



COLÁISTE MUIRE GAN SMÁL
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH
MARY IMMACULATE COLLEGE
UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK

Research Office Quality Review

Peer Review Group Report

June 2013



Table of Contents

1.0	Background	3
1.1	Quality at MIC.....	3
1.2	Quality Committee	3
1.3	The Quality Review Process	4
2.0	Research Office	5
2.1	Overview	5
2.2	Aims and Objectives	5
2.3	Stakeholders.....	5
3.0	Membership of the Peer Review Group (PRG)	6
4.0	Membership of Research Office Quality Team.....	6
5.0	Preliminary Comments of the PRG	6
6.0	The Report of the PRG	8
6.1	The Research Office	8
6.2	Overview of Services to Academic Staff.....	9
6.3	Environment and Facilities of the Research Office	10
6.4	Organisation and Management	11
6.5	Research Centres.....	11

1.0 Background

1.1 Quality at MIC

MIC has always been committed to ensuring the very highest standards of excellence in its teaching, learning and research activities.

The MIC Quality Office endeavours to promote and facilitate continual quality improvement across all the College's academic and professional service units. The work of the office is overseen by the MIC Quality Committee.

The Quality Office has responsibility for the establishment and implementation of procedures directed at maintaining and improving quality. To achieve this, the Quality Office:

- Supports the development of College policy and procedures in relation to quality assurance and improvement in line with best international practice
- Develops, maintains and evaluates the College's academic and professional service review processes while promoting a sense of ownership by each individual department
- Provides the necessary help and support to all departments in implementing the quality review process

The main aim of the quality assurance process is quality improvement. In common with other institutions, the procedures employed by MIC have three main stages: self-assessment, peer review and quality improvement.

The MIC approach to quality is informed by *A Framework for Quality in Irish Universities*¹, the joint Irish Universities Association (IUA) and Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) publication on quality in Irish universities.

1.2 Quality Committee

The Quality Review process at MIC is overseen by a representative, College-wide committee called the Quality Committee (QC). The QC functions as a committee of the College's Executive.

¹ Irish Universities Association & Irish Universities Quality Board (2007), *A Framework for Quality in Irish Universities: Concerted Action for Institutional Improvement*, Dublin: IUA & IUQB.

1.3 The Quality Review Process

The Quality Review Process at MIC is as follows:

Self-Assessment

A Self-Assessment Report (SAR) is drawn up under appropriate headings by the unit under review. The SAR remains confidential to the unit, the peer reviewers and the Quality Office throughout the quality review process.

Peer Review

The SAR is sent to the Peer Review Group (PRG). The members of the PRG read the SAR and spend a number of days on a site visit to the unit.

The PRG consists of four reviewers - two external reviewers and two internal reviewers (MIC staff who are not closely associated with the unit under review).

The members of the PRG read the SAR and spend three days on a site visit to the unit. During the first two days of the visit the Peer Review Group will meet the staff of the unit under review, take a tour of the College and the unit's facilities and meet with relevant stakeholders.

On the third day of the visit the PRG complete a Peer Review Report (PRR) on its findings. The review group will generally identify the strengths and weaknesses of the unit, point to examples of good practice, and make constructive recommendations on matters that require improvement. The report may also include any other issues that the PRG deems appropriate. The commendations and recommendations are communicated verbally to the unit at the end of the site visit. The PRR is finalised and sent to the unit within a month of the visit.

Quality Improvement

Once the Peer Review Report (PRR) is finalised it is sent to the Unit and the Unit's Line Manager (College President, Vice President, Associate Vice President or Faculty Dean). Following this the PRR is submitted to the Quality Committee.

The Unit reviews the PRR and begins the process of developing the Quality Improvement Plan (QIP). The PRR and the Draft QIP are then submitted to the Executive Team (ET). The ET addresses the recommendations categorised at ET level. The remaining Action Items are then submitted as Agenda Items to the relevant college bodies for completion. Once the QIP is complete it is submitted to the Quality Committee.

Finally, the PRR and QIP are presented to Bord Rialaithe (Governing Body) and permission is sought from Bord Rialaithe to make the report publicly available. Once permission is granted the PRR is made publicly available via the MIC Quality Web Site.

2.0 Research Office

2.1 Overview

The AVP for Research is the head of the Research Office and has overall responsibility for the organisation and management of all aspects of research in the College, including the Research Support Office. The Higher Executive Officer, Research is the manager of the Research Support Office and has responsibility for all aspects of administration within that section of the Research Office. Along with the Clerical Officer, Research, this gives a team of three staff within a very busy and highly responsive office that has College-wide, cross-campus and cross-faculty obligations and responsibilities.

2.2 Aims and Objectives

The aims and objectives of the Research Office are as follows:

- a) Advance the research portfolio of the College in line with the College Strategic Plan 2012 -2016
- b) Facilitate increased staff engagement with research and consequently the research profile of MIC
- c) Further develop postgraduate studies at MIC
- d) Cultivate an awareness of the role of research as an integral part of academic endeavour that underpins the teaching and learning process
- e) Up-scale research collaborations and networking nationally and internationally as well as involvement in research consortia
- f) Maximise research outputs in terms of grants, publications and conference presentations
- g) Build the research CV of Mary Immaculate College by:
 - Providing leadership, direction and policy context to the College in the area of research
 - Raising the research profile in MIC and promoting MIC as a centre of excellence in niche research areas
 - Providing information, training, technical and practical support and advice on research to all College researchers
 - Providing financial management and funding support for research
 - Encouraging and supporting high quality research output, primarily refereed publications and conference presentations
 - Maintaining records relating to all aspects of research including publications, research grant proposals/awards and conference presentations produced by researchers

2.3 Stakeholders

- i) Academic Staff
- ii) Research Committee
- iii) College Management
- iv) Other Administrative Offices in the College
- v) External Bodies and Organisations

3.0 Membership of the Peer Review Group (PRG)

Mr Damian Knipe	Research Officer St. Mary's University College Belfast
Ms Sharon King	Research Administration, Office of the Dean of Research and Humanities St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra
Ms Orla Banks	Senior Executive Officer, President's Office Mary Immaculate College
Dr Kathleen Horgan	Lecturer Mary Immaculate College

4.0 Membership of Research Office Quality Team

Prof. Michael Healy	Associate Vice President Research
Ms Mary Collins	Higher Executive Officer, Research Office
Ms Elaine Gleeson	Clerical Officer, Research Office

5.0 Preliminary Comments of the PRG

This report arises from a visit to Mary Immaculate College (MIC) between the 27th and the 30th of May 2013 where a Peer Review Group (PRG) carried out a quality review of the Research Office.

The PRG wishes, at the outset of this report, to recognise and commend the dedication and professionalism of the staff of the Research Office, and to acknowledge their considerable achievement in delivering an exceptional quality of service to the academic community in the College. The PRG also wishes to record its gratitude to all colleagues from MIC who readily and freely made available their time and knowledge and all additional information which was requested. The PRG recognises that the quality review process has placed an additional workload on each member of staff of the Research Office and wishes to commend their openness and willingness to engage in this worthwhile exercise.

The scope of the quality review as determined by the MIC Quality Committee was to incorporate the MIC Research Office and the MIC Research Centres. The PRG was informed that in preparing for the review it was recognised very early in the process that the approach to the Quality Review would have to allow for the fact that the Research Office is distinct and separate from the Research Centres which are entities with individual missions and specific local objectives. It was therefore decided that the

Research Office would undergo the full quality review process but this would not be the case for the Research Centres. A status report was provided by each of the Research Centres.

The Research Office had already prepared and submitted a 'Self-Assessment Report' that with other documentation was made available to the PRG in advance of the visit. The Self-Assessment Report was a conscientious and thoughtful account of important aspects of the work of the Research Office which helped to set the context for the work of the Research Office and identified many significant issues. A strength of the Self-Assessment Report was that it comprehensively captured and catalogued the various mission, vision, legacy and strategic forces that largely define its operational environment in MIC. The Self-Assessment Report then attempted pragmatically to distil these into a comprehensive set of operational priorities. This report constituted a very helpful primary source for the PRG.

Meetings were held with the Research Office staff both as a group and individually, members of the Research Committee, members of the Research Centres and members of research-active academic staff. These meetings provided further insights into the research function of the College and informed the PRG's commendations and recommendations.

The PRG is grateful to the Quality Officer, Emma Barry, for her professional and dedicated approach to the quality review.

6.0 The Report of the PRG

6.1 The Research Office

Commendations

6.1.1	The responsiveness and professionalism of the staff of the Research Office; their positive work ethic and relationships with colleagues across the College community.
6.1.2	The broad range of services provided by the Research Office to Faculty engaged in research activity including assistance with research funding applications, budgetary management and procurement.
6.1.3	The commitment of the Research Office to supporting research at different levels and stages and to nurturing embryonic research ideas many of which have consequently developed into research projects and research centres.
6.1.4	The capacity and willingness of the Research Office to increase Faculty engagement in research activities.
6.1.5	The increase in research activity and output which has been stimulated and supported by the Research Office notwithstanding the absence of a workloads model in MIC which would embrace research activity as core academic work.

Recommendations

6.1.6	That the College upgrades the post of Clerical Officer in the Research Office to Executive Officer to take cognisance of the workload associated with the existing post and to incorporate additional duties such as providing organisational support for research conferences led by MIC Academic staff.
6.1.7	That the College increases the budget of the Research Office to provide dedicated funding to support targeted, large-scale academic grant writing and support services.
6.1.8	That the Research Office organises seminars on relevant funding bids and facilitates the provision of mentoring for applicants by previous award recipients referencing their successful approaches to grant applications.
6.1.9	That there is greater availability and visibility of information from the Research Office and an increase in the frequency of information sessions regarding, for example, seed funding and conference funding applications.
6.1.10	That MIREC meets more frequently and plays a more active role in informing policy and protocols regarding research ethics.

6.2 Overview of Services to Academic Staff

Commendations

6.2.1	There is strong evidence of an increase in research output notably, conference presentations and published papers, since the establishment of the Research Office at MIC.
6.2.2	The independent staff satisfaction survey indicates high levels of satisfaction regarding the key services provided by the Research Office.
6.2.3	The establishment of MIRR by the Research Office is a worthwhile initiative that is appropriate to a research active institute of higher education.
6.2.4	The research mentoring initiative is lauded for its organisation and suitability for advancing the research agenda by developing communities of research practice, promoting collegiality, supporting neophyte researchers etc.
6.2.5	The two Research Showcase Events have been viewed as successful initiatives by those who participated both as presenters and attendees.
6.2.6	The utilisation of the research budget for seed funding and attendance at conferences has provided opportunities for staff to initiate, advance and disseminate their research activity.

Recommendations

6.2.7	That the College ensures adequate future staffing of MIRR as it is an essential element of research dissemination and showcasing to the wider academic community.
6.2.8	That the College provides incentives for research through an awards system including, for example, Research Fellowships for Faculty; paid Sabbatical Leave; and other structural incentives such as a President's Award for outstanding contributions to research.
6.2.9	That the Research Office provides a repeat induction session in Semester 2 to ensure that all newly-appointed Academic staff are fully informed about the functions of and opportunities available through the Research Office.
6.2.10	That the Research Office adopts a more targeted approach to fostering inter- and intra-Faculty research opportunities within MIC through, for example, a profile of staff research interests.
6.2.11	That the Research Office extends the scope of the Research Showcase Event to promote MIC research to the wider academic community by targeting key policy stakeholders and using dissemination channels such as video podcasts, live video feeds, YouTube videos, etc.
6.2.12	That the Research Office considers limiting the budget used to support conference attendance to subvent paper /poster presentations only with the added intention on the part of the researcher to refine their paper / poster for the purpose of submission to an academic publisher.

6.3 Environment and Facilities of the Research Office

Commendations

6.3.1	Despite the unsuitable location of the Research Office, the Research Office staff continue to strive to provide a high quality service.
6.3.2	The open-door policy of the Associate Vice President for Research and the Research Office itself is commendable in that it indicates that their services are there to be fully utilised by Academic staff.
6.3.3	The Research Office staff make optimal use of the facilities at their disposal.

Recommendations

6.3.4	That the Research Office is relocated to a more suitable, accessible and visible office on an interim basis, as a matter of urgency.
6.3.5	That the Research Office is permanently relocated to new purpose-built office accommodation as soon as possible.
6.3.6	That the Research Office captures data on staff research interests and outputs in a system that allows for the generation of research metrics and statistical analysis.
6.3.7	<p>That the Research Office continues to devote resources to upgrading and enhancing the Research Office's web presence in order to encourage staff to use the website as their first port of call for information on: procedures and protocols; application forms; funding alerts/open calls.</p> <p>Furthermore, it is recommended that staff contact details and office location/directions are more prominently displayed on the Research Office website.</p> <p>Consideration should be given to the use of social media to promote the work and achievements of the Research Office.</p> <p>The website should be used to promote MIC research specialists to the media and as a means of rolling-out an online Annual Research Survey.</p> <p>It is also recommended that the Research Office creates an intranet page providing summary details of open funding calls, including a matrix of call deadlines.</p>
6.3.8	That the College requires all staff funding proposals to external research bodies to be submitted through the Research Office (perhaps through an online capturing system/submission process).

6.4 Organisation and Management

Commendations

6.4.1	The College recognises the strategic importance of research through the appointment of an Associate Vice President for Research who is a member of the senior management team of the College.
6.4.2	The Research Office has from the outset and continues to engage in strategic, operational and financial planning.
6.4.3	The Research Office staff are committed to continuous professional development and engage in regular professional education and training.
6.4.4	Positive relationships exist within the Research Office and there is good communication, an openness to the exchange of ideas and mutual support.
6.4.5	The Research Office has a reputation for professionalism within the College.

Recommendations

6.4.6	That the College introduces and implements an appropriate workloads model which takes cognisance of research activity and output as an integral part of academic work.
6.4.7	That the Research Policy be reviewed and updated.
6.4.8	That the College should increase the budget assigned to the Research Office in line with future needs.
6.4.9	That the membership and terms of reference of the Research Committee should be reviewed and that this newly constituted body should more actively advance and promote the research agenda within the College. It is recommended that the HEO of the Research Office should hold full membership of the Research Committee.

6.5 Research Centres

Commendations

6.5.1	The clear commitment and passion of the staff involved in the Research Centres.
6.5.2	The Research Centres reflect the unique and diverse nature of the research being undertaken by Faculty and their rich research output.

Recommendations

6.5.3	That any rationalisation of Research Centres within MIC allows for the continuance of stand-alone centres, where appropriate and desirable, as well as for the integration of centres into larger research institutes.
-------	--