Ollscoil Mhá Nuad

Maynooth University

QUALITY IMPROVEMENT AND ASSURANCE

PEER REVIEW GROUP REPORT

DEPARTMENT OF DESIGN INNOVATION

ACADEMIC YEAR 2017/18

Date: April 2018

Contents

1.   Introduction

The Department of Design Innovation underwent its first Peer Review on Wednesday 14 and Thursday 15 March 2018. The Department had its genesis as a design activity based in Maynooth University's Department of Electronic Engineering in 2007. Two years later, the design activity took the form of a new Department of Design and Innovation in the newly formed School of Business. In 2011 Design became a distinct Department of Design Innovation, one of eleven in the Faculty of Social Sciences which is the largest Faculty in Maynooth University. From small beginnings, the Department has grown rapidly and now comprises five full-time academic staff, a studio manager, executive assistant, a part-time programme coordinator and part-time programme manager. Recruitment of an additional full-time academic staff member is under way. The Department also relies significantly on adjunct lecturers.

The Department's specialisms lie in the disciplines of Product Design, Design-led Innovation and Entrepreneurship. It offers five degree programmes: two BSc programmes (BSc in Product Design and BSc in Entrepreneurship), two taught Masters degrees (MSc in Design Innovation and MSc in Design Innovation (Food)) and a Structured PhD programme. In addition, it delivers a range of modules, courses, and workshops through the EDEN centre (est. 2014) with the aim of promoting entrepreneurship, creativity, problem-solving and innovation among all students across the University.

 The Department's current research activities focus on design innovation and design thinking.

The Department's stated mission is to act as a centre of excellence in the areas of creativity, design, innovation and enterprise. It aspires to achieve this goal through design and delivery of exceptional academic programmes and modules, close collaboration with industry in delivering projects and executive education, and serving as a central node in the University industry engagement network.

The Department is located in Rye Hall, a former hall of residence, on the north campus. It shares the building with Campus Services and the Edward M Kennedy Institute for Conflict Resolution. The Design Innovation studio and workshops are located in two prefabricated units situated close to Rye Hall.

Seven years on from its establishment as a distinct department, and emerging from a phase of rapid growth and some significant validations, notably their success in winning a competitive tender to deliver an MSc programme in conjunction with Bord Bia, the team are now at an important juncture in terms of decision-making that will impact their future direction and development within both academic and industrial sectors.

2.　Peer Review Group Members

Name	Affiliation	Role
Dr Daniel Graff	Loughborough University	External Reviewer
Ms Laura Boffi	Copenhagen Institute of Interaction Design	External Reviewer
Professor Marian Lyons	Maynooth University	Internal Reviewer
Dr John McDonald	Maynooth University	Internal Reviewer

3.　Timetable of the site visit

The Peer Review Group (PRG) received the timetable, Self-Assessment Report (SAR) documentation, instructions and guidance in advance of the review visit, allowing sufficient time to read, review and prepare questions. On 8 March the Director of Strategy and Quality, Siobhán Harkin, met with the internal reviewers to brief them regarding the process and on the eve of the site visit, the Vice President Academic/Registrar, Professor Aidan Mulkeen, hosted a dinner for the PRG which was also attended by the Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences, Dr Mark Maguire: both events were very informative and helpful.

The intensive timetable for the site visit (see Appendix 1) ensured that all relevant constituencies were made available to the PRG. At times, the schedule was challenging and the reviewers would have welcomed more time to reflect on and discuss issues that arose. The session devoted to telephone conversations with external stakeholders could have been shorter. In general, however, thanks to the efforts of Ms Helen Berry (Administrative Officer, Maynooth University Office for Strategy & Quality), members of the Department of Design

Innovation, other relevant staff and stakeholders, the PRG had sufficient opportunity for a deep engagement with the review process.

4. Peer Review Methodology

4.1 Site Visit

The site visit was conducted over two days which gave the PRG very good opportunities to visit the Department of Design staff offices, studios and workshop and to meet with all full-time members of staff and the majority of part-time administrative staff, together with a wide range of Maynooth University staff and students, and a cross-section of the Department's graduates, external partners and stakeholders. The majority of the consultations took place in one of two meeting rooms. The PRG also had a guided tour of the Department offices, studios and workshop, led by the Head of Department, Dr Peter Robbins, and facilitated by studio manager, Anthony Cleary, during which reviewers had informal discussions with students at work in the studios.

The PRG wishes to acknowledge the very significant investment of time and effort by all members of the Department of Design Innovation in preparing for the visit and ensuring that the PRG was provided with sufficient information and insights into the operational workings of the Department within the University and the industrial sector. The reviewers are also grateful to all who participated in interviews and group discussions and to the Vice President Academic/Registrar, the Director of Strategy & Quality and the administrative officer, MU Office for Strategy & Quality, for organizing and overseeing a very well-organised visit.

4.2 Preparation of the Peer Review Group Report

Having individually compiled extensive notes and engaged in continuous dialogue throughout the course of the site visit, the PRG unanimously agreed a set of findings, commendations and recommendations which featured in the concluding presentation. Immediately after the site visit, the PRG continued to collaborate remotely in preparing the report which was jointly written by all four reviewers. The external reviewers commenced the process, preparing a first draft, and the internal members completed the report.

5. Overall Assessment

5.1 Summary Assessment of the Department

The PRG is impressed by the development of the Department of Design Innovation from their beginnings to their current standing as an academic department in the Faculty of Social Sciences. Their leadership and response to the needs and development of an emerging and rapidly evolving sector within the enterprise landscape both nationally and internationally have significantly enhanced the University's curriculum offerings, reputation and partnerships.

This rapid evolution and a number of important achievements to date have placed the department in a strong, even unique, position to build upon its reputation for responding to emerging opportunities in a flexible and timely fashion. The PRG recognizes that with these opportunities also come with a new set of challenges. To meet these challenges the department now needs to define its disciplinary identity and devise a set of strategic priorities that will consolidate its position within the University and guide its future development.

Key to facilitating this process is achieving a common understanding of the relationship between the disciplines of Product Design, Design-led Innovation and Entrepreneurship in the context of a University department. Currently there are several visions both within the department and between the department and the University (Faculty and University Executive). Broadly speaking, these stem from differing perspectives on the desired balance between the department's enterprise-facing and academic research activities.

The PRG believes that the lack of a shared vision and of strategic planning has led to significant inconsistencies as well as missing links and opportunities in teaching, research, and to a lesser extent, industry relations. If allowed to persist, this will hinder the realization of the department's full potential as an integral part of the University.

The PRG has identified this as the central and immediate challenge facing the department and the University.

The PRG has recognized three potential pathways for the department, depending on how it decides to balance its enterprise-facing and academic research priorities within its overall strategic vision. (The reviewers acknowledge that there may be others.)

A. Development of a comprehensive academic research culture, agenda and programmes (postgraduate research degrees, postdoctoral researchers, etc.).

B. Enhancement of the department's enterprise-facing activities (executive education ranging from continuing professional development offerings to the professional doctorate) without committing to a comprehensive academic research culture, agenda and programmes.

C. Focus on SME-style academic research collaborations with peer researchers across the University and as part of consortia without committing to the development of graduate research programmes.

(For a general commentary on the possible ramifications of each pathway, see 6.3 Recommendations for Improvement.)

To decide on a shared vision for the department, the PRG's main recommendation is to establish a Working Group comprising two or more members of the Department and three members of University Executive Team (VP Academic, VP Research & Innovation and the Dean of Social Sciences).

This vision will be vital in directing the department in devising its strategy around programme development, research, enterprise-facing initiatives, and commercialisation.

In the context of the department's strategic planning, the PRG has identified the following strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats as particularly pertinent:

Strengths

- The department comprises an excellent team with a strong sense of *esprit de corps*. The staff members are energetic, committed, empowered, and passionate, with a strong sense that their contributions in developing the department and its reputation are valued.

- The demonstrated agility of the department has allowed it to create well established partnerships and networks with industry and related agencies. The department has effectively leveraged both to enhance its programme offerings and its reputation within the sector.

- The department has a demonstrated excellence in the application of Design Innovation in the industry sector and especially in training around the design-thinking process.

- Arising from its position in a Faculty of Social Sciences, the department is capitalizing on the potential that this presents for interdisciplinary collaborations. Such collaboration is evident in the department's adoption of a novel design ethnography which makes its programmes distinctive.

- Broadly speaking, the undergraduate programmes offered by the department are well designed and clearly valued by students and notwithstanding some issues around modes of delivery, the department is performing well in its development of taught Masters programmes.

- The department's collaboration with Bord Bia in delivering the MSc Design Innovation (food) serves as a model for the development of future programmes in conjunction with enterprise partners.

Weaknesses

- The most significant weakness identified by the PRG is the lack of a shared vision and strategic plan necessary to (a) guide the prioritization of curriculum development, research agenda, positioning within the sector and discipline nationally and internationally, and (b) devise an implementation plan on the management and allocation of resources.

- In building the discipline within the University, the department has yet to devise a strategy to develop fully its profile, place and sustained relationships with other departments and units across the institution.

- Members of the department have excessively heavy teaching loads. This is resulting in diminished time for professional career development and the advancement of other important elements of an academic department's activities, including completion of doctoral studies by academic staff.

- Given its relatively recent establishment as an academic department, its academic research culture and environment are, as yet, underdeveloped.

- There is an absence of clearly defined pathways from undergraduate to postgraduate programmes for students within the department.

- There is a need for more explicit and directive mentoring of Masters students with greater clarity regarding the role of placement within the requirements of their programmes.

- The current mode of delivery of the department's Masters programmes militates against sustained engagement and momentum in teaching and learning, and

particularly the development of studio culture, establishment of teams and coordination of group work.

- The undergraduate Product Design curriculum lacks adequate training in visual communication and organisational design.

- There is a need for enhanced mentoring and greater institutional supports for undergraduate students organising work placement.

- The department lacks a structured forum in which students have an opportunity to articulate concerns regarding their programmes of study, including facilities, curriculum issues, costs asssociated with course-related activities etc.

- Current facilities in the prefabricated units including the Design Innovation studios workshop fall well below the minimum standard expected of University Teaching and Learning facilities and are a significant impediment to student recruitment and delivery of the specialized curriculum associated with Product Design and Design Innovation.

Opportunities

- Given the department's strengths and location within Maynooth University, it is particularly well positioned to create and respond to opportunities arising from an emerging focus on Design and Design Innovation within industry and government, notably through its degree offerings and executive education and training.

- There are opportunities for the department to become leaders in the disciplines nationally and internationally by developing new methodologies and ethnographies and acquiring a reputation as a centre of excellence with a distinct academic research culture and agenda.

- There is considerable potential for the department to achieve and benefit from greater integration within the University through forging sustained strategic partnerships in teaching and research. One model would be to offer Design Innovation and Design Thinking as a single major strand within Bachelor degrees across the University.

Threats

- The ongoing absence of a shared vision for the Department will hamper its pursuit of strategic priorities essential to consolidating its position within the disciplines, the University and the sector.

- The implementation of a shared vision is predicated on the rationalization of current heavy teaching loads which, if not addressed, are also likely to significantly impede staff members' professional career development and potentially impact retention.
- Whilst recognizing the value of adjunct staff input into the department's programmes, continued over-reliance on non-permanent lecturers who are not fully integrated into the department and familiar with University policies and procedures, poses significant risks to the department's ability to deliver and develop programmes.
- The department's underdeveloped research culture and agenda is likely to constrain its potential for leadership and participation in innovative research within the disciplines.
- Substandard workshop and studio facilities and inadequate resourcing pose a real threat to the ongoing delivery and development of the department's Product Design programme and to student recruitment.
- As an established leader in the areas of Design Innovation and Design Thinking, the department faces growing competition from other universities.

5.2   Self-Assessment Report

The SAR, the first prepared by the Department for a quality review process, provided a very informative overview of the Department of Design, its evolution, staff, programmes, research activity, facilities and offered a wealth of valuable insights into the Department's perspectives on its identity, vision, successes, strengths, weaknesses, challenges, opportunities and threats. It quite rightly highlights its significant achievements to date and conveys the ambition, commitment, enthusiasm and entrepreneurial flair of all members of the team. The report is well structured, concise, accessible, attractively presented, helpfully analytic and informative, reflecting a very genuine engagement with the process of peer review and expectancy around how this can assist the team in defining the Department's identity, clarifying its strategic direction and priorities, and formulating an implementation plan.

Overall, it presents an honest, constructive reflection on where the Department is and where it would like to go in the short to medium term.

As stated above, the Department is now at an important juncture in terms of decision-making that will impact it future direction and development within both academic and industrial

sectors. This requires a deep level of reflection, strategic thinking and planning at both macro and micro levels. In this context, the PRG would like to have seen a significantly more substantial Quality Improvement Programme, detailing how the Department proposes to achieve the very broadly defined improvements cited in the report. In addition, although the SAR features a selection of quotations from graduate students in employment who highlight the merits of the programmes offered by the Department, it should also have included a substantial body of qualitative feedback from current students.

During the course of the site visit, at all times when additional documentation was requested, it was provided immediately. Overall, the documentation produced by the Department testifies to the team's pride, creativity, enthusiasm, energy, earnest commitment and ambition for the future development of Design within the University and industry sectors.

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

6.1 Overview

The PRG's overall assessment is that the Department of Design Innovation comprises an ambitious, creative, collegial and dedicated team who are in the early stages of creating a distinctive role for their Department within the university and industry sectors, and who are making significant strides in this regard. Based on analysis of the SAR, the site visit, and ongoing reflections and discussions, the PRG is generally very satisfied with the Department's governance and organization, its teaching, learning, assessment and programme development, and external engagement. The PRG sees scope for improvement in the areas of student feedback, research activities and outputs, staff development, resources and facilities, and internal engagement (detailed in the Recommendations section of this report).

6.2 Commendations

In a short time, the Department of Design Innovation has developed a significant profile in academic and industrial sectors, chiefly through its design and delivery of a growing suite of innovative programmes at undergraduate and graduate levels. The team deserves to be congratulated on their successes to date.

Of their many strengths and achievements, the following merit special mention:

- The culture of the Department is exceptionally strong in terms of its ambition, innovation, creativity, resourcefulness, collegiate values and professional work ethic.
- As a recently established and growing academic department, it has created an impressive suite of successful undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, developed a strong network with valued external stakeholders, and made significant strides in carving out a distinctive role in the university and industry sectors.
- The department's recent success in winning the competitive tender to deliver an MSc programme in conjunction with Bord Bia is a significant achievement and an important validation of their reputation and of the quality of their teaching.
- The department (individually and collective), together with their programmes, are held in high regard by their students, alumni and external partners.

6.3 Recommendations

The recommendations listed below are not in any priority order and should be read in conjunction with Section 5.1 which provides further contextual commentary.

Institutional/Strategic Recommendations

Number	Recommendation	Additional PRG Comments
S.1	The main recommendation of the Peer Review Group is that a shared vision for the Department of Design Innovation be defined and a strategic plan drafted in order to (a) guide the prioritization of curriculum development, research agenda, positioning within the sector and discipline nationally and internationally, and (b) devise an implementation plan on the management and allocation of resources. This should be achieved by a Working Group	The definition of this shared vision will be vital in directing the department in devising its strategy around programme development, research, enterprise-facing initiatives, and commercialisation. While it is not the remit of the PRG to recommend which strategic pathway the department should follow, the following considerations may help to inform the Working Group's deliberations. (Note: As per S.2, regardless of which pathway it chooses, the department's facilities require urgent improvement.)

comprising two or more members of the department and three members of University Executive (VP Academic, VP Research & Innovation and the Dean of Social Sciences). Within the context of arriving at a shared vision, the PRG has identified three potential pathways for the department, depending on how it decides to prioritise its enterprise-facing and academic research activities. (We acknowledge there may be others.)

A. Development of a comprehensive academic research culture, agenda and programmes (postgraduate research degrees, postdoctoral researchers, etc.).

Pathway A might entail:

- hiring a senior-ranking academic with a strong research background and international profile, who will drive the department's research agenda and both lead and mentor academic staff in developing their research activities
- collaborating with other departments (e.g. Department of Anthropology) in terms of research (e.g. joined hosting research seminars) and establishing a distinct research tradition by operating within a cross-disciplinary research domain
- reducing staff teaching workloads either through reduction in the

number of degrees provided, or tighter alignment of the department's programmes and/or increasing the inclusion of modules from other departments within the department's programmes

- providing resources and supports to enable lecturing staff to complete their PhDs
- active participation in Design Conferences
- active participation in inter-disciplinary/multidisciplinary research and dissemination of research via cross-disiciplinary conferences: Technology & Medicine & Design (e.g.Stanford MedEx conference; conferences in Narrative Medicines; Animal-Computer Interaction conferences; Ethnography in Industry conference - see https://2018.epicpeople.org/)
- retaining the department's structured PhD programme but with (a) a new focus on recruiting candidates intending to work in academia and (b) a sharper alignment of the programme with the department's primary research focus area(s)
- adopting a more regular schedule (3-4 days per week) for delivery of the full-Master degree programme in Design Innovation

B. Enhancement of the department's enterprise-facing activities (executive education ranging from continuing professional development offerings to the professional doctorate) without committing to a comprehensive academic research culture, agenda and programmes

Pathway B might entail:

- replacing the department's structure PhD programme with a professional doctoral programme
- developing training programmes for executives
- re-configuring programmes offered by the department (e.g. offering only MA programmes featuring strong connections with industry. Such changes would have implications for modes of delivery: the MA schedule may need to be compressed and the programme restructured in a workshops style, taught by leading experts in the field (both industry or academics).

C. Focus on SME-style academic research collaborations with peer researchers across the University and as part of consortia without committing to the development of graduate research programmes

Pathway C might entail:

- focusing on external industry consultancy and executives training
- engaging in EU-funded research and taking part in a consortium as the design expert partner (This could permit the department to contirbute to a broad range of projects as design researchers)
- permitting those members of the department who choose to engage in academic research and publication the latitude to do so.

| S.2 | The Peer Review Group recommends that the current workshop and studio facilities be upgraded immediately and that a decision be taken regarding the resourcing of these facilities in the medium term | Current facilities in the prefabricated units including the Design Innovation studios workshop fall well below the minimum standard expected of University Teaching and Learning facilities and are a significant impediment to student recruitment and delivery of the specialized curriculum associated with Product Design and Design Innovation. The PRG recommends that the issue of the department's facilities be dealt with as an urgent priority. |

Recommendations to the Department

Number	Recommendation	Additional PRG Comments
U.1	The department urgently needs to devise a strategy and resource plan that will enable it to develop fully its profile, place and sustained relationships with other departments and units across the institution.	
U.2	It is recommended that the department seek to engage in much more embedded, integrated collaborations through joint delivery of programmes (as distinct from individual modules) with other departments in the university.	
U.3	The Peer Review Group recommends that the department devises a mechanism for a more rationalized and strategic delivery of degree programmes. This should involve ongoing review of individual members' teaching loads, mindful of (a) professional career development and (b) strategic advancement of other important elements of an academic department's activities.	

U.4	The current mode of delivery of the department's Masters programmes needs to be reassessed with a view to facilitating more sustained engagement and momentum in teaching and learning, and particularly the development of studio culture, establishment of teams and coordination of group work.	
U.5	The department needs to enhance its mentoring of students prior to and during work placements so as to ensure that both students and workplace supervisors have a clear understanding of their respective roles and responsibilities, and a full awareness of the role of work placement within the requirements of their programmes. The department also needs to enhance institutional supports for undergraduate students organising work placement.	
U.6	More extensive training in visual communication and organisational design needs to be provided as part of the undergraduate Product Design curriculum.	
U.7	Clearly defined pathways from undergraduate to postgraduate programmes for students within the department are required.	
U.8	The department needs to develop formal quality assurance mechanisms and procedures in relation to student feedback. In this context, the PRG recommends that a departmental Student-Staff Liaison Committee be established, providing students and staff with an appropriate forum to articulate concerns regarding programmes of study, including facilities, curriculum issues, costs asssociated with course-related activities etc.	

	The collection, collation and analysis of student feedback on programmes delivered by the department should be formalized, and the implementation of recommendations for improvements formally recorded. The development of such quality assurance mechanisms and procedures is especially important in respect of students' work placements.	
U.9	The department needs to ensure that non-permanent lecturers are provided with appropriate induction and familiarized with University policies and procedures.	

APPENDIX 1: DEPARTMENT OF DESIGN INNOVATION: PEER REVIEW GROUP SITE VISIT TIMETABLE

Tuesday, 13th March, 2018		
Time	**Description**	**Venue**
19:00	Convening of the Peer Review Group. Briefing by: Professor Aidan Mulkeen, Vice President Academic and Registrar 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 University Executive Members	Dinner Carton House Aidan Mulkeen Mark Maguire Laura Boffi Daniel Graff Marian Lyons John McDonald

Wednesday, 14th March, 2018		
Time	**Description**	**Venue**
8:30- 9:00	Convening of Peer Review Group	Council Room
9:00-9:45	Dr Peter Robbins, Head of Department	Council Room
9:45 -10:15	Group meeting with all Department staff* (Head of Department recused)	Council Room
10:15 -11:15	Visit to core facilities of Department, escorted by Dr Peter Robbins	Design Innovation/Library/North Campus
11:15 -11:30	Refreshments	Council Room
	Meetings with Staff Members	Council Room
11:30-11.50	Dr Frank Devitt	
11.50.-12.10	Mr Anthony Cleary	
12.10-12.30	Dr Alen Keirnan	
12.30-12.50	Mr Martin Ryan	
12:50 -14:00	Working Lunch	Pugin Hall

External Reviewers: Dr Daniel Graff, Loughborough University London Ms Laura Boffi, Copenhagen Institute of Interaction Design
Internal Reviewers: Professor Marian Lyons History Dept., Dr John McDonald, Computer Science Dept.

14:00 -14:30 14.30-15.00 15.00-15.30	**Meet with Students:** Undergraduate 10 Postgraduate 1 PhD 1	Council Room
15:30- 16:00	Break	
16:00-16:30	Dr Mark Maguire, Dean Faculty of Social Sciences	Council Room
16.30-17.00	Professor Ray O'Neill, Vice President for Research and Innovation	Council Room
17.00-18.00	**External Stakeholders: Teleconference** Mr Sean McNulty – CEO Dolmen Design Mr Shane Mohan – Deloitte, Lead Partner Mr Mark Brennan – SAP, VP Software Engineering Mr Mark Coyne, Head of Innovation, Veolia	Council Room/Presidents Boardroom
18.00	PRG meeting – identification of any areas for clarification and finalisation of tasks for following day	Council Room
19:00	PRG private working dinner	Carton House

*Trevor Vaugh & Fionnuala Gilmartin not available for group meeting

External Reviewers: Dr Daniel Graff, Loughborough University London Ms Laura Boffi, Copenhagen Institute of Interaction Design
Internal Reviewers: Professor Marian Lyons History Dept., Dr John McDonald, Computer Science Dept.

Thursday, 15th March, 2018		
Time	**Description**	**Venue**
8:15-8.30	Convening of Peer Review Group	Council Room
8.30-9.00	Professor Aidan Mulkeen, Vice President Academic and Registrar	Council Room
9.00-9.20 9.20-9.50 9.50-10.10 10.10-10.50	**Meetings with Staff Members** Mr Trevor Vaugh Ms Fionnuala Gilmartin Ms Emer Fitzpatrick Adjunct Lecturing Staff: Mr Patrick Slevin	Council Room
10.50-11.20	Ms Eliz Dunne, Vice President for Estates and Capital Development	Council Room
11.20 - 11:40	Refreshments	Council Room
11.40-12.10	Dr John Scanlan, Director of Commercialisation	Council Room
12.10-12.40	Postgrad students/Food 3 Students	Council Room
12.40-13.40	**External Stakeholders: Meeting** Ms Jacqui McNabb Kildare LEO	
13:40-14:40	Working Lunch	Pugin Hall
14:40-16:30	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: Dr Daniel Graff, Loughborough University London Ms Laura Boffi, Copenhagen Institute of Interaction Design
Internal Reviewers: Professor Marian Lyons History Dept., Dr John McDonald, Computer Science Dept.