Ollscoil Mhá Nuad

Maynooth University

QUALITY IMPROVEMENT AND ASSURANCE

PEER REVIEW GROUP REPORT

DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY

ACADEMIC YEAR 2016/2017

June 2017

Contents

1.   Introduction

This report is based on a Self-Assessment Report (SAR) provided by the Department of Anthropology and on interviews and observations from a three-day site visit by the Peer Review Group (PRG) (28 February – 2 March 2017). The site visit allowed the PRG to meet with departmental staff, undergraduate and postgraduate students, University officers and external stakeholders and, in conjunction with the SAR, was sufficient to be able to review the activities of the Department as required by the MU Guidelines for Internal Quality Reviews. The PRG spoke to the departmental support and Academic staff as a group and individually, as well as to a randomly selected representative sample of undergraduate, taught graduate and research PhD students. Phone call to one external stakeholder and an interview with another one, gave a sense of how the Department and its graduates are perceived outside the University.

2.   Peer Review Group Members

Name	Affiliation	Role
Professor Helena Wulff	Stockholm University Dept. of Social Anthropology	External member
Professor Thomas Fillitz	University of Vienna Institute for Social and Cultural Anthropology	External member
Dr Kieran McGroarty	Maynooth University Dept. of Ancient Classics	Internal member
Dr M. Frances Heaney	Maynooth University Dept. of Chemistry	Internal member

3.   Timetable of the site visit

The timetable of the visit (Appendix 1) was drafted by the Maynooth University Quality Office prior to the review.

The timetable was suitable and adequate for the site visit. The only further comment by the PRG is that more and longer breaks would have been useful in order to reflect on what the PRG is hearing. For the compilation of the short exit report, more time would have been appreciated.

4. Peer Review Methodology

4.1 Site Visit

The site visit provided the PRG with an immersive introduction to the department staff, and their reflections and evaluations of the current state of affairs and future challenges. Following initial briefings from the Dean of Faculty and Quality Assurance Office, the PRG discussed the self-assessment report and identified key areas for discussion with (a) the Head of Department (b) the staff as a whole (c) individual staff members and (d) selected students (e) university officers and representatives and (f) stakeholders.

The PRG mainly worked together, other than dividing into two groups of one internal plus one external for the parallel sessions of individual staff discussions. They used lunch and evening meal times as working sessions to examine the issues arising, to consolidate shared impressions, and to identify further questions or matters for clarification. With the exception of a campus tour that focused on teaching spaces and the Department's office building, the site visit was conducted in the University Council Room. The site visit was efficiently organized and hosted, and there was sufficient flexibility to allow for necessary alterations to the schedule.

4.2 Preparation of the Peer Review Group Report

The PRG used the report template to organize their impressions and interim findings during the site visit. After the conclusion of all interviews and discussions, the PRG mapped out the main findings of the review and the main dimensions of the report; these findings served as the basis of the exit presentation. The report writing was divided between the group members, with one member taking final editorial responsibility for integrating the different contributions.

5. Overall Assessment

5.1 Summary Assessment of the Department

Strengths

Among the greatest strengths of this Department are its diversity and internationalism, as manifested, for instance in its extensive and global research profile. The Department clearly boasts world-class research, as was documented in the SAR. It also demonstrates an equally outstanding commitment to excellence in teaching as is evident from the large and disparate range of modules offered, and the fulsome praise from the students interviewed by the PRG. The global reputation of the Department is also exemplified by the fact that some staff are (or have recently been) members of executive committees of international organizations such as the European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA) and the World Council of Anthropological Associations (WCAA), as well as editor of *Social Anthropology*, the flagship journal of EASA. It is also quite clear that there exists a vibrant and harmonious relationship between staff members, administrative and academic, and between the staff and the student bodies. Key to this dynamic is the HoD, who clearly exercises a light but commanding touch in the overall organisation of the Department.

Weaknesses

The large number of undergraduate students is clearly indicative of the vitality of this Department. There are 723 students taking undergraduate modules in anthropology with a

further 54 international students. Conversely, it is the ratio between these students and academic staff that is the Departments greatest weakness. The staff student ratio, at 1 : 38.6, is significantly higher than the university average. The academic staff identified this unfavourable ratio as the most significant impediment to both personal and departmental progress. This imbalance simply has to be addressed if the Department is to be in a position to exploit any number of opportunities.

Opportunities

This Department, housed in one of the fastest growing universities in Europe, is in the unique position of being the only Department of Anthropology in the Republic of Ireland. In addition to increasing its numbers through recruitment at home, as an English-speaking department it is particularly well situated to grow its international cohort of students and to enhance more fully its reputation as a destination for visiting scholars. All of this is contingent on an improved staff student ratio and an increase in resources in proportion to its size.

Threats

The obvious threat to the Department is a continued expansion in student numbers that is not aligned to increased resources. This threat was made palpable by almost all people interviewed by the PRG. All of this will result in a workload that will not be capable of management, which in turn will impact more destructively on research output, leading to fewer opportunities for career development and curtailed mobility.

5.2   Self-Assessment Report

The Self-Assessment Report (SAR) was detailed and clearly presented. It provided sufficient information for the PRG to prepare its work, and provided an excellent background for the review visit itself. There was very strong congruence between the SAR and the discussions during the review visit. However, the provision of data in support of some of the general statements, for instance, the total number of undergraduate and postgraduate students in the Department would have been useful. A list of all staff, with an indication of their specialism, rank and position in the Department would also have been helpful.

The **SAR** clearly indicated strengths of the Department, but also weaknesses and challenges. As might be expected, the review visit brought out much detail and nuance, yet in light of the international prominence - especially in research and publication but also in teaching - of the Department, the members of the PRG found the SAR to be somewhat understated. This is a world class department working in a controlled and focused way to bring the subject of Anthropology to a large undergraduate population, and postgraduate population in a very professional manner. The SAR might have developed this position more strongly.

Methodologically, the SAR reflected input from different members of the Department of Anthropology, however, during the visit it was evident that all members of the staff were familiar with the contents of the SAR in its entirety. All of this represents good practice in terms of enhancing ownership of the review process and ensuring transparency.

6. Findings of the Peer Review Group: Commendations and Recommendations

6.1 Overview

The SAR was prepared with a shared vision of the position and future aspirations of the Department, created in a collegiate manner involving discussions at departmental meetings and an external focus day. Staff expressed professional and personal respect for each other, with particular regard for the innovative and supportive manner in which the current Head continues to develop his role. It is clear that the Department has clear aspirations for its future in educating and researching in both traditional as well as contemporary areas of anthropological interest, and to continue to connect the subject to other sectors.

The interim Dean spoke of the emergence of the Department of Anthropology within the faculty and his perception of it as a centre of excellence. It is clear that Department has been attracting students in increasing numbers, and there is every possibility that student growth may be boosted. The obvious attractions of student growth can be realised only against a background of appropriate funding, yet, universally staff felt the Department underfunded. Whilst the VP for Research and Innovation explained to the PRG the National Funding Model, the local departmental funding model and the model currently evolving for funding of the developing research institutes, recommendations following this review encompass those requiring financial input, modest and larger scale, as well as a number of *cost neutral* suggestions.

Departmental Governance and Organisation

The Department is doing its best in financially difficult circumstances and has developed new, often creative, structures, which are greatly assisting all staff with their work and planning of same. The PRG observed evidence of collegiate, highly professional inter-staff relations. The HoD-administrative staff relationship was highly professional; and there was agreed specialisation between two exceptional part-time Senior Executive Assistants. The HoD-academic staff Relationship was also highly valued. Structural efforts have been made with regard to workload allocation to facilitate ring-fencing of research and writing time against a busy teaching schedule. The HoD also engages effectively with the development and training for the Departmental tutors. It was clear that Department meetings were held regularly and were important for dissemination of information amongst all staff. It is clear that internal planning for the transition to a new HoD is required, and that the University needs to provide institution-led structures for transition to new Department heads.

Further consideration needs to be given to the **timetabling** to ensure that tutors do not have their own classes scheduled at the same time as UG lectures which they wish to attend in preparation for their supporting tutor role. The Department should consider creating space within meetings for future planning and reflection on both these matters.

Teaching, learning, assessment and student feedback

In general there was a commendable positive response to student/staff interaction on the teaching and learning front.

The PRG met 6 (3 Female, 3 Male) UG students. The feedback spoke to the approachability of all staff, and it was clear that the students perceive that the staff continue to be inspired by the subject. The PRG commends the Department on its ability to communicate well assignment submission dates, module assessment methods etc, and on its provision of tutorial

and lecture content. The grading grid described in the SAR to facilitate rapid, quality feedback, looked to the PGR to be an excellent approach. The Department is clearly open to student requests, and continues to evaluate module content and student uptake at all levels, so as to offer students the most attractive options without producing unnecessary additional work for teaching staff. The students found staff receptive on an occasion where a change in the teaching style of a module was requested. Some students expressed a desire for a module on ecological anthropology. Concern was expressed that third 3rd year students are not receiving tutorials.

It was noted that, in association with the CLT the Department is engaging in Critical Skills modules, an initiative originating at University Level. Some staff felt the formal connection between lecture/tutorial and assessment content, the chain of responsibility for the module and communication between the CTL and the Department could be improved to the benefit of all interested parties. Some staff expressed resentment that T&L courses appeared better resourced than Departmental ones.

In general, among UG and PG students there was a concern for future employment. The Department might consider inviting recent graduates to return and give a presentation about employability after graduation and to communicate about employment secured by previous graduates. Some students indicated they would like to see more skills for the work place incorporated into or available as options on their programme – e.g. business, engineering or design modules. One student was disappointed by their inability to further their interests in the study of anthropology and law.

As to Masters students in particular, (the PRG saw 1 Female and 2 Male, 1 CREOLE, and 2 One Year Masters students) there was a concern that 1 year Masters programme was not sufficient. The external reviewers of the PRG noted that a two year Masters is a necessity for entry to PhD positions in European Universities.

All PhD students felt structures of supervision were currently working well. There were concerns however regarding funding – on both large and small scales. In addition, it was noted that generic graduate modules were considered something to be ticked off the list as opposed to study units of value.

The Department needs to help academics identify research time, to discuss rotation of modules, paying regard to rotation of classes with large numbers and those taking place in the evening. It needs to strive to maintain diversity - in gender, background and research areas. It needs to formalise structures for inter-staff communication in relation to research exchange and feedback on publications, importantly without increasing the workload.

Masters and PhD Students as teachers

There was concern that there was limited training for Masters' students as teachers. At present, they are welcome to sit in on lectures as their own schedule allows, and have opportunities to speak with staff. Tutors (MA students) appear over worked and worried about the impact of their *work* commitments on their research time. A stressed environment was mentioned several times. The position of PhD students as teachers also produced what was described as a pressured environment. It was clear that the need to balance teaching responsibilities and personal research was causing significant stress amongst this cohort. It is clear that a stricter adherence to office hours both for administrative and teaching academic

staff may help facilitate progress with all aspects of the job. The Department is simply too generous with its time.

Research activities and outputs

The PRG noted an excellent record of high profile international publications: monographs, edited volumes, book chapters and journal articles with peer-reviewed top publishers. This is an increasing trend in the Department, however, there is always room for improvement. All members of the Department are encouraged to engage in international publishing, conferencing, and to apply for national and international research funding. The PRG noted that the Department has attracted many internationally (high profile European and U.S.) and nationally funded research projects. In addition, for a number of years members of Department have been very visible at prestigious international conferences such as the European Association of Social Anthropologists and the American Anthropological Association where they frequently are invited or organise sessions and present papers. The SAR also highlighted that members of the Department have been invited to give keynote lectures and seminars at universities in Europe and the United States. The Department then boasts an excellent record of international research, in spite of a high teaching load, and this is clearly not sustainable. Greater time for research is required in the form of sabbatical leave, aligned with adequate funding for fieldwork and conferences. Both academic staff and graduate students were concerned with the lack of funding and time allocation for fieldwork.

Staffing and Staff development

There is no escaping that the staff-student ratio is high with regard to faculty norms. Indeed the Department, and the PRG, see the staff shortage as single biggest obstacle to development of this subject at Maynooth University. The on-going development of a workload model designed to provide all staff with time dedicated to both teaching and research, is never going to be successful as it deserves to be as long as the staff-student ration remains at such a high level.

Staff Morale/ Career Development/Academic Promotions

Many academic staff were disappointed by the outcome of the recent (and previous) promotion rounds. In addition, some members of staff maintained that they were unable to avail of sabbatical leave due to the incurred cuts in salary and that they found annual leave the only space for fieldwork. The balance of senior staff in the department are male and some staff members felt that this contributed to a male culture.

Administrative staff

The PRG noted that the academic staff found the administrative staff extremely valuable and valued members of the Department. It was noted that they found their jobs were becoming increasingly busy. This was exacerbated by the knowledge that they were unlikely to be promoted within the Department itself, but would need to move to a different area in the University to achieve this. A great loyalty was expressed to the Department and an extreme reluctance to move. As a result they felt that they were part of a *two-tier culture*.

As to administrative staff and communication, there was a concern that there was an over-reliance on the HoD to communicate updates on new University policy which impacted

directly on their work**.** The University needs to consider providing new protocols for conveyance of information to administrative staff, and training on accounting systems. Although there is evidence that currently the administrative staff work in an excellent manner, there was concern that without the development of new protocols for the dissemination of information to administrative staff; that this might not continue to be the case.

Academic Staff

It is recommended that the University follows through on the commitment to appoint a professor to the Department. The Department needs to develop a conversation with the interim Dean on the staffing question, and particularly, to maintain experience, to consider staff replacement at a variety of levels.

Resources and Facilities – Infrastructure

During the site visit, it became clear to the PRG that some teaching venues are able to hold the class only because of absenteeism. This is far from desirable and contributes only to an increase of absenteeism. A good fit between enrolment numbers and venue capacity is a desideratum. It was observed too that while Masters and PhD students have adequate shared office space, the quality of the computer facilities was below par.

External Engagement

Stakeholder: Greg Price, HSE reported that he was involved in a collaboration on an early stage research project concerning digital health with one member of staff. The very preliminary stage of this collaboration meant he was not in a position to comment in depth on the working of the Department, or its students.

Stakeholder: Kimmage development reported to the PRG on the growth in the international relations sector and opined that since the Department occupied a unique position (being the only Department in Ireland) it might take more advantage of this. He also encouraged collaboration on the online sphere in terms of its offerings and development. He pointed out that many jobs entail an anthropological background and more could be made of this in reference to employability.

6.2 Commendations

The Department is to be commended for the detailed and helpful **SAR**, which reflected input from multiple members of the Department of Anthropology as well as the Head of the Department.

The PRG commends the Department on its diversity and internationalism, its record of excellent research, its extensive and global research profile, its commitment to excellence in teaching within which the successful CREOLE (a European) joint Masters programme, deserves special mention. We also commend the fulsome praise offered by the Anthropology students interviewed and the vibrant and harmonious relationship between staff members, administrative and academic, and between the staff and the student body. Key to this dynamic is the HoD, who clearly exercises a light but commanding touch in the overall organisation of the Department.

6.3 Recommendations for Improvement

Institutional/Strategic Recommendations

Number	Recommendation	Additional PRG Comments
S.1	Appoint a professor of Anthropology to fill the vacant chair.	Consider co-advertising the Professor and the replacement position with those to be created by forthcoming retirements Consider strategic recruitment plan.
S.2	Allocate funding that improves the staff-student ratio.	There is an acute shortage of staff
S.3	Broaden opportunities to take paid sabbatical leave. Put structures in place to reduce the administrative or teaching loads for researchers with peer-reviewed funded projects.	This would introduce periodical freeing from such duties in line with clearly defined stages of research achievements.
S.4	Facilitate conference attendance and fieldwork through the creation of small grants schemes. For CREOLE: facilitate teacher mobility and student participation at summer school by allocating funding.	These activities are necessary to maintain and develop the international profile of the Department
S5	Provide orientation – in particular for new academic staff with research grants.	A need for clear structures for engagement with Finance and HR etc was identified by some staff interviewed.
S6	Provide a handbook of procedures for administrative staff. Consider seasonal provision of administrative staffing assistance Provide a new protocol for conveyance of information to administrative staff, and training on accounting systems	This could take the form of an on-line FAQ document. This would be especially helpful at the beginning of term and assignment submission times
S7	Provide institution-led structures for transition to new Department leaders.	
S8	Raise the profile of the CREOLE programme. Consider a funding model for a 2-year Masters programme.	The Creole programme is the only joint Masters programme in Europe.
S9	Provide training for undergraduate supervision.	
S.10	Ensure a good fit between enrolment numbers and venue capacity and	

	improved IT facilities in post-graduate rooms.	
S.11	Consider the merits of a 4-year degree programme, possibly by encouraging uptake of the International Option. Continue to encourage conversations about breaking down barriers between subjects and promote facilitation of student enrolment in modules across disciplines.	.

Recommendations to the Department

Number	Recommendation	Additional PRG Comments
U.1	Embark on internal planning for transition of new HoD.	
U.2	Introduce an annual retreat.	
U.3	Encourage new members of Department to apply for national and international research funding.	
U4	Provide coaching in international publishing regarding how to write a research application. Provide advice in career planning for staff. Implement a 'research-publication´ laboratory.	
U.5	Reflect on how to relieve the pressure on Masters and PhD students as teachers.	Consider the workload and level of preparedness of the tutors for their teaching commitments. Reflect on realistic amount of time Masters and PhD students need to be adequately prepared for their teaching role.
U.6	Consider **timetabling** changes to ensure that tutors do not have their own classes scheduled at the same time as UG lectures they wish to attend in preparation for their supporting tutor role.	
U.7	Continue to develop communication lines with the CREOLE students, and structure their engagement with administrative offices, e.g. the international office.	This will ensure difficulties of a bureaucratic nature do not overwhelm students.
U.8	Clarify the formal connection between lecture/tutorial and assessment content, and establish the chain of responsibility for the module. CTL to clearly delineate and facilitate	

	engagement between all the interested parties.	
U.9	Provide tutorial classes for 3rd year students.	
U10	Strive to maintain diversity - in gender, background and research areas. Formalise structures for inter-staff communication in relation to research exchange and feedback on publications.	To avoid increased workload, such inter-staff communication should be accomplished within current workload by replacing some other departmental duties.
U11	Invite recent graduates to return and give a presentation about **employability** after college, and to communicate about employment secured by previous graduates.	

APPENDIX 1: DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY: PEER REVIEW GROUP VISIT TIMETABLE

Tuesday, 28th February, 2017		
Time	**Description**	**Venue**
19:30	Convening of the Peer Review Group. Briefing by: Siobhán Harkin, Director of Strategy and Quality PRG agrees a Chair, and discuss the visit. Identification of any aspects requiring clarification or additional information. Dinner for members of the Peer Review Group and Director for Strategy & Quality & University Executive Member	Booked Carton House Hotel Book at 7.30pm for 6 people under the name Harkin Siobhan Harkin Aidan Mulkeen Thomas Fillitz Helena Wulff Kieran McGroarty Frances Heaney

Wednesday, 1st March, 2017			
Time	**Description**		**Venue**
8:30- 8:45	Convening of Peer Review Group; Director of Quality available to group		Council Room
8:45 -9:30	Dr Mark Maguire, Head of Department		Council Room
9:30 -10:30	Group meeting with all Department staff (Head of Department recused)		Council Room
10:30 - 11:15	Visit to core facilities of Department, escorted by Dr Mark Maguire		Anthropology Dept/Library/North Campus
11:15 -11:30	Refreshments		Council Room
11:30-12.00 12.00--12.30	**Parallel Session1/CR** Ms Denise Erdmann Dr Chandana Mathur	**Parallel Session2/PB** Ms Jacqui Mullally Dr Steve Coleman	Council Room & Presidents Boardroom Booked
12:50 -14:00	Working Lunch		Reserved Pugin Hall/ Table with service for Quality/4 people
14:00 -14:45 14.45-15.15 15.15-15.45	Meet with Students: Undergraduate (8) PG Taught (3) PhD (3)		Council Room

15:4516:00	Break	
16:00-16:30 16.30-17.00	Professor Aidan Mulkeen, VP Academic & Registrar Professor Ray O'Neill, VP Research & Innovation	Council Room
17.00-17.30	**External Stakeholder:** Mr Greg Price, Assistant National Director, Quality Improvement Division, Health Service Executive	Council Room
17.30-18.00	Dr Thomas Strong Skype: strongthomas	Presidents Boardroom
18.00	PRG meeting – identification of any areas for clarification and finalisation of tasks for following day	Council Room
19:00	PRG private working dinner	Booked Carton House Hotel at 7pm for 4 people under the name McGroarty

Thursday, 2ⁿᵈ March, 2017		
Time	**Description**	**Venue**
9:15-9:30	Convening of Peer Review Group	Council Room
9.30-10.00	Professor Maurice Devlin, Dean Faculty of Social Sciences	Council Room
10.00-10.30 10.30-11.00 11.00-11.30 11.30-12.00	Dr Jamie Saris Dr Pauline Garvey Dr Abdullahi El Tom Dr Ela Drazkiewicz	Council Room
12.00 - 12:30	**Stakeholder:** Rob Kevlihan, Kimmage Development Studies Centre	Council Room
12.30-13.00	Dr Alison Hood, Dean of Teaching & Learning	Council Room
13.00-13.30	Professor Brian Donnellan, Dean of International	Council Room
13:30-14:30	Working Lunch	Reserved Pugin Hall/ Table with service for Quality, 4 people
14:30-16:30	Preparation of Exit Presentation	Council Room
16:30-17:00	Exit presentation to all departmental staff, made by the Chair of the PRG, summarising the principal commendations and recommendations of the Peer Review Group.	Council Room
17:00	Refreshments and Exit of the PRG	Council Room