



University College Dublin

REVIEW GROUP REPORT

Periodic Quality Review

UCD School of Philosophy

July 2022

Accepted by the UCD Governing Authority at its meeting on 21 September 2023

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Key Findings of the Review Group

The Review Group (RG) has identified a number of key findings in relation to areas of good practice operating within the School of Philosophy, and also areas which the RG would highlight as requiring improvement. The main section of this Report sets out all observations, commendations and recommendations of the RG in more detail. An aggregated list of all commendations and recommendations is set out in Appendix 1.

Examples of Good Practice

The RG identified a number of commendations, in particular:

1. The sharing of responsibilities among faculty and professional staff is noteworthy and reflects good team working, but also strong ethical leadership, commitment, and a clear sense of responsibility. (2.13)
2. The School is exceptionally pluralistic in its research and teaching specialisms while retaining impressive levels of cohesion and community. (3.9)
3. The RG commend the collegiality of the School, which again and again shone through, and the way in which it extends to the relationship between faculty and professional staff, who were as keen to talk about philosophy as about their administrative duties. (3.10)
4. The RG commends the School for the creation and maintenance of a large community of PhD students who are well integrated into the School and make a substantial contribution to it. (6.15)
5. This collegiality of the School, coupled with the high number of experienced faculty, allows much quality management to happen informally and collaboratively. The RG found that change and enhancement are most usually pro-actively self-generated by the School, rather than imposed or required by external university or college directives. (7.15)

Prioritised Recommendations for Improvement

The RG would suggest that the following recommendations be prioritised:

1. The balance and breadth of the syllabus is highly diverse and a real asset to the School. It includes both the 'analytic' and 'continental' traditions, eastern and western philosophy, and contemporary and historical approaches. There is a need to consider how this pluralism and the benefits that it brings can be reconciled with the need to distribute PhD supervision more evenly. This may, for example, require reducing PhD numbers or making at least one appointment at a more senior level in an area in which the School already has a strong international profile, so as to redistribute supervision (with the student's permission) and to continue to attract PhD students, given pending retirements at full professor level. More generally, there is a need to consider how future recruitment fits in with longer-term strategic aims and what are the priorities, given any constraints on resources. (4.1)
2. In keeping with university trends internationally, the School notes the challenges of responding to student engagement amongst undergraduates, in particular attendance at tutorials. Though this is also a College-wide (and indeed sector-wide) challenge, the School rightly recognises that poor attendance may be a symptom of other more serious welfare issues. In addressing challenges of student engagement and attendance, the RG recommend that (A) consideration be given to re-introducing participation-based grades (e.g. 10% of modules grade is based on tutorial participation). This is something students themselves are keen on. (B) The School should work with the College to embed the academic mentoring and peer mentoring programmes to support students. (C) The School might also consider how it can utilise its newly refurbished space to help create a sense of belonging for students taking philosophy modules. (4.15)
3. There are very few institutions in Ireland or the UK offering an MA in Contemporary European Philosophy, so it is surprising to see such low recruitment onto this programme. This is certainly an area for potential growth. The School might consider how to make this MA more attractive, for example by giving more thought to overall curriculum coherence; making some classes exclusively for MA students on the programme; introducing core modules. (4.17)
4. The School's staff: student ratio is being adversely affected by growing student numbers without an increase in staffing. This is a potential threat not only to the quality of teaching but also to the QS subject rankings. We recommend staffing levels are not allowed to drop further relative to student numbers. (4.19)

1. Introduction and Overview of UCD School of Philosophy

Introduction

- 1.1 This report presents the findings of a quality review of the School of Philosophy, University College Dublin, which was undertaken on 4-7 April 2022. The School response to the Review Group Report is attached as Appendix 2.

The Review Framework

- 1.2 Irish Universities have collectively agreed a framework for their quality review and quality improvement systems, which is consistent with both the legislative requirements of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012, and international good practice (e.g. Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, 2015). Quality reviews are carried out in academic, administrative and support service units.
- 1.3 The purpose of periodic review is to assist the University to assure itself of the quality of each of its constituent units, and to utilise learning from this developmental process in order to effect improvement, including:
- To monitor the quality of the student experience, and of teaching and learning.
 - To monitor research activity, including management of research activity, assessing the research performance with regard to research productivity, research income, and recruiting and supporting doctoral students.
 - To identify, encourage and disseminate good practice, and to identify challenges and how to address these.
 - To provide an opportunity for units to test the effectiveness of their systems and procedures for monitoring and enhancing quality and standards.
 - To encourage the development and enhancement of these systems, in the context of current and emerging provision.
 - To inform the University's strategic planning process.
 - The output report provides robust evidence for external accreditation bodies.
 - The process provides an external benchmark on practice and curriculum.

- To provide public information on the University's capacity to assure the quality and standards of its awards. The University's implementation of its quality procedures enables it to demonstrate how it discharges its responsibilities for assuring the quality and standards of its awards, as required by the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012.

The Review Process

1.4 Typically, the review model comprises four major elements:

- Preparation of a self-assessment report (SAR)
- A visit by a RG that includes UCD staff and external experts, both national and international. The site visit normally will take place over a two or three day period
- Preparation of a review group report that is made public
- Agreement of an action plan for improvement (quality improvement plan) based on the RG report's recommendations. The University will also monitor progress against the improvement plan

Full details of the review process can be found on the UCD Quality Office website: www.ucd.ie/quality.

The Review Group

1.5 The composition of the RG for the UCD School of Philosophy was as follows:

- Professor Fiona Timmins, UCD School of Nursing, Midwifery & Health Systems, Chair
- Assistant Professor David James, University of Warwick, Extern
- Assistant Professor Rachael Wiseman, University of Liverpool, Extern

1.6 The RG visited the School from 4-7 April 2022 and held meetings with School staff; undergraduate and postgraduate students; graduates, employers, the SAR Co-ordinating Committee; other University staff, including the Principal of the College of Arts and Humanities, the Associate Dean of Arts and Humanities and Associate Dean of Social Sciences and Law. The site visit schedule is included as Appendix 3. All members of the Review Group participated in all discussions and meetings.

1.7 In addition to the Self-assessment Report, the RG considered documentation provided by the School and the University during the site visit.

1.8 This Report has been read and approved by all members of the Review Group.

Preparation of the Self-assessment Report (SAR)

- 1.9 Following a briefing from the UCD Quality Office, a Self-assessment Report Coordinating Committee (SARCC) was established by the School.
- 1.10 The SAR was prepared in the period June 2021 – February 2022. Staff were consulted during the process with specific aspects of the report discussed in various fora. The final draft report was developed by the SAR Co-ordinating Committee reflecting the various inputs with individual members taking responsibility for chapters of the report. All staff were invited to comment on the final draft and to contribute to the final report.
- 1.11 The RG found the SAR documentation to be detailed and well written, clearly demonstrating areas of School strengths and weaknesses. Also, demonstrating the significant progress against recommendations made in the last Quality Review in 2015. As this was an online site visit, a short video tour of facilities was also provided to the RG by the School.

The University

- 1.12 University College Dublin (UCD) is a large and diverse university whose origins date back to 1854. The University is situated on a large modern campus about 6 km to the south of the centre of Dublin.
- 1.13 The University Strategic Plan (2020 to 2024) states that the University’s mission is: “to contribute to the flourishing of Dublin, Ireland, Europe and the world through the excellence and impact of our research and scholarship, the quality of our graduates and our global engagement; providing a supportive community in which every member of the University is enabled to achieve their full potential”.

The University is currently organised into six colleges and 37 schools:

- UCD College of Arts and Humanities
- UCD College of Business
- UCD College of Engineering and Architecture
- UCD College of Health and Agricultural Sciences
- UCD College of Social Sciences and Law
- UCD College of Science

- 1.14 As one of the largest universities on the island of Ireland, UCD supports a broad, deep and rich academic community in Science, Business, Engineering, Health Sciences, Agriculture, Veterinary Medicine, Arts, Law, Celtic Studies and Human Sciences. UCD has more than 33,000 students on our UCD campus, with approximately 18,000 undergraduates, 12,600 postgraduates and 2,200 Occasional students. This includes over 9,500 international students from 152 countries. In addition, UCD has almost 5,200 students studying UCD degree programmes on campuses overseas. Undergraduate degree students have the choice of 38 entry routes on offer via the CAO system, while UCD offers many other options at graduate level.

UCD School of Philosophy

- 1.15 UCD School of Philosophy is one of eleven schools in the College of Social Sciences and Law and is the largest philosophy school in Ireland (in terms of both academic staff and student numbers). UCD School of Philosophy is ranked #101-150 of the QS subject rankings for 2022.
- 1.16 The Schools staff FTE profile includes: Academic (18 - including one fixed term contact and an UCD Ad Astra Scholar), Research (6), Research Support (2.8) and Professional (2.6). (March 2022 data provided by the School).
- 1.17 The grade profile of the School's academic staff includes: 4 Full Professor, 1 Professor, 5 Associate Professor, 7 Assistant Professor, 1 Other Academic/Teaching (March 2022 data provided by the School).
- 1.18 The School has 342 student FTEs, with 237 at Undergraduate level and 56 Graduate Research students. (March 2022 data provided by the School). The SAR notes, the average number of Masters' students per year in the period 2015-2021 is 19.
- 1.19 UCD's School of Philosophy is located on the fifth floor in the Newman Building on the main UCD campus. The School Offices have been recently refurbished with increased office space as well a seminar room. There is also some limited space for post-doctoral researchers, on the fifth floor of the Library. The School also has access to offices above the Careers Network, which require refurbishment.
- 1.20 At undergraduate level the School is part of three different degree programmes:

The four-year BSc, College of Social Sciences and Law

- Joint Major combinations with Politics, Economics, Sociology, Archaeology, Geography, Information & Communication Studies, Social Policy, Social Work and Social Justice, as well as with School of Mathematics and Statistics
- A 'triple-major' in Philosophy, Politics and Economics (PPE)
- At the end of Stage 1, students are allowed to switch from a different Joint Major into a Joint Major with Philosophy
- At the end of Stage 2, students are allowed to switch from Joint Major X + Philosophy (or from PPE) to Single Major Philosophy for stages 3 and 4

The three-year BA, College of Arts and Humanities

- Joint Major combination with English, History, Art History, Music.
- The three-year BA can be converted into a four-year International BA by spending the third year abroad

The four-year BCL – ‘Law with Philosophy’, College of Social Sciences and Law

1.21 The SAR notes the School was active in designing and creating the new Philosophy, Politics and Economics programme, launched in 2018. Building on from this, the School is now looking at possibility of starting a new programme with the same format as the PPE: Philosophy, Politics and Sociology (PPS).

1.22 The School’s curriculum covers both contemporary and historical approaches to Western philosophy, with a wide range of option modules.

1.23 The School offers the following MA programmes:

Pure Philosophy MA Programmes:

- MA General Programme
- MA in Contemporary European Philosophy

Interdisciplinary programmes

- MA in Philosophy and Literature
- MA in Philosophy and Public Affairs (PPA)
- MA in Consciousness and Embodiment
- MA in Ethics: Theory and Practice

1.24 The School of Philosophy also contributes modules to the MSc in Cognitive Science. This is a joint Philosophy and Computer Science programme.

1.25 Research bodies within the School include the UCD Newman Centre for the Study of Religions and the Centre for Ethics in Public Life.

2. Organisation and Management of Resources

General Comments and Context

- 2.1 The School appears to be functioning effectively and providing robust educational programmes at both undergraduate and postgraduate level that are well received by students and commended by external examiners.
- 2.2 There is a high proportion of senior faculty (62%) that provides strategic oversight and leadership for the School.
- 2.3 Progress since the last review includes improvement in staffing levels, tutorial support and the establishment (and productivity) of UCD Centre for Ethics in Public Life.
- 2.4 This collegiality and sharing of responsibilities among faculty and professional staff is noteworthy and reflects good team working, but also strong ethical leadership, commitment, and a clear sense of responsibility.
- 2.5 The SAR report and site visit revealed effective governance and committee function. However, the committees, due to the relatively small size of faculty and staff, appear to overlap in their functions. For example, the function and operation of the School Committee/School Executive and Research Committee are at times interchangeable. In addition, the minutes in some cases reflect descriptive commentary rather than strategic discussions or developments. However, the processes do seem to work, perhaps due to the collective leadership approach used in the School.
- 2.6 The unique 2-year Head of School rotation appears to work well for the School. The management experience gained by faculty from this system (that pertains to other roles and functions too) that is spread across the team means that decision-making, and responsibility is shared and there is great support for one another.
- 2.7 The Head of School has clear support for strategic and budgetary considerations and decisions. An atmosphere of budgetary constraint and caution is noted, in the context of ongoing impact of post recessionary reform, but also because the School consistently runs at a deficit. The reason for this deficit is unclear to the RG; however at the site visit there was an indication of fluctuating student numbers. It is not clear where efforts are being targeted to improve net fee income, or make more efficient use of current resources, and consideration needs to be given to the efficiency of the MA offerings, especially given the low numbers on some modules, and the potential to attract international students.
- 2.8 While there is a strong awareness of the budgetary caution required and plans to offset the current deficit (e.g. salary savings) there is limited evidence of a risk register that identifies the risks of any such action. There are important areas of growth and outreach, such as the Young Philosophers Competition and the UCD Centre for Ethics in Public Life, that are not necessarily self-financing and require investment, and yet it is unlikely to be forthcoming given current budgetary constraints. The risks to the School from this caution need to be clearly outlined.

- 2.9 The working environment is exceptional and this is observed at all levels (by faculty, students, professional staff, new hires etc).
- 2.10 There is a clear system of sabbaticals that affords all faculty an opportunity for protected research time.
- 2.11 New faculty, while appearing to settle in well and enjoy their roles, might benefit from a more structured orientation programme or signposting system. Training and information for faculty and staff on University services are available at a cross-institutional level. This information can almost be overwhelming for new faculty. The RG would suggest that the provision of a school brochure or signposted information system might be useful which would highlight key events, information or support unit staff contacts such as disability services, subject librarian etc. Clear explanation of the system of teaching allocation, and the clear choice available would also be helpful.
- 2.12 Mentorship in the School would benefit from being more structured and include a greater emphasis on the benefits of Progress for Growth (P4G). With the small numbers of faculty, excellent collegial relationships and support, and multiple overlap of activities (e.g., a School meeting could effectively serve as a mentorship session), these processes may seem superfluous, however they are important aspects of University support.

Commendations

- 2.13 The sharing of responsibilities among faculty and professional staff is noteworthy and reflects good team working, but also strong ethical leadership, commitment, and a clear sense of responsibility.
- 2.14 There is a very strong team of professional staff in the School, who provide tremendous support to the School, demonstrating high levels of commitment, collaboration and leadership.

Recommendations

- 2.15 Consideration needs to be given to a more strategic understanding of the School budget to include an understanding of ways by which the School could maximise its resources and income. Alternative sources of revenue need to be considered, and a potential capping on the number of PhD fee waivers.
- 2.16 The RG recommends the development of a risk register that identifies the current risks to the School. There are important areas of growth and outreach, such as the Young Philosophers Competition and the UCD Centre for Ethics in Public Life, that present risks to the School in terms of reputation, research and sustainability. Staffing is not a particular risk at the moment, however continued conservatism in terms of rehiring where vacancies exist could lead to risk in terms of reputation, ratios and other matters, and the School/College ought not to be complacent about this.

- 2.17 New faculty, while appearing to settle in well and enjoy their roles, might benefit from a more structured orientation programme or signposting system at School level.
- 2.18 The RG recommend the School develop a more formal approach to mentorship and the benefits of Performance for Growth (P4G) also need to be highlighted.

3. Staff and Facilities

General Comments and Context

A. Staff

- 3.1 As already noted, the School is a pluralistic one that covers analytic philosophy, modern European philosophy and the history of philosophy. This is an obvious strength in that it enables the School to offer a wide range of programmes at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, and to attract PhD students working in many key areas of philosophy.
- 3.2 In order to preserve its pluralist identity, the School will need to maintain sufficient staffing levels in the face of one recent unexpected resignation and two pending retirements. The RG noted the School is not seeking to expand unnecessarily and are of the opinion that its proposals to recruit new staff reflects genuine needs. Importantly, the failure to recruit new staff will have a negative impact on the staff-student ratios.
- 3.3 The School plan to use the funding made available by the two pending retirements, both of which are at full professor level, to hire 4 full-time permanent faculty at Assistant Professor level. The unexpected resignation in 2021 of one academic staff member has not yet been replaced. This is being used to reduce the budget deficit that the School is currently running.
- 3.4 Challenges that the School faces with respect to future recruitment concerns competing demands. On the one hand, there is the need to maintain a broad curriculum at the undergraduate and MA levels. On the other hand, the School has done remarkably well at recruiting PhD students. Although these demands are not mutually exclusive, they are not fully aligned, given how the PhD students tend to cluster around certain subject areas, especially modern European philosophy, which also has a specific MA programme. Yet only one of the proposed new appointments is in this area. There is consequently a need to consider how the pluralism of the School and the benefits that it brings can be reconciled with the need to distribute supervision more evenly. This may not require any major changes, but it may involve concentrating on consolidation at the expense of expansion, unless new staff can be hired whose areas of expertise are sufficiently varied.

- 3.5 Professional staff did not raise any concerns with the RG about school administrative staffing levels. However, concerns were raised about the part-time administrator for the Centre for Ethics in Public Life, who is partly funded by the School using a research grant which is shortly due to end. The RG understood in discussions, that the research centre would not be able to function without this administrator, making it imperative to find the funding for this post.
- 3.6 While the School is currently able to employ a Research Project Manager, the funding for this post is also grant dependent. The School's successes in attracting external research funding speaks to the value of this post, and it is therefore worthwhile funding on a longer-term basis.
- 3.7 It is reported in the SAR that tutors feel their pay to be inadequate, despite the School's efforts to supplement the University's hourly rate out of its own budget.

B. Facilities

- 3.8 The School is very happy with the refurbishment work that was undertaken after the last quality review. The video made available to the RG confirmed the improvements, as did the fact that none of the students flagged the facilities as a matter of concern. The School has, however, raised concerns about the lack of facilities for postgraduate research students. (see 6.2 below). An absence of lecterns was also raised as a concern, and the lecture rooms featured in the video did not appear to contain any of them.

Commendations

- 3.9 The School is exceptionally pluralistic in its research and teaching specialisms while retaining impressive levels of cohesion and community.
- 3.10 The RG commend the collegiality of the School, which again and again shone through, and the way in which it extends to the relationship between faculty and professional staff, who were as keen to talk about philosophy as about their administrative duties.
- 3.11 The impressive level of commitment to the School and the pride in it that was demonstrated by the members of staff whom the RG met.
- 3.12 The community of PhD students is a major asset to the School, which is doing well to attract so many of them and appear to be very well integrated into the School not only as researchers, but also as temporary teaching staff.

Recommendations

- 3.13 The balance and breadth of the syllabus is highly diverse and a real asset to the School. It includes both the 'analytic' and 'continental' traditions, eastern and western philosophy, and contemporary and historical approaches. There is a need to consider how this pluralism and the benefits that it brings can be reconciled with the need to distribute PhD supervision more evenly. This may, for example, require reducing PhD numbers or making at least one appointment at a more senior level in an area in which the School already has a strong international profile, so as to redistribute supervision (with the student's permission) and to continue to attract PhD students, given pending retirements at full professor level. More generally, there is a need to consider how future recruitment fits in with longer-term strategic aims and what are the priorities, given any constraints on resources.
- 3.14 The RG recommends the advice for new staff members at the School level be more formalised by providing key points and contacts in a single induction document. For instance, it may not be obvious to incoming academic staff that teaching is informally negotiated rather than modules being assigned on the basis of teaching needs only. (see also 2.17 and 2.18)

4. Teaching, Learning and Assessment

General Comments and Context

- 4.1 The School offers a broad, balanced curriculum that encourages and enables faculty to make use of their research expertise in the classroom. Although the core curriculum is very small and there are no prerequisites, the offering is coherent and comprehensive - indeed impressively so.
- 4.2 Undergraduate modules are taught through a combination of weekly lectures delivered by faculty, and tutorials delivered by PhD students. Lectures focused on philosophical content, tutorials are more skill and assessment-oriented.
- 4.3 The SAR notes that, while the School considers tutorials to be central to their pedagogy (offering seven sessions per student per trimester to almost all undergraduate modules), this is only possible because of the School's relatively large number of PhD students.
- 4.4 There is a great range and variety of students taking modules in the School of Philosophy. Students can be on one of three UG programmes, based in two colleges. Philosophy modules are taken by students on these programmes as part of a Joint Major combination, a 'triple major' with PPE, or as a minor with law. Students on other programmes can also take philosophy electives. All this creates a large and highly varied cohort, with different levels of commitment and exposure to philosophy.
- 4.5 This variability also creates challenges in respect of cohort identity and engagement (both in terms of absences and the 'long tail' in results). There is a risk of students getting 'lost'. These issues were also identified in the 2015 RG report and by the last two external examiners.

- 4.6 Undergraduate students value being taught by PhD students, who they feel are able to connect with their learning needs. The range of modules taught, and the breadth of coverage of philosophical traditions, is quite remarkable and highly distinctive. The RG noted in their discussions with students that there was some inconsistency in the focus and quality of the teaching delivery by some PhD tutors.
- 4.7 Currently all MA modules are open to postgraduate research students which, while beneficial the RG note, in many respects can inhibit MA engagement and cohort identity. It might also be helpful to provide at least one distinctive core module for each MA programme, and to restrict registration on the module to students on the relevant MA.

Commendations

- 4.8 The balance and breadth of the syllabus is highly diverse and a real asset to the School. It includes both the 'analytic' and 'continental' traditions, eastern and western philosophy, and contemporary and historical approaches. Four informal syllabi 'Streams' (or pathways) assist students in making coherent choices without imposing limits.
- 4.9 Assessment practices are robust, and include moderation, distribution analysis, close engagement with the external examiner, and a formal appeals procedure for students.
- 4.10 The School has achieved gender near-parity among its students across all stages of its teaching, including PhD. For the last three years the School has maintained a good proportion (around $\frac{1}{3}$) of students in 'under-represented' groups, as defined by the University's EDI page. It is preparing an application for an Athena Swan Bronze Award.
- 4.11 The School has produced an excellent Tutor Handbook and tutor training is offered through the College. Tutors feel well-supported by the School and faculty.
- 4.12 The graduate students, both MA and PhD, are well-integrated into the department's research activities.
- 4.13 The School has a strong and supportive relationship with the Minorities And Philosophy Chapter and the Philosophy Society, both of which could contribute to fostering cohort identity and increasing engagement.
- 4.14 The RG commend the School and its contribution to the new PPE programme, which has the potential to become a flagship programme.

Recommendations

- 4.15 In keeping with university trends internationally, the School notes the challenges of responding to student engagement amongst undergraduates, in particular attendance at tutorials. Though this is also a College-wide (and indeed sector-wide) challenge, the School rightly recognises that poor attendance may be a symptom of other more serious welfare issues. In addressing challenges of student engagement and attendance, the RG recommend that (A) consideration be given to re-introducing participation-based grades (e.g. 10% of modules grade is based on tutorial participation). This is something students themselves are keen on. (B) The School should work with the College to embed the academic mentoring and peer mentoring programmes to support students. (C) The School might also consider how it can utilise its newly refurbished space to help create a sense of belonging for students taking philosophy modules.
- 4.16 The RG recommend the School consider a more formal requirement for observation and feedback on teaching for tutors. This could be done in a supportive way as part of the PhD student's professional development.
- 4.17 There are very few institutions in Ireland or the UK offering an MA in Contemporary European Philosophy, so it is surprising to see such low recruitment onto this programme. This is certainly an area for potential growth. The School might consider how to make this MA more attractive, for example by giving more thought to overall curriculum coherence; making some classes exclusively for MA students on the programme; introducing core modules.
- 4.18 Given that the majority of School's undergraduate tutorials are delivered by PhD students, adequate office space to prepare for tutorials, conduct student meetings, and meet with other tutors and lecturers should also be available. As such, the RG recommend the School continues its efforts to secure long-term desk and meeting space for its PhD students.
- 4.19 The School's staff: student ratio is being adversely affected by growing student numbers without an increase in staffing. This is a potential threat not only to the quality of teaching but also to the QS subject rankings. The RG recommend staffing levels are not allowed to drop further relative to student numbers.

5. Curriculum Development and Review

General Comments and Context

- 5.1 Curriculum development and review is conducted annually. It is overseen by the School's joint directors of undergraduate teaching and learning, and the College Teaching and Learning Committee. Faculty have a large degree of autonomy and flexibility when it comes to what they teach and the final curriculum is developed through a process of informal negotiation.

- 5.2 In response to the 2015 Quality Review Report's recommendation that the School do more to prepare its students for life after University, philosophy Joint Major students can now take elective modules in 'Careers in the Social Sciences' and 'Public Sector Careers', as well as a semester-long internship (in the final year).
- 5.3 The School has recently engaged in a 'module mapping exercise' overseen by the College. In light of this exercise the School made some positive changes to the curriculum. They have introduced a broader range of assessments, increased the use of shorter, continuous assessment, and diversified the type of assessment to include class presentations and audio-visual-based assessment. They also introduced two popular 'experiential modules', Practical Philosophy and Animated Philosophy.
- 5.4 One major planned area of curriculum development is in relation to the MA provision, with two new programmes planned.
- 5.5 During Covid, the School pivoted to online teaching and recorded lectures and material. As classroom-based teaching has returned, the School has resisted pressure from students to continue providing recordings of lectures.
- 5.6 Students have the opportunity to feed into curriculum development through the online student feedback system and the staff-student liaison committee.

Commendations

- 5.7 The emphasis placed on module convenor autonomy in the curriculum development process leads to a varied, exciting and research-led curriculum.
- 5.8 Minutes of the Teaching and Learning Committee reveal a thoughtful and creative approach to curriculum development, with clear input from student representatives and continuing engagement with relevant College and University committees and directives.
- 5.9 The changes introduced in response to the module mapping exercise mean the curriculum now benefits from diverse assessment methods and practically-oriented learning.
- 5.10 Based on student meetings and information provided in the SAR there is generally high-level of student satisfaction with regard to the School's teaching and overall support.
- 5.11 The RG found the School's position on recording lectures to be robust and informed by clear pedagogical reflection and is evidence of a balanced approach to student feedback. They are meeting accessibility concerns by making recordings available in cases of need.
- 5.12 Feedback from the representative alumni was very positive in terms of their student experience and education in UCD.
- 5.13 The staff-student liaison committee plays an active role, and their views are heard by the Teaching and Learning Committee.

Recommendations

- 5.14 The School reports challenges in receiving a representative quantity of student-feedback. The response rate to the online feedback questionnaire is around 25%. Attempts have been made by the School to improve this (via email reminders and allowing time in lectures). The RG recommend the School consider introducing a 'You Said, We Did' communication system, which would allow students to see the effect of their feedback and thereby encourage greater engagement with this system. (see also 4.15, 7.18)
- 5.15 One member of staff has completed the UCD Professional Teaching Certificate in University Teaching and Learning. It would be good to see other members of faculty taking up this training.
- 5.16 Given the low student numbers on existing MA programmes, the RG recommend that the School reflect carefully on the rationale for new programmes and on what might be done to increase the attractiveness of the programmes already on offer.
- 5.17 Following on from 5.16 above, reducing the number of MA modules PhD students have to take (from 4 to 3) may create an opportunity to 'ring-fence' some modules for MA students only, thereby allowing more tailored and coherent provision. (see also 4.17)
- 5.18 The RG recommends that the School consider making more use of its alumni, especially recent graduates, to help prepare its students for life after University. For example, recent graduates/alumni could be invited to the School to provide a career perspective. It could also consider increasing its engagement with the UCD Careers Network.

6. Research Activity

General Comments and Context

- 6.1 The School has created and maintains an impressive active, outward-looking and productive research culture across a broad range of areas of specialisation in analytic philosophy, modern European philosophy and the history of philosophy. This has been achieved by allowing each researcher genuine autonomy within a supportive environment.
- 6.2 Both the number and quality of the School's research outputs are impressive viewed in terms of the norms of the discipline. The School is classed by UCD Research and Innovation as 100% research active.
- 6.3 The undergraduate and postgraduate curricula are designed in such a way as to enable staff to combine their teaching with their research interests. This benefits students as well, in that the staff are enthusiastic about what they are teaching. This enthusiasm was noted by existing and past students.

- 6.4 There is a clear and transparent system in place for identifying when members of staff are entitled to research sabbatical leave. This facilitates a sense of fairness and the ability to plan research activity.
- 6.5 The RG noted the School's impressive record of successful grant applications for the discipline, and it is especially successful at attracting EU funding. According to the UCD Research and Innovation representatives the RG met during the visit, this success rate is by University standards very good.
- 6.6 Research grants and other sources of funding have been used to support the highly effective and promising research centres, the Centre for Ethics in Public Life and the Newman Centre for the Study of Religions, run by extremely committed directors.
- 6.7 The Research Centre for Ethics in Public Life has plans to develop a new MA in Medical Humanities, in cooperation with the School of Medicine, the School of English, Drama and Film Studies and School of History. Medical Humanities would include the subjects of medical ethics, medical law, phenomenology of illness, the history of medicine, and literary accounts of health and illness. Stakeholders who met with the RG described their experiences of the Centre for Ethics in Public's Life's events and initiatives as very positive.
- 6.8 The School is doing exceptionally well for a Philosophy school in attracting PhD students, who are well integrated into the School through various research events, such as the visiting speaker series, participation in MA seminars and the teaching of tutorials. The SAR notes the growth in the number of PhD students is not matched by the availability of sufficient study space for this cohort.
- 6.9 The progress of PhD students is effectively reviewed and monitored by means of a doctoral research panel and a PhD Transfer assessment meeting, which decides if the student should be allowed to progress to the final stage of the PhD.
- 6.10 PhD students are required to take a certain number of MA modules as part of their programme. The RG understood from discussions that applying to take a language module from the Applied Language Centre (ALC) as a replacement for one of the philosophy MA modules can prove more challenging than taking a language-related module from another School. The reasons for this were not fully clear to the RG. Yet, given the high number of PhD students researching in the area of modern European philosophy, the RG are of the opinion that taking an ALC language module should be possible and easy to do for PhD students.
- 6.11 Given how successful the School is in recruiting PhDs, the RG note it is imperative that adequate facilities for them are provided, however, the RG understood that there is currently a lack of sufficient study spaces. (see 4.18 above)
- 6.12 There is an effectively functioning research committee in place linking the School and the College.

Commendations

- 6.13 The School allows researchers genuine autonomy in keeping with its pluralistic ethos, in that it does not put pressure on them to tailor their research to any agenda or other external goal, while supporting them when requested.
- 6.14 The School enables teaching and research to complement one another in a way that benefits both staff and students.
- 6.15 The RG commends the School for the creation and maintenance of a large community of PhD students who are well integrated into the School and make a substantial contribution to it.
- 6.16 The RG commends the School for its effective monitoring of the progress of PhD students.
- 6.17 The School's success in attracting external research funding is commendable.
- 6.18 The RG commends the School for how the research grants awarded to members of the School have been used to support outward-looking, long-term projects that not only promise to raise the School's (and thereby the University's) profile but also to make a substantial contribution to the wider society by facilitating the extension of philosophical discussion and reflection to key areas of public life.

Recommendations

- 6.19 The RG recommends the School consider developing more formal research clusters under which various activities and programmes could be grouped. For example, a modern European philosophy research cluster would link well with the corresponding MA in a way that presents a more cohesive image to prospective students interested in this specific area of philosophy, thereby contributing to the goal of recruiting more MA students. The research centres are already in effect performing this function, and so it would be only a matter of extending it to areas where a more distinctive and/or internationally prominent profile is desirable.
- 6.20 As the research centres (i.e. the Centre for Ethics in Public Life (CEPL) and the Newman Centre for the Study of Religions) are moving in the direction of applied research, particularly in relation to areas of interest within healthcare (ethics, religion, dementia etc) the RG recommends consideration be given to even greater partnership with schools and centres that support health services research such as the School of Medicine, the School of Nursing, Midwifery & Health Systems, and UCD Centre for Interdisciplinary Research, Education and Innovation in Health Systems.
- 6.21 The RG recommends the School ensures that the relevant information regarding the availability and selection of language modules is easily available and effectively communicated to incoming PhD students.

7. Management of Quality and Enhancement

General Comments and Context

- 7.1 Excellent progress since the 2015 Quality Review report including improvement in tutorial support and the establishment (and productivity) of UCD Centre for Ethics in Public Life and the Newman Centre for the Study of Religions.
- 7.2 The School uses a variety of formal and informal approaches to evaluate and enhance the quality of teaching and research.
- 7.3 This is a School with an extraordinary level of collegiality and cooperation, which allows for a good deal of quality monitoring to happen informally and constructively between peers. In addition, a number of formal mechanisms are used to monitor teaching quality, including student feedback, essay moderation, the School Module Examination Committee, external examiner reports, staff-student liaison committee. Research quality monitoring is light touch. Outputs are recorded and ranked (either ordinary or prestigious) via the OBRSS system; more detailed evaluation is made through the promotion system; the college monitors research applications and success (the 5-year average is 50-71 applications at 20% success rate: this is very impressive).
- 7.4 Faculty appear committed to excellence and operate an informal system of continuous reflection on their practice. It was reported at the site visit that during the preparation of the SAR report, for example, they observed changes that were needed in relation to student support and took steps to implement these changes. One example of this was implementing a system of following up and meeting with all Masters' degree students on a one-to-one basis.
- 7.5 This reflection occurs at all levels of School activity and when perceived needs are identified action is taken. There is a strong sense of responsibility, but also an empowerment to make changes for the betterment of the School. There is also a clear sense of creativity and entrepreneurship.
- 7.6 In terms of teaching and learning, faculty reflect on all aspects of this, including reviewing student feedback, but also ensuring that learning resources (such as the library resources) are sufficient to meet the needs of students.
- 7.7 There is also good, shared programme governance within the School in terms of the Joint Director of Programmes, but also clear interaction between these and the Associate Deans at College Level.
- 7.8 Like many other Schools and universities, student responses to satisfaction surveys are very low, and while staff are responsive, it is challenging to meaningfully address all students' concerns, or clearly understand what works well, when such a low number of students contributes to this aspect of quality enhancement.

- 7.9 The external examiner system functions in line with the governance structures of the University, and there is clear evidence of external examiner scrutiny, feedback and interaction with faculty. The RG also found clear evidence of full integration of the examiners' recommendations.
- 7.10 Based on the information provided, the RG noted that the external examiner is largely satisfied with the programmes and finds that the standards are comparable with other universities, however, there appear to be structural barriers to having the type of oversight of the marks and standards that is desired/required. While external examiner reports the desire for a more active role in the assessment process, this is limited by UCD policy.
- 7.11 It appears to be a source of frustration that the external examiner is not privy to Programme Board activity but rather comments in a more general way after the examiners meet. Certainly, the role is an oversight one, to assure academic standards and the quality of teaching, learning, assessment and feedback and to confirm that the academic standards are comparable to those achieved in equivalent universities internationally. However, the RG are of the opinion, there also needs to be room for "exceptional" recommendations for grade changes across a cohort (as provided for within the UCD policy) if issues are identified (to address the slight grade inflation at the lower grades in the 2017 external report, for example).
- 7.12 The external examiner should be encouraged to meet with students as the School have suggested as this is clearly provided for and recommended within the UCD policy.
- 7.13 The external examiner also travels quite a distance for a short one-hour meeting and more use could be made of their time during this visit.

Commendations

- 7.14 Excellent progress since the 2015 Quality Review report. The School has implemented all the headline recommendations of this review and has engaged seriously and thoughtfully with both the spirit and the letter of the recommendations. Major developments have included refurbishment of the entire School, adopting a 4-year degree, introducing a Tutor handbook and creating two new research centres.
- 7.15 The collegiality of the School, coupled with the high number of experienced faculty, allows much quality management to happen informally and collaboratively. The RG found that change and enhancement are most usually pro-actively self-generated by the School, rather than imposed or required by external University or College directives.
- 7.16 The external examiners reports are taken seriously and used to implement change.
- 7.17 The RG found the SAR to be a comprehensive, honest, thoughtful and insightful account of the School's position in relation to quality. Equally, the progress reporting since the last review appears to have been developed in similar fashion.

Recommendations

- 7.18 As noted in 5.14, the School should aim to achieve higher levels of student engagement with the electronic module evaluation system.
- 7.19 The external examiner ought to be encouraged to meet with students as has been suggested by the School as this is clearly provided for and recommended within the UCD policy.
- 7.20 Consideration needs to be given to ensuring a more robust interaction with the External Examiner during their visit so that they are satisfied that they are enacting their role in the way that they should.

8. Support Services

General Comments and Context

- 8.1 There is strong local governance and autonomy evident within the School, that is well supported by the College Principal, and other College Officers such as the College Finance Manager.
- 8.2 Good support is observed for both faculty and students from centralised College and University services, however as these services are situated outside of the School, more could be done to enhance close working relationships especially with Student Disability and Library services.
- 8.3 The technical infrastructure of the University appears to support effective functioning of the School. The 'Infohub' system provides easy access to a range of information required by respective staff, and although at times there is struggle with interpretation, this on the whole is well received.
- 8.4 Despite the sophistication of infohub, expenses management and sign off remains manual and is a major burden for the Head of Schools in the University. While clearly an authoritative approval and 'sign off' is reasonable from an auditor's perspective, the current system effectively requires a great deal more than this. There are multiple basic 'administrative' tasks carried out by the Head of School such as prompting (or accepting) that the relevant funds are in place; cross checking accuracy of mileage/currency (and reverting to applicants); receiving corresponding emails from the finance office when issues arise, which are simply beyond authoritative approval and ought be managed by the administration system (whether manual or electronic).

- 8.5 Support for students with disabilities needs to be more explicit within the School. University mechanisms for student referral and communication and understanding of reasonable accommodations need to be clearly understood and supported by faculty. In meetings with School faculty some seemed unaware of these services or that there were students with such needs.

Commendations

- 8.6 The technical infrastructure of the University appears to support effective functioning of the School. The 'infohub' system provides easy access to a range of information. It was noted during the visit that this system is a locally developed one that is responsive to the needs of UCD systems, and although there are some challenges at times with interfaces between software, overall this is a very responsive and reliable support system that saves staff and students an incredible amount of time.
- 8.7 The support provided to the School by the College Principal, and other College Officers such as the College Finance Manager.

Recommendations

- 8.8 The RG recommend the University consider an approach to expenses management that is more streamlined and efficient and uses less of the (costly) resources of the Head of School's time. This system ought to be fully integrated within information systems (infohub) and include a system of automatic cross checking, to remove the need for post hoc manual checking (mileage calculation could be automatic for example). Consideration needs to be given to the delegation of alternative sign off authority (for routine expenses for example e.g. professional memberships) to senior administrators or Directors within the School.
- 8.9 The RG recommends that the School ensure that all faculty and staff are aware of the University Disability services and supports available to students, including referral services and reasonable accommodations.

9. External Relations

General Comments and Context

- 9.1 The Centre for Ethics in Public Life and the Newman Centre for the Study of Religions are integral to the School's work to establish enduring relations with the wider society, including professional bodies and other public institutions. They are run by dedicated directors, but funding is an issue. In the one case, this is because the funding of the centre currently depends on a grant that is due to run out. In the other case, this is because the financing of events is dependent on securing external funding on an ad hoc basis, as with the funding provided by research centres affiliated with the University of Notre Dame, which will be used to finance a two-day conference on the theme of Ireland and Islam.
- 9.2 The Young Philosophers initiative launched in 2017 has had a very enthusiastic reception judging from the comments of a primary teacher whom the RG met, and it forms another integral part of the School's outreach activities. The involvement of undergraduate students in this initiative promises to play a key role in their development and to integrate them more closely into the School. This initiative is now being extended internationally. This initiative is characterised by an egalitarian ethos, making it well suited to including underrepresented groups. For example, all participants are entitled to display their work, not only the winners of competitions.
- 9.3 Although the Young Philosophers initiative lacks funds of its own, it was charged to use university facilities when it last held a very successful and well-attended major in-person event. This is a significant obstacle in relation to future in-person events, given that this initiative has no funding of its own. The initiative will also require additional support if it is to develop internationally by hosting in-person as well as online events.
- 9.4 The plan for The Centre for Ethics in Public Life to perform a CPD function as well as being a research centre has clearly been hampered by the pandemic and needs the time to recover from this interruption to its plans.
- 9.5 The Centre for Ethics in Public Life is also dependent on the input of a part-time administrator, whose post is being partly funded by a research grant. As noted earlier in this report, this grant is shortly due to end and according to the information received at the visit, the Director of the Centre is in no position to take on the administration due to their workload. This threatens the existence of the Centre.

- 9.6 The plan is for the Centre to become self-financing by charging fees for courses leading to certification that it would offer. The feasibility of this plan was evident from the interest in it expressed by various professional bodies. With the onset of the pandemic, however, all events moved online and were free to access. Thus the RG are of the opinion the Centre has not been given a proper opportunity to become self-financing, and it is the RG's strongly held view that it would be extremely short-sighted not to give it an opportunity to become so. Already the Centre has attracted people who are committed to acting as mediators between the Centre and public institutions, such as a health professional whom the RG met during the quality review. The School's budget deficit and need to recruit new staff means that it will struggle to cover the gap in funding.
- 9.7 The projects currently being developed by the Newman Centre for the Study of Religions promise to make a substantial contribution to interfaith dialogue in Ireland.
- 9.8 The School is able to facilitate a wide range of study abroad exchanges and it is taking steps to increase the number of philosophy majors making use of the Erasmus programme by streamlining the options and selecting universities based on reputation and whether they offer courses in English. These steps have made the prospect of choosing a university less daunting for students and removed a major obstacle to earning credits in the case of those students with an insufficient knowledge of the language of instruction at the host institution.
- 9.9 Four members of the School are members of the Royal Irish Academy (RIA) and participate in its events, and one member has twice been elected to serve on the RIA's Council. A member of the School is Chair of the Ethical, Political, Legal and Philosophical Studies Committee.

Commendations

- 9.10 The commitment and vision of the Directors of both research centres is extremely impressive and inspiring.
- 9.11 The School is generously seeking to use research grants to establish external relations that are and promise to be of considerable value to the wider society.
- 9.12 The School has demonstrated its commitment to encouraging students to participate in exchange programmes by taking steps that are already bearing fruit.
- 9.13 The Young Philosophers initiative, its egalitarian ethos, and the way in which it is being extended internationally.

Recommendations

- 9.14 The School is encouraged to explore ways of funding the part-time administrator who is essential to the functioning and existence of the Centre for Ethics in Public Life.
- 9.15 The Directors of both research centres are clearly extremely committed and inventive, but there is the issue of whether they are being made to bear too great a burden, given the absence of any significant reduction in teaching. Both directors praised the support of their colleagues. This support, however, appears to be of a largely informal kind. The RG recommend this be reviewed and more formal options to address workload challenges be considered.
- 9.16 The RG recommend the University waive charges for the use of facilities for any Young Philosophers events, in order to support initiatives such as these.

UCD School of Philosophy – Full List of Commendations and Recommendations

This Appendix contains a full list of commendations and recommendations made by the Review Group for the UCD School of Philosophy and should be read in conjunction with the specific chapter above. *(Please note that the paragraph references below refer to the relevant paragraphs in the report text)*

2. Organisation and Management of Resources

Commendations

- 2.13 The sharing of responsibilities among faculty and professional staff is noteworthy and reflects good team working, but also strong ethical leadership, commitment, and a clear sense of responsibility.
- 2.14 There is a very strong team of professional staff in the School, who provide tremendous support to the School, demonstrating high levels of commitment, collaboration and leadership.

Recommendations

- 2.15 Consideration needs to be given to a more strategic understanding of the School budget to include an understanding of ways by which the School could maximise its resources and income. Alternative sources of revenue need to be considered, and a potential capping on the number of PhD fee waivers.
- 2.16 The RG recommends the development of a risk register that identifies the current risks to the School. There are important areas of growth and outreach, such as the Young Philosophers Competition and the UCD Centre for Ethics in Public Life, that present risks to the School in terms of reputation, research and sustainability. Staffing is not a particular risk at the moment, however continued conservatism in terms of rehiring where vacancies exist could lead to risk in terms of reputation, ratios and other matters, and the School/College ought not to be complacent about this.
- 2.17 New faculty, while appearing to settle in well and enjoy their roles, might benefit from a more structured orientation programme or signposting system at School level.
- 2.18 The RG recommend the School develop a more formal approach to mentorship and the benefits of Performance for Growth (P4G) also need to be highlighted.

3. Staff and Facilities

Commendations

- 3.9 The School is exceptionally pluralistic in its research and teaching specialisms while retaining impressive levels of cohesion and community.
- 3.10 The RG commend the collegiality of the School, which again and again shone through, and the way in which it extends to the relationship between faculty and professional staff, who were as keen to talk about philosophy as about their administrative duties.
- 3.11 The impressive level of commitment to the School and the pride in it that was demonstrated by the members of staff whom the RG met.
- 3.12 The community of PhD students is a major asset to the School, which is doing well to attract so many of them and appear to be very well integrated into the School not only as researchers, but also as temporary teaching staff.

Recommendations

- 3.13 The balance and breadth of the syllabus is highly diverse and a real asset to the School. It includes both the 'analytic' and 'continental' traditions, eastern and western philosophy, and contemporary and historical approaches. There is a need to consider how this pluralism and the benefits that it brings can be reconciled with the need to distribute PhD supervision more evenly. This may, for example, require reducing PhD numbers or making at least one appointment at a more senior level in an area in which the School already has a strong international profile, so as to redistribute supervision (with the student's permission) and to continue to attract PhD students, given pending retirements at full professor level. More generally, there is a need to consider how future recruitment fits in with longer-term strategic aims and what are the priorities, given any constraints on resources.
- 3.14 The RG recommends the advice for new staff members at the School level be more formalised by providing key points and contacts in a single induction document. For instance, it may not be obvious to incoming academic staff that teaching is informally negotiated rather than modules being assigned on the basis of teaching needs only. (see also 2.17 and 2.18)

4. Teaching, Learning and Assessment

Commendations

- 4.8 The balance and breadth of the syllabus is highly diverse and a real asset to the School. It includes both the 'analytic' and 'continental' traditions, eastern and western philosophy, and contemporary and historical approaches. Four informal syllabi 'Streams' (or pathways) assist students in making coherent choices without imposing limits.

- 4.9 Assessment practices are robust, and include moderation, distribution analysis, close engagement with the external examiner, and a formal appeals procedure for students.
- 4.10 The School has achieved gender near-parity among its students across all stages of its teaching, including PhD. For the last three years the School has maintained a good proportion (around ⅓) of students in ‘under-represented’ groups, as defined by the University’s EDI page. It is preparing an application for an Athena Swan Bronze Award.
- 4.11 The School has produced an excellent Tutor Handbook and tutor training is offered through the College. Tutors feel well-supported by the School and faculty.
- 4.12 The graduate students, both MA and PhD, are well-integrated into the department’s research activities.
- 4.13 The School has a strong and supportive relationship with the Minorities And Philosophy Chapter and the Philosophy Society, both of which could contribute to fostering cohort identity and increasing engagement.
- 4.14 The RG commend the School and its contribution to the new PPE programme, which has the potential to become a flagship programme.

Recommendations

- 4.15 In keeping with university trends internationally, the School notes the challenges of responding to student engagement amongst undergraduates, in particular attendance at tutorials. Though this is also a College-wide (and indeed sector-wide) challenge, the School rightly recognises that poor attendance may be a symptom of other more serious welfare issues. In addressing challenges of student engagement and attendance, the RG recommend that (A) consideration be given to re-introducing participation-based grades (e.g. 10% of modules grade is based on tutorial participation). This is something students themselves are keen on. (B) The School should work with the College to embed the academic mentoring and peer mentoring programmes to support students. (C) The School might also consider how it can utilise its newly refurbished space to help create a sense of belonging for students taking philosophy modules.
- 4.16 The RG recommend the School consider a more formal requirement for observation and feedback on teaching for tutors. This could be done in a supportive way as part of the PhD student’s professional development.
- 4.17 There are very few institutions in Ireland or the UK offering an MA in Contemporary European Philosophy, so it is surprising to see such low recruitment onto this programme. This is certainly an area for potential growth. The School might consider how to make this MA more attractive, for example by giving more thought to overall curriculum coherence; making some classes exclusively for MA students on the programme; introducing core modules.

- 4.18 Given that the majority of School's undergraduate tutorials are delivered by PhD students, adequate office space to prepare for tutorials, conduct student meetings, and meet with other tutors and lecturers should also be available. As such, the RG recommend the School continues its efforts to secure long-term desk and meeting space for its PhD students.
- 4.19 The School's staff: student ratio is being adversely affected by growing student numbers without an increase in staffing. This is a potential threat not only to the quality of teaching but also to the QS subject rankings. The RG recommend staffing levels are not allowed to drop further relative to student numbers.

5. Curriculum Development and Review

Commendations

- 5.7 The emphasis placed on module convenor autonomy in the curriculum development process leads to a varied, exciting and research-led curriculum.
- 5.8 Minutes of the Teaching and Learning Committee reveal a thoughtful and creative approach to curriculum development, with clear input from student representatives and continuing engagement with relevant College and University committees and directives.
- 5.9 The changes introduced in response to the module mapping exercise mean the curriculum now benefits from diverse assessment methods and practically-oriented learning.
- 5.10 Based on student meetings and information provided in the SAR there is generally high-level of student satisfaction with regard to the School's teaching and overall support.
- 5.11 The RG found the School's position on recording lectures to be robust and informed by clear pedagogical reflection and is evidence of a balanced approach to student feedback. They are meeting accessibility concerns by making recordings available in cases of need.
- 5.12 Feedback from the representative alumni was very positive in terms of their student experience and education in UCD.
- 5.13 The staff-student liaison committee plays an active role, and their views are heard by the Teaching and Learning Committee.

Recommendations

- 5.14 The School reports challenges in receiving a representative quantity of student-feedback. The response rate to the online feedback questionnaire is around 25%. Attempts have been made by the School to improve this (via email reminders and allowing time in lectures). The RG recommend the School consider introducing a 'You Said, We Did' communication system, which would allow students to see the effect of their feedback and thereby encourage greater engagement with this system. (see also 4.15, 7.18)

- 5.15 One member of staff has completed the UCD Professional Teaching Certificate in University Teaching and Learning. It would be good to see other members of faculty taking up this training.
- 5.16 Given the low student numbers on existing MA programmes, the RG recommend that the School reflect carefully on the rationale for new programmes and on what might be done to increase the attractiveness of the programmes already on offer.
- 5.17 Following on from 5.16 above, reducing the number of MA modules PhD students have to take (from 4 to 3) may create an opportunity to 'ring-fence' some modules for MA students only, thereby allowing more tailored and coherent provision. (see also 4.17)
- 5.18 The RG recommends that the School consider making more use of its alumni, especially recent graduates, to help prepare its students for life after University. For example, recent graduates/alumni could be invited to the School to provide a career perspective. It could also consider increasing its engagement with the UCD Careers Network.

6. Research Activity

Commendations

- 6.13 The School allows researchers genuine autonomy in keeping with its pluralistic ethos, in that it does not put pressure on them to tailor their research to any agenda or other external goal, while supporting them when requested.
- 6.14 The School enables teaching and research to complement one another in a way that benefits both staff and students.
- 6.15 The RG commends the School for the creation and maintenance of a large community of PhD students who are well integrated into the School and make a substantial contribution to it.
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Recommendations

- 9.14 The School is encouraged to explore ways of funding the part-time administrator who is essential to the functioning and existence of the Centre for Ethics in Public Life.
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- 9.16 The RG recommend the University waive charges for the use of facilities for any Young Philosophers events, in order to support initiatives such as these.

UCD School of Philosophy Response to the Review Group Report

The School prepared the Self-Assessment Report through the autumn of 2021 and submitted it in February 2022. The Review visit was in April 2022. We very much appreciated the opportunity to systematically discuss all of our School's activities, just as we appreciated the very detailed and helpful feedback from the Review Group's Report. The School would like to thank the Review Group for its time and interest.

This brief document highlights the School's preliminary response to some of the main recommendations there. This will then feed into the Quality Improvement Plan that we will develop over the next two months, for submission in September 2022.

With specific reference to the prioritised recommendations identified by the Review Group, the School's initial response is as follows:

Recommendation 1 (3.12): The balance and breadth of the syllabus is highly diverse and a real asset to the School. It includes both the 'analytic' and 'continental' traditions, eastern and western philosophy, and contemporary and historical approaches. There is a need to consider how this pluralism and the benefits that it brings can be reconciled with the need to distribute PhD supervision more evenly. This may, for example, require reducing PhD numbers or making at least one appointment at a more senior level in an area in which the School already has a strong international profile, so as to redistribute supervision (with the student's permission) and to continue to attract PhD students, given pending retirements at full professor level. More generally, there is a need to consider how future recruitment fits in with longer-term strategic aims and what are the priorities, given any constraints on resources

Proposal/Comment: We are reluctant to exclude highly qualified PhD applicants. We are seeking to make three new appointments over the coming three years, each guided by our longer-term strategic aims. Following the Review Group Site Visit, we have formalized these intentions as part of the School's new Strategic Plan. Here is the relevant excerpt from the plan:

- Recruiting full-time permanent replacement to cover teaching and supervision needs arising from the resignation of (a permanent Faculty member) [...] and, if possible, to meet teaching and supervision needs in 'Continental' Philosophy, especially Phenomenology/Social Theory.
- Filling the vacancy arising from retirement in March 2024 of (a Full Professor) through two posts at Assistant Professor/Lecturer level. Addressing the School's teaching and supervision needs in the area of 'Continental' Philosophy, especially Phenomenology/Social Theory, is a priority here.

Recommendation 2 (4.15): In keeping with university trends internationally, the School notes the challenges of responding to student engagement amongst undergraduates, in particular attendance at tutorials. Though this is also a College-wide (and indeed sector-wide) challenge, the School rightly recognises that poor attendance may be a symptom of other more serious welfare issues. In addressing challenges of student engagement and attendance, the RG recommend that (A) consideration be given to re-introducing participation-based grades (e.g. 10% of modules grade is based on tutorial participation). This is something students themselves are keen on. (B) The School should work with the College to embed the academic mentoring and peer mentoring programmes to support students. (C) The School might also consider how it can utilise its newly refurbished space to help create a sense of belonging for students taking philosophy modules.

Proposal/Comment: (A) In the coming year 2022-23, the School will re-introduce a 10% assessment component for 'attendance and participation' in some of its large Level 1 modules. (B) The School will work with the College to embed academic mentoring and peer review programmes. (C) Pending discussion at School level at the first staff meeting in September 2022, the School will make its seminar room D520 available to the undergraduate Philosophy Society for events, when feasible.

Recommendation 3 (4.17): There are very few institutions in Ireland or the UK offering an MA in Contemporary European Philosophy, so it is surprising to see such low recruitment onto this programme. This is certainly an area for potential growth. The School might consider how to make this MA more attractive, for example by giving more thought to overall curriculum coherence; making some classes exclusively for MA students on the programme; introducing core modules.

Proposal/Comment: The MA Curriculum has been finalised for 2022-23, but the Teaching and Learning Directors and MA Director will bear this in mind while planning for 2023-24. We will also revise our MA advertising strategy and webpages. At the moment the MA in Contemporary European Philosophy requires students to select four options from a list of available modules. Our initial proposal is to designate one of those as the main core. This and other possibilities will be discussed at School level at the first staff meeting in September 2022.

Recommendation 4 (4.19): The School's staff: student ratio is being adversely affected by growing student numbers without an increase in staffing. This is a potential threat not only to the quality of teaching but also to the QS subject rankings. We recommend staffing levels are not allowed to drop further relative to student numbers.

Proposal/Comment: Given the School's needs, and especially following the failure to recruit an Ad Astra lecturer, the School will continue to lobby the College and the University for permission to recruit as soon as possible.

APPENDIX 3



UCD School of Philosophy

Quality Review Site Visit: 4-7 April 2022

TIMETABLE

Monday 4 April 2022

10.00 -12.00	Planning Session with the Review Group
12.00 -12.30	RG Break
12.30- 13.15	Planning Session with the Review Group continues
13.15 -14.30	Review Group observations and lunch break
14.30 -14.45	RG Prep for afternoon
14.45 -15.30	RG meet with Head of School
15.30-16.00	Review Group observations and break
16.00-16.45	RG meet with SAR Coordinating Committee
16.45-17.30	Review Group observations and wrap up

Tuesday 5 April 2022

09.00-09.30	RG meeting
09.30-10.15	RG meet with College Principal
10.15-10.45	Review Group observations and break
10.45-11.30	RG meet with recently appointed members of staff
11.30-12.00	Review Group observations and break
12.00-13.00	Meeting with employers and external stakeholders

13.00-14.00	Review Group observations and Lunch break
14.00-14.45	RG meet with College Finance Manager and Head of School to outline School's financial situation
14.45-15.15	Review Group observations and break
15.15-16.00	RG meet with support staff representatives
16.00-16.30	Review Group observations and break
16.30-17.00	RG meet UCD Programme Deans
17.00-17.30	Review Group observations and wrap up

Wednesday 6 April 2022

08.45-09.15	Private meeting of the RG
09.15-10.00	RG meet relevant support service representatives e.g. UCD Registry, UCD Library, UCD Global, UCD Access & Lifelong Learning
10.00-10.30	RG observations and break
10.30-11.30	RG meet with a representative group of postgraduate students (taught and research) and with recent graduates
11.30-12.00	RG observations and break
12.00-12.45	RG meet with representative group of undergraduate students
12.45-13.30	RG observations and Lunch break
13.30-14.30	RG meet with the School Research Committee (and other staff members nominated by the HoS)
14.30-15.00	RG observations and break
15.00-16.00	RG meet with representative group of faculty staff – primary focus on Teaching and Learning, and Curriculum issues
16.00-16.30	RG observations and break
16.30-17.15	Research Centres + public lecture series + outreach + Young Philosophers

Thursday 7 April 2022

09.00-09.30	Private meeting of RG
09.30-10.30	RG preparing draft RG Report
10.30-10.45	RG break
10.45-12.30	RG continue preparing draft RG Report
12.30-13.15	Lunch
13.15-15.15	RG finalise first draft of RG Report and feedback commendations/recommendations
15.15-15.30	RG meet with Head of School to feedback initial outline commendations and recommendations.
15.30-16.00	Review Group observations and break
16.00-16.15	RG meet with College Principal to feedback initial outline commendations and recommendations
16.15-16.30	Break
16.30-17.00	Exit presentation to all available staff of the unit summarising the initial key commendations/recommendations of the Review Group