

Quality Implementation Plan for the Department of Philosophy

This plan was approved following a meeting of the President and the Head of Department on 20 September 2011.

1. Recommendations which the Department could implement unaided

Recommendation 1.1: (Peer Review Report, p. 5)

The new PPE programme to be up and running by September 2011.

Response of Department:

The new BA in Philosophy, Politics and Economics (PPE) has been approved by Academic Council and has been entered into the CAO Handbook for next year. The first intake of students for the degree will take place in September 2012.

A question was raised by the QPSC concerning the possibility that students of PPE might have the opportunity to take the module on Jurisprudence provided by the Department of Law. The Department has no objections to students of PPE studying Jurisprudence and, indeed, welcomes the suggestion but at the moment it is not possible to combine Philosophy and Law as subjects. The possibility of freeing this up as a choice in the future should be examined in the context of curriculum change following on from the Strategic Plan.

Action: The response of the department was approved.

Recommendation 1.2: (Peer Review Report, p. 5)

The development of programs relating to philosophy in relation to Computer Science (BSc in Computational Thinking), and Philosophy in relation to Classical Culture (MA in Ancient, Medieval and Renaissance Thought).

Response of Department:

The BSc in Computational Thinking has been approved by Academic Council and its first intake of students will take place in September 2012.

Discussions with the Department of Ancient Classics are at an advanced stage and it is hoped to introduce the joint MA in Ancient, Medieval and Renaissance Thought in September 2012.

Action: The response of the department was approved.

Recommendation 1.3: (Peer Review Report, p. 7)

Tutors to be offered representation in Department meetings on matters that pertain to their responsibilities.

Response of Department:

Both a representative of the tutors and of the postgraduate students, together with each of the year representatives from the undergraduate students have already

been invited to and have attended Departmental meetings since the visit of the Peer Reviewers in February. As this has proved to be successful, it is envisaged that this arrangement will continue in the future while being kept under review as to its effectiveness or otherwise.

Action: The response of the department was approved.

Recommendation 1.4: (Peer Review Report, p. 7)

Research should be promoted and supported by the Department.

Response of Department:

The Department very much welcomes this recommendation and notes the fact that the Reviewers commented favourably upon the strong research profile in the Department, stating that “All of the members of the Department have distinctive and strong profiles as researchers” (p. 7). This is not something which can be taken for granted and the Department will endeavour where possible to encourage research through seminars, the holding of conferences (two international conferences were hosted by the Department in 2010-11), research visits to other universities and libraries, the hosting of visiting professors (two academics will be guests of the Department in 2011-12), and sabbatical leave.

Action: The response of the department was approved.

Recommendation 1.5: (Peer Review Report, p. 7)

The professional research needs of the contract staff of the Department ought to be protected and not hindered by work overload.

Response of Department:

The Department readily accepts the comment made by the Reviewers and has implemented changes for the academic year 2011-12 in order to continue to ensure that the opportunities for professional development and research of the contract staff are maintained and improved.

Action: The response of the department was approved.

Recommendation 1.6: (Peer Review Report, p. 8)

Correct the balance and distribution of duties to the faculty who are employed under contract and ensure a properly proportionate burden was assumed by all of the full-time staff.

Response of Department:

The Department in response to this recommendation has carried out an extensive survey and redistribution of administrative duties in the Department for the academic year 2011-12 in order to ensure an equitable and fair burden is carried by each member of the Department while taking into account the differing circumstances which pertain to contract and tenured staff.

Action: The response of the department was approved.

Recommendation 1.7: (Peer Review Report, p. 8)

The relations between the Department and St. Patrick's were very good and the hope was expressed that this would continue.

Response of Department:

The Department has maintained and hopes to continue this good working relationship with the Pontifical University at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels insofar as, and for as long as this is of mutual benefit to both institutions.

Action: The response of the department was approved.

2. Recommendations which the Department could implement only with assistance from other bodies within the University and without cost implications

Recommendation 2.1: (Peer Review Report, pp. 5-6)

The immediate establishment of an MA in Medieval and Renaissance Philosophy with a special emphasis on the attracting of international students to Maynooth.

Response of Department:

The Department has already received approval for the MA in Medieval and Renaissance Philosophy from Academic Council, has widely advertised the course and looks forward to enrolling the first student intake in September 2011. The Department looks forward to working with the International Office and the Graduate Studies Office in order to promote this course as widely as possible and to recruit students internationally.

Action: The response of the department was approved.

Recommendation 2.2: (Peer Review Report, pp. 5-6)

Collaboration with other humanities subjects such as Irish, English, French and History, perhaps even with the German Department in the provision of an interdisciplinary MA in Medieval and Renaissance Thought.

Response of Department:

The Department is currently 'home' to the Maynooth Medieval and Renaissance Forum which has representatives on its committee from the Departments listed above and also from the Theology Faculty of St Patrick's College. At the moment its activities are limited to the holding of a lecture series in each academic year. However, there is no reason why the Forum should not be the means by which such an MA is provided and also of various interdisciplinary modules which would be open to all students and particularly to those on the structured PhD.

Action: The President requested that the question of re-launching and strengthening the Maynooth Medieval and Renaissance Forum be looked at by the Department and the Faculty.

Recommendation 2.3: (Peer Review Report, p. 6)

Undergraduate teaching: the first-year programme of the BA is of crucial importance. It is necessary that challenging and inspiring teachers be assigned to the teaching of first-year students.

Response of Department:

The Department has always valued the teaching provided to first year students since for many of them this will be their first and only encounter with philosophy. To this end, the Department has striven to make the first year course as comprehensive an introduction to Philosophy as is possible within the constraints of the time allotted. The Department has already cooperated with the Centre for Teaching and Learning in developing and improving our teaching of large groups of students (which is typical of First Arts modules) and we would hope to further develop and improve upon the quality of our teaching in conjunction with the Centre for Teaching and Learning. In addition, all of the tutors teaching with the Department and providing first-year tutorials have followed and obtained the Professional Certificate in Postgraduate Teaching and Learning and the Department will continue to require this of tutors in the future.

Action: The response of the department was approved.

Recommendation 2.4: (Peer Review Report, p. 7)

Postgraduate supervision: there is the need for vigilance to ensure for best practice, particularly in terms of PhD supervision.

Response of Department:

There have been considerable changes in the area of postgraduate study in recent years, especially with the establishment of the Graduate Studies Office and the introduction of the structured PhD in Philosophy. The Department has worked very closely with the Dean of Graduate Studies in the past in order to implement best practice in this area and will continue to do so in the future.

Action: The response of the department was approved.

3. Recommendations which the Department could implement only if additional resources are provided by the University

Recommendation 3.1: (Peer Review Report, p. 8)

A suitable room should be made available for the postgraduate students where they can meet students they are tutoring, where they can meet with each other and study when on campus.

Response of Department:

The Department very much welcomes this recommendation and will do all it can to advocate this very pressing need. However, the provision of such a room rests with the appropriate University authorities.

Action: The President agreed that such provision should be made and has undertaken to look at the matter in terms of the overall masterplan for the university-wide use of space.

Recommendation 3.2: (Peer Review Report, pp. 3-4)

The filling of the professorial chair to address the strategic needs of the department.

Response of Department:

The Department welcomes this recommendation and agrees with the Reviewers with regard to the strategic importance of this appointment as enabling the Department to “function to its optimum”. Although the current moratorium on recruitment means that the appointment of a new Chair of Philosophy is likely to be postponed for some time, the Department welcomes the fact that successive Presidents of the University have repeatedly given commitments to the prioritisation of this appointment when the moratorium is ended.

Action: The President agreed that this will be a priority when the University looks to recruit Professors.

Recommendation 3.3: (Peer Review Report, p. 4)

The upgrading of the status of the current head of the Department to reflect the duties and responsibilities associated with his current post as head of Department.

Response of Department:

The Department currently has no senior lecturers or professors which precludes it from having representatives on some boards of the University or candidates for appointment to senior positions within the University. The Department notes, however, that the University has resumed its process for promotions and that the Head of Department can apply like all other eligible members of staff.

Action: The President intends to establish a working group to clarify the role and status of non-professorial Heads of Department.

Recommendation 3.4: (Peer Review Report, p. 4)

The appointment of a lecturer position in the Department to replace expertise in the core areas of Metaphysics, Ethics and classical philosophy of God. To address the growing importance which the Department attaches to Ph.D. supervision, it is envisaged that this person would assume responsibility also in this area.

Response of Department:

The likelihood that it will be some time before a Chair of the Department is appointed has focused attention on the best way to strengthen and consolidate the

existing staffing resources in the Department. In this regard, the Department suggests that an argument can be made to the HEA for an exception to the moratorium in the case of the appointment of an assistant lecturer in philosophy. Such an appointment can be justified in view of the strategic need to provide supervision to an increasing number of PhD students in the Department since such supervision can only be provided by permanent members of staff, of which there are currently only three in the Department. The recommendation of the Reviewers that such an appointment should be in the traditional areas of Metaphysics, Ethics and Philosophy of God is very much welcomed by the Department as fitting in with the current strengths of the Department in Ancient and Medieval Thought.

Action: The response of the department was approved.

Recommendation 3.5: (Peer Review Report, p. 5)

The need to provide for continuity of staffing if the entirely legitimate expectations for further employment on the part of both the existing staff on three-year contracts, and the strategic aims of the Department, are to be met.

Response of Department:

The Department acknowledges the crucial importance and contribution of the current contract lecturers to the running of the Department in all of its aspects, namely, teaching, administration and research. The Department welcomes and endorses this specific recommendation regarding the continuity of such staffing and the meeting of legitimate expectations of further employment in order to achieve the strategic aims of the Department.

Action: The response of the department was approved.

Appendix: General departmental response to the Peer Review Report

The Department of Philosophy has found itself having to deal with a staffing crisis for the last three years. It has done so while continuing to grow its student numbers, to provide new courses, to maintain high standards in teaching and research, and to develop interdisciplinary approaches within the University. Thus, the Department welcomes the very warm and encouraging Peer Review Report which is taken as an acknowledgement of what has been delivered in very difficult circumstances. All of this has been achieved through the continuing hard work and dedication of each member of staff, both academic and administrative. This is, however, a situation which cannot be maintained indefinitely and the Department would caution against any assumption that it can. In particular, it would strongly argue against any presumption that the present situation in the Department can be 'normalised' and sustained as it is. The Reviewers quite rightly point to "the staffing crisis that currently exists in the Department" (p. 4). The Department needs to have at least three permanent appointments in the short-term and the expected increase in student numbers of the next 10-15 years would suggest that further appointments should be made. In the last few

years, in relation to those areas which fall under the control and remit of the Department, it has risen to the challenge and rather than using the current less than optimal situation as an excuse, it has expanded and improved its provision of courses and services to both the students and the University, as well as to the wider academic community and society in general. The Department does, however, now look to the University with a legitimate expectation that the supports necessary for it to continue to play its strategic role in the life of the University will be forthcoming.

Action: The President undertook to examine the financial position of the Department and to work with the Head of Department to stabilise staffing. He undertook to do so by the end of the academic year.

Professor Philip Nolan

Dr Michael Dunne