

Quality Implementation Plan

This plan was approved following a meeting of the President, Director and Associate Director of An Foras Feasa on 30th June 2011.

Introductory: General Institute Response to the Peer Review Report

In summary, the institute has found this to be a very helpful exercise. It welcomes the peer reviewers' overall endorsement of the institute's strategic direction and work to date. For example, the review strongly endorses our continuing commitments to: (a) prioritising the needs of young scholars; (b) research collaborations across the institution; (c) national and international collaborations and engagements. (Peer Review Report 5.9).

The review and QIP are also timely given AFF's acquisition of permanent facilities in the Iontas building, our current engagement in a consultation exercise for future research priorities, and current review process with the view to finalising a strategic plan for the period 2011-2014; all of these activities mark the completion of the institute's first four years of operation 2007-2011. The peer report and recommendations endorse AFF's continuing of digital humanities as a core research activity, along with the incubation of other research themes to include a wider membership and diverse participation from faculty members. It is envisaged that individual research themes (e.g. digital humanities; humanities education; creative arts) will, where relevant, collaborate on specific initiatives as recommended above, while also retaining a discrete programme of activities within An Foras Feasa. This will allow new partnerships to develop, with outcomes both in the research and educational domains.

Overall, following 4 years of operation, An Foras Feasa welcomes this report and process as a valuable source of information and reflection for its next four-year cycle.

1. Recommendations which the Department could implement unaided

Recommendation 1.1:

The report recommends: 'It is important to extend the composition of the International Advisory Board to include one or more digital humanities specialists, and to engage with the Board in a more proactive way, as is planned.' (Peer Review Report 5.8)

Institute response: This is a very useful recommendation and will be finalised in the context of the new strategic plan (completion date October 2011); one or more senior international scholars would be important resources for the institute.

Action: to be implemented in the context of the new strategic plan (completion date October 2011). More proactive engagement with members of the International Board will also be achieved through various initiatives, including the current review of research clusters within the institute, and through the newly-launched Visiting Fellowship scheme.

2. Recommendations which the Department could implement only with assistance from other bodies within the University and without cost implications.

Recommendation 2.1:

The report recommends: ‘Particular attention needs to be given to communicating AFF activities and demonstrating 'evidence of value' in the work carried out. (Peer Review Report 5.12 a).

Institute response: Further scope exists to link more proactively with other services within NUIM in this regard, including the Communications Office, Faculty Office and Research Support Services (especially through the Research Information System), the Centre for Teaching and Learning; Campus Companies; other research institutes (for example IVI and NIRSA) and other faculties.

Action: Significant progress has been achieved in the past academic year with regard to increased linkages with university offices; more specific consultation will be needed with the Research Office re collaboration on the RIS system. The securing of PRTL 5 funding for the National Audio-Visual Repository marks a new collaboration between An Foras Feasa, NIRSA and the Library; other such opportunities will be examined on an ongoing basis.

3. Recommendations which the Department could implement only if additional resources are provided by the University

Recommendation 3.1:

The report recommends: ‘Continuing and further steps to embed AFF in the Faculty and the Institution should have the highest priority. The move to the new building offers particular opportunities in this regard, but it is important that resources are found for related outreach activities to ensure that awareness and interest across the Faculty is systematically cultivated.’ (Peer Review Report 5.1)

Institute response: The institute concurs with the evaluation of the embedding of AFF in the Faculty and the Institution as of highest priority. The move to the Iontas building has allowed a clearer delineation to the Faculty of the *resources, facilities and supports* offered by An Foras Feasa and an expansion of new supports, along with newly introduced educational programmes. The new supports currently include:

- provision of 40 postgraduate spaces to departments across the Faculty (this initiative has been warmly greeted by students and faculty);
- provision of offices for postdoctoral fellows and research projects (the latter on a two year basis as incubation spaces);

- provision of facilities for vivas, meetings, video conferences;
- launch of a visiting fellowship scheme in collaboration with academic departments.
- provision of a seminar room for conferences, seminars, workshops: this has enabled a significant expansion in AFF's outreach activities, including a collaboration with the Centre for the Study of Wider Europe, and a number of co-organised events (masterclass with Department of Ancient Classics; seminar on famine with School of English and NCG; poetry event with Department of Spanish, etc).

New *educational programmes* include the MA in Digital Humanities, the provision of modules to the MA in Historical Archives (run by the history department), and the expanded provision of generic skills provision to first year and third year doctoral students (in partnership with the Library for first year provision, and NIRSA for third year provision). In 2010 An Foras Feasa launched a new Diploma and Certificate in Irish Studies, in collaboration with other academic departments and the Language Centre. The MA in Digital Humanities, the first in the country, will be made available as a distance learning programme in September 2011 and this is a key educational initiative for AFF. Currently AFF does not receive any FTE equivalents or financial remuneration for these teaching activities; this needs to be redressed by September 2011 as part of the sustainability of these various initiatives.

Research initiatives with strong 'embedding' consequences include An Foras Feasa's two successful proposals under PRTL I 5:

(1) the National Audio-Visual Repository (grant €1.5 million): as part of consortium led by RIA and including TCD, DIT and NUIG. Maynooth partners include An Foras Feasa, NIRSA and the Library, with demonstration projects led by the School of English and Department of Sociology.

(2) the Graduate Education Programme in Digital Arts and Humanities (award of €750,000), in partnership with TCD, NUIG, UCC and RIA. This will enable the recruitment of 6 fully-funded doctoral students (commencing in September 2011, for four years), each in partnership with an academic department from the Faculty of Arts, Philosophy and Celtic Studies.

Actions: In addition to the actions identified above, a clearer and more developed role for Faculty members will be enabled by the creation of 5 new *research clusters*, to commence September 2011, succeeding the existing research clusters which were primarily PRTL I-4 focused. Faculty members will be invited to join one or more research clusters, which will serve as an organising infrastructure for a range of individual and collaborative projects. A consultation exercise with departments was commenced in June 2011 to finalise the research themes; 19 colleagues attended, with representatives from all departments and schools in the Faculty, and four specific cross-departmental proposals were tabled.

Recommendation 3.2:

The report recommends: 'Among the institutional implications of further embedding of AFF in the Faculty are possible funding possibilities, e.g. contributions from departments in

recognition of existing or anticipated collaborative benefits. In one institutional model, an element of research overheads is taken as a 'tax' on 'home' departments so that the element due to AFF would be boosted in recognition of its infrastructural role. It is in any case important that AFF's contributions to collaborative research projects, and to teaching, are appropriately recognised.' (*Peer Review Report 5.2*)

Institute response: The institute welcomes this emphasis on financial sustainability and the recognition of the importance of institutional financial support. At a staffing level, this has been addressed in part by the recent institutional staff adjustment exercise, though the lecturing, training and other educational programmes by the institute remain understaffed. The recent institutional review of overheads has produced a model satisfactory to An Foras Feasa and suited to its operations. As noted above, currently AFF does not receive any FTE equivalents or financial remuneration for its teaching activities or for its doctoral programme; the institute would welcome the opportunity to work with the Registrar and Bursar's Offices to address these issues. In the longer term, the suggestion of direct contributions by departments and/or Faculty is certainly worth exploring, and justifiable in light of the many services now provided by AFF through the Iontas building as well as AFF's role in graduate education for the Faculty. However the implementation of these research and teaching partnerships has already highlighted the urgent need for dedicated expertise (software engineer) and technical support (technician) for the Institute to support faculty-wide activities.

Action: The financial structures of the Institute, and the diversification of funding possibilities, will be a key dimension of the strategic plan for 2011-2014. This plan will include the preparation of a detailed business plan, in consultation with the Vice-President of Research, and in line with overall university policy on institute funding and research overhead policy. Consultation with the Registrar and Bursar will take place with a view to clarifying and confirming remuneration for the Institute's undergraduate and postgraduate activities.

Recommendation 3.3:

The report recommends: 'There is potential for imaginative approaches to the further embedding of AFF in the wider institution, in particular in relation to the Service and Support departments, where the possibilities of shared posts and short-term secondments were suggested.' (*Peer Review Report 5.3*)

Institute response: The institute concurs with this assessment and would welcome creative and effective solutions therein. Most urgently, the move to the Iontas building, along with the new research and educational projects undertaken by An Foras Feasa, has shown the need for a technician attached to the institute, as articulated immediately above (perhaps in partnership with NIRSA and/or Computer Science). In the course of the review process, a shared post and/or short term secondment with the Research Office and Library were mooted, as a means to resource specific research projects, including European or non-exchequer grant proposals; these would be welcomed by An Foras Feasa - for example a period of secondment to the Institute of a Research Officer, or a shared archivist/imaging specialist with the Library.

Action: Continuing liaison with the University Officers and relevant University Committees (Academic Council and Governing Authority) regarding development of further staff roles in the Institute, including the possibility of shared posts and secondments.

Recommendation 3.4:

The report recommends: ‘Other models for internal funding of core positions are also under investigation. It is important that the final model should take account of AFF's need for stable and sustainable management and also for a critical mass of core expertise in applied computer science and in digital humanities, recognising both the opportunities and requirements of digital scholarship and also the career development needs of the digital humanities specialists who will instantiate this critical mass.’ (Peer Review Report 5.4)

Institute response: The institute welcomes warmly this assessment and the recognition of sustaining and expanding the now recognised core expertise of An Foras Feasa. Subsequent to the peer review, the recent staff adjustment exercise made core the posts of Director and Associate Director, and the institute welcomes this outcome as crucial to stable and sustainable management. The current positions of Project Officer and Technology Officer are, however, currently filled as contracts though both officers play a central role in the institute's teaching and research activities and both have contributed greatly to AFF's expansion and recent funding successes. The making permanent of these positions, at the first available opportunity, is a key priority for the institute as is the expansion of lecturing positions in the areas of digital humanities/humanities computing. Finally, the nature of AFF's research requires also core, dedicated software engineering expertise; currently this is resourced on a contract basis only (supported by research overheads) and for individual projects. The success in PRTL15 indicates that a dedicated post is warranted to support AFF's distinctive national expertise in digital humanities/humanities computing.

Action: Continuing liaison with the University Officers and relevant University Committees (Academic Council and Governing Authority), building on the above, regarding consolidation of core staff positions.

Recommendation 3.5:

The report recommends: ‘The development of the critical mass is likely to be a somewhat longer term goal, but among the benefits to the Faculty and the Institution will be increased opportunities for externally funded research projects and the development of new teaching programmes, as well as greater capacity and flexibility in exploiting commercial opportunities. In relation to this, one appropriate approach might be joint appointments between AFF and departments in the Faculty.’ (Peer Review Report 5.5)

Institute response: the institute concurs with the assessment as to increased opportunities for externally funded research projects, teaching programmes and commercial opportunities, and has made significant progress in all areas since the peer review. The provision of a joint appointment is a complex issue since the core teaching expertise in digital humanities/humanities computing does not match readily with any one department.

Additionally, with regard to its strategic direction and research clusters, the institute would resist any initiative that would tie its activities to one discipline or subject, given the institute's identity as a research institute for the faculty.

Action: Continuing consultation with the Faculty, in light of the above, and relevant University Committees (Academic Council and Governing Authority), regarding opportunities for further staff positions and teaching and research collaborations.

Recommendation 3.6:

The report recommends: 'In relation to this, the review strongly endorses the aspirations expressed in the SAR for development towards a lectureship/senior lectureship in digital humanities and in due course a Chair. (SAR VII.4 p.59) In part this is related also to issues of career development and progression, which will be important if AFF/NUIM is to retain key staff as its capabilities and standing develop.' (*Peer Review Report 5.6*)

Institute response: the institute welcomes this strong endorsement and concurs strongly with the evaluation of its importance with regard to career development and progression. It is hoped that the wider strategic plan for the University will recognise NUIM's established strength, through AFF's work, in digital humanities and resource the subject accordingly.

Action: Continuing consultation with the Research Committee and other relevant University Committees (Academic Council and Governing Authority), regarding expanded lecturing positions in the field of digital humanities. It is hoped that the next university strategic plan will further recognise the importance of digital humanities and digital humanities education, as developed by An Foras Feasa, to be expanded as a key priority and centre of excellence for NUI Maynooth.

Recommendation 3.7:

The report recommends: Related to this, in turn, is the prospect of a core of AFF staff capable of joint supervision of PhD research with 'home' department staff, and the accompanying recommendation that an objective is set that over time this should become the 'norm' or at least quite common for Doctoral Fellows in AFF. (*Peer Review Report 5.7*)

Institute response: this recommendation has been implemented in the context of the Grep programme in Digital Arts and Humanities, whereby students will be jointly supervised by a member of AFF and a member of the participating academic departments.

Action: The resource implementation of this model can be assisted by the provision of doctoral supervision by the Project and Technology Officers, where suitably qualified and in line with institutional guidelines on PhD supervision.

Recommendation 3.8:

The report recommends: ‘The view that the development of European collaboration and funding merits particular attention is strongly endorsed’. (Peer Review Report 5.10)

Institute response: this is a key priority for An Foras Feasa’s expansion. Since the peer review report, a proposal for Marie Curie funding has been submitted and opportunities for an international consortium actively explored. In the coming year AFF will host two large European events: the Humanities Spring international postdoctoral seminar on behalf of the ESF, and the RECODE RNP international postgraduate summer school. Hosting both of these events has been possible only with the new Iontas facilities and with considerable administrative support. These initiatives require considerable effort and An Foras Feasa would welcome participation in an institution-wide consultation policy to build strategic and selected alliances with a number of international partners, that could in turn provide the framework for European collaborative grant proposals. Involvement in European collaborations carry large resource implications and time commitments for project personnel, both in terms of research and administration. Additional resources from within the University and externally (e.g. bought-in consultancy expertise) will be needed to support both project proposals and implementation. Our current work towards completion of a strategic plan will include, over the summer period, a detailed consideration of strategic alliances and scheduled responses to EU calls.

Action: Building on the actions outlined as part of the response above, An Foras Feasa will actively prioritise the securing of European collaborations and funding opportunities as part of its strategic plan for 2011-2014.

Recommendation 3.9:

The report recommends: ‘Opportunities for commercial exploitation of consultancy and training, as well as project collaboration, are ripe for more immediate development, although some additional resource may be required initially to support this.’ (Peer Review Report 5.11)

Institute response: The recommendation is warmly welcomed by An Foras Feasa executive staff as an important recognition of the potential in this regard. The recognised expertise within Digital Humanities, a relatively rare and sought-after subject area, means that there are significant opportunities for exploitation of external paid consultancy and training work both within the university and externally (e.g. previously delivered and popular 'Digitisation in a Day' course).

Action: With respect to commercialisation of research, AFF has begun conversations with the Commercialisation Office and has received useful input on a current grant proposal; recognising the resource constraints for this busy office, it would welcome, as recommended, some initial additional resources (e.g. day-long workshop; one-on-one consultations, etc). The success of AFF’s recent Research Development Initiative (with Intel and the Irish Film Institute) indicates the rich scope for future potential.

Recommendation 3.10:

The report recommends: 'Particular attention needs to be given to communicating AFF activities and demonstrating 'evidence of value' in the work carried out. This is to be expected for any new activity, especially one operating in a new discipline area, but makes it all the more important. The following specific recommendations are well understood by AFF, but resources and prioritisation are needed to ensure they are followed up:

- to keep the website and newsletters up to date;
- to develop a framework and strategy for developing examples of use of the various resources under (and after) construction, in particular examples of how the resource may be used in research;
- to develop related strategies for keeping resource development websites active – e.g. a monthly 'xxx of the month', where 'xxx' is something relevant, such as 'person of the month' for a prosopographical resource (Peer Review Report 5.12.a)

Institute response: The institute concurs with this assessment and is currently undertaking a significant overhaul of these activities as part of its strategic review process. These dissemination activities do, however, carry large resource implications; in addition to the large demands on administrative and executive staff, they also require considerable technical support (see recommendation re technician under 3.3 above) .

Action: A new Institute website will be launched at the beginning of the next academic year; this will complement AFF's newly introduced educational site <http://www.learn.digital.humanities.ie>; these are the product of detailed internal strategic planning with targeted dissemination. The institute will also produce a detailed report of PRTL4 activities, to mark the end of the funding period in September.

Recommendation 3.11:

The report recommends:

- to ensure time for reflection and writing, so that a high level of scholarly publication is maintained;
- to pursue a strategy of joint publications with research partners, in order to address and illustrate issues associated with modes of collaborative research, which is still rather new in the Humanities. (Peer Review Report 5.12.b)

Institute response: the institute concurs strongly with this evaluation and sees its implementation (along with the Faculty embedding and financial sustainability) as the key prioritisation for institute staff members. The expansion of the institute's activities makes this issue even more urgent and potentially difficult to achieve. New teaching programmes, most especially the MA in Digital Humanities, have placed huge burdens on the time of the AFF staff, while simultaneously offering unique publication opportunities given AFF's pioneering role in digital humanities education provision and its growing contribution to discourses and practices in humanities education, more generally. Most recently this was recognised by the inclusion of an AFF team publication in the prestigious *Digital Humanities Quarterly*. The strategy of joint publications with research partners will be pursued, though this is not without potential pitfalls and is a new departure for many humanities scholars.

Action: The institute will prioritize the protection of time for research and publication for staff members, including through sabbaticals or shorter periods of leave.

Recommendation 3.12:

The report recommends: ‘The planned developments of a Strategic Plan and Business Plan are clearly important in ensuring clarity about the future of AFF.’ (Peer Review Report 5.13)

Institute response: the institute concurs and has set the target date of September 2011 for completion of its strategic plan (including business plan). In addition to the stakeholders identified in our SAR and cited in this QIP, the institute will welcome the support of senior officers of the University in completing this and in pointing to comparable plans or templates elsewhere.

Action: The target date for completion of the Institute’s strategic plan (following completion of current consultation with members, executive staff, board and other stakeholders) is October 2011, completing the first two stages of the process undertaken in March and June 2011.

Professor Tom Collins, President

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