



Quality Improvement Plan

Department of Geography

Departmental Quality Review 2017/18

Quality Review Report			Department Quality Improvement Plan	
	D = Department obligation; I = Institutional obligation		H = Head of Department; U = Undergraduate Committee; P = Postgraduate Committee; R = Research/Outreach Committee	
Number	Recommendation	Additional PRG Comments	Actions planned	Actions taken to date (21 January 2019)
S.1	Sustainability			
S.1.1	Develop a 5 year research strategy that emphasises key areas of strengths and ways to support emerging potential, including a hiring strategy and long-term plan for investment in capacity building. (D and, in response, I)	To achieve sustainability, and to support intellectual leadership in disciplinary agendas, it may be necessary to prioritise quality over quantity. The MU VPR informed the PGR that from 2018 he will require research plans from each Department, which the panel was assured will inform future hiring.	<p>R will develop a five-year research strategy for Staff to consider, revise and adopt.</p> <p>R will ensure Department responds to broader MU research strategies.</p> <p>H will report on Research as part of annual Academic Staff Planning Review.</p> <p>With new University overheads allocation policy, Department will use these sums to support existing research capacity and develop capacity further (H & R).</p>	<p>As part of our next away-day (31 January 2019) R will initiate discussion of a five-year research plan.</p> <p>H included a table of grants and publications in most recent Academic Staffing Review report.</p> <p>After discussion at Staff Meeting, Overheads for 2018-19 will be split between an allocation made by H which will include teaching buy-outs and a further allocation which will be advised by R and will include pump-priming for new projects. Staff have agreed the principles</p>

				for the sums allocated by R and a procedure is currently in preparation.
S.1.2	Instigate professional development and review processes to enable work planning and prioritisation for all staff in the Department and Institution. (D and I)	This is related to sustainability as a supportive, developmental and collegial process rather than one focused on performance monitoring.	<p>H will develop a supportive, collective, collegial and developmental process to support staff work of scholarship, teaching and service.</p> <p>H will review effectiveness of current informal mutual mentoring.</p>	H has developed a new Workload Recognition survey as part of the annual planning of Teaching and Administrative responsibilities.
S.1.3	Plan a Department away day to define transparent workload model principles to reflect teaching, research, enterprise and impact, mentoring, doctoral supervision and administrative roles. (D)	To sustain transparency and collegiality as well as to identify areas for rationalization in teaching and research delivery	H undertakes to do this.	H has engaged a labour union negotiator to facilitate a discussion of workload recognition and planning for half the next awayday (31 January 2019)
S.2	Access			
S.2.1	Establish a lecture capture system (video and/or audio) to enable remote access (space/time). (D)	Recognising that a significant number of students are missing substantial parts of certain modules (due to diverse student	H will explore lecture capture for the lecture spaces we control.	P proposed further part-time options for a new Certificate and Diploma option for students not

	Explore possibility of part-time provision of undergraduate degree programmes. (I)	backgrounds, financial constraints and issues of space on campus amongst other reasons) suggestions are being made to mitigate against poor student performance in some modules that show high failure rates.	H will make representations to the Registrar, indicating Departmental support for part-time options for undergraduate students.	taking the full suite of modules included as part of the MA in Geography. This proposal has passed through Programme Review at University level.
S.2.2	Expand learning and study spaces for undergraduates and postgraduates on campus. (I)	Undergraduate representatives expressed frustration about the lack of available learning and study spaces. This is clearly impeding their engagement with the Department and the University, and thus likely impacting their performance.	H will explore making available to our students during Reading Weeks some of the Teaching Spaces we control.	As a first experiment in this provision the Rocque Laboratory is being made available to undergraduates during study week 28 January to 1 February 2019.
S.2.3	Address urgently the lack of access to the Department offices in Rhetoric House and some learning spaces for people with mobility issues. (I)	In addition to breaching equality policies, the fact that such students are unable to access the key pastoral role played by Department administrators doubly discriminates against them, and is a matter of considerable concern.	H will again raise this with the Vice-President of Estates & Capital. H will develop a Buildings Committee to review our current space and propose improvements.	H has done this. H proposed to Estates and Capital a refit of the Rocque Lab.
S.2.4	Provide lecture content on Moodle in advance of the timetabled class. (D)	It is usual good pedagogical practice to have these resources available at least 24	H will advise staff and U will monitor.	H has passed this recommendation to all staff.

		hours in advance of the class		
S.3	Curriculum reform			
S.3.1	Rationalise UG and PG module provision to free up time for research and public engagement activities. (D)	<p>Suggestions from the panel include:</p> <p>Considering team teaching to provide greater resilience and flexibility for buyouts;</p> <p>Greater sharing of modules across postgraduate programmes;</p> <p>Standardise student work required across modules of the same credit weighting;</p> <p>Establishing minimum student numbers for module viability</p>	<p>U and P will consider these proposals.</p> <p>H will review course registrations while recognising that smaller numbers on some final-year undergraduate classes is an effective way of giving students a research-led learning experience.</p>	<p>P is developing course-sharing for more Masters courses. It is also developing proposals for the block-teaching of some modules.</p> <p>Most Masters option are now available to all PhD students with appropriately revised forms of assessment where useful.</p>
S.3.2	Establish BSc pathway. (D and I)	Developing links with the Faculty of Science will support the quality of students with science skills in the Geography undergraduate programme with the potential to feed into the physical Geography postgraduate programmes. Links with the	The Department will seek to develop: a BSc Geography/Biology degree; a BSc in Geoscience; and to have some courses in Science/Society, Physical Geography and GIS recognised as omnibus offerings in the MU	A proposed BSc Geography/Biology degree has been developed and it has passed review by University Programmes Committee and by the Faculties of Social Sciences and of Science and Engineering.

		Biology Department should be developed as a matter of urgency.	BSc programme more generally.	
S.3.3	Rebrand the MA in Human Geography. (D)	To emphasise the unique offering of this Masters provision the panel suggests something like MA in Geography, Social Justice and Public Engagement.	We will adopt this suggestion. If we get approval we will then promote this newly focused degree.	P developed a course revision for the MA in Geography so that students who take the appropriate modules will graduate with an MA in Geography: Spatial Justice. This proposal has passed through almost stages of University review and we should be able to advertise this for 2019-20.
S.3.4	Formalise existing teaching and learning arrangements such as policies relating to dates of assessment, timeliness and quality of feedback. (D)	Although there are good practices in the Department, this is inconsistent.	Referred to P and U .	Dates of assessment submission are coordinated by the Year Managers for the Undergraduate Programme and by the Directors of the individual degrees for the Masters courses. U developed a new policy on weighting and assessment of continuously assessed work and this has been adopted by a Staff Meeting.
S.3.5	Embed career development in undergraduate and postgraduate	Undergraduate students had little knowledge of career pathways or how to build a portfolio of skills	Referred to P and U . We will develop an Alumni	A Careers for Geographers brochure has been prepared by

	programmes. (D and I)	for their future employment.	<p>Group for our postgraduates and seek to include them in a careers initiative.</p> <p>Within our Masters we will develop options that will suit professional accreditation and might be made available to mid-career professionals.</p>	<p>U.</p> <p>A careers event is in preparation by P and U and will be a trial for an annual event.</p> <p>We surveyed Masters alumni and found enthusiasm for the proposal of an annual get-together.</p> <p>The Masters in GIS/Remote Sensing has just seen some of its modules approved for professional accreditation by Society for Chartered Surveyors Ireland.</p>
S.3.6	Expand practical and research skills training in undergraduate and postgraduate modules. (D)	Examples that students raised include SPSS, NVivo, field instrumentation, R programming. Establishing a permanent weather station on campus would be a significant training, outreach and research resource.	Referred to U and P .	<p>Practical and methods teaching at second-year undergraduate level in the middle of a two-year review and revision and this recommendation has been referred to the course team for GY201/GY202.</p> <p>MSc Climate Change and MSc GIS/RS now include R training as basic.</p> <p>MA Geography now has a new</p>

				<p>skills course that covers the techniques students regularly use in dissertations – Excel, Q-GIS, Nvivo.</p> <p>In collaboration with Met Eireann we are now committed to developing a weather station on campus.</p>
S.4	Enabling environment			
S.4.1	Upgrade all University IT systems (research, teaching, examination, timetable, student information, finance and welfare) such that they are fit for purpose. (I)	The present systems are a source of inefficiencies, duplication of effort and potential for introduction of errors due to mutual incompatibilities. Moreover, at present it would appear that the institution is unable to efficiently generate standard reporting metrics and comparators.	We continue to maintain our own record-keeping and reporting but would of course welcome any further assistance from central administration. The recent revision of the Research Information System is a very welcome development.	Insofar as these IT systems impact upon undergraduate and postgraduate the President and the Dean of FSS took this matter up and there have been discussions between the Dean of FSS and those teaching GIS.
S.4.2	Devolve budgets and staffing powers to HoD to improve flexibility in personnel management in respect to research buyouts. (I)	The present system would appear to dis-incentivise research grant submission.	We recognise the value of the revision to Research Overheads policy and welcome the assistance of the Research Development Office in framing	H has dealt with teaching buy-outs for staff with significant grant-related research obligations – notably in the cases of the large grants secured

			Peter Thorne's buy-out as a three-year post rather than the previous six-monthly arrangements.	by Professor Kath Browne and Dr Gerard McCarthy.
S.4.3	Co-locate the Department in a building that provides sufficient and appropriate space for teaching and research activities. (I)	The location of Departmental offices on two separate sites is a major impediment to developing cohesion, particularly between physical and human geography, and reduces the efficiency of teaching and research programmes.	We continue to make this case. A Department Buildings Committee will be constituted to see if there is better use we can make of our space in Rhetoric.	
S.4.4	Invest in further administrative support in the Department. (I)	This will free up research time for academic staff by transferring activities such as marketing, media, timetabling, etc. to dedicated / appropriately skilled administrative personnel. This could also apply to student recruitment and outreach activities.	We will present a case to the Dean of FSS.	
S.4.5	The University needs more effectively to highlight to prospective undergraduate students the excellent teaching and research programmes of the	The benefits of taking Geography at undergraduate level are not apparent from the content of the University website. A greater effort in publicising the	The Department will continue to feed Geography-related news stories to the University Communications Office. The challenge of more effectiely	Dean of FSS is reviewing ways to help Geography promote itself more effectively as part of University Open-Day programmes.

	Department. (I)	achievements of the Department is essential for attracting highly motivated students.	promoting the Department's achievements is also referred to R.	Kairos/University Communications made a video describing Geography and we will use it as part of Freshers' Week activities in September 2019.
--	-----------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------