



**Maynooth
University**

National University
of Ireland Maynooth

Ollscoil Mhá Nuad

Maynooth University

QUALITY IMPROVEMENT AND ASSURANCE

PEER REVIEW GROUP REPORT

DEPARTMENT OF ADULT AND COMMUNITY EDUCATION

ACADEMIC YEAR 2016/2017

May 2017

1. Introduction.

As part of the regular Departmental review process, a Peer Review Group of two external and two internal assessors undertook a review of the work of the Department of Adult and Community Education, Maynooth University. After reviewing the Departmental Self-Assessment report, the peer review team met between 4th and 6th April 2017, with a full programme of meetings over the 5th and 6th April, where we met staff at all levels in the Department, key colleagues in the Faculty and wider University administration, part-time tutors and students. Following the site visit, the four peer-review team members liaised to produce this report, which we collectively endorse.

2. Peer Review Group Members

Professor Alan Tuckett, University of Wolverhampton

Associate Professor Laura Formenti, University of Milano Bicocca

Professor David Wraith, Mathematics & Statistics Dept. Maynooth University

Ms Anne Gallagher, Head of Centre for Irish Language and Head of School of Celtic Studies, Maynooth University

3. Timetable. See Appendix 1

3.1 Suitability and adequacy of the timetable. The Peer Review Group felt that the timetable organised for the visit was demanding, but given the two working days, was skilfully designed to give members a comprehensive oversight of the work of the Department, to engage with tutors, students, academic staff, senior managers, members of the University Executive and external partners and stakeholders. Our ability to manage the work effectively was greatly enhanced by expert support by Breda Gibney.

4. Peer review report.

4.1 Site visit. On the first morning of the visit, Peer Review Group members were shown around the new, since November, School of Education building, with particular focus on the Department of Adult and Community Education accommodation. Areas for postgraduate study, for access to IT, and academic offices were all impressive, as were the teaching areas. There was, however, little space for students to mingle and interact between classes, and an absence of coffee making facilities in the building. For evening students there are canteen facilities until 8.30p.m. in the Arts Building, where the evening B.A. is sited, and which we visited on the first evening, which were negotiated through re-tendering of contracts, following persistent advocacy by the Department administrators. We also visited the library where we saw the core of the adult education collection, and a sample of the on-line support tutorials library staff have made to facilitate student library usage. The balance of the collection was dispersed across the collection, in disciplinary collections. Again, the library offered impressive facilities for study.

4.2 Preparation of the Peer Review Group Report. The Peer Review Group had reflection meetings during working lunches, working dinner on Wednesday 5th April, and during the afternoon of the 6th April; agreed the key issues to present in the Exit presentation, and agreed to share the drafting of

the final report amongst all four of the members. There was unanimity in our agreement of the key commendations and recommendations, and in our view that we had been received with courtesy and helpfulness at every turn.

5. Overall assessment.

5.1. The Department of Adult and Community Education achieved departmental status in 1998, having grown from a Centre for Adult and Community Education which was established in 1974. A Chair was appointed in 2005. As the Self Assessment Report (SAR) makes clear the Department's teaching and research activities have focused on meeting the educational needs of groups poorly served by traditional education. We found the SAR's analysis persuasive that there was an emphasis in the work on access, justice and equality; a commitment to partnership working with community groups, and other external organisations. We were, as this report makes clear, less convinced by the SAR view that the work *characteristically* included partnership with other academic departments, although we recognise that there were past collaborations over an MA with the Department of Sociology, 2006-15; the TEN project run with the Departments of Geography and Biology, in addition to continuing co-operation with the Education Department in creating an EdD (now DHAE), and the part time Bachelor of Arts programme, which we discuss later.

The Department's work is guided by the National Strategy for Education's commitment to widening participation, and to its view that engagement with the wider community is a core role of the University, facilitating 'inward and outward flows of knowledge, staff, students and ideas between (the) institution and its wider community'. It is also consonant with the overall strategy of the University, to secure 'effective engagement with enterprise, the community, civil society and the state.'

In doing this work DACE has built a formidable reputation as a centre of excellence in adult and community education amongst the communities it serves and among its academic peers in Ireland and abroad. We met a range of students on return to learning, counselling and guidance, and doctoral studies – all of whom had only the highest praise for the combination of intellectual rigour, the linking of theory to the practical working contexts of students' working lives, the personal support, and the quality of the pedagogy employed. Several students told us, the work has been 'transformative' in their lives, and all felt it effective in meeting their learning goals. Their perspectives were confirmed in our conversations with representative part-time tutors, by administrators and by the full-time academic staff. Indeed, after a lifetime of work in adult education I (as Chair of the Group) have never experienced such universal and convincing evidence of sustained high quality teaching and organisation, although whilst students on the part-time BA also endorsed the value of the work, their experience was that the inter-departmental course needed stronger co-ordination and they compared the learning support structures available to their evening programme unfavourably to those available to full-time daytime BA students. Nevertheless, the teaching and learning work is an undoubted strength of the Department's work that is, if anything, understated in the SAR.

The Department's strengths in student-centred teaching and learning should, in our view, be drawn upon by the wider university. Working with the Centre for Teaching and Learning, and other staff with innovative approaches to pedagogy from other faculties and departments, DACE can, we believe, contribute effectively to enriching teaching and learning across the university.

The clarity of its values, its commitment to serving the educational needs of under-represented and marginalised groups, and the extent to which these inform the work of academic full and part-time staff, and of administrators, is both a strength and to some degree a weakness. The commitment to democratic management, involving academic and administrative staff, manifests a high level of cohesion, and that careful democratic consultation is extended in the co-creation of studies with external partners. The SAR makes clear the commitment of the Department to adult education for social change, for the pursuit of equality and social justice, and the library collection offers a rich range of texts within this adult education tradition. There would, however, in our view, be some benefit to students if the staff complement included staff working in other traditions in adult education, associated with human capital formation, and with quantitative studies, to further sharpen critical debate.

The financial position of DACE has moved from a position of strength to one of vulnerability over the last decade. In the years up to the financial crash, the entrepreneurial skills of DACE also meant that it was regularly a core contributor to the University's finances, with its full-time staff growing along with the growth of its work from an initial low base of 2 or 3 staff. That situation was reversed by the financial crash, whilst the Department reduced in staff numbers from 17 in 2008 to its present complement of 14, 11.5 of whom are academic staff. There is a larger administrative staff than are found in more conventional departments and we were convinced by the argument in the SAR that since effective engagement with part-time students from under-represented groups involved the Department in heavy loads of administration that would be undertaken centrally for conventionally recruited full-time undergraduates, there was a powerful case to be made for comparative reviews of staff: student ratios to make appropriate allowance for the work needed to recruit students, and to support them to succeed educationally. The SAR highlights the challenge well. The Department has, as far as we understood it, the confidence and support of the University Executive, but as more than one of the University staff we met made clear, financial pressures on the system are such that it would be prudent not take such support for granted.

However, we were concerned that making that case was made harder because of the virtual invisibility of the Department in the wider University. As the section on governance and management below makes clear, the collegial nature of the Department's decision-making has been until very recently at the expense of sufficiently clear and visible leadership of the Department in its engagement with the wider university, with policy makers, and with at least some stakeholders. It was also apparent in the SAR that the Department was stronger in analysing individual dimensions of its work than in communicating a clear sense of strategic purpose for the period ahead. We recommend strongly that the work that has started on strategy is accelerated, that programme areas now recruiting weak numbers, or being operated with no financial return be reviewed urgently, and that concerted efforts are undertaken to develop stronger links with the work of Applied Social Sciences, and other education departments in particular. We were convinced that the new Head of Department has the skills to undertake this leadership role, but will need the active support of colleagues to achieve change at the pace needed.

The Department has increased the range of its publications over the period since the last Review, and has strengthened its research-active staff with the recent consolidation of two posts. Nevertheless, the Department needs to clarify its research and scholarship strategy, making clear the blend of peer-reviewed publications and national and international conference presentations

characteristic of strong academic departments, and of practitioner focused materials designed to share best practice, informed by research findings, with the field it serves. It has a strong complement of PhD students, has made strides to increase the proportion of doctorates held by its own staff, but needs to complement this with strategies to support early career researchers. It would help, too, if the strategy made clear what the Department felt constituted research and scholarship excellence, as a benchmark to evaluate its development. This work would, in our view, help colleagues elsewhere in the University to have a clearer view of the properly distinctive nature of the intellectual production of staff.

The Department enjoys effective partnerships with a range of external stakeholders who consistently comment on the responsiveness of DACE staff. Nevertheless, external stakeholders commented on the need for a renewed sense of vision in DACE, and for it to position itself more effectively in the changing educational and economic circumstances facing the country and the student cohort to which it is committed.

In summary, we found the quality of the existing teaching and learning programme to be of a high standard, and students expressed high levels of satisfaction overall. We admired the democratic collegiality of the Department, but felt that whilst this worked well in support of existing work, there was an urgent need for strategic leadership in strategy formation to engage the Department with the wider world of the university and with opportunities and risks arising from changes in the external environment.

5.2 Self-Assessment Report

The Self-Assessment Report gave a clear and accurate view of the current work of the Department. However, it also made clear that until the Review there was something of a lack of coherent strategy. Section 4 of the SAR, which outlined the Draft Strategic Plan highlights a range of issues – from the need to streamline provision so that it is coherent and congruent, to the need to agree criteria for prioritising areas of work- that demonstrate the need for a leadership function to complement the collegiality of the work, in order that, where needed, hard decisions can be made in a timely way.

Section 3.1 of the Self-Assessment Report focused on the Department's various diploma and degree programmes. For each programme, challenges for the Department were identified and future opportunities discussed. The review group broadly concurred with the observations given. In some cases, however, the review group had further comments, but these will be discussed in detail in section 6 below.

There were a couple of areas in which the Self-Assessment could have provided more detail. Although each diploma and degree programme had a dedicated section in the SAR, details about the contents of each programme were in short supply. The general discussions provided might be an appropriate introduction to a programme, however the review group would have appreciated some more concrete details. In particular, outline syllabi would have been very useful.

The other area in which the SAR was somewhat opaque was in relation to academic staff time. In section 6 below we have highlighted concerns the review group had concerning the distribution of staff time across teaching, research and administration, and also concerning possible duplication of

activities. These observations were made on the basis of incomplete evidence: it was not possible given the scope of the review to compile data for each individual within the Department. It would therefore have been useful to have seen such data presented in the SAR, either for the Department as a whole, or individually.

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

6.1.1 Department governance and organisation.

A key recommendation of the last Quality Review was that a management and planning process be adopted that was decentralised and capable of honouring participative decision-making, reflexivity, principles of shared responsibility and authority, and as the SAR notes ‘perhaps most importantly, that favoured innovative responses capable of transcending the barriers that obstruct the realisation of these principles.’ The Department reports that a variety of models have been adopted: the initial model was abandoned as unwieldy; more recently a Deputy Head of Department role was identified to ‘reinvigorate the search for decentralised management and leadership.

A second recommendation relating to the oversight of continuing education called for reorganising the continuing education provision ‘in terms of how it is funded and in terms of a new governance structure that embedded it in the sector and in the university’. This was not adopted since it was felt that the challenges facing the provision were dramatically affected by the economic downturn.

In both cases, whilst course provisions and relations with internal and external partners work effectively at the level of the individual course, it is clear that the current model militates against making timely if tough decisions in the light of changing circumstances. The move to harmonise resource allocation models in the university, and their piloting in DACE have highlighted the need for the current method for identifying staff: student ratios to be in need of renegotiation to take account of the real costs in making part-time provision to communities under-represented in higher education. This is a major challenge DACE shares with the wider university, and we recommend the institution draws on DACE experience in drawing up a university policy on part-time (overwhelmingly mature) students.

However, the RAM modelling has also highlighted the vulnerability of courses that attract significantly diminishing numbers of students, and we saw no evidence of how the ‘prioritisation’ called for in the SAR section on the draft strategic plan can be achieved. A major challenge for the department is to preserve its collegial ethos, and student-centred planning model with a collective commitment to support departmental leadership in securing decisions that make the Department’s programme economically defensible as well as fit for purpose in meeting learners’ needs.

More than one of the external stakeholders we spoke to highlighted an absence of clear strategic direction. One was concerned that the structure of partnership provision was rolled forward from year to year without robust consideration as to the future balance of provision to be offered to specific client groups. Another pointed to the greater fleetness of foot of competitor institutions (notably DCU) in responding to changing opportunities in further and higher education. The Department may, in the light of these perspectives, consider re-exploring the 2008 call for engaging

external partners in programme governance, at least through an advisory panel structure that can alert DACE to emerging challenges and opportunities.

Internal university stakeholders also pointed to the relative invisibility of DACE in wider university counsels, and contrasted the advocacy work undertaken by staff in Applied Social Sciences on behalf of community and youth work to make decision makers aware of their resourcing needs with that of DACE. Once again, colleagues expressed uncertainty about leadership in DACE. However, we were impressed by the achievements in just two months of the new head of department, and recommend that the Department works to create a pattern of sub-groups shaping strategy on teaching and research to support the head of department in her work.

We also noted the observation by central university staff that DACE had unusually high numbers of administrative staff, and the comments of central university administrators that there was difficulty in finding a single point of contact for administrative matters – once again a feature of the decentralisation of course decision making. At the same time, we were impressed by the passion, commitment and expertise of the administrative staff. They all spoke positively about their activities within the Department, with the only negative being in relation to the volume of work.

6.1.2. Teaching, Learning, Assessment and Student Feedback

The history of DACE has evolved from a centre that provided (and still provides) adult education, not least outside the university, to growing investment in training of professionals in education (which still continues), and more recently to the more academic role of a department where high quality research (and participatory, practice-based research) is developed in collaboration with professionals and agencies to sustain the construction of knowledge about AE. This widening scope, partly due to environmental pressures (e.g. the financial crisis, changes in the job market, etc.) offers new possibilities and challenges as well as teaching and learning opportunities.

a. Specific kinds of courses, different from other departments

The Department provides different kinds of courses, in the campus and outside, nationwide; most of these courses are very different from mainstream university courses, hence they pose specific problems, since they target mature/non-traditional audiences, and often vulnerable learners, who need special support to access education, to persist, finding solutions to life issues (work, children, care tasks...) along the way, and to accomplish successfully. Most courses have the full-time/part-time option, to meet the specific needs of mature students; this is excellent but poses problems to the organisation, which need to be strategically addressed by a specific policy of the university. Most courses have national relevance, they are ground breaking and innovative, and have created a good reputation of the Department and Maynooth University with many different stakeholders.

DACE offers a wide range of paths: from courses in HE, to continuing education for professionals working with vulnerable adults in different settings, and very strong post-graduate education, which works well. This multiplicity is challenging in itself: it requires strong and continuous efforts in organisation, in developing a range of staff competences (not only about contents, but about process, sustainment, recognition, and relationship), and a specific involvement of the administrators in the overall process of recruitment, contact with partners, advice, and support, for both students and staff (a large part of which is occasional).

b. Partnerships as a resource and a challenge

Besides, and adding more complexity, all courses are designed and managed with partners, external and internal to the university, and in strict ongoing contact with changing needs. This requires a lot of negotiation, flexibility and creativity. Partnerships are of extreme value for the university, but the cost of them is high, and there should be a way to recognize it by a specific strategy of funding and recognition. Working with so many partners, DACE also appears to have sometimes an issue of ownership: the skills and efforts that are paid to maintain this complex machine do not always appear evident to external observers, and the force of claiming recognition for DACE's role in the University and outside needs to be sustained.

c. A specific pedagogy and philosophy of learning

As stated in the Self-Assessment Report, DACE is committed to fostering student-centred learning, participative decision-making, reflexivity, critical thinking, and shared responsibility. This is very evident and emerges coherently from the self-assessment report, meetings with staff, occasional tutors, and administrators, and especially from the students' feedback. This could be further developed by strengthening the link between research, practice, and teaching, as is planned.

Some features make this Department unique:

1. Teaching and learning activities evolve in time as an answer to needs expressed by people and territories, in relation to the capacity of the staff to interpret creatively new emerging challenges (see the Crisis Pregnancies course, new certificates and masters, etc.). DACE has pioneered many AE activities in different sectors, and works as an 'incubator' for further processes of teaching and learning, not least by facilitating access to HE (e.g. an increasing number of CE students from "Training and Continuing Education" progress to a Diploma in Arts; similarly, two out of three students in "Return to learning" enrol in MU degree programmes afterwards). In fact, as stated enthusiastically by many students, the participation in courses raises their motivation to learn, reveals their interests (far more than needing a certificate to improve their careers), and a deep desire to pursue further projects for their lives.
2. A strong ethical and political positioning towards inclusion in policies and practices of adult education fosters authentic participation in the knowledge creation process by people who have experienced bad relationships in formal education. This rhetoric is coherent with strategies for education at EU, national and University levels. It should be clearer and more explicit the contribution the work of DACE brings at all these levels.
3. Teaching in DACE is strongly based on the creation of a good learning environment, not least by fostering good enough relationships among students, teachers and administrators. This quality of relationships, which was quite evident throughout the visit, adds value to the process, that is then more central than contents, at least in the self-assessment report. However, content matters: a clearer description of the contents of courses, as well the relationship between content and process in the curricula could be useful to make more explicit DACE's pedagogy to external observers and stakeholders, and to other parts of the university. The website will need a revision, in relation to this.

4. The department's ethos and pedagogy is based on coherence and integration between practices of teaching, assessment, organization, and quality assurance. All the activities are systematically assessed, with qualitative and reflexive methods, that involve participants in taking a position, and having a voice, in relation to their learning and participation. This is evident, not only by declaration, but in the facility of all the people involved in having voice, expressing difficult issues, making critiques in an open and friendly way.

Here are, course by course, some specific and sometimes challenging characteristics:

Continuing Education Certificates and Diplomas (Open Access, delivered by associate staff) need constant revision to ensure correspondence with real needs and to open new possibilities (e.g. new proposals are being developed with the Froebel Department and the Department of Education; along with modules in critical skills for the wider student population). Teaching staff work on occasional contracts, and are very uncertain about the continuity of engagement (it depends on the number of enrolled people) and often teach without a contract; however, they are very engaged, passionate and skilled, so the results are quite amazing. There could be an issue of continuity, with younger and differently motivated staff.

BA Degrees (inter-departmental, part-time courses for mature students) offer a recognised second level teaching subject qualification, and involve eight departments; DACE owns the management of the degrees, however there seems to be a poor overall investment of the university as a whole, and/or some of the involved departments/staff: part-time students are happy to have this opportunity but are also critical. They do not feel they have the same learning opportunities (learning support services) and facilities that are offered to full-time students, despite paying a fee. Criticalities are managed with a strong investment of energy in support and tutoring by committed staff. We also noticed the bad conditions of the classroom.

Certificate courses in Counselling Skills and Adult Guidance are working very well and are designed in strict relationship to practice: a) the certificate in Counselling Skills was ground breaking, at a national level, and also for its educational rather than therapeutic scope. It has involved 30.000 participants over 30 years; there could be a shrinking due to different external conditions, though; b) the course in Adult Guidance is doing good for professionals working with disadvantaged adults; it made DACE recognized as an institution offering high quality training for professionals; and c) the certificate in Crisis Pregnancy Counselling Skills has been an innovative initiative, highly appreciated by participants, and created from collaborative partnership. It answers the need of a range of professionals working in a challenging service.

Higher Diploma in Further Education is another course which is practitioner oriented, where the role of DACE as an invaluable resource for adult education in Ireland, especially in bringing forth its strong pedagogic values, appears very important. It is rooted in the history of the Department (from the 1980s), nonetheless it has changed over time following the evolution of society. The focus on practice could have lessened another equally important focus on policies. There is a plan to cultivate better the relationships with bodies and organisations in the field (AONTAS, TC, etc.), not least by lobbying and communicating in a better way, to strengthen research-based design of courses, and to restate the leading role of DACE in FET.

MEd in Adult Education/Adult Guidance and Counselling: professionally oriented, these programmes have a flexible number of credits and apply RPL. They function quite well and are attractive nationwide. It is planned to explore the possibility of including modules by distance learning; this is advisable, to guarantee better access and answer to typical needs of professionals.

MA Leadership, Management and Defence Studies: DACE has invested a lot of energy, since 2002, in this pioneer course that brought a different pedagogy and philosophical perspective in the military environment. The lack of formal recognition of courses, the lack of specific resources for them, that drain time and energy from the staff, the (surprising) lack of investment on the part of the University on something that could be strategically important at an institutional level, are good reasons to reflect on the sustainability of this specific activity.

PhD in Education: staff and students appear very happy of the introduction of a structured PhD in 2011; modules are designed to meet the specific needs of each student and bring them to accomplish the task in due time. Regular dialogic assessment allows flexible change and efficacy. There are full-time and part-time programmes; students are well supported to guarantee high quality research. The quality of the process and overall reputation of the PhD make it very attractive and promising for the future of the department, and is consistent with a stronger investment on research. Research publications and international relationships will need to be forwarded, as already planned.

Professional Doctorate. DHAЕ responds to a strategic demand of the university, as well as the Government and EU, to promote civil society through the engagement of professionals at the highest level of education. This doctorate is unique in the country, and it has a strong reputation, so it appears very attractive nationwide.

The overall number of students in post-graduate education is impressive for such a little department.

In synthesis, the overall capacity of DACE in teaching and guaranteeing high quality learning, appears very well articulated, successful, and challenging. Recommendations for further strengthening the work are highlighted below in section 6.3.

6.1.3 Research activities and outputs

There is a clear, declared, and recent investment in research that will probably need to be coordinated better with teaching and networking, if there is to be a real and shared commitment to achieving the best results in this regard. The Self-Assessment Report shows that research activities and funded projects are in place, and growing, but it is too early to see how they will develop. It is clear that publications have increased after the last assessment, however, the kind of research that is done here needs different kinds of publications, for different audiences, and since this is different the most common ways to assess the academic quality of research products, there is a need to make the strategy clear to wider University colleagues.

a. A wide range of research activities and resources for it

The range of research activities in the department is very wide for a little department. After the last quality review it increased, due to an effort that was explicitly put on it. The recent

acquisition of two staff members who are committed researchers is promising, provided that they are allocated enough time and resources to do research. All research activities are connected to the construction of knowledge in teaching and networking; this requires a delicate balance, given the Department's heavy and continuing investment in training and learning.

b. Individual interests and departmental vision

The range of projects that were funded is interestingly wide – perhaps too wide for a small Department. Some themes seem to be worth increased investment, to enable DACE's researchers to be recognized at national and international level as reputed partners for bigger projects. Research has to date grown from the personal interests and skills of both experienced and early researchers. There is a need now for some vision and planning for the future, choosing themes and addressing possible partners, balancing individual interests and collective efforts, but also having in mind very explicitly the need for staff and career development. Funded research needs strategy, and a coherent effort of the department to build international networks, as is planned.

c. A research paradigm and approach

DACE has a very strong and coherent pedagogy/philosophy, which favours a critical paradigm for research, qualitative methodological approaches, and a penchant for innovative, dialogic, participatory inquiry. The tension between local, practice-based research, and a larger, European and international focus, could require some strategic decision making. There could also be a dilemma of strategy, between hyper specialization, on one side (DACE is well positioned to become a reference point for this kind of research in Europe and beyond) and, on the other side, a larger landscape of AE topics and paradigms. To be able to attract and employ PhD students, for example, they should prepare to do research in different academic contexts, know some relevant literature on policies, on quantitative studies, etc.

d. Publications and building a reputation

Participatory and practice-based research, that aims to answer the problems of society, and involves stakeholders and professionals, as co-researchers, participants, audiences, produces many kinds of different products. Among the publications, there are papers and books written with and for professionals, and this is very valuable for AE studies, but it needs to be sustained by strong arguments, especially in relation to the academic environment. The list of publications shows quite clearly that the last years' activity has produced valuable and interesting knowledge, also witnessed by presentations at international conferences (one was also organised, and very successfully, in the campus, giving to participants from all over the world a strong impression of professionalism, competence and academic skills – two of the prized PhD papers at the conference came from DACE).

6.1.4 Staffing and staff development

There is a strong sense from talking to the various student groups that the academic staff are the Department's real strength, and that they help create a clear and distinctive identity for the Department.

The composition of the Department is somewhat atypical. There are eleven full-time academic staff and three full time administrative staff. One further academic member of the Department is shared between the Department and the Education Department. There are also 73 associate staff who for the most part act as part-time tutors across the range of the Department's teaching activities. It was noted that the large number of associate staff creates significant management and administrative issues for both the academics and administrators within the Department. This seems to go beyond the levels of administrative responsibility that would be considered normal in other departments, and has the potential to impact on other aspects of the Department's activities (for example research and scholarship).

Two of the current academic staff members were recent appointments, and were replacements for people who had retired. One of the administrative staff is currently on a short-term contract, substituting for a permanent member of administrative staff who is on a career break. There is considerable uncertainty within the Department due to the fact that a number of retirements are coming up. . This includes one member of academic staff who will retire in September 2017, followed by one more in September 2018 and two more in September 2019. . The senior administrator will retire next year, as will a number of the part-time associate staff. In fact around 35% of the Department's part-time staff will be eligible to retire in the next five years. It is our belief that if these posts are not replaced, then the functioning of the Department will be seriously impaired

The hiring criteria for academic staff is somewhat different from most other departments. As well as the usual track record in research and university-level teaching, it is also important that individuals being hired have credibility as practitioners in the field of adult education. Credibility as a practitioner is also of vital importance when hiring tutors.

It was noted that the number of administrative staff is above University norms given the size of the Department. However the review group were left with the impression that the current administrative burden has the administrators stretched to the limit. It was suggested that if there was one less person in the role, even temporarily, then the remaining staff would be unable to cope. Against this background, the impending retirement of one of the administrative staff next year is causing significant anxiety.

The administrative situation in the Department is clearly unusual, and therefore requires some explanation. As noted previously, the huge number of associate staff creates organizational difficulties. Moreover, the administrative staff play a key role in identifying and recruiting new associate staff. It seems that the major burden, however, arises from the non-standard student body. The first issue in this regard arises from student recruitment. As the CAO does not provide an entry route to the majority of the Department's offerings, it is then the Department's own responsibility to go out and find students. This is a difficulty that other departments simply do not have, and is a central and perpetual problem the Department has to deal with. A large proportion of

the responsibility for this activity falls at the feet of the administrative staff. The second student-related issue follows from the fact that some of their students are engaging with education for the first time in many years, often having had bad experiences of the education system in their youth.

Administrative staff find themselves in the front line of advising and counselling students who can be ill-equipped to re-enter education. This can include, for example, such matters as assisting students with personal budget plans. It was noted that the administrative staff routinely work evenings and Saturdays.

The review group met with a number of associate staff, all of whom had been working as tutors for the Department for many years (in some cases more than twenty). These individuals clearly were enthusiastic about their work for the Department, and there was agreement that they enjoyed parity of esteem within the Department with the full-time academic staff. Their relationship with the academics was described as 'supported autonomy'. The freedom afforded them by the Department to shape their own teaching seemed particularly valued. However the Department puts a significant effort into tutor support, and this can take various forms. Of particular note is that fact that the Department has regular scheduled meetings between tutors and academic staff to discuss issues and progress, and to present feedback. It could be argued that this form of engagement between the Department and its associate staff represents a form of continuous staff development.

Some of the tutors who met the review group will be retiring in the near future. As noted above, this is an issue across the associate staff body as a whole, with a significant proportion of the current staff eligible to retire over the next five years. Replacing these staff members will be a challenge for the Department: it is possible that the new terms and conditions on offer will make recruitment and retention of new tutors more difficult, and these problems risk being compounded by new Human Resources policies.

The subject of contracts for associate staff was raised. There were mixed views about this, with some tutors very keen to secure contracts, whereas others (typically those closer to retirement) were more relaxed about the issue.

The academic staff presented themselves in a very good light: their commitment to adult education in all its forms was very evident, and the review group was struck by the sense of mutual respect in which all the staff held each other. As noted previously, the departure of a significant number of senior academic staff in the next two years due to retirements have the potential to destabilize the Department if the positions are not filled promptly. In this regard, the review group noted that the current academic staff seem to represent a coherent philosophical outlook. On the other hand, such an outlook is not unique, and one way in which the Department could approach new hirings is to attempt to diversify by bringing in individuals who might challenge the philosophical status quo. It was also pointed out by one of the stakeholders that there are gaps within the Department's expertise which it would be useful to fill. For example it was suggested that there is no-one currently on the academic staff with expertise in national or international policy in the area of vocational Further Education.

As and when the Chair of the Department retires, the review group feels that it is important for the status of the Department that the University commits itself to finding a replacement Chair. As the only Department of its kind in Ireland, this would transmit a clear signal that the University values the seminal contribution the Department makes in the wider community, especially at a time when rival universities are increasing their activities in this area.

It became clear during the review process that in many cases, the distribution of academic staff time between the various activities one would normally expect an academic to engage in is somewhat uneven. Even though we were not able to ask each staff member individually about their workload, a high proportion of organization and administration were flagged by some. It might be useful for the Department to take steps towards re-balancing, where needed. The first step in this direction could be to compile an inventory of staff workloads and activities, to look for possibilities for reorganization and rationalization.

6.1.5 Resourcing and Facilities

As has already been highlighted, perhaps more than any other academic department in the university, DACE has been disproportionately impacted by external factors since the last Review. These factors include the recent economic recession and the resulting increased emphasis on further education and training but also changes in employment legislation, which have steered the university towards the creation of additional full-time, permanent posts at a time when government funding for universities has been subjected to regular and swingeing cutbacks.

Unsurprisingly, therefore, one of the major areas of concern for the entire staff of DACE was that of resourcing. The SAR described the impact of Ireland's economic recession on community education in particular. External funding was significantly reduced or cancelled and what little funding there was was diverted to labour activation measures. As a result, student numbers fell from 1,850 in 2008 to 480 in 2016. DACE, which was, for a number of years, a net contributor to the university purse, could now be considered to be in deficit, if rigid financial criteria were applied. It will take the Department some time to develop new programmes and initiatives that respond to the changing economic and social context. Notwithstanding this, the reduction of NGO and statutory funding in Ireland means that the Department will require the support of the University to continue its role in increasing participation and inclusion.

This financial issue is exacerbated by the introduction, albeit on a pilot basis, of a new Resource Allocation Model (RAM), which appears not to take account of the labour-intensive work of a department whose principal constituency is comprised of learners whose experience of education hitherto has not always been positive and who require a good deal of one-to-one involvement on the part of staff, not just at the recruitment stage but throughout their studies. Further, unlike most other departments in the university, DACE has a large cohort of part-time associate staff (70+) which also require considerable administrative and academic support.

The Irish government and the university are committed to widening participation in third-level education. Maynooth University Strategic Plan 2012-2017 devotes an entire column to the topic of 'widening participation'. It states that 'This university, looking to the future, will maintain its commitment to widening participation, including the multiple challenges presented by urban and

rural deprivation and immigration which are particular to its location on the outer edge of a major city-region.' Members of the university senior management met by the PRG expressed their support for this policy and displayed a keen understanding of the important role played by DACE in its furtherance. In keeping with this objective, the PRG were of the view that the development of a Resource Allocation Model which recognises the particular challenges presented by the kind of learning and teaching in which DACE is involved was necessary.

A further concern, which was echoed by students on the BA programme, was the perceived lack of support services for part-time evening courses. Students were of the view that despite the fact that they were also fee-paying, they were less well supported by university services than full-time day students. Examples cited included unsuitable library opening times, poor cafeteria services (although it was noted that Director of Campus and Commercial Services had negotiated some improvements in this area) and unsuitable and untidy classrooms.

DACE has recently moved to the new School of Education building on the North Campus and now enjoys state of the art accommodation. Notwithstanding the shortage of spaces for social interaction between students, this would be an ideal location for the part-time BA course described above. However, in the absence of coffee-making facilities, there is little enthusiasm for such a move. Nevertheless, we understand from the Director of Campus and Commercial Services that this issue will be addressed shortly.

DACE has pioneered the part-time BA degree in Maynooth University. In a climate of almost full employment (currently 6.4%) the likelihood is that demand for such part-time courses will increase. This points to the need for a coherent university policy in this area.

6.1.6 Internal and external engagement

In her first meeting with us, the Head of DACE reminded the PRG that the department constantly seeks to critique and review its work, in order to ensure that the learning it facilitates makes a difference to both individuals and society. We were presented with strong evidence that this objective was indeed being met.

We met many students who stated that their lives had been transformed by the educational experience offered by DACE. These students spoke eloquently and enthusiastically about their coursework, the high level of support afforded to them and their desire to progress to the next level.

As is the case for many departments with a strong focus on outreach, it seems that the work of DACE is better known outside the University than within in it and that there is a degree of hiding DACE's light under a bushel.

The role of DACE in incubating innovative programmes and programmes leading to recruitment to degree courses in other university departments is not fully acknowledged within the University.

Many committees across the University (one example being Teaching and Learning) could benefit from input from DACE based on its 40-year experience of recruiting, teaching and supporting 'non-traditional' students. Such an approach could constitute a Unique Selling Point for the University. Indeed it could be argued that the University does not take full public and academic advantage of the fact that it offers expertise and several decades of practitioner knowledge in all levels of education from early childhood education to adult and higher education.

There was also the view that DACE has much to offer other academic departments and units, in terms of its expertise in pedagogy, and learner and tutor support in a University with a student body as diverse as that of Maynooth and that the practice of entering mutually beneficial partnerships with departments such as Applied Social Studies, Education and Sociology could be extended and consolidated. DACE is ideally positioned to offer modules in critical skills and electives based on the very valuable and relevant expertise and practitioner knowledge it has accumulated since its inception.

The part-time BA in Local and Community Studies, which was introduced on a pilot basis, could serve as a model for interdisciplinary courses in the University, subject to the development of a University policy for interdisciplinary programmes.

It may be that the very strong emphasis on democracy at every level of the department's work and the consequent perceived absence of personalities advocating for the department have contributed to this. There also appeared to be the view that the role of the Head of Department was solely administrative and not one of advocacy. It is our conviction that it must be both.

Students studying for the Professional Doctorate in Education hailed from many different third-level institutions throughout the country. Students taking the Certificate course in Counselling were also working in different state organisations, where the learning which had taken place was likely to inform practice and have a strong washback effect on the practice of those they encountered professionally, and indeed sometimes in their personal lives.

External stakeholders emphasised the important role played by DACE in reacting and responding to perceived needs of society, one notable example being the Certificate course commissioned by the HSE in Crisis Pregnancy Counselling. However, some were also of the opinion that the department seemed to lack a definite strategy for such engagement and was in danger of losing out to other institutions (one in particular) who were now much more proactive in establishing such partnerships.

The expertise so evident in the work of DACE could be better publicised through more peer-reviewed published research and the organisation of conferences such as the recent ESREA conference, which was an outstanding success.

6.1.7 Implementation of recommendations for improvement made in the Peer Review Group Report arising from the last quality review 2008.

We noted that the 2008 Quality Reviewers made the following recommendations:

- Further promote adult education policy and practice approaches within the university.
- Develop greater dialogue between DACE and central administrative services in the university.
- Continue to exert influence within the national higher education policy arena and provide leadership in the provision of part-time, student-centred educational approaches.
- Reorganise the continuing education provision in terms of how it is funded and in terms of a new governance structure that embedded it in the sector and in the university.
- Enhance DACE's research activities.
- Establish a leadership and planning model that is decentralised and capable of honouring participative decision-making, reflexivity, principles of shared responsibility and authority.

Each of these recommendations is endorsed in our own recommendations, with different emphases. Whilst we recognise that significant progress has been made since the last Review, and the changing circumstances of the last decade, we agree with what we take to be the implicit judgement of that Review. It is our view that the outstanding teaching, learning, and internal coherence of DACE justifies its well earned reputation among the communities it serves and among its wider peer group in adult and community education, but that it needs to give greater attention to its management processes to secure its dialogue with the university, with external stakeholders and policy makers .

6.2 Commendations

We commend the excellence of the courses we reviewed, the passion and professionalism of full-time and part-time staff, and of what we called development administrators.

We admired the level of intellectual rigour, the cohesion and commitment to the service of under-represented groups, and the levels of trust demonstrated in the inclusive democratic decision making of the Department;

We noted the quality of partnerships with external agencies in the co-production of courses;

We commended the resilience of the Department in the face of the dramatic impact on its work resulting from the financial downturn;

We commended the robustness and quality of the Department's doctoral studies, and the number of PhD students supported, given the size of the academic team;

We commended, too, the innovative programmes of DACE now embedded in mainstream university activity (e.g. Access office and Kennedy Centre).

6.3 Recommendations for improvement

We recommend that DACE strengthens its management and decision making to empower and support the Head of Department:

- to secure the tough decision making presaged in the SAR;
- to represent the Department in university decision making councils
- and to be advocate for DACE and for adult and community education with politicians and policy makers.

Recommendations related to teaching and learning

We recommend that DACE reviews the current provision to identify areas where low student numbers, or in the case of the Defence MA lack of funding, make future provision unviable.

The Department should in our view:

- develop with the wider university a strategy for adult learners in the part-time BA course, addressing the full recognition of their rights as students, and their specific needs, and giving to DACE the means to co-ordinate and provide in sustainable ways support for their courses;
- develop clearer ownership of courses that are designed and provided by DACE, to make clearer negotiation with other departments and the university on what is done, and the reasons for that; not least to make more visible, accessible, and understandable the possible role of DACE for the larger body of students and the pedagogical philosophy of the university;
- find more balance between the creation and management of very demanding courses, and the consolidation, communication, dissemination, and valorisation of what is done; the passion and investment in activities should be accompanied by analysis of resources, time planning, and sustainable choices.
- Ensure each teaching and learning activity has a coordinator; as an institutional leader, the coordinator has the role to establish tasks and constraints (even if by democratic consultation) and interface with the Head of Department by providing useful information for strategic planning. The style of DACE is very democratic and diffused; this could be demanding in terms of time and energy: to find a more balanced leadership, based on trust and delegation, would be helpful.

Recommendations related to research:

We recommend that DACE clarifies its research strategy, identifying the balance sought between peer-reviewed academic research outcomes and practice focused dissemination of research, scholarship, and learner voice publications; and we recommend that DACE identify benchmarks for excellent outcomes against which its progress can be reviewed.

As DACE develops new research guidelines they should take into account:

- How to help staff to find a balance between teaching and researching, to develop their skills and c.v.s to be strong and reputed internationally, with the help of the whole department (e.g. a day off to write a paper!)
- Making a strategy for funding of research, not only at a national level: prioritize the kind of calls, and put resources into grant writing
- Diversifying models, paradigms and topics of AE that are represented in the department, in the library fund, in doctoral theses, and in publications, not least to avoid closing oneself in a small self-reproducing community
- Developing good reasons for maintaining a wide range of publications, but also writing more for peer reviewed academic journals.

We were struck by the relative invisibility of the international development dimension in the Department's work, and recommend that its place in the Department's priorities for research, scholarship and teaching be reviewed.

Recommendations related to staffing and staff development:

Administrative staff.

Since administrative staff undertake an unusually high volume of work, we recommend:

- the Department should review the range of responsibilities currently held by the administrative staff, with a view to possible re-distribution of some of the duties to academic staff where this is more appropriate.
- the Department should make sure that administrative staff have clearly defined and reasonable roles.
- the Department should assign a member of administrative staff to oversee rooms, and to coordinate room bookings with the Registrar's Office. The issue of individual members of staff attempting to make room bookings in an un-coordinated way was reported to be creating difficulties for the University's timetable.

Associate staff.

The review group would like to make the following recommendations in the interest of maintaining the strength of the large group of associate staff on which much of the Department's mission rests:

- That the University issue contracts to those associate staff who request them, to provide job security into the future.
- That the Department draw up a replacement plan for associate staff to minimize the impact of up-coming retirements, and also to consider a training plan to ease new recruits into the work of the Department.

Academic staff.

We recommend to the University below that retiring staff should be replaced. Assuming the Department hires new academic staff in the short to medium term, the review group would like to recommend that the Department should look to diversify. It could do this by hiring people holding different philosophical outlooks, and/or with specialisms in areas not currently represented in the Department.

The Department should survey the distribution of academic staff time among research, teaching and various forms of administration as a first step in facilitating staff development. It was the impression of the review group that at least some academic staff members have a workload heavily skewed towards administration, at the expense of research and scholarship. If mechanisms can be found to balance staff time between their various duties, then the Department could then explore developmental supports, especially regarding research.

We recommend:

- that DACE should consider creating a role for a member of academic staff to co-ordinate student recruitment, with the support of a designated administrator.
- that DACE should look towards expanding its student base through various forms of distance learning. In this context, the provision of relevant I.T. training for staff members might prove useful.

Recommendations related to internal and external engagement

We recommend:

- that DACE consider redefining the role of Head of Department, in discussion with the Faculty Dean, in order to ensure greater departmental visibility within the University.
- that DACE identify areas/committees where it might usefully contribute to the development of policy and good practice within the University and encourage staff members to become actively involved in these.

- that DACE develop a strategy identifying areas of particular strength and pursue the establishment of partnerships/engagement with external organisations based on these areas of strength.
- that the website be reviewed in order to better reflect the work of DACE and include information on the areas of specialism of the department.
- that DACE recognise the importance of increasing the volume of publications in peer-reviewed research journals on its impact across the University, whilst recognising the balance to be achieved with practitioner focused publication.
- that the practice of entering mutually beneficial partnerships with departments such as Applied Social Studies, Education and Sociology be extended and/or consolidated.
- that DACE develop modules in critical skills, based on particular areas of expertise relevant to all students.

Recommendations for the University

We have the following recommendations, arising from the review for the University:

- that the forthcoming University Strategic Plan contain a strong statement on the role of adult and community education within the university and in its outreach work.
- that the University develop a Resource Allocation Model specifically tailored to the requirements of departments with large numbers of non-traditional students and whose work includes a particular focus on widening participation.
- that the University develop a clear policy for part-time course provision to ensure that, as far as possible, the experience of part-time learners is as positive as that of their full-time counterparts, and as a key element of this, review the appropriate metrics to support work with under-represented groups in line with university policy;
- that the University develop a policy for interdisciplinary programmes, and that the university centrally adopt the ground-breaking BA part-time programme in local studies, to ensure inter-departmental commitment to its coherence.
- that the University should look to replace the academic staff who will retire in the next couple of years, to keep intact the strength and activities of the Department, to maintain its international profile, and to support the Department's key role in community outreach and the associated promotion of the University's name and reputation. In particular, the University should look to replace the Chair when the current incumbent retires, to emphasize the Department's status within the entire Irish university sector as the sole Department of Adult and Community Education.
- In relation to administrative staff we recommend that the University should give consideration to the role of Department administrators, and consider whether the roles and attendant job descriptions might be renamed 'development administrators.'

The University should be mindful of the Department's unusually heavy reliance on its administrative staff, and in particular of its need to hire a replacement for the senior administrator who will shortly retire. The Department hopes to consolidate its administrative staff by hiring a permanent replacement who already has the experience and skills required for working in a challenging adult education environment.

Professor Laura Formenti

Ms. Anne Gallagher

Professor Alan Tuckett, chair

Professor David Wraith.

25 April 2017

APPENDIX 1: DEPT OF ADULT & COMMUNITY EDUCATION: PEER REVIEW GROUP TIMETABLE

Tuesday, 4th April, 2017		
Time	Description	Venue
19:00	<p>Convening of the Peer Review Group.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Dinner for members of the Peer Review Group and Director for Strategy & Quality & University Executive Member</p>	<p>Booked Carton House Hotel at 7pm for 6 people under the name Harkin</p> <p>Siobhan Harkin Aidan Mulkeen Alan Tuckett Laura Formenti David Wraith Anne Gallagher</p>
Wednesday, 5th April, 2017		
Time	Description	Venue
8:30 - 8:45	Convening of Peer Review Group; Director of Quality available to group	School of Education Room 229 Conference
8:45 - 9:30	Dr Mary B Ryan, Head of Department	School of Education Room 229
9:30 - 10:30	Group meeting with all Department staff (Head of Department recused)	School of Education Room 229
10:30 – 11:15	Visit to core facilities of Department, escorted by Dr Mary B Ryan	School of Education /Library/North Campus
11:15 – 11:30	Refreshments	School of Education Room 229
11:30-11.55	<p>Parallel Session1/229</p> <p>Research Cluster Dr Bernie Grummell Prof Anne Ryan Ms Josephine Finn Dr Fergal Finnegan</p>	<p>Parallel Session2/201</p> <p>Administrative Cluster Ms Rose Gallagher Ms Breda Gibney Ms Kay Loughlin Ms Angela McGinn</p> <p>Guidance and Counselling Ms Breda Gibney Dr Mary Ryan Dr Dave McCormack</p>
11.55 – 12.20	<p>HDFE Ms Angela McGinn Mr Michael Kenny Dr Fergal Finnegan Dr Camilla Fitzsimons</p>	

12.20 - 12.50	BA/Continuing Ed Dr Derek Barter Ms Kay Loughlin Ms Josephine Finn Dr Mary B Ryan	MEd Ms Rose Gallagher Dr Michael Murray Dr Camilla Fitzsimons	
12:50 - 14:00	Working Lunch		Reserve Pugin Hall/Table with service for Quality/4 people
14:00-14:30 14.30-15.00 15.00-15.30	Meet with Students: Return to Learning (12-15) Doctoral (4-6) PG Dip Adult G&C (14)		School of Education Rm 013 School of Education Rm 229 School of Education Rm 011
15:30- 15:45	Break		
15:45-16:30 16.30-17.00	Dr Mike O'Malley, Bursar & Secretary Mr Michael Rafter, Director of Campus & Commercial Services		School of Education Room 229
17.00-17.30	Meeting with Occasional Tutors Mr Jimmy Connolly, Addiction Studies Ms Anne Roundtree, Return to Learning Ms Margaret Sweetman, Return to Learning Ms Rita Stanford, Counselling Skills Mr Mick Fahy, Adult Guidance Mr Peter Hussey, Drama & Theatre Studies		School of Education Room 229
17.30-18.15	PRG meeting – identification of any areas for clarification and finalisation of tasks for following day		School of Education Room 229
18.15-18.45	Part-time BA degree students (25)		Classhall E Arts Building
19:30	PRG private working dinner		Booked Carton House Hotel at 7.30pm for 4 people under the name Wraith

Thursday, 6th April, 2017

Time	Description		Venue
8:45-9:00	Convening of Peer Review Group		School of Education Room 229
9.00-9.15	External Stakeholder/Phone required Ms Helen Deely, Crisis Pregnancy Programme		School of Education Room 229
9.15-9.45	Professor Maurice Devlin, Dean Faculty of Social Sciences		School of Education Room 229
10.10-10.30	Stakeholder Calls/Phone Required Ms Niamh O'Reilly, Aontas		School of Education Room 229
10:30-11.00	Parallel Session1/229 Services to academic & other communities Ms Breda Gibney Ms Josephine Finn Ms Brid Connolly	Parallel Session2/201 MA(LMDS) Dr Tony Walsh Prof Anne Ryan Ms Angela McGinn	School of Education Room 229 Conference Room Room 201 Meeting Room
11.00-11.30	DHAE Ms Rose Gallagher Dr Bernie Grummell Dr Tony Walsh	PhD Prof Anne Ryan Dr Brid Connolly	
11.30-12.00	Ms Ann O'Shea, Students Records, Ms Justine Brunton, Examinations Office, Ms Rachel Fagan, Timetabling		School of Education Room 229
12.00-12.30	Ms Jane Corcoran, Bursars Office		School of Education Room 229
12:30-13:30	Working Lunch		Book Pugin Hall/Table booked with service for Quality, 4 people
13.30-14.30	Dr Mary B Ryan, Head of Department		School of Education Room 229
14:30-16:30	Preparation of Exit Presentation		School of Education Room 229
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.		School of Education Room 229
17:00	Refreshments and Exit of the PRG		School of Education Room 229