



Department of Education Quality Improvement Plan

January 2018

**Quality Improvement Plan
Department of Education**

Overview

The Department of Education convened three Working Groups at its first staff meeting in September 2017 in order to address areas already identified through our Self Assessment Report and through the verbal report given by the Quality Review Panel. They are focused on:

1. Administrative Workflow
2. Assessment
3. Evaluation

We received the Quality Review Report in October 2017 and convened an Away Day in December 2017 to finalise our Quality Improvement Plan.

Two key themes emerged from our discussions that cut across all areas: improvement in communication within the Department; and time for Departmental planning beyond the regular monthly staff meetings. To this end, we are planning 3 half day sessions in the Spring to continue the discussions initiated during our Away Day, convening an Evaluation Day, and are working on making sure there is better flow of information across programmes.

The review panel noted numerous strengths in the quality of our programmes, our academic output, and our collegiality. We seek to build on those strengths in outlining a clear plan for future development. The plan below follows the itemised recommendations made in the Quality Review Report.

6.1 Department Governance and Organisation

Recommendations	Actions
6.1.6 While the Department is clearly successful on any number of evaluative standards, the PRG also observed that the Department was able to articulate relatively few areas where the Department was moving toward clear and measurable goals –this will be particularly important around goals for enrolment growth of the various programmes at undergraduate and postgraduate levels and the enhancement of the student experience.	Establish clear goals in relation to managing growth. We have grown very quickly without adequate resources and have planned strategy meetings in the Spring. Discussion of flexible PME to manage numbers in ITE.
6.1.7 The PRG recommends that the Department therefore develop a strategic plan around future programme offerings particularly with reference to the current and potential research strengths of the Department.	Department will prepare a strategy document, outlining future directions of programme offerings and planned enrollment.
6.1.8 The PRG recommends that the Department develop a clear mapping of co-ordinator and leadership roles for courses and teams, including a clearly articulated plan for the rotation of such responsibilities.	Working Group on Administrative Workflow established: Define the role of administrators and academic course leaders: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct an audit based on a review of administrative and course leader roles, with the life-cycle of the student in mind. • Administrative staff currently working on a range of documents regarding process

	<p>issues , including staff duties, handbook for exams and improving information on the website.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearer articulation of roles in a Departmental Handbook, and include links to university supports. <p>Improve Communication among Staff regarding workflow</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating a transparent timetable that can be easily communicated to all administrative and academic staff. • Shared calendars to be developed, IT systems. • Possibility of using education.department calendar to improve communication about what is going on in the department. • Maximise the use of 365 calendars for university business • Review modalities for communication (MOODLE, onedrive, shared drive, TEAMS). • Admin team work well together in this regard; the information can be shared more easily with academic staff. • Improve HoD access to email lists for occasional staff. • Some of these issues to be inputted into departmental staff handbook for internal use <p>Opportunities for Professional Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List of administrative duties for academic staff which includes rotation of course leader responsibility. This will require planning for handing over responsibilities (mentoring/shadowing). • Develop incentives for taking on course leadership (eg. Semester free of teaching after 3 years?). <p>Induction for occasional and continuing staff</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear induction and provision of structures for occasional and continuing staff (i.e. training in the use of MOODLE as well as a range of other issues). • Solutions to provide supports for staff when induction occurs on a weekend. • Clearer articulation of roles in a Departmental Handbook. • Identify blocks at university level
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6.2 Teaching, Learning, Assessment and Student Feedback

Recommendations	Actions
<p>6.2.10 The PRG suggests improving the student feedback mechanisms, in particular to share best practices amongst academic staff. Currently there seems to be a number of mechanisms through which students can offer feedback and the Department should consider rationalising the number of approaches within its own context. Effective evaluations can provide invaluable data around effectiveness of various pedagogy methods, appropriateness of workload and evaluation methods and where additional support or professional development for academic staff and tutors would be desirable. It would also assist the work of the department if greater coherence could be established between these mechanisms and agreed institution-wide practices.</p>	<p>Working Group on Evaluation established and Evaluation Day planned for 2018.</p> <p>Key themes to be discussed:</p> <p>Examine language of evaluation; Quality of programme design; Student experience</p>
<p>6.2.11 The PRG recommends that a sub-committee be established to review assessment and feedback practices in the Department and their relationship to student learning. Consistency of information with reference to expectations around assessment types and assignments is extremely important. All programmes should review their practices in relation to this aspect.</p>	<p>Working Group on Assessment established:</p> <p>It conducted a review of all assessment practices in the Department in Fall 2017. The following actions have been agreed to:</p> <p>Create framework document for assessment giving guidelines on:</p>
<p>6.2.12 The PRG recommends that students should receive formative written feedback on assignments within a specific, agreed timeframe. Students indicated that there was too much of a time delay between completion of assignments and receipt of feedback. The type of feedback provided to students, which will inform their future learning, is an area for immediate consideration.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • writing rationale for assessment • achieving curriculum alignment (programme goals, module goals, assessment goals) • considering contextual factors that impact on assessment and feedback • posting feedback + grades on Moodle
<p>6.2.13 Students indicated a desire to take advantage of a diversity of pedagogy approaches and assessment mechanisms. Some students express a preference for presentations while others wish to have more courses assessed by writing essays. Some students wish to have more group work while others worry about their efforts rising or falling on the basis of others. Academic staff take varying approaches to pedagogy and assessment, but there does not appear to be a focus on measuring and evaluating the success of particular pedagogy or assessment mechanisms. The PRG therefore recommends that the Department undertake a review of assessment outcomes predicated upon greater transparency and clear explanations of the underpinning rationale.</p>	<p>For reference, the framework document will also offer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An assignment framework to inform the setting-out of an assignment brief • An assessment-types grid • A feedback-types grid • All areas of the document will inform CPD for staff
<p>6.2.14 The PRG suggests that the Department develop goals in relation to team teaching. At the moment, it remains unclear how great a priority this remains for the Department or what mechanisms are in place to further develop these opportunities within available resources.</p>	<p>Department will develop goals in relation to its projects and pedagogical approaches to team teaching.</p>
<p>6.2.15 The PRG recommends extended critical research-informed reflection on contemporary practice in teaching methodologies in schools and other settings, and their appropriate locus within the teacher education programmes.</p>	<p>Develop a 'pedagogy and curriculum' strand of research – feeding into MEd and EdD strands.</p>
<p>6.2.16 The rapid expansion of programmes and change</p>	<p>Develop appropriate goals and plans, aligning</p>

needs to be reconsidered into the future particularly with reference to staff capacity and alignment with research activity in the Department.	research interests with programmes on offer.
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6.3 Research Activities and Outputs

Recommendations	Actions
6.3.7 The PRG recommends that the Department develops a research strategy which is clearly aligned to the University strategy for research. An articulation of Education's priorities would assist in focusing on sources of research income within and beyond Maynooth University, and in fostering trans-disciplinary and international initiatives. In the medium to longer term, and subject to coherence with agreed university strategic objectives, the development of a defined research centre in accordance with best international practice in the field should be considered.	Develop research strategy in conjunction with role of new Professor of Educational Research
6.3.8 The PRG recommends that the Education Department develops specific criteria aligned with international benchmarks for assessing research and publications quality. This would assist colleagues in self-evaluation, collaborative working and in developing annual appraisal or other career development routes and research goals.	Ongoing discussions about this in conjunction with developing research strategy
6.3.9 The departmental workload model should be enhanced in order to ensure that all staff have the opportunity to develop their research publications and profiles.	Development of workload model; Working Group on Workload to be established with links to Administrative Workflow Group and HoD

6.4 Staffing, Staff Development, and Resources

Recommendations	Actions
6.4.7 The PRG recommends that the distribution of the workload of administrative staff be kept under regular review – with reference to internal and external programme administration. Further, issues pertaining to contractual matters should be dealt with in a timely manner.	HR has improved its timeliness regarding contractual matters. Working Group on Administrative Workflow proposing solutions to create professional development for administrative staff and making a statement to the University regarding the need of this across Departments.
6.4.8 The PRG recommends the formulation of a workload model for <i>all</i> members of academic staff, as part of the fashioning of the 2018 University Strategic Plan that is transparent and made available to the department at the start of the academic year.	University-wide workload allocation model was recommended by Athena Swan. Working Group on Workload to be established
6.4.9 The PRG recommends that the Education Department develops and establishes research supports for staff as part of their career development and the pursuit of the research goals of the Department. These might include, where relevant, sabbatical planning, and rebalancing of teaching, co-ordination, and administrative commitments.	HoD to conduct audit of staff career development needs. Bring back suggestions to staff for April/May staff meeting.
6.4.10 The PRG recommends the implementation of a structured mentoring system in order to assist all staff,	HoD to liaise with HR in setting one up for administrative and technical staff

academic, administrative and technical, in career and professional development.	Initiate development of academic mentoring both within department and larger university community
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6.5 Management of Quality and Enhancement

6.5.3 The Department should develop a framework within its existing governance structures to ensure that academic/professional expertise continues to thrive within the culture of research-led teaching, by aiming to achieve more balanced workloads; leading to clearly-defined promotion pathways for staff.	Working Group on Workload to be established. HoD to factor research time into workload allocation. Discussing whether publication, funding, etc. would be part of annual review.
6.5.4 The PRG recommends a thorough review of the responsibilities, workloads, expectations, and career pathways for all administrative and technical staff in the department.	HoD to construct more detailed allocations to admin staff, discussing career priorities. Working Group on Administrative Workflow has met around this (see actions under 6.1.8): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working towards solutions to create professional development for administrative staff and making a statement to the University regarding the importance of this
6.5.5 The Department should ensure continued active involvement of academic staff in the development of all of the processes surrounding teaching and learning, both within the department and across the university, in order to continuously enhance the teaching and learning experience of the students at undergraduate and postgraduate levels.	We are meeting regularly in teams across the programmes on offer.
6.5.6 The PRG recommends that the quality of academic standards is monitored carefully through feedback on curriculum, teaching and learning.	This will form part of the Working Group on Evaluation's deliberations. Key issues identified around data protection, sensitive information about staff and developing protocol/code of practice across programmes.
6.5.7 The PRG recommends enhanced cohesion between the work of the department of Education, the other departments of the Faculty of Social Sciences, Research Institutes, and the leadership of the university	Generating research strands and programme streams in line with strategic priorities. Meetings with new Professor of Educational Research to set strategy agenda.