Group encourages the School and College to actively seek further supports for their most vulnerable and disadvantaged students.
- 9.5 The Review Group encourages the School to consider further fruitful synergies with, in particular, the Schools of Philosophy, Geography, and Politics & International Relations, and with other areas in the University, for developing postgraduate programmes. See also 5.11.

# 1. Introduction and Overview of the UCD School of Sociology

## Introduction

- 1.1 This report presents the findings of the Periodic Quality Review of the School of Sociology, University College Dublin, which was undertaken from 19-21 October 2020.

## The Review Framework

- 1.2 Irish Universities have collectively agreed a framework for their quality review and quality improvement systems, which is consistent with both the legislative requirements of the *Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012*, and international good practice (e.g. *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, 2015*). Quality reviews are carried out in academic, administrative and support service units.
- 1.3 The purpose of Periodic Quality Review is to assist the University to assure itself of the quality of each of its constituent units, and to utilise learning from this developmental process in order to effect improvement, including:
- To monitor the quality of the student experience, and of teaching and learning.
  - To monitor research activity, including management of research activity; and assessing the research performance with regard to research productivity, research income, and recruiting and supporting doctoral students.
  - To identify, encourage and disseminate good practice, and to identify challenges and how to address these.
  - To provide an opportunity for units to test the effectiveness of their systems and procedures for monitoring and enhancing quality and standards.
  - To encourage the development and enhancement of these systems, in the context of current and emerging provision.
  - To inform the University's strategic planning process.
  - The output report provides robust evidence for external accreditation bodies.
  - The process provides an external benchmark on practice and curriculum.
  - To provide public information on the University's capacity to assure the quality and standards of its awards. The University's implementation of its quality procedures enables it to demonstrate how it discharges its responsibilities for assuring the quality and standards of its awards, as required by the *Universities Act 1997* and the *Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012*.

## The Review Process

- 1.4 Typically, the review model comprises four major elements:

- Preparation of a Self-Assessment Report (SAR);
- A visit by a Review Group that includes UCD staff and external experts, both national and international. The site visit normally will take place over a two or three day period;
- Preparation of a Review Group Report that is made public;
- Agreement of an action plan for improvement (Quality Improvement Plan) based on the Review Group Report's recommendations. The University will also monitor progress against the Quality Improvement Plan.

Full details of the review process can be found on the UCD Quality Office website: [www.ucd.ie/quality](http://www.ucd.ie/quality).

## **The Review Group**

- 1.5 The composition of the Review Group for the UCD School of Sociology was as follows:
- Professor Michael Gilchrist, UCD School of Mechanical & Materials Engineering (Chair)
  - Professor Deirdre Campion, UCD School of Veterinary Medicine (Deputy Chair)
  - Emeritus Professor of Sociology David McCrone, University of Edinburgh (Extern)
  - Associate Professor in Social Research Methods Ursula Henz, London School of Economics and Political Science (Extern)
- 1.6 Due to restrictions introduced in response to the COVID-19 virus, the Review Group undertook a virtual site visit of the School from 19-21 October 2020 and held meetings with the Registrar, Deputy President and Vice-President for Academic Affairs; Head of School; College Principal; SAR Co-ordinating Committee; Academic and Administrative staff in the School; undergraduate and postgraduate students; and other University staff working in support units which interact with the School. The site visit schedule is included as Appendix 3.
- 1.7 In addition to the Self-Assessment Report, the Review Group considered documentation provided by the School and the University during the site visit.
- 1.8 This Review Group Report has been read and approved by all members of the Review Group.

## **Preparation of the Self-Assessment Report (SAR)**

- 1.9 Following a briefing from a UCD Quality Officer in February 2019, a Self-Assessment Report Coordinating Committee (SARCC) was established to prepare the Self-Assessment Report (SAR). The Committee was representative of the key groupings within the School and included a Postgraduate Research student. Members of the committee, in consultation with staff members and student representatives, drafted sections of the Self-Assessment Report.
- 1.10 At a meeting of the School Executive Committee on 7 March 2019 the membership of the Self-Assessment Report (SAR) Coordinating Committee was agreed, and responsibility for each chapter was assigned. With the retirement of the School Manager, the new School Manager took responsibility for the relevant chapters. An additional staff member was co-opted to the Committee to represent new faculty. The SAR Coordinating Committee met first on 19 September 2019 (and again on 24 October 2019 and 25 November 2019) and decided on a

methodology whereby, in order to maximise the involvement of the whole School, the SAR would be discussed in several stages of preparation:

- Elements of the SAR relevant to each School committee were first discussed in each committee during October 2019.
- There was a SWOT session facilitated by the HR Partner from the College of Social Science and Law and the HR Partner from the College of Business.
- The first draft of the SAR was made available to all staff in December 2019.
- The second draft of the SAR was discussed at the School Planning Day on 7 January 2020, and finishing touches discussed.
- A final draft of the SAR (and associated appendices) was submitted to the UCD Quality Office on 13 February 2020.

## **The University**

1.11 University College Dublin (UCD) is a large and diverse university whose origins date back to 1854. The University is situated on a large modern campus about 4 km to the south of the centre of Dublin.

1.12 The University Strategic Plan (to 2020) states that the University's mission is: "to contribute to the flourishing of Dublin, Ireland, Europe and the world through the excellence and impact of our research and scholarship, the quality of our graduates and our global engagement; providing a supportive community in which every member of the University is enabled to achieve their full potential".

1.13 The University is currently organised into six colleges and 37 schools:

- UCD College of Arts and Humanities
- UCD College of Business
- UCD College of Engineering and Architecture
- UCD College of Health and Agricultural Sciences
- UCD College of Social Sciences and Law
- UCD College of Science

1.14 As one of the largest universities on the island of Ireland, UCD supports a broad, deep and rich academic community in Science, Business, Engineering, Health Sciences, Agriculture, Veterinary Medicine, Arts, Law, Celtic Studies and Human Sciences. There are currently more than 26,000 students in our UCD campus (approximately 16,300 undergraduates, 7,800 postgraduates and 2,200 Occasional and Adult Education students) registered on over 70 University degree programmes, including over 6,300 international students from more than 121 countries. The University also has over 5,400 students studying UCD degree programmes on campuses overseas.

## UCD School of Sociology

- 1.15 There are 27.5 staff members in the School of Sociology, of which 21.5 are faculty. Among these faculty, 15.5 are permanent, three are Ad Astra Fellows on five-year contracts, three Assistant Professors are on one-year contracts, and there is one joint appointment with the UCD School of Public Health, Physiotherapy and Sports Science. There are four administrative staff members – one permanent, one on a three-year contract and one on a 10-month contract, and one post which is currently vacant – and two research staff members. There is one faculty member and one administrator on long-term sick leave, and there are also five professors emeriti and five visiting professors.
- 1.16 Since the last Quality Review (in 2013) the Student:Faculty Ratio (SFR) in the School of Sociology has improved significantly, from 36:1 in 2001, and 37:1 in 2018, to an anticipated 25:1 in 2021.
- 1.17 Through a refurbishment and re-location plan, the School is almost all now co-located in newly-refurbished offices and other rooms on the fourth floor D-Block in the Newman Building.
- 1.18 In the 2019-2020 academic session, the School of Sociology would deliver 51 modules – 35 at undergraduate level and 16 at postgraduate level – to a total of 4,877 students.
- 1.19 At undergraduate level, these modules are delivered as part of the three-year Bachelor of Arts (BA) and Bachelor of Social Science (BSocSc) programmes, and as part of the new four-year Bachelor of Science (BSc) programme, the first cohort of which arrived in September 2018.
- 1.20 At postgraduate taught level, the number of taught master's students has grown over the past five years from less than 30 to over 40 in 2019-2020 (with a peak in 2018-2019 of almost 50). The School provides the following taught master's programmes:
- MA Sociology
  - MSc Sociology
  - MSc Social Data Analytics
  - MSc Comparative Social Change
  - MA Race, Migration and Decolonial Studies
- 1.21 In relation to postgraduate research students, the School had 13 currently registered PhD students in the academic session 2019-2020.
- 1.22 The UCD School of Sociology is ranked 101-150 by subject in the 2019 QS World University rankings.
- 1.23 The Self-Assessment Report (SAR) for the School of Sociology was submitted just prior to the outbreak in Ireland of the COVID-19 virus. As part of its preparations for the site visit – which was undertaken remotely due to the restrictions that were introduced because of the virus – the Review Group requested and received from the Head of School a further addendum to the SAR which provided information about how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted on the information contained within the SAR. The School noted in particular that:



- The move to remote teaching and assessment, at very short notice in the Spring Trimester 2019-20, was a major endeavour and the School demonstrated a strong commitment to supporting students to complete the trimester. This approach was enabled by the professionalism of faculty and staff in the School. As soon as the lockdown was announced, the Head of Teaching and Learning in the School organised and a workshop to support faculty to teach remotely.
- Ongoing supervision of postgraduate students by the School and flexibility on dissertation submissions were enabled and supported by the School. As the virus persisted, supervision of masters and PhD students continued during the summer of 2020. The deadline for submission of masters dissertations was in August, but many students were given extensions (due to circumstances relating to the pandemic) until as late as the end of September.
- Planning for the 2020-21 academic year began in July 2020. The School, and particularly the Head of Teaching and Learning, supported colleagues in their preparations for teaching in the Autumn Trimester by providing colleagues with the opportunity to request supports in the form of equipment, software and training, and by organising a School Teaching and Learning day in early September to provide insights and training in relation to online teaching. The School also produced a brief welcome video for first year students.
- Due to a larger than anticipated intake of students in 2020-21, the School's financial position has become a little less negative. This increase in the numbers of taught masters students and first year students was in response to a Government request to increase the number of places at university. That request was made in the context of the Government's decision to cancel the summer 2020 Leaving Certificate examinations and replace them with calculated grades.
- A management plan has been put in place for use of shared facilities, the School corridor and equipment. Because of the pandemic there are serious obstacles resulting from the regulations around social distancing and shared spaces. Work is ongoing with UCD Estate Services to resolve issues as best as possible, but the shortage of faculty offices, size of seminar room and the shared PhD student space are an even greater concern.

1.24 The Review Group's observation on the quality of the SAR provided by the School of Sociology was that the SAR does not show self-critical analysis relating to quality assurance. In Appendix 2.1 "Gleanings from Various School Plans" it appears that the School has carried out self-reflective exercises, which have led to plans to distribute quality assurance tasks to improve quality to the relevant School committees, but the detail on how the Review Group Report (2013), Quality Improvement Plan (2015) and Progress Review Report (2017) were considered together remains unclear (these are referred to as the Quality Improvement Plan 2013, the School Plan 2015 and the Plan Update 2017 respectively in SAR Appendix 2.1). Essentially, the SAR reported on specifics without indicating how these had informed the future ambitions of the School in respect of their teaching and research aspirations relative to their international disciplinary peers.

## **2. Organisation and Management**

### **General Comments and Context**

- 2.1 The School has engaged with this Periodic Quality Review and most of the stakeholders associated with the School have contributed directly to the preparation of the SAR. The Review Group was pleased to have the opportunity to meet and have constructive dialogue with so many of these people using a wholly online process. A minority of academic staff were not available for the Review Group to meet.
- 2.2 The School is well run and the Head of School and School Manager are highly effective in ensuring that all operational aspects of the School's diverse portfolio of activities run smoothly. Indeed, it was apparent to the Review Group that historic tensions and issues that had existed within the School have begun to dissipate, largely due to efforts of the former Head and continued by the current Head. The atmosphere and attitude that pervades the School is largely positive and inclusive and reflected in the structures that operate within the School where all stakeholders are involved appropriately in running the School.
- 2.3 The School has had a sophisticated workload model for all faculty for many decades, which is used as a means to calculate and assess individual achievements across the dimensions of teaching, research and administration. Similar to many Schools within the College of Social Sciences and Law, this School has recently instigated semestral leave for faculty to pursue research activities and it will be important that the benefits and impact of this are reviewed at some future stage.
- 2.4 The School's operational budget has increased by 30% within the past four years, largely as a result of new jointly taught masters programmes and undergraduate study abroad activity from the USA. It would appear that there are clear opportunities to continue this growth to support the School's desire for discretionary expenditure for initiatives such as PhD scholarships.
- 2.5 A distinctive characteristic of the School is that it has amongst the largest cohort of Stage 1 students: 500 or more is far greater than at many other international universities and it poses particular challenges in respect of the quality of teaching and learning provision.

### **Commendations**

- 2.6 There is a positive atmosphere and sense of collegiality within the School, which has been fostered by the current leadership of the School.
- 2.7 The effectiveness of staff within the School Office, as evidenced by the positive comments which the Review Group heard from faculty and from individuals in units outside the School, is commendable.

### **Recommendations**

- 2.8 Recommendation 2.9 of the 2013 Quality Review Report recommended that the School develops a new strategic plan, and established an Advisory Board with terms of reference which should focus on helping the School develop and implement its vision for the future. In the

current review, the Review Group advises that there is an urgent need for clear definition of the School's vision and priorities. Neither of these were articulated in the Self-Assessment Report (SAR) or forthcoming in the various meetings with the Review Group. In particular, no priorities were identified in respect of graduate taught programmes, and no coherent focus or stated ambitions for the School's future research activities were identified. An Advisory Board can also provide ongoing advice and feedback on the "fitness for purpose" of the educational offerings. Addressing this recommendation requires oversight from the Advisory Board and the College Principal.

- 2.9 Some of the School's committees (e.g. Research Committee; Graduate Studies Committee) should be more proactive and ambitious, and engage more fully with relevant groups within the College and the wider University.
- 2.10 The School and College Principal will need to consider succession planning for the current Head of School. A key challenge will be ensuring that the new Head of School has a strong focus on the School realising its full potential in respect of research. Failure to address this issue will be a significant lost opportunity for both the School, College and the wider University.

### **3. Staff and Facilities**

#### **General Comments and Context**

- 3.1 There has been superb improvements made to the facilities and space available to the School. These are no longer spread over different buildings, whilst most staff are now located contiguously in one physical location. The School has benefitted from an ongoing major new refurbishment of the Newman Building. The Review Group acknowledges the support of the College and University for this major investment and recognises that the School has taken full advantage of this opportunity to enhance their workplace.
- 3.2 The School has had success in the past two years by winning far more Ad Astra faculty positions than might have been expected from this important University initiative that sought to address issues of student:faculty ratios and gender diversity ratios amongst faculty. These new faculty positions are in addition to a significant number of additional posts that were created since 2015 and the student:faculty ratio has dramatically improved from 37:1 to 25:1 while the percentage of female faculty has increased from less than 20% to 35%. The School indicated in the SAR that it intends to apply for Athena SWAN in the immediate future – the Review Group encourages the School to undertake this. There has also been an increase in the diversity of nationalities within the School (e.g. approximately 50% are now non-Irish) and these changes provide clear potential for significant growth in both the scale and international impact of the teaching and research activities within the School and the College of Social Sciences and Law.
- 3.3 The School is now at an important juncture in its development and will require encouragement from senior management of the University to ensure that this potential is fully realised. It will be particularly important that the School takes advantage of these recent changes and dramatically increases the international impact and profile of sociology research at UCD, and pursues opportunities to create additional vibrant graduate taught programmes that are both

sustainable and distinctive, whilst strengthening the most important of its current graduate taught programmes while maintaining its traditional emphasis on the quality of its undergraduate teaching provision.

- 3.4 The Review Group was pleased to note that two individual faculty members have received College and University awards for the calibre of their teaching activities. However, the School does not keep a consolidated, running record of the staff who have received formal training to either Certificate or Diploma level in University Teaching and Learning, either from UCD or elsewhere.

### **Commendations**

- 3.5 A large number of diverse and talented faculty, including Ad Astra Fellows, have been recruited to the School within the last five years. This will broaden and deepen the potential for the School to increase their graduate taught provision, and establish critical mass in priority areas of research.

### **Recommendations**

- 3.6 Given the recent increase in the number of new staff members in the School, and the particular need for the School to further develop its research strategy, the Review Group recommendation that a concerted effort is undertaken to mentor newer faculty in respect of their opportunities to undertake, build and lead world-class research activities in the area of sociology at UCD.
- 3.7 Where appropriate, staff should be encouraged to avail of opportunities to pursue formal training in University Teaching and Learning.
- 3.8 The Review Group encourages the School to apply for Athena SWAN at the earliest opportunity.

## **4. Teaching, Learning and Assessment**

### **General Comments and Context**

- 4.1 The Review Group's comments are based on the SAR, conversations with members of staff in the School, the meeting with the School Teaching and Learning Committee and with a sample of undergraduate, taught postgraduate and PhD students. The students at postgraduate level were only a few weeks into their studies. All teaching has been online because of the COVID-19 pandemic. This limited the range of issues on which they could provide feedback.
- 4.2 The School offers a diverse set of 16 undergraduate programmes and pathways with well over a thousand students registered on Sociology options. Recent years have seen major revisions of the curriculum, in particular the introduction of the new four-year BSc in Social Science programme (DN700) three years ago.
- 4.3 This new programme provides progression from foundational courses in the first two stages to increasingly advanced and broad learning experiences. DN700 offers enhanced learning

experiences through encouraging study abroad and offering alternative 'experiential' learning modules. In the final year, students undertake their own research project. The Review Group recognizes the workload challenges associated with offering these bespoke modules for a student cohort of about 150 students per stage.

- 4.4 The School provides six taught postgraduate programmes and offers 16 taught postgraduate modules. Several specialised Sociology Master's programmes were discontinued and incorporated into the general Sociology Master's programme. Two new programmes were successfully launched during the review period – the MSc in Social Data Analytics and the MSc in Comparative Social Change.
- 4.5 The School runs a PhD programme in Sociology, in which 13 students were enrolled in 2019-20. From September 2020, University funds (as part of the Ad Astra Fellow hiring scheme) will support four incoming PhD students, and another eight have applied for Irish Research Council PhD funding. The members of the School Graduate Studies Committee expressed concern about the difficulty of attracting PhD students, which they attribute to a lack of funding opportunities and the high costs of living in Dublin.
- 4.6 The PhD students carry out their research under the guidance of their main supervisor and two additional members of staff. They go through a formal transfer procedure within 18 months of registration. The School provides work spaces for all PhD students who request it. The PhD students that the Review Group spoke to were positive about their supervision. As part of their scholarship, many PhD students must undertake 40 hours of tutorial teaching in the School.
- 4.7 The School has a strong representation of students from under-represented groups with respect to age, class, disability and direct provision. The Review Group also spoke with a student who had come through an alternative entry path. Students from these groups appear to receive appropriate support from the professional staff. However, the Review Group was made aware of cases of hardship where certain students have inadequate technological equipment, which is a particular problem during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is a matter that might require the attention at the College or even the University level. The Review Group was unable to meet with staff from UCD Access and Lifelong Learning to explore this issue further.
- 4.8 The School offers small-group tutorials on all Level One and core Level Two modules. The undergraduate students that the Review Group spoke to expressed enthusiasm about having tutorials though they also said that not all tutorials were effective. The tutorials are taught by PhD students and former students. Financial constraints currently prohibit the expansion of tutorial teaching.
- 4.9 Most courses are assessed cumulatively through a variety of forms of assessment.
- 4.10 Most of the teaching seems to be well regarded by students and is on a par with the high standards that exist within the College of Social Sciences and Law. The Review Group noted that a number of modules had a particularly low score and was assured that this issue is being addressed.
- 4.11 The SAR is thin on information about the student experience. The Review Group was only able to speak with a rather small number of students. This resonates with the external examiner

report about a lack of opportunity to meet students. The weak student engagement in these instances raises questions about the quality of the relationship between faculty and students.

- 4.12 Although the indicators of teaching quality are positive, they have a somewhat weak foundation. It would have been more reassuring to have a larger range of students at the meetings with the Review Group, and a higher response rate for the student surveys. Opportunities for enhanced student engagement should be explored by the School.

### **Commendations**

- 4.13 The Review Group commends the School for developing and implementing an innovative curriculum as part of the new BSc in Social Science.
- 4.14 The School offers a broad portfolio of undergraduate and postgraduate modules that engage with classic and current debates.
- 4.15 The School has produced examples of excellent teaching, e.g. School faculty winning a University Teaching Excellence Award and a College of Social Science and Law Excellence Award.
- 4.16 The School is commended for its variety of assessment methods.

### **Recommendations**

- 4.17 The School needs to work towards a consistently high quality of undergraduate tutorial teaching. Key to this will be a clearly articulated strategy of tutor recruitment and training. Tutors should be trained in pedagogy and have regular meetings with Module Co-ordinators to facilitate and coordinate their teaching.
- 4.18 Newly recruited faculty need to be made aware of teacher training opportunities within the School, College and University, and the Review Group recommends that all teaching faculty should strive to continuously update their teaching skills by participating in courses offered by the College or University. Furthermore, the School should maintain a consolidated, running record of all such training undertaken by its faculty members.
- 4.19 The School should review their assessment strategies to ensure that all modules provide students with timely feedback on a piece of assessment, in accordance with University guidelines and the Academic Regulations.
- 4.20 The School is encouraged to improve communication channels with undergraduate students, for example by having regular meetings with class representatives and/or active staff-student committees, and including feedback on implementation of decisions and recommendations.
- 4.21 The School should consider ways to facilitate the establishment of a Sociology Society for students.

- 4.22 The Review Group recommends that all teaching faculty should strive to continuously update their teaching skills by participating in courses offered by the College or University.

## **5. Curriculum Development and Review**

### **General Comments and Context**

- 5.1 The School of Sociology went through a very active period of curriculum development in the review period. It has implemented major innovations in its undergraduate and graduate curricula. In addition to internal module review structures, the School avails of the input from external examiners to review the quality of its teaching and assessment.
- 5.2 The introduction of a new four-year BSc Social Science degree programme with flexible progressive pathways and innovative modules is one of the main outcome of the School's curriculum review. The programme offers a clear path of pedagogic progression during the four years. It provides students with foundational skills in Year One before gradually moving towards more research-led courses and their own research in the final year. The degree offers enhanced student experience by planning for either study abroad or alternative 'experiential' learning. The implementation of the degree has progressed well. The College has scheduled an evaluation of the programme for 2021 when the first cohort will finish the degree.
- 5.3 The School provides six taught postgraduate programmes. Two of these were launched during the review period. The MSc in Comparative Social Change is a joint initiative between UCD and Trinity College Dublin (TCD). The MSc in Social Data Analytics is an interdisciplinary programme drawing on expertise within the School and other disciplines at UCD outside the School. Student recruitment on the new degrees is strong and offers an opportunity for the School to review its remaining postgraduate taught provision.
- 5.4 The curriculum development has been informed by new approaches to teaching and learning. Staff in the School, similar to those elsewhere throughout the University, have fully embraced Brightspace and the Virtual Learning Environment. The School welcomes the creation of the position of an Educational Technologist at College level.
- 5.5 The School offers a broad and forward looking curriculum that is committed to research methods training in both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Fundamental questions of research design are only addressed in a Stage 1 module and might need more exploration to facilitate creative student research projects at Stage 4 of the new BSc Social Science.
- 5.6 The School monitors the quality of its teaching through Examination Boards, its Teaching and Learning Committee, External Examiner reviews and student evaluations. In addition, students use module feedback to raise concerns. Some Module Co-ordinators maintain informal communication channels with students. The SAR also lists Staff-Student meetings as a means of monitoring teaching quality, but according to the undergraduate students which the Review Group met there were no structured meetings between class representatives and the School in the academic session 2019-20.

- 5.7 The new curriculum developments respond to the University Strategic Plan (to 2020). The MSc in Social Data Analytics aligns with the research strategy on digital society and the undergraduate Structured Elective in Sustainable Societies responds to the University's strategy of focusing on the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

### **Commendations**

- 5.8 The undergraduate curriculum of the School of Sociology is impressive in its breadth and timeliness. There are high levels of student satisfaction with most courses, including qualitative and quantitative research methods courses.
- 5.9 The School and College are commended for the development and successful implementation of the 4-year BSc in Social Science.
- 5.10 The School is commended for developing and implementing the MSc Comparative Social Change. The degree is able to attract high calibre national and international students by offering the combined resources from UCD and Trinity College Dublin (TCD). The Review Group also commends the School for developing and implementing the MSc Social Data Analytics. This forward-looking programme recruits from the global student market.

### **Recommendations**

- 5.11 The Review Group suggests that the School should undertake a strategic review, with appropriate input and support from elsewhere in the College, to identify the most significant opportunities for new graduate taught programmes. This review should identify and prioritise synergies that are likely to exist specifically with the Schools of Philosophy, Geography, and Politics & International Relations, and more broadly with other areas.
- 5.12 The School should consider, in consultation with the College and University, strategies to increase the response rate to the student survey to make it a more valid instrument for course review.
- 5.13 The School needs to adjust their offering of postgraduate modules that persistently have student numbers below what is considered viable in many other institutions.

## **6. Research Activity**

### **General Comments and Context**

- 6.1 The Review Group did see evidence of synergies between research and teaching in the School. However, the School seems to have adopted a broad definition such that anything an academic staff member does beyond teaching is constituted as research (e.g. writing articles, supervising students, running seminars). Specifically, funded research has not had a prominent and systematic profile in School.



- 6.2 The Review Group observed that ‘research activities’ as undertaken by the School are too broadly defined, which makes it difficult to determine their alignment with the overall aims of the School, College and University.
- 6.3 Research in the School appears as something of a by-product of teaching and other activities; for example, through measurement of research by publications, PhD students, seminars. Currently, there does not seem to be a proactive system for promoting research in the School. It is not evident that inviting prominent speakers to give seminars has led to enhanced research work in the School.
- 6.4 It is difficult to identify a defined School research strategy as it stands. To date, the most successful period of research income was 2016-18.
- 6.5 The articulation of research outcomes is not very obvious in the SAR. Much of the text in the SAR ostensibly relating to research is devoted to PhD activities. There is a list of PhDs, and mention of publications (SAR Chapter 6, p.37) though these are not listed therein, nor does the SAR draw attention to key publications as exemplars of the School’s research strategy.
- 6.6 A list of publications was requested by the Review Group to augment details provided in SAR Appendix 6.6 (p.107). Analysis of book publications indicated that there had been little progress in the number of books published during the period 2012 to 2019. Furthermore, there are entries for books published by visiting scholars, and for writing an introduction or editing another author’s text – these would not normally be considered part of a School’s research output. In terms of journal articles, there were none in mainstream generic English-language journals (such as the *American Journal of Sociology*, or *Sociology*), some in high-quality specialised journals (such as *Nations and Nationalism*, *Social Forces*, and *Ethnic and Racial Studies*), with the *Irish Journal of Sociology* (which members of the School have edited for the past three years) being the most mentioned journal. Most of the long list of journal articles appear in highly specialised and more peripheral publications.
- 6.7 Through its discussions with the various stakeholders during the review of the School, the Review Group observed that the commitment to teaching by the School crowds out space and time for research for the academic members of staff, so that research becomes an add-on and is not central to current activities. The Review Group did not see evidence of a system of recognisable research clusters in the School.
- 6.8 The Review Group ascertained that research as undertaken by the School is not outstanding relative to other departments/schools of sociology. There is a danger that too much is left to, and expected of, new incoming staff to effect improvements in the research performance of the School, without there being a proactive programme of research clusters. There are some good clusters, notably relating to quantitative data analysis, but these are insufficiently connected with other units in the College, e.g. Geary Institute, Politics & International Relations (for example, through a linking up with the Politics Lab) and Geography. The Review Group did not see evidence of any explicit linkage between staff recruitment and the research strategy of the School, even though new staff are expected to make a substantial contribution to research within the School.

- 6.9 Research students seemed to the Review Group to be fairly well supported in a traditional manner (e.g. supervision). The Review Group only met with a small group of PhD students and so was unable to accurately judge the effectiveness and the regularity of Doctoral Studies Panel meetings.
- 6.10 Master's programmes seemed to the Review Group to be well designed, and two big MScs (including a joint programme with Trinity College Dublin) appear to work well and have good numbers. Others are smaller, and there may be scope for some rationalisation. New Master's programmes are possible if demand and capacity are adequate without crowding out research.
- 6.11 The Review Group found that there has not been much attempt to connect up publications with research work. More needs to be done in the School to make explicit the relation between research activities (especially income), publications and their impact.
- 6.12 The School does have a record of winning research grants, and of publications from scholarship and research. The Review Group acknowledges recent research funding from the Health Research Board as a step in the right direction.
- 6.13 The Review Group recognises that the above comments relate in essence to historic practices. The School has real potential to make a significant contribution to research work, in particular by mobilising the skills and experience of middle-tier and relatively new faculty, possibly by encouraging research clusters both within and beyond the School in a more pro-active way than hitherto. There is the danger of complacency, that 'bedding down' new staff reinforces the continuation of old practices. Nevertheless, there appears to be a willingness and a drive across the School to lift research activities in particular on to a new level in such a way that in five years' time, the research component in particular will have been transformed. What is now required is the creation of new structures and opportunities to make that happen.

## **Commendations**

- 6.14 The Review Group commends the School for its success on winning research grants, most recently its Health Research Board funding.
- 6.15 The appointment of new members of staff carries the promise of lifting research activity in the School on to a higher plane in terms of scale and quality.
- 6.16 There appears to be a willingness and a drive across the School to put research activities on to a new level such that in five years' time, the research component of its work in particular will have been transformed.
- 6.17 The School tries to build in how to do sociological research at different levels of its undergraduate curriculum, and carries it through its programme so that students have an understanding of 'doing' sociology as an active process.

## **Recommendations**

- 6.18 The School should pursue a more explicit and proactive programme for research rather than simply relying on it to emerge as an outcome of general scholarship and teaching. It should set

itself measurable targets such that, for example, by the time of the next Periodic Quality Review it will have hosted two ERCs, and at least one major EU collaborative venture every three years.

- 6.19 The School should, as a matter of urgency, set in place research groupings with a view to having an explicit and clear research strategy with achievable research outcomes.
- 6.20 Explicit efforts should be made to pursue research funding notably from EU sources and, in the process, build better external and sustained collaborative links.
- 6.21 The School should institute a major revision of its collective publications strategy such as targeting top-tier English-language journals in Sociology, and publishing impactful books in the discipline with leading publishing houses.
- 6.22 It is imperative that younger staff and more recent appointments are properly mentored and advised with regard both to research applications and publication plans.
- 6.23 Better research links should be built within UCD with cognate Schools such as Politics & International Relations, and Geography, and via institutes such as the Geary Institute.
- 6.24 The School should clarify the flow of research money, notably overheads, such that these are allocated fairly, especially where more than one School or Institute is involved. The College should ensure transparency in relation to appropriate allocations to different units.
- 6.25 The School should ensure that research leave is documented in accordance with the UCD School of Sociology Research Leave Document (SAR Appendix 6.5) and that systems of report-back are in place so that outputs can be linked to leave.
- 6.26 In its undergraduate programme, the School should take steps to inculcate in students an understanding of research *design* – how to ‘get at’ and formulate research questions – rather than simply an understanding of research methods and techniques with regard to data collection and analysis.

## **7. Management of Quality and Enhancement**

### **General Comments and Context**

- 7.1 In the SAR, the School outlines the commitment to the enhancement of the quality of undergraduate and graduate teaching, and states that the evidence for this is in the major changes undertaken in these curricula over recent years. The School measures the quality of the undergraduate and graduate taught programmes using standard University tools including internal Examination Boards; External Examiner’s reports and recommendations; regular feedback from the student representatives; the standardised, University-wide, student module evaluations as well as informal student feedback. The evidence provided regarding quality assurance in the Self-Assessment Report and in the appendices relates primarily to indices of student feedback, and External Examiner reports.

- 7.2 The quality of teaching and learning is also monitored by the School Teaching and Learning Committee, although this Committee does not intervene directly where issues with individual modules are noted. The Committee meets with the Subject Extern each year and reviews the report produced by the Subject Extern.
- 7.3 Students are critically important stakeholders in the quality assurance of education, however the School's involvement with the curriculum review process undertaken in 2017 does not appear to have included undergraduate student committee members, and undergraduate students are not listed as members of the School Teaching and Learning Committee.
- 7.4 The Review Group noted that the School does not appear to have a great deal of visibility with undergraduate students. Students have stated that they have more visible contact with other schools contributing to the same programmes. The lack of visibility can be partially explained by the nature of the teaching that is delivered to the very large cohorts of Stage 1 students; however the Review Group believes that the School should work to address visibility and communication issues with the Stage 1 and 2 undergraduate students in particular.
- 7.5 The broader group of stakeholders, beyond students, does not appear to have been considered in terms of obtaining feedback on, or in redeveloping, the School's educational offerings. A new Advisory Board was proposed at the previous Periodic Quality Review (in 2013), but at the time of the current review this has not been established.
- 7.6 The School states that it has a long tradition of active engagement with UCD Teaching and Learning, and staff regularly avail themselves of opportunities to improve education skills. The SAR lists innovative educational practices as evidence of quality in education. The Review Group found that some recently appointed staff showed interest in pursuing such training but did not appear to know how to go about this, while some of the longer-appointed academic staff appeared ambivalent towards pursuing further training in teaching and learning.
- 7.7 The School relies considerably on tutors to deliver small group teaching in the early years of courses. These tutors receive one hour of general tutor training, and very little else. The Review Group note that there is no structured process to ensure quality of teaching of Sociology by tutors as noted in Chapter 4 of this report.
- 7.8 In addition, the large class sizes in the early years results in large grading loads for staff and it is not possible to moderate the assessments and provide adequate feedback that would ensure that students fully develop specific University-level skills.

## **Commendations**

- 7.9 The Review Group note that the School has shown engagement with External Examiner reports, and there is evidence provided of direct efforts made to address any concerns raised by the External Examiners.
- 7.10 Overall the student feedback indicates a high level of student satisfaction with Sociology modules, with a small number of exceptions which are being addressed.

## **Recommendations**

- 7.11 The Review Group would encourage faculty to embrace the opportunities that UCD and other organisations offer to enhance the quality of their teaching to the benefit of students.
- 7.12 The School must improve on and further develop structured interactions at Programme level with undergraduate Sociology students.
- 7.13 Opportunities should be identified for undergraduate and graduate taught students to engage directly in the curriculum enhancement process. One option would be by establishing student representation on School committees. University policy and guidelines in this area should be consulted to determine appropriate actions.
- 7.14 The School should better utilise resources within the UCD Careers Network to identify alumni career outcomes beyond the nine-month “Graduate Outcomes” survey. School self-evaluation for quality enhancement should reflect on feedback from alumni, placement supervisors and employers.
- 7.15 Assessment strategies should be designed to ensure that students are given appropriate and timely feedback from the earliest years of the Programme. This would enable students to develop, grow and achieve University-level graduate outcomes.

## **8. Support Services**

### **General Comments and Context**

- 8.1 The Review Group had the opportunity to meet with representatives from a broad range of UCD support services.
- 8.2 General support services for students are primarily organised at College and University level. The School find that the UCD Registry, Programme School Liaison service operates particularly effectively on student registration, curriculum management and recording of student grades. The School considers that it is well supported by UCD Registry, including UCD Assessment.
- 8.3 Access supports are provided by the UCD Access and Lifelong Learning (ALL) office. Because of information campaigns by the ALL office there is a greater awareness in the School of how staff can provide practical support to students.
- 8.4 There are support structures in place at School and College level for struggling students. It is acknowledged that a considerable proportion of students studying Sociology are likely to belong to a socially disadvantaged group. The School is represented on the College Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) committee. Mental health and finances were noted as the most significant EDI issues for students. It was noted that there are students who are known to lack sufficient WiFi, computer facilities, and other basic equipment. There was concern that more support may be needed in specific and complex cases of student disadvantage.

- 8.5 Internet and IT technological services are provided by UCD IT Services. The School has expressed satisfaction with this service.
- 8.6 The UCD Library provides a Library Liaison who acts as the Library subject specialist. The Library Liaison undertakes training sessions with the School and meets quite regularly with the representative member of the Sociology staff to discuss Library resources, including books and journals. The Library Liaison also sits on the College Teaching and Learning Committee.
- 8.7 At College level, the School is supported by the College Human Resources Partner who works closely with the Head of School and, to a lesser extent, with the School Manager. Devolution of financial resources to the School has benefitted from the assistance of the College Finance Manager. The recent appointment of an Educational Technologist has been welcomed by the School, although one Educational Technologist may be insufficient to assist with all of the modules in the College, particularly in the context of online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 8.8 The College Career and Skills Consultant provides career development opportunities for students and builds relationships with employers. The consultant also teaches a module in Stage 2 in relation to internships and professional development and runs alumni panels. The Careers Network undertakes a graduate outcomes survey nine months after graduates have left UCD.

### **Commendations**

- 8.9 The Review Group commends the positive working relationship between the School Manager and all of the support units.
- 8.10 The Review Group was impressed by the level of support offered by the Library Liaison.
- 8.11 Good opportunities and skills are offered to Sociology students by the College Career and Skills Consultant.

### **Recommendations**

- 8.12 The Review Group noted that there are good support units for students outside of the School, such as the UCD Writing Centre, UCD Access and Lifelong Learning and UCD Teaching and Learning. However, the School does not appear to take full advantage of these. The Review Group recommend that the School investigate opportunities for their students and staff to link up with these units.
- 8.13 As mental health and finances were noted as the most significant Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) issues for Sociology students, the Review Group encourages the School and College to actively seek further supports for their most vulnerable and disadvantaged students.
- 8.14 The UCD Careers Network, and the College Career and Skills Consultant should be utilised to a greater extent to forge links with employers and alumni.

- 8.15 The Review Group was unable to meet with a representative from UCD Access and Lifelong Learning during the course of the review, and recommends that such a meeting is prioritised for the next review.

## **9. Collaborative Provision**

### **General Comments and Context**

- 9.1 The School offers collaborative educational provision at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. The new BSc Social Science gives students the opportunity to spend a year on a student exchange as part of the degree. The School has student exchanges with several European universities under the framework of Erasmus exchanges. These collaborations are actively managed and those with unpopular destinations are discontinued.
- 9.2 At postgraduate level, the new Masters programmes are collaborative enterprises – the MSc in Comparative Social Change with Trinity College Dublin and the MSc in Social Data Analytics with other disciplines in the University. The SAR documents the high transaction costs associated with some collaborative educational programmes. Students on a collaborative programme also experienced some burden from having to deal with separate institutional entities.

### **Commendations**

- 9.3 The Review Group commends the School for its enhancement of its portfolio of taught postgraduate degrees by developing collaborative provision, in particular through the MSc in Comparative Social Change and MSc in Social Data Analytics programmes.
- 9.4 The Review Group commends the School for enriching the undergraduate curriculum through its involvement in international exchanges.

### **Recommendations**

- 9.5 The Review Group encourages the School to consider further fruitful synergies with, in particular, the Schools of Philosophy, Geography, and Politics & International Relations, and with other areas in the University, for developing postgraduate programmes.
- 9.6 The Review Group encourages the School to fully exploit the opportunities offered by the UCD/NUin and other Junior Year Abroad (JYA) programmes, as well as to explore other possible collaborations, for example through UCD Global.

## 10. External Relations

### General Comments and Context

- 10.1 The School appears to have a good media profile. The SAR recognises that “the School could be better represented in specific areas, particularly in international research networks that are central to making successful bids for research funds, and will seek to expand its presence in these areas in the future”. The task is now to operationalise and exploit these to the School’s advantage.
- 10.2 The School takes internships seriously, both at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. There seems scope, however, for using the Graduate Outcomes Survey more proactively, and possibly extending it in-house as a useful tool for employment as well as for raising the profile of the School and for promoting engagement with alumni.
- 10.3 The Leaving Certificate subject ‘Politics and Society’ seems an excellent vehicle for raising the profile of the School beyond the University, and for developing closer links with other Schools in the College, most obviously the School of Politics & International Relations.
- 10.4 *Irish Journal of Sociology*: The Review Group were impressed by the way that the team involved had taken on and developed the journal in the three years of their tenure. The journal is the property of the Sociological Association of Ireland, and is managed by Sage Publications. The editorial team has raised the journal’s profile, improved the content, particularly with regard to its international appeal, and made major strides as regards impact in a measurable way. The number of article downloads has increased substantially, and with an international spread (developing links across the island of Ireland both formally and informally).
- 10.5 The School is right to be upbeat about its role and position as regards external relations, and cannot be faulted for positioning itself well. The task now is to exploit that positioning to help to build up, in particular, its research capacity.

### Commendations

- 10.6 The School has a good media profile and commendable links with the external world, both nationally and internationally.
- 10.7 The team from the School took on and developed the *Irish Journal of Sociology* on behalf of the Sociological Association of Ireland, appreciably improving its content and impact in volume and spread.
- 10.8 Developing the shared Master’s degree in Comparative Social Change with Trinity College Dublin is a major achievement.
- 10.9 The Review Group commends the School on its undergraduate internship programme which has the potential to raise its profile in the wider world.



## Recommendations

- 10.10 The School acknowledges that it has to raise its profile in international research networks that are central to making successful bids for research funds. It must do this as a matter of urgency.
- 10.11 There is potential for making better use of the Graduate Outcomes Survey with a view to documenting the post graduate future employment patterns of its students.
- 10.12 The Leaving Certificate subject 'Politics and Society' has potential for raising the profile of the School in conjunction with the School of Politics & International Relations.
- 10.13 Passing the *Irish Journal of Sociology* on to its editorial successor at Queens University Belfast, given the School's success in improving the journal's standing and visibility, is an opportunity to forge stronger links with that university and other similar institutions on the island of Ireland.

## UCD School of Sociology – Full List of Commendations and Recommendations

This appendix contains a full list of all commendations and recommendations made by the Review Group for the UCD School of Sociology and should be read in conjunction with the specific chapters above.

*Please note that the paragraph references below refer to the relevant paragraphs in the report text.*

### Organisation and Management

#### Commendations

- 2.6 There is a positive atmosphere and sense of collegiality within the School, which has been fostered by the current leadership of the School.
- 2.7 The effectiveness of staff within the School Office, as evidenced by the positive comments which the Review Group heard from faculty and from individuals in units outside the School, is commendable.

#### Recommendations

- 2.8 Recommendation 2.9 of the 2013 Quality Review Report recommended that the School develops a new strategic plan, and established an Advisory Board with terms of reference which should focus on helping the School develop and implement its vision for the future. In the current review, the Review Group advises that there is an urgent need for clear definition of the School's vision and priorities. Neither of these were articulated in the Self-Assessment Report (SAR) or forthcoming in the various meetings with the Review Group. In particular, no priorities were identified in respect of graduate taught programmes, and no coherent focus or stated ambitions for the School's future research activities were identified. An Advisory Board can also provide ongoing advice and feedback on the "fitness for purpose" of the educational offerings. Addressing this recommendation requires oversight from the Advisory Board and the College Principal.
- 2.9 Some of the School's committees (e.g. Research Committee; Graduate Studies Committee) should be more proactive and ambitious, and engage more fully with relevant groups within the College and the wider University.
- 2.10 The School and College Principal will need to consider succession planning for the current Head of School. A key challenge will be ensuring that the new Head of School has a strong focus on the School realising its full potential in respect of research. Failure to address this issue will be a significant lost opportunity for both the School, College and the wider University.

## **Staff and Facilities**

### **Commendations**

- 3.5 A large number of diverse and talented faculty, including Ad Astra Fellows, have been recruited to the School within the last five years. This will broaden and deepen the potential for the School to increase their graduate taught provision, and establish critical mass in priority areas of research.

### **Recommendations**

- 3.6 Given the recent increase in the number of new staff members in the School, and the particular need for the School to further develop its research strategy, the Review Group recommendation that a concerted effort is undertaken to mentor newer faculty in respect of their opportunities to undertake, build and lead world-class research activities in the area of sociology at UCD.
- 3.7 Where appropriate, staff should be encouraged to avail of opportunities to pursue formal training in University Teaching and Learning.
- 3.8 The Review Group encourages the School to apply for Athena SWAN at the earliest opportunity.

## **Teaching, Learning and Assessment**

### **Commendations**

- 4.13 The Review Group commends the School for developing and implementing an innovative curriculum as part of the new BSc in Social Science.
- 4.14 The School offers a broad portfolio of undergraduate and postgraduate modules that engage with classic and current debates.
- 4.15 The School has produced examples of excellent teaching, e.g. School faculty winning a University Teaching Excellence Award and a College of Social Science and Law Excellence Award.
- 4.16 The School is commended for its variety of assessment methods.

### **Recommendations**

- 4.17 The School needs to work towards a consistently high quality of undergraduate tutorial teaching. Key to this will be a clearly articulated strategy of tutor recruitment and training. Tutors should be trained in pedagogy and have regular meetings with Module Co-ordinators to facilitate and coordinate their teaching.
- 4.18 Newly recruited faculty need to be made aware of teacher training opportunities within the School, College and University, and the Review Group recommends that all teaching faculty should strive to continuously update their teaching skills by participating in courses offered by the College or University. Furthermore, the School should maintain a consolidated, running record of all such training undertaken by its faculty members.
- 4.19 The School should review their assessment strategies to ensure that all modules provide students with timely feedback on a piece of assessment, in accordance with University guidelines and the Academic Regulations.

- 4.20 The School is encouraged to improve communication channels with undergraduate students, for example by having regular meetings with class representatives and/or active staff-student committees, and including feedback on implementation of decisions and recommendations.
- 4.21 The School should consider ways to facilitate the establishment of a Sociology Society for students.
- 4.22 The Review Group recommends that all teaching faculty should strive to continuously update their teaching skills by participating in courses offered by the College or University.

## **Curriculum Development and Review**

### **Commendations**

- 5.8 The undergraduate curriculum of the School of Sociology is impressive in its breadth and timeliness. There are high levels of student satisfaction with most courses, including qualitative and quantitative research methods courses.
- 5.9 The School and College are commended for the development and successful implementation of the 4-year BSc in Social Science.
- 5.10 The School is commended for developing and implementing the MSc Comparative Social Change. The degree is able to attract high calibre national and international students by offering the combined resources from UCD and Trinity College Dublin (TCD). The Review Group also commends the School for developing and implementing the MSc Social Data Analytics. This forward-looking programme recruits from the global student market.

### **Recommendations**

- 5.11 The Review Group suggests that the School should undertake a strategic review, with appropriate input and support from elsewhere in the College, to identify the most significant opportunities for new graduate taught programmes. This review should identify and prioritise synergies that are likely to exist specifically with the Schools of Philosophy, Geography, and Politics & International Relations, and more broadly with other areas.
- 5.12 The School should consider, in consultation with the College and University, strategies to increase the response rate to the student survey to make it a more valid instrument for course review.
- 5.13 The School needs to adjust their offering of postgraduate modules that persistently have student numbers below what is considered viable in many other institutions.

## **Research Activity**

### **Commendations**

- 6.14 The Review Group commends the School for its success on winning research grants, most recently its Health Research Board funding.
- 6.15 The appointment of new members of staff carries the promise of lifting research activity in the School on to a higher plane in terms of scale and quality.

- 6.16 There appears to be a willingness and a drive across the School to put research activities on to a new level such that in five years' time, the research component of its work in particular will have been transformed.
- 6.17 The School tries to build in how to do sociological research at different levels of its undergraduate curriculum, and carries it through its programme so that students have an understanding of 'doing' sociology as an active process.

### **Recommendations**

- 6.18 The School should pursue a more explicit and proactive programme for research rather than simply relying on it to emerge as an outcome of general scholarship and teaching. It should set itself measurable targets such that, for example, by the time of the next Periodic Quality Review it will have hosted two ERCs, and at least one major EU collaborative venture every three years.
- 6.19 The School should, as a matter of urgency, set in place research groupings with a view to having an explicit and clear research strategy with achievable research outcomes.
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- 6.22 It is imperative that younger staff and more recent appointments are properly mentored and advised with regard both to research applications and publication plans.
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- 6.26 In its undergraduate programme, the School should take steps to inculcate in students an understanding of research design – how to 'get at' and formulate research questions – rather than simply an understanding of research methods and techniques with regard to data collection and analysis.

## **Management of Quality and Enhancement**

### **Commendations**

- 7.9 The Review Group note that the School has shown engagement with External Examiner reports, and there is evidence provided of direct efforts made to address any concerns raised by the External Examiners.
- 7.10 Overall the student feedback indicates a high level of student satisfaction with Sociology modules, with a small number of exceptions which are being addressed.

## **Recommendations**

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- 7.12 The School must improve on and further develop structured interactions at Programme level with undergraduate Sociology students.
- 7.13 Opportunities should be identified for undergraduate and graduate taught students to engage directly in the curriculum enhancement process. One option would be by establishing student representation on School committees. University policy and guidelines in this area should be consulted to determine appropriate actions.
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- 7.15 Assessment strategies should be designed to ensure that students are given appropriate and timely feedback from the earliest years of the Programme. This would enable students to develop, grow and achieve University-level graduate outcomes.

## **Support Services**

### **Commendations**

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- 8.10 The Review Group was impressed by the level of support offered by the Library Liaison.
- 8.11 Good opportunities and skills are offered to Sociology students by the College Career and Skills Consultant.

### **Recommendations**

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## **Collaborative Provision**

### **Commendations**

- 9.3 The Review Group commends the School for its enhancement of its portfolio of taught postgraduate degrees by developing collaborative provision, in particular through the MSc in Comparative Social Change and MSc in Social Data Analytics programmes.
- 9.4 The Review Group commends the School for enriching the undergraduate curriculum through its involvement in international exchanges.

### **Recommendations**

- 9.5 The Review Group encourages the School to consider further fruitful synergies with, in particular, the Schools of Philosophy, Geography, and Politics & International Relations, and with other areas in the University, for developing postgraduate programmes.
- 9.6 The Review Group encourages the School to fully exploit the opportunities offered by the UCD/NUin and other Junior Year Abroad (JYA) programmes, as well as to explore other possible collaborations, for example through UCD Global.

## **External Relations**

### **Commendations**

- 10.6 The School has a good media profile and commendable links with the external world, both nationally and internationally.
- 10.7 The team from the School took on and developed the Irish Journal of Sociology on behalf of the Sociological Association of Ireland, appreciably improving its content and impact in volume and spread.
- 10.8 Developing the shared Master's degree in Comparative Social Change with Trinity College Dublin is a major achievement.
- 10.9 The Review Group commends the School on its undergraduate internship programme which has the potential to raise its profile in the wider world.

### **Recommendations**

- 10.10 The School acknowledges that it has to raise its profile in international research networks that are central to making successful bids for research funds. It must do this as a matter of urgency.
- 10.11 There is potential for making better use of the Graduate Outcomes Survey with a view to documenting the post graduate future employment patterns of its students.
- 10.12 The Leaving Certificate subject 'Politics and Society' has potential for raising the profile of the School in conjunction with the School of Politics & International Relations.
- 10.13 Passing the Irish Journal of Sociology on to its editorial successor at Queens University Belfast, given the School's success in improving the journal's standing and visibility, is an opportunity to forge stronger links with that university and other similar institutions on the island of Ireland.

## UCD School of Sociology – Response to the Review Group Report

A school quality review is a worthwhile exercise and we would like to thank the Review Group for their engagement as well as the Quality Office for their support. There are many opportunities for us to grasp arising from the Quality Review. Having said that, it was an unusual and challenging moment for us to engage in a quality review with so many changes occurring during the same period; such as renovation of our offices and other rooms, the retirement of our School Manager, the arrival of several new administrative staff, as well as seven new academic staff, while the university was developing a new 5-year strategic plan and a worldwide pandemic began within weeks of the completion of our Self-Assessment Report.

We would like to thank the Review Group for their commendations and we will carefully consider each recommendation. We are currently reviewing each recommendation in the relevant school committee and will consider the whole report at a forthcoming staff meeting in order to draft a Quality Improvement Plan, which we will consider at a school strategic planning day on 5 March, after which the final Quality Improvement Plan will be submitted.

We would like to thank the Review Group for the many commendations, including those highlighted as examples of good practice, such as the recruitment of a large number of diverse and talented faculty, the development of new Masters programmes, the drive across the School to put research activities on a stronger footing, the high level of student satisfaction, and the work of the School on the Irish Journal of Sociology.

We are already engaged in some of the work relating to the recommendations and will continue by developing a plan to respond constructively to the recommendations. In relation to the prioritised recommendations we will respond initially below:

1. That the School develops a new strategic plan, and establishes an Advisory Board.

As a result of the timing of the new University 5-year Strategic Plan coinciding with the quality improvement process the School had delayed the development of its strategic plan. This is scheduled (as planned) to coincide with the development of the Quality Improvement Plan, with a School Planning Day having been scheduled for 5 March 2021. At the planning day we will consider the advantages of establishing an Advisory Board.

2. The School needs to work towards a consistently high quality of undergraduate tutorial teaching.

The School has a long tradition of working with tutors and has developed policies and procedures and training opportunities for tutors. The School will examine this question both to identify if there may have been temporary issues related to working at a distance during the pandemic or if there are other issues. It is evident from the high level of student satisfaction that the School is committed to high quality teaching and we will therefore examine this question carefully. The College Teaching and Learning Committee has already developed a plan for a much more elaborate tutor training, but that project was put on hold due to Covid. Within the School this year we held regular training sessions, including general training sessions for the tutors organised at the University level and in-school training sessions on using technologies for online teaching. We encouraged the Module Coordinators to maintain consistent coordination with their tutors. We collected anonymous feedback from the tutors at the end of the first trimester and we are glad to report there was no point of dissatisfaction brought up in the feedback. All of this information will feed into the development of a strategy for tutor recruitment and training.



3. The School should pursue a more explicit and proactive programme for research.

The School thanks the Review Group for the specific example that by the time of the next Periodic Quality Review it will have hosted two ERCs, and at least one major EU collaborative venture every three years. The School will develop a Strategic Plan, including a plan for research, in which it will consider the feasibility of such objectives, but will, among other things, include specific targets for the relevant University Key Performance Indicators. There will be a focused effort to increase quality publication volume, facilitate applications for external and internal research awards, collaborate within the School (e.g. research clusters) and with other schools/institutions/disciplines, and a clear communication of the relevance of the field-weighted citation index.

4. The School should institute a major revision of its collective publications strategy such as targeting top-tier English-language journals in Sociology, and publishing impactful books in the discipline with leading publishing houses.

The School will consider this recommendation as mentioned in point 3 above. This will link to the KPI “field-weighted citation index,” but will also connect to the Output Based Research Support Scheme.

5. The Review Group encourages the School and College to actively seek further supports for their most vulnerable and disadvantaged students.

The School has been active in this area and thanks the Review Group for that recommendation. We will continue to seek such further supports. In particular the School will work closely with the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee, as well as with UCD Access and Lifelong Learning.

6. The Review Group encourages the School to consider further fruitful synergies with, in particular, the Schools of Philosophy, Geography, and Politics & International Relations, and with other areas in the University, for developing postgraduate programmes.

The School has good relationships with all the other Schools in the College (and wider), including the Schools of Philosophy, Geography, and Politics & International Relations, and has worked with these schools on many projects. This includes, for example, developing the BSc Computational Social Science, the Sustainable Societies Structured Elective, developing plans relating to the Politics and Society Leaving Certificate subject, developing a new joint MA in Social and Political Thought, and running a joint MSc in Spatial Demography. We will continue to seek further synergies with these Schools and with other Schools, and develop suitable programmes drawing on expertise within the School.



## Remote Site Visit Timetable - UCD School of Sociology

### SESSION 1

<b>Thursday, 10 September 2020</b> <b>Review Group Briefing Meeting</b>	
<i>All times are local Irish time</i>	
10.00-10.30	Introductions; UCD Quality Office Lead briefing to Review Group members on the quality process; run through technical platform, collaborative spaces, and any practicalities.
10.30-10.45	Break
10.45-11.30	Review Group discussion in preparation for the Review Site Visit.

### SESSION 2

<b>Friday, 9 October 2020</b> <b>Review Group Planning Meeting</b>	
<i>All times are local Irish time</i>	
10.00-10.45	Review Group Planning Meeting
10.45-11.00	Break
11.00-12.00	Review Group Meeting with the Registrar & Deputy President
12.00-12.15	Break
12.15-13.00	Review Group Planning Meeting continued

### SESSION 3

<b>Friday, 16 October 2020</b> <b>Review Group Meeting with College Principal and Head of School</b> <b>Organisation/Management of Resources/Strategy</b>	
<i>All times are local Irish time</i>	
11.30-12.00	Private meeting of Review Group
12.00-12.45	College Principal, UCD College of Social Sciences & Law
12.45-13.30	Review Group only – Key observations & break for lunch
13.30-14.15	Head of School, UCD School of Sociology
14.15-14.45	Review Group only – Key observations & preparation for next session

## SESSION 4

<b>Monday, 19 October 2020</b>	
<b>Core Activities &amp; Stakeholder Feedback</b>	
<i>All times are local Irish time</i>	
12.00-12.30	Private meeting of Review Group
12.30-13.15	SESSION 4.1, Stakeholder meeting – SAR Co-ordinating Committee
13.15-13.45	Review Group only – Key observations & break for lunch
13.45-14.30	SESSION 4.2, Stakeholder meeting – Academic Staff (at all levels – Professor, Associate Professor, Lecturer, etc.)
14.30-15.00	Review Group only – Key observations & break
15.00-15.45	SESSION 4.3, Stakeholder meeting – Support Staff (to also include relevant Student Advisors)
15.45-16.15	Review Group only – Key observations & break
16.15-17.15	SESSION 4.4, Stakeholder meeting – Programme Deans (Arts & Social Science), VP Research, College Finance Manager, HR Partner
17.15-17.30	Review Group only – Key observations & break
17.30-18.00	Review Group only – Report Drafting Session & preparation for next session (option for group to work offline)

## SESSION 5

<b>Tuesday, 20 October 2020</b>	
<b>Core Activities &amp; Stakeholder Feedback</b>	
<i>All times are local Irish time</i>	
09.30-10.00	Private meeting of Review Group
10.00-10.45	SESSION 5.1, Stakeholder meeting – Undergraduate students
10.45-11.00	Review Group only – Key observations & break
11.00-11.45	SESSION 5.2, Stakeholder meeting – Research and Taught Postgraduate student
11.45-12.15	Review Group only – Key observations & break
12.15-13.00	SESSION 5.3, Stakeholder meeting – School support service representative
13.00-13.15	Review Group only – Key observations
13.15-14.00	Review Group Break for lunch
14.00-14.15	Review Group preparation for afternoon
14.15-14.45	SESSION 5.4, Stakeholder meeting – School Teaching & Learning Committee
14.45-15.15	Review Group only – Key observations & break
15.15-15.45	SESSION 5.5, Stakeholder meeting – School Graduate Studies Committee
15.45-16.15	Review Group only – Key observations & break
16.15-16.45	SESSION 5.6, Stakeholder meeting – School Research Committee
16.45-17.10	Review Group only – Key observations & break
17.10-18.00	Review Group only – Report Drafting Session & preparation for next session (option for group to work offline)

## SESSION 6

<b>Wednesday, 21 October 2020</b>	
<b>Additional Stakeholder Meetings &amp; Review Key Findings</b>	
<i>All times are local Irish time</i>	
09.30-10.30	Review Group only – preparation for Exit Presentations
10.30-10.50	SESSION 6.1 – <i>Optional slot for private meeting with Review Group</i>
10.50-11.00	Review Group break
11.00-11.30	SESSION 6.1a, Editorial Board of the Irish Journal of Sociology
11.30-12.00	SESSION 6.1b, New non-Ad-Astra Academic Staf
12.00-12.20	SESSION 6.2, Review Group feedback initial outline commendations and findings College Principal, UCD College of Social Sciences and Law and UCD Director of Quality
12.20-12.30	Review Group break
12.30-12.50	SESSION 6.3, Review Group feedback initial outline commendations and findings Head of School and UCD Director of Quality
12.50-14.00	Review Group only – final preparation for exit presentation and break for lunch
14.00-14.30	SESSION 6.4, Exit Presentation to UCD School of Sociology Head of School, School staff and UCD Director of Quality
14.30-15.00	Review Group only – Remote Site Visit close out & next steps

## SESSION 7

<b>Wednesday, 4 November 2020</b>	
<b>Review Group Drafting Session</b>	
<i>All times are local Irish time</i>	
10.00-12.40	Review Group Drafting Session

## SESSION 8

<b>Monday, 23 November 2020</b>	
<b>Review Group Drafting Session</b>	
<i>All times are local Irish time</i>	
15.00-17.00	Review Group Drafting Session