MIC

MARY IMMACULATE COLLEGE
COLÁISTE MHUIRE GAN SMÁL

Quality Review
Peer Review Summary
Report
Department of Psychology
2020

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 college 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/QI 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 Psychology

The [Department of Psychology](#) resides within the Faculty of Arts.

Department Mission

The Department's mission is to enrich humanity through the cultivation of a collaborative psychological research and learning community. The Department of Psychology is a community that enables all of its members – undergraduates, postgraduates and staff to continually develop within the practice of psychology.

The Department achieves its mission by:

- Fostering a clear disciplinary identity
- Cultivating a disciplinary research community
- Advancing awareness of psychological research more widely

Department Vision

The Department's vision for psychology at MIC is of a collaborative research community of disciplinary excellence in the science of humanity. The Department of Psychology is grounded in values of respect for the autonomy and humanity of their staff, students, professional colleagues, and the public at large.

Peer Review Group Observations

First, the Peer Review Group (PRG) would like to formally recognise and acknowledge the courage and leadership of the Department of Psychology (Dept) in Mary Immaculate College (MIC) in being the first Dept to undergo this Quality Review process. While there were clear and considered guidelines, and institutional support for the process, it was a step into the unknown for the Dept. The flexibility of the staff and students of the Dept, and the Quality Review team, in this regard together with their total commitment to progressing quality and seeing movement as progressive, reflects a 'can do attitude' that was evident to the PRG throughout the quality review process. Indeed, the commitment, openness and engagement with the process from all stakeholders was striking. It was clear that the Dept welcomed this Quality Review as an opportunity to reflect on their processes, activities and structures to date. This enabled enthusiastic discussions with the PRG and an ability to grapple honestly with challenging queries that were raised.

The hospitality offered to the PRG by MIC was generous, warm, whole-hearted. While elements of this may often be present during general meetings and site visits, it is worthy of particular note here as it was experienced as being reflective of an ethos that runs throughout the Institution.

The exceptionally well organised three-day site visit made it possible for the PRG to explore a wide range of perspectives across the Dept and College. This enabled a thorough review of the Dept through a series of meetings with staff, students and stakeholders from across the Institution. As such, it enabled the PRG to develop an understanding of the contribution, history and prospects of the Dept within the College, and in a national context. The site visit timetable provided for a number of intensive days which was experienced by the panel as respectful of a process that is committed to supporting change mechanisms. Change can be difficult on many levels. We suggest that recommendations noted within this report are not revolutionary. Rather they are an evolution of what the Dept is already doing.

The PRG judged that much time and effort had been invested in the self-assessment report (SAR) which resulted in a thoughtful, well-structured, concise, and helpful document. It was also clear that the report had involved input from several individuals and groups in various formats. The PRG was impressed with this collective effort. A noticeable gap in SAR was in terms of contributions from administrative / professional services staff. When this was identified, the PRG appreciated the opportunity that was organised to hear directly from members of professional services staff.

The PRG felt that it would have strengthened the SAR further to have:
- included more concrete specifics
- engaged in a bench marking exercise which would support a movement beyond the anecdotal to the concrete. In ensuring any such future benchmarking exercise is useful, it will be important to determine appropriate comparators in terms of size, research profile and finances.

Finally, it is important to note that as the site visit progressed, a struggle arose for the PRG. Specifically, the remit was to review the Dept of Psychology, MIC. To do this, engagement was needed with stakeholders across two faculties and two programmes. This was both interesting and challenging. It reflects an unusual position.

The challenges the PRG experienced arose from comments, and disconnects in understanding, across staff and student stakeholder cohorts in terms of the position of some students in relation to the Dept. This cascaded into multiple areas e.g. identity, career paths, understanding programme workloads and students knowing the appropriate person to whom they should refer to with immediate issues. While the PRG agreed with most of the strengths highlighted in the SCOT analysis, it felt that at this point in its development, it might be an opportune time for the Dept to reflect on its specific identity on two levels namely within the Institution and within the

national context i.e. what makes the Dept of Psychology, MIC stand out from the other Schools and Departments of Psychology in Ireland. Such reflection could consider optimal size, developing a single honours BA in Psychology and / or a one-year MA, and what the Departmental strategic aims are in terms of research profile.

The PRG felt that the opportunity to combine analysis of paper submissions with the chance to discuss issues that arose from it with stakeholders was very useful. However, paradoxes were apparent throughout the data (written documents and verbal reports) considered. The clear appreciation of connection and accessibility of informality is holding hands with frustration and confusion resulting from lack of transparency that informal communication and process promotes. The task, as the PRG sees it, is to manage balance in advancing the formalisation of structures.

The aim of the PRG was to be constructive in feedback. The purpose is not to challenge the ethos or culture of the Institution, rather to support it in developing a framework to quality assure forward movement.

Members of the PRG each took initial responsibility for certain areas of the report and site visit meetings. However, all sections of the report were finalised and agreed by the full PRG. Sections are unequal in length and some points raised are reiterated in several places across the report reflecting the occurrence of the issues throughout various points of the site-visit.

Vision, Mission, Strategy and Governance	
Commendations	
1	The Department has both a short-term and long-term vision which includes aspiration for a School of Psychology
2	The Department has a dynamic forward-looking staff body
3	The Department has evidenced strong leadership in developing departmental structures to support institutional strategic aims e.g. Dept leads for Learning and Teaching and Research
Recommendations	
1	Identify time frame for roll out of Workloads Allocation Model and Resource Allocation Model	This is a central concern that underlies many of the recommendations throughout the report. Clarify workable timelines for implementation of both WAM and RAM will enable the Dept to plan appropriately.
2	Engage the staff team in operationalising the Workloads Allocation Model	Staff have taken on various extra roles and activities in supporting the everyday functioning and development of the Dept. Tasks are qualitatively different. To ensure cohesion across staff it would be useful for the staff team to operationalise tasks / roles to determine equity across workloads.
3	Develop transparent communication processes across all programmes with which the Department is engaged	In addition to points raised earlier and in Chapter 3, clarity of communication structures and processes are needed to reduce confusion and promote the breadth of work of the Dept.
4	Consider developing a School of Psychology	In addition to points raised earlier that justify this recommendation, we would add that the effort invested in growing undergraduate numbers has been productive in terms of capacity building. It would now be opportune to grow in terms of maturing the psychology tradition within MIC. Developing a postgraduate tradition within the Dept would be a strategic way to establish the Depts identity on a national, and ultimately, international, basis. The institution has the capacity to incorporate a School with multiple programmes within its academic structures.

| 5 | Advance cohesion of the Department through consolidating the physical location of the Department | While staff have a strong sense of identity at an individual level, at times the staff cohort presented as a group of psychologists rather than as Dept of Psychology. Their identity as a Dept did not seem to translate strongly as it could within the Institution and is not supported by the fragmentation of their physical locations. The PRG suggest that Dept cohesion and academic collaboration could be enhanced as a result of consolidating the physical location of the Dept. This would further advance the Depts capacity building potential. |
| 6 | Ensure continued accreditation through securing more physical department specific space e.g. labs/ research space | The PRG felt that the facilities for lab and research could be enhanced. To support a growing Dept, and ensure continued alignment with national Psychological Society of Ireland accreditation criteria, there will be a need to build lab and research considerations into development plans. |

Organisation, Management and Staffing

Commendations

1	Faculty Offices review completed
2	Deep seated loyalty and commitment to the institution which does not hinder critical engagement with external review process
3	Incredible initiative and creativity demonstrated by staff body
4	Commitment to advancement of the Discipline through active engagement with national professional body PSI (e.g. memberships of the DATR in Psy) and academic engagement at international level e.g. editorial and review boards and external examining duties

Recommendations

1	Work with senior management to campaign for review of promotional process	Since 2012 there has been a high turn-over of staff. Indeed, it is understood that the Dept were down 4 staff members for several years. While there is a sense of ambition within the Dept, being able to capitalise on this is currently somewhat limited due to low staff morale resulting from lack of promotional prospects and progression routes.
2	Advance understanding of Institutional reward mechanisms to recognise excellence in staff contribution	Need for staff recognition awards noted at College management level but awareness of same not apparent throughout staff cohort.

3	Appropriately fund CPD for professional services staff	Appropriate funding should be available to allow Professional Services staff to engage with CPD to enhance and extend their skill sets (short courses e.g. part-time, online).
4	Develop induction training and mentoring which is specific to academic staff	Levels of induction and mentoring is available in an informal ad hoc manner. Developing an induction training policy and a mentoring policy (definition, who, how long etc) for academic staff will support staff morale, staff progression and clarity of understanding of Dept and Institutional processes.
5	Ensure implementation of recommendations from Faculty Offices Review	Maximise impact of leadership shown in undertaking Faculty Offices Review and resource investment of same through closing the loop by implementing, as appropriate, recommendations noted in the report.
6	Developing transparent structures to formalise ad hoc processes	This issue arose several times within the Institution (e.g. WAM and RAM) and within the Dept. In terms of the latter, it was clear that staff were responding to issues as they arose however it was not always clear that staff knew the formal Dept policy to follow in responding to different situations. Developing specific guidelines or policy to guide response to students in distress, academic issues, supervision guidelines and housing same in a shared folder will enhance transparency of process and advance equity throughout the Dept.
7	Review administrative support for the Dept in line with expansion needs	The current administrative support is stretched yet can manage. It is however insufficient to support expansion and development within the Dept.
8	Establish a part time teaching register	This would serve multiple functions including increasing efficiency in human resources given to this task on an annual basis as well as establishing a record of teaching collaborators and tracking progression.

Design, Content and Review of Curriculum

Commendations

1	There is a clear focus on maintaining small, and well managed, cohorts to a high academic standard.
2	Well established procedures supported by positive external examiner reports (Note: There is currently no overall external examiner for BA programme. This is addressed elsewhere in the report).
3	Recognition of the central importance of curriculum to building individual professional student identity is evident.
4	Both the SAR and discussions with students and staff evidenced the strategic importance of the UG curriculum in planning for future expansion and growth.
5	PSI accredit awards

Recommendations		
1	Recruit specifically for BA with Single Honours in psychology in order that students can become psychologists by design rather than accident	Amongst BA students, identification with the Department of Psychology seemed lacking. In part at least, this seems to be a function of curriculum design as students do not know whether they will be able to pursue a degree in psychology until after the 1st year Summer Exam Boards have concluded.
2	Avoid mixing year cohorts	Mixing of BA students across year cohorts with B.Ed. & Psychology students (who are studying for a B.Ed. with Psychology by design) exacerbates a lack of identification and a perceived feeling of inequity in relation to the Department of Psychology amongst the BA cohort.
3	Appoint someone to be responsible for distinct cohorts of students i.e. subject tutors for specific programmes Coordinate input on career development to ensure increased awareness of accredited qualifications and career mentoring re: employability. This will also help to ensure that students are aware that on completion of their programme they will have a degree that is accredited by the Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI)	B.Ed. & Psychology students expressed the view that neither the Faculty of Education nor the Department of Psychology is responsible for them. Given that these B.Ed. & Psychology students were invited to take part in the Department of Psychology Quality Review, it raised a question as to whether this lack of clarity is reflected at an institutional level? Given that these students were invited to take part in the review, the PRG feel compelled to comment even though, strictly speaking, these students may not fall under the remit of the Department of Psychology. This last point was exacerbated by the lack of a course co-ordinator.
4	Review degree structure and inequality of credit loading	Surplus credits are an issue with the B.Ed. & Psychology students. It is not clear why B.Ed. & Psychology students are required to complete more credits than B.Ed. students who in turn take more credits than BA students.
5	Engage with the student voice in formal processes around curriculum design	The voice of students is not as clear as it might be in programme design.
6	Placement provision needs to be reviewed in conjunction with associated, subject specific, learning opportunities. Incorporate classes on transferable learning opportunities stemming from placement	Students raised this issue repeatedly specifically in relation to placements being limited to an educational environment.
7	Review and align modular and credit structures with sector norms (i.e. 5 and 10 credit units in accordance with the Bologna process)	The current structure used is out of line with sector norms. This change will aid consistency and transparency across workloads as well as enabling clarity in bench marking exercises.

Teaching, Learning, Assessment and Feedback

Commendations

1	Appreciation of the importance of feedback in the learning process
2	Peer observation of teaching network
3	Diversity of assessment practices

Recommendations

1	Review policies to ensure consistent practice in relation to plagiarism, moderation and feedback (i.e. quality, timeliness, delivery). This may be enhanced by including a small number of brief Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)	There was strong awareness of these issues yet inconsistency in practice. Specifying a number of SOP will support alignment of practice.
2	Develop consistency across assessment load per module	There is a perception among students of inequity across workloads. This issue dovetails with aligning modular and credit structures with sector norms i.e. Bologna.
3	Review course work submission procedures to include consistency of practice re: hard and soft copies, submission dates / times, penalties	Currently there seems to be inconsistency in practice across the Dept (some people using Moodle, some emailing directly etc) resulting in confusion for students and increased workload for staff in managing same.
4	Ensure Student Evaluation of Teaching is resourced appropriately	This will enable staff to avail of an excellent support in a more consistent manner thereby attending to their continuing professional development needs and advancing teaching processes within the Dept.
5	Modify module satisfaction survey (MSS) and consider ways to enhance student engagement with same	Enhance usability of survey to increase student feedback.
6	Appoint an overall external examiner for the BA Degree	To ensure academic standards across the degree are consistent with the identified academic outcomes and are comparable to those achieved nationally and internationally.

The Student Experience

Commendations

1	Strong sense of pastoral care
2	Very approachable staff leading to clear knowledge of individual students and individualised responses

3	Highly motivated student body comprising cohesive cohorts	
4	Development of new Student Learning and Partnership Dialogue Charter	
5	Proactive Academic Learning Centre	
6	Growing awareness of needs of specific student populations	

Recommendations

1	Develop clear signposting to students and all staff of the range of student support services and the multiple access points	While it was evident to the PRG that there is a wide and varied range of on-campus support services for students, it was clear that there were many gaps in knowledge of same among both students and staff cohorts. All stakeholders knew that they would be able to access guidance, or guide someone to a support point, but it was often in a round-about way. Developing decision trees to help all stakeholders to identify and access the appropriate service may be useful.
2	Develop connections between student cohorts to advance identity and community across the discipline of psychology in MIC	While there was unity among different student cohorts and a sense of belonging to a particular programme, there was no sense of community between the different groups of psychology students and limited sense of belonging to a Dept. Working to enhance this will help to promote Psychology in MIC on a local and national level.
3	Ensure policy developments explicitly allow for integration of the student voice	The student body were energised, creative and committed to their study and institution. To enhance student experience in MIC, explicit steps need to be taken to ensure their voice is presented in the development of Departmental policies.
4	Consider developing peer learning / mentoring system	Students who had advanced through the system recounted experiences with which current students were struggling to grapple. Developing a peer learning or peer mentoring system could be useful in transfer of knowledge/ skill for how to deal with recurring issues, promote cohesion across different cohorts, support development of identity across the discipline of psychology in MIC and provide a voluntary activity that could complement placement.
5	Design timetable to meet needs of psychology students following decoupling of joint BA	Currently psychology is topping and tailing the timetable. This needs to be reviewed to ensure accessibility and equity across the student body.
6	Secure appropriate infrastructure to develop appropriate psychology lab space for practicals and research	To support growth and development of the Dept, expansion of lab space will be needed to ensure ability to continue to meet accreditation guidelines.

Research Activity

Commendations

1	A dedicated and enthusiastic staff group
2	Support provided to facilitate research
3	Evidence of external research activities and productive collaborations
4	Some programmes of research are clearly demonstrating impact
5	Students are performing well in research as evidenced by the number securing prizes at PSI conferences

Recommendations

1	Develop a clearly defined research strategy that identifies research priorities	Having visible, shared goals will help to coordinate staff activities, drive research and strengthen the research culture within the department.
2	Operationalise comprehensive Workloads Allocation Model to recognise the importance of research including PhD supervision	Recognising the value of research and associated activities will help to achieve equity and cohesion (in a department where teaching is currently the priority) and in so doing, will encourage staff to invest in the research agenda.
3	Foster external research collaborations to secure funding	Many staff are enthusiastic but at an early stage in their research careers. Working collaboratively with more experienced researchers external to the college will increase the likelihood of grant success.
4	Mobilise staff to conduct research by responding to the disconnects between institutional policy and practical roll out of same	A strong research culture will be established and maintained by ensuring staff are aware of the supports available to them and supporting in accessing and availing of same.
5	Develop training opportunities that will enhance the professional development of research students	Current research students are highly motivated yet somewhat isolated, requiring more support and clarity of role. While training in various elements of the PhD journey is provided, increased training opportunities and supports in relation to their tutoring and teaching roles will enhance their contribution to the research community and better prepare them for rewarding careers.
6	Ensure research activities of staff are embedded in the design of new/revised curriculum	To promote a deeper understanding of the knowledge base of the discipline, further develop the intellectual capabilities of students and foster a strong research culture in the department.

Peer Review Panel Members

Dr Maria Dempsey, Lecturer, School of Applied Psychology, UCC

Dr Maria Dempsey is a counselling psychologist and lecturer in the School of Applied Psychology, UCC. She is Chair of CACSSS Student Experience Committee. She previously held the position of Assistant Dean for Student Affairs at UCC from 2003-2006. Her research interests include Adolescent Sexuality; Teenage Pregnancy, Parenting, Reflective Teaching & Learning, and Mental health. Since 1997, she has been engaged in work with colleagues from Applied Social Studies, Education and Adult & Continuing Education on Reflective Teaching & Learning. The objectives of their work focuses on developing knowledge, teaching materials and assessment procedures to support reflective learning on professional education courses.

Professor Melanie Giles, Professor of Psychology, Ulster University

Professor Melanie Giles is a Professor of Psychology and Head of School at Ulster University. She is also a Chartered Psychologist and a registered health practitioner with the HCPC. Her main research interests are in the area of attitudes, specifically the attitude-behaviour relationship and attitude change. Melanie also has a keen interest in the scholarship of learning and teaching and has led a number of research projects focused on student engagement, employability and peer mentoring. She is a trained PASS/SI Supervisor affiliated to the UK National PASS Network and is responsible for the introduction of the PASS peer-mentoring scheme at Ulster. She is also a member of the Academic Peer Learning Leadership Forum and is currently chair of a special interest group focused on research and evaluation. She is a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy and a Fellow of the Centre for Higher Education Research Practice.

Dr R. Stephen Walsh, Senior Lecturer in Psychology, Manchester Metropolitan University

Dr R. Stephen Walsh, is a Senior Lecturer in Psychology at the Department of Psychology, Manchester Metropolitan University. His primary research interest is the application of a social identity approach to the study of health and well-being, particularly in the context of Acquired Brain Injury and other chronic conditions. Stephen's PhD was funded by the Irish Research Council and was undertaken in the Department of Psychology, University of Limerick. He is conducting ongoing, funded, research with Future Directions Community Interest Company. Future Directions CIC is a leading, high quality social care provider for people with learning disabilities and complex needs in the North West of England. This research includes a focus on positive behavioural support, identity, and engagement in meaningful activity.

Mr Pádraig Murphy, Vice President, MIC Students Union

Pádraig Murphy is the Vice President and Academic Officer of MIC Students Union. Pádraig is completing his BA in History and English at MIC.