Quality Improvement Plan

Department of English
April 2022

RECOMMENDATIONS

The PRG supports the Draft Improvement Plan to relaunch the Peer Tutoring scheme.			
The PRG commends the Department's collaboration with Kildare County Council on the Writer-in- Residence initiative and is of the view that this should be continued and developed further where possible.			
Objective and Commentary **High**/**Med**/**Low** priority	**Action Year 1 (2021-2022)**	**Action Year 2 (2022-2023)**	**Action Year 3 (2023-2024)**
U1[1]-Re-launch Peer Tutoring as identified in self-assessment report (SAR), Draft Quality Improvement Plan (QIP), and supported by Peer-Review Group (hereafter PRG).		a) Discuss with Assoc Dean for T&L avenues for support and identification of Dept peer-tutoring as best practice. b) Risk analysis in light of ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. c) Commence planning with Teaching and Learning for financial supports for Department-level peer tutoring.	a) Aim to reinstate Peer-tutoring.

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[1] *Note that the Peer Review Group (PRG) did not assign recommendations to the department or the institution. The Department have however categorised each recommendation as falling within their remit (numbered U1-U18) or falling within the Institution's remit (numbered S1- S3).*

U2-Develop Writer in Residency (W-i-R) Programmes as recommended by PRG.	a) Commence inaugural Arts Council Writer in Residence programme.	b) Enhance W-i-R integration in whole Dept and clarify contribution to new MA in Creative Writing programme and BA English and Creative Writing (en-train).	

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Recommendation No. 5.3.1.1. Undergraduate student recruitment			
• The Department should take a step back to look at its offering in the first 4 weeks, when students are deciding; how to frontload the excitement of studying English? • There is potential for developing new subject streams, e.g. Creative Writing as independent first year subject (15 ECTS); Film and Media Studies — or other collaborations. It is noted, however, that current FTE allocation models may impede such collaborations.			
Objective and Commentary High/Med/Low priority	Action Year 1 (2021-2022)	Action Year 2 (2022-2023)	Action Year 3 (2023-2024)
U3-Improve undergraduate student retention and recruitment as recommended by PRG.	a) Nominate Outreach Team to commence 2022-23 (Whole Dept). b) Plan Semester 1 2022-23 schools visits. c) Review first 4-weeks of EN101 and EN106 to "frontload the excitement of studying English" as recommended by peer-review report (EN101 and EN106 coordinators).	a) Orientation for each year group, introducing the curriculum and teaching team. b) End of year presentations to cohorts introducing following year's curriculum. c) Develop Dept supports for leaving-cert curriculum; possible webinars and/or other digital materials.	a) Reflect on engagement with schools in terms of "shop window" of first-year English.

	d) Task group to discuss mechanisms for improving attendance and participation across the degree programme.	d) Task group to capture in-class experiential learning and to develop text that can be used on website and in marketing/recruitment materials as well as to encourage attendance. e) Add film studies/adaptations to 102 module description.	
U4-Develop new subject streams as recommended by PRG.		a) Head of Dept (HoD) to lay out English and Creative Writing degree pathway in consultation with Department and the Dean. b) Reflect on teaching needs and strategic priorities of Dept, with a view to FTEs.	c) Implement new BA in Creative Writing and English. d) In January 2024 academic planning, seek new permanent post in English, in light of Year 2 strategy b.

Recommendation No. 5.3.1.2.
Undergraduate curriculum

- Monitor the effectiveness of the current progression structure from second to third year and ensure diversity of content.
- Ensure that permanent staff are responsible as module convenors — or at least allocated to take over when a fixed-term or occasional staff member has concluded the contract.
- Review allocations of core teaching so that all permanent staff contribute over time (not necessarily each year); see also Recommendation on Sabbatical research leave below.
- Where there is tutorial support for 2nd and 3rd year elective optional modules, but not for core modules, we recommend that the Department consider re-distributing that tutorial support, so that some tutorials are available for both core and elective modules. This may, of course,

result in a reduction of the tutorial support currently allocated to elective modules, but would allow all modules to benefit over a period.
- It is standard good practice for each module to be evaluated; the Department must put such student evaluation procedures in place.

Objective and Commentary High/Med/Low priority	Action Year 1 (2021-2022)	Action Year 2 (2022-2023)	Action Year 3 (2023-2024)
U5-Monitor effectiveness of curriculum progression structure as identified by PRG.	a) Seek targeted response on Year 1-2-3 curriculum progression structure from external examiners in spring 2022. b) Identify skills progression at 1-2-3 year and prepare these for 2022-23 academic year course materials. Include these skills reviews/objectives in Year Group Orientations/Exits. Also include in introductory and concluding lectures for each module.	c) Plan for introduction of tutorials to core modules at 2nd year as a pilot for 2023-24. d) Census of module content to ensure breadth and diversity of writers and topics.	e) Implement tutorials to pilot modules 2023-24. Reflective exercise in 2025-26 on the effectiveness of tutorials.
U6-Module Convenors.	In planning for 2022-23 ensure all modules are convened by a long-term member of staff.	Continue to ensure all modules are convened by a long-term member of staff.	Continue to ensure all modules are convened by a long-term member of staff.
U7-Allocation of core teaching.	Review allocation of core teaching since 2019.	Consult staff on contribution to core teaching across the degree and make adjustments to 2023-24 for a fixed period, e.g. 3 years.	Implement new teaching rota.
U8-Implement Student Evaluations for all modules as identified as best practice by PRG.	a) Use standard module evaluations in Moodle as a baseline.	b) Consider developing bespoke Department module evaluations to be used in all modules.	c) Ensure module evaluations continue to be implemented as standard best practice

			across all modules in the Dept.

Recommendation No. 5.3.1.3. **Postgraduate recruitment**			
• The MA programmes (Literatures of Engagement and Cultures of Migration) should be aggressively marketed, with help from the Graduate Studies Office and University Communications Office. • The PRG notes the clear reluctance on the part of some staff to recruit research students on the basis of ethical concerns in relation to the current academic career pipeline. However, those students who are in the Department require a vibrant research community of peers; PhD researchers bring fresh energies and ideas to any academic department; the Department relies on PhD students to teach first-year tutorials and assist with high marking burdens; and PhD supervision is usually deemed crucial to career progression for permanent staff. The PRG endorses current structures for enhancing employability of Postgraduate Research students and urges the Department to develop and enhance the ideas articulated in the draft quality improvement plan. The University Research Office should resume anonymous peer reviewing for IRC applications.			
Objective and Commentary **High/Med/Low priority**	**Action Year 1** **(2021-2022)**	**Action Year 2** **(2022-2023)**	**Action Year 3** **(2023-2024)**
U9-Market MA programmes "aggressively" as recommended by PRG.	a) Develop new marketing materials for MA in Literatures of Engagement and Creative Writing MA (SWAY as baseline). b) Market MA programmes at May 2022 MU Arts Festival.	a) Develop / Capture MA cohorts' experience to develop marketing materials, with support from Communications. b) Review social media engagements, aim to link with public conversations and debates. c) Collaborate with students on social media content. d) Use mainstream media outlines to tie-in to the curriculum.	

		e) Consider developing podcast series based on MA guests/expertise.	
U10-Develop and Enhance PhD Recruitment as recommended by PRG, and outlined in SAR and Draft QIP.	a) Review actions outlined in Draft QIP and identify resources needed.	a) Establish annual PhD symposium b) Lay groundwork for short internships/placements possibly in collaboration with University. c) Continue offering career development opportunities through the Department based structured PhD modules.	a) Implement internships/placements. b) Continue PhD symposium.
U11-University should resume anonymous reviewing of Irish Research Council (IRC) applications.	a) Dept requested University re-instatement of anonymous reviewing of IRC applications. University response was that an increase in applications made the workload centrally unfeasible.	a) Advocate at Faculty level for University re-instatement of anonymous reviewing of IRC applications.	

RESEARCH

Recommendation No. 5.3.2.1. Research Identity			
• We commend the Department's diversification of its research portfolio while retaining existing strengths in Irish Studies. It is clear, however, that there is still some tension between those who identify them- selves according to different research clusters. It is equally clear to the PRG that there should not be an either/or perception of the Department; rather, an embracing of the range of research strengths (for example, gender and sexuality, non-Western literatures, Irish literature, early modern). The two new MA programmes (Literatures of Engagement and Cultures of Migration) clearly identify two unifying research strands: politically engaged criticism and literatures of migration. This can be the bedrock of an inclusive articulation of the Department's research identity.			
Objective and Commentary High/Med/Low **priority**	**Action Year 1 (2021-2022)**	**Action Year 2 (2022-2023)**	**Action Year 3 (2023-2024)**
U12-Research Identity.	a) Use internal department research events to highlight the diversity of research in the Dept and to develop dialogues between colleagues working on similar themes in areas that are generally regarded separately (e.g. due to historical period or geography). b) Use social media to celebrate the Dept's many research successes, to buttress the public recognition of the Dept as producing the best in research. See also recommendation 5.3.3.4.	a) Re-launch Dept research seminars on campus to share the Dept's research with the wider University. b) Continue Coffee Conversations as an internal Dept event to solidify research environment.	a) Continue internal and external research events, ensuring a diversity of speakers and topics.

Recommendation No. 5.3.2.2.
Sabbatical research leave
• There is no doubt that clear periods of research leave are absolutely essential for Humanities researchers, for whom the sole-authored monograph remains the gold standard of research impact and achievement. Maynooth's current system (whereby staff must take a pay cut, which pays for replacement teaching) is anomalous in the sector and inequitable, breaching standard EDI principles. The standard is a semester's leave after three years or, less typically, a year's leave after six years. However, it is not usual in the sector that the teaching of a staff member on sabbatical leave is fulfilled by a paid replacement; this latter model occurs when external funding has been awarded. It is crucial that a better system be devised to support substantial periods of research leave that support specific research projects. This will enhance and improve research outputs across the board. We recommend the Department find ways to devise an equitable research leave system: e.g. build core teaching around permanent staff, so that they can swap in and out, covering for each other (this will also underpin the sustainability of those core modules) and allow for elective modules to be dropped when convenor is on sabbatical; frontload/condense teaching into one semester in order to clear up another; rotate modules so that they can be taught by multiple staff members.

Objective and Commentary High/Med/Low priority	Action Year 1 (2021-2022)	Action Year 2 (2022-2023)	Action Year 3 (2023-2024)
S1-Review Sabbatical Entitlement as advised by PRG.	a) Bring to the attention of Senior Management the PRG's feedback that "Maynooth's current system…is anomalous in the sector and inequitable, breaching standard EDI principles."	a) Map rota for research leave entitlement and review with ref to allocation of core modules (discussed in 5.3.1.2). b) Map rota for teaching-free semester in light of allocation of core modules.	a) Aim to implement teaching-free semester, which is separate to research leave in that the staff member will be expected to otherwise fulfil administrative and postgraduate supervisory commitments.

| U13-Ensure fair and equitable administrative loads that also support staff goals in career progression. | a) Map out current administrative roles and durations (e.g. 3 years with review and option to extend to 5 years).
 b) Discuss additional administrative roles as needed (e.g. Outreach Officer, Research Coordinator). | a) Review annually staff administrative roles for effectiveness and workload.
 b) Review staff teaching distribution across the year and aim to have a teaching-free semester for all staff each year for colleagues who wish to avail of it. Other colleagues may prefer the same, fair distribution across 2 semesters due to their own working practices. | |

Recommendation No. 5.3.2.3.
Research funding.

- We understand that support is available from the University Research Office around making funding applications and this should be availed of more proactively.
- There should be greater awareness and uptake of the annual research travel grant available to staff: https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/bursar/payments-office/academic-travel-grant.

Objective and Commentary High/Med/Low priority	Action Year 1 (2021-2022)	Action Year 2 (2022-2023)	Action Year 3 (2023-2024)
U14-Support Staff Knowledge of University Research Funds as advised by PRG.	a) Nominate (Whole Dept) Staff Research Coordinator to commence 2022-23.	a) Staff Research Coordinator serves as link with the Research Development Office (RDO) to communicate University funding opportunities, including the travel fund, to all staff including short-term contract staff.	

Recommendation No. 5.3.2.4.
Research outputs
• The data provided suggest that there has been a drop-off in research output. The Department should devise a strategy that supports long-term research projects and production of monographs and peer- reviewed journals.

o Strategies might include: a new system to sustain sabbatical research leave; better strategising of publications by pitching monograph chapters at journals as the monograph is drafted; inter- nationalisation of target presses and journals; internationalisation of research networks; pitching of journal special issues. We note that many, though not all, journals publish accepted versions of articles online, which can radically reduce the time lag between acceptance and publication, and that this is increasing across the sector.
o Ensure comprehensive research data are entered to RIS by individual staff.

Objective and Commentary **High**/**Med**/**Low** priority	Action Year 1 (2021-2022)	Action Year 2 (2022-2023)	Action Year 3 (2023-2024)
U15-Research outputs.	a) Encourage staff to log all publications in the Research Information System (RIS). b) Institute work-in-progress workshops to develop peer-reviewed articles and monograph projects. c) Make recommendations for research leave and teaching-free semesters, discussed above.	a) Implement RIS training for all staff. b) Continue to develop departmental mentoring supports for work in progress. c) Host research event with University Press editors to discuss pitching and proposals.	a) RIS training for new staff and refresher courses. b) Continue work-in-progress supports.

GOVERNANCE

Recommendation No. 5.3.3.1.			
Support structures for Head of Department (HoD)			
• Support structures for the HoD should be revisited			
o We recommend that a Deputy HoD be appointed on a rotating basis.			
o Systematic and effective institutional support and training should be provided to all HoDs.			
Objective and Commentary **High/Med/Low priority**	**Action Year 1 (2021-2022)**	**Action Year 2 (2022-2023)**	**Action Year 3 (2023-2024)**
U16-Support for HoD as advised by PRG.	a) Where University does not allow for Deputy Head of Dept, appoint a nominated Head in Lieu which rotates annually. b) HoD attended leadership training provided to new Heads.	a) Succession Planning for HoD including use of SharePoint for Dept documents, archiving of non-confidential emails related to administration, advance planning of teaching/leave rotas as discussed above. b) HoD continues to attend leadership and management workshops as offered by MU.	

Recommendation No. 5.3.3.2. Mentoring			
• There are insufficient mentoring systems in place, for the HoD as well as individual members of staff. A good mentoring scheme would support staff in making strategic decisions about their work over the course of the academic year, as well as over 3–5 years. This is about more than workload; it encompasses inclusion, the belief that one is centrally contributing to the Department's work and belonging. The Faculty and University should initiate such a scheme, in which mentors should be based in other parts of the University			
Objective and Commentary High/Med/Low priority	Action Year 1 (2021-2022)	Action Year 2 (2022-2023)	Action Year 3 (2023-2024)
S2-Enable mentoring for all staff.	a) Discuss roll-out of University mentoring programme to all staff who wish to avail of it.		

Recommendation No. 5.3.3.3. Internal department structures and clarity of decision making			
• The terms of reference for existing Working Groups should be revisited to ensure clarity of decision-making and communication. • Systems should be designed to ensure that the decisions informed by the Working Group are agreed on by the entire Department			
Objective and Commentary High/Med/Low priority	Action Year 1 (2021-2022)	Action Year 2 (2022-2023)	Action Year 3 (2023-2024)
U17-Improve internal Dept structures.		a) In semester 1 Develop terms of reference for working groups as advised by PRG. Terms to be drafted by HoD and brought to Dept for discussion and approval.	

Recommendation No. 5.3.3.4. Communication and cohesion			
• Ongoing attempts to produce shared strategic goals in the Department need to be developed further.			
Objective and Commentary **High**/**Med**/**Low** priority	**Action Year 1 (2021-2022)**	**Action Year 2 (2022-2023)**	**Action Year 3 (2023-2024)**
U18-Enhance communication and cohesion as advised by PRG.	a) Workshop held to discuss identity and directions for the Dept; discussion from workshop used to inform planning in QIP and other Dept activities. b) All staff encouraged to propose sessions and speakers for Dept research seminar series; two discussion meetings held to achieve maximum input.	a) Continue taking a collaborative approach to research seminar series planning. b) Hold at least one staff meeting monthly during term-time. c) Ensure Dept meetings allow for discussion and that agreement is minuted to highlight where consensus is achieved.	

Recommendation No. 5.3.3.5. Succession planning			
• We recommend that succession planning be explicitly addressed as part of the new Department strategic plan.			
Objective and Commentary **High**/**Med**/**Low** priority	**Action Year 1 (2021-2022)**	**Action Year 2 (2022-2023)**	**Action Year 3 (2023-2024)**
S3- Implement Succession Planning as advised by PRG.	a) Discussed in U16 (see recommendation 5.3.3.1).		