

## **Quality Improvement Plan**

### **Department of Adult and Community Education Response to the Peer Reviewers Recommendations**

We welcome the commendations of the Peer Reviewers which identifies the Department as ‘a centre of excellence in adult and community education amongst the community it serves and among its academic peers in Ireland and abroad’ (p2). The chair of the Peer Review team noted the following: ‘After a lifetime of work in adult education I (as chair of the group) have never experienced such universal and convincing evidence of sustained high quality teaching and organisation’ (p2).

We appreciate the Reviewers’ recognition of the unique contribution the Department has made to implementing the University strategic plan, the experience and skills required for working in an often challenging adult education environment, and the on-going need for the University to develop a clear policy and provision that is responsive to the specific requirements of, part-time students.

The Department also welcomes the recommendation by the Peer Review team to the university to indicate its intention to replace the subject professor, lecturers and administrative staff who have already, or are about to, retire so that student recruitment, especially for long-term programmes such as the BA, PhD and DHAE courses, can proceed.

A core recommendation by the Peer Review team to the Department is to enhance our visibility within the university with particular reference to our distinct pedagogical approaches. The Reviewers note that because of the Department’s focus on inclusion, equality and social justice there is an emphasis on engagement and participation with excluded groups, communities and disadvantaged sectors. This demands time and resources from staff which can be difficult to quantify and is often discounted. When enhancing our visibility, the Department is mindful of the need to acknowledge this often hidden dimension of its work.

Inherent in the Peer Reviewers appreciation of the transformative nature of the Department’s work on individual students and communities, is the need for the University to develop a workload model that takes account of the resources required for pedagogical approaches that promote engagement and participation.

The Peer Reviewers also recommend that the Department enhance the visibility of our extensive research activities within the University. They note that the Department’s strong research profile and presence in the field both nationally and internationally is not adequately reflected within the University. The Department also has a very high number of doctoral students<sup>1</sup>. We appreciate that there is a need to showcase more actively the research activities and expertise of these doctoral students and of the Department staff. In both teaching and research the Department is very aware that it is a key priority to highlight its scholarly activities and research excellence as identified by the Peer Reviewers.

The Peer Reviewers recognize the on-going commitment of the Department to democratic decision-making and they recommend that this model be further strengthened.

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<sup>1</sup> In 2016/7 29 students are registered with this Department, plus 5 are registered on the joint EdD, ADD900

In the table that follows below we respond to each individual recommendation.

Quality Review Recommendations (taken directly from the Peer Reviewers Report)	Proposed Actions
Recommendations related to <u>management and decision-making</u>	
1. We recommend that DACE strengthens its management and decision making to empower and support the Head of Department:	<b>1.</b> In order to strengthen DACE's management and decision-making capacities DACE is in the process of making organizational changes to encourage effective co-ordination and delegation within the department. There are four core areas of activity within DACE - Teaching and Learning, Research, Administration and Continuous Professional Development / Continuing Education. The Department is re-focusing staff teams in each of these areas to implement Peer Review team recommendations.
a) to secure the tough decision making presaged in the SAR	a) Each team will be responsible for strategic direction, day-to-day management, and liaising with the HOD to make decisions that ensure best use of finite resources. Each team will also have a developmental function including promoting scholarship in the field related to their area of concern
b) to represent the Department in University decision making councils	b) The Department is currently reviewing its commitment and engagement with University and Faculty bodies to ensure effective representation and critical engagement.
c) and to be advocate for DACE and for adult and community education with politicians and policy makers	c) The Department is already a member of a number of organisations such as the Teaching council, AONTAS, FEN, SCUTREA, EUCEN, ESREA, AAACE. The Department is identifying and prioritising through consultation other key practitioner organisations, policy-bodies and international associations and groups in adult education. Members of staff will undertake to represent the Department with these organisations and explore how best to share and disseminate the adult & community education insights and knowledge.

Quality Review Recommendations (taken directly from the Peer Reviewers Report)	Proposed Actions
Recommendations related to <u>teaching and learning</u>	
<p>1. We recommend that DACE reviews the current provision to identify areas where low student numbers, or in the case of the Defence MA lack of funding, make future provision unviable.</p>	<p>1. Discussions are on-going with regard to all courses. In Continuing Education the Department no longer offers courses that are under-subscribed and those that are not core to the discipline of adult and community education. For example in relation to Addiction Studies the context and policy regarding addiction have changed at national and international levels and there is a need to explore the relevance of these courses to the discipline of adult and community education. Future provision and direction of Continuing Education will be informed by (i) the Peer Reviewers recommendations (ii) a half day externally-facilitated workshop held in March and (iii) on-going reviews of specific courses.</p> <p>The Department has undertaken a number of key strategic meetings with external agencies to explore how it can respond to the growing CPD needs of adult education practitioners particularly in light of the professionalization of Further Education (FE). Responses will encompass utilizing some of the Continuing Education programme and drawing on existing postgraduate modules. All CPD provision will be credit bearing with an academic progression framework. To date the reputation and scholarship of the department is a feature in the willingness of agencies to collaborate in the development of CPD nationally.</p> <p>The MA in Leadership, Management and Defence Studies is no longer delivered through the Department.</p>
<p>2. The Department should in our view:</p>	<p>2.</p>
<p>a) develop with the wider University a strategy for adult learners in the part-time BA course, addressing the full recognition of their rights as students, and their specific needs, and giving to</p>	<p>a) The Department has managed the part-time BA since its inception in 1997. Throughout that time it has devoted a considerable amount of resources to developing and maintaining that provision. The Department's capacity to</p>

<p>DACE the means to co-ordinate and provide in sustainable ways support for their courses;</p>	<p>continue is in question within the new RAM. A draft report on the BA is nearing completion. The main recommendation is that the BA either becomes a University-wide provision or that it is redesigned to better address the inclusion and participation agenda of the University.</p> <p>The Department has also submitted a recommendation to the forthcoming University Strategic Plan regarding the establishment of a centre to co-ordinate part-time education across the University. We believe this approach will better enable the University to appreciate and respond at an institutional level to the needs of part-time students.</p> <p>The Department has made a significant contribution to the university Strategic Plan on widening participation. Being responsive to the needs of part-time learners is central to widening participation.</p>
<p>b) develop clearer ownership of courses that are designed and provided by DACE, to make clearer negotiation with other departments and the University on what is done, and the reasons for that; not least to make more visible, accessible, and understandable the possible role of DACE for the larger body of students and the pedagogical philosophy of the University;</p>	<p>b) The Department is exploring how best it can use its existing networks and partnerships with other Departments in the University (such as the seven other Departments across the Faculties of Arts and Social Science on the BA in Local and Community Studies, research partnerships with Education, Froebel, Geography, Biology and the Kennedy Institute) in order to make its pedagogical philosophy more visible and accessible to students and staff. Work is underway to improve the content of the web-site which to date has not adequately reflected the breadth and depth of the Department's work. The revision work will be completed by May 2018 the website used more extensively thereafter.</p>
<p>c) find more balance between the creation and management of very demanding courses, and the consolidation, communication, dissemination, and valorisation of what is done; the passion and</p>	<p>c) Finding this balance is a challenge that we believe we will address by a better flow of information between the different activities within the Department as described earlier. It will assist decision-making regarding taking new initiatives, and</p>

investment in activities should be accompanied by analysis of resources, time planning, and sustainable choices.	demand a greater emphasis on sustainability, resources and the requirement to disseminate the knowledge in various forums.
d) Ensure each teaching and learning activity has a coordinator; as an institutional leader, the coordinator has the role to establish tasks and constraints (even if by democratic consultation) and interface with the Head of Department by providing useful information for strategic planning. The style of DACE is very democratic and diffused; this could be demanding in terms of time and energy: to find a more balanced leadership, based on trust and delegation, would be helpful.	d) Every programme has named coordinators who are responsible for programme delivery, interfacing with the HOD and strategic planning for the programme in the context of the Department's available resources. A small working group are exploring models of balanced leadership based on trust and delegation that are compatible with the ethos of the Department and the needs of the University.
<b>Quality Review Recommendations (taken directly from the Peer Reviewers Report)</b>	<b>Proposed Actions</b>
<b>Recommendations related to <u>research</u></b>	
<p>1. We recommend that DACE clarifies its research strategy, identifying the balance sought between peer-reviewed academic research outcomes and practice focused dissemination of research, scholarship, and learner voice publications; and we recommend that DACE identify benchmarks for excellent outcomes against which its progress can be reviewed.</p>	<p>1. The Department has established a Research Working-Group to consider DACE's research strategy and to develop a clearer focus for the work of 'The Centre for Research in Adult Learning and Education' (CRALE). Consultations have taken place with key staff in the University and a business plan will be completed by December 2017. A key task for CRALE is to develop a strategy to ensure the Department continues to lead in research on FE and HE in Ireland and to bid for higher profile research grants.</p> <p>The Working-Group is looking at the balance sought between peer-reviewed academic research outcomes; practice focused dissemination of research, scholarship, and learner voice publications; and identifying benchmarks for excellent outcomes against which progress can be reviewed. It is also foregrounding doctoral research through events and social media.</p>

<b>2.</b> As DACE develops new research guidelines they should take into account:	<b>2.</b>
a) How to help staff to find a balance between teaching and researching, to develop their skills and c.v.s to be strong and reputed internationally, with the help of the whole department (e.g. a day off to write a paper!)	a) The HOD has met all academic staff and discussed their individual workloads with particular emphasis on research and where possible has adjusted workloads.
b) Making a strategy for funding of research, not only at a national level: prioritize the kind of calls, and put resources into grant writing	b) The Business Plan for CRALE seeks to utilize the recently finalized Incentivisation for Externally Funded Research Policy to enhance its capacity to source funding for research that is compatible with the philosophy of the Department and the strategic research agenda of the University.
c) Diversifying models, paradigms and topics of AE that are represented in the department, in the library fund, in doctoral theses, and in publications, not least to avoid closing oneself in a small self-reproducing community.	c) The Department will continue to represent and research different models, paradigms and topics in adult education, and will ensure that such diversity is more visible, accessible and transparent. For example, the CRALE strategic plan includes scheduling four showcase events annually to highlight the research activities of Department staff and students within the University and the sector. We will also explore how best to fund research within Continuing Education and how best to integrate participative research approaches within all teaching programmes.
d) Developing good reasons for maintaining a wide range of publications, but also writing more for peer reviewed academic journals.	d) An agreement with the publisher Gill to distribute MACE (Maynooth Adult and Community Education) Press publications had been formally signed. This ensures that MACE Press existing and future publications will be available to wider national and international audiences. The Department has identified key journals and is supporting a greater level of peer review publications.
<b>3.</b> We were struck by the relative invisibility of the international development dimension in the Department's work, and recommend that its place in the Department's priorities for research, scholarship and teaching be reviewed.	<b>3.</b> We anticipate that improvements in the web-site and a greater use of social media will increase the visibility of all aspects of the Department's work including its research, scholarship and teaching. We will liaise with the University's Communications, Research and Postgraduate Offices regarding other means of increasing our visibility e.g. national media, teaching and learning competitions etc.

Quality Review Recommendations (taken directly from the Peer Reviewers Report)	Proposed Actions
<b>Recommendations related to <u>staffing and staff development</u></b>	
<b>1. Administrative staff</b> Since administrative staff undertake an unusually high volume of work, we recommend:	<b>1. Administrative staff</b>
a) The Department should review the range of responsibilities currently held by the administrative staff, with a view to possible re-distribution of some of the duties to academic staff where this is more appropriate.	a) The Administration Working- Group meets monthly to review the on-going admin needs of the Department, to monitor resource allocation, including finances, to keep up to date on new systems, to identify gaps and overlap in the Department, and to streamline Department engagement with students, tutors, occasional staff and University offices.
b) The Department should make sure that administrative staff have clearly defined and reasonable roles.	b) The HOD has met with all admin staff to clarify their individual roles and responsibilities.
c) The Department should assign a member of administrative staff to oversee rooms, and to coordinate room bookings with the Registrar's Office. The issue of individual members of staff attempting to make room bookings in an un-coordinated way was reported to be creating difficulties for the University's timetable.	c) Since moving to the new building, academic room bookings are now centrally timetabled. The new system can now accommodate our requirement for 'full day bookings' on campus which has enabled us to strategically plan teaching hours
<b>2. Associate staff</b> The review group would like to make the following recommendations in the interest of maintaining the strength of the large group of associate staff on which much of the Department's mission rests:	<b>2. Associate staff</b>
a) That the University issue contracts to those associate staff who request them, to provide job security into the future.	a) The HOD is in consultation with HR regarding contracts for Associate Staff.
b) That the Department draw up a replacement plan for associate staff to minimize the impact of up-coming retirements, and also to consider a training plan to ease new recruits into the work of the Department.	b) The Department is mindful that all of its off-campus provision and most of its part-time on-campus provision relies on part-time associate staff. This is not sustainable in the long-term. There are also ethical and legal implications that need to be addressed at a university level with regard to the employment status of these staff.

	A Handbook for all associate staff is being prepared by the admin team, the Continuing Education Coordinator, the HOD and Associate Staff. The Handbook will be ready for the academic year 2018/9.
<b>3. Academic staff</b>	<b>3. Academic staff</b>
a) We recommend to the University below that retiring staff should be replaced. Assuming the Department hires new academic staff in the short to medium term, the review group would like to recommend that the Department should look to diversify. It could do this by hiring people holding different philosophical outlooks, and/or with specialisms in areas not currently represented in the Department.	a) The HOD will make a presentation to the new academic staffing and planning group regarding the replacements for staff who have or are about to retire including the subject professor. As the appointments are ratified, the Department will look to recruit staff who have appropriate specialism that add to the diversity of the department.
b) The Department should survey the distribution of academic staff time among research, teaching and various forms of administration as a first step in facilitating staff development. It was the impression of the review group that at least some academic staff members have a workload heavily skewed towards administration, at the expense of research and scholarship. If mechanisms can be found to balance staff time between their various duties, then the Department could then explore developmental supports, especially regarding research.	b) The HOD has met with every member of staff to discuss their individual workload and has made adjustments where possible and as required.  All of the academic staff came together for a half day planning meeting in June 2017 to review the distribution of academic staff time among, research, teaching and various forms of administration. As a follow-up, a facilitated full day meeting will be held in spring 2018. The aim of the meeting will be to clarify existing staff workloads with a view to informing the Department's strategic planning.
<b>4. We recommend:</b>	<b>4.</b>
a) That DACE should consider creating a role for a member of academic staff to co-ordinate student recruitment, with the support of a designated administrator.	a) Given the current level of staff, the Department is not in a position to address the recommendation that it create a role for a member of academic staff to co-ordinate student recruitment, with the support of a designated administrator.
b) That DACE should look towards expanding its student base through various forms of distance learning. In this context, the provision of relevant I.T. training for staff members might prove useful.	b) The Department has submitted a new programme using e-learning technologies. IT training for staff has begun. It is anticipated that blended learning will become a more central mode of delivery across all programmes from certificate to doctoral levels.



Quality Review Recommendations (taken directly from the Peer Reviewers Report)	Proposed Actions
<b>Recommendations related to <u>internal and external engagement</u></b>	
<b>1. We recommend:</b>	<b>1.</b>
a) That DACE consider redefining the role of Head of Department, in discussion with the Faculty Dean, in order to ensure greater departmental visibility within the University.	a) The HOD will continue to raise the need to redefine the role of Head of Department at HOD meetings in FSS.
b) That DACE identify areas/committees where it might usefully contribute to the development of policy and good practice within the University and encourage staff members to become actively involved in these.	b) Staff have identified areas/committees that are strategic and central to the Department's agenda.
c) That DACE develop a strategy identifying areas of particular strength and pursue the establishment of partnerships/engagement with external organisations based on these areas of strength.	c) Staff have established or reconnected with external organizations that are core to the Department's strategic development (e.g. the Teaching Council, ESREA, SOLAS, ETB's, QQI, Department of Education and Skills).
d) That the website be reviewed in order to better reflect the work of DACE and include information on the areas of specialism of the department	d) Work on the website has commenced and is on-going.
e) That DACE recognise the importance of increasing the volume of publications in peer- reviewed research journals and its impact across the University, whilst recognising the balance to be achieved with practitioner focused publication.	e) CRALE is responding to the recommendation regarding the volume of publications in peer- reviewed research journals and its impact across the University, whilst recognising the balance to be achieved with practitioner focused publication. Workshops for staff and mentoring for doctoral students have begun.
f) That the practice of entering mutually beneficial partnerships with departments such as Applied Social Studies, Education and Sociology be extended and/or consolidated.	f) The Department is committed to collaborating with other Departments as recommended. For example, the PATH project is commencing and involves this Department, Frobel, Education, Applied Social Studies and Access. The BA in Local and Community Studies requires collaboration with 7 other academic Departments. Meetings have also begun with staff in the education departments regarding the content and delivery of elective modules.
g) That DACE develop modules in critical skills, based on particular areas of expertise relevant to all students.	g) The Department continues to be involved in the design and delivery of critical skills and elective modules.

Quality Review Recommendations (taken directly from the Peer Reviewers Report)	Proposed Actions
Recommendations for the University	
We have the following recommendations, arising from the review for the University:	The Department fully endorses these recommendations to the University.
1. that the forthcoming University Strategic Plan contain a strong statement on the role of adult and community education within the University and in its outreach work;	1. The Department made a submission to the forthcoming University Strategic Plan regarding the role of adult and community education within the University and its outreach work. The essence of the submission was incorporated into the University Strategic Plan.
2. that the University develop a Resource Allocation Model (RAM) specifically tailored to the requirements of departments with large numbers of non-traditional students and whose work includes a particular focus on widening participation;	2. The Department will continue to collaborate with Senior Financial Managers to explore a RAM model that is compatible with its requirements given its large numbers of non-traditional students and whose work includes a particular focus on widening participation and inclusion.
3. that the University develop a clear policy for part-time course provision to ensure that, as far as possible, the experience of part-time learners is as positive as that of their full-time counterparts, and as a key element of this, review the appropriate metrics to support work with under-represented groups in line with University policy;	3. To support the University in developing a policy for part time course provision, the Department has engaged in a strategic planning process to review its model for part time course provision. The Department will submit its findings to the Dean, which may inform the University's policy and decisions regarding extending part time learning across all faculties. It will also detail the Department's pedagogical and administrative approaches that ensure the inclusion of underrepresented groups.
4. that the University develop a policy for interdisciplinary programmes, and that the University centrally adopt the ground-breaking BA part-time programme in local studies, to ensure inter-departmental commitment to its coherence;	4. The Department has engaged in a strategic planning process to review the potential development of the BA model to inform a University wide part-time flexible learning undergraduate programme. A recommendation as to the best process has already been sent to the Dean of FSS for consideration.
5. that the University should look to replace the academic staff who will retire in the next couple of years, to keep intact the strength and activities of the Department, to maintain its international profile, and to support the Department's key role in community	5. and 6.  The Department appreciates the recommendations regarding replacing academic and administrative staff. The Department is

<p>outreach and the associated promotion of the University's name and reputation. In particular, the University should look to replace the Chair when the current incumbent retires, to emphasize the Department's status within the entire Irish University sector as the sole Department of Adult and Community Education;</p>	<p>having ongoing discussions with HR and the Dean regarding staffing issues.</p>
<p>6. in relation to administrative staff we recommend that the University should give consideration to the role of Department administrators, and consider whether the roles and attendant job descriptions might be renamed 'development administrators';</p> <p>The University should be mindful of the Department's unusually heavy reliance on its administrative staff, and in particular of its need to hire a replacement for the senior administrator who will shortly retire.</p>	