



**Maynooth  
University**  
National University  
of Ireland Maynooth

Ollscoil Mhá Nuad

**Maynooth University**

## **QUALITY IMPROVEMENT AND ASSURANCE**

### **PEER REVIEW GROUP REPORT**

***SCHOOL OF BUSINESS***

**ACADEMIC YEAR 2017/18**

16<sup>th</sup> April 2018

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## 1. Introduction

The review considered the quality framework and strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threat pertinent to the School of Business and its collaborative programme provision with other departments, in the context of the wider university and national standards. Self-evaluation documents were compiled by the School in Q1 2018 and made available to the Peer Review Group two weeks ahead of the site visit, which took place on the 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> March 2018.

## 2. Peer Review Group Members

Name	Affiliation	Role
Professor Paul Hibbert	University of St Andrews	External Reviewer
Professor Barbara Ritter	Coastal Carolina University	External Reviewer
Professor Emer Nolan	Maynooth University	Internal Reviewer
Professor Kay Ohlendieck	Maynooth University	Internal Reviewer

## 3. Timetable of the site visit

- The timetable for the visit is provided as an appendix.
- The timetable provided for engagement with all student cohorts and staff by cohort and function, as well as internal and external stakeholders. Arrangements were completely suitable if a little intense.

## 4. Peer Review Methodology

### 4.1 Site Visit

The site visit formed the core of a review process which was structured in this way: (i) review of the School's reflective self-assessment report and additional supplied materials and data; (ii) elaboration of initial inquiry themes and approaches by the peer review group; and engagement with staff, students and internal and external stakeholders (as detailed in section 3) to explore initial inquiry themes and emergent areas of interest.

### 4.2 Preparation of the Peer Review Group Report

The Peer Review Group Report was compiled and drafted through a process that began with focus on identifying the core recommendations and commendations, based on review materials and interviews, for the exit presentation. This initial step involved the review group engaging collectively to compile the important themes.

The group took the perspective that a detailed elaboration of the appropriateness and robustness of the overall quality framework in operation within the school and the university was not necessary, since this was found to be satisfactory. Instead, the group focussed on areas of strength and weakness to capture good practice and support enhancement.

## 5. Overall Assessment

### 5.1 Summary Assessment of the Department

The assessment of the Peer Review Group, based on the supplied report and the site visit was that the School of Business is a high-achieving, collegial department. It operates a robust and appropriate quality framework that is concordant with the university's policy context.

The School has clear strengths in relation to: (i) a values-driven, innovative and committed approach to learning and teaching that is focussed on the intellectual and career potential of its diverse students; (ii) research active staff that are producing work at very high standards, the best of which is competitive with heavily resourced, research-oriented institutions; and (iii) strong engagement with industry and public service.

The School's weaknesses are principally related to: (i) over-stretched facilities and staff, in particular a high staff-student ratio; (ii) a skewed student population, in relation to a large undergraduate cohort and limited doctoral student population; and (iii) a need for additional (but focussed) resources to make the developing research profile of the School sustainable.

Addressing the weaknesses provides the majority of the opportunities open to the school, but acquiring accredited status (AACSB) also provides an opportunity for the School to bolster its competitive position. However, seeking accreditation will place additional resource demands and procedural constraints on the School, and for that reason we conclude that this should be pursued slowly and carefully, in order not to impact on the committed and collegial culture which is one of the School's major assets. Additional opportunities that might be explored are detailed in the recommendations section of this report.

Overall, the Peer Review Group were satisfied with the School's quality procedures, and its standards in relation to curriculum and assessment. The group was impressed by the School's staff and its achievements. Our impression was that *all* of the staff were engaged and committed; the positive influence and example of the Head of School was also clear.

### 5.2 Self-Assessment Report

It was clear that the self-assessment report was carefully constructed with the engagement of the School across its contents, with those with particular responsibilities taking a lead where appropriate. The report was extensive and detailed, and any points for clarification were addressed during the visit.

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

### 6.1 Overview

Our summary conclusions in particular areas are detailed below, but should be read in the context of the detailed commendations and recommendations that follow below these points:

- Department governance and organisation – clear arrangements with distributed responsibilities and a collegial orientation;
- Teaching, learning, assessment and student feedback – values-led, well organized and oriented towards developing students’ intellectual and career potential;
- Research activities and outputs – well above the level that would be expected for business schools with such a high staff-student ratio, and clearly intrinsic to the identity of the school, but possibilities for more focus and resources might be explored;
- Staffing and staff development – the school needs more staff, but has provided informal mentoring and other collegial support for newer staff that is clearly valued and impactful;
- Resourcing and Facilities – require further investment if the School is to maintain its excellent development trajectory;
- Internal and external engagement – the School is recognized as a ‘good citizen’ and source of new ideas within the university, and external engagement in pursuit of students’ interests has been exemplary.

### 6.2 Commendations

The commendations and achievements that the Peer Review group wish to highlight are structured in two groups, one focussed on the university / institutional level and the other focussed on the school level.

#### **Institution-level commendations**

We commend the university for:

- Active planning in relation to facilities and staffing needs within the School of Business and more broadly.
- A flexible, liberal, interdisciplinary, committed and responsive approach to education across the institution
- An inclusive approach to education, including socio-economic and cultural diversity, with support from central services.
- Clear support and encouragement for innovation in teaching and learning across the institution.

## School-level commendations

We commend the school for its:

### *Culture and standards, that encompass –*

- Camaraderie and collegiality, in the context of liberal and egalitarian values
- Having developed a distinctive and compelling position in a very competitive field
- A positive and constructive engagement with the review process
- High standards of faculty, recognized by students, combined with approachability and a high level of commitment to students
- A mentoring approach to support informal engagement and feedback for new academic staff
- Commitment to pro-active development of processes, policies and procedures
- Shared, supportive contributions to service and citizenship across the School

### *Excellence and innovation in teaching and learning, including –*

- An integrated, interdisciplinary approach
- Useful variations in continuous assessment
- Innovative learning approaches, such as student role-plays and student co-teaching
- Applied and experiential learning, especially in relation to the Business Research Project
- The delivery of traditional, individual, theory-oriented classes in an engaging way, to balance active/group-oriented approaches
- A spirit of continuous improvement and shared development
- A strong pattern of engagement with industry and excellent focus on employability, leading for example to:
  - Recruitment of significant cohorts of students by those with experience of engagement with the Business School
  - Employers designing graduate employment schemes for Business School students
  - Influencing employer's choice to locate offices in Maynooth
  - Employer engagement in the classroom
- Overall, the development of independent and motivated students and future employees

### *Excellence in research, as signified by –*

- Delivering research publications at a high level, and investing time in the research environment
- Engaging in research conversations in practitioner as well as academic fora, leading to potential impact on practice
- Supporting research through 'blocked' teaching duties and other practical means to make the most of limited resources

## 6.3 Recommendations for Improvement

The recommendations that the Peer Review group wish to highlight are structured in two groups, one focussed on the university / institutional level and the other focussed on the school level. These are our overall conclusions based on the integration of themes in the reflective self-evaluation report with our review findings. *They do not map precisely onto the themes proposed in the self-evaluation report, for that reason.*

## Institutional/Strategic Recommendations

Number	Recommendation
S.1	<p><b>Facilities and resources: Estate</b></p> <p>We recommend that the university prioritise the School of Business in the development of its estate, specifically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Considering the provision of high-quality flexible learning and teaching spaces suitable for postgraduate programmes and experiential classes.</li> <li>• Providing a sense of a ‘home’ for students as well as staff, including study spaces for group work and social spaces adjacent to core teaching facilities.</li> </ul>
S.2	<p><b>Facilities and resources: Staff</b></p> <p>The school staff-student-ratio (SSR) is high and there is a need for additional academic and administrative staffing. Given the developmental, growth and accreditation demands on the school in the coming years, we recommend that some consideration be given to addressing these particular needs.</p>
S.3	<p><b>Facilities and resources: Research</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The school has been praised for its research orientation, but this needs to be sustainably supported. We recommend that the University consider the provision of funding to: support more uniform access to leading international conferences for staff; and establish funds for ‘pump-priming’ research projects, especially where these could lead to larger scale grant applications or collaboration and support from industry.</li> <li>• We recommend exploring the possibility of individual faculty research accounts for staff.</li> <li>• Consider incentives for staff supervising high-quality PhD students.</li> <li>• Consider, in dialogue with the school, increasing access to electronic library resources (including journals and books).</li> </ul>
S.4	<p><b>Policies and Processes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We recognize that university policies and processes are in a state of active development. However, we recommend that attention is given to clarifying these, and to increasing the visibility and accessibility of policies and processes to avoid isolation and divergence in school approaches. In particular but not only: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The process for the approval of new academic programmes needs to be clarified and made more transparent.</li> <li>○ Academic staff are not clear about whether there is extant policy to inform processes at the school level. Some consideration should be given to the development of an (online) manual of academic policies and procedures.</li> <li>○ Review and performance monitoring is informal and needs to be formalized.</li> <li>○ Construct development frameworks for academic staff, administrators and Heads of School.</li> <li>○ Explore optimization of centralised processes.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The university should consider how to provide more automation and efficiency in the recording and calculation of student grades and degree classifications.</li> <li>• The university should consider developing policies that bring consistency to marking, including eliminating practices such as negative marking in MCQ examinations that were not present in the School of Business, but had impact on its students studying in other disciplines (for example, Economics).</li> <li>• The university should consider developing induction and orientation processes for students, including content and mode(s) of delivery, such that students may be reminded of access to central services at the point of need.</li> </ul>
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## Recommendations to the Department

Number	Recommendation
U.1	<p><b>Research</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The school's key shared identity markers – interdisciplinarity, liberal and egalitarian values – are clear in teaching and learning, but could be made more visible in relation to research activities (as appropriate).</li> <li>• The school should capitalise on its strength in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) and pedagogic research, by (for example) working with the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) and developing its profile in this area.</li> </ul>
U.2	<p><b>Staff development and expansion</b></p> <p>The school should consider, in dialogue with the University administration, the appropriate deployment of additional headcount, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Addressing skills / experience gaps</li> <li>• Bolstering administrative support for marketing and accreditation processes</li> </ul>
U.3	<p><b>Learning and Teaching</b></p> <p>The school should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider how best to build on the excellent teaching and learning noted in the commendations, while maintaining a balance of practical and theoretical, and group and individual, variants.</li> <li>• Capitalise on the students' societies in the business school's areas of interest, and discuss shared activities with them.</li> <li>• External stakeholders suggested additional specialised financial class(es) might enhance students' employability.</li> <li>• Pursue AACSB (Association for the Advancement of Collegiate Schools of Business) accreditation, giving due regard to appropriate timescales and resourcing, and maintaining the positive school culture (as discussed in commendations).</li> </ul>



**APPENDIX 1: SCHOOL OF BUSINESS: PEER REVIEW GROUP SITE VISIT TIMETABLE**

<b>Monday , 19<sup>th</sup> March, 2018</b>		
<b>Time</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Venue</b>
19:00	<p>Convening of the Peer Review Group.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Dinner for members of the Peer Review Group &amp; University Executive Members</p>	<p>Booked Carton House Hotel at 7pm for 6 people under the name Mulkeen</p> <p>Aidan Mulkeen Mark Maguire Paul Hibbert Barbara Ritter Emer Nolan Kay Ohlendieck</p>
<b>Tuesday , 20<sup>th</sup> March, 2018</b>		
<b>Time</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Venue</b>
8:00- 8.15	Convening of Peer Review Group	John Hume Boardroom
8:15 -9:00	Professor Peter McNamara, Head of Department	John Hume Boardroom
9:00 -10:00	Group meeting with all Department staff (Head of Department recused)	John Hume Boardroom
10:00 -10:45	Tour of facilities of Department, escorted by Professor Peter McNamara and Ms Paula Uhel	School of Business /North Campus
10:45 -11:00	Refreshments	John Hume Boardroom
11:00-11:30	<p><b>Staff Group 1 Faculty: Research</b></p> <p>Dr Christian Martin Dr Olga Ryazanova Dr Tatiana Andreeva Dr Bastian Rake Dr Jean Cushen Dr Souleiman Hassan</p>	John Hume Boardroom
11:30-12:00	<p><b>Staff Group 2: School Office</b></p> <p>Ms Paula Uhel Ms Suzanne Scott Ms Vanessa Gallagher</p>	

12:00-12:30	<b>Staff Group 3: Academic Service</b> Mr Eddie O'Connor, MAPS Co-ordinator Dr Paul Donovan, Erasmus/International Co-ordinator Dr Paola Zappa, Placement Officer Dr Ali Nazarpour, Library Co-ordinator Dr Olga Ryazanova, School Advisory Committee Rep	
12.30:13.00	<b>Staff Group 4: Postgraduate Directors</b> Prof. Peter McNamara (MSc Strategy & Innovation) Dr Jean Cushen (MSc Business & Management) Dr Roger Sweetman (MSc IT Enabled Innovation) Dr Bastian Rake (PhD Director)	
13.00 -14:00	Working Lunch	Reserve Pugin Hall/ Table with service for Quality/4 people
14:00 -14:30	<b>Meet with Students:</b> Undergraduate Students/15	Council Room
14.30.-15.00	Postgraduate Students/5	
15.00-15.30	PhD/2	
15.30-16.00	Ms Rosaleen McCarthy, Director of Human Resources Mr Peter Miller, Senior HR Manager	
16.00-16:30	Break	Council Room
16.30-17.00	Dr Alison Hood, Dean of Teaching & Learning	Council Room
17.00.-17.30	Professor Aidan Mulkeen, Vice President Academic & Registrar	Council Room
17:30-18.00	<b>External Stakeholder/Phonecall</b>  Mr John Shawe, Fintrax (BRP Partner)	Council Room
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	<b>Booked Carton House Hotel at 7.00pm for 4 people under the name Nolan</b>

**Wednesday, 21<sup>st</sup> March, 2018**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Venue</b>
8:00-8:30	Convening of Peer Review Group	Council Room
8:30-9:00	Dr Mark Maguire, Dean Faculty of Social Sciences	Council Room
9.00-9.30	<b>Staff Group 5 Undergraduate Directors</b> Prof. Joseph Coughlan (Arts) Dr Gillian Moran (Arts) Ms Niamh O’Sullivan (Equine Business) Dr Richa Chugh (International Business) Dr Christian Martin (Marketing) Dr John Cullen (Business & Management) Dr Patrick Rigot Muller (Law & Business and Business & Accounting)	Council Room
9.30-10.00	<b>Staff Group 6, Assessment Strategy, Quality Review and Assessment Processes</b> Prof. Joseph Coughlan (Chair of Examinations) Paula Uhel (Administrative Lead) Dr Christina O’Connor	
10.00-10.30	<b>Staff Group 7, Teaching &amp; Learning</b> Ms Geraldine Lavin, University Tutor Dr John Cullen, Teaching and Learning Committee Member Dr Ruifang Wang Dr Adele Smith-Auchmuty, BRP Co-ordinator	
10.30-11.00	Professor Michael Doherty, Head of Law Department	Council Room
11.00-11.30	Refreshments	Council Room
11.30-12.00	Professor Brian Donnellan, Dean of International Affairs	Council Room
	<b>External Stakeholders/Phonecall</b>	Council Room
12.00-12.20	Mr Noel McGrath, Centaur FS (Employer)	
12.20-12.40	Ms Claire Breathnach (PG Alumni)	
12.40-13.00	Mr PJ Mealiff (UG Alumni)	

13:00-14:00	Working Lunch	Pugin Hall/Reserved Table with service for Quality, 4 people
14:00-16:30	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