



**Quality Review
Peer Review Report
Department of Media &
Communication Studies**

June 2023

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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, 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 Media & Communications Studies

The Department of Media & Communications Studies offers media and communications as an arts subject for the BA in Liberal Arts and a taught MA in Media Studies. It also supervises graduate students at MA and Ph.D. level by research .

Peer Review Group Observations

The Peer-review group welcomed the opportunity to be part of this process and found it engaging, complex and informative. Representing three different HEI's in Ireland as well as the media industry, the group were able to assess the Department at a range of levels and place many elements in a regional as well as national context. We hope that our insights, that were gleaned after extensive conversations with many different people in the College, contribute in a highly positive way, going forward.

A key finding from our meetings and the documentation we considered is the huge opportunity that exists for this Department, both in terms of the skills and contribution of members of the Department and the broader opportunities within the audio-visual industry in Ireland at present. The media industry is going through enormous change at present and the types of jobs that graduates of Media and Communication Studies can access is expanding. Traditional roles in media industry continue, but new opportunities, particularly in social media and content creation, are exploding. Media graduates with creative and critical skills are needed across many sectors of employment in the twenty-first century. The Media & Communication Studies Department is well placed to develop in this new direction while commanding a space with their expertise in media connected areas – democracy, social justice, equality and societal changes. This Department can be a strategic educational provider for the new Leaving Certificate subject – Theatre, Drama and Film, in collaboration with others at MIC. The change in CAO points level as many HEI's move to a more denominated Bachelor of Arts approach, away from general intake, means this Department is at a cross-roads, with a new single Honours programme timely. It is a time of innovation, and this department is well placed to embark on new directions. This can only happen in an environment of mutual support and trust, an area that needs attention at Executive Team level.

Staff in this Department are feeling under-valued, yet their combined track record and experience, is one of their strongest assets. The extent to which the Department engaged enthusiastically, honestly and effectively in the self-evaluation exercise and their collective openness during the peer-review group's visit was impressive. Stakeholder feedback relating

to the Department from all levels of the College and the extent to which the Department is fulfilling stakeholder needs, suggests that now is the time to drive the ambition of the Department. The goal of 2026 (30 years of Media & Communication Studies graduates at MIC) provides a timescale that will enable development and delivery of new programmes and initiatives. Support for conferences, research collaborations and a focused website populated with events, achievements and news from staff and Alumni will help expand and disseminate this Department's message. In short, this Department is very strong and has a key role to play in Ireland in the discipline of Media and Communication Studies.

The peer-review process ran very smoothly, and the group would like to note the support of Deirdre Ryan and her office for facilitating us in our meetings and preparations for our peer-review work. We were very impressed by the teaching and research experience and contributions of all in the Department and their frank and informative engagement with us in our meetings. We are grateful to the representatives from other offices across the college for their time and insights shared at our meetings. From these meetings, we have been impressed by the willingness of each office to engage with the Department and support the work they do. We were disappointed not to have the opportunity to meet with a representative from Strategic Communications but understand that it can be difficult to facilitate meetings with all offices in the time available. We believe an opportunity exists for the Department to benefit from potential support in provision of resources, development of research, communications, and teaching and learning if more engagement is made by the Department with relevant offices in the College, including Buildings and Estates, Research Office, Strategic Communications and Marketing and Leading Enhancement in Academic Development (LEAD) Centre.

We would like to wish the Department of Media & Communication Studies the very best of luck as they embark on an exciting phase of development and look forward to the outcomes.

Dr. Seán Crosson; Dr. Díóg O'Connell (Chair); Clíona O'Leary and Dr. Ciarán Ryan

April 2023

Chapter 1: Vision, Mission, Strategy and Governance

Commendations

1.1.1	The Department's ambition is a credit to the College, situating the College firmly in the media education landscape in Ireland.
1.1.2	The reputation of the individual members of the Department and as a collective greatly enhance MIC, locally, nationally and internationally, in media circles and academic, and is evidenced clearly in the SAR.
1.1.3	The provision of modules across B.A., B.Ed., and M.A programmes at MIC is remarkable for a small department.

Recommendations

1.2.1	Uncertainty around the future alignment with University of Limerick is impacting different areas of the department's experience with the college. We recommend that clarity around this is provided as soon as possible, to allow for short- and medium-term planning e.g., programme development; resource planning.
1.2.2	We recommend that more opportunities are provided for the department, perhaps via the Dean of Arts, to interact with and receive advice from the Executive Team particularly where decisions are being made (for example around proposed programmes) that impact on the department.
1.2.3	We recommend the formulation of an appropriate workload allocation model that will help clarify duties and responsibilities around teaching, research and service to the community. Due recognition for different levels of work (including research and outreach initiatives) would need to be given within this document and process.
1.2.4	We recommend that a regular newsletter/publication be established to capture and communicate to all staff and students in the college reports of recent events, research achievements, forthcoming events and coverage in the media.

Chapter 2: Organisation, Management and Staffing

Commendations

2.1.1	Outstanding range of teaching staff with hugely impressive research and community contributions in addition to their teaching work.
2.1.2	Team experience, collegiality, and relationships all seem strong. The team is able to informally deal with issues/ problems as they arise, which should allow for efficient solutions.
2.1.3	The department is ambitious and has strategically pinpointed opportunities to increase student and staff members. Furthermore, there is an awareness of developments happening nationally (e.g., the proposed introduction of Theatre, Drama and Film Studies at second level) that may require them to alter their undergraduate offerings.
2.1.4	Excellent use of current audio and visual resources – TV studio; journalism room; camera / sound lighting equipment – giving students strong technical training. The current resources have served the programme well, but new facilities in radio and video / television production are required as necessary to continue the success and development of the programme.

Recommendations

2.2.1	The issue of a member of staff on a precarious contract needs to be addressed. We would recommend that a consultation takes place that explores the potential to regularise this employee's time at the institute, as well as providing adequate workspace for them to prepare classes and assignments, meet students and colleagues, conduct research, store class materials, etc.
2.2.2	We recommend a new appointment to the lecturing staff, given that there has not been an appointment in many years. This individual can introduce innovative and complementary skill sets and enable the continuity of the department and its programme development into a new era.
2.2.3	It is clear that it is a key objective of the Dean of Arts to introduce a more structured annual programme for academic progression in the faculty. Members of the Department should be aware of this going forward.
2.2.4	Recommend engaging with Building and Estates as a matter of urgency to carry out 'minor works' in the Summer. This is recommended following encouraging support from the Director of Estates and Sustainability. This is seen as an interim measure as the new building and new studio plan is developed.

Chapter 3: Design, Content and Review of Curriculum

Commendations

3.1.1	The four-year curriculum for the B.A. Major is very well developed, and there is clear evidence that its design matches the learning objectives and vision that has been set out for the subject. The MA in Media Studies programmes incorporates a range of interesting and important theoretical modules. The modules would seem to benefit those looking to explore research topics in more depth after completion (i.e., to Level 10), while being pitched at a level that does not require prerequisite knowledge of the field.
3.1.2	The practical modules are wide-ranging and pack a significant amount into 6 credit modules. It allows for the development of industry generalists as opposed to specialists, with students receiving clear instruction in several key roles in the media industries.
3.1.3	The range of theoretical modules balance critical foundational works in media and cultural studies with contemporary literature and case studies that should make for relevant and invigorating content for undergraduate students. Reading lists, as well as films selected for screenings, are demonstrative of a department that is actively involved in research-informed teaching.

Recommendations

3.2.1	It is the view of the review panel that the development and implementation of a single honours programme is a critical aspect for the future of the department. We have encountered great support for such a programme in our conversations with various stakeholders during our visit. Media and Communication Studies has been referred to as a unique and highly sellable subject in this institution. It is our belief that it is apt timing for the introduction of such a programme with growing media industries locally and nationally eager for highly skilled graduates. 2026 marks thirty years since the first graduates of the B.A., and this significant milestone could be complemented by the unrolling of a new programme. The expertise of the academic staff in creative production and theoretical studies in media, culture and society with an emphasis in community engagement and social justice can be harnessed in an innovative and distinctive way for programme provision in the mid-west.
3.2.2	The panel was impressed by the suite of modules available as part of the MA in Media Studies. Nonetheless, the programme seems quite resource-intensive because of this range of modules, in particular with the number of electives on the course. Given the relatively small numbers on the course, we recommend that the department reviews the current structure with a view to streamlining the programme. The marketing of the programme internationally has been quite successful. However, based on discussions with current students on the programme, the option of offering two practical electives (i.e., from Year 2 of the undergraduate degree) could be explored by the department as part of this review. Freeing up resources from the MA programme would be beneficial in terms of planning and delivering a proposed new single honours programme.

3.2.3	The department should commence a dialogue with the Department of Drama and Theatre Studies if there are plans to modify existing modules – and collaborate together - should the proposed Drama, Theatre and Film subject be added to the school curriculum in order that graduates can be accredited by the Teaching Council.
3.2.4	The documentary making option for the final year project at undergraduate level shows there is some availability for practice-based major projects. Other forms of practice-based individual major projects could be explored (for example, audio, journalism or screen-based projects). Furthermore, the department should be supported in exploring the feasibility of developing more avenues towards postgraduate research by practice also.

Chapter 4: Teaching, Learning, Assessment and Feedback

Commendations

4.1.1	Academics who are engaged in teaching and learning and through their research and service to the community, connect all aspects in the interest of the students and through a diversity of assessment tools demonstrate rigorous systems of examination and feed-back.
4.1.2	The Department has created an excellent learning environment, which is acknowledged through awards for excellence in teaching.
4.1.3	Innovative teaching methods by staff and diversity of skills, craft and intellectual capacity of the department, connects T&L to future opportunities for students.
4.1.4	Use of guest lecturers and community engagement as part of learning experience for students is noteworthy as is the distribution of departmental specific evaluation sheets.

Recommendations

4.2.1	The Department of Media and Communication Studies are recommended to engage in a dialogue with Teaching & Learning to explore the evolution of the programme document for a Single Honours B.A., particularly around unifying learning outcomes. The invitation from Teaching and Learning for a process with a facilitator is seen by the PRG as a welcome initiative, that will help build on and re-fresh existing programme proposal documents.
4.2.2	Across all HEI's, essays mills, plagiarism and more recently ChatGPT are creating enormous challenges to ensuring high academic standards and integrity. Practical and creative subjects like Media and Communication Studies can lend themselves to innovative forms of assessment in counteracting these challenges. It is recommended to explore innovative approaches to assessment and examination in this context.
4.2.3	A review of the final year project is recommended to explore new designs that take into account the changing nature of student experiences, the complex learning journey of the current student body and the potential to innovate in a theoretical, creative and critical way. The reason for this recommendation is that the traditional 8000-10,000-word dissertation for undergraduate students, is not always appropriate for diverse profiles of current students.

Chapter 5: The Student Experience

Commendations

5.1.1	It is evident that the Department's relationship with the students is prioritised. It is clear from testimonials over the years that this is long standing. The mentorships provided and the non-hierarchical approach of lecturers is recognised and appreciated by students - delivering a community environment and a sense of mutual accountability.
5.1.2	There is a systematic approach at many levels to student feed-back which is evident with standardised module review forms.
5.1.3	The Department's Facebook page is very informative and current. It demonstrates excellent use of social media to keep in touch with alumni.
5.1.4	Students are well provided for in terms of the equipment and software necessary for the successful achievement of learning outcomes in each of their modules.

Recommendations

5.2.1	Student engagement challenges are similar across HEIs. We recommend that as colleagues across the sector we design a way to keep in touch with each other re: student engagement.
5.2.3	We recommend the provision of more clarity on the website for the content of the courses (some students we met had different understanding of some aspects of the MA). Also, excellent promotion evident for the MA internationally, but increased promotion for the course nationally could result in a bigger mix of perspectives for debate thus improving the student experience.
5.2.3	The hub in the main building is a great facility for students, however the studio, edit suites, equipment room and Wired FM in the library building are dated and in need of work. Many of the facilities have been there for close to 30 years and could do with updating, so we were pleased to hear there are plans for this (awaiting the green light) within the new library building design. As these works are estimated to take several years to complete, we recommend a consultation with 'Buildings & Sustainability' for short term improvements. This department can provide suggestions and provisions to improve the interior design over the summer which would modernise the environment and make it a more inviting and comfortable setting for lecturers and students.
5.2.4	We recommend that Wired FM remain on campus and part of student life in MIC. Its positioning on campus needs to be considered for visibility and engagement. It is a super resource for B.A. and B.Ed. students, and we recommend that it remain student centred and focused in any re-structuring plan.
5.2.5	Assignment deadlines are set by the academic module leader. Deadlines can only be amended with their agreement when reasonable accommodations are being explored in individual cases.

5.2.6	Perhaps some societies didn't return after Covid. We recommend an increase in the choice of societies to help encourage more students to re-engage with the internal communities which in turn would encourage more student affiliation with the college. This must be student-led.
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Chapter 6: Research Activity

Commendations

6.1.1	The PRG was hugely impressed by the outstanding research achievements by staff across a broad spectrum of Media and Communication Studies, including a wide variety of books, articles and chapters in scholarly collections on different media (radio, film, television, print media) and popular culture (music, sport). Staff have also been awarded very significant national and international funding grants in areas of huge public concern including women in the media, media and democratic participation, and in areas of creative media practice. This is all the more impressive in an environment of significant challenges (in terms of teaching load and difficulties obtaining research sabbatical leave) to conduct research.
6.1.2	There is evidence of significant support provided by the Research & Graduate School, including training in Postgrad supervision, viva voce examinations, research ethics, research methods, getting published and other similar areas. Significant internal research funding is also available.
6.1.3	Staff have also been involved in an impressive range of leadership roles and have been very active in pursuing a variety of opportunities for networking, collaborations and mobility partnerships Internationally and are members of a wide variety of national and international external bodies.

Recommendations

6.2.1	We recommend submitting research plans for the Department to the Director of Research and Research and Graduate School Office, as is custom and practice for the Department.
6.2.2	One of the biggest challenges to the development of research is finding time to do so in the context of considerable teaching and administrative responsibilities. We would recommend that the college explore adapting current paid research leave arrangements to allow for more flexibility and possibilities (including leave of shorter duration) to facilitate the development of research projects.
6.2.3	We would recommend that members of staff in the department explore further existing research leave possibilities within the faculty; it was clear to us from our meetings that existing possibilities are not being fully availed of.

6.2.4	We would recommend more active support for example in the organisation and facilitation of conferences. We would recommend that the College put in place more effective support structures, that could include an events manager, for the organisation of research events, including conferences and seminars.
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Chapter 7: Community Outreach Activity

Commendations

7.1.1	All staff in the Department espouse the mission of Pillar 4 of the MIC Strategic Plan: 'Community Belonging' - through a variety of community-based learning, community-based research, public scholarship and volunteering activities and these activities are aligned to Faculty values of 'excellence in disciplinary practice', 'research focus' and 'commitment to social justice'.
7.1.2	The breath of valuable contributions from Department staff to industry, academia and community is exceptional, from being founders to chairs to trainers, editors, reviewers, adjudicators and speakers on high-level boards, committees, associations, and festivals, locally, nationally and internationally. It displays the value academia and industry put in MIC Media & Communication Studies Staff. The work ethic and determination to share expertise to improve working conditions and opportunities for Irish talent, is evident in staff achievements and contributions.
7.1.3	There is a real commitment to and input into the local community in Limerick and Munster, from training for members of the Moyross Community and the Travelling Community, to festivals in Limerick and Cork.

Recommendations

7.2.1	The breath of valuable contributions from department staff sharing expertise in production, equality and social justice with industry, academia and community is enormous including advocacy work for people working in the media. All of this expertise that is there within the Department, is exceptional and is worth recognising as a unique selling point for the single Hons B.A. We recommend this expertise is to the fore in the design and marketing of the single Hons B.A.
7.2.2	MIC Media & Communication Studies Department has a significant number of high-profile alumni. The superb work by the Department in archiving the final year projects and hosting the 30-year anniversary in 2026 will give rise to a special opportunity to reconnect with alumni and leverage the network to create more guest lecturing, marketing and placement opportunities. We recommend that MIC leadership mobilises all departments to prioritise a specific outreach event or festival that brings in the community and creates a national profile which might coincide with the launch of the single Hons B.A.

7.2.3	We recommend recording through a campus newsletter, the level of activity the Department engages with, at committee level, and the outputs of this work for the College.
7.2.4	The Media and Communication Studies Department contributes enormously to EDII initiatives. We recommend the exploration of this strong relationship between the two departments to open an avenue for communicating ambitions and work being done with senior management. This could help with awareness of contributions to community and deliver more recognition, which could contribute to improving the current low morale of Department staff.
7.2.5	We recommend a meeting between the Department and the Strategic Communications and Marketing office to establish more effective channels of communication and to design an ongoing strategy for communicating course information and staff research, achievements and events.