Ollscoil Mhá Nuad

Maynooth University

QUALITY IMPROVEMENT AND ASSURANCE

PEER REVIEW GROUP REPORT

DEPARTMENT OF APPLIED SOCIAL STUDIES

ACADEMIC YEAR 2017

Date: 23 March 2017

Contents

1.   Introduction

The Peer Group Review Assessors' visit began with a briefing and planning meeting on the evening of 7th March 2017, running through to the end of the afternoon on 9th March 2017. The Quality Office had prepared a very comprehensive timetable of meetings with the staff and with a wide range of students and external stakeholders. In addition, there were meetings with colleagues from relevant university departments.

The Peer Group Assessors were impressed with the comprehensiveness of the programme, which included meetings with such a range of staff, students and external stakeholders, as well as including a tour of the department's accommodation. Although this was a very full programme, there were opportunities to explore the issues in depth over the two main working days. Details of the timetable for the visit are set out in Appendix 1.

The members of the Peer Review Group would like to express their appreciation to the Quality Office and to all those who participated in the programme, particularly those colleagues who made themselves available at short notice to answer particular questions as these arose during the course of the two days on campus. In addition the Peer Review Group wishes to acknowledge the quality of the written documentation, including the written documentation that was made available during the visit, in response to further questions. The entire process was managed with admirable efficiency and effectiveness and we are sincerely grateful for this.

2.   Peer Review Group Members

Name	Affiliation	Role
Professor Marjorie Mayo	Goldsmiths, University of London	Chairperson/External Reviewer
Professor Cathal O'Connell	University College Cork	External Reviewer
Dr Valerie Heffernan	Maynooth University	Internal Reviewer
Professor Tomas Ward	Maynooth University	Internal Reviewer

3.   Timetable of the site visit

- The timetable of the visit is to be found in Appendix 1.

4.   Peer Review Methodology

4.1   Site Visit

The visit was very well organised which was much appreciated. The timetable was very tightly scheduled however. It would have been helpful to have had more spaces for reflection in between sessions.

4.2   Preparation of the Peer Review Group Report

The broad outlines of this report were agreed between Peer Review Group members during the final session on 9th March 2017. Draft findings were then fed back to the department. Our draft final Report follows the recommended headings as set out by the university. Each section was initially draft by two members, working in pairs before sharing their first drafts with the rest of the Peer Review Group. Revised drafts were then compiled to form the final version of our completed report.

5. Overall Assessment

5.1   Summary Assessment of the Department

The written documentation that we received prior to the visit included SWOT analyses from the staff and students as well as from external stakeholders, via their Consultative and Advisory Group. As the frank and reflective Self-Assessment document pointed out, there was broad agreement between these separate SWOT analyses, demonstrating a high level of awareness of their strengths together with commendable awareness of the areas that could be further developed, taking account of developments since the previous Review. This was very encouraging.

In summary, the department has a clear mission statement that provides the shared framework for teaching and learning and for research, as well as providing the basis for the department's active engagement both inside and outside the University. The department has a particularly impressive track record of recruiting and retaining students from non-traditional backgrounds. This success applies across the different strands, at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. The department is to be congratulated on the excellence of its performance in this regard, providing models of good practice to the university more widely. External stakeholders confirmed the exceptional value that the department adds, making highly significant contributions to the workforce through the excellence of their students and graduates. The department is also making major contributions through its research including, but not only, through community-engaged research. Their draft Quality Improvement Plan includes proposals for further enhancing this research, building upon the achievements that have already been made following the previous Review, including the achievements of staff completing their PhDs. These achievements provide the springboard for further research, including community-engaged research and related peer-reviewed publications. It was encouraging to note that the University values community-engaged research as well as more traditional forms of research and publications, just as it was encouraging to note the value that external stakeholders place upon this as they look to the department to develop partnerships for academically

rigorous research for the future. The department is well placed to expand its provision for teaching and learning, particularly at post-graduate level. There are also encouraging opportunities to build upon its contributions to research, advocacy and policy development at both national and international levels. As the following sections set out in further detail, these opportunities can be maximised with support from the University, including support with staffing and continuing staff development as well as via support with accommodation and other infrastructure.

5.2   Self-Assessment Report

As summarised above, the Self-Assessment Report provided a full and reflective account of the department, including both strengths and areas for further development.

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

6.1   Overview

As the previous section has already identified, the department has a clear mission statement that provides the shared framework for teaching and learning and for research, as well as providing the basis for the department's active and exemplary engagement both inside and outside the University. The department has a particularly impressive track record of recruiting and retaining students from non-traditional backgrounds. The department is developing strategies to strengthen its research, as the Self-Assessment Report identified. The Peer Review Group explored these issues with the department, identifying further opportunities in this regard.

6.1.1 Department governance and organisation

The department is particularly flat in term of distribution of seniority as expressed through the academic grades, and the staff emphasise that this flat structure is also reflected in the distribution of responsibilities across the department. The Peer Review Group formed the impression that that the current internal organization of the department is working well. The staff group perceives effective leadership and appreciate the spirit of collaboration that characterise the governance of the department. Whilst the Peer Review Group was impressed with the motivation and unity of the staff group, it is a concern that the current structures rely too heavily on the spirit of collaboration and collegiality that currently prevails and that this may not necessarily scale up if the department grows in the ways it hopes to in the future. The lack of a middle layer of leadership within the department means that all full-time and part-time staff members report to the Head of Department, which places a significant burden of responsibility on that post holder. This presents longer-term challenge to the department in terms of distribution of roles and leadership in the conventional academic sense, although it was clear to the Peer Review Group that the department has no shortage of motivated staff capable of providing leadership and mentoring to less experienced staff.

Related recommendations for improvement are listed in Section 6.3.

6.1.2 Teaching, learning, assessment and student feedback

The department is very strong in practice-informed teaching and consequently it offers a range of programmes which reflect this ethos. In the section we describe our perception of the department under a number of relevant headings.

Academic Programmes

The department hosts programmes across the full range of academic levels from undergraduate to PhD in social policy, and professional programmes in youth work and community development that are subject to external accreditation by professional institutes. The Peer Review Group found that the department's programmes offer an academic experience to students that is intellectually challenging and pedagogically inclusive. There is a strong commitment to small-group teaching and tutorials and an overall ethos of student support. Students in the department expressed their appreciation of having a 'home department' within the university, and those on professional programmes have a clear sense that they are undertaking academically rigorous studies combined with the acquisition of a professional qualification.

Reputation and Perceptions

The department has an outstanding reputation, both nationally and internationally, as a leading player in the field of social science, social policy and youth work and community development. Students are progressing through their courses and achieving excellent results, even though many of them come from non-traditional backgrounds. The emphasis upon working in small groups has clearly been a particularly important feature in successfully delivering on the department's student retention and progression mission. Colleagues' perceptions of their approach to teaching and learning, as set out in their self-assessment report, were amply confirmed by the students met by the Peer Review Group and were also confirmed by the external agencies and in external examiner reports.

Academic Excellence

There is a clear commitment in the department to academic excellence, which spans all programmes and levels. Undergraduate students commented favourably on their introduction to new material and concepts, while graduate students expressed high levels of satisfaction with the quality of supervision they receive, though current limitations of space and infrastructure may constrain recruitment of PhD students in future. This issue is taken up and reflected in the recommendations. The Peer Review Group noted that there is scope for a stronger sense of integration and cross teaching across programmes, especially given that some recently appointed staff already have PhDs in relevant subject areas. This could broaden their teaching contribution and strengthen the overall curriculum available to students.

Related recommendations for improvement are listed in Section 6.3.

Links between Theory and Professional Practise

The department has been particularly effective in the integration of theory and practice, and students are undertaking placements in settings that challenge them appropriately in the process of professional formation. This requires significant investment by departmental staff but is delivering clear dividends: external agencies report a preference for hosting the

department's students because they are so well prepared and effectively co-ordinated and supported and they frequently employ them once they have completed their studies.

Areas that are under development

The department has been proactive in offering continuing professional development (CPD), and expanding its offer at PhD and MA levels. The CPD courses are very successful and there is scope for further development in this area. The Peer Review Group supports the proposed development of an MA in Social Work but noted that this will give rise to implications for staffing, resources and accommodation for consideration by the department and the university. Recommendations for improvement are listed in Section 6.3.

Teaching and Examining Workloads

Teaching and examining workloads distribution is based on a consensus model that has evolved organically, as demand and needs arise (such as study leave and PhD completions). Teaching and supervision workloads are currently documented by the department in broad terms. Overall, the staff group appeared to be satisfied with this workload model and it is working well in the context of a relatively small staff group with a high level of co-operation and collegiality. While this model is working satisfactorily at present, the Peer Review Group formed the view that it will need to be revisited in the context of future growth. Recommendations for improvement are listed in Section 6.3.

6.1.3 Research activities and outputs

The staff group is undertaking a diverse range of research activity across social policy, youth work and community development. Overall, the department demonstrates a good volume of research activity, and much of this is linked to its stated mission in policy, practice and teaching and learning. Research output by the department ranges from mainstream academic outputs in the form of some peer-reviewed journal articles and edited and co-authored books with mainstream publishers to commissioned policy reports and practice-focused outputs. The research output of the department indicates a substantial engagement with Irish issues, and it also produces internationally oriented material. It hosts summer schools and conferences and will host a global community work conference in 2018.

Many of the staff members of the department have national and international profiles, for example in relation to environmental sustainability, youth work and social policy. There are established links to European and wider international networks for research and policy development. Most staff members in the department have now completed their PhDs in line with the department's overall research strategy, and these PhDs provide scope to develop research and publications through articles and books.

Community-engaged research

Much of the research produced by the department can be characterised as 'community-engaged research', which is a valuable form of scholarship in its own right with rich potential for further development. External stakeholders' perspectives of the research activity of the department are very positive, especially in areas related to social inclusion (including the social inclusion of Travellers), access, youth work, community development and women's rights. They clearly perceive the departmental staff as a source of academic research expertise and the department collectively as a significant resource which can offer critically

informed, methodologically robust objective research that can assist civil society partners in policy evaluation, influence and advocacy. Internal stakeholders view the department as playing an important role in evidencing, evaluating and influencing university initiatives in areas such as access and student experience and support, and they expressed a strong desire to develop research relationships in these areas.

Research Funding and Grant Applications

There is evidence of funding and grant applications, especially in the area of youth work policy and practice through the Centre for Youth Research. This is an area where the department has an established national and international reputation, though there appears to be a level of unevenness in the degree of activity, with a small number of staff being responsible for most grant applications. There is clearly scope for developing further successful applications for funded research, building upon the expertise that already exists within the department, for example through joint applications to research funders with colleagues in other departments.

Peer Review Group Comments on Research Activities

The Peer Review Group is of the view that the department has a solid track record in its areas of expertise and possesses tremendous potential to extract further value and research impact. However, the Peer Review Group detected some uncertainty within the department on how to maximise the contributions of academic research to practice whilst continuing to focus upon the department's overall mission. Such reticence in relation to fully embracing the role of university academics producing peer-reviewed research outputs in various formats is surprising, given the department's reputation and the expectations of external stakeholders. External stakeholders value the academic credibility and rigour that the department offers. They clearly place much value on precisely such academic strengths. The Peer Review Group felt that the impact horizons of the Department should be further developed beyond local and national practice and policy contexts, by building upon their current engagements with European and international disciplinary contexts. There is evidence of this happening in the social policy research, but this needs to be more broadly based. The forthcoming international community development conference illustrates the scope for developing such wider engagements and associated publications. The department's achievements in the scholarship of engagement, access, student progression and professional formation particularly deserve to be further documented and disseminated to the wider community of scholars and peers.

Related recommendations for improvement are listed in Section 6.3.

6.1.4 Staffing and staff development

The staff members of this department are highly motivated, thoughtfully-led, and dedicated to their education mission. They constitute an incontrovertible strength of the department and the university and possess tremendous capacity to add further value in their roles as academics.

Current staffing arrangements

There are currently nine full-time academic staff in the department, two of whom are at assistant lecturer grade (one of these on tenure track), six at lecturer grade and one at professor grade. There is a large number of staff on part-time contracts, two part-time Executive Assistants and one Professional Development Organiser. The reliance on temporary, part-time and occasional staff presents both challenges and opportunities. On the one hand, this facilitates close linkages to policy and practice, which are essential to ensure programme content reflects contemporary developments. On the other hand, it can present administrative and logistical challenges in terms of programme delivery planning and co-ordination, and potential human resources issues relating to employment rights and career opportunities for the staff concerned. The Peer Review Group noted that the university is moving to formalise these arrangements through the introduction of better-defined contractual arrangements for part-time lecturers. There is no doubt that better defined contractual arrangements should at least bring increased clarity for the purposes of administration and academic management generally, however the impact at department level will be dependent on the details and their implementation in practice.

The academic staff group is supported by two half-time Executive Assistants and a Professional Development Organiser. The work of these three part-time staff members is essential to the effective day-to-day running of the department and is greatly appreciated by the members of the academic staff. Given the diversity of the student body and the variety of the activities that staff members are involved in, these three part-time staff members are stretched to capacity. As a result, the majority of their time is necessarily devoted to low-level operational matters, with little time left for more strategic work, for example on developing new systems, promoting the department's activities via the website, liaising with other offices in the university and so on.

Related recommendations for improvement are listed in Section 6.3.

Staff Development

The Peer Review Group formed the impression that some staff in this department have experienced some frustration with the current university promotion schemes as well as with opportunities for career advancement more generally. The absence of staff development opportunities at university level in recent years has moreover had a significant negative impact on staff morale and has meant that staff in the department have not had access to the kind of training and support that they need in order to be able to progress their careers.

The Peer Review Group also noted that the Head of Department has been providing support to staff and while this is very much appreciated, he cannot give this issue the attention it needs, given the other pressures on his time. The Peer Review Group is of the view that there is an urgent need for enhanced mentoring in the department to support and build upon the excellent mentoring already provided by the Head. This should be available both for early-career staff members who are seeking to develop their research profiles and extend their leadership capabilities and for mid-career staff whose contribution to date should be recognised and whose leadership potential can be realised in the short term. The Peer Review Group noted that the Head of Department has not had an opportunity to undertake any structured training around the needs of the role but welcomes the university's recognition of this deficit and the plans under development to address it.

As noted previously, the department is particularly flat in term of distribution of seniority. All of the academic staff members are at lecturer level apart from the Head of Department, who was recently promoted to professor. This presents longer-term threats to the department in terms of distribution of roles and leadership, however the Peer Review Group noted the department has no shortage of motivated staff capable of providing leadership and mentoring. The same observations can be made at the postgraduate and research level, where the lack of postdoctoral researchers leads to a paucity of supervisory capability and a missing component of the academic progression pathways. The Peer Review Group notes that the university has adopted a researcher career framework which provides a basis for developing research career paths. In the case of this department the lack of postdoctoral researchers means that this is not currently an issue but if staffing structures are to evolve along conventional lines, it will become an important consideration in the future.

Related recommendations for improvement are listed in Section 6.3.

6.1.5 Student Support, Resources and Infrastructure

The department has seen a period of enormous growth over the past few years, and its full-time equivalent student numbers (FTEs) are very healthy. Of particular note is the recent growth in postgraduate students, which brings in a higher level of income but which also places particular demands on staff time.

Student Support and Resources

As the Self-Assessment Report notes, the current staff-student ratio is favourable when compared with other departments in the Faculty of Social Sciences but higher than that of most other cognate departments in the country. With nine full-time academics, the department could not be considered to be well resourced, but in the light of the current economic situation, staff members are realistic about the unlikelihood of additional academic appointments being made. Nonetheless, the Peer Review Group is of the view that the distinctive student profile of the department is not adequately taken account of. It has high numbers of mature students, students with disabilities and students from socio-economically and educationally disadvantaged backgrounds. Although the university receives a higher FTE for students in these categories in recognition of the additional support they need, this higher allocation is not passed on to the department but is channelled instead into support services such as the Maynooth University Access Programme (MAP). The staff and students are united in acknowledging the benefit of such support services and in their praise of the pastoral care and academic assistance provided by the Access Office and the Writing Centre. Notwithstanding this, it was clear from conversations with students that they see the academic staff of the department as the first port of call when they have a problem. It was equally clear from conversations with staff members that they view their commitment to their students as the most important part of their job, even as they acknowledge that it is one of the most time-consuming aspects. Evidently, the current resourcing model does not give sufficient consideration to the profile of the students in the department and the time devoted by the staff in the department to ensuring such student have a positive university experience.

Infrastructure

The department's facilities and infrastructure are equally concerning. The department is located in Laraghbryan House, a former congregational home on the North Campus of the University. The rooms in these buildings were never intended for use as offices or classrooms, and it was evident to the Peer Review Group that they are not suited to the kind of teaching and research activities that are integral to the work of the department. Put simply, the department's current accommodations are not fit for purpose. An especially urgent issue is the question of accessibility. The heavy fire doors that were recently fitted in the building make access for students with a physical disability a particular challenge. Given the higher-than-average number of students in the department with a physical disability, this situation is untenable. Moreover, if the department is successful in its plans for expansion of its postgraduate offerings, this will require additional space for staff offices, teaching rooms and postgraduate and postdoctoral research space.

Related recommendations for improvement are listed in Section 6.3.

6.1.6 Internal Stakeholders

Internal stakeholders consulted by the Peer Review Group acknowledged the valuable institutional citizenship role played by the department in the academic mission of the university. The work of the department is recognised as contributing in a very significant way to the reputation of Maynooth University as an engaged, inclusive and accessible university and the department is the national leader in the metric for numbers of non-traditional students. The department has excellent relationships with central offices such as the Access Office and the Admissions Office especially in relation to the university mission on access, community engagement and regional recruitment strategy. The department's visibility is further enhanced by the 'Engaging with Civil Society' elective module. Departmental staff members are active on university committees including chairing the Campus Life Committee, Social Justice Week, Social Research Ethic Committee. The Head of Department has also been acting as Interim Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences. Staff are also centrally involved in the Green Campus initiative and the Curriculum Development Commission. It is recommended that the Department explore how this contribution to the university could be more systematically documented and disseminated for mutual gain. Related recommendations for improvement are listed in Section 6.3.

6.1.7 External Stakeholders

The department's relationships with external stakeholders represent one of its unique strengths. Staff members see external engagement as integral to their academic and professional identity. as their Self-Assessment sets out. The range of commitments by staff is diverse and impressive and involves leadership roles in national and international bodies, including global leadership up to UN level. Much of the department's external engagement is based on partnerships with national and international NGOs in such areas as social justice, minority rights, climate issues, youth work and community development and it organises symposia, conferences and summer schools in collaboration with partners. That the department is the preferred collaborator with these indicates the esteem in which it is held. The Peer Review Group is of the view that the department has to some degree understated

its national and international reputation and achievements in this area. Its work is diverse, sustained and universally respected. This was amply confirmed by the meetings with external stakeholders, reinforcing the points that had already been made by staff and students, including PhD students, from across the department. The department's external engagement activities can be summarised as embracing teaching and learning, including teaching and learning for employment in the social professions especially in relation to student placements; research and scholarship of practise particularly in the areas of youth work, climate justice and community development. It was clear that external stakeholders very much appreciated the department's research and advisory expertise, and they emphasised their openness to collaboration and their perception of the department as a provider of rigorous academic research. Stakeholders also value the work of the department in professional education and continuing professional development in child protection, youth and development education. It is acknowledged by national-level organisations as driving the agenda for professional accreditation, especially in youth work (NSETS) and community development (AIEB), on an all-island basis to establish standards and provide endorsements of programmes delivered by university departments and other third level providers. The department has been highly influential in terms of policy development at national and international levels; examples cited include national policies on drugs, youth, and Travellers' rights. In addition, former students have been progressing to employment in policy-related fields, including employment as policy advisers to national politicians. Engaging with external stakeholders has been a particularly valuable – and much valued – aspect of the department's work. The depth and quality of links with external stakeholders testify to the department's long-term investment in building and sustaining relationships on a regional, national and international basis, and there is now much upon which to build for the future. The Peer Review Group recommends that the department explores more systematically opportunities for collaborative and community-engaged research as articulated by the external partners, who see it as a source of rigorous, objective and robust research and policy, to copper fasten its reputation in this area. Related recommendations for improvement are listed in Section 6.3.

6.1.8 Recommendations from previous years

The previous quality review of the Department of Applied Social Studies was in 2008. This review concluded with nine specific recommendations. The current Self-Assessment Report highlights these and offers a summary of the department's responses to each. Here, we consider our assessment of the department's action in relation to these recommendations.

2008 Recommendation #1: *Maintain and develop the BSocSc programme with shared administration across the Faculty for placement administration to ensure employability choices.*

It is evident that the BSocSc programme has been maintained and enhanced through the introduction of new modules. The internal appraisal process can be commended for its translation into changes to improve this undergraduate degree offering, which includes further opportunities for civic engagement. However, a placement component has not been introduced, and probably could not be in a way that promotes employability options without faculty-wide arrangements for placement administration. The Self-Assessment Report does

envisage the consideration of these issues in the context of preparation for the next Strategic Plan.

2008 Recommendation #2: *Celebrate the contribution of part-time students, who bring immediate work experience into the student mix.*

Part-time students constitute a small proportion of the student body but are apparently well integrated with their full-time equivalents. Given that many of the full-time students engage in significant placement activity, it does appear that practice-orientation through work exposure is a cornerstone of the educational experience and afforded commensurate respect.

2008 Recommendation #3: *Ensure a differential weighting of FTE-related resources to ensure adequate services for part-time and non-traditional students.*

The Self-Assessment Report states, and our own assessment confirms, that there is still work to be done here. We do acknowledge that the university, through the Writing Centre and the Access Office in particular, provides valuable support. However, FTE weightings should be confirmed as properly reflecting the increased demands on departmental staff from such students. The channelling of additional FTE accrued through engagement with non-traditional students to units outside of the department should be justified through the demonstration of reduced loading of departmental academic staff to levels associated with traditional students.

2008 Recommendation #4: *Consider a level of enhanced Faculty administration between Departmental and Central services to ensure smooth communications and effective exam and financial support.*

This specific issue was not highlighted by staff, students or other stakeholders in the current review as an area of active concern. Notwithstanding, the smooth functioning of any department relies on effective and efficient interaction between departmental level administration operations and those arising centrally, and therefore this area should be reviewed internally on a regular basis.

2008 Recommendation #5: *Consider options for regularisation of status of part-time teaching/placement staff.*

While the addition of a small number of permanent positions is a positive step, the fact remains that the department depends significantly on part-time, occasional staff. This is not ideal and a more stable set of academic staff positions would be preferable, although the importance of expert and practice-specific contributions from occasional staff needs to be recognised.

Recommendations with respect to 2008 Recommendation #3 have been accounted for under S.5 in Section 6.3.

6.2   Commendations

The Peer Review Group has been deeply impressed with the department's dedication, enthusiasm and commitment to its work, which is embedded in an ethos of access and inclusion, empowerment and social justice. This is a department with a realistic understanding of the opportunities and scope for building upon its achievements whilst

addressing areas that could benefit from further development. The Peer Review Group particularly commends the department on the following aspects of its work:

- Its dedication to its core mission for teaching and learning, research and engagement within and beyond the University, both nationally and internationally. The department delivers on its mission by drawing on the commitment, diversity, hard work and shared sense of purpose of its academic and support staff.
- The effectiveness of the department's commitment to widening access, recruiting and retaining non-traditional students, supporting them to ensure that they achieve their academic potential and to progress successfully into employment in the social professions.
- The department's contribution to the development of teaching and learning, critical thinking, active citizenship and professional development through a flexible, innovative and student-centred pedagogy.
- The excellence of the department's research output in its areas of specialist expertise, including community-engaged research, youth, community development, social inclusion and climate justice.
- The unique policy and advocacy contribution that the department makes, nationally and increasingly internationally, through engagement with external stakeholders especially senior policy-makers, accreditation and professional bodies.
- The commitment to an overall ethos of teamwork and collegiality of academic and administration staff, who deliver academic excellence and a universally positive student experience.

6.3   Recommendations for Improvement

Having reflected on possibilities for enhancement as identified in the Self-Assessment Report and those that have arisen through the Peer Review Group visit, the following recommendations are made.

Recommendations to the Department

Number	Recommendation	Additional PRG Comments
U.1	The department should consider how some of the responsibilities of the Head could be devolved to more experienced departmental staff members. Apart from freeing up the Head's time, this would have the added benefit of enabling those staff members to take on positions of responsibility and develop the leadership and supervisory skills that are required for promotion to the next academic grade.	
U.2	The department should devise a Workload Allocation Model (WAC), to ensure even distribution of teaching, administrative, supervisory and student support responsibilities across the department. This would also ensure that part-time and early-career staff members are not unduly burdened and that all staff members have time to develop their research activities.	
U.3	The department should reflect on how the skills and expertise of support staff might be used to further the department's mission and publicise its activities both within and beyond the university.	
U.5	Department plans for the MA in Social Work and ongoing CPD should be taken forward with due consideration of implications both for additional staffing requirement and for teaching and learning accommodation.	

U.6	The department should explore options for reconfiguring some aspects of student support with a view to freeing up some staff time for other aspects of their academic roles – but without undermining the excellence of staff-student relationships overall.	
U.7	The department should explore the possibilities for staff who have recently acquired or are in the process of completing their PhDs to teach beyond the programmes they are formally attached to. This would give them exposure to a wider range of teaching environments and more diverse student groups.	
U.9	The department should formulate its research and publications strategy for the future. This could include preparation of PhD dissertations for publication as books, journal articles based on PhD chapters and contributing to edited collections. The strategy should include co-authorship of publications between colleagues in the department and with peers in other institutions as well as developing research partnerships within the department and beyond.	
U.15	The department should introduce a more formal PMDS or similar system to develop individual plans for personal development that are aligned with the appropriate promotion scheme rubrics. Such a system should be focussed on supporting each staff member in meeting the criteria for promotion. Completion of a PhD, while an important milestone for an academic researcher should be considered as part of a longer-term research plan for each individual researcher.	

U.10	The department should document its professional student formation activities more systematically with a view to developing a specialism in publishing and disseminating this as peer-reviewed research output.	
U.4	The department's expertise in promoting access and progression of non-traditional groups should to be documented and disseminated as academic output and shared with the wider community of scholars and peers.	
U.17	The department should develop a strategy for documenting and disseminating, through appropriate publications, the 'scholarship of community engagement' to add value to its long-term achievements in this area of activity and further the goals encapsulated in its mission statement	
U.11	The department should explore ways of taking forward a mentorship model where established staff with experience of publishing and grant proposal writing could act as mentors to support early-career academics from within the Department and from within departments with related research interests.	
U.12	The department should widen its grant-seeking activities across the staff group and focus on identifying further national and international funding opportunities in its areas of expertise, for example by exploring opportunities for joining research consortia and partnering with peers in other institutions.	
U.18	The department should explore the scope for developing collaborative research opportunities with civil society partners,	

Number	Recommendation	Additional PRG Comments
	for instance in potential IRC New Foundations Scheme and/or in EU Horizon 2020 Societal Challenges Thematic Research.	
U.16	The department should explore opportunities to broaden and strengthen its academic base and bridge with the growing graduate-level research activities through involving postdoctoral researchers.	
U.14	The department should look to develop research opportunities with relevant university offices in the areas of access, student support, retention and progression which will enhance services, scholarship and knowledge of these issues.	

Institutional/Strategic Recommendations

Number	Recommendation	Additional PRG Comments
S.1	The department has insufficient space for current doctoral students and consequently has no capacity for growth. The university needs to address this in order to allow the department continue its excellent track record in recruiting postgraduate students.	
S.2	Professional programmes require flexible arrangements regarding scheduling, seating and room allocations. The university should examine how it supports the department in this regard.	

S.3	The university should give serious consideration to extending one of the half-time Executive Assistant positions into a full-time position, where the additional time would be devoted to higher-level strategic planning and future-proofing. This additional capacity would certainly support the department in its efforts to broaden its postgraduate offering and could also support the research and dissemination activities of the academic staff.	
S.4	The university urgently needs to address the question of staff development to support the staff of the department in reaching their research, teaching and leadership goals. The introduction of appropriate opportunities for structured training and mentoring is crucial to ensuring the continued success of the department.	
S.5	The resourcing model should take into account the fact that the additional support overhead associated with non-traditional students will always require significant engagement with staff in the department and this needs to be considered as well as the need for increased resourcing to supporting units.	
S.6	The department requires better accommodation generally in order to facilitate teaching, research, staff accommodation and accessibility. It is a matter of particular urgency.	
S.7	The university needs to support the Department's taught programmes, existing and proposed, including ensuring support with staffing as well as with more suitable accommodation. In addition the University needs to continue to	

	share excellence in access and curriculum development across the university more widely, as well as providing support for marketing both existing and new developments.	
S.8	The university should acknowledge the pioneering role that the department plays in contributing to MU's reputation as a university that welcomes students from under-represented groups and non-traditional backgrounds. In the light of this, it should review the current resourcing model to ensure that this adequately reflects the high numbers of access students in the department and the additional support needed by these students.	

APPENDIX 1: DEPARTMENT OF APPLIED SOCIAL STUDIES: PEER REVIEW GROUP SITE VISIT TIMETABLE

Tuesday, 7th March, 2017		
Time	**Description**	**Venue**
18.30	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 Siobhan Harkin, Director for Strategy & Quality & University Executive Member	Booked Carton House Hotel at 6.30pm for 6 people under the name Berry/Harkin Siobhan Harkin Aidan Mulkeen n/a Marjorie Mayo n/a Cathal O'Connell Tomas Ward Valerie Heffernan

Wednesday, 8th March, 2017		
Time	**Description**	**Venue**
8:15 - 9:00	Convening of Peer Review Group; Director of Quality available to group	Council Room
9:00 - 9:45	Professor Maurice Devlin, Head of Department	Council Room
9:45 -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 Professor Maurice Devlin	Laraghbryan House /Library/North Campus
11:15 - 11:30	Refreshments	Council Room
11:30-11.50 11.50-12.10 12.10-12.30 12.30-12.50	**Staff Meetings** **Parallel Session1/CR** Mr Seamus Taylor Ms Deirdre Ward Dr Joe Larragy by phone Ms Tonye Benson Olatunde	**Parallel Session2/RCR** Dr Brian Melaugh Ms Deborah O'Rourke Dr Hilary Tierney Mr Mick O'Brien	Council Room & Registrars Conference Room booked
12:50 - 14:00	Working Lunch	Reserved Pugin Hall/Table with service for Quality/4 people
14:15 -15:00 15.00-15.45	**Meet with Students:** BSocSc & MSocSc (10) BA & MA Community & Youth Work (10)	Council Room

External Reviewers: Professor Marjorie Mayo, Goldsmiths, University of London, Professor Cathal O'Connell, UCC
Internal Reviewers: Professor Tomas Ward, Electronic Engineering Dept., Dr Valerie Heffernan, German Dept.

16:00- 16:30	Break		
16:30-17:00	Ms Rose Ryan, Director of Access	Ms Rosaleen McCarthy & Mr Peter Miller/HR	Council Room & PB
17.00-17.30	Dr Alison Hood, Dean Teaching & Learning		Council Room
17.30	PRG meeting – identification of any areas for clarification and finalisation of tasks for following day		Council Room
19:00	PRG private working dinner		Carton House Hotel booked at 7pm for 4 people under the name Berry/Mayo

External Reviewers: Professor Marjorie Mayo, Goldsmiths, University of London, Professor Cathal O'Connell, UCC
Internal Reviewers: Professor Tomas Ward, Electronic Engineering Dept., Dr Valerie Heffernan, German Dept.

Thursday, 9th March, 2017			
Time	**Description**		**Venue**
8:30-9:10	Convening of Peer Review Group		Council Room
9:10-9.30 9.30-9.50	**Staff Meetings** Ms Marianne O'Shea Dr Oonagh McArdle & Dr Ciara Bradley		Council Room
9.50-10.10 10:10-10.30 10.45-12.00	**External Stakeholders calls & meeting** Ms Orla O'Connor, Director, National Women's Council of Ireland by phone Dr Lorna Gold, Head of Policy & Advocacy, Trocaire by phone Ms Mary Cunningham, Director, National Youth Council of Ireland Ms Rachel Doyle, National Coordinator, Community Work Ireland Mr Tommy Coombes, Director, Bluebell Community Development Project Ms Saoirse Reynolds, Youth Worker, Brú Youth Project		Council Room
12.00.12.30	PhD Students (5)		Council Room
12.30-13.00	Dr John McGinnity, Admissions Officer/Assistant Registrar	Ms Deirdre Watters Director of Communications and Marketing	Council Room & Presidents Boardroom
13.00-13.30	Professor Ray O'Neill, Vice President for Research		Council Room
13:30-14:30	Working Lunch		Booked 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

External Reviewers: Professor Marjorie Mayo, Goldsmiths, University of London, Professor Cathal O'Connell, UCC
Internal Reviewers: Professor Tomas Ward, Electronic Engineering Dept., Dr Valerie Heffernan, German Dept.