



Quality Review  
Peer Review Report  
Department of History  
April 2021



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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
  - a. The department under review conducts a self-evaluation exercise and writes a self-assessment report (SAR)
2. Peer Review
  - a. A Peer Review Group (PRG) comprising external experts, both national and international, review the SAR, visit the department, meet with stakeholders, and produce a report (this report), which is made publicly available on the MIC Quality Office webpage

### 3. Quality Improvement.

- a. 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 History

The [Department of History](#) resides within the Faculty of Arts and offers programmes at both undergraduate and postgraduate (taught and research) levels. The Department teaches History as part of the joint honours [Bachelor of Arts](#) (BA) programme. The Department is very committed to research-led teaching. All faculty teach a mix of survey and specialist modules, but survey modules are taught by faculty with expertise in the area, while specialist modules are related directly to the individual research strengths of faculty. The Department also offers History and Irish Studies electives on the Bachelor of Education (BEd) programme. The Department has a long track record of supervision of research postgraduate students at MA and PhD levels. This reflects the Department's strong commitment to research: all of the permanent staff members are research active and are engaged in regular publication and dissemination of their work.

### Department Mission and Strategic Aims

The Department of History supports the [College's Mission](#) through their educational aims grounded in:

- research informed teaching focussing on the history of Ireland and the wider world, from the medieval to modern periods;
- engaging students in a person-to-person manner;
- working to produce well-formed graduates, grounded in the discipline of history, who think like historians and understand the complexity of history, life, and society as citizens.

## Peer Review Group Observations

In both pre-visit planning and during our virtual 'visit' to campus in the week April 25<sup>th</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup>, 2021, the Peer Review Group (PRG) found the Department to be very open in its dealings with us. The whole process has run smoothly with excellent support from the Quality Office Team led by Deirdre Ryan. All the meetings we requested were set up in a timely manner.

During the visit all the meetings operated in a professional manner with plenty of time for questions and discussion. All our questions were answered in a forthright and honest manner. All of us on the Peer Review Group can see a collegial atmosphere among the history team and we observed that they are appreciated by senior management as a College leader for teaching and research at MIC. The PRG appreciated the quality and candour of the students chosen for the stakeholder panels. They were quite informative and useful in helping us understand the student experience in history at MIC.

The SAR report showed some good reflection on what History at MIC had achieved and what it needed to do to sustain and improve its efforts across the board. The report clearly laid out the Department's strengths as well as its challenges. In mission terms, it could have linked better with the College's own strategic plan. The PRG saw history fulfilling several the College's strategic priorities--international research, civic participation, growth of postgraduate research students, etc.-- which were not explicitly acknowledged in that way in the SAR. While there was lots of useful documentation attached to the SAR there was still some evidence that needs to be collected for future efforts (There were also a few clerical issues with pagination and table numbers). Future external reviewers will need to see evidence of module evaluation (on a collective level), evidence of how student feedback is implemented (or not), and, in terms of assessment, evidence of mark moderation.

The meetings with 'stakeholder' students were particularly useful in helping us understand the programme and how it worked. Both the undergraduates and the postgraduates provided excellent feedback and each group seemed generally satisfied with their experience. The postgraduates particularly liked the support provided by the Departmental Assistant (DA) system which is something special to MIC. This support is a unique selling point of the History PhD programme and we hope that the College/Faculty continue to fund it. There were, however, some issues with postgraduate (PG) support around guidance and process. The PRG was surprised to find that there is no department PG coordinator in history to act in some ways as a guidance tutor, both for the students' time at MIC, and beyond. Everything seems to run through the supervisor which is fine if the relationship between student and supervisor is working, but what if it is not? Who do students go to when there are issues? There was concern among the peer group we met that a PG director would be useful for this kind of potential problem rather than taking all problems directly to the head of department or directly to the Graduate School. While Graduate School training was found useful by the students, there is a need for bespoke training/support for History postgraduates research (PGRs) (in conjunction perhaps with other humanities PGR students). For example, one PG student mentioned a Graduate School session on 'getting published' that did not discuss monographs.

The undergraduates were also forthcoming and impressed with the support and feedback given by History staff. They felt the team was very accessible and helpful. They were also very complimentary about the DAs. They were a little unclear on how their feedback on course/module improvement was dealt with and/or acted upon. Similarly, they felt having some kind of guidance tutor to go to for academic and non-academic issues would be an enhancement to the student experience.

The Department's administrative support seems strong. Having the administrators together in one faculty office is good, providing back-up for individual department administrators. The administration team does, however, seem to deal a lot with complicated student pastoral issues, which they should receive support and training for. There might be some economies of scale having larger departments in the Faculty, both in terms of administration support, but also in providing room for more academic leadership of things such as PGR directorship, student guidance, etc. Faculty leadership is vital here and we are concerned with the lack of a Dean and an Assistant Dean, and we strongly encourage that those posts are filled, if even on an interim basis, as soon as possible.

Finally, before going into the detail of our recommendations for improvement, we strongly acknowledge the excellent work the History Department does for its students and for the wider discipline. We are concerned only with the sustainability of this excellent work. Many of our recommendations require the leadership and policy changes from the College executive, especially in the areas of promotions, sabbaticals, and a workload model which explicitly acknowledges research time. For MIC and History to maintain its independence and grow its international reputation, then these kind of supports, common elsewhere, are needed. We include those higher-level recommendations here to encourage the Department to support and participate in efforts to design, test, and implement, these changes, but they must be led by senior management.

## Chapter 1: Vision, Mission, Strategy and Governance

### Commendations

1.1	Dedication to research led teaching. History team maintains a strong research profile which informs and drives excellent teaching. This reality is especially commendable with the large teaching and marking load the Department maintains.
1.2	Oral History Collection. Unique in Ireland and very valuable to the study of Irish History. It is also commendable that the Department is genuinely interested in sustaining this important collection and see it as a unique selling point for students seeking to do research at Mary I.
1.3	Retention of students into 2 <sup>nd</sup> , 3 <sup>rd</sup> , and 4 <sup>th</sup> years, indicating the strength of the History team's teaching. The BA programme is large and has many departments serving it. History attracts students beyond the size of its staff team, especially in final year projects/dissertations.
1.4	Postgraduate Research Recruitment. History at MIC has a large number of PhD students for a department of its size, again speaking to the quality research the team has done and continues to do. These students have also produced some quality work in their own right, indicating good supervision during their degree experience at the College.
1.5	Commitment to the Profession. The Department is punching above its weight in its contribution to scholarship and to development of the discipline. The editorship of <i>Irish Historical Studies</i> is especially noteworthy.

### Recommendations (Please include a brief justification for the Recommendation)

1.1	<p><b>General: Connect the Department vision better to the College's vision, especially around being grounded in the civic/local but linked to the global. Articulate the Department research strengths collectively too rather than just as the strengths of individual staff.</b></p> <p><b>Specific:</b> Set aside dedicated time at least once a semester to discuss vision and strategy especially around research and how it informs the curriculum and teaching. (The 'Research Plan' does not fulfil this recommendation because it's a report not a plan).</p>
1.2	<p><b>General: Appoint Oral Historian to lead management and growth of the Oral History Collection.</b></p> <p><b>Specific:</b> Work with senior management to find the resource for this post.</p>
1.3	<p><b>General: Recognise specific time in annual workload planning and beyond for research (to include planned sabbaticals).</b></p> <p><b>Specific:</b> Proactively work with senior management to devise and test appropriate Workload Model and Sabbatical scheme e.g., volunteer for pilot study, model how a 30 or 40% research allowance might affect the department's delivery of teaching.</p>
1.4	<p><b>General: More explicit acknowledgement and discussion of Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion across everything the Department does.</b></p>

	<p><b>Specific:</b> Review curriculum and student support annually in terms of EDI. Work with Faculty specific development sessions on EDI in Higher Education e.g., unconscious bias training, efforts to decolonize curriculum.</p>
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## Chapter 2: Organisation, Management and Staffing

### Commendations

2.1	Strong integrated collegial team. Again, History is delivering in terms of teaching and research and this could not happen without strong, but consensual, leadership and the support of the whole team for each other.
2.2	Impressive external profile. For a small department the historians have strong external profiles. Beyond the editorship of <i>Irish Historical Studies</i> , there were numerous other tv and media appearances highlighting the good work individuals are doing, thus enhancing the reputation of MIC as a whole.
2.3	Strengths in specific areas, especially linking Irish history internationally. The PRG saw some coherence to History's disciplinary strength. It is Irish History but researched and taught in innovative ways. The department also has a strong research ethics process.
2.4	Flexibility and service ethic among academic and professional staff support. Despite the lack of clear systematised processes in many areas, History staff still manage to deliver in terms of teaching and research. This flexibility to deal with issues as they arise is down to the goodwill of department members. While the PRG is recommending, for sustainability reasons, a more systematic approach in areas, we hope the team continue to show some of the flexibility they have and maintain the strong ethic they have supporting students and the discipline.

### Recommendations (Please include a brief justification for the Recommendation)

2.1	<p><b>General: More formal structures for assessing vision, policies, delivery.</b></p> <p><b>Specific:</b> Standing items in department meetings beyond housekeeping, teaching delivery, to include research, EDI, with staff assigned to report on specific items.</p>
2.2	<p><b>General: Collaborate with Faculty on common issues such as promotional pathways, a sabbatical rota, and shared roles such as directors of Postgraduate Research and/or Research, as well as Teaching and Learning.</b></p> <p><b>Specific:</b> Expanded use and remit of Faculty wide meetings to achieve these results both at department and Faculty levels.</p>
2.3	<p><b>General: More formal collaboration between academic and professional staff.</b></p> <p><b>Specific:</b> Act as conduit for professional staff to contribute to improve delivery of teaching and learning. Advocate for Faculty based professional development opportunities for professional staff.</p>
2.4	<p><b>General: Career development mentors.</b></p> <p><b>Specific:</b> Establish a system of mentorship for all academic staff to develop careers in preparation for a new College-wide promotions pathway.</p>

## Chapter 3: Design, Content and Review of Curriculum

### Commendations

3.1	Emphasis on and commitment to research led teaching.
3.2	Specific curricular unique strengths in medieval, early modern, modern history of violence and crime, and diaspora.
3.3	Expertise in material culture and visual history with a link to the MA in local history.
3.4	Writing History module in MA programme.
3.5	The range of module options in 4 <sup>th</sup> year which are very popular with students, especially given the size of the Department.

### Recommendations (Please include a brief justification for the Recommendation)

3.1	<p><b>General: Review of EDI in curriculum.</b></p> <p><b>Specific:</b> Embedding EDI across modules, both in terms of content and reading lists, in place of stand-alone topics.</p>
3.2	<p><b>General: Explore possibility of MA online.</b></p> <p><b>Specific:</b> Work with marketing and the energetic international office to establish feasibility and sustainability of online provision.</p>
3.3	<p><b>General: Maintain strength in Oral History.</b></p> <p><b>Specific:</b> Present case for appointment of a staff member in Oral History.</p>
3.4	<p><b>General: Integrate medieval history strand to a greater extent into the BA.</b></p> <p><b>Specific:</b> Better marketing of medieval courses to students.</p>
3.5	<p><b>General: Highlight employability beyond teaching.</b></p> <p><b>Specific:</b> Work with students and Faculty to identify skills and help students translate them into what employers seek e.g., specific sessions for students at each level, a Faculty-wide employability module.</p>

## Chapter 4: Teaching, Learning, Assessment and Feedback

### Commendations

4.1	Quality and extent of positive feedback given to students.
4.2	Accessibility of staff, including Department Assistants.
4.3	A broadening range of assessments, including online forum assessments.
4.4	Retention of students through the levels.
4.5	Wide range of teaching experience.

### Recommendations (Please include a brief justification for the Recommendation)

4.1	<p><b>General: Module review process.</b></p> <p><b>Specific:</b> Establish an internal structure which examines and reflects upon good awards, mark moderation, student feedback, and external examiner comments with regard to module improvement. In collaboration with the Faculty, develop a consistent method of student feedback.</p>
4.2	<p><b>General: Student feedback to staff.</b></p> <p><b>Specific:</b> In order to close the feedback loop, communicate more effectively with students on how their feedback is actioned e.g., student representative forums, 'You said, we did' reports from previous student feedback.</p>
4.3	<p><b>General: Grow international links.</b></p> <p><b>Specific:</b> Establish strategic links with international universities focussed on the specific needs of history students and staff in order to strengthen student recruitment, enhance the MIC student experience, and explore research opportunities.</p>
4.4	<p><b>General: Department Assistant (DA)/Tutor training.</b></p> <p><b>Specific:</b> Develop key teaching and learning skills, including marking and moderation, for DAs/Tutors. Produce a specific DA/Tutor handbook.</p>

## Chapter 5: The Student Experience

### Commendations

5.1	Academic mentor system for 1 <sup>st</sup> years.
5.2	Dedication to student academic success, by both academic and professional staff.
5.3	Availability of academic and professional staff to students.
5.4	Tutorial system and general class size.

### Recommendations (Please include a brief justification for the Recommendation)

5.1	<p><b>General: New Library.</b></p> <p><b>Specific:</b> Pending the re-development of the library, identify creative and cost-effective ways to expand history collection for students e.g., e-books, primary sources, especially State Papers considering early modern strength, use of UL library and City/County libraries, and possibly inter-library loans.</p>
5.2	<p><b>General: Build Student Community.</b></p> <p><b>Specific:</b> Develop department and faculty led student community efforts e.g., History society, quizzes, Historians at the Movies etc.</p>
5.3	<p><b>General: Academic/Guidance mentorship scheme.</b></p> <p><b>Specific:</b> Participate in Faculty review of current 1<sup>st</sup> year scheme with view to expanding beyond 1<sup>st</sup> year and driving engagement.</p>

## Chapter 6: Research Activity

### Commendations

6.1	The staff of the Department of History at Mary Immaculate College, as individuals and as a group, are committed to the production of, and are producing, history research and writing that is characterised by excellence. Within the broader discipline, the Department of History at MIC is recognised and admired for these achievements, while each individual staff member is esteemed (nationally and internationally) for their expertise in their field. This is to be commended on its own terms. It is also a considerable reputational asset to MIC more broadly, while it will underpin any future success in recruiting postgraduate students and winning research funding.
6.2	This is enhanced by the consistency and quality of the Department's service to the field. It is evident that the Department is a place where a culture of good citizenship and associational effort is fostered and facilitated. The range of editorial work, service on bodies that support the profession, service on associational committees that underpin the discipline, peer-reviewing, external examining, together with the organisation of conferences and seminars that are so essential to the health of history at local, regional, and national levels is admirable. It is, again, a considerable reputational asset to MIC.
6.3	For its size, the Department is attracting very strong numbers of research postgraduates. This rests on the Department's expertise and reputation but also the Departmental Assistantships and high levels of satisfaction among graduates of the MA. Further, the quality of the supervision that these graduates receive is evidenced in the fact that several recent graduates have published, and are publishing, work of a high quality.
6.4	The Oral History Collection is a unique asset in an Irish context. It offers the Department the potential to sustain a reputation as centre for excellence in the field of oral history. The collection has the potential to direct the attention of a broad range of scholars toward MIC as well as being a resource that can further bind MIC to local and regional communities.

### Recommendations (Please include a brief justification for the Recommendation)

6.1	<p><b>General: More officially defined time for research. If the highly commendable levels of research activity are to be maintained, then staff require enhanced (that is defined and resourced) research time. The Department cannot alone address this issue, though some ameliorative measures may rest within their control.</b></p> <p><b>Specific:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Working with College and Faculty to achieve enhanced structured provision for sabbatical research leave; a defined allocation of research time within regular workloads; enhanced staffing.</li> <li>At departmental level, the purposeful investigation of measures to mitigate onerous teaching loads; such measures to include the reduction of teaching hours associated with a 6-credit module from 36 to 30 hours (reflecting sectoral norms), and the teaching of modules across programmes (BEd and BA).</li> </ul>
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6.2	<p><b>General: Develop a plan for communicating their collective research accomplishments in a more structured manner to ensure that those beyond the discipline (at Mary Immaculate and among external stakeholders, including potential funders) understand the scale of their achievement.</b></p> <p><b>Specific:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collectively, this involves minor but important adjustments such as an enhancement of the Department’s research webpage so that it becomes a forum where their strengths and achievements are elucidated more clearly and fully.</li> <li>• If possible, linking the active Departmental twitter account to the webpage would create a rolling noticeboard of achievements.</li> <li>• At an individual level this involves more consistent engagement with external and internal mechanisms for promoting research.</li> </ul>
6.3	<p><b>General: Enhanced structured attention at Departmental level for PGR students.</b></p> <p><b>Specific:</b> Achieving this will certainly involve collective planning and will likely involve the identification of a dedicated postgraduate research leader or point of contact in the Department. Outcomes should likely include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A shared research-focused activity that is purposeful and for these students specifically, centred on the Department, as this would enhance their sense of being a history research community;</li> <li>• The provision of a PhD Handbook which welcomes the students, provides essential information, articulates (from the beginning) the expected path of a History PhD student at MIC, directs them toward resources available to them at Departmental and Research and Graduate School Office, informs them of points of contact beyond their supervisor, and communicates to them what is expected from them;</li> <li>• Enhancing the listing of current PhD students on the webpage by listing their areas of study;</li> <li>• Listing recent graduates and providing testimonials from them on the webpage;</li> <li>• Consideration of whether the Departmental Assistantships can become structured launchpads to the achievement of external funding (e.g., IRC) as well as being an admirable end in themselves.</li> </ul>
6.4	<p><b>General: Preservation of the Oral History collection.</b></p> <p><b>Specific:</b> Preservation and transformation into a high-quality useable research resource housed by, and identified with, MIC and second, as already identified, the teaching/research staff to ensure that the Department becomes the primary site where the value of the collection is liberated and so the Department is identified as a centre of excellence. This will involve co-operation, inventiveness, and the commitment of resources across at all levels, College, Faculty, Research and Graduate School Office and the Department of History.</p>

## Annex 1: Peer Review Group

### **Professor David Gleeson (Chair)**

#### **Faculty Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor – Research and Innovation Northumbria University, Newcastle upon Tyne**

David is professor of American history at Northumbria University, Newcastle upon Tyne. He is the author or editor of numerous books and articles, including most recently *The Green and the Gray: The Irish in the Confederate States of America* (2013). He was a coinvestigator for the Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded Major Research Project "Locating the Hidden Diaspora: The English in North America in Transatlantic Perspective, 1760–1950". He formerly taught at the College of Charleston in South Carolina, where he also directed the Program in the Carolina Lowcountry and Atlantic World. He teaches courses in nineteenth-century U.S. history and is an expert on American immigration, ethnicity, and race. He is also interested in the transnational elements of U.S. history. David is currently the Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2021 Lead for the Faculty of Arts, Design and Social Sciences and is a member of the Peer Review College of the Arts and Humanities Council of the UK.

### **Dr Ciara Meehan**

#### **Reader in History and Associate Dean Education (Student Experience), University of Hertfordshire**

Having previously lectured at University College Dublin, Ciara joined the [History Group](#) at the University of Hertfordshire in 2013 where she is Reader in History. Between August 2016 and January 2019, Ciara was Head of History and is now Associate Dean Education (Student Experience) for the School of Humanities. Her major publications include *The Cosgrave Party: A History of Cumann na nGaedheal, 1923-1933* (2010), *A Just Society for Ireland? 1964-1987* (2013), and her co-authored book *Saving the State: Fine Gael from Collins to Varadkar* (2020). Her commitment to excellence in learning and teaching was acknowledged in her successful application to become a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy in 2014, and in her advancement to Senior Fellow in 2018.

### **Dr William Murphy**

#### **Associate Professor, School of History & Geography, Dublin City University**

William's primary field of teaching and research is in modern Irish history, with a particular expertise in the history of the Irish revolutionary period. To date this work has centred on three key areas, the history of political imprisonment, the history of sport and leisure, and the history of female suffragism. That first interest is reflected in a series of articles and in the monograph *Political Imprisonment and the Irish, 1912-1921* (Oxford University Press, 2014). His current research includes further work on political prisoners which will contribute to a project entitled 'Prisoners, Medical Care and Entitlement to Health in England and Ireland, 1850-2000'. William is co-founder with Dr Paul Rouse (University College Dublin) of Sports History Ireland and co-editor of two collections on the history of sport and leisure. His most recent monograph, *Michael Collins: the man and the revolution* (Collins Press/Gill, 2018), was co-authored with Anne Dolan.

## **Winnie Davern MA (History)**

### **MIC Alumna**

Winnie retired from working in the health service after 30+ years. She returned to education and completed her BA (English and History) and MA in History at MIC. Winnie's MA thesis centred on a private collection of correspondence written by her grandparents between 1917 and 1919. Themes explored in this thesis included the changing Irish political landscape, emigration and identity, the impact of the Spanish Influenza pandemic and the experiences of ex-servicemen in the aftermath of the Great War.

## Annex 2: Schedule of meetings with stakeholders

Date	Stakeholder(s)
Monday 26 April	Introductory Briefing – Overview of MIC Governance and Structures VP Academic Affairs, VP Governance & Strategy, VP Research, Director of Quality, Quality Assurance Manager
Tuesday 27 April	Head of Department
	Department of History (all staff)
	Director of Teaching and Learning
Thursday 29 April	Faculty Office Manager and Department Administrator
	Postgraduate Students including Departmental Assistants and Department Tutors
	BA Undergraduate Students
	Director of Research
Friday 30 April	Director of International Engagement
	Director of Student Life