

Progress on Implementation of Recommendations from Quality Reviews

All academic departments completed Quality Reviews between 2008 and 2010. The Reviews were organised by Faculties. As part of the monitoring function of the Quality Office the Heads of all departments were invited in summer 2015 to prepare short reports on progress in relation to implementation of the recommendations arising from their reviews and quality improvement plans. The department reports have been shared with the Faculty Deans.

The main findings to note are:

1. The follow up to Quality Reviews is taken seriously by all departments as evidenced by the fact that 82% of the 191 recommendations made by the review teams for all departments have been implemented, and work is progressing on some others. The recommendations that have been implemented cover a wide range of matters, some of which are specific to individual departments. Examples include review of academic workloads, replacement of some senior staff who retired or left the university, reform of first year curriculum, strengthening of international links, further development of structured PhD programmes, upgrading of facilities for postgraduates, review of library resources especially for research in some disciplines, transition to 'year abroad' as the default option for all students in the SMLLC, greater collaboration across cognate disciplines (SMLLC), promotion and support for research groupings within and between departments, introduction of more formal internal structures in departments as they grow in size, celebrate and promote achievements of departments, encouragement for staff to publish in international journals, greater clarity on expectations re academic standards and University level revision of Marks and Standards, development of procedures to address difficulties that may arise between students and supervisors, provision of supports for postgraduates to attend conferences, and co-location of all staff and research students in each department as opportunities arise.
2. The reasons for not implementing some recommendations include: constraints on appointment of additional staff to overcome unfavourable staff/student ratios when compared to disciplinary norms; absence of staff development programme; inconsistency between departments in provision of training for tutors; the current procedures that apply in relation to sabbaticals (funding contribution, small department issues); resources not available to reduce administrative workloads for academic staff especially Heads of Departments; scarcity of physical space to meet needs of some departments, though solutions have been found in some case through collaboration between departments; lack of consensus among majority of Academic Council members on proposals in relation to double marking of exam scripts, or implementation of anonymous marking; and constraints on the University to impose subject caps on entry to omnibus degrees.
3. In some cases Departments considered but decided not to proceed with recommendations that could impact on all staff, such as peer review of teaching, and consistency in use of continuous assessment as component of overall assessment of students.

In summary, the review confirms that quality assurance and enhancement is embedded in the culture and work of all departments. The review, albeit as a desk top exercise, establishes that progress has been made against a backdrop of very severe reductions in resources (funding, staff, infrastructure investment) while student numbers have expanded greatly. The experience in Maynooth echoes that reported in a recent review for QQI.

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