



# Department of English Language & Literature Quality Improvement Plan Final Report

Date: 20 February 2024



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## Quality Improvement Plan Timeline

This report sets out the key actions to deliver on the recommendations of the Department of English Language & Literature (ELL) Quality Review. This report maps the progress of the recommendations from the drafting of the Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) in June 2021 and subsequent implementation.

The review process consists of the following stages:

| Stage | Process   | Timeline                                   |
|-------|---|--|
| 1     | Initiation of the Quality Review  | January 2020<br>Stalled March due to Covid |
| 2     | Development of a Self-Assessment Report (SAR)                                     | SAR Completed November 2020                |
| 3     | External Assessment and <b>Virtual Review</b> by the Peer Review Group            | January 2021                               |
| 4     | Publication of a <b>Peer Review Report</b> including findings and recommendations | September 2021                             |
| 5     | Development of QIP  | March 2021 ongoing                         |
| 5     | Adoption of a <b>Quality Improvement Plan</b> by Executive Team (ET)              | ET April 2023 for adoption                 |
| 6     | Completion of the <b>Quality Improvement Plan</b>                                 | February 2024                              |

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| <b>Total Number of Recommendations</b> | 27 |
| <b>Recommendations - Completed</b>     | 22 |
| <b>Recommendations - In Progress*</b>  | 5  |

\*These recommendations are ongoing and outside of the Department's control.

In the following sections, recommendations that have been completed are shown in green (Table 3), those that are ongoing and outside of the Department's control (Table 4).

**Table 3: Recommendations Completed**

| Allocated To                                       | Rec. No. | Recommendations                                    | Recommendation (Specific)   | Action Item | Action  |
|--|----------|--|---|-------------|---|
| <b>Prof. Eugene O'Brien<br/>Head of Department</b> | 1.1      | Further emphasis on the role and value of research | The Department's research profile is highly impressive and its research achievements might be acknowledged and articulated more fully in terms of 'vision' and 'mission', including the importance of research to the Department's international reputation. It would be good to reiterate the importance of research as an integral part of the Department's work, perhaps through emphasising that research-led teaching is a dynamic process, not just delivering the personal insights of research but allowing student ideas to challenge, inform, and shape research in the course of teaching. The concept of 'undergraduate research' to which the Department is also clearly committed is worth emphasising, too, in any future documentation. | 1.1.0       | <b>1.</b> Include our own research in marketing material and Departmental Handbook and highlight the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internationally known researchers in the field</li> <li>• International reputation</li> <li>• Research as vision and mission</li> <li>• PhD Students progressed.</li> </ul> <b>2.</b> Highlight our research in modules at U/G and P/G levels. |
|  |          |  |   | 1.1.2       | <b>3.</b> Formally recognise our research led teaching in the module descriptors (Descriptors updated to include short standard text to highlight <i>lecturers as national &amp; internationally renowned researchers whose teaching is research led</i> )  |
| <b>Dr Marita Ryan<br/>Dept. of ELL</b>             | 1.2      | Reaffirm commitment to lifelong learning           | Despite the recent decline in recruitment of adult learners, the Department and the College have a strong reputation for supporting 'mature students' and those wishing to 'return to learn' after absence from formal education and / or a career break. Hopefully, this will continue to be a significant part of the Department / College mission.   | 1.2.2       | <b>1.</b> Highlight the following in marketing and internal documentation: Strong connection with Lifelong learning. Postgrad work. Mature students. Recognition of prior learning.   |

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|  |  |  |  | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. Include in marketing material welcome for mature students, life-long learning.</li> <li>3. Include student testimonials in department handbook &amp; website of student journeys from foundation studies to UG/PG, MA and PhD.</li> <li>4. New Certificate in English for Academic Purposes – Level 6 (Special Purpose Award) developed and rolled out in the Spring Semester AY 2023/24.<br/>The Level 6 Certificate comprises of one 6 ECTS module and has been developed in response to demand from the ETB for the International Protection sector (in partnership with EDII at MIC). The programme has an access widening participation / dimension and aligns with MIC's strategic goals. The programme also has potential for the International Office in terms of offering a foundational programme for students coming to Ireland to undertake a degree here.</li> </ol> |
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| <b>Prof. Eugene O'Brien</b><br><b>Head of Department</b>   | 1.3 | Register of graduate destinations                          | <p>The Department is clearly committed to supporting all students in their career pathways. The Department might consider giving greater emphasis to graduate destinations as part of its mission statement, and perhaps to publicise the various kinds of employment that graduates have gone into (in addition to teaching), such as local government, journalism, arts management, business communication, and other occupations.</p> | 1.3.1 | <p>Details of employment gained/career pathways of all PG students across language and literature now included in Department Handbook.</p>   |
| <b>Vice-President Research Prof. Michael Healy &amp; Head of Department Prof. Eugene O'Brien</b> | 1.4 | The need for careful discussions to do with sustainability | <p>The sheer amount of work undertaken at every level by a very small team – teaching, administration, and research – raises serious concerns about sustainability. Questions of strategy need to be tempered by these questions of sustainability. Can current levels of supervision and mentoring be maintained at postgraduate level, for instance, if there is significant postgraduate expansion?</p>                               | 1.4.1 | <p>A Charter for Supervision and Co-Supervision has been developed by the Research and Graduate School.</p> <p>The additional academic staff resourcing allocated to the Department together with the co-supervision model used for the MA and Structured PhD in Applied Linguistics have alleviated this issue within the Department.</p> |
| <b>Dr Joan O'Sullivan</b><br><b>Dept. of ELL</b>   | 1.5 | Support for planned improvements                           | <p>1. The proposal of a new Single Honours degree programme in English has great merit and promise, especially if it brings new resources to the Department. It will strengthen the Department's reputation for excellence nationally and internationally.</p>   | 1.5.1 | <p>Two new programmes: BA in English &amp; Drama; BA in Language &amp; Literature have been developed.</p> <p>Full programme approval recommended by APAC (March 2023), ratified by An Chomhairle Acadúil (May 2023). First intake for both programmes AY 2024/25.</p>   |

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| <b>Prof. William Leahy</b><br><b>Dean of Arts</b> | 1.5 | Support for planned improvements   | 2. Even allowing for the special and distinctive status of the College, the pathways for progression and promotion look antiquated, and this applies all the way from clerical officers to senior lecturers. New programmes of study clearly need to be supported with additional and improved resources. It is surprising that the Head of Department is not also a Professor. The research profiles of other colleagues in the Department are equivalent to those of Reader / Professor in other institutions. Having a Chair in the Department carries great significance in terms of leadership and morale, and also provides a clear indication at home and abroad about the major teaching and research achievements of the Head of Department | 1.5.2 | <p>The Head of Department and a Senior Lecturer have been promoted to Principal Lecturers.</p> <p>One member of the Department has been promoted to Senior Lecturer.</p> <p>A new round of promotions to Senior Lecturer is currently underway.</p>     |
| <b>Prof. William Leahy</b><br><b>Dean of Arts</b> | 2.2 | Review allocation of administrative support with a view to increasing allocation | Related to 2.1, the high number of students and breadth of activity require additional administrative support to make the unit sustainable and enable innovation. Additional dedicated support by the current departmental administrator would allow this imbalance to be addressed.   | 2.2.2 | Reorganisation of the department administrator's workload has led to provision of greater support to the Department.  |
| <b>Prof. William Leahy</b><br><b>Dean of Arts</b> | 2.3 | Review fixed-term contracts with a view to making these permanent (year-long)    | A combination of different types of contracts can pose a risk to staff morale and retention. There is a clear need to review fixed-term contracts and ensure that all activity in the Department is valued and remunerated in a fair and consistent way.   | 2.3.1 | Fixed-term contracts have been reviewed and two new full-time posts at Assistant Professor level and a post of English Language Projects Coordinator have been secured by the Department in the time period since the Peer Review Report was published. |

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| <b>Eugene.OBrien</b>                        | 2.5 | Review approach to staff engagement with overall decision making with a view to understanding whether these are fit for purpose in the long run. | The informal arrangement in place for staff to feed in to decision making at every level of the organization seems to serve the Department well, and lead to strong staff engagement and a positive culture in the workplace. However, reliance on an outstanding leader and informal decision-making arrangements may pose a risk to longer term planning and sustainability of that positive culture if there is a change in the Headship. | 2.5   | Opportunities for shared decision have been formalised across the Department: The full departmental meetings have been supplemented with meetings of language and literature staff separately to allow for a more strategic approach to decision making in each area. There is a greater sharing out of administrative and overall duties to mitigate against over-reliance on the Head of Department.  |
| <b>Prof. William Leahy<br/>Dean of Arts</b> | 3.1 | Review under-resourcing of TEFL and TEAL   | The staff teaching in this area are on very circumscribed CID contracts and work in excess of contracted hours.<br><br>The administration of the students taking TEFL courses places a heavy overhead on the department administrator.   | 3.1.1 | The Department have been successful in securing a full-time post for an English Language Projects Coordinator. Part of the remit of the Projects Coordinator is to work strategically with internal and external stakeholders to establish, implement and coordinate short-term face-to-face ESOL / EAL courses. This in turn allows for proper resource planning.<br><br>More resources have been given to the Department to assist with TEAL and TEFL administration. |
| <b>Dr Joan O'Sullivan<br/>Dept. of ELL</b>  | 3.2 | Consider integrating offerings in literature and linguistics   | A programme integrating offerings in literature and linguistics is highly desirable and would put the strengths of the Department to good use. It would also be attractive to students. However, such a development is predicated on the appointment of additional staff.  | 1.5   | Completed (see Action item 1.5.1)   |



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| <b>Prof. William Leahy<br/>Dean of Arts</b> | 3.3 | Review oversight and management of the BA Programme                                  | The lack of a Director for the Bachelor of Arts at Faculty level means that there is no proper oversight and management of this programme and that it lacks institutional validation and standing.   | 3.3            | This falls under the remit of the newly appointed Assistant Dean of Arts.<br><br>An external examiner for the BA programme has been appointed for AY2024/25.  |
| <b>Dr Joan O'Sullivan<br/>Dept. of ELL</b>  | 3.4 | Review programme offerings   | The size of the classes and the number of programmes being taught has led to high contact hours and loads of assessment, and increases the administrative and pastoral burden for the individual lecturer. The latter burden also takes its toll on the Departmental administrator.                      | 2.2, 2.3 & 3.1 | A number of additional resources have been provided to the Department as outlined in 2.2, 2.3 & 3.1. These additional resources are based on the levels of activity and output of the Department.   |
| <b>Dr Deirdre Flynn<br/>Dept. of ELL</b>    | 3.5 | The reshaping of the curriculum in English literature should be carefully weighed up | The reshaping of the curriculum in English literature should be carefully weighed up: as offering courses in canonical texts and historical periods adds to the breadth of the programme and is vital for producing students who are conversant with the wider contexts and evolution of literary texts. | 3.5.1          | We have proceeded on the basis of one module per semester. We will strive to maintain a balance between innovative and research-driven new modules and teaching a broad range of period and generic literature. This has fed into our proposed curriculum steering committee <b>(Rec 1.5 Action Item 1)</b> |
| <b>Dr Joan O'Sullivan<br/>Dept. of ELL</b>  | 4.2 | Online access to library resources needs to be more user-friendly.                   |  | 4.2            | The Library has rolled out Leganto and a host of other updates have occurred during/since Covid-19 to assist students.  |

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| <b>Prof. Eugene.O'Brien<br/>Head of Department</b>          | 4.3 | Online lectures should be provided in the same IT format where possible.                           |  | 4.3.1 | Standardised Moodle template, lecture capture and delivery software have been implemented in response to Covid-19 which has assisted with this.   |
| <b>Ms Maeve.Sullivan<br/>Careers Manager</b>                | 4.4 | There should be more careers advice and support for job applications on the undergraduate courses. |  | 4.4.1 | Careers Service Manager appointed in 2020.<br>Services provided to current undergraduate students include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guidance on subject choice</li> <li>• Undergraduate group careers information seminars</li> <li>• One-to-one confidential careers advice</li> <li>• Assistance with postgraduate study applications</li> <li>• Assistance with employment applications</li> </ul> |
| <b>Vice-President Academic Affairs Prof. Niamh Hourigan</b> | 5.1 | Improvement of student feedback channels   | The use of module evaluation questionnaires might be formalised, with an opportunity for students to offer feedback on teaching and learning, and with reassurance (perhaps at an appropriate staff-student committee meeting) that feedback has been considered and (where appropriate) acted upon. | 5.1.1 | The Student Learning and Partnership Dialogue Charter was launched in January 2021. Formal Staff-Student forums form a central pillar of the Charter. The Chair of each Staff-Student Forum reports back to the Programme Course Boards, Faculty Board and the Charter Taskforce.   |

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| <b>Eugene.OBrien</b>                     | 5.2 | Strengthening of student representation | The meetings between class representatives and the Head of Department are clearly valuable and are welcomed by the students. However, it would be good to have a formal structure that enabled occasional meetings between student representatives and staff in something like a staff-student committee, and also to demonstrate, as with student feedback (above), that action has been taken when necessary. | 5.1.1                               | Linked to Rec 5.1 Action Item 1.  |
| <b>Dr Eoin Flannery<br/>Dept. of ELL</b> | 5.4 | Promoting undergraduate research        | The Department prides itself on research-led teaching and also on its success in student progression. The Department should take every opportunity to encourage undergraduate research and to show how it operates in undergraduate dissertations / final year projects. Students should be encouraged to emphasise their research skills in their CVs and job applications.                                    | 5.4.1;<br>5.4.2;<br>5.4.3;<br>5.4.4 | The Department have implemented the following:<br>1. Demonstrate/highlight to students how research informs our teaching.<br>2. Use term research essays and re-designate assignments as research essays.<br>3. Encourage Postgrad tutors to talk about research at every programme level.<br>4. Inform/highlight to students through department documentation and in discussions with students the research skills being taught and their value to the students. |
| <b>William.Leahy</b>                     | 5.5 | Improvement of staff-student ratios     | Many of the Department's desirable aspirations, with regard to improving student experience and offering enhanced support through academic advisors and programme directors, are very much dependent on more equitable and manageable staff-student ratios.   | 1.5;<br>3.2;<br>3.4                 | This item is linked to <b>1.5, 3.2 &amp; 3.4</b>  |

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| <b>Prof. Eugene.O'Brien<br/>Head of Department</b> | 6.3 | There should be a set expectation for the number of supervision meetings per semester (to be invoked if staff are over-worked or a student has gone missing in action). |  | 6.3             | Formalised rule of one supervision consultation per semester put in place. This would not impede any student looking for higher levels of interaction.  |
| <b>Dr Richard Butler<br/>Director of Research</b>  | 6.1 | Research plans need to be more than a paper exercise  | They should be developmental rather than evaluative, discussed semi-formally with the Head of Department and reviewed annually. The Head of Department should have time profiled for this. | 6.1.1;<br>6.1.2 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Director of Research has worked and continues to work with the Department in shaping their research plans.</li> <li>2. As part of the overall development of the Department's Research Plan the HoD sets aside time to discuss individual research plans with staff.</li> </ol> |

**Table 4: Recommendations that are current and ongoing and is not within the Department's control**

| Allocated To   | Rec. No. | Recommendations  | Recommendation (Specific)  | Action Item               | Action   |
|--|----------|--|--|---------------------------|--|
| <b>Vice-President of Academic Affairs – Prof. Niamh.Hourigan</b> | 2.1      | Review workload allocations and address unsustainable workloads amongst staff. | The overall success of the Department relies on the good will and engagement of its staff and the high student numbers pose a serious risk to staff engagement, as well as to the feasibility of any planned future innovation.  | 2.1.1                     | <b>This remains current and ongoing and is not within the Department's control</b><br><br>WAM development is in progress.  |
| <b>Director of Human Resources Mr Frank White</b>                | 2.4      | Review provision of staff training with a view to identifying any current gaps | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Staff training in all areas is a combination of informal instruction and mentoring arrangements. While this is clearly working well on the whole, a review of the training needs of different staff groups would allow the Department to identify requirements for provision as they occur.</li> <li>Review incentivisation and career progression with a view to enhance opportunities for professional development. There is currently little scope for career progression across both the academic and administrative job families and the reasons for this lie mainly with the overall national approach to this issue.</li> <li>A review of alternative ways to enable professional development alongside lobbying for a career progression framework would be desirable.</li> </ol> | 2.4.1;<br>2.4.2;<br>2.4.3 | <b>This remains current and ongoing and is not within the Department's control</b><br><br><b>Note:</b> The College has completed two rounds of academic promotions (historical vacancies) and has now embarked on a new round of promotions at senior lecturer level. Opportunities now exist within the professional services areas for promotion.<br><br>The Faculty of Arts Athena Swan Action Plan addresses the issue of career progression.<br><br>Human Resources have rolled out training in several areas linked to management/supervisory roles.<br><br>The Aurora Mentorship Programme is currently in its third iteration within the College.<br><br>Additionally, Department staff are involved in formal and informal professional |

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|  |     |  |   |       | development with LEAD - where this linked to promotional opportunities this would bolster the department's already active engagement. Department will continue to encourage staff to engage with PD opportunities on campus   |
| <b>Director of Quality<br/>Dr Deirdre Ryan</b> | 4.1 | Module evaluation should be standard and standardised practice.  | 1. Module Satisfaction Survey (MSS) currently undergoing re-development.  | 4.1.1 | <b>This remains current and ongoing and is not within the Department's control</b><br><br>A newly developed Module Feedback Survey rolled out AY2021/22 Sem 2. However, response rate has been very low. A shortened version of the module satisfaction survey will run in Week 9-11 Spring Semester AY2023-24.<br><b>Note: The Department use their tutorials to gather feedback from Students</b> |
| <b>Head Librarian<br/>Ms Aine.Finucane</b>     | 5.3 | Improving student work spaces and facilities   | Students greatly appreciate the learning environment at MIC, including the social spaces where they can meet, but they are also aware of the current constraints, including demand on the Library and relatively few opportunities for socialising out of class. The Peer Review Group notes that there are plans for improved library provision. | 5.3   | <b>This remains current and ongoing and is not within the Department's control</b><br><br>The New Library is currently at planning stage.   |
| <b>President Prof.<br/>Eugene Wall</b>         | 6.2 | The College should (continue to) lobby for the national regulatory framework to allow the appointment of |   | 6.2   | <b>This remains current and ongoing and is not within the Department's control</b>  |

new professors and  
greater allocation of  
sabbaticals