Quality Review
Peer Review Report
Arts Education and Physical Education
(AEPE)

April 2023

Contents

Introduction

MIC's quality review process, as applied to both academic departments and professional services, was developed and continues to evolve in order to satisfy the College's Quality Policy and meet legislative QA requirements. MIC complies with the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012, which places a legal responsibility on the provider and linked provider to establish procedures in writing for quality assurance for the purposes of establishing, ascertaining, maintaining and improving the quality of education, training, research and related services. (Part 3, Section 28). These QA procedures must take due account of relevant quality guidelines issued by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) and/or predecessor organisations. QQI is the statutory body responsible for reviewing and monitoring the effectiveness of QA procedures adopted and implemented by higher (and further) educational institutions within Ireland.

The periodic quality review of functional areas (academic and professional service) within the College represents a cornerstone institutional QA/QE mechanism.

MIC's Quality Review Process

The purpose of the quality review process is:

- To provide a structured opportunity for the department to engage in periodic and strategic evidence-based self-reflection and assessment in the context of the quality of its activities and processes, and to identify opportunities for quality improvement
- To provide a framework by which external peers, in an evidence-based manner, can independently review, evaluate, report upon and suggest improvements to the quality of the department's activities and processes
- To provide a framework by which the department implements quality improvements in a verifiable manner
- To provide MIC, its students, its prospective students and other stakeholders with independent evidence of the quality of the department's activities
- To ensure that all MIC departments are evaluated in a systematic and standardised manner in accordance with good international practice and in support of the objectives of the College's Quality Policy
- To satisfy good international practice in the context of quality assurance in higher education and to meet statutory QA requirements as enshrined in national law

Overview of the Quality Review Process for Academic Departments

The MIC Quality Review process consists of three phases:

1. Self-Assessment

The department under review conducts a self-evaluation exercise and writes a self-assessment report (SAR).

2. Peer Review

A Peer Review Group (PRG) comprising external experts, both national and international, review the SAR, meet with Department members and stakeholders and produce a report (this report), which is made publicly available on the MIC Quality Office webpage.

3. Quality Improvement

The department considers the recommendations of the PRG, devises a quality Improvement Plan (QIP) to implement them and reports implementation progress to Quality Committee and MIC Executive Team.

Department of Arts Education & Physical Education (AEPE)

The [Department of Arts Education & Physical Education](#) (AEPE) is located within the Faculty of Education and comprises two Senior Lecturers, 9 Lecturers, one Teaching Fellow, a Visual Arts Technician, 4 part-time CID staff, and three part-time staff who contribute regularly to our programmes.. The Department of Arts Education and Physical Education at Mary Immaculate College includes four specialist teams in the areas of Drama Education, Music Education, Visual Art Education and Physical Education. The department contributes to teaching on the [Bachelor of Education -Primary Teaching](#) (B Ed), [B Ed - International](#), [B Ed in Education and Psychology](#), [Professional Masters in Education](#) (PME Primary teaching) and the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programmes (see table 1-3). Department members also engage in school placement (approx. 50 visits per year) on all teacher education programmes. Two masters level programme, the [MA in Music Education](#) and [Masters in Education and the Arts (META)](#) are housed within AEPE. Members of the department have also contributed to teaching on the [Structured PhD in Education](#) (elements of research methods module), [MA in Leadership of Wellbeing in Education](#) (elements of three modules), and the [Masters of Education](#) (module elements related to research methods) (M Ed).

Peer Review Group Observations

The peer review group would like to thank the Department for their open and honest interactions with the peer review team. The Department is facing multiple challenges, some of which are due to external conditions such as government requirements for teacher education, and some are due to internal tensions and challenges. These were signalled in the Self-Assessment Report and clearly articulated throughout meetings during the review visit. We found colleagues had a genuine desire to resolve issues and to move forward as a department.

During our visit, we made the following observations:

- We noted that there is inadequate staffing for the teaching of the number of students on the programmes. Our definition of teaching includes school experience visits, as this is an essential teaching and assessment activity linked to regulatory requirements, and doctoral supervision.
- We noted an inequity between the Faculties of Arts and Education, linked to the current exclusion of School Experience as a teaching activity. The nature of the conditions of registration for initial teacher education programmes results in a higher intensity of teaching, and therefore staffing resource does not reflect required teaching intensity as deemed necessary for fulfilment of regulatory requirements.
- We noted that the Department is at risk of losing quality teaching staff due to the structures of the College, including having no (or very limited) internal academic promotions procedure.
- We noted that communication up-flow was missing. There was little operational knowledge of those responsible for strategic oversight, and this is problematic.
- We noted that the administration of the large bank of colleagues on part time hourly paid contracts was over-burdensome.
- We noted that the College has a low risk appetite for reputational risk (including meeting conditions of registration) and operational risk (including ability to deliver programmes) yet the observations above put the B.Ed. programme, in particular, at high risk of non-compliance and non-delivery.
- We noted that the student learning experience, for example, the experience that students had when in contact with teaching staff either at the College or during Student Experience and their capacity for learning as result, was exceptional.

We have made our recommendations based on the following principles:

1. That students are the first priority and the student learning experience is placed at the centre of activities.

2. To provide ways for the Department to move forward and fulfil its potential as a collective of exceptional staff.

3. To enact the College's Strategic Plan in relation to pillar 6 – Professional Infrastructure, and in particular High Level Goal 6.1 – activity to support professional excellence.

Chapter 1: Vision, Mission, Strategy and Governance

Commendations

1.1.1	The forward-thinking curriculum developments are a reflection of the quality of teaching staff, and are to be commended.
1.1.2	The department brings together subject areas that make a significant contribution to building the values outlined in the Strategic Plan.
1.1.3	The impressive retention rate for the 4-year B.Ed. programme.

Recommendations

1.2.1	Map departmental subjects onto the College values, articulating ways in which each subject areas contributes to the building of these values (such as community, social justice). Use this as a meeting point to understand the synergies in the subjects and how the subjects collectively contribute to the values. Rationale: This will enable the Department to reconceptualise its contribution to the College's mission as a Department, and provide a mechanism to understand how the subject areas are linked, using these as a way to work together whilst recognising the individual differences in subject areas.

Chapter 2: Organisation, Management and Staffing

Commendations

2.1.1	Technical support is exceptional in the areas that have them; partnerships created by teaching assistance and demonstration of technical elements provides a richer student learning experience.
2.1.2	Head of Department has a full grasp of the strengths and challenges facing both teaching staff and the department as a cohesive unit.
2.1.3	Commitment to diversity and equality.

Recommendations

2.2.1	Physical space: Address resource needs in terms of accommodation. For example, expand visual arts spaces, find spaces for artists in residence, restore tennis courts, and staff workspaces (see below). Rationale: This needs to be addressed in order to maintain the student learning experience and enable growth in student numbers as necessary.
2.2.2	Staffing resource: a) Building on cross-faculty teaching, consider different possibilities for drawing on staff resources across the Institution. This could include colleagues in the Arts faculty, as well as managerial/administrative/technical colleagues with teaching backgrounds, ensuring that workload is properly allocated. b) Maintain existing technical support and identify innovative ways to provide increased technical support. c) Ensure equity and fairness to all staff, for example access to workspaces for all staff, regardless of contractual status. Rationale: Inadequate teaching staffing is causing the biggest reputational and operational risks to the Department and College and needs urgent resolution.
2.2.3	Strategic Planning: As a department, carry out a horizon scanning planning exercise in relation to: o The impact that an imposed increase in numbers would have on the quality and ability to deliver the programme o The new national curriculum o The new teacher education framework

	o The national teacher shortage and imposed changes regarding the amount of time students have in school
	o The institutional strategy for reducing teaching staff and increasing managerial and administrative staff
	o The opportunities provided by a closer relationship with University of Limerick
	Rationale: There are some key challenges on the horizon for the Department. At present, the Department is just about functioning, albeit with tensions. Any of these external factors could potentially tip the balance for the Department, and therefore scenario planning needs to take place to mitigate any risk these pose.
2.2.4	Financial Planning: Devise a departmental academic planning cycle that feeds into business planning and ensures timely allocation of teaching and managing timetabling. Rationale: There is no business planning cycle and this needs to be addressed. There is nothing to stop the Department from devising its own business planning cycle in the absence of a College-wide approach. This will give the Head of Department agency in decision-making.
2.2.5	Departmental Structures and Processes: a) Institutional level: Promote implementation of the staff code of conduct and disciplinary policy to ensure respectful and professional interactions and working relationships. b) Departmental level: Interpret and apply the code of conduct. c) Consider models of practice for departmental meetings, which may include formal meetings and informal fora, and connect to academic voice and representation at all levels of governance. d) Develop staff induction and mentoring for all teaching staff regardless of contractual status. Rationale: There are significant challenges that can be addressed through effective Departmental structures and processes. Promotion of staff code of conduct and disciplinary policy is normal in a Higher Education Institution and serves to keep focus during times of extreme challenge. Similarly, effective Departmental governance can be achieved through revising the meeting structure. Although there is no institutional academic induction and mentoring, there is nothing to stop the Department from developing their own processes and becoming a model of good practice within the College.

Chapter 3: Design, Content and Review of Curriculum

Commendations

3.1.1	The curriculum is full, exciting, and enriches the B.Ed.
3.1.2	The space created for the arts in the programme as discrete disciplines allows for creative freedom and enriches the student learning experience.
3.1.3	The programmes place applied understanding of theory through practice at the fore. This is appreciated by the students.
3.1.4	Staff personal research is visible in the teaching and curriculum design.
3.1.5	The learning processes are scaffolded well to develop a creative a vocabulary and confidence in the various teaching practices of the different subject areas.

Recommendations

3.2.1	Assessment: Review of the relationship between the Creative Arts curriculum and the assessment points, providing regular interim assessment points for all three arts throughout the duration of the programme (this could be peer assessment). Rationale: The curriculum is designed to develop confidence over the course of the programme and this is a strength, but the assessment framework creates a barrier to accessing this. With each artform only being assessed in one out of three years of study, attendance is low in the years where the assessment doesn't take place. As an example, the students explained that as they are assessed in Drama in year 1, it becomes low priority in years 2 and 3 and there is little engagement. The result of this is that although the design of the curriculum is for students to build confidence over three years in that subject area (i.e., drama), in reality, they only engage in the first year.
3.2.2	Planning: Establish planning points throughout the year that are inclusive of all staff regardless staff contract status. Rationale: There needs to be regular planning and reflection meetings that are collaborative. Finding the synergies between subjects as stated in the above recommendation related to Chapter 1

	will enable the Department to carry out joint planning – the commonality being developing students' confidence in the subject and in the teaching of the subject.
3.2.3	Course development: Devise a clear and inclusive departmental process for developing new courses and curriculum, aligned to the underlying academic principles of the department (practice-based, applied learning, confidence building, inclusive practice) Rationale: An academic strategy based on the Departmental principles will provide coherence whilst acknowledging and supporting individual subject differences.

Chapter 4: Teaching, Learning, Assessment and Feedback

Commendations

4.1.1	The breadth and depth of the faculty expertise and experience.
4.1.2	Innovative, creative, practice-based assessments, with a range of assessment activities.
4.1.3	Doctoral supervision
4.1.4	The care for the students and student support for learning and teaching is outstanding.
4.1.5	The range of pedagogical approaches used reflects the diversity of subject areas and the expertise of the teaching staff.

Recommendations

4.2.1	Assessment: a) Carry out an assessment audit, mapping assessment to learning outcomes with a view to reducing assessment and relieving both staff and student workload. b) Review the Creative Arts assessment (see chapter 3). Rationale: There are issues with the Creative Arts assessment as articulated earlier and also a sense of over-assessment. This was observed by the review team and felt by the students. The students are very open to peer assessment, and this might be a way to provide innovative, student-led assessment as well as design staff time-efficient assessments.
4.2.2	Teaching and Workload Allocation: a) Doctoral supervision needs to be classified as teaching and included in the teaching allocation. b) School Experience needs to be classified as teaching and included in the teaching allocation. c) Institutional: Expediate the development of the workload allocation model, incorporating school experience visits as professional activity that can be accounted for in staff workloads. d) Departmental: Carry out a workflow audit, articulating the full set of duties and responsibilities related to teaching and assessment, using this to help devise an institutional approach to work streams (research and professional practice, teaching, assessment, management, administration etc.). Rationale: As stated earlier, teaching staff workload is causing the biggest reputational and operational risks to the Department. Although a college-wide workload allocation model has not been devised, the work to understand the workflow and what the work streams can be carried

	out to ensure academic leaders can advocate an evidence-based case for the actual work being carried out and establishes the Department as a model of good practice.
4.2.3	Student Choice: Consider the mechanisms for student choice in the programme, including reviewing the model of allocation of electives. Rationale: Students reported that they understood elective choices to be random and often got allocated options low down on their list. Although students felt using average scores was fair in allocating places on specialisms, the review panel also noted that this could create an inequity – those students who struggled with certain subjects and assessments were less likely to be allocated the specialism that they would excel in. This is particularly the case for Arts and PE subjects that are very practical in nature. The inequity being that those who most need the opportunities to excel, are prevented from doing so by potentially being allocated a specialism where they might struggle. In the case of Arts and PE, there may be a better way to determine potential for success as an Arts or PE specialist.
4.2.4	Planning: Devise a mechanism for peer observations of teaching in order to understand modules outside of the specialist subjects, with a view to building a collaborative planning process. Rationale: We recognise there are time and workload constraints, but without staff observing each other's work across disciplines, it is difficult to understand the nature of the discreet subjects and develop a collaborative approach to planning. This would also help understand the student learning experience and feed into an assessment audit.

Chapter 5: The Student Experience

Commendations

5.1.1	The student experience is exceptional.
5.1.2	Accessibility of staff is high and students acknowledge and appreciate this.
5.1.3	The public facing activities of the Department are an asset to the student learning experience and contribute to both the high reputation of the College and the demonstration of the values articulated in the Strategic Plan (community, social justice, etc.)
5.1.4	The range of different teaching staff appeals to the students.
5.1.5	The students are cared for and cared for well.

Recommendations

5.2.1	Student Voice: Listen to the student voice – consider staffing models that start with the student experience and provide solutions to the existing tensions regarding who carries out different activities such as teaching, school experience visits, etc. Rationale: We noticed a discrepancy between what the Institution believes to be the best experience for students and what they believe to be the best experience to them. For example, the Institution believes that permanent staff should carry out school experience visits so as to see the results of their teaching in practice (we note that this view also declines to acknowledge that school experience visits are teaching and assessment activities). However, students reported that they like to be visited by retired principals and retired teachers, as they were perceived to give the best advice and feedback (we note that advice and feedback is teaching and assessment).
5.2.2	Technical infrastructure: Devise a system for prioritisation of IT support, ensuring that support for teaching 'in the moment' is immediate (i.e., class support). Rationale: Not having immediate IT support during a student-facing activity (i.e., teaching a class) significantly undermines the student experience. Student-facing activities should be top priority for IT support. If colleagues have to wait a day for an IT issue to be resolved, that is a day of teaching and learning lost for the students.

Chapter 6: Research & Community Outreach Activity

Commendations

6.1.1	The development of staff practice through research – examples of current and recent doctoral studies show how the student learning experience has benefited from staff research.
6.1.2	Clear impact is being made in all department areas in terms of publications, conferences, funding, and in particular local outreach to communities.
6.1.3	The number of PhDs supervised for the size of the department is outstanding. This contributes to a Departmental research environment that fosters research at all levels.
6.1.4	A commitment to research related to education and contributions to professional associations and scholarly outputs, with a clear focus on practice-based research.
6.1.5	Research collaborations with other departments and faculties and universities/communities.
6.1.6	Wide reaching community/public facing programme and outreach activities.

Recommendations

6.2.1	Research Planning: a) Conceptualise all professional practice as staff development, including research at all levels. b) Formalise process for planning for research activity, identifying responsibilities in terms of continuity of teaching (teaching and all associated responsibilities) during staff absence and approval processes in a timely manner prior to research leave being taken. Rationale: At present, there is not a shared understanding of research and professional practice as professional development and this is causing fractures in the staff body. Once there is a shared understanding of research and professional practice, then planning can take place to ensure that staff are enabled to engage in their professional development, whether research or professional practice, and the responsibilities on all colleagues involved are outlined, made transparent and owned by all in the Department.
6.2.2	Building a research community: Devise a mechanism for sharing research and professional practice to enrich the curriculum and raise visibility and understanding of each other's practice and strengths and build relationships. Rationale: Along with the recommendation to observe each other's teaching, this will provide a site to bring the Department together and help colleagues develop an understanding of each other's strengths. No one area of research or professional practice is more important than

	another, and this will help colleagues to feel equally valued for their contribution to the intellectual environment of the Department.
6.2.4	Departmental Research Structure:
	Prepare for the forthcoming investment in research centres with a view to bidding for funding to develop a collaborative, inclusive research centre as a site to develop both internal and external research and practice relationships.
	Rationale:
	The Director of Research informed the review panel that there will shortly be a round of proposals for funding to form research centres. We recommend that the Department prepare for this with a view of proposing a research centre. The recommendations above will help with this.
6.2.5	Enriching the Research Environment:
	Build on the artist in residence programme across all areas.
	Rationale:
	We noted how the artist in residence programme enriches both the student learning experience and staff research/professional practice community.

Annex 1: Peer Review Group Members

Professor Jeff Adams	Emeritus Professor of Art in Education, co-director RECAP, and former leader of the EdD programme	University of Chester
Professor George Belliveau	Professor, Theatre Education, Faculty of Education	The University of British Columbia
Professor Jennie Henley (Chair)	Director of Programmes	Royal Northern College of Music
Dr Elaine McLaughlin	MSc Coordinator Course Team Leader B.Ed. PE	St Mary's University College Belfast

Annex 2: Schedule of Meetings with Stakeholders

Day 1 - Monday 6 February

Peer Review Group Members	Stakeholders
Peer Review Group (PRG),	Director of Quality
PRG	Head of Department

Day 2 - Tuesday 7 February

Peer Review Group Members	Stakeholders
Prof. Jeff Adams Dr Elaine McLaughlin	Meeting with Visual Arts Team
PRG	Dean of Education
PRG	VP Governance & Strategy
Prof. Jennie Henley Prof. Jeff Adams	Meeting with Music Ed Team
Prof. George Belliveau Dr Elaine McLaughlin	Meeting with Drama Ed Team
Prof. Jennie Henley Prof. George Belliveau	Director of Teaching & Learning
Dr Elaine Mc Laughlin Prof. Jeff Adams	Director of Student Life
Dr Elaine Mc Laughlin Prof. Jeff Adams	Meeting with PE Team
PRG	Director of Research
Prof. Jeff Adams	Visual Arts Observation
Prof. Jennie Henley	Music Education Observation
Dr Elaine Mc Laughlin Prof. George Belliveau	PE Observation
Dr Elaine Mc Laughlin Prof. George Belliveau	Postgraduate Experience
Prof. George Belliveau Dr Elaine Mc Laughlin	Drama Ed Observation
Prof. Jennie Henley Prof. Jeff Adams	Assistant Dean of Education
PRG	Meeting with Students