

# Quality Implementation Plan for the Education Department

Version 29 July 2011

## 1. Recommendations which the Department could implement unaided

### *Recommendation 1.5 to 1.8: Reduce the fragmentation and duplication of teaching.*

No	Page	Recommendation
1.5	9	The reviewers were not aware of a mechanism that enabled an overview of taught programmes and the identification of overlap or duplication. It may be that in a small department this is done informally and we are aware that the two course leaders in the separate leadership and management courses are discussing opportunity for synergies. We would suggest however, that these matters are too important to be left to chance and the Department sets aside a specific time each year to explore the range of course provision, including option modules to maximise efficiency.
1.6	11	Further exploration is undertaken by the department on developing modules that can be shared across programmes, taking into account issues of levels and suitability of content.
1.7	11	On the masters' programme for example it appears common practice for cohorts to be divided into small groups so that the students are able to explore areas that particularly interested them. This is laudatory but the reviewers recommend that, given that some of the resultant groups of students are very small, the department reflect on the sustainability of this approach, particularly in the context of the increasing demands on staff.
1.8	14	The development of a mechanism that enables an overview of taught programmes and the identification of overlap or duplication.

**Response of the department:** The practice in the department has been to develop free-standing courses which were designed as integrated units, with a cohesive cohort of students passing through. While this resulted in a very supportive learning environment with small group teaching, one of the consequences was some duplication of teaching resulting in high workloads for some staff members. We recognise that as the department has grown in the number of courses and students, without a corresponding growth in staff numbers, this approach is no longer viable. As a result we have adjusted the Masters level programmes to share taught modules where possible, resulting in a reduction in the number of small classes. In the medium term, we are reviewing our entire range of postgraduate courses, with a view to providing a progressive series of courses which students can take in a flexible manner designed to match their own needs and availability.

**Action agreed:** The Education Department will continue to explore the possibilities of sharing modules within and between departments, and will report to the Quality sub-committee by December 2011.

***Recommendation 2.1 and 2.2: Increase the support for early career staff***

No	Page	Recommendation
2.1	13	More actively manage staff members who are studying for PhDs to ensure steady progress and the taking of study leave.
2.2	13	Develop a research mentoring scheme so that new staff have a guide to help them on beginning research, on a publication strategy and on career development.

**Response of the department:** The department recognises the need to support staff members in completing their doctoral research, and in early career research. Some limited progress has been made in this regard:

- One staff member has been able to avail of sabbatical leave to progress her doctoral studies.
- Arrangements have been made to provide financial support for staff members to cover the fees for PhD research, at least in the current financial year.
- It has been agreed that where opportunities arise to reduce the workload of staff (and particularly the workload associated with course leadership), priority will be given to those engaged in doctoral research.
- The department is using some funds provided by the Faculty of Social Sciences to develop a research strategy for the department, and to organise a workshop for staff on writing for publication.
- Some modest funds have been allocated to allow newly appointed staff to attend Irish educational conferences.
- The research manager is working with newly appointed staff to make them aware of research and publication opportunities.

Despite these steps, we recognise the need for a deeper and more structured support for early career staff members.

**Action:** The department will seek to develop a structured mentoring system for new staff, to provide guidance on research and career development, and will report to the Quality sub-committee by December 2011.

***Recommendation 2.3 to 2.5: Encourage staff research and publication***

No	Page	Recommendation
2.3	13	Encourage staff to publish in international journals.
2.4	13	Avoid dichotomising collaborative and individual research and seek to expand and develop the research manager role.
2.5	13	Sustain the clear interconnections between research and teaching.

As noted earlier, the department recognises the desirability of increased publication in international journals. The department has been heavily engaged in research, and involved in many of the recent developments in the Irish education sector. While retaining a commitment to the development within the sector, we recognise the desirability of increasing the profile of the work of the department in published work. A number of books and articles have been published in international fora in recent years, and despite the pressures on time, the department is seeking to support further publication. We recognise the value of collaborative work, and increasingly the work undertaken by the department is working through research teams rather than individual researchers.

We fully support the call to sustain the links between research and teaching. One of the major research projects in the department in recent years, *Teaching and Learning for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (TL21) has as its central focus the improvement of the quality of teaching in Irish second level schools, and the insights derived from this have underpinned the recent evolution of the PGDE. A further stage of this project, which links research with teaching, continues through the TL21 Transfer Initiative. It involves the NUI Maynooth Education Department, four of the regional Education Centres and the country's largest VEC. The active phase will finish in summer 2012, and the final stage of the accreditation /research dimension will finish in 2013.

The department has initiated a series of educational research staff seminars with the Department of Adult and Community Education which will encourage conversations about educational research amongst staff and the presentation of initial research findings that can be later developed into research articles.

**Action:** The department will continue to encourage staff to publish in international publications, and will release the research manager from some administrative work to allow expansion of this role.

***Recommendation 2.6: More explicit reporting of the work of the department.***

No	Page	Recommendation
2.6	13	In general the department needs to be more explicit about its many strengths, citing evidence of them. We noted that the President's Report for 2006-07 does not seem to reflect fully the considerable work undertaken by members of the department.

We agree that the department should be more explicit in citing evidence of its work. Efforts will be made to encourage greater reporting of publications and other research activities in future reports, through the NUIM research information system, and on the department website.

**Action:** The department will ensure greater reporting of its work, on its website, through the President's report, and in other fora.

***Recommendation 3.2: Double marking***

No	Page	Recommendation
3.2	11	The reviewers also note that there have been developments in promoting collaborative approaches to assessment and recommend that the department consider developing this further in terms of double marking and/or moderation processes.

The department has introduced double marking for M.Ed, M.Ed School Leadership and M.Ed School Guidance and Counselling theses from 2010. For smaller projects, full double marking is impractical because of the volume of assignments. In these areas, work has been done to strengthen the cross moderation procedures.

**Action:** The department will continue to use double marking for Master's theses and strengthen cross moderation of smaller assignments.

***Recommendation 3.3: Collaborative approaches to assessment***

No	Page	Recommendation
3.3	12	The levels to which students feel supported in their work are highly commendable. However there must be a question about the long term sustainability of the particular and often individual approaches to student support, given the many demands on staff time. The reviewers noted that there were some interesting developments in the department in the use of peer support in some programmes. The reviewers recommend that further exploration could be done in this area to alleviate some of the pressure on staff time without detriment to the highly supportive environment provided by the department.

The department has been developing a group supervision process in the M.Ed School Guidance and Counselling. In this process, each student has a specific supervisor, with all the usual supervision responsibilities. The small cluster of student who share a supervisor meet the supervisor as a group at a number of scheduled times throughout the year, and share in the discussion of the work of each member of the cluster. This mechanism has proven to be very helpful to students, who appreciate the opportunity to consider the work of others. We plan to expand this approach gradually to other programmes.

**Action:** The department will continue to develop collaborative supervision structures for thesis work, and peer support mechanisms where practical in other courses.

### ***Recommendation 3.4: Developing a standard feedback instrument***

No	Page	Recommendation
3.4	12	Whilst evaluation is an integral part of working with students and is on-going, the department should consider developing a standard data capture tool that would provide a common set of evaluative measures across programmes.

We note the value of a common data collection instrument, and plan to develop one, but this has not yet been done.

**Action:** The department will develop a common format for collecting student feedback, and extend this as soon as possible to all courses.

### ***Recommendation 4.1 and 4.2: Reviewing the strategic plan***

No	Page	Recommendation
4.1	9	Strategic Plan, we would suggest is too long and vague. It needs to be more succinct with clearly identifiable targets and responsibilities for meeting these clearly identified. In short it needs to become a working document which directly shapes and informs staff meetings.
4.2	13	A reformulation of the strategic plan into a shorter and more precise shape so that it becomes a live planning tool.

We note the need to reformulate the strategic plan. The earlier plan has been overtaken by external factors including (i) the employment control framework, (ii) the adverse economic climate, and (iii) the potential for a two-year PGDE. In addition there has been considerable turnover of staff in the last two years, and there are now four academic staff in the department who were not involved at the time of preparation of the older strategic plan. As a result of these changes a new and reformulated strategic plan for the department is needed. While some preliminary consideration has been given to future strategy, the plan has not yet been developed.

**Action:** The department will review and reformulate the strategic plan, by December 2011.

### ***Recommendation 5: Supporting student publication***

No	Page	Recommendation
5	13	The Department consider devising a strategy for publishing or otherwise disseminating the research outcomes from Master or PhD theses. This might be achieved, for example, via joint articles in journals involving supervisors and students, or developing a series of Working Papers that could be made available electronically.

Some modest progress has been made in this area. As a pilot activity, some of the students from the PGDEL programme last year are being asked to present their work in a specially convened symposium in May of 2011. This will provide the selected students with an opportunity to share their work with a wider audience, and provide an opportunity for students in the current PGDEL cohort to hear the work of a previous group. Based on the progress of this event, we hope to expand this model to other courses.

There is also scope for joint publication of outcomes of research, particularly at doctoral level. The first cohort of EdD graduates are preparing an edited book for publication (currently in initial draft format)

**Action:** The department will seek ways to publish work co-authored with students, and to make working papers available electronically.

### ***Recommendation 6: Audit of Moodle***

No	Page	Recommendation
6	11	The department audit the use of Moodle in courses to evaluate the extent to which it is being used consistently in all areas.

The use of Moodle has been reviewed. It was noted that some of the part-time staff members made very little use of Moodle. In response, a training workshop was organised in 2010. Use of Moodle has grown since then, and almost all modules make use of it.

**Action:** A further review of Moodle will be conducted in the coming year and course evaluations will examine student usage and feedback about Moodle.

### ***Recommendation 7: Establishment of risk register***

No	Page	Recommendation
7	14	The setting up of a risk register.

A risk register has been established, as part of the University-wide risk register. This was established in 2009 and updated in 2010.

**Action:** Complete, but will require annual updates.

## 2. Recommendations which the Department could implement only with assistance from other bodies within the University

### *Recommendation 1.1 to 1.4: Enhance shared teaching linkages with other departments*

No	Page	Recommendation
1.1	7	Participation in Graduate School Provision could increase the range of research methods to which students are exposed, encourage contact with students beyond the department who are studying similar topics and expose students to social science theories which may help inform their studies.
1.2	7	The Ed.D students and staff indicated the benefits of inter-departmental collaboration in interviews with the reviewers and so the department might find it helpful to think through how these benefits could be extended to traditional PhD students.
1.3	13	Seek ways of including PhD and Ed.D students in broader social science research training provision in the University and avoid duplication of provision.
1.4	12	Financial constraints may reduce the likelihood of any increase in the resourcing levels of the department and the reviewers in this situation recommend that the department explores the possibility of further collaboration with other units and departments in teaching programmes

The PhD in education has been developed into a structured PhD format. As part of this change, students are required to take a number of taught modules (normally 6 modules amounting to 30 credits). Arrangements have been put in place allowing students to take up to half of the taught modules from other departments of the University, and a number of shared modules have been developed with the other departments in the Faculty of Social Sciences. While these developments are in the early stages, we anticipate that there will be greater opportunities for sharing of modules with other departments in the future.

**Action:** The department will continue to explore opportunities for inter-departmental collaboration and sharing of modules.

### *Recommendation 3.1 Anonymous marking*

No	Page	Recommendation
3.1	11	The reviewers commend the department for exploring the possibility of employing anonymous marking procedures and recommend that the department continue to develop this approach to assessment where appropriate.

The department recognises the value of anonymous marking of examinations. However this is a University-wide issue, as it involves changes to the examination practices throughout the University. This has logistical implications for the examinations office, as it would involve additional work in verification procedures.

Anonymous marking of projects M.Ed and M.Ed S.L assignments has been introduced, and anonymous marking of assignments will be expanded to other assignments wherever feasible.

## **Appendix: General Departmental response to the Peer Review Report**

The Education Department welcomes the Peer Review Report as a positive and affirming acknowledgement of the work of the department and as a valuable instrument for the guidance of future planning. The positive tone of the report supports the philosophy of the Department as embodied in a number of features of our work. These are:

- Commitment to the endeavour of education and to the development and renewal of the teaching profession at all levels
- Willingness to accept and promote change and development
- Commitment to the creation of environments of learning and to the development of learning communities
- Concern for students as individuals and recognition of the need to combine academic, cognitive and imaginative challenge with a commitment to human flourishing
- Belief in the value of strong links between teaching and research
- Recognition of the multi-faceted and multi-disciplinary nature of education and educational research
- Commitment to individual research as well as to large-scale collaborative research, within and across departments and faculties
- Commitment to distributed leadership and ongoing review of mechanisms used to achieve this.

This philosophy is given concrete expression through active, participatory learning and teaching methodologies. These methodologies are expressly encouraged and rewarded via our teaching and assessment strategies and are actively modelled whenever possible. This involves work with small as well as large groups, engaging students in critical reflection, encouraging collaborative learning, accepting and promoting critical student participation and developing congruence between teaching and assessment. ICT is seen as a vital tool and support in this process and it is used, in particular, to promote and facilitate collaborative learning and authentic assessment. Concern for student well-being implies that it is (and is intended to be) virtually impossible for a student to proceed anonymously through any of the department's courses.

The affirmation of the Department's work is particularly heartening at a time of economic stringency. We are aware that our approach, and our commitment to active engagement with our students and to continuing, appropriate development of the Department's programmes, imposes a high cost in staff time and effort. In looking to the future, we are cognisant of the need to consider issues of quality, efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability. Of these we hold quality to be of paramount importance. We do, however, accept that efficiency and effectiveness may provide the necessary conditions to allow quality to be sustained.