



University College Dublin

Quality Improvement Plan

UCD School of Philosophy

February 2023

1. Introduction

The original review was scheduled on 4-7 April 2022. We received the draft Report from the Review Group in June and wrote our response to it the same month. The Final Report, with our response, was sent to us in July.

The first draft of the QIP was written by the QIP co-ordinator and circulated to the QIP Committee in August. The QIP co-ordinator received comments from individual QIP members before the committee met in person on September 12 2022 for a detailed discussion. Certain QIP issues were identified as items for discussion at the School meeting on September 23. The QIP was revised following the discussions at both meetings.

The revised version was discussed at a QIP committee meeting on October 4, 2022. The final version was submitted to the School meeting of October 29, 2022, and formally approved.

The School of Philosophy Quality Improvement Plan Committee comprised:

- Prof. Maeve Cooke, Head of School (until August 2023).
- Dr. Christopher Cowley, Co-ordinator of the QUIP Committee and formerly the Co-ordinator of the Self-Assessment Report (SAR) Committee
- Dr. Danielle Petherbridge, Deputy Head of School
- Dr. Daniel Esmonde Deasy, Deputy Head of School
- Dr. Ruth Boeker
- Gillian Johnston, School Manager.

Categories

1. Recommendations concerning academic, organisational and other matters which are entirely under the control of the unit
2. Recommendations concerning shortcomings in services, procedures and facilities which are outside the control of the unit
3. Recommendations concerning inadequate staffing, and/or facilities which require recurrent or capital funding

Timescale

- A. Recommendation already implemented [i.e. by 1 November 2022.]
- B. Recommendations to be implemented within one year [i.e. during the calendar year 2023]
- C. Recommendations to be implemented within five years
- D. Recommendations which will not be implemented

Report	RG Recommendation	Category (see list above)	Action Taken/Action Planned/Reason for Not Implementing	Timescale (see list above)
ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT				
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.	1, 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The HOS and the School Manager met with the College Management team (the Principal, the Finance Managers, the HR liaison) in April 2022. The School was informed that its financial situation was better than expected and that its finances are on an upwards trajectory. ● School members continue to apply for Irish Research Council and European Research Council grants, building on multiple successes to date. ● The School has been strongly encouraged by the College to retain its waiver of European PhD fees and subsidy of international fees. Doing so helps to attract high quality PhD students. This improves the School's financial position indirectly, enhancing its vibrant research culture and strong international standing, thereby increasing possibilities for attracting major research grants and for recruiting new faculty from outside UCD who hold such grants (as is possible under UCD's Central Pool Appointments scheme). ● For some years the School has sought to increase its income through Continuing 	A, B, C

			Professional Development (CPD), with limited success. This may be due to the pandemic. Currently CPD is under review. Alongside this, it is actively pursuing similar income-generating possibilities, such as a 'micro-credentials' course (now accredited) and a postgraduate certificate in Ethics.	
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.	1, 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The School Strategic Plan drawn up in Summer 2022 identifies certain risks in the areas of recruitment, research and teaching & learning. It explains how it is currently responding to some of them and how it proposes to respond to others. The School will continue to assess and monitor serious risks in all three areas and endeavour to respond creatively and effectively. 	A, B, C
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.	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the 2022-23 academic year, in consultation with its recently hired faculty, both temporary and permanent, the School will develop a structured initiation for new members, comprising the following elements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A welcome pack of practical information, especially regarding School-specific practices in teaching and assessment. An orientation programme at School level, co-ordinated with College induction sessions. A mentoring system with senior members of the School. 	B

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.	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Staff members have expressed satisfaction with P4G as a forum for consultation and discussion and the process has generated several helpful suggestions for School policy on a range of issues (such as teaching relief for Directors of Centres). ● The important question of mentoring is viewed as an additional layer of support. This is address this in 2.17 above. 	B
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STAFF AND FACILITIES

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 one 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,	1, 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● We are conscious of the historic self-understanding of the School as pluralist. However, as the numbers of academic staff increase and the motivation for recruitment is no longer solely to cover immediate teaching needs, the School confronts the questions of whether and how to support research areas for which there is high student demand, especially at PhD level, without compromising its pluralist ethos. This is a new departure for the School and calls for focused discussion of the wider issues. The HoS brought the need for such discussion to the September 2022 staff meeting. It was agreed to give full consideration at a planning meeting in Spring 2023. ● Relatedly but separately, the School is conscious of the need to monitor the current imbalance in the research areas favoured by incoming PhD students and the corresponding imbalance among colleagues in PhD supervision and mentoring (including membership of Research Student Assessment panels). For reasons given in 2.15 above, the School does not consider it advisable to reduce the number of highly qualified PhD applicants whom it accepts. Nor does it consider it advisable to redistribute supervision, given the wide diversity of research expertise in the School, which is in turn part of its pluralist ethos. However, it recognises the need to be even more selective in admitting PhD students. The School Graduate Committee will review the PhD admission procedures in November 2022. ● In April 2022, the School was authorised to hire three new permanent members of academic staff, one with a possible start-date of September 2023. The School’s PhD supervision, assessment and mentoring needs will be an important consideration when making these hires. For details, see the School Strategic Plan. ● In view of upcoming retirements, the School is alert to the importance of maintaining a balance between numbers of junior and senior staff, be it through progression on UCD’s internal faculty promotion path and/or new hires. 	A,B, C
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	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)	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See 2.17 and 2.18 above 	B

TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT

<p>4.15</p>	<p><i>Prioritised Recommendation 2</i></p> <p>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.</p> <p>(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.</p>	<p>1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● (A) For the coming year, 2022-23, the School has re-introduced a 10% assessment component for ‘attendance and participation’ in some of its Level 1 modules. The School Teaching and Learning Committee has been tasked with exploring possibilities for a significant assessment component for all UG modules. ● (B) The School will work with the College to embed academic mentoring and peer review programmes for undergraduate students more firmly within its structures. ● (C) The School allows its seminar room D520 to be used when available by PG students for various philosophical and social events (e.g. coffee mornings), by Phil Soc (Philosophy Society, UG) and by MAP (Minorities and Philosophy, UG and PG). Prior to the pandemic, Phil Soc regularly organised events that helped to create a sense of belonging among undergraduates. In 2022-23, the School will support it in its efforts to do so again. ● The School has been allocated 3 desk spaces in room B101 (Newman) for PhD students, and 3 spaces in D106 (Newman) for Postdoctoral researchers. The PhD desk spaces are being used eagerly; take-up for the Post-doc desks has been slower. If this persists, the School will allocate these spaces to advanced PhD students. 	<p>A,B</p>
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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.	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The School Teaching and Learning Committee will set up a system of observation and feedback for all tutors during the course of the 2022-23 academic year. 	B
4.17	<i>Prioritised Recommendation 3</i> 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.	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The MA in Contemporary European Philosophy is relatively new and was set up during the pandemic. It needs more time to establish itself. Given the high level of interest among PhD students internationally in working in the area of European Philosophy, the School is confident that it will increase recruitment to the MA programme in the next two-three years. However, it recognises the importance of dedicated and vigorous advertising (see this section, below). The School takes the view that including PhD students in MA modules is of benefit to both sets of students. It regards the diversity of the MA modules as a strength. The School recognises the importance of actively advertising all its MA programmes. The Graduate Committee and Global Engagement Officer, as a first step, will work closely with UCD's Global Office to explore ways of improving its advertising. Alongside this, it will investigate possibilities for hiring an administrative assistant for Centre for Ethics and Public Life and the Newman Centre with special responsibility for publicising the event of the Centres and of the School. 	A,C,D
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.	1, 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> See the last item of 4.15. 	A,B

4.19	<p><i>Prioritised Recommendation 4</i></p> <p>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.</p>	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See 3.12. for details of the three new permanent positions that the School has been authorized to hire in the coming two-three years. • In addition, as specified in its Strategic Plan, the School will actively explore possibilities for recruitment through all three strands of the Central Pool Appointments scheme, especially 'reactive hires' and 'strategic hires'. 	B, C
CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT AND REVIEW				
5.14	<p>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)</p>	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the coming year, the School Teaching and Learning Committee will explore possibilities for new, constructive and wide-ranging feedback procedures. In doing so, it will also address the issue that currently, on the Student Feedback system, text feedback is accessible only to the relevant module co-ordinator (MC) and consider possibilities for involving the HoS in evaluating this. 	B
5.15	<p>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.</p>	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some members have completed the equivalent certificate at another institution before coming to UCD. • In the coming year, the HoS will encourage all junior staff members to complete the UCD Certificate, if they have not done so or hold no equivalent qualification. 	A, B

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.	1, 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Our traditionally high MA recruitment (compared to other Schools in College of Social Science and Law) suffered from the effects of the pandemic and continues to do so. In recent times, an additional factor is the ever-increasing cost of living in Dublin. Neither of these problems is in the control of the School. ● The School is actively seeking to increase recruitment to the MA programmes that it currently offers, through advertising (see 4.17) and through supporting presentations at international and national conferences by our PhD students and postdocs. ● The School does not discount the possibility of initiating new MA programmes, for instance on issues relating to ecological disaster, but will proceed cautiously. Alongside this, it is currently participating in some new interdisciplinary programmes initiated by other Schools in UCD. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ In September 2022, the School of Sociology launched an MA in Social and Political Thought. Two members of the School’s faculty will be contributing to this. ○ The School is taking part in a multi-School initiative to create a new MA in Medical Humanities, to be launched in September 2024. The Schools involved are currently (2022-23) co-teaching a new first- year Discovery module on ‘Mental Illness’. ○ The School is contributing to a further new Discovery module on ‘Hope’ in 2022-23 	A, B, C
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 4.18)	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● As stated in 4.17 above, the School is reluctant to ‘ring-fence’ some modules for MA students only. It takes the view that including PhD students in MA modules is of benefit to both sets of students. ● The School Graduate Committee is currently discussing a proposal to reduce the number of MA modules required by PhD students from 4 to 3. 	A, B, D

5.18	The RG recommend 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.	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● In previous academic years we have run several sessions on careers, or career related topics, in the Graduate Skills or Research Methods programme. The School will explore possibilities for developing this side of the programme, for example, by including recent graduates. ● The School will continue to support efforts by the College and by the UCD Careers Network to present career options to all undergraduates from the two Colleges. We will explore ways of creating awareness of the wide range of career options open to philosophy graduates. 	A, B, C
RESEARCH ACTIVITY				
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.	1,3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Staff in the School are aligned with specific “research areas”, which are publicised on our website: https://www.ucd.ie/philosophy/research/ourfacultybyresearcharea/ ● We agree that the two Research Centres already perform the function of research clusters since they are closely linked with programmes in the School and list on their websites affiliated members in the School. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The Centre for Ethics in Public Life (CEPL). This is already connected with the MA in Ethics: Theory and Practice. If the planned new interdisciplinary MA in Medical Humanities launches in September 2024, the CEPL will be directly involved. ○ The Newman Centre for the Study of Religions provides PhD and MA Scholarships to students who wish to work on topics connected with John Henry Newman’s thought. It also supports an MA seminar on Newman’s thought which is open to all students. ● The School will review the existing areas at a general planning meeting in Spring 2023 and consider how to publicize its research strengths to MA and other graduate students, with due acknowledgement of the current interest internationally in contemporary European Philosophy. The School will also investigate funding sources for a part-time publicity officer (see 4.17). 	A, B

6.20	As the research centres 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.	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● In the coming year 2022-23, the Centre for Ethics in Public Life will explore the possibility of greater partnerships with other Schools, especially Medicine, Nursing, Midwifery. ● In the coming year 2022-23, the Newman Centre for the Study of Religions will explore the possibility of greater partnerships with other Schools, especially Law and Education. 	B
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.	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The PhD Director will ensure that current and future first-year PhD students are informed about the language modules available. We will add a relevant section to the Graduate Handbook. 	B
MANAGEMENT OF QUALITY AND ENHANCEMENT				
7.18	As noted in 5.14, the School should aim to achieve higher levels of student engagement with the electronic module evaluation system.	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● See 5.14 above 	B

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.	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> See 7.20 below 	B
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.	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Teaching and Learning Committee, in consultation with the present External Examiner, will discuss the ways in which the interaction of the External Examiner with the School can be made more robust, within the terms of the role. 	B
SUPPORT SERVICES				
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.	1, 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> During the Academic Year 2022-2023 year the Head of School will enquire at College and University level about possible simplifications to certain processes. 	B

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.	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The UCD Access and Lifelong Learning unit regularly provides information about their services to all staff. In addition, the School's Widening Participation Co-ordinator informed all Staff members in September 2022 about the services and continues to update them at frequent intervals. 	A
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EXTERNAL RELATIONS				
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.	1,2,3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The School recognises the need for a part-time administrator, ideally a full-time position to be shared with the Newman Centre that would also involve publicity for the Centres and the School (see 4.17 above). Although it is expected that the cost of the current part-time administrator will be covered until the end of their contract in March 2023, currently there are no funds available for extending this contract. The School will renew discussion with the College Principal and UCD Finance about funding sources. In addition, it will continue to seek funding from other sources, for example, through CPD income, through 'micro-credential' courses (2.15.) and through overheads from major research projects if they become available. 	B
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.	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The School recognises the burden on the two Directors. For the duration of the Directorships, the Director of the Centre for Ethics in Public Life. and the Director of the Newman Centre will each have their teaching loads reduced by 0.5 modules. 	s
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.	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In addition to other possible forms of support, the School would greatly appreciate support from UCD in the use of O'Reilly Hall for the Young Philosophers day in May 2023. Stressing the huge PR benefit that this event has for UCD, it will request UCD to waive all fees for the event and to cover the costs of set-up and cleaning. 	B

3. Prioritised Resource Requirements

This section should only contain a list, prioritised by the Quality Improvement Committee, of recommendations outlined in the Review Group Report, which require additional resources. The planned action to address each recommendation with an estimate of the cost involved should also be included:

1. Our main resource requirement is to ensure the hiring of the three new junior posts in 2023 and 2024, as set out in the current School Strategic Plan. The estimated cost of each is €60,000.00 per year.
2. We are actively seeking funding to cover the half-time administrative post supporting the Centre for Ethics in Public Life on a medium-long term basis. This post would be shared with the Newman Centre and specify publicity alongside administration. However, in the event that we do not succeed in doing this for 2023-24, we would like to ask the University/CSSL for a once-off grant to cover salary costs of approx. €20,000 per year for a part-time administrator/publicity officer.
3. Since the development of CPD and micro-credentials depends on additional teaching resources, we estimate the need for two full-time teaching fellowships per year (i.e. currently 2 x €46,000).
4. The current part-time Research Officer, funded by PERITIA, has provided excellent support to the School Research Committee, for example in designing School-specific documents for postgraduate students and postdocs applying for IRC awards. The School is very keen to retain this position and expand it. If overheads from major funded projects become available, and it is feasible for it to use them for this purpose, it will do so. However, to ensure continuity, it requests support from the University/CSSL for the eventuality that no overhead funds are available.
5. CSSL currently provides support for the Young Philosopher awards, for which we are grateful. However, given the scale of the initiative, additional funding is urgently required from university sources if this important initiative is to continue. This would include the use of O'Reilly Hall at no charge and cover of set-up and cleaning costs (€25,000), as well as technical support for the on-line component of the event (€5,000).