

Quality Promotion Sub-Committee

Minutes of the meeting of 21 January 2011

Present: Dr David Redmond (Acting Chair), Mr. Robert Dixon, Dr Honor Fagan, Mr. Cathal McCauley, Dr Bernard Mahon, Dr Tom O'Connor, Mr. Aengus Ó Maoláin, Dr Richard Watson (Secretary).

Apologies: Professor Tom Collins, Mr. Colm Nelson, Professor Ray O'Neill, Professor Rowena Pecchenino, Professor Jim Walsh.

In Attendance: Professor Margaret Kelleher

1. Minutes and Notes of meeting of 14 December 2010

The draft minutes and notes of this meeting had been circulated and were accepted.

2. Matters arising

None

3. Self Assessment Report from the Department of Philosophy

The QPSC reviewed the draft Self Assessment Report (SAR) of the Department of Philosophy. The Sub-Committee was impressed by the tremendous amount of high quality work, in teaching, research, and contributions to the community in NUI Maynooth and to the general academic community: the quality and quantity of the output from the Department is all the more impressive, given its small size and the difficulties in its recent history. The Sub-Committee commends the Department on its excellent work, and hopes that the University may be able to provide more support despite the continuing constraints on finances and staffing.

Comments were made on various aspects of the SAR which successfully convey many admirable features of the Department. The attention given to the work of teaching is impressive: there is an evident concern to maintain good contact with students, to deliver a structured, comprehensive and broadly based undergraduate course with well defined pathways leading to postgraduate study. The cooperation with other NUI Maynooth Departments in existing and future activities is commendable, and equally commendable is the distinctive role which the NUI Maynooth Philosophy Department plays vis-à-vis the other Philosophy Departments in the country: this is no doubt due in part to the international nature of the staff. The Sub-Committee considered that the document might better convey the high quality of the Department by addressing some of the following matters; but the Sub-Committee would like to stress that these are suggestions to improve the document, and do not imply any criticism of the Department or of the conduct of its business.

One set of suggestions concerns structure. It might be desirable to provide more structure in the document by using a numbering system of paragraphs, as in section 3, and by providing more headings and/or sub-headings. For example, essentially the same material as in the present section 1, with some additions from Appendix I and Appendix X, and some editing, might be presented under headings such as:

1.1 Vision Statement (from Appendix I)

1.2 History of the Department

1.3 Courses

1.4 Student numbers (including the full table from Appendix X)

1.5 Staffing

1.6 Methodology used in preparing the SAR (including an expanded description of the bench marking exercise mentioned in section 2, page 3)

(Quite apart from any considerations of restructuring, it was thought to be important that a Vision Statement and a description of methodology be included in the main text of the SAR.) The long paragraph from page 6 to page 8 concerning postgraduate study would benefit by the introduction of breaks into sub topics indicated by sub-headings, and by the omission of some of the detail on page 7. It would be an improvement also to highlight the comments on the previous Peer Review Report on page 9 by providing it with its own heading and sub-headings.

A second set of suggestions concerns evaluation. The Sub-Committee thought that the SAR would benefit by including more self assessment, which could be done in two main ways. First, the SAR lacks any mention of the Strategic Plan of the University; there should be some mention of this, and any attempt to show the link between the present and future activities of the Department and the Strategic Plan of the University will inevitably involve evaluation. A second main way of including more self assessment would be to strengthen section 7 considerably. At present, even the title suggests a tentative approach to the future. The self assessment exercise provides an opportunity for the Department to make decisions and firm proposals concerning directions to be taken, even in the absence of a Professor, and an occasion for deriving benefit from the wisdom and experience of the External Reviewers expressed in the advice they may have to offer on these directions.

The third set of suggestions concerns the Appendices. The Sub-Committee thought that the amount of material in the Appendices should be reduced, by referring to web pages where possible, and by making some of the material available in hard copy for inspection by the External Reviewers during the Peer Review Visit, if they should wish to look at it. The idea is to reduce the demands on the Reviewers, without reducing the impressive amount of descriptive material assembled. One change,

however, must be made: any information which might serve to identify the students in Appendix IX, such as names and student numbers, should be removed so as to make the report sheets quite anonymous.

Finally, the SAR contains a few typos which the Director of Quality will convey to the Head of Department.

4. AOB

The Director informed the Sub-Committee that the next meeting was scheduled for 3.30 p.m. on 11 February in the Registrar's Conference Room, and would consider the SAR from the Centre for Media Studies. Other matters would need to be considered at this or a subsequent meeting of the QPSC:

- ongoing actions to implement recommendations of the Institutional Review; these would include the exploration of benchmarking and the adoption of a consistent approach to collecting feedback from students on teaching and learning;
- proposed revisions to be made to *Quality Review Guidelines* in the light of the second cycle of internal quality reviews; for example, some changes in the existing Follow-up Procedures would be needed, since the Director had not yet received a single Quality Implementation Plan for publication on the web.