

**Department of History
Quality Improvement Plan 2021**

Section 1: Unit details

<i>Dates of Peer Review Visit</i>	19-23 April 2021
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Section 2: Sign off.


<i>Stage of QIP (Draft/Final)</i>	Final	
<i>Head of Unit (NAME):</i> David Lederer	<i>Signature:</i> 	<i>Date:</i> 17.02.2022


Section 3: Response to Recommendations of Peer Review Group


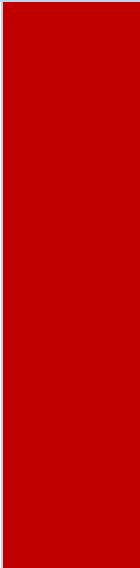
Level of Priority



High	Medium	Lower
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Item No.	PRG Recommendation	Departmental Comments	Proposed Action	Priority
U1	<p>U.1 The Review Group recommends very strongly that the Department should articulate a strategic vision document (a ‘5-year plan’), in which it articulates how the Department intends to position itself in a rapidly evolving national and global context. Will the Department build on its past/existing research strengths or will it move into new directions?</p>	<p><i>The Department recognises the need for a strategic vision document. Such a document need not encompass a mechanical plan, but instead should leave the Department generous tactical latitude to react to national and sectoral exigencies. Initial discussions at Departmental level identified three key strategic concerns:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. UG retention into 2nd Year History 2. Taught MA Programmes 3. Grant Capture 	<p><i>As in other departments, these key strategic issues can be addressed in committee - 1 in the T&L Committee, 2 in the Research Committee and 3 in the Finance Committee. The document should articulate a future direction, based upon the recommendations of the Peer Review Group (PRG) above. It is proposed that each committee should compose a document on their specific area and then all three documents be presented to a Committee of Strategy for collation and further discussion. The overall timetable should continue in tandem with the University’s Strategic Plan over the next 15-18 months.</i></p> <p><i>The-vision plan is reviewed at the start of each academic year thereafter.</i></p>	


	<p>U1.2 Such a discussion should precede any potential senior appointment, if such an appointment is what the university / Faculty / Department feel is the best way forward to give the department more coherence / fresh ideas / a better chance at grant capture at the national and international level. If such an appointment is being made, it should be informed by the Department's strategic vision</p>	<p><i>Negotiations for a senior appointment have been underway for some months.</i></p>	<p><i>Secure appointment through ongoing negotiations with the Dean and the President.</i></p>	
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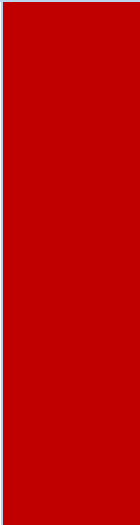
<p>U2</p>	<p>The Department Research Committee could consider broadening its remit to lead interactions with the University Research and Development Office to ensure that funding opportunities are efficiently communicated to History staff. It could also play an increased role in staff development through peer-to-peer critique of grant applications and research publications.</p>	<p><i>Circular emails reach all staff directly and, in so far as the University Research Development Office (URDO) is aware of them, opportunities are communicated. The URDO tends to focus on large national framework funding (SFI, IRC, etc.). The Department does not have either financial or human resources to conduct these activities on a formal basis. Universities with great success in this area offer significant Institutional supports. Members of department have neither the level of experience, nor resources nor expertise to peer support large grant capture. Collegiality and spontaneity are important to maintain a healthy and critical research culture. The departmental PG seminar already offers colleagues a forum for peer critique. Peers could present successful results at departmental meetings, where these are not already dominated by bureaucratic and administrative business.</i></p>	<p><i>The Departmental Research Committee (DRC) will make the URDO aware of specialist possibilities in History and insist of better support both in terms of grant preparation and review. At the departmental level, informal collegial structures for critique of research publications are already in place and perhaps more useful.</i></p> <p><i>The URDO and Director of the Director of Arts & Humanities Institute (AHI) should be invited to address the Department, annually for updates.</i></p> <p><i>The Department will actively engage in the range of actions established as part of the Faculty's Athena Swan Action plan (under item 5.3.3) to encourage and support colleagues in applying for external funding.</i></p>	
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<p>U3</p>	<p>While the Department enjoys excellent administrative support, it lacks an actual concise ‘handbook’ that new HoDs and new staff can access, meaning there is a heavy dependence upon individual Departmental knowledge: if a key staff member leaves or retires, it leaves a significant knowledge gap. The team recommends that a handbook be created, to ensure that incoming HoDs have a continually updated resource to pass to their successor.</p>	<p><i>There is an extant version of the staff Handbook (2019) which requires updating.</i></p>	<p><i>Update Staff Handbook.</i></p>	
<p>U4</p>	<p>To encourage retention, student peers at years 2 and 3 should present to first years on their experiences of levels 2 and 3 modules, before they make their year 2 choices.</p>	<p><i>See also U1 above.</i></p> <p><i>Undergraduate retention into 2nd year History identified as a strategic priority within the department. However, an ongoing and detailed analysis actually reveals a very healthy state of affairs, one which is confirmed at faculty level.</i></p>	<p><i>Although some Universities favour undergraduates advising undergraduates, our department can avail of taught MA students already integrated into the first-year programme as tutors. PG Students are more effective and reliable sources of information on second- year choices. In the future, tutors will be asked to integrate short information sessions into tutorials to address students on their experiences; impact to be monitored.</i></p> <p><i>The First-Year Core Course lecturers will allow visits from lecturers of second year options during the second semester.</i></p>	

<p>U5</p>	<p>U5.1 It was clear from our meetings that a productive and generous mentoring system operates at various levels of the Department. This is however an informal arrangement, which needs to be formalised, and geared to mentoring staff in their career progression.</p>	<p><i>As the PRG correctly notes, there are already productive and generous mentoring systems operating at various levels of the Department. Since the start of 2020, the Faculty operates an Early Career Mentoring Scheme in which some colleagues in the Department are participants. This is open to all new colleagues employed on a contract basis and is year-long. For other female colleagues who are permanent members of staff, there are opportunities to participate in more advanced mentoring schemes including Aurora and PAA (Preparing for Academic Advancement) organised via HR Learning & Development.</i></p> <p><i>It is proposed, as part of the Faculty Athena Swan action plan (item 5.3.1) that the Early Career Mentoring Scheme is extended to include a Mid-Career Mentoring Scheme.</i></p>	<p><i>In the future, the department will specifically assign each new member a named informal mentor to introduce them into the procedures of the departmental procedures, e.g. marking schemes, curriculum, support mechanisms, etc. Guidelines should appear in the revised Staff handbook (see U3 above).</i></p> <p><i>Given the complexity of a developing a mentoring scheme to advise colleagues on professional development, the Department currently lacks the resources to operate a plan of professional development without material support from HR.</i></p> <p><i>In relation to the development of a Mid-Career Mentoring Scheme, the Department will actively promote engagement with this programme when it is made available.</i></p>	
	<p>U5.2 HR should be involved in creating a structured series of supports that advance individual career and publishing plans and help staff to prepare for promotion. Such a scheme will support the Department, and the University, in their Athena Swan applications.</p>	<p><i>The re-energisation of the Performance Management Development System (PMDS) scheme is in discussion at the Faculty/University level with input from HR. In its previous iteration, it enabled senior colleagues to professionally advise junior colleagues at the Departmental level.</i></p>	<p><i>The Department will respond to any new Faculty/University guidelines for the reintroduction of the PMDS.</i></p>	


<p>U6</p>	<p>A pressing concern for staff at all levels is the absence of a fair and transparent Workload Allocation Model. At present, workloads are organised through one-to-one conversations between the HoD and staff and based substantially on units of teaching hours rather than class size, marking burden, and other important factors. We recommend that the Department devises a light touch model that maps research, teaching and administrative responsibilities over time, and that colleagues understand how tasks are allocated across the Department. It is important that all staff are involved in discussions as to how allocations within the model are weighted, and the process should be transparent.</p> <p><i>Additional PRG Comment</i> Advice should be sought from HR in terms of task-weighting.</p>	<p><i>Workload Allocation Models (WAMs) are currently under discussion at the Faculty and University levels. The Department operates an informal model.</i></p>	<p><i>The Department will respond to WAMs presented to it from the University and Faculty.</i></p> <p><i>Since the draft PRG, a departmental working group was established to review WAMs within the Department to consider the recommendations of the PRG. The group is tasked with developing a ‘light-touch’ WAM by soliciting recommendations from colleagues and liaising with the University via the Faculty. It is engaged in the production of a document for departmental discussion by the end of the current academic year.</i></p> <p><i>Any resulting policy changes can be integrated into the updated Staff Handbook (see U3 above).</i></p>	
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<p>U7</p>	<p>The panel recognises the unique and valuable work done by the Centre in its promotion of research into historic Irish houses. The relationship between the Centre, Maynooth University Library and the OPW Maynooth Archive and Research Centre (OMARC) at Castletown is highly beneficial. The panel would like to recommend that the History department explores the possibilities of developing work-place internships in co-operation with OMARC. This may enable some History students to gain practical experience of the types of work and career that they can pursue on the completion of their degree.</p>	<p><i>The Centre for the study of Historic Irish Houses and Estates (CSHIHE) will continue collaboration with OMARC and explore internships, as well as consolidating its position as a world leader in Irish country house studies through national and international collaborations.</i></p>	<p><i>The History Department will continue to work with OMARC in developing possibilities for internships. The CSHIHE will consolidate its unique dimension within the department and institution, and its position as a world leader in country house studies, through its important collaborative work with national and international third level institutions in Britain and Europe, as well as with state bodies and other stakeholders. It will do this through annual international conferences, workshops, seminars, publications, engagement with the media, and fundraising.</i></p> <p><i>The post of Deputy Director, appointed by the Head of Department (HoD) in consultation with the Centre Director, has been established to provide short-term continuity.</i></p>	
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<p>S1</p>	<p>The timetabling of History modules against equally popular subjects including Business and Criminology has been confirmed as having a negative impact on the retention of History students at level 2. The panel accepts that it presents challenges to central timetabling but recommends that there be an examination of the broader impact of timetabling on student choice (through student surveys), and on whether alternative timetabling might be possible.</p>	<p><i>Timetabling is recognised by several departments at Faculty level as a strategic issue. Ultimately, this issue is one for Academic Council (AC), but immediately requires collective action at the Faculty on repositioning.</i></p>	<p><i>A review panel at Faculty Executive has been recommended to examine combinable subjects and allow departments to locate themselves in subject groups, with recommendations for AC.</i></p>	
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<p>S2</p>	<p>The approach to sabbaticals and research leave in the Department and the University as a whole is not supportive of one of the core duties of academics. It is an unusual and onerous approach to require staff to fund their own research leave. The panel recommends that a University-funded sabbatical system should be available to support research-active staff.</p> <p>We further recommend that the Department consider how the benefits of online learning technology can be used in a structured way to support research activity, through releasing staff from wholly campus based, face-to-face teaching. Student responses to the panel confirm an appetite for ongoing blended learning, that can be creatively used to reduce individual teaching loads while maintaining the quality of the student experience.</p> <p><i>Additional PRG Comment</i></p> <p>The group recognises that grants for funded leave are far more plentiful in STEM subjects than in the Humanities & Social Sciences, leaving H&SS staff struggling to secure research time free of teaching and administrative duties. The University should</p>	<p><i>Issues of sabbatical leave, while outside of departmental control, are frequently discussed at the Faculty Executive (FE) and AC. Informal arrangements between colleagues, while helpful, are no replacement for university research support. Within the Department, a re-evaluation of research culture is facilitated and grant capture has become a strategic focus. In the wake of COVID, avenues for the exploitation of online learning are being explored through discussions at Standing Committee for Teaching & Learning Committee and Departmental meetings. Staff are also participating in University events (e.g. Advancing Digital Pedagogy at Maynooth University, 10 Nov. 2021). We are open to exploring digital possibilities but remain committed to in-person, on campus teaching as our preferred option. The Department remains very attuned to and responsive to feedback from History students through dialogue via our Staff-student committee and through communication with Maynooth Students' Union (MSU) in relation to online delivery of programmes and other matters related to Teaching and Learning. Staff/PG Student RIF procedures are being developed, though there are no fiscal reassurances for coming years and budget surpluses are now regularly removed from the Department.</i></p>	<p><i>The reinforcement of grant capture as part of the Department's research culture will be emphasized as part of annual consultations with the HoD. The Finance Committee will develop mechanisms distributing Research Incentivisation Funds (RIFs) and incentivised support for grant capture from departmental, rather than University budget - but this can only be undertaken on a short-term basis, subject to the Department's available resources, and is no replacement for a fully funded sabbatical scheme. The Faculty Research Committee, with two History representatives (including the Chair) will advocate for fully funded sabbaticals.</i></p>	
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<p>consider the introduction of competitive, centrally funded Research Fellowships for Arts & Social Science scholars that would allow recipients to go on leave with full pay if their application has been successful. While such a scheme would not fully address the issue it would be of benefit to some. Centrally organized research support for Humanities scholars are currently limited. More supports for grant writing and fellowship applications would strengthen the Department's ability to compete for such grants both nationally and internationally. The Humanities Research Institute could have a role here in supporting the department.</p>			
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<p>S3</p>	<p>The History Department is exceptionally well supported by its professional administrators. However, the opportunities for promotion of professional staff is limited, and available for practical purposes to those who apply for posts at a more senior grade in other Departments. This ensures the loss of invaluable departmental knowledge, as well as the burden for that staff member in adapting to a completely different department structure. Promotional opportunities to higher grades must be available to staff without having to leave their Department.</p> <p>Additional PRG Comment Promotion/ Career Progressions of administrative staff: The current system which obliges administrative staff to leave their department position and move to a new department in order to apply for promotion should be addressed at University level. Substantive Departmental knowledge and experience is lost when support staff are obliged to move in order to secure promotion, to say nothing of those individuals having to leave departments they are happy in, and where they have built up strong working relationships.</p>	<p><i>The Department supports enhanced opportunities for promotion, particularly for administrative staff, who are now represented on Faculty and University boards and are included in Athena Swan. However, while alignment is being sought at University level, a main avenue of promotion available to administrative staff is still through lateral movement, which can result in considerable discontinuities.</i></p> <p><i>The Department welcomes the provision made in the Faculty Athena Swan action plan (item 5.4.1) to enhance and develop training for administrative, technical and professional (ATP) staff.</i></p>	<p><i>The Department recommends that the University Executive review promotion opportunities for administrative staff. Like many issues raised in the PRG, this is a University rather than Departmental issue.</i></p> <p><i>The department will also endeavour to provide administrative staff with time to expand their portfolio of roles within the department through University ATP training offerings.</i></p> <p><i>All efforts to enhance and develop training for ATP staff as part of the Faculty Athena Swan process will be engaged with actively by the Department.</i></p>	
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S4	<p>Decision making in general and succession planning in particular appear to be very slow at University level, and this is a situation that predates the Covid pandemic. There are significant benefits in selecting future Heads of Department more swiftly and allowing an adequate period of induction and training for an incoming Head of Department to appreciate the systems and processes which they will require. HoD training should precede appointment rather than lag months or years after they assume the role.</p>	<p><i>Lines of Communication with the Dean and the Registrar are well open and to be highly commended.</i></p> <p><i>Direct/improved lines of Communications with the Finance/Bursar's Office, the Communications Office and the International Office are needed in order to receive timely responses on staffing issues, to clarify the Departmental budget, to facilitate public announcements and/or make improvements to the Departmental website and to assist international students in difficulties. Overall, the accountability of administrative units to academic departments requires review.</i></p> <p><i>Induction for HoDs should occur prior to their taking up post. It is generally recognised that greater incentives for serving as HoD are needed.</i></p>	<p><i>In line with discussions for improving induction processes for staff, their timing, etc. (as outlined for S5 below), discussions will also provide for early provision of induction programmes for new heads of department to ensure that new heads are made familiar with university processes and practices well in advance rather than after taking up the post.</i></p>	
S5	<p>The University's HR Department, supported by the history Department</p>	<p><i>We acknowledge that steps have been taken by HR to disseminate information to</i></p>	<p><i>The Department will request that HR develops a welcome packet and a</i></p>	

<p>must improve its induction for new staff. Current processes are perceived as imparting a bewildering array of rules that central administration requires. As the University diversifies incoming staff may have little general knowledge of processes in Ireland, and in addition to navigating a new job, they have to acquire knowledge of Irish tax, social security, health insurance, accommodation, childcare, and school systems among other issues. These problems may be especially acute for staff on short term contracts. A simple contact point and handbook from HR might make the early experience less stressful. This need not be onerous but should be an engaged and serious commitment from HR, and more than a collection of weblinks.</p> <p><i>Additional PRG Comment</i> Current induction was perceived as “compliance based”, and as imparting a bewildering array of rules set by central administration. New staff reported that much was irrelevant or tangential to their needs, especially in cases where staff were new to Ireland as well as to Maynooth. They requested that this process needs to become user oriented</p>	<p><i>new staff members via Moodle. However, new staff have expressed a need for more individualised guidance and information on issues including Irish taxation practices, childcare supports in the University, etc. As part of hiring and induction, this has not always kept up with the growth of the University or changes in society. It should be recognised that carers face additional burdens.</i></p> <p><i>The inclusion in the Faculty Athena Swan action plan (item 5.1.1) of a commitment to increase engagement by staff members in induction and orientation programmes is welcomed as a means of ensuring that all new staff members engage with systems put in place to support their integration into university life and its operations.</i></p> <p><i>HR needs to facilitate earlier advertisement of academic positions to be filled rather than waiting until later in the year. Hiring someone in July to start work in September is not conducive to good induction.</i></p>	<p><i>welcome seminar, with a tour of campus and North Kildare/Dublin and explanations of various schemes and programmes (travel scheme, bike to work, carer provisions, pension provisions, mortgage and loan provisions, etc.) and see that it is made available to incoming staff. However, please note S4 above.</i></p>	
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S6	<p>Routine decisions regarding extra-Departmental matters need to be communicated to department and individuals more quickly by central administration and/or the University executive as appropriate. Staff reported frustration at the occasional lapse in time between decision-making at a higher level, and staff being informed of those decisions.</p>	<p><i>See S4. Above. The University needs to do better to keep lines of communications more open and create a greater sense of transparency, especially with administrative units on which the Department depends like the Finance Office/Bursar's Office, HR, the Communications Office and the International Office. Just as there is ever greater oversight of academic Departments, accountability for administrative units must keep pace.</i></p>	<p><i>Continued engagement at FE and AC for more effective liaisons between faculty and administrative units.</i></p>	
S7	<p>Promotions and Senior Staff: The decline in numbers of staff at the highest professorial level is of concern to the department but calls for promotion at this level are infrequent (the most recent being in 2015). This infrequency of is out of step with national and international universities, as is the lack of clarity as to when the next call will be. University management should address this issue and regularise it.</p>	<p><i>This situation has been partly resolved. The University Executive (UE) is currently engaged in a review of promotion procedures, but as was noted at a recent Faculty of Arts, Celtic Studies, and Philosophy (FACSP) meeting, a repetition of the results of the promotion board to professor level B (with no professor B promotions within the Faculty in 2020) cannot be allowed. Infrequencies in promotion rounds at Professor A, as well as promotion rounds in general since 2008 need to be avoided as a matter of extreme urgency as they are a substantial threat to morale.</i></p>	<p><i>Constant repetition at all University forums.</i></p>	

	<p><i>Additional PRG Comment</i></p> <p>The appointment of a new Chair in the Department has significant implications for its future direction and strategic plans. There are differences in the University and Department perspectives on the ideal profile for this post, with the University emphasising the importance of appointing an individual with a successful track record of external grant capture, and the Department seeking an individual who will underpin its existing teaching and research strengths. The team suggest that the two aims are not mutually exclusive, and stress that the Department must be at the centre of any University-level discussions of this appointment.</p>	<p><i>In reference to the Additional PRG Comment, see U1.2 above. As yet, no new appointment at any level has been approved by the University. Discussions in relation to a potential senior appointment are ongoing at the level of the Faculty/UE</i></p>	<p><i>Any subsequent departmental discussions on the nature of a potential senior appointment would be dependent upon the outcome of the Faculty/UE decision.</i></p>	
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<p>S8</p>	<p>This unique offering by the Centre for Military History and Strategic Studies requires a much greater degree of support from the University. The contractual aspects of the relationship require immediate attention, as do the internal accounting issues with regard to agreed student numbers, staffing levels, and appropriate funding levels for the department delivering the programmes. At present, the Centre staff have reached a point where the levels of teaching, assessment and administration are unsustainable. The panel recommends that the University considers the future of this valuable and unique relationship, and the resources which would be required to run it at a sustainable level, as a matter of urgency</p>	<p><i>The PRG identified military history as a ‘unique offering’ that ‘sets it apart from other History Departments in Ireland’ and emphasised that ‘it would be wise to explore the possibilities inherent in this specialism’ (pg5-6). Current staffing levels make it difficult to do this within the Department and we are able to offer only a very limited number of modules in this field. Staffing is constrained by the current funding of the Defence Forces teaching, and the resources available to the Centre for Military History and Strategic Studies (CMHSS). There is also a need to clarify how student FTEs are calculated and used. The matter has not been resolved, but is subject to ongoing discussion between the CMHSS, the Department, the Faculty and the Bursar.</i></p>	<p><i>The CMHSS has matched the Departmental response to the Quality Review report in terms of the establishment of the post of Deputy Director, and with full participation in informal departmental mentoring. The Deputy Director is appointed by the HoD in consultation with the Director CMHSS to provide short-term continuity. The PRG noted the need for immediate action on existing contractual relationships with the Defence Forces, a matter addressed in discussion between the HoD and Director, CMHSS in September 2021 and then discussed with the Defence Forces at a meeting of the Partnership Coordination Group on 9 December 2021. It was agreed then to explore the issue further, with a view to the relevant courses being subject to a competitive tender process before 2023. Discussions with the Dean and the Bursar, relating to CMHSS funding and staffing, are pending with a view to resolving these issues.</i></p>	
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